



**Developing  
Social Marketing Messages  
for Covering Kids**

**Prepared for**

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## About Covering Kids

Covering Kids is a national health access initiative for low-income, uninsured children. The program was made possible by a \$47 million grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation of Princeton, New Jersey, and is designed to help states and local communities increase the number of eligible children who benefit from health insurance coverage programs by: designing and conducting outreach programs that identify and enroll eligible children into Medicaid and other coverage programs; simplifying the enrollment processes; and coordinating existing coverage programs for low-income children. Covering Kids receives direction and technical support from the Southern Institute on Children and Families, located in Columbia, South Carolina.

*The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and no official endorsement by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is intended or should be inferred.*

## **Developing Social Marketing Messages For Covering Kids**

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Over the past ten years, those involved in social issues and causes have increasingly turned to social marketing to improve the effectiveness of their efforts. Many people working for social change become involved because they believe in the social mission. Their backgrounds, education and experience have often given them a deep understanding of the social problem and its context. However, they have never been trained or exposed to “processes” that allow them to implement solutions to those problems.

Most professionals receive training on “how” to do their business. Accountants are taught how to do an audit. Health professionals follow prescribed procedures for taking a medical history, diagnosing and treating illness. Researchers are trained in the scientific method; architects learn engineering principles.

"Social marketing" is a process designed for those working to create social change that will improve the lives of others, or society in general. It is not a theory, but a practical approach to follow in order to create and manage needed social change. Social marketing is defined as the application of commercial marketing and communication principles to public initiatives/programs in order to achieve social goals through **behavior change**. The mission of social marketing programs is to benefit the consumer and/or society, not the host organization. Covering Kids is one such program.

A major challenge to the success of social programs is the need to influence or change the behavior of others. Often these programs seek to change the behavior of individual consumers: get your child immunized, quit smoking, wear your seatbelt, exercise, eat 5 servings of fruits & vegetables a day, check for radon in your home, and so on. However, the application of social marketing is broader and includes consumers such as the media, legislators, administrators, policy makers, organizational leaders and the like. Social marketers want these new audiences to deliver messages, change policies, pass legislation, revise regulations, implement programs and the like. In this paper, any potential audience of the social marketing effort is referred to as a "consumer."

Covering Kids' consumers could include anyone from low-income mothers to health clinic workers, volunteers, eligibility workers, state legislators or business owners. Just as there are many kinds of "consumers" of commercial products and services, there can be many kinds of "consumers" for social ideas and behaviors.

## A Note About Social Marketing and Outreach

It is important to understand the relationship between social marketing and outreach. First, it must be pointed out that social marketing addresses the building of “effective programs and initiatives.” It is much broader than “communication.”

Social marketing programs will typically address at least five areas (often called the 5 P’s) and only one of those areas is communication. The areas covered by social marketing include:

- What is being offered to the consumer (Product)
- What must the consumer do to receive the offering (Price)
- How will the consumer access the offering (Place)
- What kind of policy environment is needed to support the effort (Politics)
- What messages must reach the consumer to motivate behavior change (Promotion)

In other words, promotion or communication to various consumers is just one element of a social marketing program. It is wrong to equate social marketing with communication. This paper, however, is by necessity being limited to this one element → **the development of an effective communication strategy for social programs.**

As discussed below, there are six strategic questions that, when answered, define a communication strategy. One of these questions deals with how to reach or deliver the key message to the target audience. There are many vehicles available to reach a target audience. These include paid and public service advertising, editorial media, point of purchase displays, delivery of collateral materials (e.g., brochures, posters), as well as community outreach.

Unlike commercial marketing programs, social marketing programs do not have established sales forces, or wholesale and retail distribution networks to bring the offering and/or message to the consumer. Community outreach has developed to serve this need. By building working relationships with existing community organizations, outreach efforts create the program’s “sales force” and “retail outlets” for messages and services.

