



A Practical Guide to Designing Successful Digital Cultural and Educational Programmes for Older Adults



Background

This practical guide was developed at the end of the project “Digitaler KulturLernRaum.” It is an Erasmus+ project co-funded by the European Union and implemented by Die Gute Stunde (humaQ gGmbH) from Wiesbaden, Germany, and the association nowa Training Beratung Projektmanagement from Graz, Austria.

As part of the project, digital cultural and educational programmes for older adults were developed, tested in practice, and systematically evaluated. The main objective of the project was to strengthen the digital, cultural, and social participation of older adults, as well as their media literacy.

Older people may be excluded from regular cultural events for various reasons: limited or no mobility, other physical impairments, and—particularly in the case of older women—low income.

The eight free online events developed within the project and delivered via Zoom were designed not only to inform, but also to inspire and encourage active participation. The focus was on easy access, dialogical formats, and the question of under what conditions digital formats can help reduce technical barriers and encourage seniors to actively engage in digital educational and cultural programmes.

This guide brings together the key learnings from the project. It is aimed at cultural institutions, cultural organisers, independent artists, as well as professionals in adult education and senior services who wish to implement their own digital cultural and educational programmes for older target groups.

The overarching goal is to sustainably strengthen digital participation in the fields of culture and adult education. The guide is available free of charge and is disseminated through the networks of Die Gute Stunde and nowa.



Relevance of Digital Cultural and Educational Programmes for Older People



Digital cultural and educational programmes open up new opportunities for participation for older adults — especially when mobility, health, or financial resources are limited. The project experience clearly shows:

- **Digital formats provide access to education and culture from home**
- **They foster social participation and exchange**
- **They create spaces for lifelong learning**
- **They strengthen the digital skills of older target groups by offering a low-threshold and appealing entry point into the digital world**

Through a questionnaire conducted after the eight events, we analysed the impact of participation on the target audience. 75% reported that they now enjoy technology and digitalisation more after taking part. 87.5% stated that they feel less apprehensive about technology. 94% feel more confident using the video conferencing software Zoom. 88% said they gained new knowledge through the event, and 94% felt inspired by the experience.

Digital cultural and educational programmes are not a substitute for in-person formats, but a valuable complement to them. In particular, the dialogical and interactive character of the programmes was highly appreciated throughout the project.

“Despite my limitations, being able to experience culture means a lot to me.” Participant



Who is this Practical Guide for?



This guide is aimed at event organisers as well as cultural and educational institutions such as museums, theatres, libraries, adult education centres, and other educational providers that wish to develop or expand digital cultural and educational programmes for older adults. It also addresses cultural practitioners, specialists in cultural geragogy, and museum educators who would like to design and deliver their own digital formats.

Furthermore, the guide is intended for multipliers such as senior service organisations, neighbourhood and senior centres, social service providers, and volunteer initiatives that wish to promote, support, or integrate digital programmes for older target groups into existing structures.

Project experience clearly shows that digital cultural and educational events should ideally not be implemented by a single person. Managing content, moderation, and technical aspects simultaneously can be demanding. Working in a team of at least two people has proven effective in ensuring both a smooth process and respectful and supportive guidance for participants.

**“Better than visiting a museum
because it was more intense.
You don't get that when you just
go to a museum on your own.”
Participant**

What is Needed to Implement Online Formats for Older Adults?

From the project “Digitaler KulturLernRaum,” seven key insights emerged for organising digital cultural and educational programmes for older people. These are presented across the areas of concept development, public relations, technology, moderation tips, user experience insights, follow-up, and challenges.

1. Concept Development

- Define the target audience clearly: Who should be addressed by the event?
- Which topics will be chosen for this audience? Topics should be relevant and easy to understand.
- Do not cover too many topics in a single event; if necessary, split them across multiple sessions.
- Who will conduct the event (speaker/artist)?
- Who will provide technical support for the event?
- Decide on length of the event (digital attention span can be shorter; 60–90 minutes has proven effective).
- Find a suitable space for the implementation (this can also be the speaker’s living room; a studio is not required).
- Define the flow and structure of the event, as well as the level of interaction (e.g., chat, questions, participant exchange allowed?).
- Set the time of the event (mornings make it easier for outpatient care facilities to participate, while evenings may be too late for some seniors).
- Should the event be free of charge or not?
- Helpful: Create a schedule for the event, including assigning roles (“Who does what?”)

