

SEPTEMBER 2020



Read an Excerpt from Our New Report, “Unmuted”

In October, we're going to release our new report, “Unmuted: What Works, What Doesn't, and How We Can All Do Better When Working Together Online.” Based on a survey of 4,405 people at nonprofits and foundations, colleges and universities, and government agencies, the report examines the explosion of videoconferencing triggered by the pandemic and addresses the question: what's *really* happening when working together face-to-face means screen-to-screen?

As the title suggests, by pressing “unmute” and letting thousands of people sound off about their daily experiences in videoconferences, we were able to identify best practices worth emulating along with persistent problems that require attention. The report is divided into nine sections focused on specific aspects of videoconferences such as structure, leadership and facilitation, engagement techniques, and more; and each section includes data-driven recommendations for improving your videoconferences going forward.

While the report is being prepared for publication next month, we wanted to share an excerpt, so just scroll down to read the section on “Leadership & Facilitation.” (And watch for our October issue which will include a link to download your free copy of the full report.)



(The following is an excerpt from our new report, UNMUTED, to be published next month.)

Get training. Get some help. And get better at the basics.

Leading and facilitating online is hard enough as it is. Learning by doing and trying to do it all yourself is not a recipe for success.

TRAINING

Webinars were relatively new when we conducted our first round of research in 2009, but the lack of training for webinar leaders back then was still eye-popping: 72% of respondents who were leading or facilitating webinars reported having no training whatsoever. We expected to see improvement in this category after eleven years, and we did: only 37% of respondents said they had no training to lead *webinars*, but even that number is disappointing considering how much time we're currently investing in them, both as individuals and organizations. Shouldn't we expect more professionalism by now?

The data on *web meetings* is also concerning: nearly half (48%) of respondents who regularly lead online meetings reported having no training how to do so. This is not entirely unexpected: as workplaces closed due to the pandemic – often with short notice – organizations everywhere had to adjust quickly, and moving meetings to the web was one of those on-the-fly adjustments. So, excusing a lack of training because “we’re building the plane as we’re flying it” seems reasonable, but our survey was administered five months into these unscheduled “flights.” Is it unreasonable to assume that more organizations could have prioritized this kind of training by now?

[FROM THE SURVEY]

How would you describe the training you have had to lead or facilitate online convenings (check all that apply)?

	Web Meetings	Webinars	Webcasts
Employer provided training	13%	15%	12%
Enrolled in training on my own	17%	25%	22%
Read about best practices	46%	60%	60%
Studied other presenters	51%	64%	65%
No training	48%	37%	35%

* Also receiving significant multiple mentions: Adapting skills from in-person leadership or facilitation experience

RECOMMENDATION

Web meetings are already a permanent fixture for many organizations, and they will probably remain a frequent occurrence for organizations that started videoconferencing more often due to the pandemic. According to our survey, respondents who lead web meetings anticipate leading them more often in the months and years to come, so the need for training will only increase. There is no shortage of online courses to teach these skills (our class, [“The Webinar on Webinars,”](#) among them), so we recommend individuals and organizations scan the various offerings and find the training best suited to their needs.

SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Drawing on our own experience from leading or facilitating online convenings, and also through our interviews, we identified seven challenges to leading a successful web meeting, webinar or webcast (listed below). We asked survey respondents to evaluate each challenge on a 1-5 scale where 1 indicated “not challenging at all” and 5 indicated “extremely challenging.”

“Paying attention to several simultaneous streams of information” was identified as the most significant challenge for both meetings and webinars and was a close second for webcasts (surpassed only by “Keeping participants engaged.”)

[FROM THE SURVEY]

Challenges to leading a successful online convening:			
	Meetings	Webinars	Webcasts
Having enough time to prepare content	2.4	3.0	3.0
Keeping participants engaged	2.9	3.5	3.4
Paying attention to several simultaneous streams of information	3.1	3.5	3.3
Ensuring participants know how to use all the platform's tools	2.8	3.1	2.9
Dealing with participants who talk or chat excessively	2.7	2.6	2.5
Dealing with technical problems	2.9	3.3	3.1
Knowing how to "read the room"	3.0	3.3	3.0

Fortunately, the majority of respondents who regularly lead or facilitate online convenings are already meeting this challenge by assembling teams to help them. We heard during several of our interviews that, in the best cases, these teams consisted of three people: a convening host, who was responsible for delivering the content and interacting with participants; a chat box monitor, who could answer questions directly or relay them to the host; and a technical specialist who could deal with any platform issues encountered by the host or participants.

RECOMMENDATION

Leading and facilitating groups of humans online is hard enough as it is – you shouldn't have to go it alone. If you have no alternative, we recommend minimizing the chat box or turning it off temporarily so you can concentrate fully on the material you're presenting or a conversation in progress. Let participants know in advance that you will be stopping periodically to catch up with questions or comments in the chat box and that you appreciate their patience in the interim. Admittedly, this is not an ideal scenario, but people will usually cut you some slack when you tell them explicitly that this is all in service of being fully present.

If you can assemble a team as described above, we strongly encourage you to do so. Even a two-person team (which we regularly use for Goodman Center webinars) can provide a more satisfying experience for both convening leaders and participants.

As noted above, there is already a strong trend in this direction: when asked "How often did the convening's leader/facilitator share logistical responsibilities (e.g., monitoring questions in the chat box, handling technical issues)," respondents answered in the frequently-always range 56% for meetings, 68% for webinars, and 54% for webcasts. That data is encouraging, but we believe that the team approach is so fundamental to more engaging and productive experiences that the numbers should be higher.

ATTENDING TO THE BASICS

When thinking about the minimum daily adult requirements for running a successful online convening, "providing sufficient instruction on how to use the videoconferencing platform's various tools" should be one of them, if not first on the list. Of course, if you're working with a group who uses the same platform day in and day out, feel free to skip the instructions and get right into the content. But if your participants may have a wide range of proficiency with the platform and you don't take even a minute or two to familiarize them with the basics – muting, turning cameras on and off, using the chat box, etc. – you're inviting trouble.


Our survey indicates there is a plenty of room for improvement here. If you agree that this responsibility of leadership/facilitation belongs in the frequently-to-always range (again, with the only exception being for convenings comprised entirely of experienced users), then the results below – where more than half of all respondents across the board are not covering this base consistently – are simply not acceptable.

[FROM THE SURVEY]

How often did the online convening's leader/facilitator provide sufficient instruction on how to use the videoconferencing platform's various tools (e.g., muting/unmuting, asking questions, participating in polls)?					
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Web Meetings	4%	22%	37%	31%	6%
Webinars	3%	17%	37%	34%	8%
Webcasts	9%	24%	38%	25%	3%

RECOMMENDATION

Tools differ from platform to platform, rules differ among organizations, and both may differ depending on whether it's a meeting, webinar or webcast. Whether you, as leader or facilitator, cover how platform tools will be used, or if you use community agreements to establish them, do not skip this step at the beginning of your convenings. Ensuring that everyone knows how to participate to the fullest is not optional.



Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center

GIVE PRESENTATIONS	PLAN CAMPAIGNS	TELL STORIES
Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes	Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter	Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative
September 29 & 30 11am - 12pm PT	November 5 & 6 11am - 12pm PT	Nov. 23, 30, Dec. 7 & 14 9am - 10am PT

About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

To reach Andy directly, please call (323) 272-4737 or send an email to andy@thegoodmancenter.com.

To subscribe to this newsletter, [click here](#). To unsubscribe, click the link at the bottom of this email.

The Goodman Center | Website



The Goodman Center | 251 S. Norton Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90004