


Campus and Community Coalitions in AOD Prevention

by Robert Zimmerman

 Changing the environment that affects decisions about use of alcohol and other drugs has emerged as a key to reducing substance use problems among college and university students. The student environment, however, is not limited to the campus. Education, counseling, and campus-based prevention policies and activities cannot succeed if a campus is surrounded by a community offering students easy access to alcohol and other drugs and tolerating conditions that encourage underage and high-risk substance use. Campus and community coalitions based on principles of environmental management are the answer.

Research is making the case for campus and community prevention coalitions. The College Drinking Task Force of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism emphasizes that research strongly supports the effectiveness of prevention strategies that treat a college and its surrounding community as a single environment. In its 2002 report the Task Force points out that environmental influences as well as individual student characteristics affect alcohol consumption, and the most effective strategies are those that extend beyond the campus itself to encompass the surrounding community.¹

A 2003 report of the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine (IOM) declares that building a coalition between campus and community is a vital component of effective alcohol and other drug prevention efforts by colleges and universities. Campuses and local communities have a "reciprocal influence on one another in relation to college student alcohol use," the report declares. Their collaboration allows for the pooling of resources to provide opportunities for sponsoring joint programs and for technical assistance and training. Participants in coalitions deliver consistent and unified messages to make their case for policies and programs leading to environmental change.²

Examples of campus and community coalitions are varied and come from all over the United States. The American Medical Association (AMA) has

reported early signs of success in 10 campus and community partnerships it is supporting in a program called A Matter of Degree (AMOD). High-risk drinking rates declined from 64 percent to 55 percent at the University of Nebraska in the first four years of a coalition bringing the university together with agencies in the city of Lincoln. Lehigh University attributes a dramatic reduction in alcohol-related crimes on campus to the work of a campus and community coalition. The University of Colorado joined with the city of Boulder in a partnership that led to a ban on beer sales in its football stadium and a 75 percent decline in game-day arrests. The Georgia Institute of Technology saw reductions in both high-risk drinking and student DUI rates after collaborating with the city of Atlanta to gain adoption of a statewide keg registration law. A coalition uniting the University of Vermont and the city of Burlington led to the development of a program providing responsible beverage service training for all bar owners, managers, and servers.³

Rather than blaming students for their behavior or trying to persuade them to stop drinking, says the AMA group, participants in AMOD are identifying the environmental factors that encourage high-risk alcohol use and are working together to create positive changes. "The AMOD model emphasizes the university as a dynamic community force—one that can positively or negatively affect the health of its students, its staff, and the wider community. Change is found to come not just through discussion and persuasion but from active, purposeful changes in environments."⁴

Why We Need Campus and Community Coalitions

Aspects of the campus and community environment that influence student drinking include the overconcentration of alcohol outlets in neighborhoods adjacent to the campus, aggressive marketing of alcohol to the student population, and lax or spotty enforcement of laws governing sale and consumption of

alcohol and driving under the influence. In addition, advertising messages originating off campus may feed a perception that high-risk drinking is a normal part of college life, and the community frequently offers too few social and recreational opportunities that do not depend on alcohol availability for their appeal. Campus and community coalitions constitute the best way to plan and carry out prevention strategies that lead to sustainable change in these areas of student life.

Colleges and universities are natural allies of community agencies and organizations concerned about alcohol problems, even when they see those problems from different perspectives. What campuses see as drinking behavior threatening the health, safety, and academic success of students may be perceived by the general community as a source of noise and vandalism lowering the quality of life in neighborhoods near the campus.

Coalitions provide an opportunity to avoid misunderstandings between the student population and neighboring communities. Imposing limitations on alcohol consumption on campus, for example, may be seen in the community as an effort to shift a problem to off-campus neighborhoods. The University at Albany, State University of New York, has emphasized in its coalition with the city of Albany that it is devoted to improving the quality of life both for students living off campus and for their landlords and neighbors. Ensuring that community residents understand the purpose of a coalition helps gain participation and public support for its activities.⁵ The University of Vermont and agencies in the surrounding city of Burlington called their effort the "Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment," making the point that the learning environment is a responsibility of both the university and the community.⁴

Campus and community coalitions typically represent a wide range of interests from diverse constituencies. Members commit to working toward a common



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goal, have a shared mission, participate in making decisions about coalition activities, and help identify resources for these activities. By joining in a prevention partnership with community leaders, a college or university can demonstrate that it shares concern about the effects of student drinking beyond its campus boundaries.

