

## Phase 2: Formative Research

This module describes phase 2 of the social marketing planning process, formative research. On average, it takes people 55-60 minutes to complete this module. The time you need will depend on your pace and how much you explore the resources and supplemental materials.

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Social Marketing for Nutrition and Physical Activity Web Course: Phase 2: Formative Research

[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/socialmarketing/training](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/socialmarketing/training)



## Learning Objectives

After completing this module, you will be able to

- Explain what formative research is and explain why it is important.
- List the steps in the formative research process.
- Describe how the four plan components are revisited and information gaps are determined (step 1).
- Demonstrate how to write research questions (step 2).
- Explain the process for choosing a data collection method (step 3).
- Discuss the development of instruments (step 4).
- Discuss options for recruiting participants (step 5).
- Explain the data collection process (step 6).
- Explain options for analyzing and reporting on formative research (step 7).

## Introduction

In phase 1, you learned how to make some broad decisions based on available information. You also learned to identify some information gaps. Now, in phase 2, you will make sure you've identified all information gaps, and then learn how to use formative research to fill those gaps, thereby informing decisions made in phase 3, strategy development.

Before you start with planning formative research, check with your organization to determine what policies govern data collection and/or research. Make sure you know what is required and that you follow any rules or policies put in place by your organization.

"Because social marketing demands a thorough understanding of consumers and the people who influence their decisions, the market research phase requires a far more in-depth analysis of consumers' beliefs, values, and behavior than is typically accomplished in most program needs assessments."

*Obesity Prevention Coordinator's Social Marketing Guidebook, p. 24*

## Why is Formative Research Important?

Formative research will enable you to

- Better understand your target audience and their needs and wants.
- Get useful information from the right people.
- Make decisions with an audience-focused mindset.
- Refine your social marketing plan to ensure success of your program.

Poorly conducted formative research can lead to either too much information or the wrong kind of information, both of which hinder your ability to develop an effective program.

The information you collect during the formative research phase should help you to

- Narrow and describe the target audience.
- Select a specific behavior for the audience to change.
- Identify the factors which influence the audience's behavior.
- Develop a preliminary marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) for the intervention.

## Formative Research Process

The formative research process can be broken into seven main steps:

- Step 1: Analyze Information Gaps
- Step 2: Write Research Questions
- Step 3: Choose Data Collection Method
- Step 4: Develop Instrument(s)
- Step 5: Recruit Participants
- Step 6: Collect Data
- Step 7: Analyze and Report Findings

This process will help you think through which questions you want to ask of which people and the best way to do that. Asking good questions of the wrong people or asking the right people bad questions will provide poor and unusable results. When you start planning the details of the intervention, you can't accurately reflect the needs of your target audience if you have poor data. While this may seem overly simple, many groups have made these mistakes. It can waste time and resources, cause frustration, and lead to flawed planning and a less effective program.

It may be helpful to separate formative research into smaller rounds instead of trying to answer all the questions at once. Later rounds can build on information from earlier rounds. For example, some planners have used one round of formative research to help them determine a target audience, and then a second round to probe more deeply into that audience's thoughts and feelings.

Regardless of whether you choose to do one round or multiple rounds, the steps for formative research remain the same. If you do multiple rounds, you would just repeat the necessary steps for each round.

### Limited Resources?

More than one round of formative research sounds expensive, but it doesn't have to be. You may want to spend money on one round, but then try to do another without spending any additional money by using in-house experts, or doing something less formal but still structured.

## Step 1: Analyze Information Gaps

Step 1 is to analyze information gaps. This analysis helps you decide which gaps to keep and answer with formative research and which ones to let go. Questions you ask in later steps are based on the gaps you choose to keep. Start by going back to the gaps that were identified at the end of the problem description. Go through those gaps to determine which ones should be kept and which can be let go.

The *Obesity Prevention Coordinators' Social Marketing Guidebook* contains a worksheet (*Formative Research Question Worksheet*, pg. 30) that may help you identify information gaps. The worksheet lists key decisions (problem, audience, behavior, and other factors). You can input existing data and determine whether you'll need to gather additional information. The level of detail you include in this worksheet is up to you; use as much as is helpful.

Also, see the *Gap Analysis Questions Worksheet* for a series of questions that will help you set priorities for which gaps you should keep and which you should let go.

### Big Picture Alert

It is helpful to look ahead at the decisions you'll be asked to make in later stages to get a feel for what gaps you may need to fill now.

### Resources

- [Obesity Prevention Coordinators' Social Marketing Guidebook](#)
- [Formative Research Questions Worksheet](#)
- [Gap Analysis Questions Worksheet](#)



## Step 1: Analyze Information Gaps

### I: Problem/Health Issue

In phase 1, problem description, you spent a lot of time and effort defining and analyzing the problem. Therefore, you may not identify many gaps about the problem. However, be open to learning new information about the problem from your audience's perspective. What, if anything, about it concerns them? What do they think about the problem?

## Scenario 13

Rosa: "Hi. It's good to see you.

My planning team is meeting regularly now and we're excited about getting started with our formative research.

Bob is now saying we should go ahead with it, quote, 'as long as it doesn't take forever.' He's still not totally convinced that spending time on this process is a good idea...but, Tiffany is becoming a good advocate for this type of planning. She says it will help immensely once we're starting to plan our evaluation.

I adapted the *Formative Research Question Worksheet* from the *Obesity Prevention Coordinators' Social Marketing Guidebook* to help us identify and analyze our information gaps."

"We've started with the problem. We know that obesity is a health problem and it's certainly an issue in Wellington. We listed what we know about the obesity problem from existing data, and we concluded that we don't have any major gaps in this area. But, I'll need your help later when we start talking about our audience gaps."

Key Decisions	What we know (existing data)	What we don't know (information gaps)	Formative Research Questions
<p>What is the problem? Anything else we need to know?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obesity is the health problem.</li> <li>• How big the health problem is in Wellington and Heartland (obesity prevalence rates and disease statistics).</li> <li>• BMI levels on elementary school children in Wellington (from Wellington Healthcare Association).</li> <li>• Connection between TV watching and obesity, especially in children (literature).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We don't have gaps in this area.</li> </ul>	



## Step 1: Analyze Information Gaps

### II: Target Audience

During the problem description phase, you identified a broad target audience. You probably have some gaps identified about the target audience.

