

Sasol SciFest: promoting a 'culture' of science in South Africa in a festive way

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The National Festival of Science, Engineering & Technology, or Sasol SciFest as it is popularly known, was launched in 1997 in Grahamstown as the first festival of its kind in South Africa. Since then six annual festivals have been held with attendance each year now exceeding 40 000.

Following the screening of a video-film on the most recent festival, Sasol SciFest 2002, attention will focus on the following topics.

Structure and Planning

Sasol SciFest, which enjoys funding from both the private and public sectors, is run by a permanent staff of five assisted by the Grahamstown Foundation's service departments, and some 60-70 temporary workers each festival. Guidance in the development of new ideas and contacts, marketing, and sponsorships is provided by the National Advisory Committee.

Experience has confirmed the need to shift from innovative thinking in the early months of planning for each festival to the establishment and implementation of a clear organisational matrix with inflexible deadlines.

Consultation and Assessment

These two processes will be shown to be essential in getting the greater community to take 'ownership' of Sasol SciFest. The importance of visitor surveys and other mechanisms that ensure that public opinion is 'heard' and incorporated into future planning will be addressed.

Lessons Learnt and Future Thinking

After dealing with such matters as 'peer influence in action', 'the personality that makes a science festival work', 'marketing a new mind-set', and 'passion and planning' the presentation will conclude with a brief consideration of some recent developments in the project.