

# Diagnosing and Addressing Participant Dropout: Using Program Data to Improve Retention Rates

Expanding Our Experience and Expertise:  
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Programs  
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**Allison Hyra, Ph.D.**  
**Hyra Consulting**



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# Presentation Objectives

- To help participants understand why retention rates are so important
- To provide participants with statistical steps that can be employed to diagnose retention problems
- To help participants brainstorm ways to ameliorate retention difficulties identified through data analysis



# Introduction

- My training
- My past work
- My current work

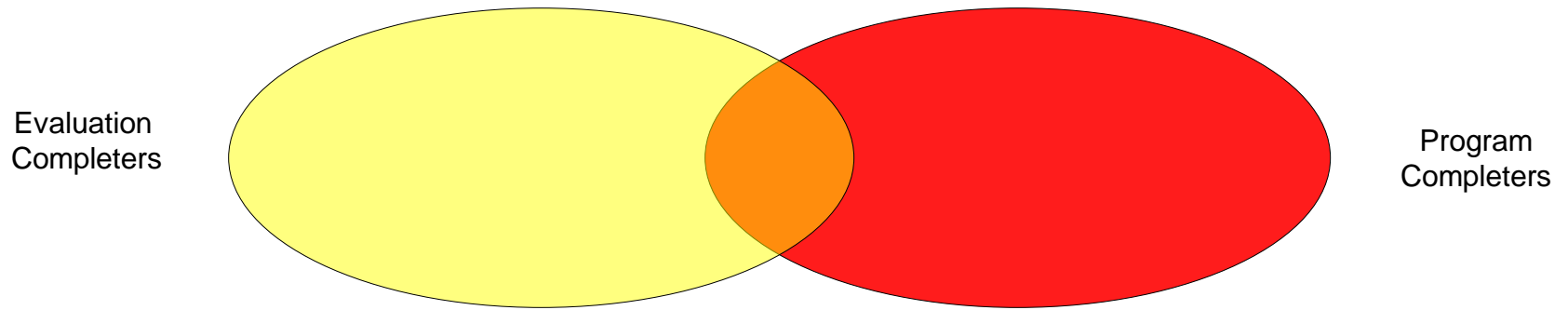


# Retention Rates?

- Calculate your denominator
  - # of inquiries, # enrolled, # at first class?
- Two different kinds of retention
  - Evaluative
  - Programmatic



# Evaluative vs. Programmatic



Want to maximize the orange space



# Why Retention is Important

- Evaluation Retention
  - Lowers quality of data; generalizability issues; reliability of findings
- Program Retention
  - Wasted effort; missing important lessons; reduced chance of transfer of knowledge; intent to treat might underestimate effects



# Discussion

- What is your program's retention/graduation rate?
- What are your biggest retention issues?





# Diagnosing Retention Issues

- You need:
  - Intake or baseline data
  - Good attendance records
  - Records of evaluation tool completion
- Choose your numerator and denominator
- Calculate your retention/graduation rate
  - Construct your dataset - add a variable for cohort; location; facilitator etc.



# Diagnosing, cont.

- Create dropout variable
- Choose diagnosis variables
  - Programmatic
  - Timing
  - Demographic
  - Other personal characteristics
  - Group characteristics



# Diagnosing, cont.

- Analyze Statistically
  - T-test for continuous or interval data
  - $X^2$  for categorical data
- Determine severity of issue
- Compare tests by intervening variables



# Diagnosis Example

- The Sunshine Program
  - Serves high school aged youth
  - Provides workshops at community centers
  - Recruits via word of mouth, fliers, community center staff
- Calculating Retention Rate
  - 300 completers in last year
  - 400 attended first session; 75% retention rate



# Sunshine, cont.

- Constructing Dataset
  - Intake, pre-test, site, facilitator, quarter, time from enrollment to first class
  - Dropout variable, 0 for completer, 1 for dropout



# Sunshine, cont.

- Analysis
  - Demographic/Personal: gender, age, race/ethnicity, in school, sexually experienced, working
  - Programmatic: facilitator, site, time from enrollment to first class
  - Timing: which quarter of fiscal year
  - Pre-test measures: knowledge, attitudes, opinions
  - Group: gap in sessions



# Sunshine, cont.

## Statistically Significant Results

Measure	Completers	Dropouts
% male	45%	57%
% sexually active	63%	78%
% Facilitator 1	25%	37%
% Facilitator 2	40%	42%
% Facilitator 3	35%	21%
Pre-test knowledge score	5.2	6.0
% gap in sessions	8%	19%



# Sunshine, cont.

- Interpretation
  - Program may be less appealing or resonate less with more experienced/knowledgeable participants
  - Program doesn't seem to resonate as well with young men
  - Gaps in programming affect retention
  - Facilitator #1 may be less engaging





# Gathering Information

- Plan must be based on analysis
- Plan may be general or for specific groups
- Solicit feedback
  - Focus groups
  - Staff
  - Other organizations
- Bring in a mole



# Possible Strategies

- Be proactive – call/text/email reminders
- Follow up on a miss immediately
- Address logistics issues
  - Time, location, dosage schedule, transportation, food
- Be high touch
  - Attuned to needs – school and work schedules, leisure activities



# Possible Strategies, cont.

- Support
  - Show interest in their lives; connect to unrelated, needed services
- Entertain
  - Interactive, engaging, welcoming, not pedantic
- Ask
  - Use a short feedback form after each session; show you use them!



# Strategy Exercise

- Sunshine Program
  - Boys, sexually experienced, more knowledgeable, taught by facilitator 1 and experiencing a gap between sessions were more likely to dropout
  - Put together a plan
    - For diagnosis – why and how will you find out?
    - For addressing – what will you do?
    - For re-testing – how will you know the plan is working?



# Strategy Exercise, cont.

- Present your plan
- Discussion
- Questions



# Conclusions

- Retention rates matter
- Data is helpful!
- Make retention an ongoing effort
- The payoff: better # for future funders; increased chance of positive outcomes; more reliable program evaluations
- For additional resources:  
[www.hyraconsulting.com](http://www.hyraconsulting.com)



# Thank you!

## Contact Information

Allison Hyra

[allison.hyra@hyraconsulting.com](mailto:allison.hyra@hyraconsulting.com)

617.894.4450

