

Oklahoma's Youth-Driven Tobacco Policy Campaigns

Assessment of Impacts and Lessons Learned

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Background: Youth engagement is an important component of comprehensive tobacco control programs. Oklahoma has dozens of Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) teams throughout the state. Traditionally, SWAT has focused more on community and peer education than policy initiatives. To systematically engage SWAT members in high-impact policy work, Oklahoma launched new training materials and policy-focused campaigns in October 2011.

Purpose: To examine initial campaign implementation and impact, including outcomes and lessons learned.

Methods: Youth baseline and post-campaign survey data and program coordinator post-campaign survey data were collected in 2011–2012 and analyzed in 2013. Chi-square analyses and *t* tests were used to identify differences in youths' attitudes, self-efficacy, and activism behavior. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of coordinator survey data were used to identify barriers to campaign implementation. Copies of passed policies were collected.

Results: Youths' tobacco-related attitudes ($p < 0.001$) and confidence to implement local policy campaigns ($p = 0.011$) and discuss Big Tobacco's lies ($p = 0.048$) were higher at follow-up. Excepting survey collection ($p = 0.019$), youth did not engage in new advocacy behaviors during the study period. Seven policies were partly attributed to the campaigns. Timing, lack of training, and material format were identified as barriers to implementation.

Conclusions: When implementing similar programs, significant planning must go into the timing of the launch. Instruction must be provided to local staff before materials are disseminated. Developed materials must account for short meetings and limited access to technology. With some adjustments, campaigns like these could prove valuable tools for engaging youth in high-impact local tobacco control efforts.

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Introduction

Youth programming is important to comprehensive tobacco control programs.¹ Investment in youth engagement provides youth a sense of ownership over programs and policies intended to serve them.^{2–6} Furthermore, although youth partnerships

require intense adult commitment, youth voices can be critical to the passage of new policies, and at times can expedite the process.^{6–8} Youth can also play a role in policy implementation and evaluation, as well as in media campaigns and community efforts designed to change social norms.⁹ Less tangible benefits, like commitment to community, positive social values, and increased competencies have also been observed among the youth involved.^{6,10,11}

Conscious of these benefits, Oklahoma's youth tobacco control program, Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT), was initiated by the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) in 1999, based on the Florida SWAT program.¹² The program's aim was to (1) engage youth in community action against tobacco; (2) cultivate

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meaningful youth-led prevention activities; and (3) build state and local youth coalitions.¹³ In 2000, the OSDH received a 3-year grant from the American Legacy Foundation's Youth Empowerment Program and hired regional coordinators to administer the program. These coordinators set up SWAT teams composed of volunteer students and onsite adult partners at middle and high schools. Teams received activity guides and basic program information to get started. Apart from the aims, concrete outcomes were not provided, leaving teams to develop their own priorities and objectives.

When the grant ended, the OSDH continued the program. In the fall of 2004, the first wave of Communities of Excellence in Tobacco Control (CX) programs was funded by the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET). These programs were designed to implement comprehensive tobacco control strategies locally. As CX program capacity grew, the regional SWAT positions were dissolved and SWAT program administration was moved to local CX staff.

Informal interviews with the OSDH staff revealed challenges to transitioning SWAT to the CX program. As program management decentralized, SWAT teams began to vary significantly in the type and quality of trainings received and activities completed. Over time, CX staff began to identify the lack of structure and up-to-date training materials and activity guides as barriers to youth involvement in the SWAT program. The initial focus of SWAT on relatively high-impact activities like local policy initiatives—including tobacco-free schools, retailers refusing point-of-sale tobacco product advertising, and rodeo associations refusing tobacco company sponsorships—gradually shifted to lower-impact activities like community and peer education.

With the growing body of scientific literature identifying policy work as a key contribution of youth to tobacco control, the OSDH and TSET decided to refocus and better align SWAT with the CX program in 2010.¹ The purpose of the realignment was to rebuild youth capacity to work toward local policy change. By providing a clear, coordinated program structure as well as improved and updated support materials, the realignment aimed to develop confident youth advocates with clear goals.

This goal was operationalized through the development of three policy-focused campaigns and various corresponding support materials. The newly developed 24/7, In the Clear (ITC), and No Minor Issue (NMI) campaigns each focus on passing and enforcing local policy. Each campaign aligns with a CX program outcome. The 24/7 campaign engages youth in advocacy for local tobacco-free school policies and includes a secondary awareness campaign following policy passage. ITC focuses on reducing exposure to secondhand smoke, with

policy goals of local Clean Indoor Air ordinances and local smoke- or tobacco-free park ordinances. NMI addresses youth access to tobacco in the retail environment. This campaign aims to pass local ordinances prohibiting tobacco sales to minors and ensure compliance with existing youth access laws.

