

PLUNGE PLANNING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

A Plunge is an innovative approach designed to mobilize a community to take action and address a community health concern such as underage drinking or local drug use. This guide is designed to assist community coalitions in organizing a successful event and is based on the process developed by the Marshfield Clinic Center for Community Outreach. The recommended timeline for organizing a Plunge is at least six months. It is recommended that as a coalition goes through the Plunge planning process, documentation is kept, which will help to modify and refine the process should the coalition choose to host a Plunge event, on another topic, at another time.

SIX MONTHS PRIOR TO PLUNGE

1) SELECT A TOPIC / THEME- Coalition determines the topic or theme of the Plunge. The theme should be based upon the comprehensive community assessment that drives the work of the coalition. Spend time to refine the theme so that the important elements are addressed. For example, if the topic is underage drinking, the coalition may want to focus the day's stops on all of the potential effects of an underage drinking party from binge drinking to alcohol related traffic crash, emergency room visits and the court room. Once the group has decided on a theme, they should freely brainstorm all potential stops or sessions related to that theme.

2) FORM A PLANNING COMMITTEE- This group should consist of 5-10 individuals who will oversee the planning and implementation of the event. Coalition members who are not on the planning committee can serve as great resources for specific plans; however a core group of individuals should be designated to lead the planning process. The committee should then routinely report back to the full coalition.

A. APPOINT A CHAIRPERSON- This person will serve as the central organizer through which all information will flow.

The Chairperson will be responsible to:

- Distribute information and assign tasks to the planning committee members
- Facilitate planning meetings
- Set timelines
- Ensure the progress of all tasks
- Set meeting agendas

B. APPOINT A TREASURER / BUDGET EXPERT- A Plunge is possible with a limited budget. A detailed budget outlining expenses should be developed as soon in the planning process as possible. The role of the treasurer is to best determine how to meet all the goals of the event in the most fiscally responsible manner.

The Treasurer will be responsible to:

- Determine the budget with input of the planning committee
- Ensure that expenses and invoices are paid on time
- Track expenditures to stay on budget

C. APPOINT A SECRETARY- Committee members and the coalition should be kept up-to-date on the progress of the Plunge planning.

The Secretary will be responsible to:

- Take minutes at all meetings
- Collect activity reports when necessary
- Distribute notes to all committee members after meetings
- Work with the Chair to compile and distribute action lists to committee members after meetings

D. ESTABLISH A MEDIA ADVOCACY COMMITTEE- Strategic use of the media to shape public opinion, mobilize community members and influence decision makers is quite possibly the greatest impact of a Plunge. Creating awareness is the first step in mobilizing a community to action. The availability of media resources will vary from one community to another depending upon demographics and geographic location. The person who serves as the chair of this committee may also serve as the primary spokesperson for the Plunge. The Media Advocacy Committee should host regular meetings to ensure a comprehensive plan is developed and implemented around a clear and consistent message. The work of the media advocacy committee will continue to play an important role even after the event is over.

The Media Advocacy Committee will be responsible to:

- Make contact with local media outlets, including but not limited to: print, radio and television
- Put together a media packet including key information
- Generate interest prior to the event
- Make personal contact with key people in the media who may be interested in covering the event
- Author letters to the editor before and after the event.
- Work with print media to provide an opinion editorial.
- Meet with media throughout the process, seeking the possibility for an on-going series to continue to keep this issue in the public eye.
- Work with alternative outlets such as schools, churches, UW Extension offices, chamber of commerce and business groups to include pre and post information in bulletins, newsletters and other local publications and circulars.
- Determine access to public television for advertisement.

3) SET THE DATE- Once the date has been set, examine the timeline carefully. Modifications should be made to fit the needs of the coalition.

4) ESTABLISH A PROGRAM FOR THE DAY- Once the coalition has determined a topic a program must be designed so that the most important elements of the theme are addressed. A Plunge held in Marshfield that focused upon underage drinking had stops that included presentations from health care professionals describing the effects of alcohol on the adolescent brain, law enforcement representatives describing party patrols and local trends in underage alcohol use, and a panel of students who talked to the audience about the strong drinking culture that exists in high school. Potential presenters for each session or stop should be identified.

5) FIND A FACILITATOR- This event’s facilitator should be someone who is respected in the community and has effective public speaking skills.

This person will be responsible to:

- Ensure that transitions are made smoothly throughout the day and that conversation continues around the topic.

6) MEET WITH THE PLANNING COMMITTEE PERIODICALLY- Meet with the planning committee periodically throughout the process to ensure that everyone involved is comfortable with the plans for the day.

FIVE MONTHS PRIOR TO PLUNGE

1) RESERVE VENUES- Once a program is established, the planning committee must decide how many venues can be accommodated during the event. Locations should be confirmed as far in advance of the event as possible.

