

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY SERVICE FAIR

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Issue(s) Being Addressed:

Orienting college students to service opportunities, both on-campus and in the local community can be challenging. An annual “community service fair” can be a good solution.

Overview:

A community service fair consists of representatives from community non-profit agencies and on-campus student service organizations being invited to share information on a college campus about getting involved in service. It is a good chance for students, faculty and staff to learn about community service opportunities and about the needs of campus and community organizations.

Logistical Arrangements:

- Plan the fair on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, ideally. Monday spurs forgetfulness and may be busy for community agencies, and college students tend to be weekend-focused on Fridays.
- Arrange for the fair to take place on-campus, in a high traffic area. Arrange for tables to be set up for presenters to set up information or displays. Try to make alternative plans to move the fair inside (ideally in a building with lots of people) in case of rain.
- Schedule the fair early in the day when students are going to and from classes.
- Provide water and chairs for presenters. Sunscreen is a good idea on a sunny day.
- Provide paperclips, rubber-bands, and paperweights in case it is windy.
- Keep track of communication with faculty, staff, students, and community representatives regarding the fair. With numerous phone calls and e-mails, there is potential to forget individual details.

Bringing Opportunities to Students, Faculty, and Staff:

- Create a list of community agencies and student groups that may potentially participate in the fair. Figure out which organizations are particularly crucial; especially important in smaller towns or at smaller colleges. It would be a mistake to forget any organization that is greatly involved with students or groups on campus.
- Most community agencies will be glad to participate, provided they have enough notice of the event. Contact non-profit agencies *6-8 weeks* prior to the fair.
- On-campus student service organizations will generally be glad to participate in a community service fair. Student leaders tend to be quite busy and may require more reminders. Contact student groups leaders *3-4 weeks* prior to the fair.
- Obtain an e-mail or postal address for all representatives of student groups and community agencies who will be presenting at the fair. Send a follow up e-mail or letter. Use this to thank them for their participation, confirm logistical details, and provide directions to the fair.
- After the fair, send thank you notes to representatives of community organizations and student groups who participated in the fair, as well as to faculty members, staff, and students who helped with the fair.

Bringing Students, Faculty, and Staff to Opportunities:

- Promote the fair on-campus with posters, flyers, and the like. Find catchy ways to grab students' attention.
- Send an e-mail about the fair to all faculty and staff and/or to all students.
- Speak briefly at student organization meetings or send e-mails via listservs.
- Encourage faculty members to announce the fair in their classes, or speak briefly to their classes and/or send an e-mail about the fair. Ask faculty members to offer incentives to their students to participate in service, and to offer the community service fair as a way to learn about opportunities.
- Create a list of crucial staff and faculty members. These might include faculty who teach courses with a service-learning component, or staff with jobs related to community service. Send them a letter about the fair (e.g. its purpose and times and locations) through campus mail, ideally a month before the fair. Follow up with a phone call or visit to their offices a week or so after sending the letter.