



CREATING VIBRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEMS

A practical guide to successful event production



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Introduction

WHAT IS SAIS 2?



The Southern Africa Innovation Support Programme (SAIS 2) is a regional development initiative supported by Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) in partnership with the Ministries responsible for science, technology and innovation of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat. The programme supports the growth of new businesses through strengthening innovation ecosystems and promotion of cross-border collaboration between innovation role-players in Southern Africa. It applies three tools: innovation funding, capacity building and knowledge exchange.

WHAT IS CONNECTED HUBS?



Connected Hubs, an initiative under SAIS 2, is a network that shares best practices in innovation and entrepreneurship support through knowledge exchange. Spanning five countries in southern Africa with linkages to international players, the "Network of Doers" builds trust and facilitates collaboration across borders. Through Connected Hubs, SAIS 2 supports improved connections between innovation actors for a joint cause of improved entrepreneurship support and by providing skills for a lasting impact in their local innovation ecosystems. The member organisations in 2018 were Botswana Innovation Hub, Nest Hubs, the National Commission on Science Research and Technology in Namibia, Namibia Business Innovation Institute, the Technology Innovation Agency, mLab Southern Africa, the Tanzania Commission on Science and Technology, Buni Hub, the National Technology Business Centre in Zambia and BongoHive.

WHAT IS ASAIF?



A regional network such as Connected Hubs is well positioned to be a catalyst for boosting innovation development within Southern Africa and beyond. SAIS 2 and the diverse group of Connected Hubs members contributed their competencies to raise awareness about inclusive innovation in the scope of innovation ecosystems, investable startups, and regional connectivity. Together they produced a truly regional innovation event. While collaborating to produce the SAIS 2 Annual Southern Africa Innovation Forum (ASAIF), the 10 member organisations were trained to better conceptualise, plan, and host innovation events. The training was offered by SAIS 2 partners Slush Global Impact Accelerator and SA Innovation Summit (The Summit), the host for ASAIF 2018. The training series elevated the event production skills of organisers to another level, and brought the topic of inclusive innovation to centre stage of the leading tech conference in Southern Africa.

The purpose of ASAIF is to support the creation of sustainable events in the Southern Africa region supporting ecosystem building. In line with this principle, SAIS 2 does not organise its own, separate events but has purposefully designed ASAIF to exist in partnership with existing events. The aim is to create something bigger together rather than to compete with other local or regional events.

WHY EVENTS?

An essential component of innovation ecosystems¹ is dialogue between the actors ranging from academia to business support providers and from policy-makers to funders.

Even if technology allows the exchange of knowledge in a virtual world, the active engagement and interaction of players on physical platforms such as meetups, workshops and conferences remains important. Such events aim to connect new valuable partners to each other and can have significant economic benefits for startups, larger companies and even societies. Quality event production increases interest in events, thus bringing more people together to create meaningful connections.

This manual aims to package valuable tips for those operating in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship support. Typical events such as pitching competitions, startup festivals and innovation days or weeks are organised to benefit innovation ecosystems as a whole. The manual also illustrates how SAIS 2 and Connected Hubs created a regional event for 120 people with 23 speakers representing eight countries.

We map out the journey to a successful event in 10 steps, first sharing some theory to inspire you and then looking at how we did it with ASAIF. Each step introduces a practical tool that you can use to make a splash in your innovation ecosystem with your next event. The tools can be downloaded from the SAIS Connected Hubs website (www.saisprogramme.org/connectedhubs) and adapted for your own purposes. The manual also outlines the most common mistakes in event production and offers advice to prevent them. Whether you are organising a weekly meetup for your startups or the biggest entrepreneurship event in your country, this manual aims to get you off to a solid start.

¹ The term *innovation ecosystem* refers to clusters and networks of entrepreneurs, inventors, firms, universities, research labs, government agencies and other institutions as well as the resources they bring to bear on the development of new or improved processes, products or services.

Foreword

In a world of quick Google Hangouts and endless CCs and BCCs it is ever more important to meet in person. As mentioned above, events are crucial platforms enabling this real social interaction. They connect entrepreneurs with investors, investors with startups, policymakers with what's actually happening in the world, journalists with unheard stories, fresh talent with jobs, and so on. The power of meetings is endless. In order to make an event succeed one needs to make it worth everybody's time. The best way to do so is by defining a core mission which all the participants stand by and believe in. It can be strengthening international collaboration, fostering economic growth, fighting against gender inequality – just to name a few. It can even be all of the above. And of course – what Slush is all about – helping entrepreneurs forward.

Slush started with the challenge of a lack of investments in local startups and in the Nordic region in general. Today, the Nordic countries represent almost one tenth of the billion dollar exits in the world – quite an achievement, given the size of their region. Another mission of Slush has been to encourage young

talent to think about entrepreneurship as the best possible way to change the world they live in. The percentage of university students thinking about entrepreneurship as a viable option for employment has increased from eight to 40 percent during the past ten years. Slush started a decade ago. Coincidence? Probably not.

The support for entrepreneurs is still on-going, although a lot has already been accomplished due to hard work and international collaborations. Slush is not the only reason why the Nordic ecosystem flourishes, but it has definitely pushed matters towards the right direction. It has become the main platform for connecting people with whom and what they need. With hard work and international collaborations the ASAIF could become the main platform enabling these connections to be formed in Southern Africa.



STEP 1

Pick a theme and partners to address a need

CONSIDER THIS:

You as organisers have your own reasons for organising the event. They could range from getting more brand visibility, showcasing the coolest startups in your network or raising awareness of your latest project. While important to you, it is crucial to make sure that the event also speaks to your main audience.

To create a purposeful event to satisfy a demand, make sure you address a need in your local ecosystem. Study the context of your activity and analyse what it needs, so you are not merely ticking a box in the deliverables for your organisation. Engage with the people you would hope to come to the event – which matters are being neglected in the current event offering?

Especially in mature innovation ecosystems the event landscape quickly becomes oversupplied with events, and sometimes similar events even overlap. Examine existing event platforms to see if you could partner with someone. Here's where you can really get creative and examine who you share a core target group with? The answer may reveal a sponsorship opportunity, but more about sponsors later.



