

Georgia Connects with West Virginia to Learn About Its Tobacco Youth Advisory Council

The Georgia Department of Public Health's Tobacco Control Program used materials and lessons provided by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources to inform key stakeholders and direct youth tobacco control efforts in the state.

In October 2015, Anne-Marie Coleman, policy and program planning advisor at the Georgia Department of Public Health (GADPH), submitted a request to the Tobacco Control Network (TCN) seeking guidance on how to start a statewide tobacco youth advisory council and engage this council in state tobacco control efforts. TCN is a coalition of over 400 tobacco control program managers and staff from each state, territory, and Washington, D.C., and through the network, members are invited to solicit TCN for guidance, materials, and examples using the Help Your Peers request process.

Steps Taken:

- In October 2015, Coleman submitted a Help Your Peers request to the TCN, which was sent to the TCN mailing list to elicit feedback on her request to learn more about tobacco youth advisory councils active in other states.
- Christina Chill, program coordinator for the Division of Tobacco Prevention's Youth Prevention Program at the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (WVDHHR), responded to the request and offered to speak to GADPH over the phone about West Virginia's Teen Advisory Council (TAC).
- ASTHO organized a phone call between Coleman and Chill, and Chill shared the following details about TAC:
 - TAC is a teen-led leadership group comprised of approximately 4,500 middle school and high school youth engaged in tobacco control from all 55 counties in the state. The program has seen much success and strong participation since its formation in 2002.
 - The American Lung Association (ALA) of West Virginia manages TAC. WVDHHR funds the ALA directly for this purpose and the ALA has a full-time staff member dedicated to the youth program.
 - Annual large-scale teen summits are organized in two different locations within state. The summits are used for networking and administrative functions, such as holding TAC elections. Two high school students between 9th and 11th grade are elected for each of ten

- West Virginia's youth tobacco program engages 4,500 students and 20 elected leaders from all 55 counties in the state.
- These students have helped implement a state-wide campaign against smoking in schools, and have helped encouraged many local parks to go smoke-free.
- Georgia used the expertise and resources of West Virginia to begin forming its own youth council.

- different state regions, and communicate with each other and with ALA staff through a Facebook group.
- Each year there are two face-to-face meetings apart from the summits, as well as monthly conference calls and other in-person opportunities for participation. For example, the teens were invited to take part in a tobacco press conference at the state capitol.
 - Elected youth receive a \$200 stipend for fulfilling their leadership roles for a year. However, this policy might change because youth have seemed to be self-motivated without the stipend.
 - TAC was engaged in the implementation of a state-wide campaign against tobacco use in schools. TAC has also been involved in several successful local efforts to have local parks go smoke-free.

Results:

- GADPH utilized the resources and expertise provided by WVDHHR, and discussed forming a tobacco youth advisory council at a Georgia's Preventing Youth Initialization Workgroup meeting. This workgroup is composed of public, private, and non-profit health stakeholders, such as the Georgia Parent Teacher Association and the Georgia ALA.
- Details and documents that West Virginia shared were utilized in drafting the presentation shared with this workgroup, and also in drafting the bylaws and charter of the forthcoming youth council.

Lessons Learned:

- Sharing of expertise and resources through peer networks like TCN are an effective way to establish new tobacco control initiatives at the state level.
- It is important for health departments and partner organizations to have a close working relationship. Partnering with groups like ALA can be a successful model for managing ongoing youth initiatives, especially when strong relationships among organizations are present.
- Mobilizing youth all throughout the state in a highly organized manner (e.g., dividing the state into regions, holding elections, and communicating with youth leaders regularly in-person, over the phone, and through social media) is necessary to form a youth council that can effectively contribute to tobacco control initiatives at the local level.
- When properly engaged on a statewide basis, youth leaders are a valuable stakeholder group.

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State Success Story



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For more information on West Virginia's Teen Advisory Council:

- <http://www.dhr.wv.gov/wvdt/youth2/Pages/default.aspx>
- <https://www.razewv.com/members/teen-advisory-council>