



Your complete guide to planning a speaking event

Planning a speaking event? We're glad to help. SaskTel wants to help local businesses to grow and prosper. So we did extensive research to bring you this step-by-step toolkit to planning an inspiring Saskatchewan speaking event.

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Speakers & Venue

STEP 1

MAKE A BUDGET

Your event budget will guide every decision you make. Budget determines how much you can pay for speakers, venue, and marketing, plus your ticket, food, and drink prices—and whether you'll seek sponsors to cover any of the above.



STEP 2

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE, PICK A THEME

Before you book speakers, ask yourself,

“Who is my audience and what do they want to learn?”

Your mission is to deliver that information to your audience. Create a theme that ignites ideas for your speakers and encourages discussion by your audience. Good themes are brief, inspiring, and broad enough to attract a variety of speakers. Past TED conference themes include The Great Unveiling, The Big Questions, Think Again, and “Icons, Geniuses, Mavericks.”





STEP 3

PICK YOUR SPEAKERS & MC

Rather than just seeking longtime experts, find people with new approaches to established topics—or as TED likes to put it,

“Look for ideas, not speakers.”

Seek out fresh, local ideas that are widely relatable, can change your audience’s perceptions, and that need to be defended with interesting facts, stats, and examples. Start by searching your network of LinkedIn and Facebook contacts and local businesses.

Review profiles, participate in groups, and read or watch the content your contacts have created, such as blog posts, social posts, and YouTube videos.

You can also find expert speakers through Saskatchewan-based speaker bureaus.



KEEP IN MIND:

The best speaking events feature a diverse range of speakers with different ideas and experiences. For your MC, you want a confident host who’s local, a nimble talker, great with introductions, eager to learn the speakers’ topics, and good at keeping the event moving.

STEP 4

MAP OUT YOUR EVENT

To plan the timeline of your event, ask yourself:

- Will your speakers follow each other, one after the other?
- Will your MC interview each speaker while seated?
- Who should speak first?
- Which speaker should close out the show?

Hint: Your two most powerful speakers should open and close your event.

- Will your speakers present videos, slides, images, and/or live demos?
- Will your event have an intermission, workshops, or an audience Q&A?

Allow time for your MC to welcome everyone, announce the night's hashtags, and introduce each guest. They'll also need time to thank your guests, sponsors, and volunteers at the end of the show.

Create a chronological outline using all these notes and time estimates.



PRO TIP:

Give each speaker a time limit. Keynote speakers typically deliver 45-minute speeches, while TED Talks are never longer than 18 minutes.





STEP 5

GET THE RIGHT VENUE

Booking a great venue at a reasonable rate is half the battle. You want a venue in a neighbourhood where your target audience lives, works, or socializes. You also need room for everyone to sit and mingle. So find a venue with enough:

- Seats/capacity
- Room to socialize
- Flexibility for a larger or smaller audience than expected

When you're scouting venues, visit them at a similar time as your event—and preferably when it's hosting a similar-sized event. This will give you a good sense of the capacity, vibe, lighting, and sound levels.

If your venue has experience hosting speaking events, ask about technical problems or challenges that they've solved. Will you provide snacks, drinks, or meals? Be sure to offer non-alcoholic options and plenty of water.

Small businesses in Saskatchewan often host their events in offbeat venues like a guitar shop or coworking space. If your event needs a bigger space, larger events are often staged at Prairieland Park and TCU Place in Saskatoon. In Regina, big conventions and speaking events are staged at Evraz Place and the Conexus Arts Centre.



THE BEST VENUES WILL HAVE:

- Raised stage
- Open layout with clear sightlines
- Video/lighting/audio microphones you can control
- Good accessibility
- Functioning bathrooms
- Easy parking
- Nearby transit

Spread the Invites

STEP 6

PREP YOUR SPEAKERS

Work with your speakers well in advance of your event. Get them to send you their:

- ☐ *Headshot: a high-res close-up shot of them smiling to camera*
- ☐ *Photos of them speaking at other events*
- ☐ *Job title or career/research focus*
- ☐ *Title of their talk plus a brief synopsis*
- ☐ *Two-paragraph thesis that sums up their speech*

- ☐ ***Optional:** Ask them for a 1-page outline that spans the arc of their speech.*

This outline helps you think of complementary speakers, while helping them plan their slides (if they're planning to project images/slides on a screen) and audio/video cues.



TOP TIP:

By assigning this homework, you're setting expectations, gathering content that helps you promote your event, and encouraging structure, brevity, purpose, and passion.

For more info on speaker prep, TED has created an excellent [illustrated guide for their TEDx speakers](#).

STEP 7

DESIGN YOUR LOGO & POSTER

Hire a graphic artist to design a stylish event logo. Your logo should capture the spirit of your event in an artistic way.

