

Generating Positive Media Coverage of College Alcohol Prevention:



Strategies and Steps

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Getting News Media Coverage for Prevention: 10 Golden Rules

1. Don't get media coverage just for the sake of coverage; have a clear objective in mind that advances your strategic plan through COMMUNITY AWARENESS/INVOLVEMENT.
2. Know your media outlets and the people who run them.
3. All news is storytelling. Make sure your message has a compelling story that people want to watch/hear/read.
4. Think like a news journalist:
 - a. What makes this story interesting/relevant for the outlet's audience?
 - b. What can be shown as well as told?
 - c. Can this be told well in 1 – 2 minutes or 500 words?
 - d. Can I connect this story to other relevant local interests?
 - e. Can we make deadline?
5. Make it easy for the reporter to get the story right.
6. Make it easy for the editor to get the story on air/in print.
7. Have prepped and articulate spokespersons ready when the media needs them.
8. Involve all stakeholders in media planning, especially if the story could cast them in a negative light.
9. Be ready to connect your efforts to stories you did not create.
10. Work to create an ongoing cooperative relationship with the media, establishing your group as the local experts on the issue.

Understanding the News Media Industry

- **The media is a FOR PROFIT business.** News media's business is creating readership/listenership – its profit comes not from subscriptions but by selling a large, consistent audience to advertisers.
- **The news media is NOT a government agency.** It does not have an obligation to serve the community in any way, although it has traditionally presented itself in this light.
- **Local news media outlets are owned by national media corporations.** They are subject to the editorial and marketing policies (and sociopolitical biases) that are passed down through the corporation.
- **Much of the stories told on local news comes from national wire.** This means that as much as 70-80% of the news they print/broadcast is from national news media organizations such as Reuters or the Associated Press.
- **Most local news agencies have small staffs.** Their job is to report local events and localize national stories. This task is critical to business, however, because it generates local advertisers.
- **The Internet has dramatically changed the news media industry.** Many newspapers are unable to maintain circulation, and many local radio stations are now merely national feeds. Cable television has given the public more choices over local television or radio news outlets.
- **News media is organized by general news and “beats”** – specific topic areas that are of general interest to most audience members because they impact a way of life. Common beats include politics, economy, health, business, lifestyle.

What all this means to you:

- Prevention coalitions and organizations should have realistic expectations about what a local outlet is able to cover, especially on a busy news day.
- Recognize that the local media person you are interacting with has a variety of priorities and demands, and is not seeing your story as “the right thing to do” unless it accomplishes other goals and objectives for the local outlet.
- Thinking about a media outlet's coverage of beats will help you position your story into an existing agenda, increases your chances of it being covered.
- Realize that a publisher/broadcaster will not demonize an advertiser, especially a local business that advertises regularly. Create the story from another angle.
- Do not try to get the local news media to care about the issue as much as you do; help them see how the story accomplishes their objectives by meeting the audience's “need to know.”

How will your story be covered?

Editors are thinking about WHO to send to cover the story, and HOW to cover the story. You can influence this decision in the way you pitch the story and tell the story.

NEWS

News is organized by world, nation, state, county and city and includes events of prominence. Most news is dramatic and tragic, such as a crime, major car crash, riot, etc., although other government issues are also news such as a recent state legislative or city council vote, an election event, or a recent report/announcement.

NEWS STORIES RELATED TO ALCOHOL PREVENTION:

- New data or report on excessive drinking and its effects (the story is the report)
- Incident involving or connected to acute intoxication
- City council meeting discussing policies related to alcohol control or unwanted behavior
- New law or policy adopted by city, county, or state legislators
- Police report on alcohol-related crime or enforcement effort related to a sports event, concert, party, etc.

FEATURE

Feature stories cover special interest areas such as government, business, health, lifestyle, etc. These are NOT stories of a current event but stories about issues related to the news. Sometimes, this is the “human interest” story behind the news and is often related to news events.

FEATURE STORIES RELATED TO ALCOHOL PREVENTION

- Stakeholder talking about their involvement in a prevention effort.
- Business or homeowner talking about impact of problem on their life/livelihood.
- Young adult talking post-tragedy or post-change.

EDITORIAL

Editorial stories are statements of opinion regarding issues raised in the news or features. Editorials can be created by the editorial board of the newspaper or broadcaster, or can be opinions expressed by columnists/news analysts.

EDITORIALS RELATED TO ALCOHOL PREVENTION

- Support or opposition for a prevention plan or activity.
- Expression of gratitude or concern for a group or individual.
- Call to action to city/local government reading a need.

