

PROMOTE RECOVERY MONTH WITH EVENTS

Organizing an event for **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** is a great way to celebrate people in recovery, their families, and others throughout the community who make living in recovery possible. Events help unite those already in recovery and can broadly spread the message that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover. Last year, 1,229 **Recovery Month** events, ranging from town-hall meetings and festivals to prayer weekends, were attended by approximately 2,117,082 people nationwide.

Each September, the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**, sponsors **Recovery Month**. This nationwide celebration is now in its 23rd year. This year's theme, "**Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It**," emphasizes that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable to individuals, families, and communities. People in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities.

This document will guide you through the event-planning process, providing successful tips and instructions for how to publicize your event to maximize attendance.

Define Goals...

Before you begin planning, consider the big picture and identify the ultimate goal of your event. It's important to think about the purpose of your event and the results you hope to achieve, which will help dictate the choices you make while planning an event. Some possible goals are to:

- Foster education and awareness about mental and/or substance use disorders and recovery;
- Inspire others to spread the messages of **Recovery Month**; and
- Garner coverage in the media.

Identify Potential Events...

Part of the planning process includes considering what type of event will be most successful in your community. All events, regardless of size, are instrumental to spreading awareness about **Recovery Month**. To decide what type of event to plan, keep in mind the goals you established in the planning process, your target audience, and your intended message. Remember that it's important to distinguish your event from others in the community to draw attention to your efforts. Below are some examples of event types that may spark your own ideas.

A **proclamation signing** gathers people together to generate enthusiasm and awareness for a common cause. When a local official declares September as **Recovery Month**, individuals understand that prevention and treatment of mental and/or substance use disorders are notable issues in the community. One way



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to draw a large crowd is to host the proclamation signing in conjunction with a larger activity, such as a **walk or run**, or a **celebratory rally** around the community. This type of activity can draw large crowds of all ages and walks of life, fostering a celebratory community atmosphere.

Often, family and friends play a key role in helping people recover from their mental health problems and/or substance use disorders. For this reason, a family **cookout**, **picnic**, or **dinner party** is a great way to bring loved ones together to support **Recovery Month** and encourage recovery. For some individuals, such as military personnel recently back from a tour of duty, a casual, low-key event may be the best way to encourage treatment, celebrate their recovery, and support their reintegration into society. Whatever event you choose, keep in mind that no event is too small to celebrate the accomplishments of those in recovery.

Forums, community roundtables, or discussion groups are all cost-effective, informal ways to bring together members of the community. These types of gatherings are ideal for people who wish to share their personal stories and discuss mental and/or substance use disorders and recovery. Speakers at these events can include active military personnel, veterans and their families, individuals in the justice system, anyone in the recovery community, or family and friends who may have supported loved ones through their recovery journeys. No matter who the speakers are, it's important that they are prepared to engage in a two-way conversation about local issues around prevention, treatment, and recovery. These educational events can take place in a variety of settings – for example, a public park, provider's office or treatment center, community center, or a place of worship.

Lastly, you can capitalize on the online discussion surrounding recovery by using the Internet to promote **Recovery Month. Webinars, Twitter chats, or other online discussion groups** give people the added convenience to participate in **Recovery Month** events from home. These types of events are an opportune time to discuss the role of online services in recovery, such as e-therapy and support chat rooms. You may want to invite experts in the field to converse with event attendees.

Always keep in mind, it is important to have information about how to get help for mental and/or substance use disorders readily available to attendees at your event.

Plan...

When planning your **Recovery Month** event, consider the following checklist.

- **Engage with potential partners:** To help offset the costs of hosting an event, consider partnerships with local organizations such as television networks, grocery stores, or small businesses in the community. Many times, area businesses or associations will sponsor events in exchange for publicity at the event. Explore potential partnerships and identify organizations that have conducted similar efforts or share the focus of **Recovery Month**, such as a local treatment center. Partners can offer different kinds of assistance, including monetary support and expertise in program development or policy issues. Additionally, partnering with another organization can significantly help widen the reach of your initiatives. Reach out to local treatment centers to see if you can find volunteers from the recovery community who are willing to help with your event. It is also helpful to connect with **Recovery Month Planning Partners** in your State to collaborate – this will eliminate any overlap of events that may be scheduled for the same day. The Planning

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Partners are considered experts in the mental health, substance use disorder, and recovery fields, and are instrumental in spreading the message that prevention works, treatment is effective, and recovery is possible. Keep in mind that when you include partners from both the mental health and substance use fields, you spread your reach to a larger recovery community!

