Formative Research and Pre-testing

To ensure that health messages have the potential to be received, under­stood, and accepted by those for whom they are intended, Office of Communications and Public Liaison (OCPL) employs formative research and pretesting. Specifically, these types of research involve: 1) assessing audience knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and other characteristics for the plann­ing/development of health messages, education products, communication strategies, and public information programs; and 2) pretesting these health messages, products, strategies, and program components while they are in developmental form to assess audience comprehen­sion, reactions, and perceptions. The informa­tion obtained from audience research and pretesting can lead to improve­ments in materi­als and strategies while revisions are still affordable and possi­ble. By maximiz­ing the effective­ness of these messages and strategies for reaching targeted audienc­es, the frequen­cy with which publica­tions, products, and programs need to be modified is reduced.

Because OCPL is NCI's chief resource for cancer communication and education, it has the respon­sibility to both the Institute and its many constitu­encies to provide credible cancer information messages and services. The complexity of these messages will only continue to increase as scientific progress in cancer continues its exponential growth. Unless NCI is able to empiri­cal­ly show that its messages and materials have the potential to be understood­ and useful to their target audiences, it will be unable to carry out its mandate effectively.

Formative research and pretesting are activities that OCPL and other communication offices perform on almost all of NCI’s print pieces, broadcast products, and informa­tion­al services and messages in order to maximize their usefulness. The studies are conducted on a small scale and focus on potential effectiveness with specific target audiences.

Customer Satisfaction

The OCPL is also responsible for ensuring the relevance, utility, and appropriateness of the many educational programs and products that the Office produces through implementation of customer satisfaction research. By obtaining information from intended audiences on the extent to which materials satisfy their needs, OCPL will be able to systematically establish and follow a feedback loop that provides immediately useful information to revise and enhance educational programs and products so that they attain maximum relevance, utility, appropriateness, and impact.

Attach­ment 2 contains a listing of different research methodologies for formative research, pretesting, and customer satisfaction used during the clearance period starting in 2013 and ending in 2015.