Social Embeddedness Network

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

2020 ASU Social Embeddedness Network Conference

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Introduction

Central to ASU's charter is the commitment to be fundamentally responsible for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of communities. Due to risks associated with COVID-19, ASU recommended that all meetings including the annual Social Embeddedness Network (SEN) Conference, be moved online or postponed. After many discussions with ASU leadership and partners and given the momentum that had already been generated, the organizers decided to move to an all-online format. This change lent itself to greater accessibility and inclusion for those who may not have been able to join the in-person conference at the Memorial Union on the Tempe campus. After the transition, conference registration increased to 453, 153 more than could have been accommodated had the conference been held, as planned.

Previously, the ASU Social Embeddedness Network had never hosted a virtual conference until 2020. Although an in-person conference is an exciting and fun way to celebrate and recognize the hard work of colleagues and community partners, the organizers saw this as an opportunity to adapt to the public health needs of the university and community. Even a few years ago, a virtual conference may not have been possible. Over the course of eight hours, 123 speakers took the virtual stage in 63 events. Many thanks to the Office of Applied Innovation, Access ASU and our community and ASU partners for working together the conference could take place on Tuesday, March 24, 2020.

What is a virtual conference?

Although technology has made the new remote-work model easier, organizations continue to look for ways to replicate their in-person experiences in a remote environment, including moving meetings to video conference calls. A virtual conference is an online event that involves people interacting in a virtual environment rather than joining in-person. A virtual conference involves a dynamic, complex agenda that includes plenary sessions and breakout presentations. Attendees can customize their experience in real-time to design an agenda that is relevant and engaging.

Initially, the 2020 ASU Social Embeddedness Network Conference was designed to span across the university and bring together community-engaged staff, faculty, graduate students and their community partners.With the transition to all-online, the conference spanned across the United States to share high-quality programming and insights into socially embedded practices, initiatives and professionals at ASU and throughout the community. The virtual conference allowed attendees who were unable to attend the event to participate and learn regardless of location.

The benefits

- **Flexibility:** Virtual events allow organizers to better tailor the content and materials to the needs of the organization. This means being able to adjust the agenda à la minute and plug in a different session if the presentation has already been pre-recorded, going from one track to several simultaneous ones or adjusting sessions to include longer or shorter Q&A opportunities. There is also greater flexibility for attendees. With a virtual conference, they can participate in various sessions and pop in and out of sessions as they please. There is less stigma given that you are not physically leaving a room and closing the door behind you in the middle of a presentation. Attendees can participate in the event from any physical location.

  Post-conference survey results revealed that attendees appreciated the variety of presentations available to them. They were grateful for the opportunity to enter and leave sessions and participate in multiple presentations during a single timeblock. The 2020 SEN Conference included up to eight simultaneous sessions, including a variety of 10-minute Lightning Talks and 45-minute partnership presentations that featured ASU and community partner co-presenters. This format gave a "real-life" feeling to the conference to keep the audience interested and engaged. Because attendees may not have been able to attend *every* session during the conference, all of the

presentations were recorded, edited for length and uploaded to the Community@ASU website. This serves as a digital archive of the content, and now anyone can attend the conference at their own convenience. The conference videos can be found [here](#).

- **Budget-friendly:** Rental fees for an event space for just one day can be expensive. Providing all-day beverage service and a buffet lunch can add thousands of dollars to the price tag of an in-person event. This does not take into account the cost of promotional items, parking fees, printing materials, speaker accommodations, etc.

   By moving the 2020 SEN Conference to all-online, there were cost savings of over $8,000.

- **Inclusive:** Physical venues often have space limitations for the number of people who are allowed to be in the same area. Virtual events allow for expanding reach and increasing brand awareness. A virtual conference accommodates attendees who might not have been able to attend the event in-person. Depending on the tools available on the virtual platform, there are also opportunities to leverage polls, nonverbal feedback, a live Q&A, chat room, etc. These types of resources have the potential to engage attendees in ways that they might not have

   After the 2020 SEN Conference transitioned to a virtual event, attendees from across the country registered and attended. Without the burden of having to pay for travel and hotel, attendees were able to participate in various sessions throughout the day. When the conference transitioned to all-online, registration increased by 50% from the previous year.

The downsides

- **Limited networking opportunities:** The most valuable asset of an in-person conference is the opportunity to network with other people. Often, this is where attendees will draw the most value. With a virtual conference, intentionality is required to facilitate the ability to network. Face-to-face events offer a different level of interaction compared to virtual ones.

   The 2020 SEN Conference included a "virtual lobby" that ran continuously for eight hours. Attendees could choose to switch into the lobby during breaks between the sessions to continue their conversations and engage with each other. The virtual lobby was underutilized, so perhaps next time, there will be a formalized agenda with topics to facilitate discussion and networking.

- **Familiarity with technology:** Just because people may have been on a few video calls does not automatically mean they are tech savvy. A virtual event can be limiting for some people. There are many types of video conferencing software available. Depending on their comfort level with technology, presenters may feel uneasy about presenting their sessions online. Attendees require additional information for how to access sessions, and it is important to provide resources for all stakeholders to feel successful.

   During the few days leading up to the 2020 SEN Conference, a technology guide was developed to support presenters with their sessions and breakout room hosts with their facilitation. This included suggested engagement tools and best practices for creating the feeling of an in-person event.

Key process insights

- For any large plenary session, work with University Technology Office (UTO) to acquire a webinar license that allows for broadcasting to larger audiences worldwide.

Zoom has different features for different types of virtual events. Webinars have enhanced functions for hosts and panelists versus a regular meeting. Learn more about the features of a Zoom webinar [here](). Request a webinar license through UTO using [this link]().

