



It's rare that a learner sees a link or QR code and independently signs up for and persists in online learning. Outreach, recruitment, screening, and orientation practices help your program's distance education options get noticed and give learners a foundation that supports persistence.

### Outreach & Recruitment

If you build it, they will not necessarily come! Make sure your distance program is visible. Start by reaching out to the learners in your program, those you still see. However, eventually, you may need to recruit learners from a distance. Make sure your website has essential information about online offerings, how to enroll, and how to get support. To drive traffic to your site, reach out to your professional networks. Use social media; set up a Facebook page or Instagram presence.

***Make sure your program offerings are known.***

Explore communication and outreach tips, tools and templates on the [EdTech Center's mLearning resource hub](#).

***Take stock of the resources you can make available to learners.*** You might target recruitment based on who you think you can best support. For example, if you know your program can't offer access to computers and the Internet, don't recruit learners who lack home access unless your curriculum is mobile friendly. If you can purchase a license for an online curriculum, decide whether the product should be tailored to a particular group of students or one that serves a variety of learners with different educational needs. Recruit only those learners who fit the profile of that curriculum.

***Make the most of online outreach.*** Students who find you through websites and social media have the sufficient mastery of technology and access needed to find you online. Provide an application form ([Google forms](#) is free) as a way for such learners to contact your distance education program administrator; this demonstrates adequate digital literacy skills for online learning.

### Orientation & Screening - Provide a strong foundation for success

Provide as much orientation as possible. An orientation should include: screening to make sure learners have the skills, access, and drive for distance learning; goal and expectation setting; and onboarding to technologies and communication technologies and processes. You might be able to do this in person, offering drop-in testing and orientation, or do what you can remotely - via video conference.

#### Screening

***Ensure alignment of learner knowledge and skills with proposed curriculum.*** Determine if a potential student has the skills needed to participate in online learning. First, this requires that instructors be familiar with the curriculum. Then, teachers need to examine a student's academic skills and knowledge, through an assessment tool (e.g., MAPT, TABE, CASAS, or BEST) and/or by informal means (e.g.,

observing a learner read and listening to their oral English skills as they talk to the teacher). If your program is closed for learners, you may need to do these informal assessments via video conference.

**Assess non-academic competencies.** Learner persistence in distance education requires students to organize their time, work independently, have good study skills, and solve problems using technology. These skills become very important in distance education, where students and teachers may meet only a limited number of times over an entire course, and likely will meet through communication technologies. Have students complete a simple survey to assess readiness and gauge what support will be needed. Here are some examples:

- [Distance Learning Suitability Survey](#)
- [Technology Skills and Comfort Survey](#)
- [Online Education Readiness Survey](#)

**Assess computer skills.** Basic computer, telephone, and tablet skills (e.g., proficiency with common computer applications, Internet browsers, and use of email) are a necessity. It is also critical that learners have a basic understanding of how websites and hyperlinking work. Have students take a few of the [Northstar Digital Literacy assessment modules](#) to determine where their digital skill gaps lie.

#### Goal and expectation setting

During the orientation, students build rapport with the teacher and are introduced to the curriculum materials and to the concept of working independently. Make clear how students and teachers will communicate, by what means, and how frequently. If possible create a simple contract with learners, which makes goals and expectations explicit. Here are a few examples:

- [Simple Contract from MN ABE](#)
- [Learner Agreement](#)

#### Onboarding to technologies and communication technologies and processes.

The final step in orientation should be an onboarding to the learning resources and communication technologies that will be used. Give students login information and links to support materials that remind them how to login. Walk through each required technology, so that students can gain comfort using them while there is some support available. If this has to be done online and remotely, you may be limited to supporting those students with sufficient digital literacy to benefit from support provided via video conference. Alternatively, encourage learners to ask a more knowledgeable other to join them, to help them with clicks as they build skills. See templates and examples of onboarding resources on the [EdTech Center's mLearning resource hub](#)..

#### Other useful resources:

EdTech Center@ World Education - [Essential Tips for Starting Distance Learning](#)

EdTech Center@World Education - [Supporting Distance Learners from the Start](#)

MN ABE Distance Learning - [DL Implementation Resources and Best Practices](#)