

Reducing problems from alcohol at events

Julia Wise based on material from local group organizers
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Alcohol is a common part of meetups. It can be an enjoyable part of socializing, but can also cause problems. Here are some ideas from other organizers about reducing problems.

Proactive steps

Have some meetups where alcohol is not present. For people who are avoiding alcohol for any reason, a pub meetup may not be one they want to attend. Some organizers also guess that meetups in pubs or bars may lead to higher rates of inappropriate behavior. This doesn't mean you can't have some meetups in pubs or bars, but be sure to provide other types of events too.

When serving alcohol, also provide good non-alcoholic options (water, flavored seltzer, juice drinks, etc.) Also provide food so people aren't drinking on an empty stomach.

Don't list an event as including drinks.

- There's debate about this one - some people might like to be informed if they'd like to avoid events with drinking
- But not listing drinks may avoid attracting people who come primarily for free drinks

Don't market party-like events to students.

Monitor the amount of alcohol that's out at an event — if people have brought several bottles of wine, put some away so that only 1 or 2 bottles are out at a time.

Have an organizer hang out near the drinks table and keep an eye on whether anything needs refilling, but also whether anyone is drinking excessive amounts.

Provide less wine and more low-alcohol drinks such as beer or hard cider.

Don't serve or allow hard liquor at events. Obviously pubs and bars will serve hard liquor, but also have staff monitoring the amount they sell to any given person — this is more a problem at events in other spaces.

Avoid having alcohol that could be mistaken for a lower-alcohol type. (For example, I was once at an event where someone got much drunker than they intended on absinthe, thinking it was wine-strength — it's actually about 4 times stronger.)

If you notice a problem

One organizer with experience in handling attendee problems in a different setting writes, “To me the #1 takeaway is **any time you even suspect anything like this may be getting out of control** — eg, an attendee behaving erratically — **notify other organizers**, or just other helpful people present. (False alarms are fine!) These things are easier with help, and if people are aware early.”

Consider removing all alcohol if necessary to prevent an intoxicated person from drinking more.

Consider talking to the person to inform them that their level of intoxication is a problem.

Consider telling the person that they need to leave.

If you think it's safe, escort the person to transportation. Ask other organizers for help.

If you believe anyone's safety is in danger, consider calling 911 or your local emergency phone number.

After a problem

Another community's [meetup guide](#) writes, “In the NYC meetup group, there was a person who had been drinking too much and been disruptive over a period of several weeks. After several hours of discussion, the person was asked to continue attending on the condition that they stay sober during the meetups. The person decided not to come back.”