

HEALTH FAIR PLAYBOOK

Learnings, case studies, and an adaptable recipe to plan and implement a community health fair.

March 2024



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INTRODUCTION



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As Health Commons, we acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and sacred territories and lands we call home across what is now known as Canada. Health Commons is located in Tkaronto, now known as Toronto, which is on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinaabe, Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. Tkaronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands, and is part of Dish With One Spoon Treaty Territory.

We recognize that for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, relationship with the land is profoundly important to their sense of self and place. We are grateful for teachings that have been shared with us about how the Lands, Skies, and Waters heal and nurture by gifting the languages, stories, songs, ceremonies, and protocol that guide and sustain many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities and nations.

We carry tremendous privilege in being guests on these lands, and are serious about our responsibility to understand, reflect on, and then take meaningful action to improve our relationships to these lands and to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who are the original stewards of these lands and who continue to host us here. We are committed to doing whatever we can and are invited to do, and to work alongside communities to create space for healing, reparation, and wellbeing for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and the Lands, Skies, and Waters that surround and nourish us. Although this playbook is not Indigenous-specific, it is part of our effort to share tools and resources that can help create space to better connect people to the social determinants of health they need to be well - which for many people includes the Lands we call home.

ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook is designed to provide an overview of a general process - including timelines, key considerations, case studies, and tools - for planning and implementing a health fair. This playbook is not intended to directly represent one specific group of people or communities. We acknowledge the content will not be relevant to every community, and that it can cause feelings of erasure when people do not see themselves represented in something.

We all carry different lived experiences, worldviews, contexts, needs, and priorities, and we do our best within Health Commons to co-create tools based on what is shared with us from community members and partners. We know that everyone is starting from a different point and have various resources, skills, capacities, and experiences available to them. To meet you where you are at, we made this playbook based on approaches that various organizations have taken and have done our best to share back a repeatable yet adaptable model for health fairs that is a useful framework across communities, timelines, budgets, and capacities.

When using this playbook, start where you are at in your health fair journey - maybe you are hosting one for the first time and are not sure where to start, or maybe you are looking for ways to streamline or improve your current process. We invite you to take what you need, leave what does not serve you, and re-imagine and adapt anything you find in here so it works for you.

Using this playbook, our intention is that you will be able to:

- Create a solid vision for your health fair
- Gather and build a team of people, skills, and capacities to bring the health fair to life
- Create an approach to planning, implementing, and sharing stories about the health fair that is unique to the needs of the communities you are supporting or serving

We are not perfect and there is always something more for us to know. If there is something you think is missing or misrepresented - or if you learn something new as you apply these learnings to your own work - we are always open to receive this feedback. That said, we want to make sure you know that you are not required to take on the responsibility or labour of sharing feedback with us. We are committed to intentional and continuous learning and unlearning, and to engaging in dialogue with community members and partners so we can evolve resources together with humility, love, and respect.

Thank you to the partners and contributors who helped us create this playbook:



WHY A HEALTH FAIR?

Health fairs act as a single door into a non-judgemental, culturally-rooted, and community-centric space for community members to have their social determinants of health met. By bringing together diverse partners in new ways, health fairs create a hyperlocal, integrated offer where people get what they need to be well. For example, health fairs are an emerging and important mechanism to connect people to chronic disease management and primary care that they would otherwise not receive - which is saving lives.

At Health Commons, we believe that organizations who can advance the health and wellbeing of communities are the ones who provide access to hyperlocal and safe spaces for people to get what they need, when and how they need it. Together, an ecosystem of local partners who are rooted in community, health equity, and the social determinants of health is an effective door for people who may not be accessing the supports that are critical to their personal and collective wellbeing. We know community voices are critical in shaping how we envision and deliver health and social care across this ecosystem, and that community-based organizations are always looking for meaningful ways to engage with the communities they serve. From our own experiences, and from the experiences of other partners we work alongside, we have learned that in many communities health fairs are a great option for this.

