

So You Want to Host an Assembly



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COMMUNITY OS • GUIDE ARCHIVE

FOR ORGANISERS // IACON.UK GUIDES SERIES // READ THIS BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Before you pick a venue or set a date, it helps to know what kind of thing you're building. This is the foundation guide, the one to read before any of the others. It sits above all three tiers of gathering IACON.uk supports, and it exists to help you find the right starting point, and the right pace, for whatever you're picturing.

A quick note before we start. This guide, and the hosting guides that follow it, are aimed at people aged 18 and over. Venues, contracts, money and licensed premises all expect an adult to be responsible, so the guides are written with that in mind. The attendee guides are relevant at any age. One-to-one mentorship is also for over 18s only.

Not 18 yet? The attendee guides are for you. Check each event's age policy with its organiser before you go, as some events are 18+.

01 KNOW YOUR WHY

Moff spent around fifteen years in the Transformers community before ever attending a gathering in person, too nervous to take that first step. That hesitation is why IACON.uk exists. Ask yourself plainly: why do you want to do this?

If your answer is "I just want to meet a few people who like the same things I do," that's enough. You don't need a bigger plan. You can go straight to organising a simple pub meet. The next guide in this series walks you through it.

If your answer is bigger than that, if you're picturing something with real scale or ambition, that's fine too, but it changes what you need to do first. That's what the rest of this guide is about.

02 GAUGE REAL INTEREST

Interest gauging only really matters once money or scale enter the picture. A pub meet with a handful of mates doesn't need market research. Something bigger does.

The simplest version of this is asking open questions rather than trying to guess. When talking to a venue, something as direct as "I might only get ten people, is that okay?" tells you a huge amount, both about whether the venue can flex around uncertain numbers, and about whether they're the right partner for something still finding its feet.

The deeper version, especially once you're thinking past a simple pub meet, is asking the community itself before you commit to anything. Ask what this could look like, and how people would want it to feel, rather than assuming you already know. None of this needs to be complicated or expensive: an open call on a Saturday afternoon, a simple feedback post, a direct question to people about what's worked well for them elsewhere. A gathering built on "me, me, me" isn't really a community gathering, whatever you end up calling it.

03 THE LADDER: THREE RUNGS, ONE PATH

IACON.uk thinks about gatherings across three rungs, each one built on the one before it, and each with its own guide pack once you're ready for it.

RUNG 01 Pub Meet UP TO AROUND 30 PEOPLE The gentlest possible entry point. A booked table, a rough headcount, somewhere to put the word out. If your only goal is meeting people, four attendees in a room is still a genuine win.	RUNG 02 Community Meet UP TO AROUND 50 PEOPLE More moving parts, a bit more planning, but still built on exactly the same relationships and the same instincts a pub meet teaches you.	RUNG 03 Micro-Con UP TO AROUND 100 PEOPLE Think something like TFUKCon, the UK's coziest convention. This is the most complex tier IACON.uk currently speaks to from lived experience, closer to a small convention than a gathering, with guests, traders and a proper running order.
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Three rungs, each one complete on its own, and each one quietly prepares you for the next, if you ever want it.

The ladder doesn't stop at a hundred. It just changes who's guiding you up it. Beyond Micro-Con sit TFNation's own three sizes as it grows, Swindon, then Manchester, then TFNation itself, and beyond that, travelling to a convention abroad. IACON.uk can't fully advise on running something at that scale, that's not lived experience yet, but we still want to help you enjoy it. That's exactly what the attendee pack is for: guides for every rung on this ladder, not just the ones we can teach you to host. These guides aren't only for hosting, either. Once you're the one travelling to a bigger event as an attendee, IACON.uk's attendee guides are there for you as well.

Guides are already being planned for every rung on this ladder, right up to attending TFNation and travelling abroad. And somewhere in amongst them, a look at what an event run entirely under the IACON.uk name might one day look like.

04 WHY A LADDER, NOT A LEAP

It helps to know why the ladder exists at all, rather than everyone simply starting at whatever size event they're picturing in their head.

A big, established organisation can launch something ambitious and be fairly confident it'll work. People already trust the name. The team's done this before. There's a track record of turning promises into delivery, and an audience who'll show up without needing convincing. Starting from a standing start, none of that exists yet, and that's fine, it's just where everyone begins.

The ladder is how you build all of that, on purpose, at a pace that doesn't put you at real financial or personal risk. A pub meet costs you almost nothing to try and teaches you an enormous amount. A community meet lets you test a little more ambition once you've already proven the basics to yourself. By the time a bigger step is even worth considering, it's being taken on the back of real experience and a real safety net, not a guess.

