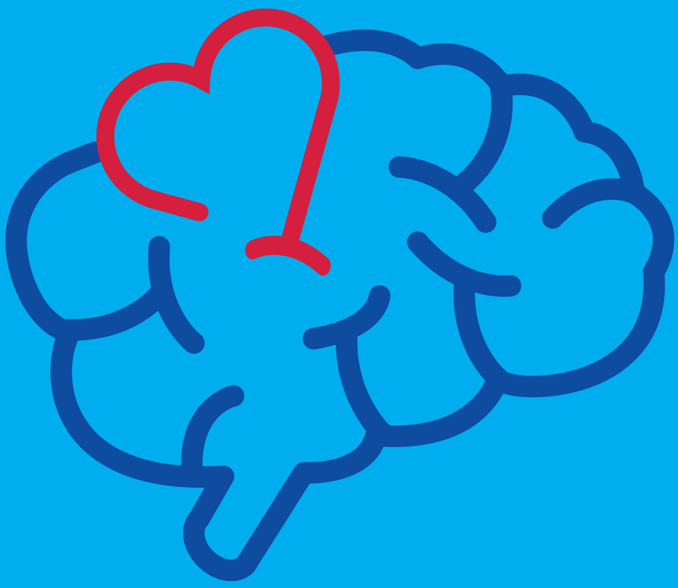
THE HEARTWIRED TOOLBOX

STRATEGIC RESEARCH TOOLS TO ACCELERATE SOCIAL CHANGE



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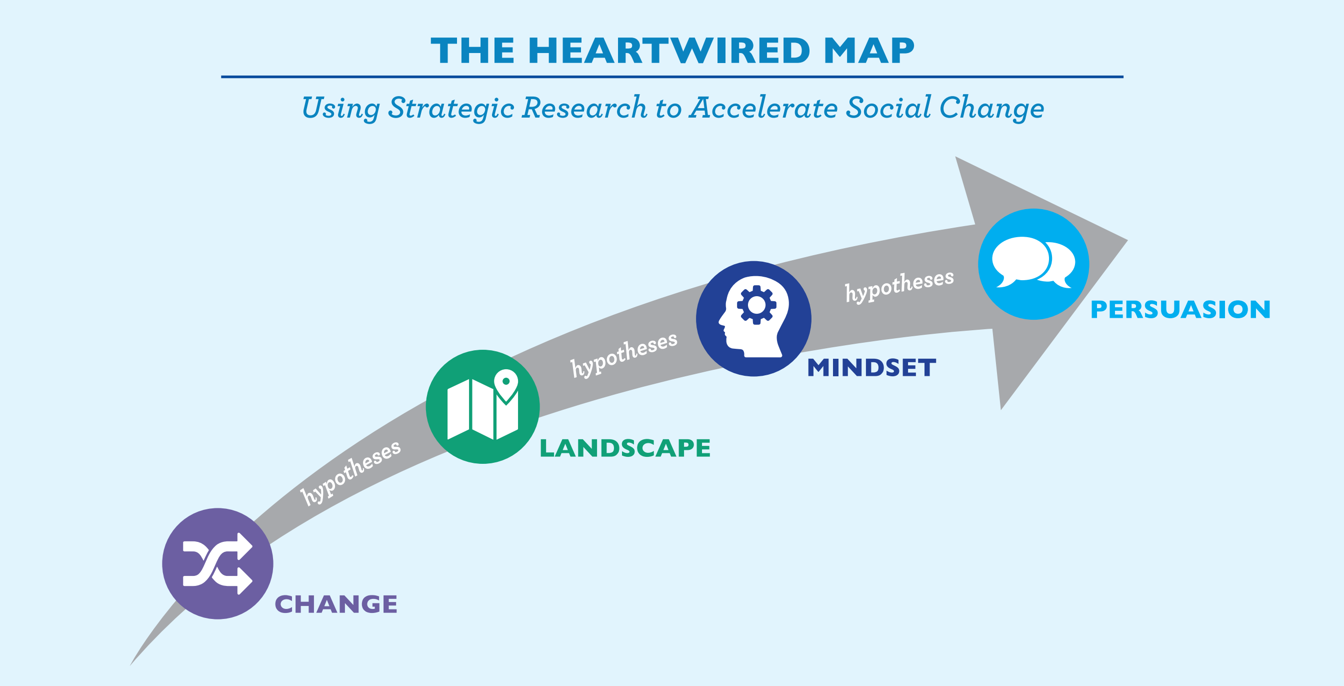
THE HEARTWIRED TOOLBOX

In this toolbox, we describe the research cycle — an iterative process that can be applied to any research-informed communication effort, no matter how broad or narrow in scope. We describe how insights from each phase lead to revisions in your hypothesis that you test in the next, and offer a wide variety of research tools to use in each phase.

USING STRATEGIC RESEARCH TO ACCELERATE SOCIAL CHANGE



Whether you are conducting a single survey or launching a long-term social change campaign that may take years and require deploying many different research methods, applying the process outlined below will help ensure that the resulting research findings and communication recommendations best support your objectives.

This research process includes four phases that are interconnected and on-going.

Begin by developing initial hypotheses about the change you want to create. These change hypotheses are then continually explored, tested and refined each step of the way. In some cases, your research findings will suggest revising your change objectives significantly or embarking on an altogether different (but often related) pathway to creating change.

Throughout the research process, it is critical to both identify and question your own assumptions, with each assumption being checked and confirmed, refined or abandoned along the way. In addition, we find that creating effective "external" change also requires creating "internal" change, by building buy-in among colleagues and coalition partners and incorporating their feedback during the research process. Otherwise, final message recommendations will not be widely adopted or implemented. Importantly, advocates and coalition partners must be considered from the beginning and throughout the research and message development process.

In this research toolbox, we dig into the four research phases introduced in Heartwired, and describe research methodologies that can be used to answer the strategic questions that guide each phase. To recap, those key questions are:

CHANGE: What is the specific change you want to enact in the world?

The freedom-to-marry movement developed the 10/10/10/20 framework as their vision of change, which they translated as: In the next 20 years, winning equal marriage rights in 10 states; civil unions in 10 states; relationship recognition for same-sex couples in 10 states; and at least some pro-equality organizing in the final 20 states.

