Limiting youth access to alcohol from commercial establishments

ATOD Planning & Implementation grantee progress report

A P R I L   2 0 1 3

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Introduction

Background

As part of the Minnesota Department of Human Services Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division's statewide youth alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) prevention initiative, the Division contracted with ten Planning and Implementation (P&I) grantees from across Minnesota to help communities prevent underage use of alcohol. In order to assess the effectiveness of these efforts, the Department of Human Services contracted with Wilder Research in St. Paul to design an evaluation strategy and instruments to be implemented by each P&I grantee. This report summarizes the evaluation of two strategies designed to reduce access to alcohol from commercial establishments by underage youth: responsible beverage server trainings and alcohol compliance checks. All ten P&I grantees are required to implement these strategies as part of their contracts with the State.

Description of strategies

Responsible beverage server trainings

Responsible beverage server trainings (RBST) provide education opportunities to owners, managers, servers, and sellers at alcohol establishments on how to avoid illegally selling alcohol to underage youth. Depending on local ordinances and laws, the trainings may be required of alcohol establishments, used as an alternative to court proceedings, and/or required after an establishment violated the law. In addition, some individual establishments may voluntarily implement training policies in the absence of any legal requirements or incentives. In most cases, P&I grantees contracted with a trainer to provide brief, on-site trainings to local businesses. Trainings usually last approximately two hours.

A literature review conducted by the University of Minnesota found that in communities where no organized efforts have been made to reduce the sale of alcohol to underage youth, up to half of undercover youth were able to buy alcohol from commercial establishments.[1] Responsible beverage server trainings were designed to reduce sales of alcohol to underage youth. Evaluations of different responsible beverage server trainings have consistently demonstrated knowledge gains among participants. However, the degree to which servers alter their alcohol serving behavior upon completion of the

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[1]   No author (2009). Responsible Beverage Service Training. University of Minnesota Alcohol Epidemiology Program. http://www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol/policy/rbst.shtm

training is more variable.[2] For this reason, research suggests that responsible beverage server training should augment other environmental interventions.[3]

Alcohol compliance checks

Alcohol compliance checks are used as a tool to help identify licensed establishments that illegally sell alcohol to underage youth. In some locations in Minnesota, alcohol compliance checks are mandated by local ordinances; in other areas, they are voluntarily implemented by law enforcement or licensing authorities. Alcohol compliance checks can be used to enforce laws and/or to identify, warn, and educate establishments about the potential penalties of illegally serving or selling alcohol to underage youth. Compliance checks are usually conducted by a team of minor youth and adults, with the cooperation of law enforcement. The adults determine which businesses to check, and the youth visit each business and attempt to purchase alcohol without proper identification. If the business sells alcohol to the minor, they have "failed" the compliance check.

Previous studies suggest that compliance checks are effective in reducing the illegal sale of alcohol to underage youth.[4] Alcohol compliance checks encourage establishments to "police" themselves and to be accountable for complying with the laws regarding alcohol sales. Alcohol compliance checks are used to motivate citizen participation and support for underage alcohol prevention efforts.

Relationship between the strategies

Research has demonstrated that compliance checks and responsible beverage server trainings, when combined, can be part of an effective environmental approach to reducing youth access to alcohol.[5] However, it should be noted that approaches to enforcing responsible service of alcohol laws and ordinances are more effective than server training alone.[6]

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[2] Stockwell, T. (2001). Responsible alcohol service: lessons from evaluations of server training and policing initiatives. *Drug and Alcohol Review, 20, 257*-265; Treno, A.J., Gruenewalk, P.J., Lee, J.P., and Remer, L.G. (2007). The Sacramento Neighborhood Alcohol Prevention Project: Outcomes from a community prevention trial. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, March 2007, 197-207.

[3] No author (2009). Responsible Beverage Service Training. University of Minnesota Alcohol Epidemiology Program. http://www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol/policy/rbst.shtm

[4] No author (2009). Compliance Checks. University of Minnesota Alcohol Epidemiology Program. http://www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol/policy/compchks.shtm

[5] Stockwell, 2001; Treno et. al, 2007

[6] Stockwell, 2001.

