

Safe Prom Initiative

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

This initiative may help reduce access to alcohol and places to use alcohol on prom night or other high-profile high school dance or event.

What area of underage drinking prevention does this project address?

This project will address youth access to alcohol and creating or strengthening community norms that support not providing alcohol to minors.

Project Description

The main point to this project is to build a positive relationship between teen leaders, local law enforcement, and businesses that sell alcohol, or provide a place where teens could potentially use alcohol (hotels, motels, limousine rentals, hot tub rentals, rental halls, etc.)

Law enforcement and local teen leaders will develop a list of all local high school prom dates and locations. If there are charter or private high schools in your area, be sure to include them. A local Intermediate School District may have a list already generated. If not, someone will need to call each high school and generate their own list.

The teen leaders and law enforcement can then visit each business on their list. The main businesses to include will be the alcohol retailers, hotel and motels in the area, limousine rental businesses, tuxedo rental shops, florists, hot tub rental businesses, and possibly rental halls. You will want to adjust your list locally to include any business where a teen may be able to purchase alcohol or host a party where alcohol is used.

The teen leaders can appeal to the business owners and managers to pay special attention to unusual alcohol purchases prior to and on the prom nights. If teens start with the assumption that the business is only allowing adults with identification to purchase alcohol, it helps create an atmosphere where a partnership can be formed. So be sure both the teen leaders and law enforcement are giving the businesses the benefit of the doubt.

The law enforcement can offer to visit the businesses on the prom nights for informal “walk-throughs” or parking lot “drive-throughs” to help deter any illegal activity. Law enforcement can also give managers and owners specific instructions regarding who to contact on these nights if the business suspects that there is anything illegal happening, or about to happen.

Many times, a clerk or manager will hesitate to contact law enforcement because there is not a true “emergency” or crime in process. This contact and partnership prior to the prom nights “gives permission” to the clerk or manager to contact law enforcement if they suspect teens are accessing alcohol at their store. The same holds true for hotel and motel staff.

Some communities also choose to print information about their efforts on stickers for corsage packaging and table tents or posters to put on display at hotels and motels. Additionally, some groups have printed information on cards for the inside pockets of tuxedos rented for proms.

Who needs to be involved?

The main part of this project is the coordination and collaboration between the law enforcement and the businesses involved. Teen involvement helps it maintain a community involvement focus as opposed to a law enforcement “action.” And, of course, the more media coverage you can get, the more parents and other adults in the community will get your message.

What resources will we need?

There will be some expenses involved with printing the stickers for corsages, the cards for tuxedo rentals, and the posters or table tents you will distribute to the various businesses. There may also be some costs if there are planning meetings that require lunch or dinner being served. This will depend on the time of your meetings.

How and why do we get the media involved?

The media will help you tell your story, or spread your message, to the part of the community that might not see the signs, cards, or stickers you print and post throughout the community. The media will also help additional businesses get involved. Business owners have a financial interest in helping their community and doing it in a public way that will get their business name associated with the positive results this project will generate.

How and why do we evaluate this project?

There are really two things that can be evaluated with this project. First, did the project have an impact on whether or not teens could get alcohol from adults? This may be possible for community groups or coalitions that are already active and have done surveys or focus groups regarding availability in the past. This can also be measured if the community group decides to gather information prior to placing the stickers to ask adults if they were aware of the penalties for providing alcohol to minors, or gathering information from teens regarding availability of alcohol. A follow up survey or focus group could then determine if there has been a change in either adult knowledge or teen availability.

The second thing that can be evaluated is the relationships that may have been formed between any of the groups who have previously not worked together in a collegial way. This could include youth and law enforcement, the community group and teen leaders, law enforcement and retailers, or any combination of the groups involved. This can be evaluated by follow up visits with any of the groups and asking a few relevant questions, such as : “After participating in this activity, how do you feel about the Anytown Police Officers involved?” or “Now that the activity is over, would you be more or less likely to have a discussion with your customers about youth alcohol access?” or “Now that you have met some of the community group members, would you be more or less willing to attend a future meeting?” These questions will help you determine if the process of planning the event helped groups who traditionally wouldn’t be allies to work together to reduce youth access to alcohol.