

The New General Plans Public Comment Toolkit: An Introduction and Walk-Through

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Panelists: JoAnn Saccato, Carolina Saavedra, Amanda Simpson

Facilitators: Hiya Peesu, Stephanie Voong

Technical Assistance: Patricia Laija

Questions Submitted at Registration

1. **Question:** If we know there is a smoke-free housing element in a city's general plan (GP), how can we bring up the issue of Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing (SFMUH) in a city?

Answer: While there won't be a "smoke-free housing element" in the GP, the GP may already include a goal and/or policy for smoke-free housing, or other health-related issue that smoke-free housing can fit into. If so, this [toolkit](#) and the [RISE Creating Verbal Public Comments for General Plans](#) document can be used to craft public comments that can be spoken by coalition members at a regularly scheduled legislative body (e.g. city council, board of supervisors) meeting. (Note: We are not referring to a meeting necessarily related to general plans). These meetings usually take place on a regular basis and require the opportunity for the public to speak or give verbal public comment directly to elected officials. This public comment opportunity is usually offered at the beginning of the meeting and is reserved for non-agenda items, but you may have to sign up ahead of time. Engaging with elected bodies in this way helps raise awareness about the issue and can build public momentum toward policy adoption. As always, check with your program directors first.

2. **Question:** What do I do if I find my city is behind schedule or out of compliance with GP updates?

Answer: Because the update process for a city or county's general plan is usually a time consuming and resource intensive process, many jurisdictions find that they don't have the funding to gather the necessary staff or hire consultants to take on this process. It is possible that your jurisdiction finds itself in such a predicament. In this case, it may be a good idea to reach out to your city's planning commission/department and ask whether they have any information about when the jurisdiction will undertake this overdue process. Your planning department is likely quite aware of the noncompliance and hearing from other departments, or the public, may renew a sense of urgency to pursue the process. A potential

relationship-building opportunity could be to help strategize resource opportunities for the update, including grants, internships, fellowships, etc.

3. **Question:** Can you provide a brief explanation of the difference between lobbying and advocacy?

Answer: Advocacy is a broad effort to support or promote a cause or policy through public education around an issue and its impact and mobilizing community support. Lobbying is actions aimed at influencing an elected official to make a particular decision on a specific piece of legislation before them.

While CTPP-funded projects and staff may provide education, lobbying activities are NOT allowed. Please visit the [Advocacy page](#) on Partners for more information. This page also includes a 1 hour recorded webinar on the differences between education vs. lobbying. Additionally, you may also refer to the Policy Manual Section [311-Program Requirements](#) in OTIS for more information on the lobbying and political activities policy.

4. **Question:** Can the General Plan help support language into Community Health Improvement Plan +/- County Behavioral Health Plan?

Answer: Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs) are adopted by health providers in part to meet their Public Health Board Accreditation requirements, as well as to assess the needs of the communities they serve. By contrast, the general plan is designed to set goals and outline policies and implementation measures to be put into place by city/county agencies and departments. Being familiar with the general plan, particularly any health-related goals and policies, could be helpful in conversations for the CHIP process, by highlighting how CHIP strategies and objectives could align with any relevant general plan policies.

5. **Question:** In what ways and to what extent is it preferable to do tobacco work under the general plan compared to a CHIP and Community Health Assessment (CHA)?

Answer: Projects may want to be involved with all, as they may be happening at different times, as well as ensuring that all community conversations around health include tobacco prevention. Anytime a coalition member or project staff can interject themselves into the process where health is being discussed will be helpful. Specifically, though, a general plan is a document that can lead to direct policy adoption given the goals and policies adopted within the general plan, where the CHIP/CHA gives community stakeholders a general direction to take for

community health but is not a document that binds the elected officials to act upon it. Many CHIPs include policy-change recommendations, which may eventually support or be reflected in local laws or plans. It can also lead to policy adoption, but it is not inherent in the process.

6. **Question:** How do you quickly get community members up to speed with general plans?

