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Toward “Shared Responsibility:” Designing Environmental Messages for Local Stakeholders

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A host of public health institutions including the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the U.S. Department of Education’s Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention, the American Medical Association, and the Harvard University School of Public Health have recommended that practitioners employ the environmental model as part of a comprehensive approach to reducing college alcohol abuse. Based on the framework of social ecology, the model posits that alcohol-related harms can be reduced by changing aspects of the environment that support the high-risk drinking behavior of college students. In the 2002 report, the NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking outlined five elements of the college environment that needed to be addressed by campus-community coalitions:

- Widespread availability of alcohol to students
- Aggressive marketing and promotion of alcohol
- Excessive unstructured free time for students
- Inconsistent publicizing and enforcement of laws and policies
- Student perceptions that high-risk drinking is the norm

Essential to the success of this model is the ability for local coalitions to build an awareness and comprehension within the community and among key stakeholders for this style of prevention, a task that has proven to be challenging for many of the ten “A Matter of Degree” (AMOD) sites funded with a mandate to establish environmental strategies in their localities. Though evaluation of the effort has shown promise (Weitzman et al., 2004), the concept of “environmental thinking” is difficult for most students, faculty, administrators, local community members and media reporters to grasp, let alone embrace. Even those who have worked with college alcohol issues on a daily basis have struggled to fully understand or incorporate the concept of environmentalism into their thinking.

This is actually not surprising. Recognizing environmental contributors to behavior is counter to a culture that remains centered in “individual responsibility” for every type of health issue from obesity to cancer. Even though experts have documented a shift toward the public health paradigm when addressing alcohol issues in the United States (Gusfield, 1996), health remains a personal rather than a social issue in the minds of most public citizens. Lawrence Wallack points to television and other forms of popular media for the association, believing that the media “reinforces the concept that health and disease are ultimately matters best understood at the individual level” and adds that because of this frame, public discourse about health focuses attention “to the individual but not the environment in which the individual lives” (1990, p. 150).

Also not surprising, then, is the fact that the vast majority of theory and research on health messaging focuses on changing individual health behaviors rather than engaging citizens in changing environmental factors that influence those behaviors. The

prevalent health persuasion theories of the day -- Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) Belief Expectancy Theory, Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Theory, Witte's (1995) Persuasive Health Message Framework, and DiClemente and Prochaska's (1985) Stages of Change Model – are all based on communicating messages to individuals so that they may avoid unhealthy or adopt healthy behaviors. Many of the alcohol education and social marketing campaigns used in college settings today employ these models with a wide range of results. The focus, however, remains on the individual as the locus of the health problem as well as the target of the persuasion.

Environmental messages are often relegated to the general category of “media advocacy” (Wallack, et. al., 1993), where current literature posits that the communication channel – the mass news media – takes center stage in order to influence the ultimate target of community decision-makers. Media advocacy experts encourage the use of data to accomplish the task, but provide little practical guidelines into the development of strong and salient arguments or appeals that influence the specific decision-makers of a local community.

How, then, do practitioners effectively communicate the role of the environment in creating alcohol problems to the rest of their campus and community? Given the mandate to adopt environmental strategies, several of the A Matter of Degree sites have had practical experience in this activity with a variety of results that have yielded a rich set of lessons learned. This essay will use the experiences of several campus-community coalitions who attempted to communicate environmental messages to local stakeholders as a way to further our understanding of this new genre of preventive communication. After establishing a basic understanding of the goals and structure of environmental

messages, this essay will provide practical examples within local communities and the lessons learned in their design and implementation.

Environmental Messages: The Basics

Simply stated, “environmental health messages” are messages that are framed to create a symbolic association in the mind of the receiver between an aspect of the environment and its potential influence on health behavior, persuading a collective society to attend to the environmental element in order to influence the health of the population. Foundational to environmental messages is the public health philosophy of “shared responsibility,” where both the individual and the society as a whole share equal responsibility for health conditions. The individual, as an independent agent able to exercise choice in health behavior, has the responsibility to make choices that result in good health for him or herself as well as for the population. Those who control the environment, however, also have a responsibility to create conditions that support healthy choice-making by individuals and to eliminate elements of the environment that encourage unhealthy behavior.

