

Big Biology Day: Event Guide



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Introduction to Big Biology Day

A Big Biology Day is a science festival that celebrates the life sciences and engages the general public with an array of biological topics, through hands-on bioscience activities, displays and talks, bringing together a variety of biological organisations under one roof.

Big Biology Days are becoming a more and more popular option for those wanting to get involved in outreach as an opportunity to share their passion for biology and the natural world, regardless of background in biology.

The first Big Biology Day was devised and delivered by the Royal Society of Biology's (RSB) East Anglia branch in 2012 led by Ian Harvey FRSB, and since then, they have continued to get bigger every year; with increased participant numbers visiting an increasing number of activity providers.

In previous years, Big Biology Days have been held across the UK in Staffordshire, Cambridge, Cardiff and more. We'd love to help these festivals grow and spread across the country, and hope that many of you are inspired to run your own.

We hope that this guide will give you a comprehensive overview as to what to expect from a Big Biology Day, and all the ins-and-outs of running one yourself together with help from a

wider team of volunteers, an organisation or committee you are already involved with, or a team from your work or local community.

What is a Big Biology Day?

A Big Biology Day is generally a one or two-day event, held in a local venue such as a school, community centre or town hall.

Although there are no hard and fast rules for what a Big Biology Day is, generally they feature the following:

- A collection of stalls that offer hands on biosciences activities for families to enjoy
- A variation of activities on the stalls led by local or national organisations or knowledgeable volunteers
- Talks or debates led by experts
- Volunteers who deliver the activities, help attendees on where to go, and offer any other support
- Refreshments and facilities for attendees to use

In the past, Big Biology Days have been hosted by secondary schools with the main hall working as an exhibition space for a number of stalls with activities. These have been led by local branches of organisations like the RSB, local universities, companies in the area, nature groups or other charities. Many are usually happy to attend on the day and bring all the equipment they need to deliver their activity, and just require a table and some chairs.

Often in adjoining rooms, local biologists will also deliver talks on their research or other projects of interest, alongside small seminars, career talks or lectures that some of the target audience may be particularly interested in.

Who attends a Big Biology Day?

Attendees will usually be families who live in the local area, who may or may not already be involved with the school or community in some way. Audiences usually have a diverse range of interests and knowledge of science, and will also span a wide range of age groups.

Why should you consider running a Big Biology Day?

Approximately three out of four people do not think science is of interest or relevance to them, when we know that this is not the case.¹

Science festivals are a great way to bring the local community together for a great day out and get family members of all ages talking about biology in the world around them.

Fun days like a Big Biology Day help bring science to lots of people all at once, stimulate their interest, give them the opportunities to explore and ask questions, and help overcome any barriers that result in people thinking science isn't of importance or interest to them.

¹ <https://www.britishtscienceassociation.org/news/introducing-our-new-strategy>

As well as improving national enthusiasm for science, these days are also a great organisational challenge that are rewarding to deliver. They can help individuals involved in the planning and delivery to grow transferable skills that are valuable for future employers.

Delivering these days are a great opportunity for not just a keen individual, but any group of volunteers such as a scout, explorer or youth group.

Planning a Big Biology Day

Not organised a Big Biology Day before?

If this is the first time you have considered running a Big Biology Day and want to speak to someone to find out more, contact the RSB at outreach@rsb.org.uk for advice and guidance. The contents of this guide should help with the basics, but RSB staff are on hand to help if requested.

Finding a venue

When choosing a venue to host your Big Biology Day, there are several things to consider as a first point of reference:

- Which locations are easily accessible by your target audience?
- How big does the space need to be?
- Do you have the budget to pay for the venue?

It is always worth shopping around for the perfect venue, and making use of existing contacts can be valuable. The following are good starting points for Big Biology Days:

Village halls and community centres

These often have cheap hire rates and also serve as a natural hub for the local community. They often have more than enough space and basic facilities available as well.

