

Moving Beyond the Barriers:

Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in OST Programs

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What Is “Participation”

Participation =
Enrollment + Attendance
+ Engagement



Presentation Overview

- ❑ Methodology for this review
- ❑ Incentives and barriers to participation
- ❑ 10 recruitment and retention strategies
- ❑ Discussion



Review Methodology

- ❑ Review of OST Program Evaluation Database
- ❑ Semi-structured key information interviews
- ❑ External review by leading researchers working on participation issues
- ❑ Practitioner review



Participation Is Lower than Expected

- ❑ 21st CCLC—average participation was 1.9 days per week for elementary students, 0.9 days per week for middle school
- ❑ San Francisco Beacons—youth averaged 1 to 2 days per week
- ❑ Extended Services Schools—1.2 to 2.4 days per week



Incentives and Barriers to Participation

- Desire to relax and “hang out” with friends
- Work
- Home and family responsibilities
- Boredom or disinterest
- Transportation and safety



10 Recruitment and Retention Strategies



Strategy 1: Help Youth Understand the Value of Participation

- Connection to a “brighter future”
- New opportunities
 - Employment/Apprenticeships
 - Educational benefits
 - Assistance with college applications
 - Exploration of technology, arts, etc.



Strategy 2: Show Families the Opportunities Associated With Participation

- Homework help and tutoring
- Socialization and new friendships
- Physical fitness activities
- Exposure to the arts
- Associations with positive peers and adults



Strategy 3: Reach out directly to youth and their parents

- The personal touch:
 - Phone calls
 - Home visits
 - On-site school visits
 - Program “ambassadors”
 - Street outreach
 - Staff follow-up



Strategy 4: Match program's attendance goals to participant needs

- Five days per week works best for elementary school children
- Flexibility is key when working with older youth
- Rolling admissions and drop-in may work best for some families
- Expectations of attendance lead to better attendance



Strategy 5: Consider at-risk youth in your recruitment and retention efforts

- School-based after school programs
 - Work closely with teachers to identify and encourage
 - Earmark a certain number of program slots for hard-to-reach children
 - Hire staff members who demonstrate an ability to relate well to these youth
- Community-based OST programs
 - Build relationships with existing school staff who can refer the neediest students to them



Strategy 6: Recruit pairs or small groups of friends

- Friendships in program sustain participation
- Reach out to school-day teachers to determine peer circles
- Identify student leaders and target them for participation



Strategy 7: Support program staff to be responsive and engaging to participants

- Staff are representative of participants' background and ethnicity
- Staff demonstrate an ability to facilitate and guide activities
 - Create fair and supportive environments
 - Provide individual support
 - Promote learning and skill building
 - Promote real-life skill use
 - Involve families and communities



Strategy 8: Hook youth with a mix of interesting, fun activities, including some time for relaxation with friends

- Content-based learning opportunities that include a mix of academic and nonacademic skill-building activities
- Physical/recreation activities
- Structured and unstructured learning opportunities
- Mastery orientation
- Opportunities for autonomy, choice, and leadership
- Provide activities to complement rather than replicate the school day



Strategy 9: Link an “academic agenda” to an engaging project or set of experiences

- Provide choice of materials
- Engage older youth by encouraging activities focused on individual experiences
- Link academic activities with hands-on experience
- Engage in group activities to reinforce academic concepts



Strategy 10: Provide opportunities for leadership, community service, and paid employment

- Job clubs
- Employment search
- Paid employment in the program
- Service learning
- Leadership



Practical Advice

- Match strategies to:
 - Age
 - Other community services
 - Program goals
 - Program activities
- Make a connection between participation and a “brighter” future
- Continue to collect implementation information to inform practice



Discussion

- Worksheet # 1: Barriers and Incentives
- Worksheet #1: Strategies to Boost Enrollment and Engagement
- Develop an advertisement for your program that is geared to prospective participants and/or their families

