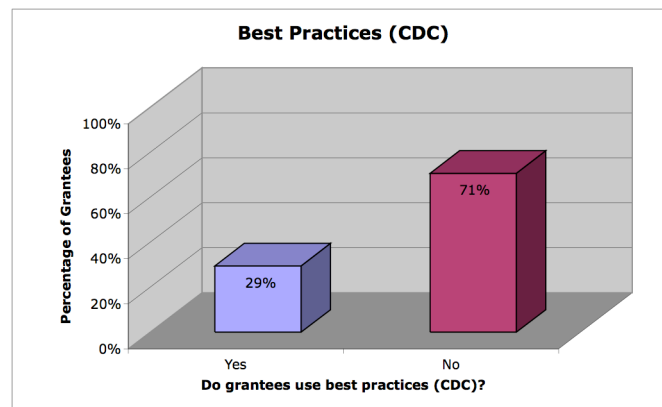
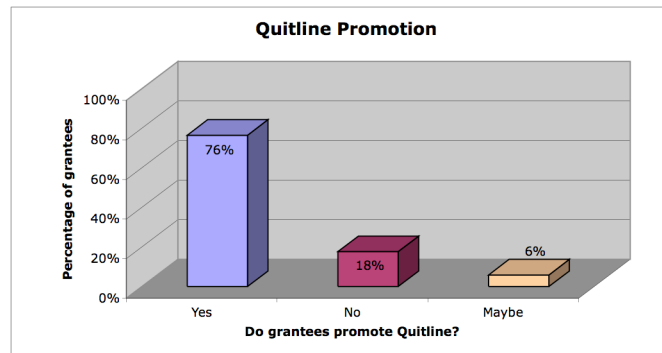


INTRODUCING THE VISUAL ALERT SYSTEM:

A GRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MISRGO MID-YEAR REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this report is to introduce a **Visual Alert System** or status report concerning MISRGO grantee and evaluator activities. It begins with a graphical depiction of tobacco prevention activities across grantees. Similar to the **Evaluation Monitoring System**, the use of graphs to demonstrate the group's combined efforts is more effective than any single grantee's work. It also provides each grantee with a context in which to measure their individual efforts. The graphs provided in this report also provide grantees with a baseline in which to measure growth (or additional activity in specified areas).

The secondary purpose of this report is to provide an insight into how grantees might characterize and display their own individual efforts, beyond descriptive accounts that are difficult to compare over time. The graphs are a tool to transform typically non-quantitative information into quantitative, measurable findings. This type of reporting will assist grantees in monitoring their own tobacco prevention activities and informing their decision-making about which activities to reinforce, substitute, and/or discontinue.

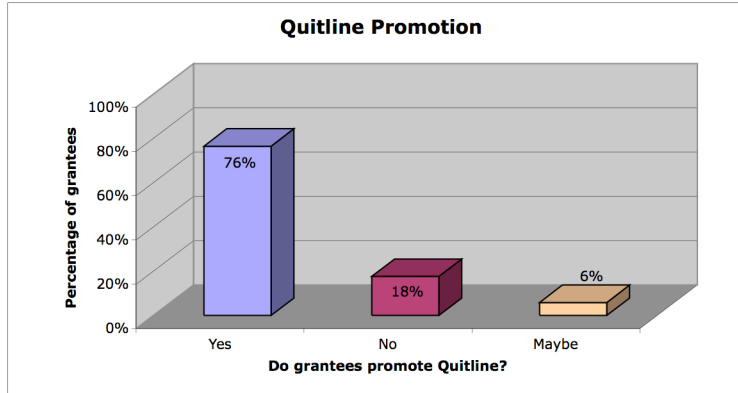
BACKGROUND

MISRGO grantees with the assistance of their evaluators are required to provide mid-year reports of their progress, as well as end-of-the-year reports. They are detailed documents concerning grantee activity. These reports provide the data used to create the bar charts presented in this report. However, it is time consuming to review these reports. In addition, these reports are difficult to digest in part because they do not follow a standard format and program activities differ from grantee to grantee.

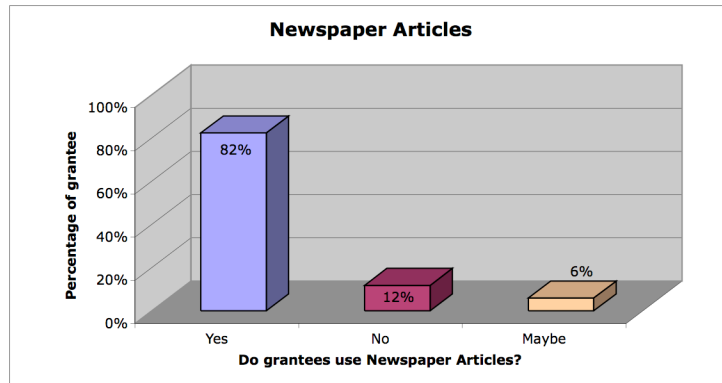
To facilitate analysis of individual grantee efforts over time and present a portrait of the entire group's activities at any given point in time, a **Visual Alert System** has been developed. A list of key activities has been extracted from the reports. The activities have been used in a checklist fashion to determine which grantees apply these tobacco prevention activities (or at least note any activity in the mid-year reports). The lists are transformed into easy to read bar charts. The bar charts graphically illustrate the various types of activities used by and across grantees. This allows program managers and/or policy makers to make a rapid assessment of the group's efforts to-date, instead of wading through hundreds of pages of text. Training will be provided in April (2008) to enable grantees and evaluators to apply this tool to their work.