New Lines of Communication

Coalitions open new lines of communication between campus and community leaders. The coalition linking Western Washington University (WWU) and the city of Bellingham demonstrates the potential breadth of participation. It includes not only WWU students, faculty, and staff but also representatives of the local courts, police department, city council, bar and restaurant association, neighborhood associations and landlords, agencies dealing with domestic violence and sexual assault, and the state liquor control agency.⁶

Many people both on and off campus are not familiar with principles of environmental management to reduce alcohol and other drug problems. Often, townspeople feel it is the responsibility of the college or university to control students' behavior and do not recognize that the community helps to create the conditions that discourage high-risk drinking and rowdiness. The NU Directions coalition bringing together the University of Nebraska and the city of Lincoln employed a full-time media communications director to oversee a variety of media advocacy and communications activities to gain support for its prevention program. Fact sheets backing up the need for policy changes were prepared for all NU Directions spokespersons seeking support for the effort in the community.⁴

The size and organizational structure of a coalition evolve as its strategies unfold. The core group organizing a coalition may be no more than a handful of campus and community leaders who lay the groundwork for the coalition and then expand its membership as strategies are developed and the need for participation of other stakeholders is defined. Support from the top administrator of the college or university, as well as the mayor or other key community leaders, helps ensure the participation of others needed for the coalition's ongoing activities. The Stepping Up coalition linking the University of Iowa and Iowa City works under a 16-member executive committee made up of city and university officials,

students, law enforcement agencies, and business owners. The executive committee leads four task forces on accessibility, enforcement, outreach, and social activities.⁴ The 21-member Partnership Council at the University of Wisconsin in Madison has a tripartite membership: seven students, seven faculty or staff members, and seven community representatives.⁷ The Building Responsibility Coalition uniting the University of Delaware with the city of Newark has grown to include 130 people serving on seven committees, councils, and subgroups. This coalition uses a technique called "intentional organizing" to ensure that participants are assigned to activities reflecting their concerns and their ability to help bring about change.⁴ The Alcohol Summit at the University of Missouri, Columbia, uses Action Teams that meet monthly to pursue their goals in assigned areas of responsibility, eliminating the need for frequent meetings of the entire coalition.⁸

Coalitions give colleges and universities an opportunity to educate community leaders about research pointing to factors in the environment that contribute to alcohol problems in both the student and nonstudent population. The 2001 Youth Access to Alcohol Survey supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found substantial public support for such prevention strategies as restricting drinking in public, penalizing adults who provide alcohol to minors, and requiring training for alcoholic beverage servers and bar owners.⁹ These measures are typical of those supported by campus and community coalitions working to change the environment surrounding student drinking. Neighborhoods close to a campus typically have a higher density of alcohol outlets, and coalitions often enjoy their strongest support from residents in neighborhoods surrounding the campus.

Partnerships for Prevention

Coalitions lead to improved collaboration between campus and community police. They foster zoning reforms to reduce the concentration of alcohol outlets near a campus. They create programs providing responsible beverage service training at on-campus events where alcohol is available and for servers in bars and restaurants in the community. In San Diego, a coalition including San Diego State University, the local association of bar and restaurant owners, and the state Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control created a College Bar Task Force offering responsible beverage service training to

servers not only in campus neighborhoods but at bars in more distant beach areas popular with students.¹⁰ The Albany coalition began in 1990 as an effort to improve relations between students living off campus and their neighbors but over the years grew to include a variety of off-campus prevention strategies. As a participant in the Albany coalition, the Empire State Restaurant and Tavern Association worked out a voluntary "Tavern Owner Advertisement Agreement" that commits Albany owners to responsible advertising and promotion practices and permits them to display signs calling attention to their participation. By 2003 there were 19 taverns cooperating in the program. The Albany coalition also established a hotline for neighborhood residents and off-campus students to report problems.¹¹

Representatives of the University of Delaware-Newark coalition were invited to serve on a Mayor's Alcohol Commission that increased the city's land-use and licensing powers to eliminate high-risk promotional activities associated with student drinking behavior in off-campus neighborhoods.⁴ This coalition and others have conducted "last drink" surveys of alcohol offenders to identify problem bars that serve patrons to the point of intoxication.

The WWU-Bellingham coalition fostered a Neighborhood Education Campaign that distributed "Be Smart—Be Safe" doorknockers providing tips on how to recognize and respond to alcohol emergencies, as well as information from the Bellingham Police Department about the legal consequences of alcohol infractions. In one recent quarter the department's Party Patrol investigated 26 parties and issued 9 citations for furnishing alcohol to minors, 80 for minors in possession, and 29 for disorderly conduct. The same coalition enlisted the help of the Washington State Liquor Control Board to develop a voluntary program based on the principle that the hospitality industry has a role in providing healthy social settings for students off campus. The coalition also distributes a booklet titled "101 Things to Do While at WWU" pointing out places and activities on and around the Bellingham campus that do not rely on alcohol for their appeal.⁶

Coalitions can tackle the problem of counterfeit ID documents. The Louisiana State University/Baton Rouge Campus-Community Coalition for Change developed a plan in collaboration with state agencies to use copyright laws to counter the production and sale of fake IDs.¹² The NU Directions coalition in



Nebraska mounted a successful campaign to reform the state's driver's license system as a strategy aimed at falsified IDs.⁴

Coalitions may at times encounter a controversy that serves as a lightning rod for public concern and dramatizes an environmental management issue. The Stepping Up coalition in Iowa City worked with a neighborhood association to raise an outcry over plans by a business firm to convert a landmark soda fountain near the university campus into a liquor store. Faced with vocal opposition that included a protest by the president of the university, the firm dropped the idea.⁴

Colleges and universities need to do their homework before developing prevention partnerships with the community. An assessment of environmental factors affecting student drinking will help identify prevention goals for a coalition, but it may also point to a need for on-campus strategies that are the sole responsibility of campus administrators. Universities and colleges entering coalitions must put campus policies and programs into place that reflect their own commitment to change if they expect community leaders to embrace broader policies that might be resisted by certain constituencies.

