

## Soda Taxes as Community-Centered Investments to Advance Health, Justice & Racial Equity August 5, 2020

### Participant Question & Answer (Q&A):

*1. How did you all combat industry influence during this process?*

One strategy is to work with community organizations to help them understand the health impacts of drinking sugary drinks, and also show them how other cities are investing revenues from soda taxes back into communities for meaningful work. Also creating coalitions between community organizations, parents' groups, health groups might be able to generate good momentum. For a deeper discussion, feel free to contact [xavier@thepraxisproject.org](mailto:xavier@thepraxisproject.org).

*2. Has there been a consideration to utilize the funds generated from soda tax to help attract/invest in grocery stores in neighborhoods with limited food access? Curious if this has been thought of or is being considered in places beyond the Bay Area? Grocery store margins are small, investment in this could provide ongoing food access and could have an amplification effect with the amazing programmatic work that is happening.*

In San Francisco, we have invested in a group in the Bayview Hunters Point that is working to open a community supported cooperative grocery store. The group received a large community grant, although with COVID and the Mayor's latest budget proposal, this funding may be threatened.

Also, the power of having community organizations at the table to develop the legislation can hardwire in support for neighborhood grocery stores.

*3. Here in DC we're looking for examples of alternatives to sugary beverages. Of course, we're promoting drinking more water and infusing water with herbs, fruit. Would appreciate other suggestions.*

We promote herbal teas and sometime offer sun teas.

Other ideas to promote water consumption that our program implements, address access to drinking water: installing hydration stations at our centers, providing staff with reusable water bottles, as well as providing reusable water bottles and water filtration systems like Brita pitchers or faucet attachments as prize incentives for parent workshop activities.

Fruit/Veg/Herb infused waters, also known as “Spa Water”, are a great way to reach those people who don’t like the taste of “plain water”. We are experimenting more with sparkling water recipes, as they provide the “bubbly” sensation that soda does, without the added sugar and other ingredients! There are many different brands of sugar-free sparkling water out now, that may help many people with the transition of cutting back on SSB’s and replacing with water.

4. *How is the state ban impacting long term strategies for local funding?*

This is a question about “Preemption.” In California, at one point, the state preempted the local tax efforts. This put an end to local organizing for soda taxes. I am not sure about the exact amount of time the preemption will last.

5. *For other jurisdictions looking to implement similar investments from SSB taxes (and other excise taxes), what lessons about the process to fund programs, etc. can be shared? Were their guidelines or rubrics etc. to guide the panel assembled to make recommendations about how to allocate funds, specifically with regards to focus on the systemic and structural factors of inequities?*

The Measure D legislative language provides for a commission comprised of experts in health, equity, and community be empaneled to make recommendations to the Berkeley City council on which school and community-based projects should be supported. Because Measure D is a general tax, there is not a dollar for dollar relationship between tax revenues and investments. However, the commission looks very closely at the soda tax revenues that are going into the City’s general fund every month, and makes appropriate recommendations for investments. The Measure D campaign this was led by a broad coalition of community organizations, elected officials, and parents of students in the Berkeley Unified School District, public health advocates, researchers, and health equity-oriented individuals. It was really important to have communities most affected by sugary drinks strongly represented in this Coalition.

6. *What are the next research steps? For example, what, if any, work do the presenters think still needs to be done to determine or document best practices around use of soda tax funds and/or reduction in related health disparities?*

On-going, University and community-based research is a part of the original thinking, as well as continual reporting back to the community the results. The City Commission that oversees the distribution of funds periodically provides reports on the success of the programs.

If you would like to contribute to our running Q&A, please email [jenna@thepraxisproject.org](mailto:jenna@thepraxisproject.org).