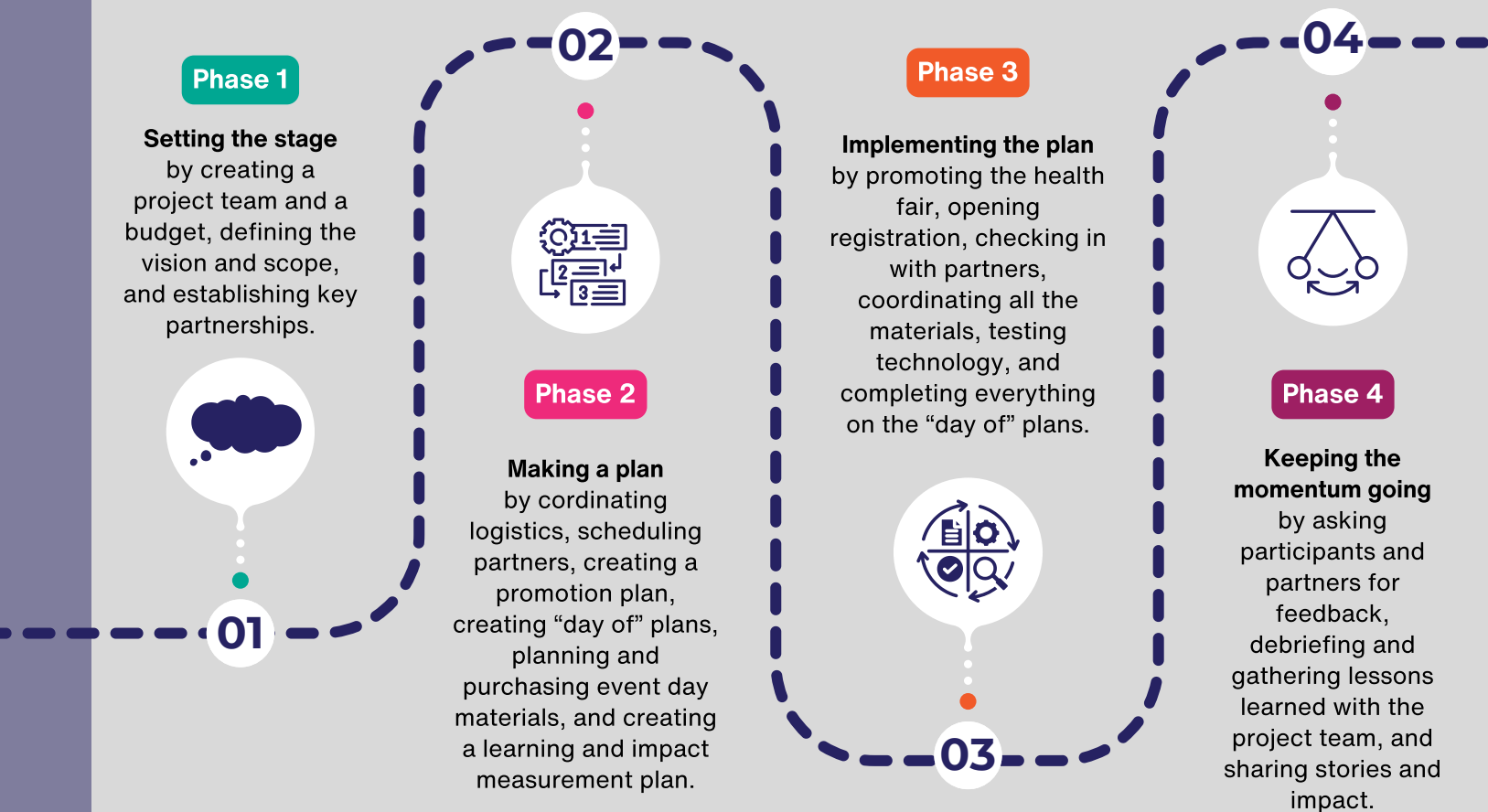
Using learnings from across these communities we have defined what we hope is a shared, repeatable, and adaptable process for planning and implementing community health fairs. To inspire you on your own health fair planning journey, there are 3 case studies at the end that highlight the distinct approach that Roots Community Services, Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association, Peel Public Health, and Health Commons used to plan and implement their own health fairs. This map shows where each health fair took place, including what the individual and collective reach was.



THE PROCESS

SUMMARY: THE PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

This playbook is broken up into the following sections which outline a different phase of a general health fair planning process. Be creative with this process - it does not have to be linear or like we have outlined below...do what works for you!



What about timelines?

We have thought a lot on if we should include timelines in this playbook, as it could be a helpful tool for some people. One of our key learnings is that for some people, organizing a health fair takes 6 months and for others they do it in less than a month. How long this process takes will depend mostly on how much money you have, how many staff or volunteers you have, how complex your health fair is, and how much time you have ahead of you to plan it. The more health fairs you host, the amount of time it takes will depend on how efficient your process becomes, how big your health fair gets, and how frequently you decide to host them. Considering this diversity in timeframes and possibilities, we are not suggesting a minimum, maximum, or average time for this process - instead we focus on sharing information that can help you get a sense of what might be involved for your own health fair and how long that might take you.

PHASE 1

Setting the stage



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **You want the right people for the job!** When building a project team, you want people who know the community well, who are committed to serving people in a good way, and who are able to cultivate relationships across diverse partners and sectors.
- **Work together!**
 - Health fairs do best when they are a collaborative effort between organizations who work together to divide responsibilities through a shared project team.
 - Not every organization has a robust budget (or any budget) to support health fairs and you might need to be creative with how you fund this work. Focus on what you need, be creative to bring in the things you want, and pool resources across organizations.
- **A vision is critical to success.** Root your vision in who the health fair is for, what needs and priorities they have, and what impact you are trying to create for them. From here, everything you do is rooted in this vision - this helps you stay focused on the right things, at the right time, and in the right way and it helps maximize the impact of the health fair.
- **Be strategic with your scope.** Make sure your health fair offers a selection of services, supports, resources, etc. that align with your intention and with what the community needs to be well.
- **Anyone can host a health fair, but not everyone will host a health fair that people love!** The vibe is key and vision and scope are only part of the equation - you also have to wrap your approach around what experience you want people to have at the health fair.
- **Pick the right partners.** Partner with people who are rooted in the same values, vision, and intention as you and who can offer the scope of services you want to provide for people. This is critical to creating a memorable, safe, and affirming experience for people, and for maximizing the impact you have.

BEFORE YOU START THE HEAVY LIFTING

As a team, one of the things we struggled with when making this playbook was where two parts of this journey fit into the overall process: building budgets and building project teams. In an ideal world, we would define the vision and scope of the health fair and *then* wrap the right amount of money and the right group of people around it. That said, we know many organizations have limited budgets and capacities and that it is not always realistic to strive toward this ideal. Considering this, we are offering guidance about these steps at the start of this book so you can think about how to best approach this for your organization and communities. Budgets and people planning are also iterative aspects of the health fair planning process and you will come back to them many times, so they are not necessarily distinct “steps” so much as they are ongoing considerations.

1A

BUILDING A PROJECT TEAM

Things to consider: Build a team that makes sense to you and that has the diverse skills, expertise, and relationships with the communities you are serving and that are critical to achieving the vision and scope of the health fair.

What you need: An up-to-date organizational chart, work planning tool, or similar information that shows which staff are available to be part of the project team, including their core skills and how much time they can dedicate to this work.

TIPS & TOOLS

Building project teams is not easy, so we have included some tips from community pros in the [health fair planning workbook](#)! This includes some key roles to think about and tools to help the team stay on track and focused (for example, a project plan template and a template for keeping track of risks, issues, actions, and decisions).

