



Evaluation of Behavior Change Activities

Taking into consideration implementers' limited time and resources, the tools in Pathfinder International's *Straight to the Point* Series provide clear, concise guidance on a variety of issues related to program design, implementation, and evaluation.



Unlike information, education, and communication (IEC), behavior change (BC) activities do not rely on materials alone. They are dependent on many variables including, but not limited to:

1. Careful identification of the behavioral objective(s) that the project is seeking to achieve (often with input from the target population);
2. Quality of facilitation by community-based agents;
3. Clear empirical and theoretical linkage between the behavioral objective(s) and the activities;
4. Observable movement toward important sub-goals and small behavioral changes.

Good behavior change activities are often expensive and complex. They deserve to be carefully monitored and evaluated for effectiveness, but this is not always possible for reasons of time and expense. Still, some sort of evaluation is better than no evaluation at all, and that is where this “straight to the point” evaluation of BC activities comes in. This is *not* meant to be a substitute for careful evaluation, and obviously the implementing (or supervising) organization should carefully monitor and evaluate all BC activities to the greatest extent possible in line with their predetermined target outcomes.

In situations where a supervising/implementing organization is unable to conduct formal monitoring and evaluation, it is still possible to perform a “straight to the point” evaluation by asking some simple questions and recording some simple observations. Even a quick, “straight to the point” evaluation of BC activities requires observation. Many aspects of a behavior change activity can only be understood by observing the small group activities that work alongside print, audio, or video materials. It is the quality of the interaction and facilitation that is critical to behavior change. If the activity you observe does not demonstrate much interaction, this does not necessarily mean that the materials are not good—it might just mean that the materials are not being used well.

As you perform any evaluation of BC activities, keep in mind that you probably are *not* a member of the target audience. You are probably better educated, more literate, more economically secure, and perhaps more urban than many of the people for whom the activities were designed. *Even better than just mentally taking this into account, you can conduct the evaluation with a member or members of the target population at your side.* Ask them questions about what they think of the activity and whether they think participants are comfortable and open with the facilitator. Do not “lead” them to any conclusions—let them answer based on their own observations.

Many aspects of a behavior change activity can only be understood through direct observation. It is the quality of the interaction and facilitation that is critical to behavior change.

If you find in your evaluation that a particular behavior change activity does poorly in several aspects of communication, you then have to decide what to do about this. Do you contact the implementer of the activity and offer to help them revise the materials or suggest they need to improve the facilitation? Do you communicate your assessment to a supervisor and await instructions? It depends on the implementer of the activity, your supervisors, and other factors.

Three important things to remember are: 1) “straight to the point” evaluations are *not* scientific and you have not “proven” anything with your evaluation; 2) if a behavior change activity does poorly in this evaluation, it does not necessarily mean that the basic materials are bad—it could be that the activity was just conducted poorly; and 3) activities that score poorly need more formal attention and should be further examined.

“Straight to the Point” Checklist for Evaluating BC Activities

Date: _____ Reviewer: _____

BC activity reviewed: _____

VERY POOR
NEEDS MAJOR
IMPROVEMENT
NEEDS MINOR
IMPROVEMENT
VERY GOOD

| | COMMUNICATIVE ASPECT | DEFINITION/DETAIL | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | Appropriate medium and location for the target population | Are the kinds of materials being used (print, video, etc.) appropriate for the target population? If they require reading, are participants comfortable with this? Are activities held in places that are convenient for target population participation? | | | | |
| 2 | Narrative/story-based components that engage the audience in complex thinking rather than use of isolated “facts”— <i>no messages!</i> | Do the materials used present behavioral issues in a realistic way showing a range of personal, social, and environmental barriers to change? Or do they rely on “messages” that may be more appropriate for IEC? | | | | |
| 3 | Quality of facilitation and opportunities for participation | Activities should be participatory because they depend on what participants have to say and how they understand the materials. Is the facilitator allowing this? Do participants have the opportunity to “talk back” to the ideas expressed by the facilitator? Does the facilitator encourage others to speak and acknowledge the importance of everyone’s contribution? | | | | |
| 4 | Bottom-up, participant-led activities | <i>Related to Question 3:</i> Are the participants taking a role in directing discussion by bringing up topics of interest to them? Are participants playing an active role in moving from activity to activity, or are they being driven by the facilitator? | | | | |
| 5 | Language appropriateness | Is the written/spoken language appropriate (in terms of level of sophistication, difficulty of vocabulary, national language vs. vernacular) for the participants? | | | | |
| 6 | Movement toward action | Is it clear that the participants are being actively encouraged to take steps (even small steps) toward change? Does the facilitator help suggest what these steps might be? | | | | |