A health fair is a good opportunity for you to engage your employees about their health and wellness. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois is pleased to provide this comprehensive Health Fair Planning Guide to help you plan, implement and evaluate a health fair.

A health fair may be a complex event encompassing many activities and learning opportunities, or it may be as simple as offering a health screening or flu shot. The needs of your organization will dictate the health fair you undertake. This guide may be used as a starting point for any size health fair. Don’t be overwhelmed by the amount of information. It has been created to cover the full gamut of potential needs for health fair planning and assessment.

**Why are health fairs important?**

A study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services concluded that, for many Americans, certain unhealthy individual behavior and lifestyle choices increase risk factors for health problems and influence the development and course of chronic conditions. These conditions are ultimately very costly to employers. Worksite-based programs that encourage individuals to adopt healthy habits and practices can help reduce the burden of illness and absenteeism and potentially reverse their effects on an employer’s bottom line.

A health fair can be a major component for employers in an overall plan to facilitate change in employees’ attitudes and health practices. With employee wellness as the ultimate objective, health fairs enable employers to reach a large number of individuals to:

- Focus on healthy life choices through activities, demonstrations and distribution of materials
- Increase awareness of health risks by providing screenings and information
- Inform employees of local, state, and national health services and resources
- Motivate participants to make positive health behavior changes
- Provide immunizations
Planning is important for a successful health fair. Allowing sufficient time for planning increases the likelihood of:

- Securing the right mix of exhibitors and vendors
- Finding an optimal event location
- Hosting a well-organized event

Based on the complexity of the event, planning should begin up to six months before the health fair date. This will allow time to implement the following steps:

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A planning committee will provide leadership and coordination for the health fair. The committee can vary in size, depending on how elaborate your health fair is and the size of your company.

For larger events, consider adding representatives from groups, such as:
- Community organizations: American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, March of Dimes
- Health professionals: physicians, optometrists, dietitians, nurses
- Health agencies: local health department, hospitals, pharmacies
- Local colleges and universities
- Local businesses

Duties of the committee may include the following:
- Setting goals
- Developing a timeline
- Establishing and managing a budget
- Developing a theme
- Identifying the target audience and the best ways to reach the audience
- Deciding activities, health screenings and information for participants
- Selecting a date
- Creating a schedule for the health fair, including opening and closing times
- Determining whether food or refreshments will be offered at the event
- Identifying and coordinating contact of potential donors, sponsors, volunteers, vendors and exhibitors
- Assisting with management of the health fair
- Establishing evaluation mechanisms and metrics

Helpful Hints
The planning committee should include representation from key areas within your organization that will be participating in the health fair.

Helpful Hints
If you intend to provide health screenings or immunizations to health fair participants, include clinical representation on the planning committee to help determine appropriateness of screenings and to ensure proper health precautions are followed. This person could be an occupational health nurse from your company or a clinician from the local health department.

List committee members

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Step 1: Organizing a Planning Committee
Step 2: Setting Goals

One of the first duties of the planning committee is to establish specific goals and objectives for the health fair. What does your organization hope to achieve through the event? This will allow you to establish guidelines for planning, promoting, implementing and evaluating the health fair.

Potential health fair goals:
- Increase personal health awareness
- Provide health screenings and educational material
- Motivate behavioral changes
- Increase knowledge of employee benefits
- Increase knowledge of community resources

Health fair goals

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Step 3: Developing a Timeline

Health fair timeline and checklist

6 months before the health fair
- Obtain senior management approval
- Establish goals and objectives
- Select a planning committee chair and members
- Identify the target audience
- Select a theme
- Select a date and time
- Select and reserve the location
- Identify possible services, information, exhibits and activities
- Prepare a budget
- Establish timelines
- Secure commitments from exhibitors, health care providers, vendors, etc.
- Send exhibitor/vendor invitation letter (included in toolkit)
- Secure volunteers, to help with: clerical duties, registration, evaluation form collection, setup/cleanup, hospitality and photography

