

Implementing a survey of worksite smoking policies: Fond du Lac's approach

Evaluation Tips: Tobacco Control

July 2001

By 2005, the Wisconsin Tobacco Control Board wants 90% of worksites in the state to be smoke-free. Many tobacco-free coalitions in Wisconsin are using telephone surveys to assess current worksite smoking policies in their communities. The Fond du Lac County Tobacco-Free Coalition is now completing a survey of workplace smoking policies. Their experiences can help guide other coalitions who are embarking on a similar survey. In this article, Joyce Mann, Coalition Coordinator, offers some tips about implementing a worksite survey.

Organizing your resources ahead of time helps reduce the amount of time required to survey worksites and produce good data.

“The survey process is a real opportunity to build community involvement. We had students from UW—Oshkosh and Marian College who were involved from the beginning,” Mann says. She recruited students from nursing, sociology and psychology to help with survey implementation. One of the students was the youth representative on the coalition during high school.

After recruiting the students, Mann spent thirty minutes to introduce each student to the purpose of the survey. “Originally, our questionnaire contained a question about whether employees were allowed to smoke on worksite grounds. Because one of our student interviewers had participated in the survey from design to implementation, he had really good input. He asked, ‘What if employees can’t smoke but customers can?’ We changed our questionnaire because of his insight.

Students or community members involved in designing the questions know what the intent is and have ownership of the process.”

Mann also received technical assistance on survey design and implementation from Amy Anderson of the University of Wisconsin – Madison’s Center for Health Policy and Program Evaluation, a partner organization of the WTCB Monitoring and Evaluation Program. Anderson used many of Fond du Lac’s lessons to develop the MEP worksite survey, which was sent to coalitions in early June. “I certainly couldn’t have developed such a good tool without the help of people like Amy. Others should take advantage of the assistance offered through the Monitoring and Evaluation Program.”

“More businesses are willing to call back than we expected.”

—Joyce Mann
Coordinator, Fond du Lac
Tobacco-Free Coalition

Organizing your process is key. “The last thing you want to do—especially in business community—is duplicate calls,” says Mann. To avoid duplicating calls, the survey team used folders to sort calls according to where they

were in the process. “We used separate folders for the list of businesses, including:

- **Callbacks**, containing questionnaires that had been started but not completed
- **Exclusions**, such as those who refused to participate, were out of business, were less than five employees, etc.
- **Completed calls**, and
- **Completed and data entered in computer.**

On the list of businesses, we checked off the name of the business when a worksheet was

started, and when the call was completed. That made it easy to determine how much progress we were making.” For example, if one of the interviewers had called a business and left a message, they put the questionnaire in the “call-backs” folder. When the business called back, they then pulled the questionnaire from the correct folder. After the questionnaires had moved through the process, the department secretary could enter data from questionnaires in the “completed surveys” folder. Assigning numeric codes for each possible response on the questionnaire helped shave off data entry time for the secretary, who used the numeric keypad on her keyboard.

Where should interviewers make the calls?

Fond du Lac decided that to coordinate the survey effort and to increase credibility, it was best for interviewers to come to health department to complete telephone interviews. Mann could more easily control survey quality, and if businesses used caller ID, they knew that the call being made was legitimate.

Mann says she has been pleasantly surprised at the positive response among businesses. If students left messages and businesses called back after the students had gone for the day, Mann made every effort to complete the questionnaire with the business. “If the business is courteous enough to call back, we should be courteous enough to finish the survey then and there.” She instructs her interviewers to leave 10-15 voice mails a day, recording on a log sheet when and for whom they leave messages.

Mann says that they used two lists to construct their sample of businesses: the City of Fond du Lac Association of Commerce, and the County Economic Development Association. A number of businesses on the list had closed, and other businesses had a corporate office that set policy for the worksite. “In one town, the county line runs down Main Street. We simply had to call worksites in that zip code to ask whether they were in our county or the next.” As they complete their data collection process, Mann says the team has gained in-depth insights into the nature of worksite smoking policies in their county.

To “crunch the numbers,” coalitions and facilitators need to assess whether they have

the time, skills and comfort level to look at the data themselves. “It depends on your sample size, your computer skills, and your own comfort level with data analysis,” Mann suggests. “If you can’t find someone at a local university or college to help with

analysis, is there a business that will donate some analysis time? It’s another opportunity to involve someone from the community.”

If a coalition asks another organization to help analyze data, Mann recommends first entering data from 25 to 30 questionnaires and ask the data analyst review the file before continuing. “You never really know whether you’ve done it right until you start looking at the data,” she says. This step will help ensure that data entry continues in a way that makes analysis more straightforward.

—Mary Michaud

Why a telephone survey for worksites?

The WTCB Monitoring and Evaluation Program has developed a standard telephone survey available for use by coalitions. Telephone surveys generally produce higher response rates and more accurate data than mail surveys.

For technical assistance or training on program evaluation in tobacco control, contact your UW Extension Regional Evaluation Specialist. For contact information, contact Mike Matschull, Program Assistant, 608-265-6332, mike.matschull@ces.uwex.edu.