

CSAP recommends that prevention programs follow specific guidelines in developing and implementing social marketing programs. They are:

- Guideline 1-Follow a 6-stage social marketing process
- Guideline 2-Understand what communications can do
- Guideline 3-Use a public health approach to prevention
- Guideline 4-Reflect and respond to cultural diversity
- Guideline 5-Involve the audience at all stages
- Guideline 6-Explore innovative strategies
- Guideline 7-Use multiple channels
- Guideline 8-Learn from successful programs.

The majority of the content in this topic focuses on Guideline 1: Follow the 6-stage social marketing process.

## **Guideline 1: Follow a 6-Stage Social Marketing Process That Provides Multiple Opportunities for Improvement and Refinement.**

Social Marketing is most successful when it is implemented as a systematic, continuous, and circular 6-stage process. The last stage provides feedback to the first, allowing for continuous improvement. In addition, there is constant research-based feedback within each stage.

The six stages are:

- Stage 1 Plan the approach.
- Stage 2 Define the messages and channels.
- Stage 3 Develop and pretest the materials.
- Stage 4 Implement the program.
- Stage 5 Evaluate the program.
- Stage 6 Use feedback to refine the program.

### **Stage 1: Plan the Approach**

The planning stage of a program provides the foundation for the entire health communications process. Faulty decisionmaking at this point can lead to the development of a program that is "off the mark." Careful planning in the beginning can reduce the need for costly mid-course corrections.



## **Research the Scope of the Problem in the Community**

Before the concept of substance abuse prevention can be marketed to a community, it is important to understand the community. Extant data collected routinely by public agencies such as police departments, schools, and social welfare agencies may shed light on the extent of the problem. In some cases, it may be necessary to conduct new research about drug use and related issues in the community.

## **Review the Research**

Often, it is helpful to look at what others have done and the results they have obtained from their social marketing efforts. Taking a broader view will help to ensure that promising opportunities are not overlooked.

## **Define the Audience.**

Even small, apparently homogeneous communities have various population subgroups. Categories such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, literacy or educational level, and occupation can be used to define subgroups. An audience may consist of one of these subgroups (for example, adolescent males) or a combination of groups (adolescent males and their parents).

## **Set Goals and Objectives.**

An action plan with specific goals and measurable objectives should be developed prior to beginning development of materials. In the process of establishing clear goals and associated measurable objectives, an evaluation plan should also be developed. By following this plan, it will be possible to assess the success of the social marketing program.

## **Develop the Concept.**

At this stage planners begin to think about what they want to tell the audience—the messages they want to deliver. At the same time they may begin to think about the channels they will use to reach the audience. However, the ideas will be very general at this stage. It is in stage two that the focus shifts to developing the messages and identifying the most promising channels for communicating them to the audience.

## **Stage 2: Define the Messages and Channels.**

The decisions made in Stage 1 provide guidance to clarify messages and select appropriate communication channels.

## Identify the Message or Messages That Will Be Sent.

In developing messages, it is important to ensure that they are based on what has been learned through social marketing research.

**The message should be meaningful and appealing to the target audience.** If the message is that substance abuse is directly linked to traffic deaths, give an example appropriate for the target audience. For instance, a high school graduation scene with an empty seat might be particularly meaningful to teen drivers.

**The message should get the audience to think, discuss, and act.** The message should not preach, it should attempt to generate action. One way to do this is to offer clear, concrete suggestions. For example, the message could show alternative behavior (such as involvement in sports or community work) or demonstrate ways to resist pressure to use drugs.

**The message should be based on facts and tied to the present, not the distant future.** Americans, particularly young Americans, have a tendency to live primarily in the here and now, and they have a strong need for instant gratification. The possibility of cirrhosis or lung cancer 20 years in the future will have little impact on an 18-year-old.




**The program's ultimate goal should be to establish social norms that promote and sustain healthy, safe behaviors.** However, it is important to recognize that change does not happen overnight or even from one campaign. In the long run, though, with persistence, change will occur.

**The message should highlight the appeal of adopting the desired behavior-the product.** In social marketing, it is important to emphasize the social and psychological appeal of a product. For instance, highlighting that community service can help put personal problems in perspective or vigorous exercise produces a natural high will convey the benefits of staying drug-free.

**The message should minimize the psychological or physical cost to the price.** For example, if an adolescent girl believes that giving up drugs will lower her status with peers, the message might minimize this cost by emphasizing well-known female athletes, musicians, or movie stars who don't use drugs or alcohol.

**The use of scare tactics in messages should be avoided.** CSAP cautions that messages based on scare tactics are likely to do more harm than good.

The reason such messages have been used is that it seems reasonable to think that if people know about the negative consequences of a behavior, they will change. Research indicates that this is not the case. 

