

# Community-based Participatory Research and the Role of Coalitions in Promoting Scientifically Sound Policies

*David Buller, Ph.D., with Walter (Snip) Young and Erwin Bettinghaus, Cooper Institute*

*Presenter: David Buller, Ph.D., Harold Simmons Senior Scientist for Health Communication, and Vice President, Center for Health Communication, Cooper Institute, Golden, Colorado*

The sometimes conflicting roles of public health practitioners, advocacy groups, and public health researchers can be a barrier to collaboration. The "Web-based Support for Community Tobacco Control Coalitions" Project required that the State Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership [STEPP], Colorado Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership [CTEPA], and The Cooper Institute [CI] collaborate to provide scientifically sound, policy-directed, technical assistance and training (TAT) to community tobacco control coalitions throughout Colorado.

TAT is provided through an interactive Web site designed to provide up-to-date information (e.g., Latest News), fact sheets on policy topics, scientific documents (e.g., CDC Best Practices, Guide to Community Preventive Services, etc.), and communication methods such as a forum, a community calendar, and e-mail. TAT is intended to help community health advocates change local tobacco control policies. A workgroup from STEPP, CTEPA, and CI developed and updates the Web site. Training modules entitled Build a Coalition, Media Advocacy, Advocate Effectively for Policies, and Basics of Tobacco Control provide online learning for tobacco control advocates. STEPP interfaces with coalitions through community public health agencies, maintains Web content, and recommends Web site use to coalitions' staff and volunteers. CTEPA provides news and personal profiles and leads promotional efforts. CI and its subcontractor produced and maintain the Web site and supervise its evaluation in a randomized trial.

Nearly 300 registered users across 34 coalitions have accessed the project's Web sites. Community-level policy change is the primary outcome being monitored. Intermediate measures include: coalition functioning; attitudes and actions of the public, business owners, and government officials toward tobacco; and media coverage of tobacco issues. Given reductions in STEPP funding, a highly efficient method of providing TAT to local advocates is needed more than ever. The partnership, while not without some "bumps along the way," has produced a valuable product that supports scientific approaches to community tobacco control policy change.