The Working Group
on DWI System Improvements
dwiwg.tirf.ca

Agency Communication & Cooperation

The education resources of the Working Group on DWI System Improvements are produced by the **Traffic Injury Research Foundation** with funding from **Anheuser-Busch**. The Working Group on DWI System Improvements is a prestigious coalition of senior leaders of organisations representing frontline professionals in all segments of the criminal DWI system (law enforcement, prosecution, judiciary, supervision, and treatment).

Cooperation and communication between and among criminal justice agencies can ensure DWI offenders are detected, appropriately sanctioned, and removed from the road to protect the public and reduce alcohol-related deaths and injuries. Good cooperation and communication enables police officers to correctly identify impaired drivers as first offenders or repeat offenders at the roadside, and make sure compelling and much-needed evidence is correctly gathered, documented, and presented in court. Cooperation and communication can also provide prosecutors and judges with essential information to make meaningful decisions regarding cases, offenders, and sentencing. Finally, cooperation and communication can ensure offenders are effectively monitored by probation and parole, and offenders receive the necessary follow-up and support to reduce recidivism.

What is inter-agency cooperation and why is it essential to the effectiveness of the DWI System?

Inter-agency cooperation is working with other agencies and providing the needed assistance to achieve common goals. Each agency requires needed information and data in a timely manner, adequate support to achieve agency-specific objectives contributing towards common goals, and effective training programs to develop skills and appropriately apply tools to enhance operations. Cooperation among agencies allows each to streamline operations, address priority issues, manage and overcome obstacles, promote teamwork, and demonstrate agency commitment to improving case outcomes.

What is effective communication and why is it important?

Communication as used here is the timely exchange of information about defendants, offenders and cases to inform decision-making at all levels of the system. It also refers to the use of electronic data exchange among agencies. Good communication can ensure impaired driving offenders are correctly identified as first or repeat DWI offenders, quality evidence is appropriately gathered, documented, and presented in court to obtain convictions of guilty offenders. Moreover, it also ensures sentences imposed by the court are targeted to meet the individual needs of offenders and promote long-term risk reduction, and offenders are effectively monitored to protect the public and discourage future offending by supporting sustainable changes in behavior.

> *Good communication can ensure impaired driving offenders are correctly identified as first or repeat DWI offenders, quality evidence is appropriately gathered, documented, and presented in court to obtain convictions of guilty offenders.*

What are some common barriers to cooperation and communication?

The lack of cooperation and communication can hinder the identification of offenders and hamper decision-making within the system, which can lead to inappropriate sanctions for offenders and high levels of recidivism. On a larger scale, this gap can impede the effectiveness and efficiency of the system for dealing with impaired drivers and enable persistent offenders to slip through the cracks, avoiding the very sanctions and programs put in place to protect the public and change behaviour. Common barriers to improving cooperation and communication that may be encountered include:

- **Silo mentality.** Agencies naturally place more emphasis on adherence to internal policies and procedures and agency objectives. Thus, they may be unaware of or pay attention to how their policies and practices might contribute to successful or failed outcomes of other system agencies and detract from the processing of cases on a larger scale.

- **Stereotypes.** Negative stereotypes and poor understanding of others' roles, responsibilities, and environmental constraints can discourage cooperation and communication. Agencies may have misperceptions of other agencies based on past experiences, high-profile events, anecdotes, inexperienced or dissatisfied staff, poor communication, and incomplete information.

- **Territorial imperatives.** Agency budgets are often tied to projects, outcomes, and responsibilities as opposed to staff and workload. An agency's struggle for adequate funding may foster a view that other agencies are 'competitors.' They may become less amenable to sharing responsibilities due to fears it may result in an erosion of funding or authority. A tendency towards territorial imperatives can inhibit cooperation and communication at all levels.

- **Politics.** Every agency must manage the 'politics' associated with doing business. Differences in politics can lead to a cultural divide between some agencies. This difference in perspective can result in opposing viewpoints on appropriate management strategies and hinder cooperative efforts and communication.

- **Rigid communication structure.** Insufficient opportunities for open and frank communication from staff to management may lead to unawareness among administrators of problems impeding working with other agencies. Without constructive communication, such problems persist and have a negative impact on cooperation and communication with other agencies and detract from successful outcomes.

The Working Group on DWI System Improvements

- **Resistance.** Management styles, policies, procedures, and attitudes can become ingrained in agency operations over time. This can make them inherently resistant to change. This is particularly true in instances in which changes are imposed upon staff without opportunity for input or feedback. Operational changes necessary to improve cooperation and communication cannot be achieved without buy-in and support from staff.

- **Confidentiality.** Much of the information relating to offenders and cases is generated by the justice system and confidential in nature. Given the liability associated with failing to protect confidential information, agencies are naturally hesitant to share it with others and neglect to develop legal procedures to protect confidentiality while allowing the necessary sharing of information.

