

Unconference 101 Tip Sheet

If this is your first time participating in an unconference, you may be thinking 'what should I expect?'

With that in mind, we've put together a brief video explaining what an unconference is, and more importantly, what you can expect at the Firefly Summit unconference sessions.

So, what is an unconference?

An unconference is an open, participant-driven event, designed to enable rapid exchange of information and ideas, provide a space for conversations that matter and foster the development of collaborative relationships. The content is proposed and provided by the participants, and is often determined on the day of the event.

How is the agenda set?

It's your day, your agenda, your sessions! All those gathered will have the opportunity to put conference sessions on the agenda. All session ideas are welcome!

At the start of the unconference, the whole group will gather together and be guided through an interactive process to create an agenda. The exact process is not important to understand in advance – the process will become clear as it happens.

What do I have to do if I host a session?

If you convene a session, your only responsibility is to "hold the space" for your session. You hold the space by leading a discussion, by posting a "first question," or by sharing information to kick off the discussion. Be the shepherd – stay visible, be as involved as necessary, be a beacon of sanity that guides the group.

- You do not need to have experience hosting to suggest a topic and convene a session so go ahead and take the plunge!
- You do not need to be an expert in the topic to host a session.
- You do not need to do preparation in order to convene a session. If you get an idea the day of the event, call a session.
- There is no 'right way' to lead a session. However, there is a suggestion to aim for interaction and discussion.
- Be sure to choose a format for your session will help you achieve your vision.
- *Pro Tip: Take notes and photos of your sessions so you can share them with others either at sessions you lead or in other sessions.*

Attending a session

When you attend a session, you are an active participant in the session – not a member of the ‘audience.’

Vote with your feet! We want everyone to be learning or contributing at the Summit. If you end up in a session you don't enjoy or find as fruitful, get up, leave and join a different session. This is one of the core principles of unconferences. No one will be offended if you decide a session is not right for you.

Types of sessions...

There are definite patterns you'll find at unconferences. Even though they're self-organized, there are some basic formats to follow that create a stimulating peer-to-peer environment. Here are some of our suggestions:

Group Discussion or Brainstorm	The host picks a topic and frames an interesting discussion or brainstorm around the topic for the group.
The Semi-Talk	This is a 5/15 minute presentation by the organiser used as fuel for the session, followed by an interactive discussion.
My Big (or Little) Question	You have a question you want to know the answer to, and you think others in the group could help you answer it. This format could simply be the seed of a conversation.
Show & Tell	You have a cool project or clinical case study or something to show that is the springboard for all the conversation in the session. Alternatively, you can invite others to bring their own items to show and tell (perhaps with a theme), and everyone takes a turn sharing. Just a reminder that “selling” or “pitching” is not permitted at the unconference.
Learn How To Do X	If you're inclined to teach, this can be simple and effective. Bring the equipment that you need, and have a plan that will let you teach five, ten, or 15 people how to do something all at the same time.
Longer Formal Presentations	This is tricky, as the basic format lacks interactivity so we advise against it for unconferences. But if you're a rock star, or have a big, well developed idea (a book in progress, a manifesto) you can pull this off. Please note: There will NOT be projector and laptop in each room so you will have to bring your own.

Advice for everyone at unconference...

- Come with an open mind! If you have never been to an unconference, you are in for a treat. The open format, especially at the beginning of the day, can feel chaotic. Participate as much or as little as you would like to, but come with an open mind and see where the discussions will go.
- 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.)
- Experiment with the kind of sessions you lead. There is no such thing as "failure" at an unconference.
- Follow your passion – go to the sessions that interest you.
- Take responsibility for your own learning – if the topics you are interested in don't appear on the agenda, volunteer to host a session on them. Participants are in the driver's seat!
- Ask for help hosting a session if you need it. Consider co-hosting with another participant who is interested in the same topic. If you are incredibly passionate about a topic, perhaps invite a co-host who offers a different perspective than you to balance the discussion.
- Don't assume people in the room know more, or less, than you do. You never know who is going to be interested in your session. You might want to start by asking people to hold up their hands if they've been involved with the topic for more than five years, for one to five years, or for one year or less.
- Be brave! Others are interested in making your session work!