unite! | University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering

Hands-on Guide to Organise Socialising Activities

Unite! Community 6 - Professional development & Training
October 2024

Co-funded by
the European Union

TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT DARMSTADT | A'' Aalto University | TU Graz Graz University of Technology | INP Grenoble | KTH | Politecnico di Torino | U LISBOA Universidade de Lisboa | UNIVERSITAT POLITÈCNICA DE CATALUNYA BARCELONATECH | Wroclaw University of Science and Technology

Introduction

Creating a vibrant and inclusive professional community within Unite! is essential to pave the way for the sustainable future of the European University. Socialising activities play a vital role in achieving this goal. This framework aims to provide guidance for planning and implementing socialising activities as part of Unite! Community Events that cater to the diverse needs and interests of faculty and staff members within Unite!.

What are Unite! Community Events?
Unite! Community Events is an overall term used for the various event formats utilised to bring together faculty and staff of the Unite! alliance. Apart from online collaboration, physical meetings are essential in strengthening cooperation throughout the alliance. Therefore, this framework focuses on Unite! Community Events that take place physically. The various event formats encompass the following but are not limited to:

- Unite! Dialogues
- Unite! Staff Weeks
- Unite! Job Shadowings
- Unite! Community Workshops
- Unite! Matchmaking Events

Objectives and purposes of socialising activities for faculty and staff:
- Create avenues for informal interactions to foster fruitful professional relationships
- Support intercultural dialogue, understanding and growth

- Promote collaboration and a sense of belonging among Unite! faculty & staff
- Enhance employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall well-being
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange

Who should use this guide?
This framework is a repository for those who organise on-site Unite! Community Events. This can range from event planners to organisation teams for larger events, e.g. Unite! Dialogues, or Community Coordinators, expert team leaders, programme officers, etc.

> *It's outside of meetings where the true connections are built.*
>
> *- Cm. 5 representative*

Who are the activities planned for?
Activities for Community events proposed in this framework are targeted at faculty and staff within the Unite! Alliance.[1]

---

[1] Out of Scope of the Framework: Even though many of the measures suggested in this framework could be applied to students participating in Unite! Community Events as well, this guide is strictly targeted at faculty and staff who represent the institutional pillars on which the Unite! alliance is built.

Catalogue of Socialising Activities

Casual Meetups and Coffee Breaks

- Informal Meetups: Organise designated spaces for informal interactions, such as common areas or coffee corners, ideally with tables or a lounge area.
- Scheduled Breaks: Include regular (coffee) breaks to encourage faculty and staff members to connect and engage in spontaneous conversations and networking.

© Fotogenia – TU Graz

© Fotogenia – TU Graz

Lunch Activities

- Group Lunch: Offer the possibility for staff and faculty to have lunch together to allow for informal exchange and relationship building.
- Lunch Lottery: Organise a networking lunch where participants are grouped with people they don't know to encourage new connections and relationships beyond usual university, community, or group boundaries.

© Fotogenia – TU Graz

© Fotogenia – TU Graz

Embrace Multiculturalism & Multilingualism

- Cooking Events: Arrange workshops where participants can learn about local cuisine to promote cultural diversity and appreciation among members.
- Movie Night: Organise film screenings to showcase Unite! languages and cultural diversity to foster intercultural learning and exchange.
- Languages Café: Contact M&M group to organise a Languages Café at your event to foster appreciation for multilingualism and peer-to-peer relationship building.
- Meet my Culture: Invite participants to bring some typical food/drinks which can be tasted during your meeting to promote intercultural exchange.
- Singalong Activities: Learn songs in Unite! languages to embrace multilingualism and promote team spirit.
- Interactive Culture Activities: Share local customs and traditions for holidays relevant to the time of year and invite participants to contribute with their own cultural perspective.

© Sebastian Borkowski– Wroclaw Tech

© Fotogenia – TU Graz

Need more information?
Contact us!

Catalogue of Socialising Activities

© Sebastian Borkowski– Wroclaw Tech

Outings and Physical Activities

- Hiking & Walking Activities: Plan outings to nearby nature reserves or an after-lunch walk to promote physical well-being and team spirit.
- Guided City Tours: Plan guided tours by foot or by (e-)bike of the city to show sights and share historical insights of a Unite! city and socialise outside the regular programme.
- Fit-Breaks: Include Fit-Breaks, e.g. 5-10 min. yoga, stretching, activating sessions) in the schedule of your meetings to foster physical and mental well-being.

© Fotogenia – TU Graz

© Fotogenia – TU Graz

Informal Social Gatherings

- Evening Socials: Arrange after-event social gatherings, such as community dinners, happy hours, gala evenings, barbecues, game nights or dancing sessions learning local folk dances to create a relaxed environment for members to socialise.
- Themed Celebrations: Celebrate festivals, holidays, or special occasions with themed gatherings or activities to enhance the sense of community and cross-cultural understanding.

