Conference Session Formats

A presenter's quick guide to seven session types — as offered at the Badge Summit — and how to choose among them. Useful as a menu when you answer any conference call for proposals.

Format	Length	Structure	Audience role	Best for
Badgesplaining	5–8 min	TED-style talk, main stage; selected via virtual audition (February)	Listen; inspired to act	One big idea, a story, or a provocation that deserves the spotlight
Badge Tank	5–8 min	Elevator pitch or problem of practice, Shark Tank style, with realtime feedback	React, critique, advise	Testing a new idea or getting unstuck on a real problem
Table Talk	10–12 min ×4	Round-table discussion led by one expert, repeated for four rotating groups	Discuss in a small group	Depth with a small group; work you can explain conversationally
Rapid Fire Session	30 min	Panel or lecture driven by an Essential Question	Share with and question presenters	A focused topic with room for structured audience exchange
Long Panel	45 min	2–5 panelists + moderator, with audience Q&A	Ask questions	Multiple perspectives on one topic; established voices in dialogue
Deep-Dive Interactive	45 min	Lecture or activity driven by an Essential Question	Share, question, work together	Teaching a skill or framework hands-on
Dream Makers' Lounge Design Challenge	45 min	Facilitated rapid design consultancy around your "How might we…?" question	Co-design with you	Getting a room full of practitioners to work on YOUR challenge

Rule of thumb: the shorter the slot, the sharper your single message must be; the longer the slot, the more the audience — not you — should be doing the work.

The formats in detail

Badgesplaining (5–8 minutes, main stage)

A TED Talk–inspired keynote short. You get the biggest room and the least time, so build it like a story: one idea, one arc, one memorable close. No walls of slides — images and a punchline. Selected presenters are invited to a virtual audition in February, so treat the proposal itself as the first performance: write it in the voice you will speak in.

Badge Tank (5–8 minutes)

Table Talks meet Shark Tank. You pitch an idea or a problem of practice and practitioners respond on the spot. The feedback is the product — come with the question you most need answered, state it explicitly, and bring a way to capture what you hear. Thick skin helps; a half-formed idea is welcome here in a way it is not on the main stage.

Table Talk (10–12 minutes, repeated four times)

A conversational take on the poster session: you lead a small round-table group, then a new group rotates in and you run it again — four times. Design for conversation, not presentation: two or three discussion prompts beat ten slides. By the fourth round you will have stress-tested your material against forty people; expect your own thinking to improve mid-session.

Rapid Fire Session (30 minutes)

A panel or lecture built around an Essential Question, with structured openings for the audience to share with and question the presenters. Spend your prep on the question itself — it does the marketing in the program and the pacing in the room. Reserve a third of the time for the exchange; a rapid fire that runs as a 30-minute lecture has missed its format.

Long Panel (45 minutes, 2–5 people + moderator)

The classic multi-voice format. It lives or dies on the moderator: recruit one who will interrupt, redirect, and keep panelists from agreeing with each other at length. Pre-plan two or three genuine points of disagreement and leave the final fifteen minutes to audience Q&A.

Deep-Dive Interactive Session (45 minutes)

The workshop slot: lecture- or activity-based, driven by an Essential Question, with attendees sharing, questioning, and working together. This is the format for teaching a skill or framework — plan an arc of short teach, guided activity, and debrief, and design the activity so strangers can start it in under a minute.

Dream Makers' Lounge Design Challenge (45 minutes)

You bring a "How might we…?" question; the room becomes your rapid design consultancy, facilitated for you. The rarest kind of session: the audience works on your problem. Choose a question that is real, specific, and genuinely open — and arrive ready to document everything, because the ideas leave the room when the people do.

Choosing: match the format to the maturity of your material — polished insight belongs on the main stage (Badgesplaining); a working idea belongs in Badge Tank or a Table Talk; a skill belongs in a Deep-Dive; an open problem belongs in the Design Challenge. When in doubt, propose the shorter format: it is easier to earn a long slot next year than to fill one this year.