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Notes on Chairing and Leading an Open Session

The Chairperson of the Open Session acts as a bridge between the panelists and the participants. Thus it is very important that the Chairperson is familiar with the material being presented so that she/he/they can monitor how effectively it is being communicated to the audience. The Chairperson also needs to help the audience communicate with the panelists and assure that the panelists are responsive to new material coming from the participants.

Open Sessions work best when:

1) Panelists have formal presentations (these do not have to be written papers that are read);

2) There is ongoing communication between the Chairperson and panelists prior to the event;

3) The panelists meet as a group with the Chairperson prior to the event. It is not always possible to meet in person or via Zoom, but conference calls and emails are also workable;

4) Chairperson and panelists are encouraged to complete free AGPA online diversity training;

5) Chairperson encourages panelists to address diversity issues in their presentation;

6) Chairperson reminds panelists to make objectives clear and note when they are addressing each objective during the presentation;

7) Chairperson can review previous evaluation of the session (if any) and improve upon any noted issues.

1. **Acceptance Letter**

Some panels are composed entirely by the Chairperson, whereas other Open Sessions include individuals recommended by the AGPA Connect Committee. In this context, you may need to assess if changes in the composition of the panel requires modification of goals and objectives. In either event, it is important to review your goals and objectives with those who will be presenting.

2. **Setting a time frame**

Panelists need to provide an initial outline of their presentations (this may be a modification of what was submitted to the Conference Committee) and/or an initial draft of the presentation. If mid-November is set for receipt of this material, it will give presenters an opportunity to work on their presentations before the holidays. A "final" version should be given to the Chairperson about three weeks before the meeting.

3. **Put it in writing**

Any communications should include an outline of the session itself with time frames, that is, the length of the introduction, presentation, audience discussion, break, and completion of evaluation forms. If accomplished early in the process, there will be sufficient time to negotiate any changes and strengthen the entire session. Remember, panelists don't have to agree with each other. Different points of view may lead to creative discussion. The Chairperson will mediate and establish the process, and monitor the communication between the panelists and the audience.

4. **Observations**

A member of the Open Session Subcommittee will be observing your open session as part of our continuing evaluation of all Conference events. These observations will help the committee to obtain a sampling of open session offerings and also provide Chairpersons with constructive feedback. The details on format and timing for observations will be determined at a later date; however Chairpersons will have the opportunity to reconvene with the observer.

5. **At the Conference**

A) Plan in advance when you will get together with your panel. Be certain that the Chairperson has panelist's professional affiliation and title of his/her/their presentation. Do not give an extensive introduction for each person. Distribute to each panelist a copy of the session outline, which includes the time frame as described above in #3.

B) Check your Open Session room (or Zoom room if presenting virtually) and make sure you and your panelists know where to go, that all equipment works, and that the size and seating of your room is as you requested. Be there 10 to 15 minutes before the Open Session begins so that you can collect your thoughts and get used to the feel of the room.

C) Review the information in 5A.

D) After introductions, the Chairperson will sit next to the-panelists and be prepared to signal each panelist when 5 minutes are left and when he/she/they should stop speaking. It is unfair to subsequent speakers to let someone go beyond the agreed upon time.

E) Remember that the audience will wish to participate, so make certain that there is sufficient time for this. Programs that fail to provide sufficient time for discussion usually are not rated very highly by the participants. Conducting sessions in accordance to guidelines established by the DEI taskforce is important. Additionally, be sure to repeat all audience comments and questions so that the audio-recording of the session will be inclusive of audience participation. Ask attendees to line up behind the microphone (if in-person) to ask questions or make comments.

F) The Chairperson will wrap up, thank the panelists, and leave sufficient time for everyone to complete evaluations (panelists too), then personally touch base with the panelists, congratulating them on a job well done.

G) The Chairperson and panelists (if available) will connect with your Observer. Get feedback if possible, review the highlights, then relax and enjoy the conference.