

“Pricing and Promotions: Resources & Ideas for MCP Objective 3.11”

Co-facilitated by

Maryann Harakall from the Maine Office of Substance Abuse
& Erica Schmitz from Maine’s Environmental Substance Abuse Prevention Center

1. Welcome & Introductions

- Due to the many questions that have come in lately about objective 3.11 and the fact that there is a gap in resources available for this objective, OSA has developed a draft guide that can be used to determine how to address objective 3.11 and where to focus your efforts: “Environmental Assessment: Pricing and Promotion.” The tool includes assessment questions to help you decide where to focus your efforts; it is included here as a Word document.
 - The guide is in draft form, and so OSA is looking for any feedback that you may have. However, feel free to begin using the resources included in the guide in your work in the community.

2. Why are pricing and promotions important?

- A summary of available research is provided in the guide, along with references. Feel free to copy and paste the text into your own coalition handout for retailers and other community members (you might want to also copy and paste the laws on the back). Here are some key points from the research:
 - Lower alcohol prices and special promotions can promote over service and binge drinking.
 - Lower pricing and promotions appeal mostly to young adult and underage drinkers, particularly in the high-risk 18-25 age group.
 - This group is more price sensitive, and are perhaps more developmentally apt to get reeled into these promotions.
 - Most alcohol-related death, disability, and damage is caused not by those who are dependent on alcohol, but by moderate drinkers who occasionally engage in risky drinking.
 - Research has found that higher pricing for alcohol can lead to a reduction in a number of problems such as drinking and driving, sexual assault, and child abuse.
- Call participants felt it would be useful for OSA to provide a 1-page bulleted handout for retailers that summarizes the research and provides some FAQ’s or persuasive arguments for responsible pricing and promotions. We will aim to have something available this summer.
- The group requested data that shows that raising prices does not hurt business—This data may not exist, but we will see what we can find. However, one compelling argument for retailers to be responsible in their pricing and promotions is that it helps to reduce their liability (Maine Liquor Liability Act: \$250,000 plus unlimited medical expenses for serving alcohol to visibly intoxicated or underage person who then causes

damage to self or others. Low pricing and promotions can increase their chances of over-serving, and thus increase their liability.)

- In addition, Maine Law already has some limits in place, and many retailers are simply unaware when they are breaking the law. One first step is to help educate them about Maine Law regarding pricing & promotions. You may copy/paste the “Applicable Liquor Laws” from the OSA guide into your own handout for retailers.

3. Overview of Assessment Tools & Strategies

Every community is responsible for shaping their own efforts based on local data-driven priorities, community readiness, and coalition capacity: Does the community have a problem with low pricing and promotions that encourage high-risk drinking? Where are you seeing the problem—with alcohol retailers? Workplaces? Colleges? Community events? All of the above? Of these issues, what is your coalition most concerned about? What do you feel you have the community readiness and resources to address?

- **Retailers (3.11a, 3.11c)**
 - The first step is to assess the community. The guide provides questions that you can ask to determine if there is actually a problem with pricing and promotions with retailers in the community and where to focus your efforts.
 - On page 8 and 9 of the guide are more detailed worksheets that can be used for your own assessment (not necessarily meant to share with retailers, as this could be seen as threatening depending on how it is presented) and to help you define what actually is a low price or a promotion. (For more considerations, please see the Discussion questions in section 5, below)
 - It is also necessary to look at the community’s (and retailer’s) readiness to address this issue, as well as the coalition’s capacity to address it. In your assessment and planning, think about how you might be able to build on your other work with retailers – for example seller/server trainings, Card ME, and compliance checks (especially if police are also checking whether promotions/advertising/signage is in compliance with state law).
 - Your efforts for the following objectives would all be complementary to 3.11a/c:
 - Objective 3.3 – Increase effectiveness of retailers policies that restrict access to alcohol by underage youth
 - Objective 3.8 – Decrease alcohol advertising/promotions that appeal to youth
 - Objective 3.13 – Increase effectiveness of retailers policies and practices that restrict availability of alcohol that encourages high risk drinking (i.e. reducing sales/service to visibly intoxicated adults)
 - Activities to address Objective 3.11 can include relationship-building, education, outreach, and collaboration with alcohol retailers. This can be done one-on-one with owners and managers, and/or on a group level with a regional bar-owners or grocers association, or other business owners association. Because relationships are so important, not just for 3.11 but for all of your work involving

liquor licensees, it can be helpful to start slowly, one small step at a time, in order to not burn any bridges.

