Using New Technologies To Strengthen Community Capacity To Prevent Underage Drinking

Tracy Farmer, M.B.A., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Substance Abuse Prevention William Beard, Jr., Project Director, SAMHSA Underage Drinking Prevention Education Initiatives Contract

ABSTRACT

nderage drinking is a significant public health issue confronting the United States, with serious health and economic consequences For individuals and communities. The estimated cost of these negative consequences (e.g., medical care, physical and sexual assaults, and deaths) exceeds \$62 billion annually. SAMHSA is tapping into new technologies, such as widgets, interactive applications, and social media, to strengthen community capacity to prevent and reduce underage drinking. These new technologies provide varied channels for prevention activists to receive resources, training, and technical assistance and to share their new knowledge with others. Furthermore, SAMHSA is using technological processes to evaluate and capture outcomes from its initiatives, leading to the identification of best practices in prevention and health communication. As technology evolves, SAMHSA will continue to integrate the latest advancements into programs and practices to support community-based underage drinking prevention.

BACKGROUND

The mission of SAMHSA is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities, which includes a priority focus on reducing the prevalence and consequences of underage drinking. About 9.7 million 12- to 21-year-olds drink illegally; the median age at which they initiate alcohol use is 14 years old. Those who begin drinking by age 14 are seven times more likely to experience alcohol problems when they are adults as those who wait until age 21 to use alcohol.¹

OUR APPROACH

SAMHSA provides comprehensive prevention information to broadbased audiences through multiple channels. Emerging technologies are enabling us to target and reach audiences in ways never before possible with resources, training, and technical assistance that aid communities in identifying data-driven solutions for underage drinking prevention. Increasingly, we are turning to new technologies to update our websites and other web-based resources and to expand communication, implementation, and evaluation.

These technologies aim to strengthen community capacity (i.e., awareness and readiness) for prevention by:

- Increasing public awareness of underage drinking as a public health problem;
- Mobilizing communities around evidence-based prevention;
- Providing resources, training, and technical assistance; and
- Identifying program outcomes and best practices through evaluation.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Results from the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and* Health: Summary of national findings. (NSDUH Series H-44, HHS Publication No. SMA 12-4713). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.









2012 Webcasts

SAMHSA creates live, interactive webcasts to inform community-based organizations about practices that are achieving measurable reductions in underage drinking. These interactive online multimedia experiences feature a moderator and expert panelists and incorporate a variety of training and technical assistance. We use blogs, Facebook, Twitter, banners, and e-mail blasts to promote attendance and encourage attendees to submit questions online. Archived webcasts attract hundreds of viewers; related resources are popular downloads.



Widgets

The Town Hall Meeting Countdown Widget builds anticipation for local events by counting down the time.

The *Newsroom Widget* maintains a constant feed of press articles related to underage drinking prevention. Articles focus on *positive actions* that communities are taking (e.g., social host liability laws) rather than simply on the negative consequences of underage drinking (e.g., impaired driving fatalities).

Town Hall Meeting Locator

An *interactive online map* of event locations and details allows users to search for meetings by state, city, or ZIP code.

The *Find a Meeting Widget* is a mobile application that allows users to search for Town Hall Meetings by ZIP code.



Still frame from the Delaware state video *Time To Re-Think Teens and Drink.*©

Videos

Videos on a website or on YouTube are an appealing and visual way to educate and engage the public in underage drinking prevention.

State/Territory Underage Drinking Prevention Videos highlight efforts at the community and state levels; inform viewers about local programs and resources; and may be directed at parents, youth, or other stakeholders. SAMHSA's YouTube channel contains 41 completed videos.

Evaluation

SAMHSA is responsible to the public and Congress for ensuring that the public's funds are spent effectively. We use technology to:

- Embed measures in webinars and websites to capture and evaluate usage;
- Record product downloads to identify products of most value to users;
- Solicit input from website and resource users; and
- Conduct online surveys of organizations hosting Town Hall Meetings to measure outcomes.





EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Every 2 years, SAMHSA sponsors local Town Hall Meetings on underage drinking prevention. A SAMHSA website serves as an event database and an online source of multimedia and promotional resources. The examples below illustrate how organizations conducting events also are using technology to educate and mobilize their communities. Organizations that host traditional meetings often use YouTube and other electronic means to document and extend the reach of their events.

Live and Televised Town Hall Meeting, Pinellas County, FL

Thanks to public broadcasting stations WEDU-Tampa Bay and WGCU-Fort Myers, a live Town Hall Meeting at a Tampa Bay high school became *Florida Kids & Alcohol*, a primetime television special with a potential audience of 250,000 Floridians. Florida Gulf Coast University students joined the Town Hall Meeting audience from the WGCU studio in Fort Myers via Skype.



Virtual Town Hall Meeting, Jefferson City, MO

Missouri's Youth–Adult Alliance (MYAA) hosted a live Town Hall Meeting through www.chattrspace.com. Attendees could sign in using their e-mail address or Twitter or Facebook account, and then submit questions for the panel of experts via e-mail or MYAA's Facebook page. MYAA will be posting video clips and transcripts online.

Flash Mob, Washburn University, Topeka, KS

On the day before spring break, students who had learned the routine through a YouTube video broke into a student-created and -choreographed song and dance urging their underage peers to avoid alcohol. Media coverage resulted in news segments on 27 television stations as well as print news articles.



Scavenger Hunt, Dorchester, MA

Each week during April—Alcohol Awareness Month—Dorchester teens were directed to a new location, where they were to take smartphone photos of themselves enjoying alcohol-free activities. The teens then posted the photos to the Dorchester Substance Abuse Coalition's new Facebook page; the picture drawing the most Facebook "likes" by the end of the contest earned the teen photographer an iPod Nano. Media attention to the project drew unexpected queries from other coalitions about how to plan similar activities.



Help prevent underage drinking. Scan the QR code, visit the Town Hall Meeting site, and get involved. www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/townhallmeetings/







Scan the QR code to learn more about underage drinking and its prevention. www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/