

THE POLITICS OF ALCOHOL POLICY CHANGE



Every action taken by a coalition, to lobbying at a clear goal of passing policy, its strengths and weaknesses must know who is calling for constant change that occurs. Every coalition must also be adaptable to changing circumstances. This concept of a battle plan is sometimes foreign to groups working to reduce underage drinking. They form around a desire to create positive community change, and they sometimes assume that their good intentions are enough to get policies passed. It can take them by surprise the first time the opposition (usually in the form of the alcohol industry) uses its considerable resources to counter the coalition's efforts. Coalitions can, at times, become stymied by their inability to think and act strategically about how to counter alcohol industry efforts. They argue about when to back down, when to compromise, and when to hold the line. They sometimes misread their allies and enemies alike, because they are thrown into battle without adequate preparation, and often times they are an army with no clear lines of authority. Coalitions can also become overwhelmed when they meet opposition (especially opposition with financial clout and resources) because they do not fully comprehend and, develop or use the potential of organized public opinion to give them enormous political capital (ammunition). The alcohol industry is not the only opposing force to alcohol policy change. Prevailing cultural attitudes that deny the real consequences of underage drinking are often a major obstacle to building public support for alcohol policies. There are also more subtle opposing forces such as competition for limited resources, commercial interests that are not specifically involved

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NEED TO THINK STRATEGICALLY

COMMUNITY GROUPS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE WORKING TO REDUCE AND PREVENT UNDERAGE DRINKING. WHAT WAS ONCE SEEN AS A HARMLESS RIGHT OF PASSAGE IS NOW BEING RECOGNIZED AS A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM REQUIRING COMMITTED CITIZEN ACTION. THE EXPERIENCE OF THESE GROUPS IN THE CHALLENGING PROCESS OF CREATING ALCOHOL POLICY CHANGE HAS HIGHLIGHTED THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF ACTING STRATEGICALLY AND MASTERING THE ABILITY TO WORK IN THE POLITICAL ARENA.

A large body of research* demonstrates that policies that limit the access and availability of alcohol to underage youth reduce and prevent underage drinking, leading to a reduction of alcohol-related health, safety, and social problems. Policies, by definition, are established through political processes. Attempts to implement alcohol control policies often meet substantial resistance from the alcohol industry-- a powerful assortment of commercial interests with a long

history of contributions to political campaigns and very effective lobbying. It is therefore essential to have a base of community allies to advocate for alcohol policies and their enforcement.

Communities have varying degrees of awareness of problems related to underage drinking as well as varying degrees of interest and commitment to doing something about it. It has been a challenge to discover how to motivate local, state, and national groups to mobilize for action to get alcohol policies passed. Even though scientific research clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of policies in reducing problems associated with underage drinking, individuals in communities are usually motivated initially by how the problem affects them personally. That personal perspective, and a general lack of knowledge about public policy, can limit their vision for solutions to actions intended to change individual behavior.

Community mobilization is dependent in large part on volunteer efforts, and sustaining it requires the dedication of people who are passionate about the issue. Many of those passionate people are not particularly interested in alcohol control policies until they see them as a potent tool for change. The alcohol policy field has been challenged to bridge the gap between what research shows are effective methods and what people in communities are inspired to act upon. The challenge is made even greater by the underlying patterns of cultural denial about the substantial consequences of underage drinking.

In 1997 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation began a bold eight year initiative to address this need to mobilize communities to pass

state level alcohol policies. The Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions (RUDC) project selected ten states, District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to build coalitions to organize community support for passing alcohol policies. The experience gained from the RUDC project has highlighted the need to understand the underlying and pervasive role of politics inherent in any public health and social justice effort, and the need to learn how to work the political processes effectively.

The politics of community change encompass more than the political process of lawmaking. The political process occurs at every level of organizing including:

- bringing together interested individuals and organizations;
- developing priorities and strategies;
- building support for the issue at the community level;
- joining forces with allies;
- countering the opposition;
- lobbying to get policies passed.

