



CITY OF FIREBAUGH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Prepared for the Board of State and Community
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BSCC Cohort 2 Final Local Evaluation Report

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EXSECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Firebaugh Police Department, funded by Proposition 64 Cohort 2, embarked on a comprehensive initiative to address the challenges posed by cannabis use and misinformation following the legalization of cannabis in California. The primary purpose of this grant was to hire a full-time police officer dedicated to educational outreach and enforcement activities within the Firebaugh community.

The project aimed to educate over 2,200 students within the Firebaugh Las Deltas School District on the dangers associated with using, smoking, and consuming cannabis products. The outreach program focused on clarifying the laws related to Proposition 64 and local municipal codes, addressing widespread misconceptions among students and adults. Through classroom PowerPoint presentations and community information booths, the grant officer provided accurate information to help students understand the legal landscape and health risks associated with cannabis use.

The outreach extended beyond students to include Firebaugh citizens, ensuring that adults were equally informed about cannabis laws and the implications of Proposition 64. A significant emphasis was placed on educating the community about the equivalence of driving under the influence of cannabis to drunk driving, aiming to reduce impaired driving incidents.

Recognizing the rural setting of Firebaugh and the limited availability of cannabis education, the project included summer activities and sports programs to engage students constructively. These initiatives aimed to deter youth from engaging in cannabis-related activities by providing positive, structured alternatives during school breaks while providing cannabis educational outreach.

The grant officer was also tasked as part of the grant with enhancing public safety through regular inspections of licensed cannabis retailers to ensure compliance with state and municipal regulations. Additionally, the officer conducted investigations into unlicensed and unpermitted cannabis operations, targeting illegal production and sales within the black market around the Firebaugh area. Aerial surveillance along the San Joaquin River was utilized to identify and address illegal cannabis cultivation in the region.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Firebaugh, a small rural community in western Fresno County, identified a critical need for enhanced educational outreach and public safety measures regarding cannabis use and legislation following the passage of Proposition 64. In response, the city applied for the BSCC Cohort 2 Grant with the objective of hiring a full-time police officer dedicated to addressing these needs within the community, particularly focusing on the Firebaugh-Las Deltas School District and the broader adult population.

A significant component of this initiative was to provide students with comprehensive educational outreach on the dangers of cannabis use. This was deemed essential due to prevalent misconceptions about cannabis law and its implications post-Proposition 64. The educational program aimed to clarify these misconceptions, ensuring that students are well-informed about both the health risks and the legal aspects of cannabis consumption.

Moreover, the project sought to extend this outreach to adult citizens, empowering them to make informed decisions regarding cannabis products. By increasing awareness and understanding of the law, the city aimed to foster a community that is knowledgeable about both the benefits and potential legal ramifications of cannabis use.

In addition to educational efforts, the grant facilitated the enhancement of public safety through the police officer's role in investigating illegal cannabis operations. This included targeting the sale of cannabis products without proper licenses and permits, which posed a significant challenge in the region. Furthermore, the officer was tasked with conducting inspections of licensed cannabis operations to ensure compliance with state regulations, thereby safeguarding community welfare and maintaining legal integrity.

Overall, the BSCC Cohort 2 Grant enabled the City of Firebaugh to address critical gaps in cannabis education and enforcement, fostering a safer and more informed community. Through this initiative, the city aimed to set a precedent for rural communities facing similar challenges in adapting to evolving cannabis laws and their societal impacts.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Firebaugh Police Department, with the support of BSCC Grant Cohort 2 funding, introduced the Cannabis Education, Outreach, and Enforcement Initiative—an innovative, multi-dimensional program designed to foster community awareness and ensure compliance with state and local cannabis laws. This initiative marks a significant step forward in public safety and education, blending engaging classroom instruction, dynamic community outreach, and active law enforcement to address the challenges posed by cannabis misuse and illegal market activities.

Key Program Components:

1. Educational Outreach in Classrooms:

- The initiative will employ a full-time police officer who will visit Firebaugh-Las Deltas School District classrooms to deliver informative cannabis education sessions.
- Presentations will utilize interactive PowerPoint slides, detailed handouts, and easily digestible pamphlets that discuss:

- The dangers of cannabis use and its potential health impacts.
- An in-depth explanation of California laws and relevant city municipal regulations as they relate to Proposition 64 legislation.