LANDSCAPE: What is the current landscape, or the playing field on which you have to compete, to create the change you seek — and what is already known about it?

Recall that in the millennials case study, the research team conducted an extensive review of existing public opinion research to ensure their work would not be redundant with polling that had already been done. They also tapped into a group of Packard Foundation staff, grantees and partners to get their buy-in from the beginning of the project.

MINDSET: What is the mindset of the audiences who you need to persuade?

Research for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation explored conscious and unconscious biases as a way to understand how to build support for programs and policies to improve the health and success of young men of color.

PERSUASION: What is the most effective approach to persuading your audiences in a way that reflects *their* values and lived experiences?

Mississippians for Healthy Families was able to defeat an extreme anti-abortion ballot measure in the state by communicating the message that "it was perfectly acceptable to be pro-life and to vote against Initiative 26."

The case studies earlier in this guide demonstrated the transformative power of each of these questions. Now let's talk about how you can answer them for your own work.

CHANGE

MAP YOUR CHANGE

Before you even begin your research, it is critical to answer a series of fundamental questions that will both guide your research and help you think through what implementation might look like once the research is complete (or, because the process is iterative with each phase building on the findings from the previous phases, if additional research is required).

The primary question to pose at this initial stage is: *What is the concrete change you are seeking?* This "Change" question is pivotal and should be fully articulated and answered before the research process begins. There are numerous ways to do so, such as through a facilitated discussion among your organization (staff, board, major donors) or with movement leaders if you are seeking to build a larger coalition.

With your Change answer in hand, you then develop a set of initial hypotheses of how to make that change happen based on what you know about the lay of the land. For example, you must develop hypotheses about *which* attitudes you need to impact for that change to occur, *who* are your potential persuasion or activation audiences, and *what messengers* do they need to hear from to be persuaded.

It is important to note that your initial change hypotheses often evolve in response to what you learn as you undertake each phase of your research. As you develop a deeper understanding of your audience, you should revisit and reconsider your change hypotheses and see if and how they need to be amended.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

As you think about these strategic questions and develop hypotheses about how to answer them, it may be helpful to think about the case studies presented throughout this guide. In each case, the research was shaped by a set of initial hypotheses about what was necessary — and possible — to create change. While this process can be time-consuming — especially when hard deadlines necessitate an urgent need for research — we find it critical to ensure that the research conducted

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS ?

What is the concrete change you are seeking?

What is the change you ultimately want to see in the world?

Are you seeking to change attitudes, policy or both?

What will success look like? How will the world be different if you are successful?

What are the changes you can win at this time that will move you toward your long-term social change goal?

How might change happen?

Who are the influencers?

What are the opportunities and barriers to change?

What other kinds of recent social change might offer guidance?

Who are potential persuasion targets?

Who do you need to persuade, activate or neutralize to achieve your goal?

What makes you think these are the audiences who need to be persuaded?

What hypotheses do you currently have about your target audience's attitudes, beliefs and values — either based on previous research or experience?

What leads you to think you can persuade these audiences to do what you need?

How can you maximize your opportunities?

What more could this research accomplish or help you learn?

Will there be opportunities to revisit and tweak your message based on real-world circumstances (e.g., based on debriefing with canvassers to determine what worked or measuring the level of response on social media)?

What are your means or modes for communicating? How will the messages you're developing ultimately be used?

How practical are your research and implementation goals?

What is your budget for research vs. communications?

What is your timeframe and potential for repetition of your message over the long term?

Communication Audit in Action

A coalition focused on combating diseases linked to environmental exposures wanted to increase the effectiveness of their communication. Consultant Ryan Schwartz used an audit of their members' communications to shine a spotlight on a critical issue: Nearly all organizations in the network were framing their message solely in terms of "health" outcomes, even though their goal was to address *environmental* causes of disease. The "health" frame was creating a barrier to audiences accurately understanding the issue and taking appropriate action because the idea of "health" triggered people to think about individual actions like diet and exercise, rather than environmental factors outside of our control.

In addition, the communication audit revealed that most of the coalition's messaging was in the passive voice — "chemicals are put into our products" and "restrictions have yet to materialize" — without naming who needs to take action in order to address the problem.

With that fresh lens on their communication, the network was able to develop a new approach to telling their story — one that made it clear how these problems were created, and by whom.

and resulting communications recommendations are aligned with the overall strategic objectives of your effort. Asking strategic questions and developing research hypotheses can also help reveal critical assumptions and barriers to progress. In the freedom-to-marry case study, for example, initial hypotheses had to be revised significantly based on in-depth public opinion research as well as by political, social and communications realities on the ground.

The strategic questions on the previous page are offered as examples to help guide your hypothesis development. You should answer as many of these questions as you can initially, and then continue to revisit them as you conduct each phase of your research.

CHANGE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

You're ready to explore your Change hypotheses. What research methods should you use? Some look *internally* at communications within your organizations or movement. Others focus *externally* on audiences or communications from opponents or other actors (e.g. media or government). In this section, we describe how certain methodologies could be employed in the Change phase.

FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS WITH ADVOCATES: If you're considering a coalition or movement-wide effort to advance your issue, you can benefit by hearing the perspectives of other advocates, particularly what has and has not worked in their own research, communication and organizing efforts. These sessions offer advocates a seat at the table to help unearth message opportunities and challenges and to begin to develop a shared vision for the change you wish to make in the world. These facilitated discussions, which should be led by an outside moderator, should focus on identifying attitudinal barriers to change.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH ADVOCATES: Just as with Facilitated Discussions, you can also employ one-on-one in-depth interviews with advocates or allies. You develop an interview guide with a set of key questions to ask each person you interview. Typically you would want to interview a minimum of five or six different people to get a range of different perspectives. More interviews may be needed to gather the full range of different perspectives needed for your work. To elicit the most frank responses, you should conduct the interviews with the agreement that the responses are confidential and anonymous and you will only report on them in the aggregate. These interviews can be conducted in person, via phone or via video. With the respondent's permission, you can audiotape the interview and make a transcript afterwards to enhance your analysis.

