Guidelines for hosting a sigma Network event

Executive Summary

- The **sustainability** of the **sigma** Network is underpinned by the willingness of institutions to cover the cost of hosting events, so that the events may be attended free of charge by the maths support community.
- **Advantages** to the host institution include the recognition of being actively engaged in the work of a national professional association. As host, you can also influence the content and structure of the event, and your own staff incur no travel costs to attend.
- The only **direct cost** to the host is providing refreshments. Typically coffee/pastries on arrival, a light sandwich/buffet lunch, and tea on departure. At approx £15 per head, a typical event for 20 attendees would be around £300. However, if this money is not available, we ask that hosts ensure there is a reasonable cafeteria nearby where attendees can purchase their own refreshments.
- **Indirect costs** include: (1) provision of a suitable room with standard AV facilities; (2) time for the organiser(s) to plan the event, liaise with presenters, take bookings and confirm attendance, and generally run the day. Support is available from the **sigma** Network Steering Group with regard to planning and promoting the event.

Fuller details and advice on hosting an event are described on the following pages.

1. Introduction

The **sigma** Network is a professional association for those involved in mathematics and statistics support in higher education. See www.sigma-network.ac.uk

A key element of the work of the **sigma** Network is the provision of meetings and events for the mathematics and statistics support community. These meetings are generally of two types:

- **Professional development events.** These tend to be whole day events, structured around a particular theme. Typically led by a "trainer" (in the case of hands-on training e.g. on IT tools) or introduced by a "keynote speaker" who can set the scene authoritatively.
- **Networking meetings.** These tend to be less formal, offering people the chance to share experiences or show-and-tell ideas and practice. Need not be a whole day, and could be regionally based.

Given that the **sigma** Network is an unfunded and voluntary association, it has become established in recent years that institutions who host meetings and events cover the cost of doing so, making the event free to attendees. There are many advantages of hosting an event. If you host the event, then your own staff will have no travel costs to attend it. Your institution will gain the publicity of being seen to be actively engaged in the work of a national professional association. As host you will have some influence on the structure and timing of the event. The "multiplier effect" means that by being prepared to host an event yourself then (along with like-minded institutions who also host) you will help ensure a number of free events are available to you and your staff across the year. And the cost of hosting is actually very small.

This document provides some advice and guidelines to institutions who would like to support the **sigma** Network by hosting a meeting or event.

2. Choosing the topic for the event

The Steering Group of the **sigma** Network meets regularly to identify topics. We often receive suggestions and requests (e.g. at our AGM each year, or as part of the feedback from previous events) and we can then co-ordinate a programme of events and meetings throughout the year. So if you would like to host an event but do not have a particular topic in mind, we should be able to suggest something and help you with the planning.

Alternatively, you might have an idea for a topic for an event that you would like to see happen. By offering to host that event, you can help ensure that it will take place! Remember: if something is of interest to you, then it will most likely be of interest to many other people in your position too. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your ideas. Email chair@sigma-network.ac.uk .

When we agree to go ahead with an event, you will be introduced to a member of the **sigma** Network Steering Group who can be your direct contact for specific questions and advice throughout.

3. Scheduling the event

The advantage of hosting an event is that you can ensure it takes place at a time that is convenient to you. Having said that, the Steering Group aims to have a programme of events spread across the year, so please check your proposed date with us first so we can avoid clashes or bunching. In general we find that November or early December tend to have fewer events, so this might be a good time to fill the gap.

With regards to timing, please bear in mind that people might need to travel some distance to and from the event. A 10.00 am start is usually early enough (with the option to arrive from around 9.30 to settle in, get a coffee or similar). You would probably want to aim to finish around 3.30 pm.

4. Choosing a location

Ideally with good public transport links – either within walking distance of a railway station or on a clearly signposted and regular bus route. It is worth bearing this in mind if you have a split-site campus with a choice of possible locations. It goes without saying that the venue should meet all the standard accessibility criteria (if you are a university, this should be a given).

Many people attending our events like the chance to take a look around the host institution's maths support centre – and many centres like to "show themselves off" and get constructive ideas/feedback from colleagues from elsewhere – so a venue nearby would be ideal.

The room should allow flexible layout of the furniture. Cabaret-style seating around islands of tables is much better for group discussion (a key aim of all our events is to give people the opportunity to network and share ideas and experiences). Alternatively, a U-shape arrangement is preferable to people sitting in rows behind each other. For this reason a traditional lecture theatre is unlikely to be an ideal location. As well as the ubiquitous online PC and projector to show PowerPoints and websites, a whiteboard or flipcharts are generally useful to have available.

