

# SPECIAL EVENTS AND ALCOHOL RESOURCE GUIDE

## This Guide Includes:

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1. How to establish alcohol sales and service goals for special events.
2. Issues to consider when updating or drafting new special event alcohol policies and procedures.
3. Important questions to answer when planning a special event that will serve alcohol.



## APRC Introduction

Prevention First's Alcohol Policy Resource Center (APRC) provides training, education, resources, and tools on evidence-based alcohol policy and law enforcement strategies to municipalities, local officials, law enforcement, and community coalitions focused on underage drinking in Illinois.

Special events are often an integral part of the fabric and culture of a community. Not only are special events an opportunity to celebrate, they can often be an economic driver for businesses and organizations in a community. Additionally, special events are often run by non-profit organizations to raise money and bring awareness to a certain issue or cause. Special events can include carnivals, art fairs, cultural celebrations, holiday celebrations, and many other festive events to bring community members together. Many community special events, especially the successful and well-run events, are a highlight on the community events calendar and a point of pride for the business, non-profit, or community host.

While special events provide community members an occasion to celebrate, they can also offer underage youth an opportunity to access alcohol. Fortunately, there is a lot of information we can learn from the experiences of other communities who routinely host special events, and specifically special events that serve alcohol. If alcohol will be a part of a special event, specific policies and procedures should be in place that make it difficult for youth to purchase alcohol or obtain alcohol from adults at the event. Special events with clear alcohol policies and procedures in place also send a clear message that consumption of alcohol by youth is not acceptable.

### This Guide Includes:

1. How to establish alcohol sales and service goals for special events
2. Issues to consider when updating or drafting new special event alcohol policies and procedures
3. Important questions to answer when planning a special event that will serve alcohol



If your community would like assistance developing special events alcohol policies and procedures, please reach out to the APRC by visiting our website at [prevention.org](https://www.prevention.org).

# Guide to Special Event Alcohol Sales Policies and Procedures

How to ensure public safety and reduce underage alcohol use  
For businesses, nonprofits and community groups



## Why Written Special Event Alcohol Policies and Procedures are Important for Your Organization and Community

Alcohol sales are often a major source of revenue for businesses, charitable organizations and other groups that host fairs, festivals, sporting events, concerts or other special events. However, these events also create a high risk for underage drinking and alcohol abuse-related problems, including public disturbances, violence, impaired driving and vandalism.

Underage youth will often do whatever they can to obtain alcohol on-site or sneak it into venues. And, adults who drink to excess may threaten the safety of others.

Many community events have a positive reputation, are run well, and have vast community support. It is important to identify early those events earning a reputation for being troublesome, as the negative connotations attached to certain events effect businesses and communities.

Fortunately, organizations can develop policies and procedures designed to significantly reduce these incidents and ensure safe enjoyment for everyone in attendance.

**In 2018, 63% of Illinois 10th graders and 74% of 12th graders who drank alcohol reported getting it from a social source other than their parents (friends, strangers, older siblings, other adults).**

Written policies and procedures allow for special events to adhere to a standard set of guidelines for operation to ensure the community is event is successful and safe.

### ***Clearly stated special event alcohol policies:***

- Reduce youth ability to purchase alcohol directly or obtain it indirectly from adults at events.
- Decrease adult overconsumption and intoxication.
- Send a clear message that alcohol consumption by underage youth is unacceptable by community social norms.

*\*This guide outlines some considerations to keep in mind as you develop alcohol policies and procedures for special events. For additional information, recommendations and assistance, contact Prevention First's Alcohol Policy Resource Center.*

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# WHERE TO START

Begin by reviewing and revising your event policies and procedures to specifically address how alcohol sales will be managed in a way that eliminates underage alcohol access while supporting safe alcohol consumption for those over the age of 21. Familiarize yourself with your community's mass gathering permits, sounds permits, and other specific permits that can be required for special events. Also check government regulations prior to each event to ensure compliance with any changes.

## Establish Alcohol Service Goals

*Having clearly stated goals in writing will ensure that everyone involved understands the need. For example:*

1. Eliminate access to alcohol by those under the age of 21 on event property, including parking areas and rest rooms.
2. Provide a safe event venue by preventing over-service of alcohol to attendees over the age of 21.
3. Ensure that all event personnel have been trained and agree to uphold all alcohol service policies and procedures.
4. Address training of event volunteers. Lack of training can be problematic for events if volunteers are inexperienced in alcohol service policies and procedures.

