ONLINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
Guidance

Introduction

In this document you will find guidance for setting up your Online Community Engagement Activity (OCEA). These guides are also available in the UNDP Diagnostic Tool. This document functions best in conjunction with the UNDP Diagnostic Tool, as the Diagnostic Tool can refer you to further resources and information.

Type of OCEA

OCEAs are not one-size-fits-all. OCEAs encompass a wide range of interventions and activities that fit different needs and audiences; from webinars and live-streamed conferences to small online dialogue groups and virtual peer-exchanges. Choosing a format and approach that is appropriate for the specific objectives and target audience is the first step towards effective online community engagement. We identify three main types of OCEA; Trainings & Workshops, Facilitated Group Interactions / Community Dialogues, and Consultations / Networking.

Trainings & Workshops

Trainings and workshops are similar in that they both involve imparting specific knowledge to your participants in a collaborative learning environment. Where they diverge is how knowledge and information are being transferred. In trainings, the knowledge dissemination comes from the organizers, whereas in workshops the knowledge dissemination happens on a horizontal, peer-to-peer level.

Trainings and workshops are cornerstones of OCEAs. They bring a unique set of opportunities and challenges.

One of the first things you will have to decide is whether your online workshop or training will be synchronous - taking place with participants at a specific time and space, live, and direct - or asynchronous - at one's own time and pace. If you are going to offer synchronous trainings and workshops, you need to consider what platform you are going to use.

If you are going to offer an asynchronous training or workshop, the space where you do this will also need to be considered. Most practitioners use a Learning Management System (LMS) for this kind of activity. You will find a selection of LMSs under Digital Tools in the UNDP Diagnostic Tool.

Another factor to consider is the length of the activity. Will you have a single session, or will you have multiple? Keep in mind that due to attention spans and screen fatigue it is not advised to plan sessions longer than 2 -4 hours, so consider planning and design accordingly.

Will you have assignments or quizzes? They can be useful in OCEAs not only as a tool for you to measure impact and progression of participants, but they also serve as 'knowledge checks' and validation for the participants themselves.

Facilitated Group Interactions / Community Dialogues

Facilitated group dialogue sessions do not aim to impart specific knowledge, but rather to have the group learn from and about each other, as well as develop individually and collectively. They are often used to bring people together across a certain divide, whether it be political, religious or social. The goal is to encourage open communication that fosters new relationships.

Facilitated group interactions and community dialogues are an intensive form of OCEA. Both of these forms are based on the principles of dialogue, and are meant to be a repeated occurrence, a process that unfolds over time.

In these types of OCEAs it is important to think about your group's 'process,' i.e. what stages you want your group to progress through over time. A group process framework can be a significant guiding tool in how the sessions are facilitated. Dialogue activities can help you facilitate specific parts of the session. There are specific online dialogue formats (see OCEA Activity Bank) or you can transform

offline dialogue activities to online formats.

It is also important to think about your needs for facilitation. For instance, how many facilitators will you need? This is dependent partly on how many participants you will have. An effective group size for dialogue is between 6 and 13 people. Less, and the diversity of viewpoints is too little; more, and you will not have the space to explore everyone's points of view.

Consultations / Networking

These are OCEAs in which you involve people from multiple disciplines and backgrounds to gain knowledge or to come to an agreement or output. It is also used to create buy-in to your policy or strategies, or refer to events designed to bring people together to network.

Consultations and networking activities online usually aim to attract a larger audience than other forms of OCEAs. Although process matters also for these types of OCEA, they tend to be more result and goal-oriented. Objectives can be to hone in on information gathering, fostering buy-in amongst a larger community, or providing space for relevant stakeholders to connect. Consultations and networking activities can be done both synchronously and asynchronously online. For instance, there can be a series of consultation meetings organized virtually or consultations through online discussion boards through platforms like SparkBlue.

Phase of your OCEA

The UNDP Diagnostic Tool offers resources applicable to each phase of your OCEA, which are organized into design, implementation, and evaluation phases.

Designing your OCEA

Designing a successful OCEA entails the use of the most efficient tools, guides, and techniques to assure sustainable engagement.