This section includes content about audience segmentation and secondary audiences. Understanding these two topics will help you identify and analyze any gaps you have about the audience. For example, you may not know

- What the segments are in your broad audience.
- How the segments differ from one another with regards to the target behavior.
- Who plays a role in influencing members of your target audience.

#### **Audience Segmentation**

The process of audience segmentation will help you divide the audience into more homogeneous segments. This means grouping individuals in a segment so they are more like each other than they are like the general population.

Audience segmentation can take place during various parts of the formative research process. Depending on your situation, you may first need to identify the best way to segment the audience and then follow up to get more information about a specific segment. Or, you may already know how you would like to segment your audience, and can use formative research simply to gather more information about the segment. Regardless of the method you choose, the information you learn about your specific segment will inform your intervention strategy.

"The more you segment, the more personal the message is. The more personal the message or your program or your intervention, the more effective because we are enchanted by the person.

'You' is the most powerful word you can put in a headline. It's because it's personal. So the more you are able to personalize your program, the more effective it will be; and the more you talk to everyone generically, the more you talk to no one."

Rebecca Brookes' video segment from CDCynergy (Phase 2.1)

#### **Reasons for Segmenting**

One reason to segment an audience is to do more with limited resources. While we hope that dollars are plentiful, in reality, budgets often affect how much you can accomplish with a particular program. Therefore, it is important to focus the resources you do have on making a difference for a smaller audience, rather than spending it trying to reach such a broad audience that your effect on any one person is minimal.

Another reason to segment is to increase the effectiveness of your program. CDCynergy offers the following advice: "The more your program strategy can be tailored to meet an audience segment's unique wants or needs, the more likely the audience segment will respond positively. This focus on the audience and the delivery of something of unique value to them is what enhances marketing effectiveness. Different audience segments will have different wants and



needs so determining which segments to target and how to do so lies at the heart of social marketing."

### **Example**

Consider two, 35-year-old Hispanic females. Both have similar educational backgrounds and income levels. Both are married and have young children. One has a supportive husband who encourages her to go on walks with her friends. She enjoys eating healthy and cooking meals for her family. The other enjoys watching TV, going to see movies, and working on the computer. Her husband is not supportive of an active lifestyle. She is busy and does not enjoy cooking, so the family will often go out for fast food.

It is impossible to tell from demographic characteristics alone anything about the individuals' behavior, attitudes, or interests.

*Adapted from Marketing Public Health: Strategies to Promote Social Change  
by Michael Siegel and Lynne Doner, p. 266*

### **Ways to Segment**

The key to audience segmentation is to divide your audience by meaningful factors that are relevant to the adoption of the desired behavior. What separates the people who do the desired behavior from those who don't?

Many public health professionals tend to segment audiences based on disease burden or risk, or by using demographic characteristics. Yet, these characteristics may not be the most important factors when it comes to behavior change, even though those data are usually easiest to find. People who fall into the same demographic category can be very different from one another with regards to nutrition and physical activity behaviors.

### **Choose a Segmentation Framework**

First you must choose a framework to use for segmentation. For example, this could mean that you want to segment your audience by their behavior

- Those who do the desired behavior consistently.
- Those who do the desired behavior but somewhat inconsistently.
- Those who occasionally or rarely do the desired behavior.
- Those who never do the desired behavior.

This type of framework would work well when the behavior is ongoing and somewhat complex.

Or, you could choose to segment based on attitudes and motivation

- Those who want to do the desired behavior and are successful at doing so.
- Those who want to do the desired behavior but have some common difficulties or barriers to overcome.
- Those who have no interest in the desired behavior and no motivation to adopt it.

Any number of frameworks can be used. Other examples include stage of change, perceptions, intentions, lifestyles, common benefits, common barriers, or geography. The framework you use depends on your broad audience, what you know about them, and the behavioral theory you are using. Each segment in your framework should be different enough from the others to make a different program approach necessary.

## Resources

- [Doer/non-doer analysis](#)  
Academy for Educational Development  
This analysis helps you to compare those who are doing the behavior to those who are not and helps you find key differences between the groups.
- [Segmenting Audiences to Promote Energy Balance: A Resource Guide for Health Professionals](#) (PDF-3.2Mb)  
Guidance and examples based on the segmentation project which characterizes U.S. adults into one of five segments based on their attitudes and behaviors around energy balance.

## Choose a Segment

Once the framework is chosen, and you've segmented the audience, you must pick which of the segments you wish to target. Naturally, you'd avoid those segments with individuals already doing the desired behavior. You may have a segment that is on the other end of the spectrum—not at all interested in the desired behavior or not motivated to participate. This segment would probably require either extreme amounts of resources or would need more forcible means of change, possibly by developing laws or other regulations. Usually, a group somewhere in-between is most appropriate.

Another important consideration is the size of your segment. In theory, you could target each person individually (a segment of one) with program strategies tailored just for him/her. This could be very effective, but, in most cases, is prohibitively resource-intensive. Or, you could go in the other direction and target the "general public." This could be relatively inexpensive, but your ability to make a strong impact is limited because you're trying to appeal to everyone. Somewhere in between is a group large enough to make your efforts worthwhile, while being similar enough to one another to make the program effective.

Speaking of segmentation of policy makers and other influential persons:

"One could send a mass electronic mailing to all relevant congresspeople concerning some issue, but one is guaranteed to have much greater effect if messages speak to each recipient in terms of his or her own needs and the needs of his or her constituency."

Alan Andreasen, *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*, p. 119

## Segmenting for Environmental and Policy Level Changes

The goal of your program may be to persuade policymakers to change a law or to get an environmental change approved. The concept of audience segmentation can still apply here, but the audience and behaviors are somewhat different. Instead of an audience of "end users" your

audience is likely to be made up of people who are legislators, policymakers, business owners, and so forth. Therefore, the frameworks for segmentation are somewhat different. You may want to segment based on receptiveness to your proposed change or by common objections to the change. In some cases, the group you are trying to persuade is small enough that you can individually tailor your messages.

### **Secondary Audiences**

Another part of refining your target audience during phase 2 is to begin exploring possible secondary audiences. This is another area where you may have information gaps. Formative research should provide you with the information you need to purposefully select secondary audiences. Remember, a secondary audience is a group of individuals who influence your target audience in some way. They are not individuals who may be secondarily exposed to part of your program's activities.

