



AMERICAN COLLEGE HEALTH ASSOCIATION
Campus COVID-19 Vaccination and Mitigation Initiative

Student Ambassador

Program Planning Guide

**A Peer Education Resource
for Campus Professionals**

Updated August 2023



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Tap into the Power of Peer Education

Find out how student ambassadors can help your campus community stay healthy — and empower students to make informed health choices.

Student ambassadors are students who educate their peers about health- and safety-related topics. Student ambassadors have the power to change the culture on campus by modeling healthy behaviors and sharing accessible, accurate health information. (You may also hear these students called peer educators, champions, or leaders.)

Many colleges and universities across the United States already have student ambassador programs focusing on topics like alcohol and drug use and sexual health. Campus professionals (e.g., campus life, student life, student health, or other staff members) usually facilitate these programs.

Student ambassadors can also teach students about COVID-19 and flu risk reduction. **Risk reduction** means taking steps to reduce the chances of people getting sick or hurt. For example, students can lower their risk of getting the flu and spreading it to others by getting a flu vaccine and staying home when they're sick.



Campus professionals can use this guide to **start a new student ambassador program or incorporate COVID-19 and flu risk reduction into an existing program.**

Why do student ambassador programs work?

We all know that young adults are more likely to trust information coming from peers than from authority figures. When it comes to public health messaging, trust is key — and a message may be more likely to resonate when it comes from a friend or classmate.

Students also tend to follow social norms set by their friends and other peers in the campus community. For example, if students hear that their friends got vaccinated, they may be more likely to do the same. [Learn more about why peer education is so effective for young adults.](#)



When admin was alone in their effort, they received a lot of pushback. However, when [our student ambassadors] started to work alongside them, students would actively listen, engage, and follow [campus health guidelines]. Having students explain to their peers the reasoning, the safety, etc. was a success!”

-ACHA GRANTEE



What can student ambassadors do?

Student ambassadors can **educate fellow students about COVID-19 and flu risk reduction** in many different ways. For example, student ambassadors can:

- Pass out health education materials
- Post on social media
- Start conversations with friends
- Model healthy behaviors in their own lives
- Create educational resources and on-campus events

Keep in mind that every campus defines the role of a student ambassador differently. It all depends on your campus culture, needs, and goals.



What will student ambassadors do on your campus?

Consider what role you want student ambassadors to play in your campus community. Here are a few activities student ambassadors can do, ranging from simple to more complex:



Share materials on campus. Student ambassadors can distribute educational materials about COVID-19 and the flu, pass out items like hand sanitizer, or give out small rewards or goodie bags to students who are following campus health guidelines.



Post on social media. Student ambassadors can share what they're doing to protect themselves from COVID-19 and the flu — and encourage peers to do the same.



Start conversations with peers. Student ambassadors can talk to their peers about topics like staying up to date on COVID-19 and flu vaccines and staying home if you feel sick.





Plan and facilitate educational events. Student ambassadors can plan events to educate their peers about topics like how to protect themselves and others from COVID-19 and the flu.



Help students plan safer, more accessible events. Student ambassadors can recommend simple ways to make events safer and more accessible to students who are at risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 and the flu.



Hold information sessions or town hall events. Student ambassadors can host events to address questions and lead community discussions about COVID-19 and the flu.



Develop education materials. Student ambassadors can work with you to create their own education materials on topics like COVID-19 and the flu. Keep in mind that this activity will need a higher level of guidance and support from you.

The **Student Ambassador Toolkit** includes resources to help with many of the activities listed above. For details on what's in the toolkit, go to [page 8](#).



How to use the Student Ambassador Toolkit

This guide is part of the American College Health Association's (ACHA) [Student Ambassador Toolkit](#). The toolkit is full of peer education resources for you to share with your students. You can choose to use some or all of these materials depending on your needs and how much time your students have to invest.

