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Working with a Creative Team

This *C-Bulletin* shares best practices for working with artists, graphic designers, and other creative professionals when developing social and behavior change communication (SBCC) materials and activities for all audiences, but especially for those with lower literacy skills.

What Is a Creative Team and Why Use One?

SBCC practitioners with limited budgets may be tempted to try to design materials and activities themselves, but they are likely to find it is worth the time and money to hire people and agencies with expertise and experience in developing creative concepts and materials. The creative team, who can include artists, graphic designers, video producers, writers, actors, musicians and other professionals, bring to life the concepts and ideas in a creative brief.

The services of creative professionals may be secured through a full-service creative agency or through individuals who can supplement already existing program and partner organization creative staff. Before recruiting outside professionals for the creative team, it is important to assess realistically the program or partner organizations' in-house capacity to manage the tasks of the creative team.

There are definite advantages to hiring an external creative team or agency. Often an outside agency can provide a much needed perspective on the existing creative brief, further refining or expanding concepts (see *C-Bulletin 3*) and offering suggestions not yet considered. A full-service agency can also be helpful in conceptualizing and designing a whole intervention with a set of mutually supportive activities and materials rather than stand-alone materials. A creative team can support SBCC practitioners to create and strengthen linkages between activities and materials, turning them into a recognizable campaign with logos and slogans.

How Is a Creative Team Hired?

To find the right full-service agency, ask several public relations or advertising agencies to present their portfolios, along with a list of clients served and skills offered.

If a full-service agency is not affordable and a creative team needs to be assembled, look to art schools or university programs to find illustrators, designers, and audiovisual producers. Often, the best way to find qualified creative professionals is to obtain recommendations from other communication programs that have successfully recruited these individuals.

The selection process for hiring a full-service agency or a team of creative professionals should be competitive. A request for proposals (RFP), incorporating a clear scope of work, should be issued to which firms or individuals can respond by a specific date. The following standard approach is usually followed.

TIP: Collaborate with partner organizations to save money and share resources. A partner organization might have a creative professional on retainer who may be able to add a smaller design project to a larger job.

Some advertising and production agencies work at reduced rates for nonprofit organizations, especially for causes they believe in.

TIP: When firms or individuals respond to a request for a proposal for a contract, invite the creative professionals competing for the contract to an audience consultation (especially if they have not worked with lower literacy audiences before). For example, invite them to observe an Action Media Workshop (see C-Bulletin 4) and ask them to use what they hear and see to develop a competitive proposal.

1. Publicly issue an RFP that describes the specific work needed and states the selection criteria to be used. Selection criteria may include: the agency's experience with the intended format (e.g., radio or print), experience in the technical area (e.g., HIV/AIDS, nutrition), references from previous clients, and samples of previous work.
2. Organize a group of reviewers while waiting for responses.
3. Evaluate and eliminate unsuitable proposals.
4. Score applicants according to cost and other criteria outlined in the RFP.
5. Invite finalists with the highest scores to make oral presentations.
6. Check references and make the final selection.
7. Inform applicants who didn't win the contract.
8. Negotiate details with the winner and sign the contract.
9. Start briefing meetings.

Before signing a contract with an advertising agency, public relations firm, or consulting firm, it is important to meet with them and agree on the final scope of work, deliverables, working relationships, costs, and reporting requirements. The professionals on the team need to be interviewed, not just the agency representatives who solicited the business. These professionals should be asked to show samples of the work they have done, rather than just a list of contracts previously fulfilled by the agency.

Contracts should specify who will work on the project, in what capacity, and the percentage of the overall effort that each team member will contribute. To further control quality and avoid costly mistakes, it is important to include the following during contract negotiations:

- Request a production schedule that shows each step in the approval process. Agree at the outset on pretesting and approvals required, when they will occur, and how long the process will take.
- Insist on reviewing and approving proofs before printing, even if the final art work has been approved.
- Find out if the agency will conduct checks prior to printing and what happens if printed materials do not meet standards.
- Ensure that the production of audio-visual materials are monitored and match the approved scripts or storyboards.

What Needs to Be Done at Different Stages in the Materials Development Process?

In working with creative professionals it is always important to define clearly what needs to be done, to establish roles, set expectations, monitor progress, answer questions, and provide support.

Following these steps will make your collaboration with a creative team more successful.

1. Before work starts, give the team the creative brief and discuss the expected deliverables and timeline for completion.