- Targeted at students, teachers, and administrators, these sessions aim to equip the school community with accurate, up-to-date information regarding cannabis risks/dangers and legal responsibilities.

2. Community Engagement and Outreach Booths:

- The program extends beyond the classroom with the establishment of educational outreach booths at key community events such as school fairs, community gatherings, festivals, and landlord-tenant meetings.

- These booths will serve as accessible information hubs, where community members can obtain guidance on the legal aspects of cannabis use and distribution and learn about the potential health risks.

- Outreach efforts will facilitate an open dialogue between law enforcement grant officer and the public, building trust and reinforcing the message of responsible cannabis use.

3. Summer Sports Programming Integrated with Cannabis Education:

- To engage Firebaugh's youth during the summer, the initiative will incorporate recreational sports activities that promote healthy, drug-free lifestyles.

- These summer programs will include integrated cannabis education segments, ensuring that students remain informed about the dangers of cannabis and the importance of adhering to legal guidelines even during school breaks.

4. Enforcement and Regulatory Oversight:

- In addition to educational efforts, the grant-funded police officer will lead targeted criminal investigations focused on curbing the illegal cannabis marketplace in Firebaugh. This includes:

- Investigating individuals involved in selling cannabis products on the black market.
- Conducting inquiries into unauthorized marijuana cultivation in residential settings or backyards, where proper city permits have not been obtained.

- The officer will also perform regular inspections of licensed cannabis retailers, verifying compliance with state cannabis retailer laws and local municipal code regulations, and addressing any violations promptly.

- This enforcement component is vital for ensuring that community safety is maintained while legal frameworks are respected.

5. Expected Impact:

- Enhanced awareness among students, educators, and community members regarding the dangers of cannabis use and the legal standards surrounding its distribution and cultivation of cannabis.
- Increased engagement and positive behavioral change in youth through integrated summer sports and educational cannabis outreach presentations.
- A measurable reduction in illegal cannabis sales and cultivation activities, thanks to proactive criminal investigations and strict inspections of licensed retailers.
- Strengthened collaboration between law enforcement, the school district, and local community stakeholders—paving the way for a safer, more informed Firebaugh.

The Cannabis Education, Outreach, and Enforcement Initiative represents a comprehensive approach that unites educational empowerment with rigorous law enforcement, offering a promising destination for community wellness and public safety. With clear objectives, multi-faceted programming, and dedicated action on both the educational and regulatory fronts, this project is poised to make a lasting impact on the health, safety, and well-being of the Firebaugh community.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The BSCC grant cohort 2 had a transformative impact on the Firebaugh-Las Deltas School District and the surrounding community, effectively addressing the complex issues related to cannabis use and regulation. Over the three-year grant period, the comprehensive efforts led by the grant officer not only increased awareness and understanding but also significantly reduced the prevalence of cannabis possession among students.

A cornerstone of the grant's success was the delivery of 33 school presentations, which employed engaging PowerPoint presentations and informative handouts to educate students and school staff. By reinforcing the same critical information year after year, the program ensured that students developed a deep and lasting understanding of the risks associated with cannabis use and the legal landscape shaped by Proposition 64. This consistent educational outreach was pivotal in cultivating a culture of awareness and responsibility within the school district.

