



PREVENTION WITH PURPOSE:

A Resource for Engaging Student-Led Organizations

Student-led organizations play a vital role in creating safe and healthy campus environments that nurture student well-being and academic success. You are in a unique position to encourage and support student engagement in activities that prevent drug misuse and promote wellness. The goal of reaching out to student-led organizations can be to encourage and support them to implement evidence-based drug misuse prevention efforts or to request their help with a program or project you are leading. By creating connections and building trust with student organizations, opportunities will arise to enhance the effectiveness of prevention efforts across campus.

Opportunities for Impact

Most student organizations are dedicated to enhancing students' quality of life. Therefore, they are well positioned to champion wellness efforts—for members of their organization as well as students campuswide. As the prevention specialist, you can work with student-led organizations to:



- » Understand the importance of addressing drug use on campus and of taking steps to keep students safe.
- » Acknowledge how the culture of their organization might affect drug use among members—for example, how norms (or even perceived norms) favorable to use might contribute to risky behavior.
- » Develop policies and protocols to protect the safety of their members, and implement evidence-based programs, practices, and strategies tailored to their needs and identified risk and protective factors.
- » Connect with other campus groups working to prevent drug misuse to amplify prevention messaging and extend reach.
- » Participate in campuswide prevention efforts to ensure that students' voices are heard and reflected in prevention planning efforts.

Keys to Success

Connect with Others

Drug misuse prevention on college campuses is often thought of as the job of one person or department, such as the student affairs department or campus health and wellness center. But the success of prevention efforts actually depends on the participation of many individuals and departments working together—including student organizations.

Why? Because student organizations are the voice of the students. And the leaders of these organizations have a demonstrated commitment to their peers and to improving student life. They are well organized, ambitious, and articulate. But change doesn't happen in isolation. And you can play a critical role in helping them understand the value and importance of collective



Student groups, in many ways, are the lifeblood of a campus. As such, any work done by organizations needs to align with efforts being done by the campus/ university as much as possible.”

—Logan Davis, Outreach and Engagement Manager, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse Prevention and Recovery

action. You also can help them to engage most productively in these collaborations—for example, by reviewing the meeting agenda with them in advance and developing key talking points about the work and interest of their student group. You can also work with other university departments to explore steps they can take to encourage meaningful student engagement.

Specifically, you can help students learn about, and connect with, other campus prevention and wellness efforts. Explain the value of collaboration—to prevent duplication of efforts and increase impact. Connect organizations with each other and with those on campus working on prevention issues. Help them to consider how their group can work as part of larger prevention efforts on campus to support each other’s goals. For more ideas on how to engage and connect student organizations, review Chapter 4 of the [Prevention with Purpose](#) strategic planning guide.

Use Data to Inform Planning

Because every college campus is unique, it is important to help students understand what drug use looks like on their campus, and among the members of their student organization. Who is using? Are some groups more at risk? When and where is drug use most prevalent? What types of drugs are being used or misused? The answers to these questions will help you identify prevention strategies that are most likely to make a difference.

If your campus has a strategic plan guiding their prevention efforts, the data that were collected and reviewed as part of a campuswide needs assessment could be useful as student organizations consider their work in prevention. Data should inform all aspects of prevention planning. To learn more, review Chapter 3 of the [Prevention with Purpose](#) strategic planning guide for details on completing an assessment.

As a prevention professional on campus, you can encourage student organizations to examine these data and ask critical questions. Do the data reflect their membership and/or the populations they serve? Do the data resonate with members’ experiences? Is there a need to collect additional data to better understand what drug use looks like on campus, and within the organization? Be there to help them—as needed—to answer and explore these important questions.

Implement Evidence-Based Prevention Programs, Practices, and Strategies

We know, from the research, that one-time programs, such as motivational speakers, and scare tactics, such as gruesome pictures of impaired driving victims, are not effective in preventing drug misuse.¹ Yet student-led organizations often choose these types of programs to implement due to the ease of implementing a one-time program. However, these approaches have proven to be ineffective and, in some cases, harmful.



Having an accurate description of the behaviors/problems you are trying to prevent is the most important part of establishing prevention in any organization.”

—Logan Davis, Outreach and Engagement Manager, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse Prevention and Recovery

Prevention professionals can help student leaders understand the importance of implementing evidence-based programs, practices, and strategies, and direct them to resources that describe them. One such resource is the [College Alcohol Intervention Matrix \(CollegeAIM\)](#), which focuses specifically on evidence-based programs and practices for college campuses. Another resource is the [Guide to Online Registries for Effective Substance Misuse Programs and Practices](#), developed by SAMHSA’s Prevention Technology Transfer Center network. To learn more about program effectiveness, review [Prevention Tools: What Works, What Doesn’t](#). For more information on selecting and implementing evidence-based strategies, review [Chapters 5 and 6 of the Prevention with Purpose](#) strategic planning guide.

Work Smarter, Not Harder

As mentioned above, effective prevention is a collective endeavor. Student organizations must be part of the equation, but they cannot—and should not—go it alone. Work with students to connect with, and tap into, the knowledge, expertise, and resources available on campus and in the surrounding community, including but not limited to the campus health and counseling centers, student affairs, campus law enforcement, and residence life.

When groups work together to align wellness messages and goals, a synergy is created that amplifies the effectiveness of prevention efforts. Work with students to help them communicate the work they’re doing and the progress they’re making.



Take Action

Here are some powerful actions you can take to support student organizations to prevent student drug use:

- » **Identify student organizations**, their leaders, and their advisors that implement drug misuse prevention or other wellness efforts. If you need help identifying these individuals, contact your student activities/management office.
- » **Create a pitch** to “sell” student groups on how effective drug misuse prevention efforts will positively affect their organization. If available, include in your pitch data showing the negative impact drug misuse has on their group’s members. And share with them the benefits of collaborating with the broader campus prevention efforts (e.g., training, guidance, financial support).
- » **Be intentional** about working collaboratively on drug misuse prevention and other wellness efforts. Encourage students to find out who is leading prevention efforts on campus and what participation involves.

- » **Understand the campus community.** Work with student organizations to review and interpret data as a means of understanding the campus as a whole as well as those members of their community organization and/or populations.
- » **Do research.** Encourage and support students to look critically at the prevention program or strategy they want to use. Does it have demonstrated evidence of effectiveness? Is it a good match for the organization's focus population? Help them understand the value of research: that it will help to ensure that the time, effort, and money they invest in prevention activities is well spent.
- » **Leverage efforts** by encouraging students to align their work and goals with other campus drug misuse prevention programming.
- » **Create a sustainability plan** to ensure collaboration with student groups is maintained when student leaders graduate. Learn when each group transitions leadership and request a meeting with the outgoing and incoming leadership to discuss how the collaboration can continue.

Acknowledgements

September Johnson, M.P.H.

Alcohol and Other Drug Specialist
Wesleyan University
Middletown, Connecticut

Joseph Espinoza, M.S.

Civil Rights Intake Coordinator
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

Dolores Cimini, Ph.D.

Senior Research Scientist
University at Albany School of
Education
Albany, New York

Endnotes

- 1 Washington State Health Care Authority. (2019). *Prevention tools: What works, what doesn't*. https://www.hca.wa.gov/assets/program/px_tool_what_works_what_doesnt.pdf

Copies of this Publication Are Available Online

Copies of this publication are available online at www.campusdrugprevention.gov, DEA's website for professionals working to prevent drug misuse among college students.

Notes

**Drug Enforcement Administration
Office of Public Affairs
Community Outreach and Prevention Support Section**

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