

GRSI COVID Response Series: Outcomes

Workshop 3: Remote sponsor training

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15 // 15:30 – 17:30 EST

32 participants from **9 countries** joined this Workshop which explored the challenges of transitioning resources and training online. Participants shared their practical experiences in developing online training, best practice in delivering interactive remote communication technologies, and identified ways to support each other, sponsors and newcomers during COVID-19 physical distancing.

A number of innovative resources were shared by participants, which are all available on the GRSI COVID-19 response [web portal](#).

Participants identified the following challenges, needs, responses, and opportunities:

- **Impact of COVID-19:** One of the key challenges of COVID-19 is the inability for organizations to meet with sponsors in-person to provide one-to-one support, group meetings, workshops and information sessions. Participants acknowledged that the COVID-19 crisis is a difficult time for sponsors who may also be in precarious situations and need support accessing online services.
- **Use of online training and information sessions:** Many organizations already employed online and remote training methods before the COVID crisis, while others are in the process of rapidly developing them. [Reset UK](#) showcased its new online training for sponsor groups, which launches on Tuesday, April 21. The [GRSI Sponsor Training Portal](#) was also highlighted. This ‘white label’ product will soon be available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese, and is intended for organizations and groups to adapt and apply to their own sponsorship programs as needed/desired. Organizations already using remote communication technology for training, including the [Argentine Support Network for Community Refugee Sponsorship](#) and the Canadian [Refugee Sponsorship Training Program](#), identified tangible benefits such as: the ability to reach national audiences, accessing and supporting remote and rural groups, and providing accessible content for sponsors who cannot attend trainings in person or during work hours.
- **Styles of online training and sessions:** An impressive variety of styles and methods of training were discussed by participants. Participants noted that a variety of formats is necessary to cater to different learning styles and differential capacity to access sessions and information. Some content is well-suited to general webinars with large audiences that can also be recorded and shared for people to access on their own time. Other forms of training that engage with difficult issues such as cultural competency, myth busting (about refugee resettlement, for example), and region-specific services benefit from online training sessions where sponsors can interact with the presenter and each other. Online meetings also empower groups to connect with and support each other.

- **Length of online training and sessions:** While some participants formerly held day-long in-person trainings, many have now shifted to shorter, compartmentalized training sessions that are offered more regularly. This format engages sponsors at an earlier stage in the application process, helps keep sponsors engaged with the content during the training sessions (combating attention fatigue), and enables sponsors with time constraints to complete training requirements.
- **Embracing technology:** Participants identified a number of helpful tools and strategies, including Zoom webinars and their polling function, Q&A, chat box, and break-out session features; sharing PowerPoint slides with groups while presenting; holding regular webinar sessions for sponsors; and remaining in contact with groups via telephone to offer one-to-one support (for example, support in finalizing sponsorship applications).
- **Additional online resources:** Like other organizations, the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) shared their comprehensive online resources and dedicated [COVID-19 updates](#). RSTP has developed online [factsheets](#), a page of [archived webinars](#) and tailored training sessions for sponsors and sponsorship organizations to adapt to COVID-19, continue with sponsorship, and provide regional specific financial and settlement supports accessible to both newcomers and sponsors.
- **Importance of in-person training:** While there are many positives to developing online resources, training, and communication with sponsors, groups noted that in-person training is often the best method to connect with sponsors. Reasons for this include the importance of personal contact, being able to “break the ice”, the ease of creating interactive environments with group work, and because some sponsors have difficulty accessing and using technologies and this impedes their engagement with online training and resources. Despite the lost value of in-person interaction brought on by COVID-19 isolation measures, sponsorship support organizations are continuing to find and implement creative new ways of reaching and keeping the sponsorship communities they work with supported and engaged while quarantine measures remain in place.
- **Supporting digital literacy:** Especially at this time, organizations need to assist sponsors to develop digital literacy to access online content, support newcomers, and communicate with sponsorship organization. To aid this, Reset UK is developing a Zoom best practice guide, which will be shared when finalized. Further, an innovative Portuguese program has recently launched to connect people with low digital literacy with university students who can provide over-the-phone digital support (while not targeted at sponsor communities, this is a resource that could be adapted to the sponsorship ecosystem). Another strategy is to encourage sponsor group diversity so that there are some digitally savvy members that can support other members.