TOBACCO CONTROL NETWORK

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TOBACCO CONTROL PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

Advancing the national commercial tobacco control agenda through evidence-based policy, systems, and environmental change (PSE) interventions is complex and requires collective work through partnerships. Most state commercial tobacco control programs partner with state or regional affiliates of national organizations through coalitions that aim to harness the diverse strengths of members to achieve mutual goals. Successful coalitions and partnerships require thoughtful, intentional work. Inherent in the concept of partnership are other words: alliance, cooperation, collaboration, communication, compromise, negotiation, sustainability, shared responsibility, and transparency.

The purpose of this document is to strengthen how state tobacco control programs and national organizations partner to advance commercial tobacco control interventions in the United States. This document discusses key guiding principles for enhancing collective work and maximizing relationships between state tobacco control programs and national organizations. It outlines essential action steps that state and national partners can take to work constructively together on behalf of Americans most vulnerable to the ravages of commercial tobacco use and tobacco-related marketing.

It is worth recognizing that state tobacco control programs determine their priorities based on guidance from their state health officials and also from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office on Smoking and Health (CDC/OSH). Similarly, the national organizations must be responsive to their boards of directors, funders, and volunteers. The "perfect storm" of priorities between states and national organizations does not always happen. It can be easy for the various partners to work exclusively through the lens of their respective organizations. While staff cannot dismiss agency/organizational priorities, it is crucial that everyone engage cooperatively to minimize damage to tobacco control, including to partner relationships. These relationships go beyond individuals and beyond what is happening at the local and state levels. Everyone must act as thoughtful and responsible stewards to preserve a strong tobacco control movement.

To minimize challenges resulting from different and shifting priorities, there are general standards from which everyone can operate to ensure that the best policies possible are advanced to protect and support the public. For example, it is important to discuss expectations for communication, transparency, and dialogue on shifting and differing priorities and how these differences will be managed within the coalition. There will be times, likely more often than is ideal, where people will need to agree to disagree, but ultimately there was a conversation.

> **NATIONAL ORGANIZATION PERSPECTIVE**
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> *"We're very fortunate to have strong coalition relationships in many states between state tobacco control programs and national advocacy organizations that provide important benefits to the tobacco control movement. They require trust, intentional communication, and respect among all parties to maintain. The principles in this document provide an important framework to help advance our collective work together."*
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> **Thomas Carr,** American Lung Association

While many national partners are referenced throughout the guide, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of collaborations between state and local community-based organizations in reaching populations tobacco control programs aim to serve. This guide can be applied and adapted to many levels of partnerships, including coalitions and local grassroots organizations, and is not limited to the definitions and list of partners discussed throughout the document. TCN strongly encourages fostering relationships with local and community organizations that support underserved populations, especially communities that face the greatest tobacco health disparities. As tobacco control programs continue to prioritize health equity in addressing tobacco use, we hope that this resource can be utilized to promote these partnerships.

Setting the Stage

The strongest partnerships are born from intentionality, respect, and trust. *Intentionality* requires that people be mindful of the coalition and its members in all aspects of planning and decision-making. This includes understanding the perspectives, needs, and realities of the other organizations in the coalition and intentionally being inclusive. *Respect* includes respect for individuals involved with the coalition, respect for the process, and respect for those most impacted by commercial tobacco. Keep in mind that respect must be earned and maintained through words and actions. Very little will erode commitment and trust more quickly than disrespectful behavior. Even if partners maintain transparency, compromise, and shared leadership, being disrespectful all but guarantees diminished good will and faith in future efforts.

