A Facilitator's Guide for the Online Course

WHAT EDUCATION LEADERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VIRTUAL EDUCATION





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INTRODUCTION

We welcome those who plan to build and facilitate the online course *What Education Leaders Should Know about Virtual Education*. This facilitator's guide contains information, advice, and examples that will help you successfully deliver the course online. It will help you build the course on a learning management system (LMS) and assist you through all phases of the course implementation, with steps to follow *before* course delivery, *during* your instruction, and *after* the course has ended.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS COURSE

When the Center on Instruction (COI) and the New England Comprehensive Center (NECC) created this course, it was built and facilitated online on a private LMS, and available free to participants during the tenure of both COI and NECC. However, with the phasing out of COI and restructuring of NECC in 2012, the course has been closed.

COI and NECC maintain their commitment to making the course available for free. That option requires you, the facilitator, to build the course on a SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Mode)-compliant LMS of your choice (perhaps with the assistance of an instructional technology expert available within your organization or as freelance support). Some may find building the course from the ground up to be a difficult technical task, especially those who have had little or no experience in course construction on an LMS. Therefore, this guide includes steps to help you through that process, from selecting an LMS, to installing the course content, to delivering the course via the LMS to your participants.

The section on building the course on an LMS starts on page 5.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE COURSE

Audience. This course has a specific audience base: it has been designed to serve *state and district leaders*, who, in turn, will provide technical assistance or professional development to district and/or local personnel.

Content. The course contains three primary topics:

- background knowledge about online learning,
- meeting the needs of diverse learners through virtual education, and
- *policy issues* related to the implementation of online programs.

Objectives. We expect that technical assistance providers will use this course to train state department of education personnel who, in turn, will provide professional development about online learning to district staff members (superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum coordinators, and others) and school-level staff members (principals, teachers, curriculum specialists, coaches, volunteers, and others).

What will participants learn from taking this course? They will learn:

- the *meanings of key concepts and terms* relating to virtual education, and
- how to apply this knowledge when they design and deliver their own online programs and engage in online learning themselves.

What will facilitators learn from delivering this course? Facilitators will learn about *additional resources* to adapt, modify, enrich, and further explain content to their learning community.

How long is the course? The course consists of *three one-week modules*, lasting a total of three weeks. We suggest starting each module on a Wednesday morning and

finishing at the end of the following Tuesday evening, giving participants a weekend at mid-session to fully participate.

Is the course synchronous or asynchronous? Most of work in the course is asynchronous so that participants can work according to their own schedules. However, participants interact and learn within each module over a period of a week, so that everyone is studying the same content at the same time.

Webinars are the only synchronous activities offered throughout the course. However, when scheduled they should be considered optional and not require participants to be present at a specific day and time. Facilitators should record course webinars, post them on the LMS, and let participants know how to access them. A brief overview or synopsis of the webinar conversation or Q&A document is also helpful to post for participants who were unable to attend the webinar.

ACCESSING OR CREATING THE COURSE

As mentioned earlier, this course was originally designed as a facilitated course, offered free of charge by COI and NECC. However, the course is no longer available online or facilitated by COI and NECC because of the phasing out of COI and the reorganization of the NECC by the U.S. Department of Education in September 2012.

Two options remain for technical assistance professionals, state departments of education, and others who would like to deliver the course to their constituents:

- 1. Download the bundled set of files that you can use to build the course on your SCORM-compliant LMS. These files are available on the COI website (www.centeroninstruction.org) with this facilitator's guide. Once you download the files, you will need to import the SCORM-compliant course materials into your LMS. The information on page 5 will help you through this process. This option likely requires the assistance of a skilled instructional technology specialist or someone familiar with the process of creating a course in an LMS.
- 2. Contact the Northeast Comprehensive Center for support. For those who are located in the New England states or New York, the Northeast Comprehensive Center can assist you in customizing this course for your use and, in some cases, facilitating the course. Contact the Northeast Comprehensive Center at VirtualEducationCourse@northeastcompcenter.org to discuss logistics.

BUILDING THE COURSE IN YOUR CHOSEN LMS

The following steps include some technical tasks you should consider when building the course in an LMS. Place a check mark in the box when the task is completed.

Choose an LMS. If you decide to import the course into an LMS, we recommend one that is SCORM-compliant, such as Moodle (http://moodle.org/) which is a free open-source LMS. However, you may already be operating a fee-based LMS within your organization (e.g., Blackboard, Desire2Learn, BrainHoney), which you could use to build the course.

Import the course files or build course content into your LMS.

Once you have created a new course on your LMS, you should upload the bundled files you downloaded to your computer from the COI website by using the "restore" feature available through your LMS. To do this, click the "restore" link in the "administration" block on the new course page to start importing the bundled files. During the restore you can also select what elements you wish to include from the bundled files and which elements you wish to leave out. If using Moodle, you will be presented with a list of all the items contained in the restore file. Check this list thoroughly so that you import the complete course.

You may also choose to build out the course content on pages 13-31 of this facilitator's guide from scratch on your LMS.

Use more than one browser. This course will work in most modern browsers, including current versions of Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, and Google Chrome. We recommend that you have at least two browsers on your computer to be able to test that any problems

encountered during course creation and delivery are not due to one particular browser.

- Install Adobe Acrobat Reader. Several documents in this course are posted as PDFs, which can be created, read, and printed with Adobe Acrobat Reader, available free from Adobe's website (www.adobe.com). If you do not yet have Acrobat Reader installed, go to the Adobe site and follow the directions to download and install the software.
- **Turn on closed captioning.** This course uses video tutorials. Some have the option to play with closed captions. To play a video with closed captions, click on the CC button in the control tray. Advise your participants to do the same.
- Add the course URL to the list of acceptable sites on your computer. Popup blockers prevent "pop-up" ads from opening up in your web browser. If your browser is configured to block pop-ups, you will need to add your course's URL as an exception. Participants should do the same on their computers. Also, have any websites that you plan to use whitelisted by your information technology department.
- *Multimedia software.* Some sites recommended in this course incorporate multimedia materials. To access full multimedia effects, you and your participants may need one or more of the following free software downloads:

QuickTime / Real Player / Shockwave / Flash Player

Accept cookies and enable JavaScript. You must configure your browser to accept cookies and enable JavaScript to use some of the features in this course. Participants should do the same on their computers.

