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Paying for Enforcement at a time of Budget Cuts

By Pamela S. Erickson

Enforcement is critical to the effectiveness of alcohol regulation. But how do you maintain enforcement in this era of devastating budget cuts? We can explore and implement ideas for raising revenue, cost shifting, using community resources and prevention.

New Revenue: You might be surprised to find industry allies in your attempt to raise revenue. In Wisconsin, the beer distributors supported the increase in their wholesale permit to fund enforcement. This fee was very low (\$25), so an increase seemed reasonable. The fee will be set by the regulatory agency up to \$2500 and will fund one FTE. A similar thing happened in Oregon where the off-premise license fee was \$50 and hadn't been raised since 1933. It was increased to \$100. The Grocer's Association agreed not to fight it because it was a reasonable increase. While money is tight these days, the alcohol industry has an interest in maintaining a balanced and stable market. Lack of enforcement can create problems when some companies decide to cheat. Other companies are then at a disadvantage.

Cost Shifting: Large events and venues often take up more than their share of law enforcement services. Why not require greater security instead of relying on local law enforcement to handle problems? Oregon has an administrative rule for any event where 2,000 or more patrons are expected. Such events must have a specified number of "alcohol monitors." The rule also specifies drink

sizes and the number of drinks that can be sold at a time. For "problem bars," it may be possible to have similar requirements for security, sales restrictions and even curtailed closing hours. These things can be used to keep the licensee in business, but prevent future problems.



Use Community Youth: You may be amazed at what high school and college kids can do for your agency. I have used high school kids to: improve recycling, re-design a warehouse process, prepare a public PowerPoint presentation, develop and deliver public service announcements. In fact, I found that high school students were so good at developing radio ads, I stopped using and paying for professionals.

Cost Avoidance: Given staff reductions, agencies need to find other ways of doing things. First, look at your contracting budget. Are you contracting for services that could be performed by a staff team? Using staff teams to solve agency problems can be highly cost-effective. First, you may discover staff skills and expertise that you didn't realize they had. Second, when staff is involved they become invested in solutions and the implementation is usually easier.



Prevent Problem Parties: Large parties and unlicensed events often attract underage drinkers and rowdy patrons. Many enforcement agencies are developing creative ways to prevent these from happening or to induce them to curtail problems themselves. You can find likely party locations through social networks or by asking community members to report likely nuisance parties. Even keg registration logs can be a source. If there is a recent large purchase of kegs, you can obtain an address of the purchaser. In these situations, an officer can pay a courtesy call to the location in advance of the party with information about laws and local ordinances for large parties and unlicensed events.

Once the property owner knows police are aware of the party plans, they are more likely to be careful to avoid any disturbance. In some cases, the party actually doesn't happen once police contact is made. Many local governments have ordinances about parties and disturbances which will result in fines for the property owner if there are repeat violations. If your community lacks such an ordinance, it may be worth discussing the possibility with your local government.

For more information, see
www.healthyalcoholmarket.com

or

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