

Collaborating with Higher Ed

Sharing a community with an institution of higher education (IHE) often adds positively to the life of a community. IHEs bring cultural engagements and interesting speakers to their campuses, offer opportunities for adult or continued education, and provide a wealth of employment opportunities for community members.

Yet there are also challenges to sharing a community with an IHE. High-risk drinking by college students continues at levels virtually unchanged since the first Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study illuminated the problem in 1993. About 40% of college students report consuming high levels of alcohol (four or more drinks on one occasion) at least once a month.¹ This behavior can result in serious community issues, ranging from vandalism to drunk and disorderly conduct to an increase in DUIs and alcohol-related fatalities.

Creating an environment that reduces the likelihood college students will engage in these dangerous behaviors requires the involvement of both community and campus stakeholders, working together. This tip sheet is designed to facilitate collaboration between community partners and IHEs. It provides an introduction to key players involved in on-campus substance use prevention efforts, explores some important considerations for working together, and presents examples of ways to engage campuses and college students in community prevention efforts.

Understanding IHEs

IHEs come in a variety of shapes and sizes, ranging from traditional 4-year residential colleges to 2-year community colleges to vocational or trade schools. They also differ in access to resources, guiding philosophies, and relationships with their host communities. Some are excellent neighbors, with high levels of community engagement and involvement. Others are less involved in community activities: less-resourced or smaller vocational and trade schools, in particular, often prefer to maintain an insular campus environment. Understanding the characteristics and makeup of the IHE in your community is key to facilitating a successful working relationship.

¹ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2015, April). *College drinking fact sheet*. Retrieved from <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/CollegeFactSheet/Collegefactsheet.pdf>

Despite their differences, all IHEs share certain characteristics. Like a corporation, all IHEs have a board of trustees that oversees the general direction and “big picture” financial health of the IHE. The board is generally made up of senior IHE leaders, such as the President, Provost, and senior academic deans. In addition, board members often include influential alumni, and business and community leaders. The board typically meets only a few times in a year in relatively closed meetings.

As a community partner, you will most likely be working with an official directly below the senior leadership, such as associate or assistant deans and directors of various offices within the institution. Using the analogy of the IHE as a corporation, officials at this level can be thought of as customer service providers: the day-to-day managers of the IHE’s operations and student experience.

Here are a few of the key offices involved in addressing alcohol misuse issues at an IHE:

Office	What They Do
Dean of Students/Dean of Student Affairs	The Dean of Students is typically in charge of all of the administrative staff overseeing the IHE’s “outside-the-classroom” experience. The Dean will typically oversee staff running residence halls, student activities, Greek life, discipline/judicial affairs, AOD-centered programming, community service/service learning, and orientation. The Dean’s attitude toward substance misuse by students will influence all the prevention and intervention activities at the IHE. Deans can vary from highly-supportive of intervention and prevention to denying the problem exists.
Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Office	By law ² every university that receives federal funds is required to have an alcohol prevention program and a designated AOD prevention staff member. On smaller or less-resourced campuses, the person in that role often has another job in health services, counseling, or mental health, and has agreed to serve as the AOD person. On most campuses, however, there will be at least one office that uses AOD in its title and one person that runs it.
Greek Life	On campuses with a Greek system, there will be at least one university-based staff member who works with these organizations. On schools with a high percentage of Greek students, this office can be large, with a director, and various staff designated to work exclusively with sororities or fraternities. For Greek groups, addressing substance misuse issues is often a priority.

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention. (2006, July). *Complying with the drug-free schools and campuses regulations [EDGAR Part 86]: A guide for university and college administrators*. Retrieved from <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/hec/product/dfscr.pdf>

Office	What They Do
Mental Health/Counseling	At less-resourced schools, these staff members often act as front-line substance misuse professionals. Their approach tends to be individual in scope, with some offering recovery support groups. They may or may not be connected to community service providers.
Athletics	Coaches and athletic instructors have considerable influence over athletes, a group of students that are known to be at higher risk for substance misuse. All NCAA athletes are required to sign a school-specific agreement that verifies their understanding of NCAA-banned drugs, adherence to federal and state alcohol laws and policies, and school disciplinary procedures for violation of alcohol policies.
Campus Police	A common misconception about campus police is that they are “rent-a-cops” responsible for breaking up parties and ticketing minors with possession of alcohol. In fact, at many IHEs, campus police officers undergo the same training and state certification as municipal and state police, and they have the same authority even though they are privately employed. Campus security guards, by contrast, are hired to protect the buildings on campus. Both groups are involved in addressing substance misuse on campuses.

As a community partner, your organization or agency’s skills will likely connect with the work of one of the IHE offices listed above. For example, an agency looking to expand alcohol recovery groups in the community would do well to reach out to either the AOD office or the mental health or counseling office, both of which would have knowledge about existing services at the IHE. A community partner looking to increase police patrols of student-heavy neighborhoods would want to connect with campus police. Reaching out to the head of any of these offices will likely be the best way to begin collaboration.

