

Simulation Tutorial

Anyssa Navrer-Agasson and Joe Bateman

10th LArTPC Software Workshop - 27th October 2025



What you will be learning?

- 1. What a FHiCL file is and some basic syntax.
- 2. How to write your first FHiCL file to begin simulating particles.
- 3. How you can use lar to run your simulation.
- 4. To use Geant4 and lar to propagate your particles.
- 5. To simulate the detector response.

By the end of this tutorial, you should have generated a sample of 10 1 μ 1p events up to the detector simulation stage. This is a sample you'll be using in subsequent tutorials.

This tutorial is heavily inspired by the previous tutorials of Rob Derby, Luis Mora Lepin, Marina Reggiani-Guzzo and Aran Borkum. Thank you!



What is a FHiCL?

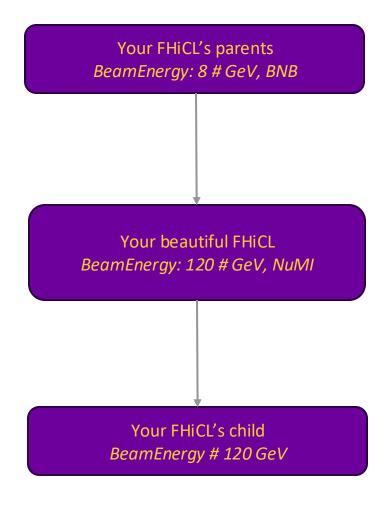


The University of Manchester What is a FHICL?

- FHiCL (pronounced "fickle") stands for Fermilab Hierarchical Configuration Language to configure software built on art, such as LArSoft.
 - Hierarchical refers to how FHiCL files inherit variables from "parent" FHiCLs.
 - **Configuration** describes how FHiCLs can **modify the variables** of your simulation tools without needing to recompile.
 - Language FHiCLs have their own specific syntax, taking elements from JSON, C++ and python.
- They appear across the simulation chain and are identified by the .fcl extension.



- FHiCLs allow us to avoid hardcoded variables in each LArSoft module you use.
- You can inherit and modify variables from parent FHiCL files, without needing to recompile
- Parameters will persist across a chain of FHiCLs and from simulation through reconstruction to analysis code.





The University of Manchester What will you need?

- This tutorial will require a workspace with sbndcode, and the workshop branch uk_larsoft_workshop_2025 checked out and set up.
 - Refer back to Rachel's tutorial for more details!
- Starting from a fresh environment:
 - Start the container using:
 source /scratch/LAR25/useful/container.sh
 - You likely made a setup script in the previous session (setup.sh) in your LArSoft directory. Use source setup.sh to run the script, or use the following commands:

```
source /cvmfs/sbnd.opensciencegrid.org/products/sbnd/setup_sbnd.sh
source localProducts_*/setup
mrbsetenv
mrbslp
```

(a copy of this script can also be found here: /scratch/LAR25/setup/setup.sh)



Parameters:

- You can define integers, floats and strings as parameters.
- Both C++ (//) and pythonic (#) style comments can be used to make your variables clearer.

Sequences:

- Sequences can take the same and mixed types of input, including other sequences!
- You can also override elements of a sequence.

```
pi: 3.14159 // This is a C++-style comment
beam: "BNB" # This is a python-style comment
output_name: "hello_world.root"
```

```
Seq1: [1, 2, 3]// Sequences can be single type
Seq2: [1, [2.3, "Gaussian"]] // Or mixed type
Seq1[2]: 3 // And elements can be overridden
```



Tables:

- We can define a table using curly braces and can assign entries to a mix of types.
- Entries can be overwritten similarly to a sequence.
- Splicing tables:
 - Tables can be spliced together using @table::name.
 - Spliced tables inherit the entries each table called, in addition to any newly defined entries.

```
tab1:{
pi: 3.14159
beam: "BNB"
seq1: [1, [2.3, "Gaussian"], 4]
// Entries can be overwritten by name
tab1.beam: "NuMI"
// Tables can also be spliced together
tab2: {
@table::tab1
n: 100
beam name: tab2.beam // Inherited from tab1
```



The University of Manchester FHICL Syntax

Prologs:

