

2010 Town Hall Meetings on Underage Drinking in California Successes, Barriers and Lessons Learned

Prepared by the Governor's Prevention Advisory Council (GPAC)
Underage Drinking Prevention Workgroup

Introduction

As part of the national effort to prevent and reduce underage alcohol use, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in collaboration with the Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking (ICCPUD) sponsored local Town Hall Meetings (THMs) nationwide. With the support of SAMHSA, ICCPUD, the National Prevention Network, and Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free Foundation, almost 2000 THMs were convened through community-based organizations nationwide.

The THMs provided communities with the opportunity to come together to learn more about underage drinking and its impact on individuals, families, and the community. Importantly, the THMs provided a forum for communities to discuss ways they can best prevent and reduce underage alcohol use.

In California, underage drinking and youth took center stage at more than one hundred Town Hall Meetings during the 2009/10 school year to raise awareness and generate discussion about underage drinking.

Timed to coincide with the start of *Alcohol Awareness Month* in April, the meetings brought together youth, parents, teachers, politicians, law enforcement, business owners, faith-based and community leaders, and substance use treatment providers in communities in forty of the state's fifty-eight counties.

Background

Underage Drinking is a persistent problem in California. According to the 12th Biennial California Student Survey (CSS), about one-tenth of California 11th graders reported:

- Being drunk or sick from drinking seven or more times
- Passing out or losing control from drinking
- Engaging in weekly binge drinking
- Using alcohol at school
- Having been drunk at school three or more times
- Experiencing two or more problems from their alcohol use

The CSS also indicated that alcohol remains the most popular substance among high school students, with the majority of 11th graders reporting recent drinking (past six months) and almost half of 9th graders having consumed at least one drink. Heavy or problematic drinking remains a cause for concern, and drinking and driving involvement is rising.

Underage drinking is a leading contributor to death from injuries, which are the main cause of death for people under age 21, and is associated with risky sexual behavior, academic failure, illicit drug use, tobacco use, and a range of physical consequences, from hangovers to death from alcohol poisoning. In addition, underage drinking can cause alterations in the structure and function of the developing brain.¹

The THMs represent an important step in addressing Underage Drinking and implementing the *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* which states, "Underage alcohol use is everybody's problem—and its solution is everybody's responsibility."²

This report summarizes the approaches used to conduct THMs in California. Also included in this report is a discussion of the barriers and challenges that confronted the Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in planning and convening the THMs, as well as recommendations for future THMs.

Increasing Capacity

The number of California THMs held in 2010 increased significantly in number from those held in 2008. Most notably, more young people are taking charge to plan and execute meetings in their communities. Youth involvement in the planning and implementation of meetings on underage drinking can be directly attributed to the California Friday Night Live Partnership's involvement.

