

Speaker 1: Welcome to CRR Radio from the Vision 2020 Project.

Ed Comeau: Welcome to CRR Radio. My name is Ed Comeau with the Vision 2020 Project. In February, the Vision 2020 Project will be hosting the sixth National Model Performance and Community Risk Reduction Symposium. Every two years. We bring together experts and practitioners in CRR from across the country to learn and share with each other. We really focus on model programs that can provide demonstrable results and that could be replicated in your community.

Finding and selecting the right presentation is a really important task, but it starts with the proposals coming in in the first place. Our guest today has been involved in this very selection process for about five of the past symposiums in one way or the other, and she's going to give us a real insider's look at what makes a good and a not so good proposal. Monica, could you please take a moment and introduce yourself?

Monica Colby: Absolutely. My name is Monica Colby. I work with the Rapid City Fire Department in South Dakota as a fire and life safety educator. I've been a fire and life safety educator with one title or another for over 20 years, working for state and local groups. I've worked with NFPA, Vision 2020, and right now I oversee the advocacy part of Vision 2020, but as you said, I've been part of the peer review team either reviewing or overseeing the review or working with the people overseeing the review, almost since the beginning of the symposiums, so I have seen quite a few of these. I've seen every proposal we've ever had and how it all turns out.

Ed Comeau: Okay. Before we start getting into essentially picking Monica's brain here, I would like to just give a little bit overview on the symposium. The symposium is happening on February 18th, 19th, and 20th in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. If you want more information on it, if you go to our website at strategicfire.org/symposium6, you can find a ton of information in addition to where you can click on a button, call for presentations, and get a lot more information on how you actually submit a presentation, which the deadline is November 15th. If you're listening to this podcast and you're thinking of submitting a proposal, you might want to get on it because that date's going to be here before you know it.

One change we're doing this year, every other symposium that has been run by Vision 2020, we've received a grant from FEMA, Fire Prevention and Safety Grant, to run these symposiums, as we have this year. But this year we're having other organizations come in and collaborate with us to help us run the symposium so we can make it a more sustainable model. We've got organizations such as IFC, International Code Council, International Fire Marshals Association, IFSTA, NFPA and USFA, working with us on various aspects of the symposium. The NFPA is the one that's running the call for presentations

component of the symposium, which Monica is going to be talking about today. Monica, let's talk about the process. A proposal is written and it comes in. What happens to it next?

Monica Colby: First, the team that's over those proposals does a quick review. We're just looking to see if it really is a model performance or if it was someone misunderstood and thought they were suggesting something they could teach to the group. We take out those that are, "Oh hey, I've got a presentation to make," and don't move those forward. Everything that is, "I did something in my community and I can prove whether it worked or not," moves forward. We take out all of the identifying identification and then send it to a group of peer review. We've picked people from across the nation and different disciplines that will review all of them that are there and give them a score.

Ed Comeau: Why do you take all the identifiers out? What's the purpose behind that?

Monica Colby: Even though we're using people from across the nation, we want to make sure that we are judging based on what information is being provided. Sometimes maybe everyone knows, "Oh, there's this great program in this city and we know that person and we trust them that they've done everything right." But if they didn't really show how all of their steps are, we don't want to put them forward as a model performance. Maybe there's something that no one knows about, but they've done a really good job at documenting everything and showing how they've accomplished and have done something really amazing. We want to make sure that there's no bias there.

Ed Comeau: The peer review team that you mentioned, what kinds of people are on there? What's the makeup of that team like?

Monica Colby: The peer review team, this time we've got people from the CDC, someone who has done this kind of evaluations and creating projects like this for a long time, what we've modeled the program after to try and be more like what the health departments are doing. Fire marshals, people that are in EMS, regular educators, regular firefighters, just trying to get that broad base. Many of the people have worn several hats so that we don't have too many reviewers, but they have a really broad knowledge and it's their personal experience in the different areas that they're going to be looking at. Anything that has to do with fire prevention, education, health, EMS, fire department, resource allocation, we've got experts there.

Ed Comeau: Do they have some criteria to go by when they're evaluating this? Is there, in essence, a score sheet that they use to evaluate the proposals?

Monica Colby:

Like any good educator, we give them a rubric and we say, "All right, we're looking at really the formative process, your impact, and your outcomes." They get to score them and show a good formative process. They really dug into what their problem is and could clearly easily identify it all the way down to outcomes. They've been doing this for at least three to five years. They've been able to show whether it worked or not and been able to make a difference.

