

## **Advocacy: Panel Discussions**

Here are tips for hosting a panel discussion:

### **Preparing for the event:**

#### **Pick a topic:**

- The topic of the panel will help guide your panelist and conversation. Make your panel focused. For example, “Affordable housing in Phoenix,” will be more effective than “Affordable housing.”

#### **Logistics:**

- Plan your panel at a centralized location on campus. Do not limit yourself to a classroom in the Math Wing across town; experiment with holding it in an auditorium or theatre.
- Decide how to set-up the room, lighting, microphones, refreshments and AV equipment in advance. Comfort is everything.
- Co-sponsoring an event can guarantee your panel more attendees, so include other campus organizations in the event.

#### **Make a list of contacts:**

- Use the resources that you already have. Send personalized invitations to professors, your local affiliate, local politicians, and your advocacy chair to participate in the panel.
- Limit your panel to a maximum of five participants. A small will ensure interaction with the audience.
- Ask the panelist to provide an outline of their presentation.

#### **Select a Moderator:**

- Have the moderator meet the panelists in advance to get a sense of the panelist style and message points.
- Educate the moderator on the topic and prepare questions that engage the audience and the panel.
- Prepare and provide the moderator in advance.
- Include a bio for each of the panelist, included one ‘fun fact,’ (i.e.: what is in their CD player right now).

#### **Advertising:**

- Send personalized invitations to target individuals and groups on campus and in your community.
- Emphasize the importance of the topic in the invitation.
- Let professors and faculty know about the panel, and ask them to encourage their students to go as a class.
- Place short bios and interesting facts about the panelist on the flyers.
- Get creative and tailor your PR towards your campus’ culture.

#### **During the event:**

- Arrive one hour early. Check the room, microphone and temperature.
- Remember to greet your panelists and guests with a smile.

- Hand the audience a brochure about the panelists and the topic chosen. Have your guests sign in and leave you their e-mail in order to send them more information.
- Plan a warm up. “Stand Up Sit Down” is a quick warm up that asks statements about the guest. They stand up if the statement pertains to them. For example, “Stand up if you have ever been to a Habitat for Humanity build.” If participants have been to one, they stand up. This will help you gain an idea of your audience’s experience with the topic, and start the panel off with a fun twist.
- Inform the audience about the background of the topic, introduce the speakers and set ground rules. Let the audience know what to expect, but keep it brief.
- Act as a time keeper. Sit in front of the panelist and give them time signals. Agree in advance the time limit per each presentation.
- Leave time at the end for question. Make sure your moderator has back up questions if the audience does not have any.
- After the panel discussion, break up your audience in as many groups as panelists. Allocate each group with a topic to discuss and let the panelist facilitate. This allows small group discussion and interaction. (Check before the panel to make sure the panelists are ok with the break out session).
- Encourage your guests to advocate around the topic. Pass around a petition and set up a letter writing area at the exit of the room.

#### **After the Event:**

- Send personalized thank you notes to all the panelists, individuals and organizations that helped you with your event.
- De-brief with your chapter members. Discuss the pros and cons of your event and what you can improve on next time.
- E-mail the guests and thank them for attending. Let them know where they can find more information about the topic.
- Plan a follow- up event.
- Relax! You did a wonderful job inspiring and educating your community.
- If possible, provide a short evaluation form about the panel for the audience to complete.