2) CONFIRM PRESENTERS- Once the coalition has brainstormed potential presenters, planning committee members should begin making calls to confirm. All presentations should be confirmed several months prior to the event.

3) CREATE INVITATIONS- Invitations should include the date, time, location, and a brief attention-getting description of the event. In addition, include RSVP contact information with a deadline date at least two weeks prior to the event. If the coalition decides to use a professionally printed invitation, it may take several months to work with a graphic designer to finalize the design and then get the invitations printed.

4) RESERVE TRANSPORTATION- Transportation options that fit the event’s budget should be identified. Coalitions may decide to allow individuals to drive themselves from one site to the next as a cost saving measure. If transportation is not provided, create a map detailing the directions to each stop to include into the registration packet.

Once a transportation source has been determined, confirm the reservation. Be sure to determine the cut off date to make changes to the reservation to accommodate the confirmed number of participants.

FOUR MONTHS PRIOR TO PLUNGE

1) MAKE AN INVITATION LIST- Ask members of the coalition to each develop a list of the people that they would like to invite to the Plunge. Develop a template to distribute to coalition members to ensure consistent information from each member including: name, title, business, address, phone number(s) and e-mail address. Compile all the lists into one spreadsheet indicating who requested the invitee for future follow up calls. This list will be used for multiple purposes in the future months.

Individuals who should be invited to the Plunge include:

- Local elected officials
- Law enforcement
- Business leaders
- Service organization members (i.e. Rotary, Kiwanis)
- Health Care professionals
- County staff
- School officials / staff
- Youth
- Clergy

- 3) CREATE A CONTACT CARD-** Create a contact card to include in the registration packet that provides participants an opportunity to join the coalition. Consider including check boxes for various committees or for a mailing-only option.

THREE MONTHS PRIOR TO PLUNGE

- 1) CREATE REGISTRATION PACKET MATERIALS-** Begin collecting materials from speakers to include in the registration packet as handouts. Place them in the packet in order that follows the agenda. In addition, begin developing other materials to include in the packet.
- 2) BEGIN MAKING PLANS FOR A FOLLOW-UP EVENT-** A follow-up event roughly a month after the Plunge is critical. A Plunge is designed to raise community awareness and prompt community dialogue. However, its primary purpose is to mobilize a community to take action. The follow-up event provides the opportunity to ask people to make a commitment to take action and to join the coalition in its work. Be sure to have a date, time, and place for the follow-up event determined prior to the Plunge so information can be included in the registration packet. Individuals who have been inspired by the day's events can then add the follow-up event directly into their calendar.
- 3) CREATE AN EVALUATION FORM-** The planning committee should create an evaluation to be included in the registration packet. This information will help the coalition refine the process for future events, as well as determine what presentations were the most effective. Be sure to include a comments section for participants to share their thoughts and ideas.

TWO MONTHS PRIOR TO PLUNGE

- 1) CREATE A MEDIA PACKET-** This packet should include all the information the media will need to tell the story. Start by determining who, what, where, why, when and how. A compelling message that states the "why" of the event should be given special attention since it serves as the hook to grab the media's attention, making them want to cover the story.

- 2) **RESERVE A CATERER-** Make calls to local caterers and select one who will work within the budget. Reserve the services for the event, confirm the deadline and give a final count of participants.
- 3) **MAIL INVITATIONS-** Mail invitations at least six weeks prior to the event.
- 4) **COMPILE A THANK YOU LIST-** Begin to compile a thank-you list to be used following the event. Include individuals/organization that helped organize the event, provided resources or funding, or contributed to the event in any way.

ONE MONTH PRIOR TO PLUNGE

- 1) **DISTRIBUTE MEDIA PACKET-** Send the media packet to local media outlets to begin publicizing the event no later than one month prior. Follow up a week later with personal calls to 1) ensure that the packet arrived, 2) share the message again and 3) offer assistance or answer any questions the media might have regarding the Plunge.
- 2) **PUBLICIZE THE EVENT-** Send letters to the editor to publicize the upcoming event. Invite interested community members to contact the coalition for more information on how to become involved with the coalition's activities.
- 3) **FINALIZE THE LOGISTICS-** The weeks prior to the event will be spent confirming all of the arrangements. Some of the items the planning committee should take care of are as follows:
 - Distribute registration / presenter packets to all presenters to review
 - Check on presenter needs
 - Meet with the Facilitator to discuss the final details
 - Order the food
 - Confirm transportation
 - Call ahead to each location to share the final schedule of events
- 4) **CONDUCT A SITE WALK-THROUGH-** The Planning committee should meet a few weeks before the event and visit each site to reduce the possibility of unexpected surprises. An early walk-through will also allow the committee time to make any necessary changes prior to the event.
- 5) **MAKE PERSONAL CALLS TO V.I.P.'S-** Coalition members should make personal contact with V.I.P.'s who would benefit from attending the Plunge. Provide the coalition members with talking points that summarize the Plunge details.