



EVENT PLANNING

Celebrating your new smartlab

Congratulations on your NEW SmartLab!

After all the planning, it's time to share your SmartLab with the community, sponsors, government officials, school board members, staff, teachers, and students!

Some schools choose to hold a ribbon cutting ceremony while others host open houses where people can get hands-on experience in the SmartLab. Regardless of how you wish to celebrate, this planning guide can help ensure a successful event.



Event Planning

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Pro Tip:

Your team doesn't have to start from scratch! Get prebuilt posters, pictures, and social media & email text templates.

[LEARN MORE](#)

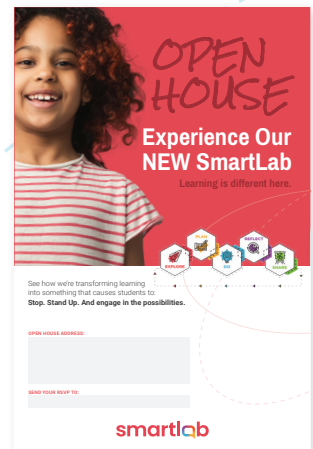
STEP 1:

Gather Your Team

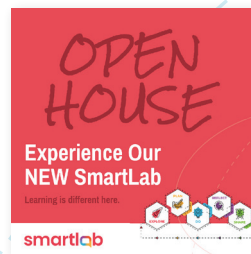
Make the work of planning an event lighter by pulling together a team of people who have both the bandwidth to help and the skillsets you need.

Possible skillsets could include:

- Project planning
- Communication & design (social media, invitations, announcements, signage, website updates)
- Videography and photography
- Logistics (including setup and teardown)
- Hospitality & presentation (including welcoming guests, speaking, and emceeing)



11" X 17" POSTER



SOCIAL MEDIA BANNER



8' X 4' PROMOTIONAL BANNER

STEP 2:

Determine Your Goal

Starting with the end in mind will help you determine the scope of the event. Some possible questions to consider include:

Who is my target audience?

- Current or potential sponsors and donors
- Media
- Board members
- Legislators
- City officials
- Parents

What do I want the outcome to be?

- Get press coverage of the event
- Get press coverage of the SmartLab in action—complete with students engaged in learning
- Increase enrollment by promoting our school's commitment to excellence
- Encourage district administration to commit to putting SmartLabs in other schools
- Inform parents about a new type of learning
- Engage community members in future drop-in learning activities
- Engage state legislators in a conversation
- Secure new donors for our school or others

Pro Tip:

Some Chamber of Commerce or Business Improvement Districts assist with ribbon cutting ceremonies and can often help with planning, provide supplies, and even hire a photographer.

STEP 3:

Establish a Budget

Once you establish the goals for your event, setting the budget will be a little easier. Will you serve food? Potluck or full-on fancy? How many people are you expecting? Do you need formal invitations or just a quick post on the school's Facebook page?

Here are some categories to help you flesh out your budget:

- Invitations
- Postage
- Printing
- Marketing materials
- Food/refreshments
- Caterer
- Rental Items (tables, chairs, tablecloths, microphones)
- Advertising
- Giveaways
- Plaques for sponsors
- Thank-you gifts
- Scissors
- Ribbon
- Photographer
- Videographer
- Entertainment



STEP 4:

Choose a Date & Time

Keep your audience and end goals in mind when you select a date and time.

If media coverage is your goal, reach out to local news teams early to understand their processes and the timing of coverage. If parent engagement is one of your goals, consider an evening event so they can join after work hours. If your goal is to get the mayor to visit, arrange the event with his or her office before firming up your plans.

Most importantly, give yourself time to plan the event. Most events take at least 4 weeks to plan well!

Other considerations:

- Be aware of holidays (religious, state, or federal) and plan around them.
- Consider mid-week events so you don't miss out on folks who are taking long weekends.
- Be aware of city-wide activities like festivals that could conflict with guests' schedules.
- Check with your local Chamber for upcoming events. While you're at it, ask them to add your event to their event calendar and notify potential attendees.



Pro Tip:

Leverage an online tool like Eventbrite to manage RSVPs.

STEP 5: Develop An Invitation List

Don't forget to invite everyone who helped make the SmartLab happen.

Keep your goals in mind as you compile an invitation list, and check with your stakeholders to make sure no VIPs were left out!