PREPARING TO DELIVER THE COURSE

The following tasks should be completed before you deliver the course. Place a check mark in the box when you've completed the task.

- Prepare the course materials as outlined in the syllabus; post them to the LMS as directed.
- The course requires two facilitators. Identify and arrange to engage two facilitators in course delivery. Consider facilitators who are familiar with delivering professional development, such as state department of education or school district personnel. You may opt to use different experts to facilitate components of the course, such as the webinar in Module Three. Have your experts become familiar with course by reviewing the course content within the LMS, participating in any tutorials that may accompany your selected LMS, and reviewing the resources in the sections of this guide on delivering and facilitating the course.
- Obtain a photo and short biography for each facilitator and guest expert.

 Include these in your marketing tools, course introduction, and

 Module Three.
- *Market the course* to potential participants. There are a variety of ways to market this course. The marketing tools that you include in your promotion plan will be based upon your goals, your audience's habits and preferences, and your organization's financial and time constraints. The tools you may consider using include:

- Email marketing through a listsery or direct email.
- Blogging on your organization's blog to communicate with your audience about the course offering or updates on experts who have signed on to work with course participants.
- Affiliate marketing with other technical assistance providers in your state or region, or your state or local education agency.



Register participants for the course. Depending on the LMS you have selected, registration may take place through the LMS. If not, you will need to use another external registration tool. You should make sure that whatever tool you select supports CSV – comma separated value – file formats to easily import participant names and email addressed into the LMS.

DELIVERING AND FACILITATING THE COURSE

As you begin to deliver and facilitate the course, attend to the following tasks. Place a check mark in the box when you've completed the task.

- Establish the mode(s) of communication you plan to employ with participants. Announce to participants when the course will begin, what schedule it will follow, and links to tutorials specific to utilizing your LMS. This is typically done via email. Collect phone numbers as well as email addresses from participants—don't hesitate to contact participants by phone if you find it convenient and appropriate. You may want to call or video chat with each participant before the first module begins, depending on course size, to ensure they have received all emails you have sent with course access information and are comfortable using the LMS. Try to do this at least two weeks before the first day of the course.
- Share tutorials with participants on how to use the LMS. Every LMS has PDF or video tutorials to acclimatize users to the features and functionalities of the platform. Make sure you have identified these resources and share them with participants at least two weeks in advance of the first day of the course.
- by participants. You might schedule this during Module One, or you might consider holding an orientation before the course begins and do it then.

 (Note: an agenda for an optional pre-course orientation has not been provided here; if you feel such an orientation will be worthwhile, we suggest using information in this facilitator's guide to structure it.)

No pre-test for this course. This course does not require participants to complete a knowledge pre-test or a post-test as it stands. However, if you are offering the course for credit, you may want to create one using the Quiz feature available on your LMS.

Consider how you might build participant engagement throughout the course. We suggest several resources that you might find helpful to share with both facilitators and participants to enhance their excitement and readiness to participate.

Building an Online Learning Community (Samuel Merritt University, n.d.). This article provides a working definition of a learning community and highlights some of the unique benefits of online learning communities, as well as techniques for sustaining them.

Building an Online Learning Community (Wilcoxon, 2011). This article goes into more depth about the essential elements of learning communities. Although the initial examples are taken from a university context, the concepts are relevant to a professional development audience as well.

<u>BE VOCAL: Characteristics of Successful Online Instructors, Journal of Interactive Online Learning</u> (Savery, 2005). VOCAL is an acronym for Visible, Organized, Compassionate, Analytical and Leader-by-example. The VOCAL approach summarizes the key characteristics that a master instructor utilizes to be effective in an online environment.

<u>Time Management Strategies for Online Instructors</u> (University of Wisconsin-Stout, n.d.). This reading highlights a number of strategies to help online instructors to maximize their time.

Fostering Critical Engagement in Online Discussions (Monroe, 2010).

What pedagogical factors foster critical engagement? This is the central research question of a qualitative study on threaded discussions recently launched at Washington State University.

Successful Online Discussion and Collaboration: Techniques for Facilitation

(Collier & Yoder, 2002). This article provides a summary of the techniques that participants can use for facilitating online discussions and guiding online collaborative projects.

WRAPPING UP THE COURSE

As you conclude delivery and facilitation of Module Three, you may wish to address the following tasks. Place a check mark in the box when you've completed the task.

- *Have participants complete the post-course survey* immediately after the final module.
- **Issue course completion certificates** via email, but not until participants complete the post-course survey.
- No post-test. There is no post-test at the conclusion of this course. However, if you are offering the course for credit, you may want to create one using the Quiz feature available on your LMS.

THE COURSE

This section provides the actual content of the course *Learning Online: What Education Leaders Should Know about Virtual Education*. Each module includes:

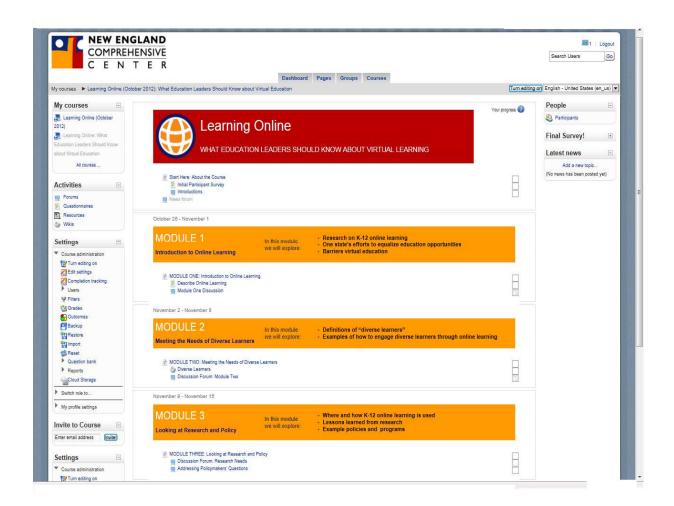
- introductory text,
- activities to activate the learning,
- readings and websites to further explore the concepts, and
- an opportunity for participants to engage in a discussion and demonstrate what they have learned.

