



**SVRI
FORUM**

Chairing at the SVRI Forum

How to create a session people want to be part of

Bangkok, 5–9 October 2026

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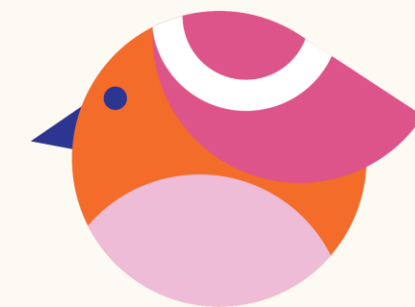
A little bit different from a conventional conference

THE FORUM IS

- Abstract-driven and peer-reviewed
- Global, with deep roots in low- and middle-income country contexts
- Research, practice, funding and policy in the same room
- A gathering of researchers, practitioners, policymakers, activists, survivors, funders and advocates
- Designed for exchange, not simply for presentation
- A place people come to connect, share and learn

KEY MESSAGE

The diversity that makes the Forum valuable is exactly what makes good chairing essential.



People bring different forms of expertise, experience and knowledge. Your job is to help bring them together.



How we built this programme

2,186

abstract submissions

193

reviewers

37

reviewer countries

84

panel submissions

CALL



REVIEW



SELECTION



PROGRAMME



SESSION

Every presentation in this programme represents work that someone developed, submitted and chose to share. A chair's job is to make sure that work gets the attention it deserves.



Quality, relevance, diversity and balance — that is what the programme was built around.



Forum programme in numbers: what's coming to Bangkok

225+/-

oral presentations

92+/-

five-minute presentations

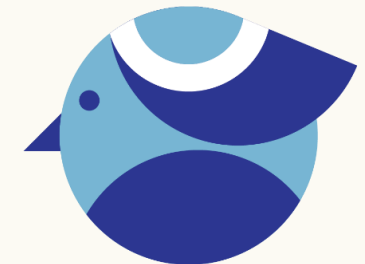
307+/-

poster presentations

Currently over 624 presentations in total across the three days of conferencing.



- 8+ films and multimedia presentations
- 23 pre-conference workshops
- 56 participant-driven events
- Opening welcome
- Gala dinner



All of it happens in the rooms you are chairing. When one session runs over, the next thing in that room starts late.



What is a chair actually for?

THE FIVE P'S

- PURPOSE**
Keep bringing the session back to why people are in the room.
- PEOPLE**
Make presenters feel welcome and respected.
- PACE**
Protect time — and protect energy.
- PARTICIPATION**
Create space for the audience to think, question and contribute.
- POWER**
Notice who is speaking, who is not, and whose knowledge is being valued.

A GREAT CHAIR

Sets the purpose

Makes people comfortable

Keeps time

Connects the presentations

Brings people into the conversation

Asks questions that open things up

Knows when to intervene

Makes presenters look good

A NOT-SO-GREAT CHAIR

Reads out the programme

Makes people nervous

Apologises endlessly about time

Gives their own mini-lecture

Lets two people dominate

Asks questions to show off

Intervenes constantly

Makes themselves look good

The best chairs are almost invisible — until they are needed.



Not all sessions are the same

●
Plenary

●
Parallel presentation session

3-5 abstracts
grouped by theme

●
Five-minute presentations

One slide · five minutes · no questions after each presentation

●
Dialogic session

Designed for conversation

●
Panel discussion

A submitted panel with its own logic

The job is the same. The format tells you how..

There is no single model of good chairing. Before you prepare, be clear about which kind of session you have been given — and what that format is trying to achieve.



Plenary & parallel sessions: your job is to create a thread

These presentations were grouped because they relate to a theme — but the presenters may never have met, and did not design the session together. Creating the connection is your job.

BEFORE THE SESSION, ASK

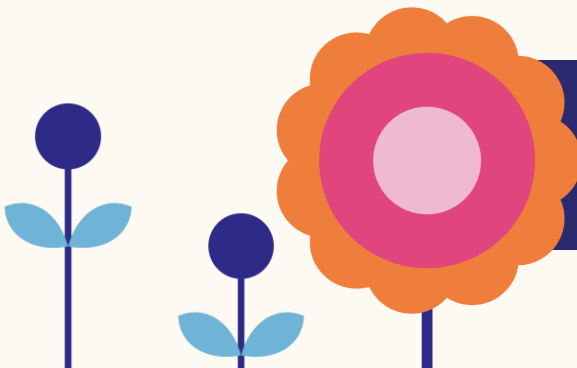
- What connects these presentations?
- What is different about them?
- Is there a tension between them?
- Is there a question running across all of them?
- What does the audience need to notice?