- **Form a planning committee:** Having the support of a working group will help ease the group's workload and be useful for brainstorming event ideas. Once you have selected a committee, create a meeting schedule and select a chair to be the primary point of contact and organizer. Throughout the planning process, it's vital for the event planning committee to meet regularly to track progress and ensure that all necessary actions are completed. You can also take this opportunity to include partners or sponsors in meetings so they can share ideas and feedback. Encourage people to commit to a certain role within the committee, such as publicity, finance, or fundraising. Within your first couple of meetings, create a timeline of deliverables and deadlines to keep the group organized.
- **Determine a budget:** Develop and adhere to a budget – this is a crucial component of the event-planning process. Develop your budget in the early stages of planning an event, as the scope of your event hinges on this information. Think realistically about your budget and goals, and leave some funds for unanticipated costs. Items to factor into your budget include fundraising costs, food and entertainment, venue and equipment rentals, permits and licenses, signage, invitations, decorations, guest-speaker fees, and publicity costs.
- **Plan logistics:** Select the event date, time, and venue as soon as possible after your budget is approved. When you select a date and time, consider other events that are occurring in your area to minimize conflicts. To do so, review a local events calendar in the newspaper (check print and online editions). You can also log onto <http://recoverymonth.gov> or <http://charityhappenings.org> to see other events in your area. Location choice is a significant factor when planning. Remember to choose a venue that's accessible, accommodates your audience, and is centrally located. Ask if permits or licenses are required for the venue(s) you consider. If you choose to hold your event in a public location, contact local authorities to confirm the steps you need to take to meet local requirements.
- **Confirm all location details with your venue:** This will make other stages in the planning process much easier. For example, any type of promotional materials will be more effective if specific event information is included (e.g., specific room, directions, parking). Once you have confirmed your event details, post the event on the [Recovery Month website](#).
- **Develop a publicity plan and encourage media attendance:** You'll need people to know about your event in advance, so it's important to publicize within the community. There are a number of ways to promote your event: advertise on local radio stations or in newspapers, conduct Internet/social media outreach, host pre-event fundraisers, post flyers, and sponsor sporting events or community meetings in the weeks leading up to your event. Invite the media to attend your event to expand your audience. Please refer to the **"Work with the Media"** document in this toolkit for further information on how to interact with the media.
- **Stimulate community interest:** Increase awareness about your event through word-of-mouth marketing. Ask friends, family, and co-workers to spread the word within their personal networks, both online and offline. For example, you and your friends can tell Facebook friends about the event, as well as colleagues at work or friends at school. Encourage attendees to bring their extended family to the event, as family is often an important component to

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one's recovery. Additionally, reach out to high-risk populations such as military families, and ask for their support and participation. If they would be comfortable doing so, ask these individuals to share their personal journey with others. These stories are powerful and will spark interest in your event.

- **Prepare materials:** Prepare materials you want to distribute at your event, such as flyers, brochures, fact sheets, and a list of local treatment centers and support groups. Distribute a questionnaire to seek feedback from event attendees. This will help your organization or planning committee know how to improve future events. Target materials to your audience and highlight relevant local issues, such as the prevalence of and treatment for mental and/or substance use disorders in your State last year. Reflect this year's theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** in your materials. For instance, include information on the ways people in recovery enjoy healthier lives, both physically and emotionally. Include the **Recovery Month** logo to brand your materials and show that your event supports a larger cause – a national observance supported by the Federal government.
- **Remember last-minute details:** Hold a final planning meeting to review final details in the days leading up to your event. Call vendors and speakers to confirm reservations. If possible, set up any booths or multimedia equipment the day before, and plan to arrive early the day of your event in case of any unexpected issues.
- **Be prepared:** Have a back-up plan in the event of an unexpected setback. Especially if your event is outdoors, it's important to reserve an indoor space or publicize a rain date.

Evaluate...

After your event, immediately review your results when details are still fresh in your mind. Create a questionnaire to receive more concrete feedback from your event attendees. Additionally, connect with event volunteers to hear their feedback on the event, including areas of improvement for the future.

You can also take this opportunity to thank event volunteers and the community for participating in your event by posting a "thank-you" letter on your website, if applicable, or as an ad in your local newspaper. Be sure to send any event promotional materials to recoverymonth@samhsa.hhs.gov, and start to brainstorm for next year's **Recovery Month** event!

Share...

SAMHSA needs to hear about all of the successful events held in honor of **Recovery Month** this year. Once your event has taken place, visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> to post details, photos, or collaborative materials you have on hand. You can also share your success with the recovery community on the **Recovery Month** Facebook page, YouTube channel, and Twitter account. If you're unfamiliar with these online tools, visit the "New Media Glossary" and "Develop Your Social Network" sections in this toolkit for details.

SAMHSA is pleased to acknowledge the efforts of those who planned and organized events through the **Recovery Month** Event Award. The four award categories include: Rally and Walk/Run Events, Educational Events, Special Celebrations, and SAMHSA-Sponsored Events. For information on how to enter an event and for an application form, visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/Community-Events/Community-Event-Award.aspx>.

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Consult Resources...

For more information on **Recovery Month** and services available to those in need, please refer to the following resources:

- **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**, provides 24-hour, free and confidential information about mental and/or substance use disorders and prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English or Spanish.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" website**, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- The **Recovery Month** website, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, contains all the materials from this toolkit and a wide variety of relevant resources.

Inclusion of websites and event examples in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.