Anytime you are dealing with children, especially young children, you'll need to collect information from parents (or other influential adults, depending on your situation) as it is likely they will end up being an influential group. Especially with young children, your program activities will likely be directed at adults to encourage their influence on the children.

### **Parents and Children as Secondary Audiences**

The concepts of primary and secondary target audiences can be especially confusing when you are working with children and their parents. It can be difficult to untangle whether you want to change the parent's behavior or the child's behavior because many times you'd like to change both. If you want to change the child's behavior, you still may need to focus your program on parents or other secondary audiences as if they were a primary target audience, because their behavior changes will impact the children's behavior. Conversely, you may design an intervention to change parents' behaviors where you direct activities or messages towards children so that they will influence their parents. What's important is understanding how each group influences the other.

### **Analyze Audience Gaps**

Based on the information about segmentation and secondary audiences, you can see some of the decisions you'll need to make later in this phase. Again, you may want to look at the *Formative Research Question Worksheet* to identify any other key decisions you may have missed, or the *Gap Analysis Questions Worksheet* to help you decide which of the gaps you've identified should be kept. Some of the information gaps about your audience will probably overlap with information gaps about the behavior. It's not as important to figure out which category they belong in as long as they are identified and you choose the appropriate gaps to fill.

## **Resources**

- [Formative Research Questions Worksheet](#)
- [Gap Analysis Questions Worksheet](#)

## Scenario 14



Rosa: "We've moved on to the audience section. At this point we've chosen children as our broad audience, but we haven't made any more decisions beyond that. Because we're targeting children, we'll probably need to collect some information from parents. Dan says that there could be a wide range of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs in a group this broad. Determining gaps and conducting formative research is going to impact who we choose for our specific audience. We've identified a few information gaps..."

"Here is our list of information gaps pertaining to the audience and, well, frankly, I'm not sure if a couple of these are appropriate."

Key Decisions	What we know (existing data)	What we don't know (information gaps)	Formative Research Questions
Whom do we want to reach? Potential Ways to Segment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current behavior</li> <li>• Future Intentions</li> <li>• Readiness to Change</li> <li>• Demographics</li> <li>• Where to Reach Them</li> <li>• Other Variables</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision made to have a broad audience of children, but that parents would be influential (a secondary audience).</li> <li>• National-level data on current TV watching behavior that includes TV usage for children (broken down by age, gender, family income level, and race and ethnicity).</li> <li>• Demographic information on families who have participated in TV-turnoff events over past two years (Wellington TV-Turnoff chapter).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What specific shows children are watching on TV.</li> <li>• Current behavior of Wellington families. Check national level data in our community, is Wellington consistent?</li> <li>• Differences in TV behaviors comparing race, gender, and income level.</li> <li>• Knowledge and attitudes of Wellington families about TV.</li> <li>• Benefits that might encourage behavior change.</li> <li>• Any additional important secondary audiences or influencers.</li> </ul>	

Below is a list of gaps from Rosa's worksheet. Click on any gaps you think could be deleted because they have already been filled or are not relevant.

1. What specific shows children are watching on TV.
2. Current behavior of Wellington families. Check national level data in our community. Is Wellington consistent?
3. Differences in TV behavior based on gender, race, and income level.
4. Knowledge and attitudes of Wellington families about TV.

5. Big benefits that might encourage behavior change.
6. Potential secondary audiences or influencers.

Feedback:

1. **Delete.** Knowing this will not help make a decision for the program. This information is not relevant.
2. **Keep.** This is relevant information and it hasn't been researched yet.
3. **Delete.** Information can be found on this topic by re-analyzing the data including national level data and local Wellington TV turnoff data. This is not an information gap.
4. **Keep.** This is relevant information and it hasn't been researched yet.
5. **Keep.** This is relevant information and it hasn't been researched yet.
6. **Keep.** This is relevant information and it hasn't been researched yet.



## Step 1: Analyze Information Gaps

### III: Behavior

During the problem description, you chose a broad behavior that you'd like to change with your program. Formative research will help you make an informed decision about narrowing that broad behavior down to a specific behavior (or behaviors) to promote. By the end of the formative research phase you should know

- What your target audience currently does.
- What the ideal behaviors are.
- The benefits and barriers that the audience perceives to adopting the desired behavior.

These are areas where you may have information gaps that need to be filled.

The behavior change you'll ask of your audience should be something more specific than "eat more fruits and vegetables," "do more physical activity," or "watch less TV."

Criteria for a specific behavior

- Be an actual behavior (not an attitude, knowledge, or belief).
- Affect the health problem of interest.
- Be observable and measurable.
- Be feasible (from the point of view of your target audience).
- Have benefits that you are able to promote.
- Have barriers that you are able to minimize.

Here are some examples of more specific behaviors that could come from broad behaviors.

Broad Behavior	Specific Behaviors		
Eat more fruits and vegetables	1. Choose fruit or vegetable options in the vending machine over candy or other high-fat snacks.	2. Eat a piece of fruit or some vegetables as a mid-day snack.	3. Purchase fruits and vegetables from a local farmer's market.
Do more physical activity	1. Join a sports team.	2. Use lunch hour to walk on trail near office.	3. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
Watch less TV	1. Turn off the TV during mealtimes.	2. Remove TV from bedrooms.	3. Establish and enforce rules limiting TV time.

These are not *objectives* yet, they will need to be refined and reworded to create behavioral objectives. Also, your choice of specific behavior(s) depends on your choice of audience. Some behaviors will make more sense than others. You may not be able to fully make that choice until you complete some formative research and get information from the audience.

### **Benefits and Barriers**

Other areas for potential information gaps are the benefits and barriers to behavior change. Phase 2 is the time where you will check in with the audience to determine what they might value about the desired behavior and what might make it more difficult for them to adopt. You may have identified some benefits and barriers during phase 1. Now is the time to check those assumptions with members of the target audience. Are they accurate, or do they need to be refined as well? Also, think realistically about which barriers and benefits you can address and which you will have little or no ability to modify with your program.

### **Think Broadly**

You may want to think about connecting the behavior to some larger benefit (for example, self esteem) that people desire. What emotional ties can be linked to your behavior? People don't buy commercial products only for their technical attributes (the type of rubber in the soles of the shoes, the quality of the material in the jeans). They buy the image and emotions that go along with the product (I'll be a better basketball player, or I'll get attention from others). However, you can only promote benefits that people can or will actually experience from doing the behavior.

