

Recovery Month Event Planning Tips and Publicity Overview

An exciting and rewarding part of **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** is organizing special events each September to promote the benefits of treatment for and recovery from substance use disorders. Your events can attract attention and support from the community, legislators, business leaders, and the media.

Events also can help spread the message of recovery and the theme of this year's campaign: **"Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars."** This theme encourages everyone to understand the value of investing in treatment and the costs of untreated substance use disorders. Re-adjusting to a productive everyday life will help people in recovery, their families, and their communities prosper.

The **Recovery Month 2007** theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars,"** is the unifying force behind these messages. This theme emphasizes the value that treatment of substance use disorders has on those who have returned as productive members in their community.

Examples of Effective Events

Large or small, successful **Recovery Month** events have raised awareness about this campaign and have gained support from various community groups over the years. The following are examples of events from **Recovery Month 2006**:

New Jersey's Recovery Walk drew more than 2,000 people to Liberty State Park and emphasized a sense of community. Each town in the state was invited by Friends of Addiction Recovery-New Jersey to send recovery delegates to the Walk, representing "the fact and the hope of recovery from addiction," and to enter the Walk's Battle of the Banners. During the Walk's program, the delegates' names were read as they came forward to be recognized and formed a circle in front of the stage in another reflection of the day's theme of unity. The South Monmouth Community Alliance enlisted students from a New Jersey high school to create a banner as an entry in the Battle of the Banners. The banner the students made, "Recovery is Discovery at the Jersey Shore," won in the Municipal category. One participant said that the Recovery Walk gave his students a glimpse of something they do not usually see—that it demonstrated that "there is hope, there is help."

The Iowa Voices for Recovery celebration started at the state capitol steps and included speakers, a march to Union Park in Des Moines, and family activities. The event drew approximately 500 people throughout the afternoon. The Governor signed a proclamation displayed for the event, which urged people who live in Iowa to participate in September's **Recovery Month** activities. A special wall was set up to display success stories and included an inspiration board on which attendees could write encouraging messages to those in recovery.

A smaller event was a **Recovery Month** reception held by the Alabama Voices for Recovery and the Drug Education Council. Nearly 80 people attended the event. The event included special awards, as well as featured speakers.

The 18th Annual *Recovery Month* Celebration Focuses On:

- Educating community members about substance use disorders, the effectiveness of treatment, and the hope of recovery
- Raising awareness about the financial and emotional cost savings for individuals, families, and the community that can be realized through treatment and recovery
- Stressing the value and contributions of individuals in recovery who rejoin their families, the workforce, and the community
- Reaching out to business leaders, places of worship, and other community groups to encourage them to provide ongoing support to individuals seeking treatment and those in recovery from substance use disorders

You can be part of this campaign by planning community roundtables, media events, and other promotional activities that can help spread these messages in your community.

Planning Your Event Step By Step

Please consider the list of tips below as a starting point for your event planning:

- **Select a specific topic for your event.** Remember the audience that you are trying to reach and the theme of the event. Some events that have been successful include runs/walks, family picnics, luncheons, or community roundtables.
- **Compile a list of participants and speakers you plan to invite.** Provide confirmed speakers with an agenda and time limit for their remarks, and instruct them to keep their speeches brief. If possible, obtain copies of their remarks in advance to ensure that many perspectives are included and no topic is repeated.
- **Have a back-up venue if your event is outdoors.** If you plan a rain date, make sure all attendees, speakers, moderators, and media know when and where the event will occur should it need to be rescheduled.
- **Select a location that is easily accessible** to members of the media and accommodates people with special needs, such as a public park or building or an open space at a treatment center. Ensure that your location easily can be identified and is visually appealing to maximize photo opportunities.

Talking Points = A list of points to be communicated that are created by an organization to convey a coherent and unified message. The talking points usually emphasize key subjects of discussion related to the topic at hand, such as how treatment for substance use disorders has a positive impact on family relationships and the larger community.

- **Speakers can be delayed**, become sick, or have a last-minute scheduling conflict. Plan to have a back-up speaker or a revised agenda if needed.
- **Arrange for speakers**, moderators, and other participants to arrive at least a half hour early and provide them with a private space to prepare. If the media will be present, confirm that each speaker has a firm grasp of your organization's pre-determined "talking points" to ensure they focus on the event topic. You can refer to the tips for speaking with the media in this planning toolkit for talking points about *Recovery Month*.

- **Check all audiovisual equipment** to be sure it is in the proper order, is set up correctly, and those in charge know how to use it.
- **Avoid competing with other *Recovery Month* activities** by coordinating the times and dates of your events with other organizations. Also, cross-check your events with others locally and nationwide on the ***Recovery Month*** Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov, clicking on the “Community Events” link. You also may look at the calendar of events listed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at www.ncadi.samhsa.gov/calendar.
- **Post your event information** on the ***Recovery Month*** Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov to increase exposure.