Exercise 1: Local Media Audit

1. List the five most influential media sources for you local area:

Newspaper(s): _____

Television News: _____

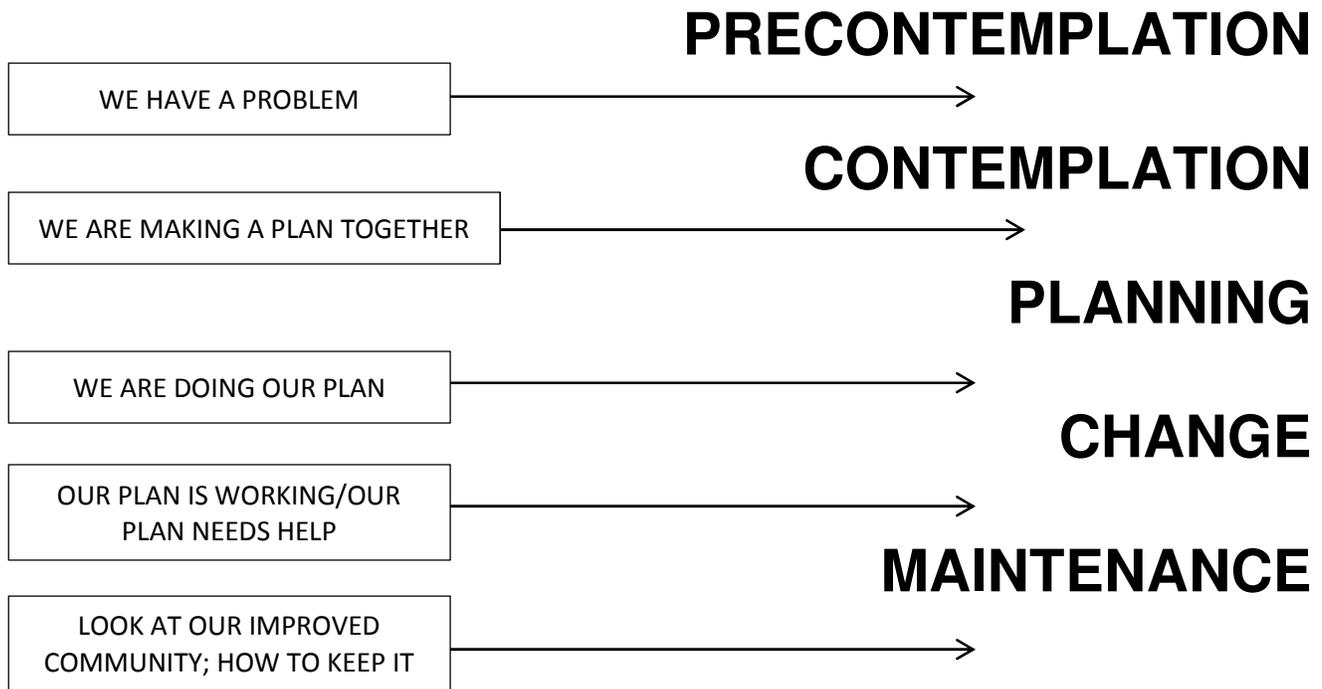
Radio News: _____

2. How does the media above “cover” college high-risk drinking? What kind of stories have they done, and in what section of news?

3. Who does the local news media use as their “go-to” people now to get information for news or editorial stories related to health/safety?

4. Thinking about the majority of local news coverage and editorials you’ve experienced, what would you say are the driving themes of the local media? You may need to separate these by media source.

Thinking about mediated messages and the impact on community-driven change



KEY ISSUES FOR MEDIA PLANNING

1. Where is our community regarding high-risk college alcohol consumption?
2. What kind of media coverage is needed RIGHT NOW to move the community to the next stage of the process?
3. Is there a specific group in the community most in need of progression through media coverage?
4. What opportunities are available to us/can we create that can serve as the strategic media story to move this aspect for the community?

MESSAGE PLANNING

1. **Get agreement across the collective on key terminology and language.**

- Binge/high-risk/dangerous/episodic drinking
- Primary and secondary harms/harms to self and others
- Address/fight/stop/end/improve/impact/change/help
- Students/young adults/kids drinkers/high-risk drinkers
- Our/your/us/them/me/you
- Environment/enablers/causes/places and spaces

2. **Have a set of standard messages ready and well rehearsed for all key spokespersons:**

- Our college/community coalition's mission and vision.
- How our college/community coalition sees the college high-risk drinking issue.
- How the coalition creates change.
- The link between the environment and high-risk drinking behavior.

