



# RURAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

## ABSTRACT

This tool kit was created by **CADCA** (Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America) in partnership with **The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry** with the generous support of the **Rx Abuse Leadership Initiative** (RALI), with content contributions from the STAND Coalition of Scott County, TN and the Rural Youth Advisory Council, composed of rural youth throughout America who care about positive community change.

## Introduction

One of the greatest challenges of this decade is opioid addiction. The opioid epidemic has wreaked havoc among many small towns in rural America as demonstrated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Morbidity and Mortality Report that shows higher rates of opioid-related deaths recorded in rural areas. The disease of addiction has infiltrated, and in many areas severely damaged the very fabric of rural communities. Treatment and recovery continue to be extremely important, however, more attention must be paid to addressing the problem upstream through universal prevention efforts. Data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy shows that \$18 is saved for every dollar invested in prevention. In order to assure sustainability and long-term viability of prevention efforts, youth must play a key role in strategies and policy goals related to substance use and misuse prevention. Youth represent the future and offer unique perspectives on how certain drugs impact their communities. These perspectives, ideas, and energy are imperative to cause a generational disruption in substance misuse in rural America and increase the safety and health of communities.

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### **Who is the tool kit for?**

The tool kit was created for Grangers, young people, coalitions, community-serving organizations, religious organizations and any other group that seeks to meaningfully engage rural youth, to address substance misuse issues in their communities and achieve positive community change through comprehensive strategies with a focus on policy and advocacy.

### **Why was the tool kit created and how was it created?**

The content contained in this tool kit was created to address substance misuse in rural communities through the meaningful engagement and involvement of rural youth in the process to enact lasting change that will contribute to healthy and safe communities throughout America. Much of the content was developed and refined by CADCA through three decades of experience in building capacity and creating change through community coalitions from all 50 U.S. states and 30 countries globally. In addition, significant contributions were provided by the Rural Youth Advisory Council, composed of rural youth trained by CADCA from throughout the country, through a series of focus groups and



discussions. The contributions from the council assured that youth were involved in every step of the creation of this tool kit and were paramount to assure of the relevancy and quality of the content.

### **Tool Kit Structure**

#### [Part I: Background and How to Meaningfully Engage Rural Youth](#)

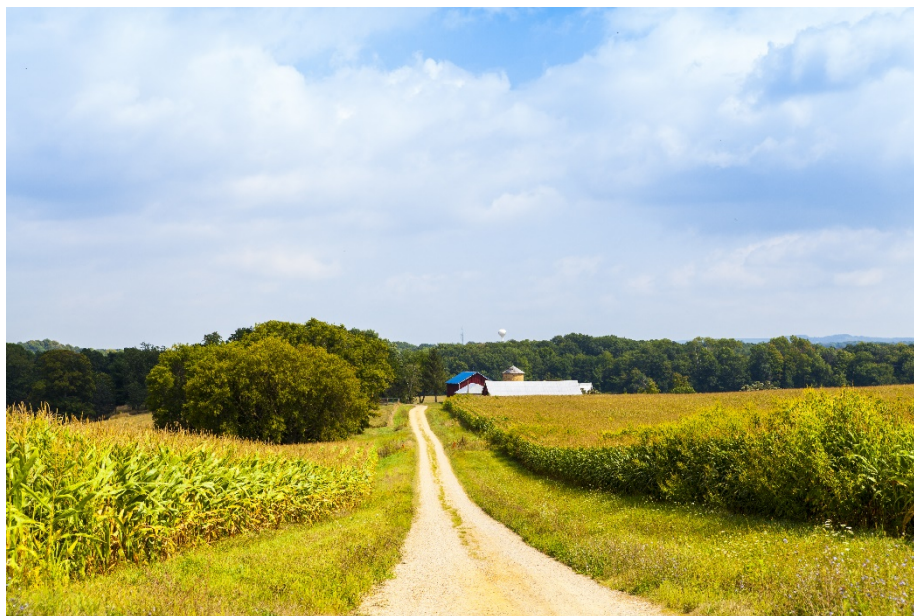
The first section discusses the protective factors and risk factors that exist for rural youth and how to meaningfully engage them in the community change process.

#### [Part II: Application of CADCA's Seven Strategies](#)

The second section will discuss CADCA's Seven Strategies for Community Change as a vehicle for increasing youth engagement and working to address substance misuse in rural communities.