When you have identified a theme, consider what your indicators of success are. Typical metrics event organisers monitor are the number of guests, ticket bookings or sales and, for instance, also the number of strategic partnerships.

Furthermore, think about which qualitative indicators you could use. These could be how many guests learnt something new which they can apply in running a business, or what the new insights were that people gained from the programme. The indicators you choose are the ones you apply throughout the event production process and when collecting feedback.



TOOLS:

Eventbrite's Event Strategy Sheet (Tool 1) helps to focus on key aspects of your event when you are in the planning stages. Eventbrite is a global platform for live experiences, and their resource bank is filled with tips, worksheets and checklists – definitely worth a look. Tools 1.1 and 1.2 are examples of agendas for a one- and two-day conferences.

DIRECT LINKS

Eventbrite's Event Strategy Sheet (Tool 1)



One-day Conference Schedule (Tool 1.1)

Two-Day Conference Schedule (Tool 1.2)

HOW WE DID IT:

SAIS 2 inherited the approach for the Annual Southern Africa Innovation Forum (ASAIF) from the programme's first phase (2011-2015). Ahead of organising the event in 2018, SAIS 2 aimed to raise awareness of the 2nd phase of the programme but also to boost innovation development within the region.

SAIS 2 shared the latter goal with the SA Innovation Summit, which is an annual flagship event on the South African innovation calendar and a platform for nurturing, developing and showcasing African innovation, as well as facilitating innovation thought leadership. Partnering with ASAIF was mutually beneficial and diminished any overlap in the regional innovation ecosystem.



Inclusive innovation is a component of SAIS 2 but it still remains a niche area of entrepreneurship in Southern Africa. Picking the topic as a theme made it take centre stage in the conversation about entrepreneurship support. The theme was chosen in accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and it promoted impact-driven entrepreneurship, aiming to solve societal challenges through scalable businesses.

Connected Hubs got together in Botswana in April 2018 for a workshop facilitated by Slush, the biggest tech conference in Finland, in order to understand what the theme for ASAIF should be. Slush shared their knowledge on how to design events to become an experience, and described how in the course of 10 years they have grown from drawing 300 people to an event to attracting

20,000 people to Helsinki and building an entire ecosystem around the event. Inspired by Slush, the members had a brainstorming session at the Botswana Innovation Hub to discuss the challenges in the innovation ecosystems in Southern Africa on a regional level. The most pressing challenges became the topics of the event and the basis for the content – ASAIF 2018 would discuss the lack of regional connectivity between innovation actors, the lack of investable startups and startup culture.



Connected Hubs brainstormed topics for ASAIF in a workshop held in April 2018 at the Botswana Innovation Hub. Pictures: Auri Evokari

STEP 2

Speaker selection and content curation

CONSIDER THIS:

Your event stands and falls with its content, which for hubs supporting entrepreneurs is often provided by speakers sharing insights into latest trends in industry or their entrepreneurial journey.

These are the key people who determine the atmosphere at the event and manage the audience's energy. Practical matters such as their geographical location and of course the availability of a particular speaker determine who ultimately makes your event a success together with you, so it is good to have alternatives to your top choice.

When shortlisting your wish list of speakers, be mindful of their demographics: a good representation of age, gender, ethnicity and even geographical location helps in reaching your audience. Look for a varied representation of views to allow for authentic dialogue on perspectives. The events we organise not only portray the kind of world we live in but also where we are going, and you can do your part in making sure that stereotypical ideals of entrepreneurship are scrutinised.



The panel discussion on various enablers of entrepreneurship ecosystems was curated by Dr Flora Ismail Tibazarwa from SAIS 2 and attended by invited guests from the Southern Africa Development Community, Slush and the World Bank (left to right). Picture: Derrick Kotze.

If events are a core element of your service offerings as a hub, you have an opportunity to establish yourself as the one to attract the most dynamic speakers. You may want to offer a chance to learn to those less experienced in public speaking, but make sure to provide some coaching in stage presence and voice control before putting them in the limelight. You have a duty to screen speakers for larger, paid events with corporate partnerships, as the programme is the core of your value proposition for your partners. Try doing away with any “status first” thinking and invite only those who are the full package – solid content delivered in a dynamic way.

To attract high-quality speakers to your event, consider what you offer them in exchange for their time and make it part of your value proposition to the speaker when you invite them. Financial compensation should be thought about twice because promoting a specific speaker at your event is already very valuable. A mature innovation ecosystem operates on a culture of reciprocity, and you will be surprised how many top speakers are happy to contribute for free to an event that discusses a pressing problem they are passionate about. The speaker not only gains exposure as a thought leader on the topic but has the chance to influence the future of a field important to them. This can lead to practical, financial gains for the speaker and should not be underestimated.



TOOLS:

If you have several speakers, compile all the relevant information on one Excel sheet in a file called **Master Program and Schedule** (Tool 2.1). Listing your programme with speakers’ information allows you to keep focus on various aspects regarding the demographics. This is a useful tool also for keeping introductions of speakers in one place, where the person in charge of communications or event marketing can easily find them for their social media activities. Make sure all names of people and organisations as well as their titles are accurate. When someone is dedicating time to your event, the least you can do is not have errors in their information.

Your Event Master Plan is the most important document you’ll need for your event production. You can download a template for the complete **Event Master Plan** consisting of tools 2.1–2.7 annexed to this manual. Compiling all the key aspects of your event in one file makes it easier to keep all crew members on the same page and to keep track of what is happening. Working with cloud-based solutions allows for the same information to be available to everyone in real time, which is especially useful for larger teams with delegated responsibilities.

The templates in Tool 2 are suitable for events with up to 150 guests, and you can even use **Project Plan Template** (Tool 3) for inspiration when creating timelines and milestones for your event.

DIRECT LINKS

[Event Master Plan \(Tools 2.1 - 2.7\)](#)

[Project Plan Template \(Tool 3\)](#)

HOW WE DID IT:

The aim for ASAIF was to be a truly regional event platform, and it was crucial that the speakers represented different sectors, genders, age groups and all of the SAIS 2 partner countries – Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia as well as Finland, the majority donor for SAIS 2. Despite the diverse representation of eight countries, none of the 23 speakers were paid any speaker fees.