3 to 6 months before the health fair
- Establish timelines
- Secure commitments from exhibitors, health care providers, vendors, etc.
- Send exhibitor/vendor invitation letter (included in toolkit)
- Secure volunteers, to help with: clerical duties, registration, evaluation form collection, setup/cleanup, hospitality and photography
- Select the health screenings and services to be offered
- Reserve the rental equipment
- Reserve the audiovisual equipment
- Reserve tables and chairs
- Order educational and promotional materials
- Plan and begin securing prizes, decorations, goodie bags, giveaways, etc.
- Reserve trash receptacles
- Customize promotional communications (posters, fliers, e-mails - included in the toolkit)
- Duplicate printed materials: registration and evaluation forms
- Seek confirmation from exhibitors, providers, vendors and volunteers
- Ask exhibitors to bring special equipment: extension cords, three-prong adaptors, etc.
- Provide exhibitors with written confirmation of:
  - Date of event
  - Service or activity to be provided by the exhibitor
  - Time to set up booth
  - Time health fair is open to public
  - Map and directions to the health fair
  - General guidelines including security, check-in and parking
  - Title for their booth signs

3 months before the health fair
- Meet with committee members to review progress toward implementation of plans
- Publicize the event with fliers, posters, etc.
- Finalize booths, exhibits
- Prepare map for exhibitors and participants
- Send final information to exhibitors that includes:
  - List of participating agencies and activities
  - Parking information
  - Security check-in instructions
  - Name and phone number of contact for the day of the health fair
  - Make a list of items still needing to be purchased
  - Develop a “Prepared for Anything Kit” that includes:
    - Office supplies
    - Extension cords
    - Tape
    - Hammer, nails, pliers and screwdriver
    - Batteries
    - First-aid kit
    - Trash bags
    - Paper towels and tissues
    - Camera and film for volunteer photographer
    - Exhibitor/vendor contact list

1 month before the health fair
- Meet with committee members to review progress toward implementation of plans
- Publicize the event with fliers, posters, etc.
- Finalize booths, exhibits
- Prepare map for exhibitors and participants
- Send final information to exhibitors that includes:
  - List of participating agencies and activities
  - Parking information
  - Security check-in instructions
  - Name and phone number of contact for the day of the health fair
  - Make a list of items still needing to be purchased

Helpful Hints
A timeline is an essential planning tool and will provide a complete view of when each activity should be completed. Adequate time to plan will result in a more organized event.
**Step 3: Developing a Timeline, continued**

### 1 week before the health fair
- Final confirmation with all exhibitors
- Print map of exhibits and program
- Prepare exhibitors’ and volunteers’ nametags
- Prepare a list of where volunteers will be assigned the day of the health fair
- Plan for 1-2 management personnel to be available to handle emergencies
- Finalize plan for the registration table and the registration process
- Finalize plan for staffing, including command center table
- Finalize plan for evaluation: distribution and collection

### Day before the health fair
- Set up the tables, booths, exhibits, chairs, etc.
- Set up the registration table:
  - Sign-in/registration sheets with addresses and phone numbers
  - Plenty of pens and pencils for participants
  - Maps of exhibits and programs, if applicable
  - “Goodie bags” for giveaways
  - Assignment list for volunteers
- Label the command center table and equip with the “Prepared for Anything Kit”
- Set up the evaluation area, including forms for exhibitors and participants, and the receptacles for form return
- Set up the food area, including refreshments for exhibitors
- Check to ensure sufficient electrical cords, outlets, audiovisual equipment, etc.

### Day of the health fair
- Be ready one hour before exhibitors are to arrive
- Greet and direct exhibitors to their assigned tables
- Direct and instruct the volunteers
- Collect registrations
- Check with exhibitors periodically to assess needs
- Collect evaluations (included in toolkit)
- Clean up
- Estimate attendance

### Follow-up after the health fair
- Send thank-you letters to exhibitors and volunteers
- Check with health agencies doing the screenings to make sure follow-up is done for all lab results
- Tabulate evaluation results
- Conduct committee debriefing meeting
- Report results to senior management and exhibitors, as appropriate

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**Helpful Hints**

When developing the timeline, take into account:

- **What is the size of the event?**
- **Who will be invited?**
- **Are insurance coverage or waiver forms required?**
- **Who needs to provide approvals, such as senior leadership and legal representative?**
Health fair costs will vary based on the size of the event, the number of participants, and the activities provided. Having a limited budget isn’t a barrier to having a successful health fair. There are many resources available, both within your organization and in the community.

You’ll want to establish a budget and consider your original health fair goals as a basis for determining where to spend the available budget dollars.

