Our mission is to coalesce, inspire and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Creating a Staff Wellness Program

Developing and implementing an effective staff wellness program can be broken down into seven steps. While considering that all school systems and communities have different assets, resources, and policies, each step can be considered a reference point for developing and implementing your own unique intervention.

Before You Begin

Consider the following questions before launching development of a staff wellness program. It is important to understand what wellness programs, if any, already exist in your community, what type of support you will have, and how you can leverage community resources to succeed.

So, before beginning, consider the following questions:

- Does your program or local school district already have a staff wellness program in place? If so, is there a way to expand or improve this program to include your staff or to address your particular needs?

- How much administrative support, community support, and employee interest do you currently have?

- What funding and resources are available for you to use in creating and implementing a staff wellness program in your community?

Seven Steps to Establishing a Staff Wellness Program:

- **Step 1**: Seek Support from Program Leaders and the Community
- **Step 2**: Assign a Wellness Leader and Establish a Wellness Committee
- **Step 3**: Collect Data to Guide Efforts
- **Step 4**: Develop a Plan
- **Step 5**: Implement the Plan
- **Step 6**: Create a Supportive Environment
- **Step 7**: Evaluate Your Program

For additional information on this toolkit, please visit [go.nhsa.org/QI-Toolkits](go.nhsa.org/QI-Toolkits)
Before developing a staff wellness program, it is important to seek support from program leaders, administrators, and other relevant community leaders. Support from leaders and administrators will help you gain access to the resources and funds necessary for achieving a successful and sustainable wellness program.

To gain this support, present the benefits and potential impact that a staff wellness program has on child health, health-care costs, employee morale, and absenteeism to the relevant stakeholders in your organization. Depending on your program, this might be the school principal and superintendent, the director of your Community Action Agency, or your program’s executive director. Creating an informational flyer or an in-person presentation with important facts and past success stories will help educate leaders on the importance of a wellness program.

When presenting the importance of staff wellness programs to relevant leadership, topics you might discuss are:

- Chronic conditions that result from poor health and wellness, such as heart disease, obesity, stress, and depression (The CDC has valuable information online you can use.)

- The impact of staff wellness on child health, such as better modeling of healthy eating, nutrition education for parents and students, and more movement activities in the classroom

- A decrease in an organization’s healthcare costs through a reduction in workers compensation claims and less staff absenteeism

- Improvements in employee interest, eagerness, and engagement, which can increase the quality of the work environment, the quality of staff’s work, and can reduce turnover

- An emphasis on why support from leadership is important to launching this project

- What funding you currently have, how much you will need, and ideas of where to access the remaining funds needed
Step 2: Assign a Wellness Leader and Establish a Wellness Committee

A Wellness Leader is responsible for coordinating the planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of the wellness program. The Wellness Leader should be an existing employee, likely one who has experience in or a commitment to health education, physical fitness, nutrition, nursing, or medicine. Depending on what resources you have available for the wellness program, the Wellness Leader may work alongside leaders in other partner organizations to carry out the leadership responsibilities.

The Wellness Leader’s formal or informal responsibilities will vary from program to program, but examples of responsibilities include:

- Coordinating the planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of the program
- Reporting the status of the program to relevant school and community leaders along the way
- Planning and coordinating regular meetings with leaders and the Wellness Committee
- Communicating proactively with Wellness Committee members and program participants
- Scheduling and planning wellness activities
- Developing relationships and communicating with community partners
- Allocating funds and resources appropriately

The Wellness Committee will act as a resource for decision making, planning, and consultation for the wellness program. This committee should consist of representatives from all areas and levels of your program, such as teachers, staff, administrators, and community partners. Having a committee with a variety of backgrounds and skillsets will ensure that all decisions made will benefit all parties involved.

