Introduction

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Since 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic restricted physical gatherings, online events have gained more presence and relevance than ever before. There is not one right name for online get-togethers but many: online convening, online event, virtual convening, online gathering, virtual get-together, virtual event. The terms we are using the most are online event and online convening, though online event will be used more frequently throughout this guide.

The common nature of any of the terms used is of a dedicated and shared presence, and participation in a safe space with an intention of learning and acknowledging each other from our unique positioning, contributions and contexts.

The definition of online convening that resonates most with us is that of an organised and recurring online gathering of a particular community that features theme-bound set of online events in multiple spaces that compose the main program flow.

The term online event denotes a specific, but wide enough frame of various formats that can entail different activities online. Throughout this guide we will be focusing on the questions and approaches related to the process of a single, general online event design and implementation. However, in some sections of the guide we will share an overview of considerations when organising convenings and/or larger scale events with multiple sessions.

Online events can be of different formats: they can range from small question-and-answer sessions to large-scale conferences with thousands of participants. They can be synchronous: happening in real time on the same platform where everyone participates at the same time; or asynchronous: taking place in one or a combination of platforms with the pace of participation that is based on

participants’ time, resources, sense of safety and availability. There are also hybrid events that combine elements of physical events and online events, however, that format is not included in this collection. They’re not part of our learning process yet, but they are a format we want to explore and organise in the future.

The logistic nature of online events might seem more subtle yet it is not less relevant or challenging. You will be relieved of the cumbersome visa processes or the process of identifying and choosing a venue that is safe, accessible and friendly for all participants. The challenges that online events bring might not appear immediately but they will ask you for a detailed preparation that ensures access and participation for all participants. For example, the features, interface and user registration requirements of platforms where the event will take place has implications we are still discovering and assessing.

When organizing an online event, you will be confronted with the complex task of communicating and agreeing on the best time and flow to ensure participation. These are related to two aspects of our reality. There is an increase in offering of online events today, parallel with the lack of culture that understands them as requiring an exclusive and dedicated presence, whereas offline events are given that parameter by default. The understanding that attending online events requires clearing our agendas of other commitments, whether work-related or personal, is yet to be assumed as a shared standard.

Finally, make sure to celebrate the commitment you, your organisation and all of your participants are making together. As this is a collaborative process, it requires a lot of planning, much more patience, flexibility, imagination and communication, and from our experience, a pinch of frustration with sprinkles of joy - for it to work altogether.

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