WORKSHOP LESSON PLAN >>

Students can use this lesson plan to **develop and facilitate an interactive workshop**. The lesson plan covers topics like:

- Getting COVID-19 and flu vaccines
- Making health care decisions (e.g., when to go to the doctor or the campus health center)
- Supporting people who are risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 and the flu
- Mental health
- Health and media literacy
- Storytelling for health communication



COMMUNICATION PLAN >>

Students can use this communication plan to **to develop their own COVID-19 education materials about COVID-19 and flu risk reduction**. The plan includes quick tips that students can use to create social media posts, as well as guidance on how to create more complex educational materials.

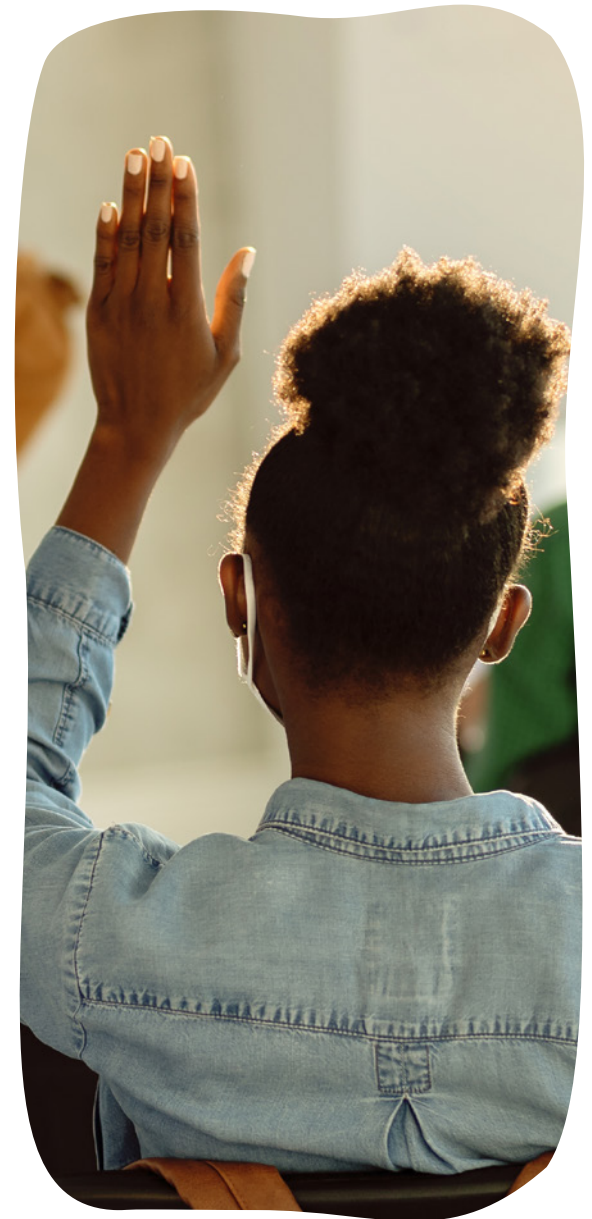
The communication plan addresses topics like:

- Defining priority audiences (e.g., fraternities and sororities, athletic teams, campus clubs)
- Getting feedback from students and campus organizations
- Choosing the best ways to distribute materials (e.g., in campus papers, public transportation ads, announcements during sporting events)

EVENT PLANNING GUIDE >>

Students can use this guide to **plan and facilitate their own events** or help other students and campus organizations plan events. The guide addresses topics like:

- Planning in-person, virtual, and hybrid events
- Setting up educational tables on campus
- Taking simple steps to reduce attendees' risk of getting sick
- Making events accessible to everyone, including students who have disabilities and chronic health issues
- Addressing any conflicts that may come up during events



HEALTH AND MEDIA LITERACY GUIDE >>

This guide is all about health and media literacy — important skills that **everyone** needs to understand health information and make informed health decisions! Student ambassadors can use this guide to **help their peers build health and media literacy skills**.

STORYTELLING FOR HEALTH COMMUNICATION GUIDE >>

This guide highlights ways to use personal stories to communicate about health topics. Student ambassadors can use this guide to **tell their own health stories, create communication materials** featuring other students' personal stories, or even **host a storytelling event** on campus.

BUILDING TRUST GUIDE >>

This guide explores why building trust is important, why some people may not trust health information, and how to communicate in a way that builds trust. Student ambassadors can use the strategies in this guide to **build trust with the students they want to reach**.