- We can use prologs to define useful configuration values that we may want to reference later, or in subsequent files.
- If these configurations are defined in beam_config.fcl, we can use #include to inherit the prolog.
- Then those configurations can be called using@local::<var>.

```
BEGIN PROLOG
    bnb: 8 // 8 GeV beam
    numi: 120 // 120 GeV beam
END PROLOG
BeamEnergy: @local::numi
```

beam config.fcl

```
BEGIN PROLOG
    bnb: 8 // 8 GeV beam
    numi: 120 // 120 GeV beam
END PROLOG
```

your working_fhicl.fcl

```
#include "beam config.fcl"
BeamEnergy: @local::numi
```



The University of Manchester FHICL Configurations

- You may be beginning to see why prologs are useful:
 - Instead of repeatedly defining parameters, we can define everything in higher level FHiCLs and inherit.
 - This leaves us with tidier files and information/parameters unified between workflows.



Creating a FHiCL file



The University of Manchester Getting started

- Now we've reviewed some of the syntax, we'll learn how to write a FHiCL that can be run by LArSoft.
- To begin, make a new working directory in your home folder and use your preferred text editor to create a new file called sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl.

```
cd $HOME
mkdir simulation_tutorial
emacs -nw sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl
```



- FHiCL files that run with LArSoft have the same basic structure, with specific fields to be filled out:
 - Include: Import other FHiCLs you need.
 - Process name: Name this set of modules.
 - **Services**: Define the simulation-specific services required.
 - Source: Define your FHiCL inputs.
 - **Physics**: Declare and configure the modules that will be run.
 - Outputs: Specify outputs of the FHiCL.

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



Include

- These behave as you have seen earlier, telling your FHiCL what files to inherit from.
- For this example, we should include the following FHiCLs:

```
// experiment specific configurations
#include "simulationservices_sbnd.fcl"
#include "messages_sbnd.fcl"
// configuration files containing prologs
#include "singles_sbnd.fcl"
#include "rootoutput_sbnd.fcl"
```

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



Process name

- This defines the name for the collection of modules this FHiCL will run.
- This name should be unique, as the same process cannot be run multiple times over the same art-root file.
- The aim of this tutorial is to generate single particles, so you should call this process SingleGen

```
process_name: SingleGen
```

```
#include
process_name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



Services

- The services table defines the simulationspecific services that are generally needed.
- This could include detector geometry, physical properties or file management.
- For this tutorial, we need SBND-specific service configuration, and a root output:

```
services:{
    @table::sbnd_simulation_services
    TFileService:{
        fileName:"hist_prod_single_sbnd.root"
    }
}
```

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



Source

- This table contains all information regarding the input that this FHiCL will take.
- module_type: EmptyEvent tells the FHiCL to begin with an empty event, as we are at the starting point of the simulation.

```
source:{
    module_type: EmptyEvent
    timestampPlugin:{
        plugin_type:
        "GeneratedEventTimestamp"
}
```

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



- maxEvents: 10 sets the default number of events to simulate. A value of -1 will process every event in an input.
 - This can be overwritten at execution.
- firstRun and firstEvent dasg set the default start values for run and event.

```
source:{
    module_type: EmptyEvent
    timestampPlugin:{
        plugin_type:"GeneratedEventTimestamp"
    }
    maxEvents: 10
    firstRun: 1
    firstEvent: 1
}
```

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



- Physics
 - This table declares and configures the modules that will be run over the input.
 - These are split into producers, analyzers and filters.
- **Producers:** modules here add information to the art-root file
 - Modifies the input file.

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



- Analyzers: Perform analysis using the input file without modifying it.
- **Filters**: Removes files we aren't interested in.
 - Modifies the input file.

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



- Configuring modules:
 - **simulate**: Declare the order to run producers.
 - **Stream1**: Define the art-root output stream of the FHiCL

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



- Configuring modules:
 - **trigger_paths**: lists everything that will modify an event (producers & filters)
 - end_paths: lists everything won't modify an event (analyzers and outputs).

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



Outputs

- This table declares where the output of the FHiCL should go.
- Notice that the output has the same name (out1) as was defined in stream1.
- The lines in out1 inherit the rootoutput table and define the name of the output file (overwritable at execution).

