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Building Support for Smoke-free Festivals and Events: The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark Experience

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The Program Training and Consultation Centre conducts applied research in partnership with the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact at the University of Waterloo.

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- Build the capacity of Ontario's 36 public health departments to plan and implement evidence-based tobacco control programs
- Support moving evidence into action
- Strengthen program development and applied research efforts
- Build system capacity to support the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy renewal

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About the Study

This document describes the work conducted in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark around building support for smoke-free outdoor festivals and events as part of the Program Training and Consultation Centre's Documentation of Practice Project (DoP). For purposes of this DoP study, the terms festival and event are used synonymously and support for smoke-free events is defined as:

- municipalities, event organizers, and/or the public developing attitudes that support smoke-free events; and/or
- event organizers setting a priority and/or developing policies and procedures to make their events smoke-free.

The study uses information gathered from semi-structured interviews and relevant documents about the documented cases. Data are analyzed using a realist-inspired approach (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to understand what worked for whom and under what circumstances to build support for smoke-free outdoor festivals and events.

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark example is one of four cases selected for this study. For this case example, one informant from the public health unit was interviewed and documents included municipal websites, event brochures, and health unit presentations. Each case example presents the processes and insights specific to that location and the cross-case report highlights the key learnings and insights from across the cases.¹

1.0 Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit (LGLDHU)

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit (LGLDHU) is a regional entity serving 164,970 people, 22.5% of whom are current smokers² (Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, 2016). The following 24 municipalities are within LGLDHU's catchment area:

- Lanark County, which includes the townships of Beckwith, Drummond/North Elmsley, Lanark Highlands, Montague, Tay Valley; and the towns of Perth, Mississippi Mills, Carleton Place;
- United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, which includes the townships of Athens, Augusta, Edwardsburgh/Cardinal, Elizabethtown-Kitley, Front of Yonge, Leeds and the Thousand Islands, Rideau Lakes; the municipality of North Grenville; and villages of Merrickville-Wolford and Westport;
- the City of Brockville; and
- the towns of Gananoque, Prescott, and Smith Falls.



¹To read the cross-case report, other case examples, and to look at other DoPs, please visit the documentation of practice section of PTCC's website at https://www.ptcc-cfc.on.ca/knowledge_exchange/DoPs/

²Current smoking defined by past 30-day use and 100 cigarettes in lifetime (Canadian Community Health Survey, 2013/2014).

2.0 Smoke-free events strategy

Historically, there were limited supports in place for LGLDHU to encourage festivals and events to be smoke-free and the health unit had limited knowledge about how events were managing smoking. Amendments made to the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA)* in January 2015, however, enabled the health unit to intervene. They worked to make event venues smoke-free by applying *SFOA* smoking restrictions on bar and restaurant patios, in sporting areas, and on children's playgrounds and play areas, and by reaching out to municipalities and event organizers to build support for compliance by applying proprietor obligations within the *SFOA*. They also used these interventions to make tobacco control a priority among these key stakeholders and address smoking beyond the minimal requirements of the *SFOA*. A key focus was the proprietor obligations of municipalities and event organizers. As one informant said:

"It's their proprietor obligations. So, we have basically assisted them in the enforcement. We've provided signs. We've gone to do visits, we've educated their staff, but we take the approach that if you're the event organizers, just like you're responsible to keep the alcohol within a certain area, you're responsible to keep the smoking off of the property or off of certain areas based on what's going on with the festival."

LGLDHU reaches out to municipalities and event organizers to promote compliance with proprietor obligations and to encourage them to work in their locus of control to make events smoke-free. Examples of local solutions within the control of municipalities include integrating smoke-free requirements into event permits and land use agreements, enacting specific smoke-free by-laws, and coordinating event planning and management with various municipal departments. Examples of solutions in the control of event organizers include event set-ups, communications, and event management protocols such as security staff protocol that helps direct people to spaces where smoking can occur.

