



# Where Do We Go From Here?

## Recommendations and Program Goals

2005 marks the beginning of one of The Allstate Foundation's new signature social programs focused on teen driving. To ensure that the Foundation has the benefit of the best thinking as we take on this issue, we sought out individuals and organizations with established expertise and successful track records.

Early counsel provided by both the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety prompted us to look beyond the conventional approaches taken by many teen-driver safety efforts that focus on providing information and technical instruction. We determined to talk directly with teens to see what they think and feel about driving. Our own research in this area, together with the outside expertise we consulted, led us to choose an attitudinal approach, which we hope will lead to better, safer driving behavior among teenagers. This approach will not come at the expense of other critical efforts to address the issue. Rather, the intent is to fill an important gap in the way teen driving has traditionally been addressed.

### Allstate Foundation Teen-Driving Program – A Preliminary Framework

Our review of existing programs reveals that no national program has attempted to address teen attitudes in a comprehensive way. That's what is needed now. Given all the data we examined, and considering the input of our expert advisers, The Allstate Foundation recommends an evolving program that incorporates these elements:

*Teen participation* – Teens have told us loud and clear that the best way to effectively address this attitudinal challenge and generate a genuine dialogue among teens is by letting them shape the program and search for solutions. To that end, we will convene a panel of teen advisers from different walks of life throughout the country, and hold a series of teen conferences. We are committed to learning from, and better understanding, those we seek to help.

*Grassroots Environment*– Teens we interviewed told us that safe-driving messages would have more impact if they came from or with a connection to people in their own schools and communities. With more than half of the teens we surveyed telling us that they had already been in a crash, we believe that real teens and real parents – and real and often tragic examples – will have an impact that instructional videos and generic scare tactics simply cannot. One element of The Allstate Foundation program will provide local advocates the tools to help them reach their peers and to make a difference in their local communities.

*Strict measurement and accountability*– Many of the programs we studied are well-intentioned, and may in fact be making a difference, but few programs incorporate a way to measure their success. As a result, it has been difficult to differentiate between those strategies that are most effective and should be expanded or replicated and those that should be modified or even replaced. With so many competing priorities, it is important to know where best to invest limited resources for maximum impact. Building measurability and accountability into teen safe-driving initiatives will help make that possible. The Allstate Foundation will use research both to guide the development of effective strategies and tactics and also to constantly measure our progress. We will also encourage the growing number of community organizations and individuals focused on teen driving to incorporate research and measurement into their own programs wherever possible. Organizations focused on new and better driving simulation techniques are perfect candidates for more rigorous measurement.

## How the Experts See It

It's important to recognize that the right kind of changes in teen attitudes and driving behavior won't by themselves solve the problem. Attitudinal programs must be supplemented by the other kinds of efforts. Our expert advisers helped us identify the following opportunity areas:

*Tougher Graduated Licensing Laws* – Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety continues to play a key role in pushing for stronger laws that protect young drivers and their passengers, including the expansion of GDL laws, which have succeeded in reducing teen deaths and injuries. Although some form of GDL has been implemented in every state, those laws are relatively weak in some states and therefore fail to keep teens out of the more dangerous driving circumstances. Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety supports passage of the Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act of 2005 (“STANDUP”), which would set national uniform GDL standards.

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*Greater Parent Involvement* – While the influence of peers on teen driving behavior is relatively uncharted, parental influence and control are clearly effective in making their teenagers safer drivers. Three quarters of the teens we surveyed said their parents would be best at getting them to drive more safely. And most parents are highly motivated to protect their children. Many programs focus on providing parents with the tools they need to effectively engage their teenage children on the issue. Parent-oriented and parent-founded programs are essential and should continue to receive support. Parents need more information about how GDL laws can help them, and about the safety deficiencies of many older, hand-me-down cars.

*Public/Private Partnerships* – We see a growing role for collaboration between advocacy organizations, parents and corporate partners to attack the problem. Local organizations, like Brakes for Brett, are already making strides toward lessening the tragedy of teen crashes. Encouraging organizations like these with public support and private resources will amplify their message.

