

## **CPRA Guidelines and Recommendations for Effectively Moderating Panel Discussions**

### General:

Panel Discussions provide an informative, cost-effective and often entertaining forum for disseminating information, providing divergent viewpoints, or reaching consensus on any number of topics of interest to Public Safety communications professionals.

Panel Discussions are relatively easy to orchestrate, but the quality of such presentations can be significantly enhanced if Moderators fully understand and fulfill their assigned role in making each program a success.

In most cases, the panel should consist of no more than 4 “subject matter experts” selected and invited by the Moderator to participate. Almost every one of CPRA’s 500+ members is well-versed in one or more disciplines, technical and operational, and potential panelists can be selected from this vast pool of active and commercial members. Most are flattered when asked to sit on a panel, as it is testimony to their professional contributions and knowledge, and their value to the chapter.

Regardless of how much the Moderator might know about the panel’s assigned topic, he/she should defer to the chosen panelists. However, the Moderator’s personal knowledge can be put to good use in framing questions, encouraging discussion, summarizing important points and otherwise contributing to the exchange of information.

It is important that the Moderator’s presence remain separate and distinct from that of the panel, in that it is the Moderator to whom the panelists and audience will look for guidance, direction and control. The Moderator is responsible for controlling the flow of discourse and keeping it moving in a meaningful direction.

Toward that end, the following guidelines, techniques and recommendations are intended to help CPRA’s Moderators simplify the task, improve performance and provide the necessary environment for a successful, meaningful and well-received Panel Discussion.

### Before the Event:

Discuss the assigned topic with the President-elect, and narrow or expand the subject to conform with the time allotted for the Panel Discussion. For example, an assigned topic of “Implementing Regional Public Safety Communications Systems” might be too broad, and could be improved by limiting the discussion to one specific aspect, such as “Successful Alternatives to Financing Regional Communications Systems.”

Choose panelists carefully, based on what each might contribute to the discussion. Some might provide excellent historical perspective, while others might possess expertise in legal issues or economic considerations.

The Moderator should freely discuss any concerns with the President-elect, as it is this chapter officer who is ultimately accountable for the various aspects of each month's meeting. The President-elect is responsible for providing the Moderator with the guidance and tools necessary to ensure the success of the Panel Discussion.

Discuss the assigned topic with the panelists, individually or collectively. Determine, with their input, where the discussion should begin and end, and what should be the parameters. Are there significant differences of opinion? Should these differences be highlighted as part of the discussion, or would they only serve to detract from the goal of the discussion?

Establish clear, consistent rules for the conduct of the panel:

- Commercial announcements are not permitted. Any vendor-specific literature should be made available only after the session.
- Panels should stay on-topic, recognizing that the subject matter was chosen because of its perceived broad interest to CPRA members.
- Panelists should not interrupt others on the panel, but should instead withhold comment until recognized by the Moderator.
- Panelists should defer back to the Moderator. Suggesting to the moderator that another panelist might better address a specific point or question is permissible, but a panelist should not directly hand-off to another member of the panel.

Obtain brief professional biographies of the panelists, concentrating on experience/education/knowledge of the discussion topic.

Prepare open-ended questions for each panelist (3x5 cards work well for this), but don't feel obligated to use all questions. The questions should be arranged in a logical order to ensure that those most important will be addressed at appropriate times. Depending on the format of the Panel Discussion, the questions can also be used if the discussion begins to falter before the allotted time is exhausted.

### Day of Event

Review the assembly room, accommodations and electronic equipment.

Greet panelists as they arrive and ascertain if any last minute needs or concerns must be addressed.

### The Panel Discussion

The Moderator will likely be introduced by the Chapter President or designee.

At the lectern, the Moderator will invite the panelists as a group to take their places at the head table. Individual name cards may or may not have been prepared.

While the panelists are assembling, the Moderator should briefly introduce him or herself, perhaps providing a little more in-depth information than was given earlier during self introductions (especially if relevant to the day's topic).

The Moderator should remain standing at the lectern throughout (unless physically prohibitive).

Before introducing the panel, provide a brief (2-3 minute) outline of the topic, its importance, considerations, ramifications and any alternatives, if appropriate. At the conclusion of the topic summary, introduce the panelists and their individual credentials.

Let the audience know in advance that questions will be entertained at the conclusion of the discussion (unless a different format is used). Allow sufficient time for Q & A.

Make note of the starting time, and the time remaining before the panel discussion is scheduled to conclude and give way to questions and answers. Adhere to the schedule.

Direct an opening question to the panel, or one panelist, and/or invite each, in turn, to respond or make an opening statement.

Remain neutral and make certain that different points of view are expressed. Create "space" for all opinions.

Organize the conclusion, and adhere to it as much as possible, particularly if a spirited exchange is underway when the allotted time is nearly exhausted.

Thank each panelist by name, and thank the audience for being present and participating, if appropriate. Acknowledge any applause.

Return the floor to the Chapter President or designee, and depart from the lectern.

(moderator)