

Moving exchange of experiences - online

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As co-chairs of the Northwest Academic Libraries Research Support interest group, Judith Carr and I are keen to share ideas, best practice and encourage collaboration across the 14 academic libraries in the NoWAL. In March, our calendars showed we were co-ordinating two events for NoWAL: a joined-up day of two half-day events on Plan S and DORA in May and a Research Support Day in July, talking about moving up in research support and marketing. And then suddenly everyone's lives made a massive

shift: of priorities, stresses, plans. Just, everything. Perhaps for some of you, this shift to moving training and events online has been a good thing. Generous sponsors and hard-working and efficient fellow librarians/conference hosts means that many of us are now able to attend events that may have been prohibitive before because of travel, costs, caring responsibilities, etc., etc. But for those organising events, what does this mean in reality?

We have outlined a few tips that we have learned in our **very** short time of attempting to put on our NoWAL events.

1. Be realistic

We honestly cannot stress this enough: be realistic. Do what you can do. And if you cannot, be honest with yourself and those that you work with. We are very much from the 'no pressure' school of working with us. You can no longer offer to do a presentation? No problem. You can only give us 5 minutes? No problem. You are feeling overwhelmed right

now and can do with one less thing to worry about? We totally understand and please do not worry, no problem. We are lucky, we know that not everyone has the freedom to call off an event. But if you can and need to, please do. And be as open and honest as possible with those you work with. It feels a lot better to be able, to be honest, and say: I would love to and I cannot right now. But if/when I am ready I will let you know.

2. Be enthusiastic

Linking in with being realistic and asking for help. At times like these, if you are not enthusiastic about putting something online, then don't do it. If you are not feeling the subject, then if you can, be realistic and say no, or ask a (more enthusiastic) colleague to contribute or offer to support that colleague in producing something online. Often colleagues just need your support to go with their ideas, offer to coordinate instead.

3. Be honest with yourself and ask for help when needed.

You have decided to run that event, great! Then be honest with yourself and ask for help when needed: what can you actually take on given your current circumstances? Perhaps you had agreed in the physical world to do a whole day. Break it down, could you do half a day? An hour? What can you realistically give? Working online can be even more exhausting and demanding than an in-person conference. You have many different variables to think about and be ready for. Such a different experience from a physical meeting. From my own (Katherine's) perspective, it was: what can I honestly do with a full-time working husband and two young children sharing the same space and also home-schooling. I am not working from home, I am working within *their* home and space. For me, it was an hour maximum for an event that I run and two hours with one that I'm assisting with. I needed to be able to mute my microphone to shout that someone was at the door, or when someone comes in to ask for the next snack (often). Any longer than an hour and it's too much on all of us. For others, it might be an afternoon. Work out what works best for you and the demands on your life.

4. Be honest and flexible with others

You are running an event with a colleague. Maybe it is with people that you never met in person or only occasionally. Moving everything online means you are going to need to use your voice, to be honest, and flexible with others. If you aren't so keen on one aspect - speak up. This can be difficult but it saves you time later on down the line. You must be honest about what you can cover and not be too critical with yourself. Similarly, with contributors, encourage and support any type of contribution, whatever they want. They will then surprise you with great contributions and content. You may need to be even more explicit when working from home and the reality that many things take longer. For us, it has meant changing what we were doing in a short space of time, adapting to the changes to what others could offer. Some changes could potentially end what we had imagined for a conference/day. For both of us, being flexible meant we were open to different ideas/ways of running an event. Being honest with each other means we know what to expect but also knowing that things may not run exactly as we may have hoped: and that's okay!

5. It takes time and 'take a break'

Planning these events takes time. If you are working with someone for the first time, take time to get to know each other. That might mean two or three planning sessions rather than one or two. Being relaxed with each other online takes time. Some of our most productive meetings were 40-minute conversations and 10 minutes of really constructive planning and decision making. Similarly, if you don't know your contributors and you feel they might be unsure of what the session will be, offer to talk to them before the actual event or start the meeting even earlier to chat with them before others arrive.

Take a break means plan a break in your session. It really helps, especially if you are changing subject or speaker after a longish section. It will help you as presenter and chairperson, makes people more relaxed and is a good way of changing topics.

Take a break also means from online sessions. Do not plan to do too many in a week, they are stressful and tiring, especially if they are on different subjects and are not repeat sessions. If you cannot do this, be kind to yourself, try to avoid planning other meetings or project deadlines in the same week.

6. Be brave (when you're ready)

For many of us, this has all been a very steep learning curve. Remember, anything new is. When you're ready, be brave. Got a good idea for an exchange of experience? Put out a feeler about doing it with a group you're a part of. Not sure where to run it? Try out an online platform you've got access to. You will not know how it goes until you use it. There's a decent chance it will not go as smoothly as you may have hoped, a screen doesn't show, someone's microphone doesn't work. That's okay! But trust us, you do things once and they will go a tiny bit better the next time. Having said all that, do this when you're ready. If you have too many commitments to think about getting your head around that online platform, don't add to your stress by taking things on you do not have time for. Working together meant we could lean on each other and learn together, too. That can be a massive help!

7. Be gracious

If you are attending online conferences, training events, webinars, etc., be gracious. Like all events, there are people, commitments, stresses, and pressures behind every glossy cover. Right now, many of us may be fortunate to be able to benefit from the expertise, experience and commitment of others. Let them know! We are so grateful that others have helped us at our events by speaking, helping to facilitate and so much more. If things do not go as planned, remember the hosts were probably balancing a bunch of things to try and make this possible. We can all appreciate the email or message in the chatbox saying 'thank you', even though during your session you felt like you waffled. Be gracious, it can mean the world to those that made things happen.

We hope that our thoughts on running events online in this new reality resonated with you and what you do. We also hope that reading this inspires you to run your own event, or wait until you feel ready!