POSITIVE TRENDS

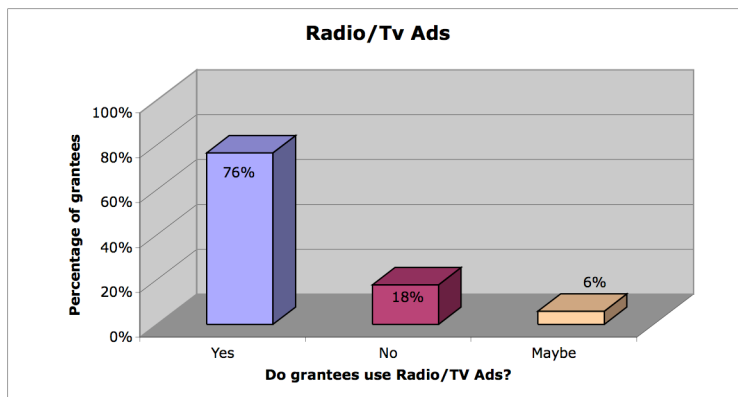
This part of the report focuses on positive findings or trends. The efforts of the MISRGO grantees are reported as a collaborative or collective, rather than as individual grantee efforts operating in individual silos. However, individual analyses will be provided during the next series of evaluation workshops to help build individual grantee and evaluator capacity.



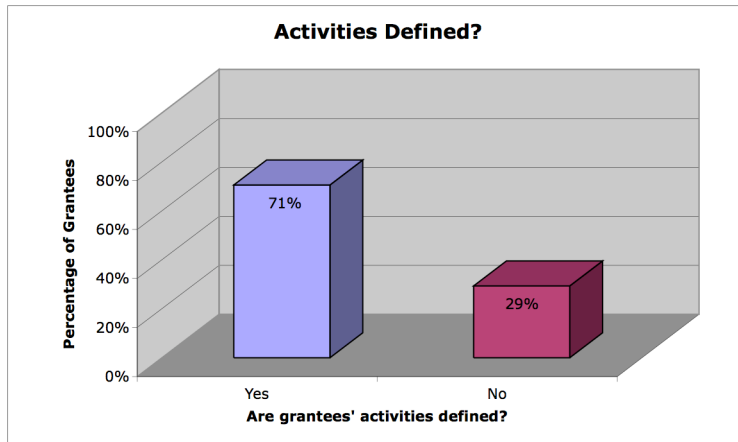
One positive pattern is that the majority of grantees (76%) are involved in Quitline Promotion activity. (13 yes, 3 no, and 1 maybe.) This is a reinforcing finding for those already involved in Quitline Promotion and a signal to others that they might want to adopt this approach and thus enhance the group's overall effectiveness.



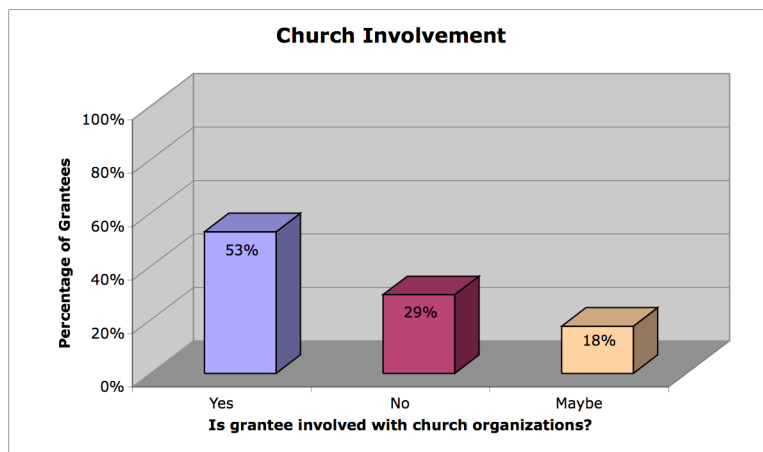
Another positive pattern is documented quickly with graphs. The majority of grantees (82%) are using newspaper articles as a tool to combat tobacco use in the State. (14 yes, 2 no, and 1 maybe.)



