Some big events, such as festivals, race days, sport competitions or large workplace parties, can become more about drinking than anything else. But you can shift the culture of these events by bringing great food, fantastic non-alcoholic drinks, activities and entertainment into the spotlight to reduce alcohol-related harm.

**THE BEST APPROACH**

The best way to reduce drinking at an event is not to shock people with messages about the harms of alcohol or even to give harm-reduction advice, but by changing the culture of the event so alcohol isn’t the focus. If you show, not tell, that there are great alternatives to drinking, you avoid alienating your target audience and increase your chances of connecting with them.

This is a long-term strategy that aims to affect the underlying drinking culture at events. Ingrained cultural practices can be difficult to change. Event organisers and attendees may be resistant if they feel you are attacking them or making sudden and dramatic changes to a well-loved event. A bit of delicacy and persistence can be the key to real and lasting change, so don’t get discouraged if your efforts don’t produce revolutionary results on the first go.

When you talk to the event organisers, remember that you’ll be bringing value to the event by making it more varied and exciting. Having a wider range of food, drink and entertainment at the event could also broaden its appeal to more members of the community.

**RESOURCES**

Links to the following resources can be found at: [www.adf.org.au/cdat-community-prevention](http://www.adf.org.au/cdat-community-prevention)

**Alternatives to drinking**

We know there is so much more to enjoy beyond alcohol! Whether you’re going to bring in the pros or DIY, the vendors below could be a good place to start. Please contact your SCDO if you know of an awesome organisation that you think others should hear about too. If you use or have had past experiences with the vendors listed, please contact your SCDO with any feedback you have.

**Great food**

Excellent food vendors attract everyone, and getting your favourite meal or snack can become something to look forward to at an event.

- Talk to your local businesses about setting up a booth at the event. It’s a great opportunity for them to show off the best they have to offer and raise awareness about their brand.
- Food trucks are all the rage! Consider browsing sites like Zamato to check out vendors you could contact that are specific to your area, and Mobile food and drinks NSW has many vendors listed online.
- An Aussie classic like Jafe Jaffles, or Harry’s Café de Wheels selling meat pies, is sure to be a crowd-pleaser.
- Don’t forget snacks. Summer options such as Flyin’ Fox Ice Blox or Liana Raine Artisan Pops have stockists in NSW.
Non-alcoholic drinks
The key is to offer equally attractive non-alcoholic beverages. We’re talking way more than just soft drinks – you want someone to spot a unique beverage, like a fresh drinking coconut, and think ‘I want that’. Consider contacting a local or larger business to do something special for the event, or your CDAT might want to run their own drinks booth.

- Local businesses: contact juice bars, cafes, health-food shops and specialty retailers. Think about partnering with one of these businesses to do something different specifically for the event – your local juice bar could sell fresh coconuts, or your local cafe could make specialty hot chocolate or trendy ‘golden lattes’.
- Gourmet teas: vendors like Tea Tonic and T2 can create eye-catching event stalls with delicious-looking drinks that everyone will want.
- Coffee: try mobile coffee services like Lord of the Beans, Xpresso Mobile Cafe or Cafe2U.
- Hot chocolate and chai: Mork Chocolate and The Original Hot Chocolate both retail online, as do Prana Chai, Chai Tea Australia, Real Chai, and Chai Spice.
- Coconut water and fresh coconuts: C-Coconut Water sell packaged, The Coconut Shop sell packaged and fresh, and Dr Livingstone’s Finest Coconuts operate in the Byron Bay area with adorable ‘tricycles’.
- Juices: Produce Art sells a feijoa and apple juice as well as fresh drinking coconuts online, and Nudie sells a variety of juices and coconut water too.
- Fancy soft drink and cordial: check out craft soft-drink producers such as All Good and Six Barrel Soda Co.; Thirst for Life, which has a range of specialty cordials and soft drinks; and Raw Materials, which sells artisanal lemonade.

Activities
By keeping people’s hands busy with fun and engaging activities you can keep everyone interested in something other than alcohol.

Music, dance, comedy and art of all stripes improve any event and help to prevent people drinking out of boredom.

Think about all the local talent and resources in your community that could be showcased. Performance gyms and CrossFit studios might set up an obstacle course; game stores might set up giant-sized games, lawn games, or a selection of board games; and a golf shop/course might run a hole-in-one putt.

Thinking of DIY drinks or activities?

- Be certain to talk to your local council about your obligations in terms of health and safety, and to make sure you’re covered under their (or the event’s) public liability insurance.
- Link up with other organisations and clubs in your area. Talk to your friends and family too; they might be able to help you out with materials, decorations, volunteers for the event day, or practical know-how.
- Pinterest is a free platform and a goldmine of inspiration for everything from homemade lemonade and iced tea to how to make your own bunting and beverage station design ideas.
- If you’re too busy to make decorations yourself, check out Etsy and Madeit, which have lots of homemade goodies. Many crafters will also make something to suit your requirements at no extra cost if you just ask, while Pink Frosting sells all kinds of party and event decorations.
- Fit your activity in with the ‘vibe’ of an event to make it more appealing to attendees. For example, race-day croquet could be the perfect match for the classy dress code and English heritage of horseracing.
- Make it flashy! You want to turn heads and pique interest in your activity – great decor (a little craftiness and a willingness to DIY can make a big impact) can be saved year-to-year, too.
- Dress the part. For example, at race-day croquet you could put on your best race-day gear (op shops and friends’ closets are great options).
- A little fun competition goes a long way. A simple scoreboard with the top five players is a great touch, and may be the nudge that gets more mates involved in trying to beat their friends’ score.
- Yard Party rents out all manner of giant games and lawn games.
- DIY ’backyard games’ – there are some fun ideas on Listotic and DIY & Crafts.
Addressing the event structure

Success in addressing the event structure can depend heavily on the relationship you develop with event organisers, and the nature of the event. You may have more luck at bringing in new vendors and organising activities than relocating or minimising the number of bars, at least initially. If you build a relationship with the organisers and demonstrate that you are adding value to the event, broadening its appeal and making it more dynamic, then over time you could develop more ability to influence how the event is structured.

