Event Planning Guide
New for the 2022-2023 Academic Year
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Your Guide to Planning Inclusive Events

You can create a supportive environment on campus by planning events that everyone can enjoy. This guide is full of tips to help you:

- Plan inclusive and accessible events
- Set up an educational table on campus
- Take COVID-19 safety precautions
- Prevent disruptions and manage any conflicts that may come up during your event

This Event Planning Guide is part of the American College Health Association’s (ACHA) COVID-19 Student Ambassador Toolkit. You can use the toolkit to start a student ambassador program on campus, or just use the materials provided to educate your campus community about COVID-19.

This guide was created in July 2022. For the latest information about COVID-19, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 webpage.
In-person events

In-person events are a great way to build connections on campus. Follow these tips to make the most of your event.

**Take COVID-19 safety precautions**

If you’re planning an in-person event, you can minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19 by taking a few simple steps:

- Look for a space that has good ventilation (air flow) or plenty of room for people to spread out — or gather outside when the weather is nice
- Limit the number of attendees or ask everyone to wear a mask
- Avoid activities that are more likely to spread COVID-19, like eating, singing, and shouting

Learn more about planning on-campus events with these resources from ACHA and Youth Marketing Connection (YMC), a marketing agency focused on reaching Gen Z and Millennial audiences.

- [Recorded webinar: Planning and Executing On-Campus Events](#)
- [More resources to help you plan on-campus events](#)

**Planning tip**

Keep an eye on the latest COVID-19 news in the weeks leading up to your event. If there are a high number of COVID-19 cases in your area, you may want to consider taking extra precautions or switching to a virtual format. See page 11 for more on virtual and hybrid events.
Make your in-person event accessible

Next, consider how you can make your event more accessible to everyone — including students who have disabilities or chronic health conditions.

Think about the physical space you’ll need for your event. Consider how many people are likely to join. If possible, look for a space where you can easily arrange furniture or seating to meet your attendees’ needs.

Check out this guide to accessible event planning created by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network. It goes beyond the basics to break down physical, sensory, and cognitive accessibility challenges and solutions. See this resource from the University of Michigan for more detailed accessibility recommendations for campus events.

When you tell people about your event, be sure to note any COVID-19 precautions that you’re taking. By sharing this info, you’ll send the message that everyone is welcome at your event and allow students who are at risk of getting very sick to make an informed choice for their health.
Plan ahead to avoid disruptions

Planning an in-person event related to COVID-19? Taking some precautions can help you prevent conflict — and manage any disruptions that may come up. Here are a few steps you can take:

- Require attendees to register for your event
- Only allow campus community members to attend your event
- If speakers plan to answer questions from the audience, ask attendees to submit their questions ahead of time
- Know your campus code of conduct — especially any freedom of expression policies — and be ready to enforce the rules if needed
- Discuss how campus police and other staff members can help if needed
Set up an educational table on campus

Tabling, or setting up a table on campus and talking to people who walk by, is a great way to educate students about COVID-19 or any other topic.

Plan your table

Here are a few tips to help you start planning:

• Look for an area where a lot of people walk by on their way to class or popular hangouts, like the cafeteria or student union
• Reserve a spot for your table
• Buy or reserve any supplies you’ll need for your table (check out the list on the next page!)
• Partner with campus departments or other student organizations to draw more attention to your table
**Your table checklist**

Use this checklist to make sure you have everything you need for your table.

**Set up your table**
- Table and chairs
- Canopy
- Tablecloth
- Retractable banner (heads up — these can be hard to handle on windy days!)
- Bottled water for everyone who’s working at the table

**Things to share**
- Handouts
- Consent forms — if you’re taking photos to share on social media, you’ll need permission from students who are in your photos
- Paperweights or plastic stands to keep your papers in place
- Laptops or tablets if you’re asking students to sign up for something
- Giveaway items, like water bottles or hand sanitizer with your school’s logo

**Things to wear**
- A name badge or t-shirt so guests can see who’s working at the table
- A mask
- Comfortable shoes
Come up with an “elevator pitch”

It’s a good idea to plan what you want to say ahead of time. That way, you’ll feel more confident when people come up to your table.

Think of a short introduction, or an “elevator pitch” that covers the main things you want students to know. Here are a few tips to get you started:

**Start with a question.** For example: Do you want a free water bottle? Do you follow [your organization or campus] on social media? Have you heard about the latest COVID-19 booster recommendations?

**Introduce yourself and your organization.** Add a personal touch to your elevator pitch and explain what your organization is all about.

**Quickly explain what you’re promoting or educating people about.** Why is your organization hosting the table?

**Finish with an action step.** What do you want people to do? Take a flyer? Sign up for a program?
**Make guests feel welcome**

While you’re working at the table, remember to keep your body language friendly and relaxed. Make eye contact and call out to people as they walk by. You can also take turns standing in front of the table to catch people’s attention.

