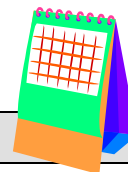


# **PLANNING MONTHLY PARENT WORKSHOPS**

- I. SCHEDULING (WHEN?)
- II. PLANNING (WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHY?)
- III. PROMOTIONS/ADVERTISING
- IV. HOSTING THE EVENT
- V. FOLLOW UP



## **I. SCHEDULING (WHEN?)**

Meet with the GEAR UP team from your school and review the school's calendar for the year. Decide when would be the best day each month to hold a parent workshop or activity. Map out your parent events for the entire school year. Submit the list to the principal for review.

### **Suggestions for Scheduling:**

Avoid Wednesday evenings so as not to conflict with church activities. Friday evenings are generally a busy time for families as well.

Look for possible patterns, such as the first Tuesday of each month, etc... to make it easy to remember.

Avoid days on which sports competitions, or homecomings/proms are scheduled.

Look for possible events to piggyback, such as parent-teacher conferences, or student performances.

Consider having alternate/back-up dates, especially during winter, in case of bad weather.

If you have difficulty deciding which dates/times would be most convenient for parents, conduct a short survey asking about their daily schedules.

Consider offering additional events at different times, such as an afternoon tea, or early morning breakfast to involve those who aren't available in the evenings.

Be sure to check the GEAR UP event calendar for any conflicts with Fairmont State-sponsored family events.

## II. PLANNING (WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHY?)

### WHO will be involved?



- **GUEST SPEAKERS:**

Invite any guest speakers and/or entertainment as far in advance as possible. (See attached Speaker's List for suggestions.) Determine the amount of any fees or travel expenses for speakers and get approval from Site Coordinator. Find out if you will need an invoice from the speaker or entertainment in order to process payment. Find out if the speaker(s) have any needs such as audio-visual equipment, an overhead projector, laptop, etc... Provide speaker(s) with the approximate number of audience members and directions to the school if necessary. Send a written confirmation to the speaker(s) and make a follow-up contact prior to the event.

- **VOLUNTEERS:**

Identify or recruit volunteers to serve at the event. Be sure to get their phone or email information so that you can contact them before the event to confirm. If you have volunteers willing to help with the planning, assign specific tasks and touch base with them often.

If you plan to provide child care, invite trustworthy high school students (who can earn credit toward their required community service hours) or other volunteers to play games or make arts and crafts with younger children. (A.C. Moore in Clarksburg carries large varieties of fun arts and crafts materials for kids.) It is not advisable to offer child care for infants unless you have a licensed provider available. (Consider offering a "Safe Sitter" training course to students at your school who can then serve as certified sitters during your workshops....for more information, contact WVU's Center for Rural Emergency Medicine at 304-293-6682.)

- **INVITEES:**

Determine who you will invite---for example, 7th grade parents, 8th grade parents, or both. It's a good idea to let the principal, teachers and guidance counselors know that they are invited as well. Determine whether or not the content of the workshop will be suitable for students, and if so, whether or not students will be welcome to attend with their parents. Keep in mind that some parents may be reluctant to ask questions if their student is present, and vice-versa.

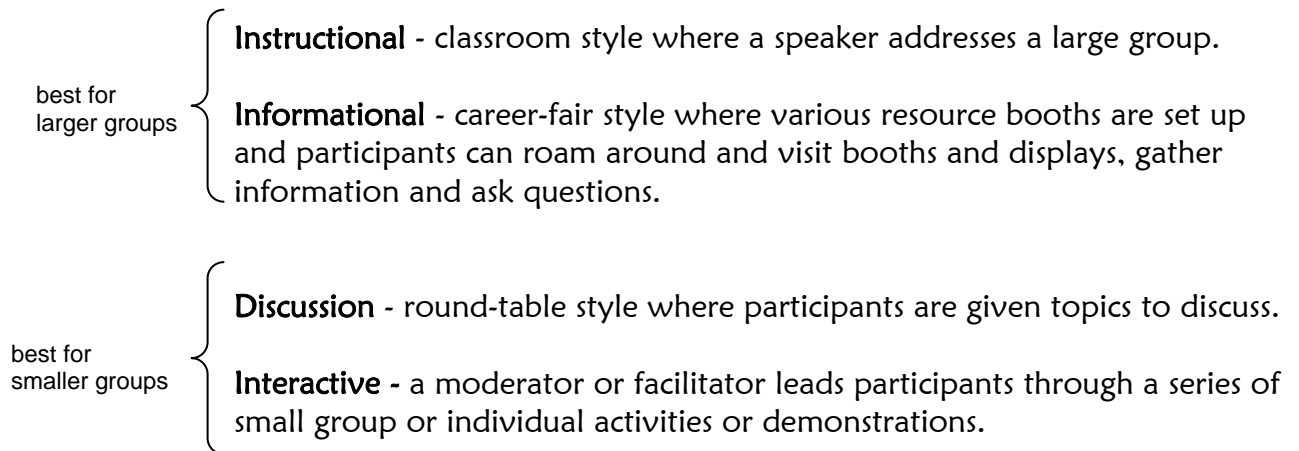
Interactive workshops are often more effective with smaller, more intimate groups. If registration for a complex workshop exceeds a specified maximum number, schedule the same workshop for another time so that all parents have an opportunity to attend.

