Event design and cycle

Work templates on the before, during and after CommsLabs.

- Before the event: Preparing and planning
- During the event: Agenda setting session and CommsLabs event
- Adaptation, Flexibility and Community leadership
- After the event

Before the event: Preparing and planning

Preparation for CommsLabs event includes structured planning through the Co-Design Session, Co-Design Agenda Workshop, and co-designed agenda and facilitation plans. Developed floor plans help organize agenda into a visual format, while comprehensive program design and development ensures smooth coordination. We have prepared templates you can download and use for each stage of the planning process.

CommsLabs Co-Design Session

- **Nomination Matrix**: for inviting and tracking participants to session. This worksheet is included in the overall CommsLabs workplan worksheet template
- **Official Invitation Letter:** a template letter for inviting participants to session. The letter can be adapted and expanded upon as needed for designated CommsLabs.
- **Co-Design Session Facilitation Plan**: the template outlines the structure for CommsLabs team to co-plan the detailed agenda, including goals, roles, prep, debrief, and materials.
- **Documentation (in-session)**: a template for capturing in-session notes and team debrief notes for the co-design sessions. The documentation notes will mirror the agenda for designated CL session.
- **Travel Information Survey**: we often use a google template to collect information around attendance and goals, and use Tutanota or Tresorit to collect travel information.

Distributed organic Co-Design Agenda Workshop

Two days of face-to-face or on-site engagement are not equivalent to the same numbers of hours in an online remote environment, because body language and fatigue interact, belong and are received differently. Additionally, all the informal conversation, time spent together at breakfast, lunches/dinners, breaks and other informal moments are irreplaceable and cannot be replicated as they are the ones through which group trust as well as assumptions “check-in” are defused and happening naturally.

Having this in mind and considering the centrality of the Co-design Agenda workshop as the “kernel”, core of the overall Caribbean CommsLab Event, the foundational moment of collective co-

creation with the Activists Advisory Board and the local partner at the center, we need to be more creative and design from and for the multiple realities we all, the Coordination team: RAD, Astraea, Equality Fund and APC, Activists Advisory board and Local Partners live and experience.

The distributed organic agenda co-design workshop is centered on activists' ease to engage from the different places and spaces where they live and work, and then progressively consolidates needs/learnings in the online continuum, where we all live and thrive together.

Download Template for Co-Design Agenda Workshop

Co-Design Agenda & Facilitation Plans

A template that contains purpose and outcomes of the co-design sessions; participant prep and checklist items; detailed agenda and facilitation plans and more.

- Download Caribbean Template
- Download Central Asia and South Caucasus Template

Floor Plan

The floor plan allows representing day by day agenda in a visual format. Each day is further divided in slots of time making it possible to view agenda items in color coded manner instead of plain text document.

- Download Caribbean Template
- Download Central Asia and South Caucasus Template

Program Design & Development

- **Full Participant Program:** provides a base template for the CommsLabs program (e.g. goals, agenda, format, etc) to be shared with participants; to date, some CommsLabs teams have experimented with digital only full programs (resource saving and in the event agenda changes).
- **Program at a glance**: this document (a multi-tab workbook) provides CommsLabs design teams - especially the Coordination Team, Facilitators, Trainers, and point folks - with a single place to find up-to-date information about the CommsLabs program, team members (sometimes aka ‘pods’), contact info (note: final product can be in long-form program)

- **Session design templates:** these templates support trainers to design plenary sessions; note that while it may be convenient to have a standalone document for the plenary planning, it may/can be more convenient to use a single template for all the session types (workshops, labs, etc.)
  - Plenary Session design
  - Workshop session design
- **Full program samples:**
  - Colombia
  - Kenya
  - South Africa
  - Dominican Republic
- **Program-at-a-glance samples:**
  - Kenya
  - South Africa

During the event: Agenda setting session and CommsLabs event

Hybrid events require careful planning to ensure all participants feel included and engaged. Emphasizing adaptation, flexibility, and community leadership fosters inclusive participation, while continuous evaluation and documentation help capture valuable insights for future improvements

Hybrid Plenary: Tech Set up and Facilitators onboarding

APC has developed Hybrid events guide 101 aimed at hosts who want to hold and facilitate hybrid convenings/events, and is based on APC's experience and learning from organising events during and after the the pandemic.

