

LSMS GUIDEBOOK
May 2021

Remote Technical Assistance for Surveys

Technical Guidance Note

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ABOUT LSMS

The Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS), a survey program housed within the World Bank's Development Data Group, provides technical assistance to national statistical offices in the design and implementation of multi-topic household surveys. Since its inception in the early 1980s, the LSMS program has worked with dozens of statistical offices around the world, generating high-quality data, developing innovative technologies and improved survey methodologies, and building technical capacity. The LSMS team also provides technical support across the World Bank in the design and implementation of household surveys and in the measurement and monitoring of poverty.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The LSMS Guidebook series offers information on best practices related to survey design and implementation. While the Guidebooks differ in scope, length, and style, they share a common objective: to provide statistical agencies, researchers, and practitioners with rigorous yet practical guidance on a range of issues related to designing and fielding high-quality household surveys. The series draws on experience accumulated from decades of LSMS survey implementation, the expertise of LSMS staff and other survey experts, and new research using LSMS data and methodological validation studies.

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Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS)

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I. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a major challenge for household survey programs. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, governments across the world have implemented and continue to institute social distancing and other containment measures, including partial or nationwide lockdowns. These measures have made traditional face-to-face survey operations difficult to conduct in many countries.¹

96%

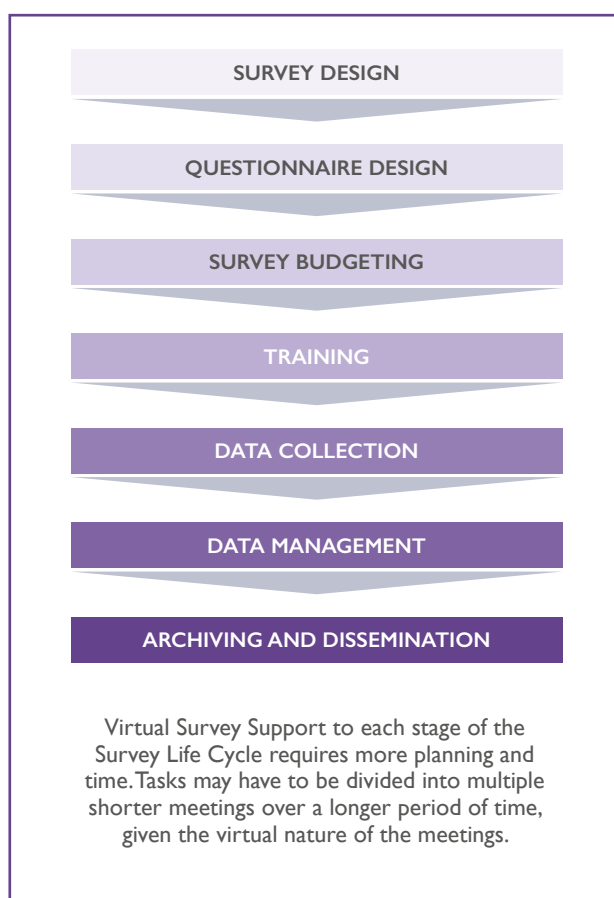
National statistical offices had either partially or fully halted face-to-face data collection due to the pandemic by May 2020.



Additionally, travel restrictions instituted by the World Bank made it impossible to provide in-person technical assistance to clients, including NSOs. In order to ensure the continuity of survey operations, production of key indicators, and provision of near real-time data to monitor the impact of the pandemic, many NSOs turned to phone or web interviews as an alternative data collection mode.

Under normal circumstances, technical assistance (TA) teams would travel to client countries for one to two weeks at a time to fulfill specific objectives, but, given existing travel restrictions and social distancing protocols, this mode of TA has been rendered unfeasible and has therefore been replaced by remote support.

