

Vermont Tobacco Control Program Community Partner Point-of-Sale Initiative:

Focus Groups with Community Partners

Summary Report

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JSI RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE, INC.



Focus Groups with VTCP Community Partners

Purpose and Scope

The Vermont Tobacco Control Program (VTCP) collaborates with community partners (e.g., community coalitions) throughout the state to prevent initiation of tobacco use among youth and young adults. Strategies include funding, training and technical assistance to support community partners in their efforts to increase awareness on pro-tobacco influences at the point-of-sale (POS), and promote local and state policies that reduce exposure and restrict access to tobacco at the POS.

Focus groups were conducted with VTCP community partners as part of an evaluation to assess the program's POS strategies and impact. Evaluation of the VTCP's capacity building assistance will inform how the program can improve and expand their support to community partners. Findings from the focus groups are expected to identify resources and supports community partners need to effectively carry out their POS activities, and to inform the VTCP's year 3 [1] work plan activities to support community partners in their POS efforts, and [2] community partner grant approach and requirements.

Participants

Representatives from the VTCP's 16 funded community partners were invited to participate in the focus groups. Representatives from 15 of the 16 community partners participated in the focus groups.

Procedure

Two focus groups were scheduled in different regions of the state for 1.5 hours each. Focus groups were facilitated by an evaluator from JSI using a semi-structured guide developed by JSI and reviewed by the VTCP. Focus groups were audio-recorded, with permission of the participants, for note taking purposes.

Summary of Findings

Knowledge of and Experience with POS Strategies

- Experience in community prevention and/or tobacco control work varied across community partners, from less than 1 year to 16 years. Most community partner staff feel experienced and prepared to conduct tobacco prevention and control work in general. The POS work is newer and unclear for some. Others see the current POS work as an extension of the healthy retailers strategies conducted in prior years and building on the more recent Counter Tools audits.



- Gaps or limitations in community partner experience and knowledge related to POS work include:
 - Knowledge on community organizing and policy change; the best practice process or steps for community partners to engage, mobilize, build capacity, inform and influence policy change.
 - Knowledge and understanding of municipal entities in Vermont and their roles and processes. For example, planning commission, zoning board, select board; development of and process for establishing an ordinance or policy.
 - Knowledge of various POS strategies and their implementation steps. For example, if a partner is charged with integrating POS tobacco control strategies, such as restriction of price promotions, into town ordinances, it is not clear what the evidence or research informed steps are to establishing a town ordinance.
 - Knowledge or tips on the starting point for POS strategies. For example, starting conversations with a planning commission versus a select board or targeting towns in process or soon to be updating their town plans.
 - Knowledge of the potential implications for a community upon implementing POS strategies. Community partners expressed need for being better prepared with this information to respond to community questions or concerns about POS strategies and policies.
- Community Partners expressed interest and need to learn about examples of successful POS strategies and policies passed in Vermont or other New England states.
 - If examples from other states are provided, partners would like to also know whether the exemplified strategies or tactics are feasible options for Vermont (e.g., legal).
- Community partners are interested in better understanding the POS work across community partners, such as their strategies, where in the process they are at, and their strengths and successes.

Barriers & Challenges in Conducting POS Strategies

- Prevention work is not coordinated nor aligned across grants for tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana prevention and control. Rather, it is organized by funding stream and program. This siloed approach to grant-making lends to separate strategies and grant requirements for tobacco and other prevention work, such as alcohol and marijuana. Community partners find this



challenging and inefficient when the prevention issues they are addressing are connected and could often be addressed in a comprehensive holistic approach.

- There is often a perceived lack of authority at the local level that stymies movement of POS strategies. For example, some community partners have found that municipal leaders or chain store managers are supportive of tobacco control at the POS, but don't feel they have the authority or control to address the issue. Some partners indicated guidance or messaging from the state could be helpful in obtaining buy-in and action at the community/local level.