#### [Part III: Policy and Advocacy](#)

Section three is a guide for youth and organizations on how to systematically analyze and take specific actions through advocacy to achieve policy change to create safer and healthier communities.



## Part I: Background and How to Meaningfully Engage Rural Youth

### Engaging Rural Youth

Youth engagement has long been a goal of organizations, particularly coalitions. Some coalitions and organizations spend years collecting data, creating detailed logic models, making elaborate plans, and implementing evidence-based strategies to address youth substance misuse, but never make inroads to the population they are trying to help. Coalition leaders are often confounded at their inability to reach the youth population when they use the same processes to build successful coalitions among their adult peers. This toolkit is designed to help coalition leaders and other youth-serving organizations to engage youth in rural communities by looking at what makes these communities unique and how to adapt your approach to increase your chances of success.

### Rural America – What Do These Communities Face?

#### *Risk Factors and Protective Factors*

#### Poverty

Poverty is a major factor facing many rural communities and is considered a **community risk factor** for drug and alcohol use. According to [estimates](#) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nearly a quarter of children growing up in rural America were poor in 2016, compared to slightly more than 20 percent in urban areas. The report found the highest concentrations of child poverty, overall, in the Mississippi Delta, Appalachia and on Native American reservations. High unemployment is one cause of the high poverty rates, but it's not the only reason. Poverty is still a problem among some that work full time. In fact, poor people in rural communities are termed “working poor.” According to a report by Paul Dudenhefer entitled *Poverty in the Rural United States*,

*“64.6% of poor rural families had at least one member who was formally employed, whereas among poor families in urban areas the percentage was 54.1.”*

#### Geographical Isolation

Many rural areas are far removed from major interstates, increasing shipping costs for manufacturers and serving as a deterrent for new industries seeking to locate new facilities. This is an example of the economic disadvantage rural communities face, a **community risk factor** for drug and alcohol use. A further consequence of this isolation often results in clan-like communities centered on extended families. This can make it difficult for newcomers to the area to gain acceptance from the local population.



## Rural Area Benefits (Protective Factors)

This isolation does, however, come with some benefits. In rural communities, there is a strong sense of family or other relationship connections. The smaller catchment areas adhere to generational connections that are strong and binding. In many rural areas, this is due to the close proximity in which they reside, worship, shop, socialize, and attend school. It is not unusual to have the same peer group from kindergarten through high school graduation and beyond. Many of the problems rural areas face are universal for their area. Identifying and addressing problems and focused solutions can reach multiple sectors making dual implementations possible. Collection of data is faster with fewer capacity partners. This makes it easier to form partnerships with key institutions that will be vital in any youth engagement effort, i.e. schools, law-enforcement agencies, local judicial system.

## Youth Engagement Mistakes

### 1. Projects without purpose

Engaging youth in projects that have no purpose or end-goal is akin to running in place. It gets your blood pumping, but ultimately you finish where you started. There must be a goal in sight and progress towards that goal must be measurable. Boredom sets in quickly if there is no sense of accomplishment.

### 2. Shielding youth from hard truths

Many of the problems communities face are uncomfortable subjects, even among adults. Sugarcoating the truth is often seen as deceit or insincerity. Many youth live with the realities of these uncomfortable subjects every day. By downplaying the significance of serious issues, you risk losing credibility.

### 3. Using youth for optics

A key mistake in youth engagement is using youth as “show ponies.” Youth will quickly begin to feel like props when their participation is limited to photo ops or delivering adult-prepared speeches. Engagement is about inclusion, making separate parts into a whole. If you are not taking into consideration the opinions, thoughts, and concerns of your youth, you will lose them.

### 4. Recruiting to type, i.e. the cheerleader or the football star. Be culturally competent

There appears to be a tendency among organizations to recruit youth from a subset of the population, the “overachievers.” The reasoning for this is understandable, by recruiting the most popular youth it becomes easier to recruit their friends. While this will fill up your rosters



quickly, you lose out on the strength of diverse points of view. Further, it allows youth to work with and understand points of view they otherwise would never experience.

5. Giving youth the facts instead of teaching them to research facts on their own

There is a saying, “give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, you feed him for life.” It is easy to share facts and statistics based on our own research and personal experiences. However, it can have a far greater impact if youth discover these facts themselves. Rather than giving youth the facts on a subject, challenge them with the task of collecting data and presenting their findings.

6. Controlling the agenda

A popular catchphrase among organizations that actively engage youth is, “youth led, adult guided.” A common mistake made when engaging youth is turning this on its head and planning activities, setting coalition tasks, recruiting members, organizing meetings, and determining discussion items without ever seeking input from youth coalition members.

