



CASE STUDY / CREATING A WELCOMING EXPERIENCE

BY THE ARTS SOCIETY AREA CHAIRMEN

Happy members keep coming back and tell their friends. It's up to us to keep them happy and to enjoy the sometimes undervalued fun and friendliness associated with all our activities.

Your members and especially aspiring members need to know clearly and as soon as possible what to expect.

BEFORE THE LECTURE

Details of future lectures are effectively advertised in newsletters to members, in Society leaflets put in places where potential new members wait (libraries, doctors and dentists' surgeries, local theatres and concert venues) as well as on your up-to-date society website. Social Media – Facebook and Twitter are also an option as we begin to attract new members. NB Leaflets may be printed very economically and The Arts Society can advise. Leaflets can also attract sponsorship so may not cost the Society anything. It is helpful to write the information in a concise and informative style that is a pleasure to read.

Start the meeting 5 minutes earlier, to allow regular updates to the members from Society's YA, CR, Heritage and Trail volunteers. Their enthusiasm will be infectious!

AT THE LECTURE

(Circumstances will vary considerably and most Societies already practice what is below)

Clear signposting. A couple of volunteers to 'meet and greet' at the door to welcome all and identify visitors and new members make a big difference in the members' experience. Although all Societies probably think of themselves as friendly, visitors and potential

member are still reported to say 'I went to the meeting and no-one spoke to me so I didn't go again'.

'Mingling time' with tea/ coffee/ wine makes for a welcoming experience prior to the lecture. As well as meeters and greeters, it's good if the committee can also be out there doing the same and making introductions. There could be a couple of designated committee members who could 'target' newcomers and guests. Encouraging members to stand and mingle with their coffee before sitting down is good as, once seated, people then only talk to the person next to them, usually their friends.

To help conviviality and build relationships individual name badges let members feel that they belong to an inclusive Society. Visitors and new members can easily be identified with a badge and it is also useful to include the member's home district on the badge.

Future Society and Area events can easily be advertised on a rolling Pearl & Dean PowerPoint presentation and more details put on a Society notice board.

A lecture themed raffle is clearly a fundraiser and it generates conversation with a member of the committee for attending members.

AFTER THE LECTURE

Feedback from the audience demonstrates to members that their opinion counts. Many Societies collect feedback scores electronically on their website immediately following the lecture from a substantial number of members. Others place a small slip of paper on each chair listing the review categories; at the end of the lecture members make a small tear next to their chosen rating before handing it to a committee member. There are of course other ways of doing this to help with the quality assessment of our Accredited Lecturers.

This can often be a lost opportunity as people tend to rush back to cars, particularly if parking is a problem or expensive. How about an occasional 'meet your committee' at the back of the hall afterwards, for a second cup of coffee/wine and an opportunity to find out more about forthcoming trips, Study Days, etc.

Organise occasional committee lunches and maybe even an outing! It doesn't have to be all day and expensive, somewhere local and with a sandwich before or after works well.

Don't forget to look after the non-committee - the meeters/greeters and curtain-pullers! They also form a team of supportive players.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Special events. Ask the committee and volunteers to provide ideas for something different and fun at some lecture meetings – for example, a themed dress style related to the lecture topic or timing of the lecture (e.g. Christmas) with a small prize. Or a lunch / dinner reflecting the theme of the lecture. Tie in a lecture with a social or fundraiser e.g. garden visits after a garden themed lecture.

A regular newsletter (preferably monthly but other frequencies may also work well). This is easily produced with MailChimp and The Arts Society House runs courses of instruction in London and the Areas for this. Let your members know what is coming up in the next few months both for your Society, neighbouring Societies and local non-Arts Society artistic events (exhibitions and concerts – people who like to go to live classical music are a rich area for recruitment so make some of your Society publicity materials available there).

We all know that awareness of The Arts Society is low and marketing the Society in every way is productive.

OTHER EVENTS

There is no doubt that the Heritage Volunteers, Church Recorders, Young Arts and Trails of Discovery volunteers find much satisfaction in their cooperative and valuable works. Group study tours, day visits, courses and study days bring members together and all encourage the friendly atmosphere we seek to achieve.

Run a specific lunch or drink for new members each year, with the committee and one or two members. It need only be a soup and sandwich but it gets them together and is a chance for the Chairman to tell new members all about The Arts Society and the bigger picture.

Above all, make it fun for everyone. Society Chairmen can set the tone to ensure that committee membership is a joy. Share the loads with suitable non-committee volunteers for specific tasks (meet and greet, badge distribution and collection and tea/coffee/biscuits). Organise the occasional committee lunch. The team that plays together stays together!

Also, make sure that everyone knows that a lot of help is available. Through Training, the Support Team, Area Teams and of course The Arts Society House a wealth of resources, experiences and tools are available. The Arts Society is driving an initiative in 2019 to make all resources more easily available and accessible. Costs are an issue for many Societies, and sometimes those who need publicity and new events and ideas the most do not have the funds to pay for these. Please contact The Arts Society House if you feel that you cannot do things that might help you improve The Arts Society experience.

CHECKLIST

Before the lecture

- An informative programme card and leaflet/flyer
- Up to date website
- Newsletter
- Flyers/leaflets distributed widely

At the lecture

- Signposting
- Meet and greet volunteers
- Network and connect with members and visitors
- Name badges for members, new members and visitors
- Power point rolling programme
- Audience feedback on the lecture

After the lecture

- Monthly newsletter
- Keep recruiting new members
- Keep volunteers involved (raffle/drinks)

WHEN PLANNING AND DELIVERING EVENTS, ASK YOURSELF:

How can we ensure **we are welcoming**, generous and sociable?

How can we communicate **we are connected** and responsive to our members' needs?

How can we get across that **we are knowledgeable** and striving for the highest standards?

How can we express that **we are pioneering** by trying new and different ways of working?

RESOURCES

For more tips on planning a successful event and attracting new audiences, please visit:
theartsociety.org/resource/planning-event

CONTACT

For further help or information please speak to The Arts Society's Membership Team:
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