

Stage 3

Researching content and format

This stage considers...

1. Types of content
2. Researching content:
 - (i) Assess existing material
 - (ii) Identify appropriate sources of new information
 - (iii) Collect necessary background information
3. Researching format (types of resources)

Aim

The aim of this stage is to ensure that the resource content is appropriate to the local context, is of high quality and is informed by information from appropriate sources. This stage also ensures that the resource is produced in a format (or formats) relevant to the target audience, to meet overall aims and paying attention to the specifics of the local context.

Factors including the amount of detail that is needed, and characteristics of the intended target audience, will inform what format you choose. It is important to clarify what type of content and what level of detail is required, before thinking about what format/s may be appropriate for the purposes of this project.

Key questions to consider at this stage include:

- ❓ Who needs to communicate with whom?
- ❓ How do they communicate at present?
- ❓ What can be learned from this? How effective is it? Why or why not?
- ❓ What appears to be the best way for these parties to communicate?

Answers to these questions should inform both the content and format of any resource you produce.

1. Types of content

Now that you have established that there is a need for a communication resource, who will be using it and what sort of material it will include (see Quest stage 1 – Assessing Needs and Quest stage 2 – Planning), it is time to research the content. The content should take into account the audience's knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about the issue (see How Tos section V on research methods). It is important to remember that the content of any material includes not just text, but also visual images like photographs, drawings and graphs. For example, content could mean the text of a booklet, or the words and images on a poster.

Different *sources* of information provide different *kinds* of information. For example, you are more likely to find life stories or human-interest stories from community members or the mass media than in textbooks or journal articles. You are likely to find up-to-date disease-specific information from recent journals. The Internet can be useful to find illustrations and access free sources of information. Remember to check the accuracy and reliability of sources of any information used, in particular those on the Internet (see **How To III(b)**).

What sort of content do you need for the resource? What types of content will meet the objectives of the project and be suitable for the intended audience? You usually need more than one type of content for a resource, for example factual information, case studies and illustrations.

Consider whether you need:

- Factual information
- Case studies or examples to illustrate points
- Life stories and other human-interest stories
- Information on local beliefs and practices
- Photographs
- Drawings
- Graphs or statistics
- Anything else?

Methods useful to researching content are included in many of the How Tos. See below for those that are relevant.

2. Researching content

By working through Quest to this point you have already formed a good idea about the information appropriate to include in the communication material. Researching content involves considering the following questions:

- ❓ What information do you need?
- ❓ What is already available?
- ❓ What do you need to find (that does not already exist)?

This involves the following three key stages, which are outlined below:

- (i) Assessing existing materials
- (ii) Identifying appropriate sources of new information
- (iii) Collecting background information

(i) Assess existing resources

It is important to learn from strengths and mistakes in resource development from the past. Analysis of why certain communication or information resources have been effective or ineffective will reveal important information that should actively inform the planning of a new resource. In this instance we are interested in lessons learned about the content of the resource, which will be affected by the process of its development. That is, by who was involved, at what stages, how and why.

See **Assessing existing materials** in Quest Stage 1 – Needs Assessment.

The questions below will guide your analysis of existing resources, to inform the development of a new resource. Keep focused on what you can learn from existing resources for the resource you are currently developing. Remember that first impressions are important as they will influence whether or not people use the resource any further.

► **Key questions**

1. What are your first impressions of the resource?
2. What is the purpose of the resource?
3. Is it clear who the material is for?
4. Who is using it? How? Is there any feedback available from users?
5. Is it being used as intended? How do you know?
6. Why was the resource produced? What problem is it trying to solve? Is the information presented clearly? Do you think the message is clear to the intended audience? Why/why not?
7. Is it user-friendly? Is the content pitched at the right level for the audience? Is the content of high quality?
8. Will the content help intended users to take action?
9. Is the information well structured, well presented and easy to find? Is the text easy to read and follow?
10. Is it visually attractive? Are the illustrations appropriate?
11. When was the resource produced? Is it still relevant? Does it need updating?
12. Is it appropriate for use in the local context?

✓ **Evaluation point**

What have you learned through analysing existing resources? What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the resources reviewed? Who was involved in developing them? On what basis have you made judgements about their quality? How did you find existing resources? Has this brought you into contact with new stakeholders? Did you get the perspective of intended users?

(ii) Identify new sources of information (where necessary)

By this stage you should be clear about whether you already have enough of the right *kinds of information* to proceed with developing the resource, or whether you are missing any particular information. If all your information has come from professionals or from printed material, consider whether you need more information from and about the intended target audience to be able to better target the resource.

Remember that much valuable knowledge is not written down or published. Recognised community leaders, community members and people working with local communities are often rich sources of relevant local knowledge and practice.

See Quest How Tos section V on Research Methods, including Interviews (B) and Focus Group Discussions (C), for ways of collecting new and different kinds of information that you might need.

(iii) Collect necessary background information

If you have identified a need for certain background information to inform the development of a new resource, you have to consider where best to access that particular information. It is important to use information from reliable sources to ensure that the resource is factually accurate and up to date. Most people draw background information from several different sources.

Think about the following questions:

► Key questions

1. What particular subject/s do you need information about?
2. What information do you already have? Where has this come from?
3. How do you know you can trust the information you already have?
4. Do you need any additional information? Why?
5. Are there any other organisations working on similar issues that could help?
6. How can you access local socio-cultural knowledge, attitudes and practice relating to the issue?
7. How can you find out about locally produced material that may be available?
8. Can you access textbooks, journal articles, leaflets and health promotion materials that might provide ideas on content and/or design?
9. Do you need to obtain information from academic, medical or other professional institutions?
10. Are there resource centres that might be able to provide information?

continued on page 28

11. Is it necessary and appropriate to search local, national or international databases?
12. Are there any local experts – practitioners, traditional healers or others respected by the community – whom you should consult?
13. Are there any organisations that specialise in the knowledge you require?
14. Are there experts willing to advise on the factual content of the resource?
15. Are there experts willing to advise on the format and design of the resource?

✓ Evaluation point

From the above questions, you should be able to identify where and how to access necessary background information. What different sources have you drawn on for this? How have local people been involved in the process? Have you consulted different sources of information, for example local respected persons like traditional healers and traditional birth attendants, where appropriate? Has this process started to build alliances? What is the significance of this to the project? What have you learned about biases and gaps in information that is typically used?

✓ Check point

You should now be clear about the type of content appropriate to the resource, which should reflect the needs identified earlier and the local socio-cultural context. You may need to revisit your plan of action to take into account this stage of Quest.

See the How Tos section V on research methods for tools to gather knowledge through basic research.



Stage 3: Useful How Tos

- ▶ Find out what is already known about the subject – I(a)
- ▶ Adapt health information and communication resources – I(b)

Section III on tools:

- ▶ Use the Internet – III(a)
- ▶ Assess the reliability of Internet resources – III(b)
- ▶ Identify and select appropriate pictures – III(c)

Section V on research methods:

- ▶ Conduct interviews – V(b)
- ▶ Conduct a Focus Group Discussion – V(c)
- ▶ Observe and listen – V(e)