Consistency is key—you want the same great logo to appear on your posters, business cards, stickers, or swag bags, and in your press releases, email invites, website, and social media.

STEP 8

CREATE A WEBSITE & FACEBOOK EVENT PAGE

Create a microsite for your event. You can hire a pro to set it up or use free/cheap DIY tools like Wordpress, Wix, or Squarespace.

Next, set up a free event page on Facebook and promote it on your business page. A Facebook event page lets you invite people, and post photos, videos, directions, and a map.

Or you can use a digital event organizer like Eventbrite which will sell tickets on your behalf for a fee.

TOP TIP:

Only use one hashtag. Pick a good, short, unique hashtag that isn't date-stamped, so you can plan future events. Use this hashtag across all your social channels.

Here's what to post on your website and event page:

- Key event details, e.g. Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How to Get There
- A concise and friendly invite that includes the job titles and interests of people who should attend
- Your event hashtag
- Downloadable content (e.g. event poster, speaker headshots, photos of your speakers with quote overlays) for your friends, fans, speakers, and affiliates to share with their communities
- If this isn't your first event, post photos of your past attendees and speakers
- Visual testimonials and quotes from past attendees of your event or attendees of your speakers' past events
- Highlight reel of your previous events

STEP 9

INVITE YOUR AUDIENCE

Sending invites on Facebook is easy—invite your friends and locals who may enjoy your event. Keep in mind: Facebook invites can be easy to miss. There's also the possibility that your target audience aren't (yet) friends with you on Facebook.

Better still, craft a great-looking email invite and be sure to address people personally. Address each person by name, not "To Whom It May Concern." It shows you want to connect with a person, not a corporation. Find people's email addresses on their website or by calling their office.



Don't rely on words alone—embed your event poster, logo, or highlight video. To design an [exceptional speaker event invite](#), add:

- Consistent colour scheme
- Speaker spotlights
- Dynamic GIFs

Remember: You're not just writing an email invite, you're designing one. You can save yourself a lot of time and repetitive work if you use Evite or a pro email marketing service like MailChimp (which is linked with Eventbrite).

Other email marketing services include Campaign Monitor, Constant Contact, Drip, Emma, Kevy, Klaviyo, Rare.io, Remarkety, and SmartrMail.

TIPS ON TONE:

- *Make your invite content hyper-relevant to your audience—speak to their interests, not yours*
- *Be approachable and encourage conversation, avoid broadcasting a one-way monologue*
- *Think about how you can help your audience... and offer them that help*

STEP 10

PUMP YOUR EVENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Get active on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat (if your audience skews younger), and LinkedIn. Create a calendar of posts so you can craft a variety of messages that all point to your website and/or event page.

Optimize your social media profiles by updating your bio copy, adding your event hashtag, and posting a great profile photo that's high-res and optimized for mobile and desktop devices.

Each social medium has different strengths and weaknesses:



Instagram

If you're posting photos or videos, Instagram is the perfect medium. Be sure to post

behind-the-scenes images about your event preparations to your Instagram Stories. This pulls back the curtain to show the hustle you're putting into the event.



Snapchat

You can [design a geofilter](#) to target a young, local audience.

On your event day, users can snap this geofilter to help you create some buzz, which is especially useful if your event happens on a regular basis.



Twitter

Most social media, Twitter included, will let you buy ads or pay to boost your posts. The

great thing about Twitter: your event hashtag creates a centralized conversation to help your event trend locally and nationally. Plus you can use the hashtag to create a live event feed that you can show on a projector or TV.

PRO TIP:

In all your social posts, remember to tag your speakers and MC so they can repost and share with all their friends, followers, and fans.

STEP 10

CONTINUED...



LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an excellent resource for finding business contacts who'd be great to join your audience.



Facebook

For a small investment, [Facebook ads](#) can target specific demographics and neighbourhoods, which is useful for local events. So you can be sure to reach your target audience and get more people clicking and signing up to attend.

For more tips on leveraging LinkedIn for your speaker event, LinkedIn has a free guide to [creating a content marketing tactical plan](#).

6 ways to reach people on LinkedIn and Facebook:

- Post brief status updates with an eye-catching image and link to your event page; test out different posting times to determine the best times for your audience
- Publish interesting and informative articles about your event
- Ask your speakers, partners, and sponsors to write a post or share yours with their networks
- Join an appropriate local Facebook or LinkedIn group, and share a tailored post to your group (provided your group doesn't forbid explicit promotion)
- Create a paid ad that's hyper-targeted to your perfect demographic
- Send direct messages to your friends and contacts—target a few key people who you'd love to attend, and send them personalized notes that are relevant, brief, polite, and friendly



STEP 11

PRESS RELEASE AND EVENT LISTINGS

Craft a strong press release and send it to your local papers and radio and TV stations. Send us your event details, too, so we can include it in our monthly list of [SK business & networking events](#).



