Testing SBCC Materials

Social and behavior change communication (SBCC) materials need to be tested before they are finalized. This is an essential step, particularly for materials and activities that aim to reach lower literacy audiences. This *C-Bulletin* describes concept testing, pretesting, and field testing of SBCC materials, including the cost of testing and how to overcome budgetary limitations.

Why Test SBCC Materials?

Testing SBCC materials and activities helps to confirm that they are effective, appropriate, understandable, attractive, and culturally relevant. Testing allows SBCC practitioners to gather feedback from intended audiences, who may suggest alternative formats and identify confusing or unclear content. Revisions can then be made that make it more likely that SBCC materials and activities will be effective. It is much easier and more cost effective to revise materials or activities at this point, than after they are finalized and disseminated!

What Is Concept Testing, Stakeholder Review, Pretesting, and Field Testing?

Four kinds of testing occur during the process of creating SBCC products. **Each type serves different purposes and happens at different points in time during the material development process (**also see *C-Bulletin 9***)**:

1. Concept testing happens *before* time is invested in fully drafting materials.
2. A stakeholder review by partners and gatekeepers occurs *after* materials have been drafted.
3. Pretesting happens *after* concept testing and stakeholder review and reviews/tests with the intended audience.
4. Field testing happens *after* these steps, and allows SBCC practitioners to observe SBCC materials in the field in action, i.e., whether they are used in their intended settings and context.

1. Concept testing involves getting input from members of the intended audience on proposed formats of new materials and on "big ideas" or concepts—the essence of what is to be communicated—before investing much time in developing materials. Audiences provide information about what motivates them, what benefits they see might result from changes in behavior, what they like and dislike about a material or activity, and their reasons why. SBCC practitioners should present at least two draft formats or concepts to determine which one is preferred. These can be in the form of drawings, black and white print outs, or mock-up designs. How concepts are presented will depend on the questions developers have and the type of audience they work with. For audiences with lower literacy it is advisable to have clean drawing drafts and mock-up examples to avoid confusion.

2. Stakeholder reviews happens after the materials have been drafted and can either be before or after pretesting. It gives experts such as technical advisors, community leaders, and representatives of partners, donors, government ministries, or another level of government, an opportunity to review the technical content of SBCC materials and provide feedback (for more information see *C-Bulletin 9*).

3. Pretesting occurs after concept testing, stakeholder review, and the design and formatting of the first draft of the material or activity. Pretesting asks members of the intended audience (those not previously involved in concept testing) to review the drafts and then answer a set of open-ended questions. This type of testing allows practitioners to learn if the formatted SBCC materials are understood and acceptable and provides them with feedback necessary for further material and activity refinements, which can then be incorporated by a creative team. Pretesting focuses on five key areas of assessment:

- Comprehension
- Attractiveness
- Acceptance
- Involvement
- Whether the material/activity induces action

Three concepts around fathers' involvement in child feeding were tested prior to developing storylines for TV spots in Bangladesh. (Alive & Thrive 2012)

3. Field testing allows practitioners to observe whether the SBCC materials are used effectively in their intended settings and contexts, through observation and focus group discussions. For example, a field test of a job aid for reproductive health counselors would involve observing them using it during their interactions with clients and reporting whether it serves the intended purpose. This could be followed by a focus group discussion to garner additional feedback from users.

BEST PRACTICES FOR TESTING LOWER LITERACY MATERIALS

When concept and pretesting materials and activities with lower literacy audiences follow these best practices:

- Assure participants that they are not being tested, but instead that the material is being tested for its effectiveness.

- Encourage participants to be open and eliminate their fears about being criticized if they provide negative feedback.

- Show only one material at a time, preferably visuals first and then words.

- Use interactive activities when possible, and change the pace of testing to keep participants engaged and interested.

- Use a trained facilitator who speaks the local language, is culturally sensitive, and especially, who knows how to put slower readers at ease.

- Use a trained note-taker who speaks the local language.