The Wellness Committee’s expectations will also vary from program to program, but examples include:

- Meet regularly to plan, develop, review, vote on, and evaluate activities in the program
- Share and express concerns or possible areas of improvement
- Advocate for and participate in wellness activities
- Develop incentives for participants to promote engagement
- Brainstorm and establish community resources available for ensuring an effective program

Tips for Building a Wellness Committee

It may be helpful to assign a treasurer or budget manager to design budget models and keep track of spending. Depending on the funding and resources available, this position (along with other wellness program staff positions) may be a volunteer position or paid position. It is important to have someone plan and review the allocation of funds to develop the most cost effective and sustainable wellness program.
Step 3: Collect Data to Guide Efforts

An effective wellness program must rest on a foundation of evidence to guide its components and ensure continuous improvement. Completing a detailed needs assessment will allow you to understand what health needs should be prioritized when planning and developing activities for the program. Ongoing data collection ensures the ability to continuously monitor progress and improve the program.

A **health needs assessment** will provide key data to support and plan an effective program. Gauging the interest of the staff with an **interest survey** can help determine what set-up and interventions will be the most effective.

There are three data collection processes essential to understanding your program’s needs:

1. **Health Needs Assessment**
   
   This assessment determines the baseline health status of employees to understand where to focus activities, interventions, and efforts. The Wellness Committee can decide whether to make a health assessment mandatory or just voluntary for all staff participating in the wellness program. All responses should be kept anonymous. A sample Health Needs Assessment is available later in this toolkit.

2. **Interest Survey**
   
   An interest survey ensures wellness activities are responsive to the needs and concerns of participants. By understanding when, where, and how employees want to improve their health and wellness, you can develop a program that engages all employees to address their most current interests. A sample Interest Survey is available later in this toolkit.

3. **Research Evidence-Based Interventions**
   
   Research to provide knowledge of evidence-based interventions is important to understanding what activities have been tried and proved successful in the past. Evidence-based interventions will also provide information on how to implement and evaluate the planned program. A sample list of past successful interventions is available later in this toolkit.
Step 4: Develop a Plan

Strategic Plan

First, you will need to develop a strategic plan, which will set a direction for your wellness program. Identify what your goals and objectives are and then what strategies you will use to pursue them. A strategic plan is a resource for leadership and relevant stakeholders to use as a general guide for organization and management.

For more support developing your strategic plan, download The Bridgespan Group’s guide.

Operational Plan

Your operational plan includes detailed information about what your program is and how you will implement it. It answers questions such as:

- What strategies, tasks, and activities will you undertake?
- Who on your leadership team will be responsible for each task?
- When does each task need to be completed? What is your timeline?
- How will you complete each task or activity? How will you allocate resources like funding and time?

When developing the operational plan, select activities and events according to the responses you collected from the health assessment and interest surveys. This information will guide you in selecting activities that will be the most successful in addressing your participants’ needs. Your operational plan should include useful local resources and relationships for any needed materials, funding, and support. Use the checklists provided at [link] to help ensure every component of a successful wellness program is included in your intervention.

Tip: Be sure to include a Waiver and Release of Liability for employees who participate in physical activity and exercise sessions. A sample waiver is available later in this toolkit.

The following are some examples of wellness activities that could be offered in a program setting:

- Health education classes
- Exercise sessions (Zumba, Pilates, yoga, etc.)
- Nutrition classes and support
- Stress management training
- Healthy cooking classes
- Emotional/social support groups
- Running, walking, or biking clubs
- Subscriptions to online resources
- Participation in CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)
Now initial implementation can finally begin: Launch your new staff wellness program. Your operational plan should guide you step-by-step through what to do first, second, and so on. If you’ve completed your operational plan and do not know what to do first, who is responsible for it, and when it should be completed, your operational plan isn’t finished.

Your operational plan should outline every task, deadline, and resource required to get your program up and running. Initial implementation can be a real challenge, but it is easier with a strong, detailed plan. Implementation requires attention from all leadership positions to ensure organization roles and functions align with the program’s development, but it also requires flexibility. No matter how well you plan, new or unforeseen challenges happen. However, with a good plan and a well-prepared team, you should be able to adapt without much difficulty.

