Promote Recovery Month with Events

"Where once I existed in the land of 'nevers,' now I live my dreams in the land of infinite possibilities."

Stanice Anderson

Author, Speaker, and Blogger, The Huffington Post and The WOW Zone Washington, DC

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Each September, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (http://www.samhsa.gov), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (http://www.hhs.gov), sponsors **National Recovery Month**). This national observance increases awareness and understanding of mental and substance use disorders, and promotes the message that behavioral health is essential to health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

Organizing an event for **Recovery Month** is an ideal way to celebrate the achievements of the recovery community. Events bring people together to share real-life examples of the power of recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders.

This document guides your event-planning process, providing tips and instructions for how to publicize events to maximize attendance.





Define Goals...

Before planning an event, consider the criteria that will make the event a success. Setting goals will help to determine the type of event that you host, as well as inform what messages will resonate with the attendees. Possible goals include:

- Spread knowledge and awareness about mental and/or substance use disorders and prevention, treatment, and recovery;
- Promote the implementation of prevention, treatment, and recovery support programs in your community;
- Inspire others to champion recovery as possible and attainable; and
- Secure coverage in the media or pickup by blogs or social media platforms to reach those who cannot attend an in-person event or to continue the conversation.

Choose the Event Type...

Events can come in all forms and sizes. Following are types of events that may be of interest:

- Proclamation signing: A proclamation is an official announcement by a public official, usually a political figure.
 The signing gathers people together to generate enthusiasm and awareness for a common cause. By declaring
 September as Recovery Month, officials can alert members of the community that prevention, treatment, and
 recovery support services are available, and that mental and/or substance use disorders are significant issues
 affecting communities nationwide.
- Walk, run, or rally: A walk, run, or rally can draw large crowds of all ages and backgrounds, fostering a celebratory community atmosphere. These events can be sponsored by local businesses and organizations dedicated to mental and/or substance use disorders. Walks or runs often consist of pre-determined lengths and routes, with social opportunities intermingled, while rallies may identify speakers and opportunities to speak with members of the recovery community.
- **Cookout, dinner, or picnic:** Cookouts, dinners, and picnics are easy ways to unite friends, family, and neighbors in a positive environment. These events can be tailored to encourage treatment, celebrate recovery, or support a person's reintegration into society.
- Twitter chat, webinar, and Google Hangout: Technology allows people the opportunity to participate in the online discussion surrounding recovery. These types of events are convenient when you are discussing the role of online services in recovery, such as e-therapy and support chat rooms.
- Forums or discussion groups: Forums and discussion groups are cost-effective, informal ways to bring together members of the community and address local interests. When planning these events, consider engaging civic leaders and elected officials to participate. These events can take place in a variety of settings for example, a provider's office or treatment center, community center, or a place of worship. Attendees should be prepared to engage in a two-way conversation about local issues centered on prevention, treatment, and recovery.

No event is too small to celebrate the accomplishments of individuals in recovery and those who serve them. Be sure to have information on how to get help for mental and/or substance use disorders readily available for event attendees.



Plan the Event...