Community members and policy-makers are usually the targets of environmental messages for obvious reasons; policy-makers are targeted because they have the power and ability to enact and enforce new policies that will support healthy behavior across a population, and community members are targeted with the hope that they will provide additional political pressure on the policy-maker to address the environmental element.

In a comprehensive environmental prevention plan, however, it’s important to think of these targets beyond their typical personas of legislator (or city council member) and voter. The policy-maker targeted with environmental messaging might be the

manager of a convenience store, bar, or restaurant, and the community member with the most influence on this policy-maker might be his or her customers. Another policy-maker worthy of environmental message targeting might be a campus administrator, with a range of key community member constituents ranging from faculty/staff, students, and parents. In fact, as will be seen in the case studies, environmental messages sometimes fail because they were targeted to the wrong set of community members or policy-makers.

As is true with all persuasion, a community member or policy-maker won't be moved to action from a single, generic environmental message. Effective persuasive campaigns require strategic audience analysis and message testing, along with ample message delivery in mediums that are best suited to those audiences. Critical to good environmental messaging is a thorough analysis of the political and social structure so that appropriate audiences can be targeted, as well as a thoughtful strategic timeline of messages, communication channels, and spokespersons that progress persuasion through the stages of community readiness. Also essential is feedback and evaluation to ensure that the campaign is not sending messages "into the void" but is actually reaching the intended audience.

Media advocacy is the strategy most often recommended to communicate environmental messages. Media advocacy is primarily involved in the creation of messages which are delivered by existing news media sources about an environmental strategy that is offered to solve a specific health problem. In their book on the subject, Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan and Themba state, "Media advocacy can be a significant force for influencing public debate and putting pressure on policymakers by increasing

the volume of the public health voice and, in turn, by increasing the visibility of values, people, and issues behind the voice” (1993, p. 2).

There is sufficient evidence that media advocacy approaches can yield environmental change, but there are important caveats to consider when adopting this mode of environmental message-sending. In many cases, framing a health issue around an environmental aspect actually involves cognitive “reframing” for audiences who have traditionally defined alcohol problems around individual responsibility. Wallack (1990) argues that such “social/political” explanations for problems are much more complex, making them more difficult to communicate through most mass communication channels. Environmental messages sent solely through the mass news media can get off target quickly from their foundation of “shared responsibility” and instead attempt to shift all responsibility onto the environment (or worse, to those who control it). Such arguments are easily dismissed by audiences, resulting in a failure to change policy. In smaller municipalities where positive relationships are critical to the success of political accomplishment, such miscommunication can yield tragic results. It may be difficult to receive cooperation from local officials after a coalition has publicly humiliated them in the media by blaming them for the unhealthy drinking of college students.

Therefore, careful attention must be made to both the construction of the environmental message and the channel used for communication. Particularly important to effective environmental messages is the logical conclusion made from the nexus between the environmental element and the health problem, which should result in corrective action by the community rather than blame.

As is true of all “civic” discourse, environmental messages consist of both arguments and appeals. Arguments are logical conclusions drawn from evidence. Appeals enhance arguments by offering emotional, logical or credible support. Although there are several models of argumentation a communicator can follow, all arguments basically follow a structure known as a logical syllogism, where a major premise (a general truth that can be applied across any situation) and minor premise (a specific truth about an actual situation) are supported by evidence and lead to a “logical” conclusion. In the case of environmental arguments, the conclusion should be one of action; premises lead us to the conclusion that something must be done rather than the simple knowledge of fact. An example within the context of collegiate alcohol consumption might be:

Major Premise 1: National research suggests that college students are price-sensitive; the lower the price of the drink, the more likely students will drink heavily.

Major Premise 2: Local data suggests that patrons who drink heavily are more likely to become intoxicated and engage in assaults, drunk driving, and other behaviors that affect the health and safety of the city.

Minor Premise 1: A significant number of bars in Lincoln offer “quarter draws” and \$1 “big (28 ounce) beers” on Thursday and Friday nights because there is no policy keeping them from doing so.

Minor Premise 2: Police data indicates that public intoxication, assault and drunk driving rates are highest in the vicinity of Lincoln bars during Thursday and Friday nights when bars offer these specials.