## Choose Effective Channels of Communication.

The channels of communication available to the social marketer include mass media, community and other organizations, and group and one-on-one interactions. Message delivery channels include:



**Mass Media:** Radio and television (local, public, statewide, regional, or national), magazines, and newspapers (local, city, national, college or school)

**Novelty Media:** Direct mail and other inserts, billboards and transit cards, grocery bags, cups and stickers, etc.

**Face-to-face Conversations:** Such as those between a member of the target audience and a health care professional, peer, or family member

**Group Delivery:** At a worksite, in a classroom, or in another place where members of the target audience spend a lot of time

**Organizations:** At events or through publications of professional or voluntary associations

**Community Institutions and Agencies:** At events or through publications of libraries, employers, schools, shopping malls, health agencies, or local government agencies.

The decision regarding the channels a program will use is closely related to decisions about the format of materials. Each channel offers different benefits and may require different message designs (although not necessarily different messages) to fit the channel in length and format.

The following factors should be considered in choosing a channel or channels.


- **Reach**—The number of people or households exposed to a specific message during a specific period of time. These data may be available from previous studies, or the target population can be surveyed to see which stations or shows they prefer and which newspapers or magazines they read.

- **Frequency** The average number of times an audience is exposed to a specific message. Repetition helps to convey a message.
- **Impact** The effect that use of each channel will have on the target audience. Each type of media has its own unique characteristics. For example, television and radio have mass appeal but are costly, so messages will probably be short. Print media can give instructions or more detailed information.
- **Credibility** The degree to which members of the target audience find the channel credible. Some people find television believable while others find newspaper articles more convincing.
- **Cost effectiveness** The degree to which benefits justify the cost. For example, a television spot during a major sporting event such as the Olympics or Superbowl is extremely expensive. However, a 30-second message will be seen and heard by tens of millions of viewers.

### Stage 3: Develop and Pretest the Materials.

One key to the development of successful public education materials is to ensure that there is a continuous flow of information between the target audience and the developers of the materials. This is one reason that testing materials before they are released to the general public is critical. If the materials are inappropriate or unappealing to the test audience, using them in a social marketing campaign could be disastrous.

### Develop Materials

Develop the message statement. The message statement outlines information critical to the development of high-quality and appropriate materials. It keeps the development of the materials on target. In addition, the message statement allows for a common understanding by all involved in the program and can be used to communicate the purpose of the campaign in presentations to [stakeholders](#)  and others. The message statement includes:

- Statement of the problem
- Goals of the campaign or other social marketing activity
- Definition of the target audience
- What has been learned about the target audience's needs, values, and perceptions
- Channels to be used
- The idea or message to be communicated.

**Develop the message concepts.** Message concepts are the preliminary ideas that eventually become draft materials after they have been tested and refined. Message concepts are verbal descriptions that convey the basic form and appeal of the message, including its presentation style, the spokesperson or source, and the slogan or other essential words or symbols. In order for a message to compete for attention, it must have style, appeal, and personal relevance. Celebrity spokespersons are often used to gain attention.

**Appeal to emotion and reason.** Messages should be designed to appeal to a variety of emotions. A moderate amount of emotional appeal is important when members of the target audience are indifferent to a problem. "Scare tactics" are not as effective as appeals to more positive emotions, although fear of social disapproval may be an exception. A factual approach is most successful with people who are already highly motivated. A sophisticated audience of opinion leaders is more likely to respond to this sort of appeal.

**Use an engaging style.** Broadcast messages can employ various techniques. A spokesperson's testimonial about a personal experience, the portrayal of an everyday situation, demonstration of a skill such as saying no to a drug dealer, and a series of vignettes portraying situations with a common theme are examples of the techniques used in broadcast messages. Printed materials can be primarily visual with little text or mostly text. Printed materials frequently use cartoons, charts, photographs, and graphics to present the message. Common formats for printed brochures and factsheets include question and answer, newsletter, and report. Be sure that the format used is appropriate for the age, educational, and literacy level of the audience. Vocabulary and tone should make the target audience feel that the message is meant for them.

## Test and Revise Materials


Much of the research conducted in social marketing is formative research to clarify understanding of the consumer and to develop and refine concepts, messages, products, and distribution channels before they are fully implemented. Social marketers view techniques such as focus groups, intercept interviews, and pilot studies as cost-effective necessities that optimize program content and delivery and help avoid expensive disasters. Summative research is also conducted in social marketing, often in the form of outcome assessment.

Here we focus on approaches to formative testing of prevention materials and to the methods commonly used to gain feedback from members of the target audience.




### Group Methods

- **Focus Groups** Small groups of 8 to 12 people who meet with a moderator to discuss ideas and materials. Focus groups are especially


helpful in the early stages of materials development to test themes, images, and general issues. 

- **Theater Testing** Many people in the same location view messages (such as public service announcements) embedded in other programming. 

