



Staffing Roles to Support Online Learning and Engagement

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One of the biggest lessons sexual assault coalitions report after building and launching online learning for advocates and community partners is how long it takes to build and maintain. Planning and launching a new online training is time intensive, and the investment does not end there. For online trainings to be effective, coalitions need to devote time to moderating and maintaining them. This is particularly true for coalitions exploring or using learning management systems (LMS). A learning management system offers more opportunities for engagement than a previously recorded webinar alone. And that comes with additional maintenance needs.

Common Online Learning Maintenance Roles

Below are some of the common roles and functions coalitions may need to consider as they maintain their online learning offerings.

Overall Project Lead

At least one person on staff should have an understanding about the online learning system, contents, and any consultants worked with as a whole. This may be the coalition executive director or a project-specific lead. Having this information helps for planning, reporting, and technical support. Often, this person has intimate knowledge of all the necessary coalition platform login

names and passwords, security, reporting, and accessibility features, should know who to call for technical support, and be able to help learners problem solve. In addition to these global tasks, the project lead may be responsible for:

- Uploading recorded webinars to web platform (website, YouTube, other) and adding in all transcript and closed caption files as necessary
- Keeping a list of platforms and logins used for different parts of online trainings
- Maintaining a list of online learning-related vendors and contractors such as closed captioners, ASL interpreters, technical writers, and content designers
- Running a backup (or makes sure a backup happens) for all parts of the learning management system (LMS)
- Ensuring the coalition does not exceed its data limits by periodically deleting users and data or arranging for data storage increases

Project Supporters/Back-ups

An important part of supporting leadership development and approaching work from a [succession planning mindset](#) is identifying and training other people to understand how to use the online learning system and tools. Having other people on staff who know how to use and access the online training tools helps ensure a seamless experience for sexual assault advocates and community partners accessing the coalition's online trainings regardless of who is in office that day. In addition to maintaining online learning in a project lead's absence, project supporters may also be helpful:

- When there is a surge of troubleshooting requests, such as at the beginning of a registration window for new modules or at the beginning of an online learning cohort
- When traveling to local programs to offer live demonstrations of the tool or when visiting members to offer technical assistance on other topics and find someone needs help accessing the training. This is particularly important to offer if any of the online trainings are essential for sexual assault advocacy certification.

Engagement and Completion Trackers

Because most sexual assault coalitions offer online training as part of professional development or certification processes, it may be important to have someone in charge of tracking and printing completion reports and certificates for people accessing the trainings and for grant reporting purposes. Depending on privacy needs, this can be a coalition staff member, intern/volunteer, or people from local or allied programs completing trainings.

Accessibility Coordinators

Language and disability accessibility coordinators are the people whose names and contact information are included on all outreach materials, registration materials, and online trainings. [Designing for Accessibility](#) and [Facilitating Online Learning](#) both offer more information about planning for language and disability access.

Content Auditors

A content auditor is someone who periodically verifies that online information included in trainings is still accurate and associated links still function. This role is primarily important for sexual assault coalitions hosting handouts and learning modules in an LMS as part of an advocate certification-type training. Coalitions may sometimes list contact information for local programs or government agencies in their trainings. These addresses and phone numbers can change, or the links to their webpages may change. Other times, such as with legal webinars and trainings, information may become outdated and need to be removed from public viewing so as not to cause confusion. Again, because people are relying on this information to provide supportive services to survivors of sexual assault, it is important that this information stay as up-to-date as possible.

Moderator(s)

Moderators are an important part of creating equitable and empowered online learning communities as well (Ortega & Marquart, 2016; Salter, 2015). Of all the online learning maintenance roles, their function can be the most time intensive. At a very basic level, moderators “differentiate between accurate and helpful and unhelpful content...and can help users to be a helpful part of the online

environment” (WikiHow, n.d.). They are also the people identified that anyone using the online learning platform can contact if they have issues with any of the other participants, facilitators, or content (conversation with Toby Shulruff, 2019). In the context of a webinar, a moderator will likely be the person monitoring and participating in the chat box most frequently. In the context of interactive eLearning modules, a moderator may be someone who regularly reads and comments on peoples’ journal entries, forum posts, and chat logs and can respond if peer discussions are escalating into oppressive or harassing dynamics.