A guest list might include:

- Parents and students
- Sponsors and significant financial contributors
- Staff
- Local media
- Contractors, vendors, and others who helped build the SmartLab
- School Board members and staff from other schools in your area
- Local business owners or executives
- Representatives and fellow members from your local Chamber of Commerce
- Key local government officials, and state representatives from your district

STEP 6:

Design & Send Invitations

Your invitation may be the first impression many people have of the new SmartLab—or maybe even your school. Consider designing an invite that echoes your school mission and vision or sets the stage for your event. For a professional look, ask design-savvy colleagues for help or use the prebuilt templates in online programs like Canva.

Types of Invitations:

- Card and envelope
- Postcard
- Letter (formal or informal)
- Email
- Flyer for students to take home
- Social media posts
- Website and blog posts
- Newsletter announcement
- Posters

Information to Include:

- Activity name
- School name and address
- School logo
- Date and time of event
- RSVP instructions (Include the RSVP URL if you're using software like Eventbrite!)

If Mailing Invitations:

Mail your invitations 3–4 weeks before the event and send a follow up email 1–2 weeks in advance.

If you need a specific headcount or want to ensure certain VIPs attend, set the RSVP date for about 1 week before the event. Consider designating a contact person and method of contact to handle incoming questions and RSVPs.

If Emailing Invitations:

Start promoting the event 3–4 weeks before the event and schedule a few reminder emails for those who don't RSVP.

If Inviting Media:

Because your school and STE(A)M are important to your community, your local newspaper or TV station may want to cover your event.

However, remember that editors are often swamped with business community news and may not be able to give you the coverage you're hoping for. To help, chat with your local Chamber of Commerce to see if they can publicize your event to their membership.

Pro Tip:

Use the mail merge feature in your database or spreadsheet program to generate standard mailing labels. Keep the file handy for your post-event thank you notes!

QUICK TIPS:

- **Send invitations to news directors at least 1 or 2 weeks ahead of your event. Include details about the SmartLab and explain why your event is important to the community.**
- **Include a brief letter or news release that contains the journalistic basics (who, what, when, where, why).**
- **Make a follow-up or reminder call the day before the event, and follow up with reporters you haven't heard from the morning of the event.**
- **Designate someone to take candid photos at the event so you can include them in press releases, follow-up messages, and thank you emails.**
- **Assign a volunteer to ask questions and record quotes from important stakeholders.**
- **Write a detailed press release about the event with a few holes to fill in with quotes and photos from the event. Note: Sample press releases are available at the bottom of [this webpage](#).**



Pro Tip:

Is evening student and parent involvement important to your purpose? Serving food makes it easier for families to attend after hours.

STEP 7: Place Orders

Although you may have everything you need to showcase STE(A)M learning in your SmartLab, you may want to consider ordering a few items for your upcoming event, including:

- Ribbon-cutting supplies (i.e., ribbon, scissors, ceremonial carpet, stanchions)
- Banners
- Balloons
- Linens/tablecloths
- Caterers (consider placing food outside of the SmartLab so nothing spills in the new space!)
- Photographer/videographer
- Plaques for sponsors
- Prizes, giveaways, or gifts

STEP 8: Create an Agenda

Whether it's a formal soiree or a casual get-together, publishing and sticking to an agenda will help you accomplish your goals. Just remember, people have short attention spans, so stick to a tight agenda that meets your objectives.

If acknowledging sponsors, make sure to include time to thank them. If engaging parents, start SmartLab demos every 15 minutes. Want to engage your community? Add brochures that promote after-school programs, summer camps, or community drop-in sessions.

If formal speeches will be part of the agenda, it's best to make those assignments 3–4 weeks before the event so speakers have ample time to develop their presentation. Provide them with time constraints and general themes.

Provide your emcee with talking points along with the correct pronunciations of any difficult names.

Finally, check in with speakers periodically before the event to ensure they're on track and ready for the big day!

A basic agenda could include information like:

- Welcome: principal or superintendent
- Explain why the SmartLab was chosen: principal or SmartLab Facilitator
- Introduce sponsor(s), funder(s), principal(s), superintendent, and other VIPs (you may want to provide opportunities to speak as well)
- Cut the ribbon: dignitaries, key administration, stakeholders, and students
- Tour SmartLab: SmartLab Facilitator
- Conclude event: principal

The ribbon cutting often signifies that the formal program is over and creates good opportunities for photography and recording interviews.

To liven up the event, you could include:

- Raffles and door prizes
- Giveaways for all attendees (e.g., bumper stickers)
- Time-lapse video of the SmartLab installation
- Looping footage of fundraising events or other relevant activities
- Hands-on demos of kits or technologies in the lab

Pro Tip:

Ask someone to do a Facebook Live video. After the event, interview attendees to share on your social channels or compile the clips into a video to post on your site or blog.

