When and how long? | Timing, time zone(s), duration and digital fatigue considerations

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Timing and time zone(s) considerations

Is the timing right? Are there other events happening at the same time? See if you should avoid overlapping altogether and find a better timing for your event or if synergies can be found between events. Look for important holidays in regions where your participants are based, and make sure your event will not clash with them.

See who you would like to connect with and adjust the time of your event to them as much as you can. Here are some of our lessons when it comes to time zone considerations:

- If you are catering for a worldwide audience you might have to allow the event to take place in 2 or 3 different time zones. Take into account the challenges in focus and engagement of your participants in different time zones.
- If your event consists of several sessions spread across various days and you can not resource repeating all event components for various time zones, consider rotating time of main event components.
- Set a local time parameter for the event. The standard length of day we are considering as eligible for a meeting starts at 07:00 and ends at 19:00 for any of our respective local times.
- If you count with global participation and yet you center the most important parts of your events in one time zone ‘where most people are’, it will be probably quite alienating for those participants who struggle to be online in that prime-time. This might mean that you don’t end up catering to the largest majority but try and distribute the ‘time discomfort’ so that it is shared. This will contribute to the overall feeling of care and justice.

STORY BOX From APC Member convening 2020: Walk the talk, from privilege and power to solidarity - time zones

Time zones are an invention. Or a discovery. But certainly, in the way they defined the 00:00 in relation to the rest of the world -12 and +24 are a display of colonialism, power and privilege! How would things look like if the 00:00 was set along Kuala Lumpur or Quito? Experiencing this is when power and privilege give place to solidarity.

For the APC member Convening we thought that was important not only to acknowledge the way power and privilege are embedded in any acts or "general convention" about time, places, languages - but to try to walk the talk and apply the logic of a dispersed network, where centres are not fixed and unmovable but are relative and can be changed and agreed upon.

During our five days of convening we rotated our plenaries in the APC member regional time zones that are based on the countries and places where APC member organisations and individual members, and also staff members, live and operate from. Our members have a time zone span from UTC -7 to +9. The two most distant regions, Asia/Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)/North America, are separated by a gap of 15 to 16 hours. So, during our 2020 Member convening everyone experienced, at least once, waking up very early and going to sleep very late.

How long should your event be?

A mindful consideration of the digital reality and (oftentimes intensive!) interactions online might help you in deciding on the duration of your online event in a way that you care both for your team and your participants.

In deciding how long your event should last - consider the following:

- overall load of content you will be presenting
- number of participants
- participants' needs and availability
- number of your central session(s) (plenary, care session, question and answer session, etc.)
- overall number of items/activities you want to put within the frame of your event (opening, closing, breaks, breakout rooms/group work, presentation, games, etc.)
- time zone considerations
- digital fatigue and hidden time needed to recover from your event
- format of your event

Depending on your content, this can be a two hour event with a central session (for example, a plenary) and several activities (opening, presentation of content, break, discussion on certain topics, group work, report back, closing). If your content load is extensive, you might consider distributing the overall material in several sessions and activities that make your event. This can be distributed within one day or even several days, weeks or months. This is especially applicable to planning a larger convening, or an event which will cover one issue extensively, or many different

issues.

An important factor to take into account is the format of the event in terms of timeload and communication type. Event formats can vary from (a)synchronous one-hour real time event; to distributed (a)synchronous self-paced event(s) happening in a longer span of time, days, weeks, months. You can find more content around around advantages and challenges related to both in our section “How to choose the format that suits my online event best?”. Here is a general description for now:

- Synchronous activities are more dynamic in the sense that they denote immediate engagement of participants in real time on the same platform and require immediate response. Some examples are video conferencing (real time workshops, conferences, meetings), live chat, live-streamed events, etc.
- Asynchronous activities are taking place in one or a combination of platforms, with a pace of participation and response that are based on the person’s time, resources, sense of safety and availability. Examples of asynchronous events and activities are collaborative sessions, discussion boards, visual boards, trainings/webinars with pre-recorded videos, etc.

Digital fatigue and hidden time

Different people engage and are affected differently during online events. For some, digital meetings might be more tiring than real-life meetings: the brain and eyes focusing harder to process input and material without body language, fewer breaks that depend on one’s own self-care routine and resources, being constantly on show, feeling vulnerable in one’s home, isolation after an intense engagement without a post-event exchange of impressions, and struggles with the technology itself.

When combined with the total amount of time spent online and in front of our devices, the above elements make what we call digital fatigue, a mind/heart/body reaction of exhaustion, lack of concentration, headaches and physical pain or discomfort which is beyond one’s personal threshold of wellbeing. There is also hidden time that is required for us all to refresh from an intense online event participation and/or organisation of the event itself. Taking into account these elements might help you in your approach when deciding on the event duration and time structure around it.

The ‘hidden time’ to recharge is something to keep in mind for your participants, but it is also vital for you and your team. As you will be both in the back end (planning and designing behind the screen) and front end of your event (implementing and running the event on screen), there is a high risk of ‘digital fatigue’ and burnout. Take into consideration the balance of online and offline time and make sure you talk about each other’s thresholds, red flags and ways of mutual support. This might also imply reallocation of your resources (time, energy) based on your sense of power in the direction of your own or your group’s wellbeing.



For our APC Staff meetings we have a general recommendation for our staff which is part of APC institutional care practices. We recommend 1:1 pairing - one hour work - one hour break - for the duration of the meeting so that would mean - for a 3 hour session in a day – that everyone takes a 3 hour break also - and not attempt to do a full days work *around* the staff meeting time.



Check in
Taking care of yourself and each other throughout the process will connect you as a team, and make the experience of organising the event less stressful, more fun and meaningful on multiple levels. You can read more about this in our section “How do we nurture, rest and play?”.

APC’s lessons learned on time, care and content

Here are just some of our insights on planning around content distribution when we organise events, bearing in mind the event duration and amount of time spent online:

- Content is distributed in sessions based on expectations around: amount of new information input, level of engagement and interaction, as well as time zone, language and digital fatigue considerations.
- Sessions and activities are balanced with care sessions, breaks and social spaces.
- Self and collective care informs the design of the sessions.
- There are specific sessions where we encourage everyone to participate.
- There are sessions that are optional and announced as such.
- Participation in activities that offer mind/heart/body breaks are actively encouraged for all participants (poetry, music, yoga, collective drawing sessions, etc.)
- Suggestions on type of leisure activities during breaks are made.
- Boundaries around schedule are set and maintained.
- Sessions are open 30 minutes in advance, starting in time.
- Asynchronous and synchronous activities are combined as to balance the real-time interaction with participation based on people’s availability, pace, situational capacities, different needs and time.
- The standard length of day we are considering as eligible for a meeting starts at 07:00 and ends at 19:00 for any of our respective local times.

Timeline of the process

A timeline is a good resource to have during the design stage. Map out your planning activities and tasks and plan mindfully in terms of time allocation. Make sure to include session and documentation design, the overall communication, team meetings, event outreach, test runs, time for rehearsals, time for care, and everything that you will explore more indepth during the event

(also called showtime).

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