Digital Tools

The amount of digital tools at your disposal are numerous and evolving. In the design phase, it is important to identify which digital tools are appropriate and accessible for your stakeholders and best suited to executing your OCEA. Using state-of-the-art digital tools does not determine the success of your intervention; more weight needs to be on whether the tools meet the needs of the target audience and match the design of the OCEA. In the end, digital tools should aid you in achieving your OCEAs objectives. The 'Digital Tools' section in the UNDP Diagnostic Tool provides both a list of tools and resources on how to use them.

Online Activities

Activities in online engagement are as important as in offline engagement. There should be an emphasis on the application of well designed and integrated activities in the design phase. Setting your OCEA objectives and framework will require activities to support the approach and guarantee continuous engagement during and after the OCEA. In this section you will find activities linked to a group process framework, tackling orientation, formation, development, relationship building, conflict resolution, critical thinking, forward thinking, activation, and more.

Approaches

Many of the resources in the UNDP Diagnostic Tool outline different approaches to take when designing an OCEA. Approaches listed include: risk-sensitive, cyber threat informed, whole-of-society, youth-led, localised, inclusive, and trauma-sensitive approaches. Your design process may need to incorporate more than one approach.

Research and Reports

When designing your OCEA, you can benefit from information gained from fields relevant to PVE and/or from evaluations of related interventions. You may want to pay special attention to interventions that engage your target audiences or that are implemented in your target region.

Guidelines and Best Practices

The UNDP Diagnostic Tool offers a wide variety of resources that contain key recommendations of best practices, guidelines and guiding principles. These resources can allow you to tap into the expertise gained from other practitioners and direct the implementation of your OCEA.

Implementing you OCEA

How-to guides

These are resources that provide practical guidance and steps to take when implementing different types of OCEAs or interventions. Keep in mind the information and vision that you gained in the design phase when assessing which are feasible or appropriate for your specific context.

Reports

Many of the reports in the UNDP Diagnostic Tool contain detailed examples of implemented activities, the outcomes of those activities, and advice for other practitioners. These can help you follow in the footsteps of successful practitioners while not repeating their mistakes.

Digital Tools

Choosing the most suitable digital tool for your OCEA and your audience is a vital step in the design phase. In the implementation phase, you need the know-how to recognize and utilize the different features of these tools and tailor them to your activities. Under this section you can find guides and links to different platforms and digital tools you can use for your OCEAs.

Facilitation Tools

Facilitation tools include digital tools, activities, design tools, and guides. There are resources on online facilitation and the specific requirements of facilitating in a virtual space. If you have significant experience facilitating in-person activities we still advise looking up resources on online facilitation, as some of the tools and skills required for effective online facilitation may be new to you.

Evaluation you OCEA

Here are points to look out for when evaluating OCEAs.

Survey Tools

The great thing about an OCEA is that your participants are already in a digital environment that can be used to survey them. There is no need to collect their home address and send them a survey in the mail, just send them a link at the end of your OCEA with your survey.

Pre-OCEA Surveys

For some impact or change measurements, you might want to get a pre-OCEA assessment of your participants. If this is the case, think about combining your pre-OCEA survey with your enrollment procedure, this way you can guarantee that all participants fill it out.

Net Promoter Score

Net promoter score (NPS) is a measure of satisfaction that has become a standard across multiple industries. Use it to easily gauge how your OCEA compares to others.

Type of Resource

This UNDP Diagnostic Tool can link you to different types of resources to support your OCEA. Here you find some guidance in their differentiation.

How-to Guides

Whether you are interested in a step-by-step guide for facilitated dialogue sessions, instructions on how to keep your data safe, or recommendations for remote activities, you can find illustrative assistance in this category. Here is where to visit if you are looking for concrete toolkits, handbooks, guidance notes, and 'how-to' instructions. These include resources relevant to the design, implementation, and evaluation phases of your OCEA.

Digital Tools

There is a full suite of digital tools available for your OCEA. These include both free and paid software, applications, and programs. The types of tools that might be of most use to your OCEAs are listed below.

Communication Systems

In order to engage people online, you need a good way to communicate with them. Mail Merge systems are highly useful in this regard, as they allow you to easily send out personalized emails to large groups of people and track if emails are read or links are used.
If emails are not the ideal method of communication for your audience, you may want to use a mobile phone messaging app. Which app to choose highly depends on your audience.

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

An LMS will allow you to keep track of participant engagement and commitment. These systems are aimed at education, and so are ideal for OCEAs that aim to deliver a training or workshop.

