



Tips, tricks and good ideas

Communication

If you are going to be away for a while, if you are ill and cannot make it for a scheduled class, or if you must stop the program for any reason (sickness, work changes, etc.) you **MUST** let your partner or the EIR office know. This may seem like an obvious fact, but every year a few EIRs and teachers drop off the grid without letting the EIR office or their partners know what has happened to them. Communication is essential to the success of the program – it reflects badly both on the individual and on the program when people disappear, fail to appear at scheduled appointments, or regularly cancel on their engineers or schools.

Staying Connected

As many of you might know, engineers are often on the move. If an EIR has to travel for work, it is important they stay connected to their school. A good way to do this is through email. The EIR can send regular updates on their whereabouts and activities that teachers can share with students. One teacher in this situation commented that her students “enjoyed asking [the EIR] questions and reading his responses.” She thought it was a “great way for us to keep in touch and make ‘real world’ connections.”



Updates



Every so often throughout the year, the EIR office will be sending out requests for updates via email. Please take a moment and drop us a quick line in response, even if you have nothing specific to report. Stories, photos, school newsletters, examples of student work – all are welcomed! We want to hear how the program is going, and it is important that we know if there are any issues so we are able to offer assistance if required. Some of the stories etc. that we collect will also be used in our newsletters (with permission of course!). These newsletters are meant to keep EIRs and teachers connected to what each other are doing, as well as pass on tips and tricks and let everyone know, including our sponsors and stakeholders, of upcoming program news or events.

Spreading the Word

Some of our EIRs have chosen to spread the word of EIR beyond the classroom by producing newsletters that are sent home to parents. Examples of what these newsletters have contained includes notes on what the EIR is up to in the classroom, general explanations of the EIR program, simple science experiments parents and kids can do at home, and notes on upcoming EIR-related events (such as an in-school competition, National Engineering Week, etc.). Getting involved in school outreach like a school newsletter can be a great way to let parents know about the program. Not only does it help parents understand what their children do in school, it also may help them engage them in conversations that can further their interest in STEM subjects. Providing ideas for at-home experiments also gives parents a way to have fun with STEM subjects at home – something that is beneficial both to students and parents.



Stamp of Approval



Students love to have their designs stamped with “engineer approval.” Although you cannot use your official PEO stamps, EIRs in the past have had custom rubber stamps made, made their own stamps at home, or simply bought a red ink “approved” stamp from the dollar store or local craft store.

A Whole School Affair

Over the years, a number of EIRs have involved the entire school in EIR activities. These have included school-wide competitions, activities and presentations such as career talks. An EIR in 2011-2012 got the whole school – from the kindergarten students all the way to the administration staff and principal – to compete in building earthquake-proof structures out of spaghetti and plasticene.



School-wide challenges or presentations can be a great way to bring exposure to the EIR program. It is great when other teachers, administrative staff, and the principal are made aware of the EIR program – it is even better when they themselves can participate in activities and get a taste of what the program offers students. As one of our teachers pointed out, school-wide competitions also inspire effort, innovation, and imagination in students through a healthy level of competition.

Tips on Material Collection: Beg, Borrow and Re-appropriate

Getting resources for EIR activities can sometimes be tough. Luckily veteran EIR teacher Paula Walker has got some pretty good tricks up her sleeve. She shared some of her vast knowledge with us at the Ottawa EIR Orientation in 2011, and now we pass it on to you:



Need some **wood**? Head over to your local paint store – they likely use wooden paint stirrers. According to Paula they usually have a *lot* of extras lying around. Explain that you need some wood for a school project, and they might just give you a whole box!

Need **microscopes, saws or scales**, or other technical equipment your elementary school might not possess? Why not try asking your local feeder high school? Have no fear about asking, Paula says, “High schools love to help out!”

Has there just been an election in your neighbourhood? Ask your local candidates if you can have some of their **election signs** once the campaign is finished. They make excellent building material for a whole variety of projects – and not only that, they “cut like butter!”

Finally, **parents** can be a huge resource. If you need a collection of found materials, like egg cartons, pop tabs, wire or tin cans, then try putting out a call in the **school newsletter**, or via a take-home memo to parents. You’d be surprised the response you might stir up!

Join the Conversation



Ask questions, give feedback or share some tips, tricks and good ideas of your own! Join the conversation on our LinkedIn group (Engineer-in-Residence Program) or on our online Bank of Knowledge forum. Follow us on Twitter (@eirprogram) or check out our online News and Events page for all the latest news. And don’t forget to use our newest resource – *The Brainstorm Crew*, a volunteer crew of knowledge engineers from a variety of industries. To gain access to the Crew, you can post a question on our Bank of Knowledge forum (all members will be notified when something is posted), or you can email a specific Crew member directly through their profile on our website. The forum, the News and Events page, and a list of Crew members can be found at www.eir.ca.