

2026 Forum Presenting Tips

The Wall Street Journal once surveyed 200 Vice Presidents of medium-sized organizations and asked them to choose one word to describe the presentations they most often see. A large number selected a negative word from the choices (44% said “Boring” and 40% said “Sleepy”). Only 3% said “Stimulating.” How can you be part of the 3%? Plan and practice. Below are some suggestions to help you engage your audience.

Using Notes:

- It’s okay and encouraged to make *brief* notes of what you plan to talk about.
 - Most presenters find they don’t ever use them, but glancing at your notes can help:
 - you get back on track if there was a distraction.
 - remind you of timing.
- Don’t write out your presentation.
 - Written talks tend to sound different than the conversational tone you’d use with colleagues and friends. It’s a cause of “presenter mode” and a disconnection between you and your audience.
- Don’t memorize your presentation.
 - If you attempt to memorize your presentation you might sound less like yourself and more like a robot. What happens if you lose your spot when there’s a distraction? Use brief notes instead and trust yourself. You’re the expert!

Practice:

- Rehearse with co-presenters.
 - Know who is saying what, and when, to minimize surprises during your presentation.
 - How will you transition between presenters?
- When practicing alone:
 - Stand up.
 - Talk out loud.
 - Add some distractions like a TV on mute and music with lyrics playing softly.
 - Practicing with these stressors will make the inevitable distractions of people walking in and out of the room and phones going off during your presentation less distracting to you.
- Write out your anticipated start times for sections.
 - These timings are one thing you might write in your brief notes.

- Be sure to leave room for Q&A and for attendees to complete the session feedback survey.

Interacting with the Audience:

- Talk to the virtual audience often.
 - Tell them to add their thoughts/questions to the chat to help them feel heard and make the connections they would more easily make in person.
 - Remember, the in-person audience can see your gestures (smile, eye contact, etc.) more easily than the virtual audience. The virtual audience is looking at a screen that shows you *and* has your PPT showing. Talking to them is a must!
 - Remember to stay on “stage” aka the field of view of the camera. Walking around the room may be beneficial for an all in-person audience, but if you go off screen for the virtual audience, they will feel left out.
 - NIGP is providing a headset microphone that we’re requiring the main presenter (person speaking the most) to use. This will reduce the gaps in audio that happen to a virtual audience when speaking into a handheld microphone or lapel microphone.
- Polling
 - Using polls can help you adjust the focus of your presentation to better meet the needs of the audience. They also help give a voice to those who may not typically ask questions.
 - Keep polls simple. Clear, straightforward questions will help minimize confusion and make the polls accessible to a greater percentage of your audience.
- Small group conversations
 - Giving space for your audience to discuss topics with their peers will help make the content “stick” since they’ll be thinking about their context.
 - Make new public procurement friends! These conversations can also lead to an exchange of contact information to continue conversations that drive procurement forward.

Questions and Answers:

- Will you take questions throughout the presentation, at the end, or both? Let the audience know up front so they engage appropriately and feel included.
- Prepare anticipated questions.
 - Your answers will flow easily if they're asked.
- What if nobody asks a question?
 - Say "Something else you may want to know is..." or "A question I anticipated someone might ask is..."
- Tell the audience how much time you have for Q&A
 - Setting this expectation will reduce disappointment if they don't get to ask their question.
- Ask
 - "By a raise of hand, who has the first question?" (Be sure to raise your hand too, to show what you're looking for)
 - "Who has the next question?" (Repeat until you only have time for one more question. Continue to raise your hand so they raise theirs. The microphone runners will be able to get to them more quickly if they see where to go.)
 - "Who has the final question?"
- Repeat or paraphrase questions.
 - The audience (virtual and in-person) may not clearly hear the question being asked. If it's short and easy to repeat, repeat it. If it's long, paraphrase before answering.
- Be sure to check in with your producer often (if you have one), or look at the virtual chat yourself, to answer questions from the virtual audience.

Feedback:

- Please ask the audience to complete the session survey before they leave the room.

If you want feedback on your content, assistance with your slide deck, or to practice your session please reach out to jkupiec@nigp.org We're happy to help!