

Facilitating Tobacco Retail Licensing to Prohibit the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products in the North Coast

Final Evaluation Report 2019-2024

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AIM AND OUTCOME

Tobacco-Free North Coast (TFNC) was a Regional Rural Initiative funded by the California Tobacco Control Program (CTCP) from 2019 through 2024. TFNC set the following Objective to reduce and prevent tobacco-related harm in North Coast communities.

By March 31, 2024, two jurisdictions in the North Coast Region (such as but not limited to Crescent City, Del Norte County unincorporated, Arcata or Rio Dell) will adopt a tobacco retail licensing (TRL) policy that prohibits sales of flavored tobacco products including electronic smoking products, and requires an annual licensing fee that will support local enforcement.

(This is a CTCP Primary Objective addressing the Center of Excellence Primary Indicator 3.2.9, Menthol and Other Flavored Tobacco Products.)

TFNC exceeded the Objective with six jurisdictions adopting a TRL: Mendocino County (11/2020, updated 4/2022), Del Norte County (9/2022), City of Willits, (updated 11/2022), Humboldt County (7/2023), City of Ukiah (9/2023), and Crescent City (10/2023).

TFNC contributed to these accomplishments by providing direct technical assistance to LLAs throughout North Coast, meeting with policy-makers and presenting to city councils, creating and sustaining a peer-led Regional Network providing meaningful problem-solving and support for policy change, and using data from young adult purchase surveys (YATPS) and policy record monitoring to inform policy change.

BACKGROUND

The North Coast Region is characterized by rugged coastal mountains and small inland valleys comprising 9,336 square miles of the most northwest portion of California. The four-county region includes (from north to south) Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. It is a rural and frontier geography (U.S. Census 2010), with a population density of 36 persons per square mile on average compared to 239 persons for California as a whole. The population is mostly White (84%) and Hispanic/Latino (19%). The counties include a higher proportion of American Indian peoples compared to California, with an average of 6 percent American Indian/Alaska Native. There is lower participation in the civilian workforce than statewide (63%), with a regional participation rate of 53%. One in five (20%) people are living in poverty, a rate 6% higher than statewide.

The California Department of Public Health-Tobacco Control Program's latest report (California Tobacco Facts and Figures, 2018) highlights several geographic and demographic characteristics of the North Coast Region that represent important tobacco-related disparities. For example, rural, low-income, and particularly white low-income areas have some of the highest smoking rates and contribute to a large portion of the burden of smoking overall. In addition, a relatively high proportion of American Indians in the region contributes to the overall smoking rates, with the highest smoking rates of any population group. The result is that the four-county North Coast Region has some of the state's highest smoking rates by county.

TFNC received a 5-year CTCP grant to increase community capacity and involvement to reduce the burden of tobacco use in the region by assisting North Coast jurisdiction to adopt Tobacco Retail Licensing (TRL) policies prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products. Mendocino County had an existing TRL policy. However, other counties and cities in the North Coast Region did not when the project began. Del Norte County had a strong policy to limit advertising on tobacco and alcohol retail outlets, but did not have a TRL policy that included a fee to support enforcement. Mendocino County was working to strengthen existing TRL policies and Lake County was working toward the adoption of a new TRL policy. Both Humboldt and Del Norte Counties were working to reduce tobacco retail density via a tobacco-free pharmacy policy. According to the most recent Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community Survey (2016) in Humboldt County, 23% of tobacco retailers were near schools, with 67% of these stores displaying unhealthy advertising, an amount higher than stores elsewhere and increasing since previous surveys (2013). There was an alarming increase in the availability of flavored electronic smoking devices and products. In Del Norte County, despite significant reductions in storefront advertising due to their local policy in Crescent City, there was no fee imposed for local enforcement. Local observations indicated a gradual increase in storefront advertising since 2018. Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community Survey data also showed an alarming increase in the availability of electronic cigarettes and other flavored/menthol cigarette and non-cigarette tobacco products that are especially appealing to kids. TFNC provided leadership and support to Local Lead Agencies (LLAs), tobacco prevention advocates, Cities and Counties to develop and implement TRL, including policies that limit locations of tobacco retailers near schools, limit the amount of advertising on tobacco retail storefronts and properties, limit sales of flavored (including menthol) tobacco products. TRL policies were designed to include license fees that are sufficient to support local enforcement.