There are two critical points related to creating effective outreach networks:

1. Community organizations are themselves “audiences” for the social marketing program
2. Successful outreach activities must develop communication strategies that answer the six strategic questions for these community organizations.

## Communication Strategies for Marketing Social Change

A common fault of many social programs is to rely solely on “information and data” as the basis for messages. This reliance leads to messages that present “the facts” about a specific program or behavior, on the assumption that exposure to these facts will lead consumers to change their behavior. The presentation of facts or information will rarely motivate behavior change. Pre-testing of outreach information is necessary to determine what message the consumer actually receives, because any information is filtered through the consumer’s reality.

The following example shows how presentation of even the most straightforward information can yield unanticipated outcomes. A public education campaign widely disseminated a message to women that *women with a history of breast cancer in their family were at greater risk of having breast cancer themselves*. The intent was to increase women's knowledge about risk factors for breast cancer so they would seek appropriate screening. However, subsequent consumer research has found that this health message, **once processed through the consumer's reality**, was translated as “If I don't have breast cancer in my family, I don't need to worry about breast cancer.” Lack of family history of breast cancer is now a primary reason women give for not having a screening mammogram. Yet, 80% of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer have no history of it in their family.

An often-heard comment on the part of well meaning program staff is “if we just educate ‘them’ about how important our issue is, then they will do the right thing.” For example, if parents just understood how important health insurance is for their children, then they would get them covered.

What committed advocates don’t realize is that the perceived importance of their issue is through their eyes, not the consumers’. There are also thousands of other committed advocates who feel the same way about their causes. However, social marketers have found that unless we can make an issue or cause relevant to someone’s personal life, we will have no effect.

It is impossible to educate consumers to value an issue, regardless of all the supporting data and evidence of its importance (although as will be seen, this information may be a very useful part of any campaign). Instead, communicators need to understand what consumers already value and what their needs and wants are today. Communication and outreach that actually have an impact on the consumer must “position” the issue as meeting the consumer’s currently valued needs and wants.

## The Critical Need for Market Research

To formulate powerful messages it is essential to listen to consumers describe their lives through their eyes (e.g., What happened the last time your child became sick? Where did you go? What did you do?). Market research is a prerequisite to effective communication and outreach.

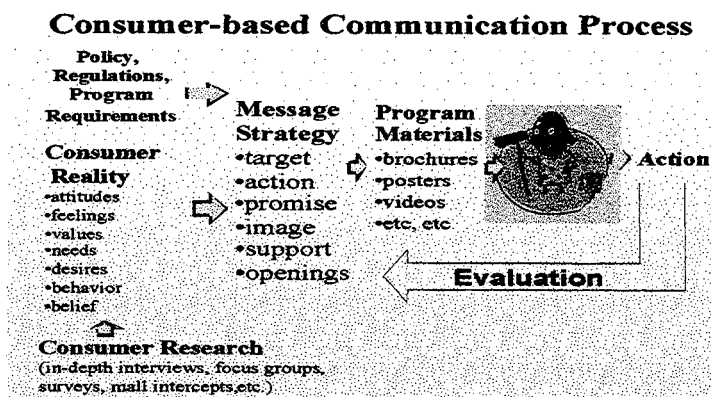
Market research is a discipline that has developed to meet the information needs of program developers. Market research is different from much research that is done for academic or scientific purposes. Market research is designed to help program designers make decisions. It is not designed to determine “causality” or prove theories. Those trained under the scientific or academic model may perceive market research as being “bad” research. It is not bad research – it is different research that meets program designers’ needs. In fact, the use of market research helps commercial organizations make billion-dollar decisions every day.

There are many ways to conduct market research. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, are invaluable for understanding how audiences think. Tracking surveys, help to determine whether the program is moving in the right direction. Since marketing research is different from many other kinds of research, it is important to work with trained communication researchers. Audiences cannot tell you how to communicate with them. Trained communication researchers must extract values, needs, wants, barriers, etc. from the consumers’ stories about their lives.