> **NATIONAL ORGANIZATION PERSPECTIVE**
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> *"Communication, respectful behavior, and trust are critical when building and maintaining coalition and other collaborator relationships…. When trust has been built among the partners, it is easier to work through differences in priorities. All parties have knowledge and skills that each other can benefit from so that the enemy, the tobacco industry, is defeated."*
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> **Carter Steger**, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Trust, like respect, must be earned and maintained. Trust is central to success. Another way to think about trust is having faith in other coalition members. Obviously, there will be disagreements among partners related to tactics, strategy, and policy positions. Organization and agency staff are not free agents—they are bound by directives from their leadership. But being reasonably frank about how and why you make decisions goes a long way toward building and maintaining trust. In other words, having faith that coalition members aren't going to act unexpectedly helps when there are varying organizational perspectives. If partners trust each other, it may be possible to negotiate and reach a compromise. If compromise is not possible, partners can at least develop communication plans and strategies to help minimize the appearance of rifts within the coalition. Furthering tobacco control measures is challenging enough; coalitions must appear and actually be cohesive. Clearly, the work is not without challenges, but adhering to the core tenets of intentionality, respect, and trust can help to carry coalitions through the years. Coalitions need to be nurtured and be rooted in a frame that plans for the long game.

In the final analysis, *intentional communication* is the central theme of this document. This is essential to preventing inaccurate assumptions, to ensuring that various partners are working from the same talking points to not confuse decision-makers, and to talking through how to thwart tobacco industry tactics. The tobacco control field faces formidable challenges. Public interest waxes and wanes, the tobacco industry is able to significantly outspend public health, and the communities most impacted by tobacco use face numerous pressing issues, many of which—like food insecurity, safe and affordable housing, and child and afterschool care—command immediate and consistent attention. In the meantime, youth and young adults are attracted to new tobacco products. This is all to say that tobacco control must be thoughtful, intentional, and *collaborative* in addressing PSE. Collaboration does not mean perfect alignment or agreement. For the purposes and the spirit of this document, it means *working together* intentionally and thoughtfully. The next section will focus on optimizing the power of working together to support tobacco control functioning at its greatest potential.

Organizational Terms Used in This Document

- *State tobacco control programs:* The division dedicated to tobacco control, typically housed in the state department of health, that receives funding from CDC/OSH.
- *Tobacco Control Network (TCN):* An organization whose members include all of the state and territorial tobacco control programs and state-based Funders Alliance organizations. It is funded by CDC/OSH's Program Services Branch and receives coordinating support from staff at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO).
- *National organizations:* National organizations devoted to tobacco control, including the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS-CAN), Americans for Nonsmokers Rights (ANR), American Heart Association (AHA), American Lung Association (ALA), Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (TFK), and Tobacco 21.
- *Voluntary organizations or "voluntaries":* ACS-CAN, AHA, and ALA.
- *Partners:* A generic term used for individuals, nonprofit organizations, and/or government agencies working to advance tobacco control efforts.

Guiding Principles

The principles below are intended to serve as guideposts for supporting meaningful partnerships among those involved with tobacco control policy, systems, and environmental change in the states. There is not one roadmap for success. States and partners will need to determine how to best apply the principles based on their circumstances and realities.

Intentional Action: Steps You Can Take When Onboarding New Staff

Onboarding new staff is a perfect opportunity to prepare them for working intentionally and thoughtfully with partners. Staff turnover is an issue facing both state tobacco control programs and the national organizations. While building trust-based relationships among partners requires time, setting clear expectations about how new staff should approach, communicate with,

and work with partners is critical. Because some states/regions experience higher levels of turnover than others, the national organizations and TCN should monitor this and consider additional measures for these states/regions to ensure appropriate onboarding of new staff.

When Onboarding New Staff at State Tobacco Control Agencies Consider Implementing:

A "partners 101" overview that illustrates who the different partners are in the world of tobacco control and how the broader ecosystem works as a collective.

- This should include descriptions of the respective roles of the major tobacco control partners, including national organizations.

- The person who provides the overview can be the CDC/OSH project officer, someone within the state health agency, and/or someone from another state tobacco control program. Through TCN, new program managers should be paired with a peer mentor who can provide a version of the partners 101 overview. If the staff person is new to tobacco control, it may be helpful for them to hear the overview from a few different people to fully digest the information.

