**Standard Setting Contingency Planning**

**Things That Go Bump in the Night (and Day)**

Standard setting, like any human activity, is subject to any number of things that can throw it off balance. Develop a contingency plan in concert with your client, and keep it handy. This table will help you do that. Add to it as necessary.

| **Contingency** | **Threat** | **Mitigation** |
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| *Panelist Related* |  |  |
| Panelists don’t show up. | Procedural validity may be called into question. | Determine absolute minimum panel size; oversample by 10-20%. |
| Panelists arrive late. | If they miss training, procedural validity may be called into question. | Depending on how late, provide independent training. If a day or more late, send them home; see above re oversampling. |
| Panelists leave early. | Procedural validity may be called into question. | Determine absolute minimum panel size; oversample by 10-20%. Confer with your client re using those panelists’ data. |
| Panelist mix is not representative. | Procedural validity may be called into question. | In defining the target mix, make sure to get a +/- for every group. See above re oversampling. |
| Panelists can’t or won’t follow directions. | Procedural validity may be called into question. | Facilitators should escalate this to the workshop leader, who will retrain the panelist(s). If the problem persists, the workshop leader should escalate this to the client representative in charge, who will determine whether to send the panelist home or possibly disregard all data from that panelist. |
| Panelists dominate. | One panelist who dominates a table or room can artificially raise or lower cut scores, calling the entire process into question. [*This might also apply to a client representative.*] | Facilitators should be trained to spot such panelists and channel their comments by asking other panelists to speak up. If the problem persists, the facilitator should escalate the matter to the lead facilitator who will counsel with the panelist in question and escalate the matter to the client representative in charge. |
| Panelists disrupt. | Procedural validity may be called into question, not only because of one panelist’s action but also because of that person’s impact on other panelists. [*This might also apply to a client representative*.] | Facilitators should escalate this to the workshop leader, who will retrain the panelist(s). If the problem persists, the workshop leader should escalate this to the client representative in charge, who will determine whether to send the panelist home. |
| Panelists leak information about test items or other secure information. | Leaks damage not only the validity of standard setting but also potentially compromise the testing program. | Have everyone sign a well-constructed nondisclosure agreement, contractually binding them to your security measures. Train facilitators to monitor panelist activities when they are using secure materials and report any incident to you and ultimately to agency staff. |
| *Staff Related* |  |  |
| Facilitators become ill or fail to perform. | Without a functioning leader, a panel will not be able to do its work. | Rehearse to make sure all facilitators know how to perform properly. If a facilitator is not following the script or is causing problems, meet with him or her privately to restore order. Take one spare facilitator to fill in for anyone who cannot or should not continue, or be prepared to fill in yourself until help can arrive. |
| Support staff become ill or fail to perform. | Key functions may lack support. | Cross train some support staff; arrange for local clerical staff as necessary. |
| *Client Related* |  |  |
| There is a delay in approval of the plan. | Standard setting cannot go forward without an approved plan. | Set an absolute deadline for overall plan approval, separate deadlines for approval of anything related to site, meeting dates, or panelists. Be prepared to cancel standard setting if necessary. Keep excellent documentation of your attempts to expedite the approval process and consequences of failure to approve the plan by the agreed-upon deadline. |
| There is a delay in approval of cut scores. | Examinees and institutions do not get needed scores in time for decisions. | Set an absolute deadline for review and approval, Keep excellent documentation of your attempts to expedite the approval process and consequences of failure to approve by the agreed-upon deadline. |
| The client rejects the report or cut scores | The validity of the standard setting is called into question. [Note: The client has a perfect right to modify the cut scores; outright rejection is rare.] | Make absolutely sure that you have followed an approved plan to the letter and that you have documented the process well. Do not question the client’s right to disregard the panel’s work. |
| *Externally Related* |  |  |
| News media or interest groups malign the process or the outcomes of standard setting. | Public acceptance of cut scores may be undermined. | Make sure the plan has been thoroughly vetted by technical experts as well as representative non-technical audiences. Identify credible spokespersons to address a range of criticisms, from technical to social. Draft responses in advance, and have them reviewed by agency leadership. |
| *Plan Related* |  |  |
| There are problems getting test data. | Lack of item- or test-level data undermines all item rating and test rating procedures; standard setting cannot go on. Lack of impact data halts standard setting before the final round. | Get an agreement to calculate all statistics on (representative) sample data (of specified scope), and arrange for collection of same well in advance. For impact data, arrange for daily delivery of updated score frequencies by subgroup. Download data the night before presenting impact. |
