Interactive Approach to Breakout Sessions

We have heard from participants in the past that the chance to learn from other board directors and make connections is a benefit of the conference and that there is a desire to have more opportunity for this. We did some research and found that this desire was backed up by studies focused specifically on audience engagement, retention and learning.

- **Higher retention rates**: According to the National Training Laboratories, participants retain only 5% of lecture material but up to 75% when they practice what they've learned through interactive activities.
- **Improved attention spans**: Research by Bunce et al. (2010) shows audience attention significantly lapses every 10-15 minutes during lectures, but interactive segments reset attention spans.
- **Better learning outcomes**: Freeman et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis of 225 studies found active learning approaches reduced failure rates by 35% compared to traditional lectures.
- **Enhanced knowledge transfer**: Deslauriers et al. (2019) demonstrated that interactive approaches significantly improved actual performance compared to passive learning methods.
- **Reduced cognitive overload**: Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988) confirms that interactive breaks help manage cognitive load, preventing the "information overload" that occurs during extended passive listening.

We recommend, therefore, that you offer opportunities for active engagement during your sessions so that, as the research above shows, participants can really engage with and learn from the insight and expertise you and your team brings. This audience engagement does take precious time from your presentation, of course!

With this in mind, we also recommend that you spend time as a presenter really clarifying what your main point / focus is and ensuring that all content you share is directly linked to that main point(s). This will ensure participants really gain from your presentation what you intend they learn. This will also help you cut parts of your presentation that might not be aligned so that there is more time for deeper engagement with your main idea, audience engagement on the content shared and time for Q&A.

- We have a few recommendations with this in mind:
  - That you consider sharing general context and information about your district in a way that does not take up time in your presentation (a handout, etc)
  - That you have a slide that shares what your main point / focus is early on to support learning.

- o That there are at least two other opportunities for audience engagement with one another to help solidify learning and make connections. A few ideas for what that engagement might look like are below:
  - **Think-Pair-Share**: Pause your presentation to allow participants 30-60 seconds to think about a question, then discuss with a neighbor before sharing with the larger group.
  - **Audience Polling:** Use digital tools or simple hand-raising to collect audience opinions and display results in real-time.
  - **Case Studies or Scenarios:** Present real-world problems and give small groups 5 minutes to develop and share solutions.
  - **Guided Note-Taking:** Provide partially completed handouts that participants fill in during your presentation, keeping them actively engaged.
  - **Knowledge Checkpoints:** Intersperse reflection questions throughout your presentation.
  - **Application Activities:** Pause for brief activities where participants apply what they've just learned to their own work.
- o That you close with a slide that includes a QR Code to an evaluation to support WSSDA in getting more consistent feedback across breakouts. This will be provided in September before the conference.

Thanks for considering this interactive approach to breakout sessions for WSSDA's Annual Conference, and please don't hesitate to reach out to Heather Curl, EdD the Director of Leadership Development at WSSDA. With both K-12 and higher education teaching and presenting experience, she is excited to work with you on your presentation.