How to Draft a Winning Conference Session Proposal

2020 LIAISON USER CONFERENCE

Thank you for your interest in presenting at the 2020 Liaison User Conference! The Programming Committee is seeking engaging, insightful sessions that will inspire attendees to take action as soon as they return to their campuses/offices. Follow these best practices to increase your chances of having your session added to the program.

Title

This is your first chance to convince attendees that attending your session will be worthwhile. With this in mind, focus on crafting a succinct, action-focused title that appeals to what your session offers attendees.

- Since your title should capture what's in it for them, write your title last. This will ensure you truly understand how attendees will benefit from participating in your session.
- Keep your title simple and concise — 8-15 words is ideal.
- Directly address your target audience's purpose or problems.
- Keep keywords in mind to capture attendees' attention and put these keywords at the beginning of the title.
- Don't reinvent the wheel! Use tried and true formats for attention-getting titles that clearly demonstrate what they can expect from the session. Take a look at this list of catchy headlines for inspiration, which includes such suggestions as:
  - How to Create the Perfect ________
  - # Most Strategic Ways to Accelerate Your ______________
  - # Ways to Master Your _____________
  - When ___________ Backfires: How to __________

Intended Audience

Who will get the most out of attending your session? Attendees will use this information to plan their conference schedules, so focus on offering insights that your attendees can use.

- **CEOs or executive directors of professional associations** are focused on advocating for their discipline, delivering member benefits and driving non-dues revenue. They need timely insights into key trends in their field and access to critical data to deliver value for programs that participate in their associations. **Directors or managers of centralized application services** share this focus and this need.
- **Deans or associate or assistant deans** are focused on driving "best-fit" enrollment while containing operational and administrative costs. They are interested in shaping their classes and managing strategic planning and analysis for their discipline, competitive cohort and region.
- **Vice presidents, directors or associate or assistant directors of marketing** are focused on engaging and recruiting best-fit prospective students with the right message at the right time. They're also tasked with supporting enrollment goals, brand visibility and improving their institutions' competitive market positions.
- **Vice presidents, directors or associate or assistant directors of admissions and/or enrollment** are focused on building the best class, of the right size and highest caliber. In addition to growing and shaping their classes, they're also responsible for driving net tuition revenue while reducing costs and improving process efficiencies. **Advisors, counselors or coordinators of admissions and/or enrollment** share these goals.
- **Vice presidents, directors or associate or assistant directors of IT** are interested in reducing technical workload and overhead as well as aggregating data. They're focused on finding ways to aggregate and streamline big data across multiple systems, managing multiple APIs and delivering an analytics package that admissions and enrollment professionals need to identify best-fit students and improve their admissions and enrollment process. **Business analysts and IT coordinators** share these goals.

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2020 LIAISON USER CONFERENCE

Abstract

You've got potential attendees' attention because of your catchy title, now they need to know how you're going to deliver on what that title promised. Your abstract should be 200 words or less. It will be used to promote your session to attendees.

- Remember that you only have 200 words, so eliminate filler language like "this presentation will cover…" or "speakers/facilitators will offer…" or "speakers/facilitators will provide…." Use the active tense.
- Highlight what attendees will get out of the session, keeping benefits in mind (e.g., how they will experience what is shared, how it will impact their work).
- Provide specific examples of what will be covered, paying special attention to the quantitative data that will help you highlight your points.
- Identify who will get the most out of attending — and possibly who should definitely not attend. Your goal is to attract the right people, the ones who will get the most out of your session, so that your engagement strategies will work.
- Highlight the features and benefits of the session:
  - A feature is a fact about the session. Example: "X institution experienced an increase in enrollment of Y% in just one year."
  - A benefit is how the attendee will experience that feature. Example: "We will share the top 3 strategies we used and illustrate how you can use these strategies at your own institution to streamline admissions and enhance enrollment outcomes."
- Start by writing a list of all the features and benefits, then turn it into a description per the next bullet. Top copywriter Clayton Makepiece has a four-step benefits writing process for persuading the reader to action. Here's how to use his process for writing conference session descriptions:
  1. Make a list of every **feature** of attending the session.
  2. Ask **why** each feature is included in the first place.
  3. Take the **why and ask how** this connects with the attendee's desires.
  4. Get to the absolute root of what's in it for the attendee at an **emotional level**.
- Describe how your session will help attendees solve their problems, being clear about which specific problems you'll help them solve.
- Be realistic and accurate. Make sure that the description matches what will be covered in your presentation so that the expectations you set for attendees are met.