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

- Form a planning committee: The first step for a successful event involves forming a planning committee. It ensures that the workload is divided evenly between volunteers, staff, and partner organizations. It also encourages the exchange of ideas. The number of committee members depends on the size and scope of the event. A committee leader should convene the committee regularly to create a timeline and develop goals for the event.
- **Determine a budget:** Adhering to a budget is crucial. Deciding on a budget early will inform critical decision-making about the size, shape, and scope of the event, including peripheral tasks, such as marketing and outreach. Other items involved in the budget include fundraising costs, food and entertainment, venue and equipment rentals, permits and licenses, invitations, and speaker fees.
- Plan logistics: Select the event date, time, and venue as soon as possible after the budget is approved. When choosing a location, remember to select a venue that is accessible and appropriate for the type of event and size of the audience. Ask the venue contacts if permits or licenses are required. If the event is in a public location, contact local authorities to confirm the steps that are needed to meet local requirements. When selecting a date and time, consider other events that are occurring in the area to minimize conflicts. Use the following tools to help streamline the search process:
 - o Search for already scheduled local events on http://www.recoverymonth.gov by typing in a zip code in the "Community Events" page. When a date is finalized, post the event on the **Recovery Month** website.
 - o Check event postings in a local newspaper's community calendar, which is often housed on its website. Go to http://www.charityhappenings.org to view a master calendar of nonprofit events, galas, and benefits.
- **Find a sponsor or partner:** Hosting an event can be expensive, but partnering with local organizations, television networks, or small businesses can help offset the cost in exchange for publicity. Support from partners or sponsors may come in the form of money, broadcast coverage, marketing, catering, or other significant expenditures. In addition, local mental illness and/or addiction treatment and recovery centers can provide volunteers from the recovery community to staff an event. **Recovery Month** Planning Partners are potential local resources to collaborate with to garner support, attendees, and/or speakers for an event. Planning Partners are considered experts on mental and/or substance use disorders, and are instrumental in spreading the message that behavioral health is essential to health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.
- Implement a publicity plan: Successful events will employ both online and traditional means of increasing awareness about an event. Some necessary outreach may involve developing flyers, banners (print and online), and advertisements, as well as using social media to start a dialogue about the event. Print or broadcast journalists, as well as bloggers, can help increase the credibility of an event. Refer to the "Work with the Media" document in this toolkit for more information on garnering publicity for an event and speaking with media. Be sure to brand your event as a **Recovery Month** event by placing the official **Recovery Month** logo on your printed materials.
- **Remember last-minute details:** Hold a final planning meeting in the days leading up to the 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 the event in case of any unexpected issues.



• **Develop a back-up plan:** Successful events have contingency plans in place. If the event location is outdoors, always plan a back-up indoor space, or a well-publicized rain date.

Please refer to the "Community Events" page to access a more detailed checklist and timeline for planning an event.

Evaluate...

Once the event concludes, take time to review key learnings from the event, and discuss the event's positive and negative aspects. A questionnaire is helpful to record feedback from attendees, and follow-up messages by email or social media may elicit audience response following the event. Staff insights are also critical to inform successes and areas to improve on for future events.

After the event, take the opportunity to thank event staff, volunteers, and community leaders for participating in your event by handwriting thank-you letters or posting a thank-you letter to a blog or website.

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

http://www.recoverymonth.gov/Community-Events/Community-Event-Award.aspx.

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 wants to hear about all of the events held in honor of **Recovery Month** this year. Once an event takes place, visit **http://www.recoverymonth.gov** to post details, photos, or collaborative materials from the event. The **Recovery Month** Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/RecoveryMonth), YouTube channel (http://www.youtube.com/recoverymonth), and Twitter (https://twitter.com/RecoveryMonth) also serve as platforms to which event planners or attendees can post details about their experiences. More information about these online tools can be found by visiting the "New Media Glossary" and "Develop Your Social Network" sections in this toolkit for details.

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) (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment): Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery in English and Spanish.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org): 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.
- **Technical Assistance Centers:** Maximizes self-determination and recovery and assists people on their path to recovery, ultimately decreasing their dependence on expensive social services and avoiding hospitalization. The five technical assistance centers include:
 - National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center at Mental Health America (http://www.ncstac.org);
 - National Empowerment Center (http://www.power2u.org);
 - National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse (http://www.mhselfhelp.org);
 - o The Family Café (http://familycafe.net); and
 - o The STAR Center (http://www.consumerstar.org/index.html).
- **BHBusiness (http://www.saasnet.org/bhb):** Offers targeted training and support for behavioral health care executives, CEOs, and directors, including health care insurance enrollment training information.
- Center for Financing Reform and Innovation (http://www.samhsa.gov/healthreform): Supports the need for information, analysis, products, and technical assistance to address significant changes in the organization and financing of behavioral health care, as well as the need to guide and support governments and people on how to most effectively and efficiently use available resources to meet the prevention, treatment, and recovery support needs of the public.
- Healthcare.gov (http://www.healthcare.gov/index.html): Contains information on finding health insurance
 options, help using insurance, information on the Affordable Care Act, help comparing providers, and information
 on prevention and wellness resources.
- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) (http://www.prainc.com/soar/about/default.asp): Increases access to Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income for eligible adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a mental and/or substance use disorder.

Inclusion of websites and resources 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.