



# The Imagination Club Organiser's Manual

Your guide on how to set up a local Imagination Club in your area

## What is the Global Imagination Club

The Global Imagination Club is a world-wide network of people with an interest in creativity and innovation. It comprises on-line discussion fora, web tools, people all over the world who like to share ideas and local imagination clubs for in-person activities..

## What is a local Imagination Club

A local Imagination Club is a group of people who meet on a regular basis to share ideas and participate in experimental activities associated with creativity and innovation. Activities might include workshops, seminars, facilitated discussions, brainstorming events and cultural activities. That said, any imagination club activity should be experimental in nature. For example, a facilitator with a new workshop idea could test it in an imagination club meeting. Someone trying to define a concept could hold a facilitated discussion in order to get ideas from other members of the imagination club.

Meetings should also include time for light refreshment and socialising before and after the activity itself. In Brussels, we hold meetings twice a month in the early evening. This allows people to arrive shortly after work and go out for dinner afterwards if they feel so inclined. You may set a different schedule timing if it better suits local custom.

The organisers may request from participants a small donation to cover the cost of materials, space and location. However, the Imagination Club should not be a for-profit activity.

## Creative Experimentation

Perhaps the most important characteristic of an Imagination Club is experimentation. Workshops, brainstorming sessions and other activities should always be experimental in nature. The imagination club is not a place for seasoned facilitators to give demonstration events in order to build business. However, seasoned facilitators are more than welcome to try out new facilitation concepts – especially radically new concepts – at an Imagination Club event. Likewise, the person who is considering a career in facilitation, but who has never performed is welcome to try out her ideas and skills at the Imagination Club.

It is important that members and participants of your Imagination Club understand this. If they do, they will form the perfect participatory audience who will welcome new ideas yet not intimidate facilitators trying out new ideas. A friendly, sympathetic audience is ideal – and if you promote your Imagination Club as a fun place for creative experimentation, the chances are your members will form such an audience.

On a related note, activities at the Brussels Imagination Club last 90 minutes. This seems to be a good time frame for an experimental workshop or event: long enough to educate, but not so long as to tire people at the end of the day.

## About this manual

This manual includes guidelines for setting up and running an Imagination Club. It is based on the authors' experience running such a group in Brussels, Belgium as well as feedback from people managing similar groups. However, there are few hard and fast rules to running an imagination club. So don't see this document as a rulebook. Rather, look upon it as a guidance for setting up your imagination club. And please give us your thoughts on running an Imagination Club. Our contact information is at the end of this document.

## Getting Started

In order to set up an imagination club, you need determination, participants, a location and facilitators. Let's look at each.

### *1. Determination*

Determination is necessary to get things started. If your heart is not in setting up an imagination club, you have no free time, your children don't remember you or you are lazy, do not even think about setting up an Imagination Club. It is not hard, but it does require determination and a little time on your part. That said, if you can convince a friend or two to help, it will make everything easier for you and more fun for all the organisers. The Brussels Imagination Club is run by two people with regular assistance from other members.

### *2. Members and Participants*

Once you've decided to set up an imagination club, you will want members to populate your mailing list and participants to attend events and help you build your club into something more valuable to all concerned. Here are some suggestions.

1. Set up a mailing list and put your name at the top. Now you're started! Add a friend's name and you've doubled the length of your list. It's not hard, now, is it? Add people's names as they express interest.
2. Start with your friends and invite them to become members. Ask them to invite their friends.
3. Contact local newspapers, what's on magazines, local web sites and other local media. Provide them with a general notice introducing your Imagination Club. And continue to use these media to announce meetings and activities (more below).
4. Contact local groups such as chambers of commerce, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs and other organisations whose members might be interested in an Imagination Club.
5. If you are in a large city with an international population, announce your club on expatriate web sites and newsletters. Expatriates are always looking for new activities. Better still, an international membership adds depth to your group.
6. Ask members to recommend the Imagination Club to their friends.
7. Have your Imagination Club listed on [www.imaginationclub.org](http://www.imaginationclub.org).
8. Encourage members to include links from their web sites to your Imagination Club web site. Designing an “[Your city] Imagination Club Member” logo might help.

### **3. Location**

Your imagination club needs to have a place to meet and perform activities. This location should be very cheap – if not free and be suitable for facilitated events. The authors have had success with a number of different location types.