EVALUATION METHODS AND DESIGN

The evaluation plan examined the process toward policy change and assessed the outcome of policy adoption. A non-experimental design without a control or comparison community was used to examine how TFNC progressed toward its Objective during the 5-year project. This type of design limits interpretations about TFNC's impact to how it contributed to changes but does not necessarily cause changes. Quantitative and qualitative measures helped TFNC understand its contributions across intervention activities over time. These measures are summarized in Table 1. The effectiveness of the policy adoption efforts were determined through content analyses of policy records consisting of public policy meeting observations and official policy records such as agendas, meeting minutes, staff presentations, and policies enacted. The YATPS was conducted to document illegal sales rates in target jurisdictions. Public intercept surveys with community members offered some guidance on public policy support. However, COVID-19 social distancing restrictions limited the usefulness of public surveying. Media Activity Record and Media Tracking Form content analyses helped to understand coverage, support and opposition for TRL policies and the need for further community education. After the policy adoption passage/failure, key informants were conducted to determine the factors that led to the successful/unsuccessful adoption of the outdoor tobacco-free policy, lessons learned, and

recommendations for future activities related to the Objective. Evaluation results and findings were used by TFNC staff, shared with LLAs and their stakeholders (e.g., coalition members), policymakers, and the broader public to raise awareness and support for TRL policies prohibiting flavored tobacco product sales.

Table 1. Key Outcome and Process Evaluation Activities

Evaluation Activity	Purpose	Sample	Instrument Source	Analysis Method	Timing/Waves
Process					
3-E-8 Education/ Participant Survey	Assess changes in knowledge, confidence/preparation, and intent to engage in activities to promote TRL policies. Capture information about training feedback and anticipated needs for additional advocacy support after the training.	20 training participants	Evaluation Consultant; TCEC	Descriptive Statistics	Year 1 to Year 2 1 Wave
3-E-3 Key Informant Interview	Interviews will determine factors that led to successful or failed policy adoption, lessons learned, and recommendations.	6-10 post-city staff from targeted jurisdictions	Evaluation Consultant; TCEC	Content Analysis	Year 3 to Year 5 1 Wave
3-E-4 Media Activity Record	Collect, quantify, and analyze relevant paid media to determine coverage, support, and opposition for the subject and the need for further community education.	Census of relevant paid media	Evaluation Consultant; TCEC	Content Analysis	Year 1 to Year 5 1 Wave
3-E-5 Policy Record	Document policymaker support/opposition, key issues raised by policymakers and staff, and other insights from public policy meetings	Official policy records	Evaluation Consultant; TCEC	Content Analysis	Year 1 to Year 5 1 Wave
3-E-1 Public Intercept Survey / Opinion Poll	Assess the attitudes of community members towards the presence of flavored tobacco products in the stores they shop, support for TRL policy, whether they have purchased flavored tobacco, and willingness to continue shopping at stores that did not sell flavored tobacco.	70-100 residents of each targeted jurisdiction	Evaluation Consultant; TCEC	Descriptive Statistics, Content Analysis	Year 1 Year 3 2 Waves
3-E-7 Tobacco Purchase Survey	Conduct onsite inspections to assess illegal sales to young adults and compliance with other local and state retail laws.	25 tobacco retailers	Evaluation Consultant, TCEC	Descriptive Statistics	Year 1 1 Wave

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

The 5-year project integrated intervention and evaluation activities to understand and improve its progress. Table 2 illustrates this journey with some key milestones and accomplishments.