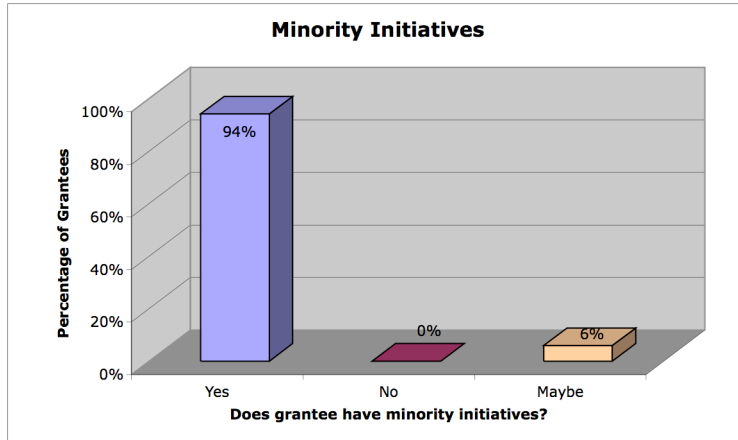
Similarly, the majority of grantees (76%) are using Radio and TV adds to communicate the tobacco prevention message. (13 yes, 3 no, and 1 maybe)



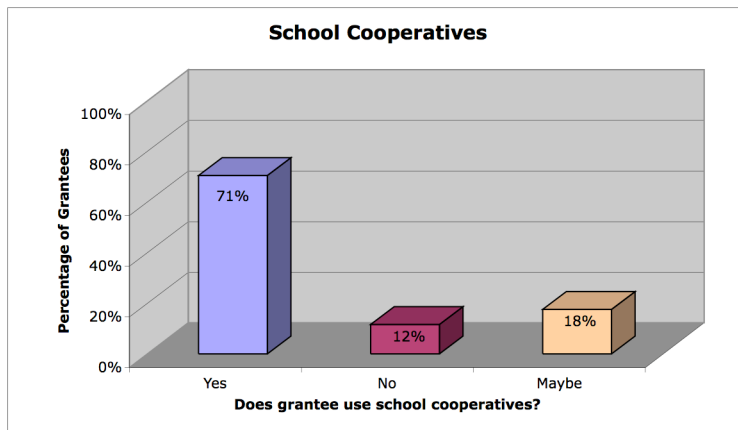
The majority of grantees (71%) have defined their activities. This is needed for basic clarity, to ensure that we all know “what we are talking about” when it comes to implementing, tracking, and evaluating program activities. (12 yes and 5 no.)



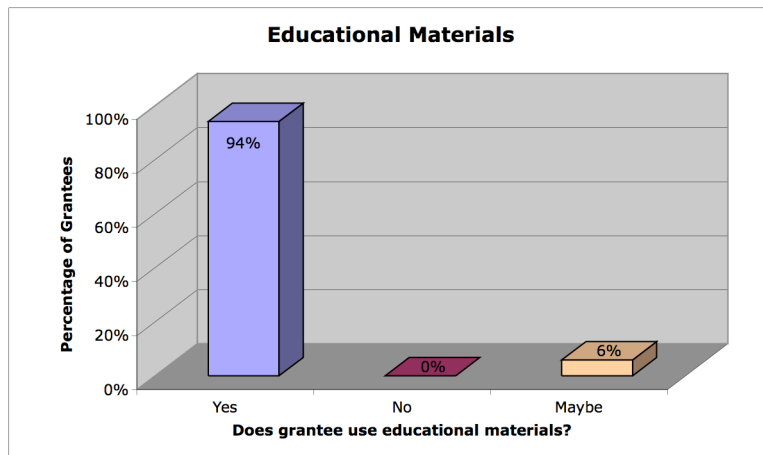
Church involvement is an important facet of tobacco prevention work in Arkansas. The majority of grantees (53%) work with the church to communicate their tobacco prevention message. This is somewhat lower than previously presented bar charts and thus suggests that it may be an underutilized resource in the community. (9 yes, 5 no, and 3 maybe.)



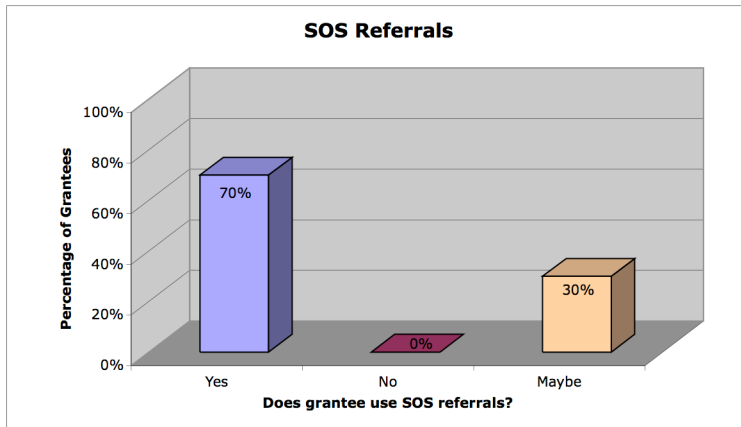
This graphically-based finding documents that the grantees are being faithful to the MISRGO charge, which is to have a minority initiatives focus. (16 yes, 0 no, and 1 maybe.)



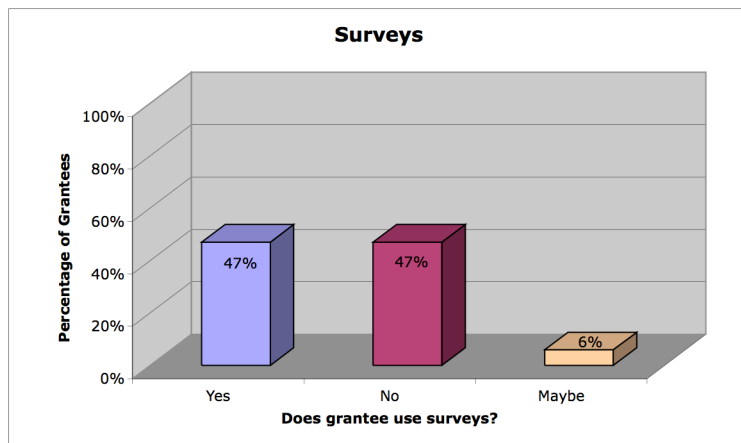
School cooperatives are another set of activities held in common by the majority of grantees (71%). (12 yes, 2 no, and 3 maybe). This chart may signal to those who are not involved in this activity that it might warrant their consideration or reconsideration.



