

Panel Discussion

- Small group of people with certain qualifications coming together for a specific purpose and a limited time

Panelist

- Member of a small group assembled for a formal public discussion

Facilitator

- Person who presides over a panel discussion

Panel Setup for In-Person Events

- When possible, arrange panelists in a **semi-circle** so they can easily see each other
- Panelists **sit on chairs or stools** (rather than at a table, which creates a barrier with the audience)
- Facilitator **sits with the panelists** to create a cohesive group

Panelists

Think of the panel as a conversation or dialogue among the panelists and the audience. Some best practices:

- Figure out **what your audience needs** to know and use in their work, and use this as a filter for your comments – choose on 3-4 key messages.
- Provide **examples and stories** that illustrate how your key messages were applied
- When talking about complex or technical information, **keep it simple and short**
- **Skip the PowerPoint** slides unless they're crucial to make a point
- When speaking, **look at the audience**, not the facilitator. For virtual events look at the camera
- Answer the question posed, but also feel free to **elaborate and add context**
- Don't feel compelled to answer every question
- Show respect for other panelists by **not interrupting** when others are speaking
- When not speaking **be aware** of how you look or what you're doing, whether in-person or on camera.

Facilitator as Catalyst/Talk Show Host



Planning

- **Prepare a short introduction** that highlights why the topic is important and what you hope to accomplish
- **Develop questions** that are designed to provoke discussion between panelists and will allow them to speak out of turn and react to each other; and prepare **follow-up questions** in advance
- **Practice** by asking questions out loud, and thinking of possible comments, ways to involve more than one panelist for each question
- **Communicate with panelists** in advance to review objectives and share opening questions

Opening

- **Introduce panelists** in one or two sentences, including, for example, why the panelist is qualified, why he or she is passionate about the topic
- **Involve the audience** in the first 5 minutes, by asking questions such as: *Where are you from? What's your level of experience with topic?* Ask for show of hands. For virtual events, conduct a poll or use the Raise Hand feature.

Discussion

- **Guide the conversation**, redirecting it if needed, knowing when to interrupt a verbose panelist, when to ask a follow-up question, for example
- **Engage the audience** with questions that require a response, for example, *Does (whatever panelist just said) inspire/scare/worry you?*
- Keep **track of time** and allow for at least 15 minutes of Q&A at the end

Closing

- Rather than asking for final thoughts, consider **alternatives**: *What do you envision for the future? What Important new trends do you see?*

Panels as a Dynamic Conversation



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