



Kickoff Event Kit

Prepared by:



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Kickoff Event Overview

Your local GEAR UP TN kickoff event is a great way to set the tone for the college-going culture in your local community. For the students, their families, and the educators working on GEAR UP TN, the kickoff event will provide a perfect opportunity to create energy and excitement around the grant program.

In planning your event, we encourage you to do what would work best for your students and your community. Work with your Collaborative team to determine the best time and place for your event and activities that will be most likely to engage your GEAR UP TN students. This kickoff kit will provide you with ideas to help you plan and promote your event, but ultimately, it is an event for your community. The event should reflect your Collaborative's personality and, most importantly, your students.

Scheduling Your Event

Your kickoff event should happen early in the school year, ideally during August or September. Determine the best day and time for your event. Some Collaboratives may choose to host an event during a school day, while others may host an event outside of school hours. Think about what day and time would work best for your community and best serve your GEAR UP TN students.

Determine the appropriate amount of time for the event (perhaps 30 minutes or one hour) and include it in your invitations.

Finding a Location

When choosing a location, consider a space that will be able to accommodate your GEAR UP TN students and any invited guests. Try to choose a location that will be easy for students to find, includes ample parking for visitors, such as invited guests and members of the media, and that will allow visitors to easily check into the event. This could be a school auditorium or a donated event space at a local business or organization.

Who to Invite

Your GEAR UP TN students should be in attendance at the event. GEAR UP TN Collaborative partners, including the site coordinator, the project director, principals, and representatives from partner higher education institutions should also plan to attend.

Other guests to invite:

- Families of GEAR UP TN students
- Admissions representatives from local higher education institutions
- Local board of education members
- City council members
- County commissioners
- Tennessee State House Representatives and State Senators representing your Collaborative area*
- United States House of Representative members representing your Collaborative area*
- Local mayor(s)
- Local chamber of commerce
- Local community organizations, such as businesses, non profits, and religious organizations
- Former GEAR UP TN students currently in college
- Members of the local media [see page 5 for information on reaching out to the media; see page 6 for a sample media advisory to send to media]

*To get contact information for local state representatives, please contact Kate Derrick at the GEAR UP TN central office at kate.derrick@tn.gov.

Event Invitations

When sending your invitations, choose a method that will suit both you and your guests. This may mean emailing invitations, mailing them, or a combination of both. If there are guests that you would particularly like to have attend your event, send a personal follow-up or note with the invitation. This will be a particularly important gesture for elected officials, who receive many invitations and have busy schedules.

If you need help with putting together an electronic invitation, the GEAR UP TN central office can provide you with guidance.

Event Invitation Template



You are invited to attend:

The [Collaborative Name] GEAR UP TN Kickoff

Celebrate the launch of the GEAR UP TN program in our community as we prepare [county/city/community name] students to attend and succeed in college.

[Date]

[Time, including end time]

[Location]

Hosted by the [Collaborative Name] GEAR UP TN Collaborative:

[Partner Names]

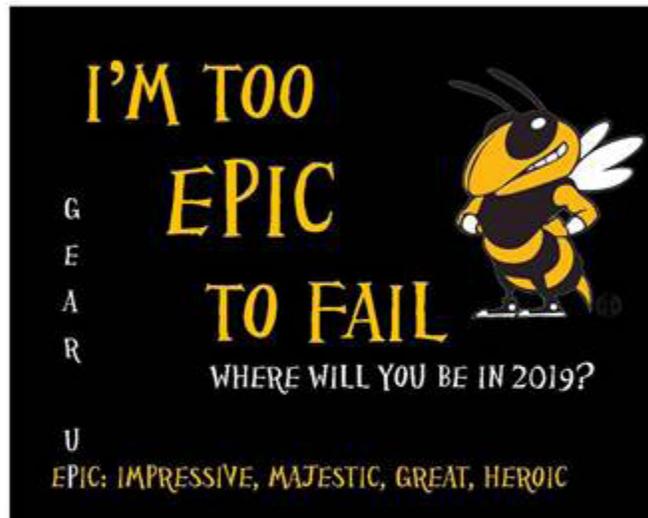
Please contact [name, phone number, email] with any questions.

Event Invitations

Sample Event Invitation

Courtesy of Robertson County GEAR UP TN Collaborative

PLEASE JOIN THE SPRINGFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL
7TH GRADE STUDENTS AS THEY GET A GLIMPSE OF THEIR EPIC FUTURE!
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26TH 8:30AM-9:00AM SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM



EDUCATIONAL PERSISTENCE IS CRITICAL
TO GET
EVERY PEER IN COLLEGE
THROUGH
EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION

BROUGHT TO YOU BY SHS, SMS, REDI, VOL STATE, WORKFORCE ESSENTIALS AND GEAR UP TN

Event Activity Ideas

Choose a structure for your kickoff event that will work best for you, your students, and the guests you invite. We ask that you do include a brief explanation of GEAR UP TN and the services that will be offered to students.

