Five Questions for Retail Campaign Superheroes

by Diana Cassady

Last summer was a busy period for everyone involved in the Retail Campaign data collection activities. Here we feature some words of wisdom from a Point of Contact (POC) that may hold lessons for the upcoming statewide public intercept surveys – and we reveal a favorite superpower. Read on.…

Jennifer Lifshay, Contra Costa Health Services

Had you used smart phones or mobile devices in data collection before? If not, what was different about it compared to using paper forms?

No. I think the key thing was the need to make sure people understood how to use the survey tool as well as the devices. Some of our data collectors were youth, so they were very familiar with the device. For them it was making sure they understood the survey protocol. For some of the adults, making sure they were comfortable with the device was crucial.

I guess another important difference was that data collectors had to know how to communicate any changes that needed to be made to their data after the fact, since they couldn't go back to a question and change the answer after they had completed the survey. Getting people to use the field notes was important for this purpose and not something we've needed to do much of when using paper surveys where it is easier to make changes if an error is discovered after the survey is completed.

If you could share one tip about how to train data collectors, what would that be?

PLAN for the training and know the content as well as you can. Do field work yourself beforehand so you can speak from experience and have a sense of what some of the issues are in the field.

We had wanted to do the quiz, mock store and store visits for our training but were only able to do the first two. I think these were very helpful for people to help them get a sense of what they might face in the field. The debrief for these is key – to surface questions, misunderstandings, etc., and clarify as many of those as possible before teams enter the field.

Photo: Katrina Wyatt

Now that you are finished collecting data from 321 stores (wow!), what did you learn from the process?

Involving the community does not necessarily take less time to do the job, but it is a great way to build collaborations. Many who participated as data collectors stated that they really enjoyed the experience. A few of the groups involved in the data collection subsequently participated in our CX process and are getting involved in some of our tobacco prevention advocacy efforts this year.

We had several data collection teams and multiple members of each team from different agencies so there were many logistics to manage. Our own staff (Jaime and Denice) did a tremendous job managing all of those logistics and keeping in close contact with the data collectors and myself to try to identify and rectify any issues as soon as they arose.

How do you plan to use the data you collected?

We hope to get a lot of use out of this data – in the CX process, for program planning and for upcoming tobacco prevention policy advocacy efforts. We actually collected data from an extra zip code that wasn't included in the sample developed by the State so that we could have additional information about more of the communities where we may want to do policy work in the future.

You really are a Retail Campaign superhero. What is your favorite superpower?

It would be great to have the power of telepathy. In order to develop useful evaluation plans and amend those plans during implementation to best meet the needs of the project, it's important to understand the needs and interests of the key stakeholders of the evaluation.

Photos: Shutterstock

A great deal of my job is communicating with others – such as program staff, data collectors, funders – to surface and address these issues. I do my best to ask useful questions, listen, observe and articulate my understanding of where we're at and where we should go with these plans. And every once in a while, especially when I'm collaborating with folks I've been working with for a long time, I feel like I am able to channel some telepathy to help with this process. BUT it would be great to have that power at my disposal whenever and wherever I wanted to access it!