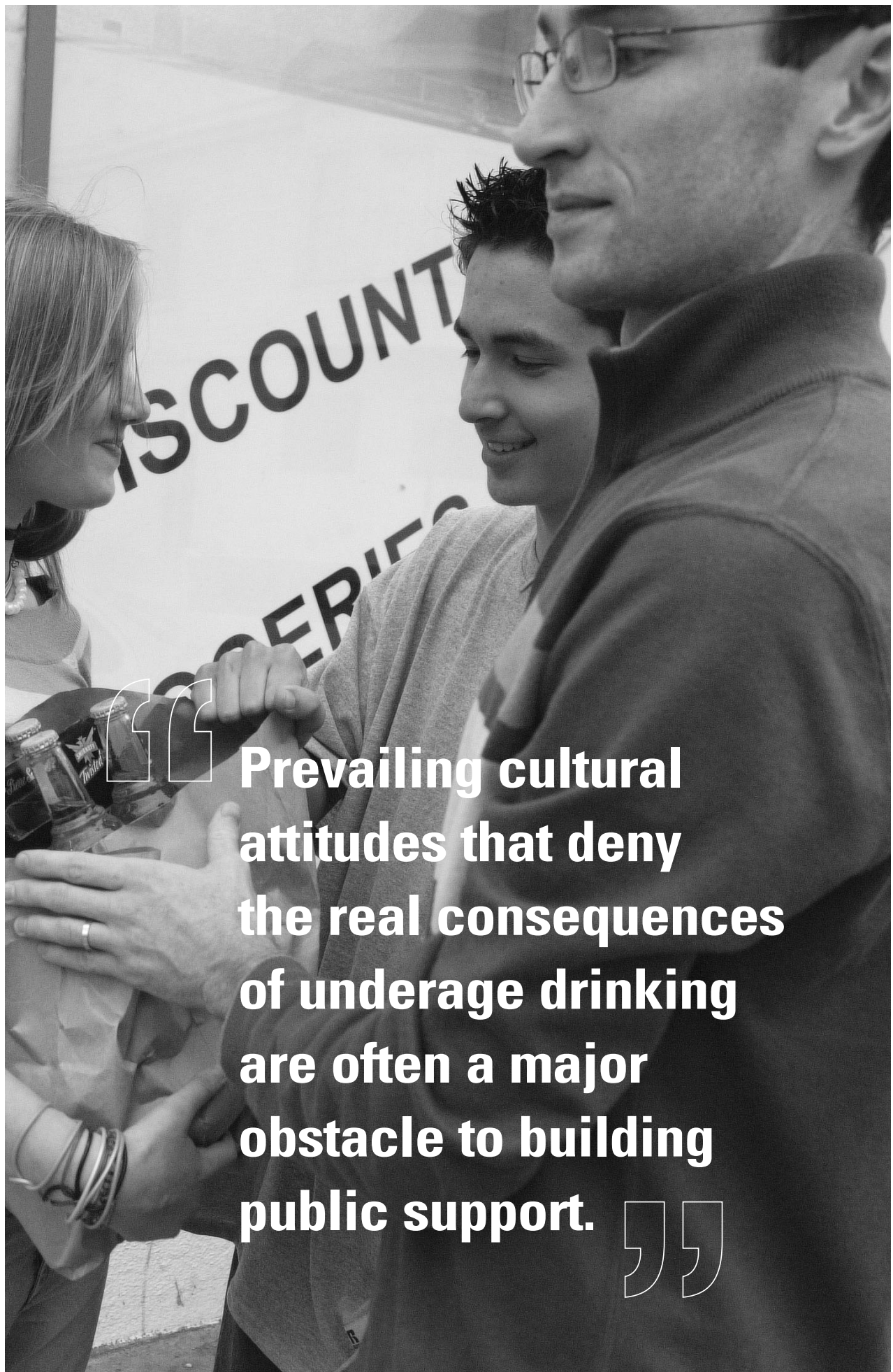
Understanding the political dynamics involved in community mobilization for change can shorten the learning curve for community groups, improve the effectiveness of strategies, and create greater community impact.

WORKING STRATEGICALLY TO PASS POLICIES

IT IS HELPFUL TO VIEW THE ENTIRE CONCEPT OF ORGANIZING COALITIONS TO PASS POLICY AS A STRATEGIC POLITICAL BATTLE PLAN TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE OF PASSING POLICIES. THIS BATTLE PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF:

- influential key players, their motivations and self-interests, and what power they hold;
- community member interests, their motivations, and what is compelling enough for them to take committed, sustained action;
- forces that may oppose policies, their motivations, self-interests, power base, and typical arguments against policies;
- potential allies, their motivations and self-interests;
- the mass media's coverage and perspective on the issue;
- the group's political capital – public opinion, credibility of the group, ability to mobilize large numbers of people, ability to get favorable media coverage, etc.
- opportunities to influence change – through the media, law enforcement, and legislative and administrative bodies





“Prevaling cultural attitudes that deny the real consequences of underage drinking are often a major obstacle to building public support.”