1B

CREATING A BUDGET FOR THE HEALTH FAIR

Things to consider: Money does not always flow as abundantly as we would like it to and there are specific costs associated with health fairs, so a good budget plus some creativity and innovation are important. There are lots of ways to stretch a dollar and to think of new and unique ways to achieve the same outcome with less - and often the simplest solution is the best and most cost efficient.

What you need: A budget template, an operating budget, and a cost directive (if applicable) that lets you know how much can be spent on the health fair and what expenses are eligible.

TIPS & TOOLS

Events have specific considerations when planning a budget. We include some event-specific budget templates and budget considerations in the [health fair planning workbook](#)!

1C

DEFINING A VISION FOR THE HEALTH FAIR

Things to consider: Think about who you are trying to reach and then about what issue, need, opportunity, or priority you are trying to address for them and how you hope to positively impact them.

What you need: Information about what issues, needs, opportunities, or priorities exist for the people you are trying to reach. Rely as much as you can on information that has been given to you by the people you are trying to reach and that is a first-hand account of what they need and want to be well, including asset maps or engagement data that describe or show gaps in services and supports and how you might fill them. If you do not have this information on hand, some [empathy-based tools](#) help you “walk in the shoes” of other people, and can help you think about your vision through their perspective.

You also need people who are closest to the community and deeply understand the needs and gaps that exist and how to address them. **Hint:** [Community Ambassadors](#) are a great resource!

TIPS & TOOLS

In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include an event vision board exercise and some guiding questions for this vision setting.

1D

DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE HEALTH FAIR

Things to consider: The critical question for this step is “what services, supports, resources, etc. do we need to offer through the health fair to achieve our vision?”

What you need: The health fair vision (see step 1C). You will also need people who are closest to the system side of things and who deeply understand what services, supports, resources, etc. are available in your area.

Hint: [Community Ambassadors](#) know which services people trust!

TIPS & TOOLS

In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include a collection of simple (and fun!) tools to help you brainstorm, define, and prioritize ideas and options.

1E

DEFINING THE EXPERIENCE YOU WANT PEOPLE TO HAVE

Things to consider: Think about how you want people to feel while they are at the health fair; what will attract them to each of the offerings; and how they will physically, emotionally, mentally, and culturally experience the health fair.

What you need: The health fair vision (see step 1C) - specifically the information about what people want and need within the community and what makes an offering memorable or valuable to them. You will also need people who are closest to the community and who deeply understand how they want a place, space, or experience to make them feel. **Hint:** [Community Ambassadors](#) are a great resource!

TIPS & TOOLS

In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include a collection of simple (and fun!) tools to help you journey map, empathy map, service map, make spaghetti diagrams, and more - which can all be part of the process to understand and improve people’s experiences!

1F

ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS

Things to consider: When you are thinking about potential partners, consider who provides the services, supports, resources, etc. that you are looking for and who serves some or all of the people you are trying to reach. It is also important to ask yourself “which of these partners share our values?” and “which of these partners will help us create the experience we want for people?” From here, you will have a good sense of who you trust and who is best to invite into this space.

What you need: The experience you want to create for people (see step 1E) and any information about potential partners. For this, you might do desk research, seek referrals from trusted partners, or chat with potential partners about what you are trying to do, how they might see themselves fitting into that, and what you both bring to the table. Choose an approach based on how many partners you need and how much time you have to find them, build a relationship, and integrate them into this work.

You will also need people who understand the vision of the health fair and the values of the organization(s) that is/are hosting the it, and who understand which partners will offer the scope of services you are looking for while at the same time create the experience you are hoping to provide for people. **Hint:** **Community Ambassadors** know trusted partners!

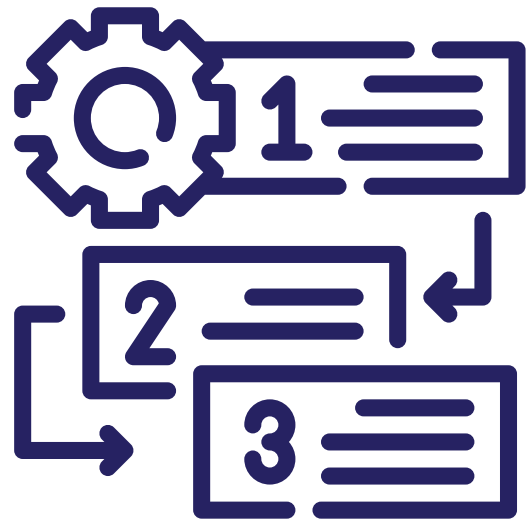
TIPS & TOOLS

In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include a collection of toolkits and simple methods to support brainstorming potential partners and moving through the partnership development journey!

Once you have a solid vision, have confirmed what you will offer, have defined the ideal user experience, and identified key partners it is time to define the ideal date, time, and location and a plan to bring it all together. Keep reading for more!

PHASE 2

Making a plan



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **There is no one size fits all format.** Choose a format (online, in person, or hybrid) that best aligns with the needs of the people who you are trying to serve, what you are trying to offer to them, and the experience you want them to have while they are there.
- **Picking the right venue is critical to how successful and impactful in person components can be.** Prioritize the needs of and barriers within the community when you are selecting a venue and pick a venue that aligns to the experience you want people to have.
- **Choose a date that works for the community (not just for you)!** Consider community events, celebrations, and activities and when is most appropriate to engage with people.
- **Registration needs to be simple and easy.** If you want people to register for your health fair, select a tool and process that meets their needs and that considers the barriers they may face when registering (for example, access to devices or wifi for online registration).
- **Community partners are busy and will need time to prepare.** Get your invitations to them early so they can plan around your event.
- **Your health fair can only succeed if people know about it, so don't forget to create a plan to promote it!** Spread the word using methods and channels that are familiar to, trusted by, and available to the people you are trying to reach - and lean on partners! They help to expand your network quickly and easily.
- **Have a detailed plan!** Each health fair looks different and may include a mixture of diverse services, supports, and activities for people to engage with. You will be coordinating a lot of partners and need a solid plan for each day of the health fair, outlining everything that needs to happen during the day (from set up to take down, and beyond).
- **The health fair is not over once the day has passed!** It is important to make space for lessons learned and telling stories about your reach and impact.

