



## LEAD 1-E-1 Consumer Testing Report

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### Background:

The LEAD project is a partnership between the African American Family and Cultural Center (AAFCC) in Oroville and the California Health Collaborative. The project developed five key messages to introduce community members to topics such as the tobacco industry's targeting of certain groups and the resulting impact of tobacco use amongst minorities. Each message was designed to be used as a conversation starter with community leaders and community members across the North State region.

- Message 1: A just society ensures that no person, regardless of race, income or age is exposed again and again to experiences that we know are harmful.
- Message 2: The environment that people grow, live, and work in impacts their health. Many people have unequal access to the things they need to make healthy choices.
- Message 3: Community leaders have a responsibility to protect minorities, youth, and low-income people against the tobacco industry that deliberately targets them with advertisements and promotions.
- Message 4: Tobacco use disproportionately affects the health of African Americans, who have a long history of being targeted by the tobacco industry.
- Message 5: The health of youth and young adults is impacted by tobacco advertising. Because young brains are developing, children and adolescents should not be exposed to harmful tobacco advertisements.

From consumer testing, the LEAD project was interested to know participants' initial reactions to the message, in what ways the message resonated, if there were any words or terms that should be clarified or edited, and any actions that participants felt should be taken in response to the message.

The five messages were consumer tested with 7 participants from Butte County. This report details the results of consumer testing with the following sections: a) key findings, b) initial recommendations, c) suggested strategy considerations, and d) detailed findings. The key findings section describes the overall success of key messages with participants. The

detailed findings elaborate on the feedback provided by participants and explore the reasons/values behind participants' responses so that LEAD can anticipate what other supporting information may be helpful to have during these conversations.

### Consumer Testing Respondents:

One consumer testing focus group was held in May with two participants. To recruit more consumer testing participants, individual interviews were held with five participants in June and early July. Both the focus group and interviews used the same interview protocol and were conducted by a facilitator who was not part of the message development team. Each session with participants was video and audio recorded.

Participants' knowledge about tobacco control issues varied. Two participants had prior experience working for a tobacco prevention program and one participant expressed current work they are doing with youth on the topic of vaping. One participant reported currently using tobacco.

Consumer testing participants had diverse backgrounds. Four identified as Black or African American, three identified as white, and one identified as Hispanic or Latino. Regions of Butte County represented by participants were Oroville, Chico, Gridley, Olivehurst, and Richvale. Participants all identified as working with the community to some capacity. This included, but was not limited to community outreach, education, social work, coaching, mentoring, and volunteering at various churches and community agencies that serve and support youth, homeless/marginally housed individuals, and Camp Fire survivors.

### Key Findings:

- Message 3 resonated most strongly across all participants. Participants did not recommend any language changes for this message and identified it as a collective 'call to action' that could be used with diverse community leaders and members across Butte County.
- Message 5 also resonated for participants. One participant suggested some language edits to improve the message (see: message 5 summary). But overall, participants felt that the youth focus of message 5 gave it more extensive appeal, which would make it well received by youth, parents, caregivers, educators, and community members across Butte County.
- Message 4 had potential to start deep and meaningful conversations about the relationship between race, tobacco, and social justice. But most participants needed more information and factual evidence to feel comfortable having that conversation. As a result, participants urged message 4 be edited to include more specific information about how the African American community is uniquely targeted and impacted by the tobacco industry, especially with menthol products. With more education, message 4 could be used to connect communities who are unfamiliar with tobacco targeting to communities who experience it regularly.

- Message 1 received mixed feedback from participants. The broad nature of message 1 led to very different conversations depending on how participants interpreted the term 'experiences that we know are harmful.' Participants advised using message 1 as a conversation starter if the intention is to have a very open-ended conversation. Participants also recommended several language edits to improve the message (see message 1 summary).
- Message 2 also received varied feedback and had the most suggested edits from participants. To improve message 2, participants recommended clarifying 'who' has unequal access and what 'things' they have unequal access to (see: message 2 summary). Participants advised using message 2 in areas where community members are already more familiar with what it means to have unequal access (e.g., predominantly lower income or rural areas).

