



Alcohol Policy: Getting Started

Introduction

When engaging in alcohol policy strategies, it can be helpful to make an action plan that will require you to do the following:

- Identify a goal
- Determine who is engaged
- Identify other stakeholders and voices
- Ensure **equitable** participation of the community, populations, and stakeholders

This handout provides an overview of each of these steps.

Identify a Goal

What needs to be changed? What is the problem that needs to be solved? With clarity of purpose, you can begin the important process of changing the conditions to reduce or eliminate the problem. It is important that the impact of the problems on the community should be engaged in the beginning to identify the problem. Clarity of purpose and sticking to the goal can go a long way when seeking solutions. Keep in mind that knowing data is not enough, there needs to be understandable solutions to change the data.

Determine Who Is Engaged

This piece is not meant to exclude anyone but to provide clarity about what you need to do **and** in what system. For example, if you are working on school policy changes, you should have parent involvement, among others. If you want to have schools engage in an evidence-based or informed screening for alcohol and other drugs, having those who have a stake in schools and reducing substance use at the table is key.

If you are working on improving a community organization's standards for allowing alcohol at their events, you should include those supporters and funders involved, as well as those who benefit (or have been harmed) by actions of the organization. An example may be something like: Do you have domestic violence shelters having fundraisers at breweries? The data is clear on alcohol's role in fueling domestic violence and alcohol fueling problems. Who can help you make the necessary organizational policy changes?

Identify Other Stakeholders and Voices

Too often, we think we know who should be involved in these efforts. However, it is important that you/your organization/coalition hold space for inviting new voices to participate. The data can show a problem, but it may not show who is most harmed. There may be tribal members with valuable information and stories to share about ensuring school resources are culturally



appropriate. For example, there are issues with local or state agencies that are concerned about the issue. Perhaps the business community is concerned about alcohol use with youth. They may look at the productivity of the workforce and would support initiatives to screen and support teens that are struggling. It's possible that young people do not want to play soccer at the field the local brewery owns. You will never know unless you ask.

Ensure *Equitable* Participation of the Community, Populations, and Stakeholders

Now you have a number of different voices and perspectives at the table. Make sure there are ground rules so that everyone gets heard. Sharing power is difficult and building trust takes time. However, if you have a unifying goal, it is possible to recognize assets that everyone brings to the table to make change. Thoughtful facilitation of the group you have organized is important as well as being transparent about next steps. This is not to say this is easy, but grounding people on why you are working together can help remove barriers and help begin the change needed for power dynamics. Below are several action steps you can take when preparing to engage new partners.

- Determine the best approach with your partners given their history with the issue, cultural norms, existing relationships, and needs.
- Ensure the information provided is culturally responsive to the needs of stakeholder groups or focus population(s).
- Take time to build relationships and to get to know potential partners.
- Use a culturally humble approach assuming there are things you need to learn from and about this partner.

References

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