Speakers were sourced for ASAIF by using a 30-30-30 principle which the organisers modelled after the great example of South by South West. Speakers were invited by SAIS 2 and shortlisted by the Connected Hubs. The third channel for sourcing was the online crowdsourcing platform [Viima](#), where anyone could suggest ideas for speakers. When the Save the Date invitations were sent out the ASAIF audience was invited to submit their suggestions for speakers through Viima.

Inviting your audience to contribute to the event's agenda is a convenient way to increase interest and commitment to your event. This is also a lesson in being bold to talk about your event even if not all the elements are confirmed: as long as you have the date set, it is possible to get your stakeholders' attention and create hype about your event.



Viima is a convenient tool to collect and develop ideas together. Anyone could log in to provide their suggestion, like others' suggestions and discuss the speakers.



A good balance in the demographics of speakers is particularly important in panel discussions. Inclusive Innovation was the topic of a panel discussion with a representation of both men and women as well as different age groups with an emphasis on young innovators coming from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia. Picture: Derrick Kotze.

STEP 3

Venue and logistics

CONSIDER THIS:

Pick a venue and design the set-up to be appropriate for your event.

Consider which event format suits the theme best. Is it an interactive workshop with small work groups or maybe a larger conference with various speaking slots ranging from panel discussions to break-away sessions?

Whether you are creating a short networking evening or a two-day seminar, make sure the set-up of the event serves your purpose and theme, and engages with the audience. While etiquette is key, people generally enjoy a relaxed atmosphere, so think of ways to create an informal ambience.

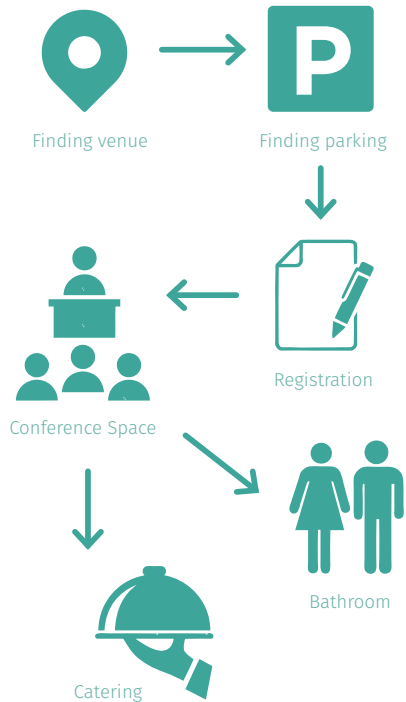
Audience engagement is important to keep in mind when compiling the program, but also when planning how people move about in the physical space during the event. When you think of the visitor journey, think about what kind of options of engagement exist at the event. You can benchmark globally creative ideas for audience participation ranging from interactive painting to business card collection jars and Twitter feeds on monitors. Having these components at your event determines the needs regarding

the space, such as having it indoors or outdoors, the needs for technical equipment as well as the choice of tables and chairs. In addition, the visitor journey also includes knowing how to find the venue, how smooth the registration process is and how easily the restrooms can be found.

When it comes to logistics, think about renting the equipment and furniture needed for the space, not forgetting well-functioning audio-visual equipment or air-conditioners. When outsourcing services for your event it helps to consider service providers as your partners. Share your purpose for the event with service providers and engage with all staff well in advance to make sure they find it meaningful to be a part of making it a success. Appointing a key person or team to liaise with your partners is advisable, but don't forget to communicate the necessary details to your team just in case, so they can assist where needed.

Be mindful of the logistics from your guests' perspective – is it easy to park at the venue, are taxis readily available or does public transport cater for your guests? This is particularly important for larger events. In Finland, the City of Helsinki is a key partner in making the 20,000 visitor Slush event the success it is. A smaller city will be greatly affected by such a number of people making their way to and from the event without its support.

Visitor's journey:



TOOLS:

Use the **Project Plan Template** (Tool 3) as inspiration when you are outlining all the required elements regarding the venue and logistics. Also check out the Milestones spreadsheet!

DIRECT LINKS

[Use the Project Plan Template \(Tool 3\)](#)

HOW WE DID IT:

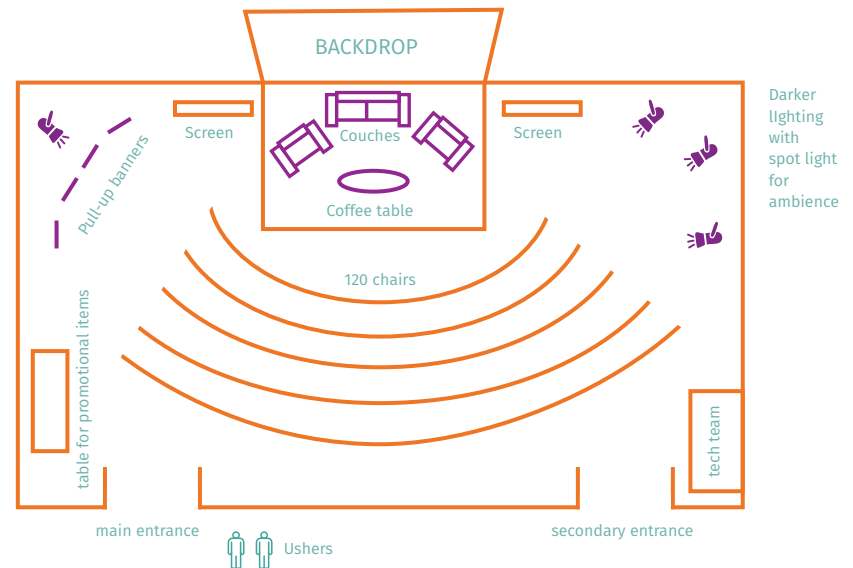
The SA Innovation Summit took place at the Cape Town Stadium in South Africa, and the ASAIF was a track included in the programme. Much of the visitor journey was guided by the excellent work done by the SA Innovation Summit. In addition the ASAIF event organisers had a specific crew focusing on the visitor journey and identifying key instances where they could add value to the experience of SA Innovation Summit guests attending the ASAIF. This included specific communications targeted at ASAIF guests as well as meeting speakers and VIP guests at the official SA Innovation Summit registration.