COMMUNICATION AUDIT: A fresh look at your own external communications — from websites and social media to advertising and speeches — is critical to assess how you currently communicate about your issue. The audit can also help you assess the clarity and effectiveness of your message. Once you've completed your audience and message research, you can identify what to keep, what to let go of and what to refine. After your new communications approach is in place, the audit can also serve as a baseline analysis to help measure the changes in your communications.

Media Audit in Action

Advocates who believe that terminally ill patients should have the legal right to have medical aid-in-dying zeroed in on the media's widespread use of the term "physician-assisted suicide" to describe what we now know as *medical aid-in-dying*. The latter was the supposedly "neutral" term that reporters often used to report on the subject. Yet the media audit and analysis emphasized that the word "suicide" implies a choice to die because one is depressed but could otherwise have lived a long and physically healthy life. But how could it be suicide if a terminal illness was already killing you? Advocates could see that they needed to focus — both in their own communications and in working with reporters — on reframing the most fundamental terms of the debate.

Read more about the movement's progress at **heartwiredforchange.com/messaging.**

LANDSCAPE

UNDERSTAND YOUR LANDSCAPE

Ready to map the current landscape? Landscape research enables you to understand how your audience is experiencing your issue. You will develop your initial hypotheses and refine them based on what you learn. The overarching question to pose in the Landscape phase is: *How are your audiences currently experiencing and reacting to communications about this issue?*

RESEARCH GOALS

Important research goals for this Landscape phase include:

- Mapping the mental templates of your target audiences (a critical undertaking that will continue in the Mindset phase);
- Identifying the message frames, words, images, metaphors, associations and emotions currently being used to communicate about your issue;
- Analyzing current narratives and stories about your issue, both in terms of their construction and how they are used; and
- Leveraging learnings from existing public opinion research that has already been conducted on your issue.

LANDSCAPE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

There are many Landscape research methodologies that can achieve the research goals above. Similar to Change methodologies, some focus *internally* on communications within your organization or movement. Others look *externally* to how target audiences, opponents or other external actors (like the media) think and talk about your issue.

PEER AND COMPETITOR COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT: Before developing a communications campaign, it's important to understand the context in which your message will be received. In reaching out to your audience, what psychological obstacles are standing in the way? What message frames, including from allies, are shaping your audience's reactions? Do those messages complement or undermine your own? What is your unique role in the conversation? Reviewing the external communications materials of other influential advocates and opinion leaders on your issue, and mapping out where each organization, including your own, falls in relation to the others, can help you better understand the lay of the land.

MEDIA AUDIT: The media is both an influencer and a mirror of public opinion. Analyzing coverage and existing message frames of your issue — pro, con and neutral — allows you to identify: the message frames that dominate the conversation; the advocates and opinion leaders who give voice to each perspective; and what biases may be embedded, even unintentionally, in the language journalists use to report on the issue.

SOCIAL LISTENING AUDIT: How do more informed and engaged audience members respond to news about your issue? Which messages penetrate the audience's psyche and which are dismissed? What life experiences and values do people bring to bear in understanding the issue? Social listening answers these questions by analyzing online comments on news articles and/or social media as a barometer of public opinion.

Depending on the demographics and media consumption habits of your target audiences, you might analyze reader comments on articles from various newspapers of record such as the New York Times or Wall Street Journal, or regional papers like the Detroit Free Press. Or you might analyze Amazon customer reviews or Facebook posts. As you analyze and categorize the message themes that emerge, pay attention to what ideas people agree or disagree with, and what personal experiences, values or beliefs they use to support their opinions.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONSTRUCTION: Analyzing, constructing and testing story narratives is critical to many of today's communications efforts. By analyzing existing stories, you can create a detailed picture of storytelling frames, mapping out key elements such as context, presumed audience, primary characters (e.g., narrator, protagonist, antagonist), secondary characters, narrative components, sequencing structures (how stories begin, build, pivot and end), and key words, images, ideas and emotions that are invoked or evoked.

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH REVIEW: In social change research, many funders require the development of metrics to measure core attitudes about your topic of interest. These metrics can be used to measure the degree to which those attitudes change as a result of being exposed to messaging — either during a survey or over the course of a communications campaign. A public opinion research review enables you to examine research that has previously been conducted on your topic to see whether existing attitudinal measures can serve as your core change measure or whether you need to develop new survey questions for that purpose. In many cases, research findings (and the questions and measures used to produce them) are publicly available. In other cases, allied organizations might be willing to share their internal questions and results to aid in your analysis.

BASELINE SURVEY: Baseline surveys take the temperature on an issue to see where people stand at the beginning of a research project. Based on these findings, you can estimate the size and scope of the communications effort required to achieve success. Analysis of the subgroup results also enables you to determine which populations (e.g., women with college degrees) will be most fruitful to include in your initial Mindset research.

We believe that it's our responsibility as change-makers to understand how to talk about an issue in a way that will motivate our audiences to not only listen, but to care and take action. If we put the onus on our audience to pay attention and care about our issue, then we relinquish an opportunity to change hearts and minds.

Keep baseline surveys short by forgoing or limiting questions about messaging, which typically require additional research to develop fully for testing.

FUNDRAISING AUDIT: A fundraising audit can help strengthen donor relations by testing the donor experience an organization and its peer organizations provide. The researcher allocates a small amount of money to donate to each organization being assessed. Then, the mystery-shopper researcher makes a donation through each organization's website, noting the language, visuals and engagement tools available. Once the donation has been made, the researcher tracks how the organization follows up — from the "thank you" to ongoing education and engagement on the issue, to any future solicitation to give again. The fundraising audit can also help to glean best practices being used by peer organizations or competitors for donor dollars.

Fundraising Audit in Action

A group of nonprofits on Long Island needed to take their fundraising to the next level as a local community foundation that had long supported their work prepared to close its doors. They were frustrated that many Long Islanders were contributing to national groups and organizations based in New York City, without supporting the work that needed to be done in their own backyards.