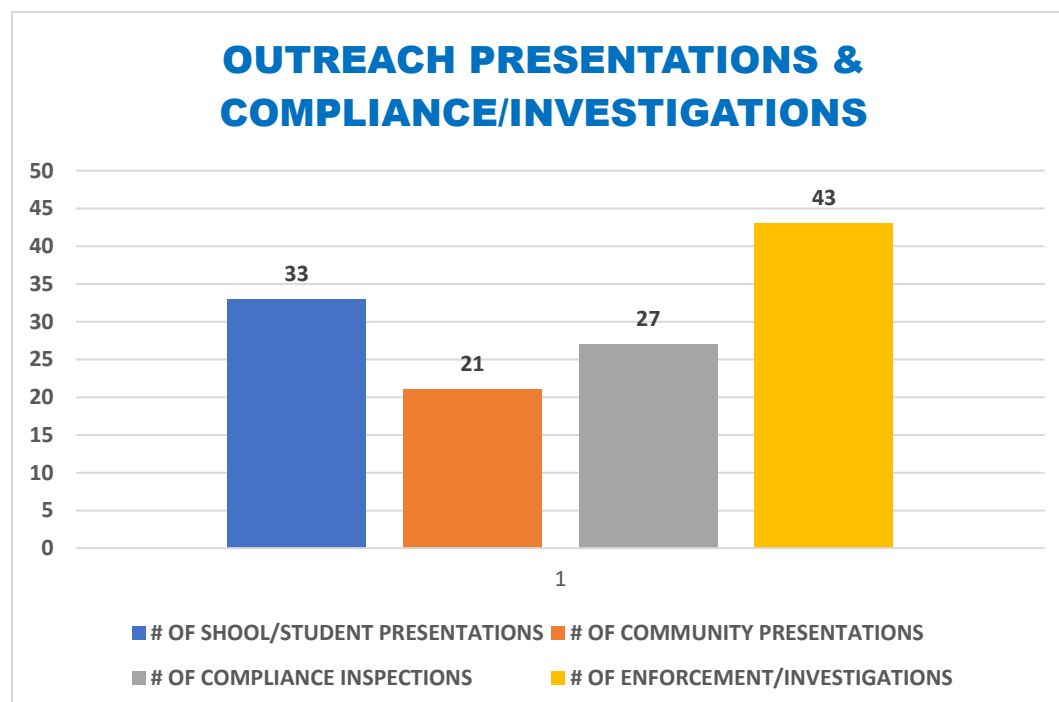
The grant officer extended these educational efforts to the broader community through 21 presentations at various local events, reaching thousands of Firebaugh citizens and their children. These community presentations were instrumental in disseminating vital information about the dangers of cannabis use and the legal requirements under the city municipal code. By fostering a well-informed community, the program empowered individuals to make safer and more informed decisions regarding cannabis.

In addition to educational outreach, the grant facilitated 27 compliance inspections of licensed cannabis retailers. These inspections played a crucial role in ensuring that businesses adhered to state regulations and municipal codes, thereby maintaining a legal and safe marketplace. This proactive approach not only deterred potential violations but also reinforced the importance of compliance within the industry.

The grant officer also conducted 43 criminal investigations into unpermitted cannabis operations and illegal sales, leading to the arrest of numerous individuals. These enforcement activities significantly curtailed the black-market sale of cannabis, protecting students and citizens from unlicensed and potentially harmful products. As a result, the community experienced a notable increase in safety and security.

The impact of these initiatives is evident in the substantial reduction in cannabis possession among students. At the outset of the program, the school district faced an average of 15 students being found with cannabis possession per month. By the end of the grant, this number had dropped to an average of 5 students per month—a reduction of over 66%. Similarly, within the broader community, the number of students found in possession of cannabis products decreased from an average of 7 per month to just 1 per month, representing an 86% reduction.

These remarkable outcomes underscore the effectiveness of the grant's educational and enforcement strategies. By achieving a more than 50% reduction in cannabis possession among students, the program not only met but exceeded its goals and objectives. The Firebaugh-Las Deltas community is now more informed, safer, and better equipped to navigate the complexities of cannabis use and regulation.



CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

During the BSCC cohort 2 grant cycle, several challenges emerged that provided valuable lessons for future initiatives. One of the primary challenges was navigating the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which initially hindered the ability to conduct in-person outreach sessions. The restrictions and health concerns associated with the pandemic meant that traditional methods of engagement, such as face-to-face presentations and community events, were not feasible for a significant portion of the grant period. This limitation required the team to adapt quickly, exploring alternative methods such as virtual presentations and digital handouts to continue reaching students and community members. The gradual return to normality by the end of 2021 allowed for a resumption of in-person activities, highlighting the importance of flexibility and adaptability in program execution.

Another challenge was securing buy-in from school staff for the cannabis education outreach efforts. Initially, there was some resistance or hesitation from educators and administrators, which could have stemmed from competing priorities or a lack of understanding of the program's objectives. The grant officer addressed this challenge by engaging in open dialogues with school staff, clearly explaining the goals and benefits of the outreach program. This communication helped build trust and demonstrated the value of the initiative, ultimately leading to increased support and collaboration from the school community. The success of these efforts is evident in the growing enthusiasm among school staff and administrators, who now express interest in having a full-time officer to conduct outreach on a broader range of topics beyond cannabis.

