

RECOMMENDATION TO CREATE AN ORGANIZATION  
TO COORDINATE ALCOHOL ABUSE REMEDIATION EFFORTS  
WITHIN NEW MEXICO

Intended to be read by Legislators and others with a stake in creating new DWI/alcohol abuse legislation and those otherwise involved in addressing the State's alcohol abuse problems.

**OVERVIEW:** The recommendation is that a committee be created by the Legislature to centralize and coordinate the development of community-based solutions to alcohol abuse. Initially, the committee would direct the monies and policies of the existing county DWI Programs. The committee would ensure the sharing of the best evidenced based practices, avoid duplication of effort, take advantage of economics of scale, ensure the sound application of the State's funding. Most of all they would leverage local passions by providing the motivation and the means for citizens to offer input and to volunteer to perform carefully directed community services initiated by the local DWI Programs.

**BACKGROUND:** Alcohol abuse in New Mexico has created an almost two Billion dollar burden upon taxpayers and victims of DWI. This figure was compiled by NM DOH, Federal Highway Adm. and other third-party organizations. It reflects only unreimbursed hospital/clinic costs, underage drinking results and DWI crash results. Not included in this figure are: the value of lives lost, victims unreimbursed expenses, lost income and earning potential or other related but often intangible losses. Much more needs to be done to lessen this burden.

Another alcohol abuse related factor is the increasing difficulty being experienced in attempting to prevent of DWI crashes. After achieving an almost 40% reduction in crashes over the past 10 years a continuing reduction is becoming increasingly more difficult to achieve. While some more can be done to increase law enforcement and adjudication efforts these are essentially punitive efforts and, thus, have their limits.

The potential for significant reduction lies in recognizing that alcohol abuse, in all of its manifestations, must be addressed in a preventative manner. And to accomplish this it will take prevention-based efforts directed by locally placed, certified prevention specialists who are supported by citizen volunteers. To continue to apply efforts focused upon only part of the problem, such as treating DWI as if it is separate from alcohol abuse in general and can be solved by harsher laws alone and to not fully utilize prevention programs, is to waste money and manpower and to prolong this scourge.

However, without a central coordinating office, on a state level, this cannot be effectively accomplished. The reason includes the fact that too many independent and not coordinated groups, organizations and individuals are currently engaged in the process. Each attempts to address the problem of alcohol abuse as it manifests itself in different forms in their neighborhood. If we can coordinate these efforts effectively, with an emphasis upon appropriate and proven prevention programs, the positive results would be greatly increased. In fact, experts familiar with alcohol abuse prevention set the return on investment at 7 to 1 and often more.

An additional reason to consider a central coordinating organization (committee?) is that most of the county DWI Programs could be made even more effective if they were able to draw upon the support of such a state-level resource. The county DWI Programs have been basically operated as unmonitored appendages of the various boards of county commissioners. This is not to disparage the work, which the BCC's do. But, the fact is that few commissioners have either the time or the background to effectively monitor much less assist their DWI Programs.

This leaves each county program to its own devices with few places to turn to for assistance. It is logical to assume that at least some of the counties have programs, which could be improved as to effectiveness if a central organization offered standards of performance and the assistance to achieve such standards. At some logical point in the future, after these programs are well staffed with appropriately trained employees and have developed a cadre of citizen volunteers, their focus could be broadened to gradually encompass other alcohol abuse problems not being addressed in their communities by other organizations.

RECOMMENDATION: Some of these problems are, at least in part, due to a lack of a centralized, state-level organization which, relative to the functional listings below, coordinates, supports and sets standards of performance for government funded alcohol abuse related prevention, treatment, law enforcement, adjudication and other affected efforts. Privately run alcohol abuse organizations have also expressed, to me, a desire to have available some of the functions listed below since such assistance could aid their efforts and prevent duplication of programs.

While, at first, this recommended new organization would seem to ignore the work of the State's DWI Czar, DOH, DTS, DFR and others, the functional descriptions listed below should illustrate that this new organization would complement and expand upon and not compete with existing efforts. In fact, as conceived, the coordinating committee would help insure the effective flow of information and resources between these organizations. Above all, it would leverage the effectiveness of the existing DWI Programs which are locally based and already positioned to take advantage of local passions about alcohol abuse.

It should be noted that our recommendation does not include just folding any part of the existing DWI or other alcohol abuse efforts into an existing State organization. A major part of the success, which community-based efforts have enjoyed, is the fact that they are run by local citizens and, thus, respond to local needs.

Consistent with the above, the rationale for recommending a separate organization is based upon the fact that the new committee would be advised by six (?) existing DWI Program managers who, together, know the most about the county-level needs and opportunities related to the state's alcohol abuse situation. However, it could be advantageous to also include representatives of other government or private alcohol abuse related organizations. This would certainly include representatives from the Governor's Office, DOH, DFR, DTS, etc. in order to enhance communication. With people of this caliber directing the State's efforts, the quality of results should be automatically enhanced.

In order to achieve the envisioned results and to ensure continuity, a staff would be required. Initially the administrative functions would be performed by full time employees. However the service functions could be contracted for until specific needs and volume could be identified.

All operating expenses would be paid for from revenue generated by the existing Alcohol Excise Tax revenue. After this concept is explored further by the Legislature and others and is finalized, a start-up budget can be constructed.

A start-up task force would be created. This group could be comprised of volunteers drawn from experienced county DWI Program advisory members (Planning Council members) and others who have a stake in the new organization. Individuals, who are not employed and thus paid by their employers, could be granted a daily "stipend" of a modest amount to compensate them for the time and experience furnished.

