

What we've learned about running discussion events

Practical tips on running effective discussion events with adults and schools

When you're planning the event content...

Choose a topic that is **controversial**, issues-based and which people really care about. Make sure it relates to the National Curriculum if you want to attract schools.

Pilot your activity on a small scale to see which discussion questions and angles get people talking best.

Come up with a short, attention-grabbing **title** – perhaps a powerful question or statement that embodies the topic – for marketing the event.

Invite a **range of speakers** to participate, representing a range of views and backgrounds. Brief speakers on the level of content as well as the length of their contribution (probably no more than ten minutes initially).

Setting up the event...

Minimise noisy distractions and keep the venue at a comfortable temperature. Make refreshments available if possible.

Set up the room so that participants can **see and hear** each other. Seek to minimise the 'them and us' feel between audience and speakers.

Arrange amplification for speakers and a roving microphone for audience questions (if appropriate).

During the event...

Make every effort to **welcome** the audience, smiling and personally greeting as many as possible to promote their sense of engagement and confidence.

Set the tone of the event using an effective facilitator who sets and implements ground rules for encouraging wide participation, and keeps speakers to time.

Kick off the event with information-rich presentations – short films, quizzes, objects, comedy, demonstrations etc – to stimulate the debate.

Use a vote or other technique to gauge opinion before, during and after the event.

Enable discussion, perhaps starting in small groups and then joining together. Encourage dialogue using open questions. Seek to give all participants a sense that they are contributing to a worthwhile and meaningful debate.

At the end...

Offer a handout or other material that encourages the audience to **continue the debate**.

Further resources:

Come on a **Talk Science** training course for teachers interested in generating class discussions on contemporary science topics www.talkscience.org.uk

Contact Beth Hawkins (beth.hawkins@sciencemuseum.org.uk) with any questions about the *Talk Science* project.

Find out more about running a discussion event in our Events DIY: www.danacentre.org.uk/aboutus/eventdiy

Find out about how to evaluate a discussion event by reading another sheet in the *What we've learned* series:

- What we've learned about evaluating discussion events

Find out about free training in promoting dialogue through events with the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres' Dialogue Academy www.dialogueacademy.org.uk