In-person Lab not possible, what else can you do?

To help you think about how to redesign your current project, we've put together some guiding questions, alternatives to consider, and a summary of the tools that can be used to make experiments happen!

IMPORTANT NOTES

In a nutshell, interventions that are designed around communications (message framing, posters, video content), simulate product tweaks or look at outcomes for behavioral games are easier to move to alternative channels. Implementing nudges and/or capturing behavioral outcomes are a little more difficult - but don't give up, we can try to think of ways to work around by identifying good proxies.

Just a heads up - with all of these methods, there are tweaks needed to ensure **data quality**, please ensure you liaise with the Lab Managers for advice on revisions to your protocol and IRB amendments. There are also specific design tweaks needed on **sample selection and randomization** to ensure you can detect a treatment effect, please ensure you liaise with the Research Specialists for advice. For further details on whether **different tools** can do exactly what you need, speak with the Programming team.

If you're still in the process of designing your interventions and/or experiment or planning for a future round of testing, 3. Overview of Tools will be useful for you to go over. And then, reach out to the Lab Team/join office hours on Fridays at 2pm if you want to brainstorm creative designs and outcome measures!

Ongoing Work

1. Type of Design

Were you going to run IDIs?

- Some questions/considerations to start:
    - How long is your script?
    - Do you have any sensitive questions/topics to cover?
    - Who are you targeting?
    - What phase of the project is this (formative, post-testing, follow-up)?

Alternative: We can run IDIs and baseline/endline surveys over the phone, with adjustments to your instrument in terms of length, number of open-ended questions, and re-phrasing of

sensitive questions. We've put together some advice on instrument tweaks plus training teams to make remote collection a possibility, here (Phone Survey Protocol).

Were you going to run focus group discussions?

+ Some questions/considerations to start:
    + Is there flexibility in moving this to IDIs or is the group effect necessary?
    + Was this for formative research? Or for prototype feedback?

Alternative #1a: If you can move to IDIs easily with additional guidelines to consider around the group effect.

+ One way to ascertain group effect is to add in some probing questions. For example, let's say we want to learn about early child marriage, we could say: imagine that some other people (in your community/age range/marital status) are in support of marriage before 18. What do you think are some of these reasons? Which of these do you agree with and why? Alternatively, we think that some people might disagree with early marriage. What might their reasons be? Which of these reasons are common? Are you in support of? Why?
+ You can also include questions like 'out of 10 people in your community, how many do you think would..?"
+ Promoting with possible viewpoints that others might hold and seeking their opinion around these is key

Alternative #1b: If you're doing prototyping of content/images, consider Swali (details below)

Alternative #2: If you can't, can you move your sample to University students or young/middle income participants who we can set up a conference call or interactive online discussion with?

Alternative #3: If you are to stay with low-income participants, is a conference phone call a possibility? If so, make sure you call individuals first and seek their permission to join a group phone call at a specific time, make sure you added in a more detailed introduction in the group discussion, make sure you let everyone introduce themselves properly, make sure you include further prompts to ensure people are paying attention and participate, include information on how people can either drop off the call voluntarily or log back on, if needed.

Alternative #4: Depending on what you're testing in a group, is it possible to move it to text message based ranking exercise or more participatory research? This is good for times

when you're getting feedback on message framing. Eg. asking for individual suggestions/feedback and then share suggestions via text to for and have them rank the options.

Were you going to run a lab in the field or in our fixed lab?

+ Do you require interactivity between participants within the session?
+ Is there a 'live' component to your experiment that can't be changed (eg. someone interacting over video or Skype)?
+ What is the level of randomization in your experiment?
+ What's the nature of the treatments (messaging vs nudges etc)?
+ What are the outcome measures you're interested in? Can we proxy for some of the behavioral outcome measures (eg. instead of measuring hand-washing, you might want to look at willingness to ask for more information on hand-washing, or recall of information in a follow-up and such)
+ How is payout determined? Is it a flat-rate or dependent on games/tasks/responses?

Mainly refer to 3. Overview of Tools below to see which platforms can support games, randomization and content delivery. But a quick snapshot here:

Alternative #1: You can convert the protocol to a phone based experiment depending on the intervention (especially where there are questions with multiple choices/options). Some games can be conducted via phone eg. MPL, ultimatum game, dictator game etc.

Alternative #2: For studies with interactivity between the sessions and participants, consider hypothetical interactions and switch to implementation using options below in 3. Overview of Tools.

Alternative #3: Use Swali if you're A/B Testing content, especially multi-media (messages, posters, videos etc).

Alternative #4: Blast the OTree link via SMS depending on your target sample. Randomization is possible on our end.

Alternative #5: Switch to qualtrics, sample if using a low income group, and email blast it to university students/middle income groups that have access to emails.

