

The Show Must Go On: FHI 360's Alliance Building and Training Session (ABTS) as a model online 3-day event

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MEETINGS ARE GOING VIRTUAL

In response to the challenges imposed by COVID-19, FHI 360 shifted the 24th annual Alliance Building and Training Session (ABTS) to a virtual platform. This event, normally held in person, celebrates the achievements, lesson learned, local success and innovation stories from a global corporate social responsibility college and career readiness program sponsored by Johnson & Johnson and managed by FHI 360's National Institute of Work and Learning (NIWL).

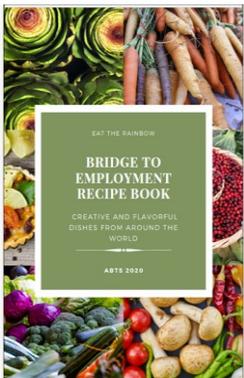
FHI 360 CAPITALIZED ON THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT TO KEEP PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED

This year, NIWL used the virtual environment to engage additional partners, guest speakers, and students from sites around the globe in the rich learning, sharing, and networking usually experienced at the in-person ABTS. To retain the spirit of the ABTS, we implemented some creative agenda items:

- **Keynote.** Dr. Maysa Akbar, a noted author on the [Ally Identity Model](#), spoke to community leaders, employees, and educators about how allyship can support young people that have lived and adapted to traumatic experiences. All participants received her book prior to the conference.
- **Student Fishbowl and Alumni Panel.** Student Ambassadors and alumni shared their thoughts and reflections about the program.
- **4 x 4 x 4 Site Spotlights.** Experienced sites shared best practices during this rapid discussion and learning session.
- **Networking Events.** Peers got to know each other at these informal (and optional) sessions, including an escape room, yoga, "speed networking" and a virtual walk.
- **Three Live Events** broadcast on Johnson & Johnson program web site (www.bridgetoemployment.org) enabled participation from those who would not normally be able to attend in person. Each live session was recorded for future viewing and to accommodate those in distant time zones.
- **Welcome Packages** mailed to each participant's home with project branded items to bring items from a conference to participants

86
representatives
from
20 sites, including
13 student
ambassadors, in
10 countries across
9 time zones

FHI 360 collected recipes from each participant and distributed an online cookbook of international cuisine at the end of the conference.



CREATIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

All ABTS sessions for corporate, academic and other institutional partners used the Zoom platform while Student Ambassador sessions used a variety of platforms, including Blackboard Collaborate, for ease of access. Attendees joined the sessions through a web browser without the need to install any extra software and did not need to create a Zoom account to participate.

Several Zoom sessions utilized Zoom break out rooms for smaller discussion and reflection opportunities. During larger group engagements, participants used the Zoom chat box to promote engagement and interaction. We also encouraged participants to add a Zoom background, such as a photo from their location, to promote cultural sharing and learning. Virtual sessions were so successful, a



Johnson & Johnson participant, Cathy Baker, quipped, “This is the first Zoom call I’ve ever been on that I actually did not want to end!”.

ROBUST TOOLS AND DOCUMENTATION

FHI 360 thoroughly prepared its speakers and participants for the online global meeting. We created:

- Rules of Virtual Conference Etiquette
- Ice Breaker Guide
- Moderator Guide
- Annotated Agendas with Zoom links
- FHI 360 staff support roles and production schedule
- A Virtual Production Guide – step by step instructions for hosts, co-hosts, panelists, presenters, moderators and chat facilitators
- Rehearsal protocol for all live panelists and moderators
- Media release forms from all participants on Zoom
- Participants Lists with photos
- An Interactive Virtual ABTS Challenge curriculum centered on Virtual Communication

“Amazing achievement to bring all of us together from all different parts of the world (not to mention time zones!!) and for it to run so smoothly from a participant point of view. I can only imagine the amount of work that went into organising the event!! – J&J participant from Ireland

CONCLUSION

During the three-day event, NIWL brought together business representatives, higher education partners, educators, students, and intermediaries from around the globe who were able to engage, network, and learn from each other all virtually.

FHI 360’s NIWL department delivered an event that sacrificed nothing by being remote. We delivered a quality and culturally wholesome experience for all participants involved. Johnson & Johnson program partners expressed their appreciation in abundance as well. Johnson & Johnson Executive Director of Global Community Impact, Michael Bzdak, shared, “The NIWL team never ceases to blow me away” when reflecting on the successful ABTS event.

The NIWL team proved that when creativity and commitment are paired with talent and technology, there are no limits to success, not even in a virtual world hindered by a global pandemic.