Trainings, Technical Assistance & Other Resources to Aid POS Strategies

- Community partners value and are appreciative of the accessibility, responsiveness, and helpfulness of the VTCP staff when reached out to for individual assistance or guidance.
- Several community partners expressed favor for the site visits currently in process. They appreciate VTCP staff coming to their space and community to better understand their work and the context they are working in.
- Community partners noted they are currently working from a draft training calendar and would like a final version, or if the version they have is final then for the VTCP to clarify so.
- The following were noted as helpful resources that aid the POS work of community partners: Counter Balance, 802Quits, multi-unit housing toolkit, and media campaigns.
- Some partners expressed that the resources and materials in the shared Google drive are helpful and "a huge asset". Most partners expressed need for better organization and cataloging of the resources and files in the shared drive. Some also felt it would be helpful to have access to other partner deliverables as examples and/or for VTCP to regularly share resources or deliverables as examples for other partners.
- Community partners expressed that the many conference calls and webinars offered are not always helpful. Reasons noted include regular technical difficulties at the beginning of calls/webinars and that the format lends to partners disengaging and conducting other work during calls/webinars.
 - Some community partners feel webinars work well for visually engaging content, such as the smoke-free housing toolkit and sharing media campaigns.
 - Community partners suggested having topic-specific calls, such as focusing on a specific strategy and requesting partners share their experience and current activities related to the strategy. Consider structuring by stage of change for a particular topic/strategy, such



as what data to use when and for what audience to gain traction and engagement. This could also be an approach used for in-person meetings with partners.

- Community partners expressed that the format and sometimes the content of in-person partner meetings are not very helpful. Some partners find it frustrating that their in-person time with other partners is prescriptive and limited. Community partners would like meetings to be more engaging and interactive.
- Community partners expressed strong interest in more in-person, un-scripted time with other community partners for networking, sharing and learning, and strategizing on implementation steps for POS work.
 - Some partners suggested VTCP coordinate regional meetings with partners more frequently throughout the year rather than full-day meetings two times a year; or consider coordinating in-person meetings with a strategy focus and allowing partners to opt to attend per the strategy of focus.
 - Community partners noted that having time to breakout by topics or strategies and share with one another would be helpful. A conference/meeting held last winter in White River Junction was noted as a good example of format.
 - Community partners noted that having technical expertise/resources (e.g., planning commission expertise, Vermont legal counsel) available during in-person networking and strategy meetings would be helpful to guide or inform thinking and planning.

Counter Tools Resource

- Usefulness of the Counter Tools mapper and store audit data varies by partner. Some community partners have found Counter Tools resources easy to use and useful for their outreach and communication activities, others expressed need for more guidance on exploring the wealth of information available, analyzing it, and communicating it.
 - Some community partners expressed it would be difficult to do their POS outreach work without the mapper information and reports, especially the comparison component. Others found the value of the mapper to be limited for smaller communities or regions where partners might already have had a strong sense of the POS landscape; therefore, the mapper and store audit didn't lend to a depth of new information and understanding as it might have for larger communities with more tobacco retailers.



- Some community partners indicated need for functionality to tailor reports/maps to best represent and communicate issues in a community.
- Some community partners expressed they are challenged with how to best analyze and convey store audit data. There is need for VTCP to provide guidance on specific areas/topics/questions to explore in the store audit data, guidance on conducting such an analysis, and guidance on what data resonates best with specific audiences (e.g., retailers, local policymakers, etc.).
- Some community partners are still exploring the mapper and what reports would aid their POS outreach and communication efforts.
 - Community partners indicated it would be helpful to share ideas and uses across partners.
- Some community partners expressed interest in expanding the mapper to include alcohol, considering tobacco and alcohol are not separate issues.
- Some community partners expressed interest in a report/map related to signage or advertising to aid in addressing or informing on need for content neutral advertising.

Grant Structure & Requirements

- Community partners expressed feeling “overwhelmed” and “stretched thin” with the grant requirements they have relative to the funding support provided by the grant. For example, they noted there is a lot of training and reporting in addition to conducting the work. In general, the partners feel the scope of work in their grants is not well aligned with the funding support.
 - Community partners noted they would rather do fewer strategies and “go deeper”.
 - Community partner recommendations include more money to hire more staff, or ability to prioritize strategies within a grant based on community interest, energy, opportunity, and momentum.
- Community partners find it challenging to meet all of the grant requirements, partly due to the structure of the grant and its lack of flexibility. Partners would like more flexibility to work on strategies in which they find their communities to be receptive and engaged, or as opportunities present.



