**Tactic: Hosting Engaging Panels**

*Keep panels dynamic and interactive so audiences stay engaged, learn something new, and feel inspired to take action—not check their phones.*

**When to Use It:**   
When you want to showcase multiple voices on a topic, or seed dialogue for the group. We suggest that panels are used as a jumping-off point for audience participation and outcome-based discussion, rather than the main event.

**How it Works:**

1. **Match purpose to audience.** With general audiences, aim for broad learning relevant and interesting to all. With technical groups, go deep on one issue or surface unique insights to ensure lessons build on their existing expertise.
2. **Prep your moderator.** They should editorialize, draw connections, and press for clarity—not just ping-pong questions and answers. Think about the power of a journalist knowing each panelist’s work in depth, and being able to ask questions that panelists haven’t already answered before.
3. **Push panelists to “take a stand.”** Ask them to make provocative or counterintuitive claims, not just comprehensive overviews.
4. **Go deep over going broad.** Frame the panel around a single big issue, then bring in speakers who can tackle it from different angles.
5. **Seed the dialogue.** Treat the panel as a setup. Plan for audience interaction afterward—breakout into small discussion groups, invite turn-to-your-neighbor reflections, or pass around written prompts.
6. **Translate to action.** Always link back to “what this means for us.” Leave people with a specific question or a concrete next step.

### **Helpful Tips:**

* Vet panelists for dynamic speaking ability *as well as* content expertise. (Dry speakers = disengaged audience.) Search online for other talks or panels they’ve delivered.
* Tell stories and curate real-life examples in advance.
* Ask questions that drive towards specific answers, rather than sweeping reflections, like: “What’s the one thing you want this group to understand about the opportunities and barriers in this space?”
* Build in interaction throughout. Consider live polls using a tool like Mentimeter, or handouts with reflection questions to guide the listeners attention.
* Close with a challenge or open question for all participants to carry forward.
* [Read this article *Panel’s Don’t Solve Problems* from Zia Khan.](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/panels-dont-solve-problems-strategic-convenings-do-zia-khan-9qhpe/?trackingId=zR5JwKZhSjuALap7tvknPg%3D%3D)

**Convening Organizer Resources:**

Here are a few resources from our Convening Design Playbook that convening organizers may find useful in preparing speakers for a panel.

* [**Speaker Invitation |** Editable email template for inviting speakers to join your convening.](https://app.box.com/file/1834863316392?s=t5t8956q8vyl057qdhvnynexqleijc0q)
* [**Speaker preparation meeting |** Agenda template for 1:1 prep conversations with guest speakers.](https://app.box.com/file/1834872738839?s=i9rlyzn36t684i3chrjqw0j3wbn08cie)
* [**Speaker Brief |**  Editable briefing document outlining speaker roles, session design, and logistics, shared in advance and on the day of the convening.](https://app.box.com/file/1834869758164?s=pvk17ab1j0o3a7x02atbqj0gkfhw198t)