- **Competing priorities.** Almost all agencies in the justice system must cope with competing priorities. Although impaired driving is the leading criminal cause of death, other issues such as sex offenders, gangs, and drugs are often treated as higher priorities due to the intense public attention and scrutiny these issues receive. This frequently translates into more attention given and resources allocated to these issues and agencies struggle to implement programs and strategies targeting impaired driving.

- **Blaming.** Attributing failure or lack of progress to another agency creates a negative atmosphere and frequently results in a defensive and nonconstructive response. Such an atmosphere discourages or fails to stimulate improvement and can ultimately lead to a lack of responsiveness and discourage cooperation and information-sharing.

- **Poor feedback.** Given the heavy caseloads and workloads most agencies cope with, active feedback is rare. For this reason, many agencies are unaware of how their responses to requests and cooperative opportunities can result in successful outcomes or how their lack of response and cooperation can detract from successful outcomes.

- **Costs.** Many criminal justice agencies cope with budget limitations or reductions in funding. This challenging situation requires agencies to focus on maintaining basic operations and outcomes. Thus, the costs associated with agency cooperation in collaborative initiatives and timely responses to requests for information are not always priorities. These initiatives may require attendance at additional meetings, hiring of additional staff to manage new responsibilities, increased workload, the shifting of timelines, and delayed completion of tasks. Similarly, the use of electronic information exchange protocols can greatly improve cooperation and communication, however these system upgrades can have substantial costs.

> *Use of electronic information exchange protocols can greatly improve cooperation and communication, however these system upgrades can have substantial costs.*

- **Inadequate DWI system performance measures.** DWI system outcome measures traditionally relied upon (e.g., conviction rates, recidivism rates, and reductions in alcohol-related deaths and injuries) indicate the effectiveness and efficiency of individual agencies but are not employed to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the DWI system as a whole. Without a method for holding individual agencies responsible for shared outcomes, these agencies have few incentives to cooperate and communicate to achieve better system-wide outcomes.

Why are communication and coordination, education and training, and agency partnerships essential to reduce impaired driving?

- Communication and coordination among criminal justice professionals are essential for problem-solving and for the DWI system to work effectively and efficiently. Communication not only strengthens effectiveness, but it helps eliminate barriers to cooperation, breeds understanding and appreciation, and the sharing of successes. The net result is that professional groups and stakeholders come together to create opportunities for ongoing communication and cooperation leading to successful efforts.

- Given the complexities of the system, solid foundational training and education specific to DWI are essential for all professionals to maximize and increase effectiveness. This is particularly important because, paradoxically, the professionals assigned to DWI are often new to the job. There is a need for continued training and education to keep abreast of statutory changes and case law developments, the use and admissibility of evidence, sentencing strategies and the use and application of different technologies and sanctions. Training can be accessed via annual state highway safety conferences and safety highway safety training institutes.

- Agency partnerships can become institutionalized across agencies using a range of formalized processes and procedures in conjunction with informal arrangements and practices. Partnerships can allow for shared goals and provide for the sharing of resources, information and ongoing communication.

How can cooperation and communication be improved system-wide?

Due to isolated missions and practices, agencies are often unaware of how their policies and practices contribute to successful or failed outcomes for other parts of the system. By working beyond agency borders, administrators should form partnerships leading to shared missions, increased funding, improved training, and new, improved strategies and approaches for addressing the impaired driving problem.

- **Increase cooperation and information sharing.** There is a need for various agencies within the justice and treatment system to identify goals and objectives they have in common and for those collaborations to be facilitated and encouraged at a political level. Agencies engaging in facilitative planning and shared goals with other agencies inherently develop cooperative approaches to tasks and good communication strategies. This cooperation produces mutual dependence and understanding of what is needed to achieve common goals. Once communication channels are opened, agencies can start sharing their information and knowledge with one another.

- **Creating a unified front can have mutual benefits.** Partnerships can be forged and encouraged to work towards gaining political attention and subsequently, support. Agency administrators can establish task forces and summits or expand the scope of existing task forces to gain political strength and influence decisions made in relation to impaired driving. Strength in numbers and solutions created through consensus are powerful influencers.

> *Agency administrators can establish task forces and summits or expand the scope of existing task forces to gain political strength and influence decisions made in relation to impaired driving.*

The Working Group on DWI System Improvements

- **Secure funding.** Every agency and/or initiative faces the challenge of securing funding. Broader access to funding opportunities is necessary. Agencies may be able to augment their funding by applying to outside sources. They also can establish partnerships with other agencies and departments who have common goals or vested interests which can lead to resource sharing or the allocation of additional funds.

- **Ensure judicial independence.** When developing and implementing information sharing, joint educational programs, data collection and inter-agency cooperation it must be recognized that the judiciary is a separate branch of government and one that must remain neutral while maintaining separation from law enforcement and prosecution. That is not to say that there cannot be any cooperation or joint efforts but that such efforts should consider and ensure judicial independence and impartiality.

What are some effective strategies to help agencies overcome barriers to cooperation and communication in the DWI system?

