

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY-BASED WORK FAIR

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Issue(s) Being Addressed:

A fair is an innovative method of displaying the magnitude and importance of service-learning and community-based work at institutions of higher education.

Actions to Consider:

Many campuses host volunteer fairs for students to make service opportunity connections. Yet, there are still many educators and higher education administrators in the dark about service and its impact on the university and its surrounding communities. One way to show the campus the importance of service-learning and volunteerism is by displaying the work of those involved in service; a fair highlighting the challenges and achievements of these students in various service experiences.

Organizing such an event to display community-based work shows its' magnitude on campus. It also encourages faculty to incorporate service into their courses, persuades other students to get into service, and gives community partners new ideas about collaborating with local colleges and universities.

Overview:

At the University of Michigan (UM), this event is referred to as the Project Fair. It is part of an annual all-day Symposium on Community-Based Work. The event includes workshops for community partners geared towards better utilizing University resources, and a keynote address and lunch open to the public. In its third year, it solicited at least 80 exhibits from more than 60 classes, student groups, and academic units. The event was attended by over 100 community partners and many more university affiliates. What are the most effective ways to attract the desired audience?

The Event:

The Project Fair runs from 1:00 - 2:30pm. It is held in the Ballroom of either the Michigan Union or Michigan League. Presenters are given table space, easels, and other materials to display their exhibits. Some presenters also bring laptops for power-point presentations, or rent TV equipment to show videos or performances. Community partners and University affiliates are encouraged to view the different exhibits and network with the presenters. Presenters are required to stay with their exhibit to explain it to the audience.

Key Components:

- Depending on the audience (i.e. students, faculty, administrators, community partners), consider making the Fair part of an all-day event that will attract the desired participants (i.e. workshops, lunch, keynote address, service project).
- Rent a space large enough to accommodate presenters and allow for navigation space
- Create an on-line registration form, asking for presenter's specific space needs and requirements (i.e. easels, TV equipment, internet connection).
- Send out a "Call for Participation" to faculty who support service learning, encouraging them to make this a requirement of those in their course.
- Contact student groups that participate in service and encourage them to participate.
- Ask other units and academic departments to co-sponsor the event; co-sponsors can assist financially as well as through advertising.
- Create publicity materials to advertise the event, such as posters and handbills, e-mails over service listservs, invitations to University dignitaries, letters and faxes to community-based organizations.
- Assign presenters a space in the facility, and create a diagram that maps out presenters' locations; include this diagram in a program for attendees.
- Number assigned easels, tables, etc. according to number assigned to each presenter.