

INSIDE EINSTEIN'S UNIVERSE

Making the Most of Your Partnership: Helpful Hints for Guest Speakers and Host Institutions

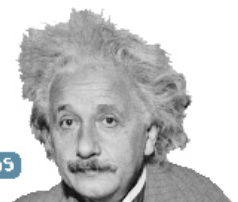
A guest scientist can be a valuable asset to public programming at a museum or planetarium, but the success of the program depends heavily on effective communication between the host institution and the speaker. The Universe Education Forum at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics has worked with scientists and museum educators to assemble a suggested checklist for discussion BEFORE the event itself.

Logistics

- Everybody's name and contact information—do people have a preferred method of contact (email, office phone, cell phone)? How will the speaker be listed in any advertising? Who will be the primary contact at the host institution? Is this same person the speaker will work with on the actual day of the event?
- Event date, time and location—what time should the speaker arrive to set up? Will there be a time to meet/talk beforehand? What is the parking situation? How will the presenter find the presentation site?
- Format and context of event—is this a special presentation? Part of a larger event? What else will be going on before, during, or after the event? What in-house resources (exhibits, displays, performances, activities, observing nights, etc.) complement the presentation?
- Audience size (anticipated) and type (families, teachers, etc.)
- Preferred presentation topic and length
- Travel support available/requested—will the speaker be paid an honorarium? What travel expenses will be reimbursed? What sort of receipts will be required? Dietary restrictions for food?
- A.V. equipment requested and/or available—whose computer will be used? Will special adapters or cables be required? What operating system/software is required/available? What about projectors? How early can the equipment be set up/checked out? Don't forget to ask about photocopies, if necessary.
- Souvenirs and follow-up resources—will there be a copy of the presentation available to the host institution (or audience members) before or after the presentation? Are there appropriate supplemental resources (activities, brochures, stickers, etc.) for the audience members to take home with them?
- Any other special needs—asking is better than assuming! Communication is key!

For the Speaker

- Your audience has a wide range of experiences coming in. A good rule of thumb is high enthusiasm, low content background. Modifying a presentation you would give as an undergraduate lecture will still probably be at too high a level for the general museum-going public. For samples of audience-appropriate presentations, visit http://www.universeforum.org/einstein/resources_speaker.htm.



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- Most people are unfamiliar with astronomy topics beyond the solar system. (For example, many people have trouble distinguishing the differences between a solar system, a galaxy, and the universe.) What basic information is needed before your particular research interest can be introduced?
- An educator at your host institution is your most valuable resource—show him or her your presentation before you give it. Does she think the audience will understand it? Does he understand it himself? A museum educator can also suggest hands-on demonstrations to enhance your presentation, which will set it apart from the typical “stand and deliver” lecture.
- Small audiences, though disappointing to scientists, offer better opportunities for personal interaction, which leads to a deeper understanding of the topic.
- Museum educators want to give audiences the authentic experience of interacting with “real scientist” and appreciate having an expert on hand to address audience questions. Audiences want to ask questions both about what you do and how you do it. When designing your presentation, be sure to leave time for these opportunities.

For the Museum

- Most speakers expect to give a 20-40 minute talk, followed by a question and answer period. Be clear if this is not the case!
- Make yourself available to the speaker beforehand—an informal dialogue about your audience and the presentation content will allow both you and the presenter to anticipate the questions that may arise. Often, a speaker can suggest some follow-up resources or sources to gain background information on the topic(s) presented. You, likewise, can inform the speaker of other activities, events or exhibit displays at your institution related to the speaker’s research and talk topic.
- If you have a good experience, let your speaker know that you are willing to write a supportive note to his or her supervisor or department chair. Positive feedback is much appreciated and can make a difference in the speaker’s career advancement and/or the department’s willingness to support future outreach efforts.

For Everyone

- It is in both parties’ interest to make this an enjoyable, informative event. Be open to hearing what the other person has to say and offer your own ideas in a friendly, supportive manner. Remember that both parties have experience as scientists and as educators. Both parties can learn a lot from this pre-event dialogue and ultimately, it is the audience that will benefit!
- Have fun! One of the most important things you can communicate is your excitement and passion for science. Consider yourself an ambassador for scientific ideas and, perhaps even more importantly, science literacy. This is an exciting opportunity to engage the next generation of scientists and to increase public support for important scientific research.