- **Build trust.** Trust is the foundation for good cooperation and communication. Agencies and their staff earn trust by consistently delivering on expectations, being responsive to requests, and demonstrating the commitment to achieving both agency objectives and successful system outcomes. Trust can reduce territorial imperatives, politics, and resistance by nurturing strong partnerships and alliances with other organisations.

- **Convey appreciation of agency roles.** Agencies demonstrating an appreciation for the roles and responsibilities of other agencies within the system, and acknowledging environmental constraints that exist, can overcome the resistance to change and foster cooperation and communication.

- **Engage in interpersonal exchanges.** Agencies encouraging interpersonal exchanges among administrators, supervisors and front-line staff between agencies often create a productive environment by reducing professional and personal isolation, tension, and stereotypes.

- **Integrate cooperation and communication in institutionalized protocols.** Agency policies and practices (whether formal or informal) institutionalize the importance of a commitment to cooperation and communication with other agencies and departments. This approach can ensure staff turnover does not erode this commitment.

- **Identify common goals.** Agencies can engage in cooperative planning and share goals with other agencies to develop collegial approaches to tasks and good communication strategies. This occurs because of their mutual dependence and understanding of what is needed to achieve common goals.

- **Cultivate a service-oriented architecture.** Agencies ensuring the information they collect is meaningful and available to other agencies can improve communication and decision-making at all levels of the system while simultaneously addressing confidentiality concerns. Shared information can reduce workload (i.e., requests from other agencies).

- **Utilize electronic exchange protocols.** The use of shared electronic data protocols can improve cooperation and communication by providing easy access to information as needed, streamlining tasks to reduce demands on staff, and providing feedback regarding outcomes so obstacles can be recognized and addressed.

The Working Group on DWI System Improvements

- **Deliver constructive feedback.** Agencies providing opportunities for constructive feedback to staff and other agencies can enhance cooperation and communication by allowing them to be recognized for their contribution to larger efforts and positive outcomes. At the same time, it can improve outcomes by illustrating gaps in existing systems that can be addressed.

- **Share successes.** Agencies sharing stories of success and providing feedback can further encourage cooperation and communication by fostering a team approach and demonstrating the positive benefits/outcomes that can be achieved.

- **Demonstrate accountability.** Establishing a culture of accountability in which tasks, timelines and responsibilities are transparent can facilitate cooperation and communication. In these instances, expectations are clear, and performance is measured. Consequences for incomplete work that can be anticipated and ways to improve performance can be implemented..

What principles should policies and practices (both formal and informal embody to stimulate cooperation and communication?

- **Accessibility.** To the extent possible, agencies should ensure the information they produce is accessible (as necessary and legal) and available to other agencies in a user-friendly format to improve decision-making at all levels of the system.

- **Compromise.** Agencies should demonstrate a willingness to work with other agencies and to compromise to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

- **Constructive approaches.** Agencies should endeavor to work with others in a constructive manner and avoid blaming and personal attacks. They should also tactfully provide useful and meaningful feedback to improve future outcomes.

- **Context.** Requests made to other agencies should be presented so each agency involved in a request understands the rationale and implications associated with it and, thus, is motivated to respond accordingly.

- **Flexibility.** Agency policies and practices should contain an appropriate level of flexibility so staff can respond to requests for information and support from other agencies along a continuum of possibilities.

- **Privacy.** Agencies should be made aware of relevant privacy policies impacting the ability of each agency to respond to internal and external requests in respect to privacy limitations.

- **Professionalism.** Agencies should employ strategies emphasizing professionalism through enhanced training while remaining focused on agency and systemwide outcomes on a larger scale.

- **Reciprocity.** Agencies should provide others with the same level of information-sharing and assistance they expect to receive from others.

- **Sensitivity.** Agencies should be sensitive to the culture and organization of other agencies as well as the pressures on them and structure communications and partnerships accordingly.

- **System-centered policies.** Agency policies and practices should ultimately support the achievement of successful system outcomes as well as agency objectives.

The Working Group on DWI System Improvements

What educational materials does The Working Group on DWI System Improvements provide?

The efforts of the Working Group on DWI System Improvements have served to identify critical system needs, to make needed educational materials available, to articulate the complex issues associated with program and policy implementation embedded within broader systems, and to give voice to the concerns of practitioners in the DWI system and identify achievable solutions. The Working Group provides educational primers, policy documents, and guides for DWI system professionals to help strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the DWI system.

Key topics discussed on this site include:

- Impaired drivers;
- Impaired driving programs and policies;
- Strategies to improve the DWI System;
- DWI Dashboard; and,
- other special topics.

Each of these topics contains a series of fact sheets structured in a question and answer format which are available for free download and sharing (with attribution). These resources are designed to support the training efforts for agencies that work within the DWI system.

To view more fact sheets, or to get more information about alcohol, its effects on driving skills, and impaired driving, visit **dwiwg.tirf.ca**.

Acknowledgements

Production of this fact sheet was made possible through the sponsorship of Anheuser-Busch.

ANHEUSER-BUSCH