7. Not being available to address concerns

While being overly involved can be a major mistake, the opposite is also true. Youth need to know that you are there to support their efforts and that what they are doing is important. Be present.

### **Rural Youth Engagement Tips**

1. Listen, Listen, Listen
2. Treat them with respect
3. Learn what is motivating youth
4. Use their communication sources and include them in our communication sources
5. Approach them at multiple stages
6. Guide and educate them, do not lead and tell them what to do
7. Allow youth to plan their own strategies and facilitate their own implementation plans
8. Go to youth where they are now
9. Form a strong relationship with youth serving entities, i.e. schools, churches, etc.
10. Don't try to have all the answers
11. Make it exciting and fun
12. Know and understand pop culture





## Preliminary Problem Analysis

In order to gain a deeper understanding of an issue facing a community, there is a simple technique through which a problem analysis can be utilized to develop more effective, localized strategies for the problem identified. The “But Why?” “But Why Here?” technique is shown below and analyzes the issue of rural youth engagement.

Problem:

- ❖ Engaging rural youth.
- ❖ Rural Youth are not focused or engaged.
- ❖ Rural Youth feel isolated and have few resources.

But Why?

- ❖ Venues and youth gathering spaces are few and far between in rural areas.
- ❖ Rural youth lack avenues of training for problem identification or change processes to create goals and objectives.
- ❖ Due to lower populations rural areas don't attract businesses or needed services.

But Why Here?

- ❖ Low rural populations feel isolated with few resources.
- ❖ Mentors and professionals are few and are unable engage rural youth effectively.
- ❖ Because of isolation and poverty rural youth can emulate generational poverty mindsets.
- ❖ Educational and professional opportunities are limited.



## Part II: Application of CADCA's Seven Strategies

### CADCA's SEVEN STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

Organizations and communities can be more successful in achieving community-level change related to preventing opioid misuse when their strategies are part of a comprehensive plan that targets youth and impacts the shared community environment.

As organizational leaders, you know that:

- ❖ There is no one “silver bullet” or a single strategy to prevent youth opioid misuse
- ❖ No single policy change will magically bring youth to the table
- ❖ No one curriculum or program can engage rural youth
- ❖ It takes many coordinated strategies to gain buy-in from rural youth

There are seven strategies typically used by coalitions to change individual behaviors and community conditions. These are commonly referred to as CADCA's Seven Strategies for Community Change.

These strategies include:

1. Provide information
2. Build skills
3. Provide social support
4. Reduce barriers/enhance access
5. Change consequences/incentives
6. Alter the physical design of the environment
7. Change policy and rules

#### **Providing Information**

Educational presentations, workshops or seminars or other presentations of data (e.g., public announcements, brochures, dissemination, billboards, community meetings, forums, web-based communication).

#### **Enhancing Skills**

Workshops, seminars or other activities designed to increase the skills of participants, members and staff needed to achieve population-level outcomes (e.g., training, technical assistance, distance learning, strategic planning retreats, curricula development).





## **Providing Support**

Creating opportunities to support people to participate in activities that reduce risk or enhance protection (e.g., providing alternative activities, mentoring, referrals, support groups or clubs).

## **Enhancing Access/Reducing Barriers**

Improving systems and processes to increase the ease, ability and opportunity to utilize those systems and services (e.g., assuring healthcare, childcare, transportation, housing, justice, education, safety, special needs, cultural and language sensitivity).

## **Changing Consequences (Incentives/Disincentives)**

Increasing or decreasing the probability of a specific behavior that reduces risk or enhances protection by altering the consequences for performing that behavior (e.g., increasing public recognition for deserved behavior, individual and business rewards, taxes, citations, fines, revocations/loss of privileges).

## **Physical Design**

Changing the physical design or structure of the environment to reduce risk or enhance protection (e.g., parks, landscapes, signage, lighting, outlet density).

## **Modifying/Changing Policies**

Formal change in written procedures, by-laws, proclamations, rules or laws with written documentation and/or voting procedures (e.g., workplace initiatives, law enforcement procedures and practices, public policy actions, systems change within government, communities and organizations).

The information below represents the combined strategies that our cohort of rural coalitions implemented to specifically help engage youth in their individual communities.

