

# Reducing Underage Drinking at Community Festivals

Restrictions on alcohol use at community events can be a strong expression of social norms and can reduce youth access to alcohol. Implementing an evidence-based approach and developing a strong partnership with festival organizers, law enforcement, and your local coalition are keys to collaboratively reduce underage drinking at community festivals.



The **Strategic Prevention Framework** is a model to implement this approach:

**Assessment:** Conduct compliance checks in cooperation with law enforcement to obtain a baseline rate.

**Capacity:** Build a partnership by sharing the baseline rate with festival organizers, requesting their help to improve the rate, and contributing resources jointly.

**Planning:** Determine a plan through your partnership of law enforcement officers, coalition members and festival staff, while respecting partner roles, responsibilities and timelines.

**Implementation:** Carry out the plan with all partners working together in their specific roles with a common vision to reduce youth access to alcohol at the event.

**Evaluation:** Perform another round of compliance checks the next year to measure improvement.

**Sustainability:** Achieve by making changes in festival policies and practices, which will endure for years reducing youth access and expressing social norms that UAD is inappropriate and unacceptable.

The Consortium for Substance Abuse Prevention in Eau Claire County, Wisconsin, initiated compliance checks in cooperation with law enforcement in 2006 at Country Jam USA, the largest country music event in the Midwest held just outside the City of Eau Claire. The three-day annual event draws over 15,000 people each day. Using the strategic prevention framework to develop an evidence-based, collaborative approach, the initial **compliance rate of 33% improved to 96%**. An effective, comprehensive plan involving education, community awareness and policy/practice changes was developed and implemented as described below.



**Year 1:** Compliance checks were conducted for the first time to establish a baseline rate and determine if a problem exists. Finding only 33% compliance, law enforcement and consortium staff met with the festival manager to share our results. (Our finding was not shared with the media.) The festival organizers were eager to work together to improve the rate. Strategies were developed to be implemented in year 2.

**Year 2:** Consortium members were involved in the orientation training session for festival workers, which provided a chance to speak about their critical role in preventing underage drinking. Consortium members also talked with festival workers individually on the days of the event. The Consortium contributed signs and buttons ("We check IDs") that were seen throughout the grounds. Consortium members also were present at the festival to observe what was working well and where improvement was needed. Compliance checks were again conducted and compliance improved to 82%. A debriefing was held with law enforcement and consortium members. Comments were summarized and shared with the festival organizers.



**Year 3:** The Consortium was again involved in the orientation training session, talked individually to festival workers and contributed signs. The festival also decided to implement two major policy changes. They changed their wristband policy, which entailed giving one brightly colored "alcohol" wristband to all festival guests who were 21 or over. In prior years, there were several "alcohol" and several "underage" wristbands issued which were difficult for servers to identify. The second major change was to not allow parents to buy alcohol for their children. Wisconsin law allows parents to buy alcohol for their children, and in the past, this was allowed at the festival. Compliance checks were again conducted and compliance improved to 96%. A joint news release was developed to share these results with the community.



**"Country Jam has worked hard every year to improve our age verification process. Working with the Eau Claire County Sheriff's Department and Reality Check has allowed us to make an even bigger impact. We are extremely proud of our success in 2008."**

- Sponsorship & Marketing Director  
Country Jam USA



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