Also, think broadly about potential barriers. There may be environmental and policy issues that are real barriers, but the target audience may not even be aware of them.

### **Example**

For example, the desire to engage in healthy behaviors to be around for a long time to take care of children can be a strong motivator for mothers. Another classic example is the TRUTH campaign, designed to reduce smoking in teenagers. It capitalized on teenagers' desire to rebel against authority by showcasing the misleading practices of the tobacco industry.

### **Analyze Behavior Gaps**

Now that you have thought through some issues with choosing a behavior, such as how specific you need to be about a behavior and what the benefits and barriers to changing that behavior, you should be ready to identify and analyze these gaps. Again, it's likely that you will make decisions about the audience segment and specific behavior concurrently because they are closely tied together.

## Scenario 15



Rosa: "We spent our whole committee meeting this week talking about the behavior and identifying gaps in this area. Bob thinks reducing TV screen time is specific enough for our behavior change. Thankfully, Dan joined our meeting via conference call and did a great job explaining why we need to be as specific as possible when it comes to choosing a behavior. We're finally making some progress."

We'd like to know what children in Wellington are doing now with regards to TV and other screen time. In keeping with the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendations about screen time for children, it's clear that too much TV watching contributes to health problems. We have ideas of some specific behaviors from the literature and other interventions, for example, removing televisions from children's bedrooms, turning the television off during mealtimes, and developing rules about how much television children can watch. However, it's clear to me that we are still missing data that is specific to our audience here in Wellington. We don't know what people are willing to change."

"Here are the gaps we've listed. We're not sure about all of them."

Key Decisions	What we know (existing data)	What we don't know (information gaps)	Formative Research Questions
What are we asking them to do? (Behavior recommendation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision made that the broad behavioral goal is to reduce TV screen time.</li> <li>Ideal behavior—recommendations from American Academy of Pediatrics.</li> <li>Details about TV watching behaviors in the home (literature and surveys of U.S. parents).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The types of practices that are associated with or contribute to TV screen time.</li> <li>Feasible behavior changes to ask of the target audience (considering current and ideal behaviors).</li> </ul>	

**Click on any gaps below you think Rosa should delete because they are irrelevant or already researched.**

- The types of practices that are associated with or contribute to TV screen time.
- Feasible behavior changes to ask of the target audience (considering current and ideal behaviors).

Feedback:

- Delete.** This information is already available in the literature and you don't need to spend resources to identify those practices or behaviors.
- Keep.** We can't determine this without further information from our target audience.





## Step 1: Analyze Information Gaps

### IV: Strategy for Change

In the formative research phase, you will refine the strategy for change by identifying preliminary marketing mix strategies (product, price, place, and promotion) that may work with your audience and test those strategies/activities with the audience.

You may have information gaps about how to address one or more of the 4 P's. You can ask questions to determine what type of product, price, placement, and promotion will work for your target audience. The following questions address gaps you may or may not have. Take a look at them to see which apply to your situation. You may need to come up with others that are not on this list as well. These questions, plus others, are included in the planning questions document.

- What social supports exist to help your audience do the behavior?
- Does the audience believe they can do the behavior?
- What will the audience need to give up to adopt the desired behavior?
- Where does the audience do the desired behavior (or its competition)?
- Where does the audience spend time?
- Where does the audience get information about the target behavior?
- Who would be a credible source of information to the audience about the health topic or about the behavior?
- What does your audience value in their lives? What are their hopes and dreams? What do they want out of life?

Also, you could use formative research to test ideas from existing programs or concepts from behavioral theories with the audience (both identified in the problem description).

### Resources

- [Planning Questions](#) (PDF-88k)



## Scenario 16

Rosa: "We've added our list of information gaps to the strategy section of our worksheet now. I'm still not sure about one of the gaps we've identified...the one about barriers to reducing TV time specific to Wellington children and families."

Dan reminded me about the gap analysis questions which might help us decide what to do. I went through the questions myself and wrote down my thoughts."

Question 1. Will knowing this information help me make a decision for the program?

"Yes, I think so. We have a general idea of what the barriers are for people, but really don't know much about the people in our community."

Question 2. Do we have the means to fill this gap?

"Yes, we do. I think we can figure out a way to at least informally ask some people what their barriers might be, depending on the rest of our research questions."

Question 3. Can an answer be found in the literature?

"I wasn't sure about this. There are quite a few articles in the literature about barriers to change, but none of them tell me about the people in Wellington specifically."

Question 4. Can we answer this by re-analyzing existing data?

"Definitely not. We don't have any data that pertains to barriers to reducing TV time."

Question 5. Can we reach the individuals who are able to fill this gap?

"Yes, I'm pretty sure we can figure out a way to talk to some parents and maybe even children."

**Look at Rosa's answers above and determine if Rosa should keep or delete this gap. How would you advise Rosa?**

1. Keep it.
2. Delete it.

Feedback:

1. This would be **good** advice. Based on Rosa's answers to the gap analysis questions, this gap is a critical one for her team to fill before they can develop an intervention strategy.
2. This would be **poor** advice. Based on Rosa's answers to the gap analysis questions, this gap is a critical one for her team to fill before they can develop an intervention strategy.

## Step 2: Write Research Questions

Once you've identified and analyzed your information gaps, the next step in phase 2 is to write research questions. Research questions are broad questions which, once answered, will fill your gaps and inform decisions about your program. Research questions are not questions that you would directly ask your target audience. They may be more general in nature or include concepts that wouldn't be understood by the target audience. If you start identifying questions that would belong on a survey instrument or focus group moderator's guide, put them aside. They may be helpful once you begin developing an instrument.

Research questions help to define the purpose of your formative research. The more clearly you can articulate your research questions, the easier it will be to develop a survey, focus group moderator's guide, or interview questions because your purpose is clear. Questions in those documents should be clearly connected to a research question that underlies your formative research.

Writing research questions before choosing a data collection method or developing an instrument will help you stay focused. If your team wants to get started with data collection, encourage them to wait. You only want to answer questions that you need to make decisions about your program. Those decisions commonly include the following<sup>1</sup>:

- Whom to reach.
- What behavior to recommend.
- What benefits to offer.
- What costs to lower.
- Other factors you must address.
- Places to offer the product.
- Spokespeople to use.
- Other aspects of the promotional strategy.

