

# IDEAS TO REVOLUTIONIZE YOUR BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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SMARTSOURCE



Breakout sessions at conferences and events have become a crucial component, often providing memorable experiences and optimum learning environments for attendees.

As greater importance is placed on spending quality time and deriving value from attending in-person events, the traditional format of breakout sessions is evolving to keep up with the times and ensure that all attendees are engaged and motivated to take part.

In this guide, we explore innovative ideas to revolutionize breakout sessions. Before we get to new ideas, let's review the basic structure and purpose of breakout sessions.

### **What is a breakout session?**

Breakout sessions, often made up of smaller group gatherings split off from the main event, are designed to foster in-depth discussions, hands-on activities, and intimate networking opportunities that allow participants to dive deeper into specific topics, engage actively with content, and connect on a personal level with like-minded peers.

These smaller, more focused gatherings within a larger event or conference allow participants to explore specific topics in-depth and engage with others who share their interests. They often involve interactive activities and discussions and provide attendees with valuable learning and networking opportunities that may not be available in the main event.

Breakout sessions are crucial to any successful conference, as they provide attendees with a more personalized and tailored experience.



## What is the purpose of breakout sessions?

These sessions serve multiple purposes. First and foremost, they allow attendees to delve deeper into a topic of interest.

While keynote addresses and panel discussions often provide a broad overview of a theme, breakout sessions can hone in on specific aspects, providing detailed insights and practical knowledge.

Secondly, breakout sessions facilitate active learning. Unlike passive listening in a large auditorium, these sessions typically require attendees to engage actively with the content. This enhances understanding and aids in the retention and application of new knowledge.

Lastly, breakout sessions foster networking and collaboration. In a smaller group setting, attendees can network and connect with peers, share ideas, and perhaps even spark collaborations. This interpersonal aspect can significantly enhance the conference experience and provide value beyond knowledge acquisition.

## What is the format of breakout sessions?

Traditionally, breakout sessions take the form of mini-seminars, workshops, or roundtable discussions, usually lasting between 30 minutes to an hour, and are led by a facilitator or subject matter expert.

The format can vary depending on the nature of the conference and the topic at hand. For instance, a tech conference might feature hands-on coding workshops, while a marketing summit could include discussion sessions on campaign strategies or digital challenges.

However, this traditional format is evolving as we transition further into the digital era. Audio visual technology is paving the way for innovative formats to make breakout sessions more interactive, engaging, and impactful. In the following sections, we explore how you can leverage these technologies to revolutionize conference breakout sessions.



# DESIGNING ENGAGING BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Creating engaging breakout sessions is both an art and a science. It requires a keen understanding of your audience's interests, a clear objective for the session, and creative use of resources to facilitate learning and interaction.

## How to structure a breakout session

The structure of your session plays a crucial role in maintaining participant interest and facilitating effective learning. Start with a clear objective: what should participants learn or achieve by the end of the session, or what will be discussed? Then, outline the key points or steps to help them reach this goal in your pre-event communication and session introduction.

Start the session with a brief introduction of the topic and its relevance, followed by an interactive activity or discussion to engage participants immediately. Intersperse your session with multiple activities to ensure participants are actively involved.

Finally, wrap up with a summary of the key takeaways and an opportunity for Q&A or further discussion, and leave time for networking before attendees move on to their next session.

## Ideas for breakout session activities

Moving away from traditional lecture-style presentations, consider incorporating innovative, interactive activities into your breakout sessions. These could include:



### INTERACTIVE QUIZZES

Use AV technology to conduct real-time quizzes, with participants responding via their smartphones. This not only tests their understanding but also adds an element of fun and competition to the session.



### VIRTUAL REALITY

If relevant to your topic, use VR headsets to provide an immersive learning experience. For instance, a breakout session on architecture might involve a virtual tour of famous buildings, or a workshop on interior design could offer hands-on practice with virtual furniture placement.



### COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

Divide participants into small groups and assign a mini-project related to the session's theme. This promotes collaborative learning and networking.



### ROLE-PLAYING

Use role-playing activities to simulate real-life scenarios, and encourage participants to apply what they have learned in a practical setting. This works particularly well for sessions on leadership, communication, or problem-solving.



### AUDIENCE-CURATED CONTENT

Ask the selected audience attending your workshop what they want to discuss. Pre-event, have them vote on topics and submit questions. If you're working with a sponsor, they might already know the audience from their database. Ask for insight to help pick what people are interested in, and use those points to engage in conversation.



## THE IMPACT OF AV TECHNOLOGY ON EVENT WORKSHOPS

As we navigate further into the digital era, Audio-Visual (AV) technology is playing an increasingly pivotal role in enhancing the quality and impact of breakout sessions.

