

# Your Senior Health Fair

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A guide to planning and implementing a successful event



In June, 2010, HealthStyle Press surveyed over 600 contacts at Area Agencies on Aging and aging departments throughout the US on the topic of Senior Health Fairs. Following are the results of the survey, as well as ideas to create and implement a successful health fair.

## II. Determining Goals and Creating a Timeline

Establishing goals can be the key to a successful event. Goals help determine what information to provide, exhibitors to solicit and activities to offer. Is your goal to increase overall health awareness through education and prevention? Provide early detection of health problems? Motivate individuals to seek healthier lifestyles, habits and behaviors? Having clear, concise goals keeps the planning committee on track for success.

Your timeline will be determined by the frequency of your fairs and your level of participation. Of our respondents, 37% hold a health fair annually for their seniors, 17% hold them twice a year and 17% follow no set schedule. Of the remaining respondents, they either hold many fairs a year or participate in other organizations' fairs:

*"We usually hold 10-12 (fairs) during Older American's Month"*

*"Continuously throughout the year"*

*"We are invited to attend 25+ a year"*

*"We participate in about 30 annually, but don't conduct any"*

*"At least once a month"*

*"We participate in, organize or help conduct about 400/year"*

### **Goals and Timeline Challenges**

- ▶ **Developing an adequate timeline**
- ▶ **Determining key tasks to be performed**

## Solutions

The length of your fair will affect your timeline. Over 56% of our respondents host their health fairs for 4-8 hours. 18% have fairs that are less than four hours in length. The remaining respondents hold fairs that are one day+ in length. Your goals, anticipated attendance and event schedule will all help determine the ideal length for your organization. Below is a general timeline based on key tasks. Adjust to meet your organization's needs:

### **Six to Twelve Months before fair:**

- ▶ Establish a committee meeting schedule
- ▶ Prepare the budget
- ▶ Set date and time
- ▶ Secure site location
- ▶ Identify potential partners, exhibitors, vendors, etc

### **Three to Six Months before fair:**

- ▶ Determine theme, activities and services offered
- ▶ Secure commitments from exhibitors and vendors

- ▶ Solicit volunteers to staff event (before, during and after)
- ▶ Reserve all rental equipment (tables, chairs, electricity)
- ▶ Develop media/communication plan

#### **Three Months before fair:**

- ▶ Develop promotional materials
- ▶ Secure giveaways and decorations
- ▶ Provide written confirm to exhibitors, vendors, volunteers, etc.
- ▶ Plan booth layout and develop collateral materials (booth signs, maps)

#### **One Month before fair:**

- ▶ Implement media plan
- ▶ Collect all “must have” items, such as office supplies, exhibitor and volunteer contact lists, first aid kit, extension cords, paper, etc.
- ▶ Develop program flyer for attendees
- ▶ Determine registration table process
- ▶ Identify post-fair evaluation and follow-up process

#### **One Week before fair:**

- ▶ Confirm with all participants
- ▶ Make nametags for all participants
- ▶ Finalize plans for registration table process, evaluation process, volunteer schedule

#### **Follow up after fair:**

- ▶ Send thank you letters to exhibitors, vendors, volunteers and key staff.
  - ▶ Review and summarize evaluation results
  - ▶ Hold a wrap-up committee meeting to discuss event and possible improvements for future fairs.
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## **II. Planning Your Senior Health Fair**

Almost half of the survey respondents (48%) plan their fair through a partnership with other organizations. Responses indicate that in most of these cases, the aging organization was not the one hosting the fair, but rather co-hosting or participating in another organization’s fair. Planning by committee is the next most popular method, with over one-third of respondents working with an established group. Only 10% of respondents have one person who plans their health fairs.

#### ***Planning Challenges:***

- ▶ **Creating an effective and efficient planning committee**
- ▶ **Approaching businesses to host a fair**
- ▶ **Communicating how your organization can participate and assist in health fairs**

## **Solutions**

To have the most effective and efficient committee, the following can be used as a general guide for determining committee size:

- ▶ 100-300 attendees: two to three members
  - ▶ 300-500 attendees: three to four members
  - ▶ 500+ attendees: five to seven members
  - ▶ For less than 100: one person should be able to effectively plan a successful health fair.
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Approaching businesses/organizations to host a fair can be an uncomfortable task for many. Keeping these few steps in mind will help ease the stress and increase your success.

