

USAID Global Education Conference

Audience Engagement Techniques Toolkit



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Introduction

This toolkit is a compilation of audience engagement techniques that you can use during your session at the Global Education Conference. Eliciting responses from the audience helps make sessions dynamic, relevant, informative, and memorable for participants.

Why is Audience Engagement Important?

The conference venue is set up in such a way that you will have at least 75 people attending your session and they will all be seated theater-style. The following audience engagement techniques are appropriate and designed specifically for this kind of large, theater style audience configuration. Integrating these techniques into your session will increase audience attention and retention.

How to Use This Toolkit

Each entry below includes the following information: The name of the technique, the session format(s) that it best serves, when to use it, how it works, and an example.

Technique #1: Show of Hands

Session Format(s):

All

When to Use It

To get a sense of the experiences and needs of people in the audience.

How it Works

1. Ask the audience to “Raise your hand if...”
2. Pose a question
3. *Optional:* Call on 2-5 audience members to hear their responses

Example 1

I am moderating a panel discussion on long-distance cycling competitions. I want my panelists to talk about their perspectives on long-distance cycling. I might use the “show of hands” technique in the following way:

1. Ask the audience, “Raise your hand if you have cycled more than 50 miles in a day?”
2. I would then select 2 people at random in the audience and invite them to share one thing they did to prepare for that ride;
3. I would then briefly summarize what I heard;
4. I would turn to the panelists and ask them to react to those examples and build off of them based on their own expertise.

Example 2

I am telling a fail fest story about my first attempt at long-distance cycling. To kick off my presentation, I might use the “show of hands” technique in the following way:

1. Ask the audience, “Raise your hand if you are thinking about doing a bicycle ride that is 50 miles / 80km or longer.”
2. Select 2 people at random (ideally from different sections of the audience) and invite them to share one of the challenges they think they might face in preparing for or

doing that ride.

3. I would then frame my story by reacting to their responses (i.e. "Much like you, I was worried about riding in rainy or foggy weather...this is the story of how I failed to complete my 100-mile ride and what I learned.")

Technique #2: Agree/Disagree

Session Format(s)

Panel discussions, Fireside chats, Poster Presentations

When to Use It

- To gauge audience opinion
- To prompt debate or discussion
- To highlight disagreements or differing perspectives

How it Works

1. Tell audience members that you are going to make a statement. If they **agree** with the statement, hold up an **open hand**. If they **disagree** with the statement, hold up a **fist**.
 - a. This can also be done with green cards (agree) and red cards (disagree)
2. Make the statement;
3. Call on 1-2 people who disagree and invite them to explain their opinion;
4. Call on 1-2 people who agree and invite them to explain their opinion.

Example

I am moderating a fireside chat about urban planning policy to encourage less use of cars. I want to start a new segment of the discussion about electric-assist bicycles - a controversial topic. I might use the “agree/disagree” technique in the following way:

1. I would tell the audience, “I am going to read a statement. I want you to hold up a green card if you agree with the statement. Hold up a red card if you disagree with the statement.”
2. I would then say, “The statement is: ‘Electric-assist bicycles should NOT be allowed on bike paths.’”

3. After 10 seconds, I would call on 1-2 people who disagree and invite them to explain their opinion
4. I would then call on 1-2 people who agree and invite them to explain their opinion
5. I would then turn to my interviewee, summarize what I heard, and ask them to react to those opinions and expand more broadly on the policy implications of planning for the use of electric-assist bicycles in their city.

Technique #3: Round of Applause

Session Format(s)

Panel discussions, Fireside chats

When to Use It

- To gauge enthusiasm or level of support
- To allow the audience to choose the path or direction of your session

How it Works

1. **Before the conference:** Decide on the options you would like to present the audience
 - a. One way to do this is to think about all the questions you would like to address and start grouping them into categories. Choose one question from each category to pose during this engagement technique.
 - b. **NOTE:** For optimum engagement, limit yourself to 2-4 options
2. Tell audience members that they are going to be shown or read a given number of something (questions, topics, etc.). They will be asked to show their support for one of the options by clapping. The option that elicits the loudest response will be chosen first.
3. Show or read the options. If you are reading them, repeat them at least once.
4. Tell the audience, “Clap your hands if you want us to address option 1.” Audience claps.
5. Tell the audience, “Clap your hands if you want us to address option 2.” Audience claps.
6. Repeat until you have gone through all of your options. Whichever option elicited the loudest applause will be the one addressed first.