Conclusion: Students are more likely to drink heavily at Lincoln bars on Thursday and Friday nights unless we intervene by creating a policy to restrict price specials or to enforce policies that eliminate service to intoxicated patrons. Creating an environmental argument requires grounding both major and minor premises in some form of credible, easily comprehended evidence in order to be successful. For this reason, media advocacy experts suggest that proof for these premises come from credible science and local data that creates the nexus between the element and measured behavior. Credibility of the information is also enhanced by the use of a spokesperson who is trustworthy in the eyes of community members and officials.

The use of scientific evidence combined with strong local data has been a critical element to the successful environmental messages used by AMOD coalitions. As credible as a national research study may be on the impact of an environmental influence on college student consumption rates and problems, only local data has the power to “make the point” ring true within a community.

Several of the cases described later in this chapter will demonstrate the power of local data and provide good examples of data that had the most impact. As is demonstrated in these cases, there are several ways to provide compelling evidence to support environmental influence claims. One method, however, is particularly worthy of note: Graphic Information Systems (GIS) mapping has been employed by a number of coalitions across the United States as an excellent way to provide the community and the media with the nexus between the geographic environment and alcohol-related harms in a community. GIS systems take police data such as calls for service, assaults, or noise

complaints and “map” the data, connecting it to specific addresses or liquor licenses in order to identify any relationships between the data and the location.

Any data can be mapped geographically; UNL has a geographic map showing which neighborhoods of Lincoln house commuter or “off-campus” students, for example. Given the increased use of technology, many local police departments now have access to GIS and simply need input from community organizers on ways in which the information can be put to good use. Several AMOD sites have employed GIS mapping as a successful tool to communicate environmental messages about the relationship between outlet density and crime, drink specials surrounding a campus, or perennial neighborhood complaints about “party houses” that lack active management by landlords. In many cases, the map provides a picture that is worth more than a thousand words.

Environmental appeals extend arguments by employing emotional and logical proofs, often in the form of narratives, analogies, visuals, and testimonies. Though they cannot (and should not) replace arguments, appeals are often effective in contextualizing and personalizing the environmental argument. Playing a videotape recording of “bar break” where hundreds of intoxicated students pour out of the local bar that offers drink specials can enhance the argument made concerning the nexus between drink specials and high-risk consumption for the city council or other community groups. Having alumni share their testimonies about the amount of drinking they did at tailgate parties on campus, or having a group of community leaders view (or even pick up) the littered beer cans and bottles created by the multiple tailgate parties in neighborhoods surrounding the stadium can significantly strengthen the argument about the impact of not enforcing policies at campus sporting events.

Two cautions, however, about the use of appeals: First, there's plenty of evidence to suggest that using a graphic and emotional image of an environment or its impact – particularly if it creates a negative emotion such as fear or despair -- may have an immediate effect, but won't yield sustained persuasion (Monahan, 1995), which is essential for the long haul of policy change. Second, appeals must be framed toward calls for action, so that emotions roused by the appeal have a context; dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) suggests that we work to relieve ourselves of distressing emotions, so supplying a viable solution following an appeal is an effective way to enhance its impact.

Environmental messages, then, are a different breed of health messages that are designed to help communities understand the relationship between the practices and policies of a community and a specific health problem with the goal of influencing changes in such policies and practices in order to support healthier individual behaviors. Like all persuasion, they must be tailored to the specific target audience, communicated consistently to the point of audience saturation, and delivered with skill and expertise.

The following examples serve as practical illustrations of the practice of environmental message creation and delivery by community coalitions created through the AMOD program. Some of the examples resulted in success by bringing about environmental change while others failed to convince the community sufficiently to address the issue. Both successes and failures have much to teach us about the challenge of communicating about environmental issues to localities. The cases all surround one of the suggested environmental elements of the NIAAA report.

One important caveat, however: These case studies focus almost exclusively on the *communication* used to assist environmental change, and not on the community

organizing, policy strategy, or political groundwork that was essential in accomplishing change. The focus here will be, simply, on what *communication* goals and strategies were used to assist the effort, and what lessons were learned about communicating environmental messages. More complete descriptions of the environmental efforts themselves can be obtained from the individual coalitions.