## Involve Alcohol Vendors, Government Agencies and Community Members

Establishing support for special event alcohol policies and creating partnerships are important first steps before establishing special event alcohol sales restrictions and safety procedures. Involving stakeholders and those community members you will need to succeed with your goals will ensure that their needs are addressed as well.

Coalitions can be powerful allies and often have the knowledge and skillset on how to work with community officials on passing ordinances or new policies. Engaging coalitions in your efforts up-front can assist in your policy efforts and readily address events and incidents as they come up.

Consider others who are affected by special events such as neighborhood residents, sponsors, EMT and emergency room personnel, insurance companies, and government agencies involved in city cleanup, law enforcement and other services.

## Collect Data

*Having information about events where alcohol is served, and where and how underage youth access alcohol, will set the stage for beginning conversations and processes for initiating or strengthening restrictions for future community events.*

- Gather information about alcohol use and any alcohol-related problems reported at past local events.
- Check the Illinois Youth Survey school, district and county reports to understand underage alcohol use in your area and determine where teenagers are accessing alcohol in your community.
- If possible, interview those who have staffed previous events to gain their insights about issues related to alcohol sales.
- When planning a special event, document the planning process through meeting notes. These meeting notes can be used in the future to provide details on tasks, responsibilities, deadlines, and all the specifics related to the planning and facilitation of the event.
- Conduct a debrief after the special event and identify areas of success, as well as challenges presented. Create a process for making modification and changes to the special event to address identified challenges.
- Gather feedback from local law enforcement after the special event. Law enforcement can provide their perspective and insight on what went well and what might need improvement or modification.





# PLANNING CHECKLISTS

Once you have gathered data, listened to the needs and concerns of organizations and community members, and established goals, use the following checklists and online resources available from the Prevention First Alcohol Policy Resource Center ([prevention.org](http://prevention.org)) to update or draft new special event alcohol policies and procedures.

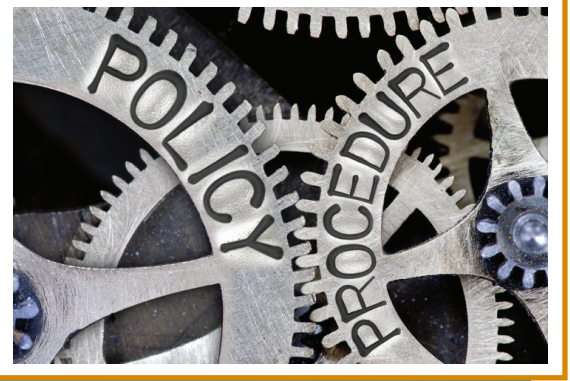


- ***Secure the Physical Space***
- ***Post Clearly Visible Signage***
- ***Suggested Alcohol Service Practices***
- ***Establish Staff and Server Policies and Procedures***
- ***Other Considerations***

## Secure the Physical Space

- Hire adequate numbers of trained security personnel over the age of 21 to monitor alcohol sales areas, as well as the overall venue, including restrooms and parking areas. Consider establishing a security-to-expected-attendance ratio minimum and have contingency plans for larger crowds.
- If possible, restrict alcohol sales to a designated location where underage attendees are not allowed, away from family and youth-oriented activities. Or, establish separate alcohol sales lines at food and beverage stations.
- Additionally, restrict alcohol consumption to designated locations where underage attendees are not allowed.
- Ensure that restroom areas, ticket booths, games or other general areas do not have “pass through” access to alcohol serving areas. Ideally separate restroom facilities would be in direct proximity of the alcohol service and consumption area and would keep those consuming alcohol in a specific, restricted area.
- Have ID verification areas separate from vendor areas, including applying wristbands.
- Have adequate lighting for all event areas to discourage activities in shadows.

