

Session Format Ideas and Tips

Philanthropy Ohio values our place-based strength at connecting philanthropy and strives to create a space for deepening learning about the challenges and opportunities faced in our sector.

We appreciate that adults learn in different ways and can benefit from a wide variety of presentation styles and session formats throughout the conference. This space to examine ideas, hone skills and connect with peers is a critical element of the success of Philanthropy Forward '19.

We are soliciting proposals for **60-minute sessions** but welcome your proposals that stretch the time or location parameters we've set forth as a starting point. We encourage you to consider creative ways to share your content. Could your information be shared on a walking tour? Is there a proven experiential situation that would illustrate your learnings? Are there local partners who could be engaged – on-site or off – to bring together what you're sharing?

Philanthropy Ohio staff are ready and willing to help you design sessions that will be as interactive and engaging as possible. Contact John Gest (jgest@philanthropyohio.org) or Laura Smith (lsmith@philanthropyohio.org) or call us at 614.224.1344 if you need assistance.

Points to Consider

We want to echo the session design elements outlined by our colleagues at Grantmakers for Effective Organizations in their own recent request for proposals. Please keep the following in mind as you develop your presentation:

- **Inclusivity of session and materials.** Be mindful of the ability for attendees to see or hear your presentation from the back of the room. Take note of sound quality for videos and clarity of color and font size for all printed materials.
- **Application of concepts.** Ensure that your session moves from theory to practice within the hour and leave time for attendees to develop ideas of how to apply concepts in their own work.
- **Interactivity.** Remember that many of our sessions can benefit from the experience in the front and around the room. Think about how you can encourage your attendees to share their expertise in the session as well.
- **Limit speakers.** Given the hour-long format, we encourage you to consider limiting speaker participation to no more than four speakers. We're happy to entertain proposals that stretch this limit but will need a more detailed understanding of the rationale and plan to include a broader speaker set.
- **Use slides sparingly.** Consider how you might convey your thoughts with as little text as possible. Better yet, consider how other emerging technologies – or no technology – might allow your participants to focus on the essence of your message more than the visuals.

Understanding How Adults Learn

Below are seven principles of adult learning which, if integrated into your planning, will ensure successful attendee engagement: *

1. Learning is fundamentally social.
 - Successful learning is often socially constructed and can require unlearning old ways.
2. Knowledge is integrated in the life of communities and the connections we maintain.
 - Learning is about optimizing our connections to people within our communities of purpose that matter to us. It's about building and maintaining person-to-person connections that build value.
3. Learning is an act of participation.
 - The motivation to learn is the desire to become an accepted member of a community of practice. It's about building and maintaining person-to-person connections that brings value.
4. The depth of our learning depends on the depth of our engagement.
 - We glean knowledge and retain more information from active participation in many different situations and activities. The more we are actively involved, the more we learn.
5. Engagement is joined at the hip with empowerment.
 - We perceive our identities in terms of our ability to contribute. Engage us and we feel empowered.
6. Exclusion for active participation equals failure to learn.
 - Learning requires access and the ability to contribute. Fill a conference with one-way lectures and you increase learning failure.
7. WIIFM (what's in it for me) is critical.
 - We want to learn subjects that have immediate relevance to our work. If we don't get WIIFM quickly at the beginning of the presentation we disconnect and lose attention.

**excerpted from Velvet Chainsaw Midcourse Corrections, March 14, 2012. These and other great resources can be found [here](#).*

From Understanding to Application

Philanthropy Ohio does not prescribe a particular session format. However, we can recommend adopting one of a number of frameworks which aim to ensure that real engagement transpires. Some approaches to consider in designing your session are below:

- **PechaKucha**
PechaKucha 20x20 is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and you talk along to the images. Each speaker has just over seven minutes to share their story and work.
- **Salon Conversations**
Salon conversations focus on holding a space for more intimate, collective discussion on a topic. Generally geared toward a small group, this format focuses on attendee contributions with a facilitator who offers models or frameworks to open the discussion.
- **Point/Counterpoint**
A lively exchange between panelists that includes and engages the audience. Panelists debate on a topic that lends itself to divergent viewpoints. The debate is facilitated by a moderator, who calls on the audience throughout the debate to provide questions for panelists to discuss.

