



People have a natural curiosity about their health. One of the best ways they can get this information is through a health fair.

A health fair is an ideal way for your organization to communicate a wealth of information on a variety of issues and services to the general public or to targeted audiences.

Health Fairs Come in All Sizes

A health fair is easier to organize than you may think. You control the size and complexity. It can be as simple as a table with posters and brochures. Or, it can be a three-day affair that fills the local park.

A health fair is anything you choose. It's exhibits, mini-workshops, displays, demonstrations, screenings and more. The possibilities are endless – from eye tests to foot check-ups.

Designing Your Health Fair

To organize a successful health fair, define your audience, the message you want to deliver, and who could help you deliver that message.

Your audience could be the general public or a "special interest group," such as senior citizens, women or young adults. The location and hours will influence the type of audience. A health fair in a park or shopping center on a weekend will attract a different audience than an event at a business complex on a weekday.

The intended audience will determine the message. Different groups have different concerns: senior citizens and nutrition; middle-aged people and cholesterol; children and dental health; women and breast cancer, etc.

Sponsors and Exhibitors

Local involvement is the key to a successful health fair. Your community has its share of potential sponsors, volunteers and exhibitors. Develop a resource list that includes health professionals, service organizations, community leaders, businesses and labor groups. Don't neglect student groups from high schools, colleges and universities – they are important sources of volunteer support.

In your search for a sponsor, approach the executive director or chief executive officer of local organizations. Detail your plans and needs, and determine what they can supply in terms of manpower and materials. The organization may also have a public relations office that could help you get the message out through daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and the internal publications and newsletters that many businesses use to communicate with their employees. If this resource isn't available, you'll need to organize your own publicity program.

Spread the Word

The person coordinating the publicity for the health fair will have one of the most important and demanding jobs. He or she will need to prepare press releases, feature stories, public service announcements or advertisements, web posts, social media posts and tweets, editorials, posters and hand-out materials, and organize a press conference or press kit. Important facts to include are: site, date, time, selected activities, organizations involved as exhibitors, name(s) of organization(s) sponsoring the event and a phone number to call for more information. Put creativity into your posters and flyers – they should not only inform, but motivate people to attend. Public service announcements to radio and television stations should be packaged as 10-, 20- and 30-second spots.

A Health Fair is...

A model health fair can be divided into the areas of health education, screening, counseling and follow-up.

Health Education – It's the most important facet of a health fair. Health education might include a poster or exhibit on nutrition. It could be a display on cancer risks or a computer health risk evaluation. When making choices, remember that passive displays of information will not attract large numbers. People like demonstrations and exhibits with which they can interact, such as:

- a taste test of whole, 2%, 1% and skim (fat-free) milk to demonstrate that low-fat milk tastes good and saves fat and calories, too;
- a chef trained in heart healthful food preparation who will demonstrate the preparation of nutritious snacks and gives fairgoers the opportunity to taste the results;
- a demonstration and chance to try traditional exercise, such as T'ai Chi, which combines meditation and motion, or a demonstration of jump-roping by a school-age jump-roping team; or
- a recreation of the popular Jeopardy™ game, which includes questions on healthy lifestyle topics.



Screening – You will find the longest lines at blood pressure and other screening tests. People want to know about themselves. Some screening may require more resources, such as those for cancer, glaucoma, hearing, and high blood cholesterol.

Whenever laboratory tests are involved, consult the public health law for requirements that must be met.

Talk to an Expert – A session with an expert provider can be used to outline actions that need to be taken in order to eliminate unhealthy habits or symptoms. Talking with an expert stops short of a diagnosis and encourages lifestyle changes in such areas as nutrition, stress and smoking. For example, a Registered Dietician could analyze and provide advice on the heart healthiness of the person's daily eating habits. The session might also include an analysis of fast food, on-the-run meals and tips for making these hurried bites healthier. Where indicated, the individual may be encouraged to see his or her health provider, or be given information on local health care facilities or local health-related agencies and organizations.

Follow-up – This can be done through mailings, by telephone or through classes and other programs available in the community. Delivery of test results through follow-up mailings or telephone calls can motivate participants to take action. You can also call participants three to six months after the health fair as a reminder and an encouragement.



Your Checklist to Success

A health fair takes forethought – about four to six months planning should be anticipated. Health professionals need plenty of advance notice. Other rules of thumb for a successful health fair are:

Site – A one-day fair for 500 people will require an area of at least 2,500 square feet (25x100). Consider access roads, rest room facilities, lighting, parking and accessibility for people with disabilities. Fairs have been held in churches, schools, community centers, shopping malls and hospitals.

Layout – Prepare a layout of the fair and plan for noise distractions, privacy, and people waiting in line. Separate learn-by-doing activities from each other. Be sure to clearly note areas assigned to exhibitors. Those with similar themes may be grouped together.

Materials – Develop a list of what you will need: electrical equipment, tables, chairs, easels, laptop, microphones, audio-visual equipment, pencils, etc. These are items that are easily overlooked in the last-minute rush.

Registration – Packets can be distributed at the registration. They can include a health fair map and list of activities, and promotional items such as a bag, name tag, etc.

Timing – Check the calendar before scheduling your event. Try not to conflict with other activities in the community which could affect attendance.

Permits – Food service, sanitary, sign, structural and other permits may be needed. Your local municipal clerk should be able to give you information. Remember, there are several levels of government – city, county, state, etc. – which may require various permits.

Exhibitors – In selecting potential exhibitors, consider the organization's compatibility with the aims and objectives of the fair. Also, consider the organization's commitment to staffing, and its potential for capturing attention and stimulating audience participation.

Fees – You may consider charging a fee for exhibitors to offset rental, heating and lighting and other costs. Your decision on fees can be made by weighing such factors as whether the exhibitor is a non-profit organization, and whether it will reap a profit, directly or indirectly, as an exhibitor.

Giveaways – Plastic bags with your logo and message are an inexpensive way to keep your name before the public. They also make it easier for people to carry publications gathered at the fair. Other possible giveaways are buttons, posters, pedometers, water bottles, rulers, pens or pencils. For information, look in the telephone book or on the Internet for promotional items.

Directions – Include directions in exhibitor information and registration packets. Avoid confusion by posting signs, arrows, posters, etc., to direct participants to parking, exhibit areas, rest rooms, mini-workshops, health fair entrances and registration, etc.

Clean-up – Make a firm agreement with the facility manager about when exhibits must be put up and taken down, when the building will be cleaned, who will be responsible for cleaning, and how the furniture, equipment, etc., should be arranged.

Thank You! – As soon as the fair is over, thank everyone involved, in writing.