

How to craft a great session proposal

You are invited to submit a proposal to present a 60-minute **breakout session**, which includes question-and-answer (Q&A) time. New for 2026, there are **three formats** for breakout sessions:

Listen and learn: A lecture-style session where speakers present key concepts and foundational knowledge. Attendees focus on the information being shared and consider how they can apply it in their organizations. Presentations may include slides, videos, demos, and/or Q&A. These sessions will focus on topics with broad applicability, yet they can be oriented toward learners at specific levels of experience. Attendees will come away with insightful ideas they can implement either to start or enhance their lifesaving programs.

Conversation: A conversation-based session where attendees work through common challenges together with the goal of arriving at solutions that can benefit everyone. There will be no slides or formal presentations — just facilitated dialogue with leaders in the no-kill movement. Speakers and attendees will engage on the assigned topic and exchange ideas in a supportive and collaborative environment.

Workshop: A hands-on, active participation session where attendees develop practical solutions and actionable plans in real time. Speakers will guide participants through case studies or actual scenarios to help them develop plans, proposals, or communications to take their lifesaving to the next level.

When you submit your proposal, you can select the format(s) best suited for your delivery style and explain how your content would be tailored to your selected format(s).



To explore how these formats may work in practice, let's walk through an example for each format. The general topic is "how to establish a community cat program at your shelter":

Listen and learn

This format resembles a "traditional" breakout session. As the speaker, your objective may be to reach as many attendees as possible, so you design your presentation to provide shelters of all sizes with actionable steps for initiating a community cat program. You can use slides as visuals on the big screen and share your proven tips and techniques throughout the presentation. If time allows, you could open the floor for a Q&A session at the end. Ahead of time, we will help make your presentation and handout materials (such as a tip sheet) available to attendees through the conference app.

Title: 10 Steps to Establish a Community Cat Program at Your Shelter

Sample description introduction: Are you looking to start a community cat program at your organization, but you aren't sure where to begin? In this introductory-level session, the presenter will guide you through the 10 steps you need to launch a community cat program.

Conversation

As the name suggests, this format involves facilitating a conversation around the topic. You can expect your audience to have some knowledge of community cat programs, as well as relevant facts from their organizations. However, they might still need guidance in working through challenges or clarifying key questions before launching a new program. You can start the session by briefly sharing your experiences and successes, as well as the challenges you faced along the way. This would set the stage for engaging the room in conversation. Participants should come ready to discuss and walk away with new inspiration and approaches. You can make a resource document or supporting material available in both hard copy and the conference app.

Title: Expert Guidance on Establishing a Community Cat Program

Sample description introduction: Do you already have a community cat program in your city but are struggling with challenges? From surgical capacity to community pushback, bring your questions and ideas to this collaborative session. With guidance from an expert facilitator, we will work collectively through challenges and brainstorm solutions that can lead to saving more lives.

Workshop

A workshop is action oriented. In this case, the speaker's goal would be to help each participant outline their organization's process and next steps. You might focus your session on participants who have a basic understanding of how a community cat program functions and are ready to implement one at their shelter. You would invite participants to come prepared with their goals and vision for their program, as well as any plans they may have already drafted. You could organize your content around your proven 10-step process and then guide participants through each step as they complete their takeaway plan.

Title: How to Build a Lifesaving Community Cat Program at Your Shelter

Sample description introduction: You already understand the basics of how a community cat program works, and now you are ready to dig into building your program implementation plan. How do you start it, fund it, market it, and run it? In this tactical workshop, an expert will help you develop your project plan, so you can head home with actionable strategies to launch your program. Come prepared with any plans you may have drafted and be ready to share your goals and visions.

Levels of learning

When submitting, you'll indicate the level of learning your session is designed for:

Beginner: An individual who is just starting in animal welfare or is new to the topic or program being discussed. The person has limited experience and is eager to learn more.

Intermediate: Someone with moderate experience in the topic or program who is interested in exploring deeper strategies and troubleshooting beyond the basic “how to”.

Advanced: A professional with many years of experience in the topic or program, ready to explore detailed methodologies, nuanced techniques, and complex problem-solving approaches to enhance their expertise and practical application.

Title and description

Write a clear and concise title that communicates the purpose of your session. In your description, highlight the context you want to share and the key takeaways for attendees. Focus on what they would learn, whom the session is geared toward, and why they should attend.

If attendees are expected to bring materials or come prepared with ideas, include this in the description. Avoid jargon, insider language, and unexplained acronyms. Your session should be welcoming and accessible.

Content guidelines

Be informative and actionable. Focus on teaching how to implement your knowledge and experiences in their own organizations, rather than just showcasing your accomplishments.

Share strategies and practical tips. For example, if your session is about a community cat program, explain why it was successful and how they can start their own program using your proven methods.

Consider including strategies to **communicate with the public or build community support**, emphasizing awareness, advocacy, and engagement. Depending on your topic, this could be a significant part of your content or as simple as one or two key messages or talking points.

Emphasize **immediate or short-term actions** people can take rather than longer-term campaigns or multi-year capital strategies.

Think about scalability. Ensure your content can be applied by a broad range of organizations. If your session is tailored to a specific audience (e.g., high-volume spay/neuter clinics or rural shelters), indicate this clearly in your title and description, so attendees will know whether your session is relevant to their needs.

Additional notes

While all submissions are considered, please note that priority will be given to sessions premiering at the Best Friends National Conference and not previously presented at other industry events.

Sessions may not be used as a sales pitch for a company's products or services. While we welcome representatives from for-profit companies to submit an exhibitor application, please refrain from submitting a speaking session geared toward selling a product or service.