

# Knowledge Fair

## What is a Knowledge Fair?

A Knowledge Fair is an event designed to showcase information about an organization or a topic. It can be organized in many ways using speakers, demonstrations, or more commonly, booths displaying information of interest to the attendance.

## What are the benefits?

A large amount of information can be made available and visitors can focus specifically on what they are interested in learning. They can interact directly with the presenters, getting immediate answers to their specific questions. They also can establish contacts for further exploration of topics if needed.

Visitors often network with one another and booth developers' often strengthen their teamwork. Knowledge Fairs also provide opportunities to draw attention to best practices and recognize employee and team achievements.

Knowledge Fair is particularly recommended when there is a lot of information to share with a lot of people and participants need a broader perspective, as well as an opportunity to interact on a one-to-one basis on specific topics. Knowledge Fair is an alternative to traditional presentations when more interactive experiences are desirable.

A Knowledge Fair is also pertinent if the organization is to adopt and sustain horizontal modes of operating and cooperating. Such a method can then foster a new organizational dynamic.

## How do I go about it?

1. Get top level support.
2. Publicize the fair widely.
3. Put the fair where there is a lot of foot traffic, e. g. in the atrium of the organization. Don't accept a decision to put the fair in an out-of-the way space – location is essential for a successful fair.
4. Put your best communities of practice on display.
5. Be realistic about how much time it takes for communities to prepare and display.
6. Get common displays for booths so as to convey an image of diversity with integration.
7. Plan ahead for electric power which can be substantial if computers are used.
8. Plan to have technicians on hand when things break down.
9. Plan for security of equipment when booths are not staffed.
10. Don't plan in too much detail for the actual booths – communities can self-organize within a common framework.
11. Don't be too serious – a fair can be fun.

## A few lessons based on practical experience at SDC and ILO

### Thematic focus

Clarify why you are staging a Knowledge Fair and what theme it is focussed on. Make sure the theme is valid and supported by stakeholders from all levels of the organization. The thematic focus needs to be both accurate and open: There needs to be a focus and room for innovation and surprise.

### Nature of the fair

Be clear about the nature of a fair: There is a common theme, a broad variety of presenters and a multi-faceted public with diverse interests. A fair offers broad opportunities for getting information, for making contacts, for interaction and for agreeing on follow-up activities. Be aware about the impact the venue may have on the event.

### Target audience

Identify the target audience and tailor the Knowledge Fair to it. Market the event appropriately to the target audience. Take into account the cultural aspects for the audience(s) identified. Analyze the formal/informal mood you wish to and can achieve with the audience(s). Be open for surprises: There might be visitors that do not correspond to the expected profile.

### Commitment

Get commitment from key stakeholders and involve them in appropriate ways at the planning stage and in execution. The values of the organization have an impact on the event.

### Language

Decide if you want a multilingual event and accordingly prepare space for the different languages, decide about necessary translations. Be aware of budget impacts.

### Preparation

Do not underestimate the time and resources required. 12 months are a minimum; 18 to 24 months are a more realistic frame. Decide about infrastructure and logistics provided; communicate it clearly to all presenters. Provide distance coaching to all presenters; half of them will need it.

### Publicity

Publicize the event before, during and after. Provide a feedback mechanism for fair participants. Identify in advance how to measure impact in relation to the audience(s) identified. Capture the process – its ups and downs could help others later.

### Interaction

Include a broad variety of interactive forms in the fair: Exhibition boards with attractive, but silent information; Market stands with “sellers” and “buyers”; short presentations with room for interaction; workshops with more formal presentations or experimental learning; video-corners or showrooms; an arena for innovative and crazy ideas; coffee corners with drinks and snacks and comfortable seating arrangements.