Stages of the Survey Life Cycle

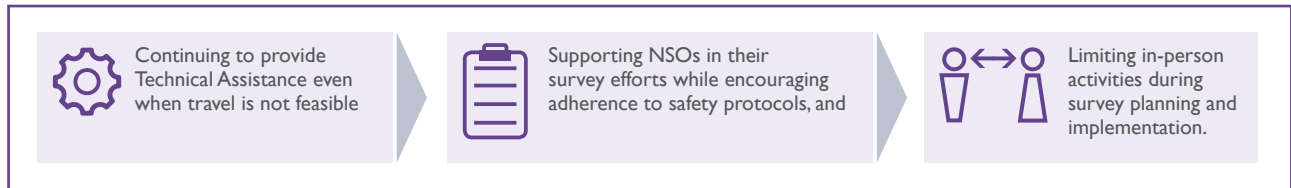


¹ According to a survey conducted by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the World Bank in May 2020

This note provides guidance on how TA teams can continue to support NSO survey operations, albeit virtually, by focusing on three key aspects of the survey process: design and planning, team organization, and implementation. The application of the recommendations in this document should be tailored to different contexts and conducted in accordance with World Bank guidelines.

If NSOs choose to conduct any in-person activities such as meetings, workshops, trainings, and/or data collection, TTLs should advise the NSOs to consult the **Technical Guidance Note: Planning and Implementing Household Surveys under COVID-19** to guide decisions on preventive measures that can help mitigate the risk of COVID-19.

General principles on Technical Assistance provision during COVID-19



2. Survey design and planning

The first crucial stage in the survey implementation cycle is the development of objectives for the proposed survey. This may not be as relevant for existing or ongoing surveys with previously defined objectives, but for new surveys, it is vital for survey practitioners to work with partners to define the objectives. Prior to the pandemic, when staff were able to travel for in-person missions, survey objectives were usually developed through a series of in-person meetings, consultations, and workshops.

Provision of Remote Technical Assistance during the design and planning phase

Several rounds of virtual meetings between TA team and NSO to discuss objectives



TA team should facilitate virtual consultations with stakeholders



Consultations should be held with Health Authorities, Experts, Labor protection unit and interagency COVID-19 Task force.



Depending on the subject matter of the survey, relevant line ministries, agencies, and other development partners should be engaged. The TA team should support NSOs in coordinating with other development partners and stakeholders to increase efficiency and avoid the duplication of data collection efforts. It is recommended that the TA team first work with the in-country survey director/coordinator forming a survey coordinating team, and create an initial draft of the survey objectives. This draft should then be circulated to relevant parties before scheduling a meeting or workshop with a larger group. The next step would be to work on sampling and questionnaire design. The table below summarizes points to keep in mind during the provision of remote TA.

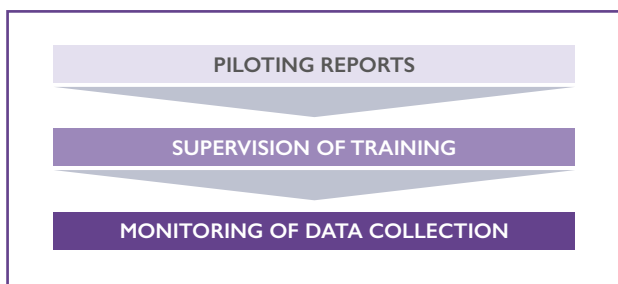
<p>SURVEY SAMPLING</p> 	<p>A careful and detailed documentation of sampling processes becomes even more critical under remote supervision. The TA team and/or sampling experts should thoroughly review the documentation and provide timely feedback.</p>
<p>QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN</p> 	<p>A questionnaire design working group should be created, which should include subject matter specialists from the NSO, experts from line ministries, and members of the survey coordinating team.</p> <p>This working group is responsible for establishing a work plan with clearly defined objectives, timelines, and responsibilities, as well as for scheduling regular meetings, either by phone or video.</p>
	<p>Each meeting should have a clear agenda detailing current and future objectives. Meeting notes should be circulated with information on the accomplishments of each meeting as well as tasks to be completed by the next meeting.</p>

3. Survey team organization

Implementing a survey involves planning (that is, making decisions on objectives, survey instruments, sampling, etc.), testing (including pre-testing and piloting), and data collection. With remote TA, it is particularly important to keep track of these processes, as they may be extended, delayed, and overlap.

