

Program Best Practices

for Active Minds Chapters

A great deal of the work your chapter does will likely be related to planning, executing, and collaborating on high-impact programming. No two programs look alike and can include things like tabling, events on a range of mental health topics, guest speakers, partnering with other clubs and school offices/administrators, policy advocacy, and more! This guide will provide some key considerations for planning successful programs.

*Let's start by reviewing how to **PLAN** for your programs.*

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN GOALS?

The Who's, What's, Why's, How's, and When's

The academic year goes quickly and it's easy to get wrapped up in planning for one program at a time, like a day or month of mental health awareness, for example. While it can be productive and exciting to jump in headfirst and follow a great idea (which we encourage!), it's also important to set a few goals to keep you on track with what you hope to achieve. Consider who you'd like to reach with your program(s), the topics you'd like to cover, and set 1-3 goals for the month, term, or academic year that you'd like to reach. Setting measurable goals can give you points to measure your progress and celebrate your successes.

The main components of program planning include the who, what, where, when, why, and how. We encourage you to consider these questions in any order but recommend thinking about all of these aspects when planning programs and setting goals.

WHO is our primary audience?

Your audience may be broad (ie. all students) or narrow (ie. undergraduate and graduate nursing majors); both approaches have distinct advantages and disadvantages. Don't forget to consider all of the other audiences that exist at your school including faculty and teachers, staff and administrators, members of the wider community such as local businesses, and more.

WHAT is the message, action, or knowledge we want to achieve through this program?

You likely have several goals for your program such as attracting a certain number of people or being fun and engaging, but consider what the one thing you want people to walk away from your program knowing or doing. Some examples might include saving the number of a 24-hour crisis service on their phones, following your chapter on social media, feeling confident talking to a friend about mental health, or challenging stigma.

WHERE & WHEN will this have the most impact or attendance?

High-traffic areas at your school such as a Student Center or a cafeteria may be a fantastic place to reach a lot of people quickly with a simple message. But, those venues may not be the best for in-depth conversations or group activities. Consider the time of day, day of the week, and at what point during the term will your messaging be most effective and important. For example, it might make sense to do Stress Less Week activities near midterms or near the end of the term when students are preparing for finals and most need a reminder to take care of themselves.

Be mindful to plan your programs for spaces where accessibility is a priority. Check out our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Guide for more about creating inclusive and accessible programs.

WHY does this program matter right now, why is it important to your target audience?

It's always worthwhile to consider the "why" so that you can be confident that you're doing the work that matters most, in a way that resonates with your primary audience. What needs are you fulfilling by offering your program? How will your primary audience be impacted by this program? Let these questions be your program planning guiding star. Asking ourselves these questions help better align events and programs to the goals of your chapter.

HOW will we plan, implement, and evaluate this program?

This question gets to the logistics of planning and leading your program and is probably a great place to bring in your larger chapter membership, volunteers, and partners. This might involve reserving space, securing or requesting needed funds from your budget, creating marketing materials, making a schedule for volunteers, and assigning responsibilities. You should also consider how you will know your program has been successful and how you will evaluate it. Evaluation can be more formal, such as creating surveys for attendees to understand what they learned, or it can be a more informal debrief as a planning team about what went well and what could be improved for next time.



LET'S PRACTICE!

Use the spaces below to write in your own goals for a program idea you'd like to implement. You can fill these in as a pdf on your phone or print it out.

Program Idea

Overall goal

Who

What

Where & When

Why

How

WHAT DOES EXECUTING YOUR PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

Below, we're sharing a few programming best practices to help execute successful programs and amplify your reach and impact.



Connect with the counselors at your school

We highly recommend you collaborate with your Counseling Center or mental health professionals at your school to have someone present for the entire event in case you need additional help facilitating conversations, answering questions that are more appropriately answered by a professional, or supporting anyone who may have an intense or unexpected emotional reaction.

Make sure to frequently remind people about counseling services or professional support at your school, local resources, and crisis hotlines and services.

The art of storytelling

Personal stories of lived experiences - whether or not you've been through the same things - can have a profound effect, including stigma reduction, increased empathy, and decreased sense of loneliness. There are many ways to share stories around mental health: panel discussions, short and long-form written narratives, professional speakers, and more. If you are considering creating spaces for personal story sharing, there are special considerations you should consider to ensure that the conversation remains productive, healthy, and safe for participants.

Interested in bringing a professional speaker to your school? Check out [Active Minds Speakers](#) and browse the list by speaker topic. Fees vary by the speaker selected. Please contact Active Minds for a formal quote by filling out the [Host Application](#).

Consult with your Chapter Advisor or a counselor to ensure you are creating a safe space where attendees will feel supported.

Learn more about inclusive mental health language in our Mental Health Messaging Best Practices Guide.

Link up with other clubs or student organizations that share your values

We strongly encourage chapters to utilize their school connections in order to broaden reach and strengthen impact. Partnering with similar clubs who share your values or larger clubs who have a bigger member base can help amplify your efforts. Find other student organizations whose goals and purpose align with yours. Who knows, you may gain some new members this way also!

Start by having a member of your executive board reach out to a member of their board to set up a meeting. Then, be sure to identify areas of programming overlap and then determine opportunities for collaboration. You can ask your Chapter Advisor for support in reaching out, too!

Get inspired!

There's no need to reinvent the wheel

Each year, chapters organize events to increase mental health awareness, prevent suicide, and educate their peers. Common formats include panel discussions, movie screenings, speaker presentations, stress-relief activities, or workshops. Each chapter should choose formats that align with the needs of their school community. Events and programs designed by past chapter leaders are a great reference point for new leaders or chapters who feel like they've hit a programming plateau. Your chapter should keep good records of what's been done in the past to help future leaders plan their events. You can also find new inspiration by looking at these resources:

Browse Active Minds' [Instagram](#) and other social media accounts and check out chapters' accounts too!

[Sign up to Active Minds Newsletters](#) and receive regular updates from the national office.

Learn from Active Minds' [Student Advisory Committee](#).

CONNECT WITH THE CHAPTERS TEAM!

**SHARE YOUR PROGRAM WINS, BRAINSTORM IDEAS,
AND CONSULT WITH US!!**



Reach out to the Chapters Team at chapters@activeminds.org for support!