


Higher Ed  
COVID-19   
Community of Practice

AMERICAN COLLEGE HEALTH ASSOCIATION

# Student Ambassador Toolkit



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# Your Guide to Starting a COVID-19 Prevention Student Ambassador Program

As students come back to campus, it's important to take steps to protect your campus community from COVID-19.

While the COVID-19 pandemic and public health guidelines continue to evolve, we all know the basic ways to stay safe: wear a mask, wash your hands, keep a safe distance, and get a COVID-19 vaccine. But to keep the whole campus community safe, you need **every student** to get on board. And with so many mixed messages and misconceptions surrounding COVID-19, it can be challenging to get everyone on the same page.

**Creating a student ambassador program** can help promote healthy behaviors and stop the spread of COVID-19. Student ambassadors can be a powerful force for behavior change on campus. That's why the American College Health Association (ACHA) developed this guide and the Student Ambassador Toolkit — to help you create a student ambassador program that works for your campus.



# What is a student ambassador?

**Student ambassadors** educate their fellow students about health- and safety-related topics. You may also hear them called peer educators or peer leaders. These students have the power to change the culture on campus by modeling healthy behaviors, sharing accurate and relevant information, and empowering their peers to make informed decisions.

Many colleges and universities across the United States already have student ambassador programs focusing on topics like alcohol and drug use and sexual health. Student ambassador programs can also be a great tool to help **stop the spread of COVID-19** by promoting preventive behaviors like wearing a mask and physical distancing.

Campus professionals (e.g., campus life, student life, student health, or other staff members) usually start these programs and continue to provide guidance and support based on students' needs. As a campus professional, you can give your student ambassadors the tools they need to succeed.



## WHAT CAN COVID-19 PREVENTION STUDENT AMBASSADORS DO?

A student ambassador's goal is simple: educate fellow students about ways to stay safe from COVID-19. But there are many different ways to reach that goal. Student ambassadors can do anything from passing out health education materials and posting on social media, to starting conversations with friends, to creating their own educational resources and on-campus events. Turn to page 6 for activity ideas.



## WHY DOES PEER-TO-PEER EDUCATION AND MODELING WORK?

We all know that young adults are more likely to trust information coming from peers than from authority figures. Students may get tired of campus administrators telling them to wear a mask — but the message is more likely to resonate when it comes from a friend or peer. Students also tend to follow social norms set by their friends and other peers in the campus community. So if other students see your student ambassadors keeping a safe distance, they're more likely to do the same.

# Create a student ambassador program that works for your campus

Every campus defines the role of a student ambassador differently. It all depends on your campus culture, needs, and goals.

**Consider what role you want student ambassadors to play in your campus community.** Here are a few activities student ambassadors can do, ranging from simple to more complex:



**Share materials on campus.** Student ambassadors can distribute educational materials about COVID-19, pass out items like masks and hand sanitizer, or give out small rewards or goodie bags to students who are following campus guidelines.



**Post on social media.** Student ambassadors can share what they're doing to protect themselves from COVID-19 and encourage peers to do the same.



**Start conversations with peers.** Student ambassadors can talk to their peers about topics like wearing a mask, physical distancing, and getting the COVID-19 vaccine.



**Plan and facilitate educational events.** Student ambassadors can plan on-campus events to educate their peers about topics like how to stay safe from COVID-19 and how to talk to friends who are hesitant about getting the vaccine.



**Adapt campus traditions and events.** Student ambassadors can help with adapting campus traditions or social events to comply with COVID-19 safety guidelines.



**Hold information sessions or town hall events.** Student ambassadors can host events to address questions and lead community discussions about COVID-19.



**Develop their own COVID-19 education materials.** Student ambassadors can work with you to create their own COVID-19 education materials. Keep in mind that this activity will need a higher level of guidance and support from you.

The **Student Ambassador Toolkit** includes resources to help with many of the activities listed above. For details on what's in the toolkit, go to page 9.



### **TIME-SAVING TIP**

If your campus already has a student ambassador program focused on another topic, consider expanding the program to focus on COVID-19 prevention.

