

Panel Tips

Your role as a workshop facilitator/moderator or panel member is vital in ensuring your presentation “stays on track” and serves as a valuable learning experience for participants. Here are some key considerations when planning for your workshop:

Workshop Formats That Work Planning For Success Preparing for Your Workshop

Develop a Plan – Determine in advance what you would like your workshop to accomplish. Consider what attendees are expecting to learn based on the description provided in the brochure and on the Web site. Think about what information to address and the best format.

Develop a Workshop Outline – A workshop outline, developed during the group conference call, is a helpful tool for organizing the workshop. In the outline, we will identify the overall goal for the workshop and what to expect from each panelist. Discussion will include the workshop format, the issues to address and how much time to allow for each panelist’s remarks. Each panelist is requested (after the planning conference call) to provide three key points they’d like to make – their “take home” messages.

Focus the Information – “less” is often better. Focus the topic so that the panel can address the issues in the available time and allow plenty of time for audience interaction. Each panelist is requested to develop remarks that are concise, focused and stimulating. The workshop facilitator will review panelists’ main points to ensure there are no major overlaps or gaps in workshop content.

Facilitator/Moderator “Game Day” Strategies Making Your Workshop Unforgettable

If serving as the workshop facilitator/moderator, you will encourage presentation of diverse viewpoints, manage the discussion and provide a summary at the end of the workshop. You will want to:

Take It Easy – Your mood and demeanor sets the stage for the whole workshop. Being organized, yet relaxed, puts everyone at ease.

Introduce Appropriately – When introducing your panelists, briefly summarize their key accomplishments and expertise as it relates to the workshop topic. Allow a minute or less for each introduction.

Preview the Workshop – Give attendees a “roadmap” of your workshop. Describe the format and preview the main points to be addressed.

Direct the Discourse – You need to control who speaks and when. If the discussion goes “off track,” graciously redirect the flow back to the agenda. As questions are asked, direct them to the most appropriate panelist.

Manage Time – Avoid a presentation/lecture format. It’s best to leave plenty of time for questions or group discussion. This keeps the workshop lively, relevant and engaging. Remind panelist to stay within their time allowances so all topics can be fairly covered. Gently constrain panelists who use too much time.

Traditional Panel – A classic! Three or four people present their views to the audience, and then respond to questions. To keep the audience engaged, share personal experiences with the subject. Feel free to use humor, too.

Role Play – Choose one or more people to demonstrate a “situation” that the audience would encounter. Explore different facets of the situation through the “players” responses.

Debate – Organize into teams to argue for and defend opposing sides of an issue.

Roundtable – The facilitator places panel members at various areas around the room to lead small group discussions.

Ways to Make Your Workshop More Interactive Planning Conference Call

Conference calls are a valuable way to plan your workshop. Here is a helpful agenda to follow:

1. Ask the facilitator/moderator and each panel member to introduce themselves and describe what they do. (Please respond during the call by first name to identify yourself each time you speak.)
2. Review the objective of the call: to coordinate panelists' remarks, avoid duplication of content presented and review logistics.
3. Review workshop title and description in brochure/web site.
4. Discuss the workshop format (i.e., how the content will be presented).
5. Ask each participant to share the three key points they'd like to make-their "take home" messages.
6. Set time and location on where to meet the day of the presentation.
7. Summarize the workshop based upon the call discussion.
8. After the call, e-mail the workshop outline and a summary of action items to all panel members.

Summary

Engage Audience – If appropriate, at the opening of your workshop ask attendees to move to the front of the room. Closer proximity will facilitate a more interactive, lively workshop.

Ask Questions – Encourage attendees to ask questions. For example, you can pass out index cards and ask attendees to write questions. Collect the cards and use the questions to keep the workshop fast paced and relevant.

Move Around – Stir up your workshop by moving participants around the room, perhaps in small discussion groups. Take a short break if needed to re-energize the session. (Works best with 50 or fewer participants)

Play Games – Games aren't just for children! Games help lighten the mood in a session and put attendees at ease. Consider a quick "get-to-know-your neighbor" exercise or even a few trivia questions about key workshop topics.