Table 2. Timeline of Key Intervention and Evaluation Activities

YEAR 1 – 19/20	YEAR 2 – 20/21	YEAR 3 – 21/22	YEAR 4 – 22/23	YEAR 5 – 23/24
<p>Established collaboration among North Coast Partners.</p> <p><i>Flavored tobacco restriction passed by Food & Drug Administration (FDA), Feb.2020</i></p> <p><i>COVID-19 pandemic begins; State adopts "sheltering in place" restrictions (Mar.2020). Prevention of group gatherings/meetings, and transition to virtual meetings.</i></p>	<p>Conducted YATPS in Mendocino showing a 38% illegal sales rate.</p> <p>Provided technical assistance to Mendocino LLA and coalition on TRL policy.</p> <p>Mendocino County adopts first TRL policy (Nov 2020)</p> <p><i>COVID-19 pandemic disruptions, shelter-in-place restrictions</i></p> <p><i>Continued closure of group meetings including city and county meetings and gatherings, transition to virtual meetings.</i></p> <p>Began monthly regional TRL workgroup meetings via Zoom.</p> <p>Organized letters from the community to remove a Lucky Strike ad from the North Coast Journal.</p> <p>Virtual presentation to UIHS CORE group of elders about flavored tobacco, vaping, and COVID-19.</p> <p>Provided technical assistance and support materials to Crescent City on TRL policy.</p>	<p>Humboldt Supervisor responds to RISE Policy Platform.</p> <p>Collaborated with Humboldt County to initiate TRL policy development.</p> <p>Reviewed TRL flavor language with Mendocino Coalition.</p> <p>First TRL presentation to Willits City Council.</p> <p>Conducted YATPS in Humboldt Unincorporated showing a 54% illegal sales rate.</p> <p><i>COVID-19 pandemic disruptions continue but state removes shelter-in-place restrictions in many communities.</i></p> <p>First presentation to Del Norte County BOS regarding TRL.</p> <p>Virtual presentation to UIHS CORE group about flavors and policy updates.</p> <p>Met with Arcata City Manager about TRL planning.</p> <p>Conducted joint workshops on TRL and MUH policy options with Del Norte County BOS and Crescent City Council.</p>	<p>Developed and shared "Questions and Concerns about TRL" document with several local policymakers and statewide LLAs.</p> <p>Del Norte County adopts TRL.</p> <p>Collaborated with Mendocino Coalition to move TRL forward in Willits City.</p> <p>Collaborated with Humboldt Public Health to provide TRL policy development updates to BOS.</p> <p>Reviewed model TRL policy to continue discussions with Del Norte County BOS.</p> <p>Drafted the Lake County Policy Platform and released by NorCal4Health.</p> <p>Collaborated with Mendocino Coalition to move TRL forward in Ukiah City.</p> <p>Conducted YATPS in Arcata showing a 47% illegal sales rate.</p> <p><i>SB793 passes - statewide ban on flavored tobacco products (Dec.2022)</i></p> <p>Willits City adopts TRL based on previously adopted County policy.</p> <p>Presentation to Law enforcement Chiefs Association Humboldt on Flavors and TRL.</p>	<p>Shared an information packet with the Arcata City Manager who indicated to move TRL forward.</p> <p>Humboldt County adopts TRL.</p> <p>The City of Ukiah adopts TRL.</p> <p>Crescent City adopts TRL.</p> <p>Presented to Sunrise Rotary in Fortuna on TRL.</p>

How Well Did TFNC Reach the Target Objective?

TFNC exceeded the target Objective with six jurisdictions adopting a TRL between 2022 and 2023: Mendocino County (2020, updated in 2022), Del Norte County (2022), City of Willits, (2022), Humboldt County (2023), City of Ukiah (2023), and Crescent City (2023). A seventh jurisdiction, the City of Arcata, agreed to move forward with a reading of the TRL in Spring 2024.

The first TRL policy, adopted by Mendocino County in November 2020, was an important tipping point that motivated other jurisdictions in the region to follow that county's lead. Mendocino's strong language controlling all flavored tobacco products became a model for subsequent jurisdictions.

Multiple policies were introduced and adopted between 2022 and 2023 (see Table 2). The time between the start of a policy campaign and policy adoption varied across communities. For example, in the City of Ukiah, at least one year was required for the policy to move forward from the City Manager. The County of Humboldt took about 1.5 years to develop an implementation plan before the policy was ready to bring to the Board of Supervisors. Crescent City required several hearings and public workshops to adopt a policy that finally met its needs. For unknown reasons, Lake County's policy process stalled over a year after the Board of Supervisors and the City of Clearlake indicated they were ready to adopt a policy in December 2022. Even after a policy is adopted, decision-makers may require modifications that community advocates must attend to ensure strong protections against tobacco harm. For example, Del Norte County's TRL originally included language specific to flavored tobacco products but was later removed. Crescent City's original policy was modified to drop a fee to cover administration and enforcement. The important accomplishment is adopting an initial TRL policy that can be improved. This requires community advocacy that is flexible and unwavering. Policy development and adoption require ongoing work over unanticipated barriers over unknown periods of time.

