

# Top Priorities for Conference Planning: A Tale of Two Higher Education Groups

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## Conceptual Framework

Rossman and Schlatter's (2019) situated activity system & Knowles' andragogy concepts (1980)



## Guiding Questions

- ? What are the conference preferences of the two populations?
- ? How do these preferences differ or align among the two groups?



## Results

- Respondents were primarily white (group A=77%; group B=43%) and female (45%; 58%)
- Participated in conferences in a variety of different roles, including attendees (89%; 85%), presenters (84%; 73%), planning committee chairs or members (51%; 49%), and advisory committee chairs or members (37%; 28%)

The five items ranked most highly by each population are in the table below, along with five of the 25 characteristics that were ranked the same by both groups.



Three of the five lowest ranked characteristics for both populations:

- Attendees are in the same field as me (group A f=75; group B f=12),
- I know most other attendees (f=28; f=8),
- I do not know most other attendees (f=20; f=10)

Three rankings that differed between populations:

- Event includes decompression/reflection time (group A's #13; group B's #5)
- Event is face-to-face rather than virtual (group A's #10; group B's #19)
- Speaker is an expert in my field (group A's #12; group B's #22).

## Methods

- Spring 2022: questionnaire with 25 items distributed via Qualtrics
- Two populations: faculty of an R1 flagship university (group A; n=276) and faculty members involved in projects funded by a national initiative for diversity and inclusion in sciences (group B; n=109)
- Analysis: descriptive statistics including counts, means, and percentages using Microsoft Excel.



### R1 Group A Rankings

I choose to attend the event (f=216).

Event focuses on specific skills and practices (f=216).

My institution provides support to attend the event (f=200).

The event flexes w/ participant needs and interests (f=196).

I'm able to take home materials or resources after the event (f=196).

### Group B Rankings

Event content focuses on specific skills and practices (f=89).

The event focuses on a setting of respect and safe space for open dialogue (f=89).

I'm able to take home materials or resources after the event (f=84).

The event flexes with participant needs and interests (f=83).

The event includes decompression/reflection time (f=82).

### Group A and B Shared Rankings

The event flexes with participant needs and interests (#4 of 25).

I create ideas, outlines, or other items during the event (#7 of 25).

The event includes breakout and small discussion time (#8 of 25).

There are interactions/activities after the event (#11 of 25).

I receive pre-conference materials with action prompts (#17 of 250).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

- Treat attendees as adult learners
- Focus influences need for certain elements
- Focus will impact speaker preference

Conference planners and professional organizers can use our questionnaire to examine their populations' wants and needs and incorporate those findings.

## References

- Knowles, M. S. (1980). The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy. Follet Publishing Company.  
Rossman, J., & Schlatter, B. E. (2019). Designing, staging, and managing the delivery of leisure experiences. Sagamore Publishing.