SAMPLE CONCEPT TESTING AND PRETESTING QUESTIONS

SBCC practitioners should take special care to ensure that concept and pretesting questions are open-ended. They should not lead participants to respond in a certain way or call for only "yes" and "no" answers. Probes or follow-up questions (e.g., Is there anything else? Can you tell me more about that?) can be used to obtain additional information or clarification.

Sample Concept Testing Questions

Step 1: Audience perceptions of their lives and key motivators

1. What do you like in your life?
2. How do you see the future?
3. What influences people like you to make changes in the way you live your life?

Step 2: Audience opinions of the concepts presented

1. What's your general reaction to this draft?
2. Can you describe what you see in this picture?
3. For whom do you think this material or activity is meant?

Step 3: Audience rating of the best concept

1. Which of the concepts do you find most attractive?
2. Which one do you think is easiest to understand?
3. Which one do you think shows a situation closest to your life?
4. Which one presents the most believable message?

Sample Pretesting Questions

- What is the main idea of this brochure, radio spot, or other type of material?

- Is this material for people like you or for other people?

- Is there anything about the material or product that might confuse, offend, or embarrass some people? What, in particular?

- Is there anything in the material that you really like? Which part? Why?

- Is there anything in the material that you do not like? Which part? Why?

- Is the information/scenario/story believable? Why or why not?

- Do you think the material is attractive or appealing? Why or why not?

- What do you think can be done to make the material better?

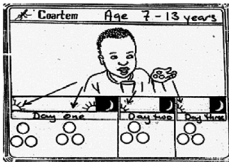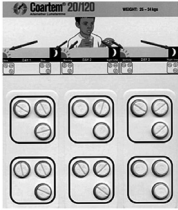- Do you think this material will help people? How?

Example of Revisions to Materials Based on Pretest Findings

1. The first draft of antimalarial instructions for Coartem (box 1) was understood by very few pretest participants.

2. The sixth pretest version (box 2) was understood by over half of the participants.

3. The final version (box 3) was later used to develop instructions that are used globally.

Chetley, A., et al. 2007. *How to Improve the Use of Medicines by Consumers.* Geneva: WHO.

What is the Sequence of Steps in a Testing Process?

This diagram shows one example of the testing process and its potential sequence. As outlined, revisions are usually made after each stage in the process. Depending on what happens when the first draft is reviewed, several more pretests and stakeholder reviews may be needed before the materials are finalized and produced.

Before first draft	After first draft	After final draft
• Concept testing	• Pretesting • Stakeholder review(s)	• Field testing

For concept, pretesting, and field testing, six steps should be followed.

1. Choose a testing method.
2. Develop a testing design and decide how many, where, and when audience members will be involved.
3. Write out questions for audience members.
4. Arrange for a venue, staff, and other logistics.
5. Recruit participants and implement the test.
6. Summarize and interpret the results.

As noted, testing occurs at different stages of materials development. Ideally, materials and activities are created collaboratively with intended audiences, allowing SBCC practitioners to understand how and why certain kinds of information are used. A series of consultation workshops with representative audience members could be a first step, before any SBCC materials are drafted or tested (see *C-Bulletin 4*).

Women in Senegal in a pretest. (©2011 Danielle Baron, courtesy of Photoshare)

What Methodologies Are Used in Concept, Pretesting, and Field Testing?

Several methodologies are used in testing of materials and activities. Most common among these are focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. These are discussed below as are other methods, including intercept, theater, and online usability testing.

Focus group discussions are small group gatherings of eight to 10 people who share characteristics such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, lifestyle, and literacy level. It is better if people in the group do not know each other, although this is difficult to arrange in many settings. Discussions are led by a trained facilitator, and a separate, skilled note-taker is employed. How many focus group discussions are held depends on how diverse the intended audience is.

