

Community Sessions Description and Bios

Historic Franklin Ballroom

May 18, 2025

9:00am to 10:00am Registration

10:00am to 10:15am Day 1 Opening Remarks

10:15am to 11:45am Pilot, Test, Transform: Building Communications That Change Community Norms

Learn how the Science of the Positive and Positive Community Norms can help you design powerful communications campaigns that shift perceptions, attitudes and behaviors to achieve authentic community transformation. This interactive session will provide real-world examples of successes and lessons learned while developing and pilot-testing Positive Community Norms messages.

Learning Objectives:

1. Spirit: Experience the energy that comes from focusing communications on the Positive.
2. Science: Learn the key steps for developing and pilot-testing Positive Community Norms messages.
3. Action: Experience real-world examples and stories of why many PCN practitioners say Pilot Testing is the most important step in the PCN framework.
4. Return: Reflect on the impacts PCN communications can have on transforming community health.

Sara Thompson, The Montana Institute



Sara Thompson is the Director of Training and Communications at The Montana Institute, specializing in the development and delivery of training, technical assistance, and communications centered on the Science of the Positive Framework and Positive Community Norms.

Since 2006, Sara has worked with community coalitions in her home state of Minnesota and nationally, focusing on correcting misperceptions of norms by applying the Montana Model for Positive Community Norms Communications. Through The Montana Institute, she offers consultation, training, tool development, and technical support to communities applying the Science of the Positive and Positive Community Norms Frameworks to prevention.

Sara spent almost a decade as a morning radio show host before she began her marketing consulting business in 2002. With over two decades of experience as a strategic marketing consultant, Sara has served a wide range of clients, including large and small companies, non-profit organizations, cooperatives, festivals, community events and prevention coalitions.

Sara finds immense reward in sharing the Science of the Positive framework with communities, exploring important questions and concerns, diving into data, and watching people light up with passion and excitement as they experience a paradigm shift that The Positive does, in fact, exist! She loves to roll up her sleeves and connect with coalitions, organizations, and agencies at the community level as they create messages from data and develop Positive Community Norms communications. Many people say that Sara's authenticity, energy, and optimism is refreshing and contagious.

Outside of work, Sara cherishes coffee time with her adult son when he visits, enjoys regularly challenging her body through exercise and fitness, and loves traveling and vacationing with her husband. She enjoys being outdoors in the woods, on the water, or in the mountains. Sara also volunteers at her church and finds great joy in connecting to a greater purpose.

11:45am to 12:45pm NETWORKING LUNCH

12:45pm to 3:15pm A Blueprint for Sustained Momentum: Assessing and Strengthening the Five Pillars of Your Prevention Program

This hands-on workshop is designed for prevention coordinators, coalition leaders, and nonprofit professionals ready to shift from reactive effort to proactive, lasting impact. Using the five-pillar framework—Data, Funding, Partnerships, Champions, and Purpose—you will learn how to systematically evaluate and strengthen your entire program.

The workshop includes a real-world case study showing how an organization transformed its outreach by rebalancing these core elements, plus a guided breakout session where you'll build a personalized action plan to reinforce your program's foundation. Come ready to assess, plan, and build. Leave with a clear blueprint to sustain—and grow—your prevention mission.

Learning Objectives:

1. Diagnose the strength of each core component of your program—Data, Funding, Partnerships, Champions, and Purpose.
2. Identify your program's weakest pillar—the greatest risk to sustainability—and learn how it impacts your momentum.
3. Create an actionable plan to strengthen any weak areas and align all five pillars into a cohesive strategy.
4. Integrate all five components into a unified plan built for long-term community impact.

Mitchell Moore, Prevention Training Services



Mitchell Moore, BAT, LCDC, ICPS, ADC, is a dynamic educator who has a passion for serving those who serve by designing and delivering professional training across America. He is an internationally certified prevention specialist and licensed chemical dependency counselor who has extensive experience working with youth and families in both prevention and recovery settings. He has served as a counselor, prevention specialist, grant writer, program director and executive director of a charitable organization. He is currently the Director of Prevention Training Services, a member of the IC&RC Prevention Group, the vice-chair of the Texas Certification Board, parliamentarian of the Texas Association of Addiction Professionals, a member of the NAADAC Prevention Committee and a beekeeper.