Moderators are important because sexual assault can be a triggering topic to learn about via online training. Advocates may be completing the training at home, reading about the sexual assault continuum for the first time and realizing that they are drawn to this work because they experienced sexual violence. Or they may be learning about systemic racism and confronting the many ways they’ve internalized racism, alone at 3:00 am. Coalition sexual assault trainings may be the first time people encounter topics such as racism and oppression in such a direct manner, and this can provoke a range of emotions that then get expressed in various ways throughout the online training experience (DiAngelo, 2011). People may post responses to videos or write questions in a webinar chat that inadvertently reflect dominant, often oppressive, worldviews and opinions and will benefit from having someone to help them evolve that thinking. Much of that work will likely happen through in-person follow-up sessions for advocates, but having someone to moderate provides an added layer of support. When an advocate or community partner posts an oppressive comment online and there is no response at a coalition or local program administrative level, this can rupture trust and lead to advocates from marginalized communities not wanting to collaborate with their peers out of self-preservation. As one online instructor reflected, “I’ll often come across something in grading that I never would have let pass in a traditional class and I have to determine what to do after the fact” (Salter, 2015). Though sexual assault coalitions don’t grade participation, this dynamic can happen when coalitions don’t have enough people to share the responsibility of facilitating online trainings and moderating chat boxes or don’t check in to discussion forums. These ruptures can then create an unspoken

background for any portions of the training completed in-person too. Moderators may not be online all the time, but their existence and periodic presence lets people know there is a person from the coalition and/or local program reading the posts online. This can also prevent people completing the online trainings from feeling like they're being asked to interact via chat or discussion forum solely because a training designer read somewhere that it's a best practice (Intrepid Learning, n.d.).

Moderation Strategies

One of the benefits of online learning is that multiple coalition staff can play different roles, especially when people are completing online training at different times. There is a lot of room for creativity here. Unlike at an in-person training, the person who developed and facilitates recorded portions of the training does not have to be the same person who engages people online (Intrepid Learning, n.d.). For example, one week a prevention staff member can lead a chat and respond to posts in a discussion forum. Another week, someone from the legal team can engage people online.

Moderators do not need to be restricted to sexual assault coalition staff either. Coalitions can ask long-time directors, managers, or others to join the forums and respond to people's posts as part of a coordinated team as well. These collaborations can reinforce that a coalition's knowledge comes directly from local programs' and advocates' experiences working individually with survivors. Sharing moderation responsibilities can include:

- Coalition staff members attending webinars hosted by their colleagues to model using the interactive tools like raising their hands or asking a probing question to other participants in the chat box. The staff member facilitating the webinar could prep the other coalition staff attendees with questions they often hear through technical assistance calls or visits to encourage discussion and questions from other participants.

- Having staff moderators participate in discussion forums to help provide learners with someone to engage with and can help create continuity if advocates are completing sexual assault certification trainings at different times. A staff member may remember a conversation that took place several weeks ago in a different discussion thread that may be of interest or help to a person currently taking the training. Pointing them to the posts may also lead to advocates connecting offline.
- Staff moderators or local program leaders can also scan forums to identify people struggling with important concepts and respond to posts that violate learning community agreements.

Closing Thoughts

How much time and energy are required to maintain a coalition’s online learning collection will depend on the types of training offered online, the target audience, and the desired outcomes. In many cases, most of these roles will be filled by a single person. However, building a team can create new opportunities for collaboration, offer insight into different types of trainings that can be built online, and strengthen relationships between a larger group of coalition staff and direct service advocates and community partners that ultimately propel the coalition further along towards their overall goals. Online learning offers new ways to engage, not just for advocates, but for the coalition as a whole.

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