If people say “no thanks” or walk away, you could ask if they know anyone who might be interested and offer a handout. But if they really don’t want to talk, let it go.

*Through our tabling efforts, we let students who disclosed lack of health care insurance know about resources available to them — and used their feedback to develop marketing pieces. We also promoted those programs to a cross-section of colleagues and asked for their assistance to encourage students to stop by events and learn about the wealth of resources available not only on our campus, but also in the community — regardless of vaccination status, insurance status, demographics, etc.”*

—ACHA grantee
Virtual events

Many campuses use virtual programs and events to reach a wider audience. For students who are at risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, virtual events can be a safer way to connect with the campus community.

Make your event accessible

Remember, virtual doesn’t automatically mean accessible. For guidance on creating accessible and inclusive virtual events, check out this toolkit from the nonprofit organization RespectAbility.

Consider a hybrid format

Some campuses have started hosting hybrid events — events that are both online and in person. For example, you could stream the event on your campus's Facebook or Instagram account or invite attendees to join you on Zoom.

Hybrid events offer the perks of seeing friends and classmates in person and the flexibility of joining in from home. But these events also require extra effort from you and your planning team. It can be tricky to interact with attendees in person and online at the same time. So it’s a good idea to designate a helper to manage the online portion of the event.
Plan ahead to avoid disruptions

Safety precautions are important for virtual and hybrid events, too. Here are a few steps you can take to avoid digital disruptions:

- Require attendees to register, and set up your online registration system so that it only accepts .edu email addresses
- If you’re presenting slides or other materials online, check your settings to make sure no one can edit your materials
- If speakers plan to answer questions from the audience, ask attendees to submit their questions before the event
- Ask other students or staff members in your organization to post genuine questions or comments
- Ask a moderator to watch and respond to any issues in the chat, comments section, or question and answer box
- Consider recording the event and posting it on social media later instead of livestreaming
Promote your event

No matter what kind of event you’re planning, getting the word out is key to your success! Here are a few ways to promote your event on campus:

- **Post on your university’s social media page or online event calendar.**

- **Ask student organizations to post on their own social media pages or calendars.** You can also ask organizations to make an announcement about the event at their next meeting.

- **Ask professors if you can visit their classes to make a short announcement about the workshop.** You can also suggest that professors give extra credit for attending your event.

- **Post flyers or digital signs in common areas like the student union, cafeteria, or residence halls.**

- **Spread the word with your friends and post on your own social media accounts.**
Know what to do if someone is disruptive

We all know COVID-19 conversations can get heated. During your event, watch participants’ body language for signs that they’re feeling frustrated or upset. If anyone says something inappropriate, argues with you, or acts aggressively, take these steps to turn down the temperature:

• **Respect personal space.** Here’s one tip that’s easy to follow during the COVID-19 pandemic: Give the other person plenty of personal space!

• **Use calming nonverbal cues.** Keep your voice and facial expressions steady and calm, and don’t make sudden moves. Avoid pointing or crossing your arms. (While it’s important to be calm, don’t tell the other person to calm down — that tends to make people feel even more frustrated.)

• **Lead with empathy.** Acknowledge that the pandemic has been hard for everyone and validate what the other person is feeling. For example, you could start by saying, “I know the past couple of years have been tough, and I hear that you’re frustrated.”
• **Ask questions and reflect back.** Show that you care about their feelings by asking open-ended questions or saying, “Tell me more about that.” Then repeat what the other person said in your own words to confirm you’re understanding them correctly.

• **Remember that you don’t have to change their mind.** It’s not your job to change the other person’s beliefs about COVID-19 or convince them that campus policies make sense. If you’re responsible for enforcing policies, focus on what you’re asking them to do (like wear a mask). Otherwise, remember you can walk away from the conversation at any time.

• **Focus on the positive.** Remind people that you have good intentions and that you care about your campus community.

**Remember:** Conversations about COVID-19 may feel uncomfortable, but they should never make you feel unsafe. Call campus police or security right away if someone becomes aggressive or violent, threatens to hurt themselves or others, or does anything else that makes you feel unsafe.
Wrap up after your event

When your event is over, don’t forget to clean up your space and put seating, furniture, or table supplies back in place. Within a week after your event, be sure to send thank you emails to anyone who helped you plan, facilitate, or promote it (e.g., professors, student organizations, campus health or counseling center).

Meet with everyone who helped to plan the event to talk about how it went. Together, you can come up with some ideas to improve your next event. You can also send out a survey to find out what participants thought of your event and what they might like to learn from future events.