CITY OF **MADISON**
Tips to Make Virtual Training Engaging

As a dedicated Learning Partner facilitating trainings for our workforce, you understand the challenge of keeping participants engaged in a virtual environment. We designed this resource to equip you with practical strategies to captivate and motivate your learners, making your sessions more interactive and impactful.

By implementing some or all these tips, you'll enhance the overall learning experience, ensuring that your virtual training not only informs, but inspires and involves every participant. Dive in to discover how you can transform your virtual sessions into dynamic, engaging learning experiences!

How to navigate this resource:

We organized this resource in the order one might follow when building their course/content and preparing to facilitate their course.

#1 is what to consider *before* your *course* – including items that you should embed into the foundation of your curriculum.

#2 is what to consider *as your course starts* – to set up the session for optimal success.

#3 is what to consider *throughout your course* – to uphold best-facilitation-practices throughout.

#4 What to consider as you are *wrapping up your course.*

1 Before Your Course

Key: Organizational Development = OD
Learning Partner = LP
Subject Matter Expert = SME

Incorporate All Learning Styles

What	Why/How
Incorporate Practice	• Provide real-world scenarios to help participants learn and practice the skills you are teaching. • This can look like role-play or practicing walking through a scenario.
Avoid Information Overload	• Remember to focus on your learner, what skills and/or knowledge are essential for them to learn? • Use bite-sized content, avoid text-heavy slides. • Review once you're done introducing a new concept.
Use a Learner Workbook	• Create a learner workbook that allows learners to follow-along with your slide deck. • Use fill-in-the-blanks, interactive graphs and charts, etc. for live learner processing while you're teaching new concepts. (This can help learners retain information more). • Use blank note spots for folks to write their thoughts down. • Include slide numbers in the learner workbook or vice-versa for folks to stay on track.
Build Accessible Slide Decks	• Use visuals, avoid text-heavy slides. Make sure to describe the connections when you are facilitating. • Use plain language. *(Check out the Federal Plain Language Guidelines & use the Hemmingway App)* • Use accessible visuals, add alt-text for any image or icon used. *(Use an Alt-Text Creator)* • Use appropriate contrasting colors. *(Use a Color Contrast Checker)* • Use appropriately sized text on slides. *(See Accessibility Guidelines)*
Use Short Videos	• Use bite-sized videos (3-5 minutes in length), these are more effective for attention span. Use closed captioning whenever possible • Provide time for discussion and questions after watching.
Use "Wordables"	• Pictures made up of a cloud of smaller words, connected to the main word/idea/concept.
Send Slides Before the Course	• Some folks learn best when they're able to review the material prior to the course. • Some folks may need to pre-prepare a screen reader with the slide deck before being able to interact with the content.
Access Needs	• Adjusting to access needs fosters inclusivity and makes sure every learner has equal opportunities and respects their right to participate fully in our courses. HR-OD will ping you in pre-course emails with steps to take should your course receive access needs requests.

Master Your Technology

Zoom vs. Teams: As a City of Madison – LP, we encourage you to use Zoom to facilitate your courses. When submitting your Course Planning Form(s), indicate whether you want to use your Zoom account, or OD's. *Note, if you do not have a paid Zoom Account, you'll want to use OD's.*

Become Familiar with Zoom Functions:

Common Zoom Features		
• Admit participants. • Participants view. • Sharing content & screens + different views. • Taking attendance (manual).	• Monitor the chat. • Mute participants who are not talking. • Stay aware of raised hands and reactions. • Manage breakout rooms.	• Run polls. • Closed captions. • Language Interpretation – Requires an additional dedicated person to run this. Must also attend IT's Language Interpretation in Zoom to access. • Assist with technology issues.

Consider Facilitating Solo vs. Having a Moderator:

Solo	Having a Moderator
• If you are experienced with the Zoom platform, and/or have minimal chat/breakout rooms/polls, then you likely do not need a moderator. • Also consider the number of participants who will be in attendance and if you are comfortable moderating alone for that amount.	• Moderators help with the Zoom operations including maintaining/operating some or all the Common Zoom Features above.

② As Your Course Starts

Engage Participants Within the First 5 Minutes

What	Why/How

Introduce Yourself	• Share pronouns if comfortable.
	• Share what you do at TeamCity and some personal information to connect with learners.
	  ○ Let your personality come through during this introduction! Keep it informal, energetic, engaging, conversational.
	  ○ What type of connection do you have to this content? What makes you the SME?

Use Check-In Questions	• This sets up for an engaging environment.
	• Check-in questions can range from serious to silly. They can be something relating to the content you're about to teach learners, or something totally unrelated.
	• Depending on number of participants, you can use chat or have folks come off of mute but keep responses short (less than 60 seconds), or use waterfall chat – *see below.*
	• *Examples:*
	  ○ *What are you most looking forward to learning in today's course?*
	  ○ *What's your favorite ___food, season, animal, song, etc.___?*
	  ○ *Would you rather questions!*

Use First Names	• Use first names of participants as they "enter" the room and welcome them.
Request Folks Update their Names	• Ask folks to rename themselves if their screen names are not what they registered with for attendance purposes. • Share they can add pronouns if comfortable, and which department they're with.
Cameras	• Encourage folks to turn on their cameras while acknowledging this increases connection engagement. Remember, not all may be able to or comfortable doing so.
Review House-Keeping Items	• Share learning objectives – aim for three-five in total. • Share group agreements and other expectations for your time together. *(Course Building Toolkit)*

Ask a Question About Topic	• Ask a question about topic ~ and make any needed adjustments on the fly to content.
	• *Examples:*
	  ○ *What's your current level of knowledge on topic?* **OR** *What is your past experience with topic?*
	  ○ *What comes to mind when you think of topic?*

Agenda

Include an agenda for the session at the beginning (this could be combined with or replace your learning objectives). As you make your way through your course, it can be helpful to some learners to have agenda check-in slides. These are simply duplicated original agenda slides with items you've taught checked off – so folks know where they're at as you make your way through the content.

