



A Collaborative Keynote: Harnessing the power of a crowd to build ideas and solve problems

What Is Meeting Facilitation?

Effectively facilitating an organizational meeting means running a productive and impartial gathering of employees or stakeholders, with the purpose of making decisions, solving problems, brainstorming, or simply exchanging ideas. The facilitator leads the group in discussion, helping them understand common objectives and formulate steps to achieve them. Quality facilitators do not assume a particular position; instead, their job is to focus on the content and the process of the conversation, and, ideally, hands-off responsibility of the discussion back to the participants.

Client: International Furnishings and Design Association (IFDA)

Established in 1947, The International Furnishings and Design Association (IFDA) provides services and products to their members in the furnishings and design field. IFDA has 14 chapters across the U.S., and their membership is comprised of people from all facets of the industry.

In developing this meeting facilitation plan and related talk, Todd Von Deak, MBA, CAE, of TVD Associates worked closely with IFDA's executive director, Jennifer Jones, MPA.

IFDA's Objectives

Every year, IFDA holds their Council of Presidents Meeting, a two-and-a-half-day conference for the key leaders of the organization. One of the sessions during the conference focuses on leadership, and features a talk and facilitated discussion.

While IFDA had previously hosted speakers from inside the design and furnishings industry at this conference, Jennifer Jones, the executive director of IFDA, was looking for a different approach in 2014. She became aware of TVD Associates a few years prior and "kept tabs on" Todd Von Deak and his work by reading his articles and following him on social media. Jones says she had long wanted to find a way to work with Todd, and in 2014 the opportunity presented itself.

Jones felt it important that not only should someone experienced and charismatic run the leadership session, it should be run by a person with an innovative approach and a strong background in the association world. She wanted someone who could connect with the audience and draw out their ideas and concerns and turn them into action steps that participants could bring back to their chapters. Todd, she says, fit the bill perfectly, and she brought him on board.

The feedback from the 2014 Council of Presidents Meeting was overwhelmingly positive, and the following year IFDA invited Todd back for a repeat engagement, the first time the organization had done so. Jones says chapter leaders still tell her about their favorable impressions of Todd and the rewarding experiences they had in both sessions; even today, she hears chapter leaders referring to many of the tools and tips that Todd shared with over those two days.



“The IFDA Council of Presidents was a great group, engaged and enthusiastic. After the first fifteen minutes, the talk evolved from a presentation to an open conversation. I could not have asked for more.”—Todd Von Deak

The Meeting Planning Process

The planning process itself was conducted in four parts:

1) Strategy Sessions with Meeting Steering Committee

The process began with several conversations between Todd Von Deak and IFDA executive director Jennifer Jones. In these discussions, they shared ideas about what the talk should cover and how the breakout session for participants should be structured, and formulated related plans.

2) Stakeholder Interviews

Todd conducted a series of one-on-one interviews with IFDA chapter leaders, from a cross-section of the organization’s membership. The interviews were centered on fact-finding and provided Todd with a deep understanding of how IFDA works, on a national level as well as regionally, and helped him learn about the chapters’ individual workings to identify the challenges they faced and the goals they wanted to achieve. Todd provided IFDA leadership with high-level feedback from the interviews he conducted.

3) Developed Talk and Facilitated Meeting Strategy

Todd’s topic for his 2015 talk was “Research Meets Reality,” an examination of key industry benchmarking research and how IFDA’s leaders could employ this knowledge to enhance their day-to-day operations, on both the national level and within each regional chapter. Todd and Jennifer Jones also created a structure for the breakout session and key points for Todd to hit on to integrate IFDA’s strategic initiatives into the conversation.

4) Delivered Keynote Address and Facilitated Discussion Session

“An important goal for this talk was to leverage the best in terms of industry research in order to foster real conversation among the participants. We knew what research to bring because we spent the time, up front, talking with attendees—you can’t underestimate the importance of that level of advance work, before you ever get to the meeting room.”—Todd Von Deak

The “Outsider” Advantage

It may seem counterintuitive to intentionally seek out a meeting facilitator whose background doesn’t directly correlate to an organization’s area of expertise or to its field. But an outlier might be just the person to spark the most interesting and insightful conversations among participants. For Jennifer Jones, it was imperative to have someone deliver this talk whose background was **not** in the furnishings and design field. Says Jones, “Having someone with an outside viewpoint is important and beneficial,” as this



point of view helps to bring a fresh perspective to what meeting participants might feel are familiar and well-trod topics that don't deserve special consideration.

Praise for TVD Associates

“Todd Von Deak brought infectious energy and a fresh perspective to our 2015 Council of Presidents meeting. All the attendees were bowled over by Todd's insights, and his session stayed high in everyone's minds long after the conference ended. I would wholeheartedly recommend TVD Associates to any organization looking for an engaging, instructive speaker and a successful facilitated meeting.”—Jennifer Jones, MPA, Executive Director, IFDA

To Learn More

For almost two decades, TVD Associates has provided counsel on strategy and management challenges in the nonprofit and association arenas. Our consulting practice focuses on helping small- to medium-sized organizations leverage their human capital for significant and measurable gains. Contact us today about your organization's needs and learn how a facilitated meeting could play an important role in your next organizational gathering.