



## NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center



### Healthier Parks Initiative

Communities Eliminating Tobacco Inequities  
Project Overview

#### Context

The focus of this project is the city of Minneapolis, with much of the community- and coalition-building taking place in North Minneapolis, where NorthPoint is located. North Minneapolis is considerably diverse: More than one quarter of residents speak a

language other than English, and three out of five adults report household incomes below 200 percent of poverty level. The area includes predominantly persons of color and ethnicities other than white. The health indicators for North Minneapolis residents portray the challenges of transforming this region into a healthier community. The Near North neighborhood reported the highest smoking rates in the city—24 percent compared to 16 percent for all of Minneapolis.

**Project goal** NorthPoint, in partnership with the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota (ANSR), aimed to advocate for the implementation of a more comprehensive and easy to understand tobacco-free<sup>1</sup> parks policy for the city of Minneapolis. This would ultimately lead to increased park use by families due to the healthier, cleaner environment. After it achieved this goal in Year 2, NorthPoint switched to a focus on keeping up momentum from this success and supporting implementation.

#### What NorthPoint set out to do

**Strategies** NorthPoint’s strategies include community education and mobilization around tobacco, and the elimination of tobacco use in indoor and outdoor settings.

**Defining success** NorthPoint defined success as getting a comprehensive tobacco-free parks policy passed.

#### What NorthPoint did

NorthPoint mobilized people to support the change in policy. These activities included:

- Engaging youth through a youth coalition.

*“Pinnacle of exposure!  
Everyone who uses  
the park—users,  
Minneapolis folk—  
anyone will be  
exposed less! This is  
top notch—we’re  
changing lives here! ...  
If a child is born now  
they will never know a  
park that had  
smoking.”*

—NorthPoint staff

*“We came up with  
language, met  
individually and  
collectively with  
elected  
commissioners, sent  
in emails, mobilized  
the community to  
email about the  
policy. ... People  
wanted the policy.  
That’s how the work  
started.”*

—NorthPoint staff

<sup>1</sup> Tobacco in this document refers specifically to the use of manufactured, commercial tobacco products, and not to the sacred, medicinal, and traditional use of tobacco by Native Americans and other groups.

- Equipping people to advocate for the policy, for example training on media and public meetings.
- Media outreach.
- Speaking with parks commissioners and at the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board meetings.

NorthPoint’s work toward a tobacco-free policy integrated with related community work, including the T21 efforts to raise the legal age to buy tobacco to 21, menthol restrictions, and adjacent institutions’ tobacco-free policies (for example, the University of Minnesota).

## Accomplishments

NorthPoint’s biggest success was achieving its original project goal—the **passage of a comprehensive tobacco-free parks policy** in the city of Minneapolis. This policy will lower exposure to tobacco for parkgoers, through all forms of exposure from second hand and third hand smoke such as park litter.

**Educating the community helped secure local buy-in** for the policy change and developed more champions. NorthPoint trained and mobilized interested community members. The education expanded beyond this specific policy effort to raising awareness around tobacco in general. For example, by explaining why they were included in the policy, NorthPoint educated community members about the dangers of e-cigarettes.

**Youth advocates were especially critical in engaging the community**—young people were enthusiastic about the work and able to interact with the community in a different way than NorthPoint could, because people care about the kids and families in the community. Additionally, NorthPoint built on existing energy by recruiting youth who were already interested in the issue of tobacco and wanted to advocate for the policy.

Another success factor was **engaging the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board**, through which NorthPoint gained a champion advocating for the policy change. This was just one partnership that helped NorthPoint’s work; the organization formed relationships with both community leaders and organizations.

NorthPoint successfully **leveraged the community’s love for its parks**. NorthPoint held events within the parks that would be affected by a policy change and highlighted the benefits parkgoers would see, for example for their pets in the park.

## Lessons learned

**Youth are key players in tobacco policy work.** NorthPoint leveraged youth who were already energized by this work and wanted to advocate for the more comprehensive policy; in turn, the community heard their voices loud and clear. Working with youth also comes with its own unique challenges; for example, scheduling conflicts and turnover. NorthPoint also struggled to ensure they could pay youth participants with CETI funding, although ultimately was able to pay them.

The policy **success also is a testament to the ability for a community to change policies**, even at large park systems like in Minneapolis. This serves as an example to other large cities looking to make this change. NorthPoint’s success factors, including mobilizing community members and working with a champion community leader, provide helpful insight. “[It] sets precedent for all outdoor place policies,” an ANSR staff member said. “No matter the size of the system, it’s possible to go tobacco-free, and we have roadmap for how to get there.”

*“[The youth advocates] doing work in the community they live in and that they are young people was important to decision makers—for them to be young people from community, that was important.”*

—ANSR staff

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