This is the course content that you will build into an LMS of your choice, using bundled files provided to you on the COI website. You may want to build the course on a platform different than Moodle. To do so you should use the resources from your LMS to help you import these bundled files appropriately. These will typically be found in the frequently asked questions or support section of the LMS provider's website.

This section begins with a screen capture of how the course looks in the Moodle LMS. It is followed on pages 16-31 by the actual text of the course content. In that section, you will find some blank areas to indicate where to enter information specific to your course (e.g., the name of the experts you identify to lead a webinar). Sidebars provide instructions for the facilitator.

Example of course layout on an LMS

This is a screen capture illustrating how the course homepage looks in Moodle.



We chose to use a cascading style sheet to ensure that the course had the same look and feel throughout. We selected a vibrant color palette that both matches the logo of the course provider and is visually interesting. We developed icons to represent each task the participants would participate in throughout the course.

To help participants work their way through the course, we set up an introductory area on the course main page with a *Start Here: About the Course* section which included information about the course, the course objectives, and the biography of

the facilitators and guest experts. We also included the Initial Participant Survey here, along with a discussion forum for participant introductions.

From here we chose to set up each module as its own subpage. On the course main page we set a banner for each module that included the module title and key areas the participants would explore in each module. We also included each module discussion forum on the course main page. Each module subpage included all the content for that module. This included the module introductory text, *Activate Ideas*, *Read*, and *Explore* activities. We also included a link from the explore activities to the module discussion forum when appropriate.

On the following pages, you will find the text of the course content.

About this course

This three-week online course, designed to build education leaders' understanding of online learning, was created as a joint effort of the Center on Instruction (COI) and the New England Comprehensive Center (NECC) in response to needs expressed by State Education Agency (SEA) leaders. In a facilitated learning community model, participants experience online learning from a student perspective through a review of background information, collaboration on online activities, and dialogue about key K-12 online learning topics. Participants will be introduced to the national landscape of K-12 online learning at both the research and programmatic levels; they will become aware of how online content presentation and instructional strategies can be used to meet the needs of diverse learners; and they will consider their local policy needs through the exploration of existing K-12 online learning policies and programs. Further, participants will be able to experience online learning themselves from the perspective of an online learner.

Objectives

This course will enable participants to:

- o understand the national landscape of online learning programs,
- o be familiar with current research on K-12 online learning issues,
- experience how online content and instruction can be used to meet the needs of diverse learners,
- o explore existing K-12 online learning programs and policies, and
- o consider their own, local K-12 online learning policy needs.

Guest experts

Photo	Biography
Photo	Biography

Notes for facilitator

You may choose to use experts to facilitate components of this course such as the webinar in Module Three. You should include a photo and short biography of each guest expert that the participants will be working with throughout the course. You can also include this information for the course facilitators, too.

Initial participant survey

Question 1: Your Name (Optional)

Question 2: Select the role that most closely relates to your professional position. You may also select "Other" and more accurately define your position.

- o State department of education representative
- o Comprehensive Center staff member
- o Other technical assistance center staff member
- o Teacher
- School administrator
- o District administrator
- Other (Response required)

Question 3: If you selected "Other", please share your specific professional position.

(Response required)

Question 4: How many online courses have you taken?

- 0 (
- 0 1-3
- 0 4-6
- 0 >7

(Response required)

Question 5: How many online courses have you taught?

- 0 (
- o 1-3
- 0 4-6
- 0 >7

(Response required)

Notes for facilitator

Administer this survey at the beginning of the course before you begin Module One or during the optional orientation. These questions will be built into the LMS using the Quiz feature.

Question 6: What kind of device(s) will you be using (select all that apply)? You may also select "Other" and add a device that is not listed in the possible responses.

- o PC Computer
- o Mac Computer
- o Tablet (e.g. iPad)
- o Smartphone
- Other (Response required)

Question 7: If you plan to use a device for course participation that not listed in the above question, please indicate the device(s) here:

(Response required)

Question 8: What types of communication devices do you use on a regular basis? Check all that apply. You may also select "Other" and add devices that are not listed.

- o Phone
- o Email
- o Texting
- o Instant Messaging
- Video (such as through Skype)
- o Social Networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
- Other (Response required)

Question 9: If you selected "Other" above, list any additional communication device(s) you use on a regular basis.

(Response required)

Question 10: Do you or your school/state/organization offer, or are you considering, offering classes through virtual education? If yes, please describe what benefits you are receiving or hope to receive.

(Response Required)

Question 11:What challenges (if any) do you foresee in offering virtual education in or through your school/district/state/organization? (Response Required)

Question 12: What do you most hope to gain or learn from this course? (Response Required)

Introductory activity

Watch the EdTech Leaders Online video tutorial titled Posting and Replying to Messages in the Moodle Discussion Board (EdTech Leaders Online, 2008) and then post a message introducing yourself in this forum. (A transcript of this video is available if you would prefer to access the tutorial that way.) Include:

- Your name and the role you play in your organization.
- A few words about why you enrolled in this course.
- A photo of yourself or of something that represents your interests.

Make sure to read and respond to some of your colleagues' introductions.

Notes for facilitator

This activity
assumes you are
using the
Discussion Forum
feature in
Moodle. If you
are not, you will
need to create or
find a video
tutorial
describing how to
post messages in
your LMS's
discussion board.

MODULE ONE

Introduction to Online Learning

In this module we will explore:

- Research on K-12 online learning
- One state's efforts to equalize education opportunities
- Barriers to virtual education

The 2011 report Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning (Watson, et al., 2011) indicated that "as of late 2011, online and blended learning opportunities exist for at least some participants in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia." The limited body of research indicates that online learning is having an increasingly positive impact on the learning process. A U.S. Department of Education analysis of more than 40 studies, including five focused on K-12 participants, found that "participants who took all or part of their classes online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction" (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development Policy and Program Studies Service, 2010).

