



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

Event Planning Guide

Updated August 2023



Table of Contents

Your Guide to Planning Inclusive Events	3
In-person events	4
Set up an educational table on campus.....	7
Your table checklist.....	8
Virtual events	11
Know what to do if someone is disruptive	14
Wrap up after your event	15
Event Planning Resources	16

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
- Practice **risk reduction** (take steps to reduce the risk of people getting sick or hurt)
- Set up an educational table on campus
- 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](#). The toolkit includes resources about health and media literacy, COVID-19 and flu risk reduction, and more. You can use the toolkit to start a student ambassador program on campus, or just use the materials provided to educate your campus community.

This guide was updated in August 2023. For the latest guidance on protecting yourself and others from COVID-19 and the flu, check out these resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

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

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.

HELP ATTENDEES STAY HEALTHY

When people get together in big groups, illnesses like COVID-19 and the flu are more likely to spread from person to person. You can help students stay healthy by practicing **risk reduction** — taking steps to reduce the risk of people getting sick or hurt. Try these simple strategies:

- Look for a space that has good ventilation (air flow)
- Choose an area with plenty of space for people to spread out (or gather outside when the weather's nice!)
- Encourage people to stay home if they're sick
- If there are lots of COVID-19 or flu cases in your area, consider switching to a virtual format or asking attendees to wear masks



WHY DOES RISK REDUCTION MATTER?

We know COVID-19 and the flu may not be top of mind for everyone. But no one likes getting sick! By taking these simple steps, you can **help attendees stay healthy and make your event more accessible** to people who are at risk of getting very sick (like students with disabilities or chronic health conditions). Plus, practicing risk reduction sends a positive message that you care about **including everyone in your campus community**. Now that's a win-win.

MAKE YOUR IN-PERSON EVENT ACCESSIBLE

Here are a few more ways 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. You can also [use this resource from the University of Michigan](#) to find more detailed accessibility recommendations for campus events.

When you tell people about your event, be sure to note any precautions you're taking (like the examples on the previous page). By sharing this info, you can help students who are at risk of getting very sick make an informed choice for their health.



PLAN AHEAD FOR TRICKY SITUATIONS

We all know health topics can bring up strong emotions. If you're planning a health-related event, try these tips to keep things running smoothly — and manage any conflicts that may come up:

- 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 attendees get disruptive



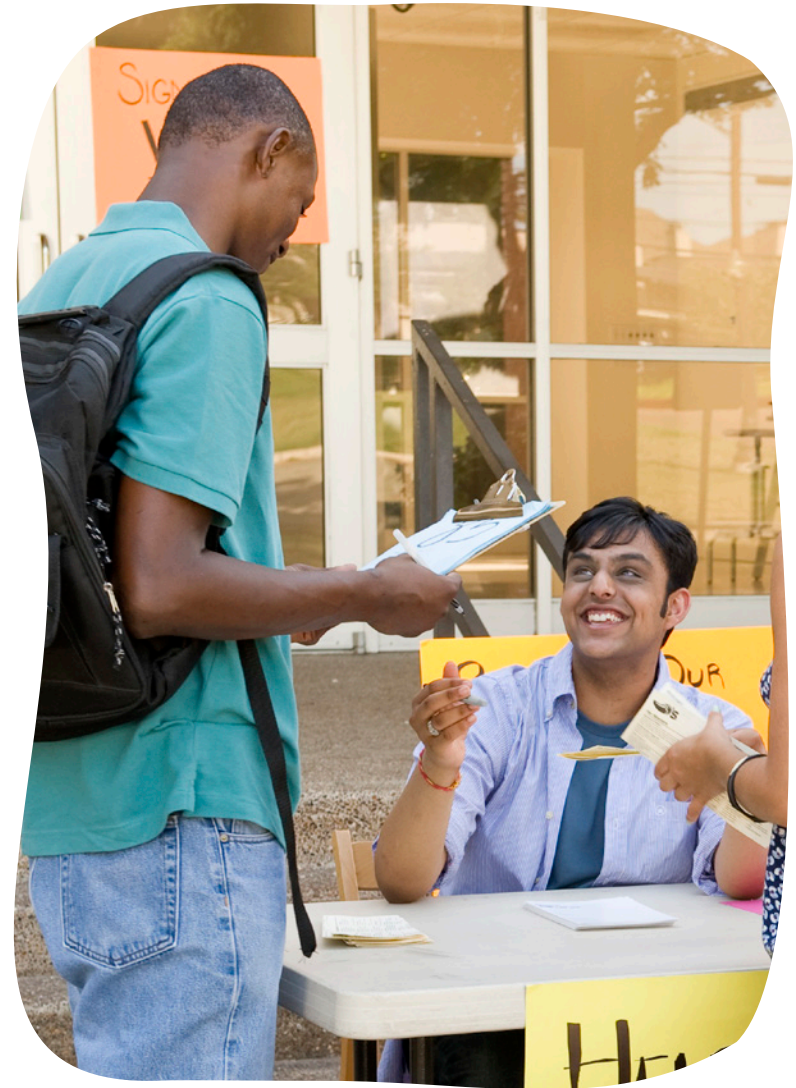
SET UP AN EDUCATIONAL TABLE ON CAMPUS

Tabling, or setting up a table on campus and talking to people who walk by, is a great way to educate students about health topics.