2.1 WORKING WITH THE MUNICIPALITIES

Outreach to municipalities began during an awareness raising campaign conducted by the health unit to prepare for the *SFOA* amendments that came into effect in January 2016. The health unit broadly publicized the amendment using "... media, both by paid and by press release and other types of media, and we publicize the information on our website and presented it to our Board of Health as well."

This campaign also included outreach to the 24 municipalities that LGLDHU serves to raise awareness about the *SFOA* changes, educate municipal departments about locations where smoking is prohibited, and provide signage for outdoor parks. The health unit made municipalities aware of proprietor obligations within the *SFOA* and that, as property owners, they too must help ensure compliance:

"We met with each individual municipality so on top of presenting at the counties council, we then organized a meeting with the staff at the different municipalities so that the clerk, the rec department, the fire department if they were interested, would attend. I think that was a key piece which set the stage for municipalities including it in their events and vendor permits and things like that."

During the outreach sessions with municipalities, the health unit noted that engagement of key departments including fire, law enforcement, and recreation departments was often an "easy sell" to get them on board and prepared to support events in going smoke-free and/or complying with minimally required smoking bans:

“So normally if there is municipal by-law and there is enforcement there, then that’s somebody that we connect with. Fire Marshalls are... interested in it because of the link with smoking and a fire at those events... rec departments... because a lot of their staff become involved in either the setting up barricades or barriers, or closing off streets for those events. So they become quite interested in... where some of the restrictions apply for example.”

Working with the enforcement bodies such as local law enforcement and Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) helped create a coordinated presence at events and promote a culture of compliance (see section 2.2 for more about enforcement and coordination, including working with AGCO). However, since the municipalities within Leeds, Grenville and Lanark fund the health unit, it was important for LGLDHU to lead the smoke-free by-law and SFOA enforcement efforts.

The SFOA applies to nearly all outdoor festivals and event venues in some way, which enabled the health unit to address tobacco use at events held on both private and municipal properties. However, the broad definition of locations where smoking is prohibited can be either an enabler or barrier for indicating where and how to address smoking. When a venue does not clearly match the definition of a location with a smoking ban, enforcement strategies can be akin to “drawing a line in the sand.” In particular, food and beverage services at festivals and events have been difficult to map onto the wording with the SFOA-mandated smoking bans. Events typically do not have distinctive patio boundaries. However, LGLDHU has been able to interpret beaches as sporting areas, and according to the SFOA, are therefore smoke-free locations. The health unit commented that including beaches in their interpretation of sporting areas has been, “... well-received by our municipalities. It hasn’t really been an issue. So when there is something at a beach area the signage is already up and [event organizers] kind of expect it [to be smoke-free].”

They also note that, without the smoke-free sporting areas mandate, it would be quite difficult to make volleyball tournaments smoke-free, especially since not all volleyball tournaments sell food or beverages.

The SFOA proprietor obligations to promote compliance with smoking bans was also used to get municipalities onboard. Note that the owner, typically the municipality, and the renter of the event venue are both proprietors. While proprietor obligations to restrict smoking at festivals and events was typically an easy sell among municipalities, some municipalities were more receptive and eager to act on their obligations than others. Those that were receptive and eager to act allowed the health unit to be included in event planning processes sooner and often quickly modified their municipal property rental agreements and/or event permit agreements to ensure that event organizers were aware of, and accountable for, making events smoke-free. For municipalities that were not as receptive, the health unit had to do more groundwork to get them onboard and obtain more than passive compliance with LGLDHU requests. To do this, the health unit used persistence and diligence. As the informant said:

“We just keep showing up. We keep showing up and showing up and showing up and eventually, you know, they kind of just realize that when there’s an event we’re going to show up and we’re going to have the discussions and they might as well just include us from the beginning.”

The Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario

The AGCO is a provincial agency established under the *Alcohol and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act, 1996* and is mandated to administer the *Liquor Licence Act, 1992*, the *Gaming Control Act, 1992*, and the *Horse Racing Licence Act, 2015*. Key points of potential interaction between the health unit and the AGCO include during administration of special occasion permits typically used for festivals and events, and during monitoring and investigation of licensed premises. Permits are issued by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario on behalf of the AGCO and are within the mandate of the Licensing and Registration Branch of the AGCO. Monitoring and investigation of premises licenced under the *Liquor License Act* are conducted by Ontario Provincial Police officers assigned to the AGCO in partnership with local police services (Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, 2010).

In time, all municipalities within their catchment incorporated smoke-free requirements into their event licences and one municipality has created a smoke-free by-law that goes beyond the minimum requirements of the *SFOA* and

“basically those were municipal decisions where instead of trying to, you know, put a line in the sand or through a parking lot or halfway through a field to say, this is where people can smoke, they’ve enhanced their by-laws to include the entire park.”

Smoke-free spaces by-laws in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark

As of January 2017, only 3¹ of the 24 municipalities in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark have a smoke-free by-law: Brockville, Smith Falls, and North Grenville. Brockville bans smoking in all municipal parks. Smith Falls restricts smoking on all municipal property, including parks, but allows designated smoking areas. North Grenville’s policy extends the buffer zone from entrances and exits to nine meters, but otherwise reiterates the prohibitions listed in the *SFOA*. Although most municipalities in LGL do not have a smoke-free by-law, many have posted *SFOA* fact sheets and embed *SFOA* restrictions in festival and event messaging (e.g., in activity guides, event brochures, etc.).

¹ Note Carlton Place’s parks and facilities by-law makes reference to a smoke-free by-law, but no smoke-free by-law or specific smoking restrictions are posted.

The health unit asserts that the smoke-free by-laws make smoking at events “...a whole lot easier to deal with than some other municipalities that have not enhanced their by-laws.” It is important to note that by-laws typically only address municipal properties, so events held on private property may not be addressed through a by-law intervention.

In their persistence, the health unit reinforces the need to create smoke-free spaces and reassures municipalities that the health unit is there to help. Through various communications, the health unit primarily reinforces the *SFOA* proprietor obligations of municipalities and event organizers, but also injects second-hand smoke exposure reduction, fire prevention, and public relations messaging into communications for additional persuasive influence as appropriate. In terms of public relations messaging, the health unit stresses that people attending festivals and events would not look favourably toward the municipality if they receive a ticket for smoking and the municipality or event organizers in the municipality do not make the prohibitions known to them. Since the health unit intends to fulfill their *SFOA* enforcement mandate and ticket if necessary, this scenario is likely to occur.

Following the health unit’s initial push to get the municipalities aware and onboard, they are now working with each of the municipalities on an ongoing basis to support smoke-free festivals and events. However, the extent of their involvement relates to the number of festivals and events held. According to the health unit:

“There are some municipalities that are quite small and don’t really hold too many events. So it’s not something that commonly occurs in their area and people might omit us once in a while, but for ... bigger municipalities that have events on a regular basis, we normally have lots of discussions on [smoking at events] issues.”

This ongoing work with the municipality helps to refine how smoking is addressed at festivals and events. For example, information gathered through patron complaints and ongoing enforcement efforts helps to refine where and how signage is used.

Influences on the spread of support for smoke-free spaces

With new policies and protocols for making events smoke-free, some community members are becoming more interested in and aware of alternative approaches to tobacco control. Between municipalities, when a neighboring community takes a more progressive approach, “it gets the public to raise questions with their municipality, ‘Well, you know, they’ve done it. Why can’t we?’ And you know, ‘Why is it that I can attend this event in this municipality and I’m not exposed, but I attend in my municipality and I’m exposed?’” However, to date, only individual advocates have emerged.