1:45pm to 2:15pm NETWORKING BREAK

3:15pm to 3:30pm BREAK

3:30 to 4:00pm 115th General Assembly Legislative Overview & Statewide Collaboration

The Prevention Alliance of Tennessee will provide updates and key takeaways from the recently concluded session of the 115th Tennessee General Assembly. Attendees will learn about the importance of statewide collaboration for substance use prevention. The session will also include practical guidance on fostering collaboration among community coalitions, Tennessee Prevention Network Agencies, college campus professionals, and the communities they serve.

Presenter: Stephanie Strutner, PAT (Prevention Alliance of Tennessee)



A retired substance use prevention coalition director, Stephanie Strutner, MPH owns and operates an independent consulting firm, Catalyst Evaluation Group, through which she provides support to clients through measuring impact and conducting biostatistical and epidemiological analyses. She also serves as Master Trainer for Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America and serves as the part-time CEO for the Prevention Alliance of Tennessee.

Stephanie holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Emory & Henry University, a Master of Public Health degree in Health Policy and Management from the University of Tennessee with a focus and field practice in Epidemiology and Biostatistics, a Certificate in Social Enterprise Effectiveness from the College of Business Administration at the University of Tennessee, and is a Level II Certified Prevention Specialist.

Stephanie has spoken to the United States Congress on a number of occasions on the impact drug use has on our communities and has also testified before the Tennessee General Assembly on multiple pertinent prevention issues. In 2018, she was summoned to a meeting in the West Wing of the White House with the President of the United States to discuss effective opioid prevention strategies in local

communities. In 2020, the efforts and impact of the coalition she led were selected to be showcased as a case study to Congress. Since 2023 she has been invited by the Institute for Research and Evaluation (UTRIP of Slovenia) to attend the United Nations Commission on Narcotics and Drugs, the global policy forum for drug policy where she has presented on best practices for impact evaluation. Stephanie is an avid snow skier and wake surfer, she also enjoys tending to her bees and plants, stand-up paddle boarding, golf, boating, sports, and spending time with her family.

May 19, 2025

8:00am to 8:30am Registration Open & Networking

8:30am to 10:00am Promoting Well-Being through Data Storytelling

Take the scary out of data and learn practical strategies on how you can promote well-being and bring your data to life through data visualization. This session will help you understand how to make data a little less intimidating with simple tips and tricks that promote the important work you do. All skill levels welcome - this is not your typical data session!

Utilizing the amazing work of Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, a data analyst and graphic designer, attendees will learn ways to apply comprehensive skills to build and tell inspiring data stories.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the importance of presenting data effectively utilizing the art of storytelling
2. Learn tips and tricks for effective visualization to help choose the appropriate visual displays, to eliminate clutter, and to focus the audience's attention with purpose
3. Gain comfort in collecting and utilizing data

Ashley Hinton, Center College & 859 W.E.L.L Coaching and Consulting



Ashley Hinton, M.S., MPH currently serves as the Director of Health Promotion at Centre College working to build a sustainable model for a health-promoting campus that empowers students while promoting skills and competency development toward lifelong wellbeing and academic success. Ashley is also the founder of 859 WELL Coaching and Consulting providing affordable and accessible evidence-based education to community and campus partners. 859 WELL also works with the University of Kentucky as project manager for the recently formed Responsible Alcohol and Substance Misuse Education Coalition serving Colleges and Universities across the state of Kentucky. Most recently Ashley has been

really focused in further understanding the art of storytelling through data after completing several self-studies and workshops to enhance data visualization. Ashley also serves as faculty for the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) Peer Education Initiatives and past co-chair for NASPA Wellness and Health Promotion Knowledge Community serving on the NASPA Strategies planning committee as a representative from the Knowledge Community. Ashley is a certified wellness coach working in partnership to help establish a strong Student Success Integrated Coaching model for higher education. Ashley completed both her undergraduate degree in Exercise and a Master's of Science in Health Promotion at the University of Kentucky, while also obtaining a second Master's in Public Health.

10:00am to 10:15am BREAK

10:15am to 11:45am Stop Saying “I’ll Just Do It”: Communities Are Empowered When You Ask for What You Need

Coalition leaders and community organizers often fall into the trap of doing everything themselves, thinking it’s easier or faster. This mindset limits impact, exhausts leaders, and underutilizes the talent and energy of volunteers.

This session demonstrates how empowerment is created through intentional, actionable “hard asks”— requests that challenge, motivate, and engage community members in meaningful ways. The approach is grounded in interpersonal psychology and informed by best practices from community organizing movements across the country, blending research-based strategies with real-world coalition experience. Participants will explore practical strategies for engaging volunteers in challenging yet rewarding roles, distributing leadership, and building trust and accountability across their teams. Interactive exercises, case examples, and hands-on tools will equip attendees to confidently mobilize volunteers, engage community members, and create lasting impact in their prevention work.