5. Promoting the event

Please draft some "blurb", to contain (a) the theme and aims of the event; (b) an outline schedule; (c) how to sign up to attend; (d) the standard statement that shows how the event maps against elements of the UKPSF. There are many examples of such blurb for events on our website, for example this one: http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/new-tutor-training-in-cardiff-3rd-october-2019/

Think about whether you are happy for people to email you directly to sign up to the event, or whether you would prefer to use online tools such as Eventbrite or Google Forms. The choice is yours. Make sure you capture all relevant information up front, to save having to get back to people. The following is suggested:
> * Name
> * Institution
> * Job role
> * Contact detail (email is usually sufficient)
> * Dietary requirements (if catering is provided)

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* Access or other needs
* Permission if you intend to take photos (please do!) or film/record proceedings.
* Permission to share name and email address with other delegates.
* If the programme includes a slot for attendees to present a "show-and-tell" or case study or similar, ask them to indicate that they would like to do so and to give a very brief title/synopsis. Give an indication of when you will confirm back that their contribution is accepted.

Share you draft with your contact on the **sigma** Network Steering Group, who can advise if necessary (especially regarding (d) above). We will then get it posted on our website under Events, and send you the link.

Before the event is promoted widely via the **sigma** Network Jiscmail list, our Membership Officer likes to give advance notice of the event to those people who have registered as Individual Members of the **sigma** Network, as a membership benefit to give them the chance register before the "rush". Then around a week later we would encourage you to send an email to sigma-network@jiscmail.ac.uk to promote the event (you can use the same text as your blurb for the website). Also, feel free to promote around any other relevant networks you are involved with, but please acknowledge the **sigma** Network and link to the events page on our website.

Future events can also be announced in the **sigma** Network Newsletter. This is published twice a year (around end September and mid March) so there might not be a Newsletter published between your planning the event and it happening. Check Newsletter details at http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/sigma-newsletters/ and don't hesitate to contact the editor for advice.

When people have signed up, ensure they get an acknowledgement, either as a direct email from you or an automated confirmation message from the online booking system you might use. Let them know the date by which any "joining instruction" will be sent (see below).

If registrations seem slow, do send out a reminder. There is no minimum number of attendees, sometimes a smaller meeting can be most productive, although if you are inviting an external keynote speaker or trainer then they will want it to be worth their while in terms of a good audience. Normally ten or more attendees is considered reasonable. And if the event fills up – as a host you are entitled to fix a limit to numbers based on your facilities available – then let us know and we can update the page on the website to show that it is full.

6. Things to do before the event

Ensure that registered attendees receive "joining instructions" a week or two before the event (which will also remind them that they have booked!). Joining instructions should include:
* How to get to the venue using public transport or on foot.
* Car parking availability – either how to reserve a place on campus, or where the nearest public car parks are and what they cost.
* The exact building name and room number (link to campus map?)
* Anything to bring (eg own laptop with specific software, printouts of any materials that you might have emailed round in advance)
* Confirmation of timing of their slot if an attendee will be giving a presentation.

It makes a good impression (for your institution too!) if you can arrange for student helpers to "meet and greet" at the front door. Also, if your car park is manned, check that the car park attendants know that visitors will be attending.

Catering will need to be booked in good time, according to your institution's procedures. It is always wise to re-confirm with the caterers as the day approaches, especially with regards to dietary requirements. Typically, hosts provide tea/coffee/water and pastries on arrival, a light buffet/sandwich lunch, and tea/coffee/water and biscuits towards the end of the day. HOWEVER, it is not the end of the world if your institution is unable to cover the cost of catering, as long as you are able to locate the meeting near to a reasonable cafeteria where delegates can purchase their own refreshments, PROVIDED you make it clear in the course information that this is the case.

Check that the IT works, and that you know how to set things up in the venue (especially if it is a room you do not often use). Do presenters need special software? Will you be "live streaming" or recording the event (in which case you really should do a dry run in advance to check it works). Ensure an IT technician will be on call in case of emergency.

Invite everyone who will be presenting to send you in advance their presentation (typically a PowerPoint file) so that you can get it loaded on the PC in advance, check that any links and embedded media work, etc. (But if they can't undertake to do this in advance, don't worry, as long as you make a note to deal with it on the day.) We do like to encourage presenters to make their slides more widely available after the event, typically we would upload them to the **sigma** Network website or provide a URL link to them, but at the same time we respect presenters who are not willing for this. Any materials should, of course, not break copyright law. The following is a suggested form of words that can be used:

> *"Thank you for agreeing to give a presentation at [the forthcoming event]. It would be helpful if you could send me your presentation as an email attachment or URL by [date] and we can get it checked and loaded onto the presenter PC in advance for you. Also, we hope you are agreeable to us making your presentation available to attendees and the wider maths support community via the* **sigma** *Network website after the event. Please confirm that you are happy with this, or tell us if you do not want us to do this. Your materials should, of course, conform to copyright law."*

7. Housekeeping on the day

If your campus is large, then some signs/arrows pointing to the venue can be put up.

Delegate name badges are always good, but please print the name nice and big so it can be seen across the room. A cheap and cheerful alternative is to give delegates a sticky label (approx 10x4 cm) to write their own name on.

