



## Surviving the Holiday Season

Celebrating the holiday season, with its many opportunities for service and social events, is a favorite time to plan student activities. It can also become a stressful time as the calendar quickly becomes overloaded with commitments, and busy advisers wonder how they will find time to get it all done. Follow these guidelines to help get you through this busy time of year.

### Schedule Wisely

Look at the calendar of events your group typically sponsors at this time of year. Sometimes events are continued from year to year without any real thought being given as to whether or not they should still be offered. New things get added from time to time, but the old things often are continued, until the activity schedule for November and December becomes truly daunting.

This year, hold a group discussion with your members to consider each activity and whether or not it is worth continuing. Consider such things as:

- Does this activity still support the goals of our group?

- Why do we sponsor this activity?
- Is this activity well-supported by the student body? Do many people participate?
- Is it something that would be missed if we discontinued it?
- If we want to keep it, how



can we give it a new twist or refresh it in some way to generate more interest?

- Is there something different we could do that would more effectively support the same goal?

### Pace Yourself

You know the abilities of your group and their commitment to your organization. Only take on the activities that you know your group can handle. If you have a relatively new, inexperienced group of members, take

on fewer projects. If you have a solid group of stalwart members with lots of experience, you can let them lead a larger number of projects. Consider how much time you, as the adviser, will have to devote to training and overseeing the work of your student leaders. Don't be drawn into taking on more than you can reasonably handle, no matter how great the idea.

### Let Students Lead

On a similar note, realize that planning all these activities is a great chance for students to learn and practice their leadership skills. Students should be doing the planning, organizing, and carrying out of all the activities—not the adviser. The adviser's role is to provide guidance, ask questions, and prompt students to take action. If someone slips up and overlooks something that should have been done, resist the urge to step in and make it right by doing it yourself. Find the student leader, ask some questions—starting with “what can we do to fix this now?” Let them figure out how to fix their mistake, error, or omission.

## Define Responsibilities

One way to help students learn to lead is to spell out very clearly who is responsible for what, especially where two committees might have overlapping areas of interest or a project is co-sponsored with another group.

Have each committee create a list of all the tasks it is responsible for completing, a deadline for each task, and the person responsible. Committee chairs should turn these lists in to the officers and the adviser so a master timeline of tasks to be completed can be compiled. Post the list in the meeting room so everyone can see it. This will help keep people accountable—it's hard to say you didn't know you were supposed to do something when it is posted right there for all to see—and makes it easier for the adviser and the officers to keep track of everything.

## Delegate

Get more people involved by delegating responsibilities to

lots of people—don't burn out a few of your most able members by saddling them with all the responsibility. Encourage your student leaders to delegate as well. But remember the cardinal rule of delegating: delegating responsibility isn't abdicating responsibility. Be sure to follow up with the person to whom you've delegated to ensure the job gets done. Developing a standard "Task Assignment Sheet" can make this job easier.

## Stay Calm

Feed yourself well (avoid junk food), get some sleep, and approach each day with a mantra that you are a competent human being and can handle anything that comes your way. No matter what happens—plans fall through, ordered decorations don't arrive on time, your DJ cancels at the last minute—remember that through your group's activities, you and your student leaders are making memories for students that will last a lifetime. As the kids say, "It's all good."

## Holiday Guidelines

Increasing diversity in U.S. schools brings a wealth of holiday traditions that are celebrated throughout November and December. Be sure your holiday activities are sensitive to the various cultures represented at your school by following these guidelines from the Anti Defamation League:

- **Be sensitive.** Holidays are a good time to learn about different customs, but don't put students on the spot by asking them to explain their own religious practices or observances or to bring religious objects to class as a basis of discussion.
- **Provide options.** Be aware that some religions teach that celebrating holidays—or birthdays—is wrong. Students should always be permitted not to participate and should have the opportunity to engage in optional, enjoyable activities. For example, instead of writing a letter to Santa, an option that is true to the spirit of the season might be to allow the student to write to local businesses seeking donations of toys for needy children.
- **Avoid stereotyping.** Not all members of a culture observe a holiday in the same way. A more neutral approach is to share the holiday's name, when it occurs, who participates and how this holiday reveals the historical experiences and culture of its followers.
- **Stress common themes.** Use holiday activities as a way of enhancing respect for religions and traditions by stressing themes they have in common. For example, many religions focus on festivals of light, including Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, Santa Lucia Day, and Diwali. By connecting holiday themes, you communicate that holidays are a valid expression of cultural and religious pride.
- **Remember the Constitution.** Holiday observances under public school auspices violate the first amendment if they suggest a religious theme.

### Holiday Resources

Check out these Web sites for information on various holiday traditions.

- **Thanksgiving**

[www.thanksgivingworld.com](http://www.thanksgivingworld.com)

- **Diwali**

[www.bawarchi.com/festivals/diwali1.html](http://www.bawarchi.com/festivals/diwali1.html)

- **Ramadan**

[www.colostate.edu/Orgs/MSA/events/Ramadan.html](http://www.colostate.edu/Orgs/MSA/events/Ramadan.html)

- **Kwanzaa**

[www.lil-fingers.com/holidays/kwanzaa](http://www.lil-fingers.com/holidays/kwanzaa)

- **Hanukkah**

[http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/School\\_Bell/Social\\_Studies/Religion/Judaism/Hanukkah/Stories\\_\\_Poems\\_\\_and\\_Games](http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/School_Bell/Social_Studies/Religion/Judaism/Hanukkah/Stories__Poems__and_Games)

- **Christmas**

[http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/School\\_Bell/Social\\_Studies/Religion/Christianity/Christmas](http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/School_Bell/Social_Studies/Religion/Christianity/Christmas)