How to plan your budget and costs

Planning and carrying out an online event also has cost implications both for you as an organiser and for your participants. Connecting remotely opens up different variables related to the infrastructure around your event, event planning and implementation, as well as participation and access.

Based on our experience, cost components of your budget can include:

- People (documentation team, interpretation and captioning team, program moderators, staff)
- Technology and software (bandwidth, software licensing, secure resource holders and repository
- Digital (remote) participation grants (food, internet access, materials, equipment rent, e-voucher giveaways for games)
- Fun and entertainment (live performances, supporting local arts and culture)
- Evaluation and learning

When approaching your budget design, go back to the size and scope of your event, your participants's needs, your resources and what you want to achieve and then decide what are the key elements that will help you in achieving your goal. Here are some examples:

- If it is a learning experience make sure all resources are easily accessible. Information should be available in ways that do not penalize participants with low connectivity.
- If your participants are from different language and needs background, value interpretation, translation and accessibility as opportunities for direct exchange among participants during some key moment of the online event, both real time or asynchronously.
- If your focus is to reach a decision on important issues within your wider network, consider prioritizing documentation as a valuable resource.
- If your event poses a high or medium risk for your participants, or there are people with different needs and access barriers, consider allocating funds for digital participation grants and designing your criteria based on your participants' survey and risk assessment.

Access becomes even more layered in online spaces, and not only in terms of connectivity. Moving from face-to-face events to remote ones brings many novelties, including finding sustainable, effective ways to support participation and access. Your participants' survey answers and risk assessment will guide you in this. Go back to them and realign your priorities. If possible, budget or plan for affordable allowance / per diem to provide upon request for anyone that will participate and attend your event, especially if the duration of the event is more than one session.

Check in
There are different ways to think about supporting meaningful participation and access. Below you will find our recent learnings, highlights and existing practices around supporting participation in APC-hosted events, including digital participation grants but also considerations when the costs of meaningful digital participation are not affordable.

Access justice practices: from APC Notes on digital participation grants

One of the most essential elements when planning our events is based on ensuring participation of a wider spectrum of voices with the acknowledgment that access is hindered by structural discrimination and that participation to events implies labour from both organizers and participants. Being in a space where needs are addressed and resolved and everyone is taken care of - makes meaningful and dedicated participation possible.

For the above listed reasons we have been designing our own guidelines and set of practices on supporting digital participation for APC-hosted events. Some additional thinking around this was also prompted by our experience of organising online events during COVID-19 pandemic which has amplified the existing structural inequalities, discrimination and exclusion also in the digital realm.

The intention of digital participation grants is to respond to strategic needs shared by all or most participants, in a way that is affordable, accountable and transparently addressed. Based on our experience and learning process so far, here are the types of costs that we cover in our digital participation grants:

- **digital participation grants – standard / essential** - Data and connectivity: various data packages responding to event requirements, and small items such as microphones and cable/wire for better connectivity and experience are also included.
- **per diem for meals and/or snacks and local costs** - Cost of meals on meeting days when cooking may not be feasible, transportation to/from a quiet space, similar to physical events.
- **creative material** - When convenings require participants to create tangible outputs requiring purchase of stationery, pens, markers, stickers – the kinds of materials often provided by the host during a face to face meeting
- **digital participation grants – addressing structural discrimination and exclusion** - Renting of room/space for safety reasons; ensuring family members receive care for the duration of the meeting (family as defined by the participant); renting devices such as laptop/desktop to ensure the maximum possibility to engage and interact – mobile devices are very common but don’t always offer the best experience and access to features of a convening.

When structural discrimination hinders access to digital participation in ways the host is not able to address, this is acknowledged. Meaningful participation should then be reviewed by the participant(s) in a way that makes them feel seen and heard in terms of meeting duration, contribution to the convening, safety and privacy.

When the costs of meaningful digital participation are not affordable by the host, alternative means should be imagined and offered/provided to the participant(s). This could include providing audio or video recordings and graphic illustrations in real, or near real-time. In these cases the host commits to share with the participants - reactions, responses and any other requests intended for all participants.

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