STEP 12

DELEGATE

Be clear about your goals and everyone's responsibilities—and empower them to make smart decisions on your behalf.

If you have the budget, you can hire a local event planner. If you'd prefer to organize everything with your phone or device, use an [event planning app](#) like Doodle or Meetup.

There's a lot to do, so get help from:

- Staff
- Volunteers/drivers
- Venue staff
- Video/audio crew
- Photographer—you'll need good promo photos for your next events

STEP 13

DEAL MEMOS

Get your venue deal in writing. If you're paying speaker fees and/or their travel expenses, write up a simple contract that spells out your agreement.

Same goes for your caterers and sponsors. Pay for everything with a single credit or debit card and keep your receipts in a large envelope for tax time.

STEP 14

SCRIPT

Take your event outline and expand it into a script. This script will map out the timeline of your event, including all arrival and departure times for:

- Volunteers and drivers
- Staff
- Sponsor signage
- Caterer: food, beverages, cutlery
- Prizes, swag bags (if applicable)
- Audio, video, lighting, photographer, and projector gear
- MC
- Speakers
- Media interviews and photo ops
- Audience members



Your script will also inform your MC when and how to:

- ☐ Welcome the crowd
- ☐ Explain the night's theme & game plan
- ☐ Introduce each speaker
- ☐ Ask pre-written questions for your speakers and audience
- ☐ Announce the intermission, Q&A, and mingling sessions
- ☐ Give occasional time updates to assure the audience that your event will end on time
- ☐ Thank the volunteers, staff, venue, and sponsors
- ☐ Announce future events and themes

PRO TIP:

This script should also block out the speaking times for your MC and guest speakers, and summarize their speaking topics and supporting images, slides, or videos.



Showtime

STEP 15

LIGHTS, CAMERAS, AUDIO

If you don't film your event, you'll wish you did. Event videos generate excitement, prompt people to attend, and keep them coming back for more. An event video creates a feeling of intimacy, boosting your audience's connection with the speakers, your brand, and each other. Videos also help you attract sponsors, grants, and future speakers.

TED Talks grew famous on the strength of their videos. For all their events, they:

- Release highly shareable videos after each event, both on their website and on YouTube
- Make sure you can clearly see and hear their speaker—they get professional sound recording and use [4+ camera angles](#), so they can edit the videos for length and rhythm

Want to hire a video company instead of shooting it yourself? You can find a Saskatchewan production company through the [Saskatchewan Media Production Industry Association \(SMPIA\)](#) or get a recent grad from a film/video/media production program at the University of Regina or Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

REMEMBER:

- *People notice poor audio before they notice poor video. You need a good sound system.*
- *Get your MC and speakers to sign video release forms, and post a filming notification sign at the venue entrance. Releases allow you to broadcast everyone's faces and voices.*
- *Ask your camera operators to shoot B-roll footage of people chatting & laughing.*

This B-roll gives viewers a feel for the tone of your event.

STEP 16

SET THE STAGE

Think about the look and feel of your entire presentation:

- Do you want the feel of a sit-down Q&A or do you want the look and feel of stand-up comedy?
- Should you bring in comfy chairs, stools, or a podium?
- Will people speak at a mic stand or will they roam the stage with a lapel mic or handheld mic?
- If your speakers will be referencing slides or video (like at [Pecha Kucha](#) speaking events), you'll need a big screen and a powerful projector that doesn't block your audience's sightlines.
- Will you project images or videos around your venue? Some venues let you use their TV screens.

Don't forget to: Rehearse. The day before (or the day of) your event, do a tech rehearsal. Bring your script and all your printed instructions, directions, phone numbers, keys, extra parking permits, seating charts, and guest lists.



ADVICE FROM TED:

Don't use a black backdrop behind your speakers, as they'll get lost in the darkness when you see them on video.

Think about other ways to give your audience a satisfying experience.

Other speaker events have included:

- Music playlists
- Live DJ
- Live musical performances
- Photo booth
- Polaroid photo wall

PRO TIP:

If you're projecting videos, don't stream them or you could risk seeing the dreaded spinning beach ball (the venue's Wi-Fi may not be as fast as our [SaskTel Select Wi-Fi hot spots](#)). Instead, get hi-res copies of your videos, save them all in a single laptop folder, and number each video in order of presentation.



