

PLANNING VIRTUAL *COMMUNITIES TALK* ACTIVITIES

Feeling a little lost about how to put together a meaningful, prevention-focused activity this year? Even when following social distancing recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, there are many creative, engaging ways to host *Communities Talk* events and other substance misuse prevention activities that bring people together virtually.

Below are ideas for how you can host virtual activities using a range of tools and platforms. These tools will help you continue discussions and public education opportunities on underage drinking and other substance misuse prevention in your community throughout the year.

If you choose to host a virtual *Communities Talk* activity be sure to share the highlights with SAMHSA through the [Communities Talk website](#) and post updates, photos, and videos on social media using the hashtag #CommunitiesTalk.

1. Organize an online fair.

- a. Create a webpage or blog post that showcases [underage drinking prevention resources](#) that are available in your community or through SAMHSA and other federal agencies.
- b. Consider including the [“Hidden in Plain Sight”](#) workshop created by Hudson County Coalition for a Drug Free Community. Show participants images of a young person’s bedroom and challenge parents to identify where a substance such as alcohol, a vaping pen, or marijuana paraphernalia may be hidden.

2. Use a video conference platform to host an interactive panel discussion or “Ask Me Anything” type of event to talk about underage drinking and alcohol misuse prevention. Within it, create an opportunity for viewers to ask questions and contribute to expert panel discussions. HELP Committee’s Keystone Club made a similar pivot from in-person activity last October as Montana weathered the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Host a Twitter chat about underage drinking prevention. Invite local stakeholders, such as members of faith-based organizations, parks and recreation departments, and school boards to participate and share their insights and resources. If available, representatives from local first responder agencies, such as police or medical professionals, can offer an important point of view.

4. Host an online Underage Drinking Myths vs. Facts Trivia Night. Invite parents and youth to join you online for a trivia night or quiz show. Keep score and give the winner a gift card to a local restaurant or small business. If hosting on your own feels like too much to take on, consider partnering with a local restaurant who is already hosting weekly trivia nights virtually, and work with them to add an [underage drinking myths vs. facts](#) round into an already existing game. You can also host quizzes online via [MyQuiz](#), where participants register ahead of time and join the quiz collectively on the website. [Sam Houston State University](#) developed a “Can You Pass the Bar Exam?” survey on social media that challenges beliefs or myths about drinking.

5. **Ask local musicians to livestream a performance that includes public service announcements on underage drinking and alcohol misuse prevention.** While the music will draw your audience in, messages and information about underage drinking and alcohol misuse prevention will leave them more informed and inspired to take action.
6. **Develop a series of “Underage Drinking Prevention Tips of the Day” or “Underage Drinking Prevention Questions of the Day” and share them daily or once a week on social media.** Encourage supporters to share their perspectives on the tip or facilitate an informal dialogue about underage drinking prevention as it relates to the specific questions or statement. You can also use the polling features on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram Stories to quiz your followers.
7. **Connect with community groups that are already hosting virtual events and sign on to co-host.** Beyond trivia, make connections with local faith-based community leaders, policymakers, and school leaders who are engaged in underage drinking and alcohol misuse prevention efforts via their existing virtual activities or events.
8. **Create an underage drinking prevention lesson plan for local K–12 educators in your community** that they can use to talk about underage drinking prevention and alcohol misuse with students. Consider reaching out to your local board of education to engage high school teachers and counselors to see if they are open to adding underage drinking prevention activities to their new virtual curriculums. Explore “The Sound of Your Voice” [video](#) and [discussion guide](#), as well as the [Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults Guide](#) to get ideas and find helpful resources. SAMHSA’s [AlcoholFX app](#) is another great resource to engage pre-teens in learning about alcohol’s negative impact on the developing brain.
9. **Create and share short underage drinking prevention videos on social media.** Convert articles on your website and blog content into short videos using online video production platforms, many of which are free and easy to navigate (See **Capturing Video Like a Pro** tip sheet for more). Share the videos with community partners for posting on their website and social media profiles.
10. **Host an online speaker series for local youth leaders.** Many local communities have found success in building local youth coalitions who simultaneously work on prevention projects and activities, receive leadership training and skills in prevention, practice teamwork, and have fun. Drug Free Cecil in Cecil County, Maryland, and one of its partners, [Youth Empowerment Source](#) (YES), was able to do just this last year after the COVID-19 pandemic hit.
11. **Provide virtual prevention programming to your community.** Post resources on social media, host live and recorded presentations, direct students and parents to prevention options from partnerships, facilitate virtual support groups, and more.

