



# WORKPLACE WELLNESS GUIDE

Ingredients for success

## FORWARD

The ODS Alaska Well Workplace Wellness Guide provides a road map for implementing and sustaining an effective wellness program. We hope this tool will serve as a useful resource in your pursuit of a healthier state of well-being for your employees.

The original compilation of this start-up kit came from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention and is adapted from the National Employee Wellness Advisory Workgroup.

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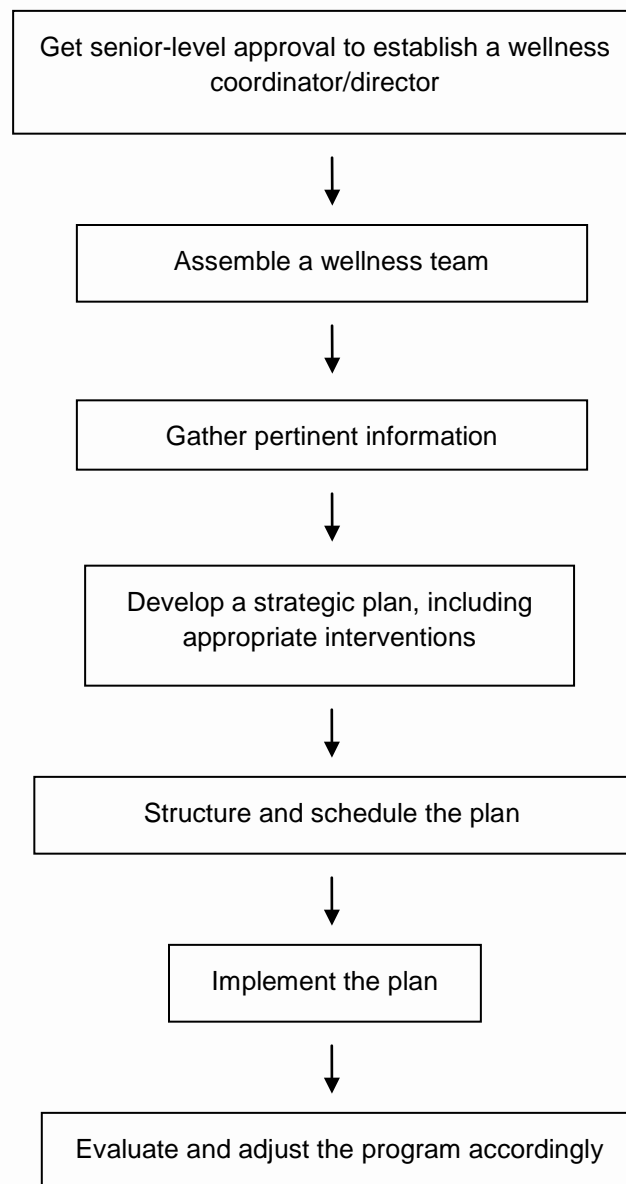
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## ***GETTING STARTED***

### ***Steps in starting a program***

It's important to begin a wellness program strategically, rather than relying on a gut feeling or random feedback and observations from the worksite. A well-thought-out program has the best chance of making a measurable change in your employees' health habits and productivity. The following flowchart illustrates the basic steps for implementing a wellness program.



The establishment of a wellness program has no end point, since the needs of employees and stakeholders are always evolving. With advances in health-related research, it's important to continually revise and adjust wellness programs for maximum effectiveness.

### ***Getting support***

Your goal is to create a successful wellness program; your success requires hard work, passion and commitment. But there is one key component that cannot be overlooked — that of leadership support. Without such support, a program may be mediocre; with it, the possibilities are endless.

Start winning support for an employee wellness program by showing how it can pay off. Consider some of the following strategies:

- **Paint a clear picture** — Describe a vision for the wellness team, possible programming and a realistic business impact.
- **Present the facts** — Although you may gather data specific to your employee population in a later step, start by presenting general information that supports your intent. Information that supports employee wellness is available in health and business journals.
- **Compare and contrast** — A market analysis can show management what similar organizations are offering, as well as their costs.
- **Join forces** — Show how employee wellness fits with the overall mission of your organization and how these efforts can tie together existing programs. This encourages leadership to see how collaboration is effective in working toward a common goal.
- **Be clear with requests** — Make a specific request to approve the initiation of an employee wellness program. Clearly state what's needed to proceed and how progress will be reported. Help leadership understand the need for resources, but know that they may need actual data to better visualize a return on investment. Make use of external data to strengthen your case.
- **Be willing to negotiate** — After clearly expressing your request, you may have to make concessions. For instance, when requesting an FTE for creating a wellness coordinator position, a part-time or temporary arrangement may initially need to be considered. Proposing a temporary position may further help in getting a “foot in the door.” However, be careful not to underestimate the time it will take to build a program and see any measurable results.

