Which technology/platform to choose?

Essential to your event design are the technological platforms and tools that will be used. This determines accessibility, opportunities and possible limitations for your event. Be flexible and make sure the team designing the event involve technologists. They can be part of your coordination team or trusted members and partners of your network. They can provide advice and support throughout the process.

Here is an overview of the basic tools you will probably need during the overall process of online event planning and implementation:

- email (mailing lists included)
- direct messaging (chat),
- wikis, etherpads
- blogs and websites
- video conferencing system/platform
- shared document repositories
- collaboration boards which allow a card-based layout for tasks, to-do management and resource sharing
- social media: social networking service or platform
- interactive tools for surveys, polls, registration forms, etc.

We suggest checking our Closer than Ever guide for a deep dive into the use and choice of ICTs for online work, as well as its specifications and limitations. Here is also a list of Available FLOSS tools with a high level of stability, adoption (and available support) in the APC community that you might want to consider as well. You will probably use a combination of tools that fits the needs and conditions of your organisation and your participants. The most important thing is that it is user-friendly, safe and accessible for your team and your participants who will be using it.

Make sure you check the specifications of each tool you are considering. Here is a list of general questions to consider at this stage:

- What do I need this specific tool for? Think of your specific activities and tools you will need for them.
- What is the number of participants? For video conferencing tool, is the load on server-side processing or client-side processing? Think of platform limitations.
- Who is participating and what content will be shared? Can it put anyone at risk? Go back to your “Who will attend” section and identify the gaps.
- What are my safety concerns? Think of user-server communication, is it established over a secure connection? Is there a risk of information interception? Can it be self-hosted or is

there a third-party involved?
- Is it free to install and use or is it a proprietary tool/platform?
- What features of the tool do I need to use? Think of multiple presenters, audio and video recording, accessibility support, translation, close-captioning and voice-over, breakout rooms, private chat for participants, chat block options.
- Do I need my meetings to be audio or video-recorded? Do I need to log chats, list of participants, etc?
- Is it a browser-based tool that works on most operating systems or an application must be installed that might cause operability issues?
- How complex is the interface? Will people need to complete multiple actions at the same time in one space to participate in the event?
- Do I want to enable easier access with invitation code, or will participants have to create a profile/user account?

If you are worried that the tool will pose a threat to your team or your participants, you would want to consider finding an alternative and safer tool. You can find more information on the specific software, platform and apps in our FTX: Safety Reboot, Alternative tools for networking and communications including a referenced Alternative To website that can help you check the security functionality of any tool and offer a spectrum of alternatives.

Check in
Be aware that you will still be doing adjustments as the planning process proceeds. You might drop some of the original technological solutions and choose some other or you might be confronted by costs or human resource implications when moving forward into the planning.

Free/libre and open source software

APC prioritises free/libre and open source software (FLOSS) and open standards. This is important because it reminds us that our choices need to always make sure that they are:

- Driven by community needs
- Sustainable
- Secure

Which are amplified and echoed by the values of Feminist practices and politics of technology:

- Participatory/Inclusive
- Secure
- Appropriate/Sustainable Technologies
- Free and Open Source software will be given priority, but only if the participants can sustain their use post-training
- Transparent/Open

- Creative/Strategic
- Emphasising the Role of Women in Technology
- Emphasising Women's Control of Technology
- Fun!

In terms of concrete choices for our online events, most of the platforms and tools we are using are FLOSS tools and tech platforms, such as: CiviCRM, Mattermost, WeKan board, etherpad, wiki and/or Nextcloud suite.

We are using Mattermost as one of the main open source, cross-system, communications platforms hosted on APC servers that ensures synchronous and asynchronous private one-on-one or group communication. We have designated spaces (channels) for different threads (topics) and also use it as a quick and simple back-up channel for announcements during our events. Mattermost has become our shared “office space” where we check in, come together as a team and have conversations.

For real time video conference APC uses a self-hosted open source conferencing system BigBlueButton (BBB). It provides us with whiteboards, presentations, breakout groups, chat and shared notes features - for up to 55 participants (stress-tested!). We have internal practice of not going all on video at the same time as not to stress both the system and individual devices. We have been developing a translation interface for BBB and are currently in the testing phase of providing a safe and easy interpretation system.

At this stage and despite the investment of time, human dedication and funds, the BBB installation is not stable enough to host larger plenaries. We hope that in the future, with the collective effort of many organisations investing in alternatives and autonomous infrastructures, we will be able to run our real time video convening securely, smoothly and comfortably on FLOSS platforms and tools only.

Limitations to the adoption of FLOSS

While FLOSS development and promotion remains APC's priority, we are also very aware of the real-life limitations to the wide adoption of FLOSS for all of our ICT tools and services.

We understand that using FLOSS can represent a significant change in organisational and individual culture and behaviour, and it can require considerable effort to switch from one system to another.

We understand that promotion and use of FLOSS requires (non-monetary) investment from users, and the price to be paid can in some cases include longer production times, lower usability of FLOSS tools, more frequent bugs that require frequent workarounds, etc.

When some challenges or barriers (such as the limitation on the number of our participants) become too costly, we make a conscious decision to use proprietary solutions, but always with the long-term goal of migrating to FLOSS when this becomes a viable option. For example, in case of our large 2020 member convening we needed to complement BBB with a proprietary system and we communicated our decision with our participants. In BBB, the load is on client-side processing,

as opposed to server-processing on proprietary system. In this particular case, it was not a question of server power, but the architecture of existing systems. The BBB developers explicitly discourage hosts from attempting to bring more than 100 people to a single session.

Revision #3
Created 2021-10-28 05:28:49 UTC by Cathy
Updated 2021-11-03 02:19:13 UTC by Cathy