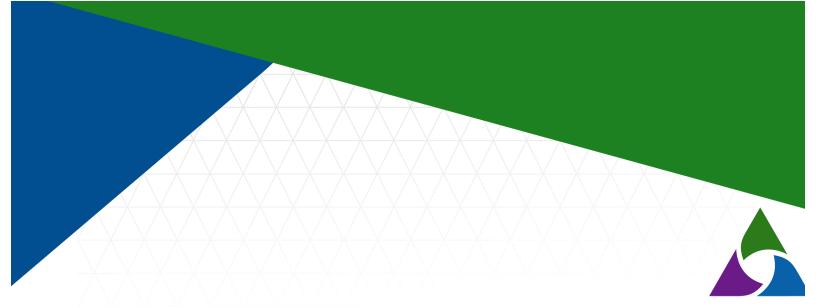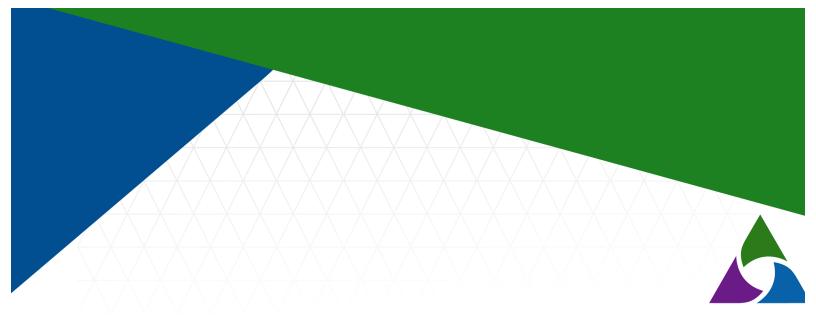# Hosting a Panel Discussion

An alternative to a single guest speaker is a panel discussion. Generally the purpose is to exchange ideas and to initiate interaction in a way that is more engaging to the audience. However, there is a big difference between an engaging panel and one that fails to connect to your audience! Below are some suggestions to make your panel discussion highly experiential and successful.

1. **Invite panelists** with enough advance notice to plan their remarks and comfortably have time to ask questions and formulate details for delivery. This should be at least eight weeks before the event.

2. **Send a reminder** out a month before the event with an agenda so that the panelists know where they fit into the larger program. Also include some general information and expectations.

   a. Target audience (age, gender, career area, shared interests, etc.)

   b. Number of attendees expected

   c. Technical needs if any

   d. Length of presentation and method for helping them stay on time

   e. A list of expected questions (suggestions only)

   f. Slides if needed (no more than 1 for every minute so a 10 minute slideshow should have no more than 10 slides including the intro and concluding slides)

3. **Choose panel members carefully.** The optimum number of panelists is 3-4 and there should be diversity among panel guests in terms of race, gender, and types of expertise. Allow panelists to share with you other demographic or ability elements they want to share as part of being a successful role model.

4. **Choose a moderator** who is not on the panel. The role of the moderator includes:

    a. Introducing each panelist (name tents are optional but a good idea if possible)

    b. Sitting in the middle of the panelists (not standing at a podium) to see them and the audience better and be in a better position to address each panelist

    c. Providing a 2-3 sentence introduction for each panelist (although longer bios may be made available to the audience electronically or in the printed program)

    d. Launching the discussion with simple, prepared questions

    e. Encouraging responses and more in-depth perspectives from the panelists

    f. Encouraging dialogue between the panelists

    g. Rephrasing answers to encourage more discussion

    h. Keeping the panel discussion moving at an appropriate pace

    i. Allowing questions from the audience throughout the panel presentation not just at the end (unless you have one audience member who dominates the event.)

    j. Summarizing what has been said throughout the discussion

5. If you are going to include PPT slides, **keep slides to a minimum** and include them in a single PPT to avoid tech breaks.

6. For better engagement with the audience, **consider a more conversational set-up**. Instead of panelists being hidden behind a long table, give them tall stools or regular chairs arranged in a slight semi-circle. Water and/or notes for the panelists can be placed on a low coffee table or side table between the seats.

7. It is important for the audience to be able to see and hear the panelists so make sure there is enough lighting on the panelists and that each panelist has access to a **microphone**.

8. **Time keeping** is important but may be delegated to someone in the back of the room who can hold up signs to indicate to the panelists that their time is running out.

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2

9. **Consider how best to end the discussion**. If possible, provide time for informal Q and A with a reception or social event or encourage the discussion to continue in person or online. At the very least, provide contact information for the panelists so that audience members can continue the discussion individually.

10. **Consider the impact of social media**. Audience members may be tweeting, recording, or photographing the event.

11. **Send thank you notes** to panelists within a few days of the event.

Learn more

www.napequity.org/resources/role-models

About NAPE

NAPE is a consortium of state agencies and affiliates who have joined forces to work collaboratively to promote equity in education and workforce development, including career and technical education and STEM. NAPE's membership is committed to the creation of equitable classrooms and workplaces where there are no barriers to opportunities. NAPE's annual program of work includes advocacy at the federal level, federal policy analysis, information and resource sharing, curriculum development, research, and professional development. NAPE provides intensive assistance on a contractual basis to state and local education agencies to assist them in implementing research-based strategies to increase the participation and completion of students pursuing nontraditional career preparation.

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3