Answer: If you are referring to when a general plan cycle is open, the jurisdiction responsible for the general plan update is required to engage the community in their efforts. So, offering to help with these efforts utilizing the resources and channels the project has can be a great way to collaborate, be involved and help set priorities, goals and a vision. If you are referring to learning, in general, what GPs are all about, creating a training for your coalition and inviting the public to attend can be helpful. Please refer to the [General Plans CoP page](#) on Partners for more information on resources.

7. **Question:** Can you please provide a few key points for convincing rural community members that the General Plan is an important thing to get involved in?

Answer: General Plans help a community set priorities. For our tobacco prevention work, this can include envisioning a community that is healthy; enjoys economic vitality based in a healthy workforce, consumers, and tourists; and a legacy of truly caring for the community. Additionally, if a particular community, rural or otherwise, has a difficult political environment for pursuing the adoption of tobacco prevention policy ordinances, engaging and providing public comment in this regard during the general plan process can create a more feasible pathway for arriving at such policy implementation. In rural communities, in particular, highlighting that tobacco product waste is a costly and largely unmanageable problem that threatens the health of crops and natural resources may persuade them to also get engaged because the general plan process will lay the foundation that could make later implementation of tobacco prevention measures easier to accomplish since the ordinances that the jurisdictions adopt must be consistent with the general plan.

General plans also provide opportunities to leverage partnerships and make use of limited resources. Rural environments benefit from broad, cross-sector partnerships because resources can be limited and collaborative solutions are necessary. Involving tobacco prevention and other health advocates can bring unique perspectives and outside resources to maximize the impact of general plan strategies, and ensure investment addresses multiple community needs.

8. **Question:** How do you leverage General Plans in Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing (SFMUH) policy work?

Answer: Stay tuned for our toolkit section on SFMUH! :)

9. **Question:** What happens after the general plan language has been approved by city officials? How is this beneficial for tobacco policy work?

Answer: After the general plan language has been approved by city officials, the plan enters an implementation phase. This phase involves translating broad policy and vision statements into actionable programs, regulations, and ongoing city operations. For example, the city will review and update zoning ordinances, subdivisions regulations, and other local codes to be consistent with the General Plan. Any permits or land use decisions by the city council must now be consistent with the updated general plan. Ongoing community engagement ensures that implementation actions are taken and that the plan remains responsive to community needs. This lays the groundwork for Local Lead Agencies (LLAs) and other funded projects and coalitions to educate elected officials and the community on how policies such as Tobacco Retail License (TRL), Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing (SF MUH), and Smoke-Free Outdoor Areas (SF OA) help the community align (more fully) with their general plan goals and community vision.

10. **Question:** Any thoughts on advancing tobacco-free behavioral health (BH) campuses and cessation treatment provision in behavioral health settings through general plans?

Answer: For the tobacco-free BH campuses, if the County has a desire for a healthy community, they could include a goal to have all county owned and operated facilities be tobacco/nicotine/smoke free. It could be possible to offer these types of policies in the general plan, particularly if the community has adopted a health element or something similar. Even if they don't have a separate health element (which is not a statutorily required element), they may have goals that address the desire for a healthy population, in which case it may be a good fit. Additionally, if your program is already engaging in public comments during the general plan update process and offering other tobacco prevention policy language (such as SF MUH or SF OA), including some language that the jurisdiction will explore investing in cessation options may be a possible strategy.

11. **Question:** Curious about what would be the equivalent of model policy language, so I guess model plan language?

Answer: Best practice language is included in the [GP Toolkit](#). The reason we do not include model language is because general plans are so community-specific, it is rare that you would adopt the language verbatim. This language is intended to be a jumping off point so you can feel more confident to engage in the process.

12. **Question:** Is an invite required to provide public comment as a prop 56/99 funded entity?

Answer: No, an invitation is not required to provide public comment. CTPP requires that projects who do formal presentations receive a formal invite, i.e. on the agenda. Please refer to [Policy Manual Section 311](#) in OTIS for more information on the lobbying and political activities policy.

13. **Question:** How do you safely engage with advocates that are part of the Latino community?

Answer: The Latino Coordinating Center (LCC) provides statewide training and technical assistance for projects interested in working with Latino Communities. You're welcome to reach out to the LCC team for project specific assistance. Please visit the [LLC website](#) or the [CTPP Coordinating Centers page](#) on Partners for more information.