```
outputs:{
    out1:{
        @table::sbnd_rootoutput
        fileName:
        "prodsingle_sbnd_%p-%tc.root"
    }
}
```

```
#include
process name:
services: {
source: {
physics:{
outputs:{
```



The University of Manchester Your first FHICL

 With all these building blocks in place, your FHiCL file should look like this:

```
// experiment specific configurations
#include "simulationservices sbnd.fcl"
#include "messages sbnd.fcl"
// configuration files containing prologs
#include "singles sbnd.fcl"
#include "rootoutput sbnd.fcl"
process name: SingleGen
services:{
   @table::sbnd simulation services
   TFileService:{
         fileName:"hist prod single sbnd.root"
source:{
   module type: EmptyEvent
    timestampPlugin:{
         plugin type:"GeneratedEventTimestamp"
   maxEvents: 10
   firstRun: 1
    firstEvent: 1
```

```
physics:{
     producers:{
         rns: { module type:
               "RandomNumberSaver"
         generator: @local::sbnd singlep
     analyzers: { }
     filters: {
     simulate: [rns, generator]
     stream1: [out1]
     trigger paths: [simulate]
     end paths: [stream1]
outputs:{
     out1:{
          @table::sbnd rootoutput
          fileName:
          "prodsingle sbnd %p-%tc.root"
```

Note: a copy of this file can be found here: \$MRB_SOURCE/sbndcode/sbndcode/Workshop/TPCSimulation/sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl



Task 1: Running your first FHiCL

• Now you have a simple FHiCL to simulate, how do we run it? If you've setup sbndcode in your container, you will have access to the lar command. To use it with your FHiCL, using the -c (--config) option:

lar -c sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl

- If your FHiCL is formatted correctly, once the command has finished running you will see an event summary and the "Art has completed and will exit with status 0" message.
- You can also use options to override some of the parameters defined in your FHiCL:
 - -n (--nevts): specify the number of events to process.
 - -o (--output): set the name of the output file.
 - -s (--source): specify which file to take as an input.
 - You can get a full list of options by using lar --help



Modifying your FHiCL



The University of Manchester What is being simulated?

- This FHiCL can now be run by LArSoft, but what is it simulating?
- We can begin to work that out by looking at the FHiCLs we import into sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl using find_fcl.sh
 - A copy of the script that you can copy to your home directory lives here:
 \$MRB_SOURCE/sbndcode/sbndcode/Workshop/TPCSimulation/find_fcl.sh
 - Copy the script into your working directory and use it to find singles_sbnd.fcl:

```
source find_fcl.sh singles_sbnd.fcl
```

- This will return the path to the FHiCL in your LArSoft install directory, which
 you can open using your preferred text editor.
- Take a look inside and see if you can spot what particle is being simulated (you may need to identify another FHiCL to investigate!).



The University of Manchester Singles_sbnd.fc

- Opening the file, you'll see a prolog like this.
- In the FHiCL we can see some of the parameters that we can modify, such as:
 - Initial energy: P0
 - Initial time: T0
 - Initial position: X0, Y0, Z0
- However, we still don't know what particle we're simulating.

```
#include "singles.fcl"
BEGIN PROLOG
sbnd singlep: @local::standard singlep
# Particle generated at this time will appear in main drift
window at trigger T0.
physics.producers.generator.T0: [ 1.7e3 ] # us
physics.producers.generator.P0: [ -1.0 ] # GeV/c
physics.producers.generator.SigmaP: [ 0.0 ] # GeV/c
physics.producers.generator.PDist: 0
physics.producers.generator.X0: [ 150.0 ] # cm
physics.producers.generator.Y0: [
                                 150.0
physics.producers.generator.Z0: [ -50.0
physics.producers.generator.Theta0XZ: [ 15.0 ] # degrees
physics.producers.generator.Theta0YZ: [ -15.0 ] # degrees
physics.producers.generator.SigmaThetaXZ: [ 0.0
physics.producers.generator.SigmaThetaYZ: [
END PROLOG
```



- We can look further back by opening singles.fcl: source find_fcl.sh singles.fcl
- What we're looking for is the Monte Carlo PDG code of the particle being simulated:
 - We can find the name of the particle the code corresponds to using the list outlined here: https://pdg.lbl.gov/2024/reviews/rpp2024-rev-monte-carlo-numbering.pdf



singles.fcl

