

Organizing Your School History Fair Event



Once you and your students have done all the hard work of producing your History Fair projects you will want an opportunity to present these projects to the whole school and decide which projects will represent your school at the History Fair regional competitions. At the school fair, keep the spirit of accomplishment high and recognize the students' achievements. Invite the school and local community to enjoy, learn from, and celebrate the students' projects too.

Planning for the school fair can begin months or weeks before the actual event. For a successful school fair it takes a number of people each handling a portion of the work. As soon as the date for the school fair is decided this group can designate all the assigned tasks and each person will know their responsibility. This could be a great opportunity to get parents and the Local School Council involved; you may also want to include your school maintenance staff, A/V personnel and someone from the administration who will be necessary to ensure a smooth event.

PREPARATION

SETTING THE DATE

Since the school registration for the regional history fair is due 10 school days before the event, and you will want at least a couple of days to complete the administrative work for HF, try to hold your event at least a week before our registration deadline. Should you be able to do it even earlier, your students who are advancing to the regional competition would have the time to improve their projects.

ORGANIZING THE SPACE

You will probably want to set up the exhibits in the media/library center, gym, cafeteria or a large multipurpose room. Make a floor plan of the exhibition area to determine where exhibits will be placed – allow two exhibits per six-foot table.

If students have documentaries or performances try to reserve rooms nearby. Schedule up to 20 minutes for each performance or documentary – 10 minutes for the project and 5 to set-up

and dismantle. For exposition of the projects, rather than judging, you might want to set up a station or two with a tv/vcr/dvd/lcd projector in the main exhibit area.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

RECOGNITION & AWARDS

Produce recognition certificates for all participating students. You may want to give ribbons or another type of prize to the top projects in each category; though a class treat might be nice as well. In addition to the projects that will advance to the Regionals, consider giving certificates or prizes for other type of strengths: best design, best use of primary sources, best interview, most scholarly summary statement form, most dynamic title, etc. Decide *when* to hold your recognition ceremony: will it be the same day or later in the week?

REFRESHMENTS

Offering treats for judges and guests shows you appreciate their extra efforts. If you can afford it, consider having treats for the participating students too. If your school has a culinary arts program, ask the coordinator if she/he is able to supply the refreshments.

PRINT A BANNER, MAKE A PROGRAM

A large, colorful banner and programs for the day lets students and guests know they are participating in an important school event. It makes the students feel recognized for their efforts too, and acknowledges all the teacher sponsors and other people who helped make the school history fair successful.

CLASS TOURS

Make a schedule for teachers to sign up at half-hour intervals or class periods to bring their class to visit the exhibits. At some schools, students are asked to judge at least two projects as a classroom assignment. History Fair students are very proud to show their work and to be recognized by their fellow students and other teachers and school administrators.

GREETERS

History students, NHS or other service organizations may be willing to help. If you plan to have guests and class tours you may want to train at least 10 students as tour guides and provide them with a ribbon, name tag or some kind of special identification. If you are a middle school have the greeters/tour guides escort students from and back to the classroom.

INVITATIONS & PUBLICITY

Be a show-off! Invite the principal and other administrators from your school, the PTA or Local School Council members and students' parents...go into the larger community and invite the district or area officers—particularly those responsible for social studies.... Also, consider enlisting the parents' support to work on the planning committee, judge, or assist at the school fair. Ask the school newspaper or writer's club to write your press releases. (Oh, and be sure to get a story in your own school's newspaper!) Ask the principal or a.p. to announce the

History Fair on the school's public marquee—and to congratulate the students who are advancing to the Regionals – just like sports champs!

Bring the community into your school too! Send invitations or press releases a few weeks ahead of the date of the school fair. Contact local newspapers, radio and TV stations as well as district newsletters/updates. Put flyers in local stores and posters in the school to create enthusiasm for the fair. Some of this publicity may assist you later with raising funds, sponsorship and/or getting judges.

JUDGING CONSIDERATIONS

Decide early how you will select the projects that will advance to the regional competition and what role the School History Fair will play in that process. Will you set up judging the way it is carried out at the History Fair event? Who will judge: the teachers only or the guests? If a combination of both, consider when the actual judging will take place: a certain block of time during the day or after the public event? Will students be interviewed or not? (If the former, take care to advise judges that cuteness is no criteria for advancement!) Do you have many exhibits? It may take several days to judge and then tally the top projects, so leave plenty of room in your schedule before the History Fair due date.

Start **recruiting** judges as soon as possible. The judges' responsibility will be to evaluate the projects from your school so that you can choose which projects advance to the regional History Fair. Good sources for judges are fellow teachers, retired teachers, librarians, alumni, school board or administration, staff and members from local historical societies; student teachers; knowledgeable parents, Local School Council members and community members. Local colleges often have Community Service offices that can be tapped into; also call the chair of the History Department.

Evaluating projects is a subjective process. If you orient your judges and they have all the same information the procedure can be a little less daunting. We recommend two judges for each project and assigning the judges about 6-8 projects to evaluate. This way each project has two score cards that can be averaged. In our orientation we ask the two judge evaluators to be within eight points of each other. Students can be very confused if the scores are too far apart. Keep the process transparent.

Many schools provide an **orientation** to all the judges beforehand: at the very least, give judges an instruction sheet, scoring rationale, and evaluation form. The Chicago Metro History Fair offers its forms online so you may either use them *or* adapt them for your own purposes. You can find the worksheet at www.chicagohistoryfair.org/1_worksheets.html and the score card at www.chicagohistoryfair.org/1_scorecards.html and http://www.chicagohistoryfair.org/1_rulesguidelines.html#judging%20rational.

If you are modeling your own School History Fair on the CMHF model, you will want to give a number to each project, and assign each judging team to approximately 6-8 exhibits. Number the spots for the exhibits so that judges can easily locate the exhibits they are judging, and keep the projects anonymous (take the list of student projects and assign each a number. Once

projects are selected, then “decode.”) You may want to keep students out of exhibit room during the judging. If you want judges to interview students, you can bring the students into the exhibit room for interviews with the judges after they have assessed the project. If students have documentaries (this may be where you’re A/V staff would come in handy) or performances use a large classroom. Schedule no more than 20 minutes for each performance or documentary – 10 minutes for the project and 5 to set-up and dismantle.

If only teachers’ evaluations are going to decide which projects advance, but you are inviting the public to see the exhibition, offer comment cards to your guests so that they feel more involved and students get the benefit of receiving praise from a wide range of people.

Above all have a great fair – Enjoy yourselves and celebrate your students’ achievements!

Date of School History Fair: _____

TASK	WHO IS DOING IT	DATE NEEDED	COMPLETED
Find & reserve appropriate space		September	
Decisions about judging process, food, tours, awards, etc.			
Community publicity and invitations to guests			
Produce banner? Order food?			
Recruit greeters & hosts			
Class tour schedule and sign-up			
Make a program			
Organize judging materials			
Set up --students submit projects day before --exhibits are organized and possibly numbered --times are assigned for performances and documentaries --banner --program --refreshments			
Judge orientation			
Judging and interviewing			
Tabulate results			
Announce results and celebrate			
School registration and <i>documentary entry</i> to CMHEC; give student entry form to advancing students			