

Guide for Designing and Delivering Concurrent Sessions

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for being part of the **CFC 2011 Conference – A World of Opportunity**. More than 40 concurrent sessions in five theme areas complement the featured speakers and various cultural activities that form the backbone of the conference. Concurrent sessions, selected because of their importance to community foundations and other philanthropic organizations, will engage conference participants in understanding issues and opportunities from local, regional and global perspectives. They will build knowledge and skills and foster connections among peers from across the country and around the world.

CFC has prepared this guide to support the development of concurrent sessions at the CFC 2011 Conference.

The ***Guide for Designing and Delivering Concurrent Sessions*** includes the following sections:

1. Considering the Audience
2. Defining The Objective
3. Focusing on Three Main Points
4. Determining Best Format
5. Blocking Time
6. Building Audience Engagement and Participation
7. Using Audio Visual Aids
8. Working with Co-Presenters

1) CONSIDERING THE AUDIENCE

Consider your audience and their reasons for attending your session. For instance, they may be coming to:

- Learn more about the topic
- Consider different perspectives on the topic
- Understand the latest thinking or approaches on the topic
- Develop specific skills
- Find new ideas or tools to help them in their work
- Exchange ideas and opinions with others working in their field
- Meet or network with others also working in this topic area
- Have ideas or efforts validated
- Be renewed and energized

Keep your audiences “main reasons for attending” at the forefront and design a session with their needs in mind. For instance if a main reason for conference participants attending your session is to exchange ideas and opinions with others, you may want to design a highly interactive session. On the other hand if you think people will come to get latest thinking or different perspectives you may want to consider how best to incorporate a range of perspectives. And for an audience that is coming primarily to get new ideas and tools to help them in their work you may want to design a hands on workshop approach.

2) DEFINING THE OBJECTIVE

Develop a clear objective to describe your session’s desired outcome or result. For instance:

- To better understand the implications of increasing competition from financial institutions
- To explore the benefits and risks of convening groups around the controversial issue of homelessness
- To learn about a foundation’s branding initiative

Take the time to develop and refine the objective to help focus your workshop.

3) FOCUSING ON THREE MAIN POINTS

Conference participants will be energized by the spirit of the conference and ideas emerging from the numerous sessions. After the conference is over they may remember two or three main points from each session.

Anchoring your session around three main points encourages depth over breadth of topic, makes the session more manageable and avoids any tendency to overwhelm delegates with information.

When considering main points you may want to work through the following:

- Generate the ideas
- Keep only those ideas that contribute most to the session objective
- Review the ideas to ensure they are relevant to the target audience
- Consider how the ideas relate to the overall themes of the conference

- Pick the three ideas that have the potential to become the main points
- Consider how these main points interconnect or sequence with one another
- Consider how you can illustrate these main points with concrete examples or stories
- Consider how these points connect with conference Threads and Themes
- Consider these ideas in the context of local, regional and global philanthropy

Because you will not be able to cover everything in the time available, a brief overview at the beginning can help to put your main points in context. Handouts and/or references can provide more information for follow-up.

4) DETERMINING THE BEST FORMAT

You will want to consider what format is suitable for your topic. The Conference Planning Committee has suggested using a variety of different formats. In this way conference participants will experience a range of session types from theatre style presentations to highly interactive workshops. The Committee has also advised that all sessions include some form of audience interaction or participation as a complement to content. Examples of the different formats for concurrent sessions include:

- A moderated panel presentation by experts followed by questions and answers
- A series of short lectures interspersed with audience participation
- A workshop format with people working in groups or clusters on case studies or role play
- A “talk host” format with one or two presenters and other stories or examples coming from the audience

Most rooms will be set up in theatre style to accommodate the numbers. Some rooms will be available for set up with round tables to accommodate smaller numbers and workshop approaches. The section in this guide called **Building Audience Engagement and Participation** can help you think through how best to make your session engaging and interactive whatever the room set up.