1. Pre-determine your goals. Are you looking for one or many organizations with which to partner? What level of participation are you comfortable with?
  2. Develop a list of benefits for hosting a health fair. You need to communicate to the business/organization “what’s in it for them.”
  3. Create your list of target organizations. Make sure you know why each is a good prospect, so you can tailor your pitch. Your first point of contact should be with the Human Resources Manager.
  4. Determine how you will contact those on your list – by phone? Mail? Be sure to schedule follow up calls if you are soliciting by mail.
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Getting the word out that your organization can be a vital partner in health fairs is a benefit not only to you, but to those you reach out to as well. Similar to the steps above, you want to start with a list of goals and benefits.

1. Using your list of benefits, develop a marketing piece targeting organizations that host health fairs. This can be as simple as a one page flyer that you can post, mail or distribute at your own events.
  2. Include an article in your newsletter. Your readers may work for/know of an organization that hosts fairs.
  3. Provide a package of information to your best referral sources, for example, public health departments. If they are contacted to participate in a fair, they can refer your organization as well.
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### III. Site Selection

Our respondents utilize a variety of sites for their health fairs. Senior Centers lead as the most popular location, with over a 50% response. The second most popular space is exposition/conference center space, with 20% of respondents utilizing this type of facility. In general, our respondents typically utilize more than one type of space, depending on anticipated attendance, availability and budget.

Other locations used by survey respondents include:

- ▶ Shopping malls
- ▶ Health care facilities
- ▶ Community colleges
- ▶ On-site of businesses
- ▶ Open air venues
- ▶ Fire halls
- ▶ Fairgrounds
- ▶ Churches
- ▶ Community centers
- ▶ Schools/school gyms

### *Site Selection Challenges*

- ▶ Choosing the right site to meet your needs and goals
- ▶ Designing the most effective site layout

## **Solutions**

When choosing a site location, it is just as important to accommodate the needs of your exhibitors, as it is your attendees. There are a number of issues to consider when making this important decision:

- ▶ Anticipated attendance
- ▶ Convenience for attendees (hours, transportation options, accessibility)
- ▶ Adequate traffic flow that does not cause “back-ups” at screening booths
- ▶ Effective for exhibitors (adequate booth space, layout that supports ample traffic, privacy for health screenings)
- ▶ Availability of and access to electricity
- ▶ Lunchroom/breakroom facilities for exhibitors and volunteers
- ▶ Facility hours (sufficient set-up/tear-down time)
- ▶ Availability of chairs, tables and other items

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Designing your site floor plan is just as important as selecting your site. Traffic flow is key. Consider the following when designing your layout:

- ▶ Determine your ideal flow for traffic. Design the layout to support this flow.
- ▶ Identify booths that may cause back-ups or crowding into aisles. Position these booths in corners or other locations outside of the main traffic pattern.
- ▶ Do not place competing exhibitors next to each other.
- ▶ Be sure to include doors, fire exits, poles, etc in your design plan.
- ▶ Allow for easy access to restroom facilities.
- ▶ Consider aisle size and traffic pattern for those with walkers and wheelchairs.
- ▶ Allow for adequate registration space. Make sure it is clearly marked and has space for those who want to review the registration information prior to entering the fair. Additionally, make sure those waiting in line to register are in a comfortable area, not forced to wait outside, in hallways, etc.
- ▶ Ensure you will have enough volunteers to staff the registration table at all times to minimize wait times and maintain traffic flow.

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## **IV. Budget and Funding**

Our respondents fund their health fairs in a variety of ways. The most popular way is through exhibitor fees, with over 63% relying on this source of funding. Almost half (47%) have health fairs as a line item in their agency’s annual budget. Sponsors are another widely used method of funding, with 50% of respondents utilizing this method. 57% of respondents also count on donations/in-kind services to support their health fairs, while 30% solicit for monetary donations.

Generally, agencies charge a higher exhibit fee to for-profit companies as compared to non-profit organizations. Fees range from \$50 to hundreds of dollars, depending on anticipated attendance, geographical location, etc.