The most recent National Survey of Student Engagement (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2012) reported that the online learning experience enables higher order thinking and reflection across the learning process. And a recent report by the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands (Heppen, et al., 2012) found that "offering Algebra I as an online course to [algebra-ready] participants is an effective way to broaden access in schools that do not typically offer Algebra I in grade 8. Taking this course significantly affected participants' algebra achievement at the end of grade 8 and increased their likelihood of participating in an advanced course taking sequence in high school."



Activate

Click <u>here</u> to complete a short questionnaire that asks,
"What word or phrase comes to mind when you think of the
term online learning?"

Once all participants have responded to the questionnaire, course facilitators will display the words via a Wordle graphic, to visually represent the group's collective ideas.

Notes for facilitator

Be sure to create an active link to the questionnaire at the word here.



Read

Read one of the two documents below. As time allows, feel free to skim or read the second document.

<u>Lessons for Online Learning</u>, Education Next. This article (Dillon & Tucker, 2011) considers virtual education advocates' assertion that online learning has the power to transform how we currently provide K-12 education to students.

Providing ACCESS to Alabama: Connecting rural classrooms through distance and online learning, This case study (Staker & Trotter, 2011) explores how a team of stakeholders across Alabama's K–12 public school system came together to create the ACCESS Distance Learning program, with the goal of connecting rural classrooms through distance and online learning.



Explore

Watch Edutopia's five-minute video <u>Anytime</u>, <u>Anywhere: Online Learning Shapes</u> the Future. This clip illustrates how schools and districts are discovering and defining the benefits of virtual education such as flexible scheduling, personalized learning, and expanded course offerings.



Discuss

In the Module One Discussion Forum, post a response to the following question:

"The Alabama case study clearly indicates that the goal for the implementation of an online learning program was the systemic reconceptualization of rural education. What lessons do you take away from the two readings and the video that can inform your own online program development?"

Please be sure to make a minimum of two substantive contributions to the discussion forum. To enter the forum, <u>click here</u> or close window and click on the Module One Discussion Forum link in the Module One block on the main course page.

Notes for facilitator

You should set **Discussion Forum** expectations at the beginning of the course. These expectations should include information on the expected format of posts and how often participants should post. One good example of such expectations is the **ETLO Discussion** Board Expectations. Be sure to make <u>click</u> here a live link to your Module One Discussion Forum.

MODULE TWO

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners

In this module we will explore:

- Definitions of "diverse learners"
- Examples of how to engage diverse learners through online learning

Traditional instruction has been criticized for utilizing a "one size fits all" curriculum framework. However, educators increasingly recognize their responsibility to attend to the individual needs of diverse learners. Virtual learning, through its many customizable features, has made it possible for educators to meet this responsibility for learners with different learning styles and academic needs.



Activate

A *wiki* is a website where users can add, modify, or delete content via a web browser using simple HTML or a built-in text editor (kind of like the editing tools you use when you post messages in this course or when you work in MS Word).

Wikis are used in online teaching and learning because they are simple and easy ways for groups of participants and/or teachers to do collaborative activities. Probably the best known example of a wiki is Wikipedia - the free online encyclopedia that anyone can edit. For a nice explanation of a wiki, see the short video Wikis in Plain English.

In this session, we'll try our hand at creating a common definition of *Diverse Learners* using Moodle's built-in wiki tool. To access the Diverse Learners Wiki, click here, or

Notes for facilitator

You will need to build a Diverse Learners wiki on your LMS. Then, at the word here, create an active link to your wiki.

click on the Diverse Learners Wiki link in the Module Two block on the course homepage. Follow the instructions (in black and then red text) to start, add to, enhance, edit, etc. the definition of Diverse Learners.



Read the first document below. As time allows, feel free to skim or read the second document.

Access and Equity in Online Classes and Virtual Schools

The iNACOL Issues Briefs (Rose & Blomeyer, n.d.) provide information on the policy issues for online classes and virtual schools. The Issue assigned for your reading challenges the myth that virtual learning courses are meant only for gifted students, outlines the regulatory process for virtual school programs, and provides educators with action strategies to meet their legal responsibilities.

<u>Virtual K-12 Public School Programs and Students with Disabilities: Issues and</u> Recommendations - A Policy Forum Proceedings Document

This brief (Muller, 2010) discusses virtual schools serving students with disabilities. Because so little is known about how virtual K-12 public school programs are serving students with disabilities, Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education convened a policy forum in February 2010. This document also details the policy recommendations developed during the forum to address these challenges.



First, review this <u>Student Voices</u> video, which was produced by the New York Comprehensive Center in collaboration with participating parents, students, and educators representing virtual school programs from across the New England and New York region.

The two activities below are optional for you to do as time allows. They introduce a tool called VoiceThread that allows teachers to create online conversations around content in a way that lets participants participate how they prefer: voice, text, doodling, etc.

(OPTIONAL) Next, watch this short video tutorial on how to access, register for and contribute to this week's optional VoiceThread activity.

Notes for facilitator

You will need to set up a VoiceThread for this module. Here is a <u>link</u> to show you how to do this. Next, create a short video tutorial for participants explaining how to use the VoiceThread. Both the <u>short video tutorial</u> and <u>VoiceThread</u> should be live links.

(OPTIONAL) Finally, visit the <u>VoiceThread</u>, listen to the existing comment(s) and join the conversation!



Following last week's discussion about your state's online program policies, what is one key strategy that your state should address to meet your needs?

You may want to use the Action Strategies on pages 9–12 in iNACOL's brief <u>Access and Equity in Online Classes</u> <u>and Virtual Schools</u>, which you read earlier, issues brief to generate some ideas.

To enter the forum discussion, click here or close this current window or tab and click on Discussion Forum: Module Two link in Module Two on the course main page.

Notes for facilitator

You will need to create a Discussion Forum for Module Two. Be sure to make here a live link to that discussion forum.