| There are problems getting external data. | Particularly for evidence-based procedures, lack of external data is a serious threat to the construct and predictive validity of the cut scores. | Determine at least a year in advance what external data will be needed (e.g., SAT scores, NAEP items), and initiate requests. Determine at least 6 months out if those data will be available in time. If not, renegotiate the external data aspect of the plan. If data are to be available by a date certain, get that guarantee in writing, and share it with the client. |
| *Materials and Equipment Related* |  |  |
| Equipment fails. | If being used by panelists or facilitators, standard setting stops. If being used by support staff, data processing is threatened and can affect progress of all rounds after Round 1. | Arrive the day before standard setting and test all equipment in place. That means every room where any equipment will be used. Take tech support with you, or arrange to have it on site. For any significant failure, arrange with the client for alternate scheduling; e.g., long lunch and later dismissal. |
| Internet fails. | If being used by panelists or facilitators, standard setting stops. If being used by support staff, data processing is threatened and can affect progress of all rounds after Round 1. | Arrive the day before standard setting and test all internet connections in place. That means every room where internet will be used and possibly paying for an extra day of service. Take tech support with you, or arrange to have it on site. For any significant failure, arrange with the client for alternate scheduling; e.g., long lunch and later dismissal. |
| *Meeting Site Related* |  |  |
| There are problems with meeting rooms. | If meeting rooms do not conform to contract specifications, it may be necessary to reconfigure panels or make other changes in the plan, which could endanger procedural validity. | Before signing a contract, make sure you have a personal contact for your event. Call the week before standard setting for a final briefing. Meet with that person when you arrive, and walk through meeting rooms and at least one guest room. If you find anything amiss during your pre-meeting staff briefing, call your contact at once to get it resolved. Have that person meet you an hour before the start of standard setting to walk through the site to make sure everything is as expected. |
| There are problems with food or guest rooms. | Uncomfortable, unhappy panelists may become a problem. | Meet with your site contact to go make sure the Day 1 menu is what you agreed to. Have a member of your staff available for panelists to contact as they arrive, in case they have any problems with their rooms. During daily debriefings, collect feedback from facilitators re comments from their panelists. |
| There is a fire or other emergency. | Panelists and facilitators may be thrown off their game, endangering procedural validity. | Brief facilitators on emergency procedures, and have them lead their panelists in accordance with them. To avoid exposure of secure materials, keep anything not being used at any given moment secured. During the emergency, confer with your client re how to proceed afterwards. Allow some time for panelists to regain their composure after the event, and resume. If the event has been lengthy, consider alternate scheduling. |
| There is a disturbing local or national event. | Such events (natural disasters, epidemics, etc.) can unnerve panelists. If they are sufficiently unnerved, procedural validity will likely suffer. | If the event occurs before standard setting and causes some panelists to cancel, go to your backup list, and keep calling until you have enough. Keep in mind that cancellations may go on for days, right up until the day of standard setting.  If the event occurs during standard setting, acknowledge it, give people time to talk about it and let you know if they will be able to continue. Confer with your client to determine whether or not to continue. |
| There are other groups meeting near yours. | Noise may be a problem, but security will be the main concern. | Find out who will be holding meetings near yours, how many people will be there, and what they will be doing. Work out a plan with the banquet manager to create and keep a “firewall” between your group and others. |
| *Transportation Related* |  |  |
| Panelists have difficulty getting to the site. | This causes standard setting to start late and creates confusion for at least some panelists. | In advance, collect all panelist travel plans, with cell phone # and e-mail address. Assign one staff member to be the primary contact for panelist travel difficulties. Have a staff member available the day before standard setting begins to check off who has arrive and to call anyone who hasn’t arrived by an agreed-upon time. Know which panelists are driving in and when they are expected. Have someone call them if they are late. |
| Staff have difficulty getting to the site. | This could cause some panels not to have a leader for a time. | In advance, collect all staff travel plans, with cell phone #, e-mail address, and transportation details. Arrange for staff to call an assigned member of your team if they have travel problems. Set an arrival time, and call anyone who is not there by that time. |
| Shipped printed materials do not arrive. | Panelists won’t be able do their jobs. | Ship materials to arrive 2 days before standard setting. Call the site the day before to confirm receipt. In advance, find a copy center near the meeting site. Take a set of originals with you. If the materials aren’t there when you arrive, take your originals to the copy center and make enough for the first day. Repeat as necessary. |
| Shipped supplies do not arrive. | While slightly less critical than forms panelists will use, lack of pens, paper, markers, and the like can affect procedures. | Before you go, get the address and phone number of a nearby office supply store. Go there and buy what you need for the first day. Repeat as necessary. |
| Shipped equipment does not arrive. | To the extent that the procedure is dependent on equipment, lack thereof threatens procedural validity. | It will be difficult to buy 100 or so computers or other electronics. It is better to ship for arrival 2 days ahead of standard setting or to drive them up in a truck yourself. |