Environmental Messages at AMOD Sites

Widespread Availability: Painting a Picture of “Problem Licenses” in Lincoln, Nebraska using data charts

The issue: Among the goals of the NU Directions Campus-Community Coalition in Lincoln, Nebraska was the reduction or control of the proliferation of alcohol outlets in the city. Currently, Lincoln has approximately 300 liquor licenses; 100 of them are within a one-mile radius of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. More than twenty of them are within two blocks of the downtown campus in the heart of the entertainment district. Several of these establishments have focused their marketing and promotion on college-aged drinkers. It is not unusual to find anywhere between one to two thousand young adults in various stages of intoxication crowding the streets at “bar break” on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday night.

Research conducted by the coalition found that density was a more significant issue depending on the type of license involved. Bars that sold alcohol as their sole or major source of income were far more likely to have intoxicated patrons in protective custody, were more likely to engage in high-risk promotions, and were more likely to have calls for service by Lincoln police. This information, along with research on the success of conditional licenses, led the coalition to seek conditions on “high-risk” licenses in the city of Lincoln.

The communication goal: The coalition wanted the community and policy makers understand the relationship between outlet density and alcohol problems, building the argument that outlet density has the greatest impact on bars who sell alcohol without food service. The goal of the argument was to convince policy makers that requiring conditions for such licenses prior to approval was necessary in order to prevent additional civic harms caused by the establishments.

The communication strategy: A daily police media briefing was used to disseminate information about density and problems. The “lead” provided for the media was the announcement that the city’s Protective Custody facility would communicate “last drink” data directly to the police and city officials as an enticement for media coverage of the issue. Several charts were created to communicate the “problem” leading to the change in policy. First, a chart illustrated the number of patrons in the city of Lincoln who were admitted into protective custody admissions and their average blood alcohol content that showed up on “last drink” reports most often (see Figure 1). Spokespersons explained that out of the 300+ licenses in the city, the majority of the protective custody admissions had come from ten bars – eight of which existed within a three-block area close to campus. Without naming any establishment, the chart provided an accurate depiction of the message that some licenses are creating more problems than others.

With the lead story established, the coalition leaders elaborated on outlet density and the particular problem it creates for bars who sell alcohol as their major source of revenue. A chart demonstrated the issue of outlet density in the city by comparing the growth rate of liquor licenses to the growth in population, UNL student admissions, and

other indicators (see Figure 2). As the growth rate more than doubled the rate of population growth for the city, the chart provided a simple visual image of proliferation and even offered community members (via spokesperson explanation) an understanding of the role in legislative changes that led to the accelerated growth. Using growth rate comparisons also enabled coalition spokespersons to argue that the number of licenses in the city had oversaturated the population, leaving businesses vulnerable to higher rates of failure due to heavy competition.

Finally, actual advertisements from downtown bars (with establishment names removed) provided “real life” evidence to the argument that a dense collection of alcohol-only establishments that sold alcohol as their only source of revenue were more likely to engage in high-risk promotions in order to remain competitive. Spokespersons were then able to make conclusion statements that connected the argument: Lincoln was oversaturated with alcohol-only licenses, and the result is fierce competition that is leading to high-risk promotion and over-service among a small group of problematic establishments who exist with a “high-risk” area of the city. In order to reduce these problems, conditions should be established at the time of licensing to help potentially high-risk establishments guard against high-risk promotions or service.

The outcome: The exposure of this message yielded support from the community and city officials when Police Chief Tom Casady recommended conditions be established for a new license proposed in the area. Conditions for similar licenses in the city’s entertainment district are also subject to conditions prior to approval by the city council. Impressed by the outcome, the state’s Liquor Control Commission also adopted the use of license conditions for high-risk licenses across the state. Conditions have yet to be

challenged in court. A legislative bill offering local control over outlet density was introduced in the state unicameral and is in the process of being rewritten.

