

# Assessing the Political Environment Checklist

During the **first phase of your campaign** you will need to make a decision about in which city or county you will conduct your public health campaign. Before making the final decision, apply this checklist to assess the political environment. Because you may discover things in your research which suggest that you make a different choice, this is done before you make your final decision.

In addition, the assessment will provide you the information you need to develop an accurate and successful strategy in phase two of your campaign. This data will dramatically increase your self-confidence and sophistication in dealing with the political world during your later phases of the campaign. Ultimately it will significantly increase your chances for winning your public health campaign.

A thorough assessment will require several people taking responsibility and spending the time necessary



to collect the information. The assessment process is a good opportunity to involve active members of the coalition in preparation for determining the campaign's strategy and tactics during the strategy chart. Some research can be done online, but much of it will require meeting and discussing this with influential community members.

The political environment and political will of a community are likely to be different depending on which policy area you are working on. Therefore, the first two sections of this assessment checklist are focused on the general political environment, while the third section is specific for your policy issue.

## PART 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

### A. Collect background data on target city/county.

- What is the population? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the demographic profile of the residents? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the profile of the different districts and neighborhoods in the community? \_\_\_\_\_
- What local media outlets serve the community? \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the most powerful organizations/associations in the community? \_\_\_\_\_ (business groups, unions, neighborhood associations, etc.)
- What is the current hot topic being debated in the community? \_\_\_\_\_

### B. How does the local government work?

- Are elections for council/board by district or at large? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is the Mayor elected or rotating? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is the City Attorney on contract or a city employee? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the role/power of City Manager/County Executive Officer? Are they a leader or a follower? \_\_\_\_\_
- What council committees or commissions have responsibility for our issue? \_\_\_\_\_
- How does a proposal become an ordinance? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is law enforcement handled by city police or county sheriffs? \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the terms of elected officials? \_\_\_\_\_
- When is the next local election (including primaries) for elected officials and election dates? \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the election results for the last two election cycles? \_\_\_\_\_
- How has the community voted in state and national issues in the last two election cycles? \_\_\_\_\_

**C. What do you know about your local decision makers?**

- What are the names of the key decision makers, both elected and appointed? \_\_\_\_\_
- Complete the [Elected Official Profile](#) form for all key local decision makers (council members, county supervisors, as well as members of key commissions or committees).
- What are the dynamics between the elected officials? Any alliances or divisions? Is anyone the natural leader? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which elected officials sit on committees or commissions that may consider our issue.? \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 2: INFORMATION ON TOBACCO: PUBLIC HEALTH AND POLITICS**

**D. Gather the available local public health and tobacco use data.**

*You need data specific for the jurisdiction in which you are working.*

- What is the current adult smoking rate in your community? What is the cost of smoking for your county? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the youth smoking prevalence in school districts in the target community? \_\_\_\_\_  
(This information can be found by school district from the California [Healthy Kids Survey](#))
- What are the top public health challenges facing the target community? \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the asthma rates for target community? \_\_\_\_\_

**E. What local tobacco control policies and resolutions have been discussed, voted on and adopted/defeated?**

- What tobacco control policies are currently in the city or county code? What are the specific requirements of the ordinance(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
- How has the city council or board voted regarding local tobacco control policies in the last five years (e.g. smoke free parks and beaches, tobacco retail licensing, voluntary resolutions)? \_\_\_\_\_
- What were the votes of each council/board member? What were reasons given for the votes? \_\_\_\_\_
- Have any city council or board members publicly voiced support for tobacco control issues in the past three years? Who? Which issue? \_\_\_\_\_

**F. How strong are pro-tobacco influences in your community and government?**

- Has the city or county taken an official position on tobacco-related state or federal legislation and/or state initiatives (e.g. Prop 86) in the last five years? \_\_\_\_\_
- Have any city council or board members accepted [contributions from the tobacco industry](#) in the last five years? How much? \_\_\_\_\_
- Has the Chamber(s) of Commerce taken a stance on tobacco-related state or federal legislation and/or state initiatives (e.g. Prop 86)? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are any city council/board members active in a Chamber or married to a Chamber leader? \_\_\_\_\_





**G. How strong are pro-health influences in your community?**

- How have voters in the target community voted on tobacco-related initiatives in the past, (e.g. Prop 99, No on 188, Prop 10, Prop 86)? \_\_\_\_\_
- How much community and political influence do local health, youth or voluntary associations (American Lung Association in California, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club) have in your city/county? Who is on the boards of these organizations, and do they have connections with decision makers? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do any of the voluntary health associations (Heart, Lung, Cancer) have active advocacy volunteers living in the target community? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are youth organizations like CYAN, Friday Night Live, or local youth coalitions involved in tobacco control activities in the community? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which community based organizations are likely to be allies of a campaign to pass tobacco control policies? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where are these organizations located in the city/county, e.g. which council or supervisorial district? \_\_\_\_\_  
(If council/board members are not elected by district, locate organizational allies with reference to where the elected officials live in the community.)