**Individual Methods**

- **Individual Interviews** In-depth interviews by phone or in-person can be used to gauge an individual's reactions to a sensitive issue and/or specific materials. 
- **Central Location Intercept Interviews** These interviews are held in public areas where members of the target population congregate. These areas include shopping malls, movie theaters, schools, and churches. Questions are designed for quick answers that are easily tabulated. 
- **Self-administered Questionnaires (mailed or personally delivered)** This method provides access to people in rural areas or those who are not likely to attend focus groups or to be at central locations for intercept interviews. 

**Nonparticipatory**

- **Readability Testing** Used to gauge the reading levels of materials. One widely used formula uses both sentence length and syllable counts to estimate reading levels. 

## Applicability of Pre-testing Methods

	Focus Groups	Theater Tests	Individual Interviews	Central Location Interviews	Questionnaires	Readability Tests
Concept Development						
Poster						
Flyer						
Booklet						
Storyboard						
Radio PSA						
TV PSA						
Videotape						

From *Making Health Communications Work: A Planner's Guide*. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. (1989).

Pretests can provide insights into whether materials or channels are appropriate or acceptable to the intended audience. They can also reveal whether a message, material, or channel is culturally acceptable. Pretests do not guarantee success. However, keeping the audience in mind and obtaining feedback from them at various points in the development process will increase the likelihood of developing a successful health communications program. Ideally, feedback will be obtained during concept development, in strategy selection, to review draft materials (including comparisons when multiple versions are developed), and just prior to final development.

### **Stage 4: Implement the Program.**

In this stage, the fully developed program is introduced to the target audience. Promotion and distribution begin through all channels. Audience exposure and reaction are tracked. At this stage, it is particularly important to determine if the message is making its way through the intended channels to the audience, what the reaction of the target audience is, and which components seems to be most and least effective. With this knowledge, it is possible to review program components and make modifications to the delivery system or messages.

A method for tracking dissemination of messages should be in place before kickoff and is part of the process evaluation of the overall program. A tracking system should allow implementers to monitor utilization of materials (for example, which pieces were published/broadcast and which were not selected; how many times public service announcements were aired; how many pamphlets were ordered). When problems are found, it is useful to try to find the underlying causes. For example, newspapers may not have enough space for lengthy items unless they have a lot of advance notice, or an item may be viewed as too controversial or inflammatory.

It may be necessary to modify some materials. If the piece is too long, shorten it up and sharpen its focus. If an item is viewed as too controversial in the community, look for ways to present the information in terms that evoke sympathy and agreement, using positive language and avoiding sarcasm and blame.

### **Stage Five: Evaluate the Program**

Evaluation serves multiple purposes. We touch briefly on some of those purposes here and treat the subject of program evaluation in more depth in [Unit 7: Planning for Successful Outcomes](#). Four types of evaluation are generally used in health communications programs.

- **Formative evaluation** includes pretesting of materials and is designed to test for program strengths and weaknesses before implementation. It is used in stages one through three.
- **Process evaluation** reviews the tasks of implementing the program. It tracks program activities and relies on a comparison of actual activities with the planned activities associated with the program's goals and objectives. It answers questions such as: Did we launch the program on time? Did the communications plan developed work out as planned? If not, why not? How many pamphlets were distributed? How many times was the PSA broadcast? How did the audience react to the materials?
- **Outcome evaluation** describes the program's direct, short-term effects. It answers questions like: In what ways and to what degree did the target population increase their knowledge about the effects of drug use? Did their attitudes or behaviors change, and in what ways?
- **Impact evaluation** focuses on the long-term outcomes of the program. It answers questions such as: What effect has the program had on the community? How have the beliefs and behaviors of the target population been influenced? What changes have occurred in how community members think about the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs?

Typically, outcome and impact evaluation are designed and conducted by a professional outside evaluator. Formative testing and process evaluation may be conducted by program staff or in conjunction with a professional evaluator.

### Stage 6: Use Feedback to Refine the Program



Once the program is implemented, data collection begins (as described in Stage 5). The results of the process evaluation, in particular, can be used to refine the program. For example, reactions of the audience can be collected in a variety of ways—through intercept surveys, in focus groups, or informally in meetings and conversations with community members. It is also useful to go back to those who helped in the development of the program

(for example, committee members, sponsors, and media representatives). This lets them know that their opinions are valued. However, It is also important to gain feedback from the general target audience. In the end, it is to them that the appeal is being made. Tracking of distribution and utilization

rates will also provide information about what is and is not working in the program. When low rates are observed, it is important to determine exactly what the problem is and use that information to make changes.

