Handout 18: Preparing a Presentation.

Who are your audience? (You will certainly need to think about your audience when writing your presentation, but it is included here as it will impact upon the more practical considerations - scheduling, location, and infrastructure - below)

You may know in advance the type of audience you will be addressing. If you don't then find out. You might need to ask a supervisor, event organiser, or go to some location or other event your audience is likely to be at. Try to get an idea of your audience's:

- age (many school age people don't like school-type presentations; some mature people don't like games)
- education (check the education level against the vocabulary you use - but avoid overuse of jargon in any case)
- cultural background (beware of making ethnocentric assumptions, for example that all people should be emotionally expressive)
- occupation(s) (professionals might prefer formality...then again, they might just need more icebreakers)
- major interests ('hooking' your material into what they care about can give a free boost to the audience's motivation to pay attention)

and, with regard to the topic, their preconceptions, amount of experience, degree of knowledge, associations, and attitude toward. Will their attitude be positive, neutral, negative, or hostile?

For example, if you are speaking about the need for workers to gather accurate statistics for the funding body, their attitude may be hostile from the outset because of their:

- preconceptions (statistics are used to measure performance related outcomes and are used as an excuse to defund services)
- prior experience (previous data collections have been time-consuming, with no obvious benefits)
- degree of knowledge (collecting meaningful quantitative data about health and welfare work is fraught with difficulties)
- associations (economic rationalism, bureaucratic high-handedness, cutbacks)

You may have a heterogeneous audience, with widely varying characteristics. This makes it harder to pitch your presentation. In judging the language (technical or plain), tone (formal or informal, light or passionate), assumed prior knowledge or experience, and attitude, you may have to 'play it safe' and risk losing the attention of a segment of your audience. Imagine giving a talk on a new computer network and database to a staff team, and having to be careful to explain what a
monitor is, or extol the virtues (speed and convenience) of computers themselves. Computer literate people could switch off, or feel patronised.

Finally, consider people’s expectations. A group of professionals may expect (and want) a lecture style presentation. If you want to use something more involving - like small group discussions, or games, then you might need to persuade them. An audience of young people may find a lectern and overheads overly formal and 'school-like'.

These next questions don’t need to all be answered in the planning stage, but having some idea will help you to visualise and structure your presentation.

**What scheduling considerations are there?**

1. Should the presentation be in work hours, or after hours? Consider if this means paying more wages, having committee members miss out, whether people may resent losing an evening (and perhaps their basketball match or art class). Think about when the last train leaves too.
2. Would it be better to have a number of presentations for smaller groups, at various times, or one big one?
3. How long will it take? Does it need breaks? Multiple sessions?
4. If part of a larger program, where should be logically positioned in the overall order?

**Where is a suitable location?**

1. Don’t rent the Town Hall for a presentation to a work team. It’s a waste of money and space. (Unless it’s a very small town!)
2. Consider going off work premises for a fresh, or neutral venue. A beautiful spot could be a bonus, but don’t use an executive chalet for a presentation on how to cut costs.
3. Check acoustics, heating, privacy, and noise.
4. Should it be near public transport? Positioned centrally if people are coming from a wide area?

**What infrastructure will you need?**

1. Water, coffee, tea, herbal tea, milk, soy milk, an urn, sugar, cups. Perhaps 'infrastructure' is too fancy a word. Food? At least half vegetarian.
2. TV, video, overhead/computer projector, screen, public address system, laser pointer, equipment check, technician, assistant.
3. Chairs, table, stage, toilets, signage, wheelchair access, interpreters, signers, attendance list, name tags, handouts/reports, pens, paper.
4. How will you arrange all this stuff? Make sure you DON’T:
   - Have a U-shaped seating arrangement where the audience on either side get to inspect your ear holes
• Have pillars or walls (or even big heads) in the way, obstructing people's view
• Have inadequate sound amplification or visual displays

As mentioned above, don't feel you have to pin down every detail straight away. However, as these things could take some time to organise and it would be useful to start making the phone calls now. Of course if you are presenting at a conference much of the infrastructure will have been taken care of.