

R2HC GUIDANCE NOTE:

PRESENTING RESEARCH EFFECTIVELY IN ONLINE MEETINGS (JANUARY 2023)

Overview

Researchers will often need to engage stakeholders in humanitarian health by presenting their research in online or virtual settings. This note covers four key elements to consider when planning your online presentation: Purpose, Content, Audience Journey, and Tools and Tech. It also provides tips and resources to maximise impact of virtual presentations contributed by grantees of Elrha's Research for Health in Humanitarian Crises programme. Key things to remember: tailor your content to audience needs, make key messages clear from the start, and engage your audience to keep their focus.

Develop a purpose

Have clear objectives for your presentation. Tailor content and engagement with the audience (and event organisers) to support this. Objectives might include: Seeking feedback or validation of findings from experts or peers; improving practice or building knowledge in a specific approach or intervention; influencing a policy dialogue or decision; building relationships /raising your profile; or keeping research stakeholders or partners informed.

Structuring and planning content

With clear objectives for engagement, plan content accordingly and outline a structure. A starting point to present results of a single research study is the Four-Box Framework below.

The four-box framework for presenting a research study



In most cases, the bulk of your time presenting should be spent on the two boxes on the right. However, tailor this and the order of content, to the audience and purpose. For example, advocates might open with key messages and then cover policy recommendations, using evidence to support the argument, with very little on the research approach. (Some researchers prefer to cover only three key points for memorable impact). Think about engaging *around* the presentation: sharing a briefing note means that your speaking time can focus on critical highlights, not be overloaded with detail.

Making content clear and compelling

To achieve your purpose, your audience must understand and be interested in your content. It is worth tailoring it to their needs and interests. Ask the audience in advance what they want to know or research their needs. (Consider: language, cultural and professional background, technical or content expertise, and research literacy).

Communicating the problem your research is addressing:

- Consider using hard-hitting statistics, images, or polls and quizzes to engage the audience in the 'real-world' problem your research is addressing. This should be tailored to their level of knowledge and familiarity with the context.
- For audience members very familiar with the problem, such as humanitarian practitioners, consider using personal stories (the 'seminal anecdote') to connect your work with their experiences.

Communicating research strategy and methods:

- Methods can be somewhat dry, and for non-academic audiences, abstract, technical language may not be easy to understand. Keep this section visual. Consider using personal stories, maps, photographs, or diagrams.
- In some cases, the audience will be more interested in your findings and recommendations. Don't use up too much time on this section unless it's critical to provide detail. Follow up in writing if necessary. For complex research designs that need to be fully explained to non-academic stakeholders, consider commissioning experts to create graphic designs (like the below example) or videos (such as [this](#)).



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A 'visual abstract' created by a graphic designer for an R2HC study team

Elrha's [Research for Health in Humanitarian Crises \(R2HC\) programme](#) aims to improve health outcomes by strengthening the evidence base for public health interventions in humanitarian crises.

Communicating research results:

Focus on clarity of understanding to prompt substantive engagement, as well as buy-in on any recommendations.

- **Quality not quantity:** Don't overwhelm the audience with every graph and table you have, just what they will need. If time is short, synthesise headlines and highlights (share detail in writing).
- **Data:** Craft meaningful graph headings that communicate the key message of the graph, rather than having abstract headings that distract, such as 'Figure 243: results of survey in District 4'. For very complex data visualisations or graphs, overlay text boxes to explain different elements.
- Edit **key informant quotes** for length (or bold critical words for emphasis); use images to illustrate, with appropriate permissions, captions and credits.

Communicating recommendations /lessons learned/next steps:

- Keep it brief: not a shopping list. Consider the **rule of three** for memorable impact - ideally no more than five recommendations.
- Try three 'buckets': *Actions to take* (what you want the audience to do), *Resources required* (human and financial), *Enabling environment* (changes needed in the surrounding social/organisational/policy context, for actions to have impact). Stock icons can add emphasis on recommendations.

Audience journey and engagement: stop them checking their emails

Tips to capture the audience's focus and keep them engaged throughout.