CREATING A STRATEGIC BATTLE PLAN

EVERY ACTION TAKEN BY GROUPS WORKING TO PASS ALCOHOL POLICIES, FROM RECRUITING PEOPLE TO FORM A COALITION, TO LOBBYING AT A STATE CAPITOL, SHOULD BE INCORPORATED IN THE BATTLE PLAN ALWAYS MAINTAINING A CLEAR GOAL OF PASSING POLICIES. USING THE METAPHOR OF A BATTLE, WITH THE COALITION AS THE ARMY, IT MUST KNOW ITS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES, AS WELL AS THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE OPPOSING FORCES. THE ARMY MUST KNOW WHO IS CALLING THE SHOTS AT ALL TIMES, AND IT MUST BE WELL TRAINED ENOUGH TO ADAPT TO THE CONSTANT CHANGE THAT OCCURS IN BATTLE. A STRATEGY TO COUNTER OPPOSING FORCES MUST BE DEVELOPED, BUT IT MUST ALSO BE ADAPTABLE TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES.

This concept of a battle plan is sometimes foreign to groups working to reduce underage drinking. They form around a desire to create positive community change, and they sometimes assume that their good intentions are enough to get policies passed. It can take them by surprise the first time the opposition (usually in the form of the alcohol industry) uses its considerable resources to counter the coalition's efforts.

Coalitions can, at times, become stymied by their inability to think and act strategically about how to counter alcohol industry efforts. They argue about when to back down, when to compromise, and when to hold the line. They sometimes misread their allies and enemies alike, because they are thrown into battle without adequate preparation, and often times they are an army with no clear lines of authority. Coalitions can also become overwhelmed when they meet opposition (especially opposition with financial clout and resources) because they do not fully comprehend and, develop or use the potential of organized public opinion to give them enormous political capital (ammunition).

The alcohol industry is not the only opposing force to alcohol policy change. Prevailing cultural attitudes that deny the real consequences of underage drinking are often a major obstacle to building public support for alcohol policies. There are also more subtle opposing forces such as competition for limited resources, commercial interests that are not specifically involved with the alcohol industry (such as chambers of commerce), and a host of

political agendas that inevitably exist among lawmakers at all levels of government.

DEVELOPING THE COALITION

The purpose and composition of a coalition are critical. Coalitions are most effective when a clear and focused policy agenda and clear expectations for membership are made prior to recruitment of coalition members.

The natural tendency of community groups is to be broadly inclusive on principal, without enough strategic thought about how organizations and individuals can help reach the goal of passing policies, and without considering that there may be a wide variety of motivations for people to become involved, some of which may be unspoken. This can be a deterrent to agreeing on priorities and an action plan, and can become a source of conflict. If a coalition is formed based on the real, perceived, or anticipated requirements of funding sources, rather than on a more strategic composition, it may be difficult to develop a shared direction and even harder to motivate people to stay involved.

A coalition will have great difficulty staying focused if it makes decisions based on who happens to show up at any given meeting and is driven by the individual or organizational priorities of a few of its members or staff. There may also be difficulty keeping coalition members involved when their particular need or priority is not being addressed.

To maximize coalition effectiveness, the following questions should be considered when recruiting coalition members.

- Do they share an interest in and a desire to pass specific alcohol policies?
- What are the priorities and constraints of the organization they are involved with?
- What funding needs do they have? Will this be in competition with the goals of the coalition?
- How will they benefit from being part of the coalition? Do they have any agendas that may conflict with the goals of the coalition (such as may be the case with alcohol retailers)?
- What do they have to offer the coalition (e.g. passionate interest, political clout, resources, skills, contacts, a constituency base, leadership ability, etc.)?
- What can individuals and organizations do and what can't they do (e.g. they may not be able to lobby or take public stands that could be seen as self-interest)?

