**Policy record review – How to find and use data**

adapted from Los Angeles County’s Policy Record Review Form

Policy record reviews are a great way to get background information on the history or particular stance an individual or a decision-making entity (such as a City Council) has on an issue. There are a variety of places this information can be found. This protocol explains where and how to collect such data.

When embarking on a new objective, take time to get familiar with the local political environment. Find out who/which entities have decision-making authority over the issues your project will be working on. For example, sometimes there are standing committees that play a key role in vetting tobacco policy on behalf of the entire decision-making body; other times tobacco issues are discussed by the whole City Council or Board of Supervisors during their sessions.

**Policymaker Biographies**Once you know who the key players are, research each person’s background by **searching their biographies**. Look for interests or linkages they have that would lead them to care about tobacco control or community health issues. For example, an avid environmentalist or outdoor enthusiast might care about smoke-free outdoor area policies. Or someone who serves on the board of Families First might be interested in supporting smoke-free multi-unit housing. Someone who lost a family member to a tobacco-related disease may be persuaded to become an ally in your efforts to protect others from such a fate.

Where to look: Biographies can often be found on your City/County website on the City Councilmember or Board of Supervisors webpage. Also try checking for their profiles on LinkedIn, election campaign pages on Facebook, or search their names with Google.

Where to record data: Note the name and district of the policymaker in the **Name** column and any alliances with specific organizations or interests that may overlap with your project’s in the **Alliances/Interests** column.

**Voting Records  
Examine past** **voting records** to ascertain where city council members or supervisors stand on related issues. Even if the record does not include enough of the discussion around reasons and motivations for their position on the vote, knowing their votes can become a conversation starter in a later key informant interview with them. It is a prime opportunity to ask what informed their decision-making on that vote and whether there are any circumstances under which they would consider voting differently.

Where to look: Try the City/County website and municipal code. If it’s an older policy or not online, go to City Hall and request a copy from the Clerk. Search using key words or look in sections that are likely to include tobacco control ordinances e.g., Health and Safety, Business License and/or Zoning. Once you find a tobacco or health-related ordinance, look at the end of each section for the month and date of adoption (Ord. 2535 § 4, 2-13-2010). The first four numbers are the ordinance number; the number after the § is the section number, followed by the adoption date.

Where to record data: Once you have the adoption date, you can work backwards to find meeting minutes on dates the ordinance was discussed, voted to draft, voted on for a first reading and officially adopted on the city/ county website. Record dates and issues where each member voted in favor of or opposed to tobacco control or health issues in the **Voting Record – Issues For** or **Against** columns. You might also want to track whether groups or people other than policymakers voiced support/opposition on these issues during these meetings (e.g., trade groups or City staff members). Based on this, (and what you know of their interests, personal history, and alliances) list what arguments or line of reasoning might be convincing to them in the **Persuasive Arguments** column.

**Meeting Agendas & Minutes**

In addition to monitoring the final vote counts, look at City Council or Board of Supervisor **meetings or recorded minutes** to get a sense of how decisionmakers framed an issue, what their concerns were, and who the key players were. Investigate how the issue was first proposed, what the arguments both for and against were, and how many tries it took to get passed.

Where to look: Monitor City/County websites for meeting agendas and minutes or obtain hard copy minutes or annotated agendas from the City Clerk. Often, these don’t include much detail (or even wrong information!), so a better strategy is to talk to insider sources for a recap, watch videotaped sessions (where available), or attend meetings in person when you have been tipped off that something relevant will be on the agenda. That’s why maintaining good relationships with staffers is key!

When searching documents, use key words such as:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Tobacco | Hookah | License | Multi-Unit Housing | Beach |
| Nicotine | Chew | Fee | Parks, Plazas | Golf Courses |
| Smoking | Spit | Landlords | Playgrounds | Zoning |
| Smoke (free) | Second-hand | Tenants | Bus Stops | Conditional Use Permit |
| Cigarettes | Merchants | Rent Control | Litter | Alcohol |
| Cigars | Retailers | Apartments | Recreational Area | Schools |

If your search doesn’t yield much, contact the Clerk who can send you relevant documents and might also have insights about what happened on an issue that is not fully captured in the minutes.

It can be helpful to listen to/monitor discussion around not only tobacco or health-related issues but also any topic which could link to your objective such as youth activism, water conservation, or economic development. These all could have some bearing on how policymakers frame your proposed issue – either positively or negatively. Therefore it is important for you to understand which issues get traction and which don’t, and the particular approaches or wording that prove most effective.

Where to record data: On the form, record the date and the source of information (type of meeting) in the first column. Attach a copy of the meeting agenda so you can document which issues the body is addressing. In the **Agenda Item**, list the tobacco or health-related topics that have potential relevance or crossover with your issue. List key points from the discussion in the third column. Then list the position of each member on the tobacco or health issue discussed in key points – use + for supportive, - for opposed or N for undecided or neutral. Lastly, indicate how this information can be leveraged by your campaign in the final column.

**When to Conduct Policy Record Reviews**

It can make sense to review policy records at various stages of your campaign.

* At the beginning of a new objective, especially when the topic is untried by your project, it is a good way to get a sense of where things stand, who the key players are, etc.
* Prior to a Midwest Academy Strategy Chart activity, looking at voting records and meeting minutes can clue you in to potential opportunities and threats and allies and opponents.
* Before approaching decisionmakers about a policy initiative, it’s a good idea to see what has been tried before, what failed, and how issues were framed. That way you may be able to avoid some pitfalls.
* On an ongoing basis, monitor current meeting agendas and minutes and/or check in with your insider sources so you are alert to threats and opportunities for your campaign.

**Policy Record Review Forms**

**Biographical Record/Voting Record**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Alliances/Interests** | **Voting Record – Issues For** | **Voting Record – Issues Against** | **Persuasive Arguments** |
| Sally Rider | Green Cities, Future Farmers of America, Community Supported Agriculture, Board of CityWorks | 9/11/08 smoke-free parks  4/22/12 smoke-free community events (including farmer’s markets) |  | Father died of lung cancer. Supports rights of people to breathe fresh air |
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**City Council Meeting Records**

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| **Mtg Date + Source** | **Agenda Items** | **Key Points** | **Councilmember Position +/-/N** | **How This Can Be Used** |
| 10/14/14 City council meeting | Economic development incentives; healthy community initiative; TRL; youth activism program; water conservation | - Concern re: a TRL could counteract economic development incentives to draw new businesses to Sacramento by making city seem unfriendly and regulation-heavy.  + But a TRL that bans vaping where smoking is prohibited fits with healthy community initiative. Mayor champions youth community activism program. | Mayor +; Peterman -; McCluskey -; Abruzzi +; Sanchez +; Chin N; Wilson N | Make TRL application process quick & easy with reasonable fee. Find ways to partner with proponents of healthy community initiative. Frame benefits in terms of promoting healthy city image, way to limit unhealthy elements in communities w density provisions, ENDD definitions and bans, strict fines for those who sell to youth. Engage youth activists. |
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