Recommendations for the Online Institute

By: Leila Card, Michelle Frasch, Ethan Schock, and Meghan Slaney
Recommendations to Improve Event Participation

Reminders & Zoom Breakout Rooms
Email Reminders

What:
• Send an email reminder 24 hours before event
• Describe format of event (lecture, open discussion, etc.)
• Explain participation expectations
  – Describe information each team will be expected to share
  – Request participants to prepare a list of questions or prepared slides

Why:
• Our team found that Mr. Ahern’s phase III event had more participation than the previous event. Mr. Ahern emailed participants a reminder prior to his event while the previous event speakers did not send email reminder.
Zoom Breakout Room

What:

• Utilize Zoom breakout rooms during design phases so participants from different institutions can interact and share their ideas.
  – Try to have one participant from each team in each breakout room
  – Have each group choose a leader who will present their breakout room’s ideas to the entire group
• Close the breakout rooms before the end of the event so there is time to discuss the breakout room ideas as a whole group.
  – Record the end group discussion so those who can not attend the live event and participate in the breakout rooms are able to gain an understanding of the ideas discussed in the breakout rooms which cannot be recorded.

Why:

• Our survey results sent to the program participants indicated that the majority of respondents believed the use of breakout rooms would make the program more engaging.
Online Platforms

Communication & Video Platforms
Online Platforms: Recommendations to Improve Communication
Combined Use of Slack & Email
Slack

- We recommend the continued use of Slack due to its low bandwidth and familiarity among participants. We recommend that Slack be used for quick announcements and have a dedicated space for general discussion and conversation.

Problem:
- Slack can be confusing for some to set up and use.

Solution:
- Host live informational session
  - Staff live session with multiple WPI Slack experts to handle individual questions
- Create recorded Slack instructional videos
  - Explain how to setup and join channels
  - Explain the intended use of each channel specific to the Online Institute workspace
  - Explain how to turn on Slack notifications
  - Send instructional videos to participants emails and post on website for future reference
Email

We recommend that email be used in combination with Slack.

- Emails may be used for longer messages while Slack can be used for short announcements.
- Increase the use of email as a form of communication.
  - Send more email event reminders with participation expectations before each event

Why:

- Our survey results from the program participants showed that all respondents preferred email over Slack as form of communication
- Some participants do not have Slack notifications turned on and miss important reminders in Slack causing lower event attendance
- Using both email & Slack to communicate will reach the largest audience
Online Platforms: Video Platform Recommendations
Zoom & YouTube
Zoom & YouTube

Zoom has a participant limit. When a large event attendance is expected, use both Zoom and YouTube for different purposes.

- **Zoom:** Identify “thought-leaders”* and invite them to attend live Zoom event
  - Thought-leaders will be more likely to speak up during the meeting, so it is important they join the Zoom call

- **YouTube:** Invite others who are less likely to speak up to attend the broadcasted YouTube live session
  - These participants will still have the option to interact if they chose by typing questions and comments
  - Record and post the YouTube live session for those who are unable to attend the live session

*thought leaders - Provost Soboyejo’s term for those who have strong ideas but may not necessarily be the team leader
Recommendations for the Future of the Program

Website Improvements & Outreach Initiatives
Future Recommendations: Website Recommendations

- Registration portal
- Locked content
- Video descriptions
- FAQ page
Create a Registration Portal

What:

- Automated registration portal on Registration page of the website
- Contact form plugin, legal agreement form plugin, integrated payment link

How:

- Search forms plugins on WordPress
  - May need to use a combination of plugins
  - One example is Forminator - create any form (contact form, order form, payment form, email form, feedback widgets, etc.)
- Contact WPI Bursar’s office
  - Talk to the bursar’s office to learn which technologies they use for payments
  - A link/ integration link may be recommended rather than paying directly on the site for security

Helpful Contacts

- Our team recommends continuing to work with WPI data management experts Ermal Toto and Siamak Najafi
  - Ermal Toto created temporary WPI WordPress site for our team to work on while waiting for domain name approval
  - https://gr-nmb6-onlineinstitute.wpi.edu/
Locked Phase II and III Event Videos

What:
- Require login credentials to access paid phase II and phase III content on the website

Why:
- We recommend that Phase II and III content be locked because it is content for paying participants only. We recommend Phase I content be unlocked because it is a free phase and this material can be used to generate interest in the program.

How:
- One option to lock content is to set up a membership site to restrict access to members only area
  - In users tab can add “member” users to the site
- Another option is to use a plugin such as OptinMonster or MemberPress
  - Download plugin and chose which content to lock
Description of the Video Content

What:
- Below each video on the program content page provide a description of the topics covered in each video.
- Include the date each video was filmed below as well

Why:
- This will make it easier for participants to find and access the content they are looking for.
- It will provide participants with an overview of the video before watching to help them prepare
FAQ Page on the Website

What:

• We recommend creating a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page.

Why:

• It will provide quick information to current participants and people interested in joining
• Reduce the time Online Institute leaders need to answer simple questions

How:

• On WordPress pages tab click “Add New” button to add new page
• At the start of version 2, record all questions participants have and transfer the most common questions to the website FAQ page. Provide answers beneath each question.
• Continually update FAQ page with more questions as program progresses
Outreach Recommendations

- Online Institute email
- Marketing content
- Social media
- Mobile App
Online Institute Official Email

We recommend creating an Online Institute official email that leaders of the Online Institute have access to.

Why:

• This will eliminate the need for the use of personal emails
• Organize all Online Institute emails in one location rather than having emails be sent to different leaders of the Online Institute
• Personal emails tend to get cluttered and it may be beneficial to have a central email address for all Online Institute information
• An official Online Institute email can be linked to the website for questions and be used to send out promotional/marketing content to other institutions.
Marketing Content

We recommend creating marketing content to help grow the program to other institutions.

What:

• Create promotional videos explaining the mission of the Online Institute and why it is beneficial to join
• Include personal success stories of former participants of the Online Institute

How:

• Interview willing participants about their experiences and what they were able to accomplish
• Include the marketing content on the website and send the content to other higher education institutions.
Social Media Accounts

We recommend creating social media accounts for the Online Institute.

What:
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Twitter

Why:
- Social media accounts can help attract new participants to the program.

How:
- We recommend creating social media accounts and following other higher education institutions
- Research marketing and social media tactics
- Conduct research to determine potential interested institutions and follow/contact those institutions
Mobile App

We recommend a mobile app because it will allow for a central location to store downloadable material.

Why:

- To have one centralized location for current participants to find material
- Have a way to send out updates to current, paying participants
- Convenient for mobile phone users
- Easily downloaded material