A communications and fundraising audit revealed a missed opportunity to connect with the identity and values that had emerged from interviews with Long Island donors. Few of the groups were nurturing a Long Island identity in their messaging or telling personal stories that would connect with members of the community at a local level. The research revealed a clear path forward for these groups to capitalize on the unique shared identity of many Long Islanders.

MINDSET

EXPLORE AUDIENCE MINDSET

We once heard a senior staff person at a major environmental organization say, "We're doing a great job talking about climate change, but no one is listening!" It's an interesting perspective. It suggests that it is the audience's fault for not listening. We believe that it's our responsibility as change-makers to understand how to talk about an issue in a way that will motivate our audiences to not only listen, but to care and take action. If we put the onus on our audience to pay attention and care about our issue, then we relinquish an opportunity to change hearts and minds.

Mindset research provides a window into the life experiences, identities, beliefs and values of the people you are trying to reach. It reveals the most powerful points of connection: those that begin with what is fundamentally true for your audience, rather than the worldview that you — the already converted — hold. By using messages that fit into their already deeply-held values, rather than trying to change their core values, we can draw on emotional power that helps change hearts and minds. Simply put, it means that our audiences come to the change themselves rather than advocates having to foist it upon them.

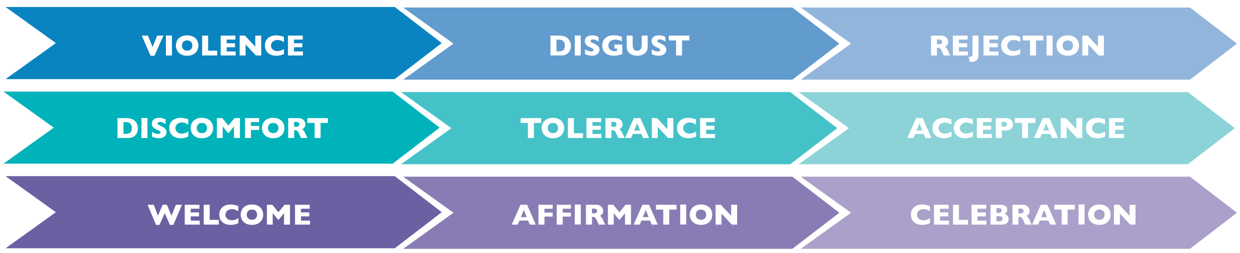
The goal for the Mindset phase of the research process is to understand: *What do your audiences think and feel about your issue, why do they think that way, and what changes in their beliefs and attitudes are required for your desired change to occur?*

"DEEP LISTENING" RESEARCH

To that end, the Mindset phase relies primarily on qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, dyads or focus groups to provide a deep understanding of public attitudes and attitude formation in a way that is not possible with quantitative research, like surveys. These methods give you an opportunity to probe people's attitudes on a wide range of issues and to explore the sometimes complicated connections that people make between seemingly unconnected issues. You can learn directly from people, in their own words,

CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT FOR LGBT PEOPLE

Using research to uncover adjacent possibilities



the attitudes and concerns that are most important to them when thinking about issues key to the success or failure of your communication efforts.

In addition, qualitative research allows you to test ways of connecting the dots for people on complex issues (e.g., climate change) by providing clear and reasoned explanations about how those processes work. When it comes to complex issues, we have found that in the absence of understandable causal stories, people frequently take various facts they have at their disposal and weave their own (sometimes erroneous) narratives about the causal connections.

The Mindset phase also provides an entry point for employing a powerful deep listening approach. Developed in partnership with Dr. Phyllis Watts, this deep listening approach has been proven to engage key audiences and in many cases facilitate profound attitudinal change. Rooted in a real-world understanding of the latest social and applied behavioral science and neuroaffective research, the deep listening approach examines how human brains process emotions, reason and primal, or gut reactions, and how these processes influence people's decision-making. It relies primarily on qualitative data but can be incorporated into quantitative methods, as well.

RESEARCH GOALS

To unpack and map your audiences' existing emotional and psychological Mindset, research goals include:

- Exploring the interaction between your issue and their emotions, values, cognitive reasoning and moral judgments;
- Revealing how their individual and collective identities enable or undermine support for your issue;
- Determining where they experience internal conflict about the issue and how that conflict can be leveraged as an opportunity for change;
- Showing how they connect the dots and create meaning out of patterns they see and hear (or think they do);
- Discovering what narratives they bring to their understanding of your issue, and how those narratives impact support;
- Understanding how their lived experiences (or perceptions of those experiences) shape their emotional reactions;
- Exploring initial messaging and messenger approaches for later refinement in the Persuasion phase; and
- Analyzing the dynamics of the back-and-forth public debate.

REVISITING INITIAL CHANGE HYPOTHESES

While your hypotheses are refined throughout the heartwired research process, the completion of the Mindset phase is a particularly important point at which to revisit and refine your initial Change hypotheses.

Research insights from the Mindset phase enable you to develop new hypotheses about your audiences and what level of change is possible within the scope of your effort. You may also need to refine your target audiences based on what you have learned to date. In some cases, you may want to develop a continuum of support for your issue area. Related to the adjacent possible concept discussed earlier, this continuum uses Mindset research to more specifically identify the steps or phases of change you seek.

In our LGBT work, for example, the Mindset research revealed that many people within our target audiences were psychologically unable to go from outright *rejection* of LGBT people to *affirmation*. It was too big a leap. Yet if we could help them move through the interim steps of *discomfort* and *tolerance*, we could bring our target audiences along the path in the positive direction.

The Mindset phase can also help you determine how to build momentum for the change you seek. Use the insights from this phase to determine where you are now in the diffusion of innovations theory described earlier and where to focus your energy next. For example:

- Do you already have early adopters whom you need to engage and activate as message ambassadors?
- If you have already engaged the early adopters, is it time to focus on building an early majority? Who are they?

MINDSET RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

To understand the mindset of your audiences, we recommend using a range of deep listening qualitative methodologies such as:

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: Unlike group-based research in which participants can choose to disengage during challenging moments by simply being quiet while others speak, one-on-one in-depth interviews (IDIs) allow researchers to probe more deeply into an individual participant's attitudes, beliefs and feelings. IDIs are also a useful tool to conduct research among elite respondents (e.g., major donors, policy experts or organizational leaders).