What Contributed to TFNC's Progress

Fostering a Community of TRL Champions Across North Coast

Within the 5-year project period, TFNC established a Regional Network of LLAs, regional and statewide leaders, and local advocates committed to adopting TRL policies. The strength of relationships, including informal meetings across stakeholders, suggested that this was more than a Network with planned meetings and tasks. Members of the TFNC Regional Network would call on and support each other with and without TFNC staff. LLA staff self-initiated campaign activities and helped each other outside of scheduled Network meetings, such as through ad hoc Zoom meetings. The real sign of community was that Network members committed to continuing the TFNC Regional Network beyond completing and funding the CTCP scope of work.

TFNC developed and maintained a quarterly Tobacco-Free North Coast Region meeting network and leveraged regional collaboration. The creation and growth of the Regional Network resulted from substantial local investments in time and technical assistance by the TFNC team, particularly the Project Director and Community Engagement Coordinator. They attended at least 117 local coalition

meetings throughout North Coast communities during the project period (over double the original projections). Due to COVID-19, local tobacco coalitions began meeting online. This enabled TFNC to attend all coalition meetings in the region regularly. TFNC staff served as trainers, active problem-solvers, co-developers of materials, and conversations with elected representatives at local meetings. TFNC helped coordinate public testimony and prepare speakers for public policy meetings. These local investments attracted people to attend the Regional Network meeting. In addition, TFNC started hosting a regional monthly TRL workgroup for an informal hour to brainstorm, collaborate, and problem-solve issues related to advancing TRL policies. The frequent meetings were essential to the rapid advance of local policies. TFNC hosted at least 32 regional TRL workgroup meetings during the project.

TFNC's Regional Network meetings became so frequent and productive that coalition meetings for many North Coast partners became less relevant. Key informants interviewed at the end of the project affirmed the importance of TFNC's role as a connector and convenor. The regional community established through TFNC was noted as a primary contributor to local TRL policy development and adoption.

Local Level Technical Assistance for TRL Policy Campaigns

LLAs working on TRL policy objectives grew to really depend on the expertise and commitment of TFNC staff, especially Project Director McCubbery. Dr. McCubbery ("Jay" to everyone who knows him) had over 30 years of local relationship-building across the region and over 30 years of experience in tobacco control. With Jay and the staff he recruited, TFNC represented local expertise that regional partners trusted.

TFNC's technical assistance to local TRL policy campaigns included the full spectrum of campaign work and developed local capacity. LLA staff and community volunteers learned new skills and strategies for community organizing and mobilizing with elected officials and city or county staff. Examples of technical assistance included:

- Guiding planning process (e.g., Midwest Academy Strategy Chart and Communities of Excellence)
- Developing educational presentations and assisting with presentations to policymakers
- Developing educational materials and assisting with dissemination strategies
- Developing, coordinating, and training others in providing public testimony at public policy meetings and preparing speakers for public policy meetings
- Drafting policy platform packets to initiate policy work with jurisdictions
- Directly presenting at City Council and Board of Supervisor meetings with local partners for general tobacco prevention educational purposes and specific TRL policy items
- Collecting, organizing, and presenting data to inform policy development and adoption (e.g., YATPS, geographic analyses of tobacco retailers)
- Scheduling and implementing public proclamations (e.g., Great American Smokeout (GAS) to City Councils), including recruiting and preparing youth and other community members

Lack of staffing with policy experience is a longstanding challenge in most communities in the North Coast, as with other remote and under-resourced areas. TFNC staff filled in when local staff with necessary expertise were unavailable and set up trainings to prepare local staff and volunteers. TFNC's educational workshops and training consistently received high satisfaction ratings (90% to 100% satisfaction) with trainers and training content. Quality, local technical assistance through North Coast communities became a hallmark of TFNC and successful TRL policy campaigns.

Use of Data and Monitoring to Inform TRL Policy Adoption

Among the various evaluation methods used by TFNC, two had particular value in the successful development and adoption of TRL policies: the Young Adult Tobacco Purchase Survey (YATPS) and the Public Policy Meeting Observation form. Both tools provided results to understand and shape policy change.

