

# Outreach Tips for the Interdisciplinary Education and Outreach Team

## *Tips for Engaging with Audiences*

Audiences at outreach events can be very dynamic and made up of people from a wide range of ages, backgrounds, knowledge, and interest. It's important to be flexible and meet audiences where they are. Our primary goal is for people to have a *positive experience* with our outreach stations. Most people will remember very few details about outreach events where see multiple different activities. However, *they will remember how they feel* – did they have a good time? Was it *interesting*? Did they *interact with nice and interesting scientists/engineers*? Do they *feel like they learned something*?

## *The IEOT outreach strategy has 3 steps:*

### **#1: Invite**

#### ***Invite:***

Some people are shy or unsure so invite them to come to your station to do the activity.

- Asking “Do you want to try something cool?” or “Fun?” or “Weird?” are great ways to start the interaction.
- Please do not be on your phone, too deeply in conversation with a fellow volunteer, or otherwise distracted – it will make you seem uninterested, and audiences will stay away.
- If participants are short, then sit or squat so you are eye level with them. This will help them feel talked “with” rather than talked “at”.
- Introduce yourself and ask their name. Try to use it if during your interaction with them (but don't worry if you cannot because there are just too many people).

## #2: Engage

### **Engage:**

As soon as someone is at your station, give them something to *do!* They may need a little instruction so you can do the activity with them so you can *show rather than tell* people what to do.

- Having people do something will help them become more invested in your activity and they will *want* to hear about the science.
- All people are impacted by emotion. Engaging in an activity will elicit an emotional reaction – *surprise, confusion, delight* – are all emotions that will help people become invested in what you are doing.
- When families are present at your station, don't forget about the parents/guardians/adult caretakers. Many will watch and not participate so you can hand them something to engage in too. If both the adult and the child experience your activity, they can talk about it later and the information is more likely to stick.

## #3: Explain

### **Explain:**

Once people are engaged by doing something, then it is time to *explain the science* behind the activity. This can be tricky because of audiences have such varied backgrounds.

- First *relate* the topic to something they may now about. For example, if you are leading an activity on magnets, ask where they have them at home or school (ex. refrigerator, toys, etc). In this way you are building upon what they already know.
- Keep your explanation *simple* to start. Tell people 1-2 new things (ex. some materials are magnetic because their atoms - or small particles if the audience is young - are all lined up in a special way and we want to learn about magnets because they can be used to make computers better).
- If possible, tell the audience about *yourself and your work*. Or why you like the topic.
- Ask “What questions do you have about...?”
- People typically remember very little about these types of events, especially details, so don't give them too much information.