With IDIs, social desirability bias — the desire of research participants to give answers that might be perceived as more socially acceptable in a group discussion — can be minimized in a conversation with a single skilled and trained interviewer. IDIs can be conducted in person, via telephone or using online video. Extensive introductory language on confidentiality, and a comfortable living room set-up for in-person IDIs, help set participants at ease. IDIs conducted in-person are often the best way to elicit in-depth information, in part because of the intimate and highly interactive environment. However, the relative costs (including travel) to conduct research with a single individual can be prohibitive.

DEEP LISTENING FOCUS GROUPS: These exploratory focus groups help reveal people's values, emotions, identities and reasoning patterns as they engage on your issue in an interactive setting. While initial message testing is sometimes warranted for these sessions, the primary goal during the Mindset phase is to elicit rich, back-and-forth discussions among participants. Participants should be encouraged to agree to disagree where appropriate, rather than feeling they need to reach any consensus. It is important to recruit a mix of respondents that differ somewhat in their attitudes about the issue at hand, but do not differ so greatly as to create an atmosphere where disagreement becomes uncomfortable. For example, if you are conducting research among a swing audience, you might exclude voters who are strongly ideological (e.g., very liberal or very conservative) or hold a rigid view about the issue being discussed (e.g., all abortions should be illegal). In addition, you may separate participants into different discussion groups by race, ethnicity or gender, as people are often more honest and open when they feel they are with people similar to themselves.

DYADS, TRIADS AND QUADS: These small group sessions help researchers understand how friends or family members talk with each other about complex issues. This type of research provides an opportunity to observe and probe people who have differing opinions and develop an understanding of influence patterns, the subtle ways in which one person is influenced to shift their attitudes by being exposed to someone else's attitudes. Unlike focus groups, where participants typically do not know each other, small groups are often conducted with pairs of people (dyads) who know each other well — such as a husband and wife, or mother and daughter — or small groups of three or four friends, relatives or coworkers (triads or quads).

An initial core respondent is first recruited and then provided with a financial incentive to refer his or her friends or acquaintances to be screened as potential participants. Each participant is screened to ensure they meet the research participation criteria before being recruited. Recruiting small qualitative groups can be a challenge, as participants have to both know one another and qualify for the session according to your recruitment criteria. It may also be necessary to recruit two sets of participants for each session to ensure that at least one complete set of participants arrives at the focus group facility as planned.

ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS: While in-person focus groups require participants to live near where the groups take place, online focus groups (also known as online bulletin boards or "qual boards") allow participants to be recruited from a larger geography and interact within a virtual environment. Online focus groups can be structured in a variety of ways. For example, they can parallel in-person focus groups and take place over a short time period (e.g., two hours). Or they can be conducted over multiple days, with participants logging in daily to answer questions and react to messages and stories. This multi-day approach enables researchers to iteratively test materials, incorporate feedback and revise approaches as they go. The online format allows for testing a variety of content, such as images, text, audio or video. The format also provides opportunities for participants to share content of their own, such as articles they have read or videos they shoot of themselves and their communities. Moderators can choose to communicate privately with participants (thereby reducing social desirability bias) or enable participants to post their comments publicly and interact more fully with one another.

ONLINE DIARIES: While focus groups and surveys allow us to capture voter sentiments at a particular moment in time, we know that in reality — especially on emotionally charged topics — people are often interacting in the debate around them in a dynamic way over a period of time. Online diaries allow participants to share their thoughts and experiences over a three- to four-week period (or even longer) as they take in different perspectives and information. Participants log in on a regular basis each week to answer questions and react to message content, which can be images, text-based, audio or video. Diary participants can share comments privately with the moderator, with the group or a hybrid approach.

Note that online multi-day focus groups or diaries require a great deal of moderator time to interact with each participant as well as moderate any group discussions. They also produce a great deal of data, so be sure to allot sufficient time and resources for full analysis.

SOCIAL INFLUENCER FOCUS GROUPS: Unlike focus groups with more general audiences, these focus groups are conducted with high-information audiences such as engaged voters or community leaders. These people read the newspaper regularly, read or write blogs or letters to the editor and are otherwise very engaged with their community — and as a result, they are often a tipping point for shaping public opinion.

Recruit a mix of respondents that allows for an open, honest discussion. If respondents are on opposite sides of a political divide, it may be important to host separate discussions rather than have them all in one discussion. Be aware that some elite participants are especially difficult to recruit and schedule, or may require a higher incentive to participate, which can increase research costs.

Mindset research provides a window into the life experiences, identities, beliefs and values of the people you are trying to reach. It reveals the most powerful points of connection: those that begin with what is fundamentally true for your audience, rather than the worldview that you — the already converted — hold.

LANGUAGE ANALYSIS AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS: Research suggests that people rarely know completely why they believe what they do, nor can they accurately self-report those beliefs thoroughly and objectively. Much of what they feel and believe may exist under the surface so they are unable to articulate it. This dynamic is especially true for emotionally complex issues. A cognitive linguistic approach helps identify underlying patterns of reasoning and reveals some of the ways in which participants' existing frames, categories, metaphors and mental rules of thumb drive how they react and reason as they do.

This language analysis approach can be applied to a variety of research methodologies, including media audits, qualitative research such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, verbatim responses to online surveys, and even question construction in telephone and online surveys. As an example, cognitively designed focus groups emphasize extensive and dynamic discussion, sometimes facilitated through group exercises such as sorting words or images. The subsequent analysis focuses intently on the words, associations and mental images that participants bring to the discussion, allowing researchers to draw empirically-based conclusions from implicit as well as explicit responses.