Find details of your nearest village hall or community centre online: www.hallshire.com

Local science centres or museums

These are often able to provide an event space for free or at a discounted rate. The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement has online advice on working with museums and science centres: www.publicengagement.ac.uk

Find your nearest centre on the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centre's online map: www.sciencecentres.org.uk/centres

Schools/sixth form colleges

Local schools or sixth form colleges often have suitable facilities for events and are worth approaching to hire a space for an evening or weekend event.

If you have a contact in a school, or work in a school yourself, this is a great way to find a space that could be available to you. Collaborating with schools is also a good way to spread the word about the event and reach more of your target audience.

Dates and times

Depending on the venue you are able to secure, you may need to consider running your Big Biology Day on a weekend or during a school holiday period. This will also ensure families are able to attend and exhibitors are free to volunteer.

Running your Big Biology Day during the RSB's annual [Biology Week](#) is a great way to get the word out about your event, as it can be added to the RSB's Biology Week calendar. We can then help advertise your event, and provide branding and other communication tools if you want to reach out to a wider audience or get the local community involved too

If your Big Biology Day lies within the RSB's 10th anniversary year (October 2019-September 2020) or you have been successful in the Big Biology Day grant scheme 2019, we can also add your event to our dedicated anniversary year website which can be found at: <https://anniversary.rsb.org.uk/>

Choosing your audience

For a Big Biology Day, the target audience is usually the local people in the area, as these are the people who will be easiest to advertise to and those who will be able to travel to attend the event. Advertise your event to:

- Local schools in the area
- Local community centres or groups
- Local sports or social groups
- Those who live nearby to the venue

Exhibitors

Every Big Biology Day needs exhibitors! Friendly, enthusiastic and knowledgeable people to deliver interactive activities to all audiences. Decide how many exhibitors your venue can host, and what provisions are available such as electricity, floor space and furniture. Then draft out an invitation to send to the following:

Your workplace or organisation

If you work for an organisation that is affiliated with biology, your co-workers may be interested in helping out or exhibiting at the event, and there may be opportunity for your organisation to help with resources and materials.

Local schools and universities

Many universities have outreach schemes in place, and the RSB has contacts at a number of universities around the country who we can contact to get in touch with you. This may be

especially worthwhile for younger students who may not get the chance to interact with universities very often.

STEM Learning

STEM Learning is an educational charity in the UK that aims to encourage school participation in science, technology, engineering and maths. Their STEM Ambassadors connect with schools to engage and inspire potential young scientists. Contact your relevant regional coordinator here: www.stem.org.uk/stem-ambassador-hub-contacts

Natural History Societies and Wildlife Trusts

These offer an extensive network of organisations across the UK, with a huge array of specialist skills and knowledge. They may be able to provide exhibitors or activities.

Local community groups

Local authority websites should have details of local community groups and organisations that exist in your area.

Inviting exhibitors

Once a potential exhibitor has expressed an interest, be sure to confirm the following:

- What their activity is and what bioscience topics it will cover
- Who their activity is suited for
- How much space is needed for its delivery
- What technical support it will need
- Whether they have a risk assessment in place

If the answers to the above are compatible with your own objectives and the venue limitations, then they should be a welcome addition to the day.

Publicising your event

Flyers and posters

Advertising your event through hard copies of flyers and posters is a good way to target a specific audience. Advertising in the venue you will be using is also useful for getting specific people that are frequent visitors of that venue to attend your event.

Be mindful of paper usage when printing copies of flyers and posters, and try to be realistic about how many you will actually hand out. Postage and printing costs must also be considered.

Contact local schools and groups

If you are targeting families and school-aged children, try and contact local schools and colleges to put your event in their newsletter or give the school copies of flyers or posters for

the event to put up on school notice boards. Schools may also be willing to send out messages to parents and carers or get in touch with their wider networks on your behalf.

Additionally, if you have any other organisations exhibiting at your event, see if they would be willing to advertise your event on their channels.

Educational networks such as STEM Learning and The Association for Science Education are also great places to contact to spread the word about your event and give you advice on how best to publicise it.

Social media

Using social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook are a great (and free) way to advertise your event to large audiences.

