

Presenting @ Educause: Soup to Nuts!

If you are interested in presenting at an Educause regional conference, here are some things that we learned during our experience.

Pros of doing a presentation or poster session

- It's an opportunity to re-evaluate your project! What worked? What didn't? What would you change next time? What were your lessons learned?
- Improve internal collaborations - if a project was handed off from one group to another, working together on presenting that project to an audience can help build future collaborations between your groups and improve working relationships.
- Professional development! Growth is good, get better at what you do, expand your network of experts and learn new things.
- Networking - be at the top of your game! These are your peers, and you can make a lot of contacts and form new alliances with people at other institutions. Starting these conversations is a lot easier when people already know who you are and what you do.

Writing the Proposal

- Go back to your project documents. Final reports and process notes can often form the bulk of the proposal with minimal rewriting.
- Think about the basic arc of the information you want to present. The proposal and the presentation should work from the same outline, and hit the same major points.
- Many details are irrelevant and can bog down your proposal! Stay focused, use standard and consistent vocabulary, and
- If possible, have people who have attended Educause conferences review your proposal for consistency, coherency, and interest.

Presentation

- Think about your audience: what do you want them to take away from your presentation? What lessons should they learn?
- Make use of Educause resources. They usually have "speaker resources" links up, either for the conference you are attending or for past conferences, containing many useful tips.
- Make use of in-department resources. Talk to people who have attended Educause conferences or who have presented at them.
- When developing a presentation in collaboration with others, be careful to have a consistent look. Agree on vocabulary, fonts, etc. and stick to the decisions!
 - Try to avoid using Carnegie Mellon-specific vocabulary or unfamiliar acronyms

- Schedule dry runs of your presentation, and leave yourself plenty of time to incorporate feedback!
 - A first dry run done one month before the conference and a second two weeks later should be sufficient.
 - Invite people who helped with your proposal, who have given advice on your presentation, or other experts on the topic at hand
 - Ask an attendee to keep track of time. Plan to leave at least 10 minutes for questions at the end of your presentation.
- Images, charts, and graphs can be useful, but use them with care.
 - Be sure that any graphic elements in your presentation are easy to read and understand.
 - Are your graphics purposeful? Do they communicate with the audience?
 - Think about how much explaining you have to do of a particular graphic. Sometimes, you might want to talk a lot about the graphic; other times, you will want the graphic to be self-explanatory or add narrative punch to the presentation.
 - Professionally done photographs can be expensive, and may or may not be worth the price.
- Create a website that you can point the audience to for more information.
 - Copy of presentation
 - Project documents (edited for privacy/confidentiality if necessary)
 - Contact information for presenters
- A one-page handout can be useful -- for example, if you have a brochure or executive summary, you can provide that. It should contain the following information:
 - URL to your project website
 - Contact information
 - Carnegie Mellon Computing Services wordmark (used in accordance with policy) helps brand the information
- Have backup plans!
 - Electronic backup of presentation on thumb drive
 - Backup computer (one of ours decided not to cooperate with the projector provided!)
 - Non-technical backup plan – be able to present without technology if necessary
 - Have a printout of your presentation with you, or notecards, or whatever physical, non-electronic support mechanism works for you.

Poster

- A one-page handout that is a printout of the poster is useful.
- Posters should be slick and professionally produced -- no "eighth grade science fair" posters!
- The posters need to contain enough information that people don't have to ask you for basics.
 - Why you did the project or why you provide the service
 - A broad outline of the process or service
 - What the results are and how you know those results

For example, if we made a poster about our project, we would want to include enough information that people could read the poster and ask questions like "What was the value of using two post-assessment instruments?" instead of questions like "So why did you make a space like this in the first place?"

Networking!

- Be able to:
 - explain who you are & what you do
 - give an overview of your group/department/division
 - a bit about Carnegie Mellon's history and demographics, esp:
 - number of undergraduate & graduate students
 - heterogeneity of population
 - heterogeneity of computing platforms
- Bring business cards (in a nice holder, if you have one)
- Print mailing labels with your presentation or poster title on them, and put them on the back of your business cards. Include a URL if you have a public website up for the project or service.
- Collect business cards of others while networking. Write on the back of them something about that person and/or the follow-up item for you on the back for easy reference when you get back.

Post Production

- Follow up on presentation items from conference. Think about big picture and possible future opportunities.
- Be sure to add last minute edits and copyright information to presentation file.
- Upload final copy of conference materials to Educause website
- Write an executive summary (one page) on your experience, and share resources and contacts with the division.