



## Making Progress: Multi-Level Leadership Engaging Leadership to Make Incremental Progress in a Challenging Environment

**Summary:** The North Carolina Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB) was able to begin breaking down barriers to local smoke-free and tobacco-free regulations by conducting

key informant interviews with local leaders. The interviews were an opportunity to open up new conversations and begin the process of breaking down existing barriers to evidence-based policy

**Challenge:** North Carolina has 100 counties. As of 2015, 23 counties had not adopted smoke-free or tobacco-free regulations for inside government buildings. According to the Surgeon General (2006) there is no safe level of secondhand smoke exposure. Secondhand smoke contains an excess of 7,000 chemicals, including many who are toxic and cancer causing. For 23 of the 100 counties whom do not have smoke-free or tobacco-free regulation, this is reality for their residents. Whether you're a resident who utilizes local services or a local government employee, you should not be exposed to toxic or cancer-causing chemicals.

**Making Progress:** Demetrius Edwards, CDC Public Health Associate, created a key informant interview guide to help identify and understand barriers associated with local governments adopting and implementing smoke-free or tobacco-free government buildings regulations. Edwards trained and collaborated with TPCB Regional Managers to interview 10 Local Public Health Officials. These interviewed shared insights on their various obstacles and barriers to adopting regulations. Changes in leadership and key government contacts as well as political barriers, were common themes shared by the officials interviewed. One official explained the lack of a written regulations due to the "understood" culture of "no smoking" within buildings.

TPCB provided local officials with valuable information on their full authority to adopt and implement local regulations. Some of the most compelling information shared were maps and dashboards showing what area counties, or counties they compare themselves with, had already put smoke-free and tobacco-free policies in place. Seeing that peer counties have smoke-free or tobacco-free government buildings generated new interest in the topic. Through the interviews, partnerships with multi-level leaders were created. New lines of communication were opened between local government officials and the local health department, as well as the TPCB.

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### Quote

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Data was collected to formulate an action plan and information provided to help move the action plan forward. Stakeholders and coalitions were identified as potential partners. As a result, one county adopted government buildings smoke-free or tobacco-free regulations, and several more started the process. Next steps are to reconnect with the previous interviewees to measure and encourage further progress; work with multi-level leaders to reach out to their peers, as well as interviewing the remaining counties that have yet adopted smoke-free tobacco-free regulations.

**Lessons Learned:** “Throughout the process I learned the importance of relationship building as a foundation for building support for evidence-based policy and program development. A simple in-person meeting goes a long way, especially on an issue that may have controversial aspects like tobacco. Additionally, the ability to share resources and work as a team makes goals attainable. Public health officials shared wisdom and knowledge on how to work collectively with community members and decision-makers.” Demetrius Edwards

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To learn more about smoke-free policies in N.C., visit [www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov)

*“Large change doesn’t come from clever, quick fixes; from smart, tense people; but from long conversations and silences among people who know different things and need to learn different things.” Anne Herbert*



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