- Twitter is a great way to advertise your event, and also to document the event as it develops
- On Facebook, you can contact the administrators of pages who provide news and updates that are suitable for your audience to publicise your event, or you can share information about the event among your own friends and contacts more directly
- In tweets and Facebook posts, tag local news outlets or other media organisations who may be willing to share the content through their channels too

RSB advertising

The RSB can also help with advertising your Big Biology Day event through our channels which include:

- Monthly e-newsletters which go out to our members and member organisations
- Social media platforms e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn
- On our website news and events pages

Press

Contacting local press

You can get in touch with local press ahead of the day to see if they would be interested in sending a reporter along, or potentially offer an interview so you can explain more about the event and get people interested.

Press invites

If you think the press will be interested in attending your Big Biology Day, consider drafting a press invite to send to local newspapers, radio stations and television channels ahead of time.

A press invite outlines what the event is, and also what coverage opportunities are available. Make sure to include:

- When and where the event is
- Any notable speakers or attendees

- What photography and filming opportunities are available (depending on permissions)
- How to get in contact with the organisers if they wish to attend

Press releases

If you don't get any interest from journalists wanting to attend on the day, don't worry. You can always issue a press release *following* the event with media suitable for outlets to use.

This is similar to a press invite, but includes:

- Photos from the event with a clear indication of to whom/where credit should be given
- A Dropbox or WeTransfer link with video content that you may have shot or have available
- Mention that high resolution versions are available on request (if applicable)

Check out www.media.info for news desk emails and other regional press contacts.

Before issuing a press invite or release, do get in touch with the RSB's press and communications manager (contact details at the end of this publication) for more advice and guidance and for final sign off/permissions.

Funding your event

There are a number of ways to ensure you can afford to run your event, with many grants and schemes available that offer financial support.

Big Biology Day grant scheme 2019

October 2019 to September 2020 is a milestone year for the RSB as it marks the organisation's 10th anniversary and 40 years of being granted a Royal Charter. It will be celebrated with a suite of exciting new events and initiative, including offering 10 Big Biology Day grants of £500 each to RSB members to run their own Big Biology Day event during the anniversary year.

The grant application form can be accessed by logging in or registering to the RSB's online portal, mySociety and further information can be found at <https://www.rsb.org.uk/get-involved/grants>

RSB Outreach and Engagement grant scheme

The RSB Outreach and Engagement grant scheme is available to any RSB member that wishes to run a Biology Week event. Grants are available for up to £500, and this can go towards a large range of activities and events.

You can read more about this grant scheme by visiting: www.rsb.org.uk/outreach-grants

Public engagement grants and bursaries

There are a number of public engagement grant schemes available which are run by organisations including the RSB. Some grants have annual deadlines, whilst others offer money on a rolling basis.

An online list of public engagement grants on offer can be found here and is regularly updated: www.rsb.org.uk/public-engagement-grants

Sponsorship

Some businesses and companies are often willing to sponsor an event. Depending on their size and budget, they may be willing to cover some of the costs and or help with resources, often in return for their logo on the event communications and banners etc.

When obtaining sponsorship, consider:

- What sort of sponsors you would like to be associated with and if there are any criteria that would make a sponsor an inappropriate choice
- Whether you will offer exclusive sponsorship; some sponsors may prefer this and will provide more funds for an exclusive partnership
- What you can provide in return for sponsorship, such as the sponsors logo or artwork on banners, posters, email footers etc.

Consider putting a sponsorship package together, detailing the different levels of funding that companies could offer you in return for different benefits. Showing packages means a company can clearly see what they'll receive in return for their sponsorship.

If you are successful in securing sponsorship, draw up a contract that details the exact agreement, to ensure there are no misaligned expectations from either party.

Local businesses

Businesses in your local area may also be able to offer skills, resources and or sponsorship for your event if it is relevant and beneficial for them to do so.

Reach out to companies or businesses that you think would benefit from visibly supporting your event and who would be able to provide you with a service e.g. printing companies or refreshment suppliers etc.

Volunteers

You may find that you need some help either preparing activities or running your event.

