



## PREVENTION WITH PURPOSE:

### Working with Community Coalitions

Campus prevention professionals and community leaders need to work together to affect students' drug use and misuse.

As a campus prevention professional, you know the consequences of student drug misuse, including its effects on academic performance, retention, graduation rates, interpersonal violence, risky sexual behavior, and mental health and suicide risks.<sup>1</sup> The impact of student use also extends beyond campus borders and affects the community in a variety of ways, including traffic crashes, violence, property crimes, and calls for medical service.<sup>2</sup>

Research strongly supports the effectiveness of prevention strategies that treat a college and its surrounding community as a single environment.<sup>3</sup> Campus prevention professionals are uniquely positioned to create the bridge between campus and community prevention efforts.

## Why Collaborate with Community Efforts and Coalitions?

What happens on campus influences the community, and vice versa. The campus and community are intimately intertwined. For example, policies and laws around drink specials, hours of service, age restrictions for establishments that serve alcohol, and retailer density all influence student alcohol and other drug misuse. And, as we have stated, student drug use and related behaviors have a negative effect on the community. Community level change can require a tremendous amount of social and political capital, time, and effort. Working together to reach collaborative solutions benefits both the campus and the community. These partnerships can help to lighten the load of complex prevention efforts.

Community coalitions are an effective vehicle for these collaborative partnerships. They have the power to draw from diverse stakeholders to “identify and define common problems, mobilize resources, and work together to improve health and quality of life.”<sup>4</sup> As a campus prevention professional working together with a community coalition, you will have a stronger impact than trying to tackle problems alone.

## Get Involved

Effective collaboration begins with identifying those who are already doing this work. Take the initiative to learn about what is already happening and how you can collaborate. Start by trying to find a local prevention coalition. This may require researching: Who is already doing prevention work in the community? Is there one player or many? Do they collaborate or compete?

In addition to looking for an existing community coalition, some potential partners include:

- » Prevention and treatment agencies
- » Law enforcement agencies
- » Health care professionals
- » Government and elected officials
- » Business and bar owners
- » Landlord associations and housing owners



Prevention is better together and together we are stronger.”

—Dave Closson, M.S., DJC Solutions, LLC



Communities and campuses share a common goal—to create a safer and healthier community for everyone.



Where a community prevention coalition already exists, college and university officials should participate. Where no coalition is in place, higher education officials should join with community partners to start a coalition and set its agenda.”<sup>5</sup>

—U.S. Department of Education

## Build Relationships

All good prevention relationships start with small conversations. Reach out to have those initial conversations with community coalition leadership and members, potential stakeholders, and community-based prevention professionals. Start by seeking to learn more about their work. Ask questions such as:

- » What types of issues are they seeing?
- » What are their concerns?
- » What kinds of efforts or services are they already connected to or involved in?
- » What barriers have they encountered with their current and past efforts?
- » Where have they seen success?
- » What do they hope to accomplish in the next 6 months? The next year?
- » Who else do they suggest you talk to?



Then share *your* answers to each of these questions. Through these conversations, you can see where existing efforts complement—or duplicate—one another. You can also begin to identify shared goals and concrete ways to work together.

Be aware when building relationships and collaborative efforts that campuses and communities can sometimes have an uneasy alliance. Communities may be appreciative of the jobs and services that campuses provide, but they may also be frustrated by the seasonal surges in population. Community members may feel as though they don't have a voice in shaping the rules and policies that guide student life, but they are affected by the consequences of those policies. Colleges and universities want to be good community partners, but they may also be concerned that acknowledging drug use problems and consequences may reflect poorly on their image. Campus prevention professionals may have limited influence or political power to make changes to campus policies. You can help by acknowledging these issues and challenges, building bridges, and helping keep the focus on shared goals.<sup>6</sup>

## Share Data

It is likely that both community and campus coalitions are using a data-driven prevention process. Sharing these data can be beneficial to community-wide alcohol and other drug misuse prevention, but it is often not easy to share data. Issues of confidentiality, reputation, and public relations can impede colleges and universities from being comfortable sharing their data outside the campus systems. Yet sharing data helps both campus and community prevention professionals identify where specific problems and underlying causes are happening. Through their partnerships and collaboration, campuses and communities can identify issues that need to be addressed to find the most effective solutions. Campus prevention professionals can:

- » **Explain to colleagues and campus administrators** the benefits of sharing data as part of a comprehensive process to address drug and alcohol misuse and reach shared goals with the community.

- » **Assist with identifying** needed agreements and processes for sharing data with community partners, including creating data-sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding.
- » **Identify potential data sources**, including data collected by campus law enforcement, campus health professionals, and student services.
- » **If directly sharing data is not an option**, share your prevention plans and logic models that show identified consumption patterns, risk and protective factors, interventions, and goals.

## Provide Expertise and Other Resources

Campus prevention professionals who work with community coalitions can be the conduit to connect identified coalition needs with campus staff who possess the needed expertise. Colleges and universities often have staff or whole departments who are experts in epidemiology, evaluation, and other specific skill sets needed to effectively implement the Strategic Prevention Framework. Learn more about the SPF in [Prevention with Purpose](#). Coalitions are often appreciative to have access and be connected to such high-caliber resources and technical skills. Your campus will benefit by increasing the capacity for effective, comprehensive prevention efforts. You may also be able to connect coalitions with technology, meeting space, and other in-kind resources that can make a huge difference to coalitions that may have limited fiscal resources.

## Take Action

You are in a unique position to use your prevention knowledge and experience to build a bridge between your campus and the community. Here are some key steps for beginning this important work:

- » **Don't wait to be asked.** Seek out prevention partners who have a stake in prevention or bring needed expertise to prevention efforts.
- » **Work with campus leaders and decision-makers** to understand the importance of strong, productive relationships between campus and community.
- » **Work to show community coalition members and stakeholders** that the community and campus have shared values and goals for safe and healthy communities.
- » **Coordinate with key stakeholders in the community** and on community coalitions to facilitate data sharing, connections to resources, and advance prevention strategies.



## Acknowledgements

### Dave Closson, M.S.

Founder

DJC Solutions

### Joan Masters, M.Ed.

Senior Coordinator

Missouri Partners in Prevention

## Endnotes

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, October 22). High-risk substance use among youth. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/substance-use/index.htm>
- 2 Drug Enforcement Administration. (n.d.). The importance of preventing drug abuse among college students. Campusdrugprevention.gov. <https://www.campusdrugprevention.gov/views-from-the-field/importance-preventing-drug-abuse-among-college-students>
- 3 Zimmerman, R. (n.d.). *Campus and community coalitions in AOD prevention*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED537645.pdf>
- 4 Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, and National Community Anti-Drug Coalition Institute. (n.d.). *People power: Mobilizing communities for policy change*. <https://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/communitymobilization.pdf>
- 5 U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). Experiences in effective prevention. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/hec/product/effective-prevention.pdf>
- 6 Cohen, L., and Gould, J. (n.d.). *The tension of turf: Making it work for the coalition*. [https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Tension%20of%20Turf%20%20col%20final\\_040511.pdf](https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Tension%20of%20Turf%20%20col%20final_040511.pdf)

## Copies of this Publication Are Available Online

Copies of this publication are available online at [www.campusdrugprevention.gov](http://www.campusdrugprevention.gov), DEA's website for professionals working to prevent drug misuse among college students.





**Drug Enforcement Administration  
Office of Public Affairs  
Community Outreach and Prevention Support Section**

**#deacampus**

**#preventionwithpurpose**



January 2023