```
BEGIN PROLOG
standard singlep:
module type: "SingleGen"
ParticleSelectionMode: "all" # 0 = use full list, 1 = randomly
PadOutVectors: false
# true: pad out if a vector is size one
PDG: [ 13 ] # list of pdg codes for particles to make
P0: [ 6. ] # central value of momentum for each particle
SigmaP: [ 0. ] # variation about the central value
PDist: "Gaussian" # 0 - uniform, 1 - gaussian distribution
X0: \begin{bmatrix} 25. \end{bmatrix} # in cm in world coordinates, ie x = 0 is at the wire
Y0: [ 0. ] # in cm in world coordinates, ie y = 0 is at the center
of the TPC
Z0: \begin{bmatrix} 20. \end{bmatrix} # in cm in world coordinates, ie z = 0 is at the
T0: [ 0. ] # starting time
```

```
SigmaX: [ 0. ] # variation in the starting x position
SigmaY: [ 0. ] # variation in the starting y position
SigmaZ: [ 0.0 ] # variation in the starting z position
SigmaT: [ 0.0 ] # variation in the starting time
PosDist: "uniform" # 0 - uniform, 1 - gaussian
TDist: "uniform" # 0 - uniform, 1 - gaussian
Theta0XZ: [ 0. ] # angle in XZ plane (degrees)
Theta0YZ: [ 3.3 ] # angle in YZ plane (degrees)
SigmaThetaXZ: [ 0. ] #in degrees
SigmaThetaYZ: [ 0. ] #in degrees
AngleDist: "Gaussian" # 0 - uniform, 1 - gaussian
random singlep: @local::standard singlep
random singlep.ParticleSelectionMode: "singleRandom"
argoneut_singlep: @local::standard singlep
microboone singlep: @local::standard singlep
microboone_singlep.Theta0YZ: [ 0.0 ] # beam is along the z axis
microboone singlep.X0: [125] # in cm in world coordinates, ie x = 0
microboone singlep.Z0: [50] # in cm in world
Coordinates
END PROLOG
```



- We can learn a few other things from this file:
 - module type: SingleGen refers to a module in already in LArSoft, which this FHiCL calls. The module is a C++ file with functions called over the input event, and you can learn more about it here.
 - We now have the full list of parameters defined in the standard singlep table, including the PDG sequence. By default, singles.fcl will produce a single 6 GeV muon but, as you may recall, this can be overridden.
- Note: this isn't the only way to get a list of parameters defined in a FHiCL:

```
fhicl-dump sim tutorial gennon0 T0.fcl >
sim tutorial gen.txt
will write the full list of parameters to a text file.
```



The University of Manchester Modifying your output

• Example 1: If we want to replace the muon with an electron, leaving everything else untouched:

```
sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl
physics.producers.generator.PDG: [ 11 ] // overwriting the muon with an electron
```

 Example 2: What if we want to produce multiple particles in a single event? We could try adding another PDG code to the sequence:

```
sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl
physics.producers.generator.PDG: [ 11, 13 ] // electron and muon
```

But would that work as we might expect?



The University of Manchester Modifying your output

- We're now missing entries for several parameters.
 We can fix this by:
 - Assigning a second entry for each parameter.
 - 2. Setting
 PadOutVectors:
 True, repeating single
 entries for all particles
 defined in the PDG
 sequence.

Running sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fc1 currently:

```
%MSG-s ArtException: SingleGen:generator@Construction 20-Oct-2025 07:40:40 CDT
ModuleConstruction
cet::exception caught in art
---- SingleGen BEGIN
  The P0,
  SigmaP,
  X0,
  Y0,
  Z0,
  SigmaX,
  SigmaY,
  SigmaZ,
  Theta0XZ,
  Theta0YZ,
  SigmaThetaXZ,
  SigmaThetaYZ
  T0,
  SigmaT,
   vector(s) defined in the fhicl files has/have a different size than the PDG vector
   and it has (they have) more than one value,
   disallowing sensible padding and/or you have set fPadOutVectors to false.
---- SingleGen END
%MSG
Art has completed and will exit with status 65.
```



The University of Manchester Modifying your output

- We can also combine these two solutions and only modify select variables.
- Example 3: We want to produce two particles, a 0.7 GeV electron and a 0.8 GeV muon, that are otherwise identical. We could instead modify our FHiCL to include:

```
sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl

physics.producers.generator.PadOutVectors: true
physics.producers.generator.PDG: [ 11, 13 ] // electron and muon
physics.producers.generator.P0: [ 0.7, 0.8 ]
```

This will now run and produce the particles and energies that we expect.



Simulation workflow



The University of Manchester Simulation workflow

- The simulation chain in LArTPC experiments generally follows the same three-stage structure:
 - Particle generation
 Simulation of the primary particles being looked at.
 - Particle propagation
 Handling of how these particles propagate through argon.
 - Detector simulation
 Simulating how the detector responds to charge and light generated inside the detector.



The University of Manchester Particle generation

- Typical LArSoft generators include:
 - **Single particle gun**: Like the FHiCL we just created, this generator simulates single particles by specifying time, position and kinematics.
 - **GENIE:** Typical neutrino interaction generator, provided an input flux.
 - CORSIKA: Cosmic ray simulations.
 - MARLEY: Low energy neutrinos, such as supernova and solar neutrinos.
 - **TextFileGen:** Simulate particles based on an input text file (ie. in the hepevt format), typically the output of a BSM generator.
- After this stage, the ART-ROOT file will typically include a number of simb::MCTruth objects.







The University of Manchester Particle propagation

- Output products of the generation stage are now propagated through the detector volume using Geant4.
- This handles the simulation of ionization, decays, argon interactions and showering that is seen as particles traverse a volume of argon.

After this stage, the ART-ROOT file will typically include a large number

simb::MCParticle objects.





Detector simulation

- This stage simulates the detector response:
 - Wire response to charge across each plane.
 - PMT response to light more details tomorrow.
- We now have additional recob::wire and raw::OpDetWaveform objects in our ART-ROOT file, the simulated detector response to our input.



The University of Manchester Simulation workflow

- These stages each have an associated FHiCLs to use. For this tutorial, these will be:
 - Particle generation
 sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl, the FHiCL you made earlier.
 - Particle propagation
 g4_workshop.fcl, included in your LArSoft build.
 - Detector simulation detsim_workshop.fcl, also included in your LArSoft build.
- Each experiment will have its own version of these simulation FHiCLs. In the case
 of SBND, they are called standard_g4_sbnd.fcl and
 standard_detsim_sbnd.fcl

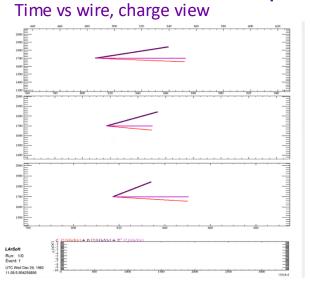


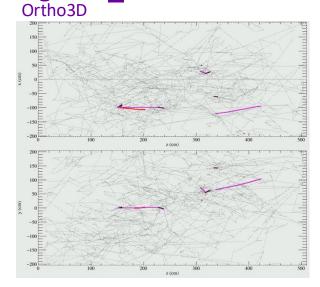
The University of Manchester Checking your outputs

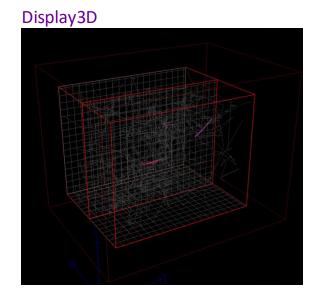
 Once you've run through the simulation chain, it can be useful to inspect your generated events by eye:

lar -c evd_sbnd.fcl -s your_detsim_output_file.root

There are three view options using evd_sbnd.fc1:







 If each stage has run correctly, you should be able to see the paths your particles traced through the detector, each labelled by color.



The University of Manchester Checking your outputs

- If you are working on a Fermilab GPVM in future and want to look at an event display, it's easiest to set up a VNC to view it.
 - Useful instructions on how to do this are available on the SBN software wiki.
 - Alternative event display tools are also available, such as <u>TITUS</u>, but are beyond the scope of this tutorial.



Running the simulation



Task 2: Simulating 10 events

- Now we've gone through the simulation chain from generation to detector response, it's your turn to simulate some events.
- To start, try simulating a single particle for each event.
- Remember that the output of each step will be the input of the next!



The University of Manchester Simulating 10 events

Solution:

- In sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl:
 - physics.producers.generator.* sequences should contain one entry each.
- In the terminal:

