



Tips for Sigma Xi Chapters

What is a Science Café?

The Basic Idea

Science café events involve lively conversations with scientists about current science topics. They are open to everyone, and they take place in relaxed settings like pubs, coffeehouses, and other informal venues. A science café's casual meeting place, plain language, and inclusive discussion create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for people who may have no science background.

Key Principles

The science café format is flexible, however, a few key principles apply. Science cafés:

- Actively engage every participant. They foster energetic, unscripted dialogue, controlled as much by the audience as by the scientist.
- Are often moderated to encourage the free flow of conversation, promote exchanges among audience members, and to steer the event away from a simple question-and-answer format.
- Reach out to new audiences and provide opportunities for people who don't typically engage in science discussions to do so.
- Avoid technical jargon, PowerPoint presentations, and prolonged lectures. Scientists are usually limited to a few minutes introduction before the moderator and audience start steering the conversation.

Scope

Science café events are usually simple and straightforward, rarely involving more than 50 to 100 people.

Content

Each meeting is organized around a science topic of general interest. A scientist gives a brief presentation, sometimes preceded by a short video clip. A moderator or host then helps facilitate a group conversation. Science topics vary, and some cafés also explore connections between science and other disciplines, such as art or music.

The Benefits

Educational Impact

A science café series is a proven way of increasing public understanding of and engagement in science and technology issues.

Reach New Audiences

Because they are generally held in nontraditional venues, in a comfortable conversational format, science cafés introduce new audiences to science and to resources for science education.

Build Relationships

Robust partnerships often grow out of community connections sparked by a science café. Sigma Xi chapters that are involved with cafés report that they collaborate with another professional organization, museum, or science center to produce the events.



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Energize Your Chapter

Holding a science café series can help your chapter develop a sense of identity and purpose, gives chapter members an opportunity to work together, and is a good opportunity to get young chapter members and graduate students involved in Sigma Xi activities. Presenting at science cafes can also help scientists and engineers fulfill their responsibility to a public who funds their research.

The Costs

Time

There is an economy of scale with establishing an ongoing café series rather than a single isolated event. Starting a series may take a few hours a week for a couple of months. But once a café series is established, preparing for each new occasion may only require a few hours per event.

A café series doesn't have to follow a rigid calendar. Individual events can be planned to compliment related programs and celebrations. Some veteran café organizers plan each event only a few weeks ahead of time.

Don't forget to delegate some of the science café-related responsibilities to other members of your chapter! This will ensure a manageable time commitment for all the organizers, and can help your chapter members feel invested in the science cafés.

A few Sigma Xi chapters simply provide speakers, funding, or publicity for an existing café series. Clearly, these are smaller time commitments than founding and maintaining a new series from scratch.

Money

Science cafés are inexpensive to plan and run; they often incur few, if any, direct expenses, and the majority of Sigma Xi chapters report spending less than \$50 per event. The most common café expenses are related to promotion. Cafés typically do not pay speaker or venue fees.

Starting a New Science Café Series

To launch your first café, you will need:

- **A topic:** A subject that can capture your audience's imagination or curiosity
- **An expert:** A scientist who works in the topic area and speaks clearly with non-scientists
- **A venue:** A pub, coffeeshop, or other comfortable and informal location
- **A moderator:** Someone to help keep the conversation flowing between the scientist and the audience
- **Promotion:** Flyers, calendar listings, emails, and a web presence to get the word out about your events

You'll also need someone to serve as the café organizer. Some cafés are run completely by one organizer; others have a point person and a network of partners.



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The main tasks required for developing a science café are:

- Understanding and establishing a connection with the target audience
- Choosing a topic
- Finding and working with presenting scientists
- Moderating the café or finding a moderator
- Attending to logistics such as booking a venue and managing an e-mail list
- Promoting events in creative ways

Check out the Chapter Model Programs portion of the Sigma Xi website to see which chapters are currently conducting Science Cafes and make contact with chapter leadership for additional tips.