

## **Expectations and Tips on Moderating a Successful Weather Band Webinar**

### **Weather Band Panel Options:**

- A webinar with a single speaker with a moderator who will engage in conversation with the speaker and then open up the discussion with the audience through their questions.
- A webinar with multiple speakers with a moderator will create a panel *conversation* – among the panelists and, at some point, between the panelists and the audience.

### **Background/research on the topic:**

- For Weather Band webinars, we will bring the webinar organizer, moderator, and panelist(s) together to talk through the purposes and focus of the webinar by email. We will share the draft marketing materials approximately 3 weeks out to be sure we have captured the right tone. We will also share early in the process if there are published pieces from the speaker(s) that will help to prepare for the webinar. Panelists may already know each other, but to ensure this, we may provide additional biographical background. Moderators, in particular, should make it a point to know the backgrounds of the individual panelists.

### **Duties:**

- Don't consider yourself or come across as just an additional speaker/panelist. As the moderator, your job is to...
  - Set purposes, context, and tone of the event.
  - Make the speakers comfortable and ensure the audience feels welcome to participate actively in the event.
  - Manage time. Ensure that speakers equitably share their time, generous time is available for audience participation, and that things end on time.
  - Identify opportunities to shift the discussion or spend more time on an interesting topic.
  - Gently but firmly ensure that panelists and audience are respectful.
  - Ensure there is no "dead air" with long periods of silence. This requires prepared questions to keep the discussion going if there are few questions from the audience.

### **Meeting with the speakers before the panel:**

- One to two weeks out, we will organize a tech check/webinar walk-through to discuss the flow of the panel discussion and give the group a chance to meet one another. We will also discuss the schedule for the day of the webinar, review any time constraints, and remind the panelists to do their best to keep their responses focused so that we can stay on schedule.

### **Time management:**

- AMS staff will gather the group 30 minutes prior to the webinar to do a final tech check and talk through any last-minute concerns. Once the webinar is underway, the staff will walk through what is expected from the attendees and will introduce the moderator. We will then pass things off to the moderator to give short introductions for each panelist (bios will be provided.) We typically allow 15 minutes at the end of the hour for a Q&A.

### **Strategic pauses:**

- Pauses (silence) can be effective in transitioning topics, giving time for audience Q&A, and allowing for panelists to think about their answers. Still, too long a pause can interrupt the flow, waste precious time, and come across as the webinar is not fully prepared. This includes when speakers are having audio/connectivity issues. A best practice is to say, *“while we work on regaining audio and full connectivity, we will move on to...”*

### **Opening the webinar:**

- Start with a powerful opening. After you introduce the speakers, share with them the goals of the panel and the reason why they decided to organize it. It helps to set the stage and context for both the audience and the speakers.

### **Engaging the audience:**

- Be strictly neutral. Never take sides or express your own opinions. In the discussion, it's the panelist's job to provide and shape discussions, while yours, as a moderator, is to ensure the panel discussion flows and the audience is getting the most out of it.
- Mix in audience questions throughout the webinar. Even if you have carefully prepared a set of your own questions, don't rigidly stick to your flow. Webinar attendees are given the opportunity to submit questions through a Q&A, these can be mixed in with the questions from the moderator. One of the few perks of moderating is the opportunity to ask a question or two as the discussion goes along. Still, the moderator bias should be toward yielding to audience questions so long as these are coming.

If you are comfortable, consider having polls during the discussion to keep the audience engaged. Once the audience casts their votes and you get enough input, invite the panelists to comment on the results. It's engaging and starts up a dialogue between the speakers and the audience.

### **Conclusion:**

- Conclude the panel with a brisk question. When the time of your panel is almost up, make sure that you close the discussion meaningfully. A powerful ending is as important as a powerful opening. To ensure the panel discussion doesn't drag on for another ten minutes, ask a question encouraging brisk, to-the-point answers. Take inspiration from political debates, where a moderator invites participants to summarize their arguments in a quick final statement. Try something like: *“Since we're almost out of time, in 30 seconds, what is the main message you want the audience to take away?”* Or, *“What's the final piece of advice you'd like to give the audience?”* Remember to keep an eye on the duration of each panelist's answer.
- In a final couple of seconds, thank both the speakers and the audience for their participation.