### Provide Information

- ❖ Be available to communicate with youth using their communication methods.
- ❖ Provide information on health disparities or other identified areas of need.
- ❖ Implement a social norms campaign to engage youth. Create a hashtag specifically for them
- ❖ Be present in places that they are to build familiarity and trust.
- ❖ Add or take away any incentives that other rural areas have experienced.
- ❖ Work with students to create a town hall meeting with key stakeholders in the community (to be facilitated by youth).



## Enhance Skills

- ❖ Provide SPF training to encourage youth to identify the problems they are interested in.
- ❖ Train youth leaders to engage their peer group.
- ❖ Provide events to connect and explain why the process is important.
- ❖ Listen to their interest and help them use the processes to create effective change.
- ❖ Add or take away any incites that other rural areas have experienced.
- ❖ Have youth do a social media takeover at events. Takeovers allow youth to highlight events and spread a positive message to their peers.

## Provide Support

- ❖ Support projects they are involved in currently.
- ❖ Provide listening sessions to identify what is important to them.
- ❖ Use their communication avenues to connect and build trust.
- ❖ Offer large group, small group, and individual listening venues.

## Enhance Access/Reduce Barriers

- ❖ Provide a consistent meeting space with specified, convenient hours for communication.
- ❖ Travel to areas where they meet or gather.
- ❖ Build a relationship with the schools or other youth serving areas to become a part of their group or mission.
- ❖ Make meeting or event times convenient to their schedules.
- ❖ Inform parents and administrators on your strategies and goals.
- ❖ Provide social media information training documents and examples.

## Change Consequences (incentives/disincentives)

- ❖ Work with existing youth serving groups and areas of interest to youth.
- ❖ Create an area of acceptance at all venues where individuals are treated fairly.
- ❖ Have giveaways to encourage youth to attend. Make incentives youth friendly and interesting. Provide things they want.
- ❖ Instill mission, purpose and connection with youth interest and concerns.

## Physical Design

- ❖ Try to utilize venues currently in place or locate another site of interest.
- ❖ Advertise in multiple media markets to ensure access and broad reach.



- ❖ Create more lighting in existing facilities so that youth feel safe staying for later meetings.

#### Policies or Regulations

- ❖ Identify what community or school policies they are interested in revising or implementing.
- ❖ Develop a youth board to create policies for the group.
- ❖ Advocate and teach them how to advocate for causes that interest them.



### **Part III: Policy and Advocacy**

Once you have youth engaged, on-boarded, and trained in applying CADCA’s Seven Strategies for Community Change, it is time to act. Some of the most effective efforts in substance misuse prevention have been accomplished through advocacy and policy change. Ritu R. Sharma from the Academy for Educational Development describes advocacy as a tool for “putting a problem on the agenda, providing a solution to that problem and building support for acting on both the problem and the solution.” This part of the toolkit will discuss how to actively engage rural youth in advocacy and how to differentiate between grassroots advocacy and lobbying. This section is drawn largely from content developed by Sue Thau, Public Policy Consultant, CADCA.

Advocacy involves principles which can be applied to many different problems. The STAND community coalition based out of rural Tennessee used these principles to great effect to enact a local ordinance at their local beer board. We’ll use their experiences step by step to examine how to use these principles in your community.

#### **13 C’S TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY**

- 1) Be Credible
- 2) Be Convincing
- 3) Be Clear
- 4) Be Concise
- 5) Be Consistent
- 6) Be Creative
- 7) Be Committed
- 8) Be Connected
- 9) Build Coalitions
- 10) Celebrate Victories
- 11) Cultivate Champions
- 12) Credit Others
- 13) Know When to Compromise

#### **1<sup>ST</sup> STEP IN ANY ADVOCACY IS A POWER ANALYSIS:**

Power Analysis: A visual mapping technique that creates a picture and common understanding of the current power relations related to a particular problem by placing stakeholders on two intersecting continuums: 1) from opposing to supporting a systems solution and 2) from having no power to significant power to make decisions about the systems solution. There are nine steps to creating a power analysis map:



## 1) WHAT DO I WANT TO CHANGE?

LAW

REGULATION

POLICY

FUNDING

In 2014, STAND noticed that stores selling alcohol to minors resulted in a citation being written to the clerk that sold the alcohol, which most often resulted in the loss of his/her job. This occurred repeatedly, often at the same stores. Why wasn't the owner or beer license holder being held responsible for ensuring that his/her staff were well trained to prevent these sales. We needed a new ordinance that would hold these individuals equally responsible.

