



DEALING WITH CIGARETTE COMPANY “ANTI-YOUTH-SMOKING” GRANTS – STRATEGIES FOR TOBACCO PREVENTION ADVOCATES –

Philip Morris and the other major cigarette companies have a new campaign to enter into strategic partnerships with public schools, youth-focused nonprofits, and universities by supplying them with grants to finance new “anti-youth-smoking” efforts. Whether you think that schools or youth-focused organizations should accept cigarette company money or reject it, any attempt by the cigarette companies to make an “anti-youth-smoking” grant in your state or city presents a tremendous opportunity to focus media and public attention on how deceitful and hypocritical the companies are and on how much harm they cause.

The cigarette companies’ current grant-making efforts are part of their much more extensive, multimillion-dollar strategy to improve their public image and block any further governmental action that might impede their ability to market and sell cigarettes. Most simply, policymakers could use the companies’ anti-youth-smoking grants and TV ads as an excuse for not directing public funds for more extensive and effective initiatives to prevent and reduce youth smoking. But the cigarette companies’ strategy is much more ambitious. By presenting themselves as model corporate citizens that have turned over a new leaf and are now opposed to youth smoking, the cigarette companies hope to convince policymakers and the public that they should be allowed to pursue their business goals without any additional government oversight or regulation at all.

Meanwhile, the cigarette companies are still spending over \$6.8 billion per year to promote their products -- including seductive ads in magazines with large youth audiences and other marketing strategies that inevitably reach and attract kids. The companies are also rigorously opposing legislative efforts that would restrict cigarette marketing practices that promote youth smoking, such as proposed bans on cigarette vending machines or new restrictions on selling cigarettes by mail or over the Internet. If current trends continue, five million kids who are alive today will ultimately die from smoking-caused illness.

Those who see through the cigarette companies’ self-serving grants and their underlying public relations strategy must work to make sure that no one else is fooled, either. Fortunately, the companies’ attempts to make anti-youth-smoking grants are newsworthy events that present numerous media hooks. For example:

- The cigarette companies current anti-youth-smoking efforts can be exposed for what they really are by presenting the tobacco industry’s long history of using weak or ineffective anti-youth-smoking activities for public relations and political purposes.
- The underlying purpose of the grants to local groups can be revealed by showing the cigarette companies’ long history of subverting other groups by helping them financially and then using them for their own political purposes. Raising this issue should also raise a warning flag to make actual or potential grant recipients more wary and vigilant, and to ensure more rigorous oversight of any accepted grants.
- The companies’ hypocrisy can be shown by comparing their current statements about combating youth smoking to the tobacco industry’s history of targeting kids, including quotes from internal company documents.
- The possible benefits from the grants can be set against: a) the enormous amount of harm the cigarette companies cause to kids, and adults, in your state; and b) the enormous economic costs suffered by your state and its residents caused by the tobacco companies.
- More cigarette company hypocrisy can be revealed by comparing the amount of the grants to: a) how much the companies spend to promote their products in your state; b) the companies’ profits

from underage smoking in your state; and c) the tobacco industry's fundamental and inescapable reliance on underage smoking to maintain its customer base.

- If people support accepting the cigarette company grants by saying that funds to prevent and reduce youth smoking are desperately needed, their words can be used to support efforts to get the state to allocate more of its tobacco settlement funds to new tobacco prevention efforts. [It is also useful to check to make sure they have already exhausted alternative funding possibilities – and aren't just taking the easy path of accepting the readily available public-relations payments from the cigarette companies.]

Unless the media coverage of the cigarette companies' grants focuses on these points, the grant-making component of the cigarette companies' dangerous new public relations strategy will be a complete success.

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, June 22, 2001

More examples of the tobacco industry's bad acts are available at
http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/fact_sheets/industry/bad_acts/.