### Initial Recommendations:

- LEAD should determine if they want to use only the messages that resonated best/had the broadest appeal (i.e., 3 and 5) or rework the messages that resonated less well (i.e., 1, 2, and 4) to start conversations about race, tobacco, and social justice. If LEAD wants to have messages that more explicitly address race, lived environment, and social justice, consider using the feedback provided to make the suggested edits. Revised messages can be consumer tested again and/or explored more deeply with key informant interviews in the future.
- Alternatively, LEAD may use the feedback on how messages resonated differently based on participants' background to create different communication strategies for each audience type.
- Recommendation for message 4 – Because the LEAD project already has statistics that will be provided to community leaders, an additional sentence should be added to message 4 to describe how the African American community is targeted and impacted by the tobacco industry. While the suggested edits may help people feel more comfortable with the topic, the LEAD project should anticipate that there may still be some individuals who are uncomfortable having an explicit conversation about race.

## Detailed Findings by message:

**Message 1: A just society ensures that no person, regardless of race, income or age is exposed again and again to experiences that we know are harmful.**

Most participants' initial response to message 1 was a combination of irritation, frustration, and outrage. While participants all resonated the idea of a 'just society,' participants varied in how they understood justice. Some participants understood justice at a systems level, so when they discussed 'experiences that we know are harmful' they discussed it at a community level. Their insights focused on the historical context of how the tobacco industry, like other industries, unfairly targets and exploits black, brown, indigenous and lower-income people. These participants expressed hurt and outrage that the same systemic injustices continue to plague communities of color without accountability.

However, not all participants felt that the 'system' was to blame for injustice. One participant felt strongly that individual choices make up a just society. Their understanding of message 1 was that each person needs to critically self-reflect on how their own choices may be exposing them to potential harm and take responsibility to change at an individual level. In this way, each person is protecting themselves and those around them from potential harm. How participants viewed/ understood justice seemed to be the determining factor of whether message 1 resonated with them.

Overall, while participants felt message 1 could be used to start a conversation, almost all participants felt the message was too broad/ general for people who are not already aware of racial injustice issues and tobacco industry targeting to deeply connect with this message. Some recommendations to make the message more impactful included – calling out the tobacco industry more explicitly and sharing ways for people to be a 'part of the solution.' For example, one participant requested to learn more about how residents in Butte County may be affected by different types of harmful experiences and another participant requested more information on how to address that harm.

Specific language edits suggested by participants:

- Use the word "continually" instead of again and again to make it shorter (i.e. "is continually exposed"). The participant acknowledged that using the word "continually" may not be best depending on the target reading level.
- Clarify what types of experiences the message is targeting. For example, change 'experiences that we know are harmful' to 'toxic chemicals/harmful substances'
- Add language about how individuals' health is affected by tobacco exposure
- Add 'age, gender, sexual orientation, and ability/ disability' to the list of groups that should be protected from experiences that we know are harmful

Sample comments:

- “Good conversation starter because it can be interpreted in multiple ways.”
- “The system is broken and crooked... because it’s allowing tobacco to be sold to kids and in low-income areas, they know it’s harmful and they don’t care about the people”
- “We are perpetuating the BS – why are there so many tobacco and liquor stores in college areas, which also has a lot of minority people, there is also low-income housing” “
- “[I] want to use the message in [my] own training about race for white people to understand that this is not a just society.”
- “[The] broad nature of the message makes it seem ‘fearful’ of calling out the tobacco companies directly and even patronizing of the community it wants to support.”
- “I want to be a part of the solution. My motivation is high, but it’s also about figuring out the best way to do that”

**Message 2: The environment that people grow, live, and work in impacts their health. Many people have unequal access to the things they need to make healthy choices.**

Participants often read message 2 as two separate statements, each of which prompted their own initial reactions. The first statement that the environment impacts health was met with universal agreement. Whereas the second statement that some people have ‘unequal access to things needed to make healthy choices’ lacked clarity and impact for participants. Participants suggested several language edits to improve message 2, which are listed below.