PERSUASION

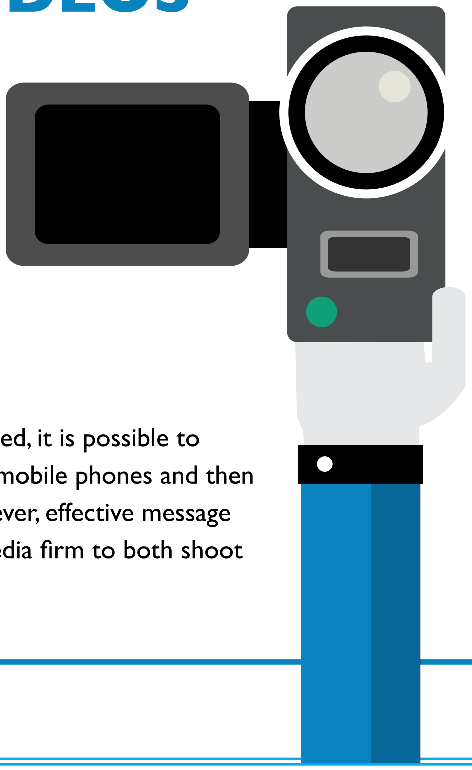
TEST PERSUASION STRATEGIES

The first three phases of the research process help you define the change you are seeking, the underlying context in which you are seeking it, and the mindset of those who must be persuaded in order to achieve success. When you're ready to test your persuasion strategies, the core research question is: *How do you effectively persuade your audiences to support the change you are seeking?* To answer this question, you'll need to consider:

- What kinds of messages and messengers will most effectively resonate and connect with your key audiences in ways that reflect their own values and lived experiences?
- How are you able to facilitate identification with your messengers?
- What conscious or unconscious associations need to be disrupted? What do they need to be replaced with?

MESSAGE-TESTING VIDEOS

Traditional qualitative and quantitative research has often relied primarily on getting participant reactions to written materials. We recommend showing participants test videos to assess messages in a way that combines content, context *and messengers* all in one platform. This research approach also reflects an increased use of video to communicate and persuade. Importantly, this message-testing medium could be used on an ongoing basis to craft and test new messages as issues evolve on the ground.



For exploratory research or if your research budget is extremely limited, it is possible to develop videos for testing by filming using personal video cameras or mobile phones and then hiring an editor to do the actual editing. In later research phases, however, effective message development and testing requires partnering with a highly qualified media firm to both shoot and edit the test videos.

- How do you develop alternative stories or narratives that still align with audience identities and values that can be an alternative to the problem story?

- For communication efforts in a contested environment, how are opposition messages and messengers triggering resistance?

RESEARCH GOALS

Effective messages must be values-based and emotionally attuned to your target audience. As we learned in *Change from the Inside Out*, by using messages that fit with your audience's existing values rather than trying to change their core values, you can draw on the emotional power that helps a person come to the change themselves.

In addition, persuasive communications are inextricably tied with the messengers delivering them. The same message from one kind of messenger will fall flat, while it can be a home run from a messenger with the right characteristics, credentials and emotional tone.

Therefore, the Persuasion phase focuses on the following research goals:

- ☑ Elevate shared values that allow you to work from within your audience's existing mindset, not against it;

- ☑ Tap into people's core psychological need to see themselves as good people who do right by others. This need can be a powerful motivator to shift attitudes and change behavior;

- ☑ Use messengers with whom your audience can identify, which can sometimes be "unexpected" (e.g., generals talking about climate change as a threat to national security);

- ☑ Understand ways in which opposition messaging can trigger negative emotional reactions, and then develop effective *emotional* rebuttals (not a tit-for-tat response);

- ☑ Ensure your communications are effective in a real-world environment by using a feedback loop of testing, measuring (e.g., via field tests) and refining; and

- ☑ Do the necessary internal work to ensure your resulting communications are adopted and implemented by allies.

PERSUASION RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Creating effective communications in the Persuasion phase relies on a variety of methodologies. A combination of some of the following qualitative and quantitative methods often leads to the best results:

MESSAGE-TESTING FOCUS GROUPS: While focus groups in the Mindset phase are often exploratory in nature and are designed to understand the emotions, values and identities of your audiences, message-testing focus groups build on pre-existing knowledge to develop, test and refine messages. They can also be used to test reactions to opposition messages and the rebuttals that would be employed in an engaged public debate.

ONLINE SURVEYS: Online surveys are also useful as a way to explore attitudes on controversial issues that might be affected by social desirability bias when a person is surveyed by a live interviewer. In addition, online surveys also provide an excellent platform for testing messages, including lengthy messages or those that combine message and messenger in an audio or video format. Online surveys allow us to gather important qualitative data through open-ended verbatim responses.

While a telephone survey relies on a list of phone numbers, an online survey is typically conducted with a vendor that invites survey respondents from a panel (an online list) they maintain. While high quality panels typically comprise a diverse cross-section of people, online panels do tend to be somewhat younger, more urban and more educated, and tend to have higher incomes, than the American public as a whole. These systematic biases reflect the differences in who is online versus those who are not. These online surveys offer the advantage of being less expensive than telephone surveys, given equal sample sizes and lengths. There are vendors who work to develop and maintain panels that are representative of the U.S. population by recruiting via telephone and mail as well as online, and providing online access for homes without existing Internet service. However, the expense of building these panels and the limited number of respondents on these panels can make them of limited use in practice, particularly for state-specific research.

TELEPHONE SURVEYS: Despite the rise of online surveys, telephone surveys remain one of the best data collection methods available because they reach a representative sample of people within a given geography. Telephone surveys are especially critical for election-related research, such as for ballot initiatives, because they target respondents using voter lists that include history of voting in past elections and other information that improves the validity of the results.

Due to the high number of cell phone-only households, quality phone surveys must employ sampling that includes both landline and cell phone numbers. Without a cell phone portion of the sample, a significant portion of the population will not be represented in the survey. Other non-response issues such as caller ID and unlisted numbers also pose obstacles. As such, it is important that the survey vendor use strict quota and callback procedures, provide adequate field time for interviewing and use experienced interviewers who can keep people on the phone. At times, automated interviewing techniques, including Interactive Voice Response (IVR) surveys that incorporate cell phones into their sample, may be an appropriate option. IVR surveys can lower cost or in some instances reduce social desirability bias by eliminating a live interviewer. However, qualified, live interviewers remain the gold standard of telephone surveys.

A larger discussion about the comparative advantages and disadvantages of telephone surveys versus online surveys can be found later in this Toolbox.