Although comparisons between events seem to create advocates, successful practices of event organizers can reduce political will to act within a municipality. The health unit has noticed that, after event organizers develop their own policy, “at that point, the municipality doesn’t see the need to put in a by-law because it’s been covered by the event organizers.”

2.2 WORKING WITH EVENT ORGANIZERS

The health unit made event organizers aware of their obligations, reinforced the need to address smoking, and provided planning and enforcement support as part of engagement. One informant noted:

“It’s their proprietor obligation so we have basically assisted them in the enforcement. We’ve provided signs, we’ve gone to do visits, we’ve educated their staff, but we take the approach that if you’re the event organizers, just like you’re responsible to keep the alcohol within a certain area, you’re responsible to keep the smoking off of the property or off of certain areas...”

As part of raising awareness of proprietor obligations, the health unit presented the *SFOA* as a mandatory minimum standard with optional support from the health unit in achieving or going beyond the standard. Presenting the requirements as necessary helped keep the awareness raising efforts to a minimum and allowed the health unit to focus on helping event organizers achieve compliance.

“Raising awareness was quick because when the event came in, we basically forced the adoption on them. We didn’t give them the option of debating it and all those things, but it has become part of the culture where they will look at how they can comply with the Act, so it’s been adopted fairly well.”

Although event organizers have influence over their patrons through the practices that they adopt to make their events smoke-free, certain events, event venues, clientele, and event priorities also influence risk of non-compliant smoking, second-hand smoke exposure, and how events can be managed. When event organizers prioritize smoking as important, they are more proactive in their smoke-free planning. However, others, such as sponsors, can influence event organizer priorities. For example:

“If the event sponsor is really looking to have a smoke-free event, it does help. Where the event sponsor believes this to be frivolous, it becomes a whole lot less advertised, less signage, and a little harder to enforce.”

The health unit also finds that events with alcohol tend to be the most challenging to manage. These factors are things that the health unit has had to identify and navigate to help event organizers manage smoking at their events.

Addressing smoking at events that serve alcohol

Alcohol at events causes challenges because alcohol promotion and second-hand smoke protection messages conflict with one another. As one informant noted “When [alcohol] consumption increases compliance decreases.” Alcohol sale profitability often supersedes efforts to address smoking. However, the health unit has had some successes building on existing enforcement efforts mandated through the Liquor License Act and other relevant laws by doing

“joint events with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission[AGCO], the local police within that community and sometimes even the Fire Marshall. . . So that not only is our presence seen, but we are seen in a presence with the rest of the enforcement agencies that need to deal with other things. So you know, on top of the beer garden that's got the event staff that are checking for ID and. . . all of those things, when you've got the presence of the-the [AGCO], the Health Unit, the fire marshall and the local police, it does help in keeping some of those issues in check.”

Municipalities also have event permits and licenses in place to control alcohol use at events. The alcohol licenses help the health unit identify which events are serving alcohol and provides an opportunity to work with the AGCO to manage behaviours at events. When there is a coordinated enforcement presence at events, patrons tend to be more law-abiding in general and take smoking bans seriously. Additionally, including *SFOA* compliance as a condition of the liquor license and/or event permit helps reinforce tobacco control as a priority.

2.2.1 EVENT SET-UP AND COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

While the health unit uses a firm but informative approach for raising awareness of the *SFOA* and proprietor obligations, they use a soft supportive approach to help event organizers through the planning and management processes:

“It's a give or take quite a bit... Some of the fair organizers already come with a plan in place and sometimes it's just the rubber stamp of yeah, that's great and we'll work with you on that. Sometimes it's helping them revise their plan where it doesn't meet requirements... basically just to make sure that everything complies.”

Supports offered to event organizers include messaging, signage, smoking location planning support, and enforcement support. The health unit finds that even in completely smoke-free spaces, some people that will want to smoke and need to be directed to an appropriate location; they support event organizers with this in mind. This also makes choosing a suitable location for smoking and helping them plan communications a key part of the process.

