



AMERICA ON TRACK RALLIES VOLUNTEERS TO BAN FLAVORED TOBACCO IN BUENA PARK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America On Track worked with the Buena Park FIT Committee that focuses on health and wellness issues to drive support for a flavor policy restricting youth access to sweet, fruity, and menthol tobacco products in Buena Park. Buena Park is a diverse community of more than 84,000 people in Orange County. Hispanics/Latinos represent nearly 38% of the population; Asians represent 32.4%.

The America On Track (AOT) Flavors Workgroup was key to policy success. They built on existing relationships with city leaders, partnering with community-based organizations, and recruiting community members focused on nutrition and physical education. Efforts resulted in a tobacco retail license (TRL) and a ban on sales of flavored and menthol tobacco products, in addition to other measures to reduce youth access.

AMERICA ON TRACK

Based in Santa Ana, America On Track is a non-profit organization that has designed and executed groundbreaking programs in youth leadership development, mentoring, fitness and nutrition education, tobacco/drug use prevention, and policy development.

APPROACH

With a long track record of working on health and wellness issues in Buena Park, AOT served as a facilitator for the Buena Park FIT Committee, a resident group that works with city departments to create policies and practices that improve the overall health of the city. After AOT's presentation about the health impacts and trends in youth tobacco use to the FIT Committee on Feb. 12, 2021, a group of residents formed the AOT Flavors Workgroup and agreed to measure community support for a policy to restrict the sale of flavored tobaccos products in Buena Park. The campaign garnered early support by then-Mayor Pro-Tem Sunny Park, who agreed to champion the issue.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CAMPAIGN

Surveying to Test Public Opinion, Community Support

Comprised of 11 Buena Park residents, the Flavors Workgroup began collecting public opinion polls in person and online to test community support for a city council flavors policy. Surveys were available in English, Spanish and Korean in order to reach and engage broad community support. The survey consisted of a combination of Likert scale ratings, multiple response, and yes/no questions. Questions assessed views about mentholated cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products and the level of support for policies eliminating the sale and distribution of those products.

Workgroup members canvassed in groups, first practicing their scripts, and identifying the strongest English speaker among them to take the lead when talking to non-Spanish speaking community residents. These efforts netted 1,177 surveys, in time to be presented at the city council’s initial information session on the flavors issue.

An overwhelming majority of Buena Park area residents (96%) either “very strongly” (87%) or “somewhat strongly” (9%) supported a city law that bans the sale of flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes.



Training and engaging volunteers for a fast-moving campaign.

Training sessions for the Flavors Workgroup members were scheduled for early March, providing each volunteer with comprehensive kits including educational resources and supplies, such as hand sanitizer and gloves, to mitigate risks of COVID-19 transmission during survey collection. Once restrictions on public gatherings eased in June 2021, Flavors Workgroup members had more opportunities for data collection through community events, such as a summer reading programs, a concert series in the park.

A Spanish speaking Flavors Workgroup member, Brenda Torres, who lives in low-income housing and saw the impact youth tobacco access was having in the community, said she was inspired to get involved with the Flavors Workgroup that included her children. Torres believed training was key to giving her the confidence to collect in-person surveys.

The Flavors Workgroup collected surveys, made signs, and attended city council meetings wearing custom t-shirts in support. “AOT was able to find a specific job for each person in the Flavors Workgroup and focused on their capacity for growing leadership skills,” Torres said. “We were not just speaking to

Latinos, but also Whites and Asians, so overcoming a language barrier was important,” Torres said, “we were all well trained and equipped to feel confident to independently do the work.”

At community events, the Flavors Workgroup invited community members to post selfies holding frames or laminated posters that said, “Flavors Hook Kids” and write-in their own answers to a sign saying, “I support a flavor and menthol tobacco ban because ...” Images were shared broadly by community members on their social media accounts. Flavors Workgroup members also invited community members to post selfies with the signs as they did survey collections and or to invite family members, neighbors, or friends to post pictures of themselves holding the signs.

In addition, AOT and the Flavors Workgroup conducted 14 key informant interviews with community stakeholders and met with 12 tobacco retail store owners. As community residents, the Flavors Workgroup played an important role in securing meetings, said Claire Braeburn, AOT Executive Director. AOT provided trainings for the Flavors Workgroup members who would present public comment and survey data during the March 2021 session.



Motivating City Council to take action.

Between March and July, the Flavors Workgroup worked with AOT to secure 15 presentations for local organizations, including parent groups, local schools, Buena Park's Volunteer Opportunities and Leadership for Teens (VOLT) program, the Buena Park Jamboree affordable housing community and member organizations of the Buena Park Collaborative.

Presentations provided by the Flavors Workgroup members included health disparities among the Latino community and survey results demonstrating community support.

During the city council session, AOT provided examples of policies adopted

in other communities, research and statistics about youth flavored tobacco access and use. Mayor Pro-Tem Park said supporting similar efforts outside Buena Park is important to ultimate success. Without similar measures in surrounding communities, "kids can easily go to adjacent cities to get flavored products," she said. "Unless we make a regional effort, I don't think this effort will ever go away."

Unfortunately, the campaign experienced a temporary setback when discussion during the March city council study session expanded beyond youth access and flavored tobacco to smoke-free multi-unit housing issues, complicating the topic for council members. The subject of smoke-free multi-unit housing was tabled. A second study session was scheduled to focus solely on a TRL and ban on flavored tobacco products and was held in April 2021 at which time city staff was directed to draft ordinance language for consideration in July.