Ask event organisers:

- How many bars are there, and where are they located? A long-term goal may be to have food centrally located, and alcohol more peripheral.
- Is the venue extremely loud? A loud venue encourages faster drinking. A long-term goal may be to affect the noise level through volume and speaker location.
- What number and what quality of non-alcoholic drinks are on offer? Ideally, they should be equal in number and quality to alcoholic drinks.
- Are non-alcoholic drinks displayed with equal prominence and advertised equally prior to the event? Having high-quality, eye-catching non-alcoholic options can make it easier to generate enthusiasm for them.
- Is it an open bar, and are there servers topping up glasses or circulating with drink trays? This makes it hard for guests to keep track of how many drinks they’ve had, as well as encouraging consumption. A long-term goal may be to limit and eventually stop these practices.

MAKING A PLAN

Following the ‘Six steps to planning community alcohol and drug projects’ helps guide your CDAT towards creating the most effective initiative.

Step 1: Networking

Talk to other local groups and organisations that might already be running initiatives, considering what they might have done in the past and if you could collaborate in the future. They might also have some thoughts on what event your energies are best directed towards.

- What are the big events in your community? Race days, schoolies, agricultural shows, music festivals, etc.
- Major employers may hold large events, regular Friday-night drinks or parties for staff. Your CDAT members might have the opportunity to influence their own workplaces’ events.
- Who else is active in trying to prevent alcohol and drug harms through safe partying initiatives? For example, local councils, youth groups, police, Lions/Rotary clubs, churches, schools and universities are good organisations to contact.

Step 2: Gathering statistics

Identify what specifically your CDAT wants to address. Is there a particular event at which people are at higher risk of alcohol-related harms? Think about contacting primary health-care partnerships, police, local council and the ADF for further information and evidence to support your plans.

Once you decide what needs to be addressed and you know what other initiatives already exist in your community, look into the details of the specific event. You could begin by looking at how many food and non-alcoholic vendors participated in previous years, as well as the number of activities and type of entertainment offered (you may need to contact the event organisers for this information, or the council that was responsible for approving the event). This can help to build your case that new and more options would be beneficial. Once you’ve shown there are gaps in what’s being offered, you can share your ideas about how to fill them.
Step 3: Engage with your community

Once you determine what event you’re going to tackle, you’ll need to reach out to the organisers and promoters of the event. Having a positive relationship with them will make it easier to share your ideas and suggestions.

Ask event organisers for any information they have about the types of people who regularly attend their event and if they have any formal or informal evaluations they can share with you. You could also try talking to a sample of the target audience yourself to encourage suggestions of what they would like to see done differently and what could improve the event for them as an attendee.

Talking to the event attendees can help you gather information about what gets them excited in terms of types of food, activities, entertainment and non-alcoholic drinks. Also consider asking about what the past events were like. Were people bored? Was the food ordinary? Was the only activity to drink alcohol? Having that kind of ‘market research’ will also strengthen your pitch to the organisers.

Step 4: Identify the best approach

Changing the underlying culture and structure of the event is great primary prevention. Although it may take a few years to create real change, what you’re working towards is showing people that there can be much more to events than alcohol. This is more effective than harm-reduction or ‘scare’ messages. Using the information you’ve gathered from past attendees and the level of interest from local businesses, discuss where you think your efforts are best directed.

Was the most common complaint boredom and lack of entertainment/activities, or did more people suggest better and more varied foods be introduced? Was the only alternative to alcohol soft drinks or water? Take these as your starting point, and brainstorm how you could address the problems based on the resources available to you.

Talk to the local businesses that might want to get involved with food, non-alcoholic drinks and activities. Who else might want to work with you? Lions/Rotary clubs, youth groups, community development representatives and other local organisations may be keen to participate if you want to set up a drinks booth or activity. Business associations, major employers and unions might be able to support you with materials, decorations or know-how. Your local council may also be able to help out.

Step 5: Plan the best way to take action

Write a plan detailing:

• The problem or behaviour you are trying to influence, with any statistics or evidence you have
• Information on your target audience
• A clear overall aim
• Objectives detailing how you will achieve your aim, which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-frame specific
• A strategy detailing how you will achieve your objectives through creative ideas and tactics
• How you will evaluate to what degree each objective is achieved

When articulating your overall aims and setting your objectives, remember that change can be slow to happen but persistence and incremental changes can be the key to long-term success.

Clearly expressing your aims – for example, to reduce harmful drinking – can avoid misunderstandings such as that you’re trying to make the event completely dry.

Setting achievable objectives can be great for team morale. Starting small – for example, stating as an objective to ‘increase the number of great food vendors’ or ‘increase the number of non-alcoholic drink options’ – means your objectives are more likely to be achieved, which will be encouraging for your team while keeping you oriented towards your long-term objectives.

Step 6: Evaluate what you do

Good evaluation begins in the planning stages with measurable objectives, and how you’ll track them. It allows you to reflect and improve your initiatives for next time. Sharing your success through your SCDO can also inspire other teams across the state! Remember to take lots of pictures, document your wins and your challenges, and once the event is over, debrief with your team about how you’ll do it even better next time.