The use of organizational tools can aid in tracking the flow of the work and communication. For project management, organizational tools can be used to identify responsible parties, set a timeline, provide a mechanism for capturing progress and identifying problems. For communication, these tools can help the team stay informed on current and next steps. To aid collaboration, organizational tools can be used to document resources, store inputs, and keep track of the progress being made. Below, we present various tools for TA teams to consider in each of these three categories.

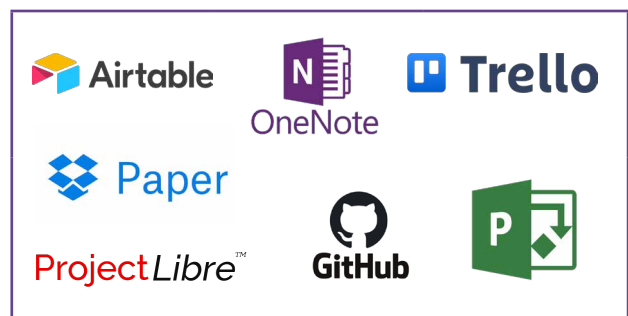
Quality assurance is essential throughout all of the survey implementation phases



3.1 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Survey coordinating teams need a task management system that informs them of the next tasks that need to be done, the people responsible for each task, the deadlines set for each task, and the current status of each item. There are several tools that can be used for project management, such as Microsoft OneNote, Dropbox Paper and Notion, Trello, Airtable, GitHub, Microsoft Project, and ProjectLibre.

Project Management Tools



The best tool will be a function of the nature of the project and their needs, and it should be made accessible to all the members of the survey coordinating team.

3.2 COMMUNICATION

Open and reliable channels of communication are necessary for survey coordinating teams to work together effectively on remote TA efforts. It is advisable to ensure that a commitment for continuous and timely communication – preferably, in a written form - is reached between the remote TA team and the NSO.

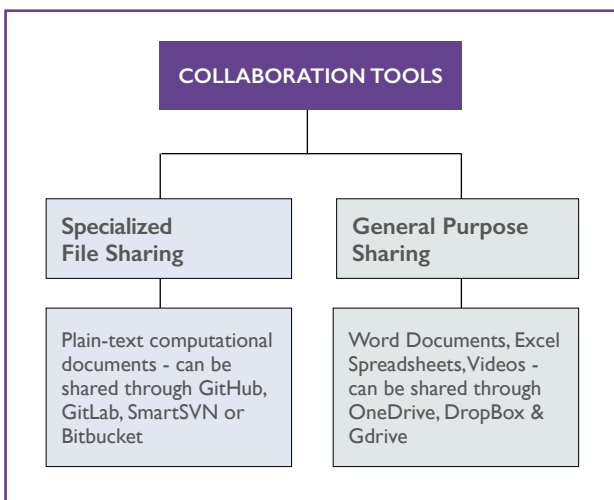
	<p>For all members of the team, this requires a reliable internet connection, with reasonable speed and adequate bandwidth for video connections (see Annex I for more details on etiquette for remote meetings). For some NSOs, project funds may be needed to provide reliable infrastructure, such as a router and data bundle for project use only.</p>
	<p>To facilitate effective communication during planning, preparation, and implementation support, the survey coordinating team should envision three types of communication in addition to emails: standing meetings, virtual workshops and ad hoc meetings, and instant messaging.</p>