***Budget and Funding Challenge***  
▶ **Setting and Managing a Health Fair Budget**

## **Solution**

There are many items that should be included in your health fair budget. Consider the following:

- ▶ Publicity and promotion costs
- ▶ Equipment rental: tables, chairs, audiovisual, etc
- ▶ Refreshments and food for attendees, volunteers and vendors
- ▶ Screenings and other vendor costs
- ▶ Printing and mailing expenses
- ▶ Promotional materials/giveaways

When managing the budget, it is important to determine how specific situations will be handled prior to the event:

- ▶ Identify person responsible for writing and signing checks
  - ▶ Determine how deposits will be handled
  - ▶ Determine recordkeeping expectations
  - ▶ Determine deadlines for vendor/sponsor payments, reimbursements, etc.
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## **V. Exhibitor Management**

Your exhibitors are the backbone of your health fair. Your relationship with them is a mutually beneficial one. It is important though, to keep in mind that exhibitor staff are professionals who have responsibilities outside of your event. Exhibitors appreciate plenty of time to consider and prepare for the health fair, as well as consistent communication leading up to the day of the event.

There are many topics that can be covered in a health fair. Refer to your goals when determining which organizations would be beneficial to your attendees. With respect to our survey respondents, this is how the surveyed topics were ranked:

1. Blood Pressure Screenings (100%)
2. Caregiver Resources (87%)
3. Medicare (83%)
4. Nutrition (83%)
5. Falls Prevention (77%)
6. Home Health Care (73%)
7. Medical Devices (70%)
8. Physical Activity (70%)
9. Flu Shots (67%)
10. Home Health Supplies (67%)

11. Arthritis Education (63%)
12. Chronic Disease Management (63%)
13. Disability Resources (63%)
14. Adult Day Care (60%)
15. Medication Management (57%)
16. Mental Health Resources (47%)
17. Back Health (40%)
18. Cancer Detection/Treatment (40%)
19. Transportation (40%)
20. Stress Management (33%)
21. Dental Care (30%)
22. Other Immunizations (30%)
23. Tobacco Use Prevention (27%)
24. Other (10%)
  - ▶ Bone Density
  - ▶ Cholesterol/Glucose
  - ▶ Foot Health
  - ▶ Vision
  - ▶ Massage

To address these issues, all of our respondents (100%) count on community-based organizations to exhibit at their fairs. This is followed closely by local health care providers (93%), state and local health departments (77%) and local chapters of national health organizations (67%). Other exhibitors include local physicians or dentists (47%), police/fire departments (47%), and health clubs (33%).

Respondents offered additional ideas for exhibitors:

- ▶ Social Security Office
- ▶ DME providers
- ▶ Mosquito abatement
- ▶ Health insurance companies
- ▶ Veterans services
- ▶ AARP
- ▶ Home health agencies

***Exhibitor Management Challenge***  
▶ Effectively managing exhibitors and vendors

## Solution

Give potential exhibitors/vendors plenty of time to get your event on their calendar. The following are some suggestions for ensuring a successful partnership:

- ▶ Develop a list of potential exhibitors/vendors who focus on the health problems and issues of those you serve.
- ▶ Once contacted, send a confirmation letter to the exhibitors/vendors with the details of your health fair, such as:
  - Date, set-up, exhibit and tear-down times
  - Point of contact information
  - Instructions on where to park, unload materials, etc.

- Number of expected attendees
  - Layout of the health fair and booth assignment
  - Payment expectations (if applicable)
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- ▶ Ask for the following information from exhibitors:
    - Names of representatives working the fair
    - Electrical and audio visual needs
    - Space requirements, special needs
    - Plans for giveaways, drawings, etc.
  
  - ▶ Let the exhibitors/vendors know how you will be publicizing the event. Ask for assistance in getting the word out.
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## VI. Promotion

Promotion and as a result, attendance, is the biggest challenge for AAAs. The methods of promotion most frequently used by our respondents are typically those with minimal or no cost associated to it. Postings at Senior Centers (97%) ranked number one, with press releases to local media and flyers/posters in the community tied for second at 90%. Many rely on partner organizations (80%) to help get the word out. Your organization's newsletter is another effective vehicle for promotion, with 63% of respondents utilizing this method. Only 50% of respondents purchase advertising space in local publications.