## **Guideline 2: Understand What Social Marketing and Health Communications Can Do**

A strong community-based prevention program includes activities that support the six prevention strategies and comprehensive communication efforts. Effective programs focus on a specific target audience and develop prevention messages with the primary audience in mind. At the same time, secondary and tertiary audiences are likely to receive the messages, leading to an increase in the general public's awareness of prevention and ultimately to change in social policies and practices.

### ***The Social Marketing Program Development Cycle***

At this point, a cycle or program development is complete. The information gleaned in this final stage should be used to prepare for a new development cycle. By accepting negative feedback and building on positive feedback, substantial improvements can be made during the next cycle.

The benefits and limitations of health communications have been addressed previously in Topic 1: Principles of Social Marketing and Health Communications. To briefly recap here, effective health communications programs can increase awareness, refute myths and misconceptions, increase and reinforce knowledge, influence and reinforce attitudes and societal norms, show the benefits of behavior change, demonstrate skills, prompt action, and increase demand for services. In general, health communications does not bring about long-term behavior change, as individuals go through many stages before accepting and committing to significant change. Additional prevention strategies are needed to ensure that individuals make a long-term commitment to healthy behaviors.

## **Guideline 3: Use a Public Health Approach to Prevention**

The **public health model** stresses that problems arise through the interaction of a **host**, **agent**, and **environment**. Prevention programs that focus totally on the host may overlook the influences in the environment or community that promote substance abuse. Effective programs take a comprehensive approach. They look not only at individual risk and protective factors, but also at community norms, local laws such as those relating to drinking age, availability of alcohol, and other factors.

## **Guideline 4: Reflect and Respond to Cultural Diversity**

Cultural changes are constant in all societies, especially today with the ease of travel and the high rate of immigration. In addition to differences in life experience, people vary in their ability to adapt to and make change. Some people rush to accept new ideas, technologies, and values, while others turn to traditional values for support. Understanding how people respond to change is critical for those who design health messages. Other issues to be considered include assimilation, immigration, and discrimination.

Successful prevention programs in minority communities deal with the dynamics of drug use specific to the cultures of residents. Programs should promote cultural understanding and pride in a shared heritage while confronting the problems of alcoholism and drug use in the community.



### **Guideline 5: Involve the Audience at All Stages**

It is very important to involve members of the target audience at all stages of a social marketing initiative. In particular, members of the target audience should have the opportunity to contribute to and react to the materials that are developed.

- **Involve members of the target audience in the preparation of materials.** This involvement not only helps to ensure that the materials will be appropriate for the target audience, but also helps to create ownership. Individuals may contribute by offering their opinions during concept development through interviews or focus groups. Selected members of the target audience may also serve on the workgroup that develops materials.
- **Involve members of the target audience in testing of materials.** As previously described, there are numerous ways to obtain input from the target audience during the materials development process. In addition to focus groups and interviews, social marketers often use theater tests and questionnaires to obtain feedback on materials.

### **Guideline 6: Explore innovative strategies.**

The range of media available to social marketers today is far broader than it was just a decade ago. There is no longer a need to limit a campaign to a brochure and an occasional public service announcement. Social marketers should look for creative combinations of media to spread the word to their target audiences.

- **Traditional Media.** As previously mentioned, radio and television, magazines, and newspapers can be used to deliver health messages. In recent years, there has been increased specialization in many of the mainstream media. Cable television channels (such as MTV) target very specific audiences. Magazines have become increasingly niche oriented. Identifying the specific shows and publications that the target audience prefers allows social marketers to reach their audiences efficiently.
- **Novelty Media.** Direct mail, billboards, grocery bags, and signs on public transit vehicles are among the many non-traditional ways to convey health messages. New technologies make it possible to produce high-quality posters, flyers, and brochures at reasonable cost.
- **Computers.** We are becoming an online nation. Youth, in particular are drawn to computers and the Internet. There are many special interest forums, including health-focused forums, on the World Wide Web. Many celebrities have their own Web sites, and some have included strong anti-drug messages on their sites.

### Guideline 7: Use Multiple Channels and Methods

The use of multiple channels and methods ensures more coverage of the issues and increases the chances of reaching the target audience. Channels have been previously described in Stage 2 (Define the messages and channels) of the 6-Stage Social Marketing Process.

It is important to decide if a multiple-outlet or a limited-outlet approach is more appropriate for a particular social marketing effort.

- **Multiple Outlet** A total social marketing program that uses as many available resources as possible including television and radio stations, newspapers, and billboards. The community is inundated with information from these multiple outlets.
- **Limited Outlet** A concentrated effort through one or two outlets. Each makes a more significant commitment of time and resources than in a multiple outlet effort. The benefit to these outlets is that the campaign becomes closely tied to and associated with the organizations.

### Guideline 8: Learn From Successful Programs

There is no need to reinvent the wheel for each social marketing effort. Many organizations and communities have been through the process, and there is a



considerable amount of information available on designing and implementing social marketing programs for drug prevention.