In all of those they get a score. Those get compiled together with all of the reviewers and we put those in order and give that to the symposium committee. All of the peer reviewers too also get a chance to give other input. "I gave it a good score and I think this is really good," or, "We've seen this kind of stuff before, it's a really good score, we should consider it," or maybe, "I gave it a low score. It hasn't been going long enough. They don't really have outcomes, but their process and impact is really interesting. We should take a look at this."

We give the scores and that input to the committee in order of how they were scored, and they're the ones who select which ones are going to present. We do almost always take that top 10 right away and say, "Okay, these guys are all in, they've done such a great job." But we do try and make sure that there's a balance. Are we talking about all different aspects of community risk reduction? We don't want them all to be the same type of program, like they were all home visits with smoke alarm installations, that's going to be really boring.

Sometimes people will score high on that, but there isn't anything innovative enough because we've seen so many people present on the same thing that year that we'll pick just the top ones of those. Sometimes maybe you have something that isn't as clear cut, "I've done a fabulous job," but you're in the process of that, you're still just working through it. That might get bumped to the top because it's something really different, it's something innovative, something that other people haven't taken the time to prove yet. That symposium committee picks out those top people and then we inform everyone whether they've been selected or not.

Ed Comeau:

What would make for a really strong proposal, somebody sitting at their computer right now? And of course they think they have a great program, but like you said, crafting it in such a way and answering the questions can be difficult. How can they really make their proposal rise to the top?

Monica Colby:

A really good proposal will start with your why's, your formative evaluation. Get to the point, be succinct, give us numbers and data. Tell the story, but do it in a quick, short way. In process, we're looking for what you did and trying to encourage everyone to start documenting what you're doing, why you did it, what mistakes you made, how you fix that, what you ran into, what you found works. Those are the things that we're really looking for is to be able to share

that with one another and to be able to compare. Why did one program work and another one not work? What will work for my community?

The impact, again this is mostly about numbers. What did you accomplish? Did you go to so many homes and install so many smoke alarms? Did you get sprinklers installed in this many buildings? We've had people explain how they went about choosing how often they should inspect different buildings and to keep everyone safe and still use fewer resources. What has your community paramedicine program accomplished? If you've changed the way you deploy your resources, how has that made a difference? How have you reduced the impact to the firefighters and paramedics?

And then in your outcomes, showing that you have made some accomplishment. We are saving in resources. We've reduced the time we spend waiting in the hospital for a bed to deliver our patient to them. We've saved money, fewer people are dying, fewer people are being injured, fewer fires are occurring. Just really all of it is get to the point and show that it's working, show the data in this. And then later if you're selected you can tell a little bit more of the heart of the story, maybe an example of how this has really worked and that motivates people. But this one really is, can you show that you've documented everything and that it works or doesn't work?

Ed Comeau: Let's talk about the other side of the coin a little bit. What could make for a bad proposal? What makes it weaker from what you've seen in the past?

Monica Colby: When people try to fake their way through, that they've done the process. Sometimes you maybe haven't documented everything, but you know how your program is working, you've got enough there, enough to get the proposal in and get it pushed through and then you're going to find all of the data. That can work, we've had some do that before. But in general you need to already have the numbers before to just say, "Hey, I've got this great program. I'd like to teach everyone else how to do it," isn't going to work. You have to show us that you really are evaluating what you're doing. Just wanting to share a good program or, again, wanting to teach how to do evaluation, that's not going to work either. We need you to show that you've actually evaluated a program.

Ed Comeau: In other words, it has to be a program that's been there for a while, it's got some history behind it, some data, that sort of thing, right?

Monica Colby: Right. The ones that rise to the top have been doing this for three or five years, so they actually have a chance to say, I have some outcomes." Now that being said, it's still worth putting in a proposal for something that doesn't have all of that time on it. If it's something that is really innovative or something new, like maybe you're doing something about the opioid crisis. Maybe you don't have five years of data that this is making a difference, but you're pretty sure that

you're on the right track and you have been documenting everything else. That might make it because that's something that we all need to share and it's new and emerging. It's possible to still be selected when it doesn't have the time in it, but it's going to need to be really good at everything else.