Educational materials are considered the bedrock of most educational campaigns to educate people about smoking, the effects of second hand smoking, as well as spit and snuff use. Almost every grantee uses educational materials to accomplish their objectives. (16 yes, 0 no, and 1 maybe).



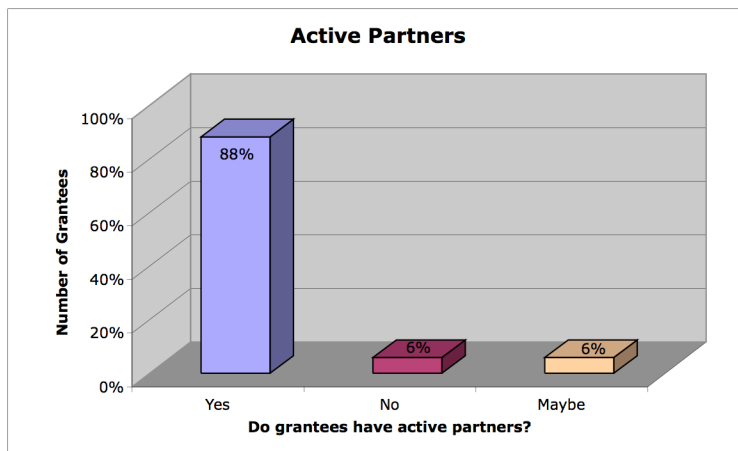
SOS Referrals are a basic staple of tobacco prevention work in Arkansas and other states. Although the majority of grantees (70%) report using SOS Referrals, only 10 grantees stated that they used it in their mid-year reports. This serves as a reminder to report as many relevant activities as possible in the report and certainly significant activities held in common by the group such as SOS Referrals. It also raises the question about whether there is adequate tracking between agency SOS referral activity and SOS statistics. (7 yes, 0 no, and 3 maybe)



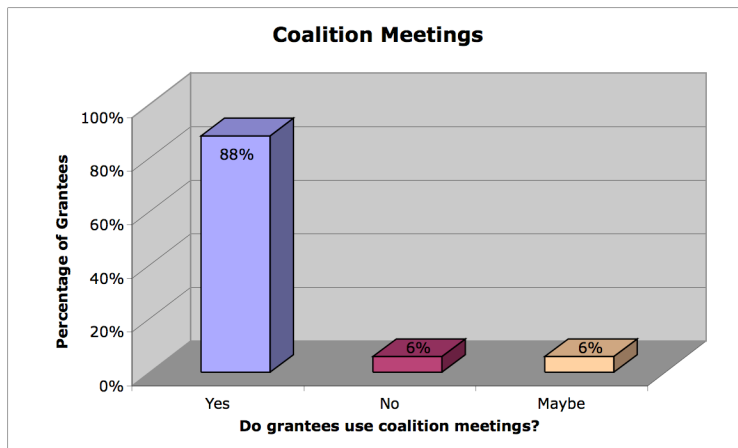
It is a positive indicator to see that half of the grantees are using surveys, since we have devoted time to training in this area and the group has relied on survey results to document community support throughout the State. However, this chart reminds us that more work is needed in this area. Ideally, this chart will be used as a baseline indicator to help measure the increased use of surveys in the future. (8 yes, 8 no, and 1 maybe.)



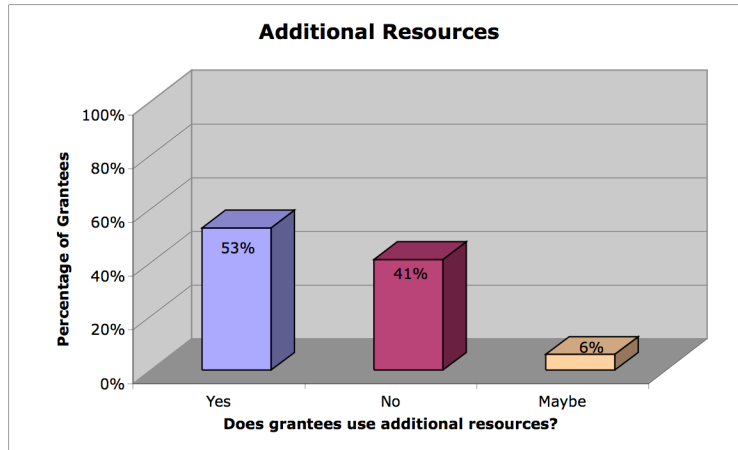
100% of the grantees documented receiving professional training to enhance their performance as effective professionals. The tobacco prevention blog provides documentation to support this rating. (17 yes, 0 no.)