Get students involved

Once you've decided what role you want student ambassadors to play in your campus community, the next step is to recruit students to join your program and serve as a student ambassador! Here's how to get students involved.

IDENTIFY YOUR "WHY"

As a first step, **consider what your ambassador program has to offer students.** Why should they take time out of their busy schedule to participate?

Some programs choose to compensate students for participation by paying students directly, through work-study, or through other incentives. (For more on compensation, see [page 20](#).) Other programs are volunteer-only, but students can still get valuable experience to add to their resume and prepare for a future career in public health, communication, or related fields. Once you've identified your "why," you can use it to pitch your program to students.

DEFINE YOUR APPLICATION PROCESS

Will you accept every student who wants to participate, or will you ask students to apply for the program? Will you continue to accept new students throughout the semester, or stop after a set period of time or once you reach a certain number of students? Be sure to set a clear timeline to let students know what to expect.



REACH OUT TO STUDENTS

Here are a few ways to reach students who may be interested in participating:



Partner with faculty in health-related departments (e.g., public health, health sciences, or biology) to promote the program. You could ask for 5 to 10 minutes of class time to talk to students about the program.



Partner with health-related student organizations (e.g., health education, pre-pharmacy and pre-medicine, or nursing organizations). For example, you could ask these organizations to send out an email about the program or post on their social media platforms. You could also ask for a few minutes of meeting time to talk to students about the program.



Reach out to other student organizations like international student groups, first-year student groups, and student government/student council organizations. Ask if they would be interested in sharing information about the ambassador program with their members.



Host information sessions for students to learn more about the program. Consider bringing snacks or other small incentives to thank students for attending.



Post on your department's social media accounts. Ask other departments to share or repost your materials.

Train student ambassadors

Next you'll need to **train your student ambassadors** — introduce them to your program, educate them about campus health guidelines, and give them the tools they need to succeed. Training also provides opportunities for ambassadors to get to know each other and start building a connection as a team.

PLAN TRAINING EVENTS

Here are some important points to consider as you plan training events:

- What is your budget for training?
- Where will you hold training events?
- Who will lead training events?
- How many training sessions do you need? Depending on the activities you're expecting your student ambassadors to do, you might need a single training or a series of training events spread out over several weeks.
- Do you need any educational resources for your training? For example, you could create a handout to sum up key takeaways.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) offers a Certified Peer Educator training course. This course helps students develop the leadership skills they need to successfully create and implement campus programs. You can encourage your students to sign up for the course or use it as a starting point to plan your own training event. [Learn more about the NASPA course.](#)



EMPOWER STUDENTS TO RESPOND TO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

When they're talking to peers about health topics, student ambassadors may run into some difficult situations. Whether it's a rude comment or a more serious safety issue, it's important to **make sure students are prepared to respond to common obstacles** that may come up. Here are some ways you can empower your student ambassadors:

- Consider offering training sessions focused on **conflict resolution and de-escalation**. [Check out this webinar on de-escalation](#) and [explore more helpful resources](#) from ACHA and our partner Youth Marketing Connection (YMC).
- Use **role-play** to show students what to do in everyday situations (e.g., if someone shares misinformation about COVID-19).
- Provide **talking points** for tough conversations — like setting boundaries with friends and roommates who may have different beliefs about vaccines.
- Set clear expectations about when ambassadors should **call you or other campus staff members for help** (e.g., if a peer is experiencing a mental health crisis).



KEEP IT GOING!

Once you've got a team of student ambassadors, try these tips to keep them engaged:



Set up regular meetings to check in with student ambassadors. Depending on students' schedules, you might choose to meet once a week or once a month. Clearly let students know what meetings they're required to attend and how much time you expect them to commit to the program.



Decide how student ambassadors will stay in touch outside of meetings. For example, you might set up a group text or social media account for ambassadors to communicate.



Give plenty of praise and positive reinforcement. Remind your ambassadors that their work empowers students to take care of their health — and build healthy habits that will last a lifetime.



Build partnerships on campus

You can set your student ambassador program up for success by building partnerships with campus leadership and other student organizations.

