Service Year Fair Guide

Introduction

Service year fairs are a great way to connect with students who are looking for alternative pathways post-college graduation, or considering a gap year. Many service year programs have detailed the difficulties of recruiting in a space where they must compete with higher wage employers. By organizing a Service Year Fair or designating a space for service year programs at a career fair, students are more likely to learn of the personal, professional, and financial benefits of a year of paid, full-time service – a service year.

This guide will detail the value of hosting a Service Year Fair on a campus or in your community, how to organize a fair, guidance on connecting with other service year programs, and tips for a successful event.

Why a Service Year Fair?

Service year fairs are beneficial to programs in a variety of ways:

- Service year programs will not need to compete with higher wage employers (ex. corporate employers like Wells Fargo, Deloitte, Booz Allen-Hamilton, etc.).

- Young people can interact directly with service year programs and discover post-graduation and alternative career pathways.

- Higher education institutions have an opportunity to create stronger community partnerships.

- They provide local service year programs with an opportunity to partner and raise awareness together. As they say, "a rising tide lifts all boats!".

Fair Types

No two Service Year Fair's are exactly the same. However, these are some of the most common types of service year fairs:

- Single school - One school serves as the host, closed to the public and other institutions.

- Multi-school - Multiple schools partner and co-host the Service Year Fair with local programs. This combined fair usually takes place at a single location, inviting students from multiple universities and the public to attend.

- City-wide - Hosted through a governing body, most often the Mayor's office, State Service Commission, or CNCS State Office.

Service Year Fair Participants

When hosting a Service Year Fair, work with Service Year Alliance and others within the service year field to recruit programs to participate. Below are descriptions and contact information of individuals that may be able to help:

Service Year Alliance staff will help you connect with local programs and alumni.

State Commission: Governor-appointed commissions that oversee the federal dollars distributed to AmeriCorps programs within their state.

CNCS State Office: Federal employees who oversee all AmeriCorps VISTA programs within their state.

Other, non-federally funded programs: Programs that do not receive federal dollars and do not fall within the AmeriCorps umbrella. Some examples are Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Repair the World, ArtistYear, and Good Shepherd Volunteers.

Getting Started

Before the fair can begin to take shape, here are a few steps to get you started:

Partners

- Are you partnering with a campus, a city, or a specific community? Gauge the interest of relevant parties and see who is excited to co-host a service year fair with you. Then, determine a date, a minimum of a month and a half in advance.

- When considering partners for your Service Year Fair, it's important to highlight the broad spectrum of service year opportunities that exist. Students generally do not know their options and the Service Year Fair should ideally demonstrate that programs can be found across the country, in their community, and in varying fields.

- Work with Service Year Alliance staff to connect with CNCS state offices and Commissions to send an email to programs in their networks. Emails from the CNCS state office or Commission can often have more of an impact.

- Work with Service Year Alliance to coordinate with programs directly, especially those that do not fall under the CNCS or State Commission office jurisdiction.

- Work with the university or community staff to invite specific programs they want highlighted.

- Be consistent with communicating details and updates. Keep programs up to date with timing, parking, day of needs – *mass emails to programs* **two weeks out, one week out, and the day before are helpful.**

- Facilitate opportunities for the programs that are attending to connect and share best practices

before and after the event.

Set a Budget

Determine your budget and the campus budget for the fair. Can the cost be split? Who will cover snacks and refreshments, posters, and t-shirts (if applicable)? Be honest and transparent, but clear about what your limitations are for funding.

Find Your Location

When thinking of a venue space, consider the venue capacity and the number of programs slots available. Sometimes working in a centralized or urban location can be easier to find a space and pull in other programs or schools from the surrounding areas. If you are working with a school(s), be sure to check they don't already hold service/non-profit focused fairs before asking to create a new one. Don't reinvent the wheel!

Make sure the space fits the type of fair you want: traditional tabling, networking social, multi-school, citywide, etc.

Pro-Tip:
Consider locations that may not charge for use of the event space, including universities, parks, libraries, and community centers. Ask about any charges for technology and clean-up, as well, to avoid any hidden fees.

Outreach

In the months or weeks leading up to the fair, confirm with your contacts that a date, venue, and budget have all been set. Then, start doing attendance outreach! Ask your primary point of contact for support in reaching all corners of the city or college campus(es) through digital and on-the-ground marketing.

Campus

On campus, consider majors in the humanities, and tailor your outreach to show relevance to students' work.

For example, if reaching out to a Government Affairs department, highlight programs like AmeriCorps NCCC FEMA Corps who work hand-in-hand with the federal government.

Other campus outreach may include:

- Flyers - Create fun, eye catching flyers to post on social media accounts and in buildings all over campus.

- Tabling - This is an easy way to get on campus and make your name known. However, this does not always yield the highest results.

- **Emails** - Promote your event through different department newsletters, a listserv, and targeted email campaigns (ie. graduating seniors).
- **Ads in local and campus papers** - Creating ads in local and campus papers to reach out to a larger population in the area.