Participants recommended several language edits to improve message 2, but especially highlighted that the term “things” is too vague. When asked how they understood the phrase “things needed to make healthy choices,” most participants spoke about having equal access to healthy food. Other responses included having equal access to a) health insurance, b) culturally responsive healthcare services, c) health information (e.g., physical and financial) and d) emergency services (i.e., especially for individuals in more rural parts of Butte County).

While having access to the above-mentioned resources is important, participants acknowledged that access is not the sole factor for facilitating better health. One participant shared that there is an internal factor of “having the self-worth and self-value” needed to make healthy choices. Several other participants brought up external factors like having strong support systems (e.g., family and friends, supportive working environments, healthy living dynamics, mental health counseling etc.) as a necessity for prioritizing one’s health. Participants recognized that many of the same people who lack access to health insurance or healthy food may also lack the support systems needed to prioritize their health.

Participants felt that message 2 would resonate most strongly for people who are more familiar with how unequal resources are in different parts of Butte County. Participants

acknowledged that for community members who live in areas where the resources needed to make healthy choices are readily available, and who do not travel outside of that area, they will need more support and evidence to understand the issue of unequal access. When asked how they would facilitate conversations with Butte County residents who are unfamiliar with the topic of equal access, one participant recommended using personal stories to build connectedness across different communities in Butte County.

Specific language edits suggested by participants:

- Message [2] is too vague, too unclear compared to the first message
- Change 'things' to resources and information – People who have the resources, information, and access to facilities make healthier choices
- Change grow to raised – 'the environment people are raised in, live in, and work in.'
  - Other variations: 'Raised in and work in' 'Grow up in and work in' (i.e., remove live)
- Clarifying that the focus is on tobacco and the tobacco industry – it's not pinpointing the issue we are focusing on. For example, if a nonsmoker reads this, they won't get the smoking connection – have direct language to identify that this message is about protecting people from tobacco
- State clearly who is it that has unequal access/ who it is that's most affected
- State clearly what is meant by 'things'

Sample comments:

- "[I] thought of the phrase, if you teach a man to fish, they will eat for a [lifetime]. Some people don't have access [to the] materials needed to go fishing. It's not an even [playing field]."
- "The message is trying to talk to lower-income minorities and their daily life struggles, and it would resonate with them."
  - Would [this message] resonate with people who are not experiencing th[at]?  
"If they are able to come out of their bubble, then yes. Also, people who experienced this, but worked really hard to get out of it so I'm able to make that connection. I'm not going to forget."
- "In a nation that's one of the richest in the world having unequal access to things that people need to make healthy choices seems wrong."
- "I have support to make healthy choices. I recognize that may not be the case for everyone around me."
- "[Where I live] everyone has access to the grocery store but some people choose not to go there – it comes down to personal choice."
- "I think there is access to healthy food and that might be sort of my privilege speaking. But it's that motivation to want to select it I think... Because I think it's self-worth and self-value that make you choose healthier [or] make healthy choices. I think that comes from a place we don't talk about."

- "I've only seen 1 anti-tobacco ad in all of Butte County - located in Richvale outside of Live Oak. It's an ad that focuses on youth and vaping. It says 'looks like tech, works like poison.' [Note from evaluation team: The participant described the demographics of Richvale as being a community of retired, older white farmers. Many of whom use tobacco]."

**Message 3: Community leaders have a responsibility to protect minorities, youth, and low-income people against the tobacco industry that deliberately targets them with advertisements and promotions.**

Message 3 resonated most strongly across all participants. Participants described message 3 as "on point," "a home run," and "speaking to [their] hearts." Participants universally agreed that community leaders are responsible for protecting community members and that community leaders must be held accountable as representatives of "we the people." Participants appreciated the direct approach of message 3 as it clearly states how the tobacco industry is causing harm, who is being directly affected, and what response needs to be taken (i.e. community leaders need to uphold their responsibility). No edits were suggested for this message.