Learning Objectives:

1. Recognize when overextension limits impact and why “I’ll just do it” isn’t sustainable, drawing on interpersonal psychology principles to understand team dynamics.
2. Make intentional, actionable “hard asks” that empower community members and volunteers, informed by best practices from top community organizing movements nationwide.
3. Build trust, accountability, and distribute leadership across their coalition or team using research-based engagement strategies.
4. Strengthen coalition capacity and sustainability by applying evidence-informed approaches to volunteer engagement, motivation, and meaningful responsibility

Bethany Lemons, Metro Drug Coalition



Prevention Coordinator at Metro Drug Coalition, Bethany Lemons is a passionate prevention coordinator dedicated to combating substance misuse and promoting mental health in the community. In her role at the Metro Drug Coalition (MDC) in Knoxville, Tennessee, she focuses on coalition coordination, young adult focused prevention, alcohol policy and building meaningful community partnerships.

In addition to her work at MDC, Bethany is involved in several local organizations, including the Young Professionals of Knoxville, Junior League of Knoxville, the FBI Knoxville Citizen's Academy Alumni Association, Knoxville Writers Guild, and Women in Film & Television Knoxville. As a volunteer QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Trainer for the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network, Bethany is committed to suicide prevention and mental health advocacy.

Bethany has been recognized for her contributions to the community, including being named the 2024 Outstanding Young Professional of Knoxville by the Young Professionals of Knoxville. She was also honored with the 2023 East Tennessee Suicide Prevention Award from the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network (TSPN) for her efforts in suicide prevention. In 2025, Bethany placed third in the American Association of Suicidology's annual lived experience writing competition.

Bethany holds a Magna Cum Laude Bachelor's Degree in Communication and Psychology with Honors from Carson-Newman University, where she was named the Outstanding Graduate in Psychology of the 2018 class. When she's not working, Bethany enjoys writing, traveling, and writing about traveling.

11:45am to 12:45pm NETWORKING LUNCH

12:45pm to 2:15pm Partner Up! Turning School Collaboration into Prevention Success

Schools play a critical role in shaping young people's attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities, making them essential partners in community efforts to prevent youth substance misuse. Yet, forming effective partnerships between schools and community coalitions can be challenging due to differences in priorities, communication styles, and available resources. This interactive session will explore practical strategies to overcome those barriers and establish strong, sustainable K–12 collaborations that advance prevention efforts.

Participants will first identify common challenges coalitions face when engaging schools, including navigating concerns of liability and data collection, aligning goals with academic priorities, and effectively communicating the many approaches and strategies used in prevention work. The session will then highlight a successful partnership model from Knoxville, illustrating how a local coalition and school system built a mutually beneficial relationship that supports prevention programming, education, and student well-being.

Finally, participants will take part in a guided action-planning activity designed to help them apply these lessons to their own communities. Each attendee will leave with concrete next steps for initiating or strengthening a school-based partnership tailored to their local needs.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify common barriers in forming partnerships with schools.
2. Learn about a successful partnership model from Knoxville and explore multiple avenues for school collaboration.
3. Develop an individualized action plan for starting or strengthening a school-based partnership in their own community.

Maria Valerio Hastings, Metro Drug Coalition



Maria Valerio Hastings has worked with the Metro Drug Coalition since 2023, and serves as the Assistant Director for Youth Initiatives. She is deeply passionate about educating youth about drug misuse and mental health in an engaging, non-stigmatizing way. Maria earned her bachelor's degree in Cultural Anthropology from the University of TN Knoxville with a concentration in their Disasters, Displacement and Human Rights program. She has spent the last several years learning best practices for working with youth and making last connections within the Knox County School system. She earned her Certified Prevention Specialist title in June of 2025.

Elle Peeples, Metro Drug Coalition



Elle Peeples is the Director of Primary Prevention Services for Metro Drug Coalition in Knoxville, TN where she oversees the non-profit's catalog of prevention programming, with initiatives serving the entire lifespan from prenatal to older adults. She has a M.A. in Interpersonal and Health Communication and is currently a Ph.D candidate in the same subject. Elle is additionally a Certified Prevention Specialist and has nearly a decade of experience in developing, coordinating, and evaluating prevention programming for youth, families, and at-risk populations.