

Designing & Preparing for the Learning Event

Seminar designing and planning were results-oriented, methodical, consultative, and iterative. Existing literature was surveyed and prospective participants were consulted to identify learning needs.

As a result, the program design was oriented towards providing the participants with practical examples and ideas to improve basic services, particularly to the poor. The design avoided themes and discussions that were too theoretical and remote to actual practice. The design endeavored to make the entire program – and every aspect of it – useful to the participants. Attention to detail was emphasized to ensure that the program proceeded as planned.

In deciding on the content and materials to be presented in the seminar, the design entailed documenting and sharing evidence-based success stories by selected local government units (LGUs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) in making service delivery more efficient and responsive to the needs of the citizens, especially the historically disadvantaged and marginalized.

The stories highlighted the importance of partnerships and collaboration, citizens' participation and feedback, knowledge management, and responsible leadership in raising the quality of public services. They followed a common framework and agreed set of guidelines. Local government practitioners developed the case studies. The seminar organizers quality assured and signed off the case studies for inclusion in the program. Case studies had to be rewritten until they satisfactorily met the set standards.

One of the presenters, Dr. P.K. Srihari, Additional Commissioner of Bangalore Mahanagara Palike, attested to the long hours and days they worked to ensure quality in their case study and presentation. Dr. Srihari, along with the other presenters who similarly demonstrated passion in perfecting their pieces, was highly appreciative of the process and the experience that they went through. They were happy to have been able to effectively share their lessons and to learn from others.

Knowing that most of the seminar participants would not have time to read the case studies (even though they were kept to the minimum number of pages) and that the audience's span of attention is limited, the seminar design allocated a maximum of 20 minutes for every presenter. Executive summaries or abstracts of all case studies were also prepared and distributed.

The presenters were required to rehearse thoroughly to ensure presentations were kept within the prescribed time limit and more importantly, to ensure that the messages were clear to an audience where English was not their first language. All presenters were asked to arrive at least a day early for the seminar to attend the presentations dry run and to make the necessary improvements on the presentations. As a consequence, time management of the seminar was remarkable with every session starting and ending on time.

Adult-learning techniques were utilized in the seminar. Physical arrangements were given considerable attention to maximize interaction among participants and presenters, thus creating a more conducive and facilitative learning environment.

In his welcome remarks, Mr. Geert van der Linden, ADB Vice President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development, remarked on the seating arrangements, where participants were grouped and seated around ten tables facing the stage: "I was...surprised...by these seating arrangements. Normally in a conference like this, you expect people to sit in long rows or ... in a very large oval, both of which are not very good to encourage any discussion. This is the first time I have seen an arrangement like this..."

The event organizers carefully looked into the appropriate number of sessions and activities as well as sequenced them in such a way to suit the participants' learning profiles. A mix of pedagogical approaches was also utilized to sustain the audience's attention and interest. In addition to the case study presentations, learning diaries, and group learning activities, there were videotaped and live video-link presentations from the United Kingdom, South Africa, Brazil, and the United States.

A good project team was essential. The facilitators and moderators were particularly helpful not only in managing time, but also in managing the learning processes. Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined and efficiently carried out. Furthermore, the event would not have been successful without teamwork, unrelenting dedication to hard work, and appreciating the values of idealism and iterations.

The program was rated as successful by the attendees. University of Birmingham Professor, Richard Batley, assessed the seminar as "an excellent event." He added that the program was "the most productive and practical event" that he has attended.