Lessons Learned: 1) Have a plan in place to “inoculate” the counter-arguments from opponents before they ever emerge. Involvement by the hospitality community was essential throughout the planning process to ensure that local bar owners didn’t feel targeted by the coalition’s message. Messages were reviewed with local hospitality representatives from the coalition, and spokespersons from the city’s Responsible Hospitality Council who were also local licensees were included as sources in media kits and briefings. As anticipated, the media went directly from the media briefing to get hospitality industry perspective on the subject, and found dissention only among hospitality owners and patrons that lacked credibility with the community. Without prior warning and negotiation, hospitality industry spokespersons could have undermined the message and accused the coalition of being prohibitionist and anti-business.

2) Nothing matches the power of a picture. Having a visual representation of the data increased the likelihood of television and print coverage, increased community and policy-maker comprehension of the complex message, and enabled easy repeat messaging in follow-up communications through presentations, newsletters, city council meetings, etc.

3) Follow-up matters. Don’t expect a single successful media conference to complete the task. Instead, build upon successful communication of environmental messages by finding opportunities for multiple spokespersons to repeat the message in a variety of incidents and related situations. Not long after the conference, several incidents downtown involving intoxicated patrons were perfect opportunities for coalition

spokespeople to repeat the message of how competition (via density) leads to high-risk practices and problems. But even those opportunities needed additional messaging in other contexts, such as city council briefings and other civic presentations, to help move from the general understanding of the environmental nexus to the adoption of new policy.

Communicating Environmental Influence Using GIS Mapping: Ending Happy Hours in Madison, Wisconsin

The issue: A dense cluster of bars surrounding the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UWM) rely heavily on drink specials to compete for patrons, many of whom are UWM students. Members of the PACE coalition recognized the impact of hospitality establishments near campus as part of their scan of the environment and set a goal to address the issue. Research revealed that the promotions were having a significant influence on the drinking behaviors of patrons, resulting in a variety of primary and secondary harms ranging from vandalism to assault. The PACE coalition determined that the best policy solution would be a city ordinance prohibiting drink specials in the downtown Madison area, especially during high-risk periods.

The communication goal: The coalition wanted community members, hospitality owners, and city policy makers to understand the relationship between price specials (particularly those occurring during prime college student drinking hours on Friday and Saturday nights) and crime in order to support a policy prohibiting drink specials.

The communication strategy: GIS mapping was employed by the coalition to paint a “progressive picture” of the relationship between bars offering specials, their location to campus, and the number of crimes reported in the same area. GIS maps were layered in presentations that first showed the density of Madison bars near the UWM

campus, then showed the proximity of bars with price specials around the UWM campus, and finally, a visual representation of crime reports, including disorderly conduct (fights, assaults, and aggravated batteries), liquor law violations, and vandalism by location, which showed the highest amounts of these crimes occurring in the same area as the drink specials.

The GIS maps were displayed and discussed at coalition meetings and in presentations throughout the community, including the Tavern League of Madison, as a way to begin dialogue about the aspect of the environment and potential solutions to the problems it created. “We showed the maps as often as we could,” stated Jonathan Zarov, the Communications Manager for the PACE coalition and UWM’s Health Services, “Whenever we had a chance to talk to the public about drinking at UW, we included the maps as a way to show the influence of the environment.” The coalition also presented the information to the media, who carried the story to the public, helping to build community consensus that drink specials were part of the problem.

The result: In September, 2002, the Tavern League created a voluntary limit on drink specials after 8:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. A group of 25 downtown bars pledged not to offer or advertise drink specials. According to a 2004 release from the PACE coalition, 19 bars continued the ban one year later. Though the coalition had hoped that city officials would institute an ordinance restricting drink specials, coalition leaders accepted the voluntary ban as a step in the right direction, but also with the caveat that they would continue to monitor data to evaluate its success.

Soon after the ban was established, a group of UWM students filed a lawsuit against the establishments involved in the ban, claiming that local bars were conspiring

against University of Wisconsin students by price fixing drinks and taking away drink specials. A judge dismissed the case. Adding insult to injury, coalition evaluation of the ban in 2004 revealed that crime continued to increase rather than lessen in the area. The PACE coalition released a news report of the increases, using comparison charts of crime rates prior to the ban and one year later to make the visual point that the voluntary ban created by the Tavern League was, in fact, not working. Rather than allowing critics to assume that the original advocacy by the coalition was misguided, the coalition took a proactive posture and framed the issue for the media around the need for better policy solutions. Doing so kept the issue of price specials and their impact on student drinking in the news, and led to a report about the chair of the Alcohol License Review Committee's consideration of a citywide ban on happy hours and drink specials modeled after Illinois law.