BENCHMARK TELEPHONE SURVEYS: A benchmark survey is typically a 15- to 25-minute telephone survey that enables you to accurately identify key target audiences, confirm the strongest messages for those targets and track changes from the time of the benchmark survey through the end of the campaign. It is often conducted after qualitative research to integrate and expand upon those findings and quantify the initial research findings. The benchmark survey measures attitudes, tests a range of messages on both sides of the issue and analyzes which messages are strongest both overall and among certain subgroups of the population.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN: Building experimental testing into persuasion and mobilization programs can help identify the most effective message and develop a model of the most persuadable targets. Experimental design uses randomized, controlled experiments to assess the impact of an activity or message on a desired behavior. In many situations, the method is simple. One segment of the targeted population receives the contact program, and the other segment does not. Following the contact, the intended result of the program (registration, turnout, vote choice, activism, etc.) is measured for both groups and compared. If the group that received the contact program performed at a statistically higher rate than the group that did not, then the difference can be attributed to the contact program. With that information, the cost to produce the desired effect can be calculated and used to inform future campaign spending decisions. One excellent partner for designing, conducting and analyzing the outcomes of experiments that incorporate research and communications is the Analyst Institute. https://analystinstitute.org/

IMPLICIT BIAS ONLINE SURVEY: Modern research in psychology and neuroscience has shown that unconscious associations, attitudes and emotional reactions underlie much of human behavior. The innovative implicit emotions test pioneered by Drew Westen and Joel Weinberger can identify which messages are most effective at both the conscious and unconscious levels. This test can measure gut-level emotional responses to messages, messengers and other forms of communication even when people are not aware of their own feelings.

MESSAGE REFINEMENT SURVEYS (Online or Telephone): Messages are often delivered in a contested environment where opposing views are also presented. Message refinement surveys test messages in the back-and-forth environment in which your audiences hear and experience the topic under debate. These shorter surveys are employed to refine messages and test rebuttals in response to the attacks that your opponents are using at that time. While your underlying message framework typically remains stable throughout a contested public education campaign, specific messages may need to be updated regularly to reflect the real-world environment you are facing.

MODELING: Statistical modeling can be valuable if you are working to develop a clear understanding of your audiences. Modeling is used to extrapolate results from survey respondents to the remaining members of a target population, such as a statewide electorate or union membership. The survey results are used to segment survey respondents into distinct groups (e.g., strong supporters, soft supporters, persuadable, soft opponents and strong opponents). Researchers then use demographic, political and sometimes consumer variables that are available for all members of the target population to characterize the people in each group. Using advanced statistics, researchers develop a predictive model to assign non-surveyed members of the population into the same categories, thereby allowing non-surveyed audience members to be targeted with the proper communications.

TRACKING TELEPHONE SURVEYS: These short tracking surveys, conducted in a contested public campaign environment, allow you to measure the impact of the communications tug of war between you and your opponents. They also allow you to test ways to navigate around any late-breaking news or policy issues. In some cases, you would conduct daily tracking surveys, also called a rolling track. Rolling tracks are brief telephone surveys where each night you call a small but complete sample of respondents, typically 150 or 200. You add up the survey results from three, four or five nights of interviewing to get a valid statewide or national sample. Once you hit your minimum number of interviews (typically after three or four nights), then each night you add the newest night's data and drop out the oldest night's data. This approach enables you to capture recent trend lines day-to-day with statistical accuracy and reliability.

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Qualitative research enables us to understand the why and how behind people's beliefs, attitudes and emotional reactions. Quantitative research enables us to measure how many people feel or believe certain things, and what kinds of people (defined demographically, behaviorally or attitudinally, e.g. men compared to women, liberals compared to conservatives, vegetarians compared to meat eaters) are more likely to feel one way compared to another.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CHARACTERISTICS

Qualitative research, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, is frequently conducted before a survey to help ensure survey questions are well constructed and measuring the attitudes and beliefs they are intended to measure. Qualitative research also helps to put survey results into a broader attitudinal context that provides more insight and meaning for survey results. However, qualitative research can also be used after a survey to help interpret survey results that might be surprising or counterintuitive. The structure of qualitative research varies, but it typically begin with broad discussions about underlying values and attitudes before narrowing to a discussion about your specific issue, communications agenda or messaging.

An Iterative Process

It is often valuable to conduct multiple rounds of qualitative research. The initial round is exploratory and provides opportunities for wide-ranging and open discussions among participants to help us better understand how people feel about key issues or how they are experiencing them in their everyday lives. While exploratory qualitative research can also provide an opportunity to test initial messaging or policy approaches, these initial message materials are crafted without the benefit of insights from prior research. As such, after conducting the initial exploratory research, you would strengthen and refine what seem to be the strongest approaches for impacting people's views or their support for specific policy positions. You then test these refined and strengthened communications in a subsequent phase of message refinement qualitative research before testing them quantitatively. Qualitative research also provides a crucial platform for exploring initial values-based frames, stories, messages and messengers to help build and solidify support.

Qualitative research can be conducted either online, via telephone or in-person. Researchers often separate in-person qualitative sessions by gender. Men and women often have very different priorities, views and emotions when it comes to discussing politically-charged or socially-sensitive issues, and it can be hard to elicit frank and honest responses in a room with men and women together.

Similarly, it is generally advisable to use an ethnically-matched moderator (e.g., a Latino moderator for Latino audiences), both to identify important cultural cues and to create an environment in which participants feel more comfortable sharing genuine responses. As researchers, we recommend incorporating a range of racial and ethnic groups into research from the start. Sometimes (often for budget reasons), research plans rely too heavily on white participants as a proxy for the U.S. general population. They then add in just a few focus groups among other populations later in the research process. Yet the U.S. is increasingly diverse, and understanding how different populations feel about your issue from the very beginning of your research can be key to your long-term success at generating attitude change.