- Ensure that each member of the team understands the creative brief ([see C-Bulletin 3](#)). What the creative brief calls for must be clear at the outset, before any discussions or further elaboration can take place.
- Show the team examples of other communication or SBCC materials for people with lower literacy that did or did not work well and explain why.
- Explain sensitive issues, how to address literacy, and key content points to be conveyed in the material or activity.
- Discuss the theoretical basis of the communication effort and help the creative team understand its application to lower literacy formats, messages and materials development.
- Let the team know that work in progress will be reviewed with this perspective and with the creative brief in mind.

2. At various stages as materials are developed, ask the creative team to present their ideas and designs to staff (and, as appropriate, to audience members and other stakeholders). Set regular meetings to learn about progress and address concerns. If possible, involve the team in concept and pretesting, asking them what questions they would like addressed and include them as observers. This involvement is likely to help team members craft messages and materials that use language and ideas that the audience likes.

3. Assess draft messages and materials against the creative brief, SBCC strategy, and audience data. Material drafts have to resonate primarily with the audience, not just with the creative team. An intended audience of rural women at risk for HIV infection has a much different perspective than urban middle-class males who are on a creative team.

TIP: When developing materials and activities for people with lower literacy skills, it is important to probe for adequate experience among the creative team. Ask for samples of materials they have developed addressing literacy issues. If there is no specific experience, creative professionals will need additional guidance on best practices for formats, visuals, and content presentation (see C-Bulletins 2, 5 & 6).

4. Trust the team's professional expertise if their drafts are consistent with the creative brief, SBCC strategy, and the intended audience's culture. SBCC practitioners need to ensure the appropriateness and accuracy of the content of the material or activity and maintain the program's strategic focus. The creative insights and experiences of the creative team need to be respected if the team is to remain committed and involved.

POTENTIAL CREATIVE DESIGN AND PRODUCTION COSTS

Potential Costs

Production of radio and TV spots (or longer content)

- Fees or salaries for artists, graphic designers, scriptwriters, actors, musicians, producers, photographers, videographers, and technicians
- Fees for writers, editors, and technical content reviewers
- Studio and equipment rental
- Pretests (preferably led by experienced SBCC practitioners)
- Airtime
- Distribution
- Travel to meetings or production locations

Production of posters, flipcharts, comic books, games, or other printed materials

- Fees or salaries for writers, editors, artists, and graphic designers
- Pretests (preferably led by experienced SBCC practitioners)
- Printing and distribution

Overhead and Incidentals

- Telephone, internet, fax, postage
- Administrative costs
- Other transportation costs

What Is the Value Added of Working with a Creative Team?

Effective and fruitful collaboration with a creative team.

Well-designed and attractive creative materials that will resonate with the intended audiences for a long time because they meet their needs.

Notes

CommunicationBulletins

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- 2 SBCC MATERIAL AND ACTIVITY FORMATS FOR AUDIENCES WITH LOWER LITERACY SKILLS
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- 8 TESTING SBCC MATERIALS
- 9 CONDUCTING A STAKEHOLDER REVIEW
- 10 ADAPTING MATERIALS FOR AUDIENCES WITH LOWER LITERACY SKILLS

Resources for More Information

- Debus, M. 1990. *How to Get What You Want from an Advertising Agency*. Porter/Novelli, AIDSCOM Project.
- Greenberg, R., et al. 1996. *How to Select and Work with an Advertising Agency*. Handbook for Population and Health Communication Programs. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs. <http://www.jhuccp.org/sites/all/files/HowtoSelectandWorkwithanAdvertisingAgency.pdf>
- National Cancer Institute. 2008. *Making Health Communication Programs Work*. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook/page1
- Quiroga, R., et al. 2002. *Developing Material on HIV/AIDS/STIs for Low-Literate Audiences*. Washington, DC: PATH/Family Health International. <http://www.fhi360.org/en/HIVAIDS/pub/guide/lowliteracyguide.htm>
- Riley, K., et al. 1994. *Beyond the Brochure: Alternative Approaches to Effective Health Communication*. Denver: AMC Cancer Research Center. www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/pdf/amcbeyon.pdf
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2003. *Designing and Implementing an Effective Tobacco Counter-Marketing Campaign*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and CDC. www.cdc.gov/tobacco/stateandcommunity/counter_marketing/manual/index.htm

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*Feel free to make copies.
We welcome the sharing
of resources.*



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