

# APRC

ALCOHOL POLICY  
RESOURCE CENTER



## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN TOOLKIT



# OVERVIEW

Assessing your community is critical in identifying potential issues contributing to underage or excessive alcohol use. Completing a comprehensive assessment involves utilizing many tools and methods. Environmental scanning allows you to observe and document how alcohol presents itself in your community, including through advertising. These observations take place at both on-premise and off-premise establishments that sell alcohol. On-premise retail locations are bars and restaurants where alcohol is consumed on-site. Off-premise retail locations include liquor stores, grocery stores, big box stores, convenience stores, and gas stations. It is essential to make visual observations regarding alcohol and advertising throughout your community. Social media scanning will be an integral part of the process as well.

## TOOLKIT PURPOSE

Environmental scanning aims to identify your community's risk factors that can contribute to underage or excessive alcohol consumption. Conducting a scan allows you to observe and document the 4 P's: Price, Product, Promotion, and Placement. Recording these observations and pairing that information with other assessment data, such as youth survey data, allows you to create a clear picture of alcohol in your community. From that picture, you can then identify strategies to reduce underage and excessive use of alcohol.

This toolkit outlines considerations for conducting community environmental scans, including the following:

- ✓ The 4 Ps of Environmental Scanning
- ✓ Types of scanning
- ✓ Building your team
- ✓ Safety protocols
- ✓ Preparing to scan
- ✓ Conducting scans
- ✓ Documentation
- ✓ Sharing your results
- ✓ Appendix with sample forms

## 4 Ps of Environmental Scanning

Price, product, promotion and placement are the 4 Ps. They are the guiding factors when conducting an environmental scan. There are questions for each of the 4 Ps to consider. Here are a few questions, but certainly not all, when utilizing the 4 Ps.

### Price

- Does the price change based on the time of day?
- Is alcohol cheaper than non-alcohol (water/soda)?
- How much tax is collected?
- Are larger quantities of alcohol cheaper than smaller quantities?

## Product

- Are single units sold?
- Is there a brand more popular with underage youth offered for sale?
- Are products with high alcohol content sold?
- Are caffeinated alcoholic products sold?

## Promotion

- Are they advertising drink specials?
- Are there displays related to holidays or events?
- Are there displays in non-alcohol-related areas of the store?
- Are gifts attached to alcohol purchases?

## Placement

- Is alcohol in a cooler next to water/soda?
- Is alcohol by an entrance/exit?
- Is alcohol next to candy?
- Is alcohol available at the check-out counter?

## Types of Scanning

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A comprehensive environmental scan is vital in assessing youth exposure to alcohol. The three categories of scans are:

- *Physical locations* where alcohol is sold/served
- *Advertisements* on/in stores, billboards, buses and other physical locations
- *Media advertising* – television, radio, social media

Traditional environmental scans observe the 4 Ps in off-premise locations. Off-premise includes big box stores, grocery stores, liquor stores, convenience stores, and gas stations. Scans also can be conducted in on-premise locations, such as bars and restaurants. You can take it further and scan special events and concession stands.

Environmental scanning also includes observing how alcoholic beverages are marketed or advertised in your community within physical locations or through the media.

## Building Your Team

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Conducting a thorough scan will require a comprehensive team. Scans can be active or passive, overt or covert, and implemented by a group, pair, or individual, depending on the scan type. Prevention coalitions can build a diverse team covering all sector representation. It is essential to involve youth representatives to gain an authentic perspective on where, what, and how they are exposed to alcoholic beverages. Ideally, groups or pairs would combine youth and adults when scanning a physical location or community advertisements. Law enforcement officers are great partners to include, too. Covert social media and mass media scans can be done individually by youth.