## WHAT will occur?

Brainstorm ideas for parent event themes with your school's GEAR UP team, and then determine which format type would be best.

- *FORMAT*

Determine the format of the workshop. Types of formats include



These format styles can combined within a workshop.

- *FOOD*

The timing of your workshop should determine the type of food to serve. For example, if you are hosting a four-hour evening workshop, a dinner would be appropriate. If you are hosting a one- or two-hour late afternoon workshop, light refreshments such as a vegetable tray and juice would be appropriate.

When serving a meal, be certain to offer enough of a variety to accommodate the dietary restrictions of diabetics, heart patients, vegans, etc... Consult carefully with the food service manager or caterer about menu items. A safe bet is to serve all sauces, dressings, toppings, and spices on the side. If you offer dessert, offer a sugar-free version as well. (A nutritional-education activity would make a great workshop for families!).

When planning to serve a meal during a workshop, ask invitees to pre-register so that you can have an accurate count of meals to serve. As a general rule, figure on approximately 80% of those registered showing up. Contact a local mission, shelter, or church to see if they will accept food you may have left over.

Consider contracting with the culinary program at your local Technical Center for lower-cost catering options that provide learning experiences for students. Also

consider coordinating with Home Economics teachers and classes to offer student-prepared meals.

Pre-determine the cost of the meal, catering, and/or fees, including tip, and get approval from Site Coordinator. Find out if you will need an invoice in order to process payment.

### **WHERE will the event be held?**

If your event will be held at the school, decide upon which rooms you will need. Confirm that there will be space for comfortable seating, ample workspace, and an area for refreshments. Check with the school to be sure rooms you need are available and to reserve them. Ensure doors will be unlocked, or a custodian with the keys will be available before and after the event. Be sure any heating or air conditioning you need will be on and know how to have it adjusted if necessary.

Visit the room prior to the event to envision how it will be set up. It is a good idea to visit the room at the same time of day in which your workshop will be held so that you can observe the lighting in the room and if, for example, sunlight may obstruct anyone's vision.

If your event will be held at a facility outside of the school, follow the above steps with a person in charge of the facility. Determine if there is ample parking. Double and triple-check to ensure the facility will be prepared for your event.

Determine how many tables and chairs will fit into the room, how many you will need, and how many will be available. Determine how tables and chairs will be arranged. Find out when you can go in to arrange the room for the event.

If an audio system will be required for guest speakers or music, determine if the school or facility has a system or if you will need to make arrangements to bring one in.

### **WHY?**

Determine the purpose of the event and list specific objectives. Title each event so that the purpose is reflected.

For example:

**Workshop Title:** "Coaching Your Student to Success"

**Purpose:** This one-hour workshop will help parents and students begin planning for the future together by laying out a play-by-play game plan.

**Objectives:** to provide 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents with the Parents' Handbook that describes Pathways, Career Clusters and the Five-Year Plan; to show parents that planning early can ensure their students' success as well as dramatically cut college costs; to reinforce the fact that the parents play a vital role in education.

Workshops can, of course, have multiple purposes and objectives---the more the better. Be clear about how parents and students will benefit, rather than how the workshop will meet GEAR UP or NCLB goals.