GET BUY-IN FROM LEADERSHIP

If you're starting a new student ambassador program, you'll probably need approval from campus leadership. When you meet with leadership, emphasize the benefits of peer-to-peer education: students are more likely to trust information from their peers, and student ambassadors can help set social norms around behaviors like staying home when you're sick.

COLLABORATE WITH CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS

Look for opportunities to **collaborate with other student-led organizations on campus**, like:

- Student media organizations (e.g., newspapers, TV, and radio stations)
- Fraternities and sororities
- Athletic teams
- Residence life organizations or residence halls
- Cultural or faith-based organizations
- Other student life organizations or clubs



By partnering with other organizations, student ambassadors can:

- Work together to distribute education materials and giveaway items (e.g., giving out hand sanitizer in the student center or putting up posters in classroom buildings)
- Help organizations support members who are at risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 and the flu (e.g., students who have chronic health issues or disabilities)
- Spread the word about the ambassador program and get more students involved

COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS ON CAMPUS

Think about whether student ambassadors will need to **interact with other departments on campus**. For example, ambassadors might need to talk to campus housing or academic departments to get permission to post educational materials. Or if they're helping with a campus vaccine clinic, they might need to coordinate with the student health center.

Be sure to give these departments a heads-up about your program and let students know what to expect in these interactions.



Health Ambassadors partnered with different groups that reached all types of students and majors on campus.”

-ACHA GRANTEE

Make your program inclusive

It's important to **make sure that your student ambassador program is equitable, inclusive, and accessible** to everyone. As you're building your program, ask yourself:

Are my student ambassadors representative of our campus population?

Make sure your ambassadors are connected to every part of the campus community. That means including students with different needs and perspectives, like:

- Students with different majors and academic interests
- Students of diverse ages, races, and ethnicities
- LGBTQ+ students
- Students who have disabilities or chronic health conditions
- Students who commute to campus
- Working students
- Students who are parents or caregivers

Are there barriers to entry that might prevent students from participating in my program?

Students who work or have other big time commitments outside of school, like parenting or caring for a loved one, may not have as much time to invest in the program. One solution is to compensate students for their participation by paying them directly or providing other incentives. See [page 20](#) for more on compensation. You might also consider offering multiple times for training sessions and other meetings so that students can find a time that works for their schedule.

Are my program communications and activities inclusive?

When you're planning program activities or designing materials, it's important to make sure that all students feel welcomed and represented. Be sure to use language that's accessible to your student audience.

When choosing images, look for photos that represent the diversity of your campus population. In addition to characteristics like race and ethnicity, gender, and disability, think about what makes your campus community unique. For example, if you have many veterans or older students on campus, consider highlighting those groups in photos.

Are my program communications and activities accessible?

Students who have disabilities or chronic health conditions are often left out of campus activities and communications. It's important to make sure your program includes people who are at risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 and the flu.

- For guidance on planning accessible events, see our [Event Planning](#) guide.
- For tips on creating accessible social media content, see our [Communication Plan](#).



We made special efforts to reach out to campus partners that represented marginalized students on campus to engage them. When the students distributed incentives, they made it a point to visit spaces that students of color and LGBTQIA+ students often use, such as the Office of Multicultural Affairs study/conference spaces and the LGBTQIA+ hangout space on campus. We coached our students to make sure to ask permission to enter those spaces.”

-ACHA GRANTEE

Keep student ambassadors engaged with incentives and recognition

Many campuses choose to compensate students or provide incentives for participating in student ambassador programs. Providing some type of compensation can make it possible for more students to participate, including students who work during the semester. Here are some options to consider:



Direct payment. Consider paying students directly for their participation in the program.



Work-study. Consider making the student ambassador role a work-study position.



Tuition or housing remission. Some campuses cover a portion of students' tuition or housing in return for their participation in the program.



Discounts and other small incentives. Even if you don't have the budget to compensate students on a larger scale, small incentives like discounts at nearby restaurants or the campus bookstore and giveaway items can be a great way to keep students motivated.





Appreciation notes. A few words of encouragement can go a long way. Write your student ambassadors a quick note to show that you appreciate their commitment to the program. You can also give students a recommendation or endorsement on LinkedIn to publicly recognize their work.



