

INTERNAL Evaluation Activity Summary – by the evaluator for project use**Antelope County Tobacco Control Program (ATCP)****Activity 3-E-4 – Highland Focus Groups with Youth****Purpose**

In order to understand the extent of teen access to and use of tobacco products, the Antelope Tobacco Control Program (ATCP) conducted five focus groups in March of 2019 in the city of Highland with young people aged 16-19. This data was collected to bolster ATCP's objective for the city to adopt a policy that bans the sale of flavored tobacco products.

Method

The project's external evaluator and health educator held 5 focus group discussions with a total of 29 youth who were diverse in gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Participants were recruited via Facebook ads targeting the pages of a cross section of local social and cultural groups which included:

1. Latinx Youth Leadership Project
2. 4-H Highland
3. Highland Soccer League
4. The Highland Teen Club
5. The Highland Hangout

The ads offered a \$25 gift card as an incentive for volunteers to take part in one of the focus group discussions. Once a sufficient number of participants was recruited for each group, the ads were pulled from Facebook. The discussions took place on afternoons or evenings March 4-23, 2019 at the ATCP office. Transportation for participants was provided, if needed.

The evaluator had developed a focus group guide with input from ATCP program staff. Four questions with probes focused on perceptions of youth tobacco use and access to tobacco products. The evaluator facilitated the focus groups while the ATCP health educator took notes. Each discussion lasted approximately 45 minutes. The notes were then content analyzed for themes across groups as well as any particulars that were specific to each of the groups.

Focus Group Composition

The five focus groups ranged in size and composition, based on the Facebook groups they were recruited from. Group 1, drawn from the **Latinx Youth Leadership Project** Facebook page, was comprised of 5 Latinx youth of both high and low socioeconomic status. The 7 participants in group 2 affiliated with **4-H Highland** were diverse culturally but mostly from low SES populations. Group 3 included primarily male **Highland Soccer** players with a mix of SES levels and ethnicities. The two teen affinity clubs in Groups 4 and 5 were from predominantly high socioeconomic populations and fairly

culturally diverse. With this mix, we felt certain the participant pool would provide a fairly accurate understanding of teen viewpoints in Highland.

Focus Group Characteristics

	M	F	High SES	Low SES	Asian	Black	Latinx	Native American	White
Group 1	2	3	2	3			5		
Group 2	4	3	2	5	1		2	1	3
Group 3	5	1	3	3		1	3		2
Group 4	2	4	4	2	1	2		1	2
Group 5	3	2	5	0	1		1		3
TOTALS	14	15	16	13	3	3	11	2	10

Results

Extent of Tobacco Use Among Youth

The general consensus (28 of 29) among participants in all groups was that smoking/vaping among underage young adults is fairly prevalent and that electronic devices are more popular than cigarettes or other forms of tobacco. Participants had plenty of anecdotal evidence for this assertion, as they have seen people use tobacco at parties they had attended, at “hang-outs” such as popular spots in public parks, in people’s backyards, on their way to and from school, after sporting events in parking lots, even on school grounds. Twenty percent of participants admitted that they themselves had smoked or vaped at least once in the past month, and 15% did so on a regular basis (at least 5 days per week). When asked about why electronic smoking devices had become so popular, a number of reasons were mentioned:

“If you want to smoke, then it’s better to vape than to use traditional cigarettes because it is not as bad for your health.”

“The different devices allow you to do different things. It’s pretty cool what tricks you can do with the vapor.”

“The smell of cigarette smoke is more noticeable than vapor, so you don’t get caught as easily when you use vape devices.”

“There are so many flavors, you can find something that fits your mood at the time.”

When asked what they thought about the number of tobacco flavors on the market, participants shared that there are so many that it would take months to try them all. “I’m kind of blown away by the volume of different brands and flavors,” a young man from Group 5 said. There was agreement across all groups that the wide variety of flavors made the vape products more appealing to young people. For example, someone from Group 4 commented, “The old Marlboro-type cigarettes taste and smell kind of nasty but when you inhale vapor that tastes like chocolate mint, it’s enjoyable.”

There was less familiarity with vape products among the Highland and Soccer Highland groups which were comprised mostly of Latinx youth. Those who didn't use stated that they did not like to have to inhale other people's smoke or vapor. "Even though vapor doesn't smell as awful as cigarette smoke, we don't really know if it's bad for us," said a young woman from Group 1.