## Safety Protocols

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Safety is the number one priority. Scanning of physical locations should always be conducted in pairs or groups. If youth are involved in the scan, an adult should always be present. Social media scans can be completed individually by observing their profile feed for alcohol products and advertising. Here are some additional safety tips:

- If an area doesn't feel safe, do not conduct a scan at that location. It is OK to leave.
- Do not scan a physical location alone.
- Determine a safety signal or alert ahead of time. Use the signal if there's a safety issue.
- Be respectful of other customers and employees during the scan.
- Inform the business upon arrival of your intentions during the scan.
- If asked to leave, do so quickly and quietly.
- When scanning social media sites, do not interact – only observe.

## Preparing to Scan

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The first step is determining the area to scan. Will you check the entire community or county? Will you check a neighborhood or city block? What social media sites will you scan? Communities can enact ordinances that determine how much a window can be covered by advertising. Coalitions should familiarize themselves with local ordinances before scanning for advertisements.

If you're scanning physical locations, you must know who sells and serves alcoholic beverages in your area. You can access a list of all liquor license holders in Illinois at the Illinois Liquor Control Commission's [Liquor License Lookup](#) page. Searches can be filtered by address, city, or county. You can also download a list of licensees for the entire state. Selection can be random, by specific geographic area, certain types of outlets (i.e., big box stores, restaurants, convenience stores, or gas stations), or based on community input.

Once you've determined the area and locations, create a list or map to decide the percentage of licensees you will scan and assign teams. Provide the team with a map or list of locations. Teams or groups should always conduct scans of physical locations. At least one adult should be assigned if a youth team conducts the scan. You will want to hold a briefing before the scan to share details, such as locations to be scanned, team rosters, emergency contact numbers, and scan timeline.

It is essential to have all forms prepared for your scan, including signed parent permission forms. Sample forms are included in the appendix.

## Conducting Scans

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### Physical locations where alcohol is sold/served

Upon entering a retail location, ask to speak with the manager on duty. It's important to inform the manager that you will conduct a scan as a part of a more extensive community-wide assessment. Be sure to tell them you will take pictures of products and advertisements. You will want to reassure them the photos are for internal planning efforts and will not be published. Consider creating a form letter for retailers to explain your intentions with your scan.

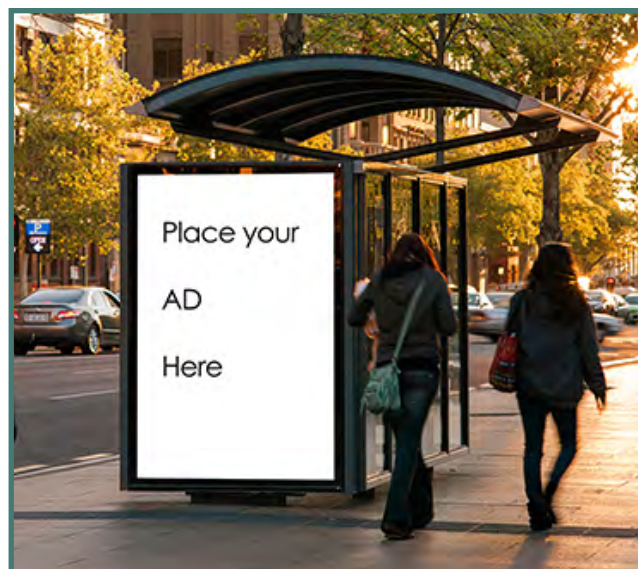


- Take a picture of the storefront before taking photographs inside. You can catalog your photos by location and match the digital data with your written documentation.
- You will begin the scan by observing and documenting the 4 Ps - price, product, promotion, and placement. Documentation includes completing forms and taking pictures.
- Check if they sell alcohol with a higher content (%) than a standard drink. A standard drink is 12 oz. of beer (5%), 5 oz. of wine (12%), or 1.5 oz. of distilled spirits (40%).
- Survey your youth to gauge their perception of what brands are more popular with their peers. Look for how those brands are displayed and priced.
- Look for alcohol advertisements on windows, walls, and displays.
- Check for signage such as *We Card Hard*, Surgeon General's Pregnancy Warning, or Proof of Age.
- When scanning at on-premise locations like restaurants, observe if non-alcoholic beverages are served in glasses or cups with an alcoholic beverage logo.
- Look to see if any employees are wearing alcohol logo apparel.
- Be sure to scan quickly and quietly, not interrupting regular business transactions. For example, teams should not block exits, shelving, or coolers.