The YATPS is a well-established method to determine the degree of underage tobacco sales. During a YATPS, young adults (over 18 years old) attempt to purchase tobacco products from retailers in a target jurisdiction. TFNC assisted local LLAs in conducting their YATPS. YATPS results were reviewed among LLA staff and coalition members to plan campaign activities. Results were also shared with businesses and policymakers to demonstrate the need for a TRL policy. YATPS results supported policy wins in many counties adopting a TRL policy. For example, illegal sales rates from YATPS were 38% in Mendocino County, which served as the lead jurisdiction for other successful TRL policy campaigns. A key driver for the TRL policy in Humboldt was the YATPS in Humboldt Unincorporated, showing 54% illegal sales rate. The City of Arcata YATPS found an illegal sales rate of 47%, spurring it toward a TRL policy toward the end of the project. TFNC worked with local LLAs to develop and share informational packets and presentations using YATPS results as a call to action.

The Public Policy Meeting Observation form (Policy Form) is another well-established method in tobacco control policy campaigns. The form includes one or more tables to organize information about policymakers (e.g., their alliances, voting record, and concerns or priorities that may persuade them toward a TRL policy) and about a jurisdiction's policy process (e.g., dates, activities, and results from important discussions and decisions). TFNC and LLA staff used the Policy Form to observe and record this information during the meetings. In addition, official policy records (e.g., city council agendas, meeting minutes, presentations, testimony, and policies) were collected and reviewed for 1) support/opposition; 2) key issues that surface during the intervention, which could help shape changes to the intervention plan during the process; 3) the policy adoption process so that it can be described in the final evaluation report; and 4) to confirm adoption of a policy meeting the Objective.

The most activity documentation period was between 2022 and 2023, when several jurisdictions were engaged in their policy adoption. For example, Del Norte County and Willits City meetings generated information about policymakers to support the TRL. This information was shared with local policy champions, who used it in upcoming conversations with those policymakers. TFNC used the policy records to augment TRL talking points during public presentations. TFNC created a "Questions & Concerns About TRL" document from policymaker questions and comments

documented in the Policy Form. This was shared with several local policymakers and statewide with LLA's. In smaller, rural jurisdictions such as those throughout the North Coast region, websites and meeting documents may not be regularly updated and comprehensive. Using the Policy Form during meetings was an important way to learn and keep up with information relevant to the TRL policy campaigns.

How Did TFNC Overcome Obstacles?

TFNC encountered two major challenges in advancing TRL policy campaigns. The first challenge was the disconnected network of tobacco control advocated in the North Coast. Geographic isolation often limits information exchange and social support for tobacco control advocates and policymakers. TFNC's very proactive, local engagement served as a model and magnet for many others, leading to the creation of the TFNC Regional Network. The exchange of ideas, listening, and social support has created a sustainable community for TRL and other policy work. Coincidentally, the other major challenges during this project may have also facilitated the creation of a strong Regional network. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all aspects of community functioning as well as the progress of many planned TFNC intervention and evaluation activities. For example, it was difficult to complete useful public opinion polls specific to each jurisdiction during social distancing and closure of businesses. However, COVID-19 social distancing led to the mass use and normalization of online meetings (e.g., Zoom, Teams) that made it easier for people to attend each other's meetings without transportation barriers. In the North Coast, where communities are far apart, separated by difficult roads, online meetings facilitated more social interactions than ever before.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The TFNC 5-year project was very successful. Six jurisdictions adopted TRL policies (far exceeding the goal of two jurisdictions). The evolution of a meaningful, sustainable Regional Network for tobacco control advocacy was possibly more important than the policy successes. The TFNC Regional Network became a foundation for TRL policies and many other policy campaigns for the years ahead.

The project's work supports three conclusions.

1. Frequent, meaningful meetings built strong collaboration and moved progress forward. These meetings go beyond planned formal meetings with traditional agendas. The most successful meetings were informal regional collaboration meetings among regional staff.
2. YATPS results were critical support for policy wins. Staff, community members, businesses, and policymakers are more likely to take action when they see clear signs of illegal tobacco sales to youth.
3. Policy development is more successful when it is flexible. Success is getting a good TRL policy adopted and improving it over time. Communities and their policymakers can learn together how to improve tobacco control policies.

Future TRL policy campaigns, especially those in rural, less-resourced areas, may benefit from TFNC's approach. TFNC recommends creating and maintaining a peer-based support group (e.g., network, coalition, workgroup) to exchange ideas, listen to each other's needs and success stories, and support each other. Working across silos and common dividing lines makes campaigns more

reliant and sustainable. Make sure to go beyond traditional meetings to informal gatherings and ad hoc conversations to share lessons, ask for help, and work toward shared goals. More jurisdictions will succeed in their local policy campaigns by creating a regional network for peer learning.