2A

SELECTING A FORMAT

Things to consider: The format you choose (online, in person, or hybrid) should support your vision and the experience you want for people, while also giving you the space you need to offer the full scope of services, supports, resources, etc. you have planned. For example, online is good for reaching lots of people and for people with mobility requirements where in person is good for hands-on services like vaccines, sharing food, etc. Hybrid can be a “best of both worlds” option but is often harder to coordinate without some people feeling “left out” or forgotten (which is often the case for the online folks).

What you need: The vision for the health fair (see step 1C), the scope of services you are offering (see step 1D), what experience you want people to have (see step 1E), and your budget (see step 1B).

TIPS & TOOLS

To help decide which format works well in different scenarios, this playbook includes 4 case studies at the end that describe virtual, in person, and hybrid health fairs. We also include some helpful tips in the [health fair planning workbook](#) about what works best in different scenarios.

2B

SELECTING A VENUE

Things to consider: Critical considerations include if the venue is accessible (both to get to and once people are there), if it has the space you need, if it will help achieve your vision and create the experience you want for people, and if it is within your budget.

What you need: The vision for the health fair (see step 1C), the scope of services you are offering (see step 1D), what experience you want people to have (see step 1E), and your budget (see step 1B).

TIPS & TOOLS

Do not forget to visit a venue before you select it - it is important to see it yourself first to make sure it has what you need. Also, remember to support local. Renting public spaces like schools, community centres, libraries, etc. not only supports local organizations but also means you are using spaces that are accessible, trusted, and feel safe for people. We also include some additional considerations in the [health fair planning workbook](#).

2C

SELECTING A DATE(S)

Things to consider: Even if you have a specific date in mind, select a few at the start - just in case your ideal date does not work out. As you start to figure out who and what is critical to the success of the health fair, you can finalize a date that makes most sense.

What you need: Community calendars that indicate important holidays, events, and celebrations within the community that may or may not be the best timing for people. For in person health fairs, you will also need the list of potential venues (see step 2B) - their availability will play a big role in deciding when you can have the health fair.

TIPS & TOOLS

Need some help along the way? Employees, partners, Community Ambassadors, and other community members are very helpful in navigating around cultural and social holidays, events, and celebrations. We also include some extra tips in the [health fair planning workbook](#).

2D

DEVELOPING A REGISTRATION MECHANISM (IF APPLICABLE)

Some health fair organizers prefer that people register in advance, for example to help plan food or because they have limits for how many people can be in the venue. Other organizers prefer that people do not register, for example for health fairs that take place regularly or that are open to any number of people and are in high traffic places within the community.

Things to consider: Online registration is popular and convenient for organizers and participants, but not everyone has access to the internet, a device, or the digital skills required to navigate the registration process. To be inclusive, you may need to offer alternatives such as a phone number to call. Overall, registration may pose a barrier to people and is not always the approach to take. We generally only recommend requiring people to register if you are having an online health fair and want to have a sense of how many people will be there to make sure your tech plan can support that.

What you need: A list of preferred websites or platforms you can use. [Google forms](#) (for free events only) and [Eventbrite](#) (for free events or events where there is a fee) are the most common ones.

TIPS & TOOLS In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include an example of what a Google Form could look like and an example of a registration we have used before at Health Commons, using Google Forms. We also include additional considerations for the process and the content of the registration form.

2E INVITING AND SCHEDULING PARTNERS

Things to consider: In your invitation to partners you do not need to include all the details - you will work through that with them later. For now, here are some critical things to include:

- Date, time, and location of the health fair
- Vision for the health fair
- What service, support, resource, activity, etc. you want them to provide at the health fair
- If you are inviting them to stay for the entire health fair, or just for a certain part
- How you will compensate for their time, for example with an honorarium, gift, etc.

What you need: Date, time, location, and venue of the health fair (see steps 2A - 2C); vision for the health fair (see step 1C); scope of the health fair (see step 1D); and list of potential partners (see step 1F).

TIPS & TOOLS In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include a simple tool to help coordinate partners and keep track of where they each are at.

2F CREATING A PROMOTION PLAN

Things to consider: This does not need to be complicated, so focus on creating a plan that is simple and that reaches people in a way that makes sense for them. Posters and other visuals (digital or hard copy) are a great way to reach people easily! Even before you have all the details, once you know the date and location you can share a Save the Date with people.

What you need: The vision of the health fair (see step 1C); what services, supports, resources, etc. people will be able to access at the health fair (see step 1D); when and where it is (see step 2A-2C); and how to register (see step 2D). You will also need people who understand what a trusted source of information is for the communities you are trying to reach and what communication channels are common in those communities. For example, WhatsApp is a popular communication channel. [Community Ambassadors](#) can help you understand trusted communication channels.

TIPS & TOOLS In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include examples of some posters, social media posts, and frequently asked questions that have been used in the past and a template to create a plan to promote the event! Also check out this great [website](#) that Roots Community Services uses!

CREATING “DAY OF” PLANS AND LISTS

Things to consider: When you are making these plans, make sure to think about:

- Who are all the different actors during the health fair?
- What are they all doing at each phase of the health fair? How? With what? When?
- What materials or instructions do they need at different parts of the day to help them set up, offer, and take down their service, support, resource, etc.?

