



N.C. Smoke-Free/Tobacco-Free Government Buildings, Grounds and Parks

Making Incremental Progress in a Challenging Environment through Leadership Engagement

Summary: The North Carolina Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB) was able to break down barriers to local smoke-free and tobacco-free regulations by conducting key informant interviews with local leaders. The interviews were an opportunity to open up new conversations and begin the process of breaking down existing barriers to evidence-based policy

Challenge: North Carolina has 100 counties. As of 2015, 23 counties had not adopted smoke-free or tobacco-free regulations for inside government buildings. According to the Surgeon General (2006) there is no safe level of secondhand smoke exposure. Secondhand smoke contains an excess of 7,000 chemicals, including many who are toxic and cancer causing. For 23 of the 100 counties whom do not have smoke-free or tobacco-free regulation, this is reality for their residents. Whether you're a resident who utilizes local services or a local government employee, you should not be exposed to toxic or cancer-causing chemicals.

Solution: Demetrius Edwards, CDC Public Health Associate, created a key informant interview guide to understand barriers associated with local officials adopting and implementing smoke-free or tobacco-free government buildings regulations.

Results: Edwards trained and collaborated with TPCB Regional Managers to interview 10 Local Health Officials. Officials shared insights on their various obstacles and barriers to adopting regulations. Changes in leadership and key government contacts as well as political barriers, were common themes shared by the officials interviewed. One official explained the lack of a written regulations due to the "understood" culture of "no smoking" within buildings.

We provided local officials with valuable information on the full authority adopting and implementing local regulations. Some of the most compelling information we shared were maps and dashboards showing what area counties, or counties they compare themselves with, have already put smoke-free and tobacco-free policies in place. Seeing that peer counties have smoke-free or tobacco-free government buildings generated new interest in the topic. Through the interviews, partnerships were created where, in past they were not as fruitful. New lines of communication were opened between local government officials and the local health department, as well as the TPCB.

Quote

"One of the goals was to open up that communication," Edwards said. "I was trying to identify how to connect with leaders and decision-makers on a personal level. Tobacco intersects with many interests, such as children, pets and business. I could tailor the conversation to each person." – Demetrius Edwards, CDC Public Health Associate.



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Data was collected to formulate an action plan and shared information that may help move the action plan forward. Stakeholders and coalitions were identified as potential partners. As a result, one county adopted government buildings smoke-free or tobacco-free regulations, and several more have started the process. Next steps are to reconnect with the previously interviewees to measure and encourage further progress; work with local leaders to interview municipal leaders and decision-makers as well as county leader, and interview the remaining counties that have yet adopted smoke-free tobacco-free regulations.

Lessons Learned: Throughout the process I learned the importance of relationship building as a foundation for building support for evidence-based policy and program development. A simple in-person meeting goes a long way, especially on an issue that may have controversial aspects like tobacco. Additionally, the ability to share resources and work as a team makes goals attainable. Public health officials shared wisdom and knowledge on how to work collectively with community members and decision-makers.

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To learn more about smoke-free policies in N.C., visit www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov

“Large change doesn’t come from clever, quick fixes; from smart, tense people; but from long conversations and silences among people who know different things and need to learn different things.” Anne Herbert



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