



Minutes of the RITCN Quarterly Fall Meeting on 2013 Policy Prioritization

October 26, 2012

RITCN Director, Karina Wood, made opening remarks:

The major focus of RITCN this year is to increase and diversify our funding sources, so we can become less reliant upon grant monies from the CDC and RI Department of Health, and build up a sustainable “war chest” to keep us going for the long term.

With our primary focus on fundraising, and understanding that we have limited resources and personnel (one full-time staff member, plus a small number of policy folks at the State House), and that we are operating in a tough economy and challenging political time, the Policy Committee is recommending a narrow, targeted approach at the State House for 2013, picking one issue, building a strong campaign around it, rallying broad grassroots support around it, and really going for it.

Please see our new homepage featuring updated donation and giving options www.RITCN.org

Please ask your organization to consider making an annual financial contribution to RITCN to sustain our Network and our important work. Please consider making an individual donation.

If you wish to make a donation in honor of a special person in your life, or in memory of a loved one, we will feature their name on our new Gifts for Life wall of giving: <http://www.ritcn.org/gifts-for-life-wall.htm>

Please “like” our Facebook page!

Participant introductions:

Dr. Robert Crausman, RITCN Steering Committee Chair

Lori Fresina, consultant, M+R

Susan Roberts, American Cancer Association-Cancer Action Network

Donna Levesque, Tri-Town Tobacco Treatment

Astrid Meijer, Chariho Task Force on Substance Abuse Prevention

Danny Nesmith, Chariho Task Force on Substance Abuse Prevention

Carol Frisk, Woonsocket Prevention Coalition

Bela Teixeira, Urban League

Betina Ragless, American Lung Association

Katie King, American Lung Association

Noell Woolley, New England Laborer’s Health and Safety Fund

Mary Roth, Thundermist

Bette Ann McHugh, RI Dept. of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH)

Meghan Grady, YWCA

Alexandra Batista, Mayor's Substance Abuse Prevention Council / Tobacco Free Providence
Megan Tucker, American Heart Association
Laura Hosley, RI Student Assistance Services
Molly Clark, American Lung Association
Ed Miller, American Lung Association
Steve DeToy, RI Medical Society
Nicholas Oliver, The Partnership to Reduce Cancer in Rhode Island
John Anatone, Laborers' International Union
Shannon Spurlock, JSI
Tina Spears, RI Parent Information Network
Rosa DeCastillo, Lifespan Community Health Services
Dana McCants-Derisier, DOH TCP
Erica Collins, DOH TCP
Cynthia Roberts, DOH TCP
John Petina, Brown University student intern at DOH TCP
Ann Marie Rakovic, JSI / RI QuitLine (via telephone)
Kevin O'Flaherty, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (via telephone)

Department of Health update from Cynthia Roberts and Erica Collins:

The RI Tobacco Control program is in a state of transition following the recent loss of its Director, Seema Dixit, who was recruited by the AIDS Bureau. The hope is to have a new TCP program director in place in December 2012.

TCP's 2013 policy prioritization process is ongoing: reducing indoor and outdoor exposure to secondhand smoke to close the existing gaps is a high priority. Housing and outdoor public places are being highlighted.

RI School of Nursing has passed a no-smoking policy within that campus; this past summer folks did opinion surveys on beaches and collected cigarette litter to help make the point that a lot of smoking is taking places on our beaches, highlighting environmental effect of toxic litter as well as health effects. An outdoor patio campaign is in the works. Woonsocket had a series of smoke-free outdoor venues at this year's Autumnfest in October. In Charliho region, a smoke-free beaches local ordinance was passed. Donna Levesque mentioned that Rally for Recovery was smoke-free for the first time this year (with designated smoking areas). Erica is leading an effort to collect personal stories that can be used for education and advocacy.

Cynthia explained that she has been working internally to develop a "burden document" for Rhode Island and a draft version is being formatted now. There will be both youth and adult versions. Once they are made public, there will be an opportunity for public comment. This burden document will lay out the health and economic consequences of tobacco use as well as history of policy and systems change work that has been done in the state. It also includes personal vignettes to make it more readable and HEALTH will be using this as its foundation for planning and prioritization going forward. John Petina, Brown student intern, is working on this.

Cynthia shared that their application for the FDA media grant response has been delayed but they hoped to hear back soon.

The youth RFPs that were sent out several months ago received a few solicitations but HEALTH has needed to table those grants in the face of state financial pressures.

Erica distributed TCP's quarterly newsletter to meeting participants.

