Recovery-Friendly Gathering Event Toolkit

Purpose

This toolkit provides ideas and planning guidance for hosting engaging, substance-free events that support individuals in or exploring recovery, especially with Recovery Month being in September. These events are inclusive, safe, and centered on connection, creativity, and fun—without the presence of alcohol or other substances.

Important Dates to Remember

- **International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD):** August 31
- **Recovery Month:** September
- **National Addiction Professionals Day:** September 20
- **International Recovery Day:** September 30
- **Red Ribbon Week:** October 23-31

Event Planning Checklist

- ☐ Identify your audience and goals
- ☐ Choose a recovery-friendly theme or activity
- ☐ Reserve a venue that is accessible and comfortable
- ☐ Provide clear signage and promote expectations of a substance-free space
- ☐ Offer refreshments, ideally non-caffeinated and non-alcoholic
- ☐ Plan for inclusive entertainment or activity options
- ☐ Create feedback forms to evaluate the event's impact

Optional Resource Table: Include PIP brochures, hotline numbers, or info on recovery support

Event Ideas & Descriptions

Mocktail Mixer

Create a DIY mocktail bar with: Sparkling or still water, fruit juices, flavored syrups, fresh/frozen fruit, herbs (mint, basil), recipe cards, and a "Build Your Own" station. Include icebreaker games and soft music. Add edible glitter, or fancy cups and straws for added visualization.

Art /Craft Night

Set up multiple crafting stations: Painting, coloring, journaling, beading, vision boards, and DIY. Provide supplies and prompts for self-reflection or creativity, and background music, mocktails, or herbal teas.

Sober Movie Night

Screen a crowd-friendly film: Use a projector or large TV and offer cozy seating. Provide a popcorn bar with toppings, soda/mocktail options. Choose uplifting, funny, or nostalgic films, or invite attendees to vote on the lineup beforehand.

Game Night

Invite participants to play: Board games, card games, group trivia, option for tournament-style rounds with small prizes, and themed snacks and drinks (e.g., root beer floats, nachos). Consider having a mix of fast-paced and relaxed games.

Yoga & Tea Social

Combine mindfulness and socializing: Host a guided yoga or meditation session. Follow with a tea station (herbal, decaf options). Encourage sharing, journaling, or intention-setting.

Open Mic or Talent Night

Celebrate community and expression: Invite poetry, music, storytelling, or comedy. Provide a low-pressure, encouraging environment. Offer light refreshments and sign-up sheets.

Bake & Share

Create a cozy kitchen vibe: Encourage students to bring baked goods or treats to share. Offer a station to decorate cupcakes or cookies and/or provide recipe cards and allergy-friendly options. Add a cozy element like seasonal-themed mocktails.

Book or Podcast Club

Connect through stories: Attendees bring a book to trade or the name of a podcast/episode. Optional guided journaling or discussion prompts, share snacks, and have a casual discussion circle.

Potluck with a Purpose

Tie groups together through food: Host a recovery-friendly potluck with a theme (comfort foods, cultural dishes, etc.). Include discussion cards about support systems, challenges, and milestones that occurred in the academic year.

Plant and Connect

Grow something meaningful: Host a succulent or small plant potting workshop. Offer decorative pots, soil, and plant care tips. Use the activity as a metaphor for growth, resilience, and self-care.

Trivia & Treats Night

Host a themed trivia game: General knowledge, pop culture, school-specific facts. Use teams or individuals and offer small prizes. Pair with a snack bar or fun treat station.

Volunteer Together

Serve and connect with others: Plan a group day of service or community project. Follow up with a reflection circle and snacks. Reinforce purpose, connection, and belonging.

Nature Walk or Picnic

Enjoy the outdoors together: Host a casual outdoor walk or group picnic. Provide blankets, frisbees, and mocktail coolers. Consider adding meditation or journaling moments.

Karaoke Night

Sing it out: Rent or use a karaoke machine/app. Encourage fun, silly performances in a no-pressure setting. Offer themed drinks and snack trays.