## 2) WHY DOES IT NEED TO BE CHANGED? DOCUMENT YOUR CASE. TO BUILD YOUR CASE ON HOW TO STOP A PROBLEM OR START A SOLUTION, YOU NEED STATS AND STORES. DOCUMENT:

### EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2014, 25% of all DUI arrests were of underage drinkers. 84% of high school seniors in Scott County claimed that obtaining alcohol was very easy or fairly easy. They also claimed that it was easy to obtain alcohol from local stores.

### FACTS

In the organization's first law-enforcement sponsored compliance check, 40% of retailers failed, selling alcohol to an undercover minor.

### ANECDOTES – MUST HAVE HUMAN INTEREST STORIES TO PUT A HUMAN FACE ON THE ISSUE. THIS IS NECESSARY, BUT NOT SUFFICIENT.

When we first began looking at the issue, we tried to get the data from previous law-enforcement compliance checks. What we found was that no records existed of previous compliance checks. In speaking with then Oneida Police Chief Mike Cross, we learned that the standard procedure was to investigate underage alcohol sales based on call-in reports from citizens. We decided to gather baseline data in the form of an alcohol purchase survey. We looked for young-looking 21-year-olds and sent them in



to purchase alcohol and document whether or not they were asked for an ID. It was found that over 50% of retailers never asked for an ID on alcohol sales. Once law-enforcement agencies were made aware of the problem by the presentation of hard data, they were completely on-board for actual compliance checks.

**3) KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS THROUGH WHICH THE CHANGE CAN BE MADE**

In Tennessee, liquor sales are overseen by the Alcoholic Beverage Commission (ABC), however, beer sales are regulated by local beer boards. Scott County, TN has four beer boards; a primary beer board for the county and three beer boards that regulate their respective municipalities, Oneida, Huntsville, and Winfield. Each municipality has regulatory authority to withdraw beer licenses from those retailers in their jurisdiction for just cause.

**4) KNOW THE TIMING FOR THAT PROCESS**

In Scott County, each municipal Board of Aldermen also serves as the beer board. To formally address the beer board, it must be done at the conclusion of the regularly scheduled Board of Aldermen monthly meeting. Any proposed ordinance must undergo two readings held at two separate beer board meetings before a vote can be called.

**5) KNOW WHO HAS THE POWER TO HELP YOU GET THE CHANGE MADE**

Our beer boards are five-member boards. In order to pass an ordinance, the proposal must secure three yeas to continue to a second reading.

**6) WHO HAS THE POWER TO BLOCK THE CHANGE?**

The county beer board in our community has the power to overrule an ordinance if it deems the municipal beer board has exceeded its authority. Additionally, local retailers are an important source of revenue for municipalities via tax dollars. If beer board members can be convinced that local retailers risk going out of business with the passage of the ordinance, the proposal may not pass.

**7) WHO ARE YOUR POTENTIAL ALLIES? HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY THEM? HOW DO YOU MOBILIZE THEM?**

Law enforcement agencies, other non-profit organizations and local elected officials could be potential allies.

**8) WHO WILL YOUR OPPONENTS BE?**

Alcohol retailers and beer-license holders may be opponents.



## 9) HOW, WHY AND WHEN DO YOU GET THE MEDIA INVOLVED? WHAT IS YOUR MEDIA STRATEGY?

The media was critical in our case very early in the process. Using media to publicize the results of compliance checks can generate movement in a cause that otherwise suffers from complacency on the part of elected officials. Getting the media involved does not relieve you of the responsibility of doing your research. On the contrary, your research should be solid before ever approaching media outlets. Never assume that the media will cover your story from your point of view.

### STEPS IN THE PROCESS:

- ❖ Know Points When You Can Have An Impact  
To affect a change, you must know the process for change in your community and when you can introduce or interject your issue into the mix.
- ❖ Timing Is Key – As Early In The Process As Possible  
Has something happened in the community or in the news that has the attention of the decision-makers? Overdoses on the rise, a recent increase in vehicle accidents or a large field party broken up by law enforcement which led to the citations of several high school students are all examples of things happening in the local community that could lead to the passage of an ordinance or policy change.
- ❖ Do As Much Of The Work For Them As Possible – Write The Bill Language/Report Language Yourself  
You can't get what you don't ask for. Leaving it to others to write up the proposal rarely results in language that achieves what you seek. By writing the proposal yourself you stand a better chance of achieving your goals.
- ❖ Meet With Everyone Who Can Help Or Hurt You  
Meeting with those that can help you gives your allies a chance to provide helpful information and provides your potential allies with advance notice of the proposal you are planning to present. Particularly among local elected officials, they can look foolish if you bring a proposal to a formal setting and are caught unaware. Meeting with potential opponents gives you hints on the arguments against your proposal you are likely to encounter and gives you the chance to counter them prior to your public presentation.