Ed Comeau:

Monica, one of the models that we do, and we've done for a number of years now at the symposium, is these are 20-minute presentations and the idea is ... It was kind of built on the TED Talk model where they just do these really short, impactful kind of presentations. The idea behind it is not to tell everything about your program but to hit the highlights and then people can talk to you afterwards. We build in a lot of networking time that people can learn a lot more from the individuals on it. But that said, 20 minutes, that's not that much time and a lot of people aren't really used to doing a 20-minute presentation. What have you seen that makes for a good and a not so good 20-minute presentation? What are some tips you might have?

Monica Colby:

You're right, hitting the highlights is a big part of it and you do still need to share that data. Here is how I prove that this works, that's a really critical part of this. We're not used to hearing that, every 20 minutes hearing another set of, "Here's my numbers, here's my graphs," when we're sitting in the symposium, but that really is the point. Can you prove that this is working and how you did it? You need to be able to get your story across quickly. I would say plan a 15-minute presentation that highlights the story. Maybe you do have some pictures you can show or you can tell how you did it all in one example, and don't spend too much time on that formative. A lot of times they'll spend so much time on why this was important that they don't get to the what they did and how it works, which is the most important.

Like anything else, plan with the end in mind. Most of your time needs to be spent on your impact and outcomes. "This is what we accomplished, and then here's how we got it done," highlighting that. And then you also present a two-page document, a summary of all of that, with your contact information so then people can follow up and say, "Hey, I really liked that. I've got the same problem. I think I can make that happen, now give me all of the details. How did you get this done?"

We need some heart, we need some interest of why you do this, but keeping that shorter, more about the, "Hey, we're making a big difference in our community, and that's our focus." You only have 20 minutes, but I think you should plan for 15 because it always tends to go a little bit longer. And then you've got a PowerPoint to show, something to support what you're talking about. It needs to be very few words, graphs, charts, pictures, just highlighting the point. Mostly you want people to listen to what you're saying, not to be reading what's on the screen, so it should be supporting your narrative.

When you're thinking about, "Can I present this? Is this a good model performance to show, can I describe it well, and who's the right person to share that information? Who can help me to craft my visuals? Who can help me to craft what I'm going to say?" Maybe you're the right person to write up what happened, but you're not the right person to share it with everyone. Give it some thought.

Ed Comeau: I'd like to bring up a few things on the PowerPoint slides that I've noticed, because that's the component that I've been responsible for in the past is the PowerPoint component and sitting in the back of the room watching what's happening. I have to admit, there have been a few cringe-worthy moments that I've seen that I think I'd like to ask people to really try to avoid, and you brought up one of them. Very few words on the slide, really rely on pictures or diagrams, photos, things like that, to illustrate your point. You don't want a ton of bullet points on there because you want them, as you said, to listen to you. People can't read and listen at the same time. They can't absorb what's on the screen and what they're hearing, especially if they're different. Please, whatever you do, do not read what's on the slide.

Monica Colby: Yeah.

Ed Comeau: To me ... Boy, talk about cringe-worthy, I hate it when presenter does that, read what's on the slide. One other thing too is that all these PowerPoint presentations in the handout you mentioned are going to be available on the website afterwards so people can download all this material. But a few other things I've noticed when you're doing your PowerPoint presentation, you don't need to go in depth with an overview of your community, just hit the high points. We don't need to know all the runs that Station Two did within a week or something like that. Just keep it short, succinct, give the 30,000-foot overview on it.

Another big thing, and believe it or not this happened a number of times in the past, as you said, you might not be the person to put together the presentation, somebody else might be the person to do it, but know your presentation. I've had so many people come up to me and said, "Here's my PowerPoint presentation. I'm not sure what's on it, somebody else made it for me." If you're presenting, practice, practice, practice.

Monica Colby: Right.

Ed Comeau: Know your presentation, and don't always rely on another person to do a good job for you. You don't want to find out what's on that presentation as you're standing on stage there trying to present it, that just does not make for a good presentation.

Monica Colby: Actually, practice two weeks ahead of time, everything is set. There's no last minute changes. You have to already have had everything done a couple of weeks ahead of time. Everything's in and ready to go and put up on the web. And then you spend those two weeks practicing how to deliver that information so that you don't need to read what's on the screen, you know what you're doing, you know what's happening because you're just not going to be able to make those last minute changes.