Implementation of each campaign follows a similar structure and was designed to occur during a single school year. First, SWAT members watch and discuss a series of online training videos, the information and appearance of which were designed to appeal to youth. The videos include an outline of each campaign as well as lessons on Tobacco 101, policy change, public speaking, project planning, teamwork, and media advocacy.

After completing video training, teams select a campaign and plan their activities for the year. Implementation centers on the completion of predefined measures of progress (MOPs) intended to lead toward each campaign's policy goal. MOPs are designed to engage youth in local data collection, education, and advocacy. Each MOP is assigned a point value to promote and incentivize high-impact advocacy strategies, and to unite SWAT teams by earning points together (Table 1).

The revitalization of SWAT through these campaigns provided a natural opportunity for an evaluation project. CX program evaluators at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) developed an evaluation plan focused on campaign implementation and impact. Interested grantees could choose to use this plan to meet the evaluation requirement for their grant. Although CX grantees completed the evaluation and used their results independently, evaluators from the OUHSC compiled the individual program data and conducted secondary analysis to summarize broader trends. This paper aims to identify key lessons learned about campaign implementation, and to assess the extent to which the campaigns positively affected youths' attitudes, self-efficacy, advocacy behaviors, and local policy change.

Methods

A case study of the 13 CX grantees completing the OUHSC evaluation plan was conducted. Participating grantees cover 18 counties and operate 54 SWAT teams. SWAT teams were based in public schools (middle schools, $n=22$; high schools, $n=19$; combination middle/high school campuses, $n=12$) with the exception of one Boys and Girls Club (Table 2).

Data Sources

Data were collected in 2011–2012 using originally designed tools and analyzed in 2013. A baseline survey ($n=708$) assessing tobacco-related attitudes, self-efficacy, and advocacy behaviors was administered to SWAT youth prior to training and campaign

Table 1. Policy campaign measures of progress and assigned point values^a

Measures of progress	Point value
1. Public opinion surveys	1 per survey
2. Comment cards	1 per card
3. Video testimonials	5 per on-target testimonial
4. Educational presentations	
Presentations to groups	2 per attendee (Max 50 per presentation)
Presentations to VIPs (1 on 1)	
Local school and elected officials	25 per presentation
State legislators	75 per presentation
5. Media	
Traditional media—TV, newspaper, or radio interviews	100 per media piece
Other media—school paper, church bulletin, newsletters, etc.	25 per media piece
New media on SWAT issues	
Social media posting	5 per post
Blog post	10 per post
Followers/friends	1 per 10
6. Tobacco retailer compliance checks ^b	25 per retailer
7. Big achievement—passed a policy	250 per policy

^aTable is specific to policy focused campaigns. The MOPs and associated point values for the 24/7 awareness campaign are not listed.

^bMOP is applicable only to the No Minor Issue campaign.

MOP, measure of progress; SWAT, Students Working Against Tobacco; VIPs, very important persons.

implementation. At the conclusion of the campaign (policy passed or end of the school year), youth completed a follow-up survey ($n=340$) that mirrored the baseline, but also assessed youth opinion regarding the campaign materials, campaign structure, and implementation process. CX staff transferred completed surveys to Survey Monkey.

At the conclusion of the campaigns, CX staff completed an online survey assessing campaign implementation and effectiveness using Survey Monkey ($n=12$). Staff also submitted copies of policies passed during the campaigns to the OSDH. Evaluators at the OUHSC compiled data from all sources and performed the analysis. The study was exempted by the OUHSC IRB.

Measures and Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated from youth and adult post campaign surveys to assess implementation. CX staff rated the effectiveness of the training videos, printed materials and point system on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *very effective* to *not at all effective*. Responses of *very effective* and *somewhat effective* were coded as positive. CX staff were asked whether the format and structure of the materials were effective at engaging teams, implementing a range of MOPs, and building youth capacity using response options of *yes*, *no*, and *not sure*. *Yes* responses were coded as positive (Table 3). CX staff responded to

open-ended questions regarding pros and cons of the training videos, campaign MOPs and the point system, as well as barriers to campaign implementation. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify and summarize trends.