Consider beginning implementation with a smaller scale pilot program that is adaptable and easy to maintain. Or, instead of launching four completely new wellness activities at once, start with one simple activity and build from there.

Be sure to monitor your implementation plan and strategies during your pilot program or first event. Assessing the effectiveness of your implementation plan will help your program adapt to improve the implementation process for the next event.

More: For more information regarding the implementation process, consider the National Implementation Research Network’s 4 Stages of Implementation resource found on their website at nirn.fpg.unc.edu.

Tips for successful initial implementation

- Start simple: schedule just one event per month or a few simple activities throughout the year
- Have an initial kick-off event to promote the wellness program to all participants and leaders involved
- Use e-mails, posters, social media posts, newsletters, and announcements at meetings to raise awareness and interest before the first event
- Have a fun and easy first event - preferably with incentives and prizes - to encourage attendance
- Collect data and feedback about the first activity or event to guide improvement efforts
Staff wellness programs cannot thrive without the support of the population they serve.

Giving the entire staff the opportunity to vote and become involved in the planning and decision making of the program is one way to create a culture of inclusion and support. Ensuring that participants feel safe and respected during wellness activities is also critical to ensuring participation and sustainability. Also consider making the program an employee health benefit with incentive programs to improve participation and employee support. Strive to create activities that make involvement easy and fun!

Incentive programs should reward active involvement, such as attendance at wellness activities, as opposed to specific objectives, such as weight loss. Inappropriate incentive programs, such as one measuring weight loss, may cause stress, unhealthy competition, or harmful habits instead of encouragement, motivation, and actual improvements in health and wellness. Rewards can include small gifts like water bottles, pedometers, exercise equipment, books, or gift cards.

A supportive environment will also include an effective communication system, allowing for information to be shared easily and feedback to be readily provided. This will improve sustainability of the program and allow it to meet the direct needs of the staff and students. It is important to engage every participant in order to get thorough feedback.

Examples of strong communication tools include:

- Monthly emails
- Support groups
- Feedback forms
- Staff meetings
- Regular announcements and status updates
- Posters to present success and promote engagement
- Media posts and outreach
- Newsletters

If time during school is limited and not many participants are able to attend meetings for a face-to-face support environment, consider using social media, online surveys, voting systems, and newsletters to increase support and

Tip for Selecting Incentives

If funding is limited and cannot cover costs towards awards and incentives, consider simple gifts like baked goods from volunteers, donated gifts from local businesses, participation in special events, or recognition at all-staff meetings.
Evaluation helps quantitatively measure the value of a wellness program. The only way to know if a staff wellness program has achieved any of its predefined goals and objectives is to measure them. An effective measurement and evaluation strategy can help a program foster constant program improvement, present program outcomes to leadership, understand the financial impacts of the program, and understand the impact on employee health and satisfaction. There are many ways to evaluate a staff wellness program, but seven key measurements to a comprehensive evaluation plan are listed here. Depending on the objectives and activities of your wellness program, as well as the program evaluation capacity you have available, you can adjust your evaluation plan to meet your specific needs.

Measurements from an evaluation will provide vital information to assess the success of a program and adapt going forward to ensure it is always meeting staff needs. Some measures will require assessments at both the beginning (baseline measurements) and at the end (outcome measurements) of implementation to measure progress. Others may only require measurement at the end to give a picture of what you were able to provide and what value you were able to create. A well-done program evaluation will allow you to understand where the wellness program was most effective and where there is room for future improvement. Just as populations change, a sustainable and effective staff wellness program will change every year to match the health needs and interest of its participants. Consider the 5 basic steps of evaluation when establishing and conducting your evaluation plan.

**Seven Key Measures of Program Evaluation**

- Participation
- Satisfaction
- Organizational Support
- Impact on Health
- Financial Outcomes
- Productivity and Performance
- Value on Investment (VOI)

**Five Steps of Evaluation**

**Step 1:** Identify what you know

**Step 2:** Decide how to collect the information

**Step 3:** Collect the information

**Step 4:** Analyze and review

**Step 5:** Report back