- Host onboarding/training calls with breakout room hosts to review roles and responsibilities, familiarize hosts with Zoom interface and test Internet, audio and video connections.

  Do not take for granted the digital literacy of the team. This also gives breakout room hosts an opportunity to learn more about the conference objectives and practice using the virtual tools.

- Host virtual office hours for conference presenters to review slides, share virtual meeting/presentation best practices and confirm Internet, audio and video connections.

  Do not take for granted the digital literacy of the presenters. Facilitating an in-person conference session is different from a virtual one, and it may require adjusting pieces of the session. Optional virtual office hours gave presenters the opportunity to ask questions one-on-one and get feedback in a low-risk environment prior to the conference.

- Work 1:1 with keynote/plenary session speaker(s) to review a run-of-show, conduct a virtual dress rehearsal and pre-record session(s) in preparation for any day-of technical glitches.

  Great care and preparation are expected for keynote speakers for in-person conferences, and it is no different for a virtual conference. Schedule regular check-ins with the speaker, and facilitate a practice keynote session to familiarize them with the tools. Pre-record the session (and any other sessions) ahead of time in case there are any day-of challenges.

- Ensure consistent and frequent communication with all stakeholders involved (keynote speaker, presenters, breakout room hosts and attendees) through email, social media, Slack channels, etc. on updates, schedule, responsibilities and resources.

  Given the current circumstances, there is no such thing as too much communication. This is an experience unlike any other, and the more transparent and communicative you can be, the better. Feedback from the post-conference surveys from attendees and presenters indicated that they were grateful to learn about any new updates or information as they occurred.

Collaborators

Thank you to our collaborators for making the 2020 ASU Social Embeddedness Network Conference possible.

ASU Office of the President
ASU Office of Applied Innovation
ASU Educational Outreach & Student Services
ASU University Technology Office

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Sylvia Symonds, Associate Vice President, Educational Outreach & Student Services

Presenters

Thank you to the 2020 ASU Social Embeddedness Network Conference presenters. We would like to extend our gratitude to you for persevering during this time and making on your commitment to delivering high-quality programming and insights into socially embedded practices, initiatives and professionals at ASU and throughout the community.

Adrienne Henderson-Cole	Heather Fauland	Melanie Baca
Adrienne Lindsey	Heather Griller Clark	Melissa Guardaro
Alicia Baier Wideman	Heidi Doxey	Melita Belgrave
Allison Mullady	James Short	Michelle Sullivan Govani
Allyce Hargrove	Jeanne Powers	Milagros Zingoni
Amy Bowen	Jenn Duff	Molly Cashion
Amy Scoville-Weaver	Jennifer Stein	Nancy Grimm
Amy Scoville-Weaver	Jimi Brooks	Nicholas "Nich" Weller
Angelyn Chasse	Joel Nishimura	Olga L. Teran
Annee Grayson	Joe O'Reilly	Patricia Murphy
Areej Mawasi	Jon Schmitt	Paul Coseo
Aric Bopp	Julia Colbert	Paul Tighe
Aubrey Coffey-Urban	Julia Tebben	Phil Allsopp
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Braden Kay	Katja Brundiers	Rick Miller
Brandi Champion	Kelly Owen	Rochelle Candler
Brian Nethero	Kelly Sandin	Rod Ambrose
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Christina Spicer	Kirn Kim	Ryan Winkle
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Cynthia Pickering	Kristin Slice	Samuel Peña
Dana Van Deinse	Kylie Winn	Sandra Abbott
David L. Pearson	Laura Berger	Sarai Richter
David Manuel-Navarette	Lisa Espinosa	Sarup R. Mathur
David Morrison	Lisa Wyatt	Scott C. Marley
David Priniski	Lisa Young	Sharon R. Harvey
Dean Bacalzo	Lizz Woody	Shelley Morgan
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Duane Roen	Madison Rock	Stefanie Leite
Edward Chien	Magnus Feil	Steve Russell
Elena Ortiz	Marcelino Quiñonez	Susannah Sandrin
Enrique R. Vivoni	María Rosario Jackson	Sylvia Symonds
Erick Cole	Mark Roseland	Tara Bartlett
Eva Ordonez Olivas	Marta Berbés-Blázquez	Troy McDaniel
Felipe González Castro	Mary Brown	Tsafrir Mor
Fredi Lajvardi	Masavi Perea	Will Butler
Gregory Sale	McKensie Gation	

Get plugged into the network

The ASU Social Embeddedness Network is a collective of over 1,000 community-engaged faculty, staff and students from across ASU's academic and administrative units that are interested in exchanging best practices for forming effective community partnerships with community organizations and advancing ASU's mission to be socially embedded. Visit community.asu.edu to learn more and sign up to receive official ASU Social Embeddedness Network communications.

he.cecollaboratory.com/arizonastate

Collaboratory is ASU's platform to capture the variety of ways faculty and staff are partnering with the community to address community challenges. Collaboratory software permits great institution-wide coordination by enabling users to search the database, identify which faculty and staff across the university are tackling the same social issues, find out with whom they are partnering and in which communities. It also offers robust reporting capabilities that will enable each college and unit to better showcase the important work they do with our partner organizations.

@ASUEmbeddedness

Follow our account on Twitter to explore and see what is happening related to social embeddedness at ASU. Find out what people are talking about and stay tuned into what is going on in the global fields of community engagement and engaged scholarship.

asusocialembeddedness.slack.com

Join our Slack workspace to connect with other community-engaged professionals, share opportunities, co-develop projects and solve problems together. Our Slack workspace connects stakeholders everywhere to send and receive messages, schedule or initiate meetings, etc. We use Slack to foster deeper communities of practice, enabling people to organize discussions and activities by subject matter.