Not seeing the right virtual activity for your community? Get inspired by reading (or watching) additional [Communities Talk Success Stories](#) available online.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY OF TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS FOR HOSTING VIRTUAL *COMMUNITIES TALK* ACTIVITIES

Online Meetings and Webinars

Online meetings are interactive sessions that offer plenty of opportunities for audience interaction and are great for smaller groups. Webinars are ideal for presentations to large audiences and events that are open to the public with no expectation of interaction between attendees. Both online meetings and webinars could use video and/or presentation slides as visuals.

- **Benefits:** Online meeting and webinar platforms allow attendees to gather without traveling or meeting in person. By using video feeds during meetings and webinars, participants can see each other—especially during smaller meetings—and easily contribute during discussions. Most meeting and webinar platforms can record your virtual activity for sharing with individuals who were unable to attend or who would benefit from the content at a later date.
- **Platforms:** Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex, Skype, Amazon Chime, or GoToMeeting, among others.
- **Tips:**
 - Enable question-and-answer sessions to encourage attendees to engage in the session and with the speakers. Designate a moderator to pose questions to the speakers or panelists.
 - Always prepare a few questions in advance in case the audience questions are slow to arrive.
 - Instruct your moderator not to use last names when passing on a question from an audience member unless you are in a smaller, more intimate group setting where people know each other.
 - Use polling within the platform to assess how the meeting or webinar is going, what your audience is most interested in, and what their understanding is of the topic being discussed.
 - If using presentation slides, limit the amount of text on each slide and include relevant visuals to keep the presentation interesting for the audience.

Twitter Chats

Twitter chats are public conversations on Twitter organized around a specific topic. These moderated discussions take place at a set time and connect people by using a unique or designated hashtag.

- **Benefits:** Twitter chats are open, public conversations that offer access to hundreds or even thousands of Twitter users to engage and discuss a desired topic, such as substance misuse prevention. Like an in-person town hall event, the conversation is guided by a facilitator and organized by questions shared in individual tweets with a designated hashtag. Participants respond by commenting on tweets or sharing their own tweet with the same hashtag.

- **Tips:**
 - Select a hashtag that is unique, relevant, memorable, and not too long, such as #CommunitiesTalk. Make sure that your hashtag is not affiliated with a different existing conversation on Twitter to reduce confusion for your chat participants.
 - Promote the date and time in advance across all social media platforms, websites, blogs, and email newsletters.
 - Share reminders on Twitter for when the chat will begin.
 - Send out invites to followers and influencers who you know will engage.
 - Organize questions by number (i.e., Q1, Q2, Q3, and so on) and encourage participants to respond with their answers in the same format—A1, A2, A3.
 - Chat hosts are responsible for keeping the conversation moving by responding to replies, posing follow-up questions, and sharing insightful comments. This can be easier to do if you preschedule the questions to post during your chat window prior to the event.

Livestreaming

Livestreaming is using features in a social media platform, such as Facebook or Instagram, that enable someone to start a video feed that followers can watch and engage with in real time.

- **Benefits:** Livestreaming allows your organization to convey messages that are energetic, personal, and relatable. Hosting a livestream makes social media posts interactive and allows for more natural conversations. Followers receive notifications when your account goes live so they can immediately tune in to the broadcast when it starts.
- **Platforms:** Facebook Live, Instagram Live, Twitch, YouTube, or Zoom.
- **Tips:**
 - Plan and promote the livestream so users know the broadcast is coming.
 - Decide what you want to feature and how you will show it ahead of time.
 - Before you go live, shoot a practice video and check it for sound quality or disruptions in your internet connection.
 - Engage with viewers by answering their questions and responding to their comments.
 - Always post the video immediately after broadcasting. This way, if live viewers missed something because they came in halfway through, they will be able to get the information they need by watching the full video.

Social Media Videos

Social media videos are short (15 seconds or so) videos that are designed for quick watching on a mobile device and shared on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube.

- **Benefits:** Social media videos have become an increasingly popular way to share messages in an engaging, compelling format.

- **Video creation/editing tools:** [Lumen 5](#), [Biteable](#) and [InShot](#) are just a few of many free video editing programs. [Premiere Pro](#) and [Final Cut Pro](#) are for more advanced video editors. Most social media platforms also have the ability to let you create and edit video within the mobile app.
- **Tips:**
 - Upload video content directly to each of your social media pages rather than posting a link to another website with the video. Each social media site shares this type of content (often referred to as “native content”) with your followers more often.
 - Be sure to enable the “autoplay” feature to help boost engagement.
 - For all social media videos (other than story-type videos posted on Instagram and Facebook), use subtitles so a user can understand your video without audio.
 - The end of your video should guide the user to a desired action—whether it is an email sign-up, website click, or even a behavior change, like pledging to abstain from alcohol until they are 21.
 - As you create video content, make sure it is optimized for vertical viewing on mobile devices.

Need more video tips? Check out our tip sheet **Capturing Video Like a Pro**.