

Guidelines for Organizing a Successful Conference

Education is the first step in desigmatizing mental illness.

What are the steps to putting on a successful conference?

- Bring together a diverse and committed group of persons to form a planning committee...including consumers and families.
- Identify the needs in your community and conduct some research to determine if the target audiences would be likely to attend a conference. Encourage sponsors to share expenses.
- The most successful conferences encourage collaboration between mental health providers, community groups, affiliates from NAMI, MHA and DBSA and local faith communities.
- Be clear on your goals and objectives.
- Start early! Pick a date and find a suitable site. In deciding where to hold your conference, consider a central location, the room capacity, availability of break out rooms (optional) and AV equipment.
- Develop a schedule for the day and line up your speakers.
- If this is your first conference, start small. There are many models: one or two hours, a half day or a full day conference.
- Encourage pre-registration. When there is a small registration fee, people are more likely to attend. This is also helpful if you are offering a light breakfast, lunch or other snacks. Allow for "walk-ins."
- Advertising is the key to the success of the event. Ask your committee members to use their contacts to let people know about the event at least three months in advance. Use newsletters, mailings, local papers, brochures, phone contact and other means to get the word out.
- Invite groups working in the field of mental health to be part of a resource fair with exhibits.
- Arrange for persons to handle the registration (nametags are helpful), oversee the resource fair, set up and clean up, handle the microphone and AV needs, serve as greeters and any hospitality needs like food arrangements. Share the location of the bathrooms at the beginning of the conference.

- Provide a packet of material with information provided by speakers and participating organizations.

Conference Schedule Options

Morning Conference

8:30-9:00 Registration, resource fair, networking, light refreshments

9:00-9:15 Welcome, overview of the event, information including the location of bathrooms and introduction of the speakers

9:15-10:15 Opening speaker presentation and opportunity for questions

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-11:30 Second speaker or small group offerings

11:30-11:45 Closing remarks (optional evaluation forms)

One Day Conference

Same as morning conference with directions for lunch

12:00-1:00 Lunch – consider ways to encourage networking

1:00 – 1:05 Introduction of next speaker

1:05-2:00 Second plenary event

2:00-2:55 Panel, questions, break out groups

2:55-3:00 Closing remark

You can add another hour depending on your needs.

Comments

Keep on schedule to respect participant's time commitments

Consider a weekday conference for clergy

Offering Continuing Education units can increase attendance