### Advertisements on/in stores, billboards, buses, and other physical locations

Youth regularly view alcohol advertisements in their environment. An advertising scan can be completed with physical location scans or on its own. You will want to choose what geographical area you are scanning, map the route to perform the scan, and assign locations to the scanning teams.

- Before entering a physical location, the scan team should observe the amount and type of advertising on the exterior, including windows and doors.
- Count the number of ads for alcohol on windows, walls, coolers, and displays.
- Observe and document the type of alcohol advertised.
- Document banners, window clings, and other alcoholic beverage company-sponsored merchandise.
- Observe free-standing and building-attached billboards. Count the number in the geographical area you are scanning. How close are the billboards to places where children gather?
- Are alcoholic beverage companies advertising on buses, bus shelters, or other fixed locations?
- Are alcoholic beverage companies, including distributors, sponsoring local events? What does sponsorship look like? Are alcoholic beverage logos on banners, t-shirts, cups, or other items? Are youth under twenty-one wearing logos as a part of their uniform?



## Media advertising – television, radio, social media, print

According to a 2021 [Common Sense report](#) on youth media use, *13- to 18-year-olds use about eight and a half hours of screen media per day.*<sup>1</sup> The most popular sites for teens are YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram. A 2016 [Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs](#) study found an association between advertising and consumption. Our findings indicate that the amount of exposure to television alcohol advertising is associated with the quantity of alcohol consumed by underage youth, not just which brands they consume. *In addition, there was a stronger association between advertising and consumption at higher levels of exposure.*<sup>2</sup>

Scanning for media alcohol advertisements should be part of the assessment process. Youth and adults can conduct media advertising scans or screen time scans individually over a period determined by the coalition. Media scans should be observatory in nature. Advertisements observed on social media should not be clicked. Here are a few things to consider for media scans:

- For television – what program were you watching? What time did you observe the advertisement? What products were advertised?
- Did an alcoholic beverage company sponsor a televised event? Where was their logo? What products were advertised?
- Social Media – was it a pop-up ad? Was it a video you had to watch to get to the following video of your choice? Did it involve an influencer? Was there a challenge? Did you see alcoholic products in your social media feed? Was it a banner?
- Were cartoon characters used for advertising products?
- If you want to assess a website’s age verification policy, use adult coalition members. The adults should enter their correct date of birth.

Once your scans have been completed, you should conduct a debrief for all team members. Review what went well and what concerns team members had. Ask for direct quotes from team members regarding their experiences and impressions from the scan. Collect all forms and photographs to compile your data. Be prepared to share the results with community stakeholders and your coalition. This data will help guide your strategies.

## Documentation

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Environmental scans should be documented through forms and pictures of the 4 Ps. Documentation also includes capturing where advertising is located within the community. Such as where alcohol billboards are located, how much and where alcohol-related window advertisements are located and other observations, such as bus wraps containing alcohol advertising. The forms included in the appendix are examples that can be tailored to your community.

Documentation of your results can be taken to the next level, too. You can create maps of advertising or physical outlets with locations where children gather. Creating a picture of alcohol exposure in your community will help inform your assessment and your elected officials and alcohol regulators.

## Sharing Your Results

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Environmental scanning of your community is vital in assessing how alcohol is viewed and, more importantly, how youth are exposed to alcohol.

- Share your findings during a coalition meeting to help set goals and determine prevention strategies.
- Create press releases highlighting your findings.
- Host a town hall to allow coalition members, including your youth sector, to share their scanning experiences and results.
- Create heat maps overlaying your results and social issues like crime and violence.

Community coalitions need to counter the argument that alcohol advertising brings in revenue for the community. Community coalitions can use data to present the societal costs of underage drinking and the public money spent on prevention and treatment services, which far outweigh any potential income in advertising revenue.

