FC/259/FCP05
Fellowship Council
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Good Practice note

Fellowship Council: Good Practice Shared

How to run an FRSA 'Reboot' session – by Jemima Gibbons, Digital Champion – introduced by Roxanne Persaud, FC and Digital Champion

Sixty RSA Fellows enjoyed an evening of lightning talks and speed networking at 3Space in Oxford Street – and heard about a range of innovative and exciting Fellow-led projects.

I live in London and have been a Fellow since 2006 – but I only know a handful of Fellows here. In fact, I know more than most – around 80 – but that's still just ONE per cent of the 8,000 Fellows who live and work in London.

So that's a huge living resource that I *could* be connecting to in order to make a difference, develop projects and more. But I'm currently mostly missing out.

One reason for this, as with so many RSA regions, is that there's no structured face to face networking. Our regional drinks dwindled out. The London committee has events, but they are usually paid (due to venue costs), and are topic rather than network-led. And there's the public lecture programme at John Adam Street (which we're lucky to have), but again, these talks are very specific and – unless drinks are scheduled – there's no real space to gather afterwards.

The venue

Back in March, I went to an RSA Mental Health workshop at 3Spaceon Oxford Street. It was a great venue and, it turned out, free for charities (such as the RSA) to use.
Bingo! How about hosting something there?
The great thing about 3Space is that it's UK-wide. As well as London, the organisation currently has venues in Aylesbury, Blackpool, Bury St Edmunds, Cardiff, Falkirk and Wigan. So if any FRSA would like to hold events in those areas, you've a free venue readily available.

Lee Hazzard tell Fellows about his project, Game Plan

Designing the London #FRSA event

I got together with Roxanne Persaud (London Region Fellowship Councillor) and Matthew Mezey (RSA Online Community Manager) to hatch a plan. We wanted an event that met Fellows' needs while also encouraging engagement, collaboration and community (things we're all passionate about through our work with RSAde).
Feedback from the recent Fellowship Survey, and from previous London Region events, showed that the two main things Fellows want is to:

1. Connect with other Fellows who share their interests in their region
2. Hear about current projects and initiatives they can get involved with

So, we agreed what we hoped would be a "magic" formula…

The format

1. Lightning talks
2. Speed networking
3. General chat and "collaboration huddles"

The evening would run over three hours with each activity repeated in short, sharp, bursts. The idea was to keep things moving and create a dynamic atmosphere to get everyone buzzing, spark conversation and maximise idea-sharing. This is the schedule breakdown.

A Wordle created from Fellow's feedback on the event

The name #FRSA London Reboot! was inspired by the Reboot Britain event three years ago. A "reboot" is, of course, what you do to a computer to get it up and running again after a software update. We felt it was a great way to re-ignite the London network and kickstart collaborative activity.

Lightning talks

For added inspiration, we gave the event a broad theme, "Positive deviants". This was the "peg" for speakers' presentations. We offered ten slots of 4 minutes each, broken into three "rounds" (at 6.30, 7.15 and 8pm). The speakers were allowed to talk about any type of project or initiative they wanted – the only requirement was that they needed some kind of input – whether it be skills, support or funding – from other FRSA.

3Space provided a projector so were able to show one slide containing basic information (name, website etc) behind each speaker. There was no time for multiple slides although in retrospect some of the speakers could have done with more illustration (Mark Power, for example). But equally, it would have been quite possible to run the talks with no slides.

In feedback, people said that there was a lot of information to take in and at times they felt quite overwhelmed. One attendee suggested we hand out speaker details so they could keep track of all the projects, and make notes. (Next time we can send these out with the reminder email so that people can print out and bring with them).

Collaboration huddles

After each round of lightning talks, we split the room in half: people had the choice of either chatting with one of the speakers in a "huddle" (on the Oxford Street side of the room), or taking part in speed networking (on the Soho Square side).

The collaboration huddles enabled speakers to talk in more depth about their projects and to swap contact details with the Fellows who could help them. We had great feedback from the speakers who found this really useful!

