

Suggested conference session formats

● 'Speed dating': Research match-making

Suggested session format/structure

This type of session allows many people to come together to discuss their research interests and find others with similar interests or ideas and experience they can draw on.

It is particularly useful in allowing researchers to identify and solve specific problems they are addressing in their research or writing, or to share ideas and build connections through which future research collaborations can be developed. The sessions can be organised around particular:

- topics or themes such as those working in a broad area of interest that fits with the conference theme
- research communities e.g. post-graduate, early or mid-career academics.

As this may be a new session format for many participants, a brief introduction to the aim and structure of the session is advised. In order to tailor it to those present the session organisers may wish to get a sense from participants, both beforehand (e.g. by email) and on the day, about how they would like the components structured.

For a session length of 100 minutes (1 hour 40 minutes), this could be broken up as follows:

- 5 minutes introduction
- 1 hour of 'fast rotation' in which the facilitator advises people to find new partners every 5 minutes
- 30 minutes where people can begin to have more in-depth discussions with those they have met in the previous session – this can be in pairs or small groups
- 5 minutes to round off and conclude the sessions and get feedback from participants

There is considerable flexibility in this format. For example, if there are 20 or fewer participants, 40 minutes could be spent allowing everyone 2 minutes to introduce their ideas/questions to the group, followed by 50 minutes in which people can speak in more depth with those they identify as having interests in common.

This second phase of the session can be structured in a range of ways:

- informally allowing people to group and re-group as they choose
- forming 4-5 groups from those identified in the first phase which remain for the entire period
- keeping the interactions rotating every 10 minutes

Preparing the session

As session organiser, decide whether the session will be based around a topic/theme, research community or both. Consider partners you could involve with the session, such as relevant research groups, research council/funders, practitioner organisation, etc. and involve them in setting the context where appropriate.

Running the session on the day

It is important that the session chair introduces the aim and structure of the session clearly and keeps it running to time. Remain alert to the wishes of participants and seek their view as appropriate during the session. This is an 'emergent' session in that people may become clear they wish to spend more time with a particular group/topic as it develops the session has the flexibility to encompass this, though some experience with group facilitation would be helpful for the convenor, or they may wish to bring another facilitator on board to support with this role.