



Instrument ESSENTIALS for the Policymaking Environment

TOPIC

The aim of evaluating the policymaking environment is to assess the political atmosphere of your target jurisdiction. Tobacco control projects work to address this by conducting a policy record activity at the beginning of each policy objective (and revisit it for updates as policy efforts begin in earnest) and then leveraging public opinion or observation evidence to persuade policymakers to take desired action.

The starting point of every policy objective should be to research what relevant policies have already been passed in the target jurisdiction and neighboring areas. Then get a good understanding of who the policymakers are, their interests and connections, and past voting records and indications of what motivates them. Try to identify their current priorities, who their constituents are, who they listen to the most. This will help you figure out where to focus your educational outreach and power leveraging efforts—which typically means to zero in on those decisionmakers who are undecided on the policy issue.

TERMINOLOGY

- × Biographies: Available information about the background of the policymaker. This can include personal/professional websites or social media profiles (Facebook, LinkedIn), Council or Board of Supervisors voting records, educational backgrounds, affiliations with community organizations or interest groups, etc.
- × Meeting minutes: Usually the discussion, votes and actions taken by the City Council or Board of Supervisor meetings are summarized in meeting minutes (or recorded as video) and available to the public on the jurisdiction's website.
- × Municipal code: The archive of local laws—publicly available—once adopted. Checking the municipal code or jurisdiction's website before launching your campaign (and frequently for updates) is the fastest way to determine whether there are any existing laws addressing the issue.
- × Policymaker/decisionmaker: For legislated policies, these are members of the City Council or for unincorporated areas, the Board of Supervisors.

USES OF EVALUATION

Policy Records are used to:

- a. Investigate potential linkages that can be made to the policymaker's interests through affiliated organizations, topics, personal history
- b. Look for opportunities to engage the policymaker on your topics of interest, correct misconceptions, identify influencers

- c. Monitor votes/conversation at past council/supervisor meetings around topics of interest. Determine positionality and momentum on topics from past voting record, comments made
- d. Inform the timing, content, and tactics of the project's education, outreach and policy efforts

Measures

- Affiliations or connections
- Stated positions or votes on issues
- Past comments

Tracking Measures can include

- Meeting observation notes
- Summary/table of relevant meeting minutes and/or voting records
- Summary of useful information from policymaker biographies
- Policy tracking forms that identify existing policies and their provisions and/or signed policies

Public Opinion Surveys are used to:

- a. Demonstrate public support on the issue and leverage that into policymaker action/votes
- b. Inform the timing, content, and tactics of the project's education and outreach activities

Measures

- Priorities (ranked)
- Familiarity/understanding of the issue
- Elements of the topic/policy that appeal/concern (preferences)
- Support or opposition to issues
- Lived experience related to issues
- Willingness to work on campaign

Key informant interviews with policymakers or their staff are used to:

- a. Explore policymaker's understanding of the topic, positionality, points of appeal/concern, favored policy options/language
- b. Anticipate and counter opposition, minimize surprises as the campaign moves forward
- c. Inform project strategies and timing

Measures

- Council/Supervisor priorities/pressing concerns
- Familiarity/understanding of the issue
- Elements of the topic/policy that appeal/concern
- Amenable policy elements/language
- Likelihood of policy support
- Likely supporters/opponents on council/board