Prior to the July 2021 council consideration of the policy, AOT again held training sessions to prepare Flavors Workgroup members to provide public comment. At the council meeting, 21 residents, including several Flavors Workgroup members

Paid media campaign raises broad community awareness.

In addition to the comprehensive volunteer-led efforts, AOT funded a paid media campaign from their grant to generate visibility for the campaign and to educate the public. The media campaign focused on the risks of flavored tobacco with ads in English, Spanish and Korean to raise awareness throughout Buena Park.

The campaign included: 13 bus shelter ads, one digital billboard ad, eight radio ads, two movie theatre ads, one atmosphere ad at Rock-N-Brew community event, four YouTube video ads, and eight website banners, in addition to distribution of corresponding postcard ads distributed at all city facilities and events. The media campaign also included ads on streaming service Pandora. The ads generated more than 4.6 million media impressions.

Paid posts on Facebook proved more challenging, as the campaign struggled to navigate around the platform's rules about tobacco content. Ultimately, the speed of the campaign left little time to overcome the barriers the group encountered before the policy was successfully adopted.



came to speak or show their support in person, with t-shirts and signs in support of the flavor ban, and 10 provided public comment. During the meeting, several youth shared their experiences and fears about youth access to flavored tobacco.

CHALLENGES

The main challenges faced in this campaign included:

COVID-19 Pandemic Restrictions

With pandemic-related restrictions on public gatherings and events in place during spring 2021, volunteers found non-traditional approaches to gathering surveys by focusing on where people accessed in-person services.

Hookah Business Concerns, Led to Policy Weakening

Following the April 2021 session, the council asked city staff to meet with local retailers about a TRL. During the July 27, 2021, council meeting, a challenge by a local hookah lounge raised concerns that resulted in a narrowly defined policy exemption limited to the operator in business as of that date, and requirement that space be limited to patrons ages 21 and over.

Facebook Paid Posts Approval

Paid posts on Facebook proved challenging, as AOT struggled to navigate around the platform's restrictions on tobacco content. Ultimately, the speed of the campaign left little time to overcome the barriers the group encountered before the policy was successfully adopted.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Training and Support Ensured Campaign Was Community-led.

The Flavors Workgroup members were intensely involved with development of materials, ensuring they reflected the community. AOT staff recognized that many Flavors Workgroup members were conducting community engagement activities for the first time and would need added support. AOT provided six training sessions to build volunteer confidence while distributing materials, collecting public opinion surveys. Some trainings were focused on how to register for public comment during council meetings or request key informant interviews, or even logging on to Zoom. Other sessions gave volunteers a chance to practice and hone their public comments for upcoming city council meetings.

Providing Language Translation Services

Most of the Flavors Workgroup members were Spanish-speakers, and key informant interviews were primarily in English. AOT provided a translator during meetings and made staff available to support key informant interviews and other public awareness presentations. During council meetings, a Flavors Workgroup member requested translations services for the public comment period to ensure community voices were heard.

Building trust, showing up.

AOT staff made themselves available - including being on-call to troubleshoot issues or answer questions to support data collection. With public

health measures limiting public gatherings and concerns about COVID-19 transmission, AOT worked with Flavors Workgroup members to implement measures minimizing risk. Each volunteer was given a data collection kit including a binder of key information, but also hand sanitizer, gloves, disinfectant wipes and pens that could be left behind. Materials were created in English, Spanish and Korean, to increase community reach.

“The Flavors Workgroup was able to demonstrate broad support,” Mayor Pro-Tem Park said. “I saw them at community events every week getting petitions signed.”

Creating a strong community presence.

AOT and the Flavors Workgroup made 15 presentations to community and parent and youth organizations. It also maintained a presence at key community events, including summer concerts and camps. During a summer reading program for preschoolers, Flavors Workgroup members met with families to share materials and collect surveys.

Mayor Pro-Tem Park said the Flavors Workgroup dedication and the majority of Spanish speaking moms were the key to the campaign’s success. “My job was to give them the resources and make the connections for them, but they were the ones who really pushed this issue to the table,” she said. “It was all about civic participation and civic empowerment.” “Those moms recognized that their voice matters not just at city council, but throughout the community,” she said.

RESULTS

The Flavors Workgroup ultimately collected surveys from 1,177 Buena Park residents and presented 366 endorsements from local leaders and 17 resolutions from community organizations in support of stronger tobacco control regulations. That the

surveys, endorsements, and resolutions were sent in three languages also demonstrated broad community support.

On July 27, 2021, Buena Park City Council unanimously adopted an ordinance establishing a tobacco retail license (TRL) program and prohibiting the sales of flavored tobacco products. Tobacco retailers were required to have a TRL as of January 1, 2022 and were prohibited from selling any flavored or menthol products as of March 31, 2022. The ordinance carved out an exception for any hookah businesses in operation as of July 27, 2021, enabling the single existing retailer to remain open, but limited any hookah use to areas restricted to patrons 21 years or older. The ordinance also prohibits any new tobacco retailer establishments in youth sensitive areas, mobile retailing, or discounts.

MOVING FORWARD

Building on its success, AOT and the Flavors Workgroup is supporting implementation of the TRL through retailer education efforts. They are also beginning work on marshaling community support for smoke-free policies in non-recreational locations, such as outdoor dining and farmers markets, and multifamily housing.

“As a group of moms who got this big win, it gave us a sense of pride and accomplishment,” Torres said. “It makes us want to achieve something more and also makes Buena Park an example of how to move forward.”

For information, contact **Claire Braeburn**, Executive Director, America On Track: OnTrack@AmericaOnTrack.org or go to www.AmericaOnTrack.org

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