From improving the clarity of presentations to facilitating interactive activities, AV technology is revolutionizing how we conduct and experience these sessions.

### Enhancing presentation quality

At its most basic level, AV technology ensures that presentations during breakout sessions are clear, engaging, and impactful. High-quality microphones ensure that every word from the presenter is heard clearly, regardless of the room size or the number of attendees. Similarly, high-resolution projectors or screens allow for crisp, vibrant visuals to hold the audience's attention and enhance understanding of the content.

Digital whiteboards and touchscreen displays can also add a new dimension to presentations, allowing presenters to interact with their content in real-time and enabling attendees to add their comments to the main screen. A presenter can highlight key points, draw diagrams, or annotate images on the screen with comments from the audience highlighted, making the presentation and event workshop more dynamic and engaging.

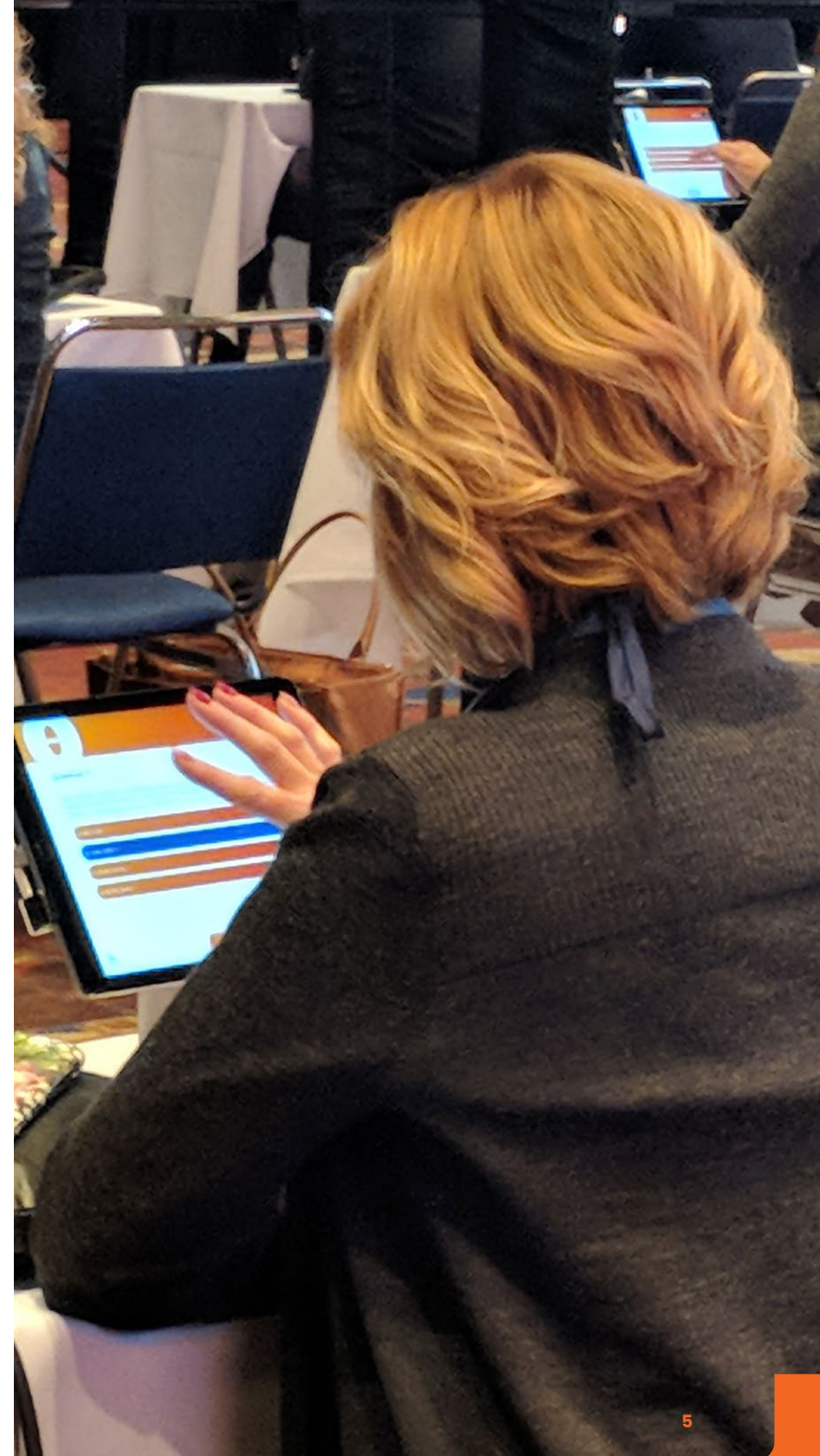


## Facilitating presentation quality

Beyond presentations, AV technology can also facilitate interactive activities during breakout sessions. As discussed earlier, real-time quizzes or polls can be conducted using audience response systems, with attendees participating via their smartphones. This not only adds an element of fun and competition to the session but also provides instant feedback to the presenter about the audience's understanding and engagement.

