



WORSHIP ACTION COALITION

# **FACILITATING COVID VACCINE ACCESS**



**GHC3**  
GLOBAL HEALTH  
Crisis Coordination Center



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## INTRODUCTION

Houses of worship and faith-based organizations have often been a cornerstone in the fight against inequities as well as a trusted source of information and guidance during troubled times. The current health crisis is no exception.

Vaccine access has emerged as one of the most concerning challenges to an equitable vaccine roll out process in the United States. Communities of color, rural towns, senior citizens, and low socioeconomic status neighborhoods have borne the brunt of this issue. Houses of worship can position themselves to be at the forefront of vaccine equity by tackling barriers to access that disproportionately impact underserved groups in their congregations through the formation of vaccine access committees entrusted with a wide range of duties.

This playbook is intended to support faith groups in this effort to deliver these key messages about vaccination. It is supplemented by the additional guides “**Setting up your House of Worship as a Vaccine Site**” and “**Developing Vaccine Messaging Programs.**” These materials are an initiative of the GHC3’s Worship Action Coalition as part of our commitment to help all faiths return safely to their places of worship and to collaborate with faith leaders to find real solutions to the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic.

The initial aim of the Worship Action Coalition was to create best practices for worshipping in-person safely. We are now focused on 1) the role of clergy as trusted sources of information on COVID vaccines, and 2) congregations at disproportionate risk for COVID-19 as locations where members and the surrounding community can get vaccinated, and 3) how both clergy and houses of worship can participate effectively in addressing health disparities. Together, we’re learning about the challenges and working to find real solutions.

If you have questions, concerns, or are interested in partnering with the Worship Action Coalition, send an email to [wac@GlobalHealthC3.org](mailto:wac@GlobalHealthC3.org).

## FACILITATING VACCINE ACCESS: IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

In an effort to facilitate access to COVID vaccines among your congregation, your leadership can start by identifying the existing barriers to access and determine which barriers present the biggest challenges to them and to residents of the surrounding community. When consensus is reached on the key barriers to address, determine the type and range of services needed to best serve your congregation. Leadership can then plan for and support the following implementation steps.

### 1. FORMING A VACCINE ACCESS COMMITTEE

Many houses of worship have successfully formed committees to ensure program success. This guide will offer tips for setting up your Vaccine Access Committee and how your committee can approach tackling these barriers.

The first step for leadership is to think about how you will recruit for your Vaccine Access Committee and who you will recruit. You may wish to consider reaching out to:

1. Established leaders within your congregation and trusted voices, and
2. Tapping into the energy of your community's youth for spreading the word and gathering volunteers.

You may also wish to consider offering incentives and recognition methods for attracting volunteers.

Once congregant volunteers are identified and committed to assist with the tasks above, establish your committee with a clear structure and defined roles, including:

- Committee Chair – oversees subgroups and directs the Committee as a whole.
- Committee Secretary – tracks the progress of committee volunteers, takes meeting notes and ensures that everyone is informed of their duties.
- Local Resource Liaison – establishes relationships between the Committee and local health and other city, county, and state authorities and programs.

The Committee Chair should assign leaders to look after subgroups focused on specific access-related

tasks; for instance, a person in charge of registration and scheduling appointments, another in charge of transportation, and so forth.

Determine the Committee resource needs.

- Consider on-site workspace and furniture requirements, as well as laptops, internet, and phone access.
- Identify and obtain the necessary financial resources and begin related purchases as needed.

Develop a simple work plan/task list and a method for progress monitoring and accountability.

Establish a preliminary meeting for your Vaccine Access Committee to discuss all the volunteers' roles and identify action items and deadlines. Make committee meetings a frequent occurrence to build upon the momentum and excitement of your first convening.

### 2. IDENTIFYING LOCAL RESOURCES

To supplement your Vaccine Access Committee, consider looking for resources beyond the grounds of your house of worship. Conduct an environmental scan for existing programs, services and resources that can be accessed for meeting your defined service delivery needs. Such resources might include:

- Local health and other city, county, and state authorities or programs.
  - See the [National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\) website](#) for a detailed directory of local health departments across the country.
  - Using a list provided by your local health department, State Department of Health or other local online source for information about COVID vaccination, contact local health centers, clinics, and hospitals (both private and public) to access information about ongoing vaccination services and community outreach that can be adapted for and used to inform your congregants and members of the surrounding communities.
- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs): An increasing number of CBOs now offer vaccine sites, including clinics, mobile sites, pop-up sites, and

other community events. They may assist in finding vaccines, financial support and other resources. You could even co-host a vaccination event with them.

- Local Chamber of Commerce: The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has a [directory of local Chambers of Commerce](#). Follow this link to find the one closest to you.
- Local service/charity organizations and societies: [Great Nonprofits](#) has a massive database of nonprofit organizations and charities that you can filter by state or territory and zip code.
- Assess your remaining service delivery and resource gaps and make a plan to close the identified gaps.
- Design your Committee with the flexibility to work together with local organizations to align with their capabilities, goals and objectives.