5) BLOCKING TIME

Each Concurrent Session is 90 minutes in length. As you consider blocking time within the 90 minutes you may want to consider the following:

- Allow 10 minutes at the beginning for the introduction of Presenters, the Objective and Agenda, and any information or considerations that are important
- If your session is heavily focused on small group work block time up front for audience members to introduce themselves to those sitting adjacent to them and/or invite them to break into cluster groups to share their experience and interest in the topic
- If your session is heavily based on presentations by experts, ensure that you allow a minimum of 20 minutes for audience questions and answers at the end of the presentations or after each presenter allow 10 minutes for audience questions

Above all be realistic about what can be accomplished in a 90 minute block. And stay focused on the three main points.

6) BUILDING AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

There are a number of different ways that you can help the audience engage in your session.

- To make everyone feel welcome and included:
 - Use French as well as English in your welcome and/or if you speak another language say a few words in that language
 - Acknowledge that conference participants come from a range of backgrounds, experiences and from different regions around the world
 - Acknowledge that every perspective is valued
 - A caution. Use humour only in the “best of taste” recognizing that audience members come from different cultural backgrounds and may or may not understand or appreciate your sense of humour

- To make the session more interactive consider the following approaches:
 - Make sure that audience participation activities add value, connect to the objective of the session and are achievable.
 - Clear instructions including expectations are required for any activity. Instructions should be provided verbally and in a written format (as a hand out or by PowerPoint). Allow time to debrief the activity. The more complicated the subject or the task, the more time required for explanations, group work and debriefing.
 - When debriefing small groups or interactive activities, after the first two or three comments invite the audience to contribute only “new” ideas or perspectives.
 - Be prepared to move on in order to get through the agenda. An individual or minority may want to continue to debate a point. You may have to agree to disagree or use the dialogue to illustrate the complexity of the topic.
 - Occasionally an audience member will want to monopolize the conversation. You may need to politely but clearly indicate that its time to hear from others or invite them to meet with you following the session.

7) USING AUDIO VISUAL AIDS

Your room will be set up theatre style unless you are advised otherwise by CFC. Each room will have:

- Standing, table top or lapel microphones
- PowerPoint projector & lap top
- Handouts as requested
- Flip chart and markers

A room monitor will be on site to check and make sure all audio visual equipment is working and a troubleshooter is available on site.

A few points to consider when using audio visual aids:

- If you are too close to the microphone your voice may be muffled. Allow about 6 inches between your voice and the microphone and if you decide to move about the room check with the audience to make sure you can be heard.
- PowerPoint presentations can be overwhelming. If you are using PowerPoint use it to emphasize or illustrate information not as the main tool of your presentation. For legibility purposes, ensure that there are no more than 6 lines per slide and no more than 6 words per line. If you have complex schematics use handouts instead. Use the laptop screen or print the presentation so that you don't have to turn your back to the audience to read or follow the slides. You may also want to ask a co-presenter or room monitor to manage the laptop as you move from slide to slide.

CFC hopes to limit paper handouts to those that are essential, such as exercise instructions, reference lists, etc. To that end please consider alternative ways to distribute additional information including posting PowerPoint presentations and further reference material to the conference web site for conference participants to access later.

While flip charts and markers are available for those who wish to use them, because of the potential for large numbers of people in each session, you may want to consider using the PowerPoint projector to record brainstorming or key ideas so that everyone can see the notes. If you do use flip charts, check site lines and ensure legibility from the back of the room.

8) WORKING WITH CO-PRESENTERS

To ensure a range of experience and perspective most concurrent sessions will have more than one presenter. Some may even have a moderator and up to three panel members.

Whatever your role in the design, development and delivery of your concurrent session there are a few things that you may want to consider when working with co-presenters:

- Most co-presenters will not live in the same community so allow sufficient lead time to work by phone calls and e-mail.
- If you do not know your co-presenters, build in a way to get to know one another's experiences and perspectives on the topic as well as each others strengths and preferences as they relate to speaking and facilitating.
- All co-presenters have busy schedules, allow more lead time than you think is required and expect the unexpected to occur.
- Consider an advance agenda for your calls to focus discussions and clarify expectations. Take notes on points of agreement and responsibilities moving forward.
- Have one person take responsibility for preparing audio visual materials so there is a consistent look.
- Set aside time to practice and fine tune your presentation well in advance of the conference.
- Arrange to meet at the conference before your session to go over any last minute details.
- Enjoy the experience and celebrate your success!