

Tips for Running an Online Artist Selection Panel

Drafted 4/6/2020 by LA Metro Arts & Design for Art-in-Transit Colleagues

Planning, Testing, Training and Setup

- Research various software and dial in options to determine the best available features for the meeting. Run internal tests to narrow the selection. Metro Arts & Design staff researched and tested Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and GoToMeeting. We determined that Teams was the appropriate platform for our selection process, along with Dropbox.
- Run a test meeting with each artist and all panelists in the intended software, as well as a backup platform, if applicable. Individual tests are helpful to identify if a particular connection is slow/bad, which seemed to be a major factor in quality of audio/visual during testing. Testing is not only important to resolving technical issues with software installation, microphones, speakers and internet, it is also an important opportunity to acclimate the users to provide comfort, ease and familiarity with the remote method.
- Establish roles and responsibilities in advance to ease the process. Some roles might include a “Host” that guides the panel, sets the tone and direction, and provides introductions; a “Facilitator” that understands the software, watches the lobby to admit participants, and shares their screen with each preloaded presentation; and a “Scribe” to take notes, document attendance, and keep time. Remember, in this format, it can be hard to get attention for timing or introductions without interrupting.
- During testing, decide with the artist who will share the screen and “drive” the presentation. Pick a word/cue with the artist for page turning like “next.” Test all intended file types (PPT, PDF, JPG, MP4) with screen sharing to make sure pages change on cue and videos play. This is also a good time to remind the artist of presentation schedule and timing.
- Have contingency plans in place for any unexpected issues and communicate those to participants. For possible internet issues, have a method to dial in via phone and follow along. For software issues, have an alternative option tested. For scheduling issues, have a list of direct phone and email numbers of participants.
- If initial anonymity is important between panelists and/or artists, research privacy and sharing controls in the online platform. Consider setting up separate calendar appointments with the meeting information to hide attendee emails.
- Enable “lobby” or “waiting room” features to control when artists enter, avoid any overheard discussion, and avoid any unwanted guests.

- Create scoring sheets and test formulas for any weighted calculations. The panelist online meeting test is a good time to also try out the score sheet.
- Distributing proposal files to panelists in advance allows them the opportunity to see the images in high(er) resolution than the shared screen, especially for video. Also, downloading a copy in advance is good way to follow along if a call-in contingency plan is needed. Ask panelists to keep their minds open and not make a decision until all presentations are complete. It is also recommended to inform the artists that their files will be shared in advance and to give artists a strict deadline for final versions of their proposal files.
- Establish an alternate channel for discussion between those running the panel, such as a group text or other chat software (such as Slack), for private logistical communications without interrupting the panel.
- Decide on policy on recording the meeting and, as a courtesy, notify the participants. Recording is not recommended, as distribution can be hard to control, and it may cause unease.
- Send out a reminder and etiquette email that includes the agenda and sets expectations, such as how one should enter/exit the room, when to deliberate, when there will be breaks, muting or other settings, and if there will be any observers (who will be in the room).

Panel Day

- Distribute a contact list within the internal team, so to easily reach out individually in the event of technical or scheduling issues.
- The day of, turn off all notifications, calendar reminders, and alerts. This is also a good reminder for all attendees to avoid background noise.
- The facilitator should check that all the files are properly sorted in generic folders on the desktop (Artist 1, 2, 3), for easy access and to keep anonymity. They should also reopen presentation files make sure that none of the software programs run new updates during the panel presentations.
- In lieu of a sign in sheet, periodic screen captures can document attendance.
- Remind attendees of the etiquette guidelines. This might include: to not use the shared chat and meeting notes (to avoid overshared/overseen proposal deliberations), to turn on cameras for introductions (as a comforting courtesy), to turn off microphones when not speaking (to cut down background noise), to use headphones if they are creating an echo, and to provide their name again when asking question.

- Provide the panel a brief refresher to the site, project and artwork goals. There is likely a lot on everyone's mind, so a reorientation can be very helpful and provides a forum for panelists to ask clarifying questions before beginning.
- Let the panelists know when a new person/artist enters/leaves the room. Let them know when to introduce themselves. Let them know when they can begin discussing a presentation.
- Speak slowly and calmly. The digital format seemed to cause a speeding up.
- Be careful that screensharing is turned off between presentations. Allow a bit of time to switch between files and let panelists stretch before admitting the next artist into the digital room.
- For scoring, remind panelists to take notes on their scoresheet as they go. After presentations, panelists can discuss and read aloud their scores, and the facilitator can add the scores on a master tally spreadsheet over screenshare. This allows panelists to see the scores autocalculate and negotiate until there is consensus.

Wrap Up

- Send out a thank you, as this process often requires additional patience and testing for all, and provide any wrap up instructions, such as invoicing.
- Panelists should submit their final, signed and dated scoresheet within 24 hours.
- Format notes and documentation while still fresh, ideally within 24 hours.
- Provide an opportunity for feedback from participants for future improvements on the process
- Note: Our internal recap was that the remote panel selection format, completely new to our group, had some unexpected benefits. It allowed a welcome peek inside artist studios (and panelist homes), instead of a formal presentation room. Some artists took advantage of their background with pinups of concept sketches. The format also seemed to allow newer or nervous artists to present more confidently. This is believed to be because the artists were in their own setting, they weren't fully visible (making fidgeting less obvious), and they had the opportunity to read notes.