

Red Cross Young Professionals Groups: PLANNING A KICK-OFF EVENT



What it is. The kick-off event is where a new American Red Cross Young Professionals Group introduces itself to the local community.

How it helps. This event helps recruit new members and spreads the word about the Young Professionals Group. It is an opportunity to involve your inner circle of friends and co-workers with the Red Cross and make new connections.

Get Started. Before beginning, contact your local Red Cross unit for assistance. You can search for your local unit by zip code on redcross.org – when you call the unit, ask to speak to someone who works with volunteers. They will guide you to available resources that can make this an impactful and successful event.

Once you have established contact with your unit, there are three parts involved in organizing a successful a kick-off event:

1. Planning the Event
2. The Kick-off Event
3. Follow Up

This guide will walk your Young Professionals Group through each of the three parts of organizing a kick-off event.

1. Planning the Event

Sample Planning Timeline for the Kick-Off Event

4 months before the Kick-off event

- Contact your local Red Cross unit and tell them about your proposed event. Find a contact that will be able to guide you to available resources that can make this an impactful and successful event, and invite the Red Cross contact to attend the event.
- The group's leadership committee should serve as the kick-off event planning committee. One or two co-chairs can run the committee, lead the event planning committee members, and serve as the main point of contact with the local Red Cross unit. Hold the first event planning meeting to discuss ideas and assign roles:
 - o **Time and location:** Red Cross Young Professionals Groups have hosted successful Kick-off events in September and early October. Try to avoid having a Kick-off after Halloween because it will be more difficult for people to attend with holiday and work schedules.
 - o **Determine a goal for attendance:** What will success look like for your event? Set a goal for attendees and also how many new members you'd like to recruit that day.
 - o **Make it unique:** Think about how to make this event different from previous kick-off events you've attended.



3 months before the Kick-off event

- Work with the local Red Cross staff to secure a venue.
- Work with the Red Cross staff to determine food/drink specials with venue.
- Hold an event planning committee meeting and update your local Red Cross contact.
- Select the promotional materials to promote the event. View the promotional material available on [Brand Central](#).

2 months before the Kick-off event

- Hold an event planning meeting and update your local Red Cross contact.
- Post event information on local Red Cross unit calendar and ask the unit Communications contact to promote on the unit Facebook page, Twitter account and on other social media accounts closer to the event date.
- Ask the communications or social media contact at your company to see if he/she can assist you with advertising your event through its communication tools.

1 month before the Kick-off event

- Hold an event planning committee meeting and update your local Red Cross contact.
- Confirm event details with venue.
- Continue promoting the event within your networks. Encourage all Group members to actively promote the event to their networks, and ask the local Red Cross unit if they can continue promoting.
- Promote the Kick-off event on social media. Encourage all group members to post on their personal accounts and share with their networks.
- Advertise the event on free local event websites.
- Create a sign-in sheet to collect contact information from attendees.
- If applicable, ask one committee member to plan and prepare the advertisement for the Kick-off event that will run in the paper the week before the event.
- Ask the Chair and Red Cross Unit Contact to prepare short and effective speeches to give during the event.
- Prepare a draft of the follow-up email to be sent the day after the event. See the follow-up email draft included in this guide.
- Assign day of responsibilities including:
 - Working the registration table and capturing contact information
 - Greeting guests and handing out nametags
 - Setting up and cleaning up
 - Picking up materials from Red Cross unit, as needed



Week before the Kick-off event

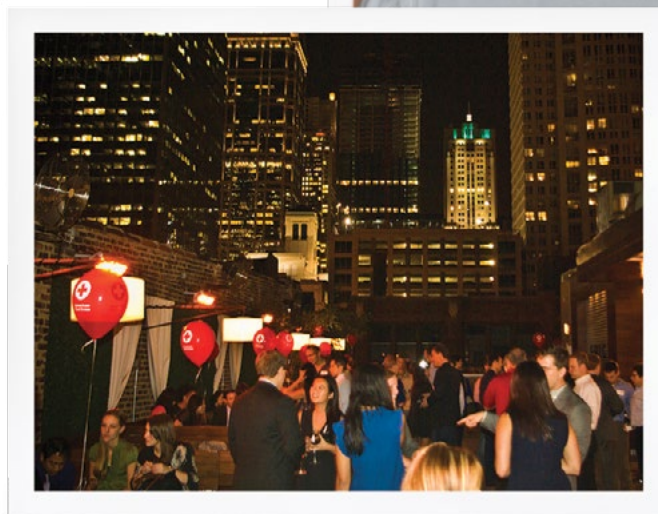
- Continue promoting the event with your networks—send emails, Facebook invites, and personally invite friends and family.
- Hold one final event planning committee meeting and talk with the local Red Cross unit about final details.
- Remind group members about their day of responsibilities.

2. At the Kick-off Event

The Kick-off event should have a fun and friendly atmosphere. Allow attendees to mix and mingle, but be careful not to overload them with too much information about the Red Cross and the Young Professionals Group.

On the day of the event:

- Arrive early to set up.
- Set up a sign-in table to give nametags and collect contact information from attendees.
- Greet all guests as they arrive.
- Work with the local Red Cross unit to have Red Cross branded give away items.
- Allocate time for the Chair and Red Cross Unit Contact to each deliver a short and effective speech thanking everyone for attending. Make sure they share information about the local Red Cross unit and Young Professionals Group.
- Share the next Young Professionals Group meeting or event date with attendees.
- Relax and have fun!



3. Follow Up

There is more work to be done after the Kick-off event is over. Your Young Professionals Group should follow-up with all event attendees. The follow-up should be personal and thoughtful.

Here are general *guidelines for follow-up* after an event:

- At the end of the Kick-off event, the event planning committee should briefly meet and discuss steps to follow up with attendees. Ideally, committee members should follow up with attendees they personally met with during the event. Meet briefly after the event to divide up the list and ensure all attendees will receive a personal follow-up email.
- The Chair should send a thank you email to all of the attendees within a week of the event. Keep this email short and sweet. A sample email can be found below.
- Within a week of the event send a personalized email to each attendee and connect with them via LinkedIn if applicable. The email should thank them for coming, mention what was discussed with the person at the event, and say you would be happy to discuss the group with them anytime. Be sure not to overload the person with too much information; keep it short and sweet.
- Generally, expect to get about a 25% response rate from potential members who attended and received follow-up.

When an attendee responds to a follow-up email and is interested in further discussing the Group in person or over the phone, you can approach the *follow-up conversation* in the following way:

- Focus on making a personal connection with them by asking about their job, their professional interests, what they enjoy doing, and what appeals to them in a young professionals group. This conversation should be natural and relaxed.
- Mention the event they attended and talk to them about the Young Professionals Group. Explain what the group is about, the leadership committees, opportunities, and what the group has planned for the future.
- End the follow-up meeting conversation by tailoring your conversation to the person. If the person says they are looking for networking opportunities, tailor the conversation to focus on the networking benefits of joining the group. Market what the person is interested in as a benefit they will receive by joining the Group.
- Next steps – Tell them what they need to do next to join the group (i.e. register as a volunteer, come to the next meeting)

There is an art to this conversation. *Practice* with other group members for feedback. Once you get this conversation down, you will be able to effectively engage people interested in joining the Group.

Two or three weeks after the Kick-off event, the event planning committee should schedule another meeting to discuss the progress of the follow-up, how the Kick-off event went, and plans for the next event.

This timeline and leadership structure can be used to plan other events in the early stages of a Young Professionals Group.

If you are interested in hosting another event, check out the planning guide for Flirting for Disaster. The guide can be found on the [Exchange](#).