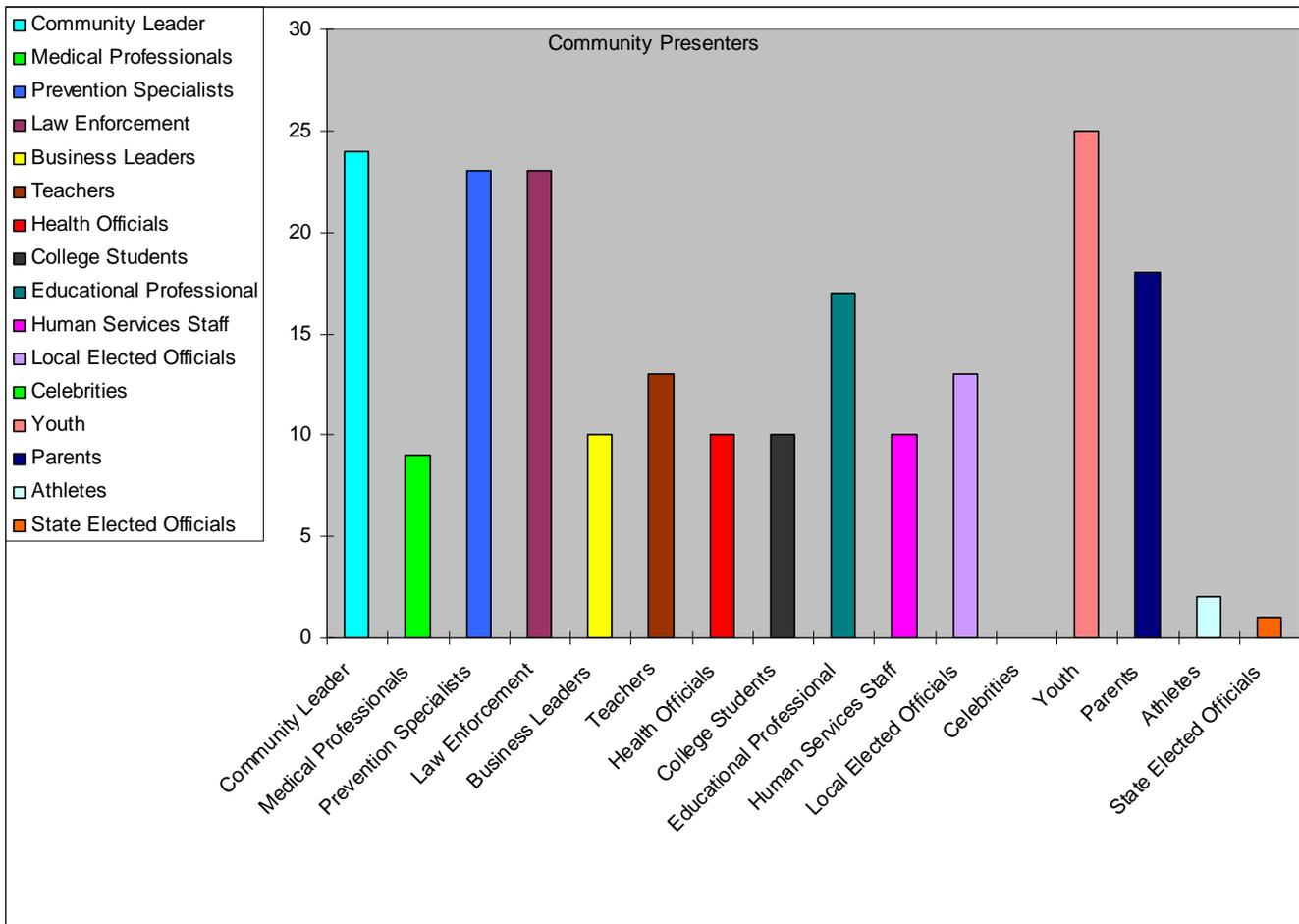
1222 adults participated in the 2010 California THMs. The community of Vista, California reported that 58 adult participants in their community were part of a THM conducted in Spanish. Similarly, 1257 youth participated in THMs statewide. The Spanish THM reported 36 youth in attendance. Please note that the survey did not require participants to report what language their THM was conducted in, but respondents self-reported that they held THMs where translation services were available.

A majority of the THMs were held in a panel presentation format. Twenty-nine percent of THMs were held as an open forum and 22 percent included keynote speakers.

California featured a wide variety of presenters. As mentioned above, youth involvement was key in the planning and implementation of THMs. An overwhelming 87 percent of THM presenters in California were youth, followed by community leaders at 82 percent. Law Enforcement and Prevention Specialists also played an important role, presenting at 79 percent of California THMs. The chart at the top of the next page represents the participation of community presenters.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). 2007. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* (electronic version), pp. 10–11. Retrieved from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/>.

² HHS. 2007. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* (electronic version), p. 75. Retrieved from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/>.



