**Unconference FAQ**

On Friday February 6, at 2pm, the AAN-TMC conference turns into an “unconference” for 3 hours. What does that mean, and how can you use the time to your advantage?

**What is an Unconference?**

An unconference is a set of participant-created and participant-led sessions. The setting explodes the conference format, giving you the chance to talk with anyone you want and about anything you want.

**Who creates Unconference Sessions?**

You do. Every single person has the opportunity to put a session on the agenda. Even if you are at the conference as a volunteer or intern, yes, you can propose a session. If you usually are a plenary speaker, remember you are also a person—propose and attend sessions!

**What kinds of topics can be proposed for Unconference Sessions?**

Any topic can be proposed. If you really want people who have flown in to San Francisco from across the country to talk about the relative value of wheat grass juice, you can propose that session. Seriously. Nothing is off the table.

Some sessions will be based on formal presentations, with speakers who have thought about a topic for years and want feedback. Some sessions will be based on groups that have already worked together and would welcome new people and ideas. Some will be spur of the moment ideas. In the same way, we expect that some sessions may be editorial in focus, some business. All are good.

**How and When do Unconference Sessions actually get created?**

Sessions are created at 2pm on Friday, February 6

* conference organizers will ask people with ideas for sessions to stand up
* session proposers will be asked to give a 7 word description of their session.
* Proposed sessions will be named and those names plus description will be written on post-it sheets
* Session proposers will stand next to their sheets
* All other attendees will be asked to stand next to the session they would like to “take”
* Sessions with large number of people will be assigned to rooms; those with smaller numbers will be given meeting spaces.

**Types of Unconference Sessions that work well:**

* Short presentation (5-10 minutes) followed by interactive discussion
* Group discussion around an interesting topic
* Big Question—you have a question, and you want help finding an answer
* Show and Tell—demo something
* Teach—teach folks how to do something

**Tips for running an Unconference session:**

* If you convene a session, it is your responsibility to “hold the space” for your session. You hold the space by leading a discussion, by posting a “first question,” or by sharing information about your program. Be the shepherd – stay visible, be as involved as necessary.
* Ask for help holding the space if you need it.
* Don’t assume people in the room know more, or less, than you do.
* Don’t be upset if only two people show up to your session. Those two people are the ones who share your interest.
* Don’t feel that you have to “fill” up an hour of time.
* Don’t feel pressure to have everything take “only” an hour. If you start with a short presentation, and then a group conversation gets going, and your discussion needs to continue past an hour – find a way to make this happen.
* Be Brave! Others are interested in making your session work!
* Do think about the ideas that you want to cover in your session, and how you want to cover them. But don’t feel as though you need to prepare a great deal. (If you’re over-prepared, your session might lose energy.)

**Rules for Unconferences:**

* Whoever comes are the right people (2 people can be a great group)
* Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened
* Every session must have a reporter to report out what has happened
* Use your two feet—if you aren’t getting out of a session what you hoped, leave that session and join another. No shame!

Good resources to learn more (and the basis for this FAQ):

<http://www.unconference.net/unconferencing-how-to-prepare-to-attend-an-unconference/>

And see: wikipedia: Open Space Technology