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Note to Editors - A list and map of the new local grants is attached.

Tobacco Settlement Endowment Awards New Local Grants to Reduce Tobacco Use in Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY – In an increasing effort to combat our state’s leading preventable cause of death, the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust today announced the award of \$525,000 in grants to seven local coalitions serving 12 Oklahoma counties.

The *Communities of Excellence* grant program challenges local coalitions to create comprehensive programs that will reduce tobacco use in their communities. These new grantees will join the ranks of the original 17 *Communities of Excellence* programs now entering their fourth year of activity.

“Our goal is to see Oklahoma’s tobacco use rates drop below the national average by 2012.” said Kenneth Rowe, Chair of the Board of Directors. “We know the formula for success is a combination of community leadership, tobacco cessation services, and public education. With this expansion, the program will reach over 70 percent of all Oklahomans and 37 counties across the state. ”

Funded with investment earnings from the tobacco settlement endowment and local matching funds, each coalition will receive up to \$75,000 in the first year of the five-year grant program. The first year is a planning phase in which the communities will develop strategic plans to be implemented in the remaining years of the program.

“While the coalitions will be following a successful strategic planning model, there is no one-size-fits-all program that can adequately meet the diverse needs of Oklahoma’s communities,” said Tracey Strader, executive director. “The coalitions will each create a strategic plan that addresses the unique needs of their communities.”

The goals of the *Communities of Excellence* program are to have communities in which public places and workplaces are tobacco-free, community organizations and events reject tobacco industry sponsorship, schools adopt tobacco-free policies and implement strong anti-tobacco curriculum; health care providers routinely refer tobacco users to accessible and culturally-appropriate cessation services; businesses adopt tobacco-free policies and provide insurance coverage for tobacco cessation; and local tobacco-related ordinances are enforced.

The Tobacco Use Prevention Service of the Oklahoma State Department of Health provides technical assistance and training for the program. The University of Oklahoma College of Public Health, provides the program’s external evaluation.

For more information please visit the TSET website at www.tset.ok.gov

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