## Consumer-Based Communications

*Consumer-based communications (CBC)* is the process for developing effective messages for target audiences. As shown in Figure 1, the CBC process is intended to transform information about the issue or program along with other empirical evidence into message strategies that are relevant to the reality of the consumers in the target audience.

**Figure 1**



The core of this approach is consumer research conducted to understand the consumer's reality. CBC poses a series of strategic questions whose answers, based on consumer research, lead to communications that are relevant, meaningful, and compelling to the audience. The immediate result of the CBC process is a strategy statement — a few pages that lay out who the target consumer is, what action should be taken, what to promise and how to make the promise credible, how and when to reach the consumer, and what image to convey.

This strategy statement then guides the execution (e.g., format, text, design, graphics) of *all* communication and outreach efforts, be they public relations, community outreach, mass media, direct marketing, media advocacy, skills-building, creating environments supportive of behavior change, or interpersonal influence. It identifies the most important "levers" for contact with the consumer. Everyone from creative specialists through management and program personnel can use the strategy statement as a touchstone to guide and judge the effectiveness of their efforts.

The core questions around which the CBC process unfolds are best answered with **solid consumer research** and **disciplined creativity**, usually in a facilitated work group of people who have diverse knowledge, talents and skills and who will be responsible for the program. The work group meets after it has answered the questions individually, based on available research. Then answers to the questions are "juggled in the air" and changed until they fit with each other as a consistent and coherent whole. Over time, consumers change, and answers to the questions should be continually reviewed and updated.

The following sections describe the strategic questions posed by the CBC process. Aspects of the National Cancer Institute's 5 A Day for Better Health media program, a nutrition education campaign to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, are used for illustration.

## The Consumer-Based Communication Process

The CBC process consists of six interrelated questions.

### 1. Who are the target consumers and what are they like?

To answer this question one must do empirical research on consumers to describe possible consumer targets, and then one must **select** the consumer segment most likely to achieve the greatest gains toward the public health objective. Target selection is based on several factors:

- **size of the consumer segment** (e.g., how many people are we trying to reach)
- **degree to which the consumer segment is in need or would benefit from the behavior change** (e.g., most at risk)
- **extent to which the consumer segment is reachable with available resources** (accessibility)
- **extent to which the consumer segment is likely to respond to communication** (responsiveness).

A variety of both quantitative and qualitative data sources can help describe and select the target consumer segment. In the beginning, it is more important to understand in-depth who the consumer is. This can be done through qualitative research, in-depth personal discussions or focus groups. The formality of the qualitative research design is less important than the ability of the researchers to **listen** to consumers and see the world through their eyes. The consumer is never “wrong” – what they think, see and believe is the reality within which messages must be developed.

For a message to be relevant and effective it must be **highly personal**; the receiver must be described as a person, not as a population or statistic (e.g., low income yet working, below 250% above poverty level, migrant workers). The strength of qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews is that they provide an in-depth understanding of the target audience as well as critical insights into current consumer actions specifically related to desired behaviors. A thorough understanding of the target provides the basis for answering the other CBC questions.

The target consumer should be specific and vivid regarding such things as how they go to work, how they spend their leisure time, and what sections of the newspaper they read.

What's important to this person? What are the person's feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about their children, going to get health care, the medical system, and the behavior change, its benefits and barriers? What can motivate this person to do something

differently? *Most importantly, an understanding of the consumer's current behavior process must be developed – a "map" of the steps they take along the way to or from the behavior of interest.* For example, what are the actual steps consumers have taken before to obtain health coverage for their children?

Well-described specific targets help to focus efforts where they will be most effective. This is a particularly useful point for social initiatives like Covering Kids, in which resources may be limited. Organizations with fewer resources must deploy them more wisely.