Lessons Learned:

1) Keep the message focused on the intended outcome. The local Tavern League was quick to respond to community pressure created by the PACE coalition, but the original goal of the messaging was to support a city ordinance rather than a voluntary ban. The message about the relationship was clearly received; city officials saw the relationship, but rather than looking to city ordinance or state liquor control law to solve the problem, they focused pressure on the tavern owners, who sought their own solution. Keeping every presentation of the message centered on the desired solution (rather than simply on the environmental nexus) will help well-meaning stakeholders remain focused as they move toward action.

2) Bad news can be good. The PACE coalition was wise to return to the media with data showing that crime had in fact increased one year after the voluntary ban was put into place. Doing so enabled the coalition to refocus the message on the faulty solution rather than allowing critics to discredit the problem. This is a critical lesson that can be applied to a variety of environmental messages: Coalition leaders often worry that, after successfully advocating for an environmental strategy, any data showing a lack of problem reduction will undermine the credibility of all future advocacy. Careful communication strategy can yield the opposite effect: Leaders can show negative data trends as evidence that the community has yet to find viable solutions to negative influences within an environment. The PACE coalition wisely reframed the evaluation data of increasing crime rates among the downtown bars involved in the voluntary ban to make the point that other measures – such as a citywide ban – is needed.

The desire to assume that negative trend data is “bad news” is understandable but inaccurate. Negative trend data simply refocuses the message from “Look! Our solution is working!” to “We still have a problem.” As much as a coalition wants to see their efforts end in success, negative data is still a powerful tool to energize the community toward continuing to address an aspect of the environment.

Finding the Party in Lincoln, Nebraska

The issue: Harvard College Alcohol Study data for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has consistently shown what many NU Directions coalition members already knew: when a university enforces its policies restricting alcohol use on campus, student parties move into surrounding neighborhoods. The coalition worked with the Lincoln Police Department to create the “Wild Party Patrol,” which used targeted enforcement to

respond to party-related complaints called in by neighbors during prime college party weekends such as the start of the academic year and graduation. Students involved in wild parties either as hosts or guests received a variety of citations, ranging from Maintaining a Disorderly House, Procuring for a Minor, Sales of Alcohol Without a License to Minor in Possession and Public Urination. Extensive media coverage of large police busts in the beginning of the academic year sent a message to students that off-campus alcohol violations would not be tolerated by either the university or the community. The result was that, following the first weekend of active enforcement, problem parties became more difficult for police to find.

Parties involving high-risk drinking continue to occur, however, particularly in the same location, at the beginning of the academic year. The coalition needed stakeholders to recognize the impact of “party houses” that changed tenant hands often but remained central locations for dangerous parties, and create new strategies to address “perennial” party houses.

The communication goal: To establish a clear picture for neighborhood stakeholders (police, the NU Directions coalition, neighborhood association officers, and landlords) as well as the city council’s Internal Liquor Committee about the relationship between rental property type and management and neighborhood disturbances in order to support the potential citation of landlords for maintaining disorderly houses.

The strategy: Citizen complaints about noise and other problems related to parties over an extended period of time were mapped by neighborhood using GIS technology, creating a picture of “party house” locations by neighborhood and address. The GIS map was used to support the claim that the majority of cases involving citizen

complaints were from rental properties (not all of whom were occupied by students – a fact that would also be used in later communications with neighborhood associations convinced that the problem was the sole responsibility of UNL). In several geographic locations, the map identified specific apartment complexes owned and managed by a sole landlord or company, as well as specific types of housing units that seemed more prone to becoming popular party locations. Not surprisingly, the map showed that large (four bedroom) apartments that had no resident managers present were most likely to become “party” houses for students and others.

This information was used to communicate to City Council members that the city’s Internal Liquor Committee should address property managers in the same way it addresses hospitality establishment managers: communicating with them about ongoing problems with their property and encouraging them to rectify policies or practices that enable these problems or face citations for maintaining a disorderly house. The information was also used to argue to landlords and property managers that they should utilize and enforce model lease agreements that prohibit high-risk activities on the property.

