



Evidence-based Malaria BCC: From Theory to Program Evaluation

Module 3: Pre-testing: A Critical Step to Ensuring SBCC Effectiveness – Handout

Module 3 of 5

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Learning objectives

At the end of this presentation, participants should be able to:

- Explain what pre-testing is and list two benefits of pre-testing for SBCC programs.
- Articulate the fundamentals of pre-testing concepts and messages.
- Describe the eight steps of the pre-testing process.

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Part 1: What is pre-testing and why do it?

Hi, everyone. Welcome to Module 3: Pre-testing, a critical step to ensuring SBCC effectiveness. My name is Rupali Limaye and I am the director of the HIV/AIDS Global Program at the Center for Communication Programs which is housed at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and I'm also associate faculty. This eLearning series was supported with funding from the United States Agency for International Development through the NetWorks project. This module has three learning objectives. By the end of this session, you will be able to 1) explain what pre-testing is and list two benefits of pre-testing for SBCC programs, 2) articulate the fundamentals of pre-testing concepts and messages, and 3) describe the eight steps of the pre-testing process.

This module is divided into four sections. Section 1 will focus on what pre-testing is and why all programmers should use it. Section 2 will focus on pre-testing concepts. For Section 3, we will walk through step by step how to actually conduct a pre-test. Finally for Section 4, we will talk about some lessons learned from real pre-testing experiences. We will end with a summary as well as some additional resources that you can consult for more information.

Let's start with Section 1: what is pre-testing and why do it? To get us started, let's take a look at a poster from Equatorial Guinea. There's an English translation on the left-hand side. I'll give you a few moments to read through the poster.

Do you think that this poster would benefit from pre-testing? Pre-testing is a process for determining an audience's reaction to and understanding of SBCC materials before finalization. If you were interested in understanding whether or not this poster is being interpreted correctly and is motivating people to take action, what steps could you take? In this session, we will learn step by step the process involved in pre-testing.

Now that we have walked through an example, let's define what pre-testing is. Pre-testing is a process for determining an audience's reaction to and understanding of SBCC materials before they are finalized. To be clear, I want to emphasize that pre-testing is not the same thing as formative research as they have different objectives but both are considered necessary for evidence-based SBCC. In terms of the process that you can use to pre-test, the idea is that materials are presented to several small groups of your intended and target audience. These groups are then asked a series of questions about the materials and programs that use the data gleaned from these interactions to analyze how the material is being interpreted. The goal of pre-testing centers around the intended effects you want your SBCC materials to have. The goal is to test the messages and materials to ensure that they are being interpreted correctly and to inform necessary improvements you may need to make before rolling out the material.

Now that we know what pre-testing is, the overall process and the goal of pre-testing, let's talk about the types of materials that you may want to pre-test. Slogans—pre-testing slogans are particularly important in SBCC because they should encompass the behavior you want your target audience to engage in. Slogans should be clear, concise and creative. You can also pre-test logos, specific messages as well as images. For radio, TV and film, pre-testing helps determine if the creative strategy sufficiently incorporates the health message into a believable and inspiring story that prompts individuals to take action. Other print materials, such as the poster we just saw, as well as brochures, need pre-testing to ensure that the images also convey the message clearly. Finally, you can also pre-test materials used in teaching and facilitation to ensure that the methodology is appropriate for your target audience. Can you think of other things that you may want to pre-test? I'll give you a few moments to think about other materials that you could pre-test to increase the effectiveness of your programming.

There are many products that you can pre-test but why would you pre-test to begin with? Let's take a look at a poster. What is the message that you get from this poster? That you should drink water to cure malaria? That you should drink water to prevent malaria? It's not clear exactly what the message is. What is the call to action, if any? Do you think that this poster could have benefitted from pre-testing?

We pre-test because:

- We want to understand whether our target audience will understand, like and be motivated by the product or service.
- We want information that tells us whether or not the product speaks to the needs and interests of the intended audience, and if we are using the most persuasive medium and channel and because we want to hear the perspective of the target audience.
- Because if we want to ultimately change their behavior, we need to hear from them what would persuade them to change their behavior.

A major barrier some programmers might bring up in regards to pre-testing is the cost and time involved for pre-testing. When given the choice, decision-makers may hesitate in allocating funding as well as time for pre-testing of SBCC activities because of the seemingly initial high start-up costs and demand for human resources or timeline delays.

But the reality is this:

- The cost and time needed to pre-test is minimal.
- By pre-testing, you can add value to your product and increase program efficiency.
- You can increase the impact of your SBCC activities.

It should be noted that pre-testing should be conducted with your intended target audience, but it is also helpful for other stakeholders to be present during pre-test to observe including the creative team that designed the material as well as donors and other relevant individuals that have the potential to improve your materials.