Think about this as THE go-to plan, the source of truth, the list, or the instructions for everything that is supposed to happen during the day. Go into whatever level of detail works for your team and make sure to include the critical details that will make or break the success of your health fair. For in person health fairs, it is also helpful to create site maps of where everything is located - this helps with set up, while also helping participants know where to go for the things they are interested in. Sometimes planners will make a site map for participants and a different one for partners and the project team.

What you need: Inform this plan with anything you can think of from all previous steps, with a distinct focus on everything required to set up, take down, and follow-up on all of the services, supports, resources, and activities you will have at the health fair and everything your team and each partner needs to know or do throughout the day.

TIPS & TOOLS

In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include some templates to help you make your own “day of” plans and checklists!

CREATING A LEARNING & IMPACT MEASUREMENT PLAN

Things to consider: Think about activities related to these categories and what you might want to learn about each one to help you tell the story of your health fair:

- **Lessons learned:** What went well and why? What could be better and how?
- **Reach:** Who came to the health fair? Where are they from? How does this compare to who you intended to reach?
- **Impact:** What was this experience like for people? How did the health fair impact peoples lives?

What you need: The vision of the health fair (see step 1C) and the experience you want people to have (see step 1E) are helpful to inform this plan.

TIPS & TOOLS

In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include some key questions and simple tools for looking back at what you learned and for assessing the impact of your health fair.

It is time to start actioning all the plans you have made, and to fully bring the health fair to life! This is the most exciting part of the process and is where you will learn the most about what is and is not working, and where you can make things even better for next time.

PHASE 3

Implementing the plan



3A

PROMOTING THE EVENT & OPENING REGISTRATION

Open registration (if applicable, see step 2D) and complete the activities in your promotion plan (see step 2F). If you are asking people to register, here are some things to consider as you go:

- Check registration regularly - if numbers are low, increase or modify promotion efforts to encourage attendees and make sure to update your promotion plan to reflect learnings
- Once registration starts getting close to capacity consider starting a wait list
- If you reach capacity, close registration and make sure to communicate this broadly across your networks and promotion materials (and those of any partners who have promoted it on your behalf)
- Send a reminder to registrants one or more times before the health fair, including everything they need to know about the fair (for example, date and location, how to access it, what to expect, etc.).

3B

CHECKING IN WITH PARTNERS

Make sure venues, speakers, service providers, people leading activities, volunteers, and other partners are prepared for their role on the day(s) of the health fair. This includes finalizing and sharing all the plans you were making in step 2G with everyone.

3C

COORDINATING ALL THE MATERIALS

Pick up and prepare any food, decorations, equipment, supplies, furniture, etc. that you purchased or ordered in step 2G. Do not leave this to the last minute - make sure to purchase everything and have it on hand (if applicable) at least a week before the health fair.

3D

TESTING TECHNOLOGY

Make sure to test any technology that you identified in step 2G, and have a backup plan in place for any critical activities or requirements. Here are some things to consider:

- Make a plan to ensure cord safety if you are plugging things in and there are cords where people may be walking. Also make sure you have lots of backup cords and chargers for unexpected needs.
- It is important to ensure speakers, service providers, and people leading activities can focus on their offerings and engaging with participants. Because of this, they should not be made responsible for running any technology that is required for them to be successful.
- These [Zoom best practices](#) can help you set your online offerings up for success

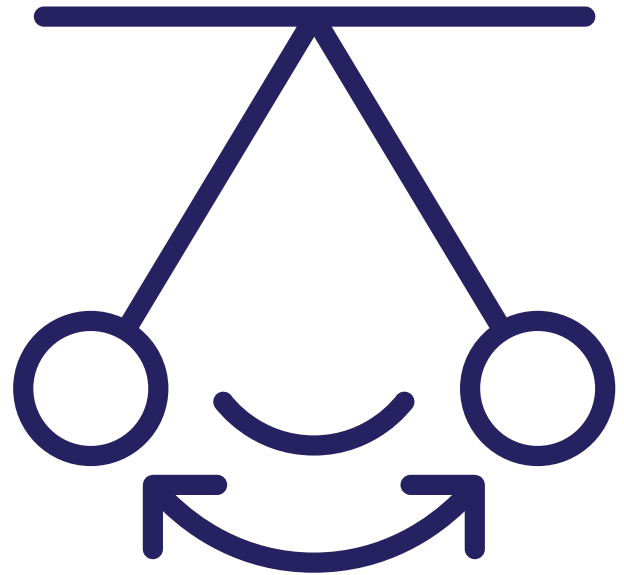
3E

HOSTING THE HEALTH FAIR

On the day of the health fair, it is time to work through any checklists, plans, or other documents you created in step 2G and 2H that outline your plan for the day(s). This includes gathering any data or stories to support your impact measurement and storytelling plan.

PHASE 4

Keeping the momentum going



The work of a health fair does not stop once it is over. After the fair, it is important to debrief, capture lessons learned, share stories about the outcomes and impacts of the health fair, and create a plan for any next steps - which might include hosting another health fair!

4A

ASKING PARTICIPANTS & PARTNERS FOR FEEDBACK

If your learning and impact measurement plan includes a post-event survey send it out as soon as possible after the health fair is over so it is fresh in people's minds. For example, you could send this out as part of a "thank you" for attending which also includes a list of any services, supports, or resources that were offered during the health fair and/or that people can access after the health fair.

TIPS & TOOLS In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include some example survey questions.

4B

DEBRIEFING & GATHERING LESSONS LEARNED

No matter how many times you host a health fair there is always something you can do to improve it. After every health fair, debrief as a project team to discuss:

- What worked well and how you can repeat that
- What could have been better and how you can avoid it or respond better in the future
- Stories about how the health fair positively impacted people
- What the next steps are for this health fair

TIPS & TOOLS In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include key questions and simple methods you can use as part of your lessons learned activities.