MODULE THREE

Looking at Research and Policy

In this module we will explore:

- Where and how K-12 online learning is used
- Lessons learned from research
- Example policies and programs

As we have seen, online learning is a viable option for meeting the instructional needs of all students, in particular those who have learning styles compatible with online delivery methods and wish to have learning opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them in their schools or communities. Currently in many situations, local education agencies determine whether to provide online learning and how to deliver it, and they are responsible for monitoring the quality of the learning experience to ensure the courses meet the districts' requirements. Both research and policy impact local, state and national K-12 online learning decisions and thus are critical for us as stakeholders to understand and shape.



Activate

- 1. Review the <u>Defining Dimensions of Online Programs</u> chart to see how K-12 online learning is currently being defined and used.
- 2. Review <u>Ten Lessons Learned from Ten Years of Research on Online Teaching and Learning</u>: Susan Lowes, Director of Research and Evaluation at the Institute for Learning Technologies at Teachers College, Columbia University, shared this presentation at the Northeast Regional Summit on Virtual Education in 2011. The presentation speaks to the lessons she and others in this field have learned from a decade of research on K-12 online teaching and learning.



Read one of the two documents below. As time allows, feel free to skim or read the other.

Creating Sound Policy for Digital Learning: A Working Paper Series

This working paper (Battaglino, et al., 2011) from the *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, introduces the benefits and challenges of regulation, accountability, and quality when considering online learning options. The paper notes that when creating policies for online learning, it is critical to truly understand the financial benefits, decide who is accountable for student achievement gains whenever possible, and develop reporting systems to help educators, parents, and students identify the most effective suppliers of online learning.

Preserving Principles of Public Education in an Online World

This brief (Fulton & Kober, 2002) from the *Center for Education Policy* (CEP) encourages policymakers to have an explicit conversation about how virtual schools, or any other sweeping education reform, will affect the fundamental purposes and principles of public education. CEP has generated a set of key questions that policymakers should ask about online learning, and any major education reform for that matter, grouped according to CEP's list of six essential purposes and principles of public education.



Review your state profile at:

http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/OnlineLearningStateProfiles

Next, review the archive of the *Alliance for Excellent Education's* webinar and live chat, "Online Learning: Addressing Challenges, Seizing Opportunities": http://www.all4ed.org/events/WebinarOnlineLearning070810#Mats



Module Three discussion forums will open on [DATE] and will be facilitated by [GUEST FACILITATOR NAME HYPERLINKED TO BIO] of [ORGANIZATION].

- 1. In the Research Needs forum, read, respond to and discuss the question posted by [GUEST FACILITATOR]. Also, feel free to pose additional research-related K-12 virtual learning questions for [GUEST FACILITATOR] and your colleagues. Let's take full advantage of [GUEST FACILITATOR] ideas, experience and presence while we can!
- 2. In the Addressing Policymakers' Questions forum, read, respond to and discuss the question posted by [GUEST FACILITATOR].

Notes for facilitator

You will need to customize the information in this section by including the appropriate dates and facilitator information. Be sure to introduce the guest facilitators to your group and set expectations for posting.

You will also need to create the two discussion forums mentioned to the right, using the prompts provided below.

Discussion Forum Prompts

Research Needs forum prompt

What research-based findings or data would you like to have as you work with your states or regions to develop K-12 virtual education programs and policies?

Addressing Policymakers Questions forum prompt

Policymakers often want to know if online learning is as successful as face-to-face classroom learning. What are some ways that we can respond to this question?

Be sure that your instructions in the "Discuss" section above live link to your discussion forums.

GLOSSARY

The following definitions are excerpted from *The Online Learning Definitions Project* completed by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning – or iNACOL – in 2011 (iNACOL, 2011).

Asynchronous learning. Communication exchanges that occur in elapsed time between two or more people. Examples are email, online discussion forums, message boards, blogs, podcasts, etc.

At-risk student. Any student who is performing poorly academically, or who may face learning impediments not limited to socioeconomic status, behavioral and learning disabilities, and home, family, and community stresses; may also specifically refer to participants in danger of not passing a course or graduating.

Blended course. Course that combines two modes of instruction, online and face-to-face.

Blended learning. Learning that occurs in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace. Term is often used synonymously with *hybrid learning* (Horn and Staker, 2011).

Blog. As a noun, a website or a section of website used for expressing ideas and opinions of users in multiple modalities, often maintained by one leader. As a verb, maintaining or adding content to an ongoing asynchronous discussion housed at a target website.

Brick and mortar school. Traditional school or traditional school building, in contrast to an online school.

Chatroom. Website or part of a website, or an online service that offers communities a synchronous venue for discussing specific topics.

Competency-based learning. System that allows participants to advance upon mastery. Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower participants. Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for participants. Participants receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs. Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

Content repository. Venue for saving and sharing content. A digital content repository is an online venue for saving and sharing digital content.

Course Management System (CMS). Technology platform through which online courses are offered. A CMS includes software for the creation and editing of course content, communication tools, assessment tools, and other features designed to enhance access and ease of use" (Watson & Kalmon, 2005, p. 120). See *Learning Management System*.

Credit recovery. Student passes and receives credit for a course that she previously attempted but was unsuccessful in earning academic credit towards graduation (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2010).

Cyber-bullying. Harassing, embarrassing, or threatening a young person via the Internet, email or mobile device. Generally, cyber-bullying occurs between two or more young people. When adults are involved, it is typically referred to as cyber-harassment or cyber-stalking.

Cyber-education. Synonymous with *online learning*. Term is largely obsolete, losing favor in the online community.

Cyber school. Formally constituted organization (public, private, state, charter, etc.) that offers full-time education delivered primarily over the Internet. Term used synonymously with *virtual school*, *eSchool*, and *online school* in some state policy. See *online school*.

Digital citizenship. Norms of behavior with regard to technology use, including the practice of netiquette, ethical and legal online behavior.

Digital learning. Online or blended learning. See *online learning* and *blended learning*.

Digital literacy. Ability to locate, organize, understand, evaluate, analyze and create information using technology (British Council & British Broadcasting Corporation, 2009).

Discussion board. See threaded discussion.

