



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

University of Texas Target Safety's Journey

The University of Texas (UT) Target Safety project is situated at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, a large urban health center at the heart of one of the largest cities in the United States. The Texas Gun Club is a large firearm retailer in the Greater Houston area. UT Target Safety collaborated with the Texas Gun Club to assess the practices, attitudes, and behaviors around firearm safety counseling by firearm retailers at the point-of-sale. The partners seek to understand the consumer perspective of point-of-sale firearm safety counseling and ultimately, create unified messaging supported by both public health and the firearm industry.

NAVIGATING THE PROCESS

In November 2020, Safe States released [*Strengthening Partnerships between Business and Public Health: A Roadmap for Advancing Community Injury and Violence Prevention*](#) (Roadmap) to foster partnerships between the public health and business sectors to advance IVP efforts at the community level. To showcase the translation of the best practices included in the Roadmap into real-world settings, Safe States provided seed grant funding to community partnerships in 2020 and 2021.

In 2022, Safe States published [*Preparing to Partner*](#), a supplemental guide on how to begin building relationships with potential partners. This prequel to the Roadmap offers practical guidance for people working in public health as they prepare to develop successful partnerships with businesses in their community.

UT Target Safety worked alongside Safe States to inform the development of the *Preparing to Partner* guide. Having never partnered with the Texas Gun Club previously, the UT Target Safety project focused on creating a novel partnership with a large firearm retailer in the Greater Houston area. As a trusted messenger for firearm expertise, firearm retailers are a strong partner in supporting the development of effective firearm safety messaging at point of sale, and their buy-in and perspective are critical to developing effective interventions.



“ Involving the firearms industry is absolutely essential in finding ways to reduce the number of firearm related injuries and deaths in children. The truth is we want the same thing, we want responsible gun owners to take safe storage seriously. We clearly can do better, and we can do better together! ”

Jason Short
Texas Gun Club

The [*Preparing to Partner*](#) prequel offers tangible and practical guidance for people working in public health as they "PREPARE" to develop successful partnerships with businesses in their communities. It aims to help public health leaders think through how these partnerships might be successful and ushers readers along their partnership journey to begin connecting using the Roadmap.

KEY PARTNERS



Firearm
Owners



Firearm
Retailers



Healthcare



Public
Health



University

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Understand the Power Dynamics of Your Partner Organization

Gaining support for the partnership from upper management can have a trickledown effect to employees throughout the organization. There is a greater chance for early adoption or buy-in within the organization by involving employees during partnership development. Multiple points of contact can foster engagement and keep the partnership or project moving forward successfully.



Be Willing to Learn About Your Potential Partner's Industry

Your organization may have an interest in a topic or organization with which you are less familiar. When identifying current or potential partners, some organizations may be outside of your comfort zone. Researching the industry can lead to a successful partnership and assist with future planning.



ROUTE



DESTINATION

- Intentional and open conversations led to better understanding across cross-sector partners and ultimately created a long-term, strengthened partnership.
- UT Target Safety saw a shift in retailer attitudes towards their role in firearm safety messaging.
- Data collected from focus groups and interviews will inform the creation of a firearm safety message that can be used by firearm retailers.
- Sharing project successes facilitated connection with additional firearm retailers interested in research.



Building Relationships Takes Time

Relationships do not happen overnight. Building trust and creating a space for innovative thinking is key in establishing relationships. Relationship building is not linear, and connections may be made in nontraditional ways. It is important for individuals and organizations to be receptive to those connections when they emerge.



Establish Your Priorities for Partnership

Start with expectations and expect the unexpected. As public health organizations and businesses are experiencing increasing staff shortages and employee burnout, it is important that priorities and expectations are discussed when establishing a partnership. This will ensure that both parties understand the key efforts to accomplish goals and prevent future miscommunication.



Determining their values, establishing priorities, thinking upstream, and uncovering biases prepared UT Target Safety to broaden their reach and deepen relationships with the business community. Applying these recommendations covered in section one of the Preparing to Partner prequel, UT Target Safety leveraged their budding partnership with Texas Gun Club to engage and conduct additional focus groups with other local firearm retailers with a vested interest in safety, as well as new and established firearm owners in the Greater Houston area. These successful outreach efforts not only yielded formative research findings that will be used to draft firearm safety messages, it also helped establish the trust essential to growing and moving the partnerships to the next level. It is important to note that the road to strengthened partnerships is not one-way. It must be a continuous process where partners cycle between steps as their work evolves and progresses.

“ It has been critical to form new partnerships with the private sector, especially in addressing firearm injury prevention. Texas Gun Club has been essential to our success. In order to address firearm safe storage with the firearm owning community, it is important to have a strong partnership with health care and firearm retailers. The qualitative work has allowed us to strengthen our partnership and also start building new partnerships among the retailer industry, which is key to implement an industry wide intervention. These key steps in relationship building and navigating how to support each other have helped us understand the needs of the retail industry so that we can better inform our intervention and ultimately improve the health and safety of the population.

Dr. Sandy McKay
Pediatrician

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GUIDE POSTS

Partnership Development Insights

Public health professionals have traditionally had difficulty talking about firearm safety for several reasons, including political sensitivity, organizational barriers, and inadequate information on communicating firearm messaging effectively, while firearm owners have been reluctant to partner with public health due to perceptions of forced limitations or ineffective messaging around firearm safety. Preparation for a non-traditional partnership between public health and gun retailers required research and planning from public health professionals, as well as overcoming possible internal bias with the topic area. When initiating partnerships on sensitive issues, like firearm safety, it will take time to establish your credibility to ensure the partnership can flourish.

Health Equity Considerations

As with any good research, race and equity were central components in the planning and facilitation of the Target Safety interviews and focus groups. Program facilitators made a concerted effort to ensure personal and professional bias did not interfere with the process.



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