

## Aspiring Leaders' Challenge Event



A one-day event for participants completing an Aspiring Leaders Programme, designed to provide them with the opportunity to practise skills acquired on the programme.

### Aspiring Leaders Challenge Event

In 2018, South East Training was invited by a County Council to put forward ideas for delivery of a Challenge Event for 38 participants who were near to completing a development programme for Aspiring Leaders.

### The Brief

The client specified that the event should:

1. Be based on real public-sector challenges involving: understanding of systems; evidence-based decision making; innovative practices; thinking ahead; cultural considerations; and working as one team.
2. Have a fun feel while facilitating the practice of leadership skills and building confidence
3. Be table-based and involve:
  - The allocation of roles to mirror a service leadership team
  - An evolving brief with surprises and twists
  - Interaction with senior managers, members and 'residents'
  - Feedback based on observation for each team
  - An assessment of the best outcome, while role modelling the behaviours.

South East Training is the trading name of South East Training Network Limited

Registered in England and Wales No: 07221826

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# South East Training

## Our Response

We interpreted the client's requirement as an event that would help participants recognise the importance of collaboration, collective leadership and innovation in resolving complex and intractable problems, whilst allowing them the opportunity to practise skills acquired on the programme.

We initially proposed an event where participants, working in groups of six or seven, considered a local issue by looking at it from several different perspectives, with each group representing a different set of stakeholders.

Two issues were tabled: 1) the location for a new waste recycling facility and 2) the introduction of a new annual sporting event (a marathon). The idea was that the different stakeholder groups should work through the five strategic thinking stages: identify the issue, understand the present, generate options, invent the future, and make it happen, to arrive at a solution that had a broad consensus. The event structure would require the groups to interact and seek innovative solutions to one of these complex problems.

Our solution incorporated ongoing assessment and feedback against the client's Leadership Expectations. We proposed, however, that the assessment of the 'best outcome', a client requirement, should be conducted by the participants themselves following a presentation of ideas by each group so as to preserve the 'one team' ethos, one of their Leadership Expectations.

## Development of the Solution

A scoping meeting with the client revealed that, whilst they were hugely excited by the dynamic nature of the event, they had two concerns: 1) a reluctance to adopt either of the two scenarios, and 2) budgetary constraints. Both issues were resolved during the meeting. A general discussion about the issues then facing the Council identified 'libraries' as a possible option for the scenario, while our solution to the budgetary constraints was to co-opt members of the clients OD team to perform as assessors and take on the role of some of the stakeholders. In total, the client was able to supply nine colleagues to support the event.

Following commissioning, South East Training developed a scenario that engaged participants in deciding how they would best use a derelict building, adjoining the local library, that had been bequeathed to the Council with the proviso that it would be used to enhance and support the work of the library. The brief asked participants, in the role of the library service, to consider how the new space could be shared with other Council services, such as 'Adult Social Care', 'Children, Families and Learning' and the Council's 'HelpShop', whilst meeting the needs of library users, local residents and the trustees of the donor's estate.

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To prepare those involved in running the event, South East Training, delivered a half-day briefing session that replicated part of the Challenge Event and allowed the assessors practice in using the assessment tools we had developed specifically for the event.

On the day, we had 26 participants, allowing us to work with four groups of six or seven. Participants were briefed on the challenge, and worked through the five practical exercises, involving liaison with stakeholders, to arrive at the delivery of a five-minute presentation to the whole group setting out their solution for the building. Additional information fed into the challenge throughout the day provided the surprises and twists required by the client.

## The Participants' Brief

### *The Challenge*

Swanlade Library, located on the high street, occupies a grade 2 listed building. It currently serves a community of 20,000, with 5,000 library members and 70,000 visits a year. Unfortunately, the library is no longer meeting the evolving needs of the community, partly because of its listed status that prevents alterations to the structure, and usage has been declining steadily over the past decade. However, a lifelong supporter of the Library has bequeathed a substantial amount of money to purchase, renovate and refurbish (for library use) a derelict commercial building adjoining the Library.

The Library does not need all the space on offer, so the Trustees are prepared to offer approximately half the area for alternative use, with the proviso that any services offered are compatible with and enhance the library service. An additional £50,000 is available for this purpose. The Trustees will have the final say on the use of the property and expenditure.

During the course of the challenge, you will have the opportunity to speak to representatives of the Trustees as well as both users and local residents who have a vested interest in how the space will be used. You may also speak to three stakeholders who have expressed an interest in using the space: Adult Social Care; Children, Families and Learning; and the HelpShop, a collaboration between the County, Borough and District Councils.

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## ***Project Ideas for the Library Space***

The Library is very keen to enhance its support for the community in line with its Business Plan 2017-

18. Key commitments are to:

- Increase use
- Market its services more effectively
- Shape its services around community needs.

It will meet its commitments by upholding its core values relating to The Library Service's Universal Offer and support for Council's Strategic Goals.

The Library, at present, is failing to meet its income target of £20K per year by £8K, so any usage that could help fill the gap would be preferred.

## **Outcome**

At the end of the challenge we were graced with four highly engaging presentations demonstrating that the participants had indeed taken onboard the different stakeholder perspectives and found innovative solutions for the shared use of the derelict property. The exercise confirmed their understanding of problem solving in complex situations.

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