## ENFORCING CAMPUS POLICIES

Some campuses may choose to have student ambassadors help with enforcing campus policies like wearing masks and physical distancing. ACHA suggests keeping the **focus of student ambassador programs on peer-to-peer education** rather than enforcement. Keep in mind that if you ask students to help with enforcing policies, they may run into pushback from their peers. It's important to give clear guidance on how to handle violations and support your student ambassadors in dealing with conflicts.





# How to use the Student Ambassador Toolkit

The **Student Ambassador Toolkit** is full of materials to help you start an ambassador program on campus. You can choose to use some or all of these materials depending on your needs and how much time your students have to invest in the program. Here's what's in the toolkit:

## CUSTOMIZABLE COVID-19 EDUCATION MATERIALS

Students can easily **share these materials on campus or online**. All you need to do is add your campus name and logo, and they're ready to share.

- Social media graphics for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- Posters
- Digital signs to display on TV screens



## WORKSHOP LESSON PLAN

If your students have a little more time to invest, they can [use this lesson plan](#) to develop and facilitate their own interactive workshop. The lesson plan covers topics like:

- Following campus COVID-19 guidelines (e.g., masking and physical distancing)
- Socializing safely, assessing personal COVID-19 risks, and setting boundaries with friends
- Addressing misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines
- Making health care decisions (e.g., when to go to the health center or get a COVID-19 test)
- Coping with mental health challenges around COVID-19 and returning to campus

## CAMPUS COMMUNICATION PLAN

Students can [use this communication plan](#) to develop their own COVID-19 education materials. The plan includes quick tips that students can use to create social media posts, as well as guidance on how to create more complex educational materials.

The communication plan addresses topics like:

- Defining priority audiences (e.g., fraternity and sorority organizations, athletic teams, campus clubs)
- Getting feedback from students and campus organizations
- Choosing the best avenues to distribute materials (e.g., campus papers, public transportation ads, announcements during sporting events)

# Get students involved

Once you've decided what role you want student ambassadors to play in your campus community, the next step is to recruit students to join your program and serve as a student ambassador! Here's how to get students involved.

## IDENTIFY YOUR "WHY"

As a first step, **consider what your ambassador program has to offer students.** Why should they take time out of their busy schedule to participate?

Some programs choose to compensate students for participation by paying students directly or providing other incentives. (For more on compensation, see page 20.) Other programs are volunteer-only, but students can still get valuable experience to add to their resume and prepare for a future career in public health, communications, or related fields. Once you've identified your "why," you can use it to pitch your program to students.

## DEFINE YOUR APPLICATION PROCESS

Will you accept every student who wants to participate, or will you ask students to submit an application for the program? Will you continue to accept new students throughout the semester, or stop after a set period of time or once you reach a certain number of students? Be sure to set a clear timeline to let students know what to expect.



## REACH OUT TO STUDENTS

Here are a few ways to reach students who may be interested in participating:



**Partner with faculty in health-related departments** (e.g., public health, health sciences, or biology) to promote the program. You could ask for 5 to 10 minutes of class time to talk to students about the program.



**Partner with health-related student organizations** (e.g., health education, pre-pharmacy and pre-medicine, or nursing organizations). For example, you could ask these organizations to send out an email about the program or post on their social media platforms. You could also ask for a few minutes of meeting time to talk to students about the program.



**Reach out to other student organizations** like international student groups, first-year student groups, and student government/student council organizations. Ask if they would be interested in sharing information about the ambassador program with their members.



**Host information sessions** for students to learn more about the program. Consider bringing snacks or other small incentives to thank students for attending.



**Post on your department's social media accounts.** Ask other departments to share or repost your materials.

# Train student ambassadors

Next you'll need to train **your student ambassadors** — introduce them to your program, educate them about campus COVID-19 guidelines, and give them the tools they need to succeed. Training also provides opportunities for ambassadors to get to know each other and start building a connection as a team.

## PLAN TRAINING EVENTS

Here are some important points to consider as you plan training events:

- What is your budget for training?
- Where will you hold training events?
- Who will lead training events?
- How many training sessions do you need? Depending on what activities you're expecting your student ambassadors to do, you might need a single hour, a day of training, or a series of training days spread out over several weeks. You could also hold the same training session more than once so students can find a time that fits into their schedule.
- Do you need any educational resources for your training? For example, you could create a handout to sum up key takeaways.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) offers a Certified Peer Educator training course that covers many topics relevant to student ambassadors. You can encourage your students to sign up for the course or use it as a starting point to plan your own training event. Learn more about the course at <https://www.naspa.org/project/certified-peer-educator-cpe-training>.