Community Outreach

When hosting a fair off campus, connect with community partners to expand your audience outreach. Work with local community centers, high schools, trade schools and youth groups. Also consider working with other city departments, such as the Mayor's office, Offices of Employment Services, and youth groups. Not only are they a great way to connect with possible service year corps members, but there is a strong chance these partners have the space to host a fair.

For more strategies, please reference our Service Year Campus Recruitment Guide.

Pro-tip: URL tracking
All links to your website, whether through email, posted on social media, displayed on a website or students registered should be trackable. Without knowing where your highest amount of traffic comes from, it is impossible to learn about the strategy that works best for your organization and the types of service years potential corps members you would like to serve. Consider using UTM tracking codes in conjunction with google analytics. It is free, reliable and very well documented online.

For information on how to build these links, please reference Additional Resources.

The Fair: Run of Show

The day is finally here! Set up a registration table for attendees to check-in when they first arrive. If possible, provide a map and additional information on each service year program, highlighting which programs are local. Work with Service Year Alliance staff to provide additional educational information about what a service year is, as many students may not know.

When considering the day's structure, add an extra element to your fair by hosting a morning community partnerships brunch and discussion. Bring together the participating programs, invite a guest speaker, and host a morning session specifically geared towards the service year programs. This is a great way to build partnerships, share best practices, and show appreciation to community partners.

Pro-Tip:
Reference the appendix below for the Service Year checklist before, during, and after the event to ensure that the fair is set-up for success.

After the Fair

Following the fair, set up time to debrief with your staff and programs either through an email survey, call, or immediately following the event. What went well? What could have gone better? What were programs expectations, versus reality? These questions are important to ask in order to determine the best path moving forward. Consider sending out a follow up email thanking programs for coming, any relevant debrief notes, next steps, and a general date to block out for the following year.

Additionally, send an email follow up to students. Post fair, send students a reminder of the programs that attended, with their linked site or profile on ServiceYear.org. A reminder email is important follow through for students who may have missed the fair, forgotten a program name, lost information, or simply were unable to stop at each table. Sending a reminder will help both students and programs to connect further.

Challenges of Hosting a Service Year Fair

- Turnout is key to success. Work with your partners and co-hosts to ensure buy-in and advertise the event early and often.

- Connecting with local programs can prove to be challenging – touch base with Service Year Alliance staff to help foster these relationships, particularly where you're starting from scratch.

- 76% of young people have no idea service year opportunities exist, and may not understand what a service year is – there will be an element of education necessary to get students excited about the fair.

For more quick tips, check out the [NACE 8 Best Practices for Hosting a Fair](#).

Additional Resources

[Google Custom Campaigns](#)

[Campaign Url Builder](#)

[Blog: UTM Tracking Tips](#)

[NACE 8 Best Practices for Hosting a Fair](#)

Appendix

Service Year Fair Checklist

Pre-Fair:
- ❏ Pick a date
- ❏ Set a budget
- ❏ Find a venue
- ❏ Determine table capacity in venue (how many programs you can invite)
- ❏ Digital advertising
- ❏ On-campus advertising (flyering)
- ❏ Create map of tables and bios for each organization
- ❏ Secure speaker(s) (if applicable)
- ❏ Create a fair schedule (ie. speaker transitions, set-up/breakdown times, fair time, etc.)

Day-of: Set Up
- ❏ Parking passes for tabling programs
- ❏ Campus map with detailed event location
- ❏ Set Up Materials
    - ❏ Posters (print/digital)
    - ❏ Ads (paid/unpaid)
    - ❏ Tables
    - ❏ Table cloths
    - ❏ Chairs (at least two per table)
    - ❏ Banners
    - ❏ Sign in forms (paper or digital)
    - ❏ Table name cards (for program)
    - ❏ *Name tags (optional)*
    - ❏ *Snacks/refreshments (optional)*
- ❏ Print out table map and organization bios
- ❏ Set up registration table
    - ❏ Lay out promotional materials (ie. t-shirts, pens, buttons, etc.)
- ❏ Secure sound system and digital screens, as needed
- ❏ Snacks/refreshments

Fair In Action

- ❏ Register every student on ServiceYear.org that attends
- ❏ Provide tabling maps for students
- ❏ Regularly check-in with organizations, ensure things are running smoothly
- ❏ Take photos during the event for post-fair follow up

Post-Fair

- ❏ Debrief with programs
    - ❏ What went well?
    - ❏ What could have gone better?
- ❏ Debrief with staff
    - ❏ What went well?
    - ❏ What could have gone better?
- ❏ How can you improve upon next year?
- ❏ Email:
    - ❏ For organizations & students:
        - ❏ Thank organizations
        - ❏ List how many students/organizations attended
        - ❏ Provide fun photos of event
        - ❏ Highlight inspirational stories
        - ❏ Plans and action steps for next year