

Beginners Guide to ... Reviving AWIS Branch Meetings



Step One

- Identify a keen “convenor”, a.k.a. a person with good organisational skills and enthusiasm for the task ahead.
- Contact the AWIS National Executive for the AWIS brochure, subscription form, guidance about obtaining the branch grant, etc.
- Provide support for the convenor in the form of at least one other, preferably more, local AWIS members to bounce ideas around together and so that at least TWO people turn up for meetings.

Step Two

- Prepare a mail-out list. Ideally have at least 25 – 30 on the list.
- Consider looking at: old AWIS membership lists (contact National Executive), University/Polytech websites listing Academic Staff, Crown Research Institute websites, local Science Centre, local medical labs/hospitals, Science Teachers Assn., local industry employing scientists.

Step Three

- Organise a “test the waters” meeting
 1. Decide on a venue, eg. local restaurant with good budget-priced menu. NB. Food is always a good draw card.
 2. Send out an email explaining the potential benefits of AWIS branch meetings (see the AWIS brochure for AWIS aims) and give time + date of first meeting.
 3. Ask for RSVP so you can be prepared for the crowd (but expect 5 – 8).

Step Four – First meeting (around food, remember)

- Give everyone a sticky-label name.
- Make a point of talking to each person individually. Yes, you CAN do it, even though you would probably rather not.
- Ask for ideas for meetings, and potential speakers. WRITE THESE DOWN.

Step Five

- After consultation with a few AWIS colleagues ...
- Take the plunge and make some executive decisions:
 1. Venue: central location ? cost ? security/after hours access ? parking ? speaker friendly ?

2. Dates: plan several months ahead and let everyone know so they can keep the AWIS evenings free. Alternating between eg. first Tuesday and first Thursday of the month provides greater opportunity for some with other regular commitments to at least attend every second meeting.
3. Invite speakers: start with people you would like to hear speaking, then it’s easier to do the inviting. Most people will accept their invitation to speak. Speakers? Successful past AWIS meetings have included Forensic scientist, Science Centre visit, Presentation skills (drama lecturer, experienced speaker, HR recommended), Financial Planning, Science talks from AWIS members, science fieldwork in exotic places, science and the media (invite local reporters).

Step Six

- Encourage social interaction and “networking” with regular social activities
- Always give people name tags at meetings
- Begin meetings with an “ice-breaker”
- Allow time for discussion at the end of presentations
- Finish branch meetings with a light supper
- Have a couple of restaurant meetings
- Organise a weekend walk
- Set up a Wine & Cheese evening

Step Seven

- Plan the programme several months ahead so you can let members know what’s happening in the coming months.
- Before each meeting, try to advertise widely:
 1. Make up a poster advertising the speaker and venue details. Use a catchy title (a dull title doesn’t draw a crowd)
 2. Email poster to all members & encourage them to print and display the poster
 3. Post a notice on the AWIS website
 4. Encourage members to bring along a colleague to the meeting

Lastly, don't forget to send in a contribution to the AWIS newsletter so we can all read about your successful meetings and can get ideas for branch activities from each other.