Furthermore the organisers of the ASAIF were in charge of designing the venue to be suitable for a dynamic and conversational community event. This aim was achieved well by considering small details, such as not having a podium but comfortable chairs on stage. For a more relaxed feel participants in panel discussions were seated around a coffee table instead of behind a large table.

The programme's slot intervals also allowed for a dynamic ambience. Keynote slots were 10 minutes and other slots 20 minutes, followed by a questions & answers session. This allowed for audience engagement throughout the 4-hour event. The venue had seating for 120 people, which made conversation in the intimate space less intimidating.

ASAIF guests were able to use of the stadium's parking area with proper signage. SAIS 2 provided basic information about Cape Town to its speakers and stakeholders coming to the ASAIF from abroad, and for accommodation had a partnership with a local hotel close to the event venue.

The original ASAIF venue floorplan



STEP 4

Communications and Marketing

CONSIDER THIS:

As BongoHive representative advised in a planning and peer-learning workshop for Connected Hubs: “Think of the event as a party. If you want your friends to come to your party, they need to know about it.”

The value of communication and event marketing cannot be underestimated. From having professionally designed visuals for your event to feature speakers on social media, successful event marketing engages with your audience, creates hype and books tickets.

It is advisable to have an online landing page for your event. If having a separate website doesn't work for you, make it a Facebook or Eventbrite page, which doesn't entail costs. Having an online presence will provide your audience with a chance to see detailed information about your event and allows you to add content closer to the final day. Tag your speakers and partners on social media to increase the reach of your tweets and other posts, and familiarise yourself with the social media marketing tools and analytics available. Boosting a Facebook post, for instance, with only one US dollar already multiplies your reach. This is where the majority of

the value proposition for your speakers and partners lies – giving them the limelight before the event commits your speakers to it and its purpose. Use figures on your estimated reach on social media and share your strategy for marketing to convince them to come on board.

This being said, since the public generally opts for a bit of mystery you don't have to worry about not having all speakers confirmed or the finest details worked out before launching the event. For sending out a Save the Date invitation all you need is a date, a location and a brief description of what the event will be about. Even a venue can be booked later! If you are financially stable and can risk it, getting sponsors or partners on board only at a later stage is not a problem – you can always offer them visibility at the event itself. When it comes to sponsors, just remember that the rules of dynamic speakers should ideally apply to them, too. Refrain from offering a speaking slot to a sponsor unless you know they provide relevant content to your event in a dynamic way.

Engaging with the print media, with radio and TV provides massive support to your purpose, which ultimately the event is all about. Create meaningful connections with journalists in the field and make sure they feel special for being included in your event. You can help get your story out there by handing out a well prepared

media kit, including short blurbs for press releases, high quality photographs and logos for their use either via cloud services online or with USB sticks at the event.

Communication does not end with the event. Post-event communication is crucial. Thanking everyone from attendants to speakers and service providers, asking for feedback and informing about the next event is all part of the visitor journey.

CHECKLIST



- Draft a one-sentence description of the event
- Draft a blurb about the event's purpose
- Create the online landing page
- Compile a guest list and a separate VIP list
- Send out Save the Date invitations
- Get short biographies and high-quality pictures of your speakers
- Profile speakers and partners online to promote your event
- Send out invitations via email, referring to the landing page
- Engage in discussion about the purpose of the event on social media
- Engage with the media and prepare media kits



TOOLS:

Use the nifty **Marketing template** (Tool 2.2) to create a communications strategy for your event and an example timeline. Capturing all the speakers' names on a separate spreadsheet, **Speakers' Social Media** (Tool 2.3), together with their social media information will help your Communication Crew on the day of the event. A template for a **Guest list** (Tool 2.4) specifies all the people involved in your event.

DIRECT LINKS

- [Marketing template \(Tool 2.2\)](#)
- [Speakers' Social Media \(Tool 2.3\)](#)
- [Guest list \(Tool 2.4\)](#)

HOW WE DID IT:

Information about the ASAIF was published on the event website and content was regularly updated as speakers were confirmed. A Save the Date invitation was shared two months prior to the event and a press release was sent out.

All 23 speakers were introduced on the website, featured on SAIS 2 social media channels (Facebook and Twitter) as well as on the SA Innovation Summit's website. Thanks to the good spread of speakers from all around Southern Africa, the speaker profiles quickly became a "Gallery of Innovators": they were well received online as people in the speakers' local ecosystems liked the posts and congratulated the speakers they knew.

While you might be monitoring ticket bookings, it might also be good to monitor qualitative indicators which relate to your communication and marketing strategy. Are you reaching women or disadvantaged communities with your marketing? Are tickets booked by people representing various sectors? For SAIS 2 it was important to reach its target of having a multi-helix audience representing policy-makers, government actors, academia, innovation support organisations and innovators themselves take part in the 120 people event. Reaching this target is a testimony to successful communications and marketing.



NOTES:

STEP 5

Speaker management

CONSIDER THIS:

You have been able to attract some of the top experts in their field or skilled facilitators for your breakaway sessions or workshops. They are contributing to your event due to their own interest in gaining experience, connections and visibility. How do you get them interested in you as an organiser throughout the collaboration?

From the moment you first engage with the speakers, right to the thank you note you send them afterwards, it is recommendable to regard speaker management as a partner's experience journey, and the goal should be that the experience is extraordinary.

Making sure that all information about your speaker is correct and up to date helps to make your speaker feel appreciated – there is no harm in double-checking titles or requesting a higher quality picture if you think it helps to profile them. Getting quotes from your speakers about the topic they'll talk about serves two purposes: first, you get good material for your marketing leading up to the event, and secondly, you attune the (most likely busy and important) speaker to the talk well in advance.

Small things, from the tone of the first email you send out to having the same contact person act as the face of your event, will make them feel appreciated and respected. Your speakers will have some experience in public speaking, and it is up to the event organiser to find a balance between directing them too little and too much. One clear and concise one-pager of the event is a good way to brief your speakers a couple of weeks in advance. The purpose of the event will of course guide you on the content and speaker selection, but even the most prestigious representatives can benefit from having well prepared speaker notes and even suggested guidelines for presentations. Even the most seasoned speakers usually appreciate it when you offer to brainstorm the content of the talk or providing panellists with questions beforehand.