Presentations from the DOH TCP Community Grantees:

Astrid Meijer, Chariho Task Force on Substance Abuse Prevention, Carol Frisk, Woonsocket Prevention Coalition, and Bela Teixeira, Urban League, shared their experiences with new engagement tools, specifically the "person-on-the-street" opinion surveys and the "key stakeholder" interviews. To date, 295 people from 28 communities across RI have been surveyed. The goal is to survey over 500 people by November 8, in order to have data to release on November 15, on the occasion of the ACA's Great American Smoke Out day. Slides were shown which depicted the numbers, geographic locations and demographic types of people interviewed to date, and their survey responses.

Astrid kicked it off with a heartfelt "thank you" for the support of so many network partners. She reviewed the goals of the survey. She has found that most people LOVE the idea of having all of the selected outdoor venues be smoke-free except current smokers begin with some push-back around dining venues.

This exercise has made her aware of her own biases – realizing that she was only going up to people who weren't smoking. This awareness will shift her approach. She's not necessarily finding that people will easily give up their email addresses.

Suggestion that we add a question for smokers to see if they are interested in getting cessation info. If yes, we will capture their email address and send them cessation support info ASAP.

Bela shared her experience in collecting survey data. She first hit a health fair that was comprised of mostly women. She began by running an exhibit/presentation on tobacco and cessation. She got about 60 people to fill out the surveys – most of whom were health care workers. She offered a \$20 gift card raffle incentive to get folks email addresses and completed surveys. She will be hitting senior centers and farmer markets. Bela is doing a skillful job engaging people in telling their personal stories and she asked to connect with Noell from the Laborer's group to better reach that important audience.

Carol talked about her experience conducting key stakeholder interviews as a means of building community support. The process is time-consuming, but rich. There are three discussion threads that it follows: (1) outdoor smoke-free public places; (2) smoke-free housing; and (3) preventing illegal sales to minors. Most discussions take about an hour. Carol has developed a target list that covers many sectors including education, law enforcement, youth, seniors, etc.

Carol has selected her key stakeholders / informants based on their ability to ultimately influence decision-makers. She's used this as a way to reach and engage and understand a new audience. One example of this was a Woonsocket School Committee member who smokes. He was surprised she wanted to talk to him, but she convinced him that his perspective was especially valuable.

Cynthia Roberts suggested that it would also be valuable to interview key stakeholders -- especially youth -- as a group. She feels a focus group format could glean lots of additional information, and be a more comfortable setting for youth especially. Cynthia offered to help do this if any of the project directors are interested.

Lori shared survey results thus far:

Mary Roth, Donna Levesque and Rosa DeCastillo offered to assist in collecting person-on-the-street surveys.

RITCN Policy Committee Recommendations for 2013 Statewide Priorities

Susan Roberts, American Cancer Society – Cancer Action Network, Chair of the RITCN Policy Committee, presented the Policy Committee’s recommendations.

She explained the process of how the affiliated lobbyists and policy directors who comprise RITCN’s Policy Committee (from Cancer, Lung, Heart, RIMS, CTFK, RI Public Health Institute: <http://www.ritcn.org/policy-committee.htm>) met to set a realistic, focused agenda based on the political and economic climate, and our resources:

Proactive:

- 1. 90-cent excise tax increase with stated investment in tobacco control and prevention**
- 2. High tech tax stamp system to reduce smuggling and recoup lost revenues *with stated increase in funding for tobacco control and prevention***

Phase 1- Inform discussions about a high tech tax stamp system providing information and education during the fall of 2012 to key stakeholders

Media outreach: Try to get the Providence Business Journal (PBN) to cover this issue as it relates to the impact of smuggling on RI small businesses.

Policy Committee will determine an implementation strategy: i.e. who is doing what and when.

Phase 2 - Policy Committee will meet in December or early January to assess impact of these Administration meetings, and decide next steps.

Defensive:

- Education work regarding tax rollback, if it comes up
- Education work regarding preemption, if it comes up

Opportunistic:

- Conduct education efforts on tobacco-related issues as needed

Back Burner Issues:

- Wait to inform on the so-called “little cigar” reclassification until 2014

Discussion ensued about the 90-cent tax proposal and more – highlights included:

Why 90-cents? - to achieve parity with New York State’s tax, the highest in the nation, and therefore the “gold standard”; and because a health effect can be achieved from a tax increase only when it is of significant increase of at least 50 cents; and because the legislative process will negotiate us down, so need to start with a high figure

What are we doing about little cigars, like Cheyennes, which are widely smoked, especially by youth? -- In January 2013 the ‘little cigar’ bill establishing price equity with cigarettes will go into law, so that should have a big impact.

Concern over Roll-Your-Own machines being sold for use with pipe tobacco – to circumvent laws -- a new Federal law on pipe tobacco will help

How much revenue will be gathered from the 90-cent increase? -- approximately \$75-\$100 Million per year.