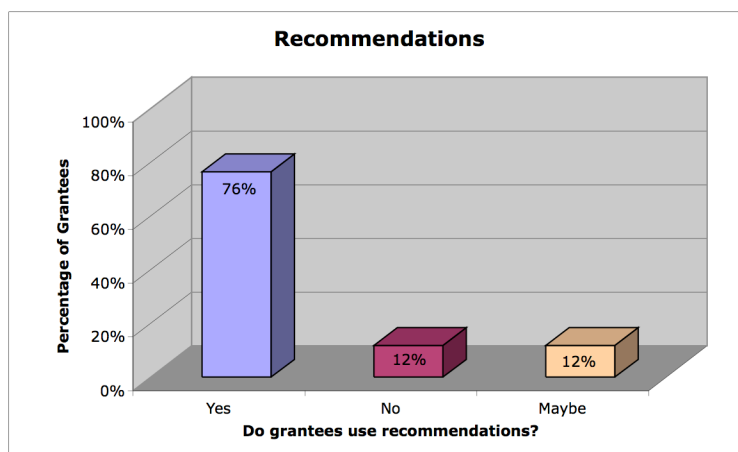
The majority of grantees are working with active partners, leveraging community resources to improve their effectiveness. (15 yes, 1 no, and 1 maybe)



Coalition meetings have been a common activity shared by grantees and is evidenced by the data (88%). A second step associated with this finding is for grantees to draw a link between this activity and desired outputs and outcomes. For example, outputs could be increased as a result of coalition building, by increasing the number of people who receive educational materials. Similarly, an outcome associated with distributing that literature, could be an increase in the number of people who state that they pledged to stop smoking. This is reasonable as long as the increased distribution of literature can be linked to the increase in coalition building efforts. (15 yes, 1 no, 1 maybe.)



The use of additional resources is a category or activity that tests whether we are reaching beyond our immediate resources in order to leverage the resources we have. A little over half of the grantees (53%) are seeking out additional resources. This graph suggests that the other half could simply ask their colleagues what additional resources they are accessing in order to supplement their own. (9 yes, 7 no, 1 maybe.)

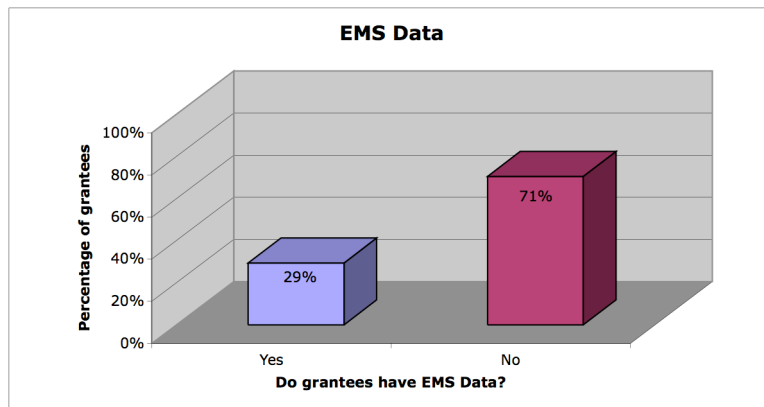


The majority of grantees use recommendations made to improve program practices (76%). This indicates receptiveness to critique and a desire to improve. Being

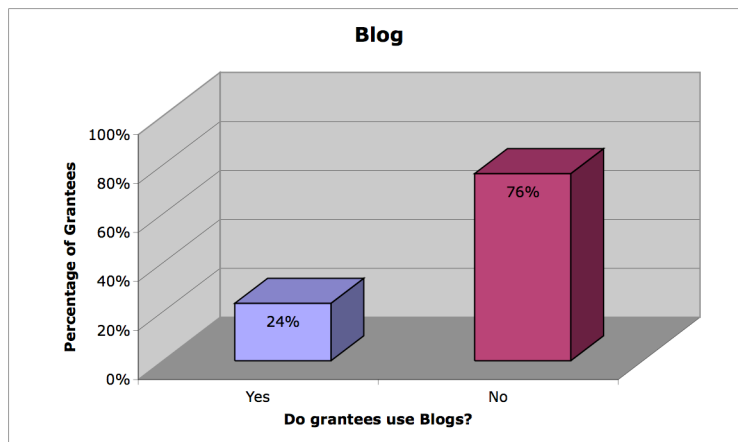
responsive to recommendations is important to maintain life-long learning. (13 yes, 2 no, 2 maybe.)

