

# Panel Session Guide

A panel discussion features 3–5 people with contrasting or complementary perspectives, moderated by a chair, with dedicated time for audience participation. Brief opening remarks set the stage for robust dialogue.



**Skip the slides.** Formal presentations, lectures, and slide decks are not recommended for this format. Most session time should be unscripted conversation among panelists.

## SESSION FORMAT

✓ Brief opening remarks

✓ Unscripted dialogue

✓ Audience Q&A

✗ Formal presentations

✗ Slide decks (ok, but not rec.)

## CHAIR RESPONSIBILITIES

### The chair is the session's facilitator — not a co-presenter

- Briefly introduce the overall panel topic and each panelist.
- Pose discussion questions to keep the conversation moving
- Moderate audience participation
- Start and end the session on time
- Step in with a bridging question when a panelist runs long, so all voices get equal time.

## SUGGESTED TIME STRUCTURE (60-MINUTE SESSION)

### Before • **Coordinate in Advance**

Before the conference, the chair and panelists align on session flow, time allocation, key points, and discussion questions.

- Review how speakers want to be introduced. Verify the phonetic pronunciation of names.

- Clarify exact time limits for individual remarks to avoid any one speaker dominating the panel.
  - Share main arguments so the chair can map out connections, highlight differing perspectives, and ensure topics aren't redundantly repeated.
  - Determine how audience questions will be handled. Will the chair seed the first questions or will the floor be opened immediately?
- 10 min • **Arrive Early**  
Arrive 5–10 minutes early to settle in at the head table and connect with the other panelists. All rooms will be equipped with AV (projector, screen, laptop, and a microphone). If slides/visual aids are essential, bring them on a USB drive, but we challenge you to “Ditch the Deck.” Typically, panels are more engaging without slides.
- 0–10 min • **Introductions & Opening Remarks**  
Chair introduces the panel; each panelist offers brief framing comments.
- 10–40 min • **Panelist Dialogue**  
Unscripted discussion among panelists, facilitated by the chair. This is the heart of the session. Audience Q&A may also be introduced in this section if desired.
- 40–55 min • **Audience Participation**  
Open the floor for questions and comments. Reserve at least 15 minutes.
- 55–60 min • **Closing**  
Chair wraps up; panelists offer brief final thoughts if time allows.

## TIPS FOR A GREAT PANEL

### Plan, but stay loose

Coordinate topics and questions beforehand but leave room for unexpected directions. The best panels feel like a real conversation.

### Listen to each other

Respond to what your fellow panelists say, not just your prepared talking points.

### Keep it brief up front

Aim for 2-3 minutes per panelist at most for opening remarks.

### Invite in the audience

Don't treat Q&A as an afterthought. Frame Q&A as part of the session early on. Actively invite quieter voices.

### Upload resources to Whova

After the speaker center opens, upload materials for attendees to access in the Whova app. Let the audience know they're available.

### Keep the connection going

Some of the best connections made at ILA happen in the hallway right after a great panel. Exchange cards and keep the dialogue going.