Tips for Moderating Panel Discussions

Advance Preparation

- Decide purpose and agenda
  - Order of panelists and other agenda steps

- Connect with each panelist
  - Agree on:
    - How they will be introduced - make sure you know correct pronunciation
    - Amount of time for initial presentation - get permission to give warnings
    - Questions will be held until the end of the presentation
    - Moderator will call on people, not the panelist
    - Panelist will make a very brief closing comment – agree on amount of time
  - Plan on how the presentation will be delivered: slides, handouts, whatever
  - You don't have to say everything you want to say in your presentation
  - Any specific questions you would like me to ask?
  - Okay if I ask some hard and/or provocative questions?

- Prepare a few questions to ask
  - Prep these in advance or jot them during the presentation – questions that you think most people will have

- Room set up
  - Make sure everyone can see and hear well
  - Consider microphones, visuals, and other equipment and props

- Consider how the session will be recorded, at least themes, or perhaps not at all

Agenda Steps

- Welcome
  - Introduce yourself
  - Purpose of the session - Best to have a specific written statement for everyone to see
  - Format – explain the steps that are anticipated
  - Ground Rules – explain desired behaviors

- Part One – Panel Presentation and Discussion
  - Panelist presentations
  - Questions from the moderator

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    - Panelist questions to each other
    - Audience questions for panelists

- Part Two – Audience Discussion
    - One topic at a time – then questions – then comments
    - No special treatment for panelists

- Wrap up
    - Each panelist makes a very brief closing comment – 30 seconds
    - If time, perhaps invite any other last comments
    - Moderator thanks panelists and thanks audience - Say: “Session Adjourned”

Tips

- Greet people as they arrive – easy going and light – contagious positive attitude
- Assert yourself as in control – convey confidence and credibility
- Convey that we are all here to learn, not argue or persuade
- Restate questions and comments with brevity
- Interject every few questions or comments – say where we are in the conversation
- All good people, some with challenging behaviors – acceptance, tolerance, compassion

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