STANDING MEETINGS	VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS AND AD HOC MEETINGS	INSTANT MESSAGING
<p>The TA team is strongly advised to hold standing meetings, scheduled at regular intervals, to provide a regular opportunity to obtain project updates in a more flexible way than email permits. The TA team should consider common videoconferencing tools such as WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Skype for these meetings. Each meeting should have a clear agenda and objectives, and the meeting notes should clearly state the accomplishments of the meeting and tasks to be completed by the next meeting.</p>	<p>There may be times when it is needed to hold ad hoc meetings or workshops for tasks or activities that cannot be addressed during the standing meetings. The same videoconferencing tools referenced above should be used.</p>	<p>Instant messaging can be an effective tool for technical assistance, as it facilitates immediate and direct communication between the TA team and NSO staff. For example, during data collection, the TA team can use instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal to communicate with NSOs and with field staff to flag issues, share solutions, and listen for other concerns.</p>

3.3 COLLABORATION

To collaborate effectively, it is recommended that survey coordinating teams work with a shared set of files stored on approved file sharing platforms. The set of team members who will have permission for editing, reviewing, or viewing a specific document should be determined in advance to ensure that the process flows smoothly and that work is not duplicated, lost, or compromised. For example, for some activities, collaboration should be managed in a controlled sequence, where reviewers may only access files after authors have completed their initial drafts. For teams to manage additions, deletions, or other changes to files, the file storage platform must include some form of version control.

Types of collaboration tools







The specialized file sharing tools offer the same advantages as general purpose file sharing platforms: centralized file storage, team-wide access, version control, options for local work, and sync to remote storage. They also offer many advantages for programming activities, such as automated identification of changes, manual documentation of reasons for changes, issue tracking, project management, as well as attractive functionality for power users, such as workflows (e.g., code review) and automations (e.g., create builds, run tests, publish content, etc.). However, this type of specialized tool may not be necessary for every project. Even though they are relatively accessible, they often require a small measure of technical sophistication, and the installation and use of software may be unfamiliar to the average office worker (i.e., Git for version control and, optionally, a client for managing changes in a graphical interface instead of the command line).

3.4 SURVEY DOCUMENTATION

The TA team should support and ensure that there is proper documentation of the entire survey process, from survey design to data quality assurance.

4. Survey implementation

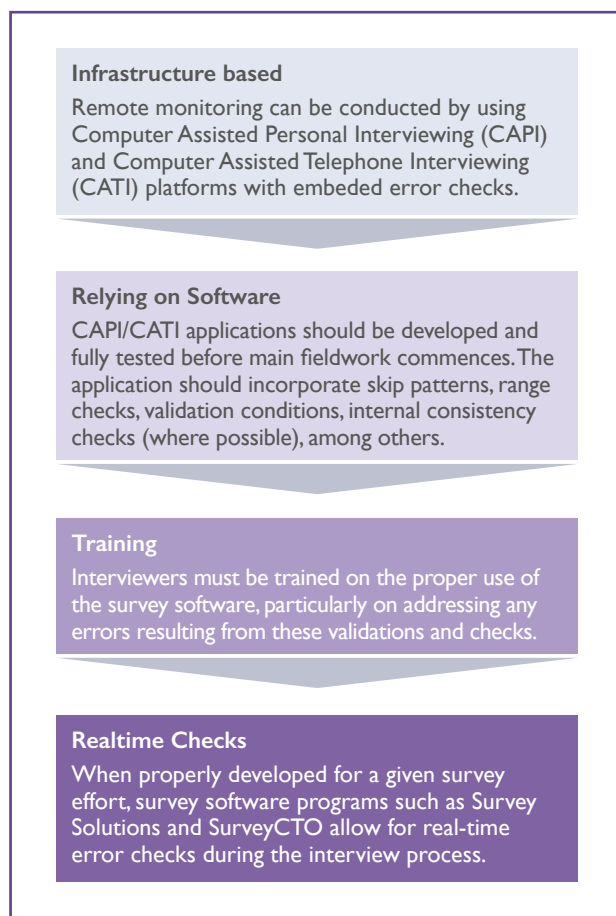
The TA team should support all phases of the survey implementation.