- Turn your camera on and smile (or upload a good headshot if you can't). Open with a clear key message, or a quote, story or question for the audience.
- Engage audience directly every 7-10 minutes: polls, quizzes or check for questions. Share links in the chat to online materials so that audience can review the detail while you're discussing/taking questions.
- Allow enough time for discussion. It is tempting to cram in slides and leave only a couple of minutes for 'them', but this is wasting a golden opportunity. Try posing questions for input at the start so the audience considers them while you're talking, and is ready for dialogue when you are.
- Signpost structure visually (agenda, title slides marking subsections). Speak at a measured pace, use title slides to remind you to slow down or engage the audience.
- Use PPT's laser pointers to grab the eye when talking through graphs or diagrams. Animate bullet points to appear on screen one by one.
- It's OK to be human (humour, personality), and better to talk freely than from a script, even if you make a mistake. People will pay attention and engage more if you don't sound like a robot.
- Talk through complex data, and check audience understanding throughout graph-covered slides. To help data 'land', devise audience reference points (EG: 'This is the same level of pollution in your city on the most polluted day last year'). Reflect as you go: What surprised you? What's interesting?

- Some audience members will still lose focus or drop offline. To keep your presentation memorable, reiterate key messages throughout: First tell them what you're going to tell them (signpost key message); then tell them (the bulk of your presentation); then tell them what you just told them (closing words to recap key message).
- Engage before, during and after. Utilise channels available to connect in advance (email, social media, conference platforms). Produce and share your key messages in multiple formats. Share any policy briefs, links, etc before or immediately after the presentation. The slide deck (PDFed, so that your speaking notes aren't visible) if it's well presented and written clearly, can be effective as a resource for policymakers.
- QR codes can enable the audience to connect with a research website quickly; there are online generators for these.
- Consider surveying the audience, especially if your purpose was training or instructional, to find out if your presentation effectively met your goals.
- If preparing a pre-recorded session for a conference website, prepare a short 'elevator pitch' to open your video, containing essential keywords that will hook the audience into watching your presentation.

Tools and tech

Hardware, software and apps are available to support data visualisation, audience engagement, translation and quality presentations (see below for list).

- Use tech intentionally- for audience engagement and delivering your purpose.
- Practice, practice, practice- use the platform/tools you're going to use on the day. Get someone to be 'the audience'. (Practice your closing words too!)
- Have backup plans for tech failure EG: pre-recorded presentation to share if your internet cuts out; prepare to talk through videos that don't work.
- Your voice is an important tool. Consider investing in a quality microphone. Do some deep breathing in advance to calm your nerves. You will be easier to listen to!
- If there will be simultaneous translation: speak slowly, structure your presentation clearly, and share your briefing /slides with the translator in advance.
- Closed captions: To help an audience understand you, you can use closed captions (words which will appear at the bottom of the screen). Look for a symbol marked 'CC' in the call platform. There are closed captions available directly in Microsoft PPT, and they can be more accurate than Zoom (but these switch off when you stop presenting)

AVOID:

Preparing a presentation knowing nothing about the audience.

TOOLS / RESOURCES

Creating and delivering a great research presentation

- Microsoft Power Point tools to explore: Rehearse Coach (for effective speaking), Design Ideas (for better slides) and access to stock images (for illustration)

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- Other options for creating presentations and infographics: <https://genial.ly/> <https://www.canva.com/>
- For pre-recording presentations try Loom <https://www.loom.com/> or Prezi <https://prezi.com/>
- [Quick tips for visualising data](#) from the Center for Humanitarian Data
- [Data Visualisation guidance](#) from Datawrapper
- Stock images for photos or illustrations: <https://unsplash.com>

Audience engagement

- Scheduling your presentation with a group: <https://doodle.com/dashboard>
- For polls and quizzes: Mentimeter <https://www.mentimeter.com> Kahoot <https://kahoot.com> or Sli.do <https://www.slido.com/>
- To survey the audience for feedback or to gauge impact, you can use Zoom's built-in survey or online survey tools like Typeform <https://www.typeform.com/>

Translation and accessibility

- [Google Translate](#) supported by translation via WhatsApp group is used by R2HC researchers for informal multilingual research meetings.
- [CBM's Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#) - A selection of tools and recommendations for more accessible online communications based on international standards.
- [Developing inclusive conferences](#) - A 'How-to' guide for organisers.

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