In the age of technology we tend to rely too much on emails and instant messages. Call your speakers a few days before the event to make sure they have received all the briefs, know how to find the venue and give them the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. They may be curious about the number of tickets booked, about where and when they were featured on social media or about information on the media coverage of the event. Also, a few days before the event is usually the time when problems could be revealed – maybe a speaker has a scheduling conflict or needs

to cancel due to other reasons. Calling a few days before gives you time to put out any fires and resort to your alternative plan.

To enhance the experience you can have your team's speaker manager greet the speakers at the event, show them around and provide them with any assistance they might need, whether it is WiFi access or finding the restrooms. We are all human, and providing the opportunity for speakers to have some peace and quiet to gather their thoughts before walking onto the stage can help a potentially nervous speaker. You may also want to provide a chance for them to meet the other panellists or speakers. After the speaking slot remember to thank your speaker in person (maybe with a small token of gratitude) and directly ask for feedback on the event.

CHECKLIST



- Ask your shortlisted speakers if they are available for your event

Share landing page information with speakers and collect material for speaker profiles. Your communication will benefit from having a confirmed name, title and organisation with a brief blurb (max. 100 words) on the expertise of the speaker plus a high-quality photo. Give technical specifics for the photo.

- Two weeks before: send out Speaker's Brief and consider introducing speakers to each other via email.

A few days before: call to make sure that speakers have received all briefs, share updates on media and social media engagement, solve any potential problems.

- On the day of the event: make sure your speakers have an extraordinary experience contributing to your event by having a designated assistant at their disposal.

- Thank your speakers in person and via email, and collect feedback.



TOOLS:

See Tool 4 for a **Speakers' Brief** listing the main points, which are good to communicate to the speaker 1-2 weeks before the event. Short is sweet and the speakers will appreciate concise, easy to read notes on what is expected from them. Aim at keeping the brief to one page, and add the overall schedule and agenda of the event.

DIRECT LINKS

[Speakers' Brief \(Tool 4\)](#)

HOW WE DID IT:

The SAIS 2 and Connected Hubs placed a special focus on Speaker Management. Speakers received a Speakers' Brief two weeks before the event with well-thought-out questions and topics for discussion. Especially with speakers travelling to the event destination, calling beforehand ensured that all travel logistics were in order and the briefs had reached the speakers. Facilitators were advised on time-keeping and how they would be assisted with that during the day (with a timer clearly visible to the person leading the conversation – a good tip!). Questions and topics were also provided to them in the form of note cards before going on stage.

The speaker notes for the Master of Ceremony (MC) were drawn up together with him to allow his personal voice to come through. This was done a week before the event, and practiced together the day before.

While speaker management was coordinated by SAIS 2, all speakers had an additional support person representing Connected Hubs. This allowed for personal attention at the event itself – each speaker was greeted at the entrance to Cape Town Stadium by a Speaker Crew member who had been introduced to them beforehand via email. The crew member guided the speaker at the event venue and provided information on the speakers' lounge, the lunch area and assisted the speaker in meeting with other speakers in their speaking slot just before their programme slot. Speakers were thanked by a SAIS 2 representative and handed a small gift as a token of gratitude. Thank you notes were sent via email after the event, and feedback was collected from speakers digitally. With their extensive experience of events, speakers tend to have great ideas for improvement. With these measures SAIS 2 and Connected Hubs were able to provide an extraordinary experience to the event contributors.



The Master of Ceremony for the ASAIF was Mr Lukonga Lindunda, founder of BongoHive in Zambia.

STEP 6

Coordinating the team

CONSIDER THIS:

A well-functioning team is motivated, has team spirit and is well informed.

It is crucial to share the purpose of the event with everyone in the team to make them ambassadors for it. Discuss roles and responsibilities well in advance, and maybe allow team members to select their own tasks instead of assigning them straightaway. Motivation can arise from providing an opportunity for someone to grow professionally on the job – perhaps someone who usually works in programme design is curious to learn about event marketing. Having them assist the marketing Team Lead can result in stronger engagement from your team members. Increased opportunity to build professional connections can be a big motivator for someone to want to be on the speaker team.

Create team spirit by celebrating milestones such as launching the event online, confirming all speakers or confirming that one big star for the key note. Celebration can take the form of a simple high-five or sharing a cake at one of the planning meetings. Make sure to encourage ideation in the team and allow everyone's voice to be

heard in the planning process. Not every idea can be implemented, but being heard is a very human need and makes everyone feel like part of the team. Think about making the different aspects of the work fun – maybe setting up the event venue could be finished with an informal get-together with pizza? No team is perfect but the golden rule of leadership applies to event management, too: give thanks in front of a group, but keep constructive criticism private.

Speaking of less than perfect event production processes: surprise issues always crop up and it is advisable to discuss the team structure for handling them. Concentrating all decision-making on one person might be too much to handle and, honestly, is quite risky – what if that person is sick on the day? Consider having specific teams for various areas of the production and having Leads for each team to solve smaller problems independently. Transparency and knowledge-sharing between the various planning teams keeps everyone informed of the status of the whole event, so have regular meetings to keep everyone on the same page.

It may be useful to test how well your hub is able to attract volunteers to be part of the event production. Reasons to volunteer for an event are quite similar to speakers' reasons to speak for free – being inspired by the purpose and wanting to contribute to the cause, and having a sense of community with like-minded

NOTES:



DIRECT LINKS

25

HOW WE DID IT:

Connected Hubs and SAIS 2 worked closely together for the event, resulting in a 15-member crew coordinated by SAIS 2. Regular online meetings were held every 2-3 weeks and were structured in a way to first include training for a specific area of event production, provided by Slush Global Impact Accelerator and SA Innovation Summit. After that the Connected Hubs members discussed the topic pertaining to the ASAIF.

Team spirit and trust were built between the Connected Hubs members in two on-site training sessions organised during the months leading up to the ASAIF. Relationships were formed between the members through group work and informal engagement during the training.

The first training session in April 2018 saw the members select Experience, Venue or Programme as a theme based on their respective interest. The Programme team later became the one to act as the crew for speakers, and the Venue and Experience teams collaborated to design the venue space and make sure that the guests, VIPs and speakers had that famous extraordinary experience. In addition there was a crew to support communication, providing input to logo design, planning a communication strategy for the event and assisting with social media coverage during the event.

