Breakout Session Format & Presentation Guide

“Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I’ll remember; involve me and I’ll understand”
- Chinese proverb

The 18th Microcredit Summit will help illustrate the best practices and innovations in strategies, partnerships, products and programs that help end extreme poverty by empowering people to seize opportunity and resist vulnerability. We invite you to use this as a platform to share how you are using microfinance and financial inclusion to that facilitate movement out of poverty.

We will create an effective learning environment with innovative and engaging plenaries, break-out sessions, trainings, and more—and we need your help to make it happen.

With this challenge in mind, use this Format Guide to develop your breakout session and organize your presentation. As one of the premiere conferences in the sector, we have found that the format of a session is key to creating an engaging learning agenda and a valuable experience to attendees.

Check out Quick Tips for ideas on how to make your presentation interactive and attractive to participants and Formats for Breakout Sessions for attention-grabbing and engaging Summit session ideas that have been molded to fit our 90 minute sessions.

If you have any questions or to provide other ideas of formats to add to the guide, contact us at summits@microcreditsummit.org.

Thank you for your interest and we look forward to having you join us at this year’s 18th Microcredit Summit!

The Microcredit Summit Campaign Secretariat
Quick Tips

1. **Prepare ahead of time**
   Take the time to prepare for your presentation! Attendees will come from all over the world to hear you speak, so make sure that you are prepared and make the right choices to fit your presentation. Being prepared and practicing your presentation will help you speak with conviction and develop strong arguments making you a better presenter. This will make for better body language and eye contact and ultimately allow you to step out of your comfort zone during your presentation.

2. **Know your audience**
   Tailor the content of your session to your audience. What are you (or the participants) seeking to achieve? Keep it simple but don’t dumb it down. Attendees will apologize for not understanding a talk but will want an apology for a talk that’s too basic. Knowing your audience will help you know how to tease your presentation and get the audience curious.

3. **Identify the “Question”**
   Be sure to define the central question you are going to answer or theme of the debate you are trying to frame. Think Big Picture first, then the details. Remember, your goal is to empower, not overpower. Establish and agree on a measurable output or result that represents the aim, and then work back from there in thinking how to word your main point. While it’s always good to be proactive, make sure you maintain the civility of the debate or question posed.

4. **Give the back story**
   Remember, not all the attendees will understand how your central question originated or how the issue arose. Be sure to tell the back story so they understand the challenges and importance of the issue. Be sure to tell the story in chronological order. This makes it easier to comprehend. Storytelling is inspiring, captures the audience, and makes them want to participate and get involved. It answers the question, “Why do the attendees need to know this?”

5. **Create a roadmap**
   Outline the key understandings or skills you wish to convey in your presentation, with each one building on the previous one. While it is important that you know where you are going, it is just as critical that your participants know this, as well. In your talk, slides, and hand-outs, use this “roadmap” to help both you and your participants stay focused. A visual representation is very helpful for most participants. This will also help you and the other speakers stay on time and allow for a more coordinated discussion.

6. **Put it into context**
   Add context to your presentation to make it meaningful. Animations, photos, data visualizations, charts, infographics, and video clips all play a critical role in communicating meaning by converting data into narrative. Using fewer words and more visuals will help participants digest and contextualize data. However, you need to make sure that you clearly identify the connections and the meaning behind the numbers and the data so they can fully capture the essence of the information.
7. Outline the takeaways
Ask yourself this: When attendees return to work and speak about you and your presentation, what do you hope they will say? What will be the key takeaways? How will they describe your presentation and what they learned? Think ahead to what the discussion may be like among attendees and what key takeaways or lessons they need to have left the session with. Whether this takes the form of additional knowledge, a sense of purpose after an engaging discussion, a working document they can take back with them, or even a new group of contacts that can work together with, allow that to help inform your preparation and presentation.

8. Make it fun and interactive
A great way to make the learning experience more memorable is to engage participants through fun and interactive activities. You could ask controversial questions and poll the audience, include collaborative dashboards, play games, or engage in social media. Split large audiences into pairs or small groups so that all participants can engage and participate.

In these ways and more, you can ensure that your attendees get the most out of the experience. Remember, learning is an act of participation and the depth of our learning depends on the depth of our participation. Engagement is joined at the hip with empowerment, so make sure your presentation empowers your audience.

9. Give them actionable steps
Send people away with some “low-hanging fruit”: very simple suggestions for things that they can implement the next day or when they return to work. It’s always a good idea to allow some time for participants to reflect on their own practices. How often does that happen on the job? Give them a few key tasks or one single action that their newly acquired knowledge and skills will allow them to take. Learning is a process, so if you share with them actionable “next steps,” give participants a way to contact you and continue the learning the process. This will make your impact greater.