Distance education. General term for any type of educational activity in which the participants are at a distance from each other, i.e., in different locations. The educational activities may or may not occur at the same time (asynchronous vs. synchronous).

Drop-out rate. Number of participants who do not complete a course as a percentage of the number who originally enrolled.

E-course. Any course offered over the Internet.

Electronic learning (e-learning). See *online learning*.

E-School. Formally constituted organization (public, private, state, charter, etc.) that offers full-time education delivered primarily over the Internet. Term often used synonymously with *virtual school*, *online school*, and *cyber school* in some state policy. See *online school*.

E-Teacher (or e-Instructor). See online teacher.

Engagement. Active participation in a course to promote retention and understanding for deeper learning.

Face-to-face. When two or more people meet in person.

Filter (Browsers). Software that restricts access to designated websites.

Full-time online instructor. Any course instructor who carries a full load, as defined locally, by contract or policy.

Full-time online programs. Enrolls participants who are primarily (often only) receiving their education through the online school. Also called cyberschools, they typically are responsible for their participants' scores on state assessments. In some states many full-time online schools are charter schools (Watson, et al., 2010).

Full-time online student. Student who takes all his/her courses over the Internet. Highly Qualified Teacher – The current Federal definition of a "highly qualified teacher" is one who is fully certified and/or licensed by the state; holds at least a Bachelor's degree from a four-year institution; and demonstrates competence in each core academic subject area in which he or she teaches (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Hybrid learning. See *blended learning*.

Instructional designer. Someone who uses the principles of learning, pedagogy, and content frameworks to create teaching materials and experiences for online courses.

Instructional media. Materials that teachers use to teach and participants use to learn (e.g., printed text, digitized text, software, speech, images).

Internet. Vast computer network connecting users worldwide via TCP/IP protocol.

Intranet. Private network using the Internet within an enterprise. Strictly for authorized users.

Learning Management System (LMS). Technology platform through which participants access online courses. A LMS generally includes software for creating and editing course content, communication tools, assessment tools, and other features for managing the course (Northwest Educational Technology Consortium, 2005). See *Course Management System*.

Learning object. Electronic media resource (or digital file; or collection of files) targeting a lesson objective, standard, or a lesson concept, that can be used and reused for instructional purposes.

Learning object repository. Location for storing digital learning resources (elearning Ontario, 2007).

Licensed content. Content with restricted usage and only available with permission, generally for a fee.

Multi-district virtual high school. Online program administered by, and serving, multiple districts, often organized in a formal consortium. These programs are

distinct from a district program that serves participants from many schools (Watson & Kalmon, 2005, p.121).

Online course. Any course offered over the Internet.

Online course provider. Organization offering courses over the Internet.

Online degree program. Program that provides degrees upon successful completion of a set of courses delivered over the Internet.

Online facilitator. For part-time online programs, this is the person working face-to-face with the online student to monitor student progress and attendance, provide training, assist in motivating the student, etc. The person may or may not be a certified teacher but works in conjunction with the certified online teacher. Term is used interchangeably with *online teacher* or *online educator*.

Online learning. Education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet (Watson & Kalmon, 2005). Term does not include printed-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development Policy and Program Studies Service, 2010). Used interchangeably with *virtual learning*, *cyber learning*, and *e-learning*.

Online learning program. Organized set of courses delivered primarily over the Internet.

Online learning resources. Any digital material used for supporting student learning; may be provided using multiple delivery models.

Online professional development. Professional development delivered over the Internet.

Online school. Formally constituted organization (public, private, state, charter, etc.) that offers full-time education delivered primarily over the Internet.

Online teacher (or instructor). Person who holds the appropriate teaching certification and is responsible for instruction in an online course.

Online teaching endorsement. Supplemental state license that approves a teacher to teach online.

Online teaching reciprocity. Ability of a teacher who is considered qualified to teach online in one state also to teach online in another state without additional requirements or assessments.

Online tutor. Someone working over the Internet to support student learning in specific content areas.

Part-time online program. Online program that allows participants to take less than a full load of online courses, as defined by local or state legal entities. Sometimes refers to a *supplemental online program*.

Part-time online student. Student who does not take a full load of online courses.

Part-time online teacher (instructor). Teacher or instructor who has a partial online course load.

Quality standards. Set of benchmarks or indicators for courses, instruction, professional development, programs, etc., developed by a governing body, association, or accrediting organization.

Self-paced course. Online courses in which participants work at their own pace to complete the course.

State virtual schools. Virtual schools created by legislation or by a state-level agency, administered by a state education agency, or funded by a state appropriation or grant for the purpose of providing online learning opportunities across the state. May also receive federal or private foundation grants. Often charge course fees to help cover their costs. (Watson, et al., 2010).

Synchronous learning. Online learning in which the participants interact at the same time and in the same space.

Teacher of record. In many online courses, same as the online teacher. In some states when the online teacher is not an employee of the student's school, educational code requires the teacher of record to be from the student's school. In this case, it is the person who holds the appropriate teaching certification and is responsible for certifying the final grade for the course.

Threaded discussion. Online forum consisting of a running commentary with contributions from group members; used to facilitate asynchronous online discussions.

Universal accessibility. Requirement by law, ADA Section 508, that learning materials, including interfaces, images, sounds, multimedia elements, and all other forms of information, must be made available for use by anyone, regardless of disability (Foothill Global Access, 2008).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Framework for the design of online learning objects and environments ensuring accessibility for all users.

Virtual class. Group of participants assigned to the same online course.

Virtual education. See online learning.

Virtual school. See online school.

Web-based education. See online learning.

Webinar. Seminar conducted over the Internet. Type of web conferencing. A webinar is "live" in the sense that information is conveyed according to an agenda, with a starting and ending time (Joy, 2004, p. 15).

Wiki. Restricted or open website developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to create, add, and edit content.

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TEMPLATES

Here you will find templates for proposed correspondence with course participants as well as an email to participants concerning the certificate of completion. You will want to personalize these templates by entering the names of facilitators and experts participating in your sessions and the relevant dates and logistics that correspond to your course. The templates below are provided to show you what you may wish to say, but you should feel free to modify as needed.