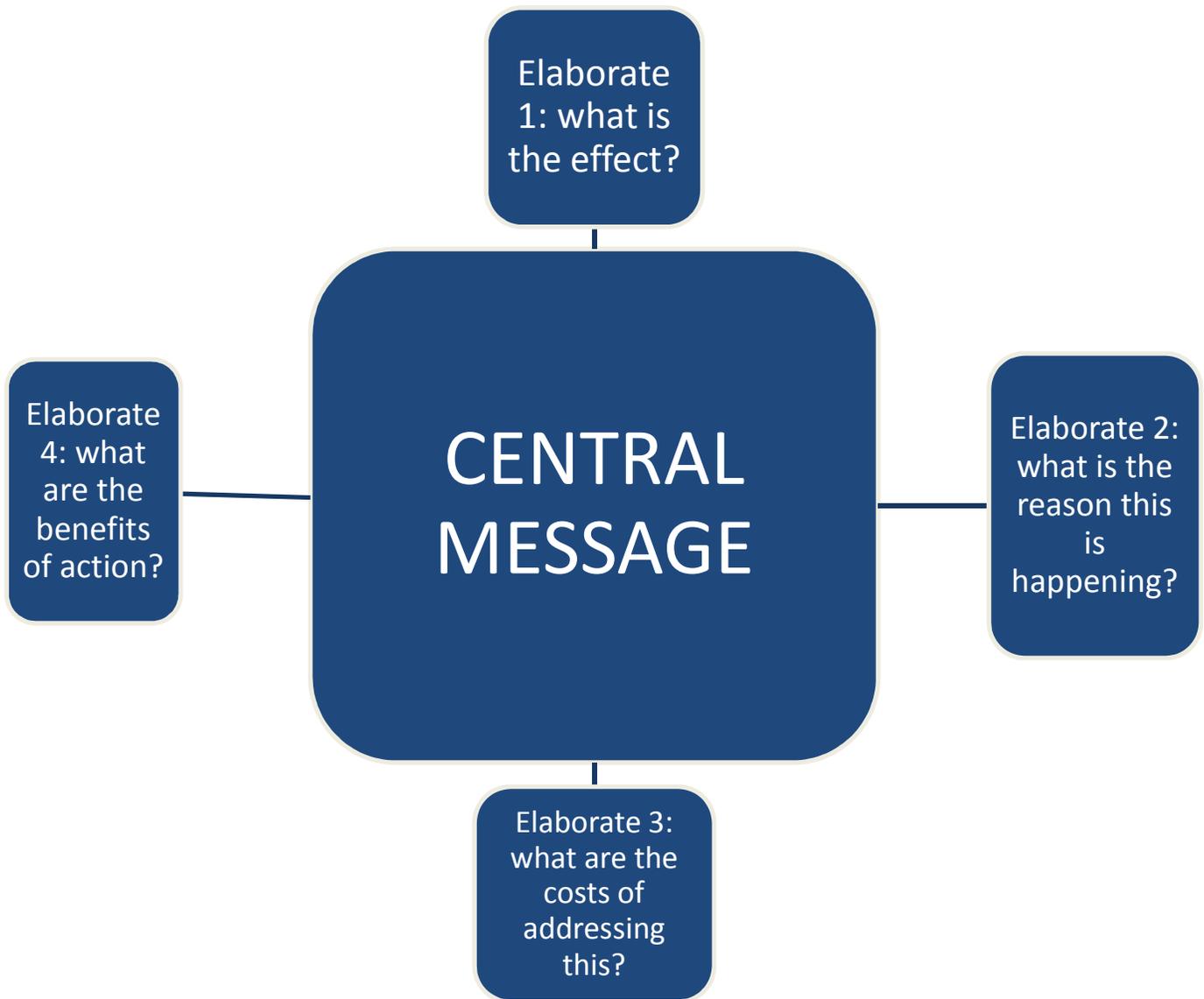
3. **Link the individual stakeholder perspective/experience to coalition messages.**

- The issues most important to me that the coalition is addressing.
- How I participate in the coalition plan.
- The role I play in creating change in the community.

4. **Have the data available to all spokespersons so that they can speak from both personal experience as well as from evidence.**

- Student drinking data.
- Location of consumption data.
- Wild party complaint data.