Youth were asked how well the training videos prepared them to complete a variety of campaign-related activities. Responses were captured on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *very well* to *not well at all*. Responses of *very well* and *kind of well* were coded as positive. Youth were asked how much they liked the training videos, available MOPs, and point system. Responses were captured on a 5-point scale ranging from *loved it* to *hated it*. Responses of *loved it* and *it was pretty good* were coded as positive. Youth were asked whether they believed the campaign MOPs and campaign point system worked as intended using *yes*, *no*, and *don't know* response options. Responses of *yes* were coded as positive (Table 4).

At baseline and follow-up, youth were asked their level of agreement with six items addressing tobacco industry practices, tobacco use restrictions, and the role of SWAT (Table 5). Responses were captured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Values were assigned from 1 to 5, with 5 corresponding to *strongly agree*. Item averages were calculated for baseline and follow-up. One-tailed independent-sample *t*-tests were calculated to identify significant increases at follow-up. Significance was set at the $p < 0.05$ level. All pre-post data were analyzed as independent samples because there was no way to link survey results by respondent.

At baseline and follow-up, youth were asked how confident they were in their ability to complete a number of tasks (Table 5). Responses were captured on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *very confident* to *not at all confident*. Values were assigned from 1 to 4, with 4 corresponding to *very confident*. Analysis identical to that described for the change in attitudes was performed.

At baseline, youth were asked if they had any experience completing a set of tasks. At follow-up they were asked if they had completed each of those tasks during the campaign (Table 6). Chi-square analysis was used to determine significant differences in the proportion of youth completing each behavior from baseline to follow-up.

Policy copies were used to determine the number of policies that were passed. CX staff responses to the question *Did participating in the campaigns contribute to a policy change in your service area?*

Table 2. Case study population, characteristics, and completion of evaluation plan components

Characteristics	Selected evaluation plan		Completed baseline		Completed follow-up	
	Teams	Youth ^a	Teams	Youth	Teams	Youth
Total teams and youth involved	54	1,057	49	708	40	340
Team affiliations						
High school	19	—	18	229	14	104
High school/middle school	12	—	12	157	10	109
Middle school	22	—	18	311	15	121
Boys and girls club	1	—	1	11	1	6
Campaigns selected ^b						
24/7 new policy	13	—	12	169	11	114
24/7 awareness	21	—	17	246	13	86
In the Clear (ITC)	14	—	14	214	14	125
No Minor Issue (NMI)	7	—	7	94	3	24
Average years in SWAT	NA	—	NA	1.46	NA	1.47

^aData breaking out the number of youth per team that selected the evaluation plan but did not complete any of the campaign surveys is not available.

^bOne team selected two campaigns (In the Clear and No Minor Issue).
NA, not available; SWAT, Students Working Against Tobacco.

and the subsequent response to the open-ended question *Why or why not?* was used to determine the number of policies attributable, in whole or in part, to the campaigns.

Results

CX staff responses regarding campaign implementation were mixed, bringing to light issues with some campaign materials and the rollout process. Campaign materials were disseminated in October 2011, but no formal training was provided. Evaluation materials (baseline and follow-up surveys) were not available until December 2011, which delayed video training until the mid-point of the school year. Qualitative analysis of CX staff responses identified these delays and lack of training as significant barriers to implementation (100%, *n*=12).

Table 3 shows that most CX staff felt the training videos were at least somewhat effective (83.3%, *n*=10), and noted that the videos had good production value (50.0%, *n*=6) and good information, especially for new members (41.7%, *n*=5). Several (50.0%, *n*=6) reported that the videos took too much time to view, and failed to take into account limited meeting time or access to technology. All staff (100%, *n*=12) rated the printed materials, including surveys and campaign briefs, positively.

Regarding MOPs, staff did not feel the campaigns encouraged teams to complete the full range of MOPs (58.3%, *n*=7), and although several staff members noted that using predefined MOPs provided structure,

Table 3. Percentage of Communities of Excellence in Tobacco Control staff rating select campaign components positively

Question prompt	Percentage responding positively
How would you rate the effectiveness of the following SWAT campaign materials?	<i>Very effective or Somewhat effective</i>
Training videos (<i>n</i> =12)	83.3
Printed materials (surveys, campaign briefs, etc.) (<i>n</i> =12)	100
Point system (<i>n</i> =12)	50.0
Did components work as intended?	Yes
Was the format/structure of the new materials effective in engaging SWAT teams versus individual SWAT youth? (<i>n</i> =12)	25.0
Did the format/structure of the new materials encourage SWAT teams to complete the full range of campaign MOPs? (<i>n</i> =12)	33.3
Do you think participating in the new SWAT campaigns increased the capacity of your SWAT youth more than if they had not used the campaign structure? (<i>n</i> =12)	58.3

MOPs, measures of progress; SWAT, Students Working Against Tobacco.