There may be individuals and organizations that can be helpful to the work of the coalition, but their agendas may not be completely compatible with the goals of the coalition; they may have limited time to offer; or their organizational roles may require that they take a low profile. It can be beneficial to have a different role for people who fit these categories -- a "friends of the coalition" category of membership that has a defined role, but does not necessarily attend a lot of meetings or participate in decision-making (e. g. making phone calls to legislators, writing letters to the editor, attending rallies, etc.). An inventory of member

resources, capacities, and roles is an important element to incorporate into strategic action plans to pass policies.

Leading a coalition can be challenging because the nature of a coalition is more like a democracy than an army, yet the goals of the coalition will inevitably cause it to do battle in the political arena. The coalition is also largely or entirely made up of volunteers who can leave the coalition whenever they choose. In order to keep people involved, coalition members must feel that their voice counts in some manner and that their priorities are being addressed, but not every decision can be made by consensus, and not every priority can be addressed. This dynamic can be offset by making expectations and decision-making authority and processes clear from the outset.

Coalitions should have a clear set of expectations for its members that addresses the following issues:

- the goals and purpose of the coalition;
- what time commitment is expected and what kinds of activities members may be asked to participate in;
- guidelines for how the coalition will deal with the self-interests and conflicts of interest of its members;
- expectations about monetary and in-kind contributions.

Decision-making authority should also be clearly delineated. The decision-making process generally works best when a small leadership group is empowered to act as a

steering committee and has the authority to make executive decisions. The larger group should be involved in determining the specific policy priorities and action plan.

If funding is involved and a host agency is required, the coalition will be most effective if the decision-making authority is clearly defined and the coalition is given a high level of autonomy over its decisions.

It is also important to determine who speaks for the coalition; who will represent it to decision makers and the media. Volunteers often have more political credibility than paid staff, but it can be a shared responsibility as long as everyone is clear on the messages.

ASSESSING THE GROUP'S POLITICAL CAPITAL

Community coalitions often have limited financial resources, and what funding they may have is usually time-limited. Whether or not there is some manner of paid staff, coalitions are comprised mostly of volunteers who care about reducing and preventing underage drinking. The base of their power is their willingness to pursue the goal of passing policy because it will benefit others, even though there is no material gain for the members of the coalition. This is an enormously powerful position because it places the coalition on the high ground and gives it considerable leverage in garnering public opinion and support for its goals.

In developing action plans and strategies, the coalition should determine where it has clout and how it can increase it. There may be

members who already have credibility with lawmakers. Some members may be more effective at presenting cogent and convincing arguments to lawmakers. The group may be able to get 300 people to join them on the steps of a state capitol building, or it may have articulate youth who can be very effective spokespeople with the media, or members skilled at writing fact sheets, action alerts and letters to the editor. Coalition members can be trained as needed in the art of leveraging public opinion. Allies can be enlisted to increase political influence and credibility.

At the heart of it, underage drinking is a well-documented serious problem, and both people who care about youth and youth themselves can be inspired to do something to prevent it. The research documenting the problem and the effectiveness of policies to help solve the problem is solid and needs to be widely disseminated. The arguments for policy are sound. With committed action, the case for alcohol policy change can make itself.

GAUGING THE OPPOSITION

In many cases, forces opposing alcohol policies are highly predictable. If coalitions think strategically and proactively, they can improve their effectiveness in countering the arguments posed by the opposition.

The arguments from the alcohol industry usually fall into the following categories.

- Underage drinking is an individual problem. It is the responsibility of parents to control their children.

- Underage drinking rates are going down, so the problem is taking care of itself.
- Advertising and sponsorships do not affect drinking behavior.
- Limiting access and availability will hurt merchants. These policies are not necessary because the problem is caused by a small percentage of irresponsible individuals.
- The alcohol industry has first amendment rights that will provide grounds to overturn alcohol policies.
- The alcohol industry is not responsible for the behavior of people who misuse its products; however, it is trying to help with its public service campaigns about responsible use.

The counter to each of these arguments is easily made. There is solid research to dispel every illusion in the opposing arguments. It is everyone's responsibility to prevent underage drinking – parents, youth, communities, merchants, law enforcement, and manufacturers. Research clearly demonstrates the extent of the problem and the correlation of access and availability to problems related to underage drinking.

The real power behind these industry arguments is twofold.

- They provide an easy out for lawmakers who face pressure from those who benefit financially from the sale of alcohol and for lawmakers who get substantial campaign contributions from the alcohol industry.