- The partners 101 overview should include information about how the national organizations are structured, including reporting lines. For example, it is important for state staff to understand that local/regional staff from the voluntaries work on multiple issues, not just tobacco control.

- Just as CDC/OSH sets priorities for state tobacco control programs, funders, boards of directors, and members set priorities for the national organizations. As such, local/regional staff are often being responsive to those priorities. Nonetheless, if there are differences in priorities that are leading to challenges within the states, it is important for state staff to communicate this with local/regional staff from the national organizations. These conversations can help state staff to understand the rationale behind national organization priorities. Although it should not be a regular default measure, if a situation gets to a critical stage, state staff can call the tobacco control staff at the national organization headquarters office to see if there are opportunities for compromise. This call would likely be from the state program manager or chronic disease director.

> **PROGRAM MANAGER PERSPECTIVE**
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> "*Relationships are built through time and good will... Staff from our [tobacco control program] team have participated, volunteered, and/or attended special community events sponsored by the voluntaries, and in turn, staff from the health voluntaries have provided support in trainings, press events, and/or community events that the department has held or sponsored. These events are not always specific to program area that we work in but do advance the public health good and our working relationships.*"
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> **Vicki Huntington,** Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Tobacco Prevention and Control Program

Protocols and procedures:

- New staff at state tobacco control programs should reach out to appropriate representatives from the national organizations, along with someone who already knows the national organization staff. Program managers need to be able to talk with and work with staff from the national organization, and asking new staff to initiate building the relationship is important.

When Onboarding New Staff at National Organizations, Consider Implementing:

A "partners 101" overview that illustrates who the different partners are in the world of tobacco control and how the broader eco-system works as a collective.

- This will include descriptions of the respective roles of the major tobacco control partners, including the national organizations. Recognizing that there are different reporting structures among the national organizations, having someone from a national office provide part of the overview to new state and regional staff within their organization will likely be helpful for discussing the bigger picture and how the work at the local, state, and national levels intersects.

- Additionally, the overview should discuss the realities facing state tobacco control programs, such as:
  - As a funder, CDC/OSH drives tobacco control priorities for the states. If a state does not have a comprehensive smokefree policy and/or strong pricing policies in place, then it is unlikely the state tobacco control program will make addressing tobacco flavors a PSE priority.
  - States provide evidence-based information to decision-makers, but do not work directly on legislative policy or ballot measures.

Protocols and procedures:

- New local/regional staff from national organizations need to reach out to the state tobacco control program manager. While the voluntary organizations work on multiple issues, tobacco control is very focused on PSE, making it important to have a strong working relationship with the state tobacco control program manager, not just the legislative liaison at the state health agency.

- When existing staff move on to new jobs, the exiting staff should facilitate a smooth

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PROGRAM MANAGER PERSPECTIVE

"A local community coalition perspective can be much different than that of a national organization, or even a state program. As stakeholders from each level (local, state, and national) are working on shared policy goals, it is helpful to have representation for each level on the policy leadership team. Not only does this help with understanding each of these perspectives, but it also gives coalition members a liaison to go to when they have concerns."

Miranda Spitznagle, Indiana State Department of Health Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Commission

transition. Ideally, this should include facilitating introductions to the various partners on behalf of incoming staff.

Optimizing Intentional Communication

Recognizing that intentional and thoughtful communication is central to successful partnerships, the following is a list of guideposts that can help to ensure that the state tobacco control programs and the national organizations maintain ongoing regular dialogue.

Establish a Charter

- One way to codify rules of engagement and roles beyond general verbal agreements is to develop a coalition charter. This should include descriptions of the respective roles of the major tobacco control partners, including the national organizations. A charter will document shared principles, determine how decisions are made, and establish roles and related functions. Charters can be particularly helpful during times of transition and when the coalition faces internal and/or external challenges. The exercise of establishing a charter will require coalition members to talk through the principles and how they will be implemented and actualized.

