

Planning a Resource Fair or Health Event

Resource fairs and health events are great ways to offer the community valuable services and information. Community events also help public and private organizations showcase their resources and programs that contribute to the health, wellness, and well-being of the public. A successful and well-organized event can be an effective way to reach a target population.

It's exciting to host a resource/health event! Please note that hosting an event takes planning, time, coordination, and work. The Outreach Planning Group (OPG) at the Florida Department of Health in Broward County (DOH-Broward) wants to help. If you are new to the field, we encourage you to contact one of the following volunteer OPG advisers who can offer guidance and support to help you make your events successful and effective.

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Steps to Planning a Successful Health Event

1. Set goals and objectives.

The first thing an event planner or planning committee should do is determine who you are trying to reach and what assistance or information your audience needs. Get input from your target audience before you start planning and focus on what you want to achieve.

Identifying goals and objectives will help guide your event planning, event promotion, implementation, and evaluation. Share your goals and objectives with your managers and incorporate their suggestions. It is also important to share the goals and objectives with all event team members.

Events that serve one group can work well, but also consider a wider community. Smaller events may not be as productive for organizations without a lot of resources for information tables.

Answering the questions below will help guide your event planning:

- What is the purpose of your event and what do you seek to accomplish?
- Have you identified your event planning team? Who?
- Who is your target audience?
- When do you want to have this event?
- When do you plan to promote the event?
- Will you have a minimum of 30 days to advertise or promote the event?
- What other similar events are occurring in your area?
- Collaborate with other organizations when hosting Back to School events.

2. Choose a title/theme.

Before selecting a title/theme, consider the event's goals and objectives, as well as the organization's focus or mission. Select a theme that will attract attention.

For example, if you are trying to reach an entire neighborhood to provide education or information about the importance of children's health, then "Investing in Our Children's Health and Nutrition" might be a good title or theme for the event.

It's important to choose a title or theme that lets participants know what the event is about and one that will encourage them to attend.

OPG members advise that event planners and participating organizations should offer attendees something more than information at the event, as information for some may not be a compelling reason to attend. Instead, information, services or items that could benefit attendees, such as free screenings or food giveaways, could be important to them.

Of note is the absence of the term “health fair” from this guide. The OPG prefers the terms resource fair, community event, awareness event, or health event. Attendees should receive information, services or items that benefit them.

3. Check the calendar.

Start identifying possible date(s) for your event. Be flexible. Have alternate dates. Don't get locked in before doing research.

Try to determine if similar events recently were held in the area or if a similar event is being planned. If so, consider forming a partnership with the other events. Teaming up will strengthen your efforts-a single combined event likely will attract more people and be more effective than several small events.

Event listings can be found at:

- Children's Services Council of Broward County.
- DOH-Broward: <http://broward.floridahealth.gov/events/index.html>.
- Online queries of the date.
- Eventbrite.com.
- Allevvents.com.
- Municipalities/city calendars.
- Social media.

Other considerations:

- Be sure the date doesn't conflict with other large community events or holidays.
- Avoid peak vacation times and the first three weekends in August unless hosting a back-to-school event that MUST take place at that time. Those weekends are crowded with events. Switching your event to another month or combining events may yield better results.
- If you have more than one site, are you setting a date for each site? Note that multiple events on the same date might impact the turnout for all of the events.
- Consider what to do if there is inclement weather for an outdoor event and communicate with vendors.
- If planning a weekend event, consider starting at 10 a.m. or later, as having an event too early in the day may result in decrease attendance.
- Identify vendor check-in time. Determine the earliest time vendors can arrive to set up.

4. Pick a location.

Choose an ideal location that will be convenient for your target population.

- Parks are often good places for outdoor events.

- If participants need transportation, organize the event close to public transit lines.
- Make sure you have adequate lighting and electrical outlets for vendor booths. Examples: Cafeteria, large foyer or hallway, large meeting room.
- If the event is going to be held outside, make sure shade and restrooms are available.
- Do you need special permits from the city or county? What's the cost? It takes time to secure a permit, so plan about six months out.
- Make sure adequate parking is available.
- Make a visual map of the location where the event is being held. Identify the drop off/unloading areas on a map.
- Are you providing tables and chairs? Are you providing tents if outside?
- If security is desired, contact the local law enforcement agency to find out if they can provide security at no cost. This process may take up to six months.
- Check with the city for sponsorship if there is a fee to secure the park. This also is recommended to plan about six months out.

5. Set a budget.

Use your goals and objectives to help set your budget and allocate funds. Remember that a big budget isn't necessary for a successful event. However, you might want to consider spending funds to attract attendance and participation. Know your target population and your community.