Don't forget about the importance of meeting the needs of the target audience — fellow employees. Starting a wellness initiative at the grassroots level encourages frontline support as those involved also solicit help from leadership.

### ***Establishing a wellness coordinator***

The person(s) chosen to lead the program should be energetic, knowledgeable and able to serve as a role model for healthy behavior. He or she should also be a strong, respected leader. This step is critical and will help ensure effective communication, support and success. Since wellness encompasses many areas of health, a variety of health professionals can adequately fulfill this role. The wellness coordinator must be able to work well with others, advocate for change and be creative in program development and implementation. Choose a person who is well-respected by fellow employees and can easily gain their trust. It is also important to build rapport and establish a wellness team that understands the culture of the organization. Each organization is different, and what might work for one facility may not for another. It may be helpful to seek advice from someone with experience in this area.

### ***Assembling a wellness team***

Selecting members to serve on a wellness team can be just as important as choosing the right wellness coordinator. Wellness team members should be as enthusiastic about promoting health as the coordinator, but may not need to be wellness experts. Team members can be selected based on area of expertise or as representatives from various areas of the organization. It is wise to include representatives from human resources, marketing, occupational health and safety, a variety of line business units, and union or other labor organizations. Take care to not involve too many or too few members on the team, as this can create a barrier to building a strong team. Not all team members need to be the “perfect picture of health.” Having a variety of members allows for different perspectives, which can help in developing realistic interventions. However, the team should be committed to dedicating time to build and implement the program and be passionate about their efforts. Don't expect managers to designate their best employees for the committee, as this could result in having people who don't want to be there. Make each member responsible for some task or event, no matter how small.

## ***DESIGNING A PROGRAM THAT WORKS***

Often, people in the business of helping others are so enthusiastic about making a difference that it is difficult to channel the enthusiasm into program planning. However, this is the difference between a program that is “nice” or “fluff” and a program that truly makes an impact.

### ***Core wellness program components***

Wellness is defined as the state of enhanced health and well-being, and wellness programs can come in all shapes and sizes. Consider the following six components to wellness:

***Physical*** — body, endurance, flexibility, strength

***Social*** — family, friends, relationships

***Occupational*** — personal and professional development, worthwhile work

***Intellectual*** — mind, creativity, knowledge

***Spiritual*** — values, purpose, religion, intuition

***Emotional*** — feelings, self esteem, coping with stress

Programming may include interventions from more than one component of wellness.

A wellness program is not just about having the occasional lunchtime program. Wellness is about valuing the whole employee in all six dimensions. Worksite wellness focuses more specifically on how these six dimensions affect productivity and creativity at work.

### ***Gathering pertinent information***

A map for creating a wellness program is most effective if you know where to start. To determine a beginning point, gather as much information as possible. Knowing employee demographics, including not only gender, age, education and race, but also what hours employees work, how far they live from work, and whether they care for children or elderly parents, can help determine the direction of a program. Your human resources department is often able to generate this information. In addition, it is vital to collect some type of health data, such as weight, lipids, blood pressure, past diagnosis, etc. This can be gathered from the worksite health insurer in aggregate data form, but the confidentiality of individual employees must be protected. Occupational health data (including injuries at the workplace)

also can be collected. Such data should be de-identified, unless otherwise approved by individual employees. All information should be kept confidential and ethically respected. Don't forget about other sources of information, such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs all-employee survey, a source that may reveal information about employee wellness.

### **Needs assessment**

Existing data can be collected through an employee needs assessment. An initial needs assessment is the best way to determine what employees perceive as their greatest wellness need. A needs assessment should not be confused with a personal health assessment. While the two can be combined, the needs assessment can generate perceived needs from employees. (A sample of the ODS Alaska Well Worksite Wellness Needs Assessment can be found in this kit). You might conduct basic health screenings at the same time as the assessment to aid in gathering objective health data. Again, it is important to follow the proper rules of privacy. Consider partnering with your occupational health department for cholesterol, diabetes, weight, blood pressure, stress and body mass index (BMI) screenings.

Once you determine a starting point, gather data to define program goals. A survey of middle and upper management regarding their expectations for the program will not only help gain their support, but will also ensure success of a wellness program.