Considerations for Working with IHEs

As a community partner, knowing as much as you can about the IHE is a key first step to a successful collaboration. Here are some important factors that will influence how open the IHE may be to collaborating with you (much of this information can be found by looking through the IHE’s website):

- *Percentage of students living on campus.* Schools with a high percentage of students living on campus tend to be more insular than those with more diffuse student populations, and

subsequently less responsive to community outreach efforts or involvement in what may be construed as a “campus issues.” By contrast, IHEs with a high percentage of students living in the community will likely welcome support for their in-town students.

- *Number of staff dedicated to addressing substance misuse issues.* Many larger schools have sections of their websites dedicated to alcohol and other drug issues. The size and scope of this web area will give you a good indication of the resources the IHE has put toward substance misuse issues. How big is the staff? How robust is the site? Does it cater to different audiences? Less-resourced offices tend to be more open to outside collaboration, welcoming the additional resources and capacity these partnerships can bring to their prevention efforts.
- *Percentage of students involved in Greek life.* Students who join fraternities and sororities tend to drink at higher rates and more frequently than those who do not.³ In addition, many IHEs have either loose or no ties to off-campus housing owned by fraternities and sororities. This can create a challenging atmosphere around collaboration, since the university is not technically the owner of the fraternity or sorority houses and has little sway over the activities in a privately-owned building. On the other hand, because these houses are technically no different than other privately owned homes, local police have free reign to intervene to shut down parties that become loud or disruptive.
- *Percent of students involved in athletics.* Student athletes tend to drink at higher rates and more frequently than those who do not participate in sports. Complicating matters, student athletes tend to drink more in the off-season, rather than in season, when they are not under the influence of their coaches. Efforts focused on working with athletic teams should be targeted toward the off-season, when coaches would likely welcome additional support for their student athletes.
- *History of publicly-reported student drinking incidents (e.g., riots, student parties stopped by police, death or injury).* One of the more challenging public relations issues for any IHE is publicly-reported student drinking. For many IHEs, newspaper and police bulletins documenting alcohol use by their students lead to a closed-off attitude toward outside intervention. As a community partner, recognize that the administrators at an IHE are likely to feel tense and overwhelmed by media attention, especially after a recent event. Use sensitivity when reaching out to staff to offer help or support.

Opportunities for Collaboration

A big question that often arises in collaborating with an IHE is what type of reception you can expect when proposing collaboration. Another equally important question is what to offer the IHE. A modern IHE, like any modern business, is sensitive to outside perceptions of its brand. For many IHEs, this sensitivity can lead to an environment that values privacy and discretion, especially when it comes to hot-button issues like student drinking. For many IHEs, navigating after-hours student behavior is

³ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2009, December 18). *High-risk drinking on college campuses, college life and alcohol: Challenges and solutions, a resource guide.*

difficult, and you will likely find many different opinions on how to best address high-risk drinking on a given campus.

What all IHEs will value, though, is the opportunity to showcase their own commitment to addressing community-wide goals of health and wellness. IHEs also want to be acknowledged as being good neighbors and giving back to the community. This presents ample opportunity for having IHE faculty, staff, and students aid the work of your organization for the betterment of the community.

Here are some ideas for collaboration between IHEs and communities, along with examples of innovative partnerships addressing alcohol misuse and its effects on a community from colleges and universities in Massachusetts:

- **Organize a neighborhood clean-up of student-dense neighborhoods:** Boston College and a local neighborhood group organize a monthly Saturday morning cleanup for college residents in off-campus housing. The impetus behind the cleanup is to encourage the students to take pride in their off-campus neighborhoods, clean up the detritus from student parties, and treat their neighbors with respect.
- **Invite the IHE to participate in local alcohol prevention efforts:** Representatives from both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University sit on the Cambridge License Advisory Board, a group of city officials, restaurant and bar owners, and liquor store owners who work together to address underage drinking in the city of Cambridge. Participation of the colleges has been instrumental in the city's ability to address problems related to college students' alcohol misuse. In one example, a local student house worked with both the college and the Advisory Board to respond to an alcohol-related discipline issue.
- **Have the IHE do discipline checks for local landlords to prevent rowdy student slums:** Concerned about renting to unruly students, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst worked with local landlords to develop a discipline check landlords could use before renting to students. The university welcomed the chance to encourage on-campus students to behave responsibly for the good of their future off-campus housing.
- **Offer to collaborate on bringing responsible beverage server training (RBS) training to a campus:** Most cities and towns require bartenders to be trained in the principles of responsible beverage service, which ensures that bartenders do not serve intoxicated patrons and understand basic alcohol pharmacology. The Cambridge Prevention Coalition worked with MIT to create an RBS training the school could use with its fraternities, many of whom host parties.

IHE staff members who work with college students are also committed to ensuring students learn to be productive and thoughtful members of society. These administrators are often passionate about outside-the-classroom education and would welcome to the opportunity to meet with community organizations to learn how they can work together to foster educational growth in their students.