The map was also used to identify neighborhoods for the coalition to conduct “roundtable” discussions (also called study groups) involving students, landlords, police, and neighbors in neighborhoods with the highest activity. The roundtables yielded a number of specific recommendations for addressing alcohol-related and other quality-of-life problems in these neighborhoods, as well as creating a new attitude of open dialogue among stakeholders in areas most impacted by students and other transient populations. The study groups proved to be an effective way to correct misperceptions by both

students and permanent residents about the source of quality-of-life issues in the neighborhood. Coalition leaders were able to encourage communication between neighbors and renters who host parties regularly, some (but not all) of whom are UNL students, as a way to solve problems. GIS information was used to communicate to neighborhood associations that the problems the neighborhood faced with “party houses” is directly related to the number and type of rental units you’ve allowed in the area. Active involvement with landlord and property management is a strategy you can employ to improve quality of life for the neighborhood.

The result: The city’s Internal Liquor Committee began meeting with individual landlords identified by GIS mapping as having properties with chronic problems. In several cases, neighbor complaints about specific properties or complexes have dropped significantly. The Resident Roundtable has yielded a social marketing campaign designed to improve the relationship between students and permanent residents, piloted in one of the neighborhoods identified by the GIS map.

Lessons Learned:

1) Not every environmental argument needs to “go public.” While the use of the news media was effective in communicating the message of legal consequences for student parties, GIS maps of favorite party locations in Lincoln neighborhoods had no business showing up in the local paper and would cause more harm than good. Beyond the anger such negative news publicity would generate from area realtors, neighborhood associations, and city council members representing specific neighborhoods, giving GIS maps to the media would do little to advance a solution, which in this case involved cooperation and dialogue more than advocacy, which tends to polarize such issues. The

GIS maps were very effective for their limited purpose in identifying locations where ongoing investigation and dialogue needed to occur. The information expressed in the maps were no surprise to the people living in the neighborhoods (or to the city council members who were receiving many citizen complaints), so sharing them in the media would be of little help in advancing the need to bring landlords, students, and concerned neighbors of specific high-risk neighborhoods into the conversation.

2) GIS mapping has utility beyond responsible hospitality. The use of GIS maps in area neighborhoods opens up a wide variety of possibilities for “making the case” for addressing areas where alcohol-related problems seem to cluster across campus and the community, such as residence halls (or floors), fraternity or sorority houses, tailgate lots, neighborhoods, and convenience store locations.

3) A system of data collection is essential to make GIS mapping work. Alcohol must be identified in a variety of crimes and violations on and off campus in order for a picture to emerge. Community organizers must invest time working with police and judicial affairs personnel to create a coding system that allows data to be entered quickly and accurately in order to make the most of this promising technology.

Using Public Opinion Poll Data to Influence Environmental Change in Baton Rouge, LA

The issue: The LSU Campus-Community Coalition for Change engaged in many advocacy efforts to educate Metropolitan Council members about the need to establish public policies to modify elements in the environment that were determined to encourage or sustain excessive drinking problems in the community. Whenever possible, coalition policy advocates reported national research results to demonstrate necessary linkages between proposed policies and the anticipated effect in reducing problems associated

with high-risk drinking. Frequently, policy-makers would respond to the effort by asking, “Yes, but how do we know if Baton Rouge voters agree with those national research results?”

The communication goal: The coalition wanted to demonstrate to policy-makers that their constituent voters would support several desirable public policies to control alcohol problems involving university students in the community. Coalition members decided to ascertain the degree of local support for the following desired policy areas: a) defining excessive drinking and its relationship to community problems, b) limiting alcohol availability at public fairs and festivals, c) prohibiting the sale of low-priced “drink specials” in bars, d) controlling the advertising and marketing of alcohol in public venues, and e) reducing neighborhood problems associated with student “house parties.” To obtain the information necessary to convince policy-makers that they would not face political “fallout” for voting for the proposed ordinances, the coalition contracted with a local political pollster to conduct telephone polls of a random sample of registered voters in the city-parish.

