



Tips for Success:

The Panel Discussion

As an advocate for agriculture, you play a key role in shaping the conversation around modern agriculture and sharing your role in sustainably providing a food-secure world. Today, more than ever, we need your voice to bring perspective to conversations and share how innovation in agriculture can help overcome the enormous challenges we're facing: a changing climate, limited natural resources and a growing population. By engaging in dialogue, you can share the story of modern ag and how the work you do every day serves to meet a variety of challenges.

Panels are a great opportunity to share your passion and story around modern ag through thought-provoking discussions. Typically, a panel is a live discussion among a group of pre-selected panelists who share expertise for a specific topic even while they may represent diverse opinions.

Panels offer you a seat at the table for important conversations in the agriculture industry and beyond. Throughout this guide, you will find tips for success when participating in, moderating, and organizing a panel discussion.

Panel Participant

Panel Moderator

Panel Organizer

Panel *Participant*

Participating on a panel is a great way to tell your story in a conversational setting. The questions and thought starters below are designed to help you prepare for your event and make sure your message hits the mark.

Pre-event

Research

- // Dig into the topic of the panel. Learn what you can about the theme of the event. Ask yourself:
 - // Am I knowledgeable about this topic?
 - // Is this something I am passionate about?
 - // Is this an opportunity to help share the story of modern agriculture?

Who is organizing/sponsoring the event?

- // Solicit feedback and insight from others (both internal & external) who may be familiar with the sponsoring organization. What is their perspective on modern agriculture?

Who is the audience?

- // Size? Background? Perspectives?

Who are the other panelists and moderator?

- // Research backgrounds and positions.

Panel Prep

- // Participate in pre-event panel call.
- // Brush up on hot topics and current events in your industry.
- // Ask if media outlets will be invited. If yes, get a list. You may want to check with others on experience with those journalists.
- // Panels are designed to showcase diverse perspectives. Be prepared to advocate for your position. Site examples and share personal stories.

Your Message

- // Since panels include multiple speakers and perspectives and there is limited time to make an impression, ask yourself these questions as you prepare:
 - // What are the top three points I would like my audience to learn?
 - // What is my call-to-action for the audience?
 - // How can I use a personal story or a case study to bring my points to life?
 - // Are there industry talking points available on topics that may come up?

Event

Final Prep

- /// Attend any last-minute meetings with fellow panelists and moderator.
- /// Review your key messages.
- /// Arrange for someone to capture photos of you on stage.
- /// Consider how you might share your experience on social media.

On Stage

- /// Be respectful:
 - // Keep calm, even in heated discussions. Remember the idea of a panel is to showcase a variety of opinions.
 - // Find opportunities to contribute, but don't compete for time or attention.
- /// Be aware of how the moderator is managing response time and conversation flow.
- /// Refer back to your top three messages in your discussion.
- /// Look for openings in the discussion to jump in.
- /// Play off comments from fellow panelists, earlier sessions and current events.
- /// Answering questions:
 - // If you didn't hear or understand the question, ask the individual to repeat it before answering.
 - // If asked a question you don't know the answer to or are uncomfortable answering, bridge back to the topic you are prepared to discuss.
- /// Sit up straight, staying poised and professional – even when you're not speaking.



Attend other sessions and networking opportunities and have your business card handy. Remember you are always “on stage” while at the event.



Panel Moderator

Strong moderators are adept listeners and savvy facilitators who are well-prepared and agile. The panelist stands in the spotlight, while the [moderator operates the spotlight](#), carefully guiding the discussion, building connections between points, and keeping track of time.

Pre-event

Organize

- // Ask the organizer about your role and responsibilities, desired panel style and tone, and dress code.
- // If you are asked to help choose the panelists, refer to Panel Organizer for details on selecting panelists.
- // As the moderator, you may be asked to organize or facilitate the panel call.

Research

- // Learn as much as you can about the panelists' career paths, personal stories and passions, and even quotes from recent interviews or talks. Understand what makes them valuable experts to participate in this dialogue.

(Over) Prepare

- // Develop questions to guide the panel discussion. Use recommendations from [Harvard Business Review](#).
- // When writing questions, ask yourself:
 - // What will the audience be interested in?
 - // Why is this panelist a part of the discussion, and what perspective can they add?
- // Practice improvising. If the conversation takes an unexpected turn, be ready to diverge from your prepared list or bring the conversation back.
- // Consider how you will manage the clock and ensure equal participation of all panelists.
- // When you arrive, introduce yourself to the panel organizer and panelists, check that A/V equipment is functioning, and familiarize yourself with the stage setup.



How can I make this question open-ended to go beyond a “yes” or “no” response?

- // “Could you talk a little about...”
- // “Why is this so important right now?”
- // “What is it that people should know about this?”