Let's take a look at another example. If this poster was designed, for example, to target young children in sub-Saharan Africa, what information could be obtained through pre-testing about how this poster would be received by the target audience? What questions could be answered by pre-testing? Take a moment to brainstorm the types of questions pre-testing could answer about SBCC materials.

Pre-testing can help you answer:

- What types of materials will fit your strategy, appeal to your target audience and clearly convey your message.
- If the call to action in your material is being communicated clearly.
- If there is a need to create new materials and if so, what types of materials?

Pre-testing can also help you answer how to develop messages and materials that are appropriate culturally, how to develop effective materials for low-literate audiences, and to increase the potential of the target audience to use the materials.

Let's take a look at the poster on the right. Do you think this poster is an effective material for a low-literate audience? Why or why not?

Why don't we take a short break? When we return, we will be discussing the role of pre-testing in SBCC programs.

Part 2: The role of pre-testing in SBCC programs: Testing concepts and messages

In terms of timing, you may be wondering where pre-testing fits within SBCC. Pre-testing should be done after your team has already reviewed existing materials, developed message concepts, decided what materials to develop and develop materials with a technical review. After these steps, you would then pre-test concepts, messages and materials. Then you would refine messages and materials using the results obtained from the pre-testing. Finally, you could then conduct additional testing if necessary as it might be pertinent to pre-test the revised materials.

In the next few slides, I will focus on the main points behind pre-testing of your campaign, concepts and materials.

In typical SBCC programs, we try and test concepts, messages and materials. You probably know what messages and materials are but you may be wondering: what is a concept? A concept is typically a brief sentence that describes an idea that frames a health topic or the benefits of a particular health behavior. Think about it like the main idea behind your material. Concepts are used to inform message development and concept testing is particularly important when you're dealing with a new issue.

You can use concept testing to identify which concept has the strongest draw or appeal, if there are confusing terms or concepts that need to be simplified, and if the language is appropriate for your target audience. Let's again take a look at the posters on the right side. What do you think the concept is behind each poster? Who will it appeal to? Are there confusing terms? Is the language appropriate?

Let's take a look at two concept examples regarding long-lasting insecticide-treated nets:

- Concept 1: sleeping under an LLIN every night will protect me from malaria.
- Concept 2: sleeping under an LLIN every night ensures my peaceful sleep free of a nuisance of mosquitoes.

Both of these concepts focus on LLIN use, but the difference is that the first concept targets the threat of malaria while the second concept appeals to the desire of peaceful sleep. By testing both of these concepts, you can then determine which concept motivates LLIN use among your target audience.

How would you actually go about pre-testing concepts? In terms of the process, concept testing would ask participants to rank concepts from most to least compelling along with their reasons why. There is then a discussion about the benefits and problems with each concept.

Let's take a look at the table on the right. The table on the right uses the two benefits of sleeping under an LLIN from the previous slide. Here, pre-testing participants would rank what concept they like the most and why.

Now that you know which concepts are compelling and understood by your target audience, it's now time to develop your SBCC materials.

Once you've chosen your concept and developed your materials, you can pre-test your materials. To reiterate, we pre-test to understand:

- What materials will fit our strategy, appeal to our intended audience and adequately convey our message.
- If the call to action is being communicated clearly.
- How can we make the materials as effective as possible?
- Do we need to create new materials and if so, what types?
- How do we develop culturally appropriate messages and materials?
- How do we develop effective materials for low-literate audiences?
- How can we make sure that the materials will be used by the intended audience?

In addition, pre-testing your materials at this stage allows you to:

1. Assess comprehensibility—does the intended audience understand the message?
2. Identify strong and weak points—what parts of the materials are doing their job best? For example, are the materials attracting attention and forming or motivating people to act? What parts are not doing their jobs?
3. Determine personal relevance—does the intended audience identify with the materials?
4. Gauge confusing, sensitive or controversial elements—does the treatment of particular topics make the intended audience uncomfortable?

Let's take another quick break. When we come back, we will talk about the steps of pre-testing.

Part 3: Steps to follow when pre-testing

Section 3 will outline the step-by-step pre-testing process. Let's get into the details a bit more.

How exactly do you pre-test? There are eight steps we follow:

1. Determine the research objectives for the pre-test.
2. Choose methods for pre-testing.
3. Secure a venue, select and then train your moderators and interviewers.
4. Identify, screen and recruit your respondents.
5. Draft pre-test instruments (including discussion guides and questionnaires as needed).
6. Conduct the pre-testing itself.
7. Analyze the results.
8. Use the results to improve SBCC programming.

Step 1: Determine research objectives

These should provide a clear understanding of what you want to learn from and whom. Here's an example of a good objective: To understand if the husbands of pregnant women living in our target area understand and are motivated by the campaign material's call to action to ensure that their wives sleep under a treated mosquito net.