4C

SHARING STORIES & IMPACT

During and after the health fair you will start to surface stories about how many people you reached, how many services were offered, how different people experienced and were impacted by the health fair, etc. These stories help you share why this event was such a success and how it helped different people in different ways. You may also have a requirement to report back to your funders about how many people you reached, where they were from, how many services were offered, etc. Make sure to share this back quickly so you can keep the momentum of the health fair going.

TIPS & TOOLS In the [health fair planning workbook](#), we include key questions you can use as part of your impact measurement process.

CASE STUDIES

HEALTH COMMONS SOLUTIONS LAB (TORONTO)

Seniors Health and Wellness Fair



Format: Online health fair that lasted 5 consecutive days (Monday through Friday)

Host organization: Health Commons Solutions Lab through the Neighbours Project (Toronto)

Supporting partners: Windsor Essex Compassion Care Community and the Community Support Centre of Essex County

Timing: November 2022

of participants:

118

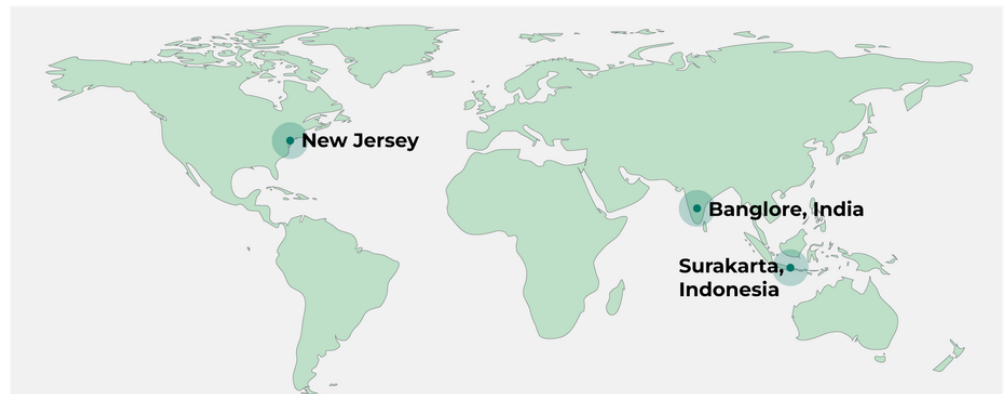
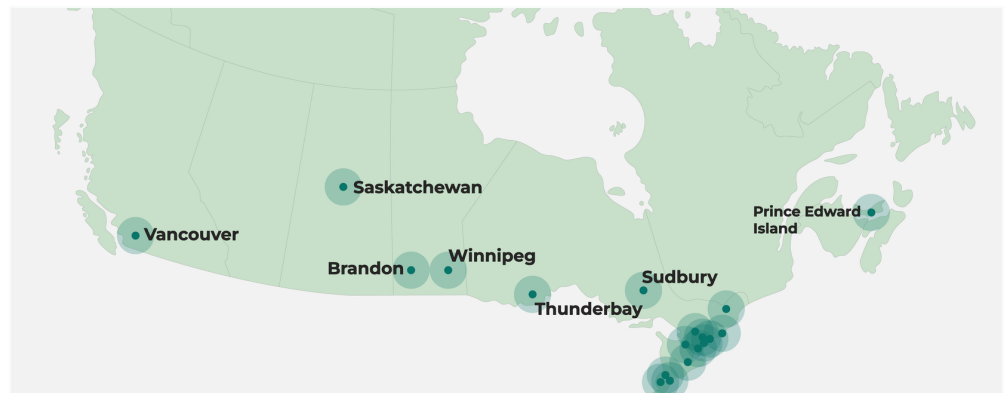
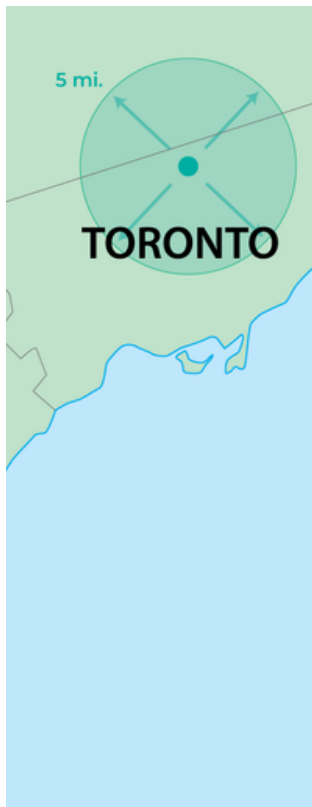
of services/sessions provided:

24

of referrals or potential referrals:

17

Intended reach: Actual reach:





WHAT WE DID & WHY WE DID IT

In collaboration with Windsor Essex Compassion Care Community and the Community Support Centre of Essex County we hosted a 5-day online health fair for seniors, as part of the [Neighbours Project](#). The intention of this health fair was to provide seniors with the opportunity to learn something new, try something new, and meet someone new. It was also an opportunity for organizations to share their offerings while networking with each other and using the learnings to inform their own programming.

The health fair included a series of interactive social activities, exercise classes, and educational sessions that were delivered by different organizations and that focused on reducing loneliness and isolation, aging at home, personal safety and security, and mental wellbeing and staying positive.



WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT

Through this health fair we spread awareness of the Neighbours Project beyond the neighbourhood level. Since the fair was promoted to seniors all across Ontario, we expanded our network of seniors and built deeper relationships with various communities and partners.

These new partnerships have proven themselves to be lasting, and this was built over several daily sessions which brought in and cultivated relationships with organizations beyond our existing network. These relationships were further strengthened through informative and engaging sessions that were relevant to the audience and that gave them what they needed - prompting them to return to the fair day after day.