The U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention provides training for local groups forming coalitions, helping them to develop strategic plans, seek resources for their activities, and put evaluation strategies in place to monitor their success. While surveys, police statistics, student focus groups, and anecdotal data are important to make a case for environmental change, this information also provides a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of prevention strategies over a period of time.

Statewide Initiatives

The ideal vehicle for promoting the formation of campus and community coalitions at the local level is a statewide prevention initiative, that is, a concerted effort by institutions of higher education, state government officials, and community organizations to change aspects of the campus and community environment that contribute to high-risk drinking and other drug use. A central goal of such statewide efforts is to increase the number of campus and community coalitions implementing environmental strategies. To that end, initiatives offer coalitions training, consultation, funding, evaluation

support, and opportunities to network with other campuses. These services focus on building coalitions' capacity to conduct a problem-oriented strategic plan, forge strategic partnerships, and implement environmental change.

While campus and community coalitions bring together an array of key partners locally, statewide initiatives foster collaboration among higher-level participants; in turn, their involvement may bring more attention and political credibility to the state-level prevention efforts. Through a statewide initiative a range of stakeholders—college administrators; state officials; community coalitions to reduce underage drinking or "for drug-free youth"; and other professional or trade associations (for chiefs of police or the hospitality industry, for example)—can collaborate to influence public policy. This approach is especially effective in limiting availability, increasing enforcement, and restricting marketing and promotion.

In Missouri, a statewide initiative brings together representatives of 12 state colleges and universities, along with state agencies dealing with liquor control, alcohol and other drug abuse, and traffic safety. It has spawned dual programs called Partners in Prevention and Partners in Environmental Change, which help new campus and community coalitions get started, offer them technical assistance in creating their strategic plans, and help them obtain grants.¹³

Ohio Parents for Drug Free Youth served as the catalyst for linking 42 colleges and universities in what is known as the Ohio College Initiative to Reduce High Risk Drinking. Members of the initiative are working both on campus and in their communities to seek fair and consistent enforcement of policies and laws affecting access to alcohol. The same coalition develops and promotes alternative recreational and entertainment events.¹⁴

In Pennsylvania, the state Liquor Control Board took the lead in creating a statewide initiative by

Sustaining Coalitions

The Ohio College Initiative to Reduce High Risk Drinking conducted an evaluation of campus and community coalitions organized in Ohio since the mid-1990s to identify factors contributing to their sustainability. Among the findings are the following:

- A coalition needs strong and consistent leadership over time for sustainability.
- The nature and visibility of the problem of high-risk drinking contributes to coalition sustainability.
- Involvement in a state-level coalition sustains campus and community coalitions through its provision of training, technical assistance, and a forum for exchange of information.
- Staffing resources are important; a coalition's longevity can be tied to the number of designated staff working both full- and part-time on the prevention effort.
- Training in the environmental model is critical to the success of implementing environmental management strategies.

offering mini-grants to colleges and universities for prevention efforts reaching into their communities.¹⁵

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A town-gown relationship is inevitable in higher education whether a campus is surrounded by a complex urban society or a smaller "college town." Regardless of the circumstances, campus and community coalitions can put that relationship to work in imaginative ways in order to manage the environment in which students make decisions about alcohol and other drug use for the benefit of students, campuses, and communities alike.

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www.edc.org/hec/pubs/strategizer.pdf

<http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/coalitions/create/index.jsp>

"Defining the Relationship of Collaborators" in Collaboration Framework—Addressing Community Capacity; see <http://crs.uvm.edu/nncocollab/framework.html#framework>

For additional information, contact:
The Higher Education Center for
Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention,
EDC, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02458-1060
(800) 676-1730 ♦ TDD Relay-Friendly, Dial 711
HigherEdCtr@edc.org ♦ www.higheredcenter.org

Resources on Sustaining Coalitions

<http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/sustainwork/index.jsp>

<http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/coalitions/expand/index.jsp>

Resource Organizations

The U.S. Department of Education's
Higher Education Center for
Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse
and Violence Prevention
www.higheredcenter.org

American Medical Association
www.ama-assn.org

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of
America (CADCA)
www.cadca.org

Join Together
www.jointogether.org/home/

National Alcohol Beverage Control
Association (NABCA)
www.nabca.org/

National Association of State Alcohol
and Drug Abuse Directors
www.nasadad.org

National Conference of State Liquor
Administrators (NCSLA)
www.ncsla.org/



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