"Delegate packs" are not necessary (unless you want to use the opportunity to provide attendees with a goody bag of promotional items from your institution…). But a piece of paper outlining the day's programme is useful, as is a list of delegates and their affiliation and email contact details (if permission given – see section 5 above).

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There is no obligation to provide printed materials (the event is not a professional conference), but if you or any presenters want to provide handouts then be clear whether they will be given out in advance, on arrival, or as-and-when on the day. Also, ensure you agree with the presenter who is going to actually do the photocopying (don't feel obliged).

If catering is provided, identify tables where it can be laid out, and spread it out so people are not falling over themselves. Are there enough places for people to sit? Provide sufficient waste bins.

Ensure a supply of appropriate stationery (flipchart pens, whiteboard markers, post-it notes, etc).

Toilets and fire alarm!!

8. Feedback

Do try to get some constructive feedback from delegates after the event. The **sigma** Network Steering Group is currently reviewing standardised ways to collect feedback, and when you agree to host an event then we will talk to you about this. [*These guidelines will be updated in due course*.]

9. After the event

Check that you have copies of the presentations where the presenter has agreed that they can be shared. Politely chase up any that seem to be missing. Then forward them to your contact on the Steering Group who will ensure they are uploaded to the **sigma** Network website (they will be added to the page that advertised your event originally).

If people contact you after (or before) the event saying that they were unable to attend but could you send them the materials/presentations, refer them to the fact that they will be made available on the website if the presenter agrees to share them. It is not for you to email out individual copies of other people's materials.

In a quiet moment, make a critical note of (a) what you thought went well and (b) what perhaps didn't work so well. Share this with your contact on the Steering Group, so that we can learn from any experiences to help ensure the success of future events.

9. Write up event for the sigma Network Newsletter

We would be grateful if you could write up a report of your event (~ 300 words), to include:
> * Aim of the event and summary of key activities that took place.
> * Number of attendees and the institutions they represented.
> * Key feedback and conclusions.
> * Preferably accompanied with a photo (happy delegates, or presenters, or activity).

Please see previous Newsletters for examples: http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/sigma-newsletters/

10. And finally…..

We are pleased that you are considering hosting an event. The **sigma** Network relies on the willingness of the maths support community to run activities in a self-sustaining manner. Do not hesitate to contact any member of the Steering Group, or directly email chair@sigma-network.ac.uk , if you have any questions or concerns at any stage in regards to your event.

APPENDIX: Suggested checklist for hosting a **sigma** Network event

Task	Target date	Done ✔
Planning the event		
Get agreement from management (if necessary) to host an event. Refer to these Guidelines to support your case.		
Propose/discuss potential topic with Steering Group		
Decide a date for the event		
Identify and book a location / room		
If appropriate for the event, contact and get agreement from any "keynote" speaker or trainer		
Draft promotional blurb for the event, and share with your Steering Group contact		
Be clear how people can register to attend, and what information they need to provide (see Section 5 above)		
Promote the event via the **sigma** Network Jiscmail list, and elsewhere. (Wait until a few days after Individual Members have been sent advance notice).		
Send round a reminder if places are slow in filling up		
If capacity reached, let Steering Group contact know so the website can be updated.		
Prior to the event		
Acknowledge receipt of registrations as they come in, saying when joining instructions will be issued nearer the time.		
Send out joining instructions.		
Contact those who have offered to give a presentation, to confirm their slot, ask for a copy of their presentation in advance, and request permission to share their presentation after the event.		
Check that the IT in the venue room works (and that you know how to work it!)		
Check that any specialist software requested is available.		
If recording or livestreaming, check (dry run) the technology and confirm availability of a technician on the day.		
Book catering, including any dietary requirements. Re-confirm exact numbers to the caterers a few days in advance.		
Book any student helpers you might need on the day.		
Print out the programme, and delegate list, and anything else you might want to issue to attendees. Delegate badges?		
Prepare any feedback form that you intend to use.		
Prepare a welcome Powerpoint slide to have on display as people arrive.		

On the day		
Lay out the furniture in the room to your satisfaction.		
Identify where attendees can leave coats or bags, and whether the room can be secured if it is unoccupied at any time.		
Check again that the IT works and that presentations have been loaded to the desktop.		
If necessary, put up directional signs to the venue.		
Stationery: whiteboard pens, flipcharts, post-its, sticky labels in lieu of delegate badges, ….		
Do YOU know where the toilets are?		
If you plan to collect feedback on the day, ensure you give time for this.		
After the event		
Collect electronic copies of the presentations where presenters are happy for them to be shared, and send to your Steering Group contact.		
If feedback is to be collected after the event (eg through an online form), let people know and chase up if slow in forthcoming.		
Collate and share the feedback – and your own reflections on the event – to your Steering Group contact.		
Email and thank any external or guest keynote speakers.		
Write up the event for the next **sigma** Network Newsletter.		
Don't forget to let your line manager know how the event went – sector reach in terms of number of attendees and institutions, positive feedback, etc – and how well it reflected on your centre.		
And finally . . . start to think about the next event you could host for the sigma Network ☺		