<p>PRETEST/PILOT</p> 	<p>The TA team should connect virtually to the pilot debrief sessions whenever possible to obtain observations from the interviewers on the questionnaire, survey protocols, respondent behavior, and more.</p>
<p>TRAINING</p> 	<p>Adequate preparation for training is fundamental to a successful survey operation. The TA team should be involved, to the greatest extent possible, to ensure the training runs smoothly.</p> <p>All training materials, such as manuals, training slides, and quizzes, should be made available in advance. Trainings should be carefully documented and include information on lessons learned and recommendations to improve the instruments. The documentation should be shared with the survey coordinating team.</p> <p>The TA team should join virtual trainings whenever possible (see Annex 2 for more details on how to hold virtual trainings).</p>
<p>DATA COLLECTION</p> 	<p>Survey implementers should follow the suggested COVID-19 safety protocols when conducting face-to-face interviews (see Technical Guidance Note: Planning and Implementing Household Surveys under COVID-19)</p> <p>During data collection, the survey coordinating team (including the TA team) should conduct remote check-ins with data collection teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For phone surveys, survey implementers should provide advice on phone interview etiquette and the team should have at least one joint remote check-in with the interviewers during each round of data collection. • In addition to regular remote check-ins, a WhatsApp group should be created where interviewers and supervisors can post their questions and the survey coordinating team can respond accordingly. • Where budget allows, hiring a local consultant to support these processes is recommended. <p>The objective of these check-ins is to address any questions from the data collection team as well as to relay issues from the team based on their monitoring of incoming data and reviews of the audio recordings. Supervision and monitoring</p>
<p>SUPERVISION & MONITORING</p> 	<p>Regardless of the mode of data collection, data collection teams will require TA throughout the duration of the field work to ensure that data quality is not compromised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With face-to-face surveys, where quality control teams are able to travel and observe data collection in the field, necessary in-person monitoring procedures should be put in place. • These procedures should follow all COVID-19 safety protocols in the respective country, and depending on the country's safety protocols, local consultants can be hired by the World Bank to provide this service. • In addition to in-person supervision, remote monitoring protocols should also be instituted using the platforms discussed above. <p>The importance of survey supervision and monitoring is discussed further below.</p>

a. Role of survey software and checks for remote monitoring

Irrespective of the mode of data collection (i.e., phone surveys, face-to-face, or a combination) quality monitoring at all levels of data collection is essential for obtaining high quality survey data. When data quality is monitored in person, quality control teams visit data collection teams in the field.

Methods of Data Validation






While validations and checks help to improve data quality during the interview, some error checks cannot be incorporated into the application, thereby creating the need for another layer of quality control after data has been sent to the server/headquarters following interview completion. Depending on the software used for data

collection, completed interviews can either be manually reviewed on the server or downloaded and error check syntax (written in R, Stata, etc.) run on the data. The resulting feedback is then sent to interviewers for action and correction, as needed. Generally, error check syntax should focus on identifying statistical outliers and implementing scripts too complex for CAPI/CATI.

b. Monitoring dashboards

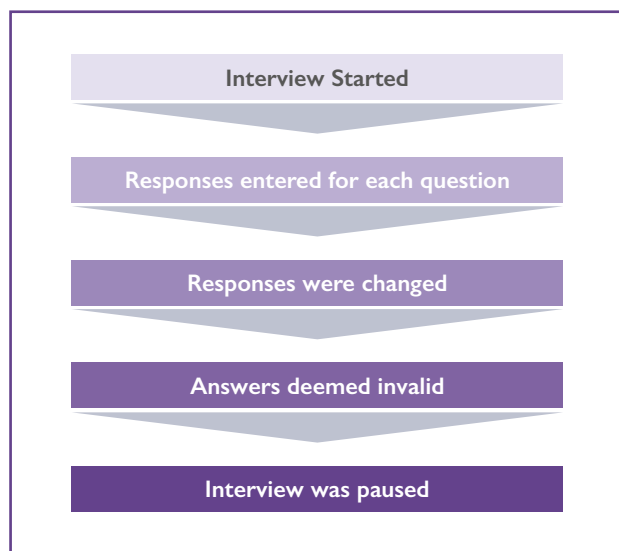
A platform should be used for monitoring data collection progress to ensure that all teams complete their fieldwork within the stipulated timeframe and ensuring that data quality is not compromised.

