



How to Organize and Plan Your Session

Who Is the Audience?

The Regional Aquatics Workshop held its first official meeting in 1989. The name was designed to provide lots of elbow room for future development. The meanings intended for each title word by the founding attendees evoke the sentiments that led to RAW and help us understand and preserve its unique character:

“Regional”

Intentionally vague enough to include a future region of any size. (Originally encompassing the Great Lakes/Midwest region, attendees now come from all over North America, Europe, etc.)

“Aquatics”

The group is not limited to those interested in fishes, or to those working at traditional public aquariums. Over the years “Aquatics” has been occasionally garbled to “Aquarium” or “Aquatic”.

“Workshop”

An intentional attempt to avoid the creation of (or reference to) a traditional governing body that would evolve unnecessary hierarchical structures. Read “Workshop” as “public aquarium professionals of all levels learning from one another”.

RAW is not part of any other organization. However its attendees are members of other organizations (AZA, EUAC, etc.) that have found it productive to conduct some of their business in conjunction with RAW meetings [the day before RAW has become the working meeting venue of choice for many AZA conservation committees including the Coral Reef CAP, the Fish and Aquatic Invertebrate TAGs, and the Lake Victoria SSP]. The RAW audience is from all levels of public aquarium and zoo/aquarium management. Every attendee comes to the session with varying experience and skill sets.

What does your Audience want to hear?

Attendees are eager to learn new ideas and skills, connect with one another, and engage in dialogue relative to their personal and professional interests. Presenters play a valuable role in fulfilling this expectation. Presenters should identify key learning objectives for the audience and communicate them before and during the session. These goals will help ensure attendees understand the purpose of the session and what they will learn from it.

Role of Session Participants

It is the role of Presenters to develop valuable learning experiences and engage the audience in fresh thinking and new solutions. A successful presentation will offer insight into a new concept, idea or technology and to provide solutions to many challenges.

Presenters should share knowledge, but also use the audience to impart new ideas with one another. Engaging the audience as much as possible during the presentation creates an atmosphere for creativity and learning, making connections with peers, and sharing ideas, successes – and lessons learned.

Special Note to Commercial Presenters

RAW is a forum for sharing new information and networking within the public aquarium industry. The RAW Program Committee recognizes the vital part that our commercial colleagues play in supporting the industry and assisting the industry to meet its potential. As a commercial presenter at RAW you have been invited to share your particular expertise or experience with attendees.

A successful presentation will offer attendees insight into a new concept, idea or technology, explore future trends, or provide solutions to current industry challenges. A successful presentation will not promote a particular product, commercial process, or commercial entity or institution. For example, if a commercial presenter wishes to share information on a new product, the presenter should either seek a neutral party to review and compare this and similar products. Or in the case of processes, like collecting or transshipping animals, the presenter should

describe how the process should be done for best practices and not the particular entities involved. There is also an option for commercial presenters to follow the current RAW host's guidelines on sponsorships as they may relate to hosting a session related to their product. In all cases, the presenter should not pass judgment regarding whether their product, process or procedure is better than others in the industry. Real science and evaluation provided by commercial presenters and associated public aquarium professionals are strongly encouraged.

Commercial Identification in Presentation: Commercial presenters should only identify their company on the title slide of their presentation and only describe their company in terms that cannot be described as advertising.

Tips Developing Presentation Materials

When developing your presentation materials, here are some important elements to remember:

- Register for RAW. Visit <http://www.rawconference.org/> for more information.
- When developing your presentation materials, be aware of your audience and how your presentation aligns with your stated topic. Identify the objectives of your presentation.
- In an effort to reduce waste, Presenters are encouraged to minimize handouts. If you choose to offer handouts, you are responsible for printing, delivering and distributing them to attendees.
- Maintain consistent timing when advancing the slides.
- Avoid patterned backgrounds and distracting graphics in slides.
- Cite the original source for any graphic, chart, video, audio or any material that is not yours.
- Use a font size of 30-point (or greater), preferably in a font that's easy to read (e.g., Arial, Helvetica).
- Avoid using red colored letters on blue backgrounds and vice versa. This combination is very hard to read.
- Check in with the session moderator/ program leader/ IT personnel before you have to speak to get your presentation loaded on the program lap top. This may be done up until the break before you are scheduled to speak.
- Allow plenty of time beforehand to familiarize yourself with the session location, room set-up and podium/technology.
- Practice presenting several times beforehand so you are comfortable with the timing. It can be just as awkward to have the presentation be too short as too long.
- Be prepared with a back-up copy of your presentation, preferably on a flash drive.

Tips Giving Presentations

Here are a few pointers in delivering your presentation:

- State your name at the beginning and end of your presentation.
- Thank the audience for attending the session and make sure you provide contact information on your opening and closing slide.
- Stand straight – don't lean over the podium.
- Include visuals in your slides – people like to “see” what you are talking about.
- Keep your message real – use stories and describe experiences to help illustrate your points.
- Don't point out mistakes or errors if you come across them while you are presenting. Your audience probably doesn't notice.
- Speak loudly and clearly into the microphone provided.
- Have eye-contact with your audience, not the podium or screen.
- Create cohesion with the overall panel by making small references to one another's presentations as you are presenting.
- Keep points clear and concise – if you over talk your audience will stop listening.
- Speakers are limited to a certain time depending on the session they are assigned. Most speakers will have 20 minutes unless advised by the Conference Host otherwise. Don't go over your limit and put other Presenters at a disadvantage.
- Do not “read” your presentation notes or slides.
- Be prepared for questions after your talk if time allows. Think up possible answers to questions you may be asked by the audience.
- If using humor in your presentation, be sure it's “politically correct” and not offensive in any way. Keep inside jokes inside.
- During the Questions & Answers (Q&A) portion of the session, repeat the question before answering.
- Relax and enjoy your time at the podium. It is not uncommon, especially if this is a speaker's first time at the podium to be nervous. Remember *every* RAW presenter had their first time at the podium.