Puzzles & Chill

Relax and collaborate: Provide a variety of puzzles (jigsaw, Sudoku, word searches) and create quiet zones with soft lighting and chill music. Offer tea, hot chocolate, or sparkling water.

Board Painting/Sign Making

Create inspiring décor: Supply wooden signs, stencils, and paint for crafting recovery affirmations. Encourage students to take their signs home or donate them to a community space. Play music and offer light snacks.

Skills Share Workshop

Learn and teach together: Invite attendees to share a short demo of a hobby or life skill (e.g., knitting, budgeting, cooking tips). Encourage peer-to-peer learning in a judgment-free environment. Pair with coffee, snacks, or mocktail tastings.

Build-Your-Own Trail Mix Bar

Create healthy fuel together: Set up a variety of nuts, seeds, dried fruit, chocolate chips, and granola. Provide bags or jars for participants to mix and label their own blend. Pair with wellness tips and recovery-friendly snack facts.

Minute to Win It Challenge Night

Light-hearted competition: Organize one-minute games that require minimal setup and materials. Include challenges like stacking cups, ping-pong toss, or cookie face race. Offer prizes and a scoreboard to keep the energy fun and engaging.

Gratitude Jar & Letter Writing Table

Foster reflection and connection: Set up a station to write thank-you notes or affirmations to self/others. Include supplies for decorating jars and cards, and invite students to take their jars or leave letters for a community wall.

Event Promotion Tips

- **Use inclusive language:** “All are welcome,” “Substance-free,” “Celebrate without substances”
- **Highlight activities,** not what’s missing
- **Include accessibility info** (transportation, wheelchair access, sensory-friendly options)
- **Partner** with student orgs, recovery allies, or wellness coalitions

Expanding Recovery-Friendly Culture on Campus

This section offers strategies beyond individual events to foster an environment where recovery is visible, celebrated, and supported across the campus.

Campus Environments & Social Norms

- **Recovery-Friendly Spaces:** Create or designate lounges or quiet areas that are substance-free zones with relaxing decor and affirming messages.
- **Visual Messaging Campaigns:** Post flyers, digital screens, or sidewalk chalk art featuring messages of hope, inclusion, and facts about recovery.
- **Wellness Corners at Campus Events:** Add a recovery-friendly zone to large events, complete with mocktails, stress kits, and support info.

Recovery Ally Engagement

- **Ally Trainings:** Host MACRO Ally Training sessions teaching students, staff, and faculty how to support peers in recovery and reduce stigma.
- **Ally Spotlights:** Highlight individuals who support recovery in newsletters or on social media to normalize allyship.
- **Peer Recovery Panels:** Organize moderated discussions featuring students in recovery or supportive allies. Especially during the National Recovery Month in September

Routine, Peer-Led Gatherings

- **Weekly Recovery Meetups:** Casual, peer-led check-ins like “Mindful Mondays.”
- **Accountability & Goal Pods:** Small groups focused on weekly goal setting, self-care, or reflection.
- **Drop-In Creativity Zones:** Open rooms stocked with journaling, art, or sensory tools for anytime access.

Integrated Health & Academic Supports

- **Syllabus Statements:** Encourage recovery-affirming language and mental health resources in course syllabi.
- **Faculty Learning Circles:** Offer development sessions around trauma-informed, recovery-sensitive practices.

Substance-Free Traditions

- **Sober Welcome or Finals Events:** Host substance-free tailgates, movie nights, or de-stress events during high-risk times.
- **Graduation Recognition:** Offer cords or pins to honor students in recovery.
- **Annual Theme Weeks:** Plan “Recovery Awareness Week” with events, panels, and wellness activities.

After the Event

- Share photos (with permission)
- Ask for feedback (anonymous forms or QR code)
- Acknowledge any volunteers or contributors
- Reflect on what worked well and what to improve

Other Resources

SAMHSA Recovery Toolkit

- samhsa.gov/about/digital-toolkits/recovery-month

Faces & Voices of Recovery

- facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/programs/advocacy/recovery-month

International Recovery Day

- internationalrecoveryday.org

Mobilize Recovery, Campus Surge

- mobilizerecovery.org