Although these strategies represent two unique activities required of P&Is under the ATOD prevention initiative, there is some overlap in their goals and objectives. Both activities are related to minors' ability to access alcohol through formal sources (businesses, bars, and restaurants). In addition, the provision of quality training to people in any alcohol service industry about the laws and risks associated with serving alcohol to minors should lead to increased compliance with laws related to serving alcohol to minors. For this reason, this report includes outcome data collected from each P&I site related to each of these strategies.

Methods

Wilder Research staff designed a set of evaluation instruments to help P&I grantees collect information about responsible beverage server trainings and alcohol compliance checks conducted in their area. This report reflects data collected about these activities from the beginning of the grant period from July 2011 through January 2013.

Description of data collection instruments

Responsible beverage server training survey

The goal of this survey is to assess participants' satisfaction with responsible beverage server trainings. It is a brief, one page survey to be administered to participants at the end of each training. The survey includes questions related to the quality of the training, current practices of businesses, and characteristics of the people participating in the training. P&I grantees were responsible for administering the survey and compiling the results. To assist grantees with data analysis, Wilder staff developed a data entry spreadsheet to auto-generate summary results of survey data. Each site submitted their completed spreadsheets to Wilder Research for further analysis.

Compliance check tracking sheet

The purpose of the tracking sheet is to help grantees collect information required for reporting to DHS, including the name of the establishment being checked, the location of the establishment, the date and time of the check, the outcome of the check, and the consequences to the establishment. The sheet is to be completed by the adult and youth who are conducting the compliance checks. Grantees were not required to use this tracking system if they had already developed their own system, but were encouraged to collect this information in order to complete the summary form (described below).

Compliance check summary form

The summary form is used to record information about a completed compliance check, including when and where the compliance check was conducted, the total number of alcohol licenses, the total number of establishments included in the compliance check, the number of establishments that passed the compliance check, the type of establishments included in the compliance check, reasons why not all establishments with an alcohol license were included in the compliance check (if applicable), and the consequences for establishments that fail the compliance check (if applicable). The data summary form is to be completed after each round of compliance checks by the compliance check coordinator, who is usually the P&I grantee.

Findings

Responsible beverage server training

As part of their contracts with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, each P&I grantee was required to host at least two responsible beverage server trainings each grant year. Data are available for the first year and a half of the grant, covering the time period of July 2011 through January 2013. In all, 568 individuals participated in 19 trainings since the beginning of the grant. All grantees hosted at least one training, and one community hosted as many as four since the beginning of the grant. The following tables show the number of trainings conducted in each grantee location (Figure 1), and the number of persons trained in each location (Figure 2).

1.   Number of responsible beverage server trainings conducted by grantee location

ATOD Planning & Implementation Communities	Total number of responsible beverage server trainings conducted Jul 2011-Jan 2013
Fairmont	4
Lake of the Woods	3
Hubbard	2
Sibley	2
Long Prairie/Grey Eagle, Browerville	2
Litchfield	2
Deer River	1
Little Falls	1
Mille Lacs	1
Dover-Eyota/St Charles	1
Total	**19**

2. Number of persons receiving responsible beverage server training by grantee

ATOD Planning & Implementation Communities	Total number of persons trained	Total number of respondents	Response rate
Lake of the Woods	139	135	97%
Fairmont	115	111	97%
Hubbard	76	72	95%
Litchfield	50	50	100%
Deer River	49	49	100%
Little Falls	41	41	100%
Long Prairie/Grey Eagle, Browerville	43	37	86%
Mille Lacs	36	36	100%
Sibley	16	16	100%
Dover-Eyota/St Charles	3	3	100%
Total	**568**	**550**	**97%**

Following their participation in the training, participants were asked to complete a brief survey to assess their satisfaction with the training, participant characteristics, and knowledge gained from the training. Selected findings from these surveys are presented below. Please note that the findings were excluded from the site in which only three servers were trained in order to protect the confidentiality of those servers and to ensure the reliability of the information presented by site.

There was notable variability across sites with regard to the percent of respondents who were participating in training for the first time (45%-81%) and those who were required to participate in the training (13%-76%). However, almost all participants across all sites agreed that the training should be required of all beverage servers (95%-100%). The percent of respondents who reported an increase in their knowledge about alcohol server laws and policies ranged from 45 percent to 75 percent across sites.