NUANCED CONSIDERATIONS THAT MADE THIS HEALTH FAIR A SUCCESS

Keep people engaged: When attending a virtual event it is easy to lose focus or get side tracked and (to keep people engaged) we had to get creative. We did this through a variety of programming, including live demonstrations, interactive fitness classes, and group singalongs. We also had a raffle at the end of each day with three randomized winners.

Lean on your partners: Because we were trying to reach a provincial audience through a local project it was important that we had a network of partners who helped us promote the health fair. This allowed us to increase awareness and reach and significantly boosted our registration numbers.

Help people plan their time: Multi-day events are unique because there is so much to offer and engage with during that time and it can be hard for people to prepare and plan. To support participants, we created:

- Calendar invites for each day, including a link to the platform we used to host the health fair and an agenda for the day. This helped people hold the time in their calendars, but also to know what to expect each day and to plan their time in case they could only attend for a certain amount of time.
- **General posters and social media posts** to promote the health fair broadly, coupled with specific posters and social media posts that were specific to each day of the event, including key agenda items and times.

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WHAT WE LEARNED & WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Make sure your technology is tested and prepared: Online events come with challenges around navigating and using different technology. Because technology is critical to success of an online event, we recommend you:

- Ensure speakers are comfortable presenting online and provide instructions on how to access and use the platform (for example, how to share their screen or their audio or how to use the chat)
- Ensure the platform is set up in advance (for example, you can set up hosts and alternate hosts, set permissions for who can create polls, share their screens, share their audio, etc. in advance so you do not have to do it on the day of)
- We recommend using Zoom since it is relatively accessible for most people with the internet and a computer/laptop and people are generally familiar with it
- When hosting online fairs, designate an individual to actively monitor the platform you are using to ensure any disruptive activity can be dealt with in an appropriate and timely manner and to make sure the chat is monitored and questions are answered

Always have a backup plan: The day of the health fair is unpredictable and anything can happen - especially online where wifi can drop or lag at any time. We recommend you have a backup plan, including having content prepared and being able to easily swap sessions at the last minute in case a speaker does not show or cannot join. You should also have an additional platform available in case the primary platform fails.

ROOTS COMMUNITY SERVICES AND PEEL REGION (GREATER TORONTO AREA)

Our Community Wellness Fair for Black, African, and Caribbean Communities

Format: In person across different locations, with physical booths set up with speciality talks and service offerings throughout the day. This is an event that is supporting a specific group of people and has a distinct approach as a result.

Host organization: WellFort Community Health Centre, Roots Community Services, and Peel Public Health.

Supporting partners: LAMP-East Mississauga, Ontario Health, Moyo, Canadian Mental Health Association - Peel Dufferin, Black Health Alliance, REST Centres, and Black Physicians Association of Ontario.

Timing: This group has hosted 6 fairs, doing 2-3 a year.

of participants:

150-350

of services/sessions provided:

20-30

of referrals or potential referrals:

We are looking to add this to our evaluation in the future. The last fair at Malton delivered 120 blood pressure tests, 40 diabetes tests, 75 routine school immunizations and 22 COVID-19 vaccines.

Intended reach: We have done 6 wellness fairs now, each a bit different. We tend to focus on the geography within a forward sortation area, and usually an area with a higher percentage of residents from Black, African, and Caribbean communities (like Malton, Bramalea). We focus outreach in the local and bordering forward sortation areas. Our general promotion (newspaper advertising, social media, radio etc.) reaches all of Peel Region and beyond.

Actual reach: At our last fair, we had attendees put a dot on a map indicating where they were from. The event was in Malton and we found that 88% came from Peel and, more specifically, 56% came from Malton.

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WHAT WE DID & WHY WE DID IT

This group came together to support Black, African, and Caribbean communities in Peel Region who have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. We understand the challenges and hesitation of these communities and want to create a safe and supportive space for people to receive their COVID-19 vaccination. We also know that Black, African, and Caribbean communities in Peel Region are more likely to experience racism and barriers while seeking medical care.

This highlighted the need to build trust in these communities through a holistic approach that focused on the wellbeing of an individual, not just individual health issues, and on prevention and the social determinants of health - like housing and health care connection. In response, as a group, we host “Our Community Wellness Fairs” to create a safe and supportive space to receive education and resources and have questions answered by health, wellness, and social service providers. Our work has evolved to meet the broader health needs of community members through the diverse wrap-around supports people need to be well. We offer 2-3 health fairs per year and include a selection of services, including but not limited to the ones noted on this [poster](#) (scroll down when you open the link).



WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT

Through a holistic approach, we are able to connect people to diverse service providers who are offering not only health services but comprehensive social services that incorporate food, music, and Community Ambassadors to help create community and cultural connections. Through these different offerings and ways for participants to experience the health fair, people collect information and resources; actively engage in conversation with leaders, providers, community organizations, and each other; and participate in interactive activities like screening, testing, and presentations. This also creates networking opportunities for organizations in attendance through critical collaboration between health and social care partners in the community who are providing culturally-sensitive care.



NUANCED CONSIDERATIONS THAT MADE THIS HEALTH FAIR A SUCCESS

Community-led and informed work: As a community-specific health fair, it is critical that we deeply understand the histories, experiences, context, and priorities of Black, African, and Caribbean communities in Peel Region. It is critical that we truly understand the scope and purpose of these health fairs and be intentional in achieving that purpose. This includes spending time learning about these communities through desk and on the ground research done by Community Ambassadors.

Choosing the right location: Location determines who will be there and it is critical to find a space that can accommodate your audience, is easily accessible, and is a space that feels welcoming and safe.

Choosing the right timing: Make sure your event does not overlap with other culturally-relevant holidays, events, or significant days within the community and

that will impact who is able to come to the health fair. Also make sure the date, time, and location are solidified at least 2 months before.

Create a welcoming and upbeat atmosphere: Choosing the right host is important as they set the tone and feel for the day - find someone who knows the community well, who is comfortable speaking for large groups, and who may speak multiple languages. Playing music, offering food, and hosting culturally-relevant activities that feel connected to the community also create a space where people feel welcome, included, and entertained.