**Budget details**
- Health screening and other vendor costs
- Thank-you gifts for vendors
- Decorations
- Mailings, including promotional and follow-up
- Publicity and promotion costs
- Parking
- Permits and insurance requirements
- Giveaways for participants
- Printing
- Refreshments for participants, volunteers, and people in exhibitor and vendor booths
- Rental of tables, chairs, audiovisual equipment or other equipment
## Health fair budget planning form

### Displays
- Decorations
  - Cost: $__________________
- Banners
  - Cost: $__________________
- Barriers/privacy curtains
  - Cost: $__________________
- Display boards/posters
  - Cost: $__________________
- Educational materials
  - Cost: $__________________
- Extension cords
  - Cost: $__________________

### Volunteers
- Nametags
  - Cost: $__________________
- Parking
  - Cost: $__________________
- Refreshments
  - Cost: $__________________
- T-shirts
  - Cost: $__________________

### Equipment
- Tables/chairs
  - Cost: $__________________
- Other equipment rental
  - Cost: $__________________

### Promotional/publicity materials
- Bags
  - Cost: $__________________
- Banners
  - Cost: $__________________
- Prizes
  - Cost: $__________________
- Fliers
  - Cost: $__________________
- Giveaways
  - Cost: $__________________

### Vendor costs
- Health screenings
  - Cost: $__________________
- Insurance/waivers
  - Cost: $__________________
- Vendor parking
  - Cost: $__________________
- Honorariums/travel costs
  - Cost: $__________________

### Paperwork
- Correspondence/postage
  - Cost: $__________________
- Evaluations
  - Cost: $__________________
- Printing
  - Cost: $__________________
- Invitations
  - Cost: $__________________
- Registration forms
  - Cost: $__________________
- Screening forms
  - Cost: $__________________

### Subtotals
- Displays: $__________________
- Volunteers: $__________________
- Equipment: $__________________
- Promotional/publicity materials: $__________________
- Vendor costs: $__________________
- Paperwork: $__________________

### Total cost
- Total: $__________________

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**Step 4: Establishing a Budget, continued**
Creating a theme can heighten interest and help with promotions.

**Selecting a theme**

- **Evaluate past themed events your company may have held or your committee members may have attended**
- **Survey employees**
  - Assess the health needs and desires of the target audience (an employee interests and needs survey is included in the toolkit).
  - Utilize survey results to plan the theme.
- **Investigate local resources**
  - Are health care professionals or community organizations available that may provide expertise on a certain theme?
  - What resources are available in your area? Take into account colleges and universities, volunteer organizations, government agencies such as the police and fire departments, and the parks and recreation department. Also consider hospitals, fitness centers, pharmacies and grocery stores. These community organizations may provide staff, screenings, refreshments or promotional material.
- **Review lists of National Health Observances**
  - Each month of the year has specific health observances such as National Nutrition Month in March, National High Blood Pressure Education Month in May, National Immunization Awareness Month in August, and American Diabetes Month in November. Consider piggybacking on the awareness of these observances to help generate event interest and participation.

**Brainstorm possible health fair themes**

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Step 6: Determining Event Activities

When determining the activities for the health fair, consider the health fair goals and objectives and select activities that will best help achieve them while staying within budget. The most successful health fairs offer a variety of activities that may be divided into the following categories:

**Demonstrations:**
Hands-on learning is a good way to engage participation, as well as enhance learning.
- Aerobics
- Cooking
- CPR
- Hand washing
- Proper lifting
- Safety
- Self-defense
- Upper body massage

**Awareness and educational information:**
Interactive displays are among the most effective ways to encourage participation.
- Back care
- Child health and safety
- Dental health
- Ergonomics
- First aid
- Men’s and women’s health issues
- Nutrition
- Stress management
- Substance abuse information
- Tobacco cessation
- Weight management
- Work-life balance

**Screenings:**
Screenings provide a venue to promote awareness of health risks and information on lifestyle changes that can positively impact the health and well-being of your employees. See page 11 for a list of universal precautions to take if screenings are part of your health fair.
- Blood pressure
- Body fat analysis
- Body mass index (BMI)
- Bone density testing
- Feet screening
- Glucose testing
- Hearing
- Lung capacity
- Mobile mammography
- Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) screening
- Skin cancer
- Total cholesterol testing
- Vision screening

Helpful Hints
You may choose to feature Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois programs* such as:
- Blue Care Connection®
- BlueExtras℠
- Dental benefits
- Pharmacy benefits
- Healthy Expectations®

Helpful Hints
Educate your employees about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois online tools* such as:
- Blue Access® for Members
- Health Risk Assessment
- The Personal Health Manager

*Talk to your Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois representative to discuss programs and online resources available for your employees.
Universal Precautions

When conducting screenings, follow universal precautions:

– Plan and arrange for clinical staff, laboratory services, onsite mobile mammogram van or transporation to the location, such as a local hospital for mammograms.

