Let's cook together

Online collaboration

What is online collaboration?

Cooking in a group, whether with friends or family, is a fun experience. Everyone wants to contribute their experience on the ingredients to use, quantities, cooking time, etc. Online collaboration also could be compared with a potluck (a meal or party to which each of the guests contributes a dish). Using online collaboration, we can design and develop collaborative documents, handbooks, papers, content for eLearning courses and other electronic products. Online collaboration includes both, synchronous and asynchronous activities.

What do you want to cook?

The definition of the final product that you expect to have is very important for online collaboration. Take time to think about the collaborative product, its objective and users before starting to cook. Please also consider that some products might require only one session but others might require many in order to finalize the product.

Who to invite to the table?

We recommend that you identify and invite people with experience and knowledge about the topic of the product. Some products could require the participation of experts—in our experience, for instance, eLearning specialists.

For example, the educational materials for our Audit of Strong & Resilient National Public Health Systems (3.d audit) were developed using online collaboration. IDI invited performance auditors, SDG auditors, public health experts and eLearning specialists to work online together as a team on this initiative. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the face-to-face design meetings were replaced by online collaboration activities.

Defining the process and tools for online collaboration

In this section we share some ideas about common activities related to online collaboration and possible tools to use.
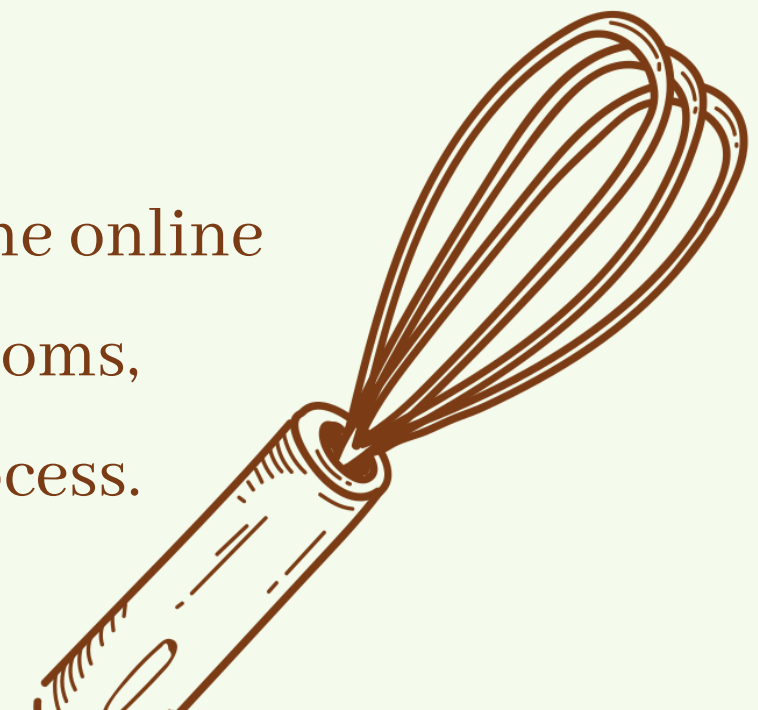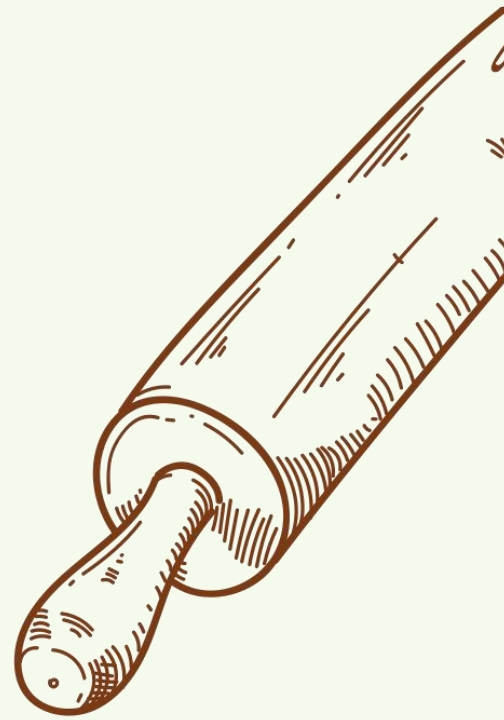
- **Share a timeline** – Share a timeline with your team to agree on the activities and dates for the project. The use of online shared calendars is a good practice.

- **Use video conferencing** – Use some of the video conference tools in order to have periodic meetings. It is recommended to have orientation meetings with the team at the beginning of the project to clarify the type of product to be developed, its objective and the methodology to be used.

- **Use breakout rooms** – Some other meetings may require smaller group discussions. For these smaller discussions we recommend using the breakout rooms feature available on many video conferencing platforms.

- **Try brainstorming** – Consider whether you need to organize ideas or knowledge with your team. You could have an online brainstorming session using an interactive collaboration whiteboard. There are some interesting options on the web for this kind of digital mural (Padlet, Mural, Poplet).

- **Use collaborative documents –** Many of the online collaboration products need to be documented using templates or simple documents in different formats (text, spreadsheet, or presentations). In those cases, the use of collaborative documents is key. Some of the options for online documents are Teams, SharePoint or Google documents.

Putting it all together on the table

Having many activities and using several tools can be very useful, but it could also be a distraction if you do not have a hub that can be used as point of access and integration.

In IDI we are successfully using online workspaces that are basically rooms in our Learning Management System, dedicated to centralizing all activities and documenting products of the online collaboration for a specific project. The same method is also used in our Audit Support rooms, where participating SAIs can work on SAI Teams during the different stages of the audit process.

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