



# **Creating Safer, Healthier Neighborhoods by Reducing Chronic Public Inebriation**

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**City of Tacoma, Washington  
Case Study**

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## **Discussion Guide**

# Background Information

Citizen complaints about the problem of chronic public inebriation in the city of Tacoma resulted in a city ordinance recommending the establishment of an Alcohol Impact Area or AIA. An AIA is a geographical boundary area that has been determined to have a high degree of public inebriation.

The goal for establishing an AIA was to reduce the effects of the public consumption of alcohol and/or public intoxication that endangers the welfare, health, peace or safety of a neighborhood or community.

A key component to success was when the County Board of Health declared chronic public inebriation to be a public health problem, not just a safety concern. With pressure from community and neighborhood residents, the board requested that the Washington State Liquor Control Board enact rules to reduce the availability of certain high-octane, low-cost products in the alcohol impact zones.

## Strategies:

The strategies used were:

- Designate an AIA in the urban core of the city of Tacoma.
- Restrict the sales of high alcohol content, low-cost beer and wine for off-premise sales.
- Use Graphic Information Systems (GIS) mapping to reveal patterns, study proximity to other features (liquor outlets), and perform a variety of analysis. By mapping police incidents, it helped the community and decision makers understand the connection between alcohol and violent crimes, party disturbances and DUI arrests.
- Involve community residents, social service agencies, police, and other public services in helping to mitigate the negative effects of chronic public inebriation.

## Results:

Two years after the AIA was established:

- 21% decrease in detox admissions
- 61% decrease in police service calls
- 25% of residents and 21% of retailers report that problems with public inebriation have decreased over the previous two years
- 19% of residents report less incidents of public urination and defecation
- 31% of residents and retailers report less trash due to public inebriation over the last two years
- 25% of residents report that neighborhoods are safer compared to two years ago

# Lessons Learned:

**Research matters.** Whether compiling crime statistics, investigating ownership status of problem properties or researching relevant statutes, gathering accurate and thorough data and background information helps identify the real or underlying community problems. It also adds credibility to a grassroots effort in the eyes of those controlling resource allocations. Organizers can use their findings to complement anecdotal evidence in developing a strategic response.

**Organizing is more effective when it is done in support of a particular goal rather than only in opposition to an existing condition.** While anger and frustration motivate temporary involvement, the coalition which forms around specific objectives is more likely to maintain enthusiasm and realize its goals.

**Action is important.** Including a wide range of collaborators in the problem solving process is critical to identifying mutually advantageous solutions and generating necessary political support, but eventually, the organizer must have the confidence to communicate a vision and lead the partnership towards its objectives. The organizer cannot allow details and uncertainty to prevent forward progress.

**An outreach effort that employs both incentive (carrot) and potential punishment (stick) in its outreach strategy is likely to encourage greater participation.**

**Local change does not occur in a vacuum.** Neighborhoods compete for and rely on city, state and national resources. Developing linkages to and an understanding of trends at these other tiers can help communities expedite the revitalization process by providing direction and capitalizing on broader momentum. The central participation of law enforcement in developing community-based responses offers an effective means to establishing those linkages and gaining a broader perspective.

***“The best advice I would give to another community, is to know that it works. We did the research, we tracked the results very closely. If you do this, it’s going to work and you are going to see a demonstrative improvement in your community.”***

***-Kevin Phelps  
Tacoma City Council  
Tacoma, Washington***

*“When we sat down to be*

# 4 Ways FACE Can Help You Get Started

- 1. Get Support:** Go to the FACE website ([www.faceproject.org/storiesofchange](http://www.faceproject.org/storiesofchange)) to find additional, free downloadable resources related to this Case Study.
- 2. Assess Your Community:** Take *The Community Alcohol Personality Survey*.<sup>®</sup> This survey will help you identify alcohol problems and contributing factors in your community. It will then identify research-based strategies that you can choose from to create a specific plan of action. You can download it free from our website.
- 3. Create Change:** Use *A Fork In the Road: The Path to Reducing Underage Drinking in your Community*<sup>®</sup> to communicate your findings and identify a plan of action that is relevant to your community.
- 4. Learn More About Youth and Alcohol:** Check out the additional resources on the FACE website.