AFTER THE PRESENTATIONS, SAY

“We have heard three very different approaches to the same problem...”

“There is an interesting tension emerging here between X and Y...”

Two sentences from the chair can change how the whole room hears what came before.



Do not allow one person to take time from everyone else.

Five-minute presentations: ruthless kindness

Five minutes is five minutes.

THE CHAIR'S JOB

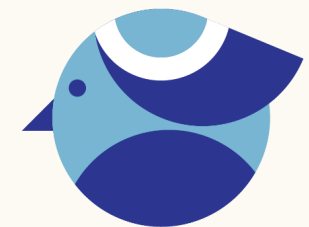
- Explain the format clearly at the start
- Make the rules feel supportive, not punitive
- Give every presenter the same clear time signal
- Intervene when you need to — early, not late
- Keep transitions very short

Being firm about time is not rude. It is how you make sure everyone gets the time they were promised.

RUTHLESS KINDNESS

Be firm on time so that you can be generous to everyone.

Do not allow one person to take time from everyone else.



Before the session: prepare

☐

Know the session purpose

☐

Know how to pronounce their names

☐

Know the timings

☐

Identify the session's connecting thread

☐

Know what to do if something goes wrong

☐

Know every presenter

☐

Know the format

☐

Know what technology is being used

☐

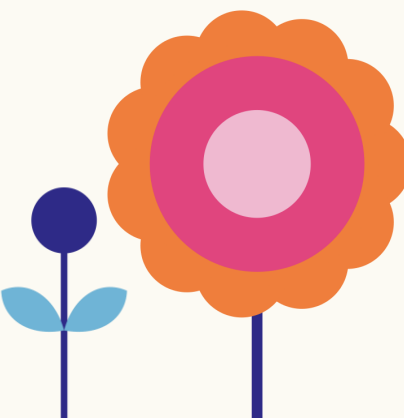
Prepare two or three questions

☐

Agree signals with presenters and the AV team

Do your homework so that you can be relaxed in the room.

Preparation is what buys you the freedom to improvise. A chair who knows the material can afford to stop watching the clock and start listening to the room.



When things go wrong

Someone goes over time

› “I’m going to stop you there so that everyone has a chance to speak.”

A question becomes a speech

› “I’m going to pause you there and bring in our next question.”

One person dominates

› “Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t come in yet.”

A comment turns hostile or personal

› Intervene early and calmly. Name it, then move the room on.

The technology fails

› Don’t panic. Acknowledge it and keep people engaged while it is fixed.

A presenter doesn’t arrive

› Adapt. Don’t spend five minutes apologising.

Nobody asks a question

› Ask your own — you prepared it for exactly this moment.

Never depend entirely on the audience to generate the discussion.



End on time — and clear the room

AGREE THE SIGNALS BEFORE YOU START

- Agree signals with presenters and the AV team before the session begins
- Time cards at five minutes, two minutes and time
- Hold the card up — don't talk over the presenter
- Same signals for everyone, no exceptions
- Start on time even if the room is half full
- Close the session at time, not after the last question

AT THE START

"We have five presentations and fifteen minutes for discussion. I'll hold up a card at five minutes, two minutes and time. When you see the last card, please finish your sentence and hand over."

AT TIME

"That's time - please take us to your closing slide."

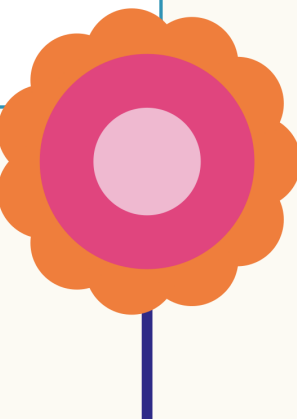
IF THEY CARRY ON

"I'm going to stop you there so the next presenter gets their full time. Do stay for questions afterwards."

CLOSING THE SESSION

"We're at time. Thank you all - [one sentence]. Please carry these conversations into the corridor: the team needs this room set up for the next session."

The room has to be turned around for the next session — over 56 participant-driven events depend on it.



The SVRI Forum chair: ten things to remember

- 1 Knows the purpose of the session
- 2 Prepares
- 3 Introduces, rather than performs
- 4 Protects everyone's time
- 5 Connects the presentations
- 6 Asks questions that open discussion
- 7 Makes space for different forms of knowledge
- 8 Notices power in the room
- 9 Is comfortable with silence and with disagreement
- 10 Leaves the audience with something to think about

Your job is to make the session work.

You don't need to know the most, ask the best question, or speak the most. You need to make it possible for other people to do their best thinking.



Thank you for chairing.

Your role is to make your session work.

Questions before the Forum?

forums@svri.org

svrforum2026.org · Bangkok, 5–9 October 2026

