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 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?
Sources:

Hough K. Moderating a panel: 8 ways to run an excellent discussion. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karen-hough/moderating-a-panel-8-ways_b_5242146.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karen-hough/moderating-a-panel-8-ways_b_5242146.html).

Kawasaki G. How to be a great moderator. [http://guykawasaki.com/how_to_be_a_gre/](http://guykawasaki.com/how_to_be_a_gre/).


Kirsner S. How to moderate a panel like a pro. [https://hbr.org/2013/05/how-to-moderate-a-panel-like-a](https://hbr.org/2013/05/how-to-moderate-a-panel-like-a).