Some gaps are fairly straightforward, and you may be able to just turn them into a research question. Or, it may be helpful to get your planning team together to brainstorm ideas for research questions.

If you find yourself generating too many research questions, you can prioritize by referring back to the gaps you identified. Discard any questions that do not fill gaps. If you have several questions that address a similar topic, see if you can combine them into one broader question. The point is to avoid collecting too much information which can lead to "analysis paralysis" and make decision-making very difficult.

### Examples

- What influences do parents exert on their children with respect to fruit and vegetable consumption? (West Virginia)

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<sup>1</sup> From *Obesity Prevention Coordinators' Social Marketing Guidebook*

- What are the biggest challenges facing obesity prevention coalitions? (Wisconsin)
- How much access do parents have to healthful foods and beverages in their community? (Rhode Island)
- How does the environment influence physical activity for the target audience?
- What are children's experiences regarding TV watching during mealtimes? (Children's Media Use Study)

## Scenario 17



Rosa: "I think the list of information gaps we identified will definitely guide our formative research. We tried to keep the list manageable which meant cutting out some things we'd like to know, but weren't the highest priority for this particular project. So far, so good."

The planning team met again this week to talk about research questions. Based on the information gaps we kept, I had everyone come up with a list of research questions. I also approached some members of the Wellington Community Coalition that are not on the planning team and got some questions from them too. Bob didn't really want to get more people involved, but I'm glad we insisted. They came up with some great questions.

But, now we've probably got more than we need. I discussed this with Dan and he cautioned me against trying to do too much with formative research."



Dan: "In one of my programs we didn't really pare down our research questions and we ended up with a big mess! Once we got done with our research we couldn't figure out where to go because we were overloaded with information."



Rosa: "So, Dan worked with me to eliminate some questions, but there are still a few that I'm not sure what to do with. We don't want to be asking questions just to ask questions; we want to get the information we need! Can you help me figure out which research questions we should eliminate?"

Key Decisions	What we know (existing data)	What we don't know (information gaps)	Formative Research Questions
Whom do we want to reach? Potential Ways to Segment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current behavior</li> <li>• Future Intentions</li> <li>• Readiness to Change</li> <li>• Demographics</li> <li>• Where to Reach Them</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision made to have a broad audience of children, but that parents would be influential.</li> <li>• National-level data on current TV watching behavior that includes TV usage for children (broken down by age, gender, family income level, and race and ethnicity).</li> <li>• Demographic information on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current behavior of Wellington families (check national level data in our community, is Wellington consistent?).</li> <li>• Knowledge and attitudes of Wellington families about TV.</li> <li>• Benefits that might encourage behavior change.</li> <li>• Potential secondary audiences or influencers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who influences the home environment and policies?</li> <li>• Who influences children? Their parents?</li> <li>• Do parents make the connection between weight and TV time?</li> <li>• How do parents and children influence each other with regards to TV watching?</li> <li>• Do children (or parents) think they can reduce TV time in their household?</li> <li>• What do parents value that will help them reduce children's TV time?</li> </ul>

Variables	families who have participated in TV-turnoff events over past two years (Wellington TV-Turnoff chapter).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do children watch TV now?</li> <li>• What do children do when they are not watching TV?</li> <li>• What do parents enjoy about watching TV during mealtimes with their children?</li> <li>• Do boys watch more TV than girls?</li> </ul>
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Of the questions Rosa is unsure about (listed below), click to select the questions you think should be *taken off the list* because they don't help to fill a information gap for this intervention or are better suited to ask the audience directly.

1. Who influences the home environment and policies?
2. Do parents make the connection between weight and TV time?
3. What do parents enjoy about watching TV during mealtimes with their children?
4. Do boys watch more TV than girls?

Feedback:

1. **Keep.** This question helps to fill the gap about potential secondary audiences or influencers and needs to stay on the list.
2. **Keep.** This question helps to fill the gap about knowledge and attitudes and should stay on the list.
3. **Delete.** This question is better suited to asking the target audience directly. Remember, the purpose of a research question is to provide broad direction for your formative research.
4. **Delete.** This information is already available, so this doesn't help to fill one of the identified gaps.



Rosa: "I've been overwhelmed trying to figure this all out. Based on Dan's advice, we kept the questions pretty general.

I thought the remaining questions were good, but Tiffany looked at them and thought there was still some redundancy. So, we decided to combine these three questions into one broader question:

1. Who influences the home environment and policies?
2. Who influences children? Their parents?
3. How do parents and children influence each other with regards to TV watching?"

**Which of the following questions is the one you think Rosa should use to combine the three questions above? Select the best response.**

1. What are the major influences on TV watching in the home?
2. Who has the most influence over TV watching in the home?
3. How much influence do children have with TV watching policies in the home?

Feedback:

Choice 1 would be the most appropriate broad question that encompasses the three more specific questions.

## Step 3: Choose Data Collection Method(s)

The third step is to choose data collection methods to answer your research questions.

Two overarching factors will determine which method is best

- How reliable and valid results should be.
- How much money and time you can spend.

There is always a tension between how reliable and valid you can be and how much you will spend. High reliability and validity usually equals high cost, and vice versa. You have to choose the best method you can with the resources you have.

### Limited Resources?

If you don't have a lot of money for this phase, see if you can partner with a university or get work donated by a private firm. If not, see what you have the capability to do on your own or with the help of your partners or colleagues.

### How to Choose a Method

You may need several different data collection methods to answer the complete list of research questions. Most likely, a question can be effectively answered with a variety of methods, so you'll probably have several options.

Specifically you must decide:

#### Where will you obtain the answer?

If you are able to take a fresh look at secondary sources and get an answer to your question, then do so. It will save your money for the questions where you need to do your own research. Try checking with your stakeholders and partners to see if they have unpublished reports.

#### Who should answer?

The most appropriate people to answer your research questions could be key informants or local experts, members of the target audience, policymakers, or someone else altogether. You should also determine if there are specific characteristics to look for in someone who will help answer your research questions. You will use these characteristics to screen potential participants when recruiting them to participate.

#### Should you use quantitative or qualitative methods?

The decision about who should answer is also tied to the decision about how it should be answered. Your first determination should be whether to use qualitative or quantitative methods. Qualitative methods provide rich descriptive information and insights into characteristics and choices. Quantitative methods provide numbers, frequencies, percentages, and rates. Both are important and can complement each other.



A Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods <sup>2</sup>	
Qualitative	Quantitative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides depth of understanding</li> <li>• Asks "Why?"</li> <li>• Studies motivations</li> <li>• Is subjective</li> <li>• Enables discovery</li> <li>• Is exploratory</li> <li>• Allows insights into behavior, trends, and so on</li> <li>• Interprets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures level of occurrence</li> <li>• Asks "How many?" or "How often?"</li> <li>• Studies action</li> <li>• Is objective</li> <li>• Provides proof</li> <li>• Is definitive</li> <li>• Measures level of actions, trends, and so on</li> <li>• Describes</li> </ul>

### What other factors should you consider?

Consider what methods you or your group has the skills to do, what skills could be accessed by hiring someone, how much time you have available, and how much money you have to spend on this.

### Common Formative Research Methods

- Focus groups
- In-depth interviews/intercept interviews
- Observations/environmental scans
- Surveys

Each of these methods has special considerations and strengths and weaknesses, so you should be aware of these before starting. *CDCynergy: Social Marketing Edition* has a great resource in the "Tools for Research" tab (on the right hand side of each page) for finding out more information on these methods and a range of other methods. CDCynergy also lists advantages and disadvantages of each method.

Many people gravitate to focus groups. However, don't limit yourself to this method until you have explored other options. Even if focus groups are the best method for collecting your data, consider how to do them. The traditional methodology for focus groups may not always work in your situation. For example, a project that calls for young children as participants may mean limiting the number in a group to 3 or 4. Or, if you want to have a focus group with participants who are geographically separated, you may want to consider telephone or online focus groups. Also think about the questions you're asking in groups. Focus groups don't usually provide reliable information for quantitative questions like how many fruits and vegetables the participants have eaten or usually eat.

<sup>2</sup> From [A Handbook for Excellence in Focus Group Research](#).

## Big Picture Alert

This step is a good time to decide whether you will conduct all of your formative research at the same time or if you want to do it in several rounds. If you find that you need to answer some of your research questions before you can answer others, approaching formative research in smaller rounds may be helpful. You can answer some questions and then use those answers to inform the rest.

## Resources

- [CDCynergy: Social Marketing Edition](#)
- [General Guidelines for Focus Groups](#) (PDF-29k)  
Basic tips and ideas for developing moderators' guides and conducting focus groups, as well as a list of references for more advice.

## Scenario 18



Rosa: "We finalized the rest of our research questions for the behavior and strategy sections. Here's [the final worksheet](#)." (PDF-70k)

"It looks like formative research is going to be time consuming and I'm not sure I have the expertise on staff to handle this. If we do focus groups, our nutrition expert might be able to help. She has worked on developing moderator's guides in the past but hasn't ever moderated a group on her own.

None of us has any idea how to develop a data collection instrument or even what to expect. Collectively we have some experience conducting key informant interviews and I suspect we could do observations if we know what to look for.

Frankly, I'm not really sure how we should go about choosing a method of data collection. What would you suggest?"

### What would you advise Rosa to try? Check all that apply.

1. If everyone does focus groups, maybe you should start with those.
2. Look at each of your research questions and determine what method would be most appropriate. You may find that most of the questions can be answered using several different methods which probably overlap with each other.
3. Find someone who you could use as a consultant. Look for a university professor, a contractor, or someone with the Wellington coalition who is experienced in doing research like this and could help you make this decision.
4. If you have experience with key informant interviews, stick with the methods that you know how to use.

### Feedback:

1. This would be **poor advice**. Just because people use focus groups with other projects doesn't mean they are the best choice for this situation.
2. This would be **good advice**. Choosing a method after developing your research questions is most appropriate.
3. This would be **good advice**. However, it is important to get assistance from someone experienced in research for program planning, both qualitative and quantitative.
4. This would be **poor advice**. While your experience is an important consideration, you don't necessarily have to only use methods that you are familiar with, especially if you can hire someone to advise you or do the research for you.

## Step 4: Develop Instrument(s)

The fourth step is to develop an instrument. Depending on which method you chose, this could be an interview guide, a focus group moderator's guide, a questionnaire, or an observation checklist.

Developing good questions is a unique skill set. You will often have to go through several iterations before you end up with the right questions. The answers that you get are only as good as the questions you ask. Therefore, it's a great idea to work with someone who has experience in instrument design.

Many times it is appropriate to hire a research firm or other contractor to do a survey or focus groups for you. If you do hire a contractor for a project, stay involved. You should take a very active role and you should be clear that you will do so as early as possible. Experienced firms can be very helpful in developing instruments, but you are the client. Meet with them, review everything they do, and provide lots of feedback. That way you can be sure they collect the information you need.

### Tip

If you can find validated questions that have been tested and used in the past, use those questions, but only if they answer your research questions. Just because a question has been validated, it doesn't mean that it will answer your particular research question.

If your questions are meant to be read aloud, try reading them to other members of your team to see how they work when spoken.

Here are a few tips for developing an instrument (whether you're doing it on your own or you've hired a contractor):

- 1. Plan plenty of time for this process.** You may want to send the instrument to important stakeholders or back and forth with the contractor. It is normal to have more than one round of revisions before the instrument is finalized, even if you start with a relatively good instrument.
- 2. Answer your research questions.** Other instruments can help you in wording questions, but make sure your research questions are the focal point for your instrument. It should be easy to connect your research questions and your instrument questions. If you can't explain why you are asking a particular question, don't ask it.
- 3. Create questions appropriate for the audience and method.** For example, focus group questions should be in a style and language that make sense to the audience. If you are creating an observation form/checklist, make sure your observers understand the terminology used and how to use the form. In general, quantitative methods should have closed-ended questions, while qualitative methods should have open-ended questions.

#### 4. Pretest questions with the people who will be using or responding to the instrument.

Get feedback about whether the questions make sense and if they're being answered. Revise based on feedback.

#### Resources<sup>3</sup>

- [Working with Contractors](#) (PDF-40k)  
This document provides additional details for how to work with contractors to conduct formative research.
- Book: *The Focus Group Kit*
- Book: *Improving Survey Questions: Design and Evaluation*
- Book: *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide*
- Book: *The Survey Kit*

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<sup>3</sup> Resources that are not hyperlinked can be found at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/socialmarketing/training/resources.htm>

## Scenario 19



Rosa: "Hi. It's been awhile since the last time we talked and we've been busy! We looked at all of our research questions and decided we needed to answer them with three different methods: key informant interviews with community leaders, observations of families, and focus groups with parents and children.

