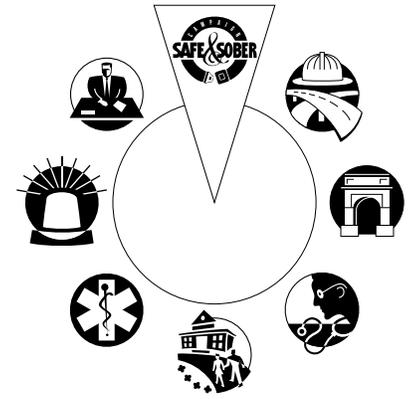


Underage drinking is a community problem that demands a solution. When most of us think of the word “enable,” we relate it to an individual “enabling” another to engage in harmful or potentially destructive behavior. Communities enable as well when they tolerate underage drinking, despite the fact that it is against the law. Individuals and organizations need to confront the seriousness of this problem. It is an illegal, potentially dangerous act.

We must not regard underage drinking as merely a “right of passage” or a “phase.” Individuals and organizations need to confront the severity of the problem. This means debunking myths about alcohol use by youth. Why should someone who is not directly involved with your organization become concerned about underage drinking? Why should they worry if, after all, “it’s only beer?” Community leaders must be prepared to answer these questions when assembling a coalition that will enlist support from parents, educators, and other community leaders.



Youth Are the Employees & Parents of the Future

Today’s youth are tomorrow’s leaders. Our nation’s productivity and ability to compete in the world market depends on their ability to produce. A teen who abuses alcohol can grow to become a worker who abuses alcohol, which results in decreased productivity and increased health care costs. These avoidable expenses rob individual businesses and our society as a whole. A teen who abuses alcohol may also become an abusive parent or spouse whose behavior demands attention and intervention from social service organizations, the medical community, and the justice system. Youth who start drinking at very early ages and continue to abuse alcohol create untold problems for society.

What Is a “Coalition”?

A coalition is “a diverse group of community partners who join to solve a common problem.” A coalition to prevent underage drinking should be composed of a diverse group of community partners who have united to prevent underage drinking. If the coalition is effective, the “payoff” will include reduced injuries and deaths from motor vehicle crashes, along with reduced costs associated with those crashes. There are many other benefits as well. Coalitions have been around for a long time. The American Revolution was a grassroots coalition movement, as were the civil rights and women’s movements. Grassroots coalitions can be very powerful when they represent all segments of the community.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is a good example of a coalition. MADD is made up of a group of ordinary citizens who changed the way society views impaired driving. Before MADD, no one ever thought twice about having “one for the road.” By many, it was a “badge of honor” to see how many drinks he or she could consume and still drive. Yet MADD helped to change society’s perception of drinking and driving, and this saved lives.

Who Should Participate?

Although a coalition should be as broad-based and inclusive as possible, the size of the coalition must be manageable in order to accomplish anything. Determining the appropriate size is a key consideration. The coalition cannot be too small, because everyone probably cannot attend every meeting. There must be enough people at each meeting to make decisions for the group.

“How-to” Guide to Coalition Building

Following are some helpful steps to follow before forming a coalition.

Getting Started

Ask three or four other individuals who are affiliated with your current organization and/or who are well-connected in the community to participate in a brainstorming session. Make sure they understand the goals of your proposed coalition and the limited purpose of this initial session. Tell them you need their help in identifying people who could be enlisted to join the coalition.

Draft a letter of invitation asking identified potential members to attend an organizational meeting. It is a good idea to have the letter signed by a prominent individual who is recognized in the community and who is willing to lend his or her prestige to the coalition-building task. An elected official, a judge, the head of a government agency, the police chief, a prominent business person, or a combination of these individuals would be excellent choices.

Develop the roles and responsibilities of coalition members. The start-up group may also want to draft a "mission statement." Be sure to include the number of times the group will meet throughout the year, the times of the meetings, and what is expected of the group. Have some activity or activities already developed to include in the roles and responsibilities. For instance, the first activity might be a needs assessment that asks individuals to distribute a market survey to people in their neighborhoods or in their organization.

