



Training Highlight:

TTAC and partners celebrate six years of successful collaboration in Louisiana

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina brought chaos to the State of Louisiana. Many state residents had been displaced by the storm, leaving the State Department of Health and Hospitals with tobacco control funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) without the human resources to utilize the money.

There were two state-level tobacco control organizations in Louisiana: The Louisiana Tobacco Control Program (LTCP) within the Louisiana Department of Health & Hospitals (DHH) and the Louisiana Campaign for Tobacco-Free Living (TFL), an affiliated program of the Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI) funded through the Louisiana Cancer Research Consortium (LCRC). While the two organizations had similar goals, they each worked in isolation, with little coordination of efforts. **The leaders of both programs realized that to be sustainable, the two organizations needed to work more collaboratively in order to eliminate duplication of efforts and create a unified tobacco control movement in their state.**

They called upon the Tobacco Technical Assistance Consortium (TTAC) as a neutral outside facilitator to enable the two organizations to build trust, foster a productive dialogue between the two groups, achieve consensus on a vision for their work, and create a list of shared goals. **TTAC used a structured process, tools, and framework to move the groups toward a mutual understanding of how to work together, identify unique roles for each group that were supportive of the other's work, and develop internal and external communication plans.** The TTAC facilitator presented several models for what integration of the two organizations could entail, and worked with the Louisiana program staff to combine different aspects of the models to create their own framework for organizational alignment that met their needs, dubbing it the "Bayou Integration Model." TTAC worked with not only leadership, but also engaged all staff from both organizations to gain buy-in to the collaborative planning process.

The alignment process was just the first step toward establishing a formal relationship between LTCP and TFL. Unlike many organizational relationships that exist only on paper, **the programs have received ongoing facilitation and support from TTAC, enabling them to coordinate:**

- **Staffing.** Staff from each organization know their counterparts at the other, and are constantly in touch to plan programmatic activities and ensure that their efforts are complementary.
- **Funds.** The two organizations dually fund the quitline.
- **A brand.** Prior to the alignment, each organization had its own logo for tobacco cessation materials. TFL is fortunate to have a large media department, so a shared cessation brand that both groups can use, QuitWithUsLA, was developed during the alignment process.

- **Responsibility for local programs.** TFL manages regional subcommittees focused on tobacco, with participation from grantees of both TFL and LTCP.
- **Priorities.** LTCP and TFL have a shared evaluation plan that includes the CDC’s four goal areas and incorporates shared objectives where possible. In addition, both organizations are working to address tobacco-related disparities, and have collaboratively created a joint five-year strategic plan toward that goal. Each organization has a separate and distinct set of priority populations to target in order to avoid duplication of efforts.
- **Successes.** LTCP staff are limited in their ability to influence public policy, so they take on other supportive roles, such as educating the public, while the TFL staff are able to advocate for tobacco control policies. The passage of smoke-free air policies and other tobacco control “wins” are celebrated by both programs, together. Says LTCP Interim Program Manager Brandi Bourgeois, “It’s not a win for one program; it’s one win for both programs.”

While the alignment has thrived, TTAC continues to be involved in keeping the two groups moving forward and on track with their goals, as well as in getting buy-in from newly-hired staff. TTAC continues to facilitate monthly conference calls to exchange information and ensure that they maintain a unified voice for tobacco control. In the nearly six years since the planning first began, the collaborative model has survived leadership changes and staff turnover within both organizations.

LTCP has been recognized nationally, in part due to the alignment model. Reflecting on the past six years, Ms. Bourgeois says that her biggest source of pride is seeing how far the two programs have come. Bourgeois remembers that it took a great deal of hard work in the beginning to rebound after the post-Katrina disarray and get the two programs in sync, but now, the thriving partnership has now become easy to maintain.

The leaders of both programs were involved in the initial alignment process and want this valued collaboration to continue and grow. **In the coming year, the organizations plan to work with TTAC to engage new state and regional-level tobacco control partners in the collaborative process, and to explore a framework to involve other chronic disease prevention programs, broadening the impact of the tobacco control movement in Louisiana.**

TTAC strives to create collaborative work environments that foster creativity, inclusiveness, innovation, continuous learning, and the celebration of achievements. After years of providing quality technical assistance, we know that many different paths exist to achieve common outcomes. Our goal is to work in partnership with our colleagues to assess needs, fill gaps, and provide viable solutions to overcome challenges. We work openly, with a sense of urgency, in the spirit of respect, collaboration and trust; with enthusiasm and commitment to public health principles and the highest ethical standards.