Event

Engage

- /// Briefly introduce yourself and the panelists and state the purpose of the session before opening with an engaging first question.
- /// Grab the audience's attention with a hook that answers the question: Why is this topic important at this moment?
- /// Consider additional ways to keep the audience engaged such as including a [free polling app](#) for the audience to download to collect real-time feedback on topics during the discussion or Q&A, if applicable. Ensure your on-site AV team would be able to handle the request.

Facilitate

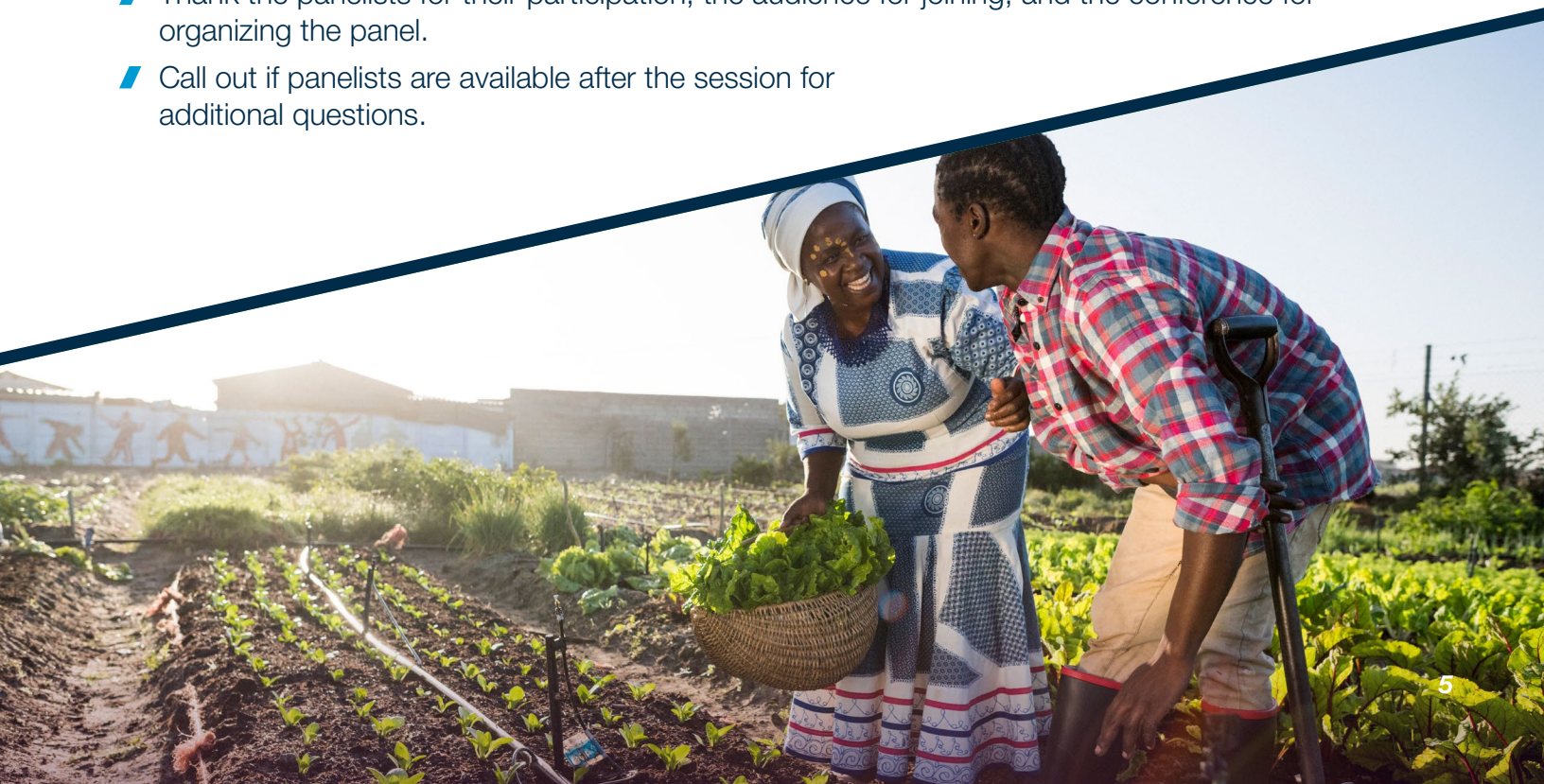
- /// Support the conversation flow by:
 - // Asking follow-up questions.
 - // Encouraging one panelist to comment on another panelist's statement.
 - // Building bridges between ideas to bring the audience along with you.
 - // Clearly transitioning between topics and carefully pacing the discussion.