We understand hybrid event as an event that has both on-site and online participants and/or speakers, and where participation and engagement are mediated through and by technology.

Hybrid events have the advantages of allowing more people to participate (especially people with limited resources or in remote locations, those caring for others, or those unable to travel for any other reason), reducing event costs related to travel, and reduced impact on the environment.

A hybrid event has elements of both on-site events and online events by design, forcing you to rethink the space as a combination of both worlds.

One of the key learnings that we have had is that for those participants who are together in a room, it is very easy to forget that there are remote participants, as the physical space is so compelling.

Read APC's Hybrid Events Guide 101

Caribbean and CASC - Adaptation, Flexibility and Community leadership

We are at the last circle, the last round of smiles, nodding, rising of arms with hands waving appreciation and gratitude. Agreement rises and diffuse gently as a low paced tide.

The event has flown seamlessly with everyone contributing to its magic. Folks have stepped up as needed. Participants, facilitators, interpreters, volunteers, logistic and resource team everyone feel ownership and name the belonging ... Even staff at the venue share praise.

How have we arrived here? **Click here to read more**

Evaluation & Documentation

- **Pre-CommsLabs Participant Eval (gDoc live Form):** serves as baseline for pre-CommsLabs event evaluation for activist participants to share their reflections on their expectations of CommsLabs, aspects of their work, and experience of CommsLabs to date. *[Ideally administered on-site pre-event]*
- **Post-CommsLabs Participant Eval (gDoc live Form):** serves as a baseline for post-CommsLabs event evaluation for activist participants to share their reflections immediately following CommsLabs. *[Ideally administered before participants return home.]*
- **Pre-CommsLabs Trainer/Facil Eval (gDoc live Form)**: serves as baseline for pre-CommsLabs event evaluation for trainers to share their reflections on their expectations of CL, aspects of their work, and experience of CommsLabs to date. *[Ideally administered on-site, pre-event]*
- **Post-CommsLabs Trainer/Facil Eval (gDoc live Form):** serves as a baseline for post-CommsLabs event evaluation for trainers to share reflections immediately following CommsLabs. *[Ideally administered before trainers] return home.*
- **Astraea Internal Debrief:** supports the individual Astraea CommsLabs teams in ongoing reflection and revision (action learning) about the CommsLabs process as it unfolds.

Adaptation, Flexibility and Community leadership

We are at the last circle, the last round of smiles, nodding, rising of arms with hands waving appreciation and gratitude. Agreement rises and diffuse gently as a low paced tide.

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How have we arrived here?

Humbleness, patience, trust, care, wisdom and ... discipline toward a lot of practical little recurrent tasks distributed across time to weave and help fill-in distance of places, diversity of time-zones, multiplicity of languages and experiences, visible and invisible privileges, declared and hidden powers.

All milled, digested and spun through the continuum of clear, documented and documentable slow direct (individual and collective) communication threads.

Heart warming events do not shy away from discussion, disagreement, asking questions, push back, maintaining of repetitive administrative tasks (emails, minutes, agendas, ... handouts, repositories, workflows).

If we are all remote, it is an infrastructure that provides everyone with accessible, curated documentation and connection that is part of the kernel that builds the magic retribution of the closing circle.

Yet everything should be movable, changeable, adaptable as nothing in life is fixed so events build themselves through space, time, context, adjusting to the messy lives and circumstances of everyone involved.

If the beginning of an event see (depending on the methodology and the culture of the convener) the adoption of a workplan shaped as an xls file, a visual board, a presentation. It is not the workplan that will make the magic. Magic will come from folks working together renewing their agreements time and time again until the last participant has reached home.

Folks are all who have a stake into the event:

- convener (a person, a collective, an institution)
- consultants (a person, a pair/team, an institution) contracted by the convener with specific mandated supporting roles

- the community
  - local partner (a person, a pair/team, an institution) knowing and living the place, ensuring connections, relationships, language
  - facilitators (a person, a pair/team, an institution) members of the community with skills, competences, knowledge, connections, relationships, language
  - advisors (a group of trusted folks) to guide understanding of themes, issues, priorities, fears, needs, and again connections, relationships, language
  - participants.