STEP 9: Set-Up Details

The day of your event is an all-hands-on-deck kind of day! Ask volunteers to help set up so you can be available to meet with reporters, welcome VIPs, and handle any last-minute logistics.

Before guests arrive:

- Check AV equipment (presentations, microphones, speakers)
- Review agenda with volunteers/staff
- Stage the ribbon-cutting space (carpet, ribbon, scissors)
- Set up a “welcome” table with a greeter so attendees can check in and get name badges
- Start and end on time!

STEP 10: Post-Event To-Dos

Immediately after the ceremony, add compelling quotes to your press release and send it (along with pictures of the event) to any news outlets that weren't able to attend.

The following morning, check news outlets (or set up Google Alerts) to identify any news coverage, then repost the items on your school's social media feeds or website.

Send emails thanking reporters, VIPs, and administrators for attending the event—and don't forget to thank the volunteers who helped!

Finally, compile photos, videos, and other items to share online, in a school newsletter, or via social channels.

PRINTABLE CHECKLISTS TO HELP YOU PREPARE EVENT PLANNER CHECKLIST

PRE-EVENT

Logistics

- Designate event planner (if not you)
- Identify team and delegate responsibilities
 - Contact for RSVPs and media contacts
 - Spokesperson
 - Emcee and speakers
 - Parking assistants
 - Greeters
 - Setup and cleanup crews
- Determine goals
 - Identify target audience
 - Determine outcomes and how success will be measured
- Set budget
 - Invitations
 - Postage
 - Printing
 - Marketing materials
 - Food or refreshments
 - Caterer
 - Rental Items (i.e., tables, chairs, tablecloths, AV equipment)
 - Advertising
 - Giveaways
 - Plaques for sponsors
 - Thank-you gifts
 - Ribbon and scissors (if applicable)
 - Photographer/videographer
 - Entertainment
- Select event date and time
- Prepare guest list

Communications

- Prepare media list
- Compile pictures or videos for press releases, blogs, or website
- Write, design, produce collateral
 - Invitations and envelopes
 - Postcards
 - Letters (formal or informal)
 - Emails (use our ready-to-use items)
 - Flyers
 - Social media posts ([use our ready-to-use posts](#))
 - Event on Facebook
 - Website and blog posts
 - Newsletter announcement
 - Posters (use our ready-to-use items)
- Set up RSVP tools (i.e., Eventbrite)
- Prepare press release ([use our ready-to-use posts](#))
- Develop schedule to send invitations, reminder emails, post information on website and social media, and notify media
- Contact local Chamber of Commerce

Event Logistics

- Develop agenda
- Select event vendors
 - Caterer
 - Photographer/videographer (if needed)
- Determine room layout (should you add tables or chairs, shift learning stations, etc.)
- Identify AV or technology needs
- Secure decorations (i.e., ribbon, scissors, ceremonial carpet, banners, balloons, tablecloths)

Media Logistics

- Invite media to attend
- Send press release

DAY-OF AND DURING EVENT

- Communicate arrival time to volunteers for setup
- Check mics/speakers
- Review agenda with volunteers and staff
- Set up ribbon (and carpet)
- Set up "welcome" table for attendees to pick up name badges and/or gifts
- Interview and gather quotes from attendees about the SmartLab
- Photograph attendees and ribbon cutting
- Stream/Post the event live on your social networks (Facebook Live, Instagram Stories)
- Start and end on time
- Breathe and have fun!

POST-EVENT

- Send thank-you emails or cards to speakers, sponsors, and others who attended
- Post pictures/videos of event on social media channels
- Post thank-you posts on social media channels
- Upload videos/pictures on website
- Send post-event press release with images of ribbon cutting to local media contacts
- Send email to parents (include pictures and/or video link(s))
- Send thank-you gifts to sponsors/financial contributors

FACILITATOR CHECKLIST

PRE-EVENT

- Determine goals. What projects align best with the goals of the event?
- Determine agenda for lab tours
- Determine number of stations
- Determine flow of SmartLab tour
- Select three projects that use three Systems of Technology to showcase

DAY-OF AND DURING EVENT

- Use your Facilitator skills
- Manage the clock to ensure attendees rotate through every station
- Breathe and have fun!

POST-EVENT

- Share feedback with event planner
- Forward quotes and/or pictures to event planner

Again, congratulations on your NEW SmartLab!

To help simplify your planning process, be sure to print out the quick reference checklist on the previous pages so you don't have to start from scratch.