The strategy: The coalition began by drafting the integral questions for each broad study area to answer the questions of policy-makers. The pollster edited the questions for ease of understanding by the respondents, and then a subgroup of the coalition further refined the questions with the assistance of the pollster. Two surveys were developed and administered over a one-year period. The first poll ascertained voters’ opinions about proposed mechanisms to control alcohol promotions, drink specials, and alcohol sales and consumption at public events. The second poll asked off-campus residents (students and non-students) about various mechanisms to control the

alcohol problems near their neighborhoods. The pollster developed comprehensive reports for each poll detailing and interpreting the results.

The complete reports then were sent to each Metropolitan Council member to develop an awareness of their constituents' opinions concerning these issues. To further "soften the market," the coalition sent news releases about the results to the local campus and community media. The news releases led to several public interest stories in print and electronic media. Next, coalition members began applying specific results in public advocacy activities to support proposed ordinances.

Example: One proposed ordinance was intended to establish alcohol-free zones at public parades, fairs, and festivals where alcohol generally is permitted. The poll revealed that "80% or more say that excessive drinking causes an overall negative reputation or image of our community." Furthermore, there was strong community support for controlling alcohol at public fairs and festivals accessible to youth:

- Keeping alcohol booths away from children's activities (91%)
- Having family zones where alcohol is not allowed (81%)
- Limiting the number of alcohol booths at public events (74%)
- Not allowing people to bring their own alcohol to public events (68%)

Those results were inserted into advocacy issue papers, disseminated by selected coalition members to policy-makers, and discussed in relation to the proposed ordinance. Other selected coalition members presented charts and oral testimony using the same data when the ordinance was brought up publicly for the final vote.

The outcome: Realizing that they would have the support of their constituents if they decided to support the proposed ordinance, the ordinance unanimously passed.

Further public advocacy followed to institutionalize the practice in the alcoholic beverage control office and the public works department.

Lessons learned:

1) Analyze the elements of your problem carefully, keeping your local culture in mind. Research strategies used by other communities to resolve their problems, compare each element with your own situation, and then determine what strategy is most likely to solve the problem locally. Investigate what arguments are likely to be presented by opposing parties and incorporate questions into your poll that will answer those usual arguments. You will save time in the long run by taking adequate time to determine where the pitfalls are likely to occur along the way.

2) Obtain assistance from a professional pollster or researcher to assure that the results of your poll will meet research rigor. Opponents likely will attempt to debunk both the procedure and the results.

3) Present the resulting data in multiple formats for the following audiences: a) the general public, interested primarily in the “big picture;” b) media professionals, desiring specific details about the process and the results; and c) policy-makers, looking for a practical and acceptable solution to the problem. Prepare an executive summary, a full report explaining all data in text and charts, a simplified poster showing results by voter districts, and friendly personal letters. Prepare visuals to help sell a convincing story to all possible audiences through the media.

4) Determine who are the most convincing presenters and make sure they take the time to practice the message, as public testimony can be intimidating. Practice to be able to present the results within the time allotted for the specific forum. Determined

opponents know how to find the holes in the argument and may challenge the presenter publicly. An off-the-cuff answer to a question can doom the presentation to negative results.

5) You will enjoy the creative process of conducting your own research for the purpose of educating policy-makers who have the power to change the problem environment. You can achieve your desired results through this methodology, though it requires detailed effort and patience.

Conclusion

Though the four cases outlined represent only a small sampling of the kinds of environmental messages communicated through A Matter of Degree sites, they illustrate the importance of this form of communication in reducing high-risk drinking behaviors for college students. Getting a community that is bombarded with “individual responsibility” messages to begin to think environmentally is certainly a challenge, yet as more communities begin to see success in reducing alcohol-related harms by changing their environments, organizers should see less resistance. While these cases are in no means meant to be a prescriptive list of approaches, hopefully they provide some insight into the general use of environmental argumentation as a tool in prevention.

Still, much more work in perfecting this communication strategy is needed. Environmental messages have yet to be studied in depth to enable organizers to predict which arguments and appeals, or which forms of evidence, can yield the greatest success, or which audiences are most likely to respond to environmental appeals. Fuller case examinations, along with research using a variety of methodology, can shed additional light into this strategy and assist prevention efforts in creating changes to high-risk

environments.

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