Youth access to tobacco

In terms of accessibility, a majority (19 of 29) participants stated that it was relatively easy to get both electronic devices and the flavored content for them, as well as traditional tobacco products, even though the age limit to buy tobacco/vape products is now 21. "You have to be a little more inventive on how to get what you want," one Group 2 participant said, "but it isn't that hard for people to get around the law." Favorite avenues that teens or others use to get products from are older friends or acquaintances. Several said that some adults were buying large amounts and selling them at parties or on the street illegally. One mentioned he got his device from a parent who hoped it would prevent the son from smoking cigarettes. However, about 1/3 of participants (11 of 29) said that they did not know how their peers got tobacco products, just that they somehow had access to them.

Feelings about a Flavor Ban

Asked what they thought of a law that would ban flavored tobacco products, many (20 of 29) expressed that they were in favor since it might make more young people stop smoking altogether when the product became harder to obtain. A few (4 of 29) said that such a policy would be unfair to users since there are a lot of other bad things on the market like candy and pastries that are also not good for you, and people still have a choice to purchase them. Some (10 of 29) mentioned that people would just buy the products in other places where they would still be sold.

Group Differences

While there were a lot of similarities across the groups in the answers which participants gave to the questions, there were some distinct differences.

No one in groups 1 through 3 (Latinx Youth Leadership Project, 4-H Highland, and Highland Soccer) admitted to using tobacco, while the Highland Teen Club and The Highland Hangout had quite a few members in their group that were active tobacco users. The Latinx group participants said peers of theirs that used tobacco seemed to prefer cigarettes, while all other groups said that their peers who used preferred vaping. The Highland Hangout participants were the most vocal about support for individuals' freedom to choose. Several in the group (2 of 5) argued that in all aspects of life they are being asked to act like adults, but when it comes to making choices about what they want to do with their bodies they are treated like kids.

Recommendations

Overall, the focus group discussions showed that teen smoking is fairly prevalent and that vaping is becoming the tobacco product of choice among young people. Participants indicated that teens can

easily gain access to tobacco/vape products despite the Tobacco 21 law. Their comments on flavored tobacco shows that these products have great appeal to some youth, pointing at the possibility that with less access to these products, youth may be less tempted to take up smoking or vaping.

These localized findings, corroborating results from the National Youth Tobacco Survey, can be used to educate Highland policymakers about the need for a flavors ban policy. Data can be woven into talking points as project personnel meet with City Council members. The results could be further triangulated with the upcoming Young Adult Tobacco Purchase Survey scheduled for May of this year.

OTIS Progress Report Narrative (in activity fields)

Activity 3-E-4 – Highland Focus Groups with Youth

In order to better understand how widespread the use of tobacco products is among Highland youth and how easy or difficult it is to access tobacco products, five focus groups were conducted with Highland teens aged 16-29 in March of 2019. The 29 teen participants were recruited via Facebook ads which targeted the group pages of youth-oriented organizations in Highland. Results from the 45 minute discussions show that smoking among underage adults is fairly prevalent and that electronic devices are more popular than cigarettes because they are perceived to be less damaging to health, the vapor is less noticeable and one cannot get caught easily, and the flavors of e-products are more appealing than that of cigarettes. Non-smokers were supportive of a flavor ban as were half of the small number (6 of 29) of tobacco users in the sample. Youth gain access to tobacco/vape products despite the Tobacco 21 law and are often aided in this by adults. Results will be triangulated with other data sources and used as talking points with meetings with Highland City Council members to illustrate the need for a flavors ban policy.

Tracking Measures Uploaded into Document Repository

Activity Summary Report

Data Collection Instrument (Focus Group Discussion Guide)

Implementation & Results Section of a Brief or Final Evaluation Report

In order to better understand how widespread the use of tobacco products is among Highland youth and how easy or difficult it is to access tobacco products, five focus groups were conducted with Highland teens aged 16-29 in March of 2019. The external evaluator developed the question guide instrument and conducted the sessions with the aid of the health educator who took notes. The 29 teen participants were recruited via Facebook ads which targeted the group pages of youth-oriented organizations in Highland. Results from the 45-minute discussions show that smoking among underage adults is fairly prevalent and that electronic devices are more popular than cigarettes because they are perceived to be less damaging to health, the vapor is less noticeable and one cannot get caught easily, and the flavors of e-products are more appealing than that of cigarettes. Non-smokers were supportive of a flavor ban as were half of the small number (6 of 29) of tobacco users in the sample. Youth gain access to tobacco/vape products despite the Tobacco 21 law and are often aided in this by adults. Focus group results were triangulated with data from the National Youth Tobacco Survey and the Young Adult Tobacco Purchase Survey conducted several months later which confirmed youth access to and use of tobacco products, in particular vape devices and e-juices.

This data, shared with Highland City Council members in fact sheets and meeting talking points, proved to be incontrovertible and ultimately convincing for the need for a flavors ban policy. Leveraged with comments made by youth advocates at public council meetings, the council voted to adopt a complete flavors ban for the city of Highland on May 10th, 2019.