AREAS MERITING ATTENTION

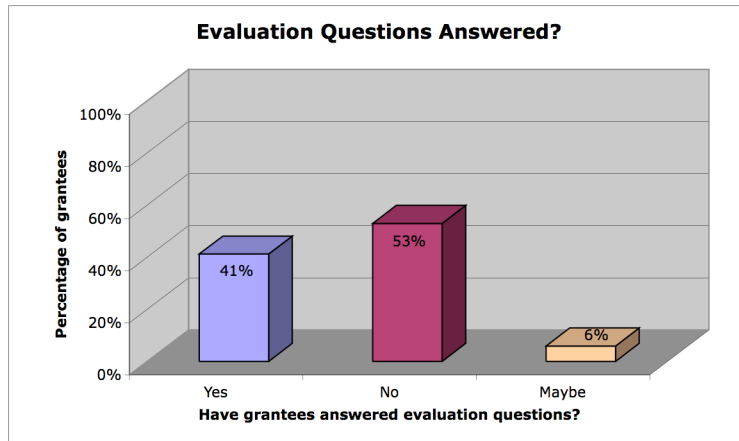
This part of the report focuses on areas that merit attention. Using the **Visual Alert System**, it is easy to see where grantees are spending their time and effort and where they are not devoting resources to specific activities. The grantee can decide whether the activity is within their scope or capacity, however, the data will inform them of “where they stand” in relation to the rest of the group. If it is an activity they are committed to as part of their program (and proposal) these charts inform them of their status and the need to improve. If the activity is outside the scope of the program (and not a part of their proposal), the grantee may simply consider this as useful information. Alternatively, they might redirect their efforts to strengthen the overall consolidated effort of the group in a specified area.



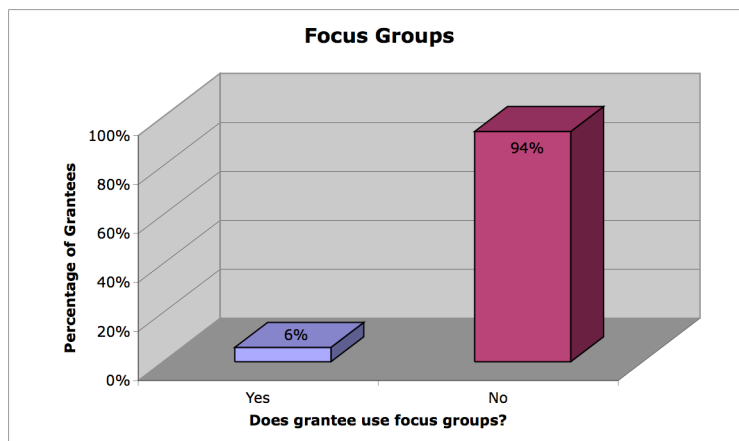
The **Evaluation Monitoring System** has been an invaluable tool to document MISRGO success in terms that taxpayers, policymakers, and legislators can appreciate. It translates the number of people who stop smoking into dollars saved by the State, specifically in terms of excess medical costs. This graph suggests some success in attracting early adopters, but the power of the group could be expanded exponentially if larger numbers of grantees adopted the tool. (5 yes and 12 no.)



Blogs are a free tool to document and broadcast program achievements. They are also a tool to invite collaboration and communication. Once again the chart suggests limited success adopting this tool. Training has been provided concerning the creation and maintenance of blogs. If programs do not find them useful they need not be created or used. However, if they are an untapped resource, greater effort should be made to capitalize on the tool. (4 yes and 13 no)

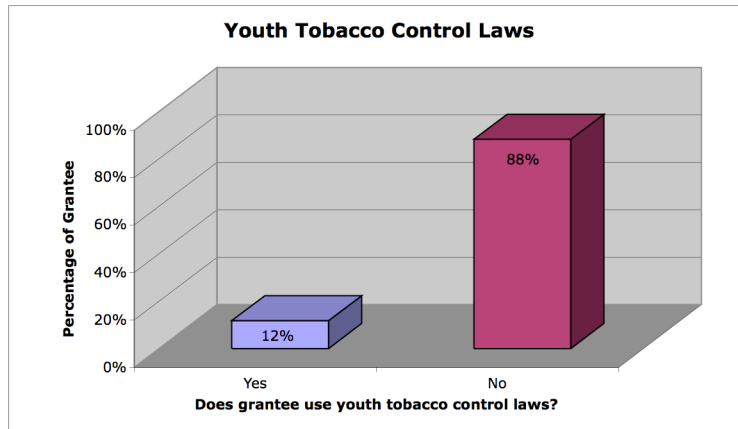


This is an important evaluation indicator that merits attention. If the reason that the evaluation questions are not answered is because they are not relevant, meaningful, or feasible, then there should be a low response or rating. In some case there were no specific questions asked. However, 41% were able to answer the evaluation questions, suggesting that it is feasible. This finding raises a number of additional questions: Are we collecting baseline data when we say the program has made progress or growth? Similarly, are we providing data to document that we have made growth or improvement, rather than a simple assertion? (7 yes, 9 no, 1 maybe.)

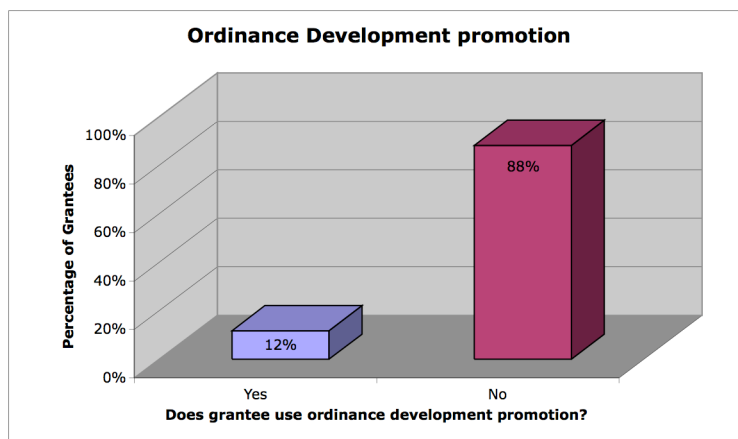


Focus groups are an important tool to help document the relative strengths and weaknesses of a program in an informal setting. Focus groups help provide program staff with specific suggestions concerning how best to improve services. In addition, focus

