

## Caravan to the Capitol

**It's KBD and you're ready to speak out!** What better way than a rally at your state capitol or city hall. Gather as many youth advocates as you can and caravan to the capitol to let your representatives know you support strong tobacco control policies and they should too!

**AGE GROUP:** middle school and high school

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:** 100 to 1,000 or more

**TIME:** 3 to 4 months

**RESOURCES:** paper and access to photocopier and printer; transportation (either private cars or rented buses); access to a microphone, loudspeakers, and a podium.

**COST:** varies, but a minimum of \$5-\$10 per participant to cover transportation and audiovisual equipment rental. (Estimate does not include the cost of box lunches or giveaways such as T-shirts, buttons, etc.)

### Road Trip with a Purpose

It's time to show your elected representatives that you are the experts when it comes to tobacco control policies. Every day, advocates meet with state and local leaders to explain why they should support a certain cause or issue. Tell them what's important to you. Whether it's eliminating secondhand smoke in workplaces, increasing the tobacco tax, or making sure your state continues to fund the tobacco prevention programs that are saving lives, use KBD to speak out and let them know.

### Youth Can Do It

This activity is a great opportunity to broadcast that youth can be major players in changing policy. Here's a secret to youth empowerment: Don't ever think that you can't make a difference. Youth advocates often receive a better response from elected officials than adults do, so don't be afraid to schedule appointments with your lawmakers or their aides to address your concerns and push for important tobacco control policies.

### Plan Away

If you want to coordinate a large rally and visits with representatives, you have to start early. You can choose to do both or either the rally or the visits. Regardless, this activity involves a lot of planning, such as transporting participants to and from the government offices, scheduling meetings with local or state officials, and, for the rally, finding speakers, arranging for press coverage and staging the event. Put together a team to cover all of this important preparation. Work with teachers and adult advisors to confirm all the logistics.

### Key Messages

Don't forget to start developing your key messages early on. What does your group think is important? Do you want to get rid of secondhand smoke, increase the tobacco tax, fund programs to help people quit, all of the above? Find out what tobacco issues are currently priorities in your state and try to work them into your key messages. Make sure your speakers and the materials you present to your representatives and media incorporate your key goals and messages. See the Resources section to find other organizations working on tobacco control issues in your state.

### The 3 E's

A Caravan to the Capitol begins with the 3 E's: an Exciting, Energetic, and Enthusiastic rally outside of the Capitol. This is the perfect time for youth to shine. You have to come up with a program of exactly what you want to happen during that rally. You can have chants, cheers, dances, skits, and posters or other artwork. Your rally should fire up all participants and motivate them to take a stand against tobacco. One great way to generate excitement and news coverage is to get a legislator, the attorney general, or even your governor to come out and speak.

### Personal Visit

After the rally, smaller groups of students can split up to visit lawmakers' offices. This is your chance to be face-to-face with elected officials to challenge them to take a stand and to protect young people from tobacco. Organizing a rally involves a whole lot of planning and communication, but most important, remember that this is a day to promote tobacco prevention and to let all who participate know that youth have a voice.

Plan it out:

**3 months before the event:**

- Get your event team together and begin discussing goals and objectives. Invite students from your school, community, and even others across the state, as well as teachers and advisors. It might be helpful to create specific "rally committees" to plan different parts of the event. You can start by focusing on publicity, transportation, and recruitment.
- Choose a date for your event, such as Kick Butts Day or another day when the state legislature or county council is at work. Make sure a similar event isn't scheduled for the same day so your event gets the most attention possible.
- Recruit other people who can help you, including companies and organizations that might want to sponsor your event. It's never too early to start fundraising for your event.
- Develop your key messages that will be used in talking points and media materials.
- Transportation is a key part of your event. If your school or group can't provide buses, get started organizing carpools and permission slips.
- Begin to secure necessary permits for the rally site, sound equipment such as a microphone and speakers, and all other logistics to stage the event. **Don't forget a permit!**

**2 1/2 months before the event:**

- Find a legislator or another local celebrity to give your group visibility and who can encourage other people in the community to get involved. Consider inviting a television news personality to chair the event (which could really help you spread your message!).
- Recruit public officials, sports figures and other well-known people as speakers for your event, and ask them to support and help spread the word about your efforts.
- Keep organizing! Choose your speakers and continue developing your materials. For tips on media outreach and for media materials, refer to the media section of the.

