

Community Mapping

Why would our community group or coalition want to do this project?

This is a good starter activity for a new group. This activity can be done if the community group or teen leaders feel there is a lot of alcohol advertising that minors can see on a regular basis. Another reason would be if the group feels that a high concentration of alcohol retailers is contributing to other crime-related problems in a community.

What area of underage drinking prevention does this project address?

This project will address youth access to alcohol and teens being exposed to alcohol promotion.

Project Description

There are several ways that a group can map their community. The way a group does this activity should be determined by what they have found to be an issue through surveying the community, holding focus group or key informant meetings, or through the observations of the community group members. A group can map for alcohol outlets (get addresses from the Liquor Control Commission website – see page in this packet called “Using Data” for web address), outlet density (number of outlets in a given area), alcohol promotion and advertising (see attached form), point-of-sale alcohol promotions inside retail outlets (see attached form), or any combination of these.

It is important to note that some community agencies may already have done this project in a formal way and may be able to share their information with you. These agencies may include the United Way, Health Department, law enforcement, Community Coalition, or municipal zoning departments.

You may also be able to use the resources of a community agency that has mapped for a different reason, but will have the computer software or printed maps that they have used for their purposes. These may include law enforcement, emergency medical services, fire departments, utility companies, or civil air patrol or search and rescue groups.

Once the group gathers the information that they want on a map, they can create the symbols to represent items and place them on the map. Depending on what the group plans to do with the map once it is finished, the map can be as simple (hand drawn on plain white paper) or sophisticated (computer software using GPS data and professional printouts) as the group needs.

Some groups want the data for planning purposes, others will use it as the centerpiece for advocacy efforts or a media initiative. The purpose for creating the map will determine what form the map takes.

Some groups have used “throw-away” single use cameras for teens to use to photograph places that will be represented on the finished map. This would be useful if the information will be used to get media attention or to do presentations in the community.

Who needs to be involved?

The purpose for creating the mapping will determine who, in addition to the community group, should be involved. If the intention is to present the finished product to the media, they should be included in the information gathering sessions. It could also be helpful to include law enforcement. They will know where any “hot spots” for criminal activity are and may be able to help make the connection between high outlet density and high crime areas. Teens are also keenly aware of what outlets have a lot of point-of-sale advertisements and store-front advertising.

What resources will we need?

There may be expenses involved with the planning meetings for this initiative. Feeding teens usually makes it easier for them to attend. The scope of your project will determine what other expenses you will likely incur. If you will be taking pictures of the store fronts or advertising, you will likely need cameras and film processing. If you have access to digital cameras, you may still need to purchase photo paper and other supplies. There will likely be expenses involved with creating the map or maps. Special computer software can be pricey, but depending on your needs may be necessary.

How and why do we get the media involved?

The media would likely be interested in two phases of this project. There will be good photo opportunities when you are gathering information to include on the map, and when you “release” the map to the public (or whomever you will be releasing it to.) Getting the media involved will help get your message (which you will determine) out to the general public. Depending on your desired outcomes (media attention, policy change, awareness raising) the media can be a powerful ally on this project.

How and why do we evaluate this project?

This can be tricky to evaluate. For many groups it is a part of their awareness raising or planning process. They will map their community to identify where the problem spots are or if there really is a lot of alcohol advertising that youth are exposed to. One item that can be evaluated is whether the participants in the project came to understand the influences that teens feel to use alcohol. Whether it is outlet density, point-of-sale advertising, or billboards that you are looking for, they are all a powerful part of a teen’s environment. Understanding this sometimes helps community groups make plans to address these issues. Increasing participant’s awareness or helping them understand the impact of the environment on teen alcohol use would be a powerful issue to evaluate.