Addendum

Considerations for Conducting Rapid Community Assessment in Adolescent Populations and Digital Contexts

October 2023

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Purpose

This document outlines considerations and guidelines for working with adolescent populations (12–17 years old) and gathering information from digital communication platforms as part of a Rapid Community Assessment (RCA). A full RCA guide with detailed steps and adaptable tools is available on the [CDC website](), including details on how to conduct social listening on various platforms.

RCA Step 1: Identify Objectives & Communities of Focus

Identify Your Objective(s)

Examples of objectives for engaging in an adolescent RCA may include:

- Identifying and understanding barriers, facilitators, and recommended strategies for adolescent vaccination by engaging teens and their families as well as the organizations and systems that serve them.

- Understanding the spread of misinformation among teens online and developing strategies to disseminate accurate information over social networking platforms like Instagram, content aggregators like YouTube, and private message applications like WhatsApp.

- Enabling adolescents to learn about participatory research and have a voice in developing messaging for adolescents.

Identify Your Community(ies) of Focus

When identifying community(ies) of focus for an adolescent RCA, consider intersectional elements such as gender, race and ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status.

During a pandemic, adolescents may not gather in physical spaces, which may make data collection with them more challenging. Given how much time adolescents spend online, it can be very important to observe and analyze digital spaces and interactions.

When collecting data online, you should first clarify the community type of interest and platforms of focus. Community types include user, demographic, identity-based, and behavioral. For example:

- **User:** Instagram users trying to seek vaccination information on the platform

- **Demographic:** Spanish speakers seeking vaccination information on YouTube

- **Identity:** Self-Identified healthcare workers on TikTok

- **Behavioral:** Those debunking anti-vaccine messages on the streaming platform Twitch

Keep in mind that:

- Adolescents can join most non-child platforms at 13 years old; however, certain types of content are restricted for users below the age of 16 years old.

- Those who "self-identify" as part of a community may be engaging in role playing, fraud, and other strategic identity misrepresentation.

- Users of platform tools may be older or younger than their listed or claimed age.

- Online socializing is not age-segregated and therefore is difficult to track.

- Platform tools (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, Instagram) will not separate users by age for researchers.

Review Existing Data

In preparation for the RCA, you can review existing data such as:

- Reports on youth platform use, trends, and uptake from organizations such as Global Web Index, App Annie, and Pew Internet.

- Information on youth consumption and communication preferences from sites such as YouGov.

- Any locally available data on youth platforms or media use.

Human Subjects Considerations

If your organization or agency has Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, submit your RCA plan for research determination. Whether it is determined to be research or not, rights of participants should be respected and prioritized. The following Human Subjects Protections are recommended when working with adolescents:

1. All adolescents are minors. Informed consent procedures for minors vary by state. Consult IRB and/or federal and state guidelines when working with children (defined as persons who have not reached legal age for consent to treatments or procedures involved in the research, under the applicable law of the jurisdiction in which research will be conducted).

2. All adolescents are considered a vulnerable population and are at higher risk than adults for emotional trauma when participating in a project. **Note:** Training in Mental Health First Aid may be required for the RCA team.

3. Subject confidentiality procedures and data protection requirements for adolescents are the same as adults. **Note:** Even when an adolescent appears to pose as a public figure (e.g., as an influencer or appears in a public forum), protect the confidentiality of online posters via de-identification processes. This will protect the adolescent from becoming tied publicly as an adult to sentiments once expressed as a vulnerable minor.

RCA Step 2: Plan for the Assessment

Identify Community Partners

Community partners who work with and serve adolescents include:

- Pediatricians/family practitioners

- Public health programs

- Community and faith-based organizations serving adolescents

- After-school programs

- Sports leagues

- School staff

- Youth groups

- State regulatory bodies connected to child protection

- Corporate representatives from social media platforms

- Social media platform representatives from divisions designed to address young people

Obtain Support

In addition to sending out Letters of Invitation to engage partners, consider contacting key users on platforms such as hosts, moderators, or frequent posters in online communities of interest to inform them about the project and request their support.