Bob had a contact at Wellington University who set us up with a graduate student in their MPH program. We hired the student to conduct the key informant interviews and to organize and conduct observations of different families to see how they interact with TV. He's done a great job with these projects and the results have helped us answer a few of our research questions. Most importantly, the results helped us to narrow our audience segment to children aged 4—7 years, and they will be useful when we write up our decision in the summary report.

We're planning to answer the rest of the research questions with focus groups. Luckily for us, we found out that we have some year-end money that needs to be spent very soon. Dr. Richards suggested we contract with a local market research firm, Wellington Data, to conduct the focus groups."

"Things were going well at the beginning, but now I'm starting to get a little frustrated. I thought I'd just give Wellington Data my research questions and they'd do the rest, right?"

Well, it's not quite happening like that. We e-mailed our research questions to them and they sent us a draft moderator's guide for the groups. When we read through it, though, we realized the guide had a bunch of irrelevant questions that won't help us to answer our research questions. So we want them to revise the guide. Is this normal? Shouldn't they just be able to create a good moderator's guide from the start?"

### What should you say to Rosa? Check all that apply.

1. It is normal to work back and forth with a contractor. As new information is revealed, instruments need to be modified.
2. Call Wellington Data's management team and complain.
3. Engage stakeholders and other staff in reviewing the questions.
4. It's better to spend time now than waste it later with irrelevant data.

### Feedback:

1. This would be **good advice**. Writing instruments often takes many revisions before you get the best questions.
2. This would be **poor advice**. If you (as the client) aren't getting what you need from a contractor, then this may be an appropriate step. However, good communication between you and the contractor can solve many of these problems.
3. This would be **good advice**. Getting input from stakeholders is important in the long run and they may see problems with questions that you wouldn't see yourself.
4. This would be **good advice**. Spending time getting the questions right will ensure you have good data to work from later.

## Step 5: Recruit Participants

The next step is recruiting participants for your data collection. The method of recruiting participants varies widely depending on your chosen data collection methods.

Just as you need good questions to get good results, you also need to have the *right participants*. There's no point in spending time and effort creating questions only to ask them of the wrong people. You should have an instrument developed before you start recruiting participants. Recruiting participants too early can rush the timeline; therefore, not allowing you the opportunity to develop the best possible instrument.

### Screening

You should have a set of characteristics that define your participants. Use these criteria to set up a screening tool. When someone responds to your inquiries about participating, this screening tool will allow you to see if they match your criteria. If you are doing separate focus groups with people who have different characteristics the screening tool can determine which group the respondent is most appropriate for, if any.

### Offering Incentives

You may want to offer incentives for participating, especially if recruiting is difficult or your data collection significantly inconveniences participants. Incentives don't necessarily have to be costly, but they should be relevant to your audience. Sometimes a meal and free childcare are enough, other times you may need to offer something more substantial. Taking a few moments to find out from your audience what incentives are motivating could save you quite a bit of time and money in the long run.

### Biases

Think about any biases inherent in the method of your recruitment. For example, if you plan to use a commercial marketing research firm's recruitment database, you may have difficulty reaching low-income participants. If you recruit participants from a clinic or other setting, think about if they will be inherently different from people who do not go to that clinic or who wouldn't be at that specific setting.

### Example

- [Sample screening questionnaires used during VERB's™ formative research](#) (PDF-1.2Mb)

### Limited Resources?

If you don't have money for financial incentives, be creative. Try to find things that will appeal to your audience without costing money such as time off, recognition, or publicity/positive PR. Or, see if you can get your partners or stakeholders to donate food, childcare, or other appealing incentives.



## Scenario 20

Rosa: "We've set up ongoing in-person meetings with our contacts at Wellington Data and that has helped us resolve some of our communication issues.

The focus groups will be with the parents, and while they're participating, we want to have some short conversations with the children themselves, to get their perspective on TV and how it fits into their lives. We decided to have separate groups with parents who are concerned about TV and those that aren't to see if segmenting them in that way would be appropriate for our intervention.

The research firm has started calling people in their database for recruitment, but is having a hard time finding people that will agree to participate in the groups. Do you have any ideas?"

### Which of the following would you recommend to Rosa? Check all that apply.

1. Think about the incentives you are offering, and make sure they are relevant to the audience.
2. Remove any barriers to participation that you can find. Make sure the location of the groups is convenient and that you are scheduling them at appropriate times.
3. Check on the questions that Wellington Data is using to identify people and make sure they are accurately screening people for the groups.
4. Find out if obesity is a problem for them before asking questions.
5. Look for another source of potential participants like church groups or after school programs instead of the Wellington Data database.

### Feedback:

1. This would be **good advice**. If you aren't offering incentives, you may need to provide something to compensate people for their time.
2. This would be **good advice**. Making the groups convenient should help you find more participants.
3. This would be **good advice**. Your screening questions may be too rigid and requirements may need to be loosened if you can't find enough participants.
4. This would be **poor advice**. The presence or absence of obesity is not a screening criterion for the focus groups, so there is no need to ask if it is a problem.
5. This would be **good advice**. The Wellington Data database may not have enough contacts with the group of people you're trying to reach. Try other methods of reaching that group, but keep in mind that certain lists may have inherent biases.



## Step 6: Collect Data

The sixth step is to collect data. In some cases, especially if you have experience with this type of work, you may be able to do this yourself. Otherwise, you can use a contractor or recruit a graduate student from a local university to help you carry out the research. In doing this type of data collection, your ultimate goal is to get the best data so that you can make well-informed decisions, and not necessarily to conduct generalizable research. Adjust the way you collect data, the order of questions, and the wording of questions if you find that something isn't working.

### Tip

If you and your stakeholders have the opportunity to observe data collection in action, it is an incredibly valuable experience. For example, if you are doing focus groups and have a one-way mirror arrangement, it is helpful to bring in as many people from your team as possible to observe the discussion. Watching a focus group first-hand will help you see how your target audience responds to questions, how they differ from each other and how they may differ from your own expectations. These observations can go a long way towards understanding your audience, and therefore facilitate later group discussions about the program.

## Scenario 21



Rosa: "Well... I might as well admit that this research has been taking up most of my time recently. We've done a couple of groups and have two more scheduled for next week. I'm looking forward to getting those done and getting the final report with the data analysis back from Wellington Data.