© Sebastian Borkowski– Wroclaw Tech

© Expert Team Quality Management

Onboarding of New Team Members

- Introduction Sessions: Host introductory sessions where new members can share their backgrounds, interests, and professional experiences, allowing for better integration and relationship building.
- Check-in Activities: Giving every group member the chance to say at least one word at the beginning of your meetings, e.g.: "What's your expectation for ...?"
- Icebreaker Activities: Include icebreaker activities at the start of an event to break down barriers and facilitate interactions, e.g.: speed dating, bingo, games, quizzes, etc.

© Benedetta Gennaro

Need more information?
Contact us!

Checklist
Planning & Organisation

As socialising activities are an essential part of every event to foster community building, taking them into consideration for the programme from the very start of the planning phase is vital.

Dedicate an appropriate amount of time and resources to plan and execute the activity. Make sure to gather feedback afterwards and share your lessons learnt with the community. (cf. Plan-Do-Check-Act).

- ☐ Understand the target group: conduct surveys or focus groups to understand interests and preferences of the Unite! community members.

- ☐ Offer activities that attract a wide range of people, are inclusive and allow for easy accessibility.

- ☐ Designate a coordinator or a coordination team to handle logistics, answer questions, and address any issues that arise during the activity.

- ☐ Choose a convenient date, time, and accessible venue which aligns with the activity's purpose and needs.

- ☐ If possible, engage the participants in challenges and give out rewards.

- ☐ If required, organise catering and refreshments.

- ☐ Be sustainable with your resources.

- ☐ Clear communication: communicate the purpose and benefits of the social activities offered and any registration requirements (see Communication and Dissemination on page 5).

- ☐ Gather feedback after the activity and lessons learned for future planning and organisation.

- ☐ Make use of resources and channels available via the Unite! Professional Community Platform, especially the Unite! Socialising Clubs, i.e. Unite! Hiking & Walking Club, Unite! Cooking Club, Unite! Film Club, and reach out to expert team 6.4 to receive support and guidance (see: Need more information? Contact us!) .

Need more information?
Contact us!

A few General Aspects

Communication & Dissemination

The agendas of Unite! events are often very tight. Hence, participants have a lot of working meetings and there is not much time left for more informal activities. That is why communication is crucial in terms of socialising activities at each step of the organisation process.

Consider various actions to take regarding communication, including:

Before:
- Promote activity
- Share details about time, place, necessary equipment, accessibility, etc.
- Send a reminder

During:
- Take pictures and record videos (make sure to obtain consent)
- Gather testimonials and stories

After:
- Share your lessons learnt with others
- Share successful new encounters in the Unite! LinkedIn group to boost motivation and promote a sense of belonging.

Contact the Strategic Communication Team (SCT) contact person at your home university to receive support in communicating your initiative: SCT Contact Person per Partner.

GDPR

Ensure the protection of participants' personal data by applying GDPR and handling all information appropriately.

Find helpful resources on uShare: A GDPR Presentation:
For further questions, contact your local Data Protection Officer.

Accessibility, Inclusivity and Equity

When designing integration activities for the Unite! community, remember to always consider individual and cultural differences, equal access, and respect for all.

Ensure that socialising activities are accessible and inclusive to all staff and faculty members involved, including those with diverse abilities or special needs.

Additional resources on uShare:

Unite! Checklist for Accessible Events

Unite! Guidelines for accessible content

Unite! Policy on Multilingualism & Multiculturalism

Sustainability

- When planning socialising activities, think about its impact for the future: Can participants meet new peers or develop stronger bonds with ones they already know? Is there a possibility to make a tradition out of the activity?
- Make sure resources are efficiently utilised, e.g., by organising and conducting activities hosted by a dedicated team member.
- If designing rewards, e.g. souvenir pins, for participants, try to make them versatile and reusable avoiding specific event names or related slogans.
- Consider using digital tools instead of print outs such as posters or flyers.

Need more information?
Contact us!

Examples of Good Practices

Sending a reminder and request for final confirmation (by TU Darmstadt): "Although participation in our offers is free of charge for you, the university still incurs costs for the workshops and their administration. In order to conserve resources and be fair to other interested people, we ask you to cancel the workshop via [WAY OF CANCELLING] right away if you are unable to attend. This way, others can move up, our resources are used sensibly and as many people as possible can benefit from our offers."
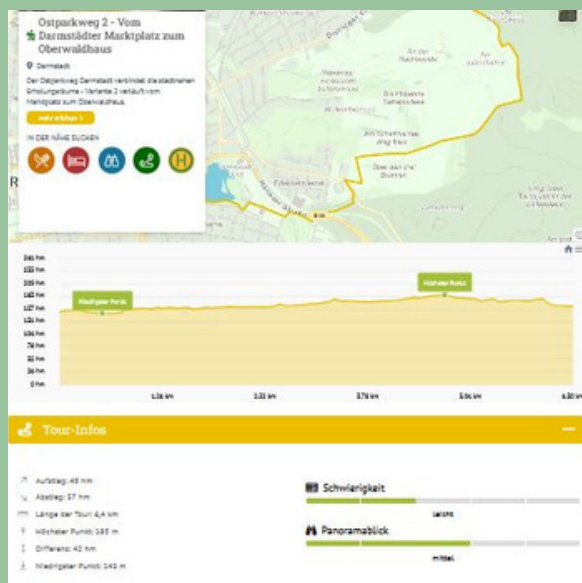
Sharing details of the event with participants (by TU Darmstadt for X Unite! Dialogue): Route available before the event to help participants assess their ability to join the hike.

