
Moderate to Mobilize:

Leading Conversations that Drive Action



Moderating a panel is a powerful advocacy tool. This guide provides quick, actionable tips to help you lead conversations that are engaging, balanced, and designed to inspire action. Use these strategies to elevate your panelists and move your audience to take action.

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I. Before the Panel

Preparing for a panel discussion requires clarifying your key messages, understanding your audience, and grounding your contributions in evidence and experience.



Know the Purpose

- Define what you want the audience to learn, feel, or do.
- Align your planned questions with the event's goals and intended impact.

Know the Panelists

- Review bios, recent work, and relevant perspectives.
- Draft 1–2 personalized questions per panelist.
- Set expectations early: timing, topics, format, and the no–sales pitch rule.

Prepare the Structure

- **Opening:** 1–2 minutes
- **Panelist Introductions:** 15–20 seconds each
- **Core Questions:** 4–6 total
- **Audience Q&A:** Optional
- **Lightning Round / Takeaways**
- **Closing**

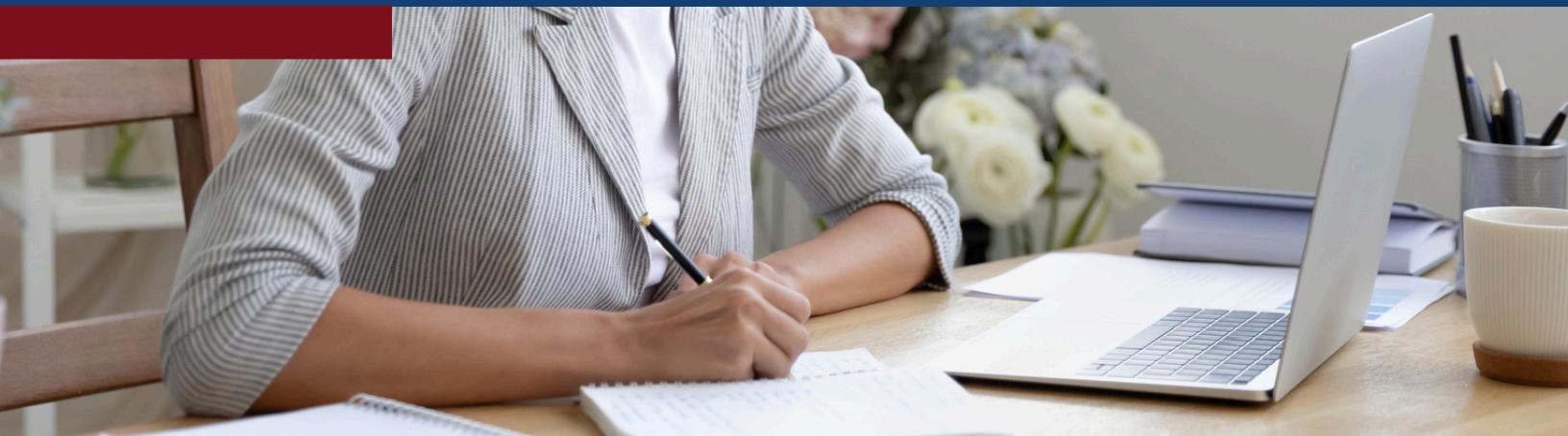
Pro Tip!

Use headphones to reduce background noise, prevent audio feedback, and ensure clear communication – old iPhone headphones with built in mics work great!

II. Opening the Panel

Opening the panel sets the tone—use this moment to frame the topic, establish expectations, and clearly outline the flow of the conversation.

- Welcome the audience and set a clear, purposeful tone.
- Explain why the topic matters now—ground it in urgency or relevance.
- Introduce panelists briefly (avoid full bios).
- Outline the flow: “We’ll begin with..., then shift to..., and close with audience questions.”



III. Running the Conversation

Preparing for a panel discussion requires clarifying your key messages, understanding your audience, and grounding your contributions in evidence and experience.

Ask Great Questions

- Start broad: “What’s the biggest misconception about...?”
- Push deeper: “Can you share a concrete example?”
- Bring in the full panel: “I’d love to hear another perspective on this...”

Pro Tip!