In-depth interviews are conducted one-on-one by an unbiased and trained professional with representative members of the intended audience to gather in-depth information about attitudes and beliefs and reactions to the draft materials and activities. Often, this method is used to get information about sensitive topics that people may not want to discuss in a larger focus group. Again, how many interviews are held depends on the diversity of the intended audience (normally two to four interviews are a minimum number).

Intercept testing occurs in a public place, sometimes with people who are leaving a venue. Interviewers ask for immediate reactions to an audiovisual material just seen or one played on a handheld computer or a mobile phone.

Theater testing usually involves the presentation of an audio or audiovisual product to

a larger group of audience members to register group likes or dislikes. Depending on the size of the group, the set up can be similar to a focus group. Theater testing can also involve filling in surveys or using response meters or majority votes to register group likes or dislikes.

Online usability testing makes use of a survey form that is filled out by users of online tools or materials.

The following are the types of questions that will allow SBCC practitioners to determine which testing method or methods to use.

- Which method or methods is most suitable for the intended audience and the material or product being tested?

- Do resources and time allow for 10–20 in-depth interviews to be conducted?

- How difficult and costly would it be to organize focus group discussions?

- Are skilled interviewers or facilitators and note-takers available? Do they speak the same language as members of the intended audience?

More information about testing methods can be found in Module 3 of the *C-Modules.*

How Should Results from Testing Be Used?

When reviewing and using feedback from testing, it helps to involve a mix of people. Ideally this should include relevant program staff, interviewers, and note-takers who conducted testing, but could also include writers, editors, and designers who will be involved in making any revisions to the material. Most of the time, simple revisions can fix problems uncovered during testing. But SBCC practitioners need to consider starting over when participants indicate they have fundamental problems with the materials. Whether a problem is considered to be fundamental will depend—among other things—if more than one person per focus group note it as such. If in doubt, more testing or discussion with audience members usually helps to find out. However, be careful using a focus group's "numbers" to justify decisions, as it is not a quantitative method. It is also important to note that pretest participants are "experts" in what they understand and accept in a material, but not in material design. Therefore, not all suggestions should be followed without professional judgment. There may also be differences in opinion among the group of people that are reviewing audience feedback, so it is important to make final decisions based on the creative brief and other audience data.

How Much Does Testing Cost and do Budget Limitations Constrain the Use of Testing?

When developing a budget for testing, the following costs need to be considered:

- fees for skilled facilitators and note-takers

- payment to a mobilizer who recruits participants

- venue rental

- incentives and transport for participants

- transport for the concept test, pretest, and field test team

- copies of drafts of materials

- report writing

- meeting costs to review results with stakeholders

SBCC practitioners with limited funds can still test materials. A good way to start is to answer the following questions:

- Is a partner organization active in a potential pretest area that could provide support for the testing?

- Is there a venue available free of charge, perhaps as a community donation?

Though SBCC practitioners may feel that tight budgets constrain their use of testing, they should note that it will cost more time and money if untested materials are finalized and disseminated, then found to be inappropriate for their intended audiences!

What is the Value Added for Testing?

Testing allows SBCC practitioners to avoid costly and embarrassing mistakes by the dissemination of materials and activities that are rejected by audiences and stakeholders alike. Thorough and considered testing allows SBCC practitioners to benefit from feedback from intended audiences on materials and activities as they are developed. The feedback informs revisions and contributes to effective final materials and activities that receive stakeholder buy-in and support from intended audiences.

Have Testing Procedures Met These Standards?

☐ The testing process includes concept testing, stakeholder review, pretesting, and field testing

☐ Different people are engaged in the concept test, pretest, and field test

☐ Pretest respondents are representative of the intended audience

☐ Questions cover the five key assessment areas for pretesting

☐ Only one message or material—or one part of a material—is shown at a time

☐ The SBCC practitioners are open to feedback and reassure participants that their ideas are important

☐ Participants know that it is the SBCC material being tested, not their ability to read or understand

Communication**Bulletins**

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

Resources for More Information

AIDSCAP. *How to Conduct Effective Pretests.* Arlington, Va: Family Health International.

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Acknowledgments