Example

I am moderating a panel on the public health benefits of cycling and want the audience to decide how the panelists introduce themselves. I might use the “round of applause” technique in the following way:

1. I show three questions on a slide or piece of flip chart. (1) What’s one of your fondest memories of riding a bicycle? (2) What’s the longest bike ride you’ve ever done? And (3) What’s one dream bicycle ride that you really want to do before you die?
2. I tell the audience, “Clap your hands if you want our panelists to answer question 1. Clap your hands if you want our panelists to answer question 2. Clap your hands if you want the panelists to answer question 3.”
3. Whichever question receives the most applause is the one the panelists answer.

Technique #4: Fist to Five

Session Format(s)

All

When to Use It

- To gauge opinions
- To gauge skill or comfort levels beyond a simple yes/no or agree/disagree

How it Works

1. Say, “On a scale of 0 to 5, tell us....” (give a statement on a topic that can be measured on a continuum)
2. Say, “Holding up a fist, or zero fingers, means you have no idea about [topic]. Holding up five fingers means you consider yourself an expert on [topic]. You can hold up any amount of fingers between 0 and 5.”
3. Scan the room to get a sense of the audience’s comfort level or skill level. Use this information

Example

I am facilitating an ignite talk session about how cities are successfully implementing public bicycle cooperatives at the city level. After one ignite talk on successfully creating a network of neighborhood cooperatives in X city, I would use this technique in the following way:

1. I would explain that one of the biggest challenges to the general population becoming consistent cyclists is knowing how to do your own basic bicycle maintenance - changing a flat tire, replacing brake pads, cleaning and lubing the chain, etc.
2. I would ask the audience, “On a scale from 0 to 5 using your fingers tell us how capable you are of doing your own bicycle maintenance and repairs; holding up a fist or 0 finger means you have no idea whatsoever how to do anything with a bike.

Holding up five fingers means you consider yourself an expert and could build an entire bicycle from scratch. You can hold up any amount of fingers between 0 and 5.”

3. I would scan the hands and fingers in the air and note out loud that there are a lot of 0, 1 and 2 fingers being held up.
4. I would turn to the presenter and say, “It looks like it might be useful to hear from you what you consider to be the most useful bike maintenance skills and how those skills played a part in the success of your initiative.”

Technique #5: Eliciting Questions

Session Format(s)

All

When to Use It

- To transition between topics
- To dive deeper into topics discussed in presentations
- To bring the audience into the conversation
- **Note:** What we want to avoid is leaving any questions to the very end of the panel. What we too often see happening is that only 5 minutes remains for only one or two questions

How it Works

1. Turn to the audience and take 2-3 questions at once
2. Spread out the questions you take (from different sections of the room, from different stakeholders, etc.)

Example

I am moderating a fireside chat with a representative from the International Cycling Union. We have just wrapped up a segment of the interview where we discuss how cycling can be used to lower emissions in urban areas.

Before transitioning to another part of the discussion or category of discussion topics, I turn to the audience and take 2-3 questions related to what my interviewee and I just discussed. I take them all at once and then turn to my interviewee to address any or all of them. We then transition to the next question in the interview.

Additional Information

Important Deadlines

February 28th:

- Deadline to upload your final session title and description
- Upload preliminary PowerPoint presentation or session outline

March 20th:

- Deadline to upload final PowerPoint presentation or session outline

Facilitation Support

Professional facilitators will be provided for each session to make sure they start and end on time, that the audience is engaged throughout the session, and that audience learning is captured at the end of each session.

For panel discussions, there is an option for the facilitator to act as panel moderator.

Further information on facilitation support will be provided in March.

Inquiries

Please reach out to the Conference Session Design and Development Committee at gfu@usaid.gov.