Example – Holding a Community Roundtable

People to include on such a panel are:

- People in recovery
- Public officials and civic leaders
- Local health care and addiction treatment providers
- Representatives from local support programs for children whose parents or other family members have substance use disorders
- Media representatives
- Members of the local business community involved in recovery issues
- Justice system representatives

Community Roundtable = A forum to raise awareness about a certain topic, such as substance use disorders and recovery in your community, by featuring a panel of community leaders who discuss the issue.

Tips for a Successful Community Roundtable

- **Enlist an experienced and well-informed moderator**, such as a local news anchor, professor, recovery counselor or physician, or other respected community member. A good moderator will help set a positive tone for the event and keep the discussion moving smoothly.
- **Use the roundtable to unite people** with substance use disorders and people in recovery with likely allies, such as legislators and business leaders. Forming these connections could have a positive impact on the roundtable members in recovery.

- **Strive to form a partnership** between the local and state government agencies responsible for overseeing many aspects of the issue. For example, these entities might seek to address substance use disorders with the same attention as other treatable conditions, help those in need obtain access to treatment, or provide support for people in recovery.
- **Partner with other organizations** to coordinate your activities with other heavily publicized events already taking place. Some examples could be local festivals, neighborhood gatherings, or government events. For tips on how to partner with other groups in your area, please refer to the “Building Community Coalitions” document in the “Resources” section of this planning toolkit.
- **Attract media attention** and achieve support for policies and funding initiatives by partnering with a government agency or legislator. Remember to reach out to public officials from various political parties to garner widespread support.

Additional Tips for Garnering Wide Media Coverage

The message of your **Recovery Month** event and its success can have a wider audience if the media attends and reports on the event. When inviting the media, include local broadcast (television and radio) and Internet outlets, along with newspaper reporters. Broadcast outlets may air your activities in their entirety—either live or taped. Consider Web casting your event through your organization’s Web site to reach a larger group.

Successful media events contain two critical elements: a focus on an exceptionally newsworthy activity and the involvement of prominent figures from the community.

Newsworthy Activity = An activity that adds value to the community and distributes the message of the campaign and the theme: *“Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars.”* A news-worthy activity typically consists of something unique or a “first” of some kind.

Newsworthy activities that may attract media attention include:

- Athletic events such as a run/walk to celebrate recovery
- Gala events or award presentations that honor those making a difference in the fight against substance use disorders
- The opening of a new treatment center
- The creation or expansion of a K-12 student assistance program in the local school district for children who have parents with substance use disorders
- A roundtable where community members can address concerns and learn

from local officials and experts about recovery (more details on how to plan a roundtable can be found earlier in this document)

- The announcement of a new or expanded support program for people to reintegrate into the workforce after treatment
- A fundraising event attended by influential community members
- A speech and issuance of a proclamation by a local or state government official

The involvement of prominent figures from the community also should attract media attention. Plan ahead by creating a roster of prominent speakers and, before inviting them, research who would have the most compelling angle to share.

Participants who might draw media attention include:

- Members of Congress
- State legislators
- City council members
- The mayor
- The governor
- Well-known community leaders
- Notable citizens
- People who are in recovery or were affected by a loved one's substance use
- Citizens who have assisted others in working toward recovery

Begin your event with a person in recovery saying a few words to introduce the event or signaling the beginning of a race. If people in recovery are speaking at your event, they can speak about their experiences without violating the “anonymity” clauses of various mutual support groups. Many of these groups encourage members to share their stories as long as their membership in that particular group is not disclosed. As part of your planning process, let speakers know in advance if media will be invited so they can observe anonymity traditions. Be sure to inform the media about the reasons behind anonymity.

Distribute materials to members of the media with comprehensive, accurate information about recovery, your event, and your organization to help them complete their stories. Samples of materials are included in this planning toolkit, along with tips for speaking with the media. Materials to distribute should include:

- News release
- Speaker biographies and photos
- Fact sheets about substance use disorders, ***Recovery Month***, and your organization
- Proclamations issued in observance of ***Recovery Month***
- Contact information for a spokesperson in your organization who can respond to media inquiries

Alert the media in advance. Send local media a media advisory in advance of the event, and fax or e-mail a news release the morning of the event. Templates for both documents are included in this planning toolkit. Many television affiliates have a calendar of local events that community members find valuable, so you can have your event details posted there in advance.

Follow up with the media. At the conclusion of your event, encourage reporters to raise questions and interview the featured speakers. Additionally, in the following days, call reporters to ask if they need any further information, unless they have asked not to be contacted afterward. Finally, be sure to send thank-you letters to the non-media attendees at your event.

Monitor media coverage after the event. Collect news clips mentioning your event for future use. Before distributing any clips on your Web site or to members of your organization, double-check with the publication and the author to obtain their permission. Please send samples of your media materials and clips to SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) using the address included at the end of this document.

Ways to Spread the *Recovery Month* Messages

Articles – Write a short article that discusses the advantages of treating substance use disorders and the increased benefit of providing education and support for family members. Include a Web site or telephone number where people can get more information—or to locate a treatment center. Use this article as part of your media outreach for your *Recovery Month* events. For more tips on writing and disseminating articles for *Recovery Month*, please see the document titled “Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed” in the “Media Outreach” section of this planning toolkit.