- If permitted, ask for donations from the business for raffle items.

6. Develop a to-do list.

Outline the following elements on the to-do list:

- Each task that needs to be completed.
- The person responsible for each task.
- The target completion date for each task.
- Create a (QR code) for the event registration.
- Create a list of items needed, such as tablets, chairs, and supplies.

Add new responsibilities as they arise and be sure to allow adequate time for each task, keeping in mind that some tasks may need special approval or planning.

7. If permitted, solicit sponsors and invite organizations to participate

If you need resources to stage the event or buy prizes, giveaways, or other enticements, consider finding a sponsor. Look for companies, organizations, or local businesses that have an interest in your target audience or your community. If permitted, you can offer them special recognition and promotion as an inducement to become a sponsor.

Also, if permitted, you can ask participating organizations, vendors, or providers to donate items as prizes or raffle items. You can consider charging a vendor fee but be aware that some agencies do not have an event budget and may not be able to participate.

To invite organizations to participate, think about the community agencies, voluntary organizations, for-profit and nonprofit organizations that are important to the theme of your event. Make a list and contact them for support and participation.

The OPG, which is organized by DOH-Broward, is a good resource to use to invite organizations to set up information tables, serve as speakers, or provide screenings.

To complete a vendor request form, go to the [OPG page](#) on the DOH-Broward website. On the second page, list the types of services and programs you want to invite. Email the form to chd06post@flhealth.gov; Vanice.rolle@flhealth.gov.

Be sure to:

- Select the correct vendors for the event based on the target community.
- Select vendors who provide a service that the community needs, such as mammograms, vaccines, or physicals.

Once DOH-Broward receives your form, your event information will be sent to all of our programs and to hundreds of organizations that participate in the OPG. The event information also will be posted on the DOH-Broward website at: <http://broward.floridahealth.gov/events/index.html>.

Be clear about the size and scope of your event and give a realistic estimate regarding attendance. This information helps organizations focus on events to attend. Preregistration helps identify the number of possible attendees. Create a QR code for event registration beforehand, and on the day of the event place the QR code at all entry points for attendees to scan.

Completing the form is not a guarantee that any of the requested services will be available for your event. Each program and organization will decide whether to attend, based on the availability of staff and services.

Remember to identify departments within your organization and community partners who may be able to contribute to your event.

8. Consider attending an outreach planning group meeting.

At OPG meetings, members give a constructive critique of events they attended during the previous month. Most participants have years of experience and know what vendors and the public want to find at an event.

Hearing this information before your event can provide valuable insight that can help make your event more successful. At the meeting, you can invite OPG members to participate as vendors.

OPG meetings take place at 3 p.m. on the first Wednesday of the month at the Florida Department of Health in Broward County at 780 SW 24 St., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33315.

9. Confirm needs and content of your participating organizations and vendors.

- What information are the vendors sharing?
- What services will the vendors provide?
- Secure just one vendor for each service you're looking to provide at the event.
- How will the material be presented (display, brochures, demonstration)?
- What is the title of their display?
- What size is the display? Is there enough room?
- Do vendors need a table and chairs? How big and how many?
- Do they need electrical outlets?
- Is there a keynote speaker? Will a microphone or podium be needed?
- If there is food, you need proper heating and refrigeration. Check with the city for requirements.
- Will there be enough trash cans?
- When will vendors set up?
- What is the target population?
- How many attendees are expected?
- Will tents be provided? How many will you need?
- How much time is needed for setting up, breaking down and cleaning up?

10. Promotion.

Promotion is important. Weakness in promoting events is probably the most common issue regarding health events in our community.

- Advertising can help a lot. Local print, radio and TV outlets generally require advanced notice to advertise an event.
- Create a marketing plan. It doesn't have to be fancy. But promotion is very important for generating awareness, interest, and excitement about your event. Begin promoting at least one or two months before the event.
- Look for a "champion." This would be someone admired or well-known to your target audience who will adopt your event to add star power and interest.

Word of mouth is a good way to advertise. Do as much as you can. Also use all resources available to promote your event:

- Send voicemails, emails, and share banners/posters, and announcements.
- Post and share information about the event on social media.
- Request coverage and listings from media outlets. Contact newspapers, weekly and monthly publications, radio, and TV stations several weeks prior to your event. Send them an alert or press release.
 - Mention the event in newsletters, bulletins and in meetings that serve your target audience.
 - Distribute flyers to grocery stores, dry cleaners and other local business that serve your audience.
 - Personally invite to key people, such as local government officials and key business leaders.
- Ask your event vendors to help promote the event.
- Use street outreach to share the flyers one week before the scheduled event.
- Provide the information to communities near the event.
- Distribute flyers at events leading up to your scheduled event.
- Update the flyer as additional vendors are secured.
- Promoting vendors and services offered may attract more attendees.
- Update flyers and messaging on the marketing and social media platforms used.