Video Conferencing Tools

Many OCEAs will need a video conferencing tool. These vary widely in regards to format, features, and accessibility. It is recommended to assess the needs of your specific audience before making your choice. Factors to take into consideration include: how accessible it is to participants with low bandwidths or tech experience, whether it meets the security requirements of your audience or organization, and what functions you need in order to carry out your planned activities (whiteboard, polls etc.).

Online Collaboration Tools

There are two main types of collaboration tools included in the UNDP Diagnostic Tool. The first is tools for collaborating online with your participants during your OCEA, which include whiteboard and live polling applications. The second type is tools for designing and implementing your OCEA with your team. Most organizations will already make use of online collaboration software such as Google Workspace or Microsoft Teams. Discuss whether this is meeting all your needs efficiently, and if replacing or supplementing your existing systems would be beneficial.

Survey Tools

Survey tools are highly recommended for OCEAs that incorporate monitoring and evaluation. Most are easy to use for both audiences and staff. When selecting a survey tool, keep in mind what your organization's requirements are for the handling of participant data.

Digital Security Tools

There may be security concerns associated with your specific location or audience, including surveillance, censorship or hacking. Digital security tools include collaboration, video conferencing, and communication services that have made digital security a priority, along with some critical assessment of their security claims.

Facilitation Tools & Activities

Group Process Framework

This framework presents six stages that a group can go through. This can be a useful tool for facilitators wanting to assess what stage their group is in and what interventions can be made at each stage to move the group forward. It can help you identify the overall process of your group, where you would like them to end up, and specific methods to help them get there.

Activity Bank

Linked to the Group Process Framework you can find activities for any type of OCEA. In this section you will find a handful of activities tackling introduction and ice-breakers, relationship building, identity, conflict resolution, critical thinking, forward thinking, youth engagement, reflection, activation, and more.

Context-Specific Resources

Facilitation looks different and requires different tools depending on what is being facilitated, whether it is online or offline, and who the participants are. You will notice that there are separate resources for different kinds of facilitation, including dialogue, mediation, interfaith dialogue, and mental health and psychosocial support.

You can also find information specific to designing and implementing online events or facilitating activities online. These can help you determine which facilitation tools to use, what can (or should not) be brought online, opportunities and challenges, and how best to work with your audience.

Courses & Trainings

It may be that you do not have significant experience in facilitating, teaching, or leading trainings/workshops online. Or perhaps you would like to learn more about how to design a community-based dialogue or set up secure communication with your audience. Here you will find up-to-date free and paid courses and trainings that can help you fill in these gaps in your knowledge.

Research & Reports

Here you are presented with resources that include research on intersections between digital technology and peacebuilding, case studies of virtual exchanges, and reports from various stakeholders on their work in the field.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation is an important part of OCEAs. Evidence-based programming and learning through M&E allows us to improve the engagement of our audience over time.

If you offer content, it can be of great value to ask, in either surveys or focus groups, the quality of specific content, and any other questions to evaluate whether the objectives of the OCEA has been met. Improving your content is the number one way to improve your engagement, so knowing what works and what doesn't is vital.

When running an OCEA you might expect specific change in the target audience, including knowledge/awareness, attitude, and/or behavior change, as a direct impact of your OCEA. If you are, you might want to use pre and post-OCEA surveys.

Theoretical or Hands-on Support

This UNDP Diagnostic Tool can connect you to both research on OCEAs and hands-on tips and tools on how to design or implement your OCEA. The categories present are:

Theory & Background

In this category you can find research into the evolving relationship between digital technologies and various sectors, foundational knowledge of dialogue, and case studies of interventions and OCEAs. You can use them to gain a wider understanding of trends and developments in the field, learn from basic approaches, and get ideas and insights from practitioners and real-life cases.

Hands-on Tips & Tools

'Hands-on tips and tools' is perhaps the widest category you will encounter in the UNDP Diagnostic Tool. Here you can find digital tools, online activities, step-by-step guides, toolkits, trainings and more.

Your Audience

Sometimes your OCEA is targeting a specific audience. The UNDP Diagnostic Tool can link you to specific resources for dedicated audiences.