Many engagement and outreach events rely on volunteers to contribute their time and effort, but forward planning and good volunteer management is essential for its success.

Deciding how many volunteers you need

Prepare a list of tasks or activities you will need help with, and then delegate tasks accordingly. Make sure you factor in enough volunteers to allow everyone time for a break

or to eat lunch, and also that no-one is left on their own.

Where to find your volunteers

Finding people to volunteer isn't always easy. Consider contacting:

- Local universities to ask for students who may be interested in gaining science outreach and engagement experience
- The STEM Ambassadors scheme; their volunteers all have completed DBS checks and training: www.stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors
- Local volunteer groups. Many schools and colleges will run volunteering schemes, and this is a great way for you to offer a learning experience to an enthusiastic group of people
- You can also recruit your own family and friends and allocate roles accordingly

Advertising your volunteer opportunity

Depending on what communication channels you can utilise to advertise your volunteering opportunity, make sure your advert covers the following:

- The event name, date, time and venue
- The type of event and expected audience demographic and size
- Contact details to request further information
- A deadline to sign up to volunteering by

Managing your volunteers

Once they have expressed their interest, it is important to keep them informed and up to date with information and to be open so that they can ask any questions they may have and so that you can put them at ease if they have any concerns.

As a starting point:

- Let all your potential volunteers know whether or not you are able to accept them as a volunteer for the event
- Set a timeline of when you will send them further details
- As soon as possible, provide volunteers with an exhaustive list covering everything you expect them to provide, including crucial paperwork they may have to arrange
- Ensure they are clear on what paperwork they should make time to read and/or sign-off and when this needs to be returned by (e.g. activity briefs, extra reading, policies)
- Make it clear to volunteers how they can contact you about questions they may have

Volunteer briefing document

This should be sent out to all volunteers by email in advance of the event, allowing enough time to be read and any questions to be asked. This document should include:

- Key information about the event, including date, time of arrival, location and time the event is expected to end
- Contact details for a named event organiser who will be the volunteers' point of contact on the day
- Information about the type of event and type of tasks they will be expected to do

- A thorough guide to the science behind the event/activity, including a guide to help volunteers engage with different ages and levels of science understanding
- Some pre-prepared answers for potential questions the audience may have about the event/activity
- What to do and who to contact if they find themselves in a challenging situation
- What will already be provided by yourselves and/or the venue e.g. food/food vouchers, drinks, protective clothing if needed, other equipment, travel expenses etc.
- Any essentials they should provide themselves, e.g. food, drink, sun cream etc.
- What clothing is appropriate to wear e.g. a specific colour for volunteers to be recognisable
- Key information about the venue e.g. fire exits, evacuation points, local transport connections, facilities etc.
- How they can claim expenses following the event if applicable
- Risk assessment of the event/activity and health and safety guidelines to follow

Volunteer agreement forms

It is important that you have on record the expectations and behaviour that the volunteers have agreed to. This should include any repercussions to expect if they deviate from this during their time volunteering.

The volunteer form should include:

- Expected behaviour and a code of conduct
- Rules on taking photos (must be complicit with any policy the venue has)
- Rules on interacting with those under the age of 18

Volunteer DBS forms

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (formerly CRB) are government checks overseen by the Disclosure and Barring Service. They work to prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children.

Organisations have their own policy's on whether DBS checks are mandatory and how often they need to be completed. It is also up to them to decide whether they will allow someone to work or volunteer for them depending on what is disclosed on the certificate.

Although it is not mandatory that your volunteers undergo DBS checks, some venues or larger organisations will require which you must adhere to.

STEM Ambassador volunteers will have already undergone a DBS check; those who wish to acquire a DBS certificate can sign up to the STEM Ambassador scheme, which will aid them in completing their application.

