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## Creating Your Own Give Back Day

A great way for your organization to give back to the community and help move the lab industry forward

### About COLA

COLA accredits almost 8,000 medical laboratories and provides the clinical laboratory with a program of education, consultation and accreditation. The organization is an independent, non-profit accreditor whose education program and standards enables clinical laboratories and staff to meet U.S. CLIA and other regulatory requirements. For more information about COLA accreditation services and educational products, and online educational opportunities, please visit COLA's web site at [www.cola.org](http://www.cola.org) or [colainsider.com](http://colainsider.com)

### WHAT IS A GIVE BACK DAY?

Glad you asked. In its simplest form, a **Give Back Day** is an organizational initiative that empowers your staff at all levels to "give back" to the local community by educating young students on the laboratory industry. It is best done by going into a local elementary or middle school and engaging the students in lab demonstrations and getting them animated about the unknown world of laboratory medicine. It also doesn't hurt to serve pizza.

### WHY A GIVE BACK DAY?

A healthcare crisis is quietly unfolding in our nation's laboratories. This crisis has developed largely off the public's radar screen. If not resolved, it can adversely impact the lives of every American.

Lab testing has an estimated impact on over 70 percent of medical decisions. But according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), more than 40,000 current lab jobs are vacant in the United States. But the size of tomorrow's projected shortage is even more daunting.

Right now 14,000 new lab professionals are needed annually, yet educational programs produce only 5,000 per year. What's more, 36 percent of lab workers are baby boomers ages 50-59 rapidly approaching retirement.

The good news: A lab career offers young people a stable, attractive, potentially lucrative professional path during economically challenging times. *US News and World Report* chose "Laboratory Technicians" as one of the best careers of 2011.

The **Give Back Day** concept is designed to educate young people about the many job opportunities that exist in laboratory science careers, and the enormous contributions these workers make to delivery of the kind of safe and effective care patients deserve.

### WHERE DID THIS IDEA COME FROM?

Give Back Day was an initiative developed by COLA, a national laboratory accreditation organization, to have its staff "give back" to the local community by educating young people about the laboratory world and the job opportunities it offers. The success of the Give Back

Day prompted COLA to develop this "How To" kit to enable other organizations to spread the word about career opportunities in the lab industry.

### HOW GIVE BACK DAY WORKS.

COLA introduced over 30 students in two Baltimore schools to the exciting world of laboratory sciences. COLA's CEO and members of the COLA team visited both Rayner Browne Academy and Collington Square School in East Baltimore. After serving a pizza lunch to and interacting with the students, team COLA staged a series of exciting lab demonstrations. Experiments allowed students to discover polymer reactions by making their own slime, determining the difference between the pH levels of acids and bases, and viewing a variety of structures inside the human body.

By all accounts, the kids found the experience illuminating and valuable. At one of the schools, a majority of students proudly raised their hands when asked if they wanted to be laboratorians.



### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO OUR ORGANIZATION?

First and foremost, the **Give Back Day** is a great way to involve your staff in a civic and service minded way. It enables them to bond together for a good cause outside of the office. You can encourage team building through T-shirts that feature your organization name and the **Give Back Day** event.

Externally it is an excellent means to promote your organization via a cause marketing focus. Research shows that consumers and the public at large respect organizations that support causes by featuring a mission that goes beyond bottom line.

The **Give Back Day** is also an opportunity to align your company with other high profile local organizations and non-profits. It is a win-win for you and them. Your CEO and top management can also garner key exposure in local and trade media to position them as business leaders with a civic-minded focus.

### HOW DO WE GET STARTED?

First, commit to having a **Give Back Day** (the easy part). Then, form an internal **Give Back Day** task force. This can be 4-5 staff members who will really be the go-to team in making the event happen. They can then assign their own roles and responsibilities.

The next step is to secure elementary or middle school to host your **Give Back Day**. Partnering with another community organization – for example, COLA joined forces with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Maryland and the Maryland Mentoring Partnership – can make this part easier.

### WHAT ARE THE KEY COMPONENTS?

Here are the key steps to follow but you should also feel free to add other elements to make your Give Back day unique. This is a guideline to follow but your team may have other ideas. Go for it!

- Contact potential partners such as your local Big Brothers Big Sisters Chapter and discuss the concept. Schedule a face-to-face meeting. Bring this folder.
- Identify a school/schools willing to participate
- Select a school and confirm a date 3-4 months in advance
- Meet in person with the school(s) and review the space/location and time needed (allocate 2-3 hours).
- Contact other local civic officials and organizations to join in event.
- Prepare your publicity plan (see next session)
- Develop your program content and curriculum for the event. Involve your leadership team.
- Decide what materials will be needed (i.e. throw away lab coats and goggles, glue, borax, etc.). Procure materials (use a Task Force Member)
- Locate and purchase requisite safety materials for the kids. Performing an Internet search for “lab coats for kids” and “lab goggles for kids” will direct you to a number of vendors.
- Send out a final PR blast prior to the event.
- Arrive at event 60-90 minutes early. Have a team ready conduct experiments. Plan to offer three different types of experiments at different stations. (Information about three proposed experiments worth considering is contained in the back pocket).

### HOW DO I PUBLICIZE GIVE BACK DAY?

- Create a press release with details about your event, using the attached release as a model.
- Develop a list of local media contacts in your area. Be sure to include weekly and daily newspapers, and local TV and radio station assignment editors. Research contact personnel at media outlets online to be sure you are directing your press announcement to the right person. You can email the press release or snail mail it if you have the time.
- Send out your press release at least 7-10 days in advance of your event.



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- Post your release on Facebook and send a link to an online version of the release via Twitter if you are using social media tools to promote your event.
- Prepare a Media Advisory (Sample enclosed for your customization) and send to local TV and radio and key print contacts via FAX or email one day prior to your event.
- Call all key media contacts the monitoring of your events to assess who is planning to attend.
- Consider hiring a photographer for the event so that you use them on your website, your social media sites, or share them after the event with members of the media who did not attend or did not bring a photographer.
- Develop a list of Q&A Talking Points that your organization's spokesperson(s) can offer to in advance of any media interviews.
- Bring along any printed materials you may want to pass along to media who are covering event, including but not limited to, brochures, fact sheets, copy of press release, spokesperson's bio, etc.

### **NOW WHAT?**

GO for it. You will be amazed at how children light up once they experience the wondrous world of laboratory medicine. Your organization will also see a transformation as your staff bond and give back to the community. Get started now. Call one of your community organizations to start a partnership now. Explain the concept. Get a meeting. You will be on your way to the start of something big for you and the lab profession.