Alternative #6: Consider tweaks to experimental design that allow intervention delivery over SMS or IVR. We can brainstorm together on this!

2. Sample

What is your target sample?

+ If recruitment is done, these are your options:
    + Randomize them into different conditions/groups and proceed to conduct phone surveys, but be careful with attrition i.e balancing complete surveys across the different groups so ensure you have a larger pool of numbers/participants to start with.
+ If recruitment is pending, how much flexibility do you have with your sample (income, age, gender)? Accordingly, these are your options:

Alternative #1: Switch to people in our database which might mean changing the location of your study.

Alternative #2: Can you work with a different sample that might be as good as this population - is there a good proxy population? Can you pilot with a proxy population even if they are slightly different - are the insights you'll get from that useful to inform the original population?

Alternative #3: If recruiting university students/middle income groups, and you have a contact from the recruitment area of interest, you can create a whatsapp group and snowball by creating an online CTO form where they can sign up/self recruit.

Alternative #4: Get an IRB amendment to allow people in the database to refer a friend (if you have a small sample and need a larger one). You can ask everyone to refer 3-5 friends and randomly select 1-2 from the list.

Alternative #5: Think of snowball sampling if you can identify relevant/key points in a market/sample/community.

Are you working with vulnerable populations?

+ If your sample is vulnerable or hard to reach (eg. adolescents), please ensure you have a discussion with Anisha and/or the lab managers before proceeding with any options in this document!

What sort of phone does your sample have?

+ Smartphones with Internet access: Swali, Online Games, Qualtrics + offline options
+ Only feature phones but can get Internet access: Swali, Online Games, Qualtrics +

offline options
+ Only feature phones and cannot get Internet access: Telerivet, TextIt, SMS Leopard

3. Overview of Tools

Swali (developed by Busara)
Swali is a tool for quick testing of content and paying of incentives. Eg. if you want to do A/B testing of two videos, you can upload them to the platform and ask pre or post questions in relation to the videos. Main features:

+ Multimedia Testing
    + Video: can look at whether people forward through bits, length spent viewing
    + Images: time spent on images and scroll activities
    + Content: Time spent on content
+ Assessment questions: pre and post questions:
    + Open ended and single choice questions
    + Multiple choice questions
    + Range input
+ Payments: airtime and mpesa incentives possible!

Weaknesses:

+ The current version has not been tested with live projects and may have bugs (dev team working to have these ironed out).
+ Current version is still in its early phase of development and may not be able to support complex surveys.
+ Still unclear how easy the app will be to use for respondents, but now's the time to try it out!
+ Requires the participant to have Internet access and a smart-phone

Telerivet (here)
Telerivet provides three main services: automation, SMS and IVR poll services. You can run an SMS or voice poll using Telerivet using both the platform and an android app installed on a smart-phone. Allows integration with shortcodes, virtual numbers and other API based systems. We can support simple games such as a dictator game and have done this in the past!
This works best for:

+ Shorter surveys or polls
+ We have phone numbers already
+ Can run simple games
+ Can automate airtime incentives

+ Multiple projects can share same Telerivet setup
+ Vast support and integration with other external systems

Weaknesses:

+ Requires stable internet connection on the control device. See here for full requirements
+ Has monthly maintenance fee

Example: We're looking at measuring the cross-cultural influence of accents, especially implicit assumptions of accents for service provision. We assess how respondents generally unpack cultural assumptions and adapt their answers according to who they are interacting with. Through IVR, we implement a standardized audio recording and create a clean experiment where we control (as much as possible) for gender, tonality, and content that respondents in three accent arms (Luo, Chinese and American) are exposed to. Participants interact with the survey through their keypad, after hearing the audio message and then input whether how much (if any) money they donate as well as other short/simple questions through IVR (like when you call and airline and they tell you to dial '1' for English, dial '2' for Swahili).

TextIt (here)

TextIt is similar to Telerivet but in addition you can easily integrate short codes and send incentives mid-way to ensure participants stay engaged. You can send out surveys via SMS - TextIt is offering free services in light of the covid-19 outbreak!

This works best for:

+ Shorter surveys
+ We have phone numbers already
+ Pay as you go platform

Weaknesses:

+ Can get expensive when running polls due to requirement of shortcodes or external sms gateway, but TextIt is offering free services for the next one month in light of covid-19.

Example: The coronavirus outbreak is a greater burden in resource poor settings and yet, there is little data on pathogen spread or tractable approaches to mitigation. Therefore, we're looking at interventions that can increase the spread of good information in these studies. Through TextIt, we're sending out information nuggets to people in our database and incentivizing them to refer a friend through responding to our short-code and pass on the information to a friend, we're then testing comprehension of the friend through an SMS

based survey responding True/False to various statements.

