

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING AND HOSTING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Hosting an informational meeting or community program on substance use issues can: 1) build congregational and community interest, 2) connect churches with possible partners, and/or 3) provide education that helps reduce stigma. This resource provides helpful guidance for churches to consider as they plan and host such events.



PRACTICES OF HOSPITALITY

Choose an event space that has **adequate parking** and is **centrally located and accessible**.

Provide food and/or coffee to encourage attendance and allow space for connection. Pro tip: a location where you can brew coffee on-site is preferred.

Consider event-specific needs like **audio-visual (AV) equipment** and **tables and chairs**.

Provide pen and paper so attendees can take notes.

For **in-person events, a two-hour time frame is often ideal**, including one hour for programming and time on either side for mingling and Q&A.

For **virtual events, a one-hour meeting** is best; Friday lunch hours often work well.



MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

Advertise your event at least two or three weeks in advance, preferably more.

Local champions with networks of their own **are often the most effective marketers**.

Make it easy for others to help you spread the word. Create a flyer, social media post, and/or an email that others can forward to their networks.

If you collect emails or other contact information through a registration site, **send an event reminder one week before and the day of the event**.

Invite a variety of individuals from the community to attend, including local clergy, law enforcement, EMS, and public health leaders.

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PROGRAM CONTENT AND GUEST SPEAKERS

Feature a local speaker or expert for the event. Someone local will know the community's context and particular needs, and will therefore garner more trust from attendees.

The host church or organization can share information about their work, **but should keep this brief so that the focus remains on the featured guest(s).**

Different attendees will respond to different content. Offer statistics about substance use issues, stories from people who have experienced substance use issues, and relevant scripture.

Meet people where they are. Offer content that will expand understanding of substance use issues without pushing attendees too far outside their comfort zones.

Provide informational flyers or handouts that include major themes, definitions, and key takeaways about the program content.

Build in time for your attendees to ask questions of the guest speaker(s) and to speak with each other. A conversation is more helpful to everyone than a lecture.



NEXT STEPS

Collect contact information from attendees who want to get involved.

Provide an **evaluation form** for attendees to complete at the end of the event.

Have a plan in advance **for how and when you will follow up** with attendees.

Offer actionable next steps with multiple entry points. Not everyone needs to start a recovery group or syringe exchange program. Churches can offer stigma-reducing language, host an opioid awareness worship service, or partner in a supply drive with a local organization.

Many thanks to Elizabeth Brewington, Associate Director of Partners in Health and Wholeness for her contributions to this action guide.