- They resonate with cultural attitudes about underage drinking. It is easier not to see the problem and it provides an easy out for those who, for a variety of reasons, would prefer not to acknowledge that alcohol consumption causes problems.

In addition to opposition from the alcohol industry, there may be local political concerns that would oppose the proposed policies. For example, a local politician who campaigned with a platform of no new taxes would likely oppose an alcohol excise tax.

Coalitions should realistically examine the likely opposition and prepare a response plan as part of their campaign strategy.

IDENTIFYING THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

It can be very confusing for coalitions to determine an effective course of action, and it is often a challenge to effectively weigh and balance all of the factors to consider when selecting priorities. This can be made even more difficult if the coalition is not accustomed to acting strategically. A policy priority may be selected because it is the only one the group can agree upon, even though it may not be a particularly effective policy in terms of preventing underage drinking, or the group may feel it is only able to get policies passed that have no teeth, because there will be less opposition. Some coalition members may have professional interests that preclude them from supporting a policy. There can be disagreement about which strategies are winnable; or some members may have strong emotional

attachment to policies that are lost causes.

A coalition can achieve more focus, and thus more effectiveness, if it has strategically selected its members and clarified roles and expectations before selecting priorities, and if members realize the need to adopt an overall long-term strategy.

In developing policy priorities and a successful action plan, it is important for coalitions to consider their possibilities for success based on an assessment of the following:

- the coalition's political clout and how it will match up to those who may oppose the policies;
- identified policy goals for which there is interest, commitment, and passion on the part of coalition members;
- the effectiveness of the policy to reduce underage drinking;
- the ability of a policy to resonate with the general public;
- how the policy achieves the coalition's overall goals.

The most effective approach is to consider priorities in the context of a larger strategic plan for the coalition. This larger strategic plan should be a primary driving force in setting coalition direction.

COMMON ATTITUDES HINDERING COALITION EFFORTS

- Kids will always drink – nothing ever changes.
- Nothing should get in the way of my right to drink when and where I want.
- We have enough regulation.
- It's only alcohol, not an illegal drug.
- Drinking is a rite of passage; we need to teach our children responsible drinking.

COMMON ATTITUDES ASSISTING COALITION EFFORTS

- Alcohol is an addictive drug; illegal for anyone under 21.
- Alcohol related problems surround us – DUI, violent outbreaks, litter. The problem goes beyond individual responsibilities.
- Children need to be protected.
- Drinkers have no right to hurt others.
- Parents deserve a community that protects their children.
- Communities need and should support strong laws and their enforcement.
- Youth do not manufacture, promote and sell alcohol – adults do.
- Bars and alcohol advertising seem to overwhelm everything else in many communities.

LEARNING TO PLAY **HARDBALL**

SUCCESSFULLY WORKING POLITICAL PROCESSES
REQUIRES BOTH SKILL AND BACKBONE. IN ORDER
TO PASS POLICY, COALITIONS MUST ENTER THE
POLITICAL ARENA. IF THERE IS FUNDING FOR A
COALITION, IT IS LIKELY THAT THE FUNDING
SOURCE WILL NOT ALLOW ITS FUNDS TO BE SPENT ON
LOBBYING ACTIVITIES. IF THERE ARE PAID STAFF,
THEY WILL NEED TO REFRAIN FROM LOBBYING
ACTIVITIES UNLESS THEY CAN DO IT ON THEIR OWN
TIME OR HAVE A PERCENTAGE OF THEIR STAFF TIME
PAID FROM ANOTHER SOURCE THAT DOESN'T HAVE
RESTRICTIONS ON LOBBYING.

The political arena can also be viewed within the metaphor of a battlefield. New coalitions can be caught by surprise at the hardball nature of the political process. They can be dismayed that a person considered an ally suddenly changes position or the coalition can underestimate their opposition or overestimate their support. They can be shocked that the alcohol industry will use whatever tactic necessary to defeat them, regardless of the values coalitions tend to hold dear such as fairness, cooperation, or finding win-win solutions. The opposition can see the coalition's lack of knowledge and sophistication about the political process as an exploitable weakness.

Coalitions often get a "trial by fire" in the political arena because they are inexperienced and they have not developed a strategic battle plan. Coalitions can be more effective if they understand how to play political hardball.

Coalitions should consider the following in determining their battle plan.