	<p>Progress by team, region (or required administrative level), over a period of time (i.e., daily, weekly, etc.) can be tracked using dashboards. Some platforms, such as Survey Solutions, have in-built dashboards for tracking progress by team, interviewer, questionnaire, quantity, speed, map reports, and more.</p>
	<p>The quality control team can download the data and produce any progress reports they need using platforms that provide near real-time information</p>
	<p>Softwares such as PowerBI can also be used to provide a more detailed and disaggregated dashboard for progress monitoring. However, unlike CAPI or CATI software that draw data directly from the respective server, data must be fed externally into the PowerBI application.</p>

c. Use of paradata

Paradata can help monitor the quality of the interview process, which is generally difficult to observe from primary data. Thus, any CAPI/CATI software used should also be capable of collecting paradata, allowing the quality control team to ascertain interview duration, answers per minute, frequency of answer changes across interviewer, teams, regions, and more.

Generally, paradata includes information on the timing of every single action taken by the interviewer during the interview process and while the CAPI/CATI application.



MONITORING INTERVIEWER PERFORMANCE DURING PHONE SURVEYS

Phone surveys present unique options for monitoring interviewer performance that are generally unfeasible with face-to-face surveys. While monitoring activities may vary by country, four different strategies that have been successfully used in World Bank-supported phone surveys can be employed.

These monitoring strategies will allow for rapid identification of any interviewer performing poorly and ensure that mistakes are not repeated. The random selection of cases for audio audit or callback will incentivize interviewers to adhere closely to established protocols and consistently capture accurate information from the respondents. A mechanism for easily relaying feedback to the interviewer should be in place, either via a WhatsApp group or through the survey software.

	STRATEGY	IMPLEMENTATION	REQUIREMENT
	When the data collection software (e.g., CAPI/CATI) allows, randomly selected interviews are recorded and reviewed by a specialized team of anonymous monitors.	The team's feedback can then be shared directly with the interviewers to ensure mistakes are not repeated and corrections through re-interviews are made when necessary.	This quality control team should participate in training and have a thorough understanding of the survey design, as their objective is to identify any interviewer errors such as translation issues. Any feedback should be relayed to the interviewers
	Randomly selected interviews from those that the interviewer has marked as "complete" (which can be either fully completed, partially completed, refused, etc.) should be assigned to a specialized team (call back interviewers) for a call back.	The cases selected would be re-contacted by a call back interviewer who will implement a short questionnaire to confirm that an interview took place, that the interviewers conducted themselves professionally, and that the information they captured was accurate.	The call back interviewers should also be part of the training and thus should have full understanding of the scope of the survey . Any feedback should be relayed to the interviewers
	For this monitoring strategy, some members of the quality control team act as "fake" respondents in the sample of households to be called and interviewed.	The fake respondent would present some difficult scenarios and assess how these were handled by the interviewer. They would subsequently complete a report on the interviewer's performance and provide feedback for them to improve. The fake respondent can also have pre-scripted responses to specific questions to allow the quality control team to review the difference between the responses recorded by the interviewer and the pre-scripted version.	The interview should be conducted without the interviewer's knowledge of who the fake respondents are. The fake respondents should also be part of the training and thus should have full understanding of the scope of the survey . Any feedback should be relayed to the interviewers.
	Every completed interview is reviewed by supervisors for accuracy and consistency. This should be possible irrespective of the mode of data collection used.	Supervisors review the interviews, identify issues, and send back the interviews to the interviewers with comments for explanation or correction.	Supervisors should provide feedback in a timely manner and clearly communicate the issues found, so that there is no ambiguity on the correction needed.

ANNEX I.