Athletic Activities – Get involved in local sports at the high school or college level. Work with schools, teams, and coaches to educate students about the dangers of steroids and other illegal—or legal—performance-enhancing substances. Some *Recovery Month* activities have been staged at amateur, semi-professional, or professional sporting events. Coordinate a walk/run, marathon, sports tournament, or similar event that encourages healthy lifestyles.

Banners/Ads – Place banners or advertisements promoting September as *Recovery Month* in your community's most visible areas, such as busy parks and intersections, on outdoor billboards, and on public transportation. You also can add an electronic image to your organization's Web site by downloading a banner from the *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov.

Business and Volunteer Organization Distribution Channels – You can capitalize on local organizations' existing channels for communicating with the general public by placing ads about your event in an organization's newsletter, in church bulletins, or on bulletin boards of local stores and restaurants. Ask local businesses to display banners in prominent areas seen by the general public or to post notices on their Web sites.

Exhibit Booths – Set up a booth at a local hospital, community center, festival, health fair, or wellness event to disseminate pamphlets about effective treatment options and related subjects.

Health Fairs – Coordinate with other organizations to sponsor a health fair that addresses multiple health issues. Booths for local treatment centers, mutual support groups, and other service organizations can offer information about how they assist members of your community. Encourage families and children to attend the fair by offering health-related games, activities, and giveaways. Include information for children living with a family member with a substance use disorder, as well as information for employers and other groups who can offer support. SAMHSA's NCADI has many helpful hand-out materials for these types of events. To order materials, call 800-729-6686 or visit the Web site at www.ncadi.samhsa.gov.

High School Assemblies – Coordinate with principals and counselors at local high schools to organize assemblies that discuss substance use disorders, warning signs, the difficulties of living with a person with these disorders, and the hope and effectiveness of treatment. Educate them about how recovery can restore the health of the individual, family, friends, and the community. Tell them about the effective treatment options specifically designed for youths and about support programs for youths living with family members with substance use disorders. Invite youths in recovery to share personal anecdotes at assemblies, but first consult each school and district's guidelines regarding the sharing of sensitive and personal information by the students and obtain parent and/or guardian consent if the youth is a minor.

High School or Local College Essay Contest – Work with social workers, advisors, or counselors to have students submit essays about the impact of recovery on their lives, either through their own experience or the experience of a person close to them. Establish criteria for judging the entries and reward winners with a scholarship to help further their education.

Media Sponsorships – Ask local media outlets to sponsor your **Recovery Month** event by featuring their logo on your promotional materials. A media sponsorship enhances the credibility of your event by showing local support and also can help increase media coverage. Typically, only one media outlet will sponsor your event, but this will raise the profile of your program and will make it more possible for other outlets to cover the event.

Radio Outreach – Coordinate with a local radio DJ, public affairs director, or station manager to promote your **Recovery Month** event and mention key messages about your organization on the air. Radio is an important and powerful tool because most stations appeal to specific audiences. By marketing your event to a specific population, you are taking advantage of a great opportunity to interest different groups in your event.

Radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs) – Send the live-read PSA scripts in this planning toolkit to your local radio stations to promote **Recovery Month** and substance use disorder treatment. You also can order recorded radio PSAs to disseminate to local radio outlets by e-mailing recoverymonth@iqsolutions.com or calling 240-221-4273. Open-ended television PSAs to tailor to your local community are also available.

Recovery Weekend – Reach out to faith leaders and clergy for a "Recovery Weekend." This is an opportunity for religious leaders of all denominations to make recovery part of their sermons/homilies. Discuss the importance of early intervention, treatment, and recovery and how it can impact individuals, family members, the religious organization, and the entire community. Faith leaders can help their congregations better understand substance use disorders and dispel many myths associated with recovery. They can provide hand-out materials for congregants in need of help, using pamphlets and posters that are available at www.ncadi.samhsa.gov. Invite clergy in recovery to share their stories, if possible.

Workplace Partnerships – Urge local employers to promote *Recovery Month* to their employees. Ask them to display *Recovery Month* posters in high-traffic areas. Employers can host seminars that discuss what programs their company offers to assist those in need of treatment for substance use disorders and their family members.

Make sure that for all planned activities, your materials include phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and Web sites where people can get additional information regarding treatment programs.

Share Your Activities and Successes

You are encouraged to share your plans and activities for *Recovery Month 2007* with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), your colleagues, and the general public by posting them on the official *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. By sharing your planning and activities, you are helping to generate momentum, thereby increasing outreach efforts to touch millions of lives that are affected by substance use disorders.

You also can share community success stories and other outreach efforts during *Recovery Month* by completing the Customer Satisfaction Form in this planning toolkit. Instructions are included on the form.

Please send samples of your organization's *Recovery Month* promotional materials to: Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor, Rockville, MD 20857.

Sample *Recovery Month* materials are available electronically at the *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. For additional *Recovery Month* materials, visit the Web site or call 1-800-662-HELP. For additional information about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery, please visit SAMHSA's Web site at www.samhsa.gov.