- The players in the political arena will act in their own self-interest. Coalitions should find out everything they can about what each key player's self-interest and motivations are.
- Politics includes a great deal of bargaining, compromise, and "back room deals." Many of these deals happen at the last minute. Coalitions should discuss among themselves potential deals and compromises ahead of time, but a leader or a small group of leaders must be empowered to make judgment calls during the process.

- The coalition must be poised to put last minute pressure on lawmakers by getting large numbers of voters to make calls, write letters, or visit their elected representatives. Public opinion is generally the coalition's most potent ammunition. Sometimes public opinion can be used to make it hard for lawmakers to oppose the coalition's priority, even if they have not supported it initially.
- The media is often a key player in the political process because it has a broad effect upon public opinion, but using the media can backfire if it is not done correctly. A coalition should develop skill in getting media attention and creating a favorable spin on its positions.
- Youth are often very powerful spokespeople for policies about underage drinking. They can easily undercut many of the alcohol industry's arguments. However, they must be well trained in advance about working with the media.
- It is important to realize that when the coalition is being highly effective, the opposition is likely to hit hardest. If the opposition is pulling out all the stops, the coalition can take heart, because it is probably winning.

Working for alcohol policy change is a long-term goal. It may take several tries before a policy is passed, and once it is passed, there may be attempts to overturn it. Coalitions should factor this into their battle plans and be prepared to lose some battles in order to win the war.



**“ The arguments for policy
are sound. With committed
action, the case for
alcohol policy change
can make itself. ”**

IN CONCLUSION

IT IS ALREADY EVIDENT, BASED BOTH ON RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE, THAT ALCOHOL POLICIES HAVE ENORMOUS POTENTIAL TO REDUCE AND PREVENT UNDERAGE DRINKING. THERE IS NOW A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE TO SUGGEST THAT COALITIONS WORKING FOR ALCOHOL POLICY CHANGE CAN ACCOMPLISH THE GOAL OF PASSING POLICY. EXPERIENCE ALSO SUGGESTS THAT COALITIONS CAN BE MOST EFFECTIVE IF THEY WORK STRATEGICALLY AND BECOME ADEPT AT MANAGING THE POLITICAL PROCESS INHERENT IN COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE.

* National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2003) Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility, Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking, Richard J. Bonnie and Mary Ellen O'Connell, Editors

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL

ST



MINNESOTA JOIN TOGETHER (MJT) successfully opposed a bill that would allow wine to be sold in grocery stores

- MJT opposed legislation to allow the sale of wine in grocery stores.
- In order to gain support to oppose the bill, they formed an alliance with two major alcohol retail associations.
- The retail associations were motivated to oppose the sale of wine in grocery stores because it was competition for them.
- The two groups shared lobbying intelligence, did a joint mailing about the bill (although they decided not to share mailing lists), and they coordinated their testimony at the hearings.
- The bill was successfully defeated and advocates have continued to defeat it every year for four years.

MJT and the state's two major alcohol retail associations discussed an alliance on a bill that would require mandatory compliance checks.

- The retail associations wanted a clause that would not allow cities to establish stronger penalties than the state legislation.
- The MJT coordinating group recommended a compromise that would grandfather the stronger

city ordinances, but the retailers would not agree to the compromise.

- The coordinating group recommended supporting the legislation even without the compromise, because it felt a stronger bill would not be passable and getting a law passed that would require mandatory checks was more important than the penalties. However, the coalition decided against it, because it was opposed to pre-empting city ordinances.
- The bill was left to die because the agreement with the retailers had been that neither side would go forward with the bill unless both sides agreed. MJT introduced its own bill, but it never asked the author to seek a vote because there was insufficient support for it.
- Whether or not it would have been more effective to support the original legislation remains a matter of divided opinion.

CONNECTICUT COALITION TO STOP UNDERAGE DRINKING (CCSUD) focused on local action as a catalyst to affect statewide change.

- A loophole in a Connecticut law prohibiting anyone under 21 from possessing alcohol on public property resulted in allowing minors to

FUL STRATEGIES FROM RUDC



possess alcohol at “house parties”, which normally occur on private property.