- ❖ Try To Find A Champion  
A champion of your cause typically carries a great deal of weight in your community. Having the support of such an individual can be the difference between success or failure.
- ❖ Do All Of Your Homework On The Member – Tailor Your Pitch To Where They Are And What They Care About  
This is often easier to accomplish in a smaller, rural setting than in larger, metropolitan areas. There is a good chance that you know the member personally, or you know someone that does. Take advantage of your connections to learn all you can about the member you are seeking to persuade.
- ❖ Once You Establish Allies, You Can Rely On Them  
A true ally not only supports your vision, but also has the passion to take meaningful action. Without that action from a significant number of people little will change.
- ❖ Give Out Awards And Recognition To Your Champions  
This is one of the most cost-effective means to developing long-lasting relationships that will pay dividends on potential future advocacy endeavors.

**MUST ALWAYS ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING BEFORE YOU BEGIN:**

- ❖ Can you win?
- ❖ Can you afford to lose?
- ❖ Can you afford not to try?
- ❖ Special interests have power – Alcohol and Tobacco
  - PAC money
  - Paid lobbyists at every level
  - Fancy materials and strategies
  - Money to buy media coverage
- ❖ We don't have the money
- ❖ We have other kinds of power
- ❖ We must know how to organize and use it
- ❖ What power do we have?
  - Numbers are power – voters are power – constituents who care and make their voices heard are power.
  - Coalitions are power – find as many other groups as you can to sign on with you. Your allies only have to agree on this issue, not all issues.
  - Unity Is Power –diverse group behind a single goal (pick spokesperson carefully).



- Relationships are power – who do you know? Who knows the decision maker/key staffer/donor/trusted friend or advisor?
- Know what you can and can't do legally as far as lobbying goes.
- Lobbying is taking a specific position on a specific piece of legislation.
- Can educate and do general advocacy, even with federal funds.
- Can't use any federal funds to do it at the federal and state level – can use federal funds to do it at the local level.
- Do any of you elect to come under section 501h of the 1976 tax reform act?
- If elect, can use 20% of your first 500k in tax exempt expenditures as a 501c3?
- Should you consider doing it?
- General advocacy – awareness raising on an issue or set of issues.

### **SPECIFIC ADVOCACY**

Set up meetings to brief key decision makers.

Set up a lift line.

It's only grassroots lobbying if all three things apply:

- ❖ Refers to specific legislation
- ❖ Reflects a view on the legislation
- ❖ Encourages the recipient to act on the legislation

To be grassroots lobbying, it must include a call to action.

Call to action defined as:

Call to recipient to contact legislator

Has address, phone number, etc., of member or staff

Identifies how a member stands on the legislation

If elect to come under 501h, only restriction is that no more than 25% of direct lobbying can be grassroots lobbying.

Bake sale idea. Can't spend federal funds to lobby but can calculate them into your total expenditures of which you take the 20% of first 500k.

Try to be called as a witness to testify – if invited, you can do it and its not lobbying.

Sign-on letters.



## Concluding Summary

Residents of rural communities are vulnerable to poor outcomes across the substance use and misuse spectrum from prevention to treatment and recovery. However, communities can work with key stakeholders, with youth being the critical sector, to address many factors that contribute to substance misuse in rural communities

Meaningful engagement and involvement of rural youth can be used as a framework to assess the risk/contributing factors to substance use and misuse rates in a particular community. Through collective action, it is possible to improve the health and well-being of rural communities and reduce the burden of substance use and misuse in these areas.



### **About CADCA**

The mission of CADCA (Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America) is to strengthen the capacity of community coalitions to create and maintain safe, healthy and drug-free communities globally. This is accomplished by providing technical assistance and training, public policy advocacy, media strategies and marketing programs, training and special events.

### **About Grange**

The Grange strengthens individuals, families and communities through grassroots action, service, education, advocacy and agriculture awareness.

The Grange is a family, community organization with its roots in agriculture. Founded in 1867, the Grange was formed as a national organization with a local focus. Our members are given the opportunity to learn and grow to their full potential as citizens and leaders.

