

Not for Sale!

Improving the Retail Environment through Evaluation

by [Robin Kipke](#)

Envision a future when parents can send their kids to the corner store for a gallon of milk without having them exposed to the aggressive marketing of tobacco and alcohol products, and where they could even find some fresh fruits and vegetables to bring home for dinner. How could this dream become possible? It starts with evaluation.

Data collection activities begun in the Bridge Year will help identify where to focus community efforts and the results will play a key role in setting the direction for local and statewide objectives during the 10-year Retail Campaign.



Why focus on the retail environment? Because junk food, alcohol and tobacco are sold everywhere you turn, it seems, and exposure to these products increase the likelihood of youth experimentation and consumption. It also makes it much harder for current users who are trying to quit. For more background see CTCP's [Retail Campaign Fact Sheet](#).



In order to understand how to improve the retail environment in your community, you'll need to get a clear picture of what products are being sold, how widespread they are, and ways they are being promoted to stores and consumers. By conducting store observations in a random sample of retailers in your area (selected by zip code), you'll be able to find this out. Armed with this data, you'll not only have a better idea of how to prioritize work objectives but you can also use the results to educate the public and persuade decision makers of the need for change.

Part of this education process will happen as tobacco control advocates throughout the state hold local press conferences to draw media attention to the scope of the problem in the jurisdiction as documented by their data. Tracking the amount, type and tone of news coverage your events generate with a media activity record will indicate how successfully your message is reaching the public. Monitoring content may also point out the need to clarify your message and counter any misconceptions out there about the issues.

After the education campaign, you can assess where public opinion is on the issue by conducting intercept surveys with people in your communities. Results will show you whether further education and outreach is needed, or whether the support is there and the time is ripe to take results to policymakers and other key stakeholders (like retailers) and press for change in policy (and practice).

Key informant interviews with retailers can help you identify how they think – what they base their decisions on, their concerns about potential change, and what policies or practices they would be most willing to consider. This can give you crucial ideas for framing the rationale for a policy, best strategies to pursue, and barriers you will have to find a way around. If pursuing a legislated policy, of course you'll want to find out what key players (those who could influence the decision) are thinking – talk to retail associations, chambers of commerce, or members or staff of city councils or boards of supervisors. Getting a peek into the minds of local thought leaders can make the difference between your policy efforts being a resounding success or a frustrating flop.



The last piece of the evaluation puzzle is writing up a summary of your efforts, strategies, and evaluation data in a brief evaluation report. That way, your project will have a record of what worked and what did not for the next plan cycle. It's a nice way to share your approach with other projects as well.



So help put up the 'not for sale' sign in your communities when it comes to the aggressive marketing campaigns of tobacco, alcohol and junk food products! Start by collecting good quality data.

Photos by: CounterTobacco.org and Microsoft