

Running a successful event

The Society of Biology supports the delivery of numerous events throughout the year, from the work of our staff at Charles Darwin House, the work of our [regional branch committees](#), and through our [regional grant scheme](#).

There are a number of ways to run a successful event and approaches that can be taken. The following are a number of key considerations to take into account when organising and delivering a successful event.

If you are struggling for an event idea, then browse our [idea list](#)

Why are you holding the event?

- What do you want to achieve and how best can you go about this?
- What are the motives behind the event? Is it a showcase, celebration, consultation, debate, launch?

Who is involved in organising and delivering the event?

- Although it is useful to have someone ultimately responsible for delivering the event, make sure that one person is not left with all the work.
- It is best to get commitment early on from volunteers and determine each person's responsibilities at the onset.
- Are there any other useful partners or collaborators to approach (see [collaborations](#) for some ideas)?

What resources will be required?

- Are these resources available? Where from? Is it possible to receive services / equipment in-kind?
- If funding is required, where can this be secured from?

What is your target audience?

- Are you hoping to see a range of people at your event, or a more specific group of people?
- The target audience will be somewhat determined by your event motives.
- The desired audience will affect how you promote and market the event.

What kind of activities would your audience like to see at the event?

- There are numerous possibilities. See our [idea list](#) for some inspiration.

When should you hold the event?

- Will it clash with any other similar events or any popular national events?
- Is the weather a factor?

Where should you hold the event?

- This will depend upon your target audience, the motive of the event, and the type of activity you have planned.
- Shop around for your best option and make use of contacts and potential partners to secure a venue in-kind or at a discounted rate.
- See some of our [venue suggestions](#) for more ideas.

How will you reach your audience?

- This will depend on who you want to attend your event.
- There are numerous promotional channels that can be used (see our [publicity advice](#) for some ideas).
- If it is a Society of Biology then [get in touch](#) and we can help you promote it.

How will you evaluate your event?

- What would make your event a success and how can you measure this?
- The following [guide](#) form Manchester University contains useful advice on evaluation.

Other important considerations

Do you need to complete a risk assessment for your event? If it is a Society of Biology event, you must complete our [risk assessment](#) in order to comply with our public liability insurance policy.

Do you have relevant insurance for your event if it is required? All Society of Biology events are covered by the organisation's insurance policy.

Will you be taking photos or video on the day? If so photo release forms will be required.

If the event involves working with children, young people or vulnerable adults, have you taken all reasonable steps to ensure their safety. All Society of Biology events must follow the [Society's Safeguarding Policy](#).

Do you have a contingency plan in place (for example, if your event is outdoors, what happens if it rains)?

If you have any questions on the above, or seek further advice, then please contact our public engagement and events manager [Penny Fletcher](#)

For a more detailed guide to running a community event, download Green Space's '[Plan it!](#)' guide. Although it is designed for events to be held in green spaces, it has some very useful general advice.

Event ideas

Often the hardest part of organising an event is coming up with an event idea or activity that will simultaneously attract the desired audience, engage them with the subject, while informing and educating them also. There are many tried and tested event formats and ideas, and if you find something that works well it is worth using it again; however, don't be afraid to take a creative and innovative approach, as these are often more likely to generate new interest and attract a crossover audience.

Remember, if you would like to try any of the ideas below, or have your own idea for a Society of Biology event, then contact your [local branch committee](#) with the idea, or put in an application for our [regional grant scheme](#) (grants of up to £500 available).

Below are suggestions of some things you might like to try:

Science busking

This is the art of using simple science tricks to entertain and educate people. They can be performed anywhere, from the corner of a street, in a school classroom, or at a science festival. These are more likely to add to an event rather than serve as a standalone event, although the organisation [science made simple](#) can be booked for science busking shows or for science communication training workshops.