Share the purpose of the workshop with all speakers, volunteers, school personnel, etc... and ask for any ideas/suggestions that will contribute to the purpose.

### **HOW?**

Determine how the event will flow. Create an agenda and set specific timeframes for each activity including any breaks.

Agenda should designate a time for registration as well as time for audience questions, and a wrap-up/summary at the end.

## **III. PROMOTIONS/ADVERTISING**



- **TIMING:**

One of the most common mistakes schools make is not advertising their events far enough in advance.

You and your team will be working hard to put these events together; DON'T thwart your efforts by failing to advertise properly!

Begin promoting your event at least a MONTH ahead of time to allow busy parents to add it to their schedule.

- **REPITITION:**

Keep in mind that repetition, or frequency, is key to successful advertising. The more times your message is seen or heard, the more it will be absorbed. Also, the more times a message is seen or heard, the higher priority it is assigned.

Develop a campaign---NOT just a single flyer!

- **DESIGNING PRINT ADS:**

**Graphics:**

Using the Purpose, Title, and Objectives of your workshop, (which you established during the Planning phase) find some eye-catching clip art that depicts the title or purpose you have established. The clip art used for the “Coaching Your Student to Success” workshop given in the example above could be:



*(Okay, technically that’s a referee, not a coach, but the graphic is intended to capture the idea that parents need to know the rules of the game just as a ref, or a coach does in order to help the players avoid fouls/penalties and achieve victory.)*

The clip art or graphics used in your campaign should also offer clues as to the content of the workshop. **Unfortunately, there are still many adults who cannot read, so they rely on pictures to help them understand the message.** A simple graduate cap can communicate many of the GEAR UP goals:



Pictures of money (as in the money students can earn when they continue their education, OR the financial aid for which a student may be eligible) usually always get the point across:



Be careful not to overuse graphics; too many images can be confusing. Also, take caution that images are well balanced on the page, ie., not crowded together in one area.

If you have difficulty finding clip art to use in your advertisements, contact Victoria Kesner, Parent & Family Involvement Coordinator at the Fairmont State GEAR UP office, who can search a library of clip art for you.

Even those who CAN read may not WANT to read something that doesn’t look interesting. Grab their attention with clip art and use spacing in the text of your ads so that it doesn’t appear too lengthy or complicated.

**Text:**

Keep in mind that parents are just as busy as the rest of us and they don’t have time to waste either. A page full of single-spaced, margin-to-margin, 12 point, Times New Roman text appears time-consuming and boring.

Adding spaces, bullet points, or lists can make your ad more appealing and thus, more likely to be read.

Always highlight workshop titles, dates and times by making them bold or underlined.

With almost zillions of fonts available, you may be tempted to spice up your flyers and posters with unique or wildly different fonts. Avoid the temptation! Choose a few simple, easy-to-read fonts, such as this one, Maiandra GD, and stick to them! Visit [www.fontfreak.com](http://www.fontfreak.com) for a variety of fonts you can download free.

Create a template so that all your announcements to parents have a similar look and feel. Humans are creatures of habit, and we tend to be more comfortable with things that are familiar to us. The more comfortable parents feel with your event, the more likely they are to attend. Having a template will also save you time later on.

Keep in mind that many grandparents are involved in raising children, and font sizes should be large enough to be easily read by people with vision problems. Font sizes between 12 and 14 are usually the smallest acceptable.

Use ACTION verbs to describe the event. Include in the text the specific benefit to parents/students and any door prizes, gifts or incentives that will be available. Feel free to utilize advertising clichés such as “Don’t Miss It”, or “Call Now”!

- ***PUBLICIZING THE EVENT:***

**Personal Contact:**

Personal contact remains the most effective way to call someone to action. Whenever possible, make phone calls, or write personal invitations beginning with the hardest-to-reach parents who don’t normally come to the school. Mention any upcoming workshops when speaking to parents, and ask them to invite their friends and neighbors. Let teachers and school staff know about your workshops well in advance so they too can mention them when speaking to parents. When wrapping up a workshop, mention the date of the next workshop.

Consider using or acquiring an automated telephone system such as ParentLink.

**Print:**

Of the papers given to students to take home, only about 50% reach the parents. This should NOT be your only method of publicizing events for parents!

Post flyers and posters in the school where permitted. (Make sure you remove them when it is over.)