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③ Throughout Your Course

Remember Your Zoom Moderation Duties! – especially if you're solo-facilitating without a moderator!

Be Conversational vs. Scripted (Don't be Too Formal!)

What	Why/How
Practice!	• Ask colleagues, friends, family, or even HR-OD if you can practice your content with them.
Remember YOU are the SME!	• Remember YOU are the SME and you know your content. (Why else would you be facilitating this course??) 😊 • If someone asks a question that you don't have an answer to on the spot, remember you can always get back to folks after the course with an answer!
Real-World Examples and Intersectionality	• Bring in real-world examples of times you've had to work through a similar problem/example in your daily work – from your point of view! • Explain your thought process as a SME. • Consider how your topic may impact individuals with marginalized identities. Possibly highlight unique considerations or provide information which is specific to various identities.

Provide Learner Engagement Often (Aim for at least every 7 mins)

What	Why/How
Polls or Quizzes	• You'll need to create polls and/or quizzes with set answers prior to the meeting. • Use these for anonymous interaction with questions and scale ratings.
Chat	• Ask folks to respond to questions in the chat. • Waterfalls – this is where you pose a question to the group, have participants type their answer in the chat but wait to send until you give the go-ahead. Have everyone send their answers at the same time. • Ask for aha's and/or key take-aways from the last few slides/minutes.
Breakout Rooms	• Create activities to enhance learning of your content in small groups. • Set clear expectations, send directions in the chat so folks have access to this when breakout rooms open. • Designate a specific amount of time for the groups. If you have multiple breakout rooms planned, check-in with the group after the first one to see if they felt like it was too much, too little, or just right timing to get through the activity. Adjust as needed going forward. • Ask folks to choose 1 note taker, 1 person to report-out. • Set a timer for rooms and broadcast a reminder message as end-time approaches. Suggest one at three-minutes prior to the end mark.
Scenarios & Case Studies	• Use real-life stories and scenarios that participants can relate to around the content. • Use case studies to practice a new way of thinking.
Zoom Whiteboard	• See Getting Started with Zoom Whiteboards. This may not be accessible to participants with screen readers.
Teams Whiteboard	• See Getting Started with Microsoft Whiteboards. This may not be accessible to participants with screen readers.

When Asking for Responses, Wait

- Count to 60 seconds.
- Acknowledge a need for processing and your level of comfort to wait for folks to respond/interact.
- Reframe the question.
- Offer examples if the group is extra quiet.
- Offer different methods folks can respond to the question. *(Example: In the chat or with a reaction).*

Use Feedback Loops

Integrate participants responses into your training.

What	Why/How
Example 1 – Using Polls	• If you use a poll, have some notes ready for how you'll respond depending on the answers that come in. ○ *Example:* You ask folks to rate their familiarity on a scale of 1-3. If you get mostly 1's, connect it to _____. If mostly 2's, connect it to _____. If mostly 3's… and so on and so on. So, you can tie your interaction pieces back to your content, and the interaction wasn't just for giggles.
Example 2 – Loop Back	• Loop back to previous interaction pieces, and tie in what participants respond with to the appropriate areas of your presentation. ○ *Example:* You ask folks what they might want to learn about at the beginning of the course and folks respond. Remember to reference those items they mentioned as you make your way through your content. For instance, Sam said he wanted to learn more about __trees__ at the beginning of this course, here's where we get into discussing __trees__!
Other Examples – Pivoting Required	• If participants are not at the level of knowledge you anticipated, adjust your content to meet the majority of participants. • If organic conversations and/or discussions are proving to be highly beneficial, consider skipping or condensing planned information to accommodate conversations. • If folks are demonstrating a high amount of resistance, you can change how you are facilitating – by adjusting content, using different methods, asking participants how they would like to proceed by giving them a few options.

Give Breaks

If your course lasts more than one hour, offer a break half-way through! Experts recommend a five-minute break every 45 minutes or so. *(ConferencesThatWork.com).*

Always announce the time that you expect folks to be back and ready to dive in again. You can set a count-down timer showing the breaktime remaining for participants to stay on time.
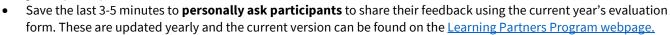
When returning from break, ask a question to re-engage learners, and make sure all have returned. *Example: What is one of your favorite break activities? – Dancing, stretching, coffee/tea refills, giving your pet some love, etc.?*

4   Wrapping Up Your Course

Feedback

In the spirit of continuous improvement, all courses offered through OD use the City of Madison Course Evaluation Form to gather participant feedback. **Send a link to the survey in the chat.**

- Save the last 3-5 minutes to **personally ask participants** to share their feedback using the current year's evaluation form. These are updated yearly and the current version can be found on the Learning Partners Program webpage.
  - OD does send a copy of the link out in course follow-up emails once attendance sheets are sent back to OD, but a personal ask typically yields more responses!
- You can expect a summary of the feedback the Friday following your course date. Review this for ideas and suggestions for how to enhance your training.

Offer Additional Support

If you have the capacity to, you can offer additional post-course support if learners need it. Share your contact information if questions come up down the road, offer 1:1 follow-up meetings and/or hold open office hours to facilitate further learning.

Looking for More Facilitation Resources?

Check out our Learning Partners Program – Course Building Toolkit, and/or reach out to us at OrganizationalDevelopment@cityofmadison.com.

Sources: eLearning Industry, other sources linked throughout the document.