11. Logistics.

Staffing:

- One or two people who know all logistics to help attendees and vendors.
- A crew to set up, tear down and clean up.
- Someone to move traffic.
- Someone to welcome attendees and vendors.
- Adults who will supervise if children are involved.
- Draft a floor plan.
- Be mindful of the traffic flow.
- Look for potential jam areas and try to move items to ease bottlenecks.
- Provide a map of where to find bathrooms and exits, for example.
- Avoid placing tables too closely together.
- Leave space for people to stand and talk.
- Outline where each display will be set up.
- Number each booth.
- Note the location of electrical outlets and assign spaces based on vendors' needs.
- Give each display enough space. Consider width and height.
- If a large crowd is expected, consider staggering people or having them enter in groups, to avoid backlogs at information and screening tables.
- If you have paying sponsors, consider giving them prime locations.
- Have a map that identifies designated vendor parking areas.

- What will vendors need to know if it rains? What would you do? Will shelter be available?
- Set up the room so community members can get what they need. Set up vendors with similar services/information in the same area.

Prepare a list of equipment that will be required:

- Tables (how many and what sizes).
- Chairs.
- Tents.
- LCD projectors.
- Extension cords.
- Reserve all equipment and rooms well in advance. Find out the event location's procedures and follow them.

Other issues:

- Is parking adequate?
- Is security needed?
- Will someone take pictures or videos at the event? If so, the person can immediately post on social media to help generate interest.
- If offering food, consider healthy choices. Don't forget snacks and water for the vendors, especially if the event runs over lunch or dinner.
- To avoid the potential for identity theft, do not allow participating organizations to collect personal information, such as Social Security numbers and dates of birth, unless they're well-known and using a secure system.
- Consider screening out vendors to avoid those with questionable products or services.
- Consider having speaker presentations while attendees are in line for items so that attendees are receiving information at the same time.

12. Other things to consider:

- Consider offering games, giveaways, and raffles, for example.
- Consider having a stamped "passport," which will enable attendees to show they visited each information table, such as to receive prizes or giveaway items.
- Consider adding the name of the participating agencies to the passport.
- Plan an alternative for bad weather.
- Create an emergency kit with first aid supplies.
- Before the event, send a welcome email to organizations that are participating and include instructions, directions, parking information, and a contact number.
- Create goody bags for giveaways.
- Create a satisfaction survey for attendees and/or vendors.

13. At the event:

- Talk with vendors and attendees.
- Inquire if the information offered at the event was helpful.
- Determine how attendees can use the information to improve health.
- Ask for suggestions for the following year's event.

14. Following the event:

- Send thank you letters to speakers, providers, and vendors.
- Have a team evaluation meeting to analyze results.
- Determine if goals and objectives were met.
- Decide if the event should be a recurring event.

Planners are encouraged to attend the next OPG meeting after the event. Constructive critiques from vendors regarding their experience will be invaluable in planning for the next year.

These steps were created by those who have put on successful health events for years in our community. There are no guarantees, but these steps provide guidance and insight to having a fantastic, successful event. Thank you for working with us to make Broward County a healthier place to live, work and play, and we wish you much success with your event.

Outreach Planning Group
Florida Department of Health in Broward County

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Sample document:

LOGO OR LETTERHEAD

[Date]

Sample headline:

[YOUR ORGANIZATION] HOSTS EVENT TO INFORM THE COMMUNITY ABOUT [YOUR TOPIC]

Contact:

[Contact Name]

[Email]

[Phone]

Sample language:

[City, Fla.] — [Organization] is hosting a [type of] event for [target area or participants], and the community is invited to learn about [your subject] and receive free [whatever you are offering]. The [type of] event, which is sponsored by [organization(s)] will take place on [your date] in [city or town].

The [title of your event] is scheduled from [event hours] at [location with address]. Admission is free [or price].

[Insert quote from your organization chief or event director, if desired]

[Give details about sponsors, speakers, attractions, entertainment, free food, games, or other aspects of the event that would attract people to attend or encourage persuade media to cover the event]. Consider adding parking information.

For more information about [event title], call x or email y.

About [Your Organization]

Give a one paragraph summary of your organization, goals, and program.

Follow us on [all social media you use]. For more information about the [organization] please visit [your website] or call [your phone number].

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