The British Science Association's [Campus Science Guide](#) is a good starting point for ideas. The following activities in the guide have a relevant biological focus:

- Hole in the hand – page 3
- Paralysed finger – page 6.
- Human origami – page 10
- The 5p challenge – page 11
- Master eye – page 12
- Finger finding – page 13
- Aristotle illusion – page 14
- The Stroop effect – page 15
- Expand your mind – page 17
- Afterimage – page 22
- Reaction ruler – page 27
- Water Balloon – page 30

Biology Quiz

Running a biology quiz is a simple and effective means of engaging an audience with whatever biological topics you want to tackle. They work in a classroom, pub, or any other place where people can be organised into separate teams. You needn't adopt a standard quiz format either, instead you could try incorporating problem solving or simple experiments into the quiz to make it more stimulating and challenging.

The Society of Biology will be creating a number of quizzes for people to download and run as part of [Biology Week 2014](#). If you would be interested in receiving a quiz pack, then please email [Dr Rebecca Nesbit](mailto:Dr.Rebecca.Nesbit@societyofbiology.org)

Biology career 'speed dating'

This event is appropriate for students seeking to learn more about a career in the life sciences. By inviting a number of professional representatives to meet students in a speed dating format, it allows them to talk one on one with people working in a biological field. The relaxed, informal setting makes the experience less intimidating and allows the students to pose the exact questions they wish to those with relevant experience.

Contact the Society of Biology's Regional Coordinator, [David Urry](#), if you would like help in sourcing biologists for your event, or alternatively, get in touch with your local [STEMNET regional coordinator](#) who can help find STEM ambassadors to attend.

Meet the scientist careers event

Similar to a career 'speed dating' event but with a more formal format; invite professional representatives from the life sciences to a school or university to talk about their careers, experiences and how they got involved in their profession and meet current or prospective biology students.

Contact the Society of Biology's Regional Coordinator, [David Urry](#) if you would like help in sourcing biologists for your event, or alternatively, get in touch with your local [STEMNET regional coordinator](#) who can help find STEM ambassadors to attend.

Workshops or training events

Being a competent biologist depends upon the accumulated acquisition of skills and knowledge. Whether these are core skills or more specific for a specialised field, training events or workshops are a good way of passing on these skills, particularly important at a time when certain skills are less frequently taught in formal education. Schools, universities, local museums and science centres ([find your nearest one](#)) are the best venue for such events, and local [natural history societies](#) or biology organisations are often a good source of experts. Contact the Society of Biology's Regional Coordinator, [David Urry](#) if you would like further help in sourcing someone to help with a workshop.

Theatre productions that communicate issues surrounding biology

Theatre can be a powerful and effective means of engaging an audience with a particular topic, particularly if the topic has a resonance beyond the scientific world. It is also likely to attract a crossover audience and wider interest, including from the media. Although the time and effort involved is significant in such a project, it can have a high impact. Graphic Science's [Smarter UK](#) pilot project provides a useful case study.

A stall at a science festival,

There are numerous [science festivals](#) in the UK that occur throughout the year. These are a perfect opportunity to talk to and engage with large numbers of people in a very short period of time. The key to doing this successfully is to have a simple message, interesting activity or display that draws people in and gets them talking / asking questions, and finally, lots of energy!

The following provide some good ideas and resources for hands on biology activities you might like to try (in addition to the science busking ideas listed above):

- [Society of Biology hands on activities](#)
- [British Science Association hands on biology](#)
- [Teaching Ideas resources](#)
- [Open Air Laboratories \(OPAL\) resources](#)

Run your own mini festival - [Big Biology Day](#)

Rather than attend someone else's science festival, there is always the option of running your own. It needn't be on a large scale, and could just involve a handful of exhibitors (unless of course you have greater ambitions!). We will very shortly be releasing a guide on how best to organise and deliver a mini festival, and we are encouraging people to take part in a [Big Biology Day](#) during Biology Week (October 12th – 18th), so please get in contact with [David Urry](#) if you would like a copy of the guide.

The following are some key considerations for delivering your own mini science festival.

