

Fundraising for Project Graduation: *Tips for bringing in cash—without alcohol!*

Project Graduation was created for high school seniors to celebrate their graduation night without the dangers of alcohol. When Project Graduation began in Maine almost 30 years ago, the purpose was to prevent drinking and driving fatalities among graduating seniors.

Since then, we've learned a lot more about the dangers of teenage drinking:



- Only one-third of youth alcohol deaths involve vehicle crashes. The other two-thirds involve homicides, suicides, alcohol poisoning, and unintentional injuries.
- Teen brains are still developing, and alcohol can damage that development.
- Alcohol has been strongly linked to teenage depression and plays a significant role in youth suicide.
- Adolescents who start drinking alcohol by age 17 are two times as likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21.

Today, Project Graduation is more important than ever. The event has become a powerful tool to correct two common misperceptions—that underage drinking is a “rite of passage,” and that “it’s not a party without alcohol.”

However, Project Graduation is usually community funded, and it is not cheap. Volunteers work all year long to raise money and plan the big event. Faced with pressure to raise lots of money in a short time, some planning committees might wonder whether holding a fundraiser with alcohol might be appropriate. Our recommendation is to stay true to the purpose of Project Graduation, and avoid serving alcohol at all related fundraising events.

This doesn't mean that adults should never drink in front of youth—in fact, adults modeling moderate drinking behavior may be helpful to young people in forming healthy attitudes about adult drinking. But youth also need plenty of examples of adults celebrating and having a good time without any alcohol at all. What better opportunity to do so than with a fundraiser event for Project Graduation?

If we want youth to believe the message of Project Graduation—which is that alcohol is NOT needed for celebration—then we need to do more than throw them a party where drinking is not allowed. We need to show that adults, too, can have a good time without alcohol.

But why alcohol-free?
Aren't we adults?



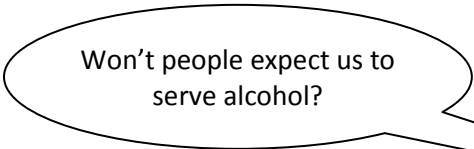


Yeah, but don't people need alcohol to socialize?

There is a myth in our society that adults need alcohol to get together. But adults can and do hang out in places that are not drinking situations, like at children's events, in faith communities, and at the workplace.

Suggestion: Create a festive feel in another way. Special snacks and non-alcoholic drinks, icebreakers, party games, and decorations are a great way to create a fun mood and help people relax. Event hosts can introduce people to each other to help conversation, and plan activities that encourage guests to interact.

Did you know that a recent survey of Portland nonprofits found that nearly half of them hold events without any alcohol?



Won't people expect us to serve alcohol?

Given the number of non-profits that report holding events without alcohol, maybe this isn't a real belief. Remember when people expected that they could smoke anywhere they wanted to? Now laws and social practice have made public spaces smoke-free, and people don't assume they can smoke everywhere. It works the same way for alcohol: there is evidence that says that people's attitudes about alcohol are making a similar change.



Suggestion: Let event guests know why you're choosing to go alcohol free. A simple statement of purpose is often enough to convince people to support your decision.



Won't people just go to other events that do have alcohol?

In these tough times, organizations can feel like they're competing for the same attendees. But people decide to go to events for lots of reasons: personal schedules, finances, entertainment, friends who are going, childcare, their personal support for the organization, and much more. The absence of alcohol at a Project Graduation fundraiser is probably only one of those factors.



Suggestion: Use the fact that you're alcohol-free as a strength, not a weakness. You may lose a few guests who require alcohol to be there, but you'll gain guests who prefer alcohol-free events--while modeling the good behavior you're trying to encourage with Project Graduation.

So How Do We Raise Money?

Here are some alcohol-free fundraising ideas. Don't forget to make a statement during the pre-event publicity about why you're choosing to go alcohol-free.

A class-faculty competition
Antique show
Battle of the bands
Bake sale

Community Work Day (rent a student)
Community dinner
Dance marathon

Family night
Fashion show
Haunted house
Homecoming carnival

Help model good choices for youth so that we all make it through graduation season healthy and safe!