10. Inspire
The best presentations are ones that not only introduce attendees to new ideas, but reassure them about their current practices. Why does what you do matter? Will people connect with this on an emotional level? People will need to feel your story, not just understand it. Share the most passionate moments in order to connect with attendees emotionally. A little inspiration or humorous quote brings closure. And, while you can give a clear, positive ending to your presentation, your last remarks should offer a charge to your group that inspires them to take action.
Sessions

Open Seat
This format needs the right audience or venue and a talented moderator. There are anywhere from 2-4 panelists up on stage and one empty seat. The empty seat is for an audience member who has a strong point of view to add to the conversation. One by one, attendees can come up, sit in the open seat and add their perspective to the discussion. Afterwards, they return to their seat in the audience and let someone else take their place in the open seat. This allows for a greater diversity of perspectives and allows the audience to be more invested in the conversation. One tip is to pre-plan for a few audience members to be the first to step up and “break-the-ice” so others will join in.

Work in Progress
Work in progress sessions are designed as a forum for presenter(s) to move forward on a central question, draft paper or project by receiving constructive suggestions from attendees. The organizer needs to provide the “work-in-progress” paper or central question/debate, ahead of time so that attendees can digest the information beforehand. The session should start by identifying what they expect the end result to be and let the guided conversation and discussion add to getting them to this end result.

Tech Café
This session format is held in small groups and offers attendees a hands-on experience with some of the latest technologies in the sector. Participants have an opportunity to test-drive technological solutions and find the best fit for their context. For many, learning by doing is the most effective way of gaining new knowledge, especially when it comes to new technology. When presenting technologies, sessions with real-life demos are a powerful way to get your attendees familiar with what’s on the tech market. It’s also important to give a context in which it’s clear what problems are solved through these tech “solutions” and that attendees understand how they can fit into their organizational needs.

Agree or Disagree
Ask the speakers and potential audience members for topics beforehand and create a list of 5-10 questions/statements. Hand each participant a list at the door of the first few selected questions/statements. After very brief introductions, have the moderator pick any question/statement, and have all the speakers Agree or Disagree with it and then enter into a discussion to explain why. Then put the question/statement up on the screen and ask for different points of view from the audience as well as general feedback on the discussion. You may end up covering all of the questions and can ask for more questions from the audience. Allowing time for feedback and engagement from the audience makes for a more interactive session.
Fish Bowl
A fishbowl session is composed of a circular seating arrangement. Four to five chairs are arranged in an inner circle. The remaining chairs are arranged in concentric circles outside the fishbowl. A few participants are selected to fill the fishbowl, while the rest of the group sits on the chairs outside the fishbowl. The moderator introduces the topic and the participants start discussing the topic. The audience outside the fishbowl listens in on the discussion. The initial participants speak for some time. When time runs out, they leave the fishbowl and a new group from the audience enters the fishbowl. This continues until many audience members have spent some time in the fishbowl. Once the final group has concluded, the moderator closes the fishbowl and summarizes the discussion.

The key for a fishbowl session is to have a good moderator and some preparation among discussants. It is somewhat like a talk show format rather than a presentation format. It has proven quite effective in keeping the audience engaged.

World Café
In this format a large whiteboard is placed just outside of a large conference room that lists the table numbers inside. Attendees can write a topic or current issue they are interested in discussing next to a table number and then go sit down at that table. As others arrived, they scan the list of topics on the whiteboard and either join a table of interest or add their own subject to the list and start their own table.

In order to adapt to it to a break-out session, make sure that your topics feed into the session theme. You can give an introduction and short presentation, but give them time to discuss the topics they have picked. Keep track of all the table groups and give some direction to their discussion.

Keep in mind, tables may have such a large group that there are double rings of chairs around a table; at others only two or three people may have landed. But in each case, everyone will be talking about a topic they had elected to participate in. And if they find that a discussion is not engaging enough, they have the option to simply stand up and move to another table with an interesting issue being addressed.

At the end of this session, you should gather all participants and have them share the highlights and conclusions from their discussion, ideally a solution to an issue discussed, and then link it back to the main theme.

Interview
This format is a great way to feature figures in your industry who may not be great or engaging speakers. By interviewing them you can present them in their best light by asking the right poignant and
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interesting questions. Pick a great interviewer or moderator and gather speakers. The interviewer or moderator can craft the questions before hand so that the speakers can prepare their possible responses.

Oxford-Style Debate
Oxford Style is a great debate format for a break-out session. Before the debate begins, ask all audience members to select a particular section of the room in which to sit. Those who agree sit on one side of the room; those who disagree sit on the other side of the room. Audience members are encouraged to demonstrate their agreement or disagreement with arguments heard by moving from their seat in one section to another. Audience movement will give important feedback both to the speakers and to other audience members. This session will have two “kick-off speakers.” They get the debate going, set the parameters of main argumentation and clash with one another’s ideas.

There should be a time period for the audience to participate and ask questions. Audience speakers are to make arguments, agree or disagree with particular points, raise new concerns, explain why they are sitting on a particular side, etc. At the end of the sessions there is an announcement of house results based on where the audience is seated.

Remember: both speakers (or teams) are given the same length of time to speak, the affirmative speaker (or team) ALWAYS speaks first and last and make sure to leave time for audience participation.

