

How to share lessons learned

Conference participation

Sometimes peer review is the best way to not only get feedback on your project, but promote it as a learning opportunity to people who do similar work, and may want to replicate aspects of it in their own programs. Conferences are ready-made stages for swapping information and showing off project successes.

Tips:

For facilitators

- Make sure audio-visual equipment is reserved well ahead of the conference.
- Set up and test projector prior to beginning of event. Load PowerPoint presentations onto laptop in advance and bring a back-up disk with presentations.
- Evaluate whether or not it is appropriate to provide food and drink to participants.
- Make sure venue is appropriate size for group; expect unexpected attendees.
- Send around a sign-in sheet to get people's contact information.
- Tell presenters in advance how long they have to speak.
- Tell presenters that you will raise your hand when they have five minutes left to speak.
- Tell audience in advance when there will be time for questions and answers.
- Have all materials, such as agendas, nametags, and publications, on a table at entrance.
- Invite attendees to bring copies of materials they would like to be made available.

For presenters

- Don't be afraid to tell people who you are, where you're from, and what your organization does—too often attendees listen to a lecture but have no understanding why a speaker is connected to the project.
- Keep lecturettes and PowerPoint presentations brief.
- Use PowerPoint to enhance your talk, not copy or repeat the words you are saying. Select a picture to illustrate the point you are making, and keep text and visuals large and simple.
- Animation in PowerPoint presentations is not a necessity, but rather a frill that should be used sparingly and only if an illustrative point cannot be made by spoken word alone.
- Speak clearly and slowly and make eye contact with attendees.
- Dim lights for PowerPoint presentations.
- Keep track of time for each presentation—don't forget time for questions and answers.
- Consider giving free publications and handouts to all attendees to supplement talks—bring more than you think you'll need.
- See who's there—get business cards from attendees before they leave and ask if they'd like to be placed on mailing and e-mail lists.
- Don't rush out if possible: Stick around for a few minutes after the presentation—it's the time attendees are most likely to introduce themselves to you and share their fresh feedback.