Table 4. Percentage of Students Working Against Tobacco youth rating select campaign components positively

Question prompt	Percentage responding positively
How well did the training videos you watched earlier in the year prepare you to...	<i>Very well or Kind of well</i>
Work together with other SWAT members (n=355)	90.7
Plan and carry out your campaign (n=334)	86.2
Speak in front of a group of adults (n=334)	68.8
Do media advocacy (n=333)	71.8
How much did you like the following parts of your campaign?	<i>Loved it or It was pretty good</i>
Training videos (n=325)	69.5
The types of MOPs available to work on (n=327)	73.7
Earning points as a team instead of individually (n=335)	81.2
Overall campaign (n=332)	85.2
Did components work as intended?	Yes
The different kinds of campaign MOPs made it easy for everyone to find something they could do (n=302)	65.6
Each of the MOPs worked together to bring us closer to a big achievement like passing a policy (n=296)	58.8
Earning points was a big reason I worked to complete the campaign MOPs (n=305)	28.9

SWAT, Students Working Against Tobacco; MOPs, measures of progress.

consistency, and well-targeted activities (58.3%, n=7), they felt the MOPs and campaigns lacked the flexibility necessary for an engaging youth program (50.0%, n=6).

The lowest-rated campaign component was the point system, which none of the teams implemented systematically. Staff preferred to award points to individuals rather than teams (50.0%, n=6). They reported that the point system lacked flexibility; it did not allow leaders to award points for non-MOP activities or activities that took place outside of the scope of the campaign (25.0%, n=3).

Youth ratings were more positive (Table 4). SWAT youth overall believed the videos prepared them either very well or kind of well to implement each of the various campaign elements. The majority responded positively

when asked their opinion about the training videos (69.5%); the types of MOPs they had to work on (73.7%); and the campaign overall (85.2%).

Youth had mixed responses when asked whether the campaign components worked as intended. Although the majority believed that the MOPs helped everyone get involved (65.6%) and that the MOPs worked to bring the team closer to passing a policy (58.8%), fewer responded that earning points motivated them to complete MOPs (28.9%).

Youth responses to most of the tobacco-related attitude questions and two of the self-efficacy questions were significantly more positive at follow-up (Table 5). Specifically, youth were more likely to agree that tobacco companies lie (p=0.014) and that they target youth as replacement tobacco users (p=0.032). They were also more likely to believe that all public places in Oklahoma should be smoke free (p=0.001); that tobacco use at schools sends the message that tobacco use is okay (p<0.001); and to understand that SWAT is not a program designed to confront tobacco users (p<0.001). Their level of confidence in their ability to carry out a local policy campaign (p=0.011) and to talk to people about Big Tobacco’s lies (p=0.048) was also significantly higher at follow-up.

Table 6 shows that with the exception of collecting surveys, youth did not engage in select advocacy behaviors at higher rates during the campaign. For three activities, the percentage of youth reporting they completed that activity during the campaign was significantly lower than the percentage that reported having experience completing that task at some point prior to the campaign.

Of the 30 teams that selected campaigns aimed at passing policy, nine were successful: two tobacco-free parks ordinances (ITC); one youth access ordinance (NMI); and six tobacco-free school district policies (24/7). In the post-campaign survey, CX staff identified the campaigns as directly contributing to seven of these nine policies. Upon follow-up, staff identified providing public opinion survey data and making presentations to decision makers as the most common contributions to policy change made by SWAT through the campaigns.

Discussion

Implications for Practice

The ready-made format and policy focus of these campaigns is significant. Having effective campaigns and materials available to youth could lead to sustained change, once barriers to implementation are addressed. Most of the identified barriers related to timing, training, and the format of some campaign materials.

Table 5. Youth change in attitude and self-efficacy

Question prompt	Baseline	Follow-up	p-value
Attitude	(N=702)	(N=339)	
How much do you agree or disagree?			
Tobacco companies lie	4.53	4.65	0.014
Smokeless tobacco is not a safe alternative to smoking	4.48	4.53	0.245
Allowing tobacco use on school property sends the message that using tobacco is okay	3.27	3.92	< 0.001
SWAT doesn't preach or get in people's faces about their choice to use tobacco	3.91	4.47	< 0.001
All public places in Oklahoma should be smokefree	4.33	4.53	0.001
Tobacco companies try to get young people to start using tobacco products	4.27	4.41	0.032
Self-efficacy	(N=695)	(N=337)	
How confident are you in your ability to...			
Work together with other students as part of a team	3.77	3.72	0.101
Plan and carry out a campaign to get your school or city/town to pass a new policy or law	3.29	3.41	0.011
Speak in front of a group of adults	2.90	2.97	0.156
Write a letter to your newspaper	3.07	3.13	0.163
Do an interview on the radio or on TV	2.88	2.85	0.308
Talk to people about Big Tobacco's lies	3.27	3.36	0.048

Note: Boldface indicates statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).
SWAT, Students Working Against Tobacco.