Even though we had them manage all of the data collection including providing a location and moderating the groups, I have still been overseeing their progress. I must say though, they've been great about involving staff and coalition members. They encouraged all of us to come and observe the focus groups and provide feedback.

Bob was funny. We had to bribe him to come to the first focus group with promises of food, but he actually said he was glad he came. I think it was eye-opening to him and he realized that the parents in our audience don't quite think about things or care about the same things we do.

There's one thing about working with Wellington Data that has bothered me, though. They seemed inflexible. They never stray from the instrument when asking questions to participants. I just wonder if we're getting as much out of these focus groups as we should be getting. What do you think?"

### What should you say to Rosa? Check all that apply.

1. Sounds like they're doing a great job.
2. Let Wellington Data know that you'd like them to be more flexible with their questioning approach. Try conducting a debriefing after each group to identify areas where you have more questions or want to revise something.
3. I'd leave well enough alone. You're paying Wellington Data to do it so don't interfere.

### Feedback:

1. This would be **poor advice**. If you want the contractor to do something differently, you should request it. Qualitative research is all about being open and receptive to where participants may lead you with their responses and following up on interesting leads.
2. This would be **good advice**. Remember the purpose of this research is to learn information to help you plan your intervention. As you start to hear repetition across early groups, you may decide to revise, add, or delete questions for the next group(s).
3. This would be **poor advice**. You have a responsibility to stay involved with the research in every step. Don't back away just because you are paying someone else to help.

## Step 7: Analyze and Report Data

The last step in the formative research process is to analyze and report data. Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data also requires specialized skills—this is another area in which you may want to hire a contractor or partner with a university. State health department epidemiologists can also be a helpful resource for analyzing quantitative data.

Whatever method you use to analyze the data you collect, it's important to keep the big picture in mind. Look through your data to find those key insights that you can use to more deeply understand your target audience. The purpose of this data is to help you make decisions and judgments, not just learn facts or information. Look for specific points that you can act on. Make sure that you have enough information to choose a final audience segment, a specific behavior change, and you have some ideas about intervention strategies. You should go back to your research questions to see if each has been answered in enough detail for you to move forward. If it is helpful, you can organize the data by research question.

### Big Picture Alert

Depending on how your data collection has gone, reassess and see if you have enough data and the right kind of data to proceed. If not, you may want to loop back through this phase to fill in any missing pieces.

### Resources<sup>4</sup>

- Book: *Qualitative Data Analysis*

If you have collected a large amount of data, it will be helpful to you and your team to present it in a *summarized* form. This is especially useful if you are working with a larger planning group or coalition that doesn't need all the details, just the main points.

Your formative research results should be accessible and easy to understand. If they are, then you are more likely to use them when developing the intervention strategies, in phase 3. You may find that strategy development is easier if you bring together following items into one summarized document

- Problem description.
- Relevant formative research findings.
- Secondary data.
- Literature review.
- Expert advice.

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<sup>4</sup> Resources that are not hyperlinked can be found at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/socialmarketing/training/resources.htm>

## Example

Georgia created a [table](#) (PDF-40k) that they used to fill in pertinent results from their problem description and formative research. Once this table was completed, the program planners had an excellent and short summary of the main points they wanted to remember when planning strategies for their intervention (phase 3). More information can be found about Georgia's planning process in [this case study](#). (PDF-1.1Mb)



## Scenario 22

Rosa: "I just got the report back from Wellington Data! Some of what they said was what we expected, but they had a few recommendations that were very interesting.

Bob's been talking informally with some coalition members about our progress but I need to figure out a way to present all of this information to the whole coalition soon. I think they need a formal presentation on what we've been doing for the last few months."

**What should Rosa share with the Wellington Community Coalition members? Choose the most appropriate answers from the responses below.**

1. The recommendations section from the research firm's report.
2. The entire report from the research firm, including their recommendations.
3. A summary of all the research that's been collected so far, including the problem description.
4. Key insights from all data collected with examples of responses.
5. Everything you have.

Feedback:

Choices 1, 3, and 4 are appropriate. Unless you have an unusual coalition, most people are busy and will need the most important information in front of them to make decisions. And, it's important to bring together all of your data, including the data you gathered during the problem description.

## Ready to Move On?

Check yourself: Have you filled in the information gaps that you wanted to? Do you need to go back to the literature to explore something new?

If you find that you haven't filled important gaps that you identified in the problem description phase, you may need to conduct additional formative research. This can happen if the results led you down a different path (i.e., a different target audience, a new behavior) than you originally anticipated.

But, in other situations, you'll have plenty of information. The hard part is making decisions and being very specific about

- Who your program will be targeted to.
- What behavior you will ask them to do.
- How you will ask them to do that behavior.

But, you will never have all the answers. As long as you are keeping the audience's perspective above all else, your expertise and that of your planning committee is valuable to help you fill in the missing pieces.

At the end of this phase, you will be able to answer most of the planning questions and you should feel comfortable with your level of understanding of your target audience.

### Resources

- [Planning Questions](#) (PDF-88k)



## Scenario 23

Rosa: "We've finally completed our formative research. The focus groups went well and I think we got some really good information from our conversations with parents and their children, not to mention the data we collected from our observations and key informant interviews. We decided to narrow the age range of the children in our target audience to ages 4-7 for several reasons

- Starting school seems to be a good transition time when children are open to making changes.
- They're older than toddlers and infants and can respond to behavior change strategies.
- We've got some national formative research on this age group.
- Other interventions have been successful for children in this age range.

A [summary report](#) (PDF-61k) is part of what we gave our coalition members. This shows the most pertinent information we hope they'll use in helping us make decisions in the next phase."

## Summary

You should now be able to

- Explain what formative research is and explain why it is important.
- List the steps in the formative research process.
- Describe how the four plan components are revisited and information gaps are determined (step 1).
- Demonstrate how to write research questions (step 2).
- Explain the process for choosing a data collection method (step 3).
- Discuss the development of instruments (step 4).
- Discuss options for recruiting participants (step 5).
- Explain the data collection process (step 6).
- Explain options for analyzing and reporting on formative research (step 7).

At this point, you should know quite a bit more about your audience and their behavior than you did at the beginning of your project. Final decisions about audience segments and behavioral objectives will be made in the next phase.