We highlighted ideas earlier about utilizing Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies, which can be used to create immersive learning experiences. Still, sometimes, simpler AV tools can be used effectively. For instance, a simple, clear video clip or audio recording can provide a different perspective on the discussed topic and encourage critical thinking among participants.

Using light and sound can also help create an immersive learning environment. For instance, dimming the lights or playing background music during certain activities can help set the mood and promote focus among participants. Relaxing music could enhance a session on meditation or mindfulness, while upbeat music could be used to energize participants during a team-building activity. Using spotlights and visual effects can add an element of drama and excitement to certain activities, depending on your desired outcomes.





## Enabling remote participation

Another significant impact of AV technology is the ability to include remote participants in breakout sessions.

With high-quality video conferencing platforms, attendees can join a session from anywhere worldwide, expanding the conference's reach and continuing the discussion long after an event. Remote participants can view the presentation, participate in activities, and even discuss via live chat or video call.

AV technology has the potential to significantly enhance the quality, engagement, and reach of breakout sessions. By leveraging these technologies, event organizers can create memorable, impactful learning experiences for all attendees.

## THE FUTURE OF BREAKOUT SESSIONS

As we look to the future, it's clear that breakout sessions will continue to evolve, driven by advancements in technology and changing audience expectations. Here's a glimpse into what the near future might hold for event breakout sessions and workshops:

### Hybrid Breakout Sessions

With the rise of remote work and virtual events, hybrid models are becoming increasingly popular. In the context of breakout sessions, this means combining in-person and virtual elements. A session could have a live audience and be streamed online for remote attendees to join in the discussion.



Alternatively, an entirely virtual session streamed at various physical locations could allow for in-person networking and workshops for the remote attendees.

This model not only extends a session's reach but also adds flexibility, allowing attendees to choose their mode of participation based on their preferences and circumstances. However, it also poses new challenges in terms of managing logistics and ensuring a seamless experience for all attendees.

### **AI-driven personalization**

Another trend that could shape the future of breakout sessions is the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for personalization. AI algorithms can analyze attendee data – such as job roles, interests, past event attendance, etc. – to recommend breakout sessions that are most relevant to each individual. This can enhance the value of the conference for attendees and increase engagement in the sessions.

In addition, AI can also be used during sessions to facilitate interactions and discussions. AI-powered chatbots, for instance, can provide fresh perspectives for discussion or suggest related topics for attendees to explore, making the sessions more collaborative and interactive.

### **Greater inclusion and accessibility**

We can expect to see more efforts made to make breakout sessions accessible to everyone. This includes considering physical accessibility for attendees with disabilities, offering translation services, or real-time closed captions for those with hearing impairment or non-native speakers. Incorporating additional tools and features that cater to the needs of diverse audiences allows for more inclusive breakout sessions, enabling a wider range of individuals to participate and benefit from knowledge-sharing opportunities.





## THE EVOLUTION OF BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Breakout sessions have evolved from simple, lecture-style presentations to dynamic, interactive experiences that engage attendees and facilitate deep learning. AV technology has significantly enhanced the quality and impact of these sessions, enabling clear presentations, interactive activities, and even remote participation.

Looking ahead, the future of breakout sessions is both exciting and challenging. Hybrid models, AI-driven personalization, and immersive technologies like VR and AR are set to revolutionize these sessions, offering unprecedented opportunities for engagement and learning. However, these advancements also pose new challenges in logistics and data privacy, as well as ensuring a seamless experience for all attendees, regardless of their mode of participation.

As event organizers navigate this evolving landscape, their focus must remain on the core objective of breakout sessions: to provide valuable, relevant learning experiences that cater to attendees' diverse needs and interests. By keeping this objective at the forefront and leveraging the latest technologies and trends, organizers can embrace the future and continue to deliver breakout sessions that are engaging and memorable and drive meaningful outcomes for attendees.

In conclusion, while technology and trends will continue to shape the format and delivery of breakout sessions, the essence of these sessions remains the same: fostering learning, facilitating networking, and creating an engaging and enriching experience for all participants.





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*“We at SmartSource ensure a personalized approach. We work closely with presenters and breakout leaders before their sessions to ensure they are comfortable with the audio visual technology. Whether it's a full rehearsal or a quick check of microphones and clickers, we aim to create a seamless and comfortable experience in what can often be an intimidating environment.”*

- Chad Frank, Vice President Event Solutions

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