

A “How To” Guide for Planning an Event and Dealing with the Media

A “How To” guide related to event planning and reaching out to the media and guidance related to other resources in the CS advocacy community that could be helpful

Planning Your Computer Science Education Week (CSEdWeek) Event

Join schools, businesses, policymakers and educational and community groups across the country in recognizing and celebrating Computer Science Education Week (CSEdWeek). Beginning on December 4 and running through December 10, 2011, people across the country will come together to raise awareness about the importance of computer science education.

CSEdWeek, designated as the week of Grace Murray Hopper’s birthday—December 9th, recognizes the transformative role of computing and the need to bolster computer science at all educational levels.

Through the promotion of CSEdWeek, supporters will:

- Raise awareness of the central role of computing in our global information society
- Promote efforts to expose students – particularly in grades K-12 – to robust computer science education
- Highlight the challenges that deny access to computer science education for all students
- Engage supporters to prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need for the 21st century

Planning Your Event

CSEdWeek events and celebrations come in all shapes and sizes. The important thing to remember and determine is planning an event that your community can support.

- Get educators, community and business leaders, volunteers, students, policymakers, members of the press and others talking about computer science education.
- Showcase the achievements of your computer science education program(s) and your students.
- Convey the messages about the importance of computer science education and the challenges facing computer science, such as access to courses, and adequate teacher preparation and professional development.

Think about whom can best deliver your computer science education messages. For example:

- Educators can talk about the impact computer science has had on their students and the specific skills it provided to prepare them for success in college and the workforce.
- Students can demonstrate the projects/programs/contest wins that would not have been possible without computer science.
- Policy makers, computing professionals, community and business leaders can be guest speakers about the importance of computer science in preparing the future workforce.

- Contests, demonstrations, videos, and photos can reinforce the message.

Helpful Tips:

Be creative! Grab attention with something out of the ordinary.

Involve as many participants in planning as possible, especially students. Remember that people will support something they helped create.

Have a lively emcee at your event - consider asking a local TV or radio personality.

Give away items are always popular; this is an opportunity to promote your school's website or www.CSEdWeek.org.

Brand your event -- use signs and posters before and during your event to attract and keep attention.

The Who, What, When & Where

Who to Invite:

- Students
- Educators and school administrators
- Parents, grandparents and extended family
- Business and community leaders
- Local employers and employees in the computing and IT industries
- Policymakers
- Media
- Youth organizations: academic and service clubs, volunteers
- Local celebrities: TV news anchor, radio host
- The community

What to Do:

- Student-created and led activities
- Student demonstrations of computer science projects, contest entries, programs or other innovations
- Special guest speakers: local elected officials, the superintendent, mayor, a member(s) of Congress, the CEO of a local business, other local celebrities, etc.
- Presentations from students about their experience with computer science classes

When to hold it:

- Pick a day and time that best suits your event goals and plans, such as:
 - During your regular school day
 - Evening hours when parents and others can participate
 - A breakfast or lunch reception that elected officials and business leaders can attend

Where to host it:

- Your school, indoors or outdoors
- City hall
- State Capitol building
- Public library, park or recreation center
- Museum or Science Center
- School gymnasium or auditorium
- Local community college or university
- Local business

Planning Your Event:

Proper planning is critical to any successful community event. The key to holding events is start planning early. In order to get the most out of your event planning, use a checklist of action items to complete alongside your calendar as you plan and execute your event.

Things to consider and develop:

- Set up planning committee
- Identify your target audiences. Who will you invite? Who will attend?
- Determine the size and theme of the event
- Brainstorm activities
- Brainstorm location options
- Send any save the date pieces to appropriate state and local officials
- Brainstorm possible sponsors, if necessary (e.g. local businesses)
- Develop a budget, if applicable
- Determine materials needed (e.g. promotional material, permits, audiovisual equipment, etc.)
- Send out formal invitations to state and local officials and other VIPs.
- Draft a “run of show,” a rundown of exactly what will happen on the day of the event. This includes times, tasks and responsibilities.
- Compile a list of media outlets that may be interested in covering your event
- Create a diagram of the layout of location
- Create nametags for attendees
- Send thank you letters to all supporters, including sponsors, VIPs, media, speakers, volunteers, vendors and anyone who may have helped plan the event.
- Hold a debriefing with event planners and evaluate the event.

Working with the Media

How the Media Works

- Generally speaking, most news stories have to do with conflict, events and issues that affect the readership or broadcast audience, local angles on national issues, appealing human interest stories, and celebrity events.
- Journalists usually work on very tight timelines.

- Local media generally focus on local news. This is where your event will likely see the most coverage.
- National news coverage in local newspapers, and on local television and radio news programs, is often provided to the station by national wire services or broadcast news services.
- Most local markets have at least a handful of radio (and sometimes television) news program. These can be excellent outlets to approach about local your event.

How to Best Communicate with the Media

- There are many ways to communication with the media in your local community. The standard practice is to distribute a media advisory about the event. There's a sample one on the CSEdWeek website.
- These days most media would like you to communication with them via email. It is likely that if you do not hear from them, you will want to follow up with a phone call.

When to Communicate with the Media about the Event:

- Reach out to the media ten days to two weeks prior to your event. This allows you enough time to follow up with them if you do not receive an initial response.
- Following your event, send media a press release, (there's a sample one on the CSEdWeek website) include photos and video if available.
- Offer media a spokesperson to interview prior to, at the event and/or following the event.

How to Frame Your Message:

- Plan your message carefully. You can reference the sample talking points provided in this toolkit.
- Deliver the important points of your message every time. Even if you've heard yourself make those points a thousand times, the audience hasn't.
- Consider a few core messages about computing being a key driver of economic growth and societal change; ensuring access to quality K-12 computer science education is crucial to America's competitiveness in the 21st Century and the fact that access to these important courses for students have seen a decrease in recent years (the percentage of US high schools with introductory computer science courses fell from 78% to 65% from 2005-2009).