The community leads the way:

- advisors, facilitators and local partners shared vision and understanding with the larger community of participants are the most vital ingredient for the event to bloom
- the convener shares a vision with the community, provides and administer means such as financial resources, keep themselves in check (power and privilege) and practice accountability to both the consultants and the community
- folks, team hired as facilitators of the overall process and of the technical infrastructure (consultants) share vision with both the convener and the community and are tasked with facilitating and holding the natural tensions, disagreements that emerges during the implementation across time and spaces (infrastructure). They role is to support the creation of a "*shared feasible vision that bring together the skies of expectation with the reality of what need and can happens*". Their role is to make easy for all actors across the entire period of engagement to contribute, share inputs and make decisions with a special attention to all members joining the process and representing the community.

Time is not a variable! Forced timeline does not make participatory events. Timelines by their nature tend to expand not to contract. If you plan it, it will take two weeks, add a buffer zone of one more.

Your event is not the only event in the lives of the community. Their ecosystem is an unknown and deserves time. Your systems, administration, technical tools for many of them are an unknown and deserve time. Communication is a quicksand of assumptions, personal trauma and second and third spoken language that deserve time.

Time should always be measured by the pace of the slowest not the faster.

After the event

After the event, communal infrastructure plays a crucial role in sustaining connections, fostering networking, and enabling ongoing knowledge sharing. It can be leveraged to organize future events, support network building and advocacy efforts.

Potential of infrastructure as a way of continuing the convening, networking, sharing

For sustainability and future applications of the current infrastructure we can consider two separate scenarios in terms of how it has been used in the past two CommsLabs and what potential applications the infrastructure can support in the future.

Current application and configuration

In the last two CommsLabs events, the infrastructure has been used primarily for coordinating the engagement that goes into organising the event. So, the Coordination Team along with Activist Advisory Board, MCs, Facilitators have operationalised remote working and collaboration via Chat, Files, Meetings and the website. In addition, the participants (community folks) have access to all logistics, program, agenda and session files; they are able to upload and download material, for example photos/ videos or presentations during and after the event. Given this context, the infrastructure has hosted and is accessible and useful for all people involved which means the infrastructure has realised its purpose of coordination, planning and information sharing.

However, there is immense potential for the existing infrastructure to support other similar events and projects as well as to continue to build on and advocate for the principles and values of a digital infrastructure based on free and open-source practices, rooted in the philosophy and transfeminist understandings of safety and security, and consider care as an exercise of active listening and contextual responses.

Future potential applications

Efforts such as CommsLabs connects activists and community members shaping the future of LGBTQI human rights advocacy and CommsLabs is not the only such effort, there can be grantee programs, research programs or projects that are online (one time webinars or workshops), offline or a mix of both. All such efforts require a set of different tools that would cater to different needs

and context. However the key that holds all this together lies in the decision making processes and workflows that embody the principles of communal infrastructure.

Success of the current infrastructure itself speaks to the fundamental ingredient of “co-responsibility” and collaboration (between Astraea, RAD, APC among other organisations and community members) - users should be encouraged to participate, but not overwhelmed. This approach shifts from profit-driven models to shared responsibility and care for the environment.

All this to suggest and recommend that for the future application of this infrastructure in the larger context of network building and advocacy efforts – whatever shape or form that may take – the ownership of the infrastructure must sit with the community. Astraea may decide to continue to host and play the role of “convenor” while other roles of operationalising and maintaining can be shared among community members.

For example, if the infrastructure is used for an event with similar structure as CommsLabs, the shared responsibilities and decision making will extend to the Activist Advisory Board, MCs, Facilitators and Community folks. There is a substantial amount of human power and monetary efforts required to maintain, operationalise and host the infrastructure, so there can be periodic reviews of deciding how long the infrastructure remains, in what configuration, which tools to be maintained and for which purposes.

Considering the human power, another critical recommendation here is to include specific clauses in contracts and scope of work for all roles (e.g. Activist Advisory Board and facilitators) that may be involved in collective decision-making for future application of the infrastructure. The conversation about the work that may be involved in continued application of the infrastructure should be embedded since the beginning. This also helps immensely with promoting community ownership.

Resources

For more context on Communal Infrastructure and how it can be used for organising various kinds of events, APC recommends the following additional resources:

- Communal internet infrastructure
- Hybrid events guide 101
- APC guidelines on planning and designing online events
- Compilation of articles and resources on feminist infrastructure