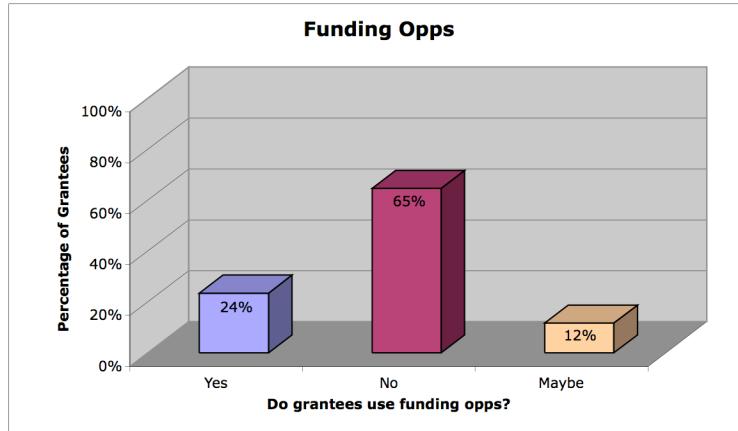
groups are inexpensive, usually the cost of soft drinks and snacks for the group. Only one grantee is using focus groups to generate useful data. This appears to be an underutilized tool. Additional exploration is needed to determine if grantees would like to use this tool and if the only barrier is training. If so, training grantees and evaluators how to conduct focus groups will be provided. (1 yes and 16 no.)



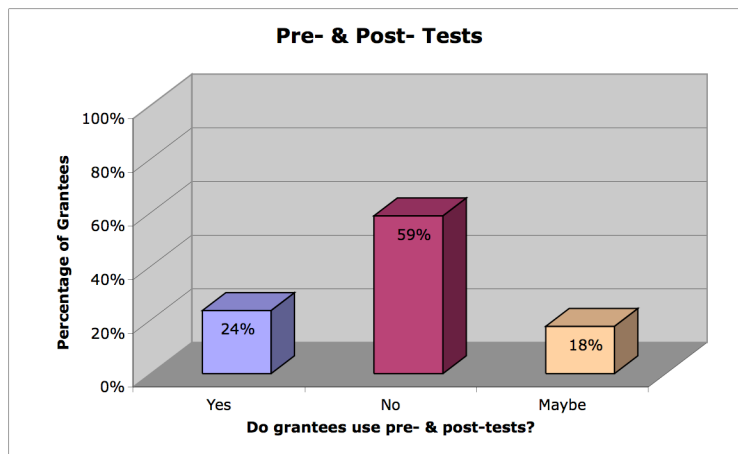
Youth tobacco control laws are an important part of any tobacco prevention portfolio. Although it is not necessary to have everyone involved in this activity, the low numbers suggest: 1) that more information is desired about how to have an impact in this area; 2) there is a perception that this is outside the scope of most grantee activities; and/or 3) there is a perception that there is little need given the new law banning smoking in public areas. Additional discussion is needed in this area to drill down further. However, the graphs provide a powerful sign that this is an area meriting further discussion and attention. (2 yes and 15 no.)



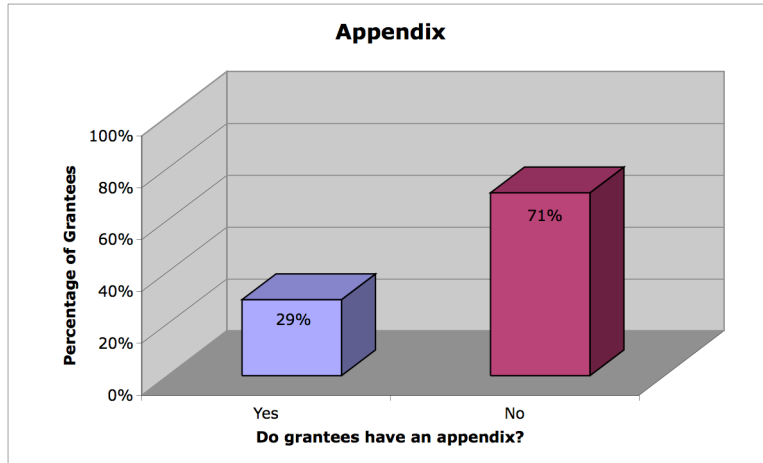
Ordinance development promotion findings parallel youth tobacco control laws and merit similar discussion and attention. (2 yes and 15 no.)



