Foreword

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is a global organisation that has worked as a completely virtual and remotely connected network since its inception in 1990. As of November 2021, the APC network comprises 62 civil society organisations and 29 individual members active in 74 countries. As a remote working organisation, at APC we have developed systems in place to carry our meetings online as part of our daily work.

Organising online convenings, events and meetings requires a framework of values and practices with a strategic use of ICTs and communications, coupled with an intersectional approach in the overall design process. The COVID-19 pandemic and the increased need for online events further defined our practice and strengthened our intent of making our get-togethers more engaging, safe, vibrant and successful. Above all we strive toward making them meaningful, nurturing and hopeful in the sense of facilitating connection and transformation - both on individual and collective levels. In this sense, evaluation and reflection are essential for adjusting our practices so as to respond in a more holistic way.

We have dived into the most relevant documentation material and our memories of APC-hosted online events to curate questions and build on this work. Most of the examples have been practiced within APC, while some of the considerations are part of our aspirations and our learning process. The entire content shared here is drawn from our background in organising online events from 20 to 200 participants, such as Take Back the Tech 2020, APC Staff meetings, APC Member convenings, and many more. One of the most urgent and powerful experiences is certainly our Closer than Ever 2020 member convening organised in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. About 200 participants across the world gathered in real time for five days. Our multi-lingual convening featured 12 plenaries, 25 hosted events, 9 Digital Booths, 12 sessions on APC 30 timeline, several informal hangouts and self/collective care spaces, and two parties.

This collection is a collaborative work in progress enriched by the collective knowledge, gifts and examples suggested, generously offered and tested within and by our network of members, partners and allies. Collected here are back-and-forth reflections and lessons learned so far based on our practices and framework. They stem from our feminist and intersectional approach, our commitment to trust and care, our passion for people and connection, and our concerns and strategies around access and safety. This is also a “live” document that will be updated as new experience is accumulated and new perspectives and stories arise.

This collection of practices and learnings is both for organisations, groups and collectives who have never designed, organised and hosted events online, and want to know how to do it; and organisations, groups and collectives who already design, organise and host events online, and want to further embed their core values in the design. However, this is not a one-size-fits-all type of guidelines, as each organisation has their own framework and a unique sense of access, resources, people and needs. We tried our best to lay out the questions and elements within this collection in

a way that they can be combined, adjusted or re-imagined altogether. We wholeheartedly hope that they will be helpful and useful in any way (re)imagined.

We organised this collection in four main sections that compose our story, the tapestry of online events with the infrastructure, labour, threads, creative patterns and strategies we think of when organising and designing online events. Each section is a thread in itself woven around the three main pillars of the entire guide: care, safety and access. Altogether, they rest on the foundation of our core principles and values. With pillars being the backbone of any event, there is also a plethora of specific issues and themes related to the interaction of context and content that is also discussed to a certain extent within the sections.

The sections are laid out as a story that has a beginning, rising action, culmination and winding down. We kept the time as one of the main reference points, it being one the most important and challenging parameters in the overall navigation of the process. The first section “Planning and designing your online event(s): The beginning” provides an overview of key considerations focusing on people, participation and access, including the reasons and goals of the event. The second section “Rising action” includes main activities and challenges that precede the event, such as technology and format choice, as well as the design of various segments. The third section “The lead up and going live” is related to communication, outreach and key parts to keep in mind as the event is happening, such as program facilitation. And finally, there is also the fourth section, “Winding down, reflection and continuation” as the conversation and connection continue in various forms after the event ends. This includes evaluation process, designing various resources for community use, and also succeeding events. The fourth section is currently being developed and will be shared in future installments of this guide.

By sharing our learning process, our intention is to contribute to the evolving pool of collective knowledge building within and beyond the communities of APC network. We hope that the content shared will find its place as part of the plurality of experiences, perspectives and knowledge(s) on organising online convenings and events that keep values and rights at their core.

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