### 3. FINDING LOCAL IMMUNIZATION SITES

While vaccine sites are more widespread than they were during the initial vaccine rollout, many people facing barriers to vaccination still do not know where to look. Help your congregants locate vaccines by:

- Raising awareness of pre-identified local vaccine sites and their hours of operation.
- Raising awareness of websites and applications dedicated to finding vaccines, such as:
  - Text your zip code to 438829 (GETVAX) or 822862 (VACUNA) to get information on the location that is nearest to you with vaccines that are in stock and available immediately. The call center number is 1-800-232-0233.
  - Visit [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov). You can customize your search based on zip code, radius of search and type of vaccine available.
- Check your local department of public health's website for more information on vaccination sites in your state.
- Individually helping congregants locate vaccines. Those without access to the internet or those who live relatively far from the house of worship should be prioritized.
- Find ways to inform your congregation of the local vaccine access resources your committee located in this discovery process.
- See also the Worship Action Coalition playbook, "[\*\*Setting Up Your House of Worship as an Immunization Site.\*\*](#)"



#### 4. REGISTRATION AND SCHEDULING

Registration and scheduling present a barrier for individuals without access to the internet. Confusion over eligibility has also been and will continue to be an issue as vaccines become authorized for younger demographics.

As of June 1, 2021, this is the eligibility for each vaccine across all states and territories:

- **Pfizer-BioNTech – 12 years and older; 2 doses separated by 21 days**
- **Moderna – 18 years and older; 2 doses separated by 28 days**
- **Johnson & Johnson – 18 years and older; 1 dose**

How to approach registering and scheduling your congregants for appointments:

- Determine when and how you will help congregants locate vaccines and schedule appointments. Also note that many sites are now walk-up sites and appointments are not needed.
- Set aside time during or after services to make people aware of their options.
- If sufficient resources exist or can be accessed in your community, e.g., volunteer staff, space, laptops and phones, and office supplies, schedule vaccine location and registration sessions throughout the week for congregants to drop by and use your committee's resources and services.
- Post or email signup forms through which congregants can let you know their availability, and the committee can make appointments on their behalf.
- Set up a call center for congregants to call in to access your committee's services and make appointments without having to come in.
- Identify web-links and apps to help you schedule appointments, and organize volunteers to process appointments directly, whether in person or over the phone. There are many more places you can go to book appointments, including **Vaccines.gov**, but use the following websites as a starting point:

- **CVS**
- **Walgreens**
- **Walmart**
- **Kroger**
- **Publix**



#### 5. COORDINATION AND SCHEDULING TRANSPORTATION

While 90% of Americans live within five miles of a vaccine site, many still face barriers to physically accessing vaccines. Offer services for those lacking access to private or public transportation, including those who are disabled, infirm or facing other related challenges.

**How to approach coordinating transportation:**

- Determine what your house of worship can afford in terms of vehicles, drivers, and hours.
- Start a volunteer program in which vaccinated congregants set aside time to drive others in the congregation to vaccine sites. Consider optimal dates and times for offering transportation services to maximize transportation and drivers' schedules.
- Hire accessible vans for transporting individuals with physical disabilities.
- Explore resource availability through your local government and local foundations for accessing existing publicly funded transportation options and for establishing a short-term transportation coordination hub (e.g., funds for temporary staff, connectivity, shuttle/cab/private car services, and so forth).

You can also make your congregation aware that Lyft and Uber are offering free rides to vaccination sites May 24 thru July 4.

- **Lyft:** Riders will be able to get their ride code directly through the Lyft app or website. After providing a few

details, users will receive a code they can apply to rides requested in the Lyft app to and from a vaccination site near them. Ride codes will cover up to \$15 each for two rides. Ride codes can be used for Lyft rideshare, bike, or scooter rides during standard pharmacy operating hours (6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.).

- **Uber:** Users of the Uber app can click on the red Vaccine icon and follow the steps shown in the app to make a Walgreens vaccine appointment. They will be redirected to the Walgreens site to finish scheduling a vaccine appointment, then redirected back into the app to schedule a pickup time.

If local pharmacies or vaccine sites are within walking distance of your house of worship, consider making an event out of walking to get vaccinated. Consider weather, snacks/refreshments, and any health conditions among your congregants.

## 6. CHILDCARE AND SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS

A common concern for parents and caregivers looking to receive the vaccine has been that they do not have access to proper childcare for during their immunization appointment or afterwards in the case that they might be experiencing side effects from the vaccine. Consider childcare services that your house of worship could offer for support.