Introductory email

Hello again from [FACILITATOR(S) NAME(S)] of the [ORGANIZATION]! We are writing to confirm your registration for the online course, *Learning Online: What* Education Leaders Should Know about Virtual Education. The course has a full roster of [PARTICIPANTS] from [LOCATION] and is set to run from [TERM]. The entire course will be conducted online and you can participate on your own schedule so long as you have access to the Internet and email. To make this work, you'll need to have an interest in K-12 online learning, set aside at two to three hours per week to review material, do some exploration and interactive work, and participate in great conversations with colleagues around online learning. [FACILITATOR NAME] and I will be actively facilitating the course, which means we'll be involved in our group conversations and in touch with all of you as individuals to make sure that we all have a quality learning experience. We'll also be joined by [GUEST RESEARCH FACILITATOR], who will share current research in K-12 online learning. At this time, please confirm that you still plan to participate in the course so that we can enroll you in the learning management system. Once you have confirmed your participation, you can expect a welcome email from us tomorrow morning that will include all you need to get started with our learning experience. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions/comments/concerns, etc. Looking forward to getting to know and work with all of you! (We do have a few spots still available, so please feel free to invite

others who you think will benefit.) FACILITATOR(S)' NAMES

[FACILITATOR 1 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

[FACILITATOR 2 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

Module One welcome email

Hello Everyone,

Welcome to *Learning Online: What Education Leaders Should Know about Virtual Education*, an online course offered by the [ORGANIZATION].

This email is from [FACILITATOR NAME]. My colleague [FACILITATOR NAME] and I will be your course facilitators, and we're looking forward to discovering together how online learning could help with your education and organization needs, as well as understanding the challenges and possible strategies for overcoming them.

Today begins our first week, and this email contains important information about how our course is structured and how to access it. Apologies for the length; the other email messages will not be as long—we promise!

COURSE OVERVIEW

First, a bit of background: *Learning Online* is a 3-week course conducted entirely online. It is a brief overview for education professionals advancing or considering and advancing online learning options for their regions. The course content will cover issues such as where and how K-12 online learning is being used; what current research and policy say about K-12 online learning; and how online learning can be used to engage and meet the needs of diverse learners. In addition to [FACILITATOR NAME] and me, you will also be supported in the third week by [NATIONAL EXPERT NAME] and [GUEST RESEARCH FACILITATOR].

During the course, you will complete short activities related to online learning and

virtual education policy and will discuss how what they learn relates to issues in

their states. The time requirement for participation is expected to be up to three

hours per week. As long as you check your e-mail regularly and have Internet

access, you are all set to participate, on your own schedule each week.

SHORT VIDEO OVERVIEW

Watch this five-minute screencast that shows you how to access and participate in

the course: [URL]

(Example from the New England Comprehensive Center:

http://www.screencast.com/t/01rNiH5xDjn.)

(Note that the course to choose for this running of the course is called: *Learning*

Online [TERM]: What Education Leaders Should Know about Virtual Education. Also,

go ahead and add your picture! We'd like to see who you are.)

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

Course Dates: [TERM]

Course Weeks/Modules: Start on Wednesdays, end on Tuesdays

COURSE FORMAT

During each module, you will be asked to complete a short reading assignment and

an activity related to online learning and to participate in the online discussion.

Although this course is online, there will be a "real-time" webinar during the course

when as many of us as possible will all be together. If you can't make the webinar

time, don't worry – we'll record it and share the URL as soon as it concludes.

COURSE LOGIN

Make sure you are able to log in to the course. The URL is: [URL TO LMS]

Your username should be [IDENTIFY NAMING CONVENTION YOU WILL USE AND

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PROVIDE EXAMPLE]. Your passwords are all [INSERT INITIAL PASSWORD FOR LMS].

Please let us know immediately if you cannot get into to the course, which is called Learning Online [TERM]: What Education Leaders Should Know about Virtual Education.

WEEK 1 – GETTING TO KNOW YOU and OVERVIEW

- 1. The first thing to do is to login to the course, look for the Topic Outline, the page with the bright red and orange bars. These are the separators for each module. For this first week you will only see down to Module One we'll make the others public later.
- 2. Directly under the red bar at the top you'll see: Start Here: About the Course. Click on that. (The Start Here page will open in a new browser window, so if you don't see anything right away then check your browser tabs or behind something that's already open.) Read down the page and make some notes if you have any questions. Then just close the browser window when you are done. (Look for and click on the "x" in the upper right corner of the page). Your Topic Outline page should still be open.
- 3. Then click on the Initial Participant Survey link and respond to the questions.
- 4. Last, Click on the Introductions link and let us know a little about you.

OVERVIEW

Now that you have the introductions out of the way, look down the Topic Outline page for MODULE ONE.

- 1. Click on the first link: MODULE ONE: Introduction to Online Learning
- 2. That page that will open in new browser window
- 3. Read down the page and follow the links as you can. Note: If you see "Click Here" there is a link embedded within. (It's not always easy to see.)

We know you all have very busy schedules. If you know you will be unable to participate in a particular session, please let us know ahead of time and do your best to make up the work before or after the session for which you are unavailable.

If you are still reading, you'll make it through this course just fine! We know this is a lot of information to digest, so please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns. We're looking forward to working with you!

We look forward to seeing you all online in the Introductions discussion forum, where you'll introduce yourself, and after that, in the Module One discussion forum.

Please don't hesitate to contact me or [FACILITATOR 2] with any login issues or questions about the course – we are always online and happy to help!

[FACILITATOR(S) NAME(S)]

[FACILITATOR 1 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

[FACILITATOR 2 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]]

How to add a photo to your profile email

We hope you all had a great weekend. We are really enjoying getting to know all of you in the Introductions forum. We have a fantastic group of people and each of you bring related but varied experiences to this course. We ought to learn a lot from each other over the next few weeks.