- CCSUD worked with State legislators for several years to correct the loophole, but was unsuccessful. The problem was not considered a high priority and some felt it was not an appropriate issue for State law. There were also concerns about protecting fourth amendment privacy rights prohibiting “unreasonable search and seizure” by the police.
- CCSUD decided to focus on local laws, reasoning that any successful action would be a catalyst for other communities. They researched local ordinances, mapped problem areas, and crafted model local ordinances. They were very successful in getting media coverage for the issue.
- Local communities were motivated to push for action because they were specifically affected by problems caused by these “house parties.” At some hearings, there were as many as 350 people who showed up to support an ordinance.
- As each ordinance was passed, its success created a ripple effect among other municipalities. Neighboring communities also wanted to curtail problems associated with these parties (and they didn’t want the parties to be moved to their cities), so they passed their own ordinances.

- 45 communities have now passed local ordinances giving them an effective policy to control and disperse underage drinking parties and hold adults who provide alcohol at those parties responsible.

MISSOURI YOUTH ADULT ALLIANCE spearheaded the formation of the **MISSOURI ALCOHOL IMPACT COALITION (MAIC)** for an alcohol tax campaign. MAIC used a public opinion survey and a professional policy analyst to help its campaign to increase alcohol excise taxes. It has launched a long-term strategy with a lot of community support to increase the tax by the equivalent of two cents per drink.

- Missouri’s alcohol excise taxes have not been increased since 1970, while 78,000 children in the state already have serious alcohol problems, and numerous other alcohol problems have been documented. This effort represented the 24th attempt over a 35-year period to increase alcohol excise tax rates.
- The State has been experiencing budget shortfalls and has inadequate resources for prevention, treatment, recovery, and law enforcement.
- MAIC reasoned that the budget shortfall could provide another opportunity to launch



a campaign to increase alcohol excise taxes because the usual reluctance to raise taxes could be offset by the considerable need for additional resources.

- However, Missouri is also the home state of Anheuser-Busch, and MAIC knew there would be considerable opposition to alcohol excise taxes. They knew they would need to use political expertise to guide their campaign. The coalition raised money for an opinion poll and hired a professional policy analyst to help develop the campaign.
- The opinion poll showed that a sizeable majority of Missourians would support the tax increase, and it also provided valuable information about how to make their case. MAIC held a press conference to release the findings and developed 69 different fact sheets that were hand-delivered to every state lawmaker's office. They developed a resolution that was signed by several hundred individuals and organizations.
- The bill was not acted upon in the 2005 legislative session, but there are assurances that it will be given a timely hearing during the 2006 session. MAIC is committed to long-term action to increase alcohol excise taxes.
- The policy analyst has concluded that massive mobilization of advocates for the proposal, at the legislative district level, will be vital for success in the future. This is needed to overcome the two continuing sources of opposition: (a) the dominance of the alcohol industry in the public policy arena, and (b) legislator's reluctance to increase taxes of any kind, including those that are presented as "user fees" or "impact fees." MAIC has begun this process by gathering

endorsements of a resolution, but a series of advocacy action steps will also need to be taken.

PUERTO RICO COALITION TO REDUCE UNDERAGE DRINKING (COPRAM) was highly successful in working political processes to reduce serious underage drinking problems in Puerto Rico by establishing local Codes of Order that now blanket the island.

- Concerned about underage and excessive drinking that was causing fights, vandalism, and excessive noise in many municipalities, COPRAM researched existing ordinances and discovered that many were not being enforced. Community leaders and police all worked together to get existing ordinances enforced and new policies passed.
- The Chamber of Commerce of old San Juan was initially reluctant to support any change to the status quo. But then-Mayor Sila Maria Calderon played hardball and indicated that if the alcohol establishment opposed supporting existing ordinances and abiding by a Code of Order, she would work to change the closing time for sale of alcoholic beverages to midnight on weekdays and 2:00 AM on weekends, a drastic measure for a city dependent on late-night establishment tourism.
- The Code of Order prohibits alcohol sales to minors, outdoor alcohol sales, consumption of alcoholic beverages in public spaces, sale of alcohol in glass containers, sale of alcoholic beverages from motor vehicles or portable refrigerators, alcohol consumption within a motor vehicle, and loud noise. Violations of the Code result in severe fines and penalties.
- Mayor Calderon became Governor Calderon, and through her leadership and a strong network of community support, all but a very small percentage of Puerto Rico's 78 municipalities, have either established or are working on establishing a Code of Order.
- All the municipalities that have established a Code of Order report significant reductions in problems.

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