Qualitative Research Costs

Costs for qualitative research vary widely, depending on the audience you are researching, among other factors. In-person general population focus groups, which have between eight and ten participants carefully screened to meet your recruitment criteria and are conducted by a professional skilled moderator, might cost between $7,500-$10,000, with typically a minimum of two conducted back-to-back at the same location. Online focus group costs vary more, depending on the research population, the number of participants and how many hours, days, weeks or even months you conduct the research.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH CHARACTERISTICS

The value of quantitative research is that it integrates and expands upon qualitative findings, while offering opportunities to further develop and test which messages and messengers are best suited to build support. The larger sample sizes in surveys also allow you to generalize research findings to a larger population, providing you with much more confidence in your results. Furthermore, a survey's larger sample size allows you to examine results among key subgroups—such as by gender, age or ethnicity—in ways that are far more precise and statistically valid than is possible with qualitative research.

Telephone Surveys

One of the most frequent questions clients ask is whether to conduct a survey by telephone or online. Despite the rise of online surveys, telephone surveys remain one of the best data collection methods available primarily because they offer the best opportunity to reach a representative sample of people within a given geography. Telephone surveys are especially critical for election-related surveys such as ballot initiatives, because they reach respondents using voter lists that include history of voting in past elections and other important information that improve the validity of the results.

In all telephone surveys, it is vital that the sample include both landline and cell phone numbers. Since 2003, when cell-only households were just three percent of American households, the proportion of Americans reachable only on wireless phones has increased at a rapid rate. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which regularly surveys Americans in-person at their homes on a range of health and prevention issues, estimates that approximately half of American homes are now wireless-only, with another significant portion being wireless-mostly (defined as having a landline yet receiving all or almost all of their calls on a cell phone). To be accurate, a telephone survey's sampling methodology must therefore include cell phones to ensure a significant portion of adults are not missing from the survey.

Large sample telephone surveys also allow you to accurately identify which segments of the initial target audience are your base, your soft support and your persuadable audience, and which segments are part of your opponent's soft support or their base.

Online Surveys

Online surveys can be extremely useful for communications efforts, especially as a way to explore attitudes on controversial issues that might be affected by social desirability bias when a person is being surveyed by a live interviewer. Now that these surveys are being designed to be taken on mobile devices, online surveys also fit people's increasingly digital lifestyles. Another major benefit, taking into account equal sample sizes and lengths, is that online surveys are typically less expensive than telephone surveys.

With online surveys, respondents are able to interact with messages in a variety of formats and at their own pace, rather than having messages read to them by an interviewer on the phone. For example, respondents can read an entire message (which can include images), and then use a highlighter or markup tool to indicate what parts of the message they find most and least compelling. Certain online tools also allow respondents to explain why they feel that particular message component was compelling (or not).

Online surveys also provide an excellent platform for testing messages—including lengthy messages or those that combine message and messenger in an audio or video format. One powerful online tool is a dial test of a message delivered via audio or video. For a dial test, respondents listen to an audio recording, or view a video, and they use their mouse (or finger) to continuously move a slider to indicate their reaction to each specific moment of the message. This second-by-second measure produces a line graph depicting the overall trajectory of the message (i.e., whether reactions rise or fall over the course of the entire message), as well as which parts of the message evoke positive reactions (i.e., peaks) or trigger negative reactions (valleys).

After respondents dial their reactions to a message, we can ask follow-up questions about their effectiveness and authenticity, including gathering open-ended answers to clarify their responses. The ability to gather open-ended verbatim responses throughout the online survey also provides us with important qualitative data, which enables us to strengthen our messages even more, through detailed input about each message's strengths and weaknesses.

The potential downside of online surveys is that for the most part, they are not (yet) statistically representative of a larger population because respondents have a lesser probability of being selected for an online survey than for a telephone survey. In an online survey, potential survey respondents are invited to participate from a panel of respondents maintained by an online survey vendor. While these panels are typically comprised of a diverse cross-section of respondents, these respondents differ from those in a telephone survey in a number of ways. First, online respondents join a sample in large part because they are incentivized to participate. For example, potential panel members might receive an invitation to join an online panel from their favorite airline in exchange for frequent flier points. In addition, online respondents earn a nominal financial incentive for each survey they complete.

Second, in the United States today, there remain significant demographic differences between those who have online access and those who do not, and those who use the Internet rarely and those who use it frequently. For example, regular Internet users tend to be somewhat younger, be more urban and have higher incomes and more education than people without Internet access (especially broadband). Nevertheless, Internet access is increasing rapidly even among lower-income, older, rural, less-educated and other populations that have been under-represented online (especially with the ubiquity of smart phones). These changes are allowing online survey vendors to build online panels that are increasingly diverse for research purposes. Quality online survey companies employ strict quotas and sample controls to ensure that the survey sample closely resembles the overall target population in terms of key demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, region and educational attainment (based on U.S. Census data). In addition, with quality online survey vendors, data from respondents who complete the survey too quickly, or who provide overly consistent responses, are discarded to ensure only valid responses are included.

It is worth noting that the comparative representativeness of online surveys versus telephone surveys is a hotly contested debate in the opinion research world. However, in summary, telephone and online surveys each have their strengths and weaknesses, and either may be an appropriate research methodology depending on the research and communications objectives involved.

Survey Costs

When it comes to survey costs, the three greatest determinants are the number of interviews (the sample size), the length of the interviews and the incidence rate of your survey population within the larger population. For example, a survey of parents of school-age children (about one in four Americans) will be more costly than a survey of adults generally, since in order to survey parents, you must first ask people if they are a parent or not, and then terminate the interview with people who are not — which adds significant time and therefore cost to a survey. Baseline telephone or online surveys, which are meant to measure attitudes about issues before persuasion efforts begin, are typically short in length (e.g., seven to 15 minutes). In contrast, messaging surveys, which gauge message efficacy, can be significantly longer (especially if conducted online). In addition, the required sample size can vary significantly depending on the geography and level of granularity needed for key subgroup analysis. Surveys of cities or counties typically include 400 to 500 interviews, statewide surveys 600 to 800 interviews and national surveys 800 to 1,200. When it comes to subgroup analysis (based on characteristics like race, political identity, profession, etc.), there must be enough respondents in that group to infer findings that are statistically valid. As such, it may be necessary to oversample demographic subgroups that are strategically important for your effort by conducting additional interviews within that subgroup.

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