Success Story: Morgan State University

   The implementation of Morgan State University's (MSU) Smoke-Free campus policy, did not happen overnight. In fact, it was five years in the making. Guided by Dr. Anne Marie O'Keefe, a group of MSU School of Community Health and Policy (SCHP) students began their journey to a smoke-free MSU in 2010. Before presenting this proposed policy to their University President, the SCHP group first wanted to gather information about current smoking habits and policy support from campus members. Thus, they began with a student survey, which showed that only about 20% of MSU students smoked and the majority of students supported a smoke-free campus policy. The SCHP students and Dr. O'Keefe brought these findings to their University President, Dr. David Wilson, hoping it would be convincing enough for immediate policy implementation. However, the President was hesitant, asking for demonstrated support from other primary campus entities and organizations. This original team of SCHP students left the project for a new group of SCHP students to undertake, under the recommendation of the University President to build support from campus organizations and to present a formal proposal.

   To provide this demonstrated support requested by the President, the SCHP students began visiting major campus entities to discuss the importance of having a smoke-free campus policy. These entities included their undergraduate student organization, graduate student association, health educators, human resources, wellness center, SCHP, Prevention Sciences Research Center, and health center. While the students found that typically these organizations did offer verbal support for such a policy, they were sometimes hesitant to do so more formally. Representative Ali Aledhaim, of the second group of SCHP students, speculates that this wariness was likely due to a lack of certainty about the general organizational support, and an unwillingness to be perceived to be part of a "vocal minority" opposition to current policy and administration. An MSU University Council member, however, did express their support of the smoke-free MSU policy. The students decided to change their approach, by focusing on efforts to gain backing from the full University Council.

   The Council is comprised of representatives of all major organizations on campus, and as such, carries profound weight with the university executive branch. The Council member aided with introducing the proposed smoke-free policy to the Council and calling a vote. The students' formal proposal, available on the MCC Tobacco Workgroup website, was introduced in March 2013, two years after the survey was completed. The University Council ultimately accepted the students' smoke-free proposal. The Council developed an implementation plan, which was almost identical to the students' original proposal, but condensed to a duration of one semester instead of the proposed three semesters. The plan was comprised of three phases: education, warning and counseling, and fine enforcement. A critical aspect of MSU's smoke-free policy, both proposed and implemented, is the focus on education rather than punishment. The enacted smoke-free policy allows for three violations with warnings/reprimand before suspension, and allows for a total of eight sequential violations before termination. Finally, this

implementation plan, with the full support of the Council, made its way back to the University President for approval. MSU has been officially smoke-free since July 1, 2015.

Representative Ali Aledhaim, of the second SCHP student group who brought this proposal to fruition, offered some lessons learned for other university student groups:

1. After determining general smoking habits and support on campus (typically via survey), bring these results to the University President. He or she could be receptive to a smoke-free campus policy, in which case, he or she will then be able to identify existing barriers that need to be overcome. Should the President be unreceptive, continue forward with a "bottom-up" approach. However, attempts from both "bottom-up" and "top-down" will be most effective.
2. Never underestimate the importance of data. A survey can be an invaluable tool in proving the need for such a policy and the existing climate among students, faculty, and staff. It is always easiest to champion a popular cause, and when it is perceived as generally unpopular, data becomes your greatest asset.
3. Find out if your university has a University Council, or equivalent organization. This could save much time in the garnering support process, and might offer a powerful campus ally.
4. Determine the existing resources for tobacco cessation. Look for organizations or programs already in place. For example, the CEASE program (Communities Engaged and Advocating for a Smoke-free Environment)[1] played a critical role in MSU's proposed implementation of their smoke-free policy. MSU is fortunate to have CEASE on campus, supporting tobacco cessation programs for campus and community members. Pre-existing and free programs such as CEASE and the Maryland Tobacco Quitline ease the financial burden of establishing a smoke-free policy. Such knowledge helps to counter an argument of *financial* strain incurred by a smoke-free policy.

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[1] For more information on CEASE program, visit their website:
http://www.morgan.edu/school_of_community_health_and_policy/funded_research_and_projects/cease.html