

NOFA-VT WINTER CONFERENCE 2017

Best Practices for Workshop Success

1. People learn best when they are active participants.

There are many ways to get the audience involved. Hands-on activities are great when possible, and tangible examples of equipment, tools, seeds, etc. are often better than pictures. Is there a 5- or 10-minute activity (small group discussion, brainstorming session, worksheet, etc.) that the audience can participate in? Don't be afraid to make some demands of them! They'll thank you for it later.

2. 5 good pictures are better than 50 slides of text.

If you plan to use a PowerPoint presentation, stay away from text-heavy slides. Have a few activities in mind that will help keep your audience awake and interested. Try a pop quiz, questions to the audience, or something to take people's attention beyond words on the screen.

3. Make sure you communicate clearly with your co-presenters ahead of time.

Each presenter should know what material her/his co-presenters will be covering. Do you and your co-presenters have divergent viewpoints? Are there ways to integrate your presentations in order to lead a more unified workshop? Make sure you coordinate and practice with each other ahead of time. And time yourselves! Once we get talking about what we know well, time can fly by.

4. Have a thorough agenda of what you want to accomplish.

Do a dry run ahead of time to make sure you've got time for everything you want to include (having too much to say is more common than having too little). At the beginning of your workshop, clearly state what you plan to cover to make sure the audience and you are on the same page.

5. Standard workshops are 75 minutes long.

Allow for 10-15 minutes of Q&A. Figure out how the time will be divided between co-presenters & plan accordingly. For half- and full-day workshops: include a few five-minute breaks—there will always be coffee and snacks during breaks on Monday.

6. Think about your audience.

Put yourself in their shoes: how would you learn best? While it is usually too time-consuming to have everyone share their names at the beginning, asking for a quick show of hands in response to simple questions ("How many of you are dairy producers?") can give you a good idea of who's in the room and help you tailor your presentation to their needs.

7. Remember that this is your workshop!

Don't be put off by the occasional interrupter, especially if this is your first time. Politely listen to what they have to offer, and don't be afraid to firmly say, "Thanks for your contribution, and we need to move on now." Some helpful techniques are to create a "parking lot" on the flipchart paper in your workshop room for topics to address if there is time at the end of the workshop. This acknowledges the interest or contribution, but doesn't let it hijack your workshop agenda. The rest of your audience will appreciate you keeping the workshop on schedule.

8. Plan on arriving to your workshop room as soon as it's available with your presentation on a flash drive.

We will do our best to help you with any technology needs you may have, but it helps us to have enough time to help you! Our staff and technical help make every effort to check the rooms for emerging issues. If you are bringing props, those can usually be placed in the room at the beginning of the day or during lunch for afternoon workshops. If you get to your room and have technical issues, call UVM Tech Support.