### ***Developing a strategic plan***

After you've gathered your data, the next step is to formulate a plan for achieving goals. A strategic plan should include the main objectives, the steps that will ensure achievement, and a way to measure success. A detailed plan also helps determine the resources to be used, the people who will be responsible for overseeing components of the plan, and a target deadline that will keep everyone on course. The objectives should align with the wellness program's mission statement and that of the organization. Conversely, the organization's strategic plan should also contain a component to support employee wellness. A strategic plan should be updated often and revised at least once a year (see sample ODS Alaska Well Success Strategies in this kit).

The ultimate goal is to integrate wellness into the very culture of your organization: a culture that places real value on a healthier lifestyle for employees and their families. Consider linking employee wellness to established programs, such as those offered at the local, state or federal level. Be sure to keep stakeholders informed, as this will help avoid a duplication of efforts. An organization-wide wellness



approach can provide support for local facilities, serve as an advocate for resources and program implementation, and provide guidance on specific directives and regulations. A word of caution: a company-wide wellness council should share the vision, while at the same time, support and encourage autonomy at the facility level.

### ***Acquiring resources***

As you develop your strategic plan, you may find there is a gap between the ideal program and what is affordable. Fortunately, there are numerous free resources available. A listing of the most common resource roadblocks and possible solutions to overcoming them is provided below.

Lack of time and/or manpower	Team up with local health agencies, non-profit organizations, local businesses and government organizations that have education coordinators or representatives willing to visit the workplace and educate employees at no charge. Consider volunteers, students or interns to help manage the program or coordinate individual events.
Lack of money	Donations from area businesses can be used for drawings or as program incentives. Work with your local employees association to see if area businesses are willing to donate items or services. Charge a fee for attendance at a program or exercise class. Ask for pharmaceutical companies or other health-related businesses to sponsor events or speakers, within the guidelines of the facility. Consider applying for grants, given the time and skill it takes to go through the process. Look for free educational materials on websites, or ask companies to send samples of their products for giveaways or incentives. Ask if local fitness centers offer discounts for employees. Collaborate with county, city and state programs and public health departments that may share the same goals.
Lack of space	Conduct programs outside or go to individual work areas to educate employees. Think of creative alternatives to the usual format or room set-up for programs. Consider alternate timing for programs. Look into using local libraries or other government and private spaces near the worksite. There are also community centers and churches that offer health promotion programs and have space for education.
Overall need	Consider contracting out the wellness program, if encountering difficulty managing an overall program. If this is not an option, provide a list of community or online resources. Local libraries have computer

	classes; educational centers and grocery stores may have cooking classes; even parks and recreation departments have lists of biking trails, etc. Sometimes, just getting employees together for mentoring or support groups can be a valuable resource.
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***Determining measures of success now***

Another crucial component of the strategic plan is to begin with the end in mind. Before implementing any strategies, consider what would be an appropriate gauge of success. Initially, the goal may be to achieve increased awareness of a program (i.e., successful attendance and participation in events). Waiting until a program is over to determine its success is not an objective measurement and the opportunity to gather information while there is a captive audience may be lost. Planning measures before an event also allows time to determine the measurement tool. Consider using employee surveys to determine how employees perceive the program’s impact on their health and work. Ask how often the employee participates in wellness activities or how he or she will apply the information learned in changing future health behaviors. Take measurements of health indicators, such as blood pressure, to get an idea of the aggregate health issues. It will be difficult to make a specific conclusion about the effect of programming unless employee behavior is measured after an intervention. This information applies more to understanding your employee population versus the impact of programming (see “Gathering pertinent information”). Be sure to communicate the success of the measures after an event to fellow employees and management.

***Structuring and scheduling the wellness plan***

Even the most well-written strategic plan means nothing until it is put into practice. Help advance the plan’s objectives by developing a schedule that reflects the plan’s strategies. Use the plan and a strategic calendar to set a completion date for each of the strategies. This is the time to be realistic. Honestly consider the time it will take to prepare for each event. Remember that great change does not happen overnight. Consider appropriate times of the year to address relevant topics. You might use National Health Observances as a guide in your planning (see [www.healthfinder.gov/nho/nho.asp](http://www.healthfinder.gov/nho/nho.asp)). Also consider your resources, including the manpower available to help implement each strategy at the appropriate time of year. Determine what your target audience will experience at a specific time of the year (e.g., conduct a program in April about reducing stress related to finances).

## ***SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION***

It's now time to move forward. You may have been anxious to jump to this point from the start, but now that your foundation has been laid, your hard work will result in a more successful program. The key now is to get participation and buy-in from all levels in your organization.

