



# Drug-Free Communities

Local Problems Require Local Solutions



## Issue Brief: Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Coalitions' Engagement with Law Enforcement

July 2019

### Research-to-Practice Tips

Recent data from site visits and August 2018 DFC progress reports there are several actions that community coalitions can undertake in order to effectively engage the law enforcement sector in their substance abuse prevention work:

- **DFC coalitions provided recommendations for successful collaborations with law enforcement:** Focusing on relationship-building with key individuals in law enforcement agencies and recognizing one another's priorities; communicating regularly and with purpose; and being persistent in outreach and follow-up with law enforcement contacts supported increased engagement between the DFC coalition and law enforcement.
- **DFC coalitions can bring to the table many essential supports for law enforcement efforts that serve both parties' objectives,** such as information sharing around local trends, supporting trainings and conferences, and serving as a conduit for improved community relations.
- **DFC coalitions provided many examples of joint initiatives and activities with law enforcement to combat opioids,** including opioid data tracking systems, trainings to build knowledge and skills, prescription drug take-back days and drop boxes, and local opioid safety task forces.

This issue brief examines DFC coalitions' engagement with the Law Enforcement sector, based on data collected from the August 2018 DFC progress report and through site visits conducted in 2018 with nine DFC coalitions around the country. Law Enforcement sector representatives come from many backgrounds, including: Federal agencies (e.g., Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA], ONDCP's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas [HIDTA] program); local, county, and state law enforcement and emergency services; schools (i.e., School Resource Officers); juvenile justice; and probation offices.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/grants-programs/> for additional information on ONDCP's HIDTA program.



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## Progress Report Results

The DFC National Evaluation Team analyzed data from the August 2018 progress report to assess factors co-occurring with high Law Enforcement engagement. Of the 713 FY 2017 coalitions, nearly all (707) submitted an August 2018 progress report.<sup>2</sup> For analysis, coalitions were first placed in two categories based on how they self-rated the involvement of their Law Enforcement sector. The *high engagement* group was defined as those reporting “high” or “very high” Law Enforcement involvement ( $n = 549$ ; 78%) and the *low engagement* group rated involvement as “low,” “some,” or “medium” Law Enforcement sector involvement ( $n = 158$ , 28%).

### Law Enforcement Engagement and Coalition Membership

In the August 2018 progress report, DFC coalitions reported having a median of three active Law Enforcement sector members.<sup>3</sup> Law Enforcement was ranked among the most highly involved sectors, with an average of 4.1 on a 5-point scale. Coalitions with high Law Enforcement engagement, when compared to coalitions with low Law Enforcement engagement, were significantly more likely to have at least one active member in the Law Enforcement sector (100% versus 92%)<sup>4</sup> and at least one active member in every sector (78% versus 68%, respectively).<sup>5</sup>

### Law Enforcement Engagement and Strategy Implementation

When compared to DFC coalitions with low Law Enforcement sector engagement, coalitions with high engagement were more likely to implement several activities; those with the greatest differences are shown in Table 1. Higher engagement with law enforcement was linked to higher implementation of activities to strengthen enforcement, strengthen surveillance, reduce home and social access for youth, and business trainings.

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<sup>2</sup> This represents nearly all (99%) FY 2017 DFC grant award recipients. Additional DFC coalitions may have completed the progress report after the point at which data were received by the DFC National Evaluation Team for this report.

<sup>3</sup> The Parents and Healthcare Professionals sectors also had a median of three active members; the Youth and Schools sector had the highest number of active members (median of 5 and 4, respectively).

<sup>4</sup>  $\chi^2(1) = 33.05, p < .001$

<sup>5</sup>  $\chi^2(1) = 5.67, p < .02$



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**Table 1. Example of Activities Implemented by Significantly More DFC Coalitions with High versus Low Law Enforcement Sector Engagement**

Activity	% of DFC Coalitions with High Law Enforcement Sector Engagement Engaging in the Activity	% of DFC Coalitions with Low Law Enforcement Sector Engagement Engaging in the Activity	Percentage Point Difference
Strengthening Enforcement (e.g., DUI checkpoints, shoulder tap, open container laws)	49.5%	29.7%	19.8
Strengthening Surveillance (e.g., “hot spots,” party patrols)	32.1%	14.6%	17.5
Reducing Home and Social Access: Adults and youth participating in activities designed to reduce access to alcohol and other substances (e.g., prescription drug take-back programs)	71.8%	56.3%	15.5
Business Training: Sessions on server compliance, training on youth-marketed alcohol products, tobacco sales, etc.	34.8%	21.5%	13.3
Direct Face-to-Face Information Sessions	88.0%	78.5%	9.5
Parent Education and Training: Sessions directed to parents on drug awareness, prevention strategies, parenting skills, etc.	54.1%	44.9%	9.2