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!)
- Any food or water needed 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
- Comfortable shoes

You might also consider wearing a mask, depending on your needs and the number of COVID-19 and flu cases in your area.

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?



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 or the flu, 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

Many campuses host 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.

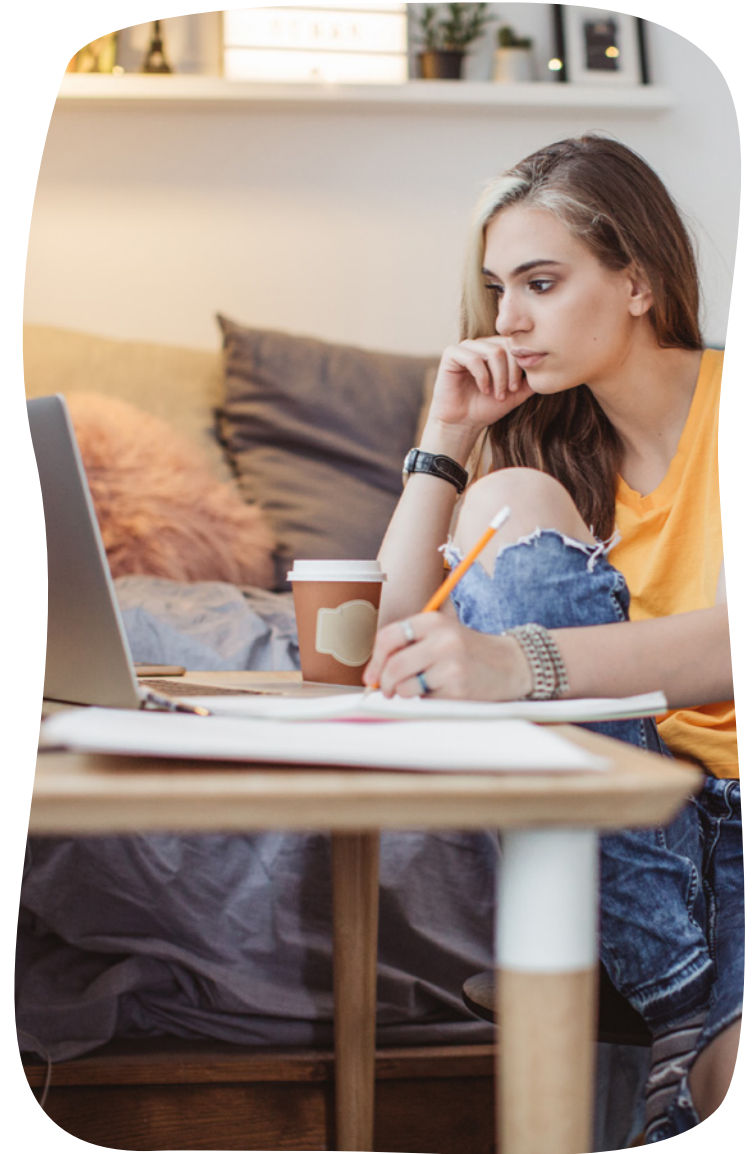
Hybrid events offer the perks of seeing friends and classmates in person and the flexibility of joining in from home. But these events also require extra effort from you and your planning team. It can be tricky to interact with attendees in person and online at the same time. So it's a good idea to designate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



PLAN AHEAD FOR TRICKY SITUATIONS

Try these tips to avoid any 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



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

If the conversation gets heated, you have the power to turn down the temperature. 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, try these strategies:

- **Respect personal space.** Give the other person a few feet of space.
- **Use calming nonverbal cues.** Keep your voice and facial expressions calm and try not to make super 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!)
- **Validate what the other person is feeling.** For example, you could start by saying, "I hear that you're frustrated about *topic X*." **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 or convince them that campus health guidelines make sense. 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 health 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 (in person or online).

Wrap up after your event

When your event's 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 (like professors, student organizations, or the 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.



Event planning resources

You can use these Student Ambassador Toolkit resources to plan educational events:

- [Workshop Lesson Plan](#): Use this step-by-step plan to host a workshop about COVID-19 and flu risk reduction.
- [Health and Media Literacy](#): Use this guide to plan an event about health and media literacy — important skills that students need to take care of their health.
- [Storytelling for Health Communication](#): Use this guide to host a storytelling event and invite students to share their own health stories.

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