Find out more about DBS checks online: www.gov.uk/government/publications/basic-checks

On the day

It is important that volunteers enjoy themselves, and that they remain safe and comfortable throughout the event. For those who are managing volunteers on the day, ensure that:

- They are registered upon arrival so you know who and how many people you are responsible for
- You provide them with something bright and eye catching so that they are visible e.g. a t-shirt or jacket
- They know where they can safely leave their personal belongings
- Time is scheduled in at the beginning of the day to talk through the volunteer briefing together
- They are aware of where to find you throughout the day and how best to contact you
- You give your volunteers regular, scheduled breaks
- You point out where essential facilities are e.g. toilets, fire escape, first aid
- You provide them, if possible, with refreshments or ample opportunities to source their own refreshments
- You reiterate what time they are expected to volunteer until and what they should do once they have finished for the day

Venue layout

It is always a good idea to plan the layout of the venue in advance. Some things to think about include:

- How best to fill the space?
- How you can ensure the venue is accessible

Producing a map of the venue and a layout of the room including where each exhibitor will be stationed and where the nearest facilities are located may be useful for attendees.

Consider also printing some flyers with this information on to hand out on the day. Alternatively, put up large printed copies of these around the venue for attendees to refer to.

Venue considerations

Liaise with the venue's caretakers in advance of the event about what your requirements will be from them on the event day.

Ensure the venue has Wi-Fi available for your exhibitors and provide them with the log-on details.

First-aid kits should also be available with a designated room for first-aid. You must ensure there is a qualified first-aider present at the venue at all times.

Risk assessment

Compile a risk assessment of the event, the activities being exhibited, and health and safety guidelines.

Most exhibitors from other organisations will provide their own risk assessments for their activities, but always double check this and collect these in advance of the event.

Reception desk

Having a reception desk as a first point of contact on the day is a useful addition for visitors. Position this near the entrance to the event to allow people to collect any information they may need for the day before they begin. It is a good place to keep programmes for the day, maps, feedback forms and pens.

Make sure the desk is manned at all times on the day if possible. This ensures there is always someone on hand for directions and to answer questions and other queries.

Signs and maps

Put up laminated signs, arrows and directions outside of the venue to direct people in. Within the venue, put up signs to clearly label directions to facilities as well as big venue plans to show attendees a plan of where each exhibitor will be set up.

Also make a map and give this out to attendees as they arrive so that they can identify which exhibits they may want to attend.

Cordon off a space for volunteers

Cordon off a space just for volunteers and event staff; they can go here to leave their luggage, and also have a break away from event attendees.

Parking

If you are offering parking at your venue, ensure that there will be plenty for all of your guests or offer alternative routes. Research local buses or walking routes from train stations to make sure attendees can find your venue.

If you are just offering parking for exhibitors, volunteers or disabled guests, make this clear to attendees before the event and perhaps have a volunteer in the car park to ensure that this is adhered to.

Photography and filming

Taking photos or filming your event is a great way to evaluate its success, get ideas for future events and to reflect on your achievement. Organise someone to have the role of photographer on the day – either a professional or an amateur.

When taking photos in public spaces, you do not need to obtain the permissions of those present. Also, as the person taking the photo, you are the copyright holder so you can do with the photo what you please, such as share on social media.

If you are running your event in a publicly accessible space, it is advised that you put up signs informing event attendees that they may be photographed, and that they should let someone who is involved in organising the event know if they are not comfortable with this.

When running your own event, you should ask guests to explicitly *opt in* to having their photo taken or being filmed, either as they sign up to the event, as they arrive, or immediately after

their photo is taken. The guests should be made aware what their photo may be used for, how it will be kept secure when stored and how they can contact you if they wish for the photo to be deleted.

Take a look at our [example consent form](#) for adults to sign to allow you to take their photo or a photo of their child.

Photography and filming of those under 18

A child (under the age of 18) does not have the legal capacity to consent to being filmed or photographed and a parent or guardian must do so on their behalf.

Schools, leisure centres and places where children and adults gather usually have their own photography restrictions so contact your chosen venue to find out whether photography is allowed there. You should obtain permission from the venue for taking photos, and always adhere to the policies they have in place.

For more information on taking photos of children, consult the NSPCC website:

www.nspcc.org.uk

Accessibility and inclusion

To ensure that as many people as possible can get involved in your Big Biology Day event, it is important that it is accessible and inclusive.

