

# DEVELOPING ENGAGING DIGITALLY-FACILITATED SKILLS TRAININGS

Digitally-facilitated training allows learners to study at their own pace and convenience. This means that you can reach more participants and provide different training opportunities for them. To take advantage of the promise of digital learning, learner engagement is key. Digital training is different from facilitating in-person learning sessions, and a new mindset to adapting training material is needed to fulfill its promise. Delivering engaging content should prioritize helping learners to connect, understand, and situate their new knowledge. This could be complemented with opportunities to engage with others and to activate their new skills. To support development of engaging digital training materials, the following recommendations are provided.


IYF's Advancing Economic Mobility with Skills (AEMS) Project, with support from Microsoft Philanthropies and in partnership with Standard Chartered Bank, seeks to lower the barrier for youth-serving organizations to launch engaging, impactful, inclusive, and targeted online skills training programs world-wide. This brief provides guidance to help organizations create engaging Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training materials.

# Understand Your Learners' Needs, Abilities, and Aspirations

To design an engaging training course, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the learners' needs and aspirations. Once these have been assessed, the next step is to ascertain the current level of their knowledge and skills. Bridging the gap between what learners currently know and what they want to know is what determines the course structure and content. This information also ensures that the course is relevant and useful to them. Beyond assessing knowledge and skills, you should also seek to assess the levels of online access, internet connectivity and device access that your participants have. This will allow you to develop resources that keep technology limitations in mind.

To understand and design training courses with your learners' needs in mind, consider the following:

Conducting a Needs Assessment for Digital Learning 

Digital Connectivity of Young People: UNICEF 

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

## Conduct a thorough needs assessment of the learners

Needs assessment techniques typically include primary research with direct observations, questionnaires, and consultations with the learners themselves. This can be complemented by secondary research with key informant interviews, reviews of relevant literature, and reviews of reports and evaluations. With all this information in hand, you should better understand who your learners are, what their needs might be, and how you can best design material to support them.

## Understand learner motivations

One powerful way to motivate learners is to stimulate their interest not only in what they are learning now, but also in what they may potentially learn in the future. Curiosity is a powerful engine for engagement and your needs assessment can help you understand what drives your learners to participate and engage in the training.

## Use prior knowledge to give meaning to your content

Explain the objectives of the modules or sessions in concrete terms and relate the objectives to 'real life'. Learners must perceive ways in which each piece of course content is applicable. More broadly, they must be able to articulate the tangible benefits of successful course completion.

## Determine learner connectivity and device usage

Learners may have differing abilities in accessing online training. Consider the availability of online devices, the cost of access, and the digital literacy of learners in your needs assessment. This information should help you determine what types of digital tools will be most successful as part of your training material development.

Developing engaging digital training material begins with understanding your learner, designing the course based on their interests and prior knowledge, and accounting for their access to technology. By rooting your training material in a solid foundation, you are better able to match your content to the needs of the people whom you seek to serve.





## Getting the Mix Right: Use Learner-Centered Design

The principles of learner-centered design, that inform good lesson planning in a classroom, apply equally to content and course development online. You will need to consider sequence and pacing, strategies for accommodating different learning styles, opportunities for differentiation, and fostering active learning.

Start sessions with activities that help learners access prior knowledge before guiding them through a sequence of increasingly challenging activities designed to help them build new skills. Learners should be given opportunities to articulate in their own words what they have learned not just for assessment purposes but also because doing so helps them link it to what they know. The session might progress from providing exercises that involve controlled practice to exercises offering more free practice. This might be linked to opportunities for participants to engage with other learners or the facilitator.

**Adhering to learner-centered design might include:**

E-learning  
Methodologies and  
Good Practices (FAO) ↗

Human Centred  
Design for  
Education ↗

Accenture Digitizing  
Learning Based  
Programs ↗

### TOOLS AND RESOURCES

#### Keep individual activities short

Remember that online learning and training is more tiring than the face-to-face equivalent. Also bear in mind that learner autonomy in asynchronous contexts might contribute to reduced attention span. Keep videos to a four-minute maximum. Divide long documents into easily digestible segments.

#### Reflect your students in your materials

Make sure that materials and resources - whether text, graphic, auditory, or video - reflect diversity and inclusion in terms of gender, race, religion, disability, and body size. Diversity and inclusion materials are available in this complementary [BRIEF](#).

#### Offer different ways to engage

Sessions do not need to be all about new knowledge acquisition. Compliment sessions that focus on new information with ones that engage learners to participate in activities that relate to the skills that they are acquiring. This can be through the content in your Learning Management System (LMS) or supported by complementary projects and assignments.

#### Accommodate the breadth of learning styles

People learn differently. Visual learners will welcome graphics, charts, and color coding in the organization of content. Auditory learners can be catered for through podcasts, storytelling, song and music. Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training provides a powerful opportunity to offer resources on the same material through different media to accommodate these variations learning styles. Use the principles of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), described in the [ACCESSIBILITY BRIEF](#), to increase the learning potential of all learners.



