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Tips for Soliciting Cohesive Enforcement Program Plans



Prepared by

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Underage Drinking Laws Program


A bout This Guide

Lead agencies in the States can help lay the groundwork for effective action at the local level. An important first step in providing strong leadership is to use a grant application format that encourages communities to construct cohesive proposals based on strategies that are most likely to succeed in combating underage drinking. This document provides tips on how this can be done.

The document can be used to

- Plan and write requests for proposals (RFPs),
- Assess the adequacy of proposals received, and
- Provide useful feedback to applicants.

By providing effective leadership and guidance, State agencies can help to maximize the effectiveness of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) *Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws Initiative*.



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T ips for Soliciting Cohesive Enforcement Program Plans: Writing Effective RFPs for the Sub-Granting Process

We all share concern about underage drinking and the health and social problems it creates. Current attention to this issue and new funding initiatives provide an unprecedented opportunity to protect young people from the dangers of alcohol use. OJJDP recognizes the centrality of enforcement in an effort to combat underage drinking. Many important enforcement activities occur at the local level, and grants to communities to support enforcement can be a critical part of a State's overall underage drinking prevention strategy. But how do we guarantee that funds provided to local communities have the greatest possible impact in terms of lives saved and tragedies averted? Designing RFPs that will elicit well-crafted plans can help to ensure the most efficient use of limited resources.

Many different questions can be asked about a proposed plan: Can the applicant actually accomplish it? Will the grant money be spent appropriately and administered with accountability? The fundamental question that we are addressing in this document is: *Will the plan work?* If the grant is to bring about the desired results, the RFP must elicit cohesive proposals that include potentially effective strategies. We suggest that the RFP pose a series of key questions and that proposals be evaluated based on the quality of the answers.

Question 1: What are the project objectives?

Applicants should be able to provide a straightforward and succinct statement concerning the overall objectives of the project. That is, a proposal's program plan should begin with a clear statement about how the applicant believes the community *will be changed* as a result of receiving mini-grant funding. Project objectives can serve as a standard against which progress can be measured. The goals of the program also should be the common thread that links the variety of strategies proposed.

Question 2: What is the nature of the underage drinking problem in the community?

A mini-grant proposal should articulate the nature of underage drinking problems in the local community. These may include problems related to actual consumption, such as binge drinking. Other problems may result from behaviors associated with underage drinking such as impaired driving, violent crime, unsafe sexual practices, delinquency, and poor academic performance. A community may intend to address one or more of these issues with the grant funding.

Some data to support the problem definition should be expected within a proposal, although an overemphasis on data is not necessary or even advisable. The use of data already available is often sufficient for this purpose and even preferable in that it does not require the conduct of additional data collection, which is often complex and costly. Existing data, such as school surveys or enforcement records—particularly those based on compliance-check data and DUI/DWI arrest information—can adequately support the definition of the community's underage drinking problems.

Question 3: What causes the identified alcohol-related problems?

Equally important in any grant solicitation is the call to identify the perceived causes or risk factors for the existing alcohol-related problems. Linking problems with perceived causes requires applicants to identify specific factors in the community that require attention in order to adequately address problems.

Most commonly perceived causes for underage alcohol problems include easy access to alcohol, lack of enforcement of alcohol-related laws, and availability of alcohol through social sources that may be difficult to control. Other perceived causes might include poor parental supervision and/or social norms among youth and adults such as a perception that underage alcohol use is an inevitable or harmless rite of passage. It is important to recognize that some of these causes are more easily addressed than others. For example, increased enforcement of laws against sales to minors is a single strategy that can result in reduced access in a matter of months—but changing social norms regarding underage alcohol use is a more complex and long-term process.

Question 4: How is the community currently addressing the problem of underage drinking?

Applicants will want to detail existing efforts in order to demonstrate community commitment to addressing the problems. Proposal reviewers, however, should also use this information to determine how proposed strategies will enhance, complement, or fill the gaps in the current effort. Consequently, when instructing applicants to describe existing efforts, the RFP should require them to describe the limitations of these efforts. Applicants should also be asked to discuss whether and to what extent existing efforts address the perceived causes of alcohol-related problems.

