BEST PRACTICES:
MANAGING TECHNOLOGY

ONLINE SMALL GROUP FACILITATION

Online facilitation can be very different from face-to-face sessions, but it is possible to make the transition more smoothly. Use the following strategies to avoid common technological hiccups and challenges.

1 **Anticipate and manage technical problems:** Take advantage of technical guides, tutorials or videos on WebEx, Google Hangouts Meet or YouTube.

2 **Be proactive:** Test-run your online environment. If that isn't possible, try to log on at least 15–30 minutes before your session is scheduled to start.

3 **Adapt to your setting:** Good audio is key for successful interaction and learning during synchronous sessions. Determine which connection type you should use to maximize audio quality.

4 **Advertise:** Share a welcome greeting slide on screen. Include reminders to mute microphones along with using the hand-raising or chat features to ask questions. Consider sharing the session outline or guidelines.

5 **Plan for crashes:** Have a plan in place and communicate it. Consider back-up technology and share cell phone numbers and email addresses in case online technology crashes.

6 **Share your screen:** Screen sharing allows for real-time communication and collaboration with learners. This feature can improve your efficiency – instead of simply explaining an idea, strategy or topic, you can show it.

7 **Be empathetic but not to the detriment of your session:** Consider your learners' technology (remote locations, low bandwidth, etc.) but refrain from playing the tech expert. Instead, point your learners to the NOSM IT Helpdesk, WebEx, Google Hangouts Meet or YouTube for support.

8 **Reflect:** Spend a few minutes after your online session to make a note of adjustments to your technology which can be made to improve your next online session.

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SMALL GROUP FACILITATION ONLINE SESSIONS

*We value your feedback! If you have comments, suggestions or other strategies to share, **please let us know**!*

BEST PRACTICES:
PREPARING YOUR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Many factors come into play during online facilitation, including lighting, physical space and positioning, and background noise. Use these simple strategies to arrange your physical environment prior to your initial session.

1 **Lights, camera, action:** Prepare your broadcast physical environment – Where will you set yourself up? Ensure that the lighting is clear, not dark or over-bright, and think about the background of your room which will also be visible. Take the time to properly set up your desk. Sit in a comfortable chair or, if you prefer to teach standing up, try to stand on a cushioned surface. Prop up your camera or laptop on a stand to keep it at eye-level (boxes or books work well!).

2 **Limit background noise:** Wear headphones or a headset if possible. Be sure to consider white noise, too. Is there an air conditioner, fan, washing machine, or dishwasher that will make it difficult to hear you?

3 **Take a peek:** Preview what your participants will see on screen and adjust your camera accordingly. Omitting this step may result in learners seeing half your face or up your nose!

4 **Keep it private:** Pause or turn off notifications on each of your electronic devices to reduce disruptions from email and text messages. If possible, silence your phone and use a room where you can close the door.

5 **Consider your cognitive load:** Teaching online requires a different type of effort compared to that of face-to-face teaching. Make sure you have access to pens, paper, sticky notes to take notes as you go. Keep your teaching plan in front of you, class list visible and coffee nearby. Have everything you may need at your disposal to make your life easier.

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BEST PRACTICES:
ENGAGING LEARNERS

Creating an active learning environment during online sessions can be challenging even for the most seasoned facilitator. Here are some key strategies to keep learners engaged and prevent them from descending into virtual passivity.

1 **Create a connection**: Email an introduction prior to initial session as a first point of contact. For videoconferences, use your webcam and ask learners to use theirs as well. For teleconferences, ask participants to introduce themselves each time they speak.

2 **Make it personal:** Do a quick social check-in and roll call at the beginning of the session. Address learners by their name and explicitly to promote engagement.

3 **Establish "netiquette":** Tell learners what is expected of them. Clarify how sessions will be conducted, suggest learners mute their microphones along with using the hand-raising or chat features to speak or ask questions.

4 **Cultivate a community of learning:** State the overall purpose and desired outcomes of the session to provide critical focus.

5 **Be learner-centered:** Ask permission to call on learners during the sessions. Always link the content to learning goals and practical application. Explain the value of what is being discussed to promote intrinsic motivation.

6 **Be dynamic**: Use synchronous time to interact with online learners in a meaningful and productive way. Share your excitement about the topic and time with your learners.

7 **Share the responsibility of learning:** Email instructions and/or materials prior to the session. Encourage multi-modal discussion (chat, polling, live) to foster critical thinking and collaboration. Assign homework to prolong learning between online sessions.

8 **Employ "Goldilocks pacing":** Not too fast, not too slow, but "just right". Pay attention to your learners' cues and adjust your delivery accordingly.

9 **Change it up:** Have a touch point with learners every few minutes. Punctuate discussion with a "click" or verbal interaction, or just a "Yes/No". Confirm understanding and consensus regularly, summarize often, and repeat key messages at least twice. Vary your strategies regularly to keep learners focused.

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