We urgently need additional funds to support RI’s very poorly-funded cessation and prevention programs. We need to work on policy that will generate additional funding.

Bette McHugh cautioned RITCN Policy Committee to fight for price parity with all other tobacco products, to prevent major push-back from convenience store owners. NECSA will argue against another increase on the basis of safety for their members – some of whom are being robbed for their cigarettes.

Susan noted that we have ample and good data to show that border sales of cigarettes in RI have not been harmed by tax price increases.

We need to pick ONE key issue that the majority of our Network partners can agree on and build a strong campaign around it.

What about E-Cigarettes? Can they be made more expensive? Can they be used in outdoor spaces that are mandated to be smoke-free?

What about partnering with other interest groups who might join forces to support tax campaign such as those working to implement the Affordable Care Act?

Donna Levesque – Has had several clients refused cessation coverage by Medicaid and Medicare

Should we be looking to ban or restrict hookah bars at the statewide level? (Laura H – North Kingstown) --Karina suggested some citizen grassroots advocacy focused at having DOR prove that these establishments are really earning at least half their income from hookah, as the law states.

Healthcare companies should be engaged

Should we seek to build alliances with other health concerns and consider bill language that distributes the additional revenue among several health needs, not solely tobacco control? Partnering with new allies would make our campaign stronger and more effective. We have many “natural allies” we have not fully leveraged.

Susan described the high-tech tax stamp proposition:

Steve DeToy weighed in with two points:

There is a lot of work being done to clamp down on black market sales in RI and it's making the news. Our state prevalence rates are connected to tax data and the numbers are not really as good as they look through DOR because DOR does not capture black market sales.

Bette McHugh responded that the one state inspector works closely with municipal law enforcement to investigate some of the contraband sales rings. Some of these smuggling operations cost millions of dollars and take months to investigate. Bette offered herself up as a resource for anyone who has information that a store is selling illegally taxed cigarettes. Repeat violators KNOW not to sell to kids that are not already familiar to them.

Steve asked if DOR offers training to identify counterfeit tax stamps. Bette replied that local law enforcement is trained by DOR.

All agreed that we need to increase the internal education on our policy issues, so that all of our members can become more knowledgeable, confident and conversant on the issues, and be able to educate others, especially elected officials and the media.

Karina and Lori will produce Talking Points on the RITCN 2013 Policy Agenda -- on the 90-cent tax increase issue, and on the High Tech Tax Stamp issue -- which will be emailed out to the RITCN membership list and published on the website.

Defensive work: we can look to New Hampshire to see what happens when a state reduces its cigarette tax as NH did by 10 cents -- it's now a hot election issue in NH.

Woonsocket folks need to educate their state rep on the cigarette tax reduction bill he introduces every year.

Defensive work: Pre-emption: we need to have a fact sheet on what the implications and impact of pre-emption legislation are. Need to engage the League of Cities and Towns, and the city mayors. When people realize that their local rights to make decisions in their community's best interests are in danger of being taken away, then they will give us their email addresses! And be spurred to take action. Our message should be: "tobacco today, what else tomorrow?"

We took a short break, and then returned to vote on the policy recommendations of the Policy Committee, and on any other proposals coming from the floor.

VOTE ON 90-CENTS TAX INCREASE: PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

VOTE: Do you want the Policy Committee to explore working with other interest groups / forming a broad coalition on the 90-cents tax increase, with some of the additional revenue generated going to those interests?: PASSED.

VOTE ON THE HIGH-TECH TAX STAMP WORK: PASSED (WITH 2 VOTES CAST OF "NOT STRONG SUPPORT", BUT NOT OPPOSED).

The question then was posed: Are there any other issues you would like RITCN to work on at the statewide level in 2013?

Bela proposed tobacco-free pharmacies.

Someone proposed smoke-free parks.

After discussion, these two proposals were withdrawn, with general agreement in the room that these issues are best worked on at the municipal level for now.

There was discussion of the advantage of regional coordination among the New England states, to work toward regional price parity (Nicholas Oliver), although it was noted that we should not make a RI tax increase contingent upon regional tax parity.

The attendees were unanimous in their response to the question: "Does everyone feel comfortable with the decisions made here today?"

Karina announced that the next Quarterly meeting of RITCN will be in January, date and venue TBD, but the hope is that we can hold it at or near the State House and use the occasion for educating lawmakers, especially newly elected reps, on tobacco control issues and our 2013 agenda.

Information on the November 15 Great American Smoke-Out events in RI will be coming soon via email and on our website and Facebook page.

Meeting adjourned.