



## TECHNICAL BRIEF

### THE MANOFF GROUP

## Program Research

### Pioneering qualitative methods to improve health outcomes

The Manoff Group, Inc. is known for its innovative approach to consultative research. We use ground-breaking methods as well as modify conventional techniques for program development and monitoring. Our research is targeted and program-oriented, resulting in the design of activities and operational features critical to program success.

#### Overview

The Manoff Group uses a variety of research techniques through all stages of the program: from formative research, to strategy design, to materials design and pretesting, to routine and special monitoring activities during program implementation.

Over our 40-year history, our specialty has been qualitative research to uncover motivations and behaviors and to understand their causes and contexts— information that may not be revealed by surveys or other methods. We are known for formative research, a key element of which is the testing of potential interventions to ensure that they are feasible for people *before* they are incorporated into programs.

#### **Trials of Improved Practices (TIPs) is a highly effective research method developed by The Manoff Group.**

We pioneered the successful qualitative method called Trials of Improved Practices (TIPs), which has been replicated by programs around the world. TIPs is one of many methods at our disposal. The research design and the choice of methods depend on the program context, type of information needed, the skill levels of in-country researchers, and the time and budget available.

The Manoff Group normally assists with the research design and final analysis, but identifies

and trains local individuals and firms to manage and carry out the research.

#### **Research Methods: A Sampling**

- TIPs
- Projective techniques (e.g., story completions, card sorts)
- In-depth individual interviews, including “best-friend” interviews for shy respondents (e.g. children)
- Focus Group Discussions
- Diagnostic role play
- Participatory Rapid Appraisal

#### **Formative Research**

Our formative research assumes that all elements of a program can benefit from the input of implementers and potential beneficiaries. We strive to elicit and include the voices of key program participants in program design.

What distinguishes The Manoff Group’s approach to formative research from others is:

- 1) It begins with a sound understanding of the epidemiology or demography of a given situation, and then focuses on how to achieve behaviors that have been defined as the most efficacious.
- 2) After an initial focus on understanding current perceptions and practices, along with their context, we move to a joint exploration (researchers together with participants) in real-life conditions of the acceptability and feasibility of new, improved practices.

- 3) Our designs do not rely on one standard approach—methods and techniques are selected depending on the situation.
- 4) We often incorporate new techniques from social science and market research in an effort to raise new questions and explore unanticipated themes.

Investments in quality formative research pay off by creating demand for products, services, and practices and by avoiding program actions or communications that do not meet peoples' needs. By providing a process that focuses information gathering and organizes and analyses consumer views, we have helped programs to:

- Increase the acceptance of services by non-users (e.g., family planning);
- Diversify distribution channels (e.g. using community midwives to offer iron supplements);
- Identify the most feasible specific action to improve child feeding in the local context.

We often use a combination of three approaches within one of our formative research plans: Exploratory research, Trials of Improved Practices, and Checking research.

**Exploratory research** uncovers potentially feasible and efficacious behavior changes by discussing with people what they are doing currently and why, revealing their preferences, perceptions, and resources. We start with open-ended techniques in order to learn key contextual information, which would be missed if asked specific questions that we, but perhaps not the respondents, consider important. Methods used in this phase include ethnographic style interviews, participant observation, and FGDs using various projective techniques.

**Trials of Improved Practices (TIPs)** is a participatory action research method pioneered by The Manoff Group to learn more about the feasibility of changing behaviors locally. TIPs is built around the thorough participation of potential program participants in formulating and testing proposed interventions. Using TIPs, the actual practices that a program may

promote are pretested and refined with participants often suggesting new solutions. TIPs focuses on behavior—what people do—rather than knowledge, or what people know or believe.

---

### **TIPs focuses on behavior—what people do—rather than knowledge.**

---

In essence, the procedure consists of a series of visits in which the interviewer and the participant analyze current practices, discuss what could be improved, and together reach an agreement on one or a few solutions to try over a trial period. At the end of the trial period, they assess the trial experience together. The results are moved directly into program design.

Trials are the best way to gauge the acceptability of new practices and learn how to promote and support them. Using TIPs gives program planners an in-depth understanding of the preferences and capabilities of program participants as well as the obstacles they face in improving their health and their motivations for trying new practices. The Manoff Group has also used TIPs to test potential behavioral interventions with health care providers to insure that guidelines, policies, and training include quality practices that are also feasible.

**Checking research** is employed when new or modified behaviors have proven successful either during TIPs or in a program setting, perhaps in one area or in a small pilot, and a program wants to quickly learn if it might expect the same success in another part of the country or in a wider area.

### **Participatory Monitoring**

Once the formative research has helped determine the nature of the proposed new practices and program activities are underway, research combining both qualitative and quantitative methods is used to assess, refine, and improve program implementation. In particular, we assist with participatory monitoring studies that include community members and health workers in assessing progress on specific behavior change activities.

The Manoff Group, Inc. creates and applies innovative strategies to improve behaviors that enhance and save lives. We were pioneers in integrating behavior change into programs, and a leader in action research, strategic communications, skills-based training, and capacity building. For 40 years, our work with individuals, families, communities, and partner institutions has achieved lasting change.

4301 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 454, Washington, DC 20008  
+202.364.9680

[www.manoffgroup.com](http://www.manoffgroup.com)

