Panels as a Dynamic Conversation

**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**
- 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
- 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 – try not to look bored!

**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.

**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?
Sources:


Kawasaki G. How to be a great moderator. http://guykawasaki.com/how_to_be_a_gre/.

