

Recruiting participants for a program, initiative, or research study is, of course, vital, but it is also equally important to retain or maintain participants throughout this process. Retention can be defined as the ability of a program, initiative, or research study to maintain participant attendance and engagement until the program is completed. Below we have provided a list of evidence-informed retention strategies that can be used to encourage participants to remain involved in a program, initiative, or research study.

## RETENTION STRATEGIES

→ **Strategy 1: Communication**- *Maintain frequent communication and contact with participants before the program, initiative, or research study officially begins, through its implementation, and after the program ends. This helps to remind participants of your appreciation for their involvement, to show that they are valued, and to keep their contact information up-to-date.* Consider using one or more of the following communication strategies:

- Provide newsletters with updates, reminders of upcoming follow-up questionnaires, reinforcement of concepts and topics introduced in the program, and/or preliminary research findings. The newsletter can also be used to share progress and the impact your initiative is having on your participants and the whole community.
- Send text message reminders for important dates/times or motivational text messages.
- Use a consistent contact number and contact person who will handle communication efforts.
- Use consistent branding and logo on all correspondence.
- Send Thank You cards following the end of the program.
- Use online social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) as an effective recruitment and retention communication tool.
  - Develop a Facebook page or Twitter account that provides regular updates on important dates and information related to the program, initiative, or research study.
- Be aware of formatting in communication with participants:
  - Use a white background for surveys and questionnaires.
  - Use simple headers in emails.
  - Consider the use of graphics and photos in email communications.
  - Include the name of the program and purpose of email (e.g., Triple P - Questionnaire reminder) or an action oriented subject line (e.g., ACTION REQUIRED).

→ **Strategy 2: Convenience**- *Participation should be made as easy as possible.* Consider the following convenience strategies:

- Provide simple-to-read descriptions of the program.
- Make sure participants are fully aware of the commitments of participation (e.g., time, effort, money, etc.).
- Provide a card or magnet with details (e.g., date and time) of all sessions for easy display; send reminder text messages before each session; provide maps and parking information; and offer free childcare and family meals.
- Offer support for participants in the form of a helpline for programs that are implemented virtually or online.

→ **Strategy 3: Appreciation**- *Participants who feel appreciated and counted on may be more inclined to return.* Consider the following appreciation strategies:

- Send thank you cards following participation in the first session.
- Raffle donated gift cards to local grocery stores, gas stations, or activities at each session based on participants' interests and needs.
- Provide positive verbal feedback and affirmation to participants (e.g., look for ways to point out what they are doing well, note progress that they have made, and thank them for their efforts).

***Please Note:** This Making Sense of the Science Sheet was developed based on research findings from Peer Reviewed Literature related to participant retention strategies. For a full reference list, please see our Participant Retention Strategies Reference List.*

*The Clearinghouse has Technical Assistance (TA) Specialists who are available to help by offering support and guidance through the program selection, implementation, and evaluation process. These TA Specialists are available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST/EDT Monday through Friday. Use the information below to contact the Clearinghouse!*

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