93% of respondents utilize giveaways at the health fair to promote their agency. The most popular giveaways are health education pamphlets (83%), tote bags (67%) and pill cases (67%). 50% have handed out health records, while medication trackers and stress balls have been used by one third of respondents. But the ideas don't stop there! Other items used include:

- ▶ Magnets
- ▶ Jar openers
- ▶ Pens
- ▶ Magnifiers
- ▶ Mini-flashlights
- ▶ Post-it notepads
- ▶ Eyeglass repair kits
- ▶ Collapsible cups
- ▶ Back scratchers
- ▶ Key chains
- ▶ Hand sanitizers
- ▶ Travel bottles

Finally, many agencies rely on donations or count on exhibitors to provide giveaways.

### *Promotion Challenges*

- ▶ Promotion options
- ▶ Increasing attendance

## Solution

There are two ways to increase attendance to your health fair. The first is to increase the number of people who are aware of the fair, and secondly, ensure the fair is meeting the needs of potential attendees.

### Promotion and Publicity

The sky's the limit when it comes to ways to promote your event. Here are some ways to reach a wider audience:

#### 1. Media outlets

- Prepare press releases for local newspapers and public service announcements for local radio stations.
- Submit your health fair to be included in community newspaper calendars (be sure to confirm deadlines)
- Secure a remote broadcast for a local radio station at your event.
- Check into community access cable opportunities in your area. Many have channels with calendars or the opportunity to present a brief commercial.

#### 2. Business and Organization Outreach

- Utilize your local Chamber of Commerce to spread the word
- Get the message out to fraternal and other local organizations such as the Rotary or Lions clubs
- Provide flyers and information to local churches so they can inform their parishioners
- Ask your local banks if they would advertise your event on their bank marque
- Distribute flyers to local hospitals and physicians offices
- Ask for volunteers to distribute flyers in retirement communities, etc.
- Write a paragraph about the event to be included in other organizations' newsletters
- Post flyers at all local senior centers, grocery stores, libraries, restaurants and any other areas where your target audience will see them.

#### 3. Electronic Media

- Many seniors are now connected via social media. Develop a Facebook page or utilize other social networking sites to reach out to your local seniors.
- Collect email addresses and promote electronically.
- Promote on your organization's web site
- Ask your exhibitors and vendors to add a link/information to their web site

### Increasing Attendance

The above ideas will help you reach more people, but you still need to motivate them to come. Motivation can come in all different ways:

- Entertainment – secure a popular local band or ensemble to play during the fair. Be sure though, to position the entertainment so it does not detract from the exhibitors/vendors
- Work with exhibitors, vendors and in-kind donors to have an auction or raffle. Promote some of the more valuable prizes in your flyers and advertising.
- Recruit local restaurants to offer healthy fare to attendees
- Arrange for transportation, either through private organizations or through transportation services provided by city or county agencies. Ensure that the transportation includes a sufficient number of wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

- Survey your attendees to find out what they liked and disliked about your event. Make changes to next year's event that will help draw in more people.
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## VII. Evaluation

Evaluation is an important element of any health fair, but is often overlooked. Soliciting feedback from both attendees and exhibitors provides important information on your efforts, as well as offering ideas for future fairs. About one in five respondents find soliciting feedback a challenge.

*Evaluation Challenge*  
▶ Soliciting feedback from attendees

## Solution

While soliciting feedback can be a tedious, time-consuming task, it is also one of the most crucial tasks in ensuring successful future events.

- Keep the form brief, soliciting both open-ended answers and ratings on different topics
  - If you do not want to survey everyone, target every 5<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> person
  - Have volunteers ask the questions verbally or complete the form with the attendees
  - To encourage completion, offer a prize drawing for those who complete the forms. (Make sure to ask for name and phone number.)
  - Be sure to survey your exhibitors/vendors as well. They attend many events and could provide valuable feedback on ways to improve your event.
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## VIII. Summary

Senior Health Fairs are great ways to educate on health risks and promote preventive health behaviors. By preparing a well thought out plan and setting goals for success, your event can be rewarding for both the organization and the attendees!