**2 months before the event:**

- Hold the first meeting of the program committee, which is responsible for establishing the agenda for the day's events. The committee also will need to secure and coach the emcee, guest speakers and other VIP participants.
- Decide what banners, posters and other visual materials you will need. If you decide to have any banners professionally made, an adult may be able to help select a business to do that. Since your event is for a good cause, the business may donate some or all of its services, so be sure to ask!
- Design and print a simple flyer that tells kids about your event and how to register. Don't forget to include a deadline for registration. It also needs to include the date, time, cost (for their transportation or other expenses to participate) and goal of your event. The flyer also should list any individual or corporate sponsors (a publicity bonus that you should mention to local businesses when requesting sponsorship help).

- Put the flyers up around your school and in other prominent places in the community such as malls, movie theaters, bulletin boards in places of worship, supermarkets, doctors' offices, etc.
- Continue to gather and create materials and supplies, including the most important – lots of people! Don't stop promoting your event and recruiting participants. Reach out to other schools and groups in your area.

#### 1 1/2 months before the event:

- Send an information packet to each school that is participating. Make sure to include the fact sheet from this guide on youth tobacco use and any local facts you can get your hands on. Visit [tobaccofreekids.org](http://tobaccofreekids.org) for your state's "Tobacco's Toll" fact sheet.
- Encourage each school to conduct learning activities related to teen tobacco use. You can look throughout the activity section of the guide for some ideas.
- Ask each school to write and request an appointment with state or local elected officials on the day of the event.
- Assign specific responsibilities for the event to school leaders and notify each school about its responsibilities.
- Send letters to your representatives letting them know what you are planning and asking for the opportunity to meet with them after the rally.

#### 1 month before the event:

- Hold a meeting of the full planning committee to discuss any potential problems with attendance, speakers' schedules or program needs. This is a good time to go over your plans for alerting the media (see the media section for tips) and to make final work assignments.
- Call legislators to follow up on your letter and request an appointment on the day of the event.
- Keep working on those logistics, especially permits, sound and transportation. Make sure all plans are final and ready to go for the event.
- Complete and print press kits for distribution during the event, including a press release, fact sheet, good visuals, and information about your partners and corporate sponsors. See our media section for tips.
- Mail a general invitation to all elected officials encouraging them to participate. Be sure to include all special guests, speakers and sponsors (with their permission) on your invitation.
- Arrange to have somebody photograph and videotape the event.

#### 2 weeks before the event:

- Send a second mailing to all participating schools with an event agenda, maps, assignments for parking and information on any assigned location where each school group will gather.

- Mail press kits to all media you want to reach.
- Meet with law enforcement officials to finalize plans for the rally.
- Contact each participating school to verify attendance numbers and answer questions.
- Call speakers to confirm their participation and what time they will speak.

**1 week before the event:**

- Confirm appointments with legislators.
- Call all local media as a follow-up to the press kit mailing.
- Hold final meeting of the planning committee to confirm all aspects of the event and identify any last-minute issues to be addressed.

**2 days before the event:**

- Remind key radio, television and print media about the event and invite them to any or all portions of the day.

**Event day:**

- Confirm arrival of speakers, participants and sponsors and solve problems as they arise.
- Have fun and keep repeating your key messages!

**Event follow-up:**

This event should motivate people to do more to fight tobacco. Here are a few ideas:

- Create a petition to support the specific policy goals you spoke about at the rally. Have participants gather signatures throughout their school and town.
- Send a thank you letter to your representatives after your visit. Be sure to reinforce your key messages and include copies of any signed petitions.
- Also send thank you letters to all speakers, special guests and sponsors for participating and/or supporting the event.