1. **Restaurant back rooms.** Many restaurants have meeting rooms or group activities rooms which they rent out cheaply and sometimes provide free of charge provided you order refreshments from the restaurant. Such environments are often comfortable and convenient, but may lack facilities a facilitator needs – especially if your activities run more towards workshops, brainstorming and the like.
2. **Businesses.** Some businesses will provide a conference room free of charge, particularly if you offer them something in return such as allowing employees to participate and/or including mention of the business in your announcements, web site, etc. Business meeting rooms often have good spaces for facilitated activities, but may seem too formal for some tastes.
3. **Non-profit organisations.** Many established non-profit organisations have meeting rooms, training rooms and/or classrooms which they will rent out very inexpensively. Better still, they may be willing to promote your imagination club to their members.
4. **Specialised facilities.** Hotels and conference centres can provide high quality meeting spaces – but at a price. Usually, the cost will be prohibitive – and remember, you want your imagination club to be open to people of all backgrounds. But if you can get a good deal, take advantage of it!

### **4. Facilitators**

You and your fellow organisers will probably have to take the lead in facilitating early events. But once you get your imagination club going, you will find participants who are keen to try out their ideas and facilitate activities. At every event, remind people that you are always looking for facilitators. Likewise, when you meet professional trainers, coaches and other facilitators, tell them about your imagination club. A lot of professionals relish the opportunity to try out creative new ideas in front of a friendly audience who will provide feedback.

There are no rules regarding facilitators. At the Brussels Imagination Club, we have had highly experienced facilitators as well as people facilitating their first event. Activities have included traditional workshops, facilitated discussions, brainstorming events, music therapy, laughter workshops and much more. Workshops should not be restricted to topics directly related to creativity. A workshop on accounting can be dynamic and creative if done well.

If the facilitator is not much experienced, you should support her by helping her structure her workshop, offering suggestions and positively encouraging her. While she is facilitating, be prepared to lend a helping hand or suggest a short refreshment break if she becomes stuck.

The only recommendation we make to facilitators is: please try to avoid PowerPoint presentations. Trainers, facilitators, coaches and others have become addicted to PowerPoint slides. Learning to present without slides is a useful creative exercise.

## **Activities**

The Brussels Imagination Club promotes activities on the first and third Wednesday of every month, although we take a break during July and August when schools are out and many families are on holiday. Events start at 18.45 and last until about 21.00 or 21.30 with the actual activity running from 19.00 to 20.30. Often people go to dinner afterwards. Feel free to design a schedule that works for you and your location. But we do recommend similar overall timing to start with. You can lengthen or shorten your events once you gain experience.

Events are held in a variety of locations, always in safe neighbourhoods and near public transportation.

## ***Preparation***

We always serve wine, mineral water and light snacks such as olives, fresh fruit, cheese, nuts and so on. Crisps (potato chips in US English), pretzels and other snacks are also welcome, although we try to encourage healthier snacks to encourage healthier minds. If you are holding your workshop in a restaurant or club which can provide the refreshments, this is convenient. Otherwise, you may either ask the facilitator to bring refreshments – and refund her the costs afterwards – or bring refreshments yourself. We generally invite the facilitators to bring snacks as this encourages variety.

## ***Costs***

In Brussels, we request a donation of €10.00 from each participant – but not the facilitator. This is sufficient to cover the costs of refreshments, room and materials such as markers, index cards, flip-chart paper and so on. If there is money left over at the end of the season, we use it to fund a barbecue or other group event. Hence the Imagination Club is completely non-profit.

Unemployed people, students and anyone who cannot afford the donation may attend for free – and there is no requirement to prove one's unemployed status. We do not want to prevent anyone's participation because they cannot afford to participate or are ashamed they cannot afford it. Moreover, an unemployed person may be able use skills she acquires by participating in the club in order to get work. Wouldn't that be terrific?

## ***Schedule***

Note: we use the term “workshop” below. But a brainstorming event, seminar, facilitated discussion or any other activity could be the “workshop”.

