

Building School & Tobacco-Free Coalition Partnerships

Tips for Schools

A school's primary mission is educating children, but children cannot learn effectively without the foundations of health and safety. One major issue among youth today is the pressure of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. While schools can do much on their own to address these issues, a community-wide approach is much more effective. Through the tobacco settlement dollars that shaped the Wisconsin Tobacco Control Board, all Wisconsin communities now have local tobacco-free coalitions in place that address comprehensive tobacco control—prevention and education, cessation, and advocacy. Working in conjunction with these tobacco-free coalitions can provide support for students, school staff and communities by facilitating communication and the coordination of programs and resources. In order for effective tobacco prevention programs to take place, communities and schools need to develop successful relationships. Consider the following when working with your local tobacco-free coalition.

ADVANTAGES TO BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP:

- Regular communication with the tobacco-free coalition's contacts will keep you updated on current tobacco control initiatives that are being targeted in the community.
- A tobacco-free coalition can provide a venue for presenting information and data on tobacco to school, community, and youth health and safety advocates.
- A tobacco-free coalition can be a financial resource to support a school's tobacco control program.
- With a broad range of community expertise represented on the local tobacco-free coalition, the coalition can offer guidance and resources related to school tobacco programs and policies.
- Ongoing relationships and collaborative partnering can successfully tackle many facets of tobacco control that influence the community.

(More)

- Coalitions offer an opportunity for youth to provide leadership, knowledge, and skills as well as help meet youth service learning requirements.
- Coalitions provide an organizational framework for reducing duplication of activities and efforts within the community.

CONNECTING WITH YOUR TOBACCO-FREE COALITION:

- Make a connection! Most community tobacco-free coalitions meet on a monthly basis and welcome input from school districts and youth. If you do not know whom to contact, start with your local public health department. They often provide staff and administrative support to local tobacco-free coalitions.
- Ask for background information on the coalition's membership, goals, objectives and previous activities. Some coalitions are just becoming active while others are very seasoned. Look for a shared mission and common ground and use that as your starting point.
- Even if you cannot make every tobacco-free coalition meeting, it is helpful to have on-going communication with the coalition contact. Ask to be added to the coalition's mailing list. Your on-going involvement and input can help shape the focus of the community efforts.
- Let your coalition know what your needs and issues are—whether it is after school meeting times or a program resource. For example, many coalitions have the financial resources to purchase and provide tobacco-free school policy signs for you. Let them know you are interested.
- Recruit two school representatives to alternately serve on the coalition. This lessens the time commitment for any one individual, but ensures the school's voice will be heard.