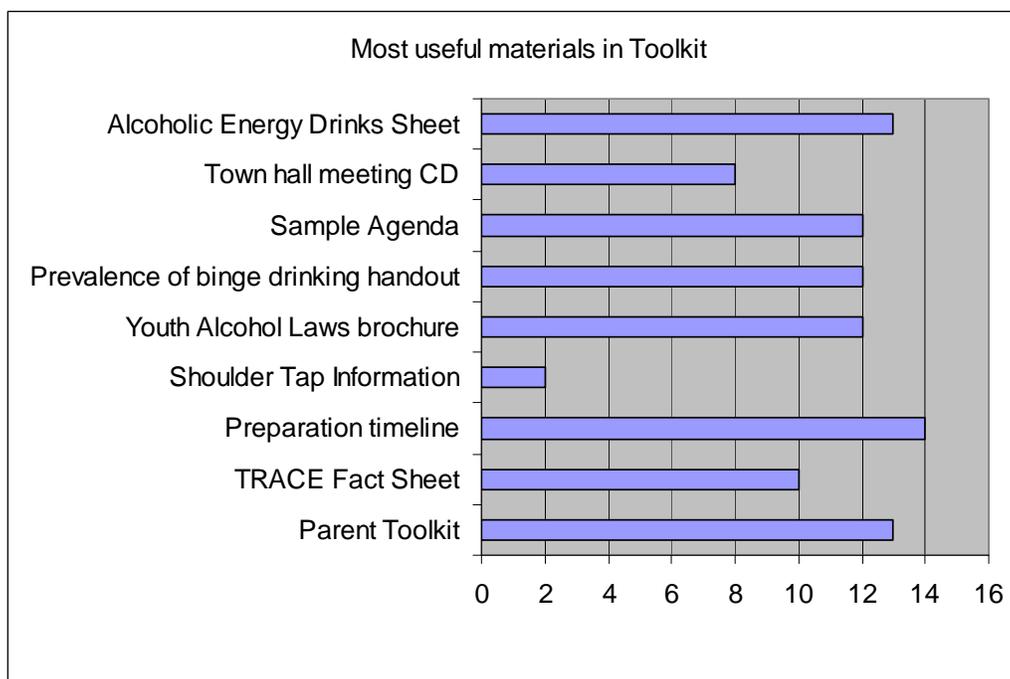
Increasing Awareness

The Governor's Prevention Advisory Council (GPAC) Underage Drinking Prevention Workgroup provided support to the THMs statewide by developing and disseminating California-specific materials to those who received the SAMHSA stipend to conduct a THM.

The materials created included a:

- Parent toolkit
- Sample agenda
- Preparation timeline
- Shoulder Tap Operation information card
- Brochure on Youth Alcohol Laws
- Handout on the prevalence of binge drinking in California
- One-pager on Alcoholic Energy Drinks
- Town Hall Meeting CD

The chart below shows the most useful materials in the toolkit according to the Town Hall meeting coordinators.



Over the last several years, alcoholic energy drinks (AEDs) have become increasingly popular and have gained a lot of media attention due to incidences involving AEDs. To address this very serious issue, some THMs provided information on how these products are marketed and the health and safety risks associated with AEDs. An AED “one-pager” was provided in the California-specific toolkit and was reported as one of the most widely-used materials.

Marketing Strategies

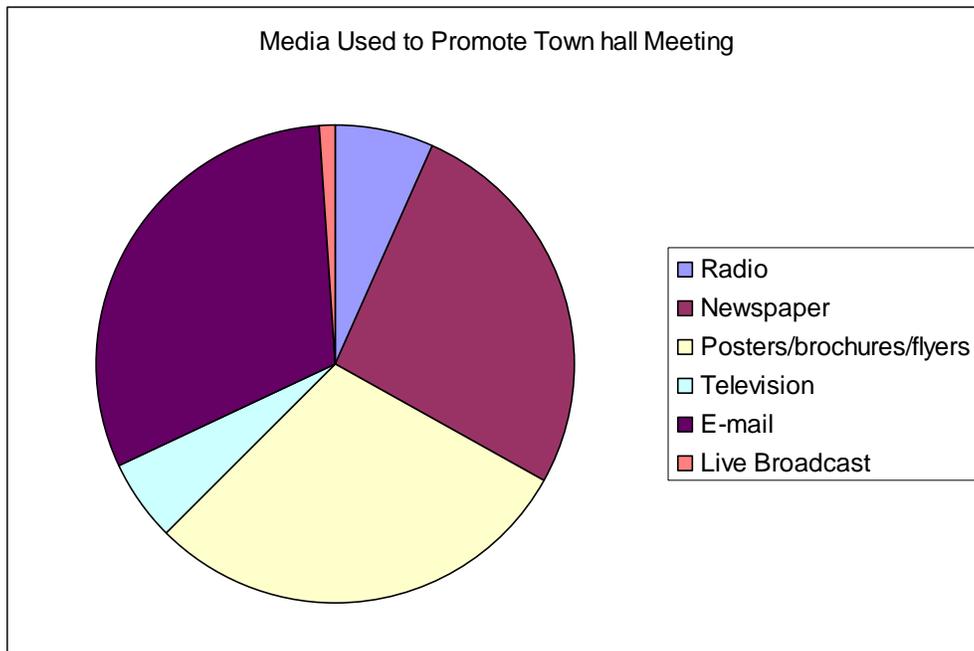
To promote and market Town Hall Meetings on Underage Drinking, a statewide press release was disseminated by ADP in March of 2010. Attached to the release was a list of locations, dates, and times for all 104 Town Hall Meetings in California.

One California community reported that they hosted an alcohol-free St. Patrick’s Day party. They found it was a good way to attract families, reach a multigenerational audience, and change social norms in their community.

Another community offered extra credit to students if parents attended. Parents and students worked on questions.

The survey also revealed that if youth planned the event, participants of the THMs would be well-represented by younger audiences.

The survey revealed that the most widely used method of marketing was via email or some other electronic media source i.e. Facebook followed by the use of pamphlets, posters and brochures. The chart on the next page depicts the media sources used to promote Town Hall Meetings.



