

Moderator's Guide

The Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute



Introduction

Moderators play a special role in public presentations. Often the success of a session hinges on the moderator's ability to handle it smoothly. While the work put into developing a session will determine its value, ***the professional polish a moderator provides in conducting the session greatly reinforces the content and message.*** This guide is for both new and experienced moderators. New moderators learn how to prepare for a session, and experienced moderators gain tips for anticipating and handling difficult or unexpected situations.

Many moderators also play a role as a speaker. If this is the case, the moderator should introduce him or herself as both at the start of a session to avoid confusing the audience.

Guidelines

Preparing Your Speakers

The moderator must prepare all speakers for the session, so that they understand clearly what is expected of them. Moderators must speak individually with each speaker about his or her presentation in detail in order to understand how one presentation coordinates with the others. It is important for the moderator to let each speaker know what other speakers in the session are talking about.

While written correspondence is good for confirming details, telephone conversations are most effective for resolving questions. Well-prepared moderators will talk with speakers at least twice during the planning process. Sometimes the moderator completes the planning stage with a conference call among all speakers.

RMLUI will inform speakers of the date, time, and location of the public presentation. Even if some other person is sending the speakers this information, a considerate moderator will communicate this material as well to make certain it is received and understood. From the first, it is important for moderators to be precise and firm with speakers about the amount of time allocated to their presentations. While most speakers will try to comply with the time limits, few are aware of their pace when actually presenting. Therefore, moderators need to have a technique in mind for keeping the session on schedule. ***(some moderators have been known to use alarm clocks and stop watches!)***

Introducing Speakers

Moderators prepare the audience to listen by first introducing the session and its purpose. Next, he/she introduces all speakers. Moderators will be provided with speaker biographies. Moderators should attempt to make all introductions similar. Introductions should be informative but brief, warm but professional. Like most things, great

introductions are an art form, so it's best to play safe and avoid using humor that may backfire

Time Schedule for Sessions

All sessions must have time for discussion. Most sessions are 1 hour and 15 minutes, so the presentations should take 45-55 minutes and the discussion 15-25 minutes. As good as a presentation may be, audiences become frustrated and lose concentration if they are not permitted to interact with presenters. The 15 minutes of discussion can be broken up throughout the session. However, if this method is chosen, the moderator needs to keep time carefully to accommodate both speakers and audience.

When a Speaker Runs Over Time

Occasionally speakers will talk beyond the time limits of their presentations. Quite obviously, it is discourteous to other speakers and creates problems for the entire session schedule. If the problem is severe enough it may affect the next session as well. Finding a diplomatic way of ending an overly long presentation is a challenge. Some tips may help:

- *Alert Speakers to Time Limits*
During the planning stage, alert speakers to the fact that all time limits will be strictly observed. If a speaker has problems condensing information, offer to review the presentation and suggest ways it can be shortened.
- *Remind Speakers*
Before the session begins, remind speakers of their time limits; tell them clearly that you will signal them as they come to the end of their time.
- *Techniques for Alerting:*
One or two minutes before the end of the talk (particularly if the talk does not seem to be winding down), call "time" softly to the speaker, pass him/her a slip with the remaining time written on it, or tap a pencil
- *Ending the Presentation:*
Use other techniques to end the presentation. Standing, walking toward the speaker, and even putting a hand over the microphone are trusty, (if somewhat obtrusive) techniques. Moderators should use approaches that are comfortable to them.
- *Use Appropriate Measures*
When a speaker is a flagrant violator of the time, it is appropriate to tell him/her (after all do future audiences have to suffer?). After the session, the moderator should tell the speaker in private about the problem, calmly, firmly, and politely (although the moderator may feel none of above at the time).

Handling Questions

We recommend that the moderator pass out question forms to the audience. The moderator will then ask someone to circulate through the audience and collect the questions and pass them to the moderator. This helps make the Q&A more focused so that more questions can be answered. In addition, it assures that all questions will be recorded on tape. You will find question forms in the Speaker Ready Room (see below). Questions may also be asked from the floor. If you use this method, the moderator needs to repeat the question for the entire audience to hear. Repeating the questions is

essential for taping. If questions seem unfocused or unclear, the moderator may wish to rephrase them for the speaker. Occasionally, an audience member is only trying to make a point. In that case, she/he isn't asking a question and no response is necessary. Remember, the moderator needs to be as firm with the audience as with speakers in terms of time limits. The moderator should warn the audience when a session is drawing to a close and close the session promptly if another session is scheduled after it. The moderator can invite the audience to follow up with personal questions.

Closing Remarks

Moderators can conclude a session with a short thank you to all the speakers. If discussion was cut short, an invitation is extended to the audience to adjourn to a reception room or hallway, where additional discussion can take place. It is important that you leave the room promptly when another session is scheduled immediately after yours.

Speaker Ready Room

A special room is set aside for speakers at the conference. Look in the final conference program (distributed at the event) for the location of this room. It is also a convenient place to meet with the other speakers in your session to rehearse.