- Often, retailers are not aware that they are breaking any laws. For example, games that encourage drinking or give alcohol as a prize are illegal. Other liquor licensing laws are available on page 10 of the guide. Liquor Licensing also has a white booklet that is a quick reference for liquor licensees with common liquor laws. This can be obtained through liquor licensing at the Department of Public Safety.
 - If a retailer has a violation, it is often best to first discuss it with the retailer, especially since often they don't even realize that they're breaking the law. Then, if that doesn't work, you may want to go to local law enforcement, and then if that is not effective, you may want to report the violation directly to liquor licensing.
 - Since an important part of objective 3.11 is to build long term relationships with retailers, it is not appropriate for youth or for short term volunteers to take charge of this objective. Paid and trained coalition staff, or long-term coalition members are appropriate people to be doing the relationship-building.
 - Here are some resources that might be helpful in your efforts with retailers around pricing/promotions:
 - Sample Responsible Bar Management Guidelines: These were developed by Portland's downtown bar owner's association with help from 21 Reasons. http://www.21reasons.org/images/Microsoft_Word_-_NLOC_Agreement-Suggestions-as_adopted_edited.pdf
 - Sample Best Practices brochure for liquor licensees: This document, developed by 21 Reasons/MESAP and the City of Portland, includes pricing/promotions guidelines on page 3 and a brief law summary; there is room in several spots for adding your own logo and contact information before photocopying for distribution. http://www.21reasons.org/images/11x17_folded_Brochure_Layout_1.pdf
- **Communities (3.11b)**
 - This includes working with local decision-makers and organizing your community to advocate for policies and practices that will help to increase alcohol prices or reduce low-price promotions. This can be challenging on the local ordinance level, because of state jurisdiction over liquor licenses. However, you can also work directly with organizations on community events policies.
 - The guide provides questions that you can ask to determine if there is a problem with pricing and promotions in local community events, and where to focus your efforts.
 - Here are some resources for working on community events policies:
 - <http://www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol/policy/atevents.shtml>
 - http://www.marininstitute.org/pdf/alcohol_community_events.pdf

- Change can also be made at a state level. This can be done by educating policy makers about issues regarding pricing and promotion, including the importance of raising alcohol prices (for example, by raising licensing fees or raising alcohol taxes) and putting restrictions on low-price promotions (for example, no selling liquor below cost). You can support statewide efforts through MAPSA (Maine Alliance to Prevent Substance Abuse): www.masap.org/site/prevention.asp.
 - When looking at your coalition's capacity, think about how this objective ties in with the work that your coalition is doing with other strategies.
- **Worksites (3.11f)**
 - The guide provides questions that you can ask to determine if there is a problem with pricing and promotions in local worksites, and where to focus your efforts.
 - Activities for this objective can include educating and collaborating with workplaces to reduce low-price promotions—for example, strengthening workplace policies regarding business/holiday parties and not providing free alcohol, not over serving, or not even having alcohol at all.
 - Workplaces that are likely to employ 18-25 year olds include the food and beverage industry, hospitality, construction, and retail.
 - If you are working with employers, please make sure that you are coordinating with your broader HMP initiatives around the Worksite Health Framework using Healthy Maine Works, as well as your efforts around Drug Free Workplace and WorkAlert. Contact: Cheryl Cichowski [Cheryl.Cichowski@maine.gov] <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/osa/prevention/workplace/workalert/index.htm>
 - For more information about workplace initiatives, please review the notes and handouts from the recent OSA/MESAP conference call: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/osa/prevention/provider/workdevevents.htm>
- **Colleges (3.11e)**
 - The guide provides questions that you can ask to determine if there is a problem with pricing and promotions in local colleges, and where to focus your efforts.
 - Is the college a member of HEAPP (Maine's Higher Education Alcohol Prevention Partnership)? Coalitions should talk with Becky Ireland and HEAPP about what the school is already doing before working with the college in order to avoid duplications. Contact: Becky Ireland [Rebecca.Ireland@maine.gov].
 - Look for ways in which your coalition and HEAPP overlap so that you can coordinate and collaborate in your efforts.
 - This will also help to make sure that you and Maine campuses take advantage of HEAPP's specialized resources, evidence-based practices, training/TA, and collaborative efforts to address underage and/or high-risk drinking by Maine college students.
 - Activities for this objective can include educating and collaborating with colleges to reduce low-price promotions—for example, working with administrators to stop distributing free or low-cost alcohol at events, or working with student newspapers to stop accepting certain advertising.

- **Media (3.11d)**

Media advocacy is not a stand-alone strategy. It's a complementary tool to help support your policy efforts, such as those listed above.

- You can use things such as letters to the editor, opinion editorials, press releases, and education and outreach to reporters to further the work that you are doing in other strategies of objective 3.11.
- You can also scan local media sources for ads of alcohol specials and promotions as well as whether or not the local media outlets have policies to restrict advertising of alcohol specials and promotions.
- For media advocacy resources, please review the notes and handouts from the OSA/MESAP conference call on 3/19/09:
<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/osa/prevention/provider/workdevents.htm>

4. Additional Recommendations

- Objective 3.11 complements several other work plan objectives very well. Look at what you are already doing in your work, and try to see how objective 3.11 can fit into the work that you are currently doing.
- As mentioned above, because 3.11 is primarily about relationship building and ongoing outreach, education, and collaboration, it is not appropriate to put youth or short-term volunteers in these roles. However, youth can conduct many of the assessment activities described above. Youth can also participate in media advocacy to support the coalition's efforts for objective 3.11.