Online Gaming
Hosting programmed games online and sharing links with [screened] participants to play the games. Games can be shared over SMS and played on a mobile browser - we can send out links to experiments to participants over SMS and if they have Internet access and can run through themselves. We have run some studies on this model previously. We can also have them go through the links while on phone with an FO and run one-on-one guided lab sessions.

This works best for:
+ All games programmed on oTree platform
+ Ideal for games without complex comprehension
+ Can run simple and complex surveys
+ Real time data capture and storage

Weaknesses:
+ Not ideal for games with grouping requirements
+ Requires participant to have a smartphone
+ May not be possible to mirror the same control provided by the lab

Smart Sensing App (developed by Busara)
Smart Sensing is a passive data collection tool that collects data from mobile based sensors on a participant to unravel human behaviours.

The app ships with a financial diary that helps in understanding participant's financial behaviours and an algorithm/gaming platform where participants can play games based on challenges assigned to them.

Data collected on the app entails below sensors
+ Communication events. Existing and ongoing calls/SMS patterns.
+ Battery. Battery consumption patterns
+ Wifi access points i.e. information on wifi points connected by a participant
+ Screen activity
+ Software information i.e. apps installed or uninstalled on participant device
+ App usage i.e. softwares used by participants
+ Location. Geo locations data based on GPS, wifi and mobile data

This works best for:

+ Passive data collection to unravel human behaviours
+ Running simple algorithms [which could be based on data]

Weaknesses:

+ Requires participants with smartphones
+ Requires mobile data or wifi for data to stream to the backend
+ Onboarding process can be challenging and we are piloting how to do this over phone sessions currently

Qualtrics (here)

If your survey/experiment can be programmed on qualtrics, we can reach University students and other similar populations through our WhatsApp groups and text blasts. Remember to add in attention checks to your surveys! You can of course use Google Forms too.

This works best for:

+ Low budget studies.
+ Studies targeting a sample of 500 and below. Whatsapp groups have a limit of 257 members.
+ Studies with a standard incentive, it is easy to explain to the target sample and easily earn their trust.
+ Studies that IRB allow electronic consenting.

Weaknesses:

+ Difficult to ascertain responses are coming from your target sample but can do a follow up survey with a random sample to cross check
+ There is a loophole of receiving duplicate responses. A respondent participating more than once by using different phone numbers.
+ Additional monitoring is needed to track when you have enough responses.

Example: In collaboration with University of Arizona, we ran a cross cultural study to assess how individuals' Fundamental Social Motives vary around the world. The Qualtrics link was shared on whatsapp where it snowballed to other students outside the group.

Survey length: 30 mins
Target sample-200, university students
Incentive: $2 per response
Unique identifier: phone number

Managed 450 responses in 12 hours(more than twice the target sample)

Phone Surveys
We can run all your IDIs and baseline/endline surveys over the phone, we have a template for phone surveys, here.

This works best for:

+ Household, baseline/endline surveys with more close ended questions than open ended questions
+ IDIs where calls/interviews can be recorded (with permission and IRB)
+ Lab studies with close ended questions
+ Studies that can easily be programmed on CTO/Otree

Weaknesses:

+ Won't work well with studies that include diagrams, videos and visual aids.
+ Not efficient for samples over 300 respondents.
+ Not efficient and effective for long scripts/surveys. For this you will be required to book appointments prior to conducting phone surveys.
+ Some randomization might not work properly eg. by session/group randomization or needs extra care. Preferably avoid randomizing at the FO level as that gives way to bias, but can look at all FOs running a certain treatment on a given day.

SMS Leopard (here)
Beside link blasts, we can also run very simple/short surveys. We can also use SMS Leopard to send SMSes with numbers for people to call on or reminder messages as part of intervention implementation. We've done this in the past to study whether a lab environment changes behavior on a dictator game.

This works best for:

+ One way (outgoing) SMS and reminders
+ Easy setup for the platform

Weaknesses:

+ Only supports links and doesn't support extensive polling/surveys itself
+ No support for integration with external parties

Example: We looked at whether the lab environment (or intentionality of opting into a lab game) changes behavior on a dictator game. Participants played one of four variants:

standard game in the lab on a screen, in the lab but shared on SMS, outside the lab on SMS at a scheduled time (phone consent and set up), outside the lab with limited notice (SMS consent and set up).

Mturk (here)

A crowdsourcing marketplace where games can be run online. Remember to add in attention checks to your surveys!

This works best for:

+ Supports embedding other survey/gaming platforms e.g. oTree and Qualtrics.
+ Diverse subject pool for countries such as the US and India

Weaknesses:

+ Platform uncommon for low/middle income participants especially outside the western countries