The Task Force would be responsible for creating a mission statement, the initial strategic plan, the first year budget, job descriptions, function descriptions (aka standard procedures) and other initial documentation required to provide a solid framework to hire and to direct the organization's process. We believe that sufficient volunteers are currently available to accomplish the start-up process in a timely manner.

The question as to whom the new organization, as well as the task force, should report to would have to be addressed as part of the concept's approval process. However, in order to succeed in the most effective manner, the new Coordinating Committee must be allowed to proceed on a daily basis with the least amount of "managing" from above. The policies and standard procedures created during the start-up will ensure that any need to "micro-manage" will be unnecessary and unwarranted. Thus, the administrative and financial impact upon our state or county governments should minimal for the above stated reasons.

#### THE FUNCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The new Coordinating Committee will:

1. Research and compile background information about all alcohol abuse related organizations, both government and privately sponsored, operating within the State of New Mexico. The data base would include: mission statements and area(s) of expertise, funding sources and amounts, personnel number and qualifications, specifics as to past achievements and current endeavors, strategic plans and goals and any other relevant information including primary contact information. Also obtained would be information as to any assistance desired by any surveyed organization to achieve their goals as well as requests for collaboration with other organizations engaged in achieving similar goals. A summary would be included in each file about each organization. This would serve to identify each organization's potential for assistance in overall goals related to a statewide plan to reduce alcohol abuse. Building upon this information the Coordinating Committee would compile a strategic plan the purpose of which would be to address, as effectively as possible, the overall alcohol abuse problem in this state. As with all of the listed functional objectives, this information would be updated on a schedule to be determined by future experience.

2. Monitor existing alcohol abuse related programs, funded in whole or in part by public monies, to insure their adherence to both science and evidenced based standards and results. Determine adherence to budgets and timeframes stated in their previously approved grant applications. Deviations would then be explored with corrective measures agreed upon by all affected parties on a case-by-case basis in order to ensure success.

3. Provide consulting assistance (on-site or by phone/e-mail as appropriate) to allow and encourage organizations (e.g. county DWI programs) to implement and successfully manage annual distributions and grants for which they may not have sufficient, in-place resources and, therefore, could not otherwise achieve with the same quality of results. The paid consultant's mission would include the development of the client's in-place personnel in order to achieve self-sufficiency for the client organization. Consultants would be either proven private contractors or Committee staff as appropriate to the need.

4. Reduce duplication and the use of unproven programs by researching existing programs and support materials, both within the US and in other countries, and compiling a library of science and evidence based information available, including by internet, to any and all interested parties. This, alone, would serve to establish this State as a leader in the fight to reduce alcohol abuse and could set the standard and procedure for other State operated programs to follow.

5. Assume responsibility for communication with statewide alcohol abuse related organizations (governmental and private) to help ensure a maximum flow of accurate and timely information. Also create a periodic "Executive Summary" to be sent to the Governor's Office, interested State agencies, the members of the State Legislature and appropriate members of the state's county and city/town governments. The objective would be to achieve a better understanding of achievements/solutions, goals and problems encountered in regard to alcohol abuse. This should help to ensure maximum cooperation and two-way information flow as well as promote requests for assistance.

6. Establish an in-house training and education capability to help upgrade the knowledge, skills and morale of personnel, both government and private, whose primary responsibilities are related to alcohol abuse related work. This particular function could be organized on a self-funding basis with the pupils required to pay tuition, which would offset costs. For government employees the tuition would be covered from the training portion of their annual budgets.

7. Maintain a lobbying liaison capability to assist in the communication of alcohol abuse related problems/needs between the public and providers, on one hand, and the State Government/Legislature. This mechanism is envisioned as a method to enhance two-way communication for all involved.

8. Maintain an employment clearing-house to attract qualified job candidates and to provide an organized career-path for existing personnel throughout the state.

9. Create an on-going organizational resource listing from which interested organizations within this state could locate the professional assistance required to implement new projects. This would

include existing private consulting, treatment and supply source organizations as well as governmental organizations and advocate organizations such as MADD and Impact DWI.

10. Centralize and standardize computer related reporting, analysis and audio-visual related programs and other media to enhance the communication process between government and private-level organizations and the public. This function would also assist the in-house educational and training function (number 6 listed above). This endeavor should help provide high-quality media while keeping costs to a minimum and eliminating duplication of effort between the various organizations. It is possible that this function could sell some of its output to other organizations and offset some of its cost of operation.

11. Create a reporting and audit criterion and perform "spot" audits of financial, administrative, employee moral and program effectiveness of all partially or wholly funded programs and organization as appropriate, to help ensure timeliness, adherence to budget, quality of results and adequacy of results as well as adequacy of administration staffing and employee/contractor qualifications. This function will complement function number 2 above.

12. Utilizing the information acquired from the above actions, a state wide Alcohol Abuse Reduction Strategic Plan could be compiled and, upon approval, implemented by the Coordinating Committee.

CONCLUSION: With a documented cost of almost two Billion dollars per year and with so many of our citizen's lives, health and quality-of -life at stake, if we do not take this logical next step to reduce alcohol abuse, now, by coordinating and better administrating our existing efforts and resources (when we enjoy a state level revenue surplus) when will we do it? We have it with in our means to make New Mexico a leader in reducing DWI and other alcohol abuse symptoms to a minimum.

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