Considering the accessibility of your venue

Here are a few things to consider when choosing a venue for your event:

- Ensure that the venue has accessible or step free access, there are lifts available if the event spans more than one floor, and that the stairs have handrails
- Ensure that toilets are accessible and there are provisions for those with disabilities
- Ensure there is a suitable location for baby changing facilities to be located
- Ensure that there are disabled parking spaces available
- Ensure that dietary and cultural needs are considered when providing refreshments
- For printed material, consider using sans serif fonts and avoid small font sizes
- If you or your exhibitors are playing videos, ensure that they have subtitles on or a transcript is available

Make it clear how potential attendees can get in contact ahead of the day to request any specific provisions if needed.

Visibility and representation

Representation is also important, so if you are inviting external speakers consider if they represent the diversity of the community. Consider characteristics such as race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability. Also ensure a suitable representation of the community is presented in any imagery that is used in any materials or literature for your event.

Event cost

High ticket costs can exclude those who have little disposable income. If you need to cover costs but don't want tickets to be expensive, consider seeking sponsorship or funding from other organisations to work with you in partnership.

Please note that any Big Biology Day events run through the RSB's Big Biology Day grant scheme 2019 must be free for visitors to attend. This is to maximise accessibility and is in line with the RSB's charitable aims.

After the event

It is always important to say 'thank you' to exhibitors and volunteers that have supported you with the event. Do this on the day itself and by sending out an email following the event. You could even buy small thank you gifts, if your budget allows.

Ensure you give your volunteers and exhibitors an opportunity to give you feedback on their experience, and the management, so that you can determine what went well and what could be improved next time, if necessary.

Evaluation and feedback

Evaluating your event is an important part of making sure your guests, volunteers and exhibitors have all had a good time and is also an opportunity to identify any areas you may need to improve on next time.

Take a look at our [template feedback form](#) for exhibitors and visitors. Alternatively, feedback can come in other forms including online reactions on twitter for example, or by getting younger attendees to draw something they learnt or saw that day or fill in an [evaluation postcard](#).

Prepare a report on the event including analysis of the feedback gained.

It is also important to do a self-evaluation of how *you* felt the day went, while it is still fresh in your mind. Note down all the things that went well that you would like to repeat should you do the same event again, and all the things that you would change and why.

Contact us

For further information on Big Biology Days or advice on running your own Big Biology Day, please contact the RSB outreach and engagement team: outreach@rsb.org.uk

We can offer advice and guidance from our public engagement team via email, over the phone, or in person if possible.

Contact your local RSB branch

You should contact your local RSB branch who can help you run your event and make sure they're aware of the work you are doing.

They also have a lot of resources already available online to help with event planning, publicising and running, and can also put you in touch with others in the area who are interested in biology and may want to get involved too.

Get in contact with your local branch via email:

Beds, Essex and Herts	bedsessexherts@rsb.org.uk
Devon and Cornwall	devoncornwall@rsb.org.uk
East Anglia	eastanglia@rsb.org.uk
East Midlands	eastmidlands@rsb.org.uk
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	kentsurreysussex@rsb.org.uk
London	london@rsb.org.uk
North Western	northwest@rsb.org.uk
Northern	northern@rsb.org.uk
Thames Valley	thamesvalley@rsb.org.uk
Wessex	wessex@rsb.org.uk
West Midlands	westmidlands@rsb.org.uk
Western	western@rsb.org.uk
Yorkshire	yorkshire@rsb.org.uk
Scotland	scotland@rsb.org.uk
North Wales	northwales@rsb.org.uk
South Wales	southwales@rsb.org.uk
Northern Ireland	ni@rsb.org.uk
Australasia	australasia@rsb.org.uk
Hong Kong	hongkong@rsb.org.uk

Check out our regional branch resources online: www.rsb.org.uk/regional-resources

Find out what events are happening near you: www.rsb.org.uk/regional-events

Find out more about our branches: www.rsb.org.uk/regional-activity