WHAT WE LEARNED & WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Make confirming service providers, speakers, vendors, and venues a priority: We recommend assigning one project team member to manage relationships, schedules, and communications with the service providers, speakers, vendors, and venues. This is a time consuming but very pivotal aspect of the planning process. When reaching out to potential service providers, speakers, vendors, and venues make sure to consider who will be engaging, trustworthy, and interesting for the community and use existing connections to recruit rather than cold calling.

When promoting, make sure you know your audience: For this health fair to succeed, most of our promotion takes place through radio channels that are driven by the community. We also advertise through partners and the service providers, speakers, etc. who are attending the health fair so we can reach more people. Having a really good flyer is key since this acts as your main form of print advertising.

Feedback is valuable: Feedback from exhibitors is important. Asking partners what their goals are and if they succeeded in achieving them will help you understand what worked about the health fair and what did not work well. This will also help promote collaboration and sharing resources between partners, and will help you understand what they would do differently next time.

Getting creative with data collection: Finding a balance between maintaining a walk-in feel but still being able to collect data is important but requires creativity - like having a [“passport” system](#). This involves people receiving a blank passport when they arrive, and being stamped at each booth or activity and then collected at the end for an entry to win a prize. This encourages people to visit the offerings that mean something to them and tap into new networks, while also collecting data about what topic areas people are interested in. To do this in a way that collects the most meaningful information, it is important that people only have to go to the offerings that mean something to them and can be entered into the prize no matter how many things they explored. [Here](#) is an example of the passport Peel Region used.

TIPS & TOOLS

If you decide to use a passport system and you are hosting your health fair in a place where other events are happening, you could include something on the passport for people to indicate what other events they were there to see. This will help you in your lessons learned and evaluation activities, and to create partnerships with other groups who are offering services and that could be part of wrap-around support for the community you are serving.

CASE STUDY #3:

CAREFIRST SENIORS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES ASSOCIATION (MARKHAM)

Winter Wellness Fest, High Priority Communities Strategy Program of South East Markham



Format: Hybrid (online and in person components)

Host organization: Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association (Markham)

Supporting partners: Markham YMCA

Timing: Recurring

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WHAT WE DID & WHY WE DID IT

The High Priority Communities Strategy Program of South East Markham teamed up with the local community to bring a winter series of free workshops and fitness activities geared towards mental health and women's health hosted at the Markham YMCA.

Our primary focus is supporting the Asian community and seniors who live in Toronto and York Region. This is a closely acquainted community that is majority Cantonese or Mandarin speaking, and who are often not reached by local community services.

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WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT

These health fairs attract diverse turnout, with people from various age groups due to the communal and lively nature of the YMCA location (which is a known

and trusted community space with a lot of programming) and because of the culturally-relevant content of the health fair. We bring in experts, leaders, and connectors from the community to provide relevant information that is consistent with the theme of each health fair.



NUANCED CONSIDERATIONS THAT MADE THIS HEALTH FAIR A SUCCESS

Having a clear theme: The theme of this health fair was focused on mental health and women's health. Having a themed health fair that includes a series of offerings that are relevant to the people you are trying to reach allows you to reach a specific population and helps you stay consistent with your scope and intention.

Simultaneous educational workshops and interactive sessions offer variety: Hosting a blend of informational and interactive activities creates space for a diverse audience to participate in the health fair in ways that interest them.

Prioritize location: Location is critical for attracting the people you are trying to reach, and it is important to consider things like the type of facility (community centre, park, etc.), how accessible it is for people to get to, and capacity for the number of people you are expecting. Securing this early on allows you to plan ahead and avoid disappointment.

Setting up a strong project team: Health fairs take a lot of work and it is important to ensure that key tasks such as confirming partners, coordinating logistics, purchasing and arranging food, and communications and promotion are assigned to dedicated people so nothing is missed. It is also important to have regular meetings and to make them more frequent leading up to the fair so you stay organized and manage risks as the event approaches.



WHAT WE LEARNED AND WHERE WE GO FROM THERE

Hybrid health fairs are great to accommodate many people, but take a lot of effort and coordination: Having to bring and set-up the infrastructure, troubleshoot technology, and coordinate sound/projection can be time consuming and include a lot of people to manage it. If the health fair is spread out in multiple rooms or spaces at your physical location you may not be able to stream all of it online. It is also difficult to engage people who are tuning in virtually while you are in a physical space, so you will need to consider how best to do this.

Time your health fair around pre-existing events: Hosting the health fair at a community-centred location that overlaps with multiple other activities allows people to pop in to explore the health fair at the same time they can explore other activities, which ultimately increases reach and visibility.

Collect demographic data to understand who is showing up: Although demographic data is collected for individuals who require follow-up at specific booths, it can be difficult to gauge holistically who showed up to the event and which audiences you are reaching overall. Developing a data collection strategy that consistently captures everyone who is there is key to understanding who is showing up, what is important to them, and who may be getting missed.

Intimately know your community: Understanding who you are serving and what they respond best to is essential to building and maintaining trust within the community. For this fair, for example, political representation was well received and welcomed, but for other communities that may create mistrust and create an uncomfortable environment.

When you start advertising is important and it is critical to know your audience: If you start too early people may forget about it and if you start too late people may already have plans. It is important to know your audience and how best to reach them with your marketing - for example, for this health fair, radio and print worked well. Leveraging partners is also important to expanding your reach, by having them promote your health fair through their channels and networks.

ONE MORE THING:

Is it possible to significantly reduce health and social care waiting lists overnight? A physiotherapy team in the UK has reduced the average waiting time for appointments from 16 to ten weeks in just two working days using “Community Appointment Days.” [Read here for more!](#)



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March 2024

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