> **PROGRAM MANAGER PERSPECTIVE**
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> *"National advocacy organizations, while having their unique organizational priorities, are critical partners to advance common goals. For the coalition to be successful, it is important for the members to define and agree on what success looks like over the course of the next two or three years. There must be a clear unified strategy. Along with concrete goals and objectives, there must be consistent message and, more importantly, clarity and agreement on non-negotiables. We must be intentional when working together through tough times and good times."*
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> **Natalya Verscheure,** Former Program Manager, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Tobacco Control Program

- In addition to a charter, the coalition should establish other expectations for more fluid realities:
  - National organizations should check in with each other and the states as they start to consider their annual plans. The goal is not perfect synchronization, but to provide updates and, where possible, reach consensus on priorities. At minimum, knowing what the state and the national organizations plan for the year will be important when everyone starts to implement their respective plans, and it will help organizations avoid working on conflicting goals.
  - Partners need to come together from the beginning to define what success will look like. Using the example of pricing strategies, this definition should go beyond just ensuring that pricing strategies get passed; it should include agreement about minimum prices, expectations about how the new revenue should be allocated, discussion of non-negotiables, and so forth. For example, what if it is possible to increase taxes by $1.50, but no funds from the new tax will support tobacco control?

Acknowledge Where You Agree (Early and Often) and Where You Disagree

- Realistically, the different organizations will have different priorities over the years. Whether it is during the annual planning process or because priorities shift during the year, it is important that organizations surface areas where there will be limited or no priority alignment and share that information with the other partners. Transparency is critical to help partners avoid misspeaking.

- While there may be room for negotiation at times, there will sometimes be a need to agree to disagree and to determine how to manage these differences publicly. Acknowledging these differences and planning how to communicate the difference will help to minimize confusion among decision-makers and the public.

- Rather than assume a staff person from another organization is making decisions or operating a certain way, it is better to pick up the phone and thoughtfully talk through concerns.

Candor is Critical; Communicate Where Your Agency/Organization Will Draw the Line (and Don't Assume You Know Where Partners Stand)

- Even when partners agree on priorities, there will sometimes be differences in strategy or non-negotiables (e.g., if it is acceptable to exclude menthol in a flavor ban). To the extent possible, partners need to have conversations to determine if they have substantive differences. Clearly, compromise will be necessary, but the bottom-line question is whether an individual or an organization is unwilling or unable to compromise. There will be times when an organizational position will remain steadfast because of a funder or board of directors, but there are other times where ego is the barrier. It's crucial that everyone remains focused on the end goal and put their egos aside.

- At the national level, there is often a set of gold standards when it comes to certain types of policy. With smoke-free policy, a stakeholder such as the local chamber of commerce may push for exemptions for, say, cigar bars. Recognizing that it can take many years to rectify bad policy, there may be a reason (good or bad) that the state governor is willing to accept the exemption. A gold standard policy would not allow for any exemptions, and while consensus among the partners may be unlikely, it's important that partners at least discuss the exemption.

- In keeping with the theme of communication and transparency, there are times when an organization will state publicly that certain items are non-negotiable, but internally recognize that compromise will be necessary. Sharing this with partners is important, as it would be a shame for a partner to not know that there *is* room for compromise. In this case, a lack of transparency will result in muddled messages to decision-makers and the public.

Get Specific About Your Message Frame

- Moving PSE forward in tobacco control is an uphill battle. Typically, there is interference from the tobacco industry, some decision-makers, and other advocates. The environment is often fluid, with accurate and inaccurate information floating about. It is important to ensure consistent messages among the partners and/or to be clear why different organizations have varying positions. Partners do not want to be in a position where everyone is working toward the same goal, but they are putting forth inconsistent messages. While someone in tobacco control is able to sift through the nuances, someone who is an ally but not steeped in the issue might conflate information and disrupt the environment.