**PART 3: POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR ISSUE**

**H. What is current public opinion about the tobacco problem you are addressing and the appropriate policy solution?**

- How do community members feel about the problem and the solution? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Conduct surveys on the street to assess this, and review polling data from the Center's website and other sources.)
- How do community leaders feel about this issue? \_\_\_\_\_ (Conduct interviews with key opinion leaders.)
- What is the nearest city or county that has addressed the problem and how did they do it? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are there any cities or counties that have addressed your public health issue, but are facing problems with their adopted policies? \_\_\_\_\_

**I. How will the pro-tobacco and pro-health sides in your community and government feel about your proposed policy change? And how strong are they?**

- Which organizations/individuals may oppose the proposed policy? Why? What will the new policy cost them? \_\_\_\_\_
- How powerful are the opposing organizations/individuals? Who do they know and influence? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which organizations/individuals may support the proposed policy? Why? Who do they know and influence? \_\_\_\_\_

**J. Assess the support and environment for your specific policy issue.**

*Below are suggestions for thinking about your specific policy issue.*

Policy Issue	Assess the Political Environment
<p><b>Tobacco retailer licensing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How many tobacco retailers in your area are licensed with the Board of Equalization? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some recent rates of tobacco Youth Purchase Surveys (YPS) conducted in the target city and in bordering communities? _____ (CA STAKE Act Program, Food and Drug Branch, CA Dept. of Public Health)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are any tobacco retailers active in the Chamber of Commerce? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does the city/county have a commission or committee that this ordinance would need to go through on the way to the city council/board of supervisors, such as a Licensing Commission or Safety Committee? Is there a city or countywide Youth Board that could vote on this ordinance? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does the city collect a business license fee? _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Smokefree beaches and parks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are the results from recent park or beach cleanups? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How many parks/beaches are there and where are they located? Where are these parks located with respect to council/Board districts? If the city doesn't have districts, then which parks and beaches are close to where each of the elected officials live? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What events are held at the parks? Which organized groups use the parks and might be an ally? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does the community have a Parks &amp; Recreation Commission (an appointed board versus just staff) that this ordinance will have to go through before coming before the city council/board of supervisors? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does your city have a history of fires in parks, beach piers or elsewhere which originated with discarded cigarettes? _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Smokefree outdoor areas</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What specific areas are being considered for smoke free restrictions, e.g. entryways, outdoor dining, parks, beaches, service lines, outdoor work areas, sidewalks, etc.? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are the butt collection results from recent cleanups of these areas? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is there a known area in your community that would be impacted? An "old town" or "downtown?" Are the businesses in this area organized? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What events are held in the outdoor areas of the community? Which organized groups use the outdoor areas and might be an ally? Opponent? _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Smokefree housing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What is the percentage of renters in population? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What is the percentage of condos in the community? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is there a rent control or rent stabilization ordinance? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are there strong affordable housing advocates groups? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What apartment owner/manager associations are in the community? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have records of people who have called to complain about drifting tobacco smoke? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have apartment managers who are voluntarily smokefree in your community? _____ What about in nearby communities? _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Smokefree outdoor dining</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How many restaurants are voluntarily smokefree on their dining patios? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How many restaurants have outdoor seating? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are any restaurateurs active in the Chamber of Commerce? _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Which major restaurants hold charity events on their patios which might be used to ask for an exemption? _____</li> </ul>

Policy Issue	Assess the Political Environment
<b>Tobacco free pharmacies</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Which pharmacies are located in your city? Which are corporate and which are independent? Who owns the pharmacies or who is the manager? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Have any pharmacies in your community already stopped selling tobacco products voluntarily? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Are any pharmacy owners active in the Chamber of Commerce? _____
<b>MSA money</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Where does the MSA money currently go in your county? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> What percentage if any goes to public health? Tobacco control? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> How often does the county take up MSA allocation questions? _____
<b>Sampling</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> What types of rodeos, fairs, festivals does the community have? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Are any of them tobacco free? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Are youth the primary audience for any of the events? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Do any bars in the community host tobacco industry sponsored events? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> What types of sampling of tobacco products occur at these events (free samples, coupons, low cost samples)? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Are the owners of any of these bars or the organizers of any of these events active in the Chamber of Commerce or local government? _____
<b>Point of Purchase</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Is there a tobacco retailer licensing ordinance in your community? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any local cessation programs in your community? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> What is the density of tobacco industry signs in tobacco outlets in your community? Is this any higher near schools or in certain communities? _____
<b>Cigarette Litter Fee</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Are there any community litter clean up programs? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> What are the butt collection results from recent cleanups of outdoor areas? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Are any tobacco retailers active in the Chamber of Commerce? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Does your city have a history of fires in parks, beach piers or elsewhere which originated with discarded cigarettes? _____

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