- **Venue:** where will the event take place? This is the most important starting point. Schools, universities and [village halls](#) / community centres are the best option.
- **Main organiser:** elect someone who is ultimately responsible for delivering the event and is a main point of contact.
- **Exhibitors:** local schools, universities, professional biology related organisations, STEM ambassadors, natural history societies / community groups might all be suitable exhibitors. See our [collaborations](#) section for more ideas.
- **Volunteers:** this sort of project should not be undertaken alone. Make sure that you have a number of people willing to help with the organisation and also general help on the day itself.
- **Ideas:** a successful science festival will depend a lot on the activities and displays present. Try and have a variety of ideas, suitable for a non-specialist audience. Many of the ideas in this guide would be suitable.
- **Promotion:** see our [publicising your event guidance](#)
- **Logistics:** there will inevitably be logistical issues that arise during organisation and delivery. Careful planning and pre-emption of problems, as well as delegating logistical responsibilities, and having people on hand at the event ready to deal with potential problems that arise, will help the event run smoothly.

Guided walks / visits

Organise a visit to a local area of scientific interest; this might be a local [nature reserve or protected area](#), or could be a laboratory or [research facility](#) nearby. If you work in a laboratory or research facility, you could organise an open day. Partnership and collaboration with relevant parties at the site of interest is key to delivering a successful event. Additionally, in order to increase potential attendees, the event should be made as accessible as possible, with set times and directions for the event clearly advertised. Other ideas include discounts for members and coordinated transport.

Conservation work / ecological surveying

Organising a practical conservation session or coordinated ecological survey is often a very good way of promoting a cause and engaging an audience, while also benefiting the local environment. You may also consider organising a local [Bioblitz](#). Bristol Natural History Consortium has created a brilliant [guide](#) to running your own Bioblitz and would be interested in hearing about your event.

You may wish to create an event that involves a locally targeted ecological recording effort, perhaps around a species of regional significance, or one that is locally threatened. The records can then be uploaded onto the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), via [Irecord](#). You could also go one step further, and set up your own recording website from as little as £100 through the NBN ([download their guide](#)).

This type of activity is best delivered in partnership with other relevant local organisations: your [local wildlife trust](#), [natural history group](#) or [nature reserve](#) would all be good to approach.

Events with a focus on member engagement

You might also want to organise an event that focuses exclusively on Society of Biology members, or a more specialist audience.

- **Networking events:** Rather than just organise a social, we would encourage creative and dynamic networking events that will stimulate participation of a wide range of members and non-members in the area.
- **Forums / symposiums:** if there is an important biology issue, particularly one with local interest, this is a good way of sharing ideas on the subject.
- **Lecture:** on a salient and timely topic in the life sciences.

Hopefully the suggestions above might give you some ideas on the sort of event you might want to deliver. It may be that you can organise something that combines several of these ideas, or of course, come up with something completely different.

*Please feel free to contact either [David Urry](#) or [Penny Fletcher](#) to discuss an idea you might have, and take a look at past science events that people have conducted through the **British Science Association's Collective Memory** [website](#).*

Event venue ideas

Finding an appropriate venue for an event can sometimes be a challenge, and room and facility hire can be very costly. It is always worth shopping around for venues, making use of contacts you might have or approaching potential new venues. The following are good starting points:

- **Local universities:** the Society of Biology has contacts at a number of universities around the country that may be able to help you with finding a room. [View our up to date list](#) of On-Campus Representatives, who we can contact on your behalf.
- **Local science centres or museums:** these are often able to provide a venue for free or at a discounted rate. The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement has advice on their [website](#) on working with museums and science centres. Find your nearest centre on the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres' [map](#).
- **Village halls and community centres:** these have the benefit of offering very cheap rates to hire and also they serve as a natural hub for the local community. They often have more than enough space and basic facilities available as well. Find details of your nearest village hall or community centre [online](#).
- **Your local park or green space:** these are obviously better suited to spring or summer events, where you want to engage with the local community. GreenSpace's [website](#) provides advice on organising such an event.
- **Local Wildlife Trust:** there are [47 Wildlife Trusts across the UK](#), each with their own headquarters, some of which may be able to host your event.
- **Schools / sixth form colleges:** local schools or sixth form colleges often have suitable facilities for events and are worth approaching to hire a space for an evening or weekend event. However, it may be that only events suitable for school / college children are welcome.