Learning Outcomes

Your title is catchy, and your abstract makes big promises. Now how will attendees be able to prove that attending your session was useful? Your learning outcomes will help set the structure for your session, and they'll also help attendees use what you're sharing in their own contexts.

- Start with a stem statement like:
  - "After attending the session, attendees will be able to: ________."
  - "This session will help attendees ________."
- Focus on the attendee rather than on the speaker/facilitator. Avoid statements like, "the speaker/facilitator will offer" or "we will use X school to demonstrate."

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2020 LIAISON USER CONFERENCE

- Be concise, observable and measurable, focusing on the attendee. Include measurable verbs like *describe, design, assess, apply, explain, analyze*, etc. Using measurable verbs means you will have to clearly identify what the attendee must do to demonstrate learning. Avoid nonmeasurable verbs like *understand, gain awareness, gain insight, improve, increase, know, learn,* etc. Review this overview of Bloom's Taxonomy for more information about choosing the right verbs.
- Limit your session to 3-4 learning outcomes.
- Go beyond just listing the topics or features that will be covered.

Required Subject Matter Understanding

If you're planning to cover the basics, those who have an intermediate or advanced understanding of the subject matter area will not get as much out of or be as engaged with your session.

If you're planning to cover advanced topics, those who don't understand the basics will quickly get lost.

Use this field to help attendees understand if your session will offer value to them.

Required Product Experience

Will an attendee who has never used Liaison's products and services benefit from attending your session? Will an attendee who has years of experience learn anything new in your session? Should attendees who are just getting started with Liaison's products and services be sure to attend your session so they get started on the right foot? Help attendees plan their schedules with your answer to this question.

Tags

What topics will you cover during your session? Use tags to offer insight into the answer to this question. Attendees will use these tags to plan their schedules.

If you are covering one or more discipline-specific CASs during your session, which one or ones specifically?

This information will help CAS members know which sessions will directly apply to their individual CAS communities.

If any, what other products and services will you cover during your session and in what context?

Are you planning on covering how a SIS integrates with a CAS? Or how a CRM can augment a CAS to optimize the admissions process? Share which specific tools you'll cover, being sure to name the SIS or CRM, and how they relate to the overall topic of your session. This will help attendees who use your same tools know they are uniquely positioned to benefit from hearing about your experience.

Preferred Session Format

While every session should employ engagement strategies to make the greatest impact, not all sessions look alike. Which session type best fits your plans?

- **Hands-on training:** These 60-minute sessions can feature one or more speakers who act in a facilitator capacity. Their goal is to empower attendees to capitalize on Liaison's strategic enrollment and experience management solutions and services.
- **Peer-led session:** These 45-minute sessions feature one speaker. Their goal is to demonstrate how attendees' colleagues have overcome their obstacles and achieved their ambitious goals.
- **Panel discussion:** These 60-minute sessions feature at least one facilitator and two to three speakers. They aim to connect attendees to industry leaders who will expand their horizons.

How to Draft a Winning Conference Session Proposal

2020 LIAISON USER CONFERENCE

What strategies will you apply to engage session attendees?

Attendees learn best when sessions are more than just “show and tell” presentations. Plan to appeal to multiple learning styles (visual, auditory, reading/writing and kinesthetic) during your session to ensure you meet your learning outcomes.

- Again, focus on the audience and what is in it for them.
- Set clear expectations for the presentation that focus on the benefits for the attendees.
- Have clear objectives for both yourself and the attendees. How will you know if it was a successful presentation? Keep the answer to this question in mind as you plan your format.
- Know your audience. Consider how much they already know — or don't know — and design the session with that in mind.
- Engage your audience with polls, discussions, differentiated instruction and use of technology. Read this article for more suggestions about ways to appeal to different learners, and review this resource for more information about active learning.
- Don't do all the talking. Incorporate the audience.

Speaker/Facilitator Information

This information will be used to promote your session and drive attendance. Share what sets you and your co-speakers/co-facilitators apart and makes you and your co-speakers/co-facilitators the go-to experts on the topic on which you'd like to present.