Speed networking

At the start of the evening, we asked everyone to fill out their own name badge. Each badge had a

coloured dot stuck to it and there were four different colours. During the speed networking, each attendee had to talk to three other people, each wearing a different colour to them. We used David Gurteen's method, which allows two minutes per conversation. We allowed six minutes (in retrospect this was a little too long)!

Event promotion

I worked with the Regional Fellowship Councillor to write a short "blurb" about the event that was sent out in the London Region e-newsletter (twice) and uploaded onto the London Region Social network.

Roxanne and I emailed our own FRSA contacts in London, and regularly reminded our followers on Twitter, sending direct tweets everyone we knew who was a London Fellow.

Roxanne set up an Eventbrite page for event registration. This worked brilliantly because you can keep track of attendees, release tickets in batches, and send out automated reminder emails to attendees. You also get email addresses for everyone who plans to attend, so you can contact these people again if you decide to run a similar event in future. (The Fellows' Tool and Techniques webpage includes lots of guides and how tos to help organise various kinds of Fellow events. An Eventbrite guide will be added to the page soon.)

Make sure you print the attendee list out, and have someone with the list on the door during the event, ticking people off as they arrive.

We announced the FRSA London Reboot! about a month beforehand and sent out a reminder email one week before, and then two days before. We had around 90 registrants but quite a high fallout – around 50 turned up on the night. We probably should have sent out an email on the day of the event but ran out of time!

During the event we encouraged people to tweet, post updates on Facebook and upload photos to any social network using the hashtag #FRSA. Video would have been a good thing too.

Cost saving tips

It was really important to us that this event was free. Fellows already pay for membership and we felt that charging for "networking" went against the very grain of what the RSA is about. However, when putting on a free event it is equally important that you, as organisers, do not end up out of pocket. Because of this, anything you can do to save costs is essential. Cost saving measures include getting people to:

- Bring their own drink and snacks
- Print out the speaker notes/ programme on their own paper beforehand
- Help out on the door and by clearing up afterwards

Other things you need:

- Plain stickers and pens for name badges
- Coloured dot stickers for speed networking
- Whistle/ soundmakers to signal start/ stop for speed networking
- Feedback forms (so you can improve next time)
- Plates and paper cups
- A bottle opener and knife (for cutting cake, quiche etc)
- Napkins

Final thoughts

Nobody reads emails properly! This is what one attendee said and it's so true. Despite all the information we put in reminder emails, people still turned up without the address, or without the food and drink we had requested everyone bring in order that there'd be enough to share.

It was a great event and we had amazing feedback. People seemed to feel really energised and inspired – just as we intended! There is definitely a gap in the FRSA market for this sort of thing. And we hope it's something that can be replicated in other RSA regions. All you need is a venue (check out the list on 3Space), the support of your regional team, and a bit of time to put it together.
As for the FRSA London Reboot? Don't worry, we'll be back!

Twitter: @JemimaG
Links: A Storify (Tweets, photos, slides) from the evening: http://bit.ly/Rebootstorify
http://www.rsablogs.org.uk/2012/fellowship/run-frsa-reboot-session

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Fellows' tools & techniques

"*In my work, I have witnessed incredible potential realised simply through the committed action of creative, inspired citizens. The RSA and its Fellows are poised to accomplish similar ongoing success in communities throughout the world, and I am excited to see what is possible in Chattanooga as we continue to collaborate*"
- Trey Meyer FRSA, Broken Windows Brigade

- How to run Fellows' network meetings
- Varied formats for meetings/workshops
- Getting your message out to the RSA Fellowship
- How to connect with Fellows online (+ live-streamed videos, Vision mobile app)
- Funding your project: RSA Catalyst Fund
- Fellows getting active: projects and enterprises (+ RSA Skillsbank)
- Understanding the structure of the RSA Fellowship
- New Fellows' Evenings
- Fellow-led thematic networks