In planning where smoking could occur, understanding the property and the flow of people is important so that visibility and second-hand smoke exposure risks are limited. One of the biggest challenges is navigating existing policy. For the property, depending on land ownership and other factors, different policies apply and clarity as to how they apply may differ. For example, many music and agricultural festivals and fairs are held on fairgrounds. These grounds are private property. This has made it more challenging for the health unit to engage these event organizers because there is no smoke-free by-law coverage and they do not have municipal department partners for support. In terms of the *SFOA*, unless there is a clearly defined patio or sporting area within the fairground, whether or not there is a smoking prohibition is unclear to the health unit, the event organizer, and patron of the event. City streets are another example, where clarity of policy coverage is unclear:

“I think one of the areas where we do find some difficulty is festivals that close down a street area. You know, the downtown core is closed off for people to walk around during this festival. And that becomes... problematic because people see it as the sidewalk and the street. So they believe that just because there's a food vendor set up in the middle of the street for this festival, this isn't a park. It's not a playground. It's not covered under a municipal by-law as a smoke-free park so I can walk around and smoke everywhere.”

Due to the complexity of how festivals and events fit within the existing tobacco control policies, there tends to be an ongoing need for the health unit to engage in discussion, consensus building, and even re-education as to where restrictions apply. LGLDHU also finds that some people try to challenge the policy, so an ongoing enforcement presence is needed:

“Even three years after the fact you still need to show a presence and make sure that signs are available and remind individuals and you still have individuals that will want to challenge it, but for the most part people are compliant.”

With event organizers, the health unit also discusses how to reduce overall second-hand smoke exposure risks, which may go beyond the scope of mandatory policies as well as outside of the confines of the event venue. Through these types of planning discussions, the health unit has typically been able to avoid sending people into high traffic areas to smoke. The health unit's recommendations for choosing a smoking location are:

- Do not allow smoking locations near entrances because there are bottle-necks of people coming in and out of the venue.
- Try to avoid promoting the use of parking lots as smoking areas.
- Try to find a segregated area or at least a low traffic area, if within a venue (e.g., outside a vendor area, outside of the main area of the concert, a secluded area behind a beer garden where alcohol is not permitted, etc.).

Having a communications and enforcement strategy within the event planning process is also important for ensuring compliance. In their experience, the health unit finds that when smoking bans and locations for smoking are well communicated, compliance dramatically increases. Messages should be incorporated into existing event communications such as tickets, flyers, brochures, and radio ads, as well as having signage and announcements at events. A clear consistent message that indicates both that smoking is not permitted and where people can go if they need to smoke is key. This can also help during enforcement, because "for the most part, if you can at least direct them somewhere, the smokers are respectful."

Generally, the health unit has identified that messaging typically needs to align with what motivates people to attend the event in the first place (e.g., enjoyment of the event). Where the health unit advises caution is with the use of cessation messaging. In their experience, cessation messaging has minimal impact at an event. Therefore, while cessation messaging and supports are a part of the health unit's overall tobacco control strategy, they are not prioritized in the context of events.

For family or children's events, messaging related to protecting children or pointing out conflict between the image of someone smoking and the image of an enjoyable family event seems to resonate well with most people. The health unit uses these messages to bring event organizers onboard and event organizers often pass on this same message to their patrons.

Event-specific practices have evolved over time as a result of event organizers sharing practices with one another (typically amongst organizers that use the same venue), through the health unit sharing practices that work well, and through various learnings along the way:

"Some of it has been learning experiences from the events themselves where they try a set up that didn't really work and caused headaches and revised the set up in the following year [to] try something different to see if there's not a better solution to dealing with accommodating everybody."

