

# Program Planning

## OBJECTIVE

- To build group cohesion
- To use a systematic tool for semester and school-year planning

## MATERIALS

- Chart paper
- Multicolored two-by-four-inch Post-its
- Markers

## SETUP

- This activity should ideally happen two to three months before the program year starts. However, program calendaring is beneficial at any time and will support staff initiative, allow for well-organized activities, and prevent back-to-back events that can cause staff to feel overwhelmed and burned out.
- Using a regular calendar as a template, draw out each month of your program year on a piece of chart paper.
- You want to do all twelve months for the long-term planning items, and then focus on the first three months for the week-by-week items.
- Hang the twelve months up around the room in the order that works best for your program. Start with September if your program follows the school year; start with January if it follows the calendar year; or start with June if your program starts in the summer.
- Write down all of your calendar items on the Post-its; this way, if your dates change, the Post-it can be lifted and moved to another date. Put one item on each Post-it.

## INSTRUCTIONS

You can do this activity in one full day or you can spread it out over three phases.

### PHASE ONE

1. **Establish a key** for the Post-it colors, i.e.:
  - red = holidays and program closures;
  - blue = field trips;
  - green = birthdays and special events;
  - yellow = daily activities, etc.
2. Use a school district calendar to **fill in all school-based holidays** and breaks that may impact your program. (OFTEN PROGRAMS PLAN ACTIVITIES THAT CONFLICT WITH THE SCHOOL DISTRICT CALENDAR; OFTEN THEY ARE NOT AWARE THAT SCHOOL STAFF-DEVELOPMENT DAYS OCCUR ON THE LAST FRIDAY OF THE MONTH. AS A RESULT, KIDS MAY SHOW UP EARLY ON THOSE DAYS.)
3. Ask staff to use Post-its to **write** down all major holidays, school holidays, school breaks, graduation dates, and special events. Ask staff to use one Post-it per event.
4. **Place** each Post-it on the calendar.
5. Next think about **program-based dates**, including major program events, session start dates and end dates, program closures, major fundraising events that may require staff or youth participation, staff development days, etc. It is good to include all staff in this exercise to ensure that you share pertinent information and avoid back-to-back or overlapping events that will spread staff too thin.
6. Lastly, fill in staff and youth birthdays (OPTIONAL).

### PHASE TWO

1. At this point, focus on the **first three months** of your program and go week by week.
2. Consider ways to give **structure** to your program—for example, you might change the programming theme every week, every month, or every quarter; you may choose to focus on a particular value each month (different themes could include DJ camp, arts and crafts, science and technology, respect, social justice, environmental awareness, etc.).



## PROGRAM PLANNING, CONTINUED

3. Once the big-picture themes are in place, consider creating a **template** for weekly scheduling of any non-curricular activities (for example, snack, homework help, swimming, field trips, etc.). Create Post-its for activities that correlate to this schedule and add them to your calendar.
4. Next, create Post-its for field trip dates, speakers, or special activities that match your themes and **weekly scheduling** for the next three months (you can always create a TBD [to be determined] Post-it for a particular day if you know that you will do a field trip on that day but don't yet have the specifics in place).

### PHASE THREE

1. Now focus on the **first month** and identify activities for the themes you have chosen for each week of the month.
2. Staff who are new to facilitation should ideally begin with a predesigned curriculum. Ideally, staff should begin to develop their own curriculum only after they are comfortable with facilitation and behavior management.
3. **Decide** how your activities will build on each theme over the course of the week. For example, if you were running a weeklong spoken-word workshop, on Monday you would do an activity that best introduces the topic. On Tuesday and Wednesday, you would teach new skills. On Thursday, you would incorporate several skills into a project, and on Friday, you would do a culminating activity. (You can apply this methodology to multi-week themes by extending the amount of time you spend on each phase.)
4. Consider the ways that your program's **themes can be reinforced** across age groups or throughout different aspects of programming.
5. Consider ways that each unit or theme can end with a **culminating event** that brings the entire community together and allows youth to showcase their talents and connect to their greater community of parents and administration.
6. **Repeat** phase two and three every three months or as often as needed.

### REFLECTION

- **How do you feel about your calendar?**
- **What are some areas that you feel still need some tweaking or deeper thinking?**
- **What is the benefit of cohesive community-based planning like this?**
- **What are some challenges you anticipate in using this calendar over the year?**
- **How often does your group need to revisit these plans to ensure they are working?**
- **What process will you use to build consensus if an aspect of the planning calendar needs to be modified?**