



Saving Our Legacy

African Americans for Smoke-Free Places

Lessons Learned

Passage of Policy Prohibiting Flavored Tobacco Sales in the City of Sacramento

In April 2019, the Sacramento City Council voted to pass a citywide prohibition on flavored tobacco sales, in large part due to the advocacy efforts of The SOL Project and their partners. This document presents a summary of the important lessons that SOL staff learned about the policy change process and tips for others working on similar initiatives.

Selecting a Target Jurisdiction

Carefully select a jurisdiction with concrete policy change potential.

- The SOL Project selected the City of Sacramento for policy change efforts based on: (1) the percentage of African American residents, (2) the feasibility of achieving the project objective, and (3) established relationships with community-based organizations, nonprofits, community leaders, and decision makers in the jurisdiction.
- SOL staff knew that the Mayor and particular city councilmembers held a firm stance against racial and social injustices and believed that the City had great potential to adopt a policy.

Approaching Elected Officials

Send direct emails to elected officials and leverage existing roles in the community.

- SOL staff found that making cold calls was ineffective for scheduling meetings but were successful directly emailing city councilmembers and copying their chief of staff and scheduler.
- SOL staff leveraged their roles in prominent local community groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council and Black Women Organized for Political Action in their initial outreach to elected officials.
- Bring sample products to “show and tell”.

Tailor your approach based on each elected official’s unique priorities.

- SOL staff made a point to learn about each councilmembers’ passions and priorities, and then framed their introductory conversations as well as policy discussions accordingly.
- The message of racial and social injustice of tobacco industry target marketing of African Americans and youth resonated.

Leave behind paper copies of additional information.

- Package sample policies, retailer density maps by ethnicity/income, public opinion, smoking prevalence, Healthy Stores Healthy Community data, letters of support in a professional folder. Use images as much as possible vs. charts and graphs.

Finding a Champion for the Policy

Find an elected official to champion the policy.

- SOL staff built relationships with three potential champions on the council, one who received complaints from constituents about illegal tobacco sales in her district. The councilmember was a parent and firmly believed in the need to protect youth.

Leverage other funding or efforts taking place at the local government level.

- The City of Sacramento Code Compliance Division was already engaged in discussions around increasing the tobacco retail license fee, and SOL was able to offer potential solutions while also using the opportunity to share information about the need to pass a flavored tobacco sales policy.

“You cannot underestimate the power of your relationship building. You have got to build your relationship with that key gatekeeper just like you have to build it with the legislator. Everybody along that trail counts.”

– SOL staff member

Building Partnerships with Community and Tobacco Control

Convene a policy workgroup of tobacco control partners.

- SOL convened the Flavors Workgroup comprised of partners such as the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (TFK), American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American's for Nonsmokers Rights, the American Lung Association in California and many more.

Engage partners with community outreach expertise and infrastructure.

- Workgroup partners were able to leverage large volunteer and donor bases to build policy momentum and encourage community support.
- SOL leveraged other CBO partners and individuals who met one-on-one with key leaders.

Train youth to engage with elected officials.

- Staff, TFK and California Youth Advocacy Network trained local youth in advocacy work, and the youth then participated in postcard campaigns aimed at elected officials, spoke at city council meetings, and joined in a press conference about the proposed policy.

Ask nontraditional partners to reach out to their elected officials as constituents.

- SOL engaged with neighborhood associations and African American-serving organizations around the City of Sacramento to encourage members to voice their policy support to elected officials via phone calls/letters/emails.
- SOL staff became members of committees and boards of local organizations and leveraged these relationships for support.

Media Campaign

Be creative about finding resources for a media campaign.

- SOL staff requested donations from partnership organizations for campaign messaging, such as print and social media ads and radio spots, from local radio stations and Black owned media companies. SOL also leveraged existing relationships with radio personalities who offered their voice in radio ads.
- SOL coordinated a press conference to coincide with the National Summit on Smokeless Tobacco Prevention, with 60 youth in attendance and speakers including community leaders and the city councilmember championing the policy.

Responding to Policy Opposition

Anticipate opposition to the policy and identify potential concerns.

- Tobacco industry lobbyists and local tobacco and vape shop owners were concurrently meeting with city councilmembers, expressing concern that they would go out of business and lose their income.
- Retailers also reached out to SOL staff and other tobacco control partners, wanting to come up with a “compromise” policy and stating that they are “on the same side.”
- Opposition to the ordinance culminated in a contentious code compliance meeting, where some retailers became so aggressive that volunteers were afraid to speak.
- Prominent Black organizations touted the policy would criminalize “Black and Brown” youth, but the policy does not penalize youth for possession.

Continued Communication with Elected Officials

Continue communication with elected officials throughout the process and call on partners as needed.

- SOL continued communication with city councilmembers to share information or important data during the process.
- In addition to always being “armed” with data, staff made sure to always have new information and updates.
- SOL encouraged policy workgroup members and other partners to contact councilmembers.

Develop close working relationships with elected officials' staff.

- Attend elected official's events.
- Offer your expertise and support with social determinants that impact health.

Overall Reflections

Policy work can take years.

Use data to educate others and support your position.

Policy success is entirely tied to establishing partnerships and relationships.

Become a permanent partner with the community you are serving.

“We complained about how long it took this policy to pass, but it needed to take three years for all these pieces of the puzzle to fit in. **If we didn't have everything that we had at the end – all the partners, all the different pieces – it may not have passed.**”

– SOL staff member