In August 2018 the crew continued collaboration and planning in Cape Town, and everyone had a chance to familiarise themselves with the event venue, the Cape Town Stadium. Last elements of venue design were discussed and agreed upon so that the Experience and Venue team would know exactly what the layout should be like on the event day in September 2018.



In search of a theme for ASAIF 2018, the Connected Hubs ideated the entrepreneurship-related challenges in Southern Africa at the training session in April 2018.



The jolly Connected Hubs crew together with SAIS familiarising themselves with the Cape Town Stadium in August 2018.

STEP 7

One week before the event

CONSIDER THIS:

It's a week before your event and ideally you have your venue secured and the logistics in terms of catering, signage and service providers are well on track.

The speakers have been confirmed and profiled on social media. There is a buzz with tickets being booked, the press release has been sent to the media and your social media activity is gaining traction. Now it is time for the final touches, the briefings and the preparations for post-event activities.

This is the peak week for your event, and usually an “all hands on deck” type of a situation. Final touches refers to calling caterers, checking furniture deliveries and testing technology. It's collecting all marketing material needed on site including flyers, posters and pull up banners. It's finalising speaker notes with your MC, calling your speakers and solving problems that may have come up. It's also making sure the VIPs on your guest list are well-informed about the event, and sending out reminders to your guests. Have a last group meeting with everyone in your team or with the Team Leads to make sure all boxes on your checklist are ticked.

As with the speakers, make sure all team members have the materials necessary to deliver excellently on their part. This could be an information kit including the minute-program, all the speakers' names and phone numbers, internal schedules of responsibilities with time slots and the persons in charge. All of these are in your Event Master Plan and can be shared as PDFs with all members beforehand.

Call each team member individually a couple of days before the event to go review each person's responsibilities and scheduled tasks during the day. Your team most likely consists of superstars and they might spot something you have missed, so these calls are good check points.

CHECKLIST



Check and double check:

- ☐ Partners and service providers
- ☐ Speakers and VIPs
- ☐ Last team meetings
- ☐ Internal information kits and calls to crew



TOOLS:

Tool 2.6 **Operative Schedule & Task Delegation** outlines specific responsibilities with the main focus on the days leading up to the event.

DIRECT LINKS

[Operative Schedule & Task Delegation \(Tool 2.6\)](#)

HOW WE DID IT:

Due to the ASAIF being an international event with crew members and speakers arriving from eight different countries, the information was disseminated to everyone involved well in advance. Thus the last days before the event were dedicated to travel and last minute checks with the various service providers, partners, speakers and crew members who weren't reached the week before.

Speakers were continuously profiled for increased hype about the upcoming event.



If you have the advantage of being in the same place with the organisers, try to organise regular meetings to keep track on everything. The meeting can range from an hour's boardroom set up to a 15-minute huddle to quickly go over key points. Communication is key.

STEP 8

On the day

CONSIDER THIS:

Not everything will go according to plan, so be prepared for anything. Communication goes a long way but unwelcome surprises, such as one of your core crew members or speakers falling ill, can still affect your event negatively.

It helps to have alternative plans in place in case of a last minute cancellation. Force majeure disruptions usually just can't be helped and then it is even more important to keep calm and see the event through with a smile. Guests who have arrived still deserve that extraordinary experience of feeling welcome and appreciated, so do your best not to let them see how stressed out you are.

Make sure you have a last minute huddle with the crew before the event starts. This is not to go through anything too important (ideally all those issues have been discussed by then) but rather to have a chance to share any last minute changes – and more importantly, fire up the crew's team spirit. Thank the whole crew for all their hard work, take a group photograph and give yourself a big hand of applause. You deserve it!

People appreciate a programme that runs on time if a schedule or agenda has been shared. The experience that you are providing to your guests includes that you are trustworthy and know how to keep everything under control. We have all been to events where the programme starts late due to technical difficulties or perhaps a key speaker arrives late. You can avoid such mishaps by testing all the technical equipment well in advance, having backup computers available and all the necessary presentations saved as one joint PDF file on a USB stick, just in case the Wi-Fi does not work. Also, the speakers should be the VIPs who are the first to arrive at the event in order to have a chance to see the venue and find their bearings before guests arrive. This is not always possible, but it's good to have as a goal.

Having a designated person using a clearly visible timer helps the MC, the main producer of the event and the facilitators to manage the programme time. The person keeping time can have an assistant to help with the time needed for each programme and to indicate a 1 or 2 minute signal with a yellow card and "time out" on a red card. Everyone who needs a timer must be made well aware of the colours of the cue cards and their meaning.

Documenting the event for social media and legacy is a nice way to engage with the audience and those unable to attend, as well

as to raise awareness of your hub in general. You can draft tweets beforehand or schedule posts about the various programme slots in advance to ease the pressure to capture the stage programme right on spot. Consider streaming the event live or to record it for inclusivity and marketing purposes in the future.



TOOLS:

The **Venue Design and Material list** (Tool 2.7) works as a checklist and therefore comes in handy not only before the event, but also on the actual day.

DIRECT LINKS

[Venue Design and Material list \(Tool 2.7\)](#)

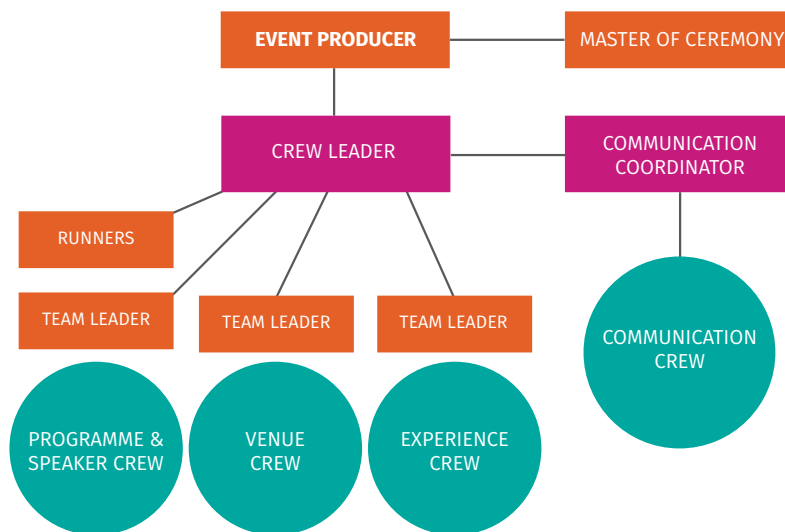
HOW WE DID IT:

The day of the ASAIF went smoothly. The Connected Hubs Crew together with SAIS 2 worked seamlessly in teams, and an hour before the start of the programme the venue looked great. By the time the doors were opened and guests were welcomed, the first speakers were feeling relaxed and getting ready for the panel discussion.