## How to provide childcare and practical support for parents and caregivers:

If your house of worship has pre-existing childcare services, modify these services to accommodate congregants with vaccine appointments. Consider how you can make childcare and practical support more accessible, such as waiving childcare fees for parents/caregivers with vaccine appointments and/or waving childcare fees for caregivers feeling ill after receiving their dose.

If your house of worship does not have pre-existing childcare services, consider what it would take to offer these services. Recruit volunteers in the congregation to look after the children, or hire professional, paid staff to do so. Consider:

- Budgetary and logistical constraints
- Site modifications
- Insurance liability
- Certification and licensing requirements in your state
- Background checks (even for volunteers)
- The number of children you could look after given staffing and space modifications
- Whether you have the capacity to do drop-off daycare in addition to daycare sign-ups. If you are short on staff, space, and budget ask parents and caregivers to let you know in advance when they will need to utilize your childcare services.

If you are not financially and logistically able to offer childcare services, identify local, cost-effective daycare centers for congregants with children.

## 7. GETTING THE WORD OUT ABOUT YOUR VACCINE ACCESS COMMITTEE

Growing your base of volunteers and recruiting members for your Vaccine Access Committee will require a messaging effort. Consider the following actions:

- If your house of worship has an active social media presence, take advantage of this existing infrastructure to get the word out about your Committee.
- If your house of worship does not have an active social media presence, maybe this is the time to establish your house of worship online and share critical vaccine-related information while also spreading the word about the Committee. Determine what social media platform is best for these purposes.
  - Tik Tok, Instagram, and Snapchat, tend to skew toward younger audiences, while Facebook tends to skew towards slightly older demographics.





- The more platforms you can handle, the more people you can reach. Successful committees have mentioned Tik Tok and Instagram as highly successful channels for encouraging people to get the vaccine and letting them know where to get it.
- Also consider uploading videos to YouTube stressing the importance of vaccination and letting people know where they can go to get immunized.
- Not every one of your congregants will be on social media, or the internet for that matter. If your house of worship sends out newsletters through email, advertise there. Create and post flyers describing your Committee's services. Also consider mentioning your Committee during services and encouraging advertisement through word of mouth.
- Refer to our playbook on "**Developing Vaccine Messaging Programs**" for approaches and methods for congregant messaging and informing the surrounding community.

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR YOUR PROGRAM

**How will you recruit for your vaccine access committee?  
Who will you recruit?**

- Consider established leaders within your congregation and trusted voices.
- Consider tapping into the energy of your community's youth for spreading the word and gathering volunteers.
- Consider incentives and recognition methods.

**What barriers to access will you prioritize confronting first? What barriers present the biggest challenge to your community?**

- Consider potential impact but also logistical and financial limitations.

**What is the best mode of messaging your committee's services to your congregation? What is the best mode of**

**raising awareness about other access-related services to your congregation?**

- Focus on information, no or low-cost options.
- Determine a Committee budget and set the appropriate funds aside.
- Consider social media, email blasts, bulletins, announcements during services.
- Consider messengers and message wording.

**How can you use your local health authority as the nexus for accessing practical guidance and the involvement of other municipal and county resources?**

- See the [National Association of County and City Health Officials \(NACCHO\) website](https://www.naccho.org/) for a detailed directory of local health departments across the country.

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### A Common Question:

Vaccines are increasingly being offered without the need for appointments; many retailers and pharmacies are now allowing walk-ins. **Should your committee still help with the scheduling of vaccination appointments?**

- Yes! Booking appointments in advance can motivate those who do not prioritize getting vaccinated, as well as those who only want one specific vaccine brand, to stick with a set time for immunization and see it through.
- Make congregants aware of local pharmacies that offer walk-in appointments, especially for those who might have unpredictable schedules or do not know how to register online. This will eliminate barriers to access such as time and the internet.

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Global Health Crisis Coordination Center (GHC3) mobilizes corporations and NGOs to collaborate with Federal, State, Local, and Tribal leadership for real-time problem solving and coordination during health-related crises. Following 18 months of funded planning, GHC3 was officially launched by the Center of Global Health Innovation on March 13, 2020, at the request of the CDC Foundation to assist with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Worship Action Committee is a part of GHC3's Back 2 Worship initiative aimed at working with faith and religious leaders to create the best practices for worshipping safely. To that end, we have held several roundtables with prioritized input from leaders whose communities are at increased risk for severe COVID-19 outcomes.

At our roundtables, we have been focusing principally on 1) the role of clergy as trusted sources of information on COVID vaccines, 2) houses of worship, as locations where people (from congregation and the surrounding community) can get vaccinated, and 3) how both clergy and houses of worship can participate effectively in addressing health disparities. We strive to include religious leaders, especially those representing congregations at high risk, as well as national faith organizations that could be influential in addressing vaccine hesitancy. These playbooks have been created with the valuable input of our diverse coalition of faith leaders at our interfaith roundtable working groups.



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