Tackling high turnover of team members: Offer onboarding sessions or prepare a handbook with general information for new team members for ease of integration.

Overbook activities or use *waiting lists* to maximize participation.

Advice by Uniters! for Uniters!:

- Assign clear roles and distribute responsibility. Carry out regular progress check-ups.
- Form small, flexible groups for different tasks.
- Clarify your vision together and regularly revisit it.
- Foster openness and trust within each meeting. This can include thinking out aloud as coordinator, not having all the answers ready at once, asking others explicitly for their opinion, valuing every contribution, having empathy for different restrictions at partner universities. Encourage team members to voice concerns, restrictions, etc.
- Enable small talk. True connections are built outside of the meetings.
- Talk about shared experiences. This is to ensure that everyone gets to speak and be heard to build connection, be present and sometimes to have laugh.
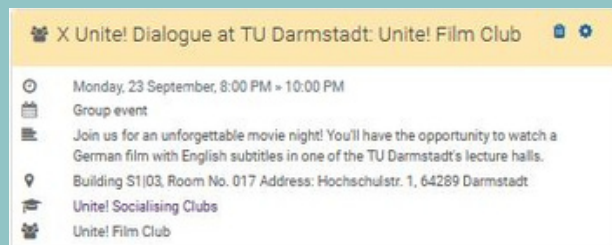- Apply a relaxed and accommodating leadership style.

Need more information?
Contact us!

unite! | University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering

Examples of Good Practices

Using *Metacampus calendar* for setting Unite! Socialising Clubs' activities (used for events during Unite! Dialogues) to help participants remember when activities take place, inform them about the details and promote them.

> **☰ X Unite! Dialogue at TU Darmstadt: Unite! Film Club** 🗑 ⚙
>
> ⏱ Monday, 23 September, 8:00 PM » 10:00 PM
> 📅 Group event
> ≣ Join us for an unforgettable movie night! You'll have the opportunity to watch a German film with English subtitles in one of the TU Darmstadt's lecture halls.
> 📍 Building S1|03, Room No. 017 Address: Hochschulstr. 1, 64289 Darmstadt
> 🏷 Unite! Socialising Clubs
> 🎬 Unite! Film Club

Reusability by Unite! Socialising Clubs: souvenir pins do not have references to specific events, so they can be used for future clubs meetings.

Creating a tradition – Unite! Choir: What started as a fun activity at the IX Dialogue at TU Graz was reintroduced at the X Dialogue at TU Darmstadt.

Sending a post-activity survey to gather feedback from no-shows (by TU Graz):

IX Unite! Dialogue Graz <dialogue-unite@tugraz.at>
do ▾

Dear registered participants of the Unite! Film Club activity,

We are reaching out today to kindly request your feedback regarding the Unite! Film Club activity that took place during the IX Unite! Dialogue, especially if you registered but did not attend the event we are interested to hear from you. Your responses are invaluable for our analysis and will help enhance socialising activities for Unite! staff and faculty in the future.

The survey is anonymous and should only take **up to 5 minutes** of your time.

Survey link: https://survey.tugraz.at/index.php/262456?lang=en

We sincerely appreciate to receive your input **by 22 March 2024, EOD.**

Thank you and all the best,

Disseminating successful new encounters by various channels, both on Unite! and local level (by Unite! Socialising Clubs).

Beyond work packages: Unite! socialising clubs pave the way to a diverse and vibrant community

Launched at the 8th Unite! Dialogue at Wroclaw Tech by the expert community focused on building the Unite! professional community platform by testing socialising activities and preparing a framework.

Diversity and collaboration are at the core of the Unite! community, but daily work within structured work packages often keeps staff members in silos. To unlock Unite!'s full potential as a true community, **fostering peer-to-peer relationships beyond these work package boundaries is essential.** With this goal in mind, Expert Team 6.4 embarked on a mission to identify the needs and expectations of all Unite! staff regarding socializing activities that boost motivation, foster a sense of belonging, and build a sustainable Unite! community.

My Unite! Experience: Joining the Unite! socialising clubs

Two members oft he Unite! Community, namely Benedetta Gennaro et Jessica Retzlaff, have joined Unite! Socialising clubs. Benedetta is a member of the cooking club, and Jessica of the Hiking & Walking club. They share with us their first experience within this framework, in Wroclaw.

Benedetta Gennaro, from TU Darmstadt who is involved in the Unite! expert community focused on diversity, inclusion and wellbeing (Cm. 3) joined the Unite! Cooking Club. Let's hear about her experience:

Need more information? Contact us!