Build Value for Meeting Together; Plan Your Meeting in Advance to Get the Results You Want

- To build and maintain a trusting and productive relationship among partners, you must institute regular communication channels. It can be easy to plan to reach out to partners but inevitably get caught up in day-to-day activities, with weeks going by without checking in. Getting regular calls on the books can facilitate consistent communication. You can always cancel calls if there is no need to meet, but it is harder to remember to talk if you don't have regular calls scheduled and difficult to get a last-minute call on the calendar.

- Regular calls with consistent agenda items help to set expectations about communication and collaboration. While being accountable to partners does not inherently lead to consensus, it should facilitate coordination. The partners in any given state will need to determine who to include on the calls. It's crucial to make sure the various partners are kept in the loop while ensuring the calls are small enough to include strategic discussion. Depending on the level of activity in any given quarter and the frequency of calls, you may need one set of calls simply for updates and another set for planning.

- The frequency of the calls should vary depending on what is happening in the state. It is even more important to hold regular check-in calls during the legislative season even though it's an especially busy time. A weekly call will help to ensure that people are on the same page and that they are using the same messages.

- There are often nuances to any given situation. Email is not an effective vehicle for conveying subtleties or backstories. When in doubt, staff should pick up the phone and call partners to promote clear communication.

> ### PROGRAM MANAGER PERSPECTIVE
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> "*Nuance and context can get lost when we aren't speaking directly with each other. I have found that sometimes the most effective way to work through opportunities or concerns with partners is to pick up the phone and have a discussion. These conversations give us a chance to connect and talk through issues in real time rather than emailing over the course of a few days.*"
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> **Braden Ainsworth,** Former Program Manager, Utah Department of Health and Human Services, Tobacco Prevention and Control Program

Leverage Structures and Opportunities to Enhance Collaboration

Communication and coordination among partners at the state level (and, often, at the regional/national level) is important. Ultimately, the system that undergirds tobacco control must be strong enough to withstand challenges from outside and within.

TCN Regional Calls

- TCN divides the states and territories into four regions. Each region holds calls at least quarterly, if not monthly or bi-monthly, where program managers and other tobacco control program leadership from the states/territories share updates and discuss pressing issues. The national organizations can ask to join regional calls as guests. The national organizations may want to ask if they can join regional calls once or twice a year to share information and engage in discussion with states in each region. To support efficient dialogue, the national organizations should be prepared to share coordinated updates, even if there are varying priorities. The same holds true for the states.

Tobacco Control Meetings, Conferences, and Other Travel

- Many people in tobacco control travel to meetings and attend conferences. When possible, reach out in advance to partner colleagues who are also attending. If you are traveling to a location where your colleagues work, set up a time to meet. Phone calls and email are a core part of communication, but in-person gatherings provide a unique opportunity to facilitate thoughtful conversation.

Conclusions

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to working with partners. Everyone needs to be reasonably flexible in how they approach the work and, when in doubt, should pick up the phone and call other partners for clarity. Consensus is not possible without conversation, and consensus will not happen all the time. However, the most dangerous situation is when there is no dialogue at all. The bottom-line goal in tobacco control is to prevent tobacco-related morbidity and mortality, and to do so through a health equity lens. One of the greatest threats to tobacco control is misinformation and competing goals, not just from the tobacco industry, but also from unintentional missteps within tobacco control. Minimizing those missteps is one of the few things partners can do to advance a strong tobacco control agenda.

Additionally, staff cannot take disagreements of substance personally. The various partners are working under difficult circumstances, and tobacco control is often not a priority for the public or decision-makers. The work can be frustrating, and working in a complex environment can exacerbate the frustration. Partners operate based on their individual organizational priorities. Being clear about why you are making certain decisions and keeping conversations focused on facts rather than personal feelings is critical. Collectively, tobacco control is working to advance a strong PSE agenda. Increasing efficiencies and effectiveness will only serve to expand capacity for stronger tobacco control measures for the public.