Build in flexibility—panel timelines are guides, not rules, so be ready to adapt if the conversation sparks deeper audience engagement.

III. Running the Conversation (cont.)

Balance the Airtime

- Draw quieter panelists in: “____, what’s your take?”
- Keep long answers on track: “Let me pause you there so we can build on that...”

Keep It Audience-Centered

- Translate jargon.
- Connect insights back to real people, impact, or action.
- Make the conversation about the issue, not the panelists’ résumés

Manage Energy & Flow

- Vary question styles: data, story, solution, policy, or lived experience.
- Use transitions: “Building on that...”, or “From another angle...”
- Watch the clock like a hawk.

Pro Tip!

Act as a conductor, not a participant—keep responses focused, make smooth transitions between speakers, and gently steer the conversation back on track when it drifts.

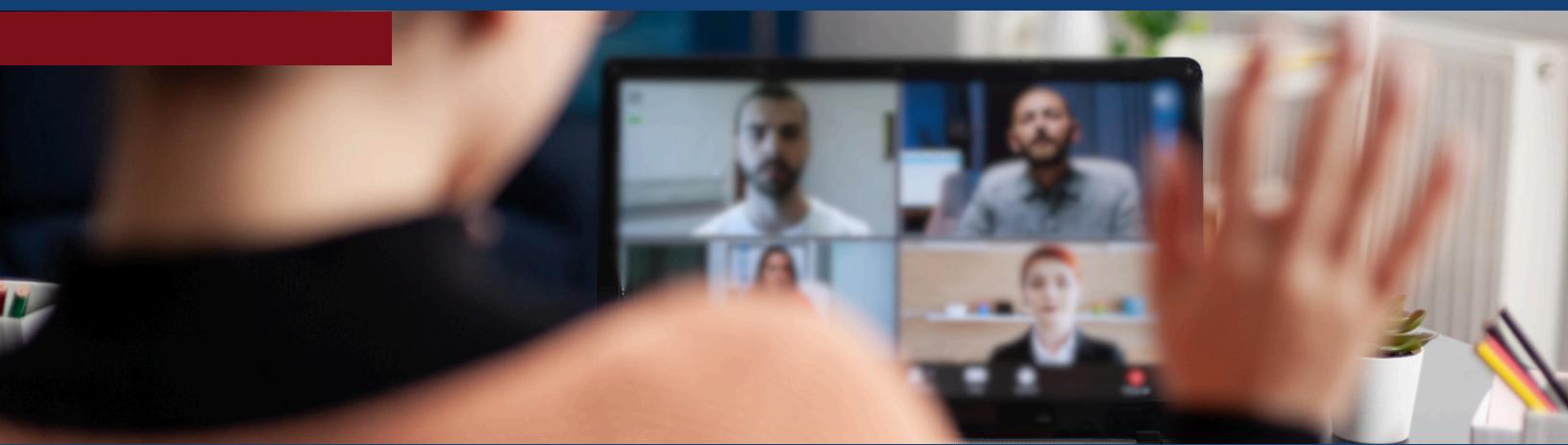
IV. Handling Q&A

When handling Q&A, listen carefully, respond concisely, and guide the conversation to ensure questions remain respectful, relevant, and aligned with the panel’s goals.

- Set expectations: “Please keep questions brief—questions, not comments.”
- Repeat questions for clarity and accessibility.
- Redirect if needed: “Let’s stay focused on our topic, but I’m happy to follow up later.”
- Ensure distribution—avoid sending every question to the same person.

V. Closing Strong

Closing strong means reinforcing the key takeaways, thanking panelists and participants, and leaving the audience with a clear next step or call to action.



- Ask panelists for a one-sentence takeaway or call to action.
- Summarize 2–3 key insights for the audience.
- Thank panelists and participants.
- End on time—or early.

VI. Moderator Best Practices

A strong moderator stays neutral, manages time effectively, elevates diverse perspectives, and keeps the discussion focused on the panel's purpose and audience.

- Stay neutral, engaged, and audience-focused.
- Keep your own remarks concise.
- Use light, inclusive humor only when appropriate.
- Track body language—both on the panel and in the room.
- Avoid tangents or self-promotion.
- Remember: Your job is to guide the conversation, not star in it!