Potential collaborations / partnerships

Collaborative projects enable sharing of ideas, resources, efforts and funds. When organising an event, establishing partnerships early on will increase the chances of your event being a success. It is important, however, to agree at the start of the process what is expected from the various parties involved. The Society of Biology encourages our regional branch committees, as well as the recipients of our regional grant scheme programme, to seek collaborations where possible and partnerships with the following:

Member Organisations

The Society of Biology has multiple organisations with which it is closely affiliated. Many of these have a presence throughout the UK, and would be suitable to approach to collaborate on an event (dependent of course on the location or subject matter proposed). You can view a full list of our Member Organisations on our [website](#). Please contact us if you would like advice on collaborating with our Membership Organisations.

Local schools and universities

School and universities are obvious potential collaborators for Society of Biology events, as one of the goals of the Society is to advance education in the life sciences and encourage the study of biology and pursuit of a career in biology amongst young people. The Society of Biology has contacts at a number of universities around the country that may be able to help you with your event. [View our up to date list](#) of On-Campus Representatives who we can contact on your behalf.

Local authorities will often have a means of contacting schools in the area to promote an event or to send out a request for collaboration. Additionally, STEMNET contractors in the area (see below), will be well connected to local schools and are worth contacting.

STEMNET – Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics Network

STEMNET is an educational charity in the UK that seeks to encourage participation at school and college into science and engineering-related subjects and (eventually) work. Their STEM ambassadors connect with schools to engage and inspire potential young scientists. If you want to run an event that you think would benefit from the involvement of STEMNET and STEM ambassadors, then contact the relevant regional coordinator using the details on their [website](#).

Natural History Societies and Wildlife Trusts

The UK has a rich tradition of amateur biologists and natural history organisations, within which, an impressive array of specialist skills and knowledge exists. Natural history groups are a source of potential speakers for events and they often have extensive knowledge on local biology and as a result are able to lead guided walks and visits to sites of interests. The Natural History Museum has a database of many UK natural history groups on their [website](#). Please contact [David Urry](#) if you are interested in finding out about further groups in your area.

Local businesses

Commercial organisations in the area may be able to offer skills, resources, advice, or sponsorship for an event if it is relevant and beneficial for them to do so. Those with a link to the life sciences are the most obvious option; however, other organisations may also consider supporting your event. A polite approach via a letter or email, explaining the goal of the event and how they might

be able to offer support, is a good way to encourage collaboration. There are many [online directories](#) that can be used to find local businesses to approach.

Local community groups

If you are looking to put on an event open to the local community, then it would be worth seeking to collaborate with other local community groups. Your local authority website should have details of the community groups and organisations that exist in your area and that can be approached.

Publicising your event

Effective publicity of your event is a crucial part of ensuring it is a success. In order to increase your chances that the event is well attended, your promotion and publicity should be multi-channelled, informative and appropriate to the type of event you are running. For example, if you are organising a family friendly hands on activity, then a bold colourful poster with lots of images would be appropriate; it would be less appropriate however, for a serious discussion or forum.

Potential channels to promote your event:

- **Society of Biology website and emails:** we will happily promote all of our regional branch events and regional grant scheme events through our website and *The Biologist* magazine. We can also email members in the relevant areas with event details. Please contact [David Urry](#) with details of your event. We will also promote our Member Organisations' events, and external organisations' events, so long as they are free or offer our members a discount.
- **Other website promotion:** make use of any partners' websites and email lists to publicise your event. Contact your local authority as well, as often they will advertise events on their websites. Most areas will also have several events directories online that can promote events. These are easily found by searching online.
- **Local publicity:** distributing flyers and displaying posters at your venue and in the surrounding area before the event can be effective means of generating interest and attracting attendees. If it is appropriate, distribute these to local schools and universities also. Make sure your poster is eye-catching, simple and contains all the basic information about the event. Avoid waste by thinking carefully about how and where to display or distribute promotional material.
- **Local press:** not all events will necessarily be newsworthy; however, it is often worth contacting the local press (newspapers, radio, local television) and preparing a press release to present to the press. Many local newspapers also have online events listings. Download a [template press release](#) and our advice on contacting the press.
- **Social media:** social media is a powerful promotional tool and means of connecting with a wide audience, particularly a young demographic. If you provide us with event details, we will happily use social media to promote Society of Biology events, making use of our many followers. We would also encourage you to write a piece for our blog, to tie in with promotion.