5. Discussion:

- In conducting the assessment, what should our message be? Do we run the risk of offending retailers by going door to door to record and take notes of things in their establishment?
 - Good point! The retail assessment worksheets are not meant to be used in a way that will threaten or alienate retailers. You would not want your work for 3.11 to jeopardize your other efforts with retailers. Use your discretion to determine the best way to use the assessment materials, depending on what you think will work in your community. For example, you may decide to do a preliminary community scan that only includes signage and promotions visible from the outside, ads in local media outlets, or promotions on the establishment's website. You could also ask local law enforcement to help you by reporting things that they notice in their patrol.
 - You can use the information in page 2 of the guide to create a 1 pager to distribute to retailers, with information on why pricings and promotions can be a problem. You can also copy and paste the Applicable Maine Laws to include in the handout.
 - Summertime can be an opportunity to address some of these issues. In many communities, the summer months see an increase in alcohol related issues, and

for many retailers there actually is a desire to fix these issues so that they do not have to deal with law enforcement in a negative way.

- The CARDME program is being updated to include some points regarding pricing and promotions.
- What have other communities done to achieve this objective?
 - At some RBS trainings that include owners and managers, it has been found that they often do not realize that they are violating state laws in some of their actions that pertain to pricing and promotion. In many instances, simply educating retailers is effective.
 - In some college communities with a high concentration of on-premise establishments, retailers compete in their pricing. Some people have had success in bringing together retailers to have a conversation about what the price wars really do to business and to think of ways to get out of these patterns.
 - Some groups sign “Tavern Owner’s Agreements” in which retailers agree on minimum alcohol pricing and work together on the issue.
 - A local bar owner’s association is another venue through which to work with retailers and get retailers to work together.
 - As mentioned above, Portland’s downtown bar owners created “Responsible Bar Management Guidelines” that include some guidelines about pricing and promotions, available on the 21 Reasons website: http://www.21reasons.org/images/Microsoft_Word_-_NLOC_Agreement-Suggestions-as_adopted_edited.pdf
 - Some communities are using the 21 Reasons/Portland liquor licensing brochure as a handout when doing RBS trainings. There is room in several spots for adding your own logo and contact information: http://www.21reasons.org/images/11x17_folded_Brochure_Layout_1.pdf
(Note: The document is in PDF format because the professional designer used design software that is not compatible with most computers. For this reason, there is no way to electronically insert your logo and information. We recommend manually printing a hard copy of the document, cutting and pasting on your information, and then photocopying for distribution. If you are tech-savvy and know a better way, please let us know.)
- How do you get merchants to “buy-in” to prevention efforts being presented?
 - This often comes down to liability, and so one way to get retailers to have buy-in is to get them to understand why low prices produce negative effects, and point them to the Liquor Liability Act. If retailers over serve, they can be responsible for any damages that result.
- Considering the endless opportunities for intervention in our communities, what are factors that make Objective 3.11 a must-address issue for us? How can we weigh the “bang for the buck” in deciding where to focus our efforts on 3.11, especially keeping in mind everything else we’re working on?

- Objective 3.11 is required in the OSA work plan. However, what and how much you choose to do for this objective should be determined according to needs, capacity, and readiness, as well as your big-picture and long-term goals. You may not solve the problem in the next year of your HMP work plan, but you can look at what progress is realistic to aim for. For example, you might not be able to create policy changes over the next year, but you could set a target of how many retailers you will educate about the negative impacts of pricing and promotions (3.11c) and how many retailers you will approach to offer assistance with their pricing/promotions policies (3.11a).
 - Think about how 3.11 can complement and boost your other work plan objectives, rather than as just “one more thing” to do.
 - Starting with the assessment of the community is essential. If you determine that pricing and promotions simply aren’t an issue, then you can talk with your OSA project officer and request that 3.11 be removed from your work plan.
- Is the guide useful? What feedback do you have?
 - Call participants agreed that the assessment tools look very useful.
 - A bulleted handout for retailers, outlining why pricing and promotions are important, as well as implications to the bottom line would be helpful.

Please send additional feedback and questions about the call and materials to Maryann Harakall at maryann.harakall@maine.gov 287-5713 or Erica Schmitz at eschmitz@mcd.org; 773-7737.

An evaluation of this conference call will be sent out through surveymonkey. Feedback on any and all parts of the call is greatly appreciated!

SAVE THE DATES! Upcoming calls...

Facilitators/Moderators	Topic	Date/Time of call
Maryann Harakall (OSA) and Erica Schmitz (MESAP)	School Policy Updates	Thursday, SEPTEMBER 17, 1-2 pm
Geoffrey Miller (OSA) and Erica Schmitz (MESAP)	Using Student Survey Data	Thursday, OCTOBER 15, 1-2 pm

Call topics may change to reflect community needs. For this reason, registration is not available until 1 month prior to each call. To register: <http://www.mcd.org/registrations.asp>

If you have specific materials or resources you would like to share with call participants, or if you have any specific questions you would like to see addressed during a call, please contact Erica Schmitz from MESAP (Maine’s Environmental Substance Abuse Prevention Center) at Medical Care Development, (207) 773-7737, eschmitz@mcd.org.