Question 5: What strategies will the community implement as a result of grant funding?

Discussion of proposed strategies is the “heart and soul” of any grant application. Scientifically proven, effective strategies can be linked to the reduction of the occurrence of problems or the perceived causes of those problems. For this initiative, of course, the emphasis is on strategies to increase enforcement and reduce youth access to alcohol. While several types of strategies may be effective, some will be more appropriate than others, depending on the context, and applicants should be encouraged to propose only the most effective strategies. OJJDP’s recent publication, *Strategies To Reduce Underage Alcohol Use: Typology and Overview*, provides a menu of effective strategies and should be consulted when reviewing proposals in response to the RFP.



Question 6: How do proposed strategies relate to the perceived causes of existing underage drinking problems?

The answer to this question will have a bearing on the overall merit of the plan. Often it is assumed that the utility of proposed strategies is self-evident, but for proposal reviewers charged with considering numerous applications, the utility of specific strategies can be very difficult to determine without additional information. Asking bidders to connect proposed strategies to the perceived causes of underage drinking problems will require that they articulate a program plan that is both logical and cohesive. It will also increase the likelihood that applicants will attempt to select strategies that are most appropriate and effective for the specific problems they seek to address.

For example, a community might identify adults buying kegs for underage parties as a major cause of binge drinking. A strategy emphasizing enforcement of laws related to checking the identification (ID) of alcohol purchasers would not likely have an impact on this issue, since it is people over 21 who are actually purchasing the alcohol. Rather, a more appropriate strategy for this particular problem would be implementation and enforcement of a keg registration ordinance.

Question 7: How will media be used to enhance proposed strategies?

The media can be a very powerful tool for influencing beliefs and attitudes about underage drinking. In fact, it is often a community's first impulse to implement a media campaign to raise awareness or change attitudes. As an isolated strategy for reducing alcohol-related problems, media campaigns have limited effectiveness. Media can and should be used to amplify and complement effective strategies, and applicants should be encouraged *not* to make media campaigns the *primary* strategy of their proposed plans.

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College Town

Program Objective: To reduce binge drinking among high school and underage college students in a small college town.

Problem: Many youth drink heavily at local bars and at parties in houses near campus.

Perceived Causes: High density of bars near campus; inadequate ID checking at bars; older students buying kegs of beer for off-campus parties attended by local high school students and underage college students.

Current Strategies: Bumper stickers and key chains distributed with “responsible drinking” messages; signs posted in bars and liquor stores saying that alcohol will not be sold to minors.

Proposed Strategies: Conduct vigorous compliance-check programs at all retail outlets (bars, liquor stores, grocery and convenience stores); implement keg registration law; implement campus policy of parental notification for alcohol-related offenses.

Media Support: High level of publicity for compliance-check program, including publication of sales rates and names of stores that sell to minors; publicity campaign highlighting new keg registration law and indepth press coverage of first violations; joint news conference with college officials and parents group explaining and supporting parental notification policy.

Outback County

Program Objective: To reduce alcohol-related traffic crashes among youth.

Problem: Outback County has experienced a higher-than-average number of traffic crashes involving underage drinkers. It is a rural community with winding roads that are particularly dangerous for impaired teen drivers.

Perceived Causes: A “zero tolerance” law was recently passed but is not well known or well enforced. Youth have little trouble purchasing alcohol at local stores because they know the proprietors.

Current Strategies: Periodic compliance checks of alcohol outlets; intensive impaired driving patrols.

Proposed Strategies: High-profile sobriety checkpoints targeting minors; personal visits from youth groups to merchants to discuss the importance of not selling to minors; increased compliance checks.

Media Support: Publicity campaign to raise awareness of the “zero tolerance” law; media coverage of sobriety checkpoints; media coverage of youth visits to merchants; media event to announce the results of compliance-check campaign.

C onclusion

The lead agency in the State can help communities to develop cohesive, well-articulated, and most importantly, *effective* plans to reduce underage alcohol use. State leadership and oversight can provide a clear and logical framework for funding applications. This framework, along with appropriate feedback on the plans submitted, can offer every applicant community the best possible chance of bringing about positive change.