Guidelines for organizing interdisciplinary workshops

These guidelines provide tips and suggestions for successfully organizing interdisciplinary workshops. The recommendations are based on the experiences of the College for Interdisciplinary Education Research (CIDER, https://ciderweb.org).

Preparation and contents

Allow sufficient **time for preparations**: Preparing interdisciplinary workshops is more time-consuming than preparing disciplinary conferences because additional coordination and planning is needed.

When **setting a date**, make sure that no important conferences in the disciplines involved are scheduled for the days the workshop is to be held.

Workshop length: If workshops are too short, there may not be sufficient time for discussing differences between the disciplines. If workshops are too long, people may be less inclined to attend. Overall, *three days* has proven to be a good length for a workshop. If you are organizing a series of workshops, meetings should be longer in the beginning to give participants sufficient time to get to know each other.

Thematic breadth of the workshop: There are two options: a) The workshop explores a single issue or method from different disciplinary perspectives. b) The workshop addresses a range of different topics to which the various disciplines are devoting their research. When opting for the latter, make sure that the issues to be addressed are interesting and relevant research fields for at least two of the envisaged disciplines.

The members of the **organizational team** should represent different disciplines and know each other well. This is important because a successful choice of good keynote speakers, for example, is only possible if the team includes persons with "expert knowledge" (concerning standards and current debates) in the respective disciplines.

Participants

When wording **invitations or calls for applications**, be careful with the terminology you use and the goals you define. Specialist terms may be used differently in different disciplines, and they may vary in connotation or appeal. Likewise, methods or publications (e.g., books or special editions of journals as expected outcomes) may be valued differently in each discipline.

Invite distinguished **keynote speakers** from various disciplines to make the workshop appealing to an audience representing different disciplines. Ideally, keynote speakers should be approached and invited by those members in the team who represent the discipline in question.

Concerning the **makeup of participants**, there are two options: a) Participants represent the disciplines involved in roughly equal proportions. This is the recommended option if the workshop aims for thematic breadth. b) If the workshop topic is narrower and possibly more disciplinary in scope, it is more advisable to invite speakers from other disciplines to expand and enrich the discussion.

Implementation and formats

Interdisciplinary discussions must address different needs:

- equip participants with basic knowledge in disciplines other than their own,
- compile research findings from each discipline on the shared issues,
- engage different perspectives
- develop joint research projects
- facilitate conversations about career pathways and discipline-specific characteristics, requirements, and publication strategies.

That is why, depending on the goals of the workshop, you should use a variety of formats. Keep in mind to always allow sufficient time for format-related discussions and questions.

Lectures supplemented with interdisciplinary content: Lectures, supplemented with statements from representatives of the other disciplines adding their respective perspectives, are a good format for plenary sessions.

Panel discussions with participants from different disciplines: Moderated panel discussions are a good way to facilitate direct conversations between experts from different disciplines. Make sure there is a good disciplinary balance among panelists and a clearly defined issue for them to discuss. Aside from scholarly experts, you may want to add practitioners (e.g., policy-makers or public administrators) to the panel to enrich the discussion and to highlight the potential of multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Paper presentations with interdisciplinary discussants: This is an opportunity for participants to present their own disciplinary research. Each presenter is paired with discussants from a different discipline who have read the paper and are hence able to provide in-depth feedback. Afterwards, the discussion is opened to the entire interdisciplinary group. This format enables participants to add new aspects to their own disciplinary perspective.

State of the art in different disciplines: In this format, participants introduce the other workshop participants to the issues, theories, and concepts that are central and influential in their respective disciplines and then take questions and discussions from the interdisciplinary audience. This format is a good means for communicating the basics of one's own discipline to participants representing other disciplines; at the same time, it is a great opportunity to (critically) reflect on one's own research perspective.

Thematic groups: This format resembles research symposia at disciplinary conferences. In thematic groups, participants present a variety of disciplinary contributions on an overarching topic. The advantage of this format is that it brings together researchers with similar research interests, thereby facilitating subsequent collaboration.

Short intros to datasets: In this format, researchers present the accessible data or datasets they work with. This helps participants of an interdisciplinary workshop to identify potential data sources that are available for joint research projects. Moreover, it supports the goal of sustainability, because various data collections are brought to the attention of a wider community and may be re-used more often. In the case of ongoing surveys, it might be possible to integrate questions and aspects of interest to other disciplines into the survey.

Open Space Technology formats: This is an open format that is especially suitable for identifying shared research issues and interests. In the context of interdisciplinary workshops, it enables different persons to get together on an informal basis.

Career counseling services should always be organized along disciplinary lines.

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