Source: DFC August 2018 Progress Report

During site visits and in the progress report, DFC coalitions provided the following examples of collaboration with the Law Enforcement sector:

- “We have established a close partnership with local law enforcement and have co-sponsored several ‘anti-crime’ public safety measures together, including bait car efforts, community-wide clean-ups, graffiti-out campaigns, and ‘coffee with a cop’ in high crime areas.” (Year 6, Western region)
- “We have been working closely with law enforcement and the agency that manages the 911 system, and have developed an enhanced 911 system, allowing parents or other citizens to report underage drinking incidents by dialing 911.” (Year 8, Southern region)
- “Coalition members have been invited to join the police in ride-alongs to check for compliance with respect to our targeted lounges and private clubs.” (Year 8, Southern region)

Additionally, several DFC coalitions described enhanced collaboration between the Law Enforcement and other coalition sector members (e.g., Healthcare), specifically to address opioids in their community:

- “We worked with the National Guard and HIDTA to implement an opioid overdose tracking system to collect more data.” (Year 6, Southern region)



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- “[DFC coalition] staff are now leading [an opioid safety coalition], which is comprised of medical professionals, pharmacists, law enforcement, and members of the community, working together to address the issue of opioid abuse, effectively expanding the [DFC coalition] membership.” (Year 7, Western region)
- “Approximately 200 healthcare professionals, law enforcement agents, students, and community members personally impacted by opioid dependence attended [a coalition-sponsored conference on the opioid epidemic] to develop knowledge and skills in understanding treatment for opioid dependence; understanding trauma and stigma; and how to offer a client-centered continuum of care.” (Year 6, Western region)

DFC coalitions have described their relationship with the Law Enforcement sector as reciprocal at times, particularly around prescription drug take-back activities. Law enforcement agencies have held take-back events and installed permanent drop boxes in their stations, while DFC coalitions have informed community members and coordinated getting medications picked up by the appropriate organizations (e.g., Drug Enforcement Agency).

Although many DFC coalitions reported they successfully cultivated relationships with the Law Enforcement sector, some reported challenges in engaging the multiple agencies that serve their communities. Often, this was due to limited time and availability of law enforcement officers or a perceived lack of interest in collaboration by law enforcement leaders. DFC coalitions also cited cultural and linguistic barriers between law enforcement agencies and community members, especially in areas with large rural or immigrant populations, as challenges to achieving higher levels of engagement with the sector.

## Promising Practices for Increasing Law Enforcement Engagement

To gain a deeper understanding of DFC coalitions’ success in partnering with the Law Enforcement sector, the DFC National Evaluation Team conducted nine site visits in 2018. The following interrelated practices were consistently reported across coalitions:

### Focus on Relationship Building

Coalition staff felt the key to fostering engagement with the Law Enforcement sector was finding the “right” person to connect with at each agency. At times, an enthusiastic “champion” for the coalition helped build new relationships by introducing coalition leaders to colleagues. Additionally, coalitions reported forming relationships with people at varying levels in the organizational hierarchy; in some cases, a law enforcement leader (e.g., sheriff) was the best contact, whereas in others it was an officer tasked with community engagement. Coalitions built relationships by regularly engaging this person, often over several years.



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Site visit participants felt that mutual respect facilitated collaboration with law enforcement. DFC coalition staff members reported they spent time trying to understand each member's views and priorities. This has helped them ensure that everyone feels valued and heard. It has also fostered a sense of mutual purpose, which has fueled their collaborative work. DFC coalition leaders noted they further deepened these relationships by identifying ways the coalition could support their law enforcement partners (as opposed to only focusing on what the DFC coalition needed *from* the law enforcement partners).

## Communicate Regularly and with Purpose

DFC coalitions shared that a key step in relationship building has been to determine the best way to communicate with their Law Enforcement members (e.g., text, phone call) and to reach out with a specific goal in mind. Several site visit participants found that establishing regular meetings or events to connect sector members with one another has helped to maintain their engagement with the overall coalition. Some coalitions have established a Law Enforcement-only task force or sub-committee, to allow members of different agencies to network, share information, and collaborate on initiatives. Others added that having Law Enforcement members attend regular coalition meetings was a catalyst for members of other agencies to get involved.

## Be Persistent: Enforcement

As one Law Enforcement sector member noted, "With the police departments, there's so many things going on that if you don't stay on top of them, people [officers] will stop coming." Coalition members shared that effective engagement, especially with new Law Enforcement members, often came about because they persisted in pursuing the relationship. They kept calling until they found the right person. They recognized that people are busy and continued to invite them to meetings and events, rather than assuming a lack of interest and giving up. Law enforcement officials often reported they appreciated this persistence and saw it as a sign the DFC coalition was serious about the relationship. In addition, DFC coalition staff members noted they attended events involving Law Enforcement and would introduce themselves and their coalition and then follow up afterward with additional communication.