# Empower students to respond to difficult situations

When they're talking to peers about COVID-19, student ambassadors are bound to run into some difficult situations. Whether it's a rude comment or a more serious safety issue, it's important to **make sure students are prepared to respond to common obstacles** that may come up. Here are some ways you can empower your student ambassadors:

- Consider offering training sessions focused on **conflict resolution and de-escalation**.
- Use **role-play** to show students what to do in everyday situations (e.g., if someone makes a comment about not wanting to wear a mask).
- Provide talking points for tough conversations — like setting boundaries with friends and roommates who may have different beliefs about COVID-19 or the vaccines. The [Vax Forward Digital Toolkit](#) can help students navigate conversations with friends who are hesitant about getting vaccinated.
- Set clear expectations about when ambassadors should **call you or other campus staff members for help** (e.g., if a peer is experiencing a mental health crisis).



## KEEP IT GOING!

Once you've got a team of student ambassadors, try these tips to keep them engaged:



**Set up regular meetings to check in with student ambassadors.** Depending on students' schedules, you might choose to meet once a week or once a month. Clearly let students know what meetings they're required to attend and how much time you expect them to commit to the program.



**Decide how student ambassadors will stay in touch outside of meetings.** For example, you might set up a group text or social media account for ambassadors to communicate.



**Give plenty of praise and positive reinforcement.** Remind your ambassadors that their work helps to keep the campus community safe from COVID-19.

# Build partnerships on campus

You can set your student ambassador program up for success by building partnerships with campus leadership and other student organizations.

## GET BUY-IN FROM LEADERSHIP

You'll probably need approval from campus leadership to start your student ambassador program. When you meet with leadership, emphasize the benefits of peer-to-peer education: students are more likely to trust information from their peers, and student ambassadors can help set social norms around behaviors like wearing masks and physical distancing.

## COLLABORATE WITH CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS

Look for opportunities to **collaborate with other student-led organizations on campus**, like:

- Student media organizations (e.g., newspapers, TV, and radio stations)
- Fraternity and sorority life organizations
- Athletic teams
- Residence life organizations or residence halls
- Cultural or faith-based organizations
- Other student life organizations or clubs



By partnering with other organizations, student ambassadors can:

- Work together to distribute education materials and giveaway items (e.g., setting up disposable mask stations in dorms or putting up posters in classroom buildings)
- Help organizations adapt their activities or traditions to follow COVID-19 safety guidelines
- Spread the word about the ambassador program and get more students involved

## COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS ON CAMPUS

Think about whether student ambassadors will need to **interact with other departments on campus**. For example, ambassadors might need to talk to campus housing or academic departments to get permission to post educational materials. If they're helping with a campus vaccine clinic, they might need to coordinate with the student health center. And if you're asking students to help enforce campus policies, they might need to work with campus police or student judicial organizations.

Be sure to give these departments a heads-up about your program and let students know what to expect in these interactions.

# Make your program inclusive

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected people of color, as well as people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. So it's especially important to **make sure that your student ambassador program is equitable, inclusive, and accessible** to everyone. As you're building your program, ask yourself:

## Are my student ambassadors representative of our campus population?

It's important to make sure your ambassadors are connected to every part of the campus community. That means including ambassadors from a variety of backgrounds, ages, races, and ethnicities.

## Are there barriers to entry that might prevent students from participating in my program?

Students who work during the semester or have other big time commitments outside of school, like parenting or caring for a loved one, may not have as much time to invest in the program. One solution is to compensate students for their participation by paying them directly or providing other incentives. See page 20 for more on compensation. You might also consider offering multiple times for training sessions and other meetings so that students can find a time that works for their schedule.

### **Are my program communications and activities inclusive?**

When you're planning program activities or designing materials, it's important to make sure that all students feel welcomed and represented. Be sure to use language that's accessible to your student audience. When you're choosing images, be sure to represent the diversity of your campus population — including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

### **Are my program communications and activities accessible?**

Students with disabilities are often left out of campus activities and communications. If you're hosting in-person activities, choose an accessible space where everyone can feel comfortable. Make sure your events are accessible with [these helpful guidelines](#).