3. Evaluation of responsible beverage server trainings conducted in Jul 2011-Jan 2013 by grantee

ATOD Planning & Implementation Communities and Regions	Attending training for first time		Required to attend training		Felt training should be required of all alcohol beverage servers*		Increased knowledge about alcohol beverage server laws and policies	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lake of the Woods (N=135)	81	60%	84	62%	130	97%	78	57%
Fairmont (N=111)	50	45%	58	52%	109	98%	65	59%
Hubbard (N=72)	54	77%	30	38%	78	95%	46	66%
Litchfield (N=50)	32	64%	33	66%	48	96%	24	48%
Deer River (N=49)	27	55%	22	46%	49	100%	21	45%
Little Falls (N=41)	26	63%	22	54%	39	98%	28	68%
Long Prairie/Grey Eagle, Browerville (N=37)	22	59%	22	59%	36	97%	20	54%
Mille Lacs (N=36)	17	49%	26	76%	36	100%	19	53%
Sibley (N=16)	13	81%	2	13%	16	100%	12	75%
Total (N=547)	**322**	**59%**	**299**	**55%**	**541**	**99%**	**313**	**57%**

Includes respondents who strongly agreed or agreed that the training should be required for all alcohol beverage servers.

Alcohol compliance checks

History and background

Grantees were required to conduct one compliance check in their community during the first year of the grant (July 2011 through June 2012), and two checks during each subsequent year. Planning and Implementation grantees used several common strategies to carry out this requirement. In general, the following strategies were used across all sites that completed compliance checks:

- Partnerships with law enforcement. Grantees partnered with local or county level law enforcement agencies to conduct the alcohol compliance checks. This included working together to select and train youth in the proper procedures to conduct the compliance check. The level of involvement by law enforcement varied across the different locations.

- Notification to businesses. Prior to each check, grantees mailed a letter to all local establishments with liquor licenses indicating that alcohol compliance checks would

be completed in their area soon. Some locations published a notice in the local newspapers.

- Server training. Because grantees were also required to host responsible beverage server training as part of their grant, many were able to offer the training as an alternative to court proceedings for establishments who failed their compliance check.

- Recognition. Grantees sent letters of congratulations to the business owner and employees of establishments who passed their compliance check. In most places, a notice was also published in local newspapers congratulating the business on passing the compliance check.

Despite these common elements, there was also a lot of variability across sites with regard to their implementation of compliance checks and only half (5/10) of the sites had conducted a compliance check since the beginning of the grant. For this reason, Figures 4 and 5 provide P&I responses to successes and challenges of conducting compliance checks for both communities that have and have not conducted compliance checks since the beginning of the grant. Common challenges for P&I communities that have not done compliance checks were lack of buy-in from local officials or law enforcement and difficulties establishing the geographic boundaries of the checks.

4.   Successes of compliance checks

P&I communities that have conducted at least one compliance check (Jul 2011- Jan 2013)

Law enforcement has completely taken over the compliance checks. This is great because before the grant began compliance checks had not been conducted in [the community].

Most of the establishments have passed.

Compliance checks went better than expected. They were not done in my communities for many years and the overwhelming majority of establishments still passed the checks.

The language of law enforcement and the newspaper turned into celebrating the increased pass rate instead of focusing on the fail rate.

A high percentage of retailers passed. We had previously done compliance checks so there is support for doing them by law enforcement. The ads congratulating successful retailers were appreciated.

P&I communities that have NOT conducted compliance checks (Jul 2011- Jan 2013)

Received approval to hold compliance checks for [the entire] county.

My new strategy is to have the county commissioners put some pressure on the Sheriff to do the checks. We have 5 new county commissioners and in meetings with them, they are supportive of conducting the checks. One commissioner has recently met with the Sheriff to discuss the checks.

Police department is planning to propose making RBST mandatory.

5. Challenges of compliance checks

P&I communities that have conducted at least one compliance check (Jul 2011- Jan 2013)

Two establishments have failed twice, but are now making changes to improve compliance.

One challenge that we ran into initially was that we attempted to do compliance checks county wide.   Because of our county's large size and the amount of establishments within various jurisdictions, we eventually decided to just complete the checks within the grant area.

Sheriff asked for funding of hidden cameras to collect evidence during compliance checks and didn't understand the logic of why they should not be used when turned down.

The timing of completing them given limited law enforcement assigned to do them. Difficulties with law enforcement trusting the grant involvement. Media references to them as "stings" and "busts." Law enforcement proactively publishing names of businesses that failed when those would be apparent by omission or by court records.