Youth

Youth as a demographic are distinctive in their general level of digital literacy and online engagement. Virtual spaces are often the primary spaces in which they communicate, connect, receive information, influence, and are influenced themselves. Those seeking to engage with youth online must keep the following in mind:

- Engaging youth on social media is not as easy as it may seem. It is important to understand exactly where and how youth are active online, and which populations they represent. Tiktok, Instagram and Facebook might be popular worldwide, but they are not necessarily the most popular with your specific youth audience, and some countries have banned these platforms. You also might find that platform choice in your target audience might vary widely in regards to the background, education level, gender, or political ideology of a young person. It is likely that your intervention will need to involve multiple platforms and approaches in order to approach equal representation.

- The internet can be positive and supportive for youth, but it can also be a place of harassment, censorship and negative repercussions outside of their control. When encouraging certain kinds of online behavior in young people, discuss possible ramifications with them in depth.

- While digital spaces increasingly have a low-barrier-to-entry due to the expansion of mobile phones and internet infrastructure in rural or under-resourced communities, you should not overestimate the amount of youth who have access to these spaces. It is also important to keep in mind that the internet is not a neutral space, and you still need to be conscientious in your practice in order to avoid reproducing unequal power structures between different youth populations.

Women

PVE OCEAs that do not take gender into account can end up reinforcing gender inequality and focus PVE work on men's issues and experiences. It is recommended that you integrate an awareness of gender dynamics into every phase of designing, implementing and evaluating your OCEA. Ask yourself: are women and girls from the target communities represented in the design and implementation of this OCEA? Have I conducted a gender-sensitive situational assessment to evaluate the context I'm working in and potential outcomes of my OCEA for women and girls? Am I perceiving women and girls as a diverse group? Do I understand how gender inequality intersects with race, class, religion, marital status, sexual orientation etc in my target community? Have I engaged in dialogue with my local stakeholders on what gender sensitivity looks like? Does my OCEA target the specific ways in which VE has harmed women and girls? Can the gender equality measures that I have integrated into my OCEA be tracked for progress, i.e through sex-disaggregated data or gender-sensitive indicators?

At risk individuals

When designing, implementing and evaluating your OCEAs, you will have to take into account that some participants may be at risk individuals. This category mainly includes people whose socioeconomic grievances are likely to make them vulnerable to influence by VE groups, and those whose identities fall outside the dominant or common cultural, social, and political norms regarding race. Young people are, however, most at risk. They are the main targets of recruitment strategies and often fall victim to extremist violence. In these cases, high sensitivity is recommended. First, you will need to define the criteria which dictate who would be considered 'at risk' in your OCEAs. Is legislation in their country used to imprison people without due process, risking promotion of violent extremism by feeding into narratives of grievance? Have you made sure that their participation in your OCEAs will not put them further at risk, either of being victims of VE groups, or of retaliation by the government? Are you safeguarding them enough, should a threat of imminent violence or recruitment arise? Are you ensuring that no personally identifiable data is shared without permission and confidentiality is maintained? Are you able, through your OCEAs, to provide anger and stress management solutions to decrease the chances of radicalization? A best practice when dealing with at risk individuals would be to engage in open discussions for critical thinking, creating space for alternative narratives to extremist ideas, and promoting tolerance in discussions.

Institutional stakeholders

When you run an OCEA specific to institutional stakeholders you need to take into account what the best format will be. One thing to keep in mind is that all institutional stakeholders bring with them their own institutional expectations. Some organisations see any meeting without an agenda as a clear waste of time, while others can't function with one. Expectation management is thus of extra importance. Learn what format of OCEA your institutional stakeholders would prefer, and be clear in what it is you are offering and how you would like for them to be involved.

Religious or Community Leaders

When planning an OCEA, it is best practice to understand the sociopolitical topography of the community you're working in. Where are the loci of power, and who is at the center of them? These individuals can range from government officials and religious leaders to tribal authorities, (un)official armed forces, or community organizers. Some questions to ask yourself are: What is their level and type of influence in the community? What are their positions on the topic of your OCEA? Does it intersect with any of their needs, interests, or values? Do they work at odds with or conjunct with each other? If you are aiming to bring multiple leaders together, is there an online platform or form of communication that they all know how to use? Do they already use the internet to interact with their followers, and if so, how are they using it? If there is some sort of hostile division between different groups, are there any leaders who currently interact with each other in a positive way, or who could provide a good starting point?

Be prepared for a wide range of digital literacy and access between different actors, and discuss with them what digital tools they will be willing to use. Be cautious of holding communication on a platform or software that creates a power imbalance - for example a dialogue between government actors and activists on a platform that is influenced or surveilled by the government. Act with full transparency, and make trust building a priority.