Participants all spoke about the importance of having community leaders who actively listen to their community members and respond to their respective needs. Nearly all participants (6/7) identified themselves as community leaders in some way, and therefore understood they have a responsibility to look out for and support individuals beyond themselves. This added to the reason message 3 resonated so strongly.

When asked about which community leaders could support the LEAD team's efforts, participants recommended reaching out to elected officials, church leaders, teachers, coaches, school administrators, and AAFCC staff. Church groups seem to have the greatest potential for positively influencing the community as they have built long-standing rapport and trust with residents across Butte County.

Participants identified message 3 as a collective 'call to action,' which can be used to start conversations between community leaders and youth. One participant suggested that LEAD conduct outreach to Gen Z residents across Butte County asking for their input on who they see as community leaders. In this way, the community leaders in LEAD's network are representative of the diverse identities and age ranges who live in Butte County.

Sample comments:

- "This message is on point. It's impactful... It's speaking to our hearts."
- "Correct! First pitch – Home run!"
- "Community leaders should better understand that that it is their responsibility. If you want to have a better community or society. Their job is to make it as good as it can be."

- “Those that are in charge of guarding and serving [as opposed to leading] – If you have any say so for what gets communicated to all groups then you have a responsibility. [And] responsibility for me is a high high, high high, high value.”
- “No, [the message] doesn’t say we need outside help – this is saying that we need leaders within our community who are responsive to this issue.”
- “Church groups should be seen as leaders, and they don’t do enough, especially since there are so many of them. The church should be equipping people for what they experience outside of the building. [Instead,] church groups are focused on what they can get from the community members.”
- “In Chico, there’s more democracy, it’s a younger community. “People there had more of a voice. They made a group or an organization that was able to talk to those leaders. Whereas in more rural areas, it’s a lot of families and retired farmers who aren’t raising their voices or they don’t care to.”

**Message 4: Tobacco use disproportionately affects the health of African Americans, who have a long history of being targeted by the tobacco industry.**

Participants initial reactions to message 4 varied significantly.

Three participants immediately understood why message 4 centers the African American community. Of those three, one participant shared that “for tobacco to target those communities who have gone through more trauma and struggled historically with being accepted is kind of enraging.” However, the other two participants advised that message 4 be expanded to include youth, lower income people, and other racial minorities. Both participants agreed that message 4 is “correct and accurate,” but feared that focusing exclusively on African Americans may alienate another part of the audience.” Please see the language edits section below for more detail on suggested changes.

Meanwhile, three other participants stated that they did not know how to respond to message 4 or “needed more information” before responding. These participants felt that the content of message 4 was too unfamiliar to resonate immediately the way message 3 did. Even though some participants did not initially connect to message 4, they also did not express any outright disagreement, mistrust, or dislike of the message. They seemed open-minded and were willing to learn about the background context and history behind message 4.

When examples of how the tobacco industry has targeted the African American community through menthol products and high levels of advertisements were shared, several participants found that information was critical to better understand the key message. All three participants whose initial response was “I don’t know,” felt motivated to act once they better understood the message. When asked what actions they would take in response to message 4 participants shared – (a) spending time in parts of Butte County (e.g. South Oroville) and observe how tobacco is targeted in African American neighborhoods, (b) facilitate difficult conversations with youth who share that they feel targeted by tobacco, and (c) sign petitions, write letters, and boycott companies that are promoting advertisements of menthol to the African American community.