### ***Getting management involved*** (front office and mid-levels)

Once the plan has been created, share it with management. Leaders know that satisfied employees are crucial to the success of an organization and they understand the importance of a healthy workforce. But they also need to know what role they should play and how they can become a fundamental aspect of a wellness program. Consider developing a wellness portfolio to keep track of activities, goals, objectives, measures and evaluation (for example, return on investment). Discuss how managers can support employees' participation because the program is designed to meet the needs of the overall organization.

### ***Marketing 101***

Marketing is about getting the target market's attention and then encouraging those individuals to adopt a certain behavior or action. In the case of marketing an event, know how to entice employees to participate by adopting their perspective. Consider the four P's of marketing theory:

**Product** — This doesn't need to be a tangible item, but can be a service or behavior (i.e., pedometer, walking program or increased activity). Is the product usable and desirable to the audience? For instance, when targeting employees who are inactive, a marathon may not be a product that would be of interest to them.

**Place** — Where to hold interventions takes some thought. Make sure that the lighting and sound quality is appropriate for the event. Is the space large enough and the layout conducive to good traffic flow? For outdoor activities, is there a shaded or covered area in case of hot or rainy weather? Is the location convenient to the target market's work area? While it might seem that hosting events is limited to the main conference room, consider alternatives — such as educating employees in the elevator or lunch line, or take the educational series to their work area.

**Price** — Even when money is not involved, there is always a cost for participating. For employees to come to a health fair, it may cost time away from their job, entail walking a long distance to attend,

or involve coming into work during non-work hours to participate. It is important to consider the cost to the target market so that the event's value outweighs any price paid.

**Promotion** — The most fascinating program means little without participants. Don't shortchange this aspect of preparation. Determine what methods of promotion work best at the worksite — e-mail notices, posters, flyers, newsletter articles, paycheck stuffers, overhead announcements, etc. Consider varying the methods of promotion to keep the program fresh and interesting. Even changing from a flat poster to a three-dimensional sign is sure to grab more attention! Face-to-face interaction works best, and don't forget that employees are the most effective salespeople. Consider marketing a program's identity by developing a slogan, logo, mission and vision statement.

### ***Incentives***

In marketing a wellness event, consider the price to the target market. Incentives can be a clever way to make the benefit of participating in an event or program greater than the cost. Incentives can include the obvious — cash, refreshments and giveaways (i.e., t-shirts, pens, etc.). However, incentives can also include discounts, drawing entries, recognition, time off or educational/training time. It is surprising that the most miniscule of incentives can increase participation dramatically. Be careful not to fall into the trap of *having* to offer an incentive to get people to participate. Incentives should complement the event or message and should be reserved for those times when participation is most crucial.

### ***Have fun and give recognition***

On the day of the event, committee members should enjoy the program and take time to observe how attendees react to the intervention. Are people confused by the layout? Are there certain booths that are more attractive than others? Are there portions of the lunch and learn that spark more input than others? Although there should be a tool in place to measure the event's success, simple observations can be very helpful in improving future events.

After everything is said and done, it is crucial to thank those who helped with the event. A wellness coordinator is only as good as those who help make the events happen. Don't forget to thank outside vendors, exhibitors and donors, too. It is also wise to thank the participants, possibly in a public forum, for their efforts and successes. Recognize leaders publicly for their support. Hold them up as role models and consider nominating them for wellness awards.

## ***EVALUATION***

Evaluation is one of the most critical points in the development of a program. Measures to gauge success are included in a good strategic plan. An analysis of the results will determine what course corrections are needed. Do not worry if your goal has not yet been achieved. Evaluation is not a time for ego, but rather self-confidence, as this is just one step in the journey. Use the information to make an even stronger program.

### ***Analyze success measures***

If your measure of success was merely to have a large attendance (“large” should be determined by a specific number or percentage ahead of time), then this stage involves simply tallying the sign-in sheet. However, when evaluating the success of a wellness program as a whole, you may need more extensive calculations, such as the program’s effect on employee absenteeism, productivity and the overall return on value. Crunching numbers need not be a nightmare of flashbacks to high school algebra class. Taking a broader approach to measurement may help to better quantify the success of your interventions and communicate the program’s effectiveness concisely.

