

# SAMHSA's Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies

## Pitching Prevention National Webinar Series

### Prevention Messaging in Action: A Case Study



You are a substance abuse coalition leader working in Anytown, USA. Anytown recently received funding to address underage drinking. So far, there are a few key stakeholders involved with your coalition, but you are looking to bring more people to the prevention table.

#### Understanding the Problem

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**Demographics.** Anytown is a small, predominately white, middle-class community with a large African American minority. Most residents, both Black and White, are Christian, and the town's three churches are the centerpieces of the community. Most parents who are currently raising children in Anytown grew up here, and people take pride in knowing who their neighbors are. High school sports are hugely popular; weekend football and basketball games consistently draw a large crowd from community members.

**Nature of the Problem.** About three years ago, Anytown saw a substantial increase in rates of underage drinking among high school students. Last year's data showed that 43% of high school students reported drinking once a week—a rate that is much higher than surrounding communities and the national average.

**Prevention Resources and Readiness.** Anytown's police department seems concerned about the spike in underage drinking, but feels that there's little it can do to stop the problem; the department is currently understaffed, and is focusing its limited resources on more serious crime offenses. Officers who catch minors drinking do hand out citations, but the department leaves it up to the schools to enforce consequences (i.e., suspend cited students). On those occasions when the school follows through, parents often fight the charges. As a result, consequences are inconsistent and often not enforced. This is especially true for school athletes, who seem to consistently escape punishment for alcohol-related offenses.

Anytown has a small prevention coalition that includes representatives from the faith community, the health department, and the mayor's office. To learn more about the factors contributing to underage drinking in the town, the coalition decides to conduct a focus group with sixteen parents from the high school. You learn that most of the underage drinking is happening in private residences, where parents often turn a blind eye to their children's alcohol consumption. Parents feel they are addressing the risk of related consequences by knowing where their kids are drinking, and making sure they do not drive to or from these events.

## Instructions

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Given what you've read about Anytown, consider the following questions:

- **What resources are present in the community to address the community's underage drinking problems?** Remember that there are three types of resources—human, financial, and organizational.
- **What challenges to readiness exist?** Consider what you know about the community's culture and attitudes to underage drinking. How might they impede your prevention efforts?
- **Who are the key players in the town's prevention efforts?** Identify the stakeholder groups in the community who have the capacity to influence the issue.

Drawing on what you know about Anytown, develop an effective prevention message. Consider these five components when crafting your pitch:

1. **Goal.** Given the substance-related issues than Anytown faces, what are some realistic goals for your coalition? Goals might include:
  - Diversifying coalition membership
  - Increasing awareness of the town's underage drinking problem
  - Gathering more information on the problem and related consequences
  - Identifying champions and gatekeepers from key stakeholder groups to engage in prevention efforts
2. **Audience.** Some audiences or stakeholders will be better positioned than others to help you reach your goals. Which audience is most likely to help you reach the goal you identified above? Potential audiences might include:
  - Youth

- Parents
  - Law enforcement representatives
  - School administrators
3. **Desired Action.** What do you want your identified stakeholder to do? Remember to frame this action in the context of your goal. For example, if your goal is to diversify Anytown’s coalition, the desired action for your stakeholder might be to attend your next coalition meeting.
4. **Compelling Element.** Consider what kinds of information will have the greatest likelihood of taking the desired action. Options might include:
- Data about drinking in the community
  - Scientific research on brain development
  - Information on alcohol-related consequences (e.g., sexual assault, unintended pregnancies, drunk driving)
  - Emotional story of an individual youth
5. **Tone.** Consider the tone that is most likely to elicit the response we want from our chosen audience. The tone might be:
- Encouraging
  - Empowering
  - Inspirational

## Next Steps

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Now that you have thought through the five components of any effective pitch, you are ready to draft your messages to engage potential stakeholders in Anytown.