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

Expanding Our Experience and Expertise: Implementing Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs
March 12-14, 2012
Baltimore, MD

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Completers</th>
<th>Dropouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% male</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% sexually active</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Facilitator 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Facilitator 2</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Facilitator 3</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test knowledge score</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% gap in sessions</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Thank you!

Contact Information
Allison Hyra
allison.hyra@hyraconsulting.com
617.894.4450