Identify Resources

Collecting data from digital platforms involves viewing and analyzing posts made on a social platform. You will need to have access to these platforms and capacity to utilize them. While Facebook and Twitter provide analytics, popular adolescent platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitch do not.

Choose Assessment Methods

In choosing assessment methods, think through available budget, time, staff, existing tools, timelines, and partnerships. For digital assessment:

- Consider collecting data using platform-specific tools (e.g., develop quiz about vaccine attitudes and post to Instagram stories—via Instagram Quiz Sticker Tool—with different types of influencers).

- Consider partnering with channel and community creators/owners/moderators to access "power features" such as analytics data on user traffic and engagement. When attempting to partner with online channel and community creators/owners/moderators who are minors, secure informed consent.

Form the Assessment Team

Ideally, your assessment team should include members with experience in youth engagement, youth-related research, and social listening. When possible, you are encouraged to include adolescents as part of the team. You can partner with youth groups, youth ambassador programs, youth-serving organizations, and schools to recruit and train adolescents to be co-investigators.

Recruit Participants

Recruit participants where subjects live, work, play, learn, and socialize. For reaching adolescents online consider:

- Posting calls for participants in online communities devoted to particular geographies (e.g., city thread on Reddit), particular behaviors employed by desired demographic (e.g., skateboarding, basketball), or particular experiences common to desired demographic (e.g., driver's education, groups online, summer camps).

- Using platform-specific message formats (e.g., call sent via Instagram posts or a TikTok video), platform-specific messengers (e.g., request directly by an influencer, broadcaster, or well-known poster in a group), and platform-specific incentives (e.g., a special offer via Snapchat filter, special Facebook profile frame, and exclusive in-game badge for participating in the study).

RCA Step 3: Collect and Analyze Data

Data Collection Tools

Use tools such community interviews, listening sessions, observations, surveys, and social listening.

- Be aware of potential power dynamics at play during tool use (e.g., tendencies to defer to, please, or alter responses in the presence of adults such as parents, teachers, fieldworkers).

- Consider using digital platforms to deploy traditional methods (e.g., community interviews via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, group listening sessions hosted on popular chat server named "Discord," and surveys offered on a phone app).

- Consider using digital artifacts in traditional methods (e.g., using a popular meme to generate a discussion, interviewing a community member about if they would post a vaccine selfie, asking focus group to share top song on phone playlist as an icebreaker among strangers).

- Conduct digital ethnography (e.g., examine behavior of specific communities online), over-the-shoulder observations (e.g., talking with subjects as they navigate features or communities online), network analysis (e.g., advanced treatment of social listening material), social media monitoring (e.g., planned online responses and interventions to the needs gauged through social listening via "Chatbot"), and platform walkthroughs to access a group of users' impressions of a new website or app.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the data you have collected, disaggregate by population subgroups of interest. Consider disaggregating users by:

- Platform (e.g., Twitter users and Facebook users)

- Channel (e.g., respondents on Facebook communities A and B, respondents on Reddit threads X and Y, responses on the posts of Instagram influencers B and C)

- Networked locales (e.g., users influenced in group chats on WhatsApp by family elders or fellow adolescent peers living in cities A and B in counties C and D)

RCA Step 4: Report Findings and Identifying Solutions

Report Findings

In addition to narrative reports and presentation, consider report formats and platforms popular with adolescents such as livestreaming a presentation on a gaming platform, video presentations for YouTube stations, and brief informational segments for Instagram or TikTok.

Identify Solutions

When identifying solutions to implement, examine their feasibility as well as review proposed solutions that involve regulatory bodies or agencies connected to child welfare protection and digital platforms.

RCA Step 5: Evaluation Your Efforts

After you have concluded your RCA, revisit your objectives to determine if you have enough information about your adolescent and digital communities of focus to make actionable recommendations to increase confidence in and uptake of vaccines.