References and letters of recommendation. Support students who are applying for internships, jobs, graduate school programs, or other opportunities by providing a reference or writing a letter of recommendation.



Community service credits. If your campus requires or encourages community service hours, ask campus leadership to classify your student ambassador program as a service activity.



PARTNERING WITH DIGITAL AMBASSADORS

In addition to traditional student ambassador programs, some campuses have partnered with digital ambassadors to share health messages about topics like COVID-19 and the flu. Digital ambassadors may include student athletes or students who already have a lot of followers on social media platforms like Instagram or TikTok.

Working with digital ambassadors can be a great way to **amplify the work you're doing on campus**. Keep in mind that ambassadors who have a large following may expect direct payment for their work.

Encourage students to practice community care

Over the past few years, many young adults have struggled with feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety. You can encourage students to care for their own mental health and support others by **practicing community care**. Community care means taking care of ourselves as well as our friends, loved ones, and peers in the campus community. Community care strategies may include:



Giving and receiving support from others. Support looks different for everyone, but it might include listening to and validating others' needs, offering practical help, or sharing information and personal perspectives on issues affecting the community.



Getting involved in mutual aid. Mutual aid means working together to meet the needs of everyone in a community. For example, campus community members might share resources like food, money, or transportation.



Creating space for reciprocal learning. Reciprocal learning happens when community members learn from each other, offer insight based on their personal experiences, and work together to solve problems.

For strategies to help students care for themselves and others, check out [these resources from ACHA's partner Youth Marketing Coalition](#).

Track your program's success

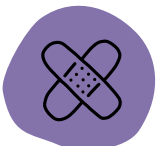
At first glance, it might be hard to tell if your student ambassador program is making a difference on campus. Here are a few ways you can **evaluate your program's impact**:



Track the reach of your program materials. For example, you could keep track of the number of branded items your student ambassadors give away, or the number of impressions or comments on their social media posts.



Conduct campus-wide surveys. Surveys are a great way to assess students' perceptions and attitudes about COVID-19 and the flu, the student ambassador program, and risk reduction behaviors like staying up to date on vaccines. .



Track health metrics like COVID-19 and flu cases or vaccination rates. Work with the campus health center to find out how many people in your campus community are sick or how many people have gotten vaccinated this year.





Interview your student ambassadors. Talk to your ambassadors about their experience with the program to identify what's working well and opportunities for improvement.



Interview other campus community members. Talk to other departments or campus organizations about their experiences with student ambassadors.



Ask professors to help. Turn evaluating your program into a learning opportunity. Consider asking marketing or communication professors to incorporate these activities into their course curriculum.

Be sure to share your findings with campus leadership, faculty members, and organizations that have supported your student ambassador program.

Finally, it may be harder to quantify, but remember that **student ambassadors influence campus social norms.** For example, if people see student ambassadors staying home when they're sick, they may be more likely to do the same.



More peer education resources

This guide covers the basic steps of starting a student ambassador program. Looking for more comprehensive guidance on peer education? Check out these resources:

- The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) offers a Certified Peer Educator training. The course helps students develop leadership skills to successfully create and implement campus programs. [Get the details on NASPA's training.](#)
- Explore more detailed guidance on creating a peer education program from [Kansas University](#) and [the University of Cincinnati](#).
- Learn about the characteristics of effective health education curriculum in [this CDC resource](#).
- [Explore more helpful resources](#) from ACHA. These webinars, slides, and handouts cover communication, social media, event planning, and more.

You can also learn a lot from following other schools' student ambassador programs (and other health and wellness-related organizations) on social media! Check out our [Communication Plan](#) for some great accounts to follow and tips to boost your own social media game.



COVID-19 and flu resources

ACHA's Student Ambassador Toolkit (including this guide) was updated in August 2023. Knowledge about COVID-19 and the flu is always evolving. Stay up to date by checking out these resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- [COVID-19](#)
- [The flu](#)

Point students toward credible resources like [We Can Do This](#) or [Vaccinate Your Family](#) to learn more about vaccines.