➤ **IdeaLab**

Participants consider ideas and solutions to core questions or challenges on a specific topic or theme. These sessions begin with several discussion leaders offering their ideas on an element of the session's theme. At the conclusion of the presentations, each leader adjourns to a table, to be joined by participants for an intimate exchange. The small group discussions are followed by a large group discussion to identify common threads and key take-aways.

➤ **Fishbowl**

Four to five chairs are arranged in an inner circle, forming the "fishbowl". The remaining chairs are arranged in concentric circles outside the fishbowl. A few participants are selected to fill the fishbowl, while the rest of the group sits on the chairs outside the fishbowl. One chair is left empty. The moderator introduces the topic and the participants start discussing the topic. Any member of the audience can, at any time, occupy the empty chair and join the fishbowl. The discussion continues with participants frequently entering and leaving the fishbowl.

➤ **Spectagram**

This is an interactive whole group exercise that helps highlight the range of perspectives in a group. There is a tape on the floor with agree on one end and disagree at the other.

Agree |-----|----- | Disagree

The moderator asks a somewhat controversial question and directs participants to take a stand on the spectrum. The moderator then interviews people at different points on the spectrum about the opinions they hold. This process creates a shared experience while demonstrating the range of opinions in a community. It can serve as an anchor for additional conversations.

➤ **Speed Geeking/Rapid Demos**

Presenters give a five-minute presentation/demonstration for a small audience. After five minutes, the audience moves on to the next demo/presentation. This repeats throughout the session. This format is a great way to see many short demos in a row with advantages for both sides: presenters refine their pitch through repetition; the audience moves from demo to demo, efficiently using their time while exposing themselves to different concepts.

➤ **World Café**

The tables are set like a small café with 4-6 people per table. A conversation is put forward, with attendees spending 20 minutes at a table. At time's end, a host is chosen to stay behind and summarize the conversation to the next group that comes to sit at the table. The other people move on to different tables and another round of conversation happens. At the conclusion of three rounds, the conversations are collected.

➤ **Pair Talk**

Facilitator poses a question and asks attendees to pair up to discuss their responses/perspectives. Facilitator asks a few people to report back on their responses.

➤ **Explain, Exercise, Debrief**

- **Walkthrough:** Show how to do something, how it was done or explain a concept.
- **Exercise:** Have everyone actually practice with the content that was just given to them (while you wander around and help people one on one or add to their discussions).
- **Debrief:** lead a discussion of where people got stuck, what parts were fun/hard/frustrating, and what things people learned, or realized they want to learn. Show people's individual work, rather than your own, to the group to help explain your insights and observations,

and as way to invite them to share theirs. The elements can be of different time increments (15/15/15 or 10/20/15 minutes) or longer.

➤ **Buzz Groups**

Buzz Groups are small groups of two to six people that discuss a specific topic. It could be a topic posed by the lecturer or one that a member of the group suggestions. They can be used several times for short periods within a specific education program.

➤ **List building**

Ask a question to the group and build a list from your participant's knowledge from these questions. Having big sheets of paper and markers or a chalkboard will be very helpful for eliciting input from the group. Here are a few types of lists you'll want to think about making to help participants learn in a participatory way

- Brainstorm – example: brainstorm all types of “tactics” you can think of
- Harvesting – example: after working in small groups, ask for examples of what each group learned about a particular topic
- Maximize/minimize – example: “What makes a good story?” followed by, “What hinders good storytelling?” to build participants' understanding of storytelling.

➤ **The Chaordic Stepping Stones**

Steps are intended to create generative structures, structures that allow a group to create together, without stifling creativity and the emergence of new ideas and new ways of doing things. Each step or section of the conversation is activated by key questions that the group reflects upon and answers. The steps or sections are- Need/ Purpose/ Principals/ People/ Concept/ Limiting Beliefs/ Structure/ Practice/ Harvest. Here is a link to detailed instructions for the process: [The Chaordic Stepping Stones](#)

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