Quick Guide: Hosting Events with Alcohol for Graduate Student Organizations

Q: My organization is hosting an event with alcohol. How can we finance it?

A: Hosting events can get expensive, and may include costs for a room rental or venue fee, food, alcohol, entertainment, bartenders, and security. Because group funds aren’t endless, it may seem like the best option is to charge an entry fee either at the door or via ticket sales. Here’s what you need to know to make sure this is done legally per Pennsylvania state law:

- **Without a liquor license, it is illegal to exchange alcohol for payment either directly or indirectly.** This means an event host cannot operate their own cash bar, cannot charge an entry fee or sell tickets for events where alcohol will be provided at an open bar, cannot provide drink tickets (or similar) in exchange for an entry fee, cannot accept donations to defray the cost of the event, and cannot be “paid back” by financial contributions of any kind.
- **Legal options include the following:**
  - Make the entire event free of charge to attendees, including drinks (if sufficient group funds are available)
  - Hold the event in a bar or restaurant, which will operate their own cash bar, and use either group funds or ticket sales to pay for all other costs
  - Hire a caterer that can use a traveling liquor license and have a cash bar, wherein guests will pay the bartender directly for each drink (the caterer must apply for a permit from the state at least one month in advance, so plan ahead), and use either group funds or ticket sales to pay for all other event costs

Q: The funds raised through ticket sales for an event with alcohol don’t go directly back into the events budget or pay for the alcohol directly; they go into a pool of funds which is reallocated at a later date. Is this legal?

A: No, it’s not legal. This constitutes an **indirect sale of liquor** because the funds collected are cycling through the budget used to purchase the alcohol.

Q: Is this a Penn policy?

A: This is Pennsylvania state liquor law, and the University of Pennsylvania expects all members of the University community to observe these laws. Student groups affiliated with the University are required to do so per University policy.
Q: What about alcohol policies that are specific to Penn, and how to do they apply to grad students?

A: Penn has an alcohol and other drug policy in addition to PA state law which helps protect the safety and wellness of our community. When making arrangements for your events, please plan ahead for the following:

- Events with alcohol must be registered with the Office of Alcohol and Other Drugs, and in some cases, by the student group’s advising office. Event registration forms can be found on AOD’s website: [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/alcohol/hostanevent.php](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/alcohol/hostanevent.php)
- Sober hosts must be designated in advance to help make sure the event runs smoothly
- All events with alcohol must also provide non-alcoholic beverages and food
- At events in campus spaces, hosts must hire a University-approved bartender from this list: [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/alcohol/approvedbartenders.php](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/alcohol/approvedbartenders.php)
- Most events in campus spaces must have security present. This is either coordinated through Perelman Quad when you make your room reservation, or through AOD if in another campus space
- Hard alcohol is permitted; however, no more than two types of hard alcohol may be available and must be served in single-serving mixed drinks only. Student groups must have a finalized guest list of no more than 150 attendees in order to serve hard alcohol. Wine and beer may be served without a guest list.
- Kegs are not permitted on Penn’s campus. Beers with an alcohol content higher than 6% may not be served.

Q: What if there’s an incident at my event?

A: Per Penn’s Medical Amnesty Policy, no student seeking medical attention as the result of alcohol or other drug use will get in trouble with the University. So, if a guest at your event becomes overly intoxicated, the best thing to do is call Penn Police to arrange for medical attention. The number is (215) 573-3333. Please don’t send overly intoxicated individuals away from the party alone. AOD can also provide confidential harm-reduction counseling to any student.

Q: Who can I contact to discuss our event plans or to get more information?

A: Contact AOD’s program coordinator with any questions:

    Margaret Yang – xiaojiao@upenn.edu or (215) 573-3525

Or view more information on AOD’s website: [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/alcohol](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/alcohol)