

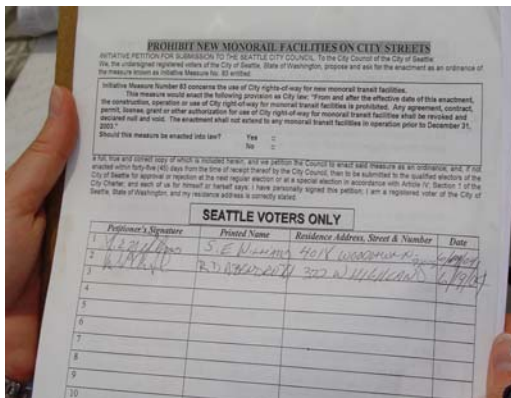
Smokefree Ballot Initiatives
December 2006

So you want to introduce a smokefree workplace ballot initiative? Great! This document will outline what you need to run a successful initiative and help you determine if you have everything in place to move forward. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Got Money?

It takes money -- from thousands to millions of dollars -- to organize a winning smokefree campaign. Money is needed for radio ads, direct mail, yard signs, web sites, polling, and organizers, among other things. Non-profit 501(c)3 groups cannot easily contribute money in a ballot environment due to campaign finance laws, so traditional sources of funding (from foundations, health organizations, etc), cannot be expected to contribute. This often means coordinating local fundraising efforts to run a winning campaign. If tobacco companies or other opposition groups choose to make a fight of your campaign, keep in mind that they have near limitless amounts of "unrestricted funds" available to dump into undermining your effort.

How much cash will we need? First, you'll need a head count. Go to your local board of elections office or website to determine how many people voted in your last election. Plan for a minimum of \$3.00 per voter for direct mail, media, yard signs, etc. So if 50,000 people voted in your last election, have at least \$150,000 in the bank dedicated to this campaign *before* moving ahead. The \$3.00/voter estimate *does not* include the signature gathering phase, which varies in cost depending on how many signatures you will need.



It usually costs about \$1.00 per signature for paid signature gatherers, and much less if you use volunteers. If you already have a volunteer-rich campaign, a full time experienced campaign organizer on board, and rental space for your campaign headquarters, fantastic! If not, be sure to add a salary for your campaign organizer, and rental space to your budget.

Got model language?

If not, we can provide model language for you. Ballot language must be carefully written to avoid legal problems and to achieve the health goal of protecting people from secondhand smoke. Our model ordinance is a good place to start, since it has been a model for hundreds of communities and has withstood legal challenges. Call us or visit www.no-smoke.org for a copy of our model and language drafting tips.

Got expertise?

Ballot campaigns require campaign sophistication, usually more than is required for a council race. Keep in mind that the opposition can and does employ the best political strategists in the business, so it is important to know about GOTV (“Get Out The Vote”) strategies, phone banking, messaging, the role of direct mail, the importance of a strong volunteer base, and what to expect from the opposition.

All campaign experts were at one time campaign novices, so it is possible to learn if you feel you are not experienced enough. With a ballot campaign, losing is not an option, since that would likely set your efforts back for years. So do your homework and make sure you have experts on your side. It is not enough to have passionate volunteers and medical experts on your team. You need political know-how, in order to run a strong campaign. You need the best political experts in the community in order to win.



Got Capacity?

The term "organized capacity" refers to how many people you can directly communicate with and spur to action. There is a huge difference between public opinion and organized capacity. If it were just up to public opinion, all the nation's workplaces would have been smokefree years ago. Capacity = political power. How many volunteers do you have to help gather signatures or help with door-to-door efforts or to drive seniors to the polls? How many registered voters are in your database in each ward or district? Do you have what it takes to win in the face of organized opposition from the tobacco forces?



Most likely, if your effort is similar to the majority of grassroots smokefree campaigns, you are rich in passion and dedication, but not cold hard cash. You probably cannot afford to hire 30 campaign staffers to get all the tasks done. This is where you will need to dig deep. Obtain solid commitments, written commitment if possible, from individual volunteers throughout your community.

You will need volunteers available for a variety of campaign-related tasks, often on short notice. Out of every 10 commitments, you should expect about 5 to fall flat. So get twice as many commitments as you'll need volunteers.

Got Implementation plan?

Most smokefree ballot initiatives take effect 30-90 days after the vote, if not immediately. A sub-group of your planning committee or coalition, in partnership with the health department, should be working on an implementation plan well before Election Day. This is easier said than done when your supporters are all running around in the heat of the battle. Developing implementation processes, enforcement protocol, business mailer kits, signage, a hotline, cessation services, and data evaluation and surveillance takes thought and planning. This is especially true because implementation and enforcement is a collaborative process that needs buy-in from a range of city agencies and community partnerships to be effective. The job isn't over after Election Day.



Opponents will try to undermine the law for a year or more with negative media. Expect the heaviest onslaught of negative attacks for about two to three months after implementation. You must have a proactive communications plan to reinforce support for the law and to be able to show that the law is making the community a healthier place and generally doing what it is intended to do. Also, most of the "social change" from the new law takes place in the first 30-90 days after the law takes effect. During this period, there will be the most questions, problems, and demands on your systems. If you have done a good job educating the public and supporting business owners during this transition, the law will be virtually self-enforcing. The good news is there are many implementation plans and toolkits from other cities and states that you can use as a template for your own city or state.

Conclusion

Smokefree ballot measures, though usually successful, are an approach of last resort. They reflect, to varying degrees, a failure of lawmakers to do their jobs by addressing the issue in a meaningful way, thus leaving health advocates with limited options.

Carefully study the tips and insights above and weigh your options thoroughly before embarking upon a ballot measure endeavor. Ballot measure campaigns can be very difficult, stressful, and expensive, but a victory can extend meaningful smokefree protections to many people.