Manage

- /// Track time. If a panelist goes off-topic, help bring them back to the topic and transition into a question for another panelist.
- /// Leave enough time for audience Q&A. Guide by directing questions to specific panelists.

Conclude

- /// Briefly summarize key points and learnings.
- /// Thank the panelists for their participation, the audience for joining, and the conference for organizing the panel.
- /// Call out if panelists are available after the session for additional questions.



Panel Organizer

While there is no cookie-cutter approach to successfully organizing a panel, the tips below will help ensure you're preparing and delivering an engaging discussion.

Pre-event

Plan with Purpose

- // Define a theme or common goal you want all the panelists to discuss.
 - // What do you want the audience to get out of this discussion?
 - // What do you want them to act on?
- // If organizing a panel that is part of a larger conference, pick a theme that aligns with the overall event.
- // Draft a panel description and title to share with potential panelists/moderator. Ask for their input once all parties are confirmed.

Pick the Right People

- // Identify and invite 3 – 4 panelists with perspective, personality and credibility.
 - // The best panelists don't have to agree but should be respectful enough to have a healthy and robust conversation.
- // Recruit a trusted voice as a moderator who can effectively manage time, engage each panelist, and keep the conversation moving.

Prioritize Activities

- // With a clear objective and the right people onboard, here's a checklist of key planning priorities:
 - // Create a timeline. Start planning 2-3 months in advance or more.
 - // Confirm location, date, and time with the conference organizer or event staff.
 - // Collect the panelists/moderator's bios and headshots for promotional use.
 - // Finalize the panel description and title. Send to the organization or event staff for promotion.
 - // Confirm if the discussion will be recorded and/or livestreamed on social media. If livestreaming, be sure to promote online to encourage participation.
 - // Organize a panel call with moderator and panelists.



Promotion

- /// *Marketing:* advertise online, on social channels, in newsletters, etc. If working with an organization, ask what their promotion plan includes.
- /// *Media:* if inviting media, send all event details including panelists/moderator bios and headshots. Ensure you've arranged time for the panelists/moderator to be available after the discussion should the reporter want to speak with the group.

Event

- /// Take notes.
- /// Capture photos.
- /// Engage on social media. Consider live-tweeting using the conference hashtag and Twitter handle.



[Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\) Endorsement Guidelines:](#)

Any panelists compensated for their participation or reimbursed for their travel must be disclosed. Please review the FTC guidelines.



Your work is not done yet!

After the event:

- /// Send thank you notes.
- /// Obtain recording of panel discussion, if possible.
- /// Ask for feedback from selected individuals, if desired.
 - // Organizer/moderator: share survey results, if applicable.
 - // Moderator/participant: provide feedback to the panel organizer to help shape future discussions.
- /// Reflect on your experience. What did you do well? What could you improve?

Panel Call

Pending availability, most conferences will organize a pre-panel call to introduce panelists to one another and provide details on the panel. Establish beforehand if the organizer or moderator will lead the call. If a call is unable to happen, confirm with the event organizers if they will be sending all details via e-mail and ensure you arrange a time on site prior to your panel discussion to connect and review details.

During the call, clearly communicate:

- /// How panelists will be introduced and how long the introduction will be. Avoid too much time for introductions. Details should be communicated prior to the event or available in an event program.
- /// If panelists will be given an opportunity for an opening or closing statement.
- /// Role of panelists and flow of questions—will panelists get individual questions or will the conversation build off each response? Will questions be solicited from the audience?
- /// How will the moderator signal to panelists that they are going over time?
- /// Questions or topic areas that the panel will focus on.
- /// If serving as the moderator of the panel, confirm with the panelists if there are any questions they would like to be asked, or any questions they would prefer not to answer.
- /// Find out if panelists are willing to stay after the panel to further discuss topics with the audience or any media (if applicable).
- /// The panel flow and length. An hour-long panel allows enough time for conversation and Q&A from the audience.
- /// Whether AV technology is available, and if there will be an accompanying PowerPoint presentation.
- /// The dress code.
- /// If organizing the panel, send out an email summarizing notes from the panel call discussion.



Social Media

Before

- Use social media platforms to research panelists/moderator and organizations.
- Connect with fellow panelists and/or conference organizers.
- Let your social networks know you will be speaking at an event and encourage people to attend by sharing a short-form post that includes the event hashtag.



During

- Take photos and share them on social media with a quick sentence about your participation in the event. Tag other participants.
- Posts might include quotes or themes from a session that you found interesting at the event.
- Consider live-tweeting sessions of interest to you and using the conference hashtag and Twitter handle.



After

- Share your experience in a long-form LinkedIn article or blog post.
- Connect with people you met at the event.
- Plug into the social conversation about the event and/or topic.