Another thing is, really be careful if you're going to show any video, that takes a lot of time. It's very interesting, it's a good way of showing, "Hey, this is what we did," and again, showing that heart and that human nature side of it, but it tends to take up too much time to stop what you're doing, watch the video, and start talking again. We really don't have very much, that 15, 20 minutes doesn't last very long. I would suggest not using video or not using video with sound, so it's not like you're doing your overview of your program again. Don't show a commercial when you're doing video. Use the video to show, "Hey, here's something we've really done differently and it works well," or if you just want to show more of like a slideshow of this working while you're talking, that would work well, but don't repeat everything you've just done in another video.

Ed Comeau: Something I'd like to mention on video too. If you do use a video in your presentation, it must be embedded into the presentation. Don't plan on hitting a link and then going out to YouTube and showing a YouTube video. You never know what your internet connection is like, you never know what your speed is going to be like, the link might be bad, it might be fire walled. Make sure the video is embedded into your PowerPoint presentation, that's really important, and the same for any links at all. Don't plan on clicking on a link in your presentation to go out to a website or something like that. Nine times out of 10 it doesn't work, it messes up the flow of your presentation, and it just doesn't look professional.

Monica Colby: Right. It's only 20 minutes, which is great. You can get everything done and it's all over with as soon as ... In just 20 minutes it'll all be done. But it also doesn't leave any room for, "Oh, this was moving too slow," or, "I thought I had a picture of this," or those kinds of things. This is, you're supposed to be the best, one of the model performances in North America or the world. This is supposed to be really, really good and you're supposed to be at the top of your game.

That's what we're looking for, that's what people are expecting. But don't let it scare you too much. We don't leave you on your own. After you're selected, we start working with you. We help you with, "Here were the high points. Here are the things that need some more work so that you can build that overview. Here's what we think about your PowerPoint. Here are some ideas. Hey, we noticed that you spelled a word wrong." We do a lot of the editing and coaching

and mentoring along the way to get you ready, but then it's still up to you at the end.

Ed Comeau: Well, this has really been a great conversation, Monica, on the presentation process, the call for papers, preparing your presentation, preparing your PowerPoint, anything like that. Is there anything you'd like to add as we're wrapping up here?

Monica Colby: If people think they've got a good program or they've heard of someone else who has a great program, help them out. Go online and look to see how to write it in that formative process, impact to outcomes. I can only help so many people a day, but I'd be happy to entertain helping you to get things going. Write it up, let me look at it, I'll send it over. I can't be part of bumping you up to the top, but I can give it a look and see if it's really ready or not.

Ed Comeau: We'll include your contact information in the show notes here so that if people need to get in touch with you. That's a great offer and I'd encourage ... Be careful what you ask for, Monica.

Monica Colby: I know.

Ed Comeau: We've been talking with Monica about the upcoming Vision 2020 national symposium on model CRR programs. It's going to be February 18th, 19th, and 20th in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. You can find a lot more information about it at strategicfire.org/symposium6. We've been talking about the presentations, they're going to be a 20-minute model that we use on presentations with a lot of networking time built in. In addition to these, we have great panel discussions on relevant topics such as research data and much more. We have a wonderful exhibit area where you can find just a great amount of information about some of the tools, resources and services that you might use as part of your community risk reduction program.

We do get attendance from across the country, other countries as well are attending, and we always sell out every year so if you are thinking of attending, I'd really suggest you go there and reserve your spot in the hotel and make your reservation or sign up for the symposium. If you do get selected as a presenter, we will be paying your way there, but we'll take care of that afterwards. I'd really suggest you lock in your spot before it all sells out.

Monica, thank you so much for your insight. As we mentioned, you've been doing this for a lot of years and plus your expertise as an educator and community risk reduction expert. Really appreciate you taking the time and joining us.



Monica Colby: You're welcome, Ed, and thank you so much.

Ed Comeau: If you aren't already subscribing to CRR radio, you can do it through your favorite podcast app, whether it's Apple Podcast, Stitcher, Overcast, or any other app. Just search for CRR Radio, hit the subscribe button, and you'll get CRR radio automatically downloaded whenever we come out with a new episode.

CRR radio is a production of the Vision 2020 Project and it's edited by Rich Palmer and produced by me, Ed Comeau. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time on CRR Radio.

Speaker 1: Thanks for joining us on CRR Radio from the Vision 2020 Project. For more information on community risk reduction, please visit us at www.strategicfire.org.