

Training VISTAs Remotely

This handout is a companion to the AmeriCorps VISTA leader webinar “Training Your VISTAs Remotely.” It provides a guide for creating new, and translating existing, trainings for a remote learning experience, as well as related links, examples, and resources for you to explore as you design and facilitate remote trainings for your VISTAs.

A. Determine Your Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes, sometimes called objectives, are statements that express what participants will be able to do as a result of an educational or training event. For the learner, they identify what behaviors and skills should be gained due to their participation. For the instructor, they provide guidance and direction for the lesson; if an instructor gets off track during a session, they can use their learning objectives to refocus and ensure the desired learning outcomes are achieved.

1. Answer the following question to determine learning outcomes for your training:
What do you want learners to be able to do as a result of their participation in your training?
2. Now frame your answer to the above question using the following format: “As a result of this training, participants should be able to...”, using action verbs like Identify, Perform, Describe, Critique, Organize, Differentiate, Discuss and Explain.
3. Repeats #1 and #2 above until you have 3-5 concrete learning outcome statements for your training.
4. Use the “SMART” approach, review each of your learning outcome statements to ensure that it is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. If so, then you are ready to move on to Step B below. If not, revisit your statement and adjust it to be even more SMART-friendly.

A note on translating in-person trainings to remote learning

If you have presented this information previously via in-person learning, review your existing learning outcomes and assess if they are still a good fit for a remote version of the training:

- a. Are any of your learning outcomes especially difficult for an online environment?
- b. Can you reshape any of them to be a better fit for remote learning?
- c. If not, create new ones from scratch, following steps #1-4.

B. Choose the Content for Your Training

Content is WHAT you will be training on. Your training content should be thorough and provide VISTAs with the knowledge and skill information they need to succeed. It should also align with your learning outcomes as identified earlier.

1. Start by brainstorming a list of topics you’d like to cover in your training. For now, go big and include every idea of interest!
2. Next, consider the breadth and depth of your training by reviewing the following questions:
 - a. How broad or narrow should my topic be for VISTAs to best understand and implement what they’ve learned?
 - b. Should my training be an introduction to a topic or does it need to go deeper?
 - c. How much can I reasonably cover in the time I have available?
 - d. How much can I cover and still hold their attention in an online setting?

- e. What experiences, skills, and knowledge will my learners have that I can connect to or draw from during the training, making it even more relevant for them?
3. Using the answers to these questions, create a draft outline of topics to cover during your training.
4. Next apply estimated timestamps to each section of your outline. For example, you might start with an icebreaker activity for 5 minutes, followed by going over the agenda for the training for 3 minutes, then introducing the overarching topic for 3 minutes, etc. Continue until you have all of your available time for the training scheduled.
5. Now assess the timing of your outline. Given what you have scheduled:
 - a. Can you cover everything you want to cover in the time you have available?
 - b. Will you have to rush or does the schedule allow time for people to absorb what you are presenting, practice it through activities, etc.?
 - c. Are you spending much more time on one topic than another?
 - d. Do you have time to go broader? Or do you need to narrow your breadth and/or depth further?
6. Based on your answers to these questions, adjust your content and timing as needed to create an outline that will help your learners to best acquire the learning outcomes you identified earlier.

A note on translating in-person training content to a remote learning framework

Review the content you covered previously through in-person sessions and determine whether you can still cover it as effectively during an online session.

If not, can you divide the content across more than one remote training session, covering the same content in a series of shorter trainings?

C. Identify Appropriate Delivery Methods for Your Training

Delivery is one area most unique to remote training as you'll need to rethink and reimagine more traditional methods for sharing training content and engaging your audience.

1. Go through your outline from Step B and, for each section of the training, consider how you can best share the information you plan to cover.
 - a. For example, should you present it like one continuous block of content? Or should you break it up into smaller pieces that are easier to remember?
2. Next, consider delivery methods that align best with adult learning. For example, you might want to tie what they are learning to their already acquired skills and experiences, or incorporate opportunities for them to learn by doing and/or to self-direct their own educational journey.
 - a. Adjust your delivery methods to align with adult learning preferences per above.
3. Repeat this process to align your delivery methods with diverse learning styles. For example, how can you deliver training content to appeal to visual learners? Auditory learners? Kinesthetic learners? Other styles?
 - a. Adjust your delivery methods to align with diverse learning styles per above.

Resources

Adult Learning:

- ["5 Principles for the Teacher of Adults"](#) – Deb Peterson, ThoughtCo
- ["Principles of Adult Learning"](#) – Alabama Pathways

Diverse learning styles:

- ["4 Different Learning Styles You Should Know: The VARK Model"](#) – University of Kansas
- ["4 Types of Learning Styles: How to Accommodate a Diverse Group of Students"](#) – Lauren Elrick, Rasmussen College

A note on translating in-person training delivery for remote learning

Revisit your delivery methods to assess whether what worked in-person will still work well online.