Successes, Barriers, and Lessons Learned

Most survey respondents reported that while coordinating and planning a THM is hard work, it was definitely a worthwhile effort and almost all reporting CBO's plan to hold future events.

In the Sacramento metropolitan area, there were more than one THM conducted. Survey respondents reported that the THMs played an important role in passing the social host ordinance in their community. Through THMs Sacramento area CBOs were able to invite key community decision makers to inform them of the issues surrounding underage drinking and of possible solutions to address the issue.

Many respondents stated that THMs provided their community with an opportunity to raise awareness about the issue of underage drinking and set the stage for participants to have candid conversations about parent and community roles in addressing the issue.

A majority of the CBOs used materials created by youth such as video documentaries and PowerPoints. One CBO reported that their youth developed a "photovoice" showing community conditions related to alcohol and alcohol advertising. That particular THM included bi-lingual translation services.

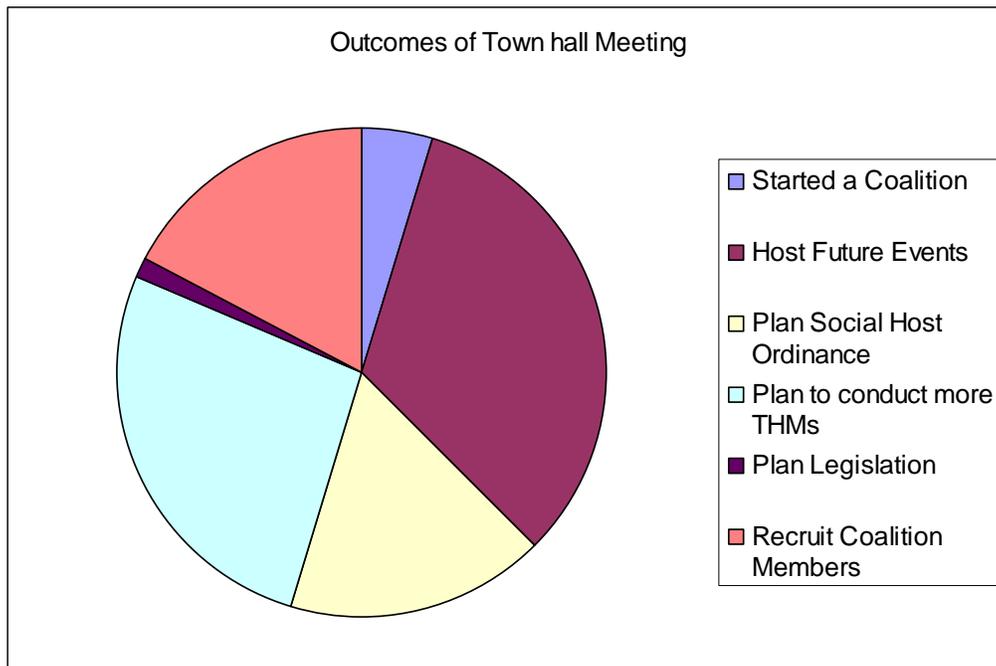
In the Santa Barbara area, a youth planning committee representing seven partner agencies was formed to coordinate and implement a THM. All survey respondents reported that youth-led events empowered the youth.

The California-specific THM Evaluation Survey provided the GPAC Underage Drinking Prevention Workgroup with excellent feedback. In order to improve quality and access of the materials provided in the California-specific toolkit, the GPAC Underage Drinking Prevention Workgroup will work to provide an online source of materials.

Barriers existed in disseminating the California-specific toolkit to CBOs. Five percent of CBOs reported that they didn't receive the California toolkit and wanted to know how they could gain access to the information. Limited staff and resources did not allow for a timely publish of the electronic toolkit.

Getting to Outcomes

All THM hosts reported that they received positive outcomes from hosting a THM. Of the survey respondents, 32 percent plan to hold future events and 27 percent plan to conduct future THM's. Five percent of THM's resulted in the start of a coalition and 17 percent recruited new coalition members. Most importantly, 20 percent of THM's resulted in plans to develop a Social Host Ordinance or other alcohol-related legislation.



Recommendations for Future Town Hall Meetings

The following recommendations came directly from the planning coordinators of the Town Hall Meetings in California.

- Youth-led events empower youth.
- Have attendees commit to a pledge of action and have someone responsible for follow-up.
- Plan early and advertise well in advance of the event.
- Partner with other agencies in your community.
- Youth-led events draw large numbers of youth participants.
- Make resource documents available in languages other than English.
- A majority of parents and members of the community are eager to become educated.