– Plan for meeting universal precautions for drawing and handling blood.

– Plan for delivery of results to the participants.

– Plan and arrange for immediate and long-term treatment referrals for participants with abnormal results, like high blood pressure or elevated blood sugar.

– Define and review the kinds of health information, brochures and giveaways appropriate for the target audience. For example, no small objects or free drug samples can be given to young children.

– Plan for immunizations appropriate for the target audience.

– Plan for obtaining a consent form, if required, for a screening procedure or immunizations.

– Plan for equipment needs, such as blood pressure cuffs, including children’s (if families are invited), average adult’s and large adult’s (the wrong size cuff will give inaccurate results). Note: Blood pressure screening is not usually conducted for children unless the target population is deemed high risk.

– Plan for first-aid needs during the health fair.

– Plan to protect the confidentiality of participants regarding results. Results must only be given to the individual participant.

– Results may never be delivered to the employer at a worksite or to an insurance company without employee approval.

– No sign-up sheets should identify participants’ blood pressures, lab results, etc.

– If height and weight are measured, for example, it must be done so no one else may even accidently be aware of another person’s results—this is true for both children and adults.

Helpful Hints

• If screenings are provided, determine the most appropriate screenings for the targeted audience.

• When family members are invited to the event, confirm that screenings can be provided to everyone in attendance.
Step 7: Selecting a Location

The health fair site should be convenient for participants and have capacity to accommodate the exhibitors and vendors.

**Location considerations:**
- **Beverages**
  - Are drinking water and refreshments available?
- **Cleanup**
  - What type of cleanup is required?
- **Equipment and electrical**
  - What is needed?
- **Food safety**
  - Will there be cooking and is refrigeration needed/available?
- **Furniture**
  - Are tables and chairs available?
- **Inside or outside**
  - If the health fair is outside, a contingency plan will be needed for bad weather, including wind, rain or excessive heat.
- **Location**
  - Is it easily accessible for the target audience?
  - Is it easy to find?
  - Is it near public transportation?
- **Parking**
  - Is it adequate?
- **Permits**
  - Are any permits required?
- **Restrooms**
  - Are there sufficient facilities to accommodate the anticipated number of attendees?
- **Safety**
  - Are there stairs and elevators?

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**Helpful Hints**

Once the location has been secured, the committee will need to:

- **Plan for security.**
  Where can purses be safely kept during the fair?

- **Plan locations and develop a diagram for exhibit booths and facilities (Competing agencies will likely not want to be next to each other).**

- **Plan for crowd flow.**

- **Plan for an exhibitor break room.**

- **Create and post directional signs at the fair.**
Step 8: Managing Staffing Needs

When planning the health fair event, you will need coworkers or other volunteers to perform the following:

- Clerical duties
- Registration
- Evaluation form collection
- Hospitality (welcome and directions)
- Setup and cleanup

A member of the committee should be designated to organize volunteers the day of the health fair. It’s also a good idea to have a manager and committee members at your Command Central table at all times.

Helpful Hints

- Holding a pre-event meeting with all of the volunteers helps to achieve an organized event. This provides a time to communicate assignments, layout of the site, confidentiality policies and procedures, and other details.

- For easy identification, consider having all the volunteers dress alike at the event and/or provide badges or T-shirts.

Volunteers’ assignments

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Once the theme and site have been selected, identify the exhibitors and vendors you want to participate. To increase the likelihood of participation and availability of activities/services the planning committee wants, approach exhibitors/vendors as early as possible.

- Develop a list of potential exhibitors and vendors, focusing on those most relevant to the health concerns and interests of the company, and to the health fair goals.