Then, you should develop a description of what segments of your target audience you want to include in the pre-testing. For example, let's think about a mosquito net. Do you want to include those that have tried the behavior and have succeeded; meaning, have they slept under

a net and appreciated it? What about those that have failed? What about those that have entertained the idea of sleeping under a net but have not yet tried it? An example of audience segmenting for a pre-test would be if you wish to promote that pregnant women ask for and obtain a mosquito net at an ANC visit, you may want to pre-test your materials with different audience segments such as pregnant women, husbands of pregnant women, and women of reproductive age who are not pregnant. The key here is thinking about who would influence the behavior of pregnant women.

Step 2: Choose methods

In choosing your methods, you want to think about what is appropriate for your product. For example, if you wish to pre-test a material that is socially normative, you may want to think about focus groups. For more sensitive materials, perhaps one-on-one in-depth interviews are a better option. To ensure anonymity, you could also use self-administered surveys. Finally, you could also include observational studies to glean the behaviors of your target audience in their natural setting.

Step 3: Secure a venue and select and train moderators and interviewers

First, you would secure a venue that has minimal distractions and arrange seating so that all participants have a clear view of the materials. If you're conducting focus groups or in-depth interviews, you will need to identify moderators or interviewers. These individuals should ideally be experienced, speak in the desired language and make sure to include one moderator and one note taker. If your organization has no experience in such studies, consider hiring a good, experienced moderator or interviewer to conduct the pre-test, and then train internal staff at the same time to develop in-house capacity and skills.

When you are thinking about training your moderators and interviewers try and look for the following qualities: someone who understands the pre-testing goal and the research questions, understands the pre-testing question guide, understands the materials to be pre-tested, will make participants feel at ease, is able to elicit a balanced discussion from a group, will engage with all participants, will ask questions in a way that participants understand and will rephrase questions if necessary, and is nonbiased.

Step 4: Identify, screen and recruit respondents

You want to segment your target audience by looking for those that fit the criteria you are seeking. For example, if you're interested in getting people to accept indoor residual spraying, you may want to include respondents that have tried it and those that haven't. From a cultural perspective, if you're trying to roll out a poster about seeking treatment for malaria in a certain rural location, you want to recruit respondents from that location that speak the local language and understand the cultural context. You may also want to consider demographic and psychosocial characteristics, meaning including those that have the same demographic and psychographic properties as your target audience, such as occupation, number of children or holding certain beliefs.

Step 5: Draft pre-test instruments

In drafting the instrument, you want to involve the creative team that developed the SBCC materials. They may have specific questions regarding layout, colors and images. Questions

should assess how much the intended audience likes each material, as research has found this to be a leading indicator of material success. Be specific to identify strengths and weaknesses in messages and materials. If there are multiple options for a certain material such as a logo or slogan, ask respondents to state which they like best and why. Ask if the call to action is clear and relevant. Finally, if there are images in your materials, you should know how the images are being interpreted to make sure that they are being interpreted in the way you intended them to.

Here are some example pre-testing questions that you can use. I'll give you a few moments to review these. Are there other questions that you would want to ask?

Here is an example of an actual pre-testing guide that has been used to test malaria-related print materials. You can see that it includes basic information at the top including material identification number, names of pre-testers, date and location of pre-testing, topic, number of participants and audience segment. As you can see, the questions are quite broad to elicit as much information as possible. I'll give you a moment to review the questions.

Here's another example. This one is for pre-testing a radio serial drama script. In this case, an interesting methodology was used as described in the instructions for the focus group facilitator on the right-hand side of the screen. A focus group discussion is assembled with participants facing the wall. Behind them, actors conduct a dramatic reading of the radio drama script. This exercise simulates what a radio listener would hear. After each dramatic reading the pre-test respondents are asked a series of questions. This is repeated for several dramatic readings.

Step 6: Conduct pre-testing

You are now ready to pre-test. Your trained pre-test staff will use the pre-testing instrument to conduct the test. It is important to take detailed notes and voice record if possible. Just a reminder that the materials pre-tested should be in the appropriate language. Here you want to encourage attendance by other team members such as creative professionals, content experts, partners and gatekeepers such as decision-makers to observe some of the pre-testing.

A helpful tip: The observations of creative professionals are particularly important during concept exploration because they may spot comments or trends important for creative development. Another thing to note: These individuals should be included in the pre-testing not as participants, but so that they can observe and hear directly from the intended target audience in order to make creative changes as necessary.

Step 7: Analyze results

For the next step, now that you have conducted the pre-test, it's time to analyze the results. You will need to organize all the data obtained through pre-testing. Often, data from the different audience segments is consolidated for each material being tested. Consider carefully what the audience could not comprehend or found confusing, as well as what they liked and disliked. Ask the creative professionals to recommend creative solutions or revisions rather than expecting researchers to make recommendations that creative professionals may later

reject. Consider pre-testing again if your program has made major changes to a message or product based on the original pre-test conclusions.