- Some community partners also expressed the POS strategy outcomes should not be so policy focused, considering policy may not always be a relevant or ideal solution. Instead, highlight the roll for and impact from partner outreach and communication efforts.
- Community partners expressed need for better communication, coordination and collaboration between the VTCP and ADAP, considering the connection between tobacco and substances, and the need for a holistic approach to addressing these issues across VDH grants to community partners.
- Community partners expressed interest and need for their involvement to advise the VTCP in their approach to grant-making, including the structure and deliverables of the grant. Partners would also like to be involved in VTCP processes to develop proposals and work plans for CDC.
- Some partners expressed need for timely grant payments from VTCP, which is important and necessary to supporting their operational and staff costs to conduct the work.
- Some partners reported need for streamlined and meaningful reporting.

Considerations & Recommendations

Following are a list of considerations and recommendations for the VTCP, based on findings from the focus groups. The list was reviewed with the VTCP to include their priorities and input, and to ensure feasibility and relevancy. An action plan to be implemented by the VTCP was developed based on the considerations and recommendations. The action plan defines strategies and activities for the VTCP to conduct in 2017 and beyond to support tobacco partners in their POS work.

- I. Provide direction and guidance on specific POS strategies or objectives from the state (e.g., VTCP, ADAP, VDH). There is value and credibility in having a state endorsed initiative, which can foster community buy-in more readily.
- II. Provide community partners with specific training, technical assistance and/or resources on:
 - Community organizing for policy change.
 - Vermont municipal structure, roles, and processes.
 - Vermont specific expertise to inform strategy and implementation planning.
 - Implementation steps for select POS strategies.



- Examples of tobacco POS strategies and policies in Vermont or other states.
 - POS tips sheet, including lessons learned by community partners, starting points, and community implications of POS strategies and policies.
 - Profiles of community partners, including information on their POS work and strengths.
- III. Organize Google shared drive by strategy. Include a table of contents. Include profiles of community partners. Include community partner deliverables.
- IV. Continue with site visits.
- V. Finalize and disseminate final training calendar.
- VI. Consider topic-specific / strategy-specific POS calls that include community partner report out on their experience, process, challenges, and current status. Consider asking a high-performing partner to initiate the discussion and allow partners to participate per their preference or need for information on the strategy or topic.
- VII. Consider opportunities to improve in-person meetings with community partners:
- Coordinate in-person POS strategy planning meeting for community partners. Include technical expertise at meeting, such as VAPDA, Vermont legal counsel, etc.
 - Conduct early in grant year; consider half-day or 10:00-2:00 to reduce time burden and consider lengthy travel time for some partners.
 - Keep agenda open; start with community partner report out and sharing, depending on how many are present and/or stage of change/implementation/focus, break into groups.
- VIII. Provide additional supports for use of Counter Tools, including:
- Develop example analyses using the store audit data, including the question or topic to explore, steps on how to perform the analysis, and how to use or communicate the findings.
 - Coordinate a community partner call or in-person meeting during which partners share how they've used Counter Tools, their successes, their challenges, and planning time for additional uses.
 - Consider adding alcohol retailers to Counter Tools.
 - Consider developing a map or report template to address content neutral advertising for partners to use and tailor with their community or regional data.



- IX. Coordinate with ADAP to develop a holistic framework and approach to guide community partners in their tobacco and substance prevention and control work at the local level.
- X. Coordinate a community partner advisory group to inform the VTCP's grant development process and other processes, such as development of community relevant sections of continuing applications and proposals to CDC.
- XI. Develop grants to be flexible in allowing community partners to conduct strategies that are responsive to community needs, interest, and/or opportunities.
 - Consider allowing partners to select from a menu of strategies and related deliverables that are most relevant for their community/region.
 - Coordinate with ADAP to establish grant structure and requirements that lend to a holistic approach in addressing health in all policies and facilitate addressing tobacco and substances in a comprehensive manner.
 - Streamline reporting requirements to include VTCP information priorities (consider how information in community partner reports is or will be used to assess level of priority).