

ENCOURAGING **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION** IN YOUR DIGITALLY-FACILITATED SKILLS TRAINING

The AEMS Project seeks to lower barriers for youth-serving organizations to launch engaging, impactful, inclusive, and targeted online skills training programs worldwide. This brief provides strategies to make your Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training project more inclusive, equitable, and transformative for participants, particularly for women and other marginalized groups.

Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training can make it possible for more people to gain access to training opportunities and diverse content. However, these opportunities are not always spread equally due to preexisting social inequities based on gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or class. It is not sufficient to simply make content freely available; rather, an inclusive design and a supportive infrastructure is needed to ensure that all learners thrive. When done well, such efforts not only make learners feel more included, but increase their ability to acquire knowledge and broaden their career aspirations. An inclusive approach would consist of three components detailed here.

Selecting and Designing Inclusive Content and Curriculum

Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training helps learners explore their identities, unlock their agency, and think critically about society as they begin or advance their professional lives. Content developers can actively promote inclusion by critically assessing materials to mitigate unconscious bias and eliminate stereotypical representations.

Inclusive design requires an intersectional approach. It is important to determine which dimensions of inclusion you are dealing with in your training material. Content developers should consider multiple potential barriers and challenges that target learners might face. In all contexts, gender is a pressing priority, but consideration should also extend to factors including age, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender diversity, ability, and class.

Key considerations for applying an inclusive approach to your training material and course development include:

Ensuring that learning activities and materials are free of stereotypes and unconscious biases

Account for and address multi-dimensional representations of groups that challenge existing stereotypes about jobs roles, domestic duties, or social norms.

Developing and selecting appropriate complementary learning content

Development of images, texts, audio recordings, and videos should be balanced and sensitive to the diversity of your groups. You should screen the external content you are selecting based on how it compliments your inclusion goals.

Using inclusive language

Language can reinforce stereotypes and unequal power relations. Consider the terms that you use to describe individuals, their jobs, and social roles. Avoid words that assume a gender (example: repairman, mankind) and avoid using masculine pronouns ('he' instead of 'they'). Be proactive in learning about inclusive language, pronouns, and terms.

Fostering awareness and discussions about discriminatory norms, barriers and challenges

Learners can be enabled to support equality of opportunity by being given the space to understand the problems that certain groups face and how they can act to address them.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

What is Unconscious Bias - VIDEO [↗](#)

Culturally Responsive Scorecard [↗](#)

Gender Checklist for Content Creation [↗](#)

Transform Access, Agency, and Power ToolKit [↗](#)

Key Definitions

Diversity is the representation of all varied individual and collective identities and differences.

Equity seeks to ensure fair treatment, equality of opportunity, and fairness in access to information and resources.

Inclusion builds a culture of belonging by actively inviting the contribution and participation of all people.

Definitions adapted from the Ford Foundation

By developing content using an inclusive approach, your project can help empower disadvantaged groups and broaden their career interests.

It is critical to support facilitators and program staff in understanding the need for inclusion and the ways in which they can support this goal through their interactions with learners. If you have existing material, this may be the critical action that you can take to support a more inclusive approach.

How to Broaden Diversity Throughout the Project Cycle

Adapting its approach to digital training is an important component of an organization's broader intervention strategy. However, organizations should be proactive about addressing diversity and fostering inclusivity across all project activities. Making projects more inclusive may require actively engaging and supporting participants from the recruitment phase to the completion phase of the project.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Resources for Culturally Responsive Evaluation [↗](#)

Making Online Course More Welcoming
- VIDEO [↗](#)

Reaching Marginalized Learners [↗](#)

Focus resources and emphasis on targeting a diverse group of learners

Social exclusion and discrimination make it more difficult to target specific groups of participants who may be disadvantaged or marginalized. Be deliberate in setting targets, allocating resources to identify and recruit these participants, and forming partnerships to find participants that align with inclusion goals.

Represent diversity and provide accommodations in the selection and enrollment process:

Consider specific accommodations for participants to support their screening, assessment, and enrollment. This could range from including representative images of target participants on recruitment advertisements, program landing page, and enrollment forms, to directly enrolling participants via one-on-one interactions with potential learners and their families.

Build out a strategy for social engagement and connection

To build community and support for learners, consider providing more personalized support through mentoring or facilitating in-person or online synchronous group discussions. Evidence suggests that taking an integrated approach that incorporates both online and community building/engagement elements is better for achieving project goals.

Align your outcomes with the needs and goals of diverse learners

Ensure that program outcomes are aligned with the aspirations and abilities of your target group. Groups may require post-training support to overcome barriers particularly in the labour market or in accessing educational opportunities. Make sure that your project evaluation recognizes some of these differences. Incorporate learners' self awareness and perceptions of diversity and inclusion issues in your evaluation tools to determine your impact in these domains.



By considering diversity and inclusion as cross-cutting components that affect all aspects of a program, you can more effectively address systemic disadvantages that some groups may face.

Ensuring Equitable Access to Digital Learning

To create an inclusive approach, content designers should consider the cost and technical requirements (such as hardware and internet access) of participating in digital learning. Though digital learning provides learners with additional availability and flexibility, lack of digital access generally mirrors social inequities. Therefore, it is important to consider who has access to digital technology and at what price. Quantitative and/or qualitative research will help designers accomplish the following:

- Assess the availability of devices (both owned and accessed via others).
- Determine the cost of access, with a focus on the data consumption required to participate.
- Measure the digital literacy of equity groups to determine if they have the basic digital skills to take advantage of digital learning.
- Determine other barriers to access, particularly whether participants have a safe and quiet space or time away from domestic or other work-related duties to be able to participate.

By understanding barriers to access, programs can modify what they offer or provide additional support to meet the needs of participants. This can include:

Facilitate Online Access for Select Participants

- Providing financial support in the form of mobile phone credit or devices to support groups that lack resources to pay for digital learning. For large, nation-wide initiatives, there are also ways in many countries to make services reverse-billed (free for learners to access).
- Providing participants with a safe space that has devices and internet access.

Modify Digital Delivery Approach to Accommodate

- Designing material that can easily be downloaded, completed offline, or delivered through low-tech channels like SMS or WhatsApp. Select LMSs or digital delivery approaches based on limited digital skill requirements and offline features.
- Incorporating digital skill-building as a key project outcome, and complementary to other skills that are developed.
- Blending and prioritize social and in-person elements to highlight project components that are more easily accessible.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Online Learning Models for low bandwidth areas ↗

How to Design an SMS Outreach Strategy ↗

Alliance for Affordable Internet: Affordability Report ↗



By facilitating digital access and aligning learning projects with the skills of learners, training programs are best able to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

Conclusions

Inclusion is an important aspirational goal. By understanding the underlying barriers to accessing digital learning, program designers can design appropriate training materials and provide support so all participants can achieve their learning and economic mobility goals. Understanding how program managers and content designers can help integrate inclusion into both material and program design allows all groups to benefit from the promise of Digitally-Facilitated Skills Training.

LIST OF TOOLS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Inclusive Education in the Project Cycle	Kaya ↗
Working with diversity in services for young people	The Open University ↗
The Inclusive STEM Teaching Project	Edx & Boston University ↗

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 ↗