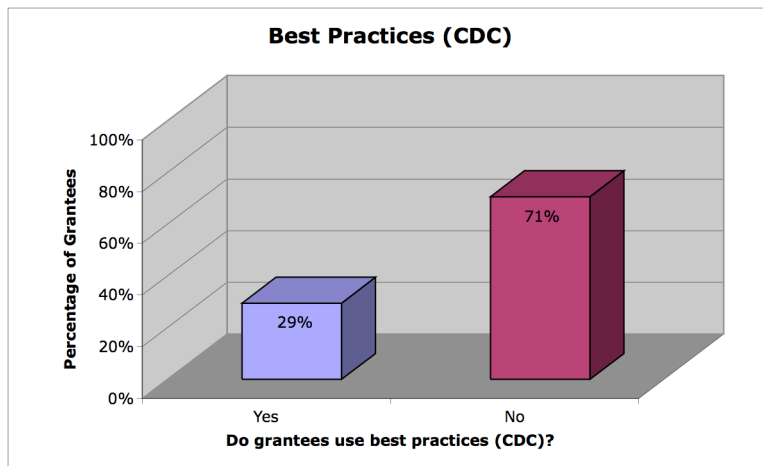
Funding opportunities are important for long-term sustainability. It is difficult to take time out of the daily routine, which is focused on meeting community needs. It is easy to rely on existing funding streams in the interim. However, policy and funding priorities change, often with little or no warning. It is important for each grantee to have alternative funding streams to ensure continuity of operation and continued effectiveness. The bar charts suggest that very little is being done to explore alternative funding opportunities. (4 yes, 11 no, and 2 maybe.)



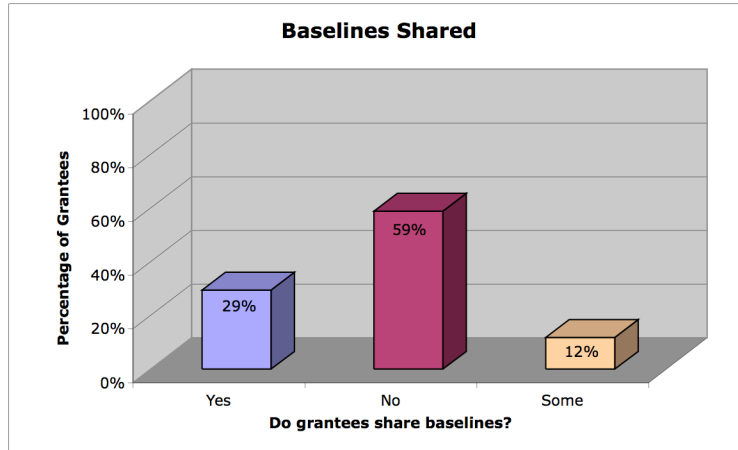
Pre- and Post-tests are common evaluation tools to document change over time. It appears that the majority of grantees do not use this tool. Typically, the pre-test is a baseline determining, for example, the knowledge people may have about second hand smoke or their attitudes toward the use of tobacco. The treatment or intervention is typically educational activities, ranging from brochures to demonstrations of athletes who have contracted mouth cancer from spit tobacco. The post-test would document any change in knowledge or attitude in these examples. Hard copy surveys or online surveys can be used to collect the information needed to document these changes and impacts. This type of data is very persuasive in a variety of settings. (4 yes, 10 no, and 3 maybe.)



The question of whether the report has an appendix is partially a procedural and contractual question. The bar chart finding raises the issue of whether grantees find the appendix useful, needed, or meaningful. However, to the extent that the appendix serves as an opportunity to further describe successful program activities, it becomes a missed opportunity to showcase grantee work. This requirement should be discussed with utility being the determining factor. (5 yes and 12 no.)



A majority of grantees (71%) do not appear to be using CDC “Best Practices”. This is an important finding that jumps off of the page with the use of these graphs. There may be many reasons that need exploration and discussion before making a summative statement about these data. Some of these grantees may be using best practices and not know it. Others may not be aware of them. There may also be a group who have always done it “their own way” and see no need for any other evidence-based approach. The finding is important enough to have already prompted a request for the CDC to visit Arkansas and make a presentation about best programmatic practices at the upcoming Arkansas Summer Evaluation Institute Workshop in July 2008. (5 yes and 12 no.)



The topic of baselines is important. The topic of sharing baselines is also important and can be sensitive. There is no question that establishing meaningful baselines is a fundamental necessity in all grantee evaluation work. Otherwise it would be impossible to determine change over time or whether the program met or exceeded its objectives or goals. However, sharing baselines can be a sensitive topic since there is a competitive component operating even in an empowering and collaborative endeavor of this nature. This topic merits discussion and exploration because many grantees now have baselines in common. Others would benefit by learning from each other about how to establish a reasonable and verifiable baseline. At the same time, it is important to respect the internal dynamics of each group, grantee propriety information, and the “competitive edge” persona some have adopted. (5 yes, 10 no, and 2 maybe.)

CONCLUSION

This report is aimed at helping grantees document their efforts more effectively, track their activities over time, and present their work in a user-friendly and ideally more persuasive manner. The report presents a new tool called the **Visual Alert System**, which provides an early warning signal concerning grantee progress toward specified goals. The findings and illustrations in this report can be used to influence grantee efforts for the remainder of the year and enhance their end-of-year reports. In addition, this report is designed to facilitate a review of the entire effort across the State in broad strokes, assisting the MISRGO office personnel, researchers, evaluators, policy makers, and legislators.