



Royal Society of
Biology



Regional Branches

Online events
guide 2020

Guide to running an online event

Online events can be very effective, and can help you expand your portfolio of events to reach a different audience.

Not only are they often lower cost due to fewer operating costs such as venue hire and catering, they can often be easier to manage in terms of physical logistics. Additionally, online events can be more accessible and can therefore lead to a higher attendance.

Many online platforms offer additional services to save you time and resources, such as event registration, recording and post-event feedback.

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Deciding on a target audience

As with any event, online or in-person, it is important to consider who your target audience is going to be.

After identifying your target audience, you can then decide what event format would appeal to them, and also what digital platform may be best through which to reach your audience based on their existing preferences.

Event ideas

One of the hardest parts of organising an event is coming up with an idea that will translate well into an online format. Common events that work well in an online arrangement include:

Panel discussions

Having a number of speakers, with different expertise, discuss a certain topic can work well in an online format. Participants can be muted so as not to interfere with the discussion, and a host can chair the event and pose questions to panellists. To create a more interactive atmosphere, questions can be taken live from attendees.

Previous RSB panel discussions that have taken place online include [Policy Lates: Antimicrobial Resistance – The One Health Approach](#), which was watched live by 154 people.

Lectures

Hosting a lecture on an interesting and informative topic can be very popular as an online event, and many online video conferencing platforms have the capacity to share screens, allowing the speaker to deliver slides with their presentation.

It is important to remember with lectures that the speaker may be the only person visible to participants in the 'room'. It can therefore be even more of a challenge to maintain engagement and encourage participation from the audience, so ensure your speaker is prepared for this.

Training sessions

Training courses can be translated very effectively into an online format by maintaining the session's interactive and engaging nature. Creating materials to support the work being done in the session, or translating existing resources into an online format to be shared ahead of time can also contribute to the success of the event.

Barriers such as the level of interactivity and a greater risk of attendees being distracted are factors to bear in mind when running training courses online, so try to ensure that sufficient breaks are provided, and everyone has an opportunity to contribute to a discussion if appropriate.

Quizzes and games

For a more informal and family-style event, online quizzes and games can be very successfully delivered online. Websites such as [Kahoot](#) allow event organisers to put together an online quiz, and participants can enter a unique pin to join the quiz and answer the questions.

You can also engage your online participants with live polls, Q&A and quizzes as they are watching your virtual event using [Slido](#) or [Mentimeter](#). Combining this with a video conference allows maximum interaction for participants.

Virtual tours

Many museums, galleries, [gardens](#) and zoos have online tours to guide you through their exhibits and grounds without leaving the comfort of your own home.

Encourage all your event attendees follow the same route and discuss what they are seeing to maintain a group feel and engagement from your guests.

Check museums and gardens locally to you, or search further afield to larger sites such as the [Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History](#), the [National Aquarium in Baltimore](#) or [Kew Gardens](#).

Craft together

Take inspiration from the RSB's [Nancy Rothwell Award](#) and celebrate the convergence of science and art. Many guests may already have supplies lying around the home to participate in virtual origami, painting, or drawing.

Choosing your platform

Finding an appropriate online platform can be a challenge, and although there is a wealth of information and options available it is worth taking some time to assess the costs and benefits of these and what type of experience you want to achieve.

Some factors to consider when choosing your platform:

- What platform is already a preference with your target audience?
- Do you want your online event to be accessible to anyone, or only a select audience?
- Is there a time limit for your meeting? Free zoom packages may limit meetings to 40 minutes.
- Will participants be able to join using just a link or will they need to register or create a profile on the platform?
- Will the meeting be password protected?
- Is there a limit on the number of participants?
- Are you able to record the event?
- Have you got consent from those being filmed?
- How will you share footage or audio afterwards?
- Is there a 'screen sharing' facility for speakers?
- Is there capability for subtitles for guests that are hard of hearing?
- Are you able to control participant interaction to minimise disruption?

If you are planning a smaller event with audience interaction (e.g. topical talk and Q&A) a webinar platform would be useful. If you want a larger event (e.g. lecture) with limited interaction, a live streaming platform may be preferable.

The following offer free options for setting up an account and are popular options:

- [Skype](#)
- [Zoom](#)
- [Webex](#)
- [Microsoft Teams](#)
- [YouTube](#)

Before making a final decision on a platform, test the platform out and see whether it meets the requirements of your event.

The RSB has a [Pro Zoom](#) account, which is used for internal and external meetings, and for running online events. This allows 100 participants, a 24-hour meeting duration limit and advanced meeting controls for the host. We can offer advice and tips for running an event on this platform.

For more information on hosting a Zoom online event, and for tips on managing attendee participation, you can download our [Zoom instructions for hosts](#).

