

Guidelines for designing National Science Week activities

The following are suggestions to inform the activities that can be planned for National Science Week. There will be a focus on one theme per day, but organisations and individuals are not required to adhere to the daily topics or the order of activities. Daily participation is encouraged, but being involved, even just once, is the most important thing.

	Topics/focus areas	Overview
1.	<i>How science, technology and innovation have changed people's lives</i>	Progress in the development of scientific knowledge, technological applications and new and improved products, processes and systems continues to transform the world. Science, technology and innovation have enabled people to deal with challenges in their day-to-day lives in areas such as healthcare, agriculture and communication. Through scientific advances, people have been able to extend their lifespans, improve their living conditions and address societal challenges.
2.	<i>Can science, technology and innovation have negative effects?</i>	Science, technology and innovation can have unintended consequences, or be misused or poorly managed. In such cases there may be harm to the environment, individuals or society, which may lead to a decline in public confidence in science, especially if people do not understand why things went wrong (e.g. the changing advice on the prevention and treatment of Covid-19 as scientists learnt more about it).
3.	<i>Can science be democratised?</i>	For STI to be more inclusive, participatory and responsive to societal needs, and for its benefits to be distributed more equitably, we need better education, greater access to science, technology and innovation outputs, and the incorporation of diverse voices and perspectives (e.g. from indigenous knowledge holders) in research. Citizen science (where scientists and ordinary members of society co-produce scientific knowledge) is another promising way of broadening data collection and democratising science.
4.	<i>Will artificial intelligence take over the world?</i>	Artificial intelligence (AI) has benefits (bringing greater efficiency, reduced human error and the ability to analyse vast amounts of data), but is it developing too quickly and creating new problems for society? There are valid concerns about privacy, job losses, increased inequity and the environmental cost of powering AI.
5.	<i>How do South Africans relate to STI?</i>	Science, technology and innovation can drive economic expansion, employment and higher living standards, but they may also have negative effects, e.g. increasing inequities in service delivery, or harming society and the environment. Some belief systems, political orientations and views on the nature of knowledge can significantly influence people's trust in STI – positively or negatively. We encourage citizens to post videos and statements on social media about whether they trust science, scientists and/or science institutions. Both mainstream media and alternative media are encouraged to conduct random interviews with people to establish their views in this regard. Think tanks are also urged to reflect on the findings of the 2022 South African Public Relationship with Science Survey that were published in December 2024.
6.	Technology and innovation open days	If you are involved in selling or manufacturing high-tech products (e.g. in the automotive, household appliance or biotechnology industries), you are encouraged to invite the public to your business site or set up a special exhibition to showcase your products and the STI behind them.