Step 8: Use results to improve programming

Pre-testing findings can be used to solve problems, plan programs, develop materials or refine existing materials or messages. A common error is to over-generalize the results. Qualitative pre-testing methods should not be used to estimate broad-scale results. A pre-test cannot tell you what kind of an impact your SBCC program will have. You may find that you need to use different materials completely.

The next section will focus on lessons learned from pre-testing experiences.

Part 4: Lessons learned from pre-testing experiences

In this section, we will examine some pre-testing experiences and the lessons learned from these experiences. Let's go back to the poster we started with from Equatorial Guinea. I'll give you a few moments to read through the poster.

Now that you've had a chance to review the poster, let's work through some questions together. Do you think the poster concepts are complicated or easy to understand? Do the images convey a clear call to action? Do you think a low-literate population would be able to understand what the poster is trying to convey? If we look at just the images, what do we think is happening to the child? Is the child getting colder and then sweating more?

In the pre-testing of this poster, some viewers actually thought that the figure with the blanket around it was an old lady. The image of the child with the blanket may imply that this is a correct action to take, when in fact, the text indicates the opposite.

The image of the mother giving drugs to the child could be confused for feeding the child or giving any other remedy.

The call to action—to take the child to the clinic for testing—is not portrayed in any of the images and this message is most likely to be missed.

Due to the issues that we just discussed, unclear images, lack of a call to action and some complicated text, viewers of this poster interpreted the message in a variety of different ways. After being used for a few months in the field, program staff were interested in understanding who within their target audience comprehended the message correctly. The result, only 3 out of 10 mothers understood the key message the program staff were trying to convey. Based on these findings, the program team is now revising the poster to ensure high message comprehension.

Here's an example of pre-testing of a message from the Stop Malaria Project in Uganda. The message is about going to a nearby drug shop to be tested for malaria with a rapid diagnostic test or RDT. The message was tested in several focus group discussions. Six focus groups were held with 9 to 12 participants in each.

The message the program tested was the following: "Treat what you know. Visit a nearby drug shop to test for malaria instantly and save your time, money and life."

In this grid, you can see some of the comments participants had about the message, which was originally tested as a poster. Why don't you take a few moments to review the comments?

Note that the test is actually not offered for free, but some persons interpreted the materials in this way. Others made the point that the message is not entirely true when it says that the test will save money and your life. Instead, they suggested that the message would be more effective if the benefits stressed the potential of saving a child's life.

Let's look at an example from Nigeria. A series of posters were tested that promote behaviors to care for LLINs and repair them when they are torn for longer net lifespan. This picture depicts a facilitator showing the participants some material options. This was a group with all men, and as you can see, they are asking questions about some of the messaging and images.

The program team was interested in understanding how to accurately convey caring and appropriate washing of mosquito nets. Two posters were developed for pre-testing.

Female pre-test participants liked the woman in the pictures as they found her to be very beautiful and said that this material was made for people like us. The pre-test participants unanimously preferred the poster of the woman washing the net in a basin, the poster on the right. They felt that washing in the stream was inappropriate because it's dirty and rocks can damage the net. They also liked the amount of foam on the second poster because it indicated that she was using mild soap and not detergent.

In summary, pre-testing is a valuable step for SBCC programs. It can improve program impact and efficiency, save you from embarrassing situations in the long run, save your program a lot of money and teach you how the problem you're trying to fix is being perceived by your target audience. Pre-testing is an integral part of an evidence-based program.

In an ideal world, pre-testing should be conducted for every material. However, we know there are resource and time constraints. As a result, many programmers may want to skip this step, but now you know how easy pre-testing actually is.

If you would like more information about pre-testing, here are some additional resources. Now that you're an expert in pre-testing, stay tuned for the next module which will focus on monitoring. Thanks so much for joining me today.

Resources

- Examples of pre-testing tools, reports and briefs from the Health Communication Partnership (Uganda):
 - <http://www.k4health.org/toolkits/hcp/pre-test-briefs-and-tools>
 - <http://www.k4health.org/toolkits/hcp/pre-test-reports>

- Pre-testing in Health Communications: Methods, Examples, and Resources for Improving Health Messages and Materials:
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED204438&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED204438
- Technical Assistance Bulletin:
http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/soc2web/Content/phase04/phase04_step04_deeper_pre-testing.htm
- Advancing Health Communication: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACT765.pdf

Speaker biography



Dr. Limaye currently serves as the director of the Global Program for HIV/AIDS at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Communication Programs. She has more than 10 years of programmatic and research experience in global health programming, and teaches graduate classes in behavior change theory and social marketing. She received her PhD from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in social and behavioral science. She also holds an MA in international affairs and an MPH in global health.

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