STEP 17

WELCOME AND DELIGHT

Try to welcome everyone so you can make introductions and encourage mingling. Set up an entrance table for your volunteers to manage:

- ☐ Tickets and stamps
- ☐ Comps and guestlist
- ☐ Business card jar to build your email list and potentially hold a raffle draw
- ☐ Media
- ☐ Name tags or “Hi my name is _____” stickers
- ☐ Printed program
- ☐ Seat assignments, where applicable
- ☐ Sign-in sheet for newsletter or video follow-ups.
Before you can email a newsletter to people, you must ask for their consent. Your sign-in sheet needs an opt-in box for them to tick.

DON'T FORGET:

Remember your digital guests, the ones who can't make it there in person. Ask your MC to encourage guests to use your hashtag, check-in, and post updates and photos. Have a crew member post social media updates during the event like photos, videos, and highlight quotes. Get them to tag you, your speakers, and MC.



STEP 18

STAY ON SCHEDULE

Get a digital countdown clock, which you can rent from an audio-visual shop. Also known as event meeting timers, these large-display clocks can be set to any duration you want.

Position the timer on the stage so each speaker has a clear view. You can also prepare large cue cards or use two signals: one signal for the speaker to wrap up, the second for when they need to end it ASAP. If your speaker still goes over time, ask your MC to walk up and stand beside them onstage.



STEP 19

INTERMISSION & MINGLING

Ask the speakers to allow networking time before and after the speech. The more time your crowd gets to spend with your keynote speakers, the more special their night becomes.

Reached the end of your event?
Congratulations!





Highlights & Follow-Up

STEP 20

THANK YOUR SPEAKERS

Speakers are the lifeblood of speaking events, so take good care of them. Ask volunteers to drive your speakers home, to the airport, or to their next event.

Shortly after your event, pay the speaker's honorarium and expenses, thank them again and give them feedback on their talk. Collect feedback from your audience, and share compliments and relevant comments with your speakers.

You want to build a network of experts, so ask your speakers for an endorsement. This means collecting brief, positive quotes about your event, which will help you to attract new speakers and promote future talks.



STEP 21

THANK EVERYONE WHO SUPPORTED YOU

Your event couldn't shine so brightly if it wasn't for your team and community. The morning after your event, post 3 to 4 highlight photos on your Facebook event page, thanking your speakers and guests. Be sure to:

- ☐ Use photo editing software to boost the picture quality and colours
- ☐ Caption each photo with your favourite quotes of the night, and tag each speaker
- ☐ Add a link to your website, where you've posted more photos
- ☐ Keep your note heartfelt and brief. To avoid a large block of text, compose your post in a Word or Google Doc first, so you can break it up with paragraph returns
- ☐ Later that same day, post a second thank you note with more photos and links to your speakers' websites
- ☐ Post a similar thank you on all your social media feeds: Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn
- ☐ By email or Facebook, send private, personal thank you notes to people who attended, sponsored, or helped you, letting them know your event was a success because of them, and then invite them to 'Like' your event page and sign up for your newsletter





STEP 22

VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

The best promo for your next event is a highlight video from your last one. Produce a video for each major speaker, plus a 1- to 2-minute highlight reel of your whole event.

You can learn how to edit your videos by taking online tutorials from [The Beat](#), [Ripple Training](#), [Lynda](#), [Vimeo](#), or [Shotcut](#). But if you'd prefer to hire a pro, you can find a Saskatchewan editor or production company through the Saskatchewan Media Production Industry Association (see p. 14).

How long should your speaker videos run? TED Talks are a good yardstick. Their talks run 10 to 18 minutes—and no speaker, no matter how famous, is allowed to talk longer than 18 minutes onstage.

TED curator, Chris Anderson, explains why:

"It [18 minutes] is long enough to be serious and short enough to hold people's attention [which] works incredibly well online. It's the length of a coffee break. So, you watch a great talk and forward the link to two or three people. It can go viral, very easily."

BE SURE TO:

Use original music in all your videos. Never use an artist's music without permission. You can find hundreds of Saskatchewan musicians and composers in the [SaskMusic directory](#). You can also find royalty-free music online.

STEP 23

PLAN & PROMOTE

Post each highlight video on your YouTube channel, website, and Facebook event pages (both your just-finished event and your next event). Then post your YouTube links in all your social media and your email lists.

Now schedule the dates for your next events. Are they quarterly? Annually? Time your next event to maximize on industry interest or relevant conferences and trade shows—and avoid dates when interest will be low, such as holidays or peak industry weeks.



Congratulations again!

Your speaking event is making Saskatchewan an even better place to live and work.

TOP TIP:

Before you hit 'Post' on Facebook, delete the video's URL from your post once you see the video's metadata (that's the video's caption and photo that automatically appears).



REMEMBER:

Send us your videos and event details, so we can include them in our monthly list of Saskatchewan business & networking events.