Consider the following ways to measure the program’s return on value:

- *Worker’s compensation claims* — Consider both the number and dollar value.
- *Absenteeism* — Tally sick leave used, but consider factoring out family leave. Also add in the cost of any “pool” staff used to cover shortages.
- *Presenteeism* — This term refers to the cost of employees who are at work but are not functioning at full capacity. This can be measured by a simple self-assessment question such as, “On average, how many days each month are you limited at work due to back pain, headaches, head colds or other illnesses?” Ask a question such as, “On average, how many days each month are you limited at work due to family issues, financial concerns or other work/life balance issues?” to determine the impact of employees’ work/life balance on presenteeism. Quantify further by asking, “On those days, at what percent of your normal ability are you able to function? (10 percent, 30 percent, 50 percent, 70 percent or 90 percent?)”
- *Number of injuries and light duty time*
- *Healthcare expenditures*
- *Participant/employee satisfaction*

- *Health indicators* — These can include weight, BMI, blood pressure, lipids, fasting blood sugar levels, tobacco usage, reported health behaviors, diagnosis or family histories of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and cancers. (These can be obtained voluntarily through screenings and the use of health risk appraisals.)

Be sure to share results with leadership and employees and communicate future recommendations with leadership.

### ***REVIVING A TIRED PROGRAM***

If wellness events seem to be drawing fewer and fewer participants or the interventions don't seem to be affecting a change in employees, it's time to step back and re-evaluate the plan. Fixing the problem may be as simple as coming up with creative new approaches to address the same health topics. Look to other programs, attend conferences or get a new perspective. Students and interns are a wonderful way to get fresh and innovative approaches to traditional interventions. Never underestimate the importance of talking to the target market — the employee population. Ask what would interest them, what methods of education they most prefer and what incentives might motivate them for change. Sometimes even taking a break for a month or two might be just the trick to re-energize participation — consider the old adage, “We don't know what we've got until it's gone.” Another way to revive a program is by changing the packaging; food manufacturers use this tactic all the time. Try a new logo, a new name, a new direction of planning and programming. Try offering programs outdoors or at different times. Consider offering programs through a different method, rather than the classic “lunch and learn.” Try to determine the reason for the lack of interest or poor participation to better direct efforts to the needs of employees. Even the slightest change can cause employees to look at the program in a whole new light.

### ***EXPANDING INTO THE ARENA OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE***

It may seem challenging to create a wellness program that is comprehensive and effective. A wellness committee should master the management of its basic program before moving on to a more inclusive program. To fully address the health and wellness of the employee population demands consideration of work/life balance issues. The term “work/life” refers to all factors that affect health both in and outside of work hours. Employees do not just bring their “work selves” to the job. Rather, they bring all of their roles, concerns and commitments with them. Work/life balance does not indicate the expectation that every employee will be able to have equal time and energy for work and life outside of

work. The intent of a wellness program is to provide the support to handle the demands of all facets of daily life.

The topic of child care is often the primary focus of work/life balance programs. However, it is important to again analyze your employee population needs. In working with a predominately middle-aged employee population, there may be a greater need for elder care considerations. In assessing the employees' needs, consider what factors affect productivity. If taking time away for preventative exams is an issue, mobile mammography, an on-site health clinic or even routine blood pressure screenings may be helpful. On the other hand, if employees express a general sense of stress due to an overwhelming number of errands and other daily tasks, then arranging on-site dry cleaning services, oil changes or even packaged dinners to-go may be worthwhile interventions.

*Employee assistance programs* are another component of work/life balance offered by many companies. Remember that work/life balance can be addressed in programs with limited resources. The ability to refer employees to local resources and notify them of programs available in the community can be a wonderful way to address these issues without having an extensive staff or expansive property.

## ***CONCLUSION***

The most important piece of advice to remember amidst all the calculations, strategic plans and operational objectives included in this kit is that worksite wellness means working with people. It's easy to get caught up in communicating return on investment figures to decision makers, but don't forget that employees are the first priority. You must truly care about employees' health and families to make long-lasting change. Mutual trust and honesty about personal struggles is key to the success of a program and employees will often respond better to a genuine spirit than to a "numbers-cruncher" whose focus is to get more productivity out of the workforce. Be clear about the goals, steadfast with the plan, but true to the mission to achieve wellness.

## ***WELLNESS MATERIALS***

As part of this toolkit, a selection of ODS Alaska Healthcare Services programming materials and resources are available for use in employee wellness programs and are posted on the myODS website at [www.odsalaska.com](http://www.odsalaska.com).

As they become available, new resources and materials will be added. Please check with your ODS Alaska marketing representative periodically for updates or e-mail [ODSWell@odscompanies.com](mailto:ODSWell@odscompanies.com).