The following practices appear to work well for all events

- mentioning in event poster or flyer that the event is a smoke-free event, and if possible that it is a smoke-free family event;
- including reminders in regular announcements that the event is smoke-free and where people need to go if they want to smoke;
- having adequate signage so that people know where not to smoke; and
- creating consistency across events, especially those held on the same venue, so that people know what to expect.

2.2.2 ENFORCEMENT

The health unit also uses an active enforcement presence to ensure that smoke-free protocols are implemented and working well. The health unit's enforcement presence serves two purposes. It allows the health unit to fulfill their enforcement mandate and helps ensure that event organizers fulfill theirs:

"We've shown a presence on weekend events and I think that most of the fairs and festivals understand that we are going to be out there, but it's also not exactly so that we can monitor what's happening with the event, but to monitor the proprietors."

As the health unit notes, "Just because we're not at the park at that day doesn't mean that the law doesn't apply," which makes providing reminders and building supports are key. When doing walk-arounds on-site, they identify missing permanent signage and report it to the municipality, locations where event organizers can add additional signage, and make sure that event staff are promoting compliance.

For larger festivals, LGLDHU ensures that they are present and check-in with security staff to remind them to look for and address non-compliant smoking. With limited resources, it is difficult to justify attending all smaller events, so they prioritize which ones they will attend based on known issues. The health unit finds that patrons tend to voice their concerns and advocate for clean air when there is an issue, so they are confident that they are aware of the smaller events where smoking is an issue.

To bolster their enforcement presence, the health unit offers training for event security staff to bring them into the fold and ensure that they have the capacity to address non-compliant smoking. They also coordinate with local police, AGCO, and security staff to raise the overall enforcement presence and remind people that following the rules and laws is important.

Enforcement of the various policies is typically resolved through discussion, but the health unit values the external motivation that tickets and fines provide whether or not they are issued. When working with event organizers, "it's just making sure that the event organizers understand the responsibility under the Act and the fines that go with it... We haven't had to [issue tickets]. It's more a case-by-case. We really feel that that would be a last resort." As there are an array of factors that can influence an event organizer's priorities, working with them on a case-by-case basis has been important.

When working with event patrons, the health unit notes that event patrons need little education about the harms of smoking and most people are compliant or at least respectful when made aware of the smoking policies:

"... it's not news to them anymore. I know that there are some that still criticize, you know, I'm in an open field. There's nobody around. Or you know, this isn't a kids' event so why the restrictions? But for the most part, until too much alcohol is consumed, they're compliant."

Although most people respond well to messaging related to protecting children or making a family friendly environment, strong, consistent communications through signage, announcements at the event, and messaging within flyers remain important. It may be necessary to work with people on a case-by-case basis using messaging that will help them understand and comply, or if needed, issue a ticket.

3.0 Next steps and lessons learned

In Leeds, Grenville and Lanark, they have had success with mobilizing event management and enforcement systems to support tobacco control aims. Now that work has progressed and addressing smoking is generally a part of ongoing operations, the health unit would like to make how smoking is addressed at festivals and events and other outdoor spaces more comprehensive and clear. To do this, they anticipate having to go back to the municipalities:

“I think it's encouraging more municipalities to go to a comprehensive, you know, all parks, festivals, all parks by-law basically so that parks are consistently smoke-free, not just a park with a playground or... sport field.”

Such municipal policies would support a clear consistent message and bolster event management and enforcement systems.

The health unit also continues to work with event organizers to promote best practices. Although many events are doing well at removing smoking from events, there is variability in event organizer actions that require ongoing monitoring and support.

When reflecting on their successes, the health unit notes, “it’s the municipality and the event organizers, the employer proprietor responsibility” so it is important to engage them in a way that places ownership of the issue in their hands. Also, AGCO, local police, and the fire marshal can also be engaged to support smoking bans at festivals and events. When working with municipalities and events, the health unit advises, “be persistent, be consistent, and show a presence.” Communications and cues that bring attention to the smoke-free policy and let people know where they can and cannot smoke are key.

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