

## VLA 2022 unconference session primer

### What is an unconference session?

Unconference sessions are a flexible, structured method for conferees to share experience and expertise on subjects of mutual interest. *You'll determine topics for our unconference sessions* online, the day before the conference. The sessions are often discussion-centered, but sometimes a presentation or panel format is more appropriate. You'll be able to tell what's going to work for you.

At VLA 2022, we'll have time and space available for four sets of up to five simultaneous one-hour sessions.

### How do I know that an unconference session will provide useful information to me?

Experience has shown that for unconference sessions to work well, it's important that there be one or more participants who have some knowledge or experience in the topic chosen. Occasionally, no expertise is available, and the session becomes a disappointment to all involved. Obviously, there are no guarantees that every session will be a success. *You can help! If you have expertise in or experience with a session topic, please consider offering to facilitate or participate. Our conference will work best when we support each other.*

### Who runs an unconference session?

Each unconference session needs a *facilitator*.

Ideally, the facilitator has some knowledge or experience of the topic, *though this is not required*. The facilitator is responsible for keeping the group focused on the topic, ensuring the session runs smoothly, and making sure that all present have an appropriate chance to contribute and ask questions.

### How are unconference topics and facilitators chosen?

**You** will choose unconference session topics through a unique online process on Tuesday, May 31, the day before the conference. In the morning, participants can propose topics. A small group will clean up what's offered, and in the afternoon, you'll be able to vote for the session topics you most want and need.

Detailed instructions are available at [LINK].

If you have some facilitation experience or knowledge or expertise in a session topic, please consider volunteering as a facilitator for the topic by adding your contact information to any topic, as explained in the instructions. Multiple offers of facilitation for a topic are very helpful to the organizers when determining the final sessions.

After voting has closed, the small group will determine what topics to schedule and find and confirm session leaders. By late Tuesday evening, we'll have determined and distributed a set of unconference sessions well-tuned to your needs.

# VLA 2022 unconference session facilitation primer

## What's involved in facilitating an unconference session?

Each session needs a *facilitator*.

Ideally the facilitator has some knowledge or experience of the topic, *but this is not required*.

The facilitator is responsible for keeping the group focused on the topic, ensuring the group runs smoothly, and making sure that everyone has an appropriate chance to contribute and ask questions.

## Unconference session facilitation—step by step

*Start on time*; don't wait for latecomers to arrive.

If the session is a presentation or panel, have the presenter(s) [which may be you] give a short initial presentation, and moderate subsequent questions and discussion.

If a presentation format isn't appropriate (this is often the case):

- Use a quick go-round with the group (not more than 30 seconds per person) to home in on what group members want to discuss, and any relevant experience they possess.
- Briefly summarize the go-round and get a quick consensus on what will be discussed.
- Moderate the ensuing discussion.

*End on time*.

## Facilitation tips

Facilitation is an art not a science. Here are some tips that may help you.

- Keep a go-round short! Don't spend more than 20% of your time on a go-round.
- Note the themes brought up in the go-round and make time for each of them as appropriate.
- Have someone (not the facilitator) use a flip chart to keep track of ideas.
- Model the way you'd like to see the group interact. People will follow your lead.
- Keep the session on-topic. If the topic wanders, check to see if the group wants to go there.
- If you have contributions to the group discussion, that's fine. But be careful: as facilitator it's easy to monopolize the conversation.
- Don't allow people to monopolize the discussion. Ensure all who wish to contribute can. It's OK to gently interrupt someone who's talking too much – that's your job!
- Encourage participation. Watch for quiet attendees and check if they have something to say or questions to ask.