Accessibility and inclusion

To ensure that as many people as possible can get involved with your event it is important that they are accessible and inclusive.

- Is the platform free to use?
- Could captioning be provided for video footage?
- If there are slides, is the font easy to read?
- Have you ensured a range of demographics are represented across your speakers?

Picking a date, time and length of your event

Depending on the nature of your target audience, some dates or times for an event may be more suitable than others.

Having a selection of potential event dates in the early stages of organisation is useful to ensure the speakers and committee members are available.

For online events, audiences may benefit from screen breaks, so what may have once been a full day of talks and discussions may work better as multiple shorter sessions online, maybe over the course of a few days.

Funding your event

Another benefit of running an online event is the low cost as expenses such as venue hire and refreshments do not apply. However, speakers may request fees or an honorarium for attending, and some online video platforms will charge for extra features such as recording.

You can charge guests a nominal fee to help guarantee attendance and add value to the content of the event, however this could restrict the numbers who wish to register in the first place.

There are a number of ways to ensure you can afford to run your event, with many grants and schemes available that offer financial support:

RSB Outreach and Engagement grant scheme

The [RSB Outreach and Engagement grant scheme](#) is available to any member that wishes to run an event. Grants are available up to £500, and the grants go towards a large range of activities and events. These will be available from January 2021 onwards.

Sponsorship

Some businesses and companies are often willing to sponsor an event. Depending on their size and budgets they may be willing to cover some of the costs, help with resources, or both, potentially in return for often logos on communications, banners or more.

When obtaining sponsorship, consider:

- What sort of sponsors you would like to be associated with and if there are criteria that may make a sponsor an inappropriate choice to align with your event
- Whether you will offer exclusive sponsorship; some sponsors may prefer and will provide more funds for an exclusive partnership but bear in mind if this is appropriate
- What you can provide in return for sponsorship, such as logos or artwork on banners, posters, email footers, a speaker slot etc

Consider putting a sponsorship package together, detailing different levels of funding companies could offer you in return for different benefits. Offering packages means a company can then clearly see what they'll receive in return for their sponsorship.

If you are able to secure sponsorship, draw up a contract that details the exact agreement, to ensure there are no misaligned expectations on either side.

Safety, security and back-up plans

Risk assessments

It is advisable to complete a risk assessment for your event to ensure you have considered all possible risks, who they may effect and how this might occur.

The main risk when holding an online event is being able to maintain control over participants (i.e. capacity to mute/hide cameras), and manage any technical difficulties that may occur.

It is important that you have a good internet connection and you are familiar with the platform you are using for the event. There is also a reputational risk should the event go wrong in any way.

Some other security and safety considerations include:

- Do you have relevant insurance for your event if it is required?
- Will you need DBS checks for those involved?
- If the event involves working with children, young people or vulnerable adults, have you taken all the reasonable steps needed to ensure their safety?
- Will you be taking photos or recording on the day? If children are involved, are the necessary notices and permissions in place to take their photos?
- Do you have contingency plans in place should a technical error occur?

Creating a backup plan

Having a backup plan or second option in the event of any major issues will ensure that your event can run smoothly no matter what. It is important to remain flexible and be quick to adapt to solve any problem that arises.

Testing your platform ahead of time is essential to make sure you understand the technical capacities of the software, as well as making sure you can smoothly and efficiently maintain control over attendees, speakers and hosts. Holding an event run-through a few days before the event with any other speakers or organisers, will help you iron out any creases and establish everyone's role in advance.

If you are using an online platform such as Zoom, it may be useful to schedule two different meetings, in case there is a technical issue with the first link or meeting ID. This way, you can quickly let all your attendees know and resume the event with minimal delay.

As with an in-person event, it is important to ensure that you have a contingency plan in place if a speaker is running late, or does not show up on the day. This may involve having a back-up speaker, or having one of the event organisers step in to give an overview of their role and the importance of the event to buy some time if the speaker is running late. The main thing to remember is to keep attendees informed, and try and act quickly and calmly.

Marketing and promotion

The success of your event relies in large part on successful marketing and promotion. There are a number of ways to promote your online event, and the RSB can help with the following:

- Direct invitations to branch members
- Monthly e-newsletters which go out to our members and Member Organisations
- Social media platforms, where possible
- On our website events pages
- In the online Biology Week events calendar (for events 3rd-11th October 2020)

The RSB events officer will send an email out to your branch members and neighbouring branches (if required) sharing details on the event. They will follow up with further invitations as requested on the events form until the event is fully booked or is taking place.

The event will be added to *The Biologist* if it is far enough in advance to be included. If your event is taking place in Biology Week (second week in October), your event will be added to the Biology Week calendar. If your branch has social media, feel free to advertise the event on there.