## What can Coalitions Bring to the Table?

During site visits, numerous DFC coalition staff members explained that a core component of relationship building is demonstrating the coalition's value to Law Enforcement partners. DFC coalition staff have found the more they support local law enforcement agencies, the more opportunities they have to lay the groundwork for fostering interpersonal relationships and establishing trust. Site visit participants enumerated ways in which their DFC coalitions



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support Law Enforcement and create opportunities for Law Enforcement to support the coalition, including:

- **Data Sharing:** DFC coalitions often facilitate the exchange of information, both by presenting community data to Law Enforcement sector members and by helping Law Enforcement members disseminate information throughout the community. For example, one member of the Law Enforcement sector reported that when HIDTA released a report with new information on vaping, the DFC coalition helped them disseminate the report widely in their community. A HIDTA representative commented that such reports are “not just law enforcement information, it’s information you need to get out to community groups. We use [the DFC coalition] as the doorway to do that” (Year 3, Southern region).
- **Trainings and Conferences:** Multiple DFC coalition staff members mentioned they provide training opportunities to local law enforcement agencies, either through a regional or national training (e.g., CADCA) or by hosting a training locally. For example, one site visit coalition partnered with HIDTA to host an annual law enforcement conference. A HIDTA leader said, “Being on the law enforcement committee, of course I solicited ideas from the members: ‘What kind of training do you guys want to see?’ And then reached out [to] pertinent people for the topic” (Year 10 Coalition, Southern Region). One coalition even petitioned the state to add a new training site so that local police would not have to travel so far for state certifications. Each of these coalitions said they found that officers who attended trainings related to drug use and prevention became more informed and motivated about prevention efforts, and that attending trainings together opened opportunities for conversation about their common goals.
- **Materials:** Coalitions repeatedly pointed out the power of small contributions. One coalition reported they have bulk ordered a drug identification fact book to distribute locally and they have found that police officers are always eager to get a copy of the latest edition. Another coalition helped connect local police officers with a funding source to procure much-needed protective gloves for handling fentanyl and carfentanyl. DFC coalitions reported the cost to the coalition was small, but the benefits to their Law Enforcement partners were significant.
- **Improved Community Relations:** Several law enforcement officers stated that working with the DFC coalition gave them opportunities to interact with the community in an informal environment and improve their relationships with community members. For example, one DFC coalition helped students put on a health fair and dance performance about healthy decision-making, as the capstone to a youth development workshop. The DFC coalition’s Law Enforcement sector member hosted a table at a school health fair and recital, and even came on stage as part of the performance. For



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some law enforcement members, attending prevention events, teaching youth prevention classes, and volunteering alongside coalition members were new and valuable ways to get to know their communities.

## Engaging with HIDTA

Several of the DFC coalitions that hosted site visits in 2018 reported having active partnerships with ONDCP's HIDTA grant program. Similar to engaging with other law enforcement agencies, coalitions found that HIDTA was a valuable partner for data sharing and information exchange.

## ODMAP

One way in which HIDTA supports the exchange of information with Law Enforcement partners is with the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program (ODMAP). The software is free to emergency personnel and Law Enforcement throughout the country and allows for real-time reporting for all overdose incidents and deaths. One site visit coalition invited a HIDTA representative to introduce ODMAP's capabilities at their coalition meeting, and successfully launched the software with all emergency responders and Law Enforcement in their county. Analysts for the county's narcotics task force have found the data they procured from ODMAP has helped them track drug shipments, target dealers, and anticipate overdose crises.

## HIDTA Website Partnership

As mentioned previously, data sharing has been mutually beneficial, whether it is the coalition sharing information with their state and national partners or vice versa. In a clear example of this interplay, one coalition worked with HIDTA to implement a drug intervention website. A section of the website serves as a tip line where visitors can anonymously report information (e.g., about illegal activity or wanted drug fugitives) to HIDTA personnel. The coalition also maintains informational pages on the site relating to prevention for youth and parents, with resources for treatment and rehabilitation.

## Conclusions

Data from the August 2018 progress report show that DFC coalitions that have effectively engaged the Law Enforcement sector were significantly more likely to have greater sector involvement and implement a range of prevention activities. DFC coalitions that participated in the 2018 site visits shared promising practices for achieving greater Law Enforcement engagement, including intentionally cultivating relationships with their partners over time,



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and purposefully and persistently reaching out to sector members to share coalition updates and identify the law enforcement agency's needs and priorities. Coalitions also reported providing opportunities for engagement where both the coalition and the Law Enforcement partner will benefit, such as through information exchange, improved community relations, or networking with other agencies. These DFC coalitions have found ways for Law Enforcement members to support coalition work, while also finding opportunities to support local law enforcement in return. In many of these partnerships, both the Law Enforcement members and DFC coalition leaders reported feeling a sense of mutual purpose and that their collaboration benefits not just their organization, but also their communities.