P&I communities that have NOT conducted compliance checks (Jul 2011- Jan 2013)

Difficulties with geographic boundaries of the grant.

Law enforcement agencies feel they are unnecessary and ineffective.

When we brought it to our county attorney last year he wanted to do compliance checks county wide instead of just our grant district area. He wants to get everyone on the same page and then get everyone trained on being a RBST trainer. That training was just a few weeks ago. It looks like it should be ready to go by this spring.

The Chief of Police resigned back in January [2013] and they still don't have one. This has caused some challenges because I don't have someone who is in charge to get this going at the moment.

Compliance check results

Half of the Planning and Implementation communities had completed at least one compliance check by January 2013 (5 of 10 communities). Fairmont conducted one compliance check, but data was not received so they are not included in the results. The following tables show the number of compliance checks conducted by location since the beginning of the grant period (Jul 2011- Jan 2013) (Figure 6), as well as the number of establishments who were checked and passed since the beginning of the grant period (Figure 7).

Of the P&I communities conducting compliance checks, 82 percent of establishments passed their alcohol compliance check. These findings are encouraging, and suggest that most businesses that sell alcohol are refusing to sell to minors (Figure 7).

6. Number of alcohol compliance checks conducted by grantee location

ATOD Planning & Implementation Communities	Total number of alcohol compliance checks Jul 2011-Jan 2013
Lake of the Woods	5
Sibley	2
Long Prairie/Grey Eagle, Browerville*	2
Hubbard	1
Fairmont**	1
Mille Lacs	0
Litchfield	0
Little Falls	0
Deer River	0
Dover-Eyota/St Charles	0

Compliance checks were done over a series of weeks instead of one night.

** Compliance check was completed but data was not received and is not included in this report.

7. Number of establishments checked Jul 2011-Jan2013 by grantee location

ATOD Planning & Implementation Communities	Number of establishments checked [a]	Number of establishments passing the compliance check	Percent of establishments passing the compliance check
Lake of the Woods	76	60	**79%**
Hubbard	62	54	**87%**
Long Prairie/Grey Eagle, Browerville	28	26	**93%**
Sibley	27	18	**67%**
Total	**193**	**158**	**82%**

[a] *Establishments may have been checked multiple times from Jul 2011- Jan 2013.*

Compliance check results combined with RBST

Research has demonstrated that compliance checks and responsible beverage server trainings are effective when combined and looking at the results side by side can show the preliminary impact of the RBST on establishments illegally selling to underage youth. Not every establishment that participated in RBSTs went on to be checked in a compliance check, but for those that were, nearly all passed (93%) compared to slightly fewer passing after not taking the RBST (80%) (Figure 8). This shows preliminarily that there may be

behavior changes following the RBST for establishments that participated. However, due to the small sample size and that we do not know if the staff who were working during the compliance check were the same staff that attended that RBST, a direct relationship cannot be drawn.

8. Establishments passing compliance checks after attending or not attending RBST

	Establishments passing after attending RBST*	Establishments passing after NOT attending RBST
Statewide (N=193)	93% (N=30)	80% (N=163)

Establishments where at least one staff member attended a RBST within one year prior to compliance check.

Issues to consider

Overall, Planning and Implementation grantees have made significant efforts to implement responsible beverage server trainings and compliance checks within their communities. The Minnesota Department of Human Services P&I grantees may wish to consider the following as they move forward in future planning related to these strategies:

- The degree to which individual sites successfully implemented these strategies appears to greatly depend on the interest and cooperation of other community stakeholders, particularly business owners and law enforcement. Similar to much of the other work of the P&I grantees, developing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders will be critical to the ongoing success of these efforts. In particular, communities that have support from law enforcement were better able to carry out compliance checks.

- Where responsible beverage server trainings and compliance checks are being routinely conducted, they appear to be having some of the intended benefits with regard to increasing knowledge of laws and policies related to serving and selling alcohol to minors.

- Responsible Beverage Server Trainings should lead to both short-term and long-term changes in knowledge which, in turn, lead to changes in behavior. While we cannot make direct connections between the RBST and passing a compliance check in this sample, the Grantees should continue to monitor compliance check passing rates over time to see whether behavior changes are sustained.