Open Space Methodology
This is a large-group process that helps participants focus energy on issues or opportunities of interest, and collectively design appropriate courses of action. At the beginning of an open space the participants will sit in a circle, or concentric circles. The facilitator will greet the people and begin the process by briefly re-stating the theme of their gathering, usually in the form of a question for the group to address. These groups can be led by a small number of experts in the field, who can encourage each participant to voice his/her own opinion and promote debate. The facilitator will invite all participants to identify issues or questions related to the theme and ask them to go up to the whiteboards distributed throughout the room to write down their suggested topics. Participants will then organize themselves in groups around the whiteboards to discuss the proposed issues and propose solutions. They can freely decide in which group to participate and may switch to another during the session. Solutions to issues addressed and conclusions from the group discussions are shared at the end of the session by each small group with the larger group. Make sure to leave time to engage in a final discussion, share last thoughts or pending questions and as a large group decide on the best approach or solutions and compile whatever notes or material may have come out of each group.

Throughout the process, the ideal facilitator is described as being “fully present and totally invisible,” “holding a space” for participants to self-organize, rather than “managing or directing the conversations.”
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Speed Dating
The sessions can be organized around a particular topic, theme, or question and you can have each table give a different answer or approach. Or, you can organize the session so that it showcases different communities e.g. practitioners, researchers, NGOs, women, etc. A brief 5 minute introduction to the aim and structure of the session is advised. You will then have attendees participate in 30 minutes of “fast rotation” in which the facilitator advises people to find new partners every 5 minutes. Then you have a period of 30 minutes where people can begin to have more in-depth discussions at the tables with those they have met in the previous session – this can be in small groups. Make sure you allow time for all participants to visits each table. Finally, allow 20 minutes for over-all questions and comments and to conclude the session.

Flip Session
The flip session format is based off of short video presentations of the presenters. The participants will have to watch the video presentation by the presenters in advance of the session. At the event, those who have already watched the videos gather with the presenters for an in-depth discussion of the presented concepts.

Make sure that the videos can be condensed into a 3-5 minute video that can be shown to those that may not have viewed the full video. In order to adapt to a break-out session, allow for a facilitator to introduce the main theme. This format allows for a longer discussion period among everyone involved, which can produce more thoughtful conclusions.

TEDx - Style Sessions
Each Session should have no more than 5 presenters and each TED Talk should last between 10-15 minutes; this requires the speaker to get very focused on the underlying message they want to convey and to deliver that message in a compelling manner. It is recommended to not use words in your PowerPoint. Show your audience photos and videos to help them visualize the places, moments, and ideas you are talking about. You want to engage the audience on an emotional level. The presentation should be done in a “Pecha-Kucha” style.

To adjust this to a break-out session, have a moderator that will briefly introduce an over-arching theme that will tie in the stories of all your speakers. Give each of your speakers the time to give their TED Talk. The presentation is followed by an interactive discussion, where audience members are given the opportunity to give their comments and ask questions. That’s what will ensure a connection between the ideas being presented and actually learning and applying them after everyone has gone home.

Also remember these general principles: reveal curiosity and passion, tell a story, speak of failures and successes, communicate your dreams, do not sell from the stage, and do not read your speech.
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20 Questions

This format is a great way to engage an audience in assessing the obstacles of a very specific topic. First, the topic is presented; the main objectives, components, and a review of the intervention’s results. This should take about 5 minutes. The audience begins with a 20 – 25 minute window to ask a variety of questions (20 tops) on the topic to form a better picture of what worked and what did not. For example: “Why was Z not successful/effective?” and “What did you do to try to ensure the sustainability and growth of the project?”

The audience is then asked to split into groups of 4-5 to discuss what they would have done differently. After 15 minutes each group reports out to the others, and all answers are recorded by someone at the front. Presenters then wrap up the session by reviewing their thoughts on each of the audience ideas.

10 Ways Session

This kind of session is a brainstorming sessions featuring a small group of contributors who share tips, guidance and successful approaches to accomplish a specified learning goal. Presenters will provide 3-5 minute explanations of their “ways.” In the session, there should be some field questions and/or additional best practices from other presenters and attending participants. After the presentations, there will be a discussion to include audience participation.

Debate

Presenters will address questions selected by the audience and/or previously announced on the event website. In the first round of the debate, presenters will have 10 minutes each to answer the audience selected questions, followed by 10 minute rebuttals, and then five minute closing statements. After the debate, there will be a 45 min Q&A session to interact with the participants.

The Pitch

This format involves a fun, yet productive, competition. There are 4 steps: 1) Have a group of presenters/experts (3-4) along with the audience choose a real world challenge. 2) Once all participants in the session have agreed, divide attendees up into teams. 3) Attendees meet with their teams and devise a solution. 4) Teams pitch their idea in 3-4 minutes in front of the original group of experts. One winner is chosen by the panel of experts. There should be time left to discuss the pitches and pose questions to the expert panel.
Reference List