Workshop Notes
Date: 15th June, 2020

Speaker 1: Ken Hiltner, Professor in Environmental Humanities at the University of California at Santa Barbara
Carbon-Neutral Conferences: Why and How

Why Virtual Conferences?

1. Accessibility for participants
   - Possible for those who can't travel for personal or economic reasons
2. Archive of conference material
   - Recordings of talks
   - Closed captioning on Youtube allows automatic transcription
3. More democratic
   - Cost of production is much smaller so more institutions can contribute
   - Available to watch globally rather than limited to major institutions

The Nearly-Carbon-Neutral Conference Approach
https://hiltner.english.ucsb.edu/index.php/ncnc-guide/
(Note some of this material comes from Ken Hiltner's NCN website)

- When asked if this NCN conference approach was successful, 87% of the speakers from the first event responded "yes," 13% "not sure," and 0% "no."

How it works:

1. Speakers record their own talks. This can be A) a video of them speaking, generally filmed with a webcam or smartphone, B) a screen recording of a presentation, such as a PowerPoint, or C) a hybrid of the two, with speaker and presentation alternately or simultaneously onscreen.

2. Talks are viewed on the conference website. Once made available on the conference website, talks can be viewed at any time. Talks are organized into panels (i.e. individual webpages) that generally have three speakers each and a shared Q&A session – just like a traditional conference. As they are prerecorded, videos can be closed captioned for greater accessibility, as were all the talks for UCSB's second NCN conference.
   - Visit a sample panel: http://ehc.english.ucsb.edu/?p=12640

3. Participants contribute to an online Q&A session. During the time that the conference is open, which is generally two or three weeks, participants can take part in the Q&A sessions for the panels, which are similar to online forums, by posing and responding to written questions and comments. Because comments can be made at any time in any time zone, participants from across the globe can equally take part in the conference.

- Visit a sample Q&A: http://ehc.english.ucsb.edu/?p=12640#QA

Speaker 2: Celia Popovic, Educational Developer and Director of Teaching Commons at York University
Tips on how to plan a virtual academic conference

Lessons to consider:

1. **Timing:** time zones, time limit
   - Solutions:
   - Spread the conference out over several days. In the ECN conference organised in Canada, each conference day was ~3 hours long so that all talks were between 9 and 5 no matter where the attendees were.
   - An alternative is to have a conference with uploaded talks like Ken Hiltner's NCN conference approach, so viewers can watch in their own time.

2. **Tech:**
   - Keep it simple & familiar. If you find something you like, continue to use it
   - Note: see supplementary document 'Virtual Conference Platforms' for a discussion of different platforms.

3. **Networking:** vital & biggest concern of many, and key factor in preventing virtual conferences
   - Solutions
      a) Hybrid model: each institution has their own smaller gathering of 1-10 people. If the institution is small, they can join a larger one.
      b) Virtual gatherings. If you are hosting the talks live, you can encourage people to come early and stay after the event to continue discussion.

4. **Virtual Room Host**
   - Useful to have a designated 'host' who monitors the talk, and manages tech issues, alongside the speaker.

5. **Poster Sessions**
   - You can fairly well replicate a poster presentation session by presenting the 'posters' online and having break-out room links which people can enter to ask the presenters questions
   - In the Canadian ECN conference, Big Blue Button was the platform used, and ~12 posters were presented at each session.

6. **Platform Access**
   - Ensure people have access to the rooms in advance
   - Run practice sessions for the speakers to test out the platform

7. **Keeping the momentum going**

- Send out a daily email with a reminder of all the talks happening that day, and links to the talks. Make attendance as easy as possible as well as making people feel they are included in the conference.
- Record a welcome video ahead of time – gestures to emulate the traditional conference experience.

8. **Get a team of organisers**
   - Running a conference takes a team of people. Don't

Peter Robinson, Project Manager of Digital Humanities at Oxford IT Department
Virtual conference technology at Oxford

Software options at Oxford:
- Teams Meetings
  - Up to 350 people
  - https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/nexus365/arranging-meeting-teams
- Teams LIVE
  - https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/nexus365/teams-live-events
- Zoom (locally supported by departments but not centrally supported)
- Public webcasting (youtube)

Information about running Webinars in Teams:
https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/nexus365/run-webinars-in-teams

The IT department runs training sessions for using these platform options – contact the IT desk if you're interested.