



Moderator Guide

Format

This event seeks to bring leading scientists, entrepreneurs, investors, business professionals and industry experts together around a common scientific theme and set of opportunities for investment and growth in the region. These independent and inclusive evening events are designed to reflect the diversity of innovative research from across the region, and to meet the needs of individuals and teams looking to commercialize their work.

Moderator Tasks:

Briefly introduce each speaker (~1 minute)

Keep speakers on time (15 minutes each).

Ask audience members to identify themselves when asking a question.

Repeat questions that are unclear.

Keep the discussion on track, interjecting when needed.

Summarize key conclusions at the end of the discussion.

Objectives and Ideology

Think of the audience as your customers

Treat the audience like your customers, they've paid with money and time to come to your panel. Your job is to give them the information they need. You'll have to set the pace, maintain some control, but know when to back off. Remember to serve the audience first and panellists second.

Find out what success looks like

Look at the context of the conference.

Who is attending? (target is a 50/50 mix of scientists and business experts)

What questions might the audience want answered?

What is their level of sophistication? (largely professional and highly educated but in diverse fields)

Preparation

Get to know the panellists and subject

Do Google searches on their name and the topic at hand, and you may be surprised what you find online. The most entertaining panels have a dash of debate, look at an issue from many angles, practical steps to get started, and tell a few jokes. Find where the points of contention are and stir these in.

Develop agenda bulletpoints

Try to establish some general high level bullets to explore around. Don't get

into overly detailed questions, you never want them to be overly rehearsed. Have some back-up questions if no one asks questions.

Bring prepared notes

Print out their bios, points of contention, the high level agenda, and follow up questions you may want to do. Don't present a powerpoint unless it's essential to get your point across.

Have a pre-briefing meeting

Have a quick meeting in person before the panel actually happens. This is good bonding time, be sure to remind them of the general structure, but make sure they're relaxed and going to have fun. Listen carefully to the conversation, as you'll pick up interest points that will help you setup questions while on stage.

Housekeeping

Tables and seats for the panellists will be arranged at the front of the room with water glasses for each.

On Stage

Be a leader and know the impact of body language

The body language of the moderator is often echoed by the panellists (so try sit up straight and avoid fidgeting). Look at the panellist when you ask a question, then look back at the audience (the panellist will follow suit). Unless responding to another panellist, the panellist should be addressing the audience so keep your attention on the customer.

Set the stage by providing context

Give a short overview before introducing the first speaker, giving context but avoiding low value banter about 'how this panel is going to be great'. Give a brief introduction (1 minute) about each speaker before they talk – but save the lengthy bios for pamphlets.

Question time

There will be a 15 minute period for a few specific questions after the first two talks. Ask people asking questions to state their name and company.

The full panel will assemble after all speakers have spoken. At this point you should tee-up the crowd, and the panellists by asking a broad, easy question. Ask for a definition, or talk about the history of the topic, or why this topic is so interesting to the panellists.

Ask about benefits and opportunities

Some moderators let the conversation dive into the weeds too fast, focusing on ratty details, nuts and bolts before prefacing 'why' these things are important in the first place. Guide the panellists to discuss the benefits, and why these things are great in the first place.

Ask about risks, challenge the panel

The audience is tired of industry zealots. We all know the panellists are passionate experts in their field, but you need to ensure a balanced viewpoint is given. Give an example of how it's *not* worked, and then ask the panellists to explore the risks. Give them the opportunity to talk about overcoming pitfalls, your audience won't want to make the same mistakes.

When to Assert Control

Never let panellists pitch

This one really irritates the audience, as they've already spent time and money and don't want to hear vendor pitches. The speakers have been pre-warned not to try to sell or obtain funding from the stage. Cut them off if they do.

...but let them tell a case study

Instead allow panellists to demonstrate their expertise by providing a case study or an example of successful discovery. There is a very thin division between this and a pitch, so it's best to remember that a panel is more like a white paper, not a brochure.

Keep on track

Panels will often get off-track to new discussions, while that's certainly normal, your job is to gently bring it back into context. You'll have to reframe a question or ask for further explanation on the topic.

Redirect panel hogs

Although rare, some panellists will overstep themselves and overpower the other panellists. Find an appropriate time (watch for when they breathe) and interject in a nice way. Compliment their opinion, and pass a question to another panellist.

Interaction gives life to a panel

Listen in

Watch the body language of the panellists, the one who wants to get a word in will be giving you non-verbal indicators, the audience will give off vibes of attention, boredom or agitation. Little disagreements will emerge between panellists, use them to segue to the next panellists, ask them for a different point of view.

Let the panellists talk to each other

Don't over structure your panel by leading into a moderator question and response pattern alone, allow for some healthy banter between the panellists, and let them chatter, jab, and joke among each other.

Know when to move on

Don't let any particular panellists dominate the session over others, interject between their breaths and pose a question to another panellist.

Know when to shut up

Some moderators go too far, and may try to make it more of a game show, insert too much humour, or answer the questions from the audience. Don't go there. Success happens when good conversation starts to take place on its own, and you only need to gently guide.

Field questions from the audience

Always repeat the question from the audience, so everyone can hear and it'll get on any recordings. Summarize long winded questions. Don't let someone try to steal the show by asking too many questions, interject that some discussion can be followed up over drinks. Ensure that the questions are spread from different folks, and only let a single person ask a second question once everyone has had a chance.

Wrapping things up

Ending the panel

Finally, at the end, let the members make a closing statement, for example about what actions they plan to take in the near future. Thank the panel and audience, then let the audience know that they are welcome to move to the Courtyard for dinner and further discussions.

Encourage the discussion move to action

The conversation between the panellists and members should be so engaging that they never want to stop discussing it. Encourage members to exchange business cards, follow up with further discussions, blog about the event, and come to the next Science Capital Meeting.

(derived in part from Jeremiah Owyang, Silicon Valley)