The Institution of Engineering and Technology

LOCAL NETWORK EVENTS

Exciting the public about technology

This Event is designed to engage a wide audience to raise awareness of the positive impact of Science, Engineering and Technology on their lives.

It will follow the format of an interesting talk with networking opportunities before and afterwards.

The theme of the talk will be how technology has changed during our lifetimes, how the pace has picked up recently, and what the future might look like. The subject matter should be chosen in a way most likely to excite a local audience. Possible themes are 'Telecommunications', 'Entertainment', 'Technology in the Home', 'Transportation' or 'Medical Technology' for example. There is a long list of potential themes within this broad subject area.

Content will be provided and developed by policy staff at Stevenage, and help will be given with sourcing speakers. However, it is hoped that local speakers can also be found who can take the material provided and add to it, develop it and personalise it with interesting examples. It is also hoped that by doing this, LNs can provide help back to the centre so that best practice, good ideas and interesting speeches and talks can be shared around using the standard EiaB model.

Fitting into the IET corporate ambition

The aims of the event are:

- to showcase SET and help more people to understand the impact of technology on their lives by building their interest in it
- to encourage more people to study, and subsequently work in, the fields of SET
- to showcase the IET and provide an opportunity to explain its role to non-members
- to recruit new members.

In particular, this kind of event lends itself to targeting an audience of teenagers and their parents to help to inspire new generations, and to encourage their parents both to take an interest and to be supportive.

Using the LN event Framework

There are ten steps to putting on any LN event. This Event in a Box follows these steps:

1. Decide what the LN wants to achieve from the event
2. Decide who you want at the event in order to achieve the desired outcome
3. Choose the content for the plenary session that will encourage the correct people to attend
4. Decide what the volunteers have to do during the event to achieve their outcome
5. Keep on top of the money side of things
6. Set up the event
7. Market the event
8. Ensure the event goes well
9. Follow up where appropriate
10. Evaluate and learn

Decide what the LN wants to achieve from the event

1.

The primary desired outcome of this event is to increase people's interest in SET, as well as tap into their existing interests. Equally important is the aim to encourage a higher proportion of younger people to consider a career in SET.

There are subsidiary aims as well:

- to showcase the IET and position it at the heart of the future of the fields of SET
- to recruit more members
- to develop relationships with partner organisations as appropriate

- to recruit more volunteers and activists from existing members
- to enable the LN to create some positive local media coverage.

2. Decide who you want at the event in order to achieve the desired outcome

This event is overtly aimed at non-members of the IET. Of course, existing members are welcome to attend, but it is hoped that they will bring interested non-members with them – so invites to members must include this overt request.

There is a huge number of people that you could target to build an audience for an event such as this. You will do best if you focus on particular areas rather than spread your efforts too thinly.

As is often the case when planning this type of event, many of the steps within the 10-point framework have to be considered simultaneously. Be careful not to get bogged down with practicalities initially – you need to work first on getting the right people to attend in as efficient a way as possible.

It is best to think about your possible channels of communication in order to invite potential audiences, and look for groups that have common characteristics, or typologies around which you could build an event and marketing efforts.

This kind of event also gives you a real chance to start or continue a relationship with suitable partners locally. It might be possible to target workers from a particular field that the locality is known for, or from a particular employer or group of employers. It is possible to target geographically, building an audience from a particular business park or trading/industrial estate.

3. Choose the content for the plenary session that will encourage the correct people to attend

The centrepiece of this event will be a talk or presentation by an engineer who is adept at building public understanding of science and engineering whilst giving an entertaining talk.

Content for events of this type has been produced by IET staff, but it is hoped that this will be developed, improved and added to by LN members over time.

As mentioned in step 2, there are many layered factors to take into account when putting on this kind of event. As the potential target audience is very large you could end up going too generalised when building your audience that you end up with low attendance. The content of the plenary session will be vital in helping you to target your marketing communications to build a suitable audience.

There may also be a particular industry sited in the LN area, which may give a nice fit, or certain employers whose staff you might decide to target, which may have a bearing on the choice of content.

4. Decide what the volunteers have to do during the event to achieve their outcome

Before and after the main talk, LN members are expected to circulate and mix with the attendees, chatting with them about the wonders of technology. Before the talk, they will set expectations about the event still to come, and afterwards they can refer to relevant, interesting points from the talk.

In both instances they would be expected to convey the notion that:

- scientists, engineers and technologists are the people responsible for making everything in the talk a reality
- through their work, and that of many engineers, scientists and technicians like them, IET members have created our improved past, and they are shaping the future
- IET members are at the forefront of today's innovations and are helping to find solutions to tomorrow's problems.

As ever, whenever the opportunity arises, volunteers will be expected to recruit at the event as well as explain and provide information. Volunteers are also needed for specific tasks, too. All existing members helping at the event will have name badges for identification.

5. Keep on top of the money side of things

Set a budget and monitor expenditure against it. It's a basic rule, and always worth following. You can of course learn for the future by monitoring expenditure and costs, along with results, for every event. Financial aspects of events are always measurable.

The main costs here will be:

Venue hire

This should always include podium, lectern, AV equipment, microphone and speaker as necessary. A good relationship with a partner organisation may mean venue costs are reduced or even free. An overt subsidiary aim of one of your events could be to foster a relationship with a particular individual or group in order to gain future access to a good venue at reduced rates.

Refreshments

Experience will show you how best to keep to budget and to keep costs down. Monitor how much food is left at each event and adjust future orders accordingly, and consider how extensive any refreshments have to be in order to attract repeat audiences.

Speaker's out of pocket expenses

These should always be offered – that's just common courtesy and respect. Often that is the difference between a speaker being willing to help out your or another LN again in the future. Often, the speaker will decline to accept any expenses.

