Breakout Session Guidelines - SOCMLx 2019

This document provides brief guidelines for break-out session leaders. In general, the breakout sessions are intended to be primarily free-form discussions. As a leader you will be responsible for introducing your session and suggesting a goal(s) to achieve during it.

The following are general guidelines to help ensure the success of your session.

- Introduce facilitators & breakout session:
    - Name, affiliations, research areas of interest, outline of session,
    - Motivate why you chose to facilitate a session on your topic.

- Be prepared to spend the first 5-10 minutes of your session introducing the topic to be discussed and highlight possible points of discussion/goals for the session. Note: If your topic needs, for example, 20 minutes, break-up the presentation into 2 parts: deliver part 1 at the beginning and part 2 halfway through the session, but please avoid 15+ mins if you can.

  Suggestions for how to introduce your topic include:
    - Define your topic,
    - Point-out key characteristics of your topic, especially those that invite other subfields, e.g. RL is closely related to control & optimization b/c...
    - Describe the key challenges in this area on a high-level,
    - Use graphics/imagery to provide intuition for the topic or key ideas,
    - Describe the key approaches on a high-level to provide newbies with intuition for the methods,
    - Make connections with other topics, e.g. note the relationship between your topic and topic X.

- Format: in general, you are free to choose the format that you are most comfortable with and consider most appropriate for your topic. While slides might help structure a session, they are by no means required. Depending on the topic, it might even be easier to get a discussion going without slides, as slides often tend to make participants more passive attendees. Keep in mind that the majority of a session should take the form of an inclusive discussion, rather than a unilateral presentation.

- Work to encourage inclusion within your session. While some participants may prefer to attend only passively (which is fine!), encouraging input from the less-vocal attendees may enable more interesting discussions. Here is a suggested activity for generating discussion. Use it after you introduce your topic to get a discussion going or mid-way through your session if you feel you've hit a lull in the discussion.
    1. Ask people to turn to a partner,

2. Then, have participants answer some questions that make the discussion relevant to their own work, for example:
    i. “What was your motivation for attending this session?”
    ii. “How does the presentation/discussion relate to the research you do?”
    iii. “Of the ideas presented/discussed, is there something you want to know more about?”
3. Ask participants to share what they and their partner discussed.

- Consider arranging the chairs in your session in a circle or a similar format that will invite discussion. Avoid rows and columns as people are then facing each others backs.

- Conclusion: At the end of your session,
    - Thank participants for attending,
    - Remind the group what the goal of your session was and how the discussion helped achieve it,
    - Provide a slide with a reference list for anyone who wants to learn more about what you presented/discussed, or
    - Create a slack group to post references and/or continue the conversation,
    - Encourage people to continue the discussion by posing additional questions,
    - If you have an extra minute, ask if someone wants to shout-out their posters.

Have a great discussion!