

Moderator Guide

What's my role?

You're in charge! Moderators set the tone for conference sessions. As a thoughtful, skilled moderator, you create an inviting space for **engagement, learning, and connection** that enhances participants' experience.

Own the Room:

Your confidence will set others at ease

Enthusiasm is infectious: a genuine interest in the speakers and audience will quickly create a positive environment. Don't worry if you don't know too much about the topic; your job is to be a confident and capable host, not the expert.

Be prepared:

- Check out the space early
- Make sure the speakers know where it is!
- Remind speakers to minimize jargon
- Introduce yourself to the Room Monitor

Own your biases: we all have them. Who are you more likely to greet or call on? Who else could you include? What discomfort might you need to move through? How can you be a role model?

Consider power dynamics in the room – are there any 'experts' who might expect to be called upon? How will you manage them, so they don't dominate the Q&A?

Encourage a conversational tone by asking the presenters what excites them about their topic.

Be prepared with a question or two that the speaker would appreciate being asked.

Speaker Introduction Essentials

Practice name pronunciation, confirm their pronouns and ask what they care about in their bio. Give a few highlights only!

WEF Member Feedback: Language Matters

In a 2021 WEF DEI member survey we were reminded of the importance of inclusive language in making everyone welcome at our events. As the moderator, please help model respectful language and remind speakers too.

Respectful language:

- It's safer to refer to people by their location in the room or clothing, rather than assuming identities such as gender or race. E.g. **"In the 3rd row, the person in the blue jacket"**, not "the young woman in row 3". They may not identify as a woman and referring to age is generally demeaning.
- What pronouns do you use?
- If you make a mistake, apologize and move on, don't dwell on it.

Warm Up the Room: Create a welcoming environment

As the moderator, it's your job to keep the session flowing. That doesn't mean the loudest people talking from start to finish! Welcome attendees from all backgrounds, technical and non-technical and foster connections by **asking questions as the audience is gathering**.

"Who do we have in the room today?" Any first-time attendees? Students? Emerging Professionals? Operators? New to the water industry? International?

- Have folks introduce themselves to their neighbors to break the ice – this is effective
- Encourage people to fill the front rows first, it helps speakers engage with the audience.
- Explain the format up front, so that folks know when they can engage with questions

"I have been dismissed when expressing my opinions by specific factions who believe they are smarter, know more, etc. because their education level is different." WEF Member

Handling Q&A: *Who has the floor has the power*

Help introverts prepare!

Announce the Q&A a minute or two prior to beginning to allow participants time to think of questions

- "We'll be moving to questions shortly. please start thinking about any questions"

Calling on a woman or younger person first will encourage a wider range of people to participate in the Q&A

Begin Q&A by explicitly setting expectations:

- "Out of respect for others, ask one question. Let us know your name, workplace and ask your question succinctly"
- "Please wait for the mic to arrive so that all can hear your question."
- Consider inviting questions on index cards ahead of time for a popular speaker
- Balance questions from different groups if possible – "is there a student with a Q?"

Where can I go to learn more?

www.wef.org/dei for WEF's DEI Committee

Book: *Reinventing Diversity: Transforming Organizational Community* by Howard Ross, 2013

Book: *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives* by Minal Bopaiah, 2021

SHRM's Workplace Resources :

<https://shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/Pages/diversity-equity-and-inclusion.aspx>

<https://500womenscientists.org/inclusive-scientific-meetings>

Trouble Shooting

Keeping the event on track

Long-winded speakers

- Use pre-established signals if possible
- As they take a breath, jump in and redirect
- Approach the podium if all else fails

Is it a question or a speech?

- Excuse me, can you move to your question?
- What is the question you would like to ask?
- We agreed one one question only, please follow up with the speaker later.

Handling Hostile Statements: Reframe/Redirect

- Thank you. I appreciate your perspective – I'd like to talk about that afterwards.
- This sounds more like a discussion. Please follow up with the speaker after the session.
- Find a way to acknowledge the individual and move on.
- **Remember, the room is with you!** Folks will thank you for handling an awkward moment confidently.

"It is rather common to witness dismissive or demeaning attitudes toward people with differing opinions or experiences, especially during the Q&A sessions of technical presentations. This does not encourage any meaningful discussion"

Thank the speakers and audience

If you can, reiterate key points, suggestions and opportunities for research or connections.

Direct the audience to the session survey and encourage them to complete it before leaving the room. Thanks for running an engaging session.

"I do not work at a large treatment facility and sometimes, I feel my questions are looked down upon"

WEF Member