After your letter has been sent, make a follow-up phone call two days before the meeting to remind individuals to attend.

Following is a list of possible organizations that could be involved in an underage drinking prevention coalition. To form a broad-based coalition, get representation from many of these groups. Are there other groups or individuals in your community who should be invited to participate?

- Law enforcement, such as police and local sheriffs' departments;
- Judges and prosecutors (both juvenile and adult), juvenile justice system representatives such as probation and children and family services support personnel;
- Alcohol Beverage Control Board members or representatives from licensing organizations;
- Substance abuse prevention and treatment personnel;
- Recreation departments that serve youth;
- Elected officials;
- Health care providers;
- Educators and school administrators, both secondary and university level;
- Businesses, especially those that employ underage youth (fast food, movie theaters, amusement parks), business settings where youth often congregate (such as shopping malls);
- Alcohol industry representatives (bars, restaurants, liquor stores, beer distributors);

- Insurance companies;
- Health care companies;
- Chambers of Commerce;
- Youth entertainment (arenas, record and video stores);
- Parent groups, such as the PTA;
- The medical community (doctors, nurses, children's hospitals);
- The military (such as the recruiters for the different branches of the military);
- Churches;
- Media (especially radio and television);
- Civic groups (Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, etc.);
- YMCAs;
- Boys and Girls Clubs, Girl Scouts, and Boy Scouts; and
- Underage youth from middle school, high school, and college levels.

How to Keep Interest and Action High

Success is the best way to keep people involved in a coalition. Everybody loves to be a winner. Look for ways in which different groups' goals overlap and capitalize on them so that everyone can be a winner. Every coalition's achievement does not need to be big or flashy. In fact, small victories, in which members of your coalition actively participate, keep people motivated and willing to carry on. Celebrate those victories. Host a small party, reception, or awards ceremony to recognize individuals who played key roles in the coalition's successes.

Recognition will go a long way, particularly when times get tough and successes are harder to achieve.

To solicit people's involvement in a coalition, you must show what they can do and what is in it for them. For instance, individuals involved in impaired driving prevention efforts may find that an underage drinking prevention coalition reaffirms what they are doing, and energizes them if their efforts have gotten stale. The coalition can build networks to support its activities and can allow members to meet new people and learn about new ideas or innovative projects and approaches. The coalition can stimulate increased financial support.

Each coalition member must perceive a payoff for his/her organization for participating in the coalition. Following are some examples of how the coalition can support various participating organizations:

- For schools, the coalition can lift the burden of being perceived as society's only social engineers;
- For law enforcement, the coalition can help reduce alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes, death, injury, and crime;
- For businesses, the coalition's work can improve the productivity of future workers and current workers whose underage children may be in trouble, thereby diverting the attention of employees away from their jobs;
- For the health care community as well as the auto and health insurance industries, the coalition can reduce alcohol-related injuries caused by trauma and reduce associated costs; and
- For treatment providers, the coalition will provide strong community support for their efforts.

Some Helpful "Do's" and "Don'ts" for Coalition Building

If a coalition is to be successful over both the short and long terms, coalition organizers should follow some simple do's and don'ts.

Some Helpful Do's

- Be inclusive -- don't limit the types of organizations and individuals to approach for membership.
- Understand the needs and concerns of each prospective member and organization. Make sure everyone understands what you are trying to accomplish and how you think they can help. Most larger organizations usually need time to plan and include coalition activities within their current work. Don't expect everybody to drop everything to join your coalition.
- Be patient -- this seems to be a recurring theme, but a necessary one.
- Be very clear about the roles and responsibilities of the coalition. People need to understand what is expected of them. They can help develop a work plan, but that should be included in their roles and responsibilities. Ambiguity only leads to confusion and this can cause people to drop out of the coalition.
- Develop specific activities. The best way to keep people involved and motivated is to give them responsibilities to fulfill and make sure their tasks are short and sweet.