Developing engaging Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training requires providing people with different ways of engaging and interacting with new information. Be strategic in how much information you provide learners and add variety to the strategies, media, and approaches that you use to help learners build skills.



## Foster Social Connections Online

People learn through social interactions, for example, during collaborations or competitions. They also develop soft skills like teamwork, conflict resolution, and communication when working together. Social interaction empowers learners to become champions of learning, allowing them to hear diverse perspectives and create greater understanding. Remember that your goal is to create a safe, deliberate space where young people can engage with each other.

With synchronous learning activities, learners can interact, reflect, and engage in dialogue with each other. These situations also lend themselves to the use of active-learning methods that foster peer interaction, using tools like breakout rooms. Where learning is asynchronous, other strategies are required to create virtual learning communities. Collaborative tasks can occur using projects or group assignments, facilitated by tools like Google Docs. Discussions can be created through LMS tools like discussion boards, social spaces or wikis, or via social media platforms such as WhatsApp group chats, Instagram stories or SMS.

To support social learning online:

### Maintain a sense of belonging to a learning community

Offer more welcoming and more friendly spaces to share projects and course related information such as a blog, WhatsApp group, or Facebook page. According to a [REVIEW](#) of girl-focused life skills interventions at a distance, learners who feel social and emotional connections are more likely to display socially appropriate behaviors, have higher levels of self-esteem and achieve better results.

### Stay connected with learners on an individual basis

Engage with learners on an individual basis and plan for regular communication to maintain connection and motivation. This might involve something as simple as sending the occasional email, message, or phone call. With additional resources, consider something more structured such as mentoring or counseling that might provide additional support to those that may need it most.

### Develop a fun, extra-curricular dimension to the online course

Set extra-curricular challenges that may be of interest to your learner, like sports, art, cooking, video making, and dancing. Learning is more likely to occur when there is a sense of community, an understanding of who they are learning with, and a space in which they feel safe to share who they are.

### Have learners involve others as part of their learning

Digital training need not be static or exist only on a device. Consider different ways that you might be able to get people to work together. Try to incorporate activities that require participants to engage with people in their communities, through interviews, surveys, or observations. Consider group activities, using approaches like project-based learning, as a means of deepening participant engagement with others and understanding of their new skills.

Community  
Building Toolkit ↗

Making Online  
Education  
Social ↗

Knowledge: The  
Social Dimension  
of Learning ↗

TOOLS AND RESOURCES



Digital learning does not mean that participants need to be independent. Think about how best to mix social elements into your course to drive engagement, develop trust, and build community. Use the technology provided to you by your LMS, build off existing social networks, or consider in-person activities as a means of bringing people together.

# Use engaging videos and multimedia

Video and audio media can facilitate storytelling and demonstrate skills. A good video can connect new concepts to the real world in an easily digestible way. Audio is a low-barrier tool that is an effective medium for conveying emotion, attitudes, and culture. These types of media can also help accommodate different learning styles and bridge the gap between concepts presented in lessons and their real-world application.

Best of all, there are large repositories of information that is available to use via public platforms like YouTube or in the form of podcasts. These can easily be imported into most LMS. You can also make your own media, depending on your budget, and access to subject matter experts. When using media, remember to always align this content with your learning objectives and assessment tools.

**Points to consider when developing engaging videos and other multi-media:**

## Find it online or do it yourself

Commissioning professional videos or audio recordings can be expensive and time-consuming. If budget and time are a constraint, explore the wealth of videos that might be available to use on services like YouTube and Vimeo, or podcast streaming services like the Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, or Pocketcasts. If nothing is available online, a quick recorded interview with one of the subject matter experts on your team using your phone may be adequate to support learning.

## Video and audio works best when part of a sequence

As with any digital learning resource, multimedia works best when it forms part of a structured sequence of activities rather than as stand-alone material. It can enhance other content when paired with supportive materials such as real-life practice, games, worksheets, discussion/reflection points, and quizzes.

## Video communicates emotions and can build empathy

Videos can tell stories that elicit emotions and foster empathy. When building critical soft skills, it is challenging to simply read about these particular skills and competencies. Video can bring them to light, showing how these skills are actualized, the situations where they are valuable, and how they can be modeled.

## Make media creation part of learning

Video and audio resources should not be the sole responsibility of the educator. Learners benefit from creating their own videos and audio resources, whether through assessed assignments or more ambitious project-based learning. Sharing these resources can also spur youth agency in learning and provide opportunities for young people to contribute.

## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

[How to Use Multimedia in eLearning](#) ↗

[5 Types of Instructional Videos](#) ↗

[Teaching Students How to Produce Their Own Podcasts](#) ↗



Different media can support the creation of quality digital training content. This supports different learning styles and can illustrate and model new skills. Remember that you do not always need to create it yourself. Consider learner media as an assessment strategy, use existing online resources, or interview experts around you. Doing so makes your content more engaging and expressive.



## Celebrate Progress

Motivating and incentivizing learners has always been a core aspect of the educator's role, and digital training is no exception. Certificates, ultimately, have value because they confer status and recognize effort. Where online training has at least a degree of synchronous learning, there are more opportunities for the educator/trainer to provide praise. In purely asynchronous online courses, consider selecting a LMS that supports this through automated incentives such as digital badges or stickers.