Tasks for before the event

Branches need to fill in the RSB events form before the event takes place. This can be found on the [branch resources page](#) and asks for details such as the event date, event description and number of attendees.

This form and the risk assessment are the two key documents required to get your event added to the RSB website and advertised to RSB members.

Complete a risk assessment

A risk assessment form can be found on the [branch resource page](#), along with an example risk assessment with ideas for different activities. A risk assessment is required before your event is uploaded online and advertised to members. Risk assessments are important as it ensures your activity is covered by the RSB public liability insurance.

Your risk assessment should only include what you could reasonably be expected to know - you are not expected to anticipate unforeseeable risks.

The RSB provides public liability insurance which can be found on the [branch resources page](#). This is sometimes requested by a venue.

Send events form and risk assessment to regions@rsb.org.uk ideally this should happen a minimum of six weeks before the event is taking place. Additional time will be needed if you require additional funding.

The event will be uploaded to the RSB regional events page and added to the branch page e.g. www.rsb.org.uk/Wessex

Guest lists

As bookings for the event will take place through the RSB website, the RSB events officer will send a guest list to you once the event is fully booked or when bookings close.

A final details email will be sent to guests a week before the event or when bookings close – including information on the platform being used, the meeting ID and joining instructions if necessary, and timings. If you have any extra information to include please let the events officer know.

You may also want to use this final details email to request some questions from participants in advance. It can be useful to send joining instructions a few days before the event and again a few hours before the meeting as a reminder.

Some platforms, such as Zoom, and Skype's Meet Now, do not require attendees to create an account, and all guests will need to join the online event is a joining link. Some platforms have the functionality to take bookings for you, and will automatically generate a post-event email for you, meaning you do not have to handle people's personal data yourself.

Event test run

A few days before the event, it is a good idea to set aside time to do a test run on the platform chosen. This can be used for everyone involved to familiarise themselves with the platform and additionally acts as a briefing session so that everyone is aware of their role during the event.

During the event

Setting up the event

When setting up the meeting, start it five to 10 minutes before the scheduled start time. This will give you time to check everything is working as it should, your audio is playing through the right audio device, etc.

Use computer audio instead of phone audio whenever possible, as it will give far better quality of sound. The use of headphones is also important for good audio, as they improve the experience for everyone.

For larger online meetings, having someone other than the chair or presenters look after the technical running of the meeting, muting people, keeping an eye on raised hands or chat messages, etc, will make for a smoother experience overall for everyone.

Hosting or chairing the event

Allow up to 10 minutes after the events starts to allow for latecomers due to internet or setup issues.

At the beginning of the online event, it is a good idea to notify guests whether they are muted or not, and to highlight other ways they are able to communicate with the hosts such as through the chat.

For any call involving more than two people, adopt the practice of muting all participants that aren't talking – it will greatly improve the audio, reduce feedback, and stop all sorts of ambient noises from many different quarters creating a distracting environment in your meeting.

When sharing documents or screens, don't share multiple screens at once and ideally use the software feature to share only a specific application window rather than the screen.

Even more than in physical meeting, ask participants to not talk over each other and actively manage the floor in this way. Where available in the software, ask people to use the “raise hand” or similar function if they want the floor or want to ask a question rather than trying to get your attention verbally.

Reducing the application window to a reasonable smaller size if you have a large monitor will improve the quality of the image participants receive, and zooming in on documents with a lot of text may also help participants see the information more clearly.

Ending the event

Ensure you remind participants how they can leave feedback or find out further information about the RSB and the branch before ending the event.

After the event

The events officer will send a thank you for attending email to guests, asking for any feedback on the event. If you have anything specific you would like included in this email, let the events officer know.

Evaluation techniques

Some online platforms will include the option to send out a post-event feedback form on your behalf, or include a couple of feedback questions at the end of the event for your information and evaluation.

There are a number of ways to evaluate online events including during the event through polls, voting and a post event survey. You can ask questions about accessibility, topics covered, joining information and include space for suggestions and improvements.

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Please fill in the post event report form found on the branch resource page, so that information on what happened at your event can be included in *The Biologist* and on your branch reports page e.g. www.rsb.org.uk/regional-activity/england/devon-and-cornwall/reports

Self-reflection

It is also important to take time to record how you as the activity organiser felt about the event. Things to consider and record include:

- How you felt the event went on the day
- How you felt organising the event went
- Challenges you faced and how you overcame them
- Successes of the event and how you might replicate them in the future
- Improvements you can make
- Lessons you can take forward for future events
- People you met and potential future partnership opportunities

Need more help or information?

For further please contact the events and regions team at regions@rsb.org.uk



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