# Marketing and Promoting Literacy
# With Webinars

Sarah Elaine Eaton, Ph.D.

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## Introduction

Webinars are the twenty-first century way to promote your programs, demonstrate your successes and generate more awareness and interest in the work you do. Webinars:

- demonstrate an awareness of 21st century marketing

- have the potential to reach more people in more places

- help you incorporate social media and technology into your advocacy work

The word webinar is being used today to refer to all kinds of online training and virtual presentations. More and more literacy organizations are adding a component of e-learning to their programs. It's the modern way to learn.

Webinars are relatively easy to put on. Some of the language is a bit different from face-to-face environments, so it's helpful to know that instructors, facilitators and teachers are mostly referred to as "presenters" in the webinar environment. Learners and clients are generally called "participants".

Both presenters and participants need some technology and computer literacy in order to take part in a webinar.

Current teachers and facilitators may require some training before moving into an e-learning environment. Your participants may benefit from an orientation prior to the content to familiarize them with how webinars work.

Assuming that both parties have the technology literacy to move forward, here are some ideas on how you can make the most of webinar technology in your organization.

## For Learners

### Online group classes

Bring participants together in an e-learning class not only to teach them new content and skills, but also to learn how to work together in an online environment. You can build two essential skills at once: computer use and working with others.

### Online tutoring

Do you have learners in rural and remote areas? Or single parents who find it hard to get a sitter? Online tutoring provides a way for otherwise isolated learners to connect with tutors from the comfort and convenience of their own home. Webinars provide an effective way to reach out to people who might otherwise not engage with learning.

### Information sessions

If you offer information sessions about your programs in a live setting (your office space, a public library or elsewhere), you can adapt your content and host virtual information sessions. Information sessions are for prospective students and have a slight marketing component. A word of caution though... do not try to "sell" in a webinar. Instead, demonstrate your expertise and what makes you unique.

**Orientation sessions**

When you bring new learners into your physical space, do you give them an orientation on  what to expect and how things work there? Photos, maps, and other materials can also be used in an online environment to give a virtual orientation. Live webinars provide an opportunity for interaction dialogue, but orientations are primarily information and so, you can record them and archive them for later viewing.

**Follow-up workshops**

Webinars are a great way to keep relationships going once the opportunity for face-to-face interaction has passed. A value-added webinar one month after the course ends is a super way to stay connected. For example, if you have a work placement component in any of your programs, you can incorporate virtual sessions after work hours. Learners can share stories about their work experience and learn from one another. In cases where participants already know one another, the online interaction is usually fun and very dynamic.

## For staff and volunteers

### Volunteer information sessions

Do you like the idea of having virtual teachers or tutors? Then set the stage by offering online information sessions for prospective teachers and volunteers about your organization. Review the programs that you offer, the opportunities you and the benefits of working with your organization. This is a great time to have current staff members and volunteer tutors chime in with what they love about working with you!

### Volunteer training

Do you train your staff in intensive sessions that jam in loads of information? You can break it up into a series of online training workshops. The material is easier to absorb if you divide it into "chunks". If you have ongoing workshops, your volunteers get ongoing training, which keeps building their skills. As an organization, ongoing training for them means you give offering them something back for their time and expertise.

### Staff development workshops

Do your staff currently get all their professional development at an annual conference? Conferences offer the chance to connect with old friends face to face. But wouldn't it be great to offer ongoing training and development for your staff throughout the year? You do not even have to organize all the sessions yourself. Check out the Centre for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC). They specialize in  offering online PD for educators. They have literally hundreds of programs to choose from, ranging from free to expensive.

# For the community

### A Virtual Open House

Share what you do with the community, your stakeholders and donors through a virtual open house. Include photos of your facilities and your staff. A video that uses digital storytelling to celebrate the success of your learners makes it even more dynamic.

> Implementing the use of webinars positions your organization as a twenty-first century leader in terms of technology.

### Community Engagement Dialogues

Invite your funders, stake holders, board and community leaders to join you for an interactive dialogue about how you are serving your learners. Invite feedback about your programs and engage others in conversations about your work.

## Webinar Day Checklist

Here's a handy checklist to help you on the day of your webinar.

- All participants have the meeting URL.

- Slides have been uploaded.

- Slides are in the correct order.

- Presenter has a printed version of the slides.

- Speaking notes or script prepared.

- Handout in .pdf format is ready-to-distribute.

- Polls are prepared.

- Phones turned off and other potential noise interferences (e.g. pets) removed.

- Sound check done.

- If your service provider's system does not allow hyperlinks from slides, then links to relevant websites are listed on a separate document (e.g. in Word) on the presenter's desktop so they can be easily cut and pasted into the chat box during the live presentation.

- Free gift is available for participants.

- Evaluation is prepared and ready for distribution at the end of the session.

- Moderators and presenters are available and logged in 20-30 minutes before the session begins.

## Conclusions

These are just a few ideas for literacy and language programs to use webinars in their organizations. Using webinar technology in the non-profit and educational sectors provides value for everyone in the organization from staff to volunteers to learners, as well as to community stake holders.

How many non-profit organizations still lag behind when it comes to their own technology literacy? Implementing the use of webinars positions your organization as a leader in terms of technology.

Webinars, webcasts, and e-learning is an important part of twenty-first century of education and professional capacity building.

## About the author

Sarah Elaine Eaton holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership.  An Adjunct Assistant Professor and a Research Associate at the University of Calgary's Language Research Centre, Dr. Sarah has been involved with language learning and literacy since the early 1990s. She has also worked as in educational administration in various capacities including program management, international educational marketing and e-learning curriculum development.

She loves working with literacy organizations to help them build their technology capacity and market their programs better.

An experienced public speaker and member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers (CAPS), Eaton has presented her work in seven different countries (Canada, the United Stated, Mexico, Honduras, Cuba, Spain and England).

Her presentations take the form of keynotes,  scholarly research dissemination, webinars and interactive live workshops. She currently resides in Calgary, Canada.

www.eatonintl.com

www.drsaraheaton.wordpress.com