The structure of the course and the sequencing of modules and activities can also foster motivation. This occurs when learners perceive that the successful completion of one module is the unlocking of another that enables them to further improve. Tell people how much they have completed either through a progress bar or reminders of the time that is left to finish the course.

**To show progress and recognize progression:**

[Digital Badges: What are they? ↗](#)

[Alternative Credentials and Youth Employment \(UNICEF\) ↗](#)

**TOOLS AND RESOURCES**



### Promote a growth mindset

Praising effort over ability helps to facilitate a growth mindset and cultivates hard work. Learners enjoy a challenge and may perceive struggle and occasional failure as integral to growth. When designing assessments, acknowledge effort as well as success in your communication. Facilitators and moderators should also look for ways to praise effort via their communications with learners as well.

### Use badges or stickers to demonstrate progress

Incentives such as badges or stickers borrow principles from gamification to engage and motivate learners. These can be awarded for the completion of individual modules or even tasks. Look at your LMS to see whether this can be automated in your system. These smaller incentives might keep learners motivated in their courses and could reduce dropout.

### Create a community of learners that can recognize success and progress

Wherever possible, complement the online dimension of the course with a social dimension where facilitators and learners can create a group identity through in-person meetings or via social media. Use these social interactions to compliment, recognize achievements, and celebrate progress through the training.

### Give certificates meaning and try to validate them

Certificates not only validate learner effort, but they also infer status on learners and enhance their credibility when applying for employment or furthering their education opportunities. Provide certificates only when learning can be demonstrated, not just for participation. Make them more valuable by getting these certificates accredited by either a vocational education provider or as a micro credential linked to in-demand jobs.

### Create a pathway to success with your courses or access to others

Reward completion of one module by unlocking further modules or training opportunities. Learning pathways should provide opportunities to broaden skills in other courses. This can be provided in additional training you are able to offer or by referring learners to other digital training opportunities provided by others.

**Learners need support in being motivated to continue engaging with course content. By ensuring that the support and the incentives provided are correct, you will be able to ensure that learners complete the course and are able to progress to other learning or earning opportunities.**

## Use Learning and Data to Drive Engagement

Developing an engaging training course requires lots of different things to come together at the same time. Being successful requires a delicate mix of technical subject knowledge, good instructional design, course marketing, and the right product market fit. While this sometimes happens right away, most often there will be bumps or challenges along the way.

It is important to realize that having a successful digital training course also likely implies a lot of learning for you as well.

**To support the improvement of your digital training materials:**

### TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Experiment & Iterate: How to Implement Effective Ed-tech ↗

Using Lms Data To Inform Course Design ↗

### Start with a limited number of learners

Bring together 10-20 people who might pilot the course for you and integrate their feedback into the course prior to launching. They would ideally be target learners but could also be coworkers in your organization if needed. Get the feedback from this small group about what they find engaging and where materials might be improved.

### Accept that things will change

Developing engaging content is an iterative process. Your content should change and evolve as you put it together and share it with learners. As you gain more information, you should be empowered to make changes to the initial course to ensure the best possible learning outcome.

### Use data to drive decisions

LMSs should have analytics that will tell you about how participants engaged with the course material. In addition to polls and feedback discussions that you have with learners, look for real-world metrics on how long participants stayed in the course, where they dropped out, and whether there were issues with assessments. This data might either compliment your intuitions or challenge what you think is going right or wrong. Good systems may also supply data on how and when learners needed support with the system, so consider that as well.

### Develop content over the whole project

Project budgets often have money allocated for the startup phase of content development. They rarely leave money to be used in later periods of the development process when things need to be changed or adapted. When calculating your budget, consider spreading it out over the lifespan of the project to allow you the flexibility to change or modify content that is not working.



Developing engaging digital training material is difficult. You might not get it right at first. Rely on pilot data, LMS analytics, and other feedback to make changes along the way. Remember to allocate time and resources to be able to make changes you need to get your content right.

## Conclusions

Digitally-Facilitated skills training requires a new way of thinking about training content that balances the opportunities of digital learning with situations where learners can build soft and hard skills. Using this approach can help learners reap the benefits of these emerging forms of training and allow for more engaging and compelling learning experiences.

# LIST OF TOOLS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

MIXing It Up: Blending Learning Options for the Online Classroom	Open Learning Campus, The World Bank ↗
Instructional Design: Working with SMEs	LinkedIn Learning ↗
ADDIE for Instructional Design	Canvas ↗

## ADDITIONAL AEMS RESOURCES

Brief 1: Developing Engaging Digitally-Facilitated Skills Trainings ↗
Brief 2: Making Your Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training More Accessible ↗
Brief 3: Selecting the Right Learning Management System for Your Youth-serving Organization ↗
Brief 4: Encouraging Diversity and Inclusion in Your Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training ↗
Resource 5: Overview of Leading Learning Management Systems ↗
Resource 6: Available Curricula and Learning Material Library for Skill Building ↗