Keep your first event as close to risk-free as you can make it. That's not playing small, that's playing it smart.

05 PATIENCE IS THE PLAN

Growth that lasts takes longer than it feels like it should. That's the point.

Every stage teaches you something the next stage needs. Skip a stage and you skip the lesson. You don't have to pick a lane forever, and you don't have to know today whether you'll ever want to climb higher. It's completely fine to stay exactly where you are, for one gathering or for ten. Small is a perfectly good permanent size, and slow building beats a big first swing that burns you out before you've even found your feet.

06 THE PERSON AT THE DOOR

The person on the door is often someone's first interaction with your event. Make it the right one.

Whatever size event you're running, ask yourself one question: could someone here play the meeting-at-the-door role for a nervous first-timer, someone who's never met any of you before and is one bad five minutes away from walking straight back out?

At pub meet scale, that's naturally you, the host. At community meet scale, it's worth deliberately naming a second person for this job, so it doesn't fall through the cracks when you're pulled in ten directions. At micro-con scale, it needs to be an actual named team responsibility.

// CLOSING NOTE

That's the shape of the thinking before you book anything, and it should help you decide which path to follow. In the appendix, I've shared what I think I'd do if I were starting fresh tomorrow.

As for our path: we're starting on the first rung, the pub meet, with guides detailing each step of the way, accompanied by attendee guides for the same level. We'll then move on to explore the community meet and micro-con levels in the same detail.

If you've read this and already have an idea taking shape, that's one of the stages Moff loves most. He'd be thrilled to hear about it, so why not get in touch for a virtual coffee and a chat at moff@iacon.uk.

IF I Were Starting From Scratch

A worked example for this guide, written in the first person, because it's easier to follow a real train of thought than a list of rules.

Imagine it's the first of January, 2027. No ticket sales, no attendee list, no audience, nothing at all. The ambition is to eventually reach micro-con scale, around a hundred people. Here's what I'd do, with the benefit of hard-won experience.

- 01 Pick somewhere close to home.** I'd choose a location I can physically get to, somewhere I can visit the venue, build a relationship with the staff, and keep control of the details in a way that just isn't possible organising something two hundred miles away.
- 02 Spend two to three months listening before I plan anything.** I'd set up a page or group and ask people what they'd want. This can all be virtual, calls, messages, whatever suits. I'm trying to answer two questions: is there a real audience here, and what do they actually want? We already know what other UK gatherings look like. If I want to be something different, that's fine, but I need to be sure that difference is what the audience wants, not just what I want. A preference that only exists in my own head won't sell tickets. This listening period also surfaces the people who'd like to help, and that matters to me, because the weight shouldn't all sit on one pair of shoulders.
- 03 Make the first event a pub meet. Nothing more.** I'd plan for around twenty people, book a space, and keep the bar deliberately low. I know this works because it's exactly how the Newcastle Transformers the Show meetup was built. When that idea first came up, people getting together to watch the film, the honest measure of success I set was four people. If four turned up, that's four more people to talk about the movie with, and a drink with friends. A genuine win. It ended up exceeding expectations, but the point is I designed it so it couldn't really fail.
- 04 Talk straight with the venue, and start building a relationship, not just booking a room.** I'd book space for roughly twenty, and check they're relaxed if only ten turn up, with no minimum spend or restriction. I'd ask what happens if thirty appear. And I'd be upfront with them about what I'm trying to build, not just what I'm booking this once, because if they know my ambitions, they might be willing to grow with me. A venue that can support me up to community meet scale could end up being my home for a good long while.
- 05 Spend the day itself talking to people.** I'd thank everyone for coming, because they took a chance on an unproven event. I'd ask what they enjoyed, what they'd change, what they'd want next time. I'd give them a route to reach me afterwards, and invite feedback once they've had time to think. I'd ask about timing too, because where these things sit in the calendar is a perpetual challenge.
- 06 Let the feedback set the pace.** I'd walk before I run. I might find that a pub meet every three months is more enjoyable and scratches the itch better than one bigger event a year. Everyone's why is different. For me, the community side appeals far more than being able to say I ran a particular event.
- 07 But I'd follow the momentum if it's there.** If the appetite points to something bigger, I'd lean into it. Move up to the community meet tier, around fifty people, maybe with a trader, some prizes, a few treats. Take it up a level of experience. And once community events are consistently going well, then look at the hundred.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

I'd hold growth back on purpose. There are lessons I'd only learn by going through the numbers in between, not by skipping straight to the end one. Grow slowly, but grow purposefully.