Publicity materials

These could include flyers and posters for workplaces, educational establishments or the venue; letters produced and sent out or hand delivered; or bought advertising, for example in a local newspaper or community or trade magazine. Of course, it is always hoped that extensive use of free media will be made but it should be recognised that some costs are inevitable, and should be encouraged when paying for something gets results.

6. Set up the event

Practicalities here revolve around the venue and its location.

You will need a venue with a room large enough to seat the desired audience, with audio facilities to enable everyone to hear, and other equipment facilities as the presentation and talk requires.

You will also need a second room for the networking sessions, where refreshments can be served if appropriate.

Choosing the venue will depend upon a combination of factors, for example:

- desired audience – making it easy for them to attend
- availability of a suitably sized venue at an affordable rate
- partnerships with other organisations
- ability to develop new partnerships
- budget available.

If you are targeting an audience from a geographical location, such as a business park or trading estate, a small amount of research and a few phone calls should elicit a suitable venue somewhere in the area itself. Perhaps a small business would be able to host it. With a bit of imagination it could even be held in a small warehouse – as long as it is warm, everyone can hear and the audience can get a great experience still of the IET through the event, there is no reason for you to restrict yourself to formal meeting-style rooms.

You want to add to the experience the audience gets of the role that science, engineering and technology has played in their lives, and you want to inspire them about future possibilities. The location will add to the sensory effect and the impact of their interaction with the IET. Be appropriate to the event, and use your imagination.

You might be able to develop a burgeoning relationship with a local educational establishment, for example, and make use of their facilities, thus deepening their involvement and relationship with you.

You may also be able to get help from a company or organisation involved somehow with the theme of the event. There might be a medical facility nearby that would host an evening themed around advancement in medical technology. Or a telecoms company that might help out.

7. Market the event

Whilst existing members are an obvious means of building an audience for LN events, this event is overtly aimed at non-members of the IET. Tickets for this event should thus only be allocated to members who will bring non-members with them.

To build an audience it is best to think about your possible channels of communication. Look for groups that have common characteristics or typologies, around which you could build an event and marketing efforts.

If you want to target employees on a business park, for example, by way of getting a toe-hold into some local SMEs, then letters to the companies, along with flyers and posters, will help. Visiting the companies will always be helpful too.

Look out for partner organisations that will publicise your event. Chambers of Commerce might be particularly helpful, but also any local community group may help out.

Your Regional Coordinator can provide advice and guidance on marketing events, and the online Marketing Toolkit has templates to help. These will include posters and flyers to help publicise events such as these.

With sufficiently interesting content, this event might become worthy of a local or regional newspaper story. The PR department in Stevenage are available for advice to help publicise your events.

It might even be considered worthwhile to take out a newspaper advertisement. Paid-for advertising is often a good way to persuade publications to feature your event in a story. If you follow this route, seek help with design and placement of the advert from staff in marketing at Stevenage.

It would also be worth contacting local radio stations – just phone the station and ask to be put through to the production team for the programme you are targeting. Have a chat and offer to have someone visit the studio to give a flavour of the event on air.

8. Ensure the event goes well

Refreshments

It is unlikely that you will have to provide refreshments for this event. However, offering participants a chance to purchase refreshments would be helpful. This may also help you negotiate room hire.

People

One person must be in overall charge of running the event. This must not be one of the speakers as they must be able to concentrate on making the whole event run smoothly, always be available to make decisions and be flexible about running the event.

Welcome desk

We would like to collect everyone's contact details so that we can invite them to future events. Have a number of signing in stations, and have people circulating collecting contact details. Be clear that we only want them so we can invite them to future, similar events.

Have a cloakroom available, provided by the venue if possible.

Information table

The information table must be in a different location to the welcome desk, otherwise it will cause extra congestion on arrival. We need people to arrive, sign in and then move away to allow others to sign in.

The information table will only need 1–2 people to staff it at any one time. As most of the explanation about the IET will happen by the volunteers who are

circulating, the information table will simply be a place to collect information from – not to stay and chat. It must always be staffed by at least one person so that the IET appears welcoming.

The Room(s)

You will need volunteers to help set up the room(s). Consider signage, branding, speakers' stage, sound system, putting out the IET information, setting up chairs if the venue doesn't do this, etc. Make sure there is sufficient signage for the audience to find the venue, and that there are plenty of pens and membership forms around the room. Once this work is complete, these volunteers can participate in circulating and recruiting.

Set up the room to encourage people to stand and circulate. Try to organise it so that people do not sit down immediately in the seats they will use later, as if people get seated too early they tend to stay seated without moving. This makes it harder for our volunteers to move among them network, chat and to recruit.

9. Follow up where appropriate

It would be nice to send a letter to every attendee, simply expressing the hope that they enjoyed themselves, found the event interesting and stimulating and may be keen to attend a future, similar event. Let them know that we'll write to them with future invitations. Even if you don't write immediately following the event, it is to be expected that the participants go onto a mailing list for future events.

Also, follow up with volunteers. Send a note or call to thank them, and discuss their participation in the next planned event. Take care of your volunteers – with careful nurturing they will grow and contribute much more.

10. Evaluate and learn

The most important point to share with other LNs and develop in the future is how you built an audience of non-members. This will help the IET to encourage awareness of SET in the wider community, which is a key part of the charitable objectives.

Monitoring the steps taken to publicise the event – which ones worked, which ones didn't – will be invaluable to other LNs. It will also help develop good links with individuals, businesses and other organisations that have been previously hard to reach. These can then be shared across other LNs, to help them build contact lists for events in the future.

Finally, it will offer an opportunity to see what topics generate the most interest amongst the public.