## THE CHALLENGE OF “SELLING” SAFE DRIVING TO TEENS

By Peter Zollo

President, Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU)

Reaching teens with any sort of message – whether it’s about sneakers or the dangers of smoking – is a marketing challenge. It’s always difficult to hit a moving target, and no lifestage changes directions more frequently. Still, there is plenty of cause for optimism: today’s generation of teens is vastly different from prior cohorts. While previous generations rebelled against the system, today’s teens want to excel within it. There is little evidence of a generation gap with today’s young people; they generally respect authority and share their parents’ values.

Today’s teens are the most media-savvy generation in history, meaning they’re perfectly familiar – and comfortable – with their position as a target audience. They’re receptive to marketing, so long as it is both believable and engaging.

How can we hope to reach one of the most diverse cohorts in U.S. history? Realize that teens are more alike than they are different. For one, they share the same major milestones, such as getting a driver’s license, going to prom, or graduating high school. Thanks to school, their days share the same shape and they’re generally doing similar things during each part of the day.

Finally, race, gender, or geography aside, they’re motivated by several fundamental “need-states.” Teens crave independence and fun, and their interest in experimentation is one offshoot of those needs. However, despite their attempts to formulate an identity of their own, they’re also experiencing a great deal of change, turmoil, and self-doubt. They are often loath to take actions that open themselves up to criticism from peers. “Indi-filiation,” TRU’s shorthand for this tension between individualism and affiliation, can best be summed up thusly: teens want to be interesting and unique – just like their friends.

Selling teens on safe driving poses considerable, but not insurmountable, challenges. Beyond knowing that car crashes are the leading cause of teen deaths, teens simply don’t give much thought to safe driving except through the frame of substance-abuse issues. Teens recognize the perils of driving drunk. Other than that, they don’t concern themselves with many details about the issue. Most – 61 percent – say they’re good drivers, although 78 percent admit driving distracted, and 52 percent say they talk on a cell phone while driving.

So, how to get there? Remember that any campaign to increase teens’ driving safety lives or dies on teen interest, acceptance, and engagement. Adults are simply role models and enforcers; teens are the only decision-makers that really count, and they’re the primary influencers among their friends.

Too many marketers labor under the misconception that teens are driven by purely emotional responses. In fact, teens require clear, straightforward information upfront. Anything less is a waste of their time – and they’re too busy to let a marketer waste their time.

Still, they’re bombarded with information constantly, and they’re adept at tuning out most of what they hear. All the rational information in the world won’t change their behavior if they don’t see it. This is where emotional engagement is crucial. Teens respect real people with real-life experiences that they may lack. Heartfelt testimony from a reckless-driving victim (or even a repentant perpetrator) would allow teens to focus on the issue’s human element, helping them better digest important facts and figures.

If this emphasis on rational versus emotional needs sounds a bit mixed – it is. That is the point. A successful

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teen brand needs both. And that is the idea: creating a “brand” for this issue that becomes shorthand to teens for a variety of messages – rational and emotional – that need to be conveyed as part of a safe-driving campaign.

Different teens need different messages, and most teens need more than one message. A brand helps to accomplish this. If you’re wondering how a brand can exist without a tangible product offering, you’re in good company. True, the vast majority of brands support products, goods, or services. But the idea of a product-less brand lies in creating intangible images that differentiate and communicate. For social marketers, the idea *is* the product, and the brand is the way to get teens to buy in.

One of the most effective and untapped ways to change teens’ perceptions of driving safety is to inject the issue into conversations with peers. As it stands now, driving safety is a subtext rarely spoken about in teen circles. A sense of invincibility prevents most teens from imagining anything serious could happen when they’re at the wheel, and teens’ reluctance to rock the boat means many won’t speak up when friends are driving unsafely. A message of personal empowerment – a willingness to make the right decisions and confront those who are putting themselves and others at risk – could be a potent force in changing teen attitudes, and ultimately their behavior.