



LINGOs offers NGOs learning solutions that help them fulfill their missions



LINGOs is a non-profit dedicated to building the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in developing countries around the world.

The more than 90 NGOs that LINGOs supports focus in a number of areas: international development, humanitarian relief, health, conservation and/or social justice. These NGOs may be widely-known “brands”, household names when it comes to charitable work. Or they could be smaller organizations with niche charters. What they all have in common is a belief that by strengthening the capabilities of their staffs, they’ll be better able to fulfill their mission to improve the lives of vulnerable communities. LINGOs helps NGOs build capacity by providing learning solutions that use technology to serve people at scale, wherever they’re located throughout the world. One of the key learning solutions that LINGOs relies on is Blackboard Collaborate.

Blackboard Collaborate enables learning for those working under the most challenging of conditions

LINGOs provides a number of training programs that use Blackboard Collaborate, including project management, information technology, human resources management, and language courses. These are the types of learning initiatives that corporations may take for granted, but which are difficult to implement when budgets are limited and when most learners are in the field, scattered across wide geographies.

Those geographies are challenging, and not just because they are far flung. They are often lacking in basic infrastructure, and, as John Cropper, Director of Capacity Building Services at LINGOs, observes, “This may sound trite, but the people we support are generally in very difficult locations. They’re working in war zones. They’re providing emergency response services in places where, when the rainy season starts, the bridges are wiped out and there’s no movement. Under these conditions, people are not going to be able to travel somewhere else for training – even if it were economically feasible and wouldn’t disrupt the work they’re doing.”

One of the most popular areas in which LINGOs provides training is project management. Through LINGOs courses, those implementing projects are equipped with budgeting, planning and other tools that will ensure that their programs are successfully implemented. They’re also able to learn about best practices – and share their own tips and practices with colleagues around the world.

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John Cropper

Director of Capacity
Building Services
LINGOs

“I can't overemphasize how critical it is for us to offer our project management courses virtually,” says Cropper. “Even assuming it was possible for NGO employees to participate in training in person, with face-to-face programs, everything is compacted into a 4.5 – 5 day timeframe, and there's no opportunity to put what people are learning into immediate action.” With the virtual approach that Collaborate enables, classes are spaced out over time, and learners can start putting new concepts and tools to use right away. And with Collaborate, there's no need for learners to take a valuable week of time out of their project.

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Building community with Blackboard Collaborate

In addition to enabling the formal virtual courses that LINGOs provides its members, Blackboard Collaborate is being used by LINGOs members for informal learning and community building initiatives. For one example, a reproductive health group has established a “journal club.” Members read journal articles, then meet to discuss them. On occasion, they invite an article author to take part. All of this is made possible by being able to meet virtually from a laptop, desktop, or mobile device.

Collaborate serves other purposes as well. Collaborate is used to onboard new members, and to provide moderator training for those who will deliver training or set up discussion groups like the journal club. Collaborate is also used by LINGOs to help them provide IT support to their members.

“This is a tool for learning”

Gus Curran, Manager of Member Services, views LINGOs as an extension of their members' learning and development teams. In this vein, his responsibilities include providing moderator training. “One of the things I focus on is making sure that moderators and facilitators understand how to make their sessions more engaging and interesting.” To this end, Curran shows his learners how to take advantage of the many Collaborate capabilities - whiteboard, chat, screen sharing, breakout rooms, polling – that support this. “Many of those I'm working with are used to working face-to-face. But when they see that, in Collaborate, you can do almost everything you can in a classroom setting, they have an ‘aha’ moment.” The whiteboard and chat features are especially important for users for whom English may be a third or fourth language, as they're often more comfortable typing text than they are speaking up.

Curran views Blackboard Collaborate as quite distinct from tools designed for one-way presentations. “If your goal is to deliver a boring speech with boring slides, use what you want. If you want to engage your learners and have them get what you're teaching, Blackboard Collaborate is the way to go. This is a tool for learning.”

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For Curran, ease of use is paramount. “We don’t get a lot of questions about how to use Collaborate. People just get how to use it. Collaborate has always been easy to access, but now, with nothing to download, it’s really simple and fast.” Recordings are important for LINGOs as well. Recordings let those who missed a session quickly catch up, and, if necessary, enable learners to take an entire course without attending a real-time session. And given the audience it supports, it’s also critical for LINGOs that Collaborate works so smoothly even in the low- and intermittent-bandwidth situations that many of its learners work under.

Reaching the unreachable

Today, most LINGOs members are using Collaborate, reaching tens of thousands of learners. “With Collaborate,” Curran says, “we can reach people who were unreachable before. Our members wouldn’t have access to learning about project management, financial management, and other skills they need to do their jobs better.”

For Cropper, Collaborate is helping democratize access to learning. “You can imagine the costs to an NGO for the travel and hotel stays that face-to-face education requires. That’s a big cost. So is the opportunity cost of people being out of the field for a week. Even where face-to-face training is an option, it’s an expensive one. This means that it’s often the more senior people who get the training, not the junior people who may have more need for it.”

Cropper shared a message he received from an NGO employee who took a project management course from an Internet café in the Democratic Republic of Congo: “I’ve been waiting for this for years and no one is going to send face-to-face trainers here.”

LINGOs has found that providing virtual learning is especially important for women. “In less-developed countries,” Cropper says, “Women, for family or other reasons, are often unable to go to the capital city or another country for face-to-face training. With Collaborate, we’re really able to open up learning for so many.”

Blackboard is helping NGOs make the world a better place

Both Cropper and Curran value Blackboard as a partner. “Blackboard is fantastic,” Curran says. “They’re a longtime partner and a really good friend.”

As Cropper puts it, “The people we work with have one thing in common: they’re trying to make the world a better place. A tool like Blackboard Collaborate makes that possible.”

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