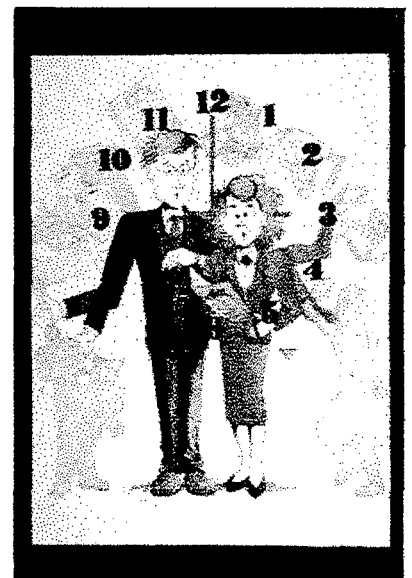
It is not always easy to follow this advice, since, by concentrating resources on one target, others will be missed. This is a common concern among public officials who believe that the mandate to serve "the public" means the impossible task of reaching and persuading everyone at once. Also, it is important to consider the competing interests of the multiple constituencies with which many agencies and groups must interact (e.g., Medicaid community, state legislators, special interest groups). Conscious target selection can maximize impact. When resources permit, a communication program can develop different strategies to meet the needs of diverse constituencies.

After extensive research the 5 A Day media program selected a target audience of people who reported eating 2-3 servings of fruits and vegetables a day and were also trying to eat more. They represented a large and growing number of consumers predisposed to adopt the new behavior – eating 4 to 5 servings a day – and likely to influence others to change their behavior. They also were more likely than others to have children, secondary targets of change efforts. One might have targeted people who eat fewer servings of fruits and vegetables, a more needy group. However, the decision was made to work with momentum for impact. **The ability to show results also enhances the viability of the program.** Other audiences targeted with different strategies can be added later.

According to national consumer surveys, the 5 A Day target consumer was more likely to:

- *be between the ages of 25-55*
- *have a busy, hectic lifestyle*
- *"cut corners" in meal preparation*
- *value convenience in selecting and preparing foods*
- *have health oriented knowledge and attitudes about diet*
- *be concerned about losing weight*
- *see cancer as the health problem to be most concerned about*
- *watch local news, news interview shows and prime time movies*
- *listen to soft rock, classic rock, easy listening and country and western radio.*

### 5 A Day Target Audience



It is helpful to use the consumer data to personify the target consumer, giving him or her a name and a biography. The above information was used to construct a portrait of the 5 A Day target audience — including an illustrator's rendering of it — that the entire planning team discussed and understood. This process helps the team to become immersed in the consumer's reality.

## **2. What *action* should the consumer *take* as a direct result of the message?**

This question aims at choosing the **consumer action** that results from the communication. This action may differ from the program objective (e.g., enrolling kids, simplification of the enrollment process, streamlining program options). The program objectives are based upon problem identification, policy analysis, and population studies. The "science" may say people should enroll their kids in health care coverage. But just telling people to do that ignores where they are coming from and/or how they can get to the recommended behavior.

As mentioned, any behavior consists of a series of steps which lead to that behavior. Various models for consumer behavior processes exist. Since each behavior differs, the model — or map — must be adapted to each situation. By combining behavior models with consumer research that shows where the target "is" on the map — as well as the mental processes, competitors, benefits, and barriers that comprise its terrain — the **specific action** prompted by the message can be located.

A consumer map can help to identify those points in the behavior process where consumers pull away from the recommended objective (e.g., enroll your child) and move toward another behavior (e.g., use the emergency room). For example, in the 5 A Day program, some consumers could not find the fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator and therefore found it easier to munch from a bowl of potato chips on a counter top.

Having mapped out the behavior process, the question becomes **What is the consumer doing now, instead of the desired behavior?** That action is the **competitive behavior** — the behavior that marketers want to replace. Answers from consumer research help formulate the intermediate steps that stand between where the consumer currently is and where marketers want the consumer to be. Consumer behavior models help determine which intermediate steps should be changed for greatest impact. Those intermediate steps then become potential candidates for the communication "**action.**"

Different **competitive behaviors** (e.g., using emergency services versus home treatment) may suggest different types of messages even when the **desired action is the same.**





