If your school has an outdoor marquee, post your event on it.

Hand out flyers in the parking lot as parents arrive to drop off or pick up students, or partner with a teacher who will offer extra credit to students who volunteer to hand out flyers in the parking lot before and/or after school.

Post announcements in the school newsletter and on the school website.

Give away tickets to the event that can be entered into a drawing for a nice prize. Must be present to win, of course.

Set up an email contact list of parents and email them announcements and flyers. Visit [www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com) for a great email management system.

Contact your local newspaper and ask about options for advertising school events.

Write a press release and submit to local media. They may wish to interview you or someone else and write an article about your upcoming event.

Look for opportunities to stuff your flyer into other materials being sent home, such as report cards.

Postcards and bulk-rate materials can be mailed to parents at reduced rates, but it could take up to two-weeks to be received.

Post flyers/announcements at local grocery stores, community centers, etc... Be sure to remove them following the event.

**Broadcast:**

Contact local radio and tv stations and ask about getting your ad on a PSA (Public Service Announcement) or community calendar listing. Also ask about special rates for government and education.

Contact your local cable company about airtime on a public access channel.

Ask the principal to announce your event over the PA system during other school events and sports.

## IV. HOSTING THE EVENT

- *BEFORE THE EVENT:*

Arrive no later than one hour prior to the event to set up registration and ensure the room and any food is set up properly.



Set up any event signs needed on the exterior. The GEAR UP office can loan out outdoor signs if they are not in use.

Confirm that parking is available and all doors are unlocked as needed.

Place any interior signs that are needed, such as arrows pointing to the registration table. Be sure to bring tape, scissors, and a stapler just in case.

Greet any guest speakers, offer them assistance with carrying in supplies if needed. Ask if they'd like to have water while speaking.

Check all mics and/or audio equipment to be sure equipment is working.

Take care of all personal needs so that you can be available as needed during the event.

**Registration:**

Set up a registration table, covered with a tablecloth and/or seasonal centerpiece. Be sure someone is seated at the table to greet and direct people.

Items on the registration table should include:

- GEAR UP Parent Program Sign-In Sheet (included in this manual)
- clipboard and pens
- copies of the Agenda
- nametags, if necessary
- a "Help Wanted" listing of any volunteer opportunities in the school
- Release Forms, if you plan to take photos/videos (included in manual)
- biographies or contact information of any speakers
- a listing of other, upcoming parent events or GEAR UP activities
- information on the school's PTA, PTO, or Booster's groups
- giveaways such as keychains, magnets, mousepads, etc...
- a basket or box to collect tickets for door prizes, or drawings
- a box in which to collect evaluations at the end of the event

● ***DURING THE EVENT:***

Be respectful of time. Begin the program promptly even though some may arrive late. Stick to the agenda as closely as possible.

Program should begin by welcoming parents/families and thanking them for attending. Briefly review your agenda, mention when food or snacks will be served, and point out the location of the restrooms. Consider requesting that all cell phones be turned to silent or vibrate.

If time permits, mention that the event has been sponsored by GEAR UP, and explain that:

GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is a six-year, federally-funded, partnership grant. Fairmont State was awarded a \$31 million GEAR UP grant to serve students, teachers and parents in middle and high schools in 14 WV counties. (You could mention specific GEAR UP activities in your school.)

Introduce guest speakers. Be on hand to offer assistance with passing out handouts or materials. Take photos without being distracting or disturbing.

At some point during the event, audience members should be offered quality information and/or resources on college/career preparation and options.

A brief wrap-up/thank you should be done when the speaker has finished and audience members should be asked to complete an evaluation of the event. Plan on staying after the event to answer questions and help clean up and ensure things are left in as good a shape as you found them.

## V. FOLLOW UP

*Well Done!*

As soon as possible after the event, send thank-you notes to speakers/presenters and/or any other participants you wish to thank. Don't forget to thank your volunteers as well!

Tally up the evaluations and make notes on improvements for your next workshop/event. Discuss the event and the evaluations with your Site Coordinator.

Complete a Parent Activity Report on your event with copies of any flyers or other publicity and submit to the GEAR UP Parent and Family Involvement Coordinator.

Consider submitting a press release with pictures to the media describing your event and any positive outcomes.