

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**PREVENTION FIRST**  
*Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse*

## TIP SHEET

## COALITION BUILDING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Community coalitions have great potential to prevent youth substance use/misuse. Building a long-term, multi-sector community coalition, however, can be challenging. While the size of a community is influential, rural and urban/suburban communities differ from each other in more ways than population. For example, according to the Carsey Institute, poverty rates are substantially higher for rural youth than urban youth.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to youth alcohol use, rural youth experience lower disapproval by parents and friends than urban youth.<sup>2</sup>

Rural communities also have unique characteristics that can be helpful in coalition building. Studies show that people in rural communities participate in local volunteer opportunities more than their urban counterparts. Generations of families have lived in the same rural communities their entire lives leading to the sense that 'everyone knows everyone.' This also supports a long-standing norm of helping each other solve community problems.<sup>3</sup> Despite higher poverty rates at the rural level, rural does not mean a lower social-economic status or lack of education.

The Strategic Prevention Framework provides an opportunity for coalitions to reinforce community strengths and prevent youth substance use. The following tips may be helpful when building/maintaining a strong coalition in a rural community.

### Recruitment Tips:

- Partner with community members, businesses and organizations that are well-respected to assist with recruitment
- Partner with other health-based organizations within the community that share the same community concerns
- Collaborate with other youth-serving clubs and organizations such as: 4-H, FFA, or Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)
- Market your efforts as community collaboration and not a competition for resources
- Be an active player by attending non-coalition events that are important to the community to boost trust and visibility



### **Maintenance Tips:**

- Create a clear, shared mission and vision that addresses the needs of the community for the long term
- Establish a meeting schedule for the year and be conscious of industry time tables such as: planting season, harvest season, community fairs, festivals, and company/plant shut downs or vacations
- Host coalition events in conjunction - not in competition - with other community events
- Be respectful of member's time; with limited people in the community, one person may have several jobs/ roles to meet the needs of the community (e.g., the Fire Chief may also be the basketball coach who also has a full-time job elsewhere)
- Post meeting and event notices on a community-accessible bulletin board, in church bulletins, in a school newsletter or grocery stores
- Hold your coalition meetings in a well-known and easily accessible area of the community
- Use a conference call-in number to allow people who can't be present to participate; traveling to a meeting may be a barrier for membership as rural communities are small in population and large in area and transportation may not be available

### **Membership Retention Tips:**

- Consider mailing meeting notices and minutes to your members who don't have internet access, since high speed internet access may not be an option for rural communities
- Utilize meeting time wisely by staying on track with the agenda
- Plan for all members to have an active role in assessment, planning and implementation of strategies
- Rotate coalition leadership positions to extend ownership
- Frame programs and policies as investments in the community
- Work with local media to publish pictures and articles that celebrate your efforts in the community
- Award your volunteers by recognizing them in the local media or other public methods

### **Additional Resources**

- CADCA – [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)
- Prevention First – [www.prevention.org](http://www.prevention.org)
- SAMHSA - <http://www.samhsa.gov/specific-populations/other>
- Rural Health Information Hub - <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/>
- Rural Policy Research Institute – [www.rupri.org](http://www.rupri.org)
- Carsey School of Public Policy – <https://carsey.unh.edu/>

<sup>1</sup>Johnson, Kenneth. "Demographic Trends in Rural and Small Town America" Carsey Institute: Reports on Rural America, 2006. Web 17 Nov. 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Gale, John, et al. Adolescent Alcohol Use: Do Risk and Protective Factors Explain Rural – Urban Differences? Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine, March 2012. Web 17 Nov. 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Hamilton, Lawrence, et al. "Place Matters Challenges and Opportunities in Four Rural Americas" Carsey Institute: Reports on Rural America, 2008. Web 17 Nov. 2016.