



Knowing What Policies are in Place

Knowing what policies are already on the books—and the degree to which they are supported and enforced—can help you determine whether new policy development is warranted.

A search of existing policies may yield some pleasant surprises. You may discover that adequate policies are already in place—and that they are being properly enforced.

You may also discover that adequate policies exist, but that they don't seem to be making a difference. In this case, you'll want to know why.

Below are some helpful questions to ask when researching existing policies:

- Who does the policies target?
- What outcomes does it hope to achieve?
- Who was instrumental in getting it passed?
- Is the policy clearly written?
- To what extent does it enjoy public support (i.e., do people think it is appropriate? Do they think the issue is important?)
- To what extent is the policy enforced? And if not, why not?
- To what degree is it understood by the general population and local merchants/retailers?
- To what degree do local merchants, retailers, and other key players know, support, and voluntarily comply with the policy?
- Is the policy effective? Is there data that supports your assessment of effectiveness?

Remember that policy doesn't function well in a vacuum. In the absence of effective enforcement, public education, and related community-based services, the impact of a policy will be negligible. Depending on the answers to the questions above, you may want to focus your efforts on building community awareness and/or strengthening enforcement, rather than on creating new policies.