- Determine if you will charge a fee for the exhibitors or vendors. Charging a fee can assist in offsetting expenses, such as rental, lighting and equipment costs. Note: Consider waiving the charges for non-profit community agencies to encourage participation.

- Make initial contacts by phone. This provides an immediate response and the opportunity to answer any questions the potential exhibitor or vendor may have.

- Send the exhibitors and vendors a written invitation and a confirmation letter (included in the toolkit).

- Request that the exhibitor complete the Exhibitor Needs Form included in the toolkit and return it by fax.
Step 10: Publicizing the Event

To ensure a good turnout at the health fair, it is important that the event is promoted. Promotion should start at least four weeks before the health fair event. The theme will support recognition of the event. Advertise giveaways, door prizes and screenings available, as well as the exhibitors who will be at the event. Use a variety of methods to promote the event.

Possible communication methods:
- Article in the company newsletter
- Announcements at employee meetings
- Banners
- Bulletin boards
- E-mail messages
- Fliers
- Letter from senior management
- Memos
- Media
  - invite reporters who cover health and consumer-related news to attend
- Use this as a good photo opportunity
- Paycheck stuffers
- Posters - place in highly visible areas:
  - Employee entrance doors
  - Copy room
  - Elevators and/or stairways
  - Restroom mirrors or doors
  - Employee cars in the parking lot
- Table tents in the cafeteria
- Telephone voicemail messages
Gathering feedback from the health fair participants, exhibitors, vendors and your committee members helps to measure the success of the health fair. This will assist in determining the event’s strengths and weaknesses, whether the goals were achieved, and what to do—and not do—in future events. Using specific questions in evaluation forms will help measure the extent to which event goals and objectives were met.

Prior to the event, assign a committee member to be responsible for the evaluation process, including collection of evaluation forms, organizing information and reporting results to the committee. A summary of results can be scheduled for the entire committee following the health fair, and follow-up steps could then be identified and assigned.

**Evaluation distribution**

Evaluations can be handed out during registration. The completed forms can be placed in a box as participants leave. Another option is to have a table at the doors where people are most likely to exit; hand out the forms there, and ask people to complete them before leaving. Or, have volunteers interview people as they leave. Ask volunteers to complete evaluations as well, indicating “Volunteer” at the top of the form. Volunteers may have the opportunity to observe challenges or hear comments that may be helpful to the committee.

Another option is to e-mail or mail evaluation forms, or call a sample of participants after the health fair—you’ll need to collect addresses and phone numbers as people sign in. Mailing evaluation forms may not have the best return—estimated to be 10 to 20 percent at best.

Exhibitor evaluations can be handed out near the end of the health fair. Ask exhibitors to deposit the completed forms in a box as they leave. Other options include interviewing exhibitors as they leave, mailing a survey or calling them a few days later.
Focus on Feedback

Participant evaluation
Participant evaluation forms should include questions regarding:

- How they heard about the health fair (to determine the most successful promotional methods)
- What motivated them to attend
- Which booths and activities were the most interesting, and what characteristics made them successful
- Whether the health fair will impact their behavior and health choices
- Suggestions for other exhibitors and activities

Exhibitor and vendor evaluation
On the exhibitor evaluation form, include questions regarding:

- Exhibitors’ and vendors’ perspective on the organization
- Adequacy of communications
- Exhibit accommodations, equipment and supplies
- Recommendations for future events

Committee evaluation
Coordinate a debriefing meeting with your health fair committee members. In the final assessment, the committee can review:

- The location
- Access and convenience
- Sufficiency of space
- Crowd flow
- Parking
- The planning process
- Timeliness
- Adequacy of volunteer and manager staffing
- Actual attendance versus anticipated attendance
- Areas that would have been more successful with increased planning

Helpful Hints
Have participant and exhibitor evaluation forms printed on different colors of paper so they will be easy to separate.

Helpful Hints
This final evaluation can serve as a starting point to facilitate planning for future successful events.

Sources: Texas Extension Service; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Supporting toolkit materials

Sample Health Fair Exhibitor/Vendor Contact Information Form
Sample Health Fair Exhibitor/Vendor Invitation Letter
Sample Health Fair Exhibitor/Vendor Participation Confirmation Letter
Sample Health Fair Exhibitor/Vendor Needs Form
Sample Health Fair Employee/Participant Evaluation
Sample Health Fair Exhibitor/Vendor Evaluation