14. **Question:** How do you coordinate multiple public comments with residents?

Answer: Invite them into the coalition! Offer a quick training and determine relevant talking points, order of comments, etc. This [toolkit](#), along with [RISE Creating Verbal Public Comments for General Plans](#) document can be helpful resources to provide your coalition members to help them create effective comments. It is helpful to remember that coalition members can provide comments through various means that your general plan process offers such as public workshops, online surveys, focus groups, town halls, and pop-up events to provide opportunities for residents with a wide range of experience and comfortability engaging with general plans. As with any public comment, it can be helpful to use tools like spreadsheets, google forms, communication platforms (Slack, Teams, etc.) to track the topic, constituency, theme, and organizations represented by members giving public comment.

15. **Question:** How can I use this toolkit to serve rural communities?

Answer: One of the main advantages of working with GPs is it moves the work further upstream to the visioning space of a community. This can be particularly

beneficial in communities where there is an aversion to policies, in general, and a fear of government overreach, as can happen in rural jurisdictions.

When a community agrees on a vision—say, healthy communities—they are more likely to support and agree upon evidence-based strategies that support that vision, including policies. Particularly when coupled with CTPP project and coalition community engagement advocacy activities for workplan-related policy work, general plan work adds to and supports a multi-pronged approach for awareness and advocacy.

Engaging with [RISE's Framing Tobacco Control Policy for Rural Decision-Makers: Best Practices to Guide Your Communication](#) provides strategies and best practice language that can help when a project and/or coalition participates in the general plan process in rural communities. Engaging your coalition with education around general plans and providing a public comment training with the [Toolkit](#) and [RISE's Creating Verbal Public Comments for a General Plan/Element Update](#) can be a supportive activity.

16. Question: Is it better to start with smoke free outdoor areas or multi-unit housing first?

Answer: If you are referring to policy work, it depends on your target jurisdiction and what your community is ready for. Regarding General Plan updates, language for both SF OA and SF MUH can be included. It would be helpful to note if your county/city is working on a comprehensive General Plan update or if they are only planning to update a specific element. For example, if your community is updating their housing element, then SF MUH may be a better fit, where if they are updating the conservation or open space element, then SF OA may be a more effective approach.

17. Question: What is the best way to use this toolkit for introducing endgame phase out policy options to decision makers?

Answer: While the [toolkit](#) is not designed for public consumption, it includes endgame language projects can use to build into conversations and public comments to help educate decision makers.

18. Question: How do you engage community members in providing public comments?

Answer: Similar to any other campaign engagement. You may want to provide a training to your coalition and community members on how to give public comment

during a general plan cycle. Engaging your coalition with education around general plans and providing a public comment training with the [GP Toolkit](#) and [RISE's Creating Verbal Public Comments for a General Plan/Element Update](#) can be a supportive activity.

19. **Question:** How do we find out when each city's GP update is scheduled for each relevant element?

Answer: Check with your city or county website and/or community development department to find out when the next general plan cycle is and what elements will be included. Note that comprehensive general plans are typically made to last between 15-20 years, with the exception of the housing element, which is updated sometimes at 4, 5, or, most common, 8 years, as required by [Housing and Community Development \(HCD\)](#). The “eight-year cycle” applies to most regions.

20. **Question:** As a competitive grantee who is not required to work on general plans, what are some transferable processes or takeaway points?

Answer: Engaging your coalition in the General Plan process would be another form of community engagement that helps educate community members and elected officials, regardless of what tobacco prevention priority area your workplan includes. Learning how to sift through evidence that can be relevant to your local community and crafting public comments is also helpful. Getting relevant general plan goals and policies in place can be a primer for ordinance policy work that projects can leverage in their education and advocacy work. For example, after learning what your community's vision is in your general plan, you can work something like the following into your public comments: “Our community has decided that health is a priority in our visioning and goals in our general plan. Creating conditions where our children are protected from predatory marketing of dangerous products, such as vapes and tobacco, is one way we can support that vision and our goals.”