



## **Tips for Participant Recruitment and Retention**

It is vitally important to plan designated time to recruit and retain youth participants for evidence-based programs. Facilitators should spend a *substantial* amount of time on recruitment prior to the start of the program. During implementation be sure to also include time for retention strategies in order to ensure more youth successfully complete the program sessions. It is recommended that youth receive at least 80% of all program sessions in order to achieve behavior change. Contact the SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy for a useful *Recruitment and Retention Planning Tool* to assist in planning the necessary strategies and action steps.

### **RECRUITMENT**

- 1) The recruiter's enthusiasm for the program is a critical part of generating youth interest. Select the right staff and encourage them to be ambassadors for your program.
- 2) The recruiter's name and affiliation being clearly identified on any recruitment materials is important to establishing trust with potential participants.
- 3) Using established social networks to recruit minority participants is particularly effective. (Example: recruit your friends to participate)
- 4) Community based recruitment is generally more effective than billboards, newspapers, or media when seeking to recruit minority participants.
- 5) Let youth be the gatekeepers! Specifically ask if they want to participate and only then contact their parents—this improves their commitment to the program and also makes parents more likely to agree to let the teen participate.
- 6) Be very open about the content and goals of the program while recruiting (this can also increase retention). One of the most common reasons for dropout is participants feel misinformed or the program is not what they expected. Specifically with youth programs, parents can develop resentment toward the program if they feel they were oversold on the potential impact of the program.
- 7) Focus on the potential benefits of the program rather than on what teens may have done wrong to have been referred to the program. Both teens and parents resent labeling of teens. It is important to tell teens why they were selected, which also helps to increase their understanding of the program goals. However, such statements should focus on building potential strengths.
- 8) Consult with your target audience about the time, location, and frequency of program meetings to consider the best options for them based on the specific community.



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### **RETENTION**

- 1) Be clear about the scheduling and time commitments up front. Working with parents and program sites to overcome transportation issues and missed sessions can increase participation.
- 2) Follow up via telephone when participants miss a session to remind them of the next session and to review what they missed. This contributes to participants rejoining rather than dropping out.
- 3) Consist program staff with whom the participants interact is particularly important to building trust. Select the right staff to be ambassadors for the program. Keep in mind, it is less important for the facilitator to look like the participants than it is for the facilitator to connect with the participants.
- 4) Two important group attributes that will contribute to consistent participation are trust and communication among group members. Even if participants are not friends going in, those who develop friendly relationships with other participants are more likely to complete. Also, those who are matched with program buddies or who have friends in the program have better attendance because they feel accountable to other participants.
- 5) Respecting youth privacy and clearly discussing confidentiality guidelines is important to youth, and respecting family privacy is important to parents.
- 6) Friendly contact other than at program-mandated times can increase retention (example: regular check-ins or holiday cards).
- 7) Youth who perceive a program as high quality and challenging are more likely to say that they want to attend vs. have to attend. This is an important motivational factor.
- 8) Some participants drop out after the first few sessions because they do not think they need the program or they think they have learned enough already. During the first session, overview the remaining sessions, including highlighting what participants will be learning and discussing. Ask participants for suggestions of what else they would like to learn about and include that in the program's lesson plan. Facilitators can also offer credits based on attendance that can culminate into a final incentive earned by continuing through to the end of the program.
- 9) Even among very poor participants, the program goals and the benefits they perceive from the program are a better motivator than incentives. The facilitator should not assume they know the best incentives for their participants. It is important to ask the target audience what types of incentives will most interest them.