

PART 9: Do's, Don'ts, and Pro Tips

Do's

- Use your imagination and create opportunities for the audience to use their imaginations too.
- Encourage diverse input during the creation phase of your event.
- Think about how time of day, event length, location, or technical components impact actual and perceived levels of accessibility.
- Incorporate physicality and/or audience interaction into your event.
- Test the space. Does the AV work? Can the audience see everything?

Don'ts

- Use a text-driven PowerPoint and read to your audience.
- Assume your audience knows less than you.
- Lecture or talk *at* your audience; talk *with* them.
- Skimp on how much time it takes to build rapport and trust with event partners, speakers, or audiences.
- Keep doing the same thing expecting different results.

Pro Tips

❖ **The Moderator or, “Ten Thoughts I Thunked” by Kevin Armstrong**

Longtime Spirit & Place *Public Conversation* moderator created this top ten list to help you plan a well-moderator discussion.

- 1. The moderator's principal role is to allow each panelist to be his or her best self.**
- 2. If at all possible, talk individually with the panelists before the event and talk together with the group for at least an hour before the presentation.** I usually provide the first question to the panelists before the event so they can hear one another's answers and get a feel for one another's tone and perspective.
- 3. Avoid formal introductions.** A printed program may already provide a biographical sketch. And even in the absence of printed material, take no more than 90 seconds to introduce the panelists. The audience has come to hear from the participants, not about them.
- 4. Stand up for the audience and involve them.** If there is a Q & A period, remind the audience to ask questions rather than make speeches. Somewhere between 25–30% of the conversation should involve the audience. Anymore and they run out of good questions. Any less and they feel sidelined. If the audience can't hear the question, repeat it. If the audience or panelists don't understand the question, rephrase it.

5. **Be neutral and objective.** It's important to be provocative but if you have a dog in the fight, you should be on the panel.
6. **Be informed and prepared.** You should have a general understanding of the subject in order to create a logical flow to the conversation. Have a set of possible questions, quotes, and conversation starters. Good answers generally arise from good questions. Then, be prepared to abandon them all if the conversation takes an interesting turn.
7. **Ask the question everyone has on his or her mind but is not asking.** If a panelist has been in the news, or is notable for a particular belief or practice, get it out on the table early so you can move on.
8. **Once you've asked a question, look at the audience and look at the other panelists.** The panelist shouldn't be talking to you but to the audience and to any other panelists.
9. **Be attentive to three things at once:** The conversation that is going on. Where the panelists seem to be taking the conversation. How the audience is responding.
10. **Say Thank you.** To the panelists. To the audience. To your sponsors.

❖ **Additional Tips from Spirit & Place**

- **Let your audience know what the goals of the event are.**
- **If the topic is contentious, establish ground rules.** Reinforce for the speakers and audience members the importance of respectful disagreement.
- **Prepare cutoff phrases ahead of time.** Example: If a panelist isn't giving enough time for others to speak, you can say, "You have a great point there, but I think we need to hear from _____ now." Or, when they take a breath, interject with, "Thank you for that perspective. I'm curious to hear what _____ might think."
- **Good follow-up questions are open-ended and can be used to ...**
 - Add clarification: What did you mean by that? Could you elaborate? Can you give an example?
 - Bring in new perspectives: X brings up an interesting point. What do the rest of you think?
 - Bridge connections between ideas: John said X and Mary said Y. Do their ideas have anything in common?
 - Dig deeper: Let's explore that from another angle. Can you unpack that point a little more? I'm fascinated by that concept you just brought up, do you want to dig into it a bit more?
- **Close with a call to action.** Challenge your audience to stay engaged.