If you haven't yet made it to the Introductions forum, please join us ASAP so you don't fall behind when we dive into the content conversations this week. Another note about the forums, you'll notice in the Introductions forum that [FACILITATOR 2] and I have our photos by the posts we make. Here's one way you can do that, too, so that we all have a sense of who we are talking with throughout the course:

Adding a photo to your discussions

Once you have logged into the course, you'll see a navigation area at the top of the screen with some gray tabs. Click on the tab called "Dashboard". (You may already be there.)

In the top of the left hand column, you should see your name in a large, bold blue font. To the right of your name you should see a small pencil icon. If you hover over the icon, you'll see that it says, "Profile Settings."

Click on the pencil to edit your profile settings. In this new screen area you can edit your profile information and upload a photo. To upload a photo, click on the silhouette image (the "profile icon") that appears above your name. The Upload Profile Picture instructions will provide you with guidance on the proper size of photos – you need a mug shot. (If you don't have a mug shot, but do have a larger picture, you can try using a free online photo editor like http://pixlr.com/ to help you create one.)

Make sure the radio button under "Default" is selected. If not, click on that button and then on the button that says "Set Default".

Let me know if you have questions. It has been our pleasure to meet you all!

[FACILITATOR(S) NAME(S)]

[FACILITATOR 1 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

[FACILITATOR 2 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

Module Two email

Hello, everyone! Module Two is ready to go! Thanks to all of you who participated in Module One; we appreciated your sharing and thoughtful discussions.

If you're feeling behind or haven't logged in yet, please be sure to introduce yourself in our Introductions Forum and then jump ahead to Module Two (URL TO YOUR MODULE TWO).

Upcoming Course Webinar with [GUEST FACILITATOR]

We feel fortunate to announce a real-time (synchronous) discussion webinar with [GUEST FACILITATOR] on [DATE AND TIME]. [GUEST FACILITATOR] will be giving us an overview of [TOPIC]. We will provide time for you to ask some of the excellent questions that have come up in the discussion forums as well as others as they arise. Feel free to invite others in your organizations or from your regions to participate.

PLEASE RSVP via reply email so we can get an idea of who will be available. We'll archive the session for those who won't be. More information on [GUEST FACILITATOR] is below, and be sure to check out her/his organization here: [URL FOR ORGANIZATION].

Online Learning Response

Before we launch into the interesting and fun things we'll explore in Module Two, we want to share the word cloud image generated with Wordle (http://www.wordle.net/) from your collective responses to the question, "What word or phrase comes to mind when you think of the term online learning?" How does seeing the collective response displayed this way differ from reading a list (or even a narrative summary) of text-based responses? Is this the type of thing that helps differentiate instruction for folks who learn in different ways? Does online learning provide a nice vehicle for sharing information this way? (See below image for Module Two information).

Insert Wordle here

Module Two

Today we move on to Module Two and it will run, just like the first module, for one week and will end next [DATE]. This next week we will be looking at how to meet the needs of Diverse Learners via online instruction. You have some excellent readings and will also have the opportunity to hear from some "diverse" high school participants in New England and New York as they share their thoughts on online learning. For some hands-on activities, to give you an idea of the types of tools that allow content to be presented and discussed in multiple ways, you'll get to create a collective definition of Diverse Learners in a wiki and you'll get to share your ideas on how online learning can help participants in a forum called VoiceThread that allows more than text for participating. We'll also continue our dialogue on issues at the policy and programmatic levels in our Module Two discussion forum. There's plenty to do in this Module and we hope you'll enjoy working together with your colleagues and keeping the ideas flowing!

More on [GUEST FACILITATOR]—biography

[FACILITATOR'S BIO HERE]

See you all online—you're doing great, and as you have any questions or comments; don't hesitate to contact us by email.

[FACILITATOR(S) NAME(S)]

[FACILITATOR #1 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

[FACILITATOR #2 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

Module Two email without expert presenter

Review the archived webinar that Allison Powell conducted for the New England Comprehensive Center (NECC) when they ran this course, and a recent one with Susan Patrick, president and CEO of iNACOL, that she did for WestEd's Schools Moving Up along with David Haglund, Director, Educational Options, Riverside Unified School District. Dr. Haglund shared the story of as flipped public school district.

- NECC course webinar with Allison Powell, Vice President State and District Services of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) via WebEx Recording:
 - https://rmcres.webex.com/rmcres/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=TC&rID=199431 37&act=pb&rKey=86f8f30a8f58ab06
 - Or on Vimeo: http://vimeo.com/album/1629487
- Webinar "A National Perspective of K-12 Online and Blended Learning: Current Issues and Trends in Policy and Practice" with Susan Patrick, president and CEO of iNACOL, and David Haglund, Director, Educational Options, Riverside Unified School District:

http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smu/view/e/5200

Thanks, and we'll see most of you online! We have a great Module Three ahead, starting tomorrow, with [GUEST RESEARCH FACILITATOR]. [GUEST RESEARCH FACILITATOR] is [BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GUEST RESEARCH FACILITATOR], and will facilitate the module's discussion through responses to course participant questions, which will include research that already exists and that you'd like to see in the field.

[FACILITATOR(S) NAME(S)]

[FACILITATOR 1 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS and ORGANIZATION]

[FACILITATOR 2 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

Certificate of completion email

Hello, everyone,

We will be sending certificates of completion to those of you who participated in each of the three module discussions, attended (or watched the recording of) the webinar, and completed the post-course survey. We will be reviewing materials and getting certificates out to those of you who complete the activities listed above in about [TIME PERIOD]. You can use the certificates for PDPs/CEUs if approved by your local organization. If you missed a discussion, you can go back now and add some thoughts – no guarantee you'll get any/many replies, but folks are still in the course so you might! Also, some have asked how long the course will be available. We expect this course to be available through [DATE].

And once you have completed all of the modules. Please take a few minutes to complete this short survey about your experience in the course. This information is important to us as it will help us to be able to support you in your K-12 online learning efforts: [URL TO SURVEY]

[FACILITATOR(S) NAME(S)]

[FACILITATOR 1 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

[FACILITATOR 2 NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS, and ORGANIZATION]

Notes for facilitator:

To issue the certificate of completion to your participants, you will need to create a link through your LMS or use your organization's standard certificates which can be issued as PDFs via email.