## Post Clearly Visible Signage



- **At entrance/exit areas indicate event alcohol policies**
  - No alcohol carry-ins or carry outs.
  - We check IDs for alcohol purchase and possession.
- **At alcohol points of sale and/or ID checkpoints**
  - Have ID verification areas separate from vendor areas, including applying wristbands.
  - Must be born on or before (date) to purchase, consume or possess alcohol.
  - Adults who provide alcoholic beverages to anyone under the age of 21 will be prosecuted under the law.
  - Must show undamaged wristband secured on wrist to purchase alcohol. Servers reserve the right to ask for additional proof of age.
  - Alcohol sales will stop 60 minutes prior to close (this reduces drinking immediately before leaving a venue).
  - We reserve the right to refuse alcohol service at our discretion. Intoxicated individuals will not be served.
- **At restrooms or porta potties**
  - No beverages allowed inside. (Prevents alcohol being given to someone underage inside rest rooms or left in porta potties for the next user.)
- **Post alcohol advertising and other signage at or above 36" from the ground.**

## Establish Staff and Server Policies and Procedures

- Establish staff, server, and volunteer policies for sales and service of alcohol. All policies should always be followed. Develop written procedures and require personnel to sign a form indicating that they have read and will uphold these policies and procedures.
- Provide pre-event training for all event personnel, including volunteers, regarding alcohol policies and procedures, such as refusing service to intoxicated individuals and handling underage drinking and alcohol-related incidents.
- Staff and servers should be easily identifiable (e.g., wear required shirts or badges).
- Event staff, servers, and volunteers should be supervised closely and in proximity of an event coordinator in case of sales and service questions and to receive assistance if needed.
- Provide radio communication between alcohol serving stations and event coordinators and law enforcement to ensure fast action when needed.
- Event staff must report to work sober and should be prohibited from drinking alcohol during working hours. If they drink after their shifts, they must remove work identification or clothing and be outside work areas.
- Provide incident report forms to staff with guidance on when forms would be filled out and how to fill out forms.

# Suggested Alcohol Service Practices

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- Limit the number of alcoholic beverages that can be purchased by an individual at one time.
- Price non-alcoholic beverages less than alcoholic drinks.
- Limit cup size to 12-16 oz. for beer and wine coolers and 5 oz. for wine. Do not serve alcohol in pitchers (to limit access for underage drinkers to pour into their cups).
- Remove lids/caps and open cans of alcoholic beverages before serving to patrons.
- Ensure that “21 and older” wristbands have not been removed or appear to have been removed and replaced.
- Serve non-alcoholic beverages in original bottles or cans, or use clear, cups distinguishable from non-alcoholic drinks.
- Prohibit alcoholic drink promotions such as 2 for 1, all you can drink or happy hours.
- Prohibit drinking games or contests and alcoholic beverages as prizes.
- Limit the hours of alcohol sales (e.g., after 12 p.m.) and stop sales 60 minutes prior to closing.

# Other Considerations

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- Require alcohol license holders to have liquor liability insurance for special events.
- Determine how you will communicate event alcohol service policies to the organization members and your community. Include WHY the policies are necessary for the safe operation of your event.
- Offer alcohol-free days/nights.
- Determine who has the authority to terminate/close the event.
- Prohibit alcohol in parking areas.
- Require event coordinators, or select staff, to be CPR/AED and first aid trained.
- Create a plan for inclement weather.
- Provide access to water throughout event to provide dehydration.
- Ensure an evacuation plan is in place and that event staff are able to access the plan if needed.



# 10 QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

**1** What are your community ordinances or state laws regarding alcohol sales?

**2** What individuals and organizations should be involved in developing special event alcohol sales policies and procedures?

**3** What alcohol use data is available for your municipality, county and state?

**4** Who must approve resulting policies and procedures?

**5** What process will be put in place to evaluate the success of your plans after the event?

**6** What are the legalities and processes required for checking IDs in your town or state?

**7** What steps must be taken to report underage drinking to legal authorities in a way that protects your organization?

**8** Do law enforcement or emergency medical service teams offer training in recognizing intoxicated individuals and how to safely address refusal of service or disruptive or dangerous behavior?

**9** Who will monitor vendors and other areas for alcohol sales or use violations?

**10** How will you implement and enforce the new policies and procedures?



*Additional Resources are available from the Alcohol Policy Resource Center at [prevention.org](http://prevention.org).*

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