You should follow up your scans with letters to the businesses you visited. Let them know what your scan revealed and how they can implement changes to prevent underage retail access to alcohol.

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<sup>1</sup>Rideout, V., Peebles, A., Mann, S., & Robb, M. B. (2022). Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2021. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense.

<sup>2</sup>Naimi, T. S., Ross, C. S., Siegel, M. B., DeJong, W., & Jernigan, D. H. (2016). Amount of Televised Alcohol Advertising Exposure and the Quantity of Alcohol Consumed by Youth. *Journal of studies on alcohol and drugs*, 77(5), 723–729.  
<https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2016.77.723>

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- ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN CHECKLIST
- PARENT PERMISSION AND PHOTO RELEASE
- PHYSICAL LOCATION SCAN TOOL
- COMMUNITY ADVERTISING SCAN TOOL
- MEDIA SCAN TOOL

# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN CHECKLIST

Signed Parent and Photo Permission slip

Reviewed safety protocols

Assigned teams

Determined the area to scan

Determined the type of scan (physical location, advertising, media)

Generated a list or map

Gathered supplies (clipboards, scan forms, tablet/iPad, pens, etc.)

Conducted pre-scan briefing

Saved emergency contact numbers

Shared scan intention letter with retailers

Conducted post-scan briefing

Shared scan results

# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN PARENT PERMISSION

Volunteer Name:

Name Of Parent Or Guardian:

Date Of Birth:

Phone:

Home Address:

Email:

City:

State :

Zip:

Emergency Contact Name:

Phone:

It should read: I, \_\_\_\_\_, parent/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ give my consent to participate in the environmental scan activity hosted by \_\_\_\_\_ coalition on (date/time).

I have reviewed all safety protocols with my child and have provided all emergency contact information.

*I release and waive the (insert coalition name) \_\_\_\_\_, as well as adult members for this scan, from and against any claim which I, any other parent or guardian, any sibling, the youth volunteer, or any other person, firm or corporation may have or claim to have, known or unknown, directly or indirectly, from any losses, damages or injuries arising out of, during or in connection with the volunteer's participation in the scan, or the rendering of emergency medical procedures, if any.\**

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Photo Permission**

Name of youth volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

May be photographed

May NOT be photographed

Permission is granted to use images for press releases and other educational purposes.

Do not use images for press releases and other educational purposes.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Language is used as an example. Consult with your legal team to determine the release and waiver statement.

# PHYSICAL LOCATION SCAN TOOL

The goal of alcohol environmental scanning is to identify your community's risk factors that can contribute to underage or excessive alcohol consumption. Conducting a scan allows you to observe and document the **4 P's: Price, Product, Promotion, and Placement**.

Store/Location name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

Team members: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Location: \_\_\_\_\_

## PRICE

- Does the price change based on the time of day?      Yes      No
  - What items are priced differently? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are there 2-for-1 specials?      Yes      No
- Is alcohol cheaper than non-alcohol (water/soda)?      Yes      No
  - What is the price of a single serving of alcohol vs. water?
    - Alcohol \_\_\_\_\_ Water \_\_\_\_\_
- Are larger quantities of alcohol cheaper than smaller quantities per serving (i.e., pitchers, 30-packs vs 6-pack)?      Yes      No

## PRODUCT

- What type of alcohol is being sold?  
Beer      Wine      Alco-pops/Ready to Drink Alcoholic Beverages      Hard Liquor
- Are single units of alcohol sold?      Yes      No
- Is there a brand more popular with underage youth offered for sale?      Yes      No
  - Brand names: \_\_\_\_\_
- Are products with higher alcohol content sold?      Yes      No  
(A standard drink is 12 oz. of beer (5%), 5 oz. of wine (12%), or 1.5 oz. of distilled spirits (40%).)
  - What is the percentage of alcohol? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are caffeinated alcoholic beverages sold?      Yes      No
- Are Alco-pops/Ready to Drink products sold (i.e., Hard Mt. Dew, White Claw, Hard Lemonade)?  
Yes      No