Owing to delays in production, campaign materials were not distributed until 2 months into the 9-month school year. Factoring in the time it took to watch the training videos, there was little time left to

fully implement the remaining campaign components. School testing late in the year proved an added barrier.

Lack of training before and during implementation was identified as another significant barrier. Campaign materials were distributed to CX staff with no formal instruction. When CX staff shared the materials with adult partners working directly with SWAT teams, they were unable to provide adequate guidance, which created an additional layer of confusion. Training on how to implement each campaign was addressed briefly in the training videos, and then non-systematically throughout the year as questions arose. Systematic training at all levels of implementation early on would have saved significant time spent on clarifications and individual consultation later.

The format of the materials themselves also proved problematic in some cases. First, although the majority of the training videos were less than 7 minutes, the Tobacco 101 video (14:30) and the 24/7 campaign video (9:44) were longer, making viewing and discussing them difficult for teams with short meeting times. Second, the videos were made available on the Oklahoma SWAT website (www.ok.gov/okswat/). Many of Oklahoma's SWAT teams are in rural locations with limited access

Table 6. Youth engagement in advocacy behaviors, %

Advocacy behavior/activity	Baseline (n=708)	Follow-up (n=340)	p-value
Collected surveys	35.2	41.8	0.039
Presented to a group of people	47.0	25.6	< 0.001 *
Met individually with VIPs ^a	22.5	11.5	< 0.001 *
Created traditional media ^a	18.8	20.9	0.422
Created other media ^a	20.6	20.9	0.922
Created new media ^a	31.9	11.8	< 0.001 *

Note: Boldface indicates statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

^aSee Table 1 for additional definition/description of these measures of progress.

*Items significantly higher at baseline than at post-campaign.
VIPs, very important persons.

to projectors and smart boards. Some groups opted to have youth watch the videos at home, which posed another barrier as several training videos were designed to be watched as a team, with built-in exercises and discussion. Third, after watching the videos, there were no additional materials provided for advanced training on specific topics. Finally, the rigid structure of the MOPs and point system lacked the flexibility needed in youth programming. Trainings, including activities and discussions, must fit into short meeting times, and the number of videos should be limited to ensure youth remain engaged and active.⁶

With the exception of collecting surveys, no increase in the types of advocacy behaviors youth engaged in during the campaign was found. Again, this could be explained by the delayed roll-out and the lack of training provided, which left many teams little time to complete MOPs after watching the videos, and no clear understanding of how the MOPs and point system built upon each other to support the goal of each campaign.

Additionally, there were a number of data collection and methodologic issues that limit our ability to make concrete claims about the precise role these campaigns played in the findings. First, in part because of the poor timing and training, data collection was not implemented systematically. Most teams implemented the surveys during a single SWAT meeting. As with other youth programs, availability and attendance at meetings varies throughout the year, with other commitments like course work, athletics, and other clubs and events impacting retention. SWAT members not in attendance were not provided another opportunity to complete the surveys. Furthermore, the campaign wrap-up survey was designed to be completed before the end of the school year in May, but CX programs were not required to complete their evaluation plan until September. Programs focused on the grant calendar deadlines as opposed to the school calendar missed implementing the follow-up survey altogether.

The data collection tools also created limitations. The baseline and follow-up surveys did not include an identifier, thus pre–post survey results could not be linked by respondent, introducing bias to the analysis. The included scales align closely to the campaigns, and had to be originally designed. The tools did not undergo any factor or validity testing.

Even with the many noted challenges and barriers, at follow-up youth involved in the campaigns reported significantly more positive tobacco-related attitudes. They also showed higher levels of confidence in their ability to implement a campaign and expose the tobacco industry. Several of the findings support previous

recommendations that youth programming build in flexibility and that programs should encourage youth to engage in creative problem solving.^{14,15}

Perhaps most importantly, program staff reported that these campaigns were successful in supporting the passage of local policy. With proper timing and training, as well as some adjustments to the supplemental materials and structure, ready-made youth campaigns like these could prove valuable tools for both teaching and engaging youth in targeted, high-impact tobacco control efforts.

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