Other activity ideas for your GEAR UP TN kickoff:

- Play Governor Haslam's video (accessible here: <https://vimeo.com/53420457>)*
- Ask communications students at your high school or at a local university to make a short video about going to college or about GEAR UP TN in your community. For an example, check out this video from the Robertson County GEAR UP TN kickoff: <https://vimeo.com/52246630>
- Have students write and perform a song about GEAR UP TN or going to college.
- Have GEAR UP TN partners, including the site coordinator, the project director, principals, school counselors, community partners, and more, introduce themselves and announce where they went to college.
- Ask faculty members and other guests to wear college gear from the schools from which they graduated.
- Prior to the event, have students write brief essays about what college means to them. Choose one or a few students to read their essays at the kickoff.
- Write a GEAR UP TN college pledge for your students to recite at the event.

*To get a copy of Governor Haslam's video in another format, please contact Kate Derrick at kate.derrick@tn.gov.

Promoting Your Event to the Media

Inviting local media to your event is a great way to increase public awareness of your local GEAR UP TN program. Your kickoff event will be a particularly good opportunity to invite local television stations and news photographers looking for inspiring visual stories. Here are some tips for contacting the media:

1. **Create a media advisory:** Write a brief media advisory with information about your event. [See page 6 for a template for your media advisory]
2. **Distribute the media advisory:** Send out the media advisory to your local media outlets approximately two weeks before your event.

If you email a copy of the media advisory, send the advisory directly in the body of your email. This will help your email avoid spam filters. If you can, send the email from an address linked to a person's name (rather than a general organizational mailbox.) An email from kate.derrick@tn.gov is more likely to be read than an email from gearup.tn@tn.gov.

Tip: If you or someone working with your Collaborative already has a relationship with the media or a specific reporter, have that person reach out and/or follow up with the media. Also try reaching out to reporters who have covered your school(s) previously.

3. **Follow-up once you send the advisory:** Once you have sent the media advisory, follow up by phone to make sure the newsroom received the advisory. Prepare a small script ahead of time with the most important information. Prepare to be brief on the phone- newsrooms and reporters are usually busy and being prepared when you speak to them will help you keep their attention.
4. **Designate a media point-of-contact:** Choose someone involved with the kickoff to be the point person for any media people attending the event.

The media point-of-contact should be prepared to greet anyone from the media who attends the event and direct them to students, faculty, or anyone else willing to be interviewed for a news piece.

5. **Follow up the day before the event:** The day before the event, follow up with your media targets by phone or email to remind them of the event and/or confirm their attendance, and give them contact information for your designated media point-of-contact.
6. **Day of the event:** Make sure parking is available for any media and that the front office of your kickoff venue are aware that media may be arriving.

Ensure that your media point-of-contact is prepared to answer basic questions about your GEAR UP TN program, including the schools participating in the program, the number of students, the amount of your local grant, the purpose of GEAR UP TN, and some of the activities that will take place for students. (You can reference the Collaborative Announcement Kit that was sent to your site on October 12th. For a copy of this kit, please contact Kate Derrick at kate.derrick@tn.gov.)

Try to get contact information from any media that attend so you have their contact information for future events/announcements and to send a follow-up thank you.

7. **Send a thank you:** Send thank you notes to members of the media that attend your kickoff. This will help to maintain a good relationship with your local media outlets.

Media Advisory Template

MEDIA ADVISORY FOR:

[Collaborative Name] GEAR UP TN KICKOFF EVENT

[Date of event]

For more information contact:

[Name, phone number, email address]

[County, city, or district name] High School Students Celebrate College Access and Success with Local GEAR UP TN Kickoff

[County, city, or district name] will kick off the school year with an event to promote college enrollment and graduation through the GEAR UP TN program on [date of event].

[Collaborative name] serves [number of students] students in the Class of 2018 and seniors at participating schools in the district. [Include details about your specific event, such as activities. "XXth graders from x schools will recite a pledge to attend college and seniors will wear college sweat-shirts."]

WHO: [XXth graders and seniors at [high schools]]

WHAT: [Collaborative Name] GEAR UP TN Kickoff Celebration

WHERE: [Location]

WHEN: [Date]

The purpose of GEAR UP TN is to expand the college-going culture in Tennessee and increase the number of students attending and succeeding in postsecondary education. Across Tennessee, GEAR UP TN will serve 7,500 students in the class of 2018 and 5,000 high school seniors each year through 2019.

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GEAR UP TN provides Tennessee students with a clear path to college. Funded through a seven-year grant from the U.S Department of Education and administered by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, GEAR UP TN works with Collaboratives in 15 counties across the state to promote college readiness and success.