For tips on how to make your social media posts and other digital content more accessible, [check out these tips](#) from the University of Chicago's Center for Digital Accessibility.

# Keep student ambassadors engaged with incentives and recognition

Many campuses choose to compensate students or provide incentives for participating in student ambassador programs.

Keep in mind that students who work during the semester may have less time to invest in your program. Providing some type of compensation can help to bridge that gap, making your program more equitable and accessible to all students. Here are some options to consider:



**Direct payment.** Consider paying students directly for their participation in the program.



**Work-study.** Consider making the student ambassador role a work-study position.



**Tuition or housing remission.** Some campuses cover a portion of students' tuition or housing in return for their participation in the program.



**Discounts and other small incentives.** Even if you don't have the budget to compensate students on a larger scale, small incentives like discounts at nearby restaurants or the campus bookstore and giveaway items can be a great way to keep students motivated.



**Appreciation notes.** A few words of encouragement can go a long way. Write your student ambassadors a quick note to show that you appreciate their commitment to the program.



**Service credits.** If your campus requires or encourages community service hours, ask campus leadership to classify your student ambassador program as a service activity.



## **PARTNERING WITH DIGITAL AMBASSADORS**

In addition to traditional student ambassador programs, some campuses have partnered with digital ambassadors to share COVID-19 prevention messaging. Digital ambassadors may include student athletes or students who already have a lot of followers on social media platforms like Instagram or TikTok.

Working with digital ambassadors can be a great way to **amplify the work you're doing on campus**. Keep in mind that ambassadors who have a large following may expect direct payment for their work.

# Encourage students to practice community care

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for all of us, and students are no exception. For many students, missing out on campus social life and in-person classes has contributed to feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety.

When you're working with students, **be up front about mental health challenges that have come with the pandemic.** Acknowledge that many are grieving — for lost loved ones or the loss of the “normal” college experience they might have expected.



You can also **encourage students to practice community care**. Community care means taking care of ourselves as well as our friends, loved ones, and peers in the campus community. Community care strategies may include:



**Giving and receiving support from others.** Support looks different for everyone, but it might include listening to and validating others' needs, offering practical help, or sharing information and personal perspectives on issues affecting the community.



**Getting involved in mutual aid.** Mutual aid means working together to meet the needs of everyone in a community. For example, campus community members might share resources like food, money, or transportation.



**Creating space for reciprocal learning.** Reciprocal learning happens when community members learn from each other, offer insight based on their personal experiences, and work together to solve problems.

# Track your program's success

At first glance, it might be hard to tell if your student ambassador program is making a difference on campus. Here are a few ways you can **measure your program's impact**:



**Track the reach of your program materials.** For example, you could keep track of the number of branded items your student ambassadors give away, or the number of impressions or comments on their social media posts.



**Do observational research.** For example, you could count students who come into the cafeteria wearing a mask, and compare results from the beginning of the semester to finals week.



**Conduct campus-wide surveys.** Surveys are a great way to assess students' perceptions and attitudes about COVID-19, the student ambassador program, and behaviors like wearing a mask and physical distancing.



**Track campus conduct cases.** Note the number of conduct cases related to masks, physical distancing, and other campus COVID-19 guidelines.





**Interview your student ambassadors.** Talk to your ambassadors about their experience with the program to identify what's working well and opportunities for improvement.



**Interview other campus community members.** Talk to other departments or campus organizations about their experiences with student ambassadors.



**Ask professors to help.** Turn evaluation into a learning opportunity. Consider asking marketing or communication professors to incorporate these activities into their course curriculum.

Be sure to share your findings with campus leadership, faculty members, and organizations that have supported your student ambassador program.

Finally, it may be harder to quantify, but remember that **student ambassadors influence campus social norms**. If other students see your student ambassadors wearing a mask and keeping a safe distance, they're more likely to do the same.



# Helpful resources

Get the latest COVID-19 updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American College Health Association (ACHA).

- Learn how to communicate about COVID-19 vaccines on campus with ACHA's Vax Forward Digital Toolkit.
- Explore more [COVID-19 resources for colleges and universities](#) from ACHA.
- Keep up to date with [CDC's COVID-19 information page](#).

Remember to check your state and county health department websites for information on local COVID-19 guidelines.



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