These challenges underscored several key lessons. First, the importance of adaptability in the face of unforeseen circumstances, such as a global pandemic, cannot be overstated. Developing contingency plans and being open to new methods of engagement are crucial for maintaining program momentum. Second, effective communication and relationship-building with stakeholders, such as school staff, are essential for gaining support and ensuring the success of outreach efforts. By fostering a collaborative environment and clearly articulating program objectives, it is possible to overcome initial resistance and build a strong foundation for future initiatives.

Overall, the experiences and lessons learned during the BSCC cohort 2 grant cycle have strengthened the program's capacity to address community needs and have laid the groundwork for even more comprehensive and inclusive outreach efforts in the future.

FUTURE PLANS

Following the successful completion of the BSCC cohort 2 grant period, the City of Firebaugh is poised to build on its achievements by applying for the BSCC cohort 3 grant. This new application retains the core concepts and requirements of the previous grant while incorporating enhancements based on the lessons learned and successes achieved during cohort 2. The primary goal is to continue and expand the impactful outreach and educational efforts that have already made a substantial difference in the community.

One of the most significant developments resulting from cohort 2 is the decision by the Firebaugh Police Department and the school district to establish a full-time School Resource Officer (SRO) position. This decision reflects the positive impact that the presence of officers on campus has had on students and staff. The officers involved in cohort 2 successfully built strong relationships within the school community, fostering a sense of safety and trust. This environment has been instrumental in changing perceptions and building rapport between students and law enforcement, which is a critical component of effective community policing.

Looking ahead, the school district is also considering the possibility of hiring a second School Resource Officer. This expansion would allow for a broader range of resources and outreach on various issues, addressing not only cannabis education but also other important topics relevant to students' well-being and safety. The presence of additional officers would further strengthen the support network available to students and staff, enhancing the overall educational environment.

The trust and positive relationships developed between students and police officers during cohort 2 have laid a solid foundation for future initiatives. By continuing to build on this trust, the program aims to create a more cohesive and supportive community where students feel comfortable seeking help and guidance from law enforcement.

In summary, the future plans following the BSCC cohort 2 grant period focus on sustaining and expanding the successful strategies implemented during the grant. With the application for BSCC cohort 3, the City of Firebaugh is committed to enhancing its outreach efforts, strengthening community-police relations, and providing comprehensive support to students and the wider community. The establishment of a full-time School Resource Officer and the potential addition of a second officer are pivotal steps in achieving these goals, ensuring that the positive momentum generated by cohort 2 continues to benefit the Firebaugh community.

CONCLUSION:

The completion of the BSCC cohort 2 grant period marks a significant milestone for the Firebaugh-Las Deltas School District and the broader community. Over the course of three years, the initiatives implemented under this grant have achieved remarkable

accomplishments, fundamentally transforming the landscape of cannabis education, enforcement, and community relations.

One of the most noteworthy achievements was the extensive educational outreach conducted by the grant officer, who delivered 33 school presentations and 21 community presentations. These efforts reached thousands of students and community members, significantly enhancing awareness and understanding of the risks associated with cannabis use, as well as the legal framework established by Proposition 64 and local municipal codes. The consistent reinforcement of these messages has cultivated a well-informed community that is better equipped to make safe and responsible decisions.

The grant also facilitated 27 compliance inspections of licensed cannabis retailers, ensuring adherence to state and local regulations. This proactive approach not only maintained a safe and legal marketplace but also underscored the importance of regulatory compliance within the industry. Additionally, the 43 criminal investigations into unpermitted cannabis operations and illegal sales led to numerous arrests, effectively curbing the black market and enhancing community safety.

Perhaps one of the most profound impacts of the grant was the fostering of trust and positive relationships between students and law enforcement. The presence of officers on campus and their engagement with the school community have created a safer and more supportive environment, leading to the decision to establish a full-time School Resource Officer position. This development, along with the consideration of hiring a second officer, reflects the lasting legacy of cohort 2's efforts.

In conclusion, the BSCC cohort 2 grant has not only met but exceeded its objectives, resulting in a more informed, safer, and cohesive community. The reduction in cannabis possession among students, the strengthened community-police relations, and the establishment of ongoing support structures are testaments to the program's success. As Firebaugh looks to the future with the application for BSCC cohort 3, the foundation laid by cohort 2 provides a strong platform for continued progress and positive change. The achievements of this grant period serve as a beacon of what can be accomplished through dedicated outreach, collaboration, and commitment to community well-being.