- a. If you have presented this content in-person in the past, will you need to adjust your delivery methods to better fit with remote learning? For example, do you need to break longer lecture sections into shorter bursts or add more visual content like videos and images?
- b. Will you still be able to hold their attention as well online as you would if you were in the same room if you use the same delivery methods?
- c. Do you need to add more interactive elements like discussions and activities to keep them present and engaged?
- d. If you need to significantly change your delivery methods, think about which elements of your delivery in-person were most important.
 - i. Was it what they would learn? How they would interact? Relationships they would develop? Tasks and skills they would practice?
 - ii. Revisit your learning outcomes to guide your decision-making!

D. Choose Appropriate Activities for Your Remote Training

Whenever possible, remote trainings should always include activities. Activities offer a compelling way for your learners to engage with their training content actively, rather than simply as a passive viewer. Plus, they can be a good way to apply what they are learning to a real-world issue, practice and reinforce what they are learning, maintain their attention, and have fun with their you and their peers.

1. Start by consider the “**Why**” of training activities.
 - a. Reflect on your learning outcomes for the training. How can activities help your learners achieve these goals?
 - b. Set a few outcomes specific to your activities.
 - What do you want your attendees to gain from participation?
 - i. Is it an opportunity for them to practice new methods or concepts?
 - ii. Or is it more focused on developing stronger connections to you or each other?
 - Even if it isn’t focused primarily on connections, be sure to include relationship development opportunities in your training as they won’t have the opportunity to do this informally as they would during an in-person training
 - c. Compare the outcomes you’ve identified for your activities and the outcomes you identified for the overall training to ensure that they still align. Adjust as needed!
2. Next consider “**How**.”
 - a. Remembering your desired outcomes for the activities and the training, what kinds of activities are the best fit for your training? For example:
 - i. Activities where people reflect and respond individually?
 - ii. Activities where they collaborate with each other in pairs or small groups?
 - iii. Activities where they communicate with you and everyone else in the training as one cohesive group?
 - b. Consider the time and tools you have available:
 - i. What kinds of activities can you easily accommodate using your videoconference platform?
 - ii. What can you incorporate using other tools?

- iii. What can you realistically fit in within the time frame you have available?
 - Remember that you can always incorporate activities as part of pre-training and post-training learning as well.
- c. Think about how fun or appealing different kinds of activities might be. Choose those that will be most engaging for your audience!
3. Now think about “*When.*”
 - a. Revisit the schedule for the training and decide how much time should be spent presenting new content vs. facilitating activities.
 - Consider what the balance should ideally be between receiving new information and participating in activities.
 - b. Think about the timing and flow of your training. For example:
 - Do you want activities to follow a section where you’ve presented new methods or practices, and now you’re providing a chance for them to get some hands-on experience?
 - Or do you want to start with an activity to get people connected to the topic, then dive deeper into presenting new info?
 - c. Decide which if any activities will take place before or after the training. For example:
 - i. Do you want to incorporate activities that you can complete from start to finish during your remote training?
 - ii. Or does it make more sense to do an activity that spans a longer period of time?
 - Activities might start before the training with a pre-workshop task and then conclude during the training. Or it could start during the training and then continue post-training with an assignment to take next steps.
4. Next think about “*Where.*”
 - a. Explore the tools you have available. For example:
 - i. Can you facilitate your activity using tools within the videoconference software?
 - ii. Do you need participants to access additional tools like Google Docs or a shared workspace?
 - iii. What else might you need?
 - b. Ensure that “where” your activities take place aligns with the “when” of your activities.
5. Brainstorm your activities!
 - a. Based on all of your answers above, choose specific types of activities to incorporate into your training: before, during, and/or after the remote session.
 - b. Review the following types of activities to determine which ones might be the best fit for your training:
 - i. Team discussions and group activities; for example:
 - Facilitated discussions as one big group using the chat box or “raise hand” functions
 - Small group discussions using chat box or breakout rooms
 - Post-training group activities
 - ii. Online demos and simulations; for example:
 - Walking them through activities using screenshare
 - Giving people time to practice new methods and tools either during or after the training, then

bring them back together to discuss questions, successes, and challenges.

iii. Role playing and planning; for example:

- Role playing a scenario in live time with a volunteer from your team so that you can demonstrate how to implement a specific practice or strategy
- Providing time for brainstorming and preliminary planning individually, then reconvening to share ideas and strategies
- Creating post-training teams to share strategies and offer peer feedback

iv. Reflection; for example:

- Providing space and an opportunity for your team members to consider what they are learning, how they might apply new information and ideas they're accruing at their site, and how it connects to their previous personal and professional experiences.
- Asking a question for them to consider and share answers on via the chat box during the training
- Creating an ongoing post-training reflection activity where you provide writing prompts or questions for them to reflect on, either sharing their responses with others on their team or just using them as tools for their own learning and growth

v. Games; for example:

- Facilitating an interactive game either during or after the training, like Training Jeopardy or an online scavenger hunt

Resources

Other Activities:

- [“7 Ideas for Interactive Activities in Your Virtual Training Environment”](#) - Caveo Learning
- [“9 eLearning Activities to Include in Your eLearning Course Design”](#) – AllenComm
- [“Internet Scavenger Hunts”](#) – Education World

E. Assess the Relevance of Your Training

Adults learn best when they can see how the learning is relevant to their lives. Highlighting the relevance (“what’s in it for me”) builds motivation for learning – and retaining knowledge. Again, ideally, all trainings would be tailored to be specifically relevant to the audience. However, it is even more important with remote trainings because of the ability for people to become distracted and lose their ability to pay attention.

1. Revisit your content and delivery plans to confirm that what you are sharing is relevant to their roles as VISTAs. Answer the following questions and adjust your training as needed:
 - a. How can you make what they are learning most relevant and applicable?
 - b. How can you take what might seem like abstract concepts and offer real world examples of how it might play out at their site?
 - c. Can you incorporate activities or share examples that will mirror what they might encounter in their service?
2. Review the backgrounds of the VISTA team members you’ll have in the training to identify where they have existing skills and knowledge that can align with this training content. Adjust your activities and language used to convey key concepts as needed.
 - For example, you might have a former teacher on your team who will be doing fundraising. Try to help him/her/they consider how communicating with a potential funder is similar to tailoring a lesson for a student: “it’s all about who the person is, what they most need, and how you can best connect them

to your message.”

3. Go through your content and delivery plan and ensure that everything feels timely.
 - a. Does your content align with what they will experience on the ground given current events, the communities in which they will serve, or time of year?
 - b. Are you delivering the training close to the time when they will most need the skills or information?

F. Build in Continuity of Learning

Whether you’re offering a one-time training or an event as part of a series of learning opportunities, remote trainings can become “stickier” and more impactful by placing them within a continuum of learning, a process that begins before your remote training and continues after everyone has clicked “Leave Meeting.”

1. Review the schedule you have created for your training, including your revised and finetuned content and delivery methods, and answer the following questions:
 - Does it need or should it all be covered in one training session?
 - i. Can you potentially start the learning process before the remote training?
 - ii. Can you potentially start the learning process after the remote training?
2. If you decide to add learning opportunities before the training, what kinds of activities might be the best fit for your content and learners?
 - a. Should they be individual activities like readings and worksheets?
 - b. Should they be small group or team-based like collaborative activities?
3. If you decide to add learning opportunities after the training, what kinds of activities might be the best fit for your content and learners?
 - a. Should they be individual activities like additional readings, reflection, or independent strategic planning?
 - b. Should they be small group or team-based like collective planning, discussion groups, microblogs, or online scavenger hunts?
4. Consider relationship development and collaboration. For example:
 - a. Do the pre- or post-training activities you’ve identified offer opportunities to build relationships with you, with each other, as a team?
 - i. If not, think about incorporating connection practices like:
 - Checking in with them individually – and encouraging them to check in with each other by text or IM
 - Creating a Slack channel with a question of the day
 - Launching peer groups or listservs for people to share ideas or ask questions by sending one email or submitting one post
 - ii. Review available tools for ongoing connection and collaboration. Here are some examples:
 - [Facebook Groups](#)
 - [Google Docs](#)
 - [Google Groups](#)
 - [Slack](#)
 - [Tumblr](#)
 - [WordPress](#)

5. Decide what you want your learners to do next. For example:
 - a. Does it make sense for you to create a shared folder for them to access your handouts, readings, tip sheets, etc.?
 - b. Can you ask them questions using direct check-ins, evaluation polls, short monthly or quarterly surveys to discover what they want to learn next, what they liked and didn't like about the most recent training, what kinds of resources they need, etc.

Next Steps

By following the steps in this handout, you should be ready to create a new dynamic remote training for your VISTAs – or translate an existing in-person training into an online version! However, if you're looking for even more resources, here are a few places to start:

- [“4 Expert Strategies for Designing an Online Course”](#) - Amy Rottmann and Salena Rabidoux, Inside Higher Ed (*Note: This resources is focused more on online academic courses but there are several useful tips that can also be applied to trainings*)
- [“Active Learning Principles: Tips to Apply in Online Training”](#) – Christopher Pappas, LearnUpon
- [“Designing and Leading Virtual Meetings”](#)

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