- Ask for ideas, suggestions, and help. When asking for help and assistance, the organizer or leader needs to be a facilitator, not a speaker. That individual also needs to make sure all coalition members offer their views, and that people who might be shy are called upon to give their opinions. Keeping track of every suggestion is also important -- make sure that everyone's opinions and views are counted. The facilitation process should lead to members "buying-in" to the coalition's goals, because people feel their contributions are valued.

Some Helpful Don'ts

- Don't be demanding -- appreciate everyone's contribution.
- Don't be impatient -- democracy works, but it takes time.
- Don't be confusing -- state plans clearly and concisely.
- Don't lecture -- you are not in a classroom.
- Don't waste time -- people's lives are too busy.
- Don't forget reminders - when sending out a meeting notice, follow-up with a phone call the day before the meeting to remind people.
- Don't forget newsletters, minutes, and regular updates.

Elected Leaders

Elected community leaders can and should be an important partner(s) in any community traffic safety coalition. They can call the first meeting, issue the invitations, and involve business, enforcement, and other civic leaders in activities of interest to them.

Why would elected leaders invest their scarce time and energy on behalf of a community effort to reduce crashes, deaths, and injuries? Because it can help them answer the WII-FM (What's In It For Me) question. As an elected leader in the community, they want to know how traffic safety initiatives will save human suffering of the citizens. They will be interested in the cost effectiveness of the initiatives. They want to lead their communities in positive and constructive programs which promote their community as a good place to live and work.

The challenge is to gain access to the elected civic leader, often through contacts who know them on a personal or professional level. Once a marketing strategy is developed which highlights the benefits to the leader (WII-FM), the community, citizens, and businesses, identify the specific action items the civic leader(s) can do for the effort. Examples include inviting other civic, business, and enforcement officials to participate; attending the appropriate press event(s) or meeting(s); and issuing the appropriate executive guidance to department heads. Once they see the positive reaction to initial efforts, it will be easier to keep them involved as a coalition's injury prevention activities evolve.

A Successful Community Coalition

In April 1992, Montgomery County, Maryland launched *Drawing the Line on Under 21 Alcohol Use*, a comprehensive, county-wide campaign that coalesced existing efforts and channeled new initiatives. A broad-based coalition of community partners pulled together the following components for the *Drawing the Line* program:

- Vigorous enforcement of the laws by ten police agencies from county, state, and federal jurisdictions within the county, as well as the Board of License Commissioners (the county alcohol beverage control agency);
- Increased attention to the seriousness of alcohol-related offenses involving minors (by the Department of Juvenile Services and the judiciary);
- Educational programs for adults and youth through schools, parent organizations, the media, community groups, and county government;
- A series of alcohol-free activities for youth at restaurants, recreation centers, and other sites;
- Programs engaging business leaders and others who have not typically been involved in underage drinking prevention, such as a group of local hotels serving the county; and
- Advocacy for legislation to reduce underage drinking.

Since the program was implemented, significant progress has been made in all areas: enforcement, education, and adult and youth involvement. In addition to ongoing efforts, *Drawing the Line* has successfully used short-term, multi-agency task forces to address specific issues. An Alcohol Enforcement Unit has been established in the county police department and police now write more citations when minors are in possession of alcohol, rather than simply pouring it out and sending young people on their way. When the program began in 1992, liquor licensees checked IDs only 30 percent of the time. Vigorous enforcement programs coupled with excellent cooperation from retail establishments has increased the compliance rate to 91 percent in 1995.

More than 500 individuals have received intensive training in prevention. Parents, youth, and teachers who received the training are empowered to work with other individuals and groups. The county recreation department has expanded its alcohol-free activities for youth and has helped train businesses in sponsoring youth events. Finally, a survey found a high degree of awareness of underage drinking prevention efforts among adults in the county.

For more information on *Drawing the Line*, contact:

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