- Are alcohol-infused products sold (i.e., whipped cream)? Yes No
  - Are frozen alcoholic products sold (i.e., ice pops, ice cream)? Yes No
  - Brand names of the most observed alcoholic products for sale:
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### PROMOTION

- Are they advertising alcoholic drink specials? Yes No
- Are there displays related to holidays or events? Yes No
- Are there displays in non-alcohol-related areas of the store? Yes No
- Is there a non-alcoholic beverage product included with the purchase of alcohol, such as glassware, a t-shirt, or a hat? Yes No
- Are there table displays advertising alcoholic beverages? Yes No
- Are staff wearing alcoholic beverage company-sponsored merchandise? Yes No

### PLACEMENT

- Is alcohol in a cooler next to water/soda? Yes No
- Is alcohol by an entrance/exit? Yes No
- Is alcohol next to candy? Yes No
- Is alcohol available at the check-out counter? Yes No
- Is alcohol displayed on end caps? Yes No
- Are alcoholic beverages and non-alcoholic beverages featured in the same display?
  - Yes No
  - If yes, what brand? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are alcoholic beverages next to soft drinks, fruit juices, bottled water, or snack foods portraying cartoons or youth-oriented photos? Yes No

### ADVERTISING

Before entering a physical location, the scan team should observe the amount and type of advertising on the exterior, including windows and doors. Scan team members should take pictures to document the external advertising.

- Is alcohol advertising visible from outside the store? Yes No
- Are windows and doors covered in alcoholic beverage company advertisements?
  - Yes No
  - What percentage of coverage? \_\_\_\_\_









# MEDIA SCAN

Scanning for media alcohol advertisements should be part of the assessment process. Youth and adults can conduct media advertising scans or screen time scans individually over a period determined by the coalition. Media scans should be observatory in nature. Advertisements observed on social media should not be clicked.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Beginning Date: \_\_\_\_\_ End Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## MEDIA TYPE

Television

Radio

Social Media

Print

### Television

Date	Start time to end time	Program Viewed	Network/Channel	Number of alcohol advertisements viewed	Brands Advertised	Celebrity/Influencer Endorsed – name and brand	Alcohol Company Sponsored Event – sporting event, concert, etc.

### Radio

Date	Start time to end time	Channel/Radio Station	Number of alcohol advertisements viewed	Brands Advertised	Celebrity/Influencer Endorsed – name and brand	Alcohol Company Sponsored Event – sporting event, concert, etc.

**Social Media**

Date	Start time to end time	Social Media Platform	Number of alcohol advertisements viewed	Brands Advertised	Pass through video	Celebrity/Influencer Endorsed – name and brand	Was a challenge involved?	Pop-up Ad/ Banner	Alcohol Company Sponsored Event – sporting event, concert, etc.

**Print**

Date	Name of newspaper or magazine	Number of alcohol advertisements viewed	Brands Advertised	Celebrity/Influencer Endorsed – name and brand	Alcohol Company Sponsored Event – sporting event, concert, etc.

Presumed target audience and age range for the advertisements: \_\_\_\_\_

Were cartoon characters used in any ads?    Yes      No

• If yes, what type of media: \_\_\_\_\_

• What brands used cartoon characters: \_\_\_\_\_

Were animals used in any ads?    Yes      No

• If yes, what type of media: \_\_\_\_\_

• What brands used animals: \_\_\_\_\_



# APRC ASSISTANCE

The APRC can assist communities and coalitions engaged in alcohol policy work. Our assistance addresses a wide range of issues, including:

- Policy adoption
- Policy enforcement
- Use of the Strategic Prevention Framework
- Promotion of policies or strategies
- Reviewing policies for effectiveness
- Other areas that may address alcohol policy work and initiatives
- Effective implementation of environmental strategies

For more information, please contact Jody Heavilin at [jody.heavilin@prevention.org](mailto:jody.heavilin@prevention.org) or 217.836.4290.

## APRC NEWSLETTER SIGN UP



<https://www.prevention.org/alcohol-policy-resource-center>



## EVERY DECISION MATTERS.

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