The team work and delegating structure functioned extremely well. From the audience's perspective the MC is in control of everything – to make sure that the right speakers are called to the stage at the right time, the programme is running on time and any surprises are handled skilfully. This is a lot to ask, and at the same time the MC has to deliver his own notes in a dynamic way. Therefore it is important that the main Event Producer, who knows the ins and outs of the event, sits with the MC to support them. During the ASAIF these two were seated at the side of the front row, with the opportunity to deal with any important issues without disturbing the audience but still within eye contact of the timers.

It was helpful that there was a Crew Leader who could communicate with the Event Producer in case something serious happened – this could be anything from a speaker not being present to an actual fire in the kitchen. Anything smaller would be handled by the Crew Leader independently. The crew taking care of speakers and assisting with communication, the venue and registration operated like a well-oiled machine.

Team structure on the day



During the event it is important that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities, and who to turn to in case of a problem. In the planning stages of the event, the core group for the event consists of the Event Producer, Crew leader, Communication Coordinator and the team leads who work together to make the event happen but while the event is happening, this diagram showcases an example of how the team was structured to make ASAIF 2018 happen.

STEP 9

The business side of events

CONSIDER THIS:

One common challenge for event production is the cost structure and business model for the event.

Typical revenue streams for a professional event are in essence ticket sales and sponsorships, but you can get creative in various ways to cover your costs or even make a profit with your event.

Typical costs include the venue, furniture and technical equipment, catering, marketing and communication, salaries for the team and possible material costs (applicable especially for workshops). While it may be daunting at first, most of it can be covered or reduced through strategic partnerships.

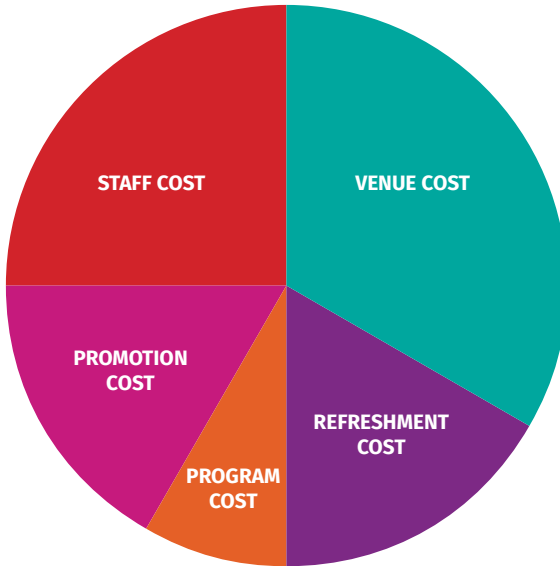
Although you may want to do without an admission charge, consider a small fee to engage with your guests and commit them to attend – the percentage of no-show guests is very high especially when events are free of charge. Even a fee equivalent to the price of a cup of coffee can be enough to actually make the targeted audience amount.

Sponsorships are usually the first choice for raising revenue for an event. The value proposition for the sponsors can be based on their affiliation to the purpose and community that the event has, increasing their brand visibility and positioning them as a thought leader in their field.

More so, it can also be about product placement. It may surprise you how many large corporations will sponsor an event to guarantee that their products are visible there instead of those of their main competitor. This can be anything from pull-up banner placement to the company providing their goods to contribute to your event. It could be a way to reduce your costs regarding catering or even technical equipment. Similar to speakers donating their expertise in kind (without financial compensation), look at building a community for your event with strategic partnerships. Perhaps you want to support a local café and convince its owner to pay a small fee for the right to set up shop at your event?

Whatever you do, be resource efficient. Think: how would I do it if I had no money at all? This way your cost structure remains solid – and even sponsors will be pleased, and eager to work with you again.

An example of event costing



TOOLS:

The **Event Budget Template** (Tool 5) compiles your projected budget together with your actual budget and provides a comparison sheet.

DIRECT LINKS

[Event Budget Template \(Tool 5\)](#)

HOW WE DID IT:

The ASAIF was funded by the SAIS Programme. Its main donors are Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as its partner countries Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. The largest part of the cost was for securing the venue, furniture, technology and logistics as well as for human resources, which were all provided by the SA Innovation Summit.

Organising the ASAIF as a part of a larger event allowed for a mutually beneficial partnership. While the SA Innovation Summit was happy to have one of its tracks organised with relevant content regarding entrepreneurship and innovation in Southern Africa, it was valuable to SAIS 2 in its early stages to partner with a large event that attracted policy-makers, government, academia, entrepreneurs and business, and to have a “keys in hand” platform for its stakeholders.

In addition to the speakers, the Connected Hubs crew’s invaluable contribution was also partly in kind. The National Focal Points for SAIS 2 contributed their resources as part of the agreement they have with the programme to implement innovation-related activities locally – and the event production training for their representatives were part of that agreement, benefitting their local ecosystems.



ASAIF 2018 in action.

NOTES:

STEP 10

After the event

CONSIDER THIS:

Once you and your team have successfully concluded your exciting event it might be tempting to take a couple of days to rest.

However, that is not advisable. Now is the time to see how well you actually did and to review those indicators of success you established in the planning stage.