```
lar -c sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl -n 10 -o output_gen.root
lar -c g4_workshop.fcl -s output_gen.root -o output_g4.root
lar -c detsim_workshop.fcl -s output_g4.root -o output_detsim.root
```

Try using evd_sbnd.fcl and have a look at the events you've generated.



The University of Manchester Main Task: Simulating 1µ1p

- The goal of this tutorial is to simulate 10 events, each with 1 muon (13) and 1 proton (2212). To do this, you'll need to modify sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl to meet the following requirements:
 - Muon: momentum = 0.7 GeV/c; theta_xz = -10 deg; theta_yz = 0 deg
 - Proton: momentum = 0.7 GeV/c; theta_xz = 35 deg; theta_yz = 10 deg
 - Start position for both particles (x,y,z) = (-100,0,150) cm
 - Starting time T0 for both particles = 1600 ns
 - Set all variations (vertex position, momentum, angles and time) to 0
 - Set all distributions to "uniform" (vertex position, time and angle)
 - Set particle being created from the same vertex: SingleVertex: True

If you're running low on time, a FHiCL meeting these requirements can be found here:

\$MRB_SOURCE/sbndcode/Workshop/TPCSimulation/.solutions/sim_tutorial_gen_non0_T0_complete.fcl



The University of Manchester Main Task: Particle gun

 Once you've modified sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl, use lar with your FHiCL:

```
lar -c sim_tutorial_gennon0_T0.fcl -o output_gen.root -n 10
```

You can quickly check the output file using:

```
lar -c eventdump.fcl-s output_gen.root -n 1
```

Hopefully, you'll see the expected simb::MCTruth object in the output.



The University of Manchester Main Task: G4 and DetSim

The next stages will be the same as previously:

```
lar -c g4_workshop.fcl -s output_gen.root -o output_g4.root
lar -c detsim_workshop.fcl -s output_g4.root -o output_detsim.root
```

• Once again, you can use eventdump.fcl to check that you have the products you expect in output_detsim.root.

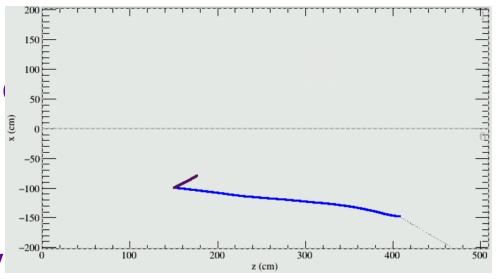


The University of Manchester Main Task: Visualising events

You can also check your sample using:

```
lar -c evd_sbnd.fcl -s
output_detsim.root -n 10
```

- If everything has gone correctly, you should see something like this:
- Once you're happy with your output, simulate another 10 events, adding a gaussian variation to theta_xz and theta_y





The University of Manchester Bonus Tasks

- If you manage to create a 10 event $1\mu1p$ sample matching the specifications outlined and gaussian angle variations, why not try the following:
 - Simulate 1e1p events:
 - Repeat the steps of the main task, replacing the muon (13) with an electron (11).
 - Can you distinguish the electron shower on the event display?
 - Getting closer to a "real" event:
 - Try generating a further 10 events with 1 muon and 1 proton, but now with 5 additional muons (cosmic rays) distributed randomly over the detector volume.
 - After running up to the detsim stage, what does your event look like now?

MANCHESTER 1824 The University of Manchester IMPERIAL (Bonus) Bonus Tasks

- Rather than using a particle gun to create our cosmic rays, we can use Corsika to generate muons for us.
- Generate 10 cosmic events using Corsika with this FHiCL: prodcorsika_cosmics_proton_sbnd.fcl*
 - After the geant4 and detsim stages, does the event display look different to your previous tasks?
- Generate 10 neutrino and cosmic events using this FHiCL: prodgenie_corsika_proton_nu_spill_tpc_sbnd.fcl
 - How does this compare to your previous neutrino + cosmics sample?

^{*} If you want to use this sample with later tutorials, try using prodcorsika_proton_intime_sbnd.fcl - This filters out cosmics that are not in time with a beam spill, so you'll need to start with a larger number of events (ie n=50, 100)



- Feel free to ask Joe or Anyssa questions in-person or via Slack.
 - @Joe Bateman
 - @A Navrer-Agasson
- There is also a dedicated TPC-Simulation Slack channel:

#tpc-simulation



 In case you didn't manage to make a 1µ1p sample, there are premade samples here:

/scratch/LAR25/simulation/



The University of Manchester References and Useful Links

- Previous tutorials:
 - 9th Software Workshop
 - 8th Software Workshop
 - 7th Software Workshop
 - 6th Software Workshop
- Other links:
 - SBN Software Wiki
 - SBND Newbie Material (may be slightly out of date)