- 18.45-19.00 Participants arrive and are welcomed by the organiser. Wine, mineral water and snacks are served. People are invited to socialise. The organiser should make it a point to welcome each attendee and introduce herself if she does not know the attendee. Quieter attendees should be invited to serve drinks and snacks.
- If seats need to be rearranged, whiteboards or flip charts set up or any other preparation is needed, it should be done at this time. Note: facilitators are strongly encouraged not to use PowerPoint presentations.
- 19.00-19.05 The organiser kicks off the evening by inviting everyone to take a seat. The organiser introduces the concept of the Imagination Club and reminds participants that a donation is requested. If there is any club business that needs to be publicised it should be discussed at this time. Finally, the organiser introduces the evening's facilitator and lets her take over from there.
- 19.05-20.30 The facilitator leads the workshop.
- 20.30-20.45 Workshops are normally completed with a review of the workshop and facilitator. If the facilitator has prepared a feedback form, it may be distributed now and the participants given time to complete the form. Otherwise, the facilitator or one of the organisers should lead an open discussion review of the workshop. This should emphasise positive feedback, but invite suggestions for improvement. Typically, we like to ask the following questions..
- What did you like about this event?
  - What did you learn [or what will you take away from] this event?  
*This is a true evaluation of how effective the facilitator has been.*
  - What could the facilitator have done to make the event even better?  
*Note, we do not ask for criticism. Rather for the audience to think about their criticisms and formulate them into recommendations. This is a much more positive approach that better helps the facilitator improve herself.*
- 20.45-21.00 Invite participants to network, socialise and finish off the refreshments.
- 21.00 The evening's activities are finished. Often people like to continue for a drink or dinner afterwards. The organiser should always announce this and invite people to join her – if she is going out to dinner – or ask someone who would like to go to dinner to take charge.

## Communication

The Brussels Imagination Club has its own web site for providing information about the club, an agenda and contact information. It is very simple. In addition, information about the Brussels Imagination Club is posted on the global Imagination Club's web site at [www.imaginationclub.org](http://www.imaginationclub.org). Please contact us (see below) with details about your Imagination Club so it may be added to the global web site.

In the past, we have used Evite ([www.evite.com](http://www.evite.com)) to send out invitations for each event. However, our communications person has found that Evite has become increasingly user unfriendly and with the 2007-2008 season we will try using Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) for sending invitations. The advantage to Evite or Facebook is that either provides you with a simple, web based tool for sending e-mail invitations and monitoring who has accepted. Moreover, other participants may also see who is attending an event.

Of course you may use other web based tools, e-mail or any other media you wish for announcing your events.

## Responsibilities

There are few responsibilities associated with managing a local Imagination Club. Here they are..

1. **Liability Issues:** At the time of writing this document, the Imagination Club and local Imagination Clubs are simple events organised and sponsored by individuals and participating companies. This may change and we are evaluating turning the global Imagination Club and the Brussels Imagination Club into a non-profit organisation.

You may wish to check your jurisdiction regarding liability and responsibility issues before going forward with your Imagination Club. However, if you are holding events in restaurants, business meeting rooms or non-profit organisations' meeting rooms, you will most likely be covered by the hosting organisation's insurance.

2. **Diversity:** The Imagination Club follows the creative principle that greater variety equals a broader range of thinking, which equals a higher level of creativity. Thus you should actively encourage as wide a range of participants as possible, welcoming people from every cultural, religious, ethnic, sexual and economic background. In Brussels, we are privileged to have a huge international community and Brussels Imagination Club events typically include 15-25 participants of 10-15 different nationalities. Events are held in English as this is a common language.

Intolerance will simply not be tolerated!

3. **Willingness to change.** No aspect of the Imagination Club is set in stone. Evolution and sometimes revolution are necessary to keep your organisation fresh. Stepping down to allow new people manage and apply their new ideas to the club, adopting member suggestions and trying radical new ideas all will make your Imagination Club thrive and grow – and that will help you grow. Adversity to change = adversity to creativity.

## Conclusion

An Imagination Club is a relatively easy club to set up and manage, yet highly rewarding. As an Imagination Club organiser, you will meet new people, learn a great deal about creativity, innovation and other topics and gain useful organisation skills.

As you gain experience, we hope you will keep us informed of your discoveries and provide us with suggestions on improving this document as well as improving local Imagination Clubs as well as the international on-line Imagination Club.

Likewise, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jeffrey Baumgartner and Andy Whittle, the authors of this document and the organisers of the Imagination Club.

## Contacts

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## Notes

This document was written by Jeffrey Baumgartner in August 2007. Please check [www.imaginationclub.org](http://www.imaginationclub.org) for later copies of this document.

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