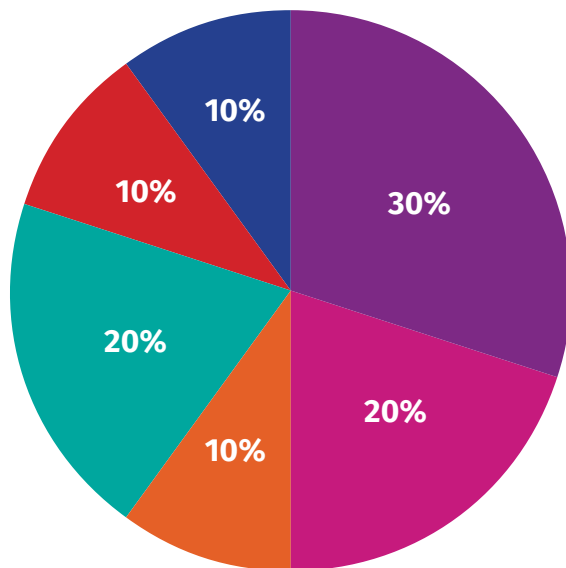
Take the necessary steps to prepare those important thank you notes before your event so that you can send them immediately afterwards. Collect feedback digitally, unless it was already done at the event. Any news about your event will be old a month later, so don't miss a chance to share news and capture lessons learnt while everything is still fresh. For many sponsors and strategic partners it is a numbers game: after your event, share the media activity regarding your event, the engagement statistics from social media and the number of guests. All of this information you should have available the next day, or at the latest within a week after the event.

Evaluating feedback is an important task for anyone organising events. When you prepare separate surveys for guests, VIPs and speakers as well as strategic partnerships, you pave the way for a continued partnership and you can better evaluate different aspects of your event.

In addition it is recommendable to have de-briefing meetings with the crew about what the successes were and what could be improved on next time. It may not be a pleasant meeting to have right after the event, but it is crucial for continuous learning purposes. Talking with service providers over the phone or informal chats with speakers will add to your evaluation process.

Learning from the evaluation for the next time requires proper documentation. Capturing templates, plans and even marketing materials used at the event together with the notes from the de-briefing meetings are all part of the legacy your event will have.

Different guests at ASAIF 2018



- Hubs, labs, accelerators, incubators, or other business support organisation
- Research, academia
- Early stage enterprise or startup
- Policy makers, ministries, governmental entity
- Donor agency, funder
- Investors, venture capitals, business angels

For SAIS 2 it was important to reach a diverse group of stakeholders and the ASAIF 2018 was a success in that regard.



TOOLS:

See a sample of **good feedback questions** in Tool 6 and remember to modify them so that you capture the lessons learnt not only from guests and speakers, but also from service providers.

DIRECT LINKS

[Feedback questions \(Tool 6\)](#)

HOW WE DID IT:

As the ASAIF is an annual SAIS 2 event it was important to capture the lessons learnt from collaborating with ten innovation support organisations in five countries. The crew members compiled brief reports capturing their feedback and a de-briefing was held with the SAIS 2 team. There was an opportunity to capture key lessons for this manual, and through this we also want to share best practices in producing events which are competitive on a global scale.

The lessons learnt have been incorporated in the plans for the ASAIF 2019, so look out for that on social media!



ASAIF 2018 couldn't have been possible without the hard work of all the Connected Hubs members.

NOTES:



Common Mistakes

Don't worry, it will never go exactly according to plan. That having been said, here is a list of the most common mistakes that you may want to avoid when planning your next big event.

1. FAILING TO BUILD A COMMUNITY

A clear purpose for the event helps to commit everyone, from team members to speakers and service providers. This, by the way, is also very useful for all your communications.

2. OVERLOOKING THE PRACTICAL STUFF

The devil really is in the detail. When food runs out, drinks are too warm or too cold, serviettes are far away from the food or garbage bins are overflowing, there clearly have been oversights in catering and the planning of the visitor journey. Check, then double-check.

3. FAILING TO TEST TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT

Technology is such a key part of events nowadays that it deserves its own checking point. When it all works the audience doesn't notice or is amazed. Test everything, from microphones to clickers and lights, well in advance and

test again several hours before. Don't rely on the internet, and limit video streaming, if you can't guarantee that it will run smoothly. Make a compilation of all the necessary presentations in order to minimise the hassle during the stage program. And don't forget: an extraordinary experience for your guests includes having access to decent WiFi.

4. LAST-MINUTE CHANGES TO THE PROGRAMME

Sure, anything crazy can happen even if you plan in minute detail. You can devise plan B, C and D for your plan A, but then the world loses a great mind like Nelson Mandela and your biggest draw card and key-note speaker has to cancel to attend his funeral (true story!). This is when you communicate the changes to your audience without too elaborate explanations, apologize for the inconvenience and introduce the alternative plan. This also applies to not keeping time, but with the solid planning and timer setup you really don't have an excuse for running late in the programme.

5. FAILING TO SCREEN YOUR SPEAKERS

With proper selection, make it your source of pride to only feature speakers skilled enough to take the stage. Dynamic

speakers are hard to come by and we have all been in a situation where we have struggled to stay awake while someone standing at a podium is reading from their notes for an hour. It is advisable to screen speakers and facilitators beforehand.

show, or to launch your event without all the speakers and sponsors confirmed. But knowing that you and your team can do anything leaves you calm and smiling during the day even if something goes wrong (and something always does).

6. FAILING TO STICK TO YOUR BUDGET

In a world of limited resources this is a definite no-no. Be smart about your business model, cut corners where you can to cut costs, know your expenditure and monitor it closely.

9. NOT LEARNING FROM IT

Collecting feedback and taking the time to analyse it may be the last thing after an event you want to put your heart and soul into, but it's a common mistake not to learn from the work done. Remember: all your immediate post-event activities are stepping stones for your next event.

7. FAILING TO COMMUNICATE – INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

Biggest mishaps in events occur when the crew doesn't know what to do and where to be, or when people don't show up to your event. Communication, like in any relationship, is key.

10. RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL

There are so many events happening in the world every day that it would be quite a mistake not to learn from what's out there. Benchmark cool events taking place in your field and find attractive new ways to initiate dialogue about important matters. There are loads of material online to help you make your event a success, so don't start from scratch.

8. NOT BEING BOLD ENOUGH

Event production is not for the fainthearted. It puts your project management and people skills severely to the test in an environment which can be quite stressful. It takes guts to overbook a venue because you expect at least 30% no-

CONNECTED HUBS MEMBERS