ETIQUETTE FOR ORGANIZING AND ATTENDING REMOTE MEETINGS

For organizers²

- Keep the number of participants manageable: complex topics with ambitious agendas have a better chance of success with fewer participants
- Keep each training session to 2-4 hours. Allow more time if there are more participants, to ensure adequate participation
- Keep in mind time zones for participants and plan accordingly
- Have a clear objective for the training workshop. Employ the use of micro-activities (5-10 minutes) and exercises (no more than 30 minutes each) to keep participants engaged
- Design the training sessions to include not only formal trainings, but also side activities and networking opportunities
- To maintain participant engagement, trainers should:
 - keep the camera on, except when the internet connection is slow
 - keep introductions short
 - use more breakout rooms to encourage small group discussions
 - ask direct questions and ensure equal participation
 - break large topics into smaller units, organized around specific questions
 - use screensharing and collaborative workspaces (e.g., Mural) to work on items together
 - assign roles to each participant to keep everyone engaged
- Give participants a break every 1 to 1.5 hours.

For participants

- Join calls on time
- Except when talking, your microphone should always remain on mute
- Keep your camera on if internet speed permits
- Post questions in the group chat, to be addressed at the end of each section
- Keep background noise to a minimum, to the extent possible

² TANDEMIC, *Mastering digital facilitation, a cheat sheet*; Tippin, Kalbach and Chin, *The Definitive Guide To Facilitating Remote Workshops*.

ANNEX 2.

HOW TO HOLD VIRTUAL TRAININGS

When face-to-face training is unadvisable or impossible, training should be done virtually. Virtual training is similar to traditional training with multiple trainers, lectures, and exercises, but requires slightly different logistics. For instance, rather than transportation, participants will need computing devices (such as tablets) for following presentations and CAPI exercises, networking devices (such as mobile routers), data bundles (such as credit for the data usage of connecting), and an appropriate venue (ideally, a quiet room from which to connect).

Rather than renting a training venue, planners must set up videoconferences for the main training and break-out sessions for group exercises and so on. Training scheduling must be flexible to accommodate the different time zones and schedules of all participants. The bandwidth requirements of videoconferencing tools may also require planners to hold several parallel training sessions, each with its own lead trainer, so that each videoconference does not exceed the maximum threshold of participants. Due to the virtual nature, it is even more important to ensure participant engagement and understanding, which can be done through regular spot quizzes and exercises during training. More comprehensive exercises should be planned to assess understanding and, if needed, to substitute for supervised practice that might be more difficult to implement. Participants should also be given an opportunity to give and receive feedback, such as through mock interviews recorded from home for trainers to review and critique. As videoconferences don't offer the option to approach training facilitators during breaks or after the training, it can be useful to offer drop-in sessions at a later time during which additional questions can be addressed. These timeslots can also be used to help participants who missed sections of the training due to connectivity issues to catch up.

Instruction videos can be a useful part of the training, especially when the group being trained is large or if there are scheduling and temporary technical difficulties. They can, for example, cover how to use and troubleshoot a particular survey software, introductions to survey methodology and protocols, as well as a video recording of a full sample interview. The use of instructional videos can be complemented with online exercises and quizzes.

Virtual trainings offer many of the same advantages as face-to-face trainings, as they both allow participants – trainers and trainees – to interact continuously throughout the course of the training. However, virtual trainings also involve a number of disadvantages. First, they are more difficult to organize, as this type of training is prone to scheduling conflicts and potential IT problems. Secondly, there are practical limits to the length of virtual trainings. From anecdotal reports, training fatigue sets in more quickly with virtual trainings than face-to-face ones. This seems to be both because of the medium (e.g., lack of physical human interaction) and because of the difficulty in being able to fully assess the interest and energy level of participants (both trainers and trainees). Finally, virtual trainings do not scale well, as the greater the number of trainees, the greater the number of trainers needed. While this is also true for face-to-face trainings, it is more so for virtual ones where there are technical limits on class size.

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January 2020

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