

HEARTS N' PARKS: CELEBRATING AND SHARING

We urge you to take advantage of the guidance, recommendations, and examples in this guide. It will be a valuable tool for both establishing and maintaining a successful Hearts N' Parks program. Refer to it often and make copies of it for your staff.

This chapter provides recommendations for *celebrating* the completion of your first Hearts N' Parks program, ways of *sharing* the program's accomplishments with partners and the community, and suggestions for *sustaining* the program in the future.

CELEBRATING

Completing the Hearts N' Parks program at your agency deserves recognition. Enjoy a job well done! Take the time to celebrate everyone's contributions, progress, and successes (including your own). Also, remember to celebrate what you've learned and the challenges you've met during the program. Participants, program staff, and partners all deserve recognition.

- A closing get-together or wrap-up event is a great way to celebrate and applaud the efforts and accomplishments of your three principal groups: participants, program staff, and partners.
 - **Participants:** Encourage invitees to bring along family members and friends. Have a heart-healthy potluck feast. Pass out honorary stars or ribbons to kids, and pins to adults, as a way of praising the efforts of all participants.
 - **Personnel:** Let them know that their contributions were valuable. Award certificates of appreciation. Consider creating an entertaining video diary of *Hearts N' Parks Behind the Scenes* to show at the wrap-up event.

- **Partners:** Express your appreciation to your partners. Thank them personally and in writing for their support. Encourage them to stay involved so that the program can grow and improve over time.

- Throughout the program, take photos of your participants, program staff, and partners in action. Then post the photos to provide recognition of their commitment and service. This type of postprogram promotion can help sustain interest in and awareness of the program and its lessons before the next program begins.

SHARING

Sharing the program's achievements is an important way of forming and sustaining a positive perception of the program, enabling it to flourish in the long term.

- **Media:** Sharing program achievements with the media is a very important task. Contact media outlets to let them know the program has been completed. If they provided any news about your program when it began, they will probably be interested in doing a followup piece. Discuss with them the highlights of your program, how many participants you had, and what types of achievements were made. Consider telling them about some aspect of the program or providing an anecdote that would make an interesting news story.
- **Focus Groups:** Conduct an informal "focus group" of participants, partners, and staff to share thoughts about the program. Encourage everyone to tell about their experiences with the program. Keep the mood upbeat, but don't be shy about discussing challenges that came up. Solicit suggestions about how the program can be improved.

- **Displays:** Create a display piece that chronicles the program with photos and highlights along with information about when it will take place again. Place the display where members of the community will see it, such as your community center’s entrance or on a community bulletin board at a store, college, or public library.
- **Followup:** Update interested parties on program activities and participant progress. Remember to highlight their contributions to the program.
 - Contact the families of participants to let them know how much you appreciated getting to know their family member and to share the program’s activities. Express the hope that they will continue to be involved in the program and will encourage others to join.
 - If you had a partner organization or program, send a letter of appreciation to its president or chairperson. If the recent partnership was successful, express willingness to work together in the future. Make a few suggestions about possibilities and let them know that you’re willing to help out.
 - Acknowledge the contribution of your agency’s director or senior management. Their support and interest are necessary to maintain the program. Share the results of performance assessments with partners, program staff, participants, and the community, if you can. Changes measured by these tests will help everyone feel proud of the program. It will also raise the visibility of your agency.
- Refer to 3rd P—Public Visibility for suggestions about “moving the messages.” See how you can employ these ideas to share the Hearts N’ Parks message with community members who are not yet involved with the program.

Celebrating and sharing are important conclusions to your Hearts N’ Parks program. Afterward, take a breather. Enjoy your success, but remember that Hearts N’ Parks is an ongoing pursuit for your agency as well as your community.

SUSTAINING

Sustaining is the final piece of Hearts N’ Parks. Because you’ve designed the program based on your community’s needs and your agency’s abilities, continuing it will be easy. To keep participants, program staff, and partners interested, use the suggested tools to change, expand, and improve the program.

- Use **performance assessments** as a tool for evaluating and improving your program. They provide the means by which Hearts N’ Parks officials at both local and national levels can identify shortcomings and overcome them, as well as bring successes to light. This kind of evidence allows you to promote Hearts N’ Parks as an effective long-term program for making your community more heart-healthy.
- **Solicit feedback** from everyone involved about continuing the program. How would they do it? What would they change? What new activities could be incorporated into the program? Do they have ideas about reaching a new audience? Once you’ve solicited feedback, ask them for help to enact their ideas and suggestions.
- Be **visible** in your community. March in community parades. Offer to speak about the program at schools and club meetings.
- Take on the challenge of a **new program**. Once you’ve finished your first Hearts N’ Parks program, consider making changes to it. Not only will this help you reach a new group of participants, it will also keep your current participants, program staff, and partners motivated.

Finally . . .

Remember that the goal of Hearts N' Parks is to increase the number of children and adults who engage in heart-healthy behavior. Cardiovascular disease is the #1 killer in the United States, and lifestyle changes incorporating heart-healthy behavior are the most important step toward prevention.

Heart-healthy behavior can prevent the development of cardiovascular disease and reduce its severity for those who already have it. Heart-healthy behavior includes a diet low in calories, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium, and rich in fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy foods, and whole grains in combination with regular physical activity.

Hearts N' Parks provides the tools to get the heart-healthy message out to those who want to hear it and those who need to hear it. The program's ideas and suggestions are designed to be easy to implement and fun to do. Use these tools and share them with your colleagues.

Good Luck and Have Fun!