Notes

2. Reaching the target audience

- Use analog and digital channels for advertising (flyers, newspaper articles, radio, WhatsApp, newsletters, posters for retirement homes or neighborhood centers, social media—especially for relatives and other multipliers, etc.).
- Make your communication appealing! Use clear and inviting language. Focus on the content rather than the digital format to spark interest.
- Highlight what makes the event special: interaction and behind-the-scenes insights.
- Include information in the announcement about the devices and technology required.
- Note that the online room will open 15 minutes early in case anyone has (technical) questions, or indicate that there is a contact person available beforehand for technical inquiries.
- If planned: include a note about the possibility of watching the digital event together publicly in neighbourhood centres, etc.
- Use multipliers to publicize the event

3. Technology

- Computer or laptop with camera and microphone
- Stable Wi-Fi! (TRY IT OUT!)
- Actively offer time for technical questions (how to use microphone, camera, subtitles, etc.)
- Good audio quality is crucial (especially for music events), so allow enough time for technical rehearsals under original conditions! (same equipment, same location),
- Clarify:
 - Who will share screens/presentations/videos, if applicable?
 - Sound sources (microphones, music clips)
 - Lighting and camera angles for the performers
 - Contingency plan: What to do in case of sound or image failure?
- Pay attention to video conferencing software settings: admit guests manually, allow only moderators to share their screen, use webinar mode if limited interaction is desired.

Notes

4. Addressing participants (Moderation Tips)

We recommend planning for a moderator in addition to the speaker/artist, who takes care of the video conferencing software and supports the speaker/artist in interacting with the participants.

This checklist assists moderators in conducting digital cultural and educational events for an older audience with limited technical experience. The focus is on clarity, calmness, repetition of important instructions, and creating a respectful and supportive atmosphere.

- Be in the online room at least 30 minutes before the event starts and conduct a final technical check with the speaker/artist.
- Calm, friendly start - deliberately slow pace
- Use simple, clear language (avoid Anglicisms)
- Introduce yourself and the speaker
- Communicate the structure and flow clearly.
- Provide technical support, briefly explain features (microphone, chat), avoid using technical jargon without explanation, and never assume prior technical knowledge!
- Allow time for repetition and questions
- Be open to thematic digressions that may occur through interaction.
- Allow time before participants respond. Online, it takes longer for participants to react to the speaker's questions. If necessary, the moderator can "stimulate" the conversation with their own question.
- Keep an eye on the chat
- Pin active speakers
- Allow latecomers to enter
- If you encounter technical problems, stay calm and explain briefly.
- At the end: Thanks to the performers and audience, possibly mention upcoming dates

Notes

5. Insights from user behavior

- Microphones and cameras are actively used, but not by everyone. Decide in advance whether to accept participants who do not turn on their camera.
- Interaction is welcomed and utilized (e.g., via the chat). However, there are always participants who prefer to just listen.
- Reactions such as emojis are used. Feel free to also show how they can be used. The artists enjoy it 😊
- Participants also interact with each other.
- Plan for the spontaneity of participants—they may join or not... don't take it personally 😊. Especially if it is a free offering, attendance may be non-binding.

6. Follow-Up

- Save the chat. Send additional information to participants upon request.
- If applicable, conduct a brief evaluation of the event (send a survey to the participants).

- Thank cooperating institutions
- Press release/blog post with event report, if applicable
- Social media follow-up, if applicable
- Publish and share workshop results on Padlet or similar platforms, if applicable.

7. Challenges

- It was difficult to attract male participants. Consider developing tailored events for this group
- Varying levels of technical knowledge make communication more complex.
- Our surveys showed that digital events that cost money would be approached with caution.

Notes

Insight: The added value of online events for participants lies in the interaction with the artists/speakers. Purely lecture-style formats are therefore not recommended, as these could also be consumed as a video or on television.



Together, You Are Less Alone – Watching in Groups



Online events for the older target group can also be viewed collectively in neighbourhood centres, care facilities (depending on the type of event), or similar settings. The following points should be considered:

- Test technology and Wi-Fi in advance (tablet, computer, projector, TV, microphone, lighting).
- Create an inviting room setup: circle of chairs, comfortable atmosphere.
- Include social elements such as coffee & cake.
- A support person should familiarize themselves with the Video conferencing software in advance.
- Someone on site should introduce the event and accompany participants throughout, motivating them to actively engage with the online programme.





Conclusion

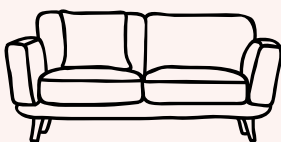


Online events can enable social, digital, and cultural participation for target groups who, for various reasons, have limited or no access to regular cultural and educational offerings. Among older adults, apprehension toward technology often represents an additional barrier. Feedback from the project “Digitaler KulturLernRaum” shows that appealing online formats can reduce this obstacle. Even a single attendance can lessen participants’ fear of technology and prove to be enjoyable and enriching.

Unlike passive consumption, such as watching documentaries on television, active participation—with opportunities for questions and exchange—produces a deeper learning effect and helps counteract social isolation in older age.

The project demonstrates the potential of digital cultural and educational formats for older adults. They enable participation, foster exchange, and open up new perspectives, regardless of mobility or financial means.

This guide invites readers to rethink culture and education: dialogic, accessible—and, indeed, digital



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