

Often times an UnCon has multiple topic tracks. I adapted the "typical" to only allow for one track given the goal of keeping the team together and working towards a common goal.

Primary Goals

<http://www.scottberkun.com/blog/2006/how-to-run-a-great-unconference-session/>

- Create both a topic and an angle
- Don't be scared to pick tough topics
- Emphasize interactivity
- Be a good host
- Take advantage of the unique opportunity
- Relax and have fun
- Continue the conversation

Supplies

- Sticky-notes, pens, pencils
- A secure meeting space the group can leave their belongings and props in
- If there is a whiteboard bring a supply of markers
- A projector
- If there is no whiteboard make sure there is a wall available to put sticky-notes on
 - Perhaps bring a freestanding isle stand and a pad of paper. The paper with an adhesive backing is a nice to have so you can stick them to the walls.
 - You can also purchase rolls of stick-on "whiteboards" (much like the adhesive backed paper) that adhere to the walls using static. This can be used and then rolled up to allow capture and transport of the ideas generated during the sessions.

Explain the format of how the UnCon process works

- Discuss a group agreement. Also explain what your goals as the group facilitator are.
- If the meeting is a multi-day one like a workweek let the group know that the beginning of the first day is mainly going to be spent setting up a topic list for the week. If it's a single day event you can bypass mentioning this. A topic list can begin in advance of the meeting using a collaborative tool like etherpads, wiki, etc. These should be viewed as an extra element to supplement the goal of working face-to-face.
- Let people know up front that this is a participatory event and that you're there to help guide the process/conversation. The group owns and can modify the process at any point.
- Make it clear that if a person needs to get up and leave at any point they should feel free to do so... bathroom breaks, smoke breaks, food, watching TV, etc.
- Also give people permission to vote with their feet. If at any point something doesn't

interest a person they should feel free to leave for that session.

Pre-planning

- Get agreement
 - how many days the conference will be
 - when the day will start and when it will end
 - the length of the sessions - typically anything shorter than 50 - 60 minutes per session is not enough.
 - when the breaks will be
 - when meals will be
- Let the group know they can change the agenda at any point

Create an agenda

- Give the group ~15 minutes to individually write topics on sticky-notes.
- Try to create themes. Using the whiteboard or wall, organize the sticky-notes into piles of duplicates and similar topic areas. Have the group help with this. I suggest getting a helper to do this task... get verbal group agreement when grouping notes together.
- Using the whiteboard, draw out a grid with the days and time slots the group agreed on. If not using a whiteboard, use the pad of paper, or simply put the sticky-notes on the wall.
- The group may realize that a particular topic doesn't quite fit a time slot
 - If a topic is too small for one slot try grouping several similar topics together.
 - If the group realizes a topic is too big for the slot times perhaps suggest increasing the time for that particular topic by shuffling the sessions around a bit.
- Create a session backlog
 - If you have too many topics to safely fit in the agenda
 - To capture new topic ideas throughout the conference
 - Remind the group that items can actively be pushed and pulled from the backlog during the week if a topic rises in importance.

Running the sessions

- Check-in with the group
 - Always touch base with the group throughout the day to see how they're doing and see if the agenda/session schedule needs to be amended.
- Always start sessions on-time. This sets a couple of precedents.
 - The group knows they can rely on you as the process shepherd
 - The group knows that their time is valuable
 - Let the group know that if they're late to a session that's OK.
- Find 1 or 2 people to assist in note taking on an etherpad or shared document that

allows real-time collaboration

- share the link with the group so they can follow along
- Take into account different learning and communication styles to help target and illicit peoples strengths
- Make sure dominant personalities in the group don't overly drive the session selection, discussions, problem exploration, and solution exploration.

House keeping

- Create a wiki page with the agenda and outcomes/action items of each session
 - example: https://wiki.mozilla.org/QA/Execution/Web_Testing/WorkWeek/2011/06
 - Action items and session agendas should be updated nightly on the wiki
- I find it useful to put the high level action items on the wiki so the group doesn't have to dig through the etherpad for the pertinent items
- As the facilitator it is up to you to remind the group to stick to the agenda, gently nudge the group at intervals before the session's time slot is up. If a topic conversation is going over remind the group of the time. However offer it up to the group that they can reorganize the schedule and allow a conversation to continue if its important enough. Though it may bump something else off of the schedule.
- Make sure to keep the wiki up-to-date with the agenda and notes throughout the week.
- Put a big note/sign somewhere in the room with these 3 pointers to remind people
 - what is the purpose of this conversation
 - what do want accomplish from this discussion
 - what are the take-aways