

# Initiatives and other ways to change public health policy



**JACK NICHOLL  
CENTER FOR TOBACCO POLICY AND  
ORGANIZING  
AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION OF  
CALIFORNIA  
JNICHOLL@VERIZON.NET**

# First thoughts on initiatives



- **The Good**
  - Control over writing policy; chance for great leap forward
- **The Bad**
  - Hard to raise money; poorly written measure
- **The Ugly**
  - Defeat (long recovery time); set back other efforts

# Preparing for victory



1. Do you have enough money?
2. How strongly does the public support your specific policy goal?
3. Who will oppose and with what resources?
4. Do you have experienced political consultants
5. Is the initiative language perfect, no baggage
6. Who are your leaders? How committed?
7. How strong is your coalition?

# Money (California)



- To get \$5-10 million, need deep pocket institutional support—but it comes with an agenda
- Agendas of funders and sponsors can conflict
- Recognize political and financial realities. Hoping for money won't pay for ads
- You need money for petition drive, political consultants, lawyers, pollsters, media time, TV spots, mail pieces, phone banks, staff, opposition research, and more

# Public support



- **Broad and deep public understanding of issue**
- **3-4 public opinion surveys**
- **Test each specific element of measure and opposition counter attacks**
- **Arms-length relationship with politicians**
- **Support will decline as opponents attack your measure over a 4 month campaign**

# Professional guidance



- Early choices are most important, get experts involved from the beginning
- Public health professionals define the policy, lawyers write the measure, pollsters check it with voters, petition firms get it on the ballot, media consultants design messages based on polling and buy time on TV, and so on
- It's a very complicated process. You'll need all the help you can get

# Opposition



- Expect strong opposition to spend 3 to 10 times as much as you have
- Question isn't "can we match them," it's can we get our message out to the same people seeing their attacks against us?
- When voters aren't clear about the arguments they weigh the credibility of the two sides—opposition research can win campaigns

# Initiative language



- Initiative language is your candidate
- Policy provisions unrelated to the initiative's core purpose are “baggage” which are fat targets for the opposition
- Victory is the standard. Don't include an ally's desired provision if it hurts the chances for victory
- The #1 reason for failure is drafting mistakes

# Leadership



- Don't underestimate its importance
- In the 2 years of an initiative drive, you face big challenges—need dependable leaders
- Leaders are tough minded, totally committed individuals with good judgment who you trust
- People who will take advice from professionals but will not sacrifice their own judgment

# Coalition



- Your central resource for funds, troops, spokespeople and credibility
- Your ability to reach beyond the public health community
- Your political foundation
- Is it just a list of endorsing organizations ... or a collection of experienced partners who jointly committed to this campaign?

# Maximum influence



- Depending on political conditions you can pursue your policy goals using a variety of strategies and tactics
- We don't have the luxury of pursuing only our top goal whether it's tobacco, obesity etc.
- Hierarchy of public health crises facing us
  - Tobacco, nutrition, obesity are not in top 3
  - Global warming is a top tier crisis with enormous public health implications

# What can we do?



- **Believe that we can change the world**
  - Prop 99
- **Educate ourselves**
  - Understand global warming/farm policy, etc.
- **Put our bodies on the line**
  - Politicians fear large numbers of people acting together
- **Do the little things that can make a big impact**
  - E-advocacy, send the letters [www.lungaction.org](http://www.lungaction.org)