Specific language edits suggested by participants:

- Expand the target audience of message 4: "It's not only AA members who would vote on this issue – you might have someone on the council who is a racist and doesn't care anyways – so the message should be revised to say 'African Americans, minority groups, youth, and poor people'"
  - Suggestion for revised message 4: 'Tobacco use impacts everyone's health, but disproportionately affects the health of African Americans, minority groups, and poor people who have long been targeted by the tobacco industry'
- While LEAD already plans to do this, several participants recommended adding statistics about how the African American community is impacted and how that differs from other racial and ethnic groups
- Specify how the physical and financial health of African Americans is impacted by tobacco use (e.g., which parts of the body are most affected)

Sample comments:

- [When asked about initial reactions to the message] "Definitely heard this message, but don't feel like I know enough to really support that."
- [After the evaluator explained more information about menthol addiction & melanin]
  - "That little blurb would help so much to get them to understand more what is specifically happening in the community."
  - "Put that right there. I'm sold. I'm done. What do y'all need me to do? That to me would be a call to action. Now that I know that what do we do now? What petition do you need me to sign, what letter do you need me to write, who are we boycotting."
- "For tobacco to target those communities who have gone through more trauma and struggled historically with being accepted is kind of enraging."
- "For someone who doesn't have any context for this message, provide education on what those ads look like in the [African American] community compared to communities that are not predominantly African American. [Creating] awareness on how that impacts a community is the first step."

**Message 5:** [The health of youth and young adults is impacted by tobacco advertising. Because young brains are developing, children and adolescents should not be exposed to harmful tobacco advertisements.](#)

Message 5 resonated for all participants as it inspired feelings of empathy, irritation, and outrage. Participants unanimously agreed that children and young adults should not be the subject of tobacco advertisements or targeting. Only one participant suggested language edits for this message (see below).

For message 5 it was less that participants felt prompted to take their own action, but rather that they wanted to see LEAD engage youth as part of the project and future conversations. Participants advocated for youth to be at the center of any action taken in response to message 5. Participants' suggestions for next steps focused on education for youth in an age-appropriate and non-judgmental way where youth could develop advocacy and leadership skills. Participants were passionate about youth having access to unbiased information about how tobacco impacts their health across the lifespan and strong support systems to make their own choices (i.e. stigma-free spaces for youth to receive support even if they choose to use tobacco or have used tobacco in the past). One participant gave the example of a school day where if students turned in any vaping products they would not be penalized. Three other participants suggested including parents and caregivers in the education efforts around message 5, so youth could share what they were learning more easily. One other participant stressed the importance of effectively addressing peer pressure. The participant advised LEAD to start conversations with youth and adults alike about the power of social acceptance and work on building young people's self-esteem, so that "they don't feel [like] they need to engage in what their friends or [any]one else is doing."

Participants were also adamant that the delivery method used to share information about tobacco should be engaging and empowering. Skits and school assemblies that model dialogue on how to say no to peer pressure and helping students find their voice were among the suggestions for keeping youth engaged. Another suggestion was facilitating an intergenerational panel of youth, adults, and older adults, all of whom could discuss how tobacco affects their age group, so each demographic could hear from their peers and learn from other age groups as well.

\*Note: Message 5 was only consumer tested with 5 of the 7 participants because the session was out of time with two participants.

Specific language edits suggested by participants:

- Message 5 lists youth, young adults, children, adolescents, and young brains. Picking just a few of those groups to focus on would help it be more consistent.
  - Participant advised that if the goal is to include a message about all of these populations, then it would be better to break out and expand the messages by target audience (i.e. one message focus on children and another message focus on adolescents and young adults)

Sample comments:

- "Education should include photos of vapes, don't shame youth. That's where DARE went wrong, and [add] statistics. Youth can come to conclusion themselves."
- "Effective advertising really tries to strike a chord...It's the herd mentality. We're all susceptible to it... But for these developing stages it's evil."
- "It takes a village to help kids make healthy choices – we all need to demonstrate how to make healthy choices and "be a respectable person." Kids are watching you

for your reactions and watching what you are doing – take the 5 minutes to think about what you do, because kids are watching.”

- “Youth are at that age where their peers are soooo much more important than their family. So if you have friends who are smoking and the environment is conducive to it (i.e. a party) young people are easily influenced by their friends.”
  - Participants’ advice to effectively address peer pressure: “Build [young] people’s self-esteem so that they don’t feel that they need to engage in what everyone else is doing, or what their friends are doing.”