5. **Story-specific messages should always tie to general coalition messages.**

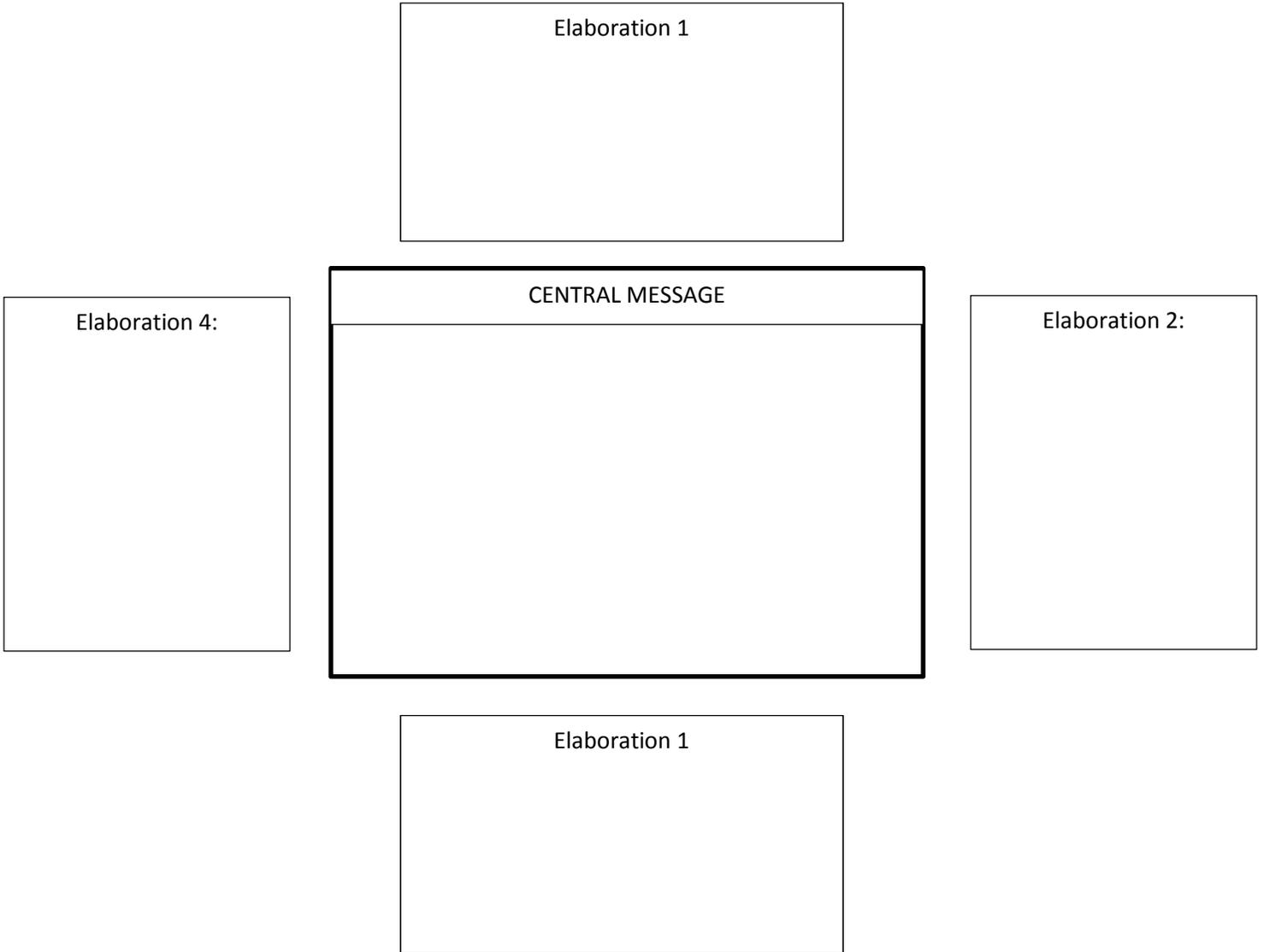


THE MESSAGE BOX

The goal of the message box is to focus your messaging to a simple, clear, and singular message statement that can be elaborated upon through a variety of facts and experiences. Key to the message box is the idea that everything communicated around a message ties back to and supports the central message of the coalition/prevention effort.

“Inoculation” of counter arguments: Elaboration 3 may also be the perfect place to raise and address potential (or existing) counterarguments to the message. Many of these will have to do with cost of change, potential unwanted side effects, etc.

YOUR MESSAGE BOX:



“Inoculation” of counter arguments:

Pitching the Story: Essential Elements Worksheet

The story we are pitching (one clear sentence):

1. What makes this story relevant to this community?

2. Who can we get to verify this story?

3. What visual aspects of this story can you supply for us?

4. Who can we interview about this story?

How will we get this story from you?

THE PRESS KIT CHECKLIST

- Press Release with main contact name and phone number.
- Information Sheet with expanded information, organized by relevant questions.
- Media Interview List with names, titles, phone numbers, and one-sentence description of perspective/experience/tie to story.
- Relevant data in easy-to-read chart or table (should be able to be reproduced directly)
- Relevant but eye-catching folder/container to draw attention on a crowded desk.
- Audio-recorded quotation clips (many university communication offices have a call-in or online quote center for downloading spoken quotations for the media.
- Photos, video, or other visual elements.

THE MEDIA CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

- All spokespersons present and prepared 20 minutes prior.
- Press kits for each reporter.
- Time created for individual interviews following formal conference.
- Visuals the media can see/videotape in addition to the speaker.
- Follow-up pitch: What's the next story they'll want to tell?