

Briefing note



Youth
Forward



Participatory
Development
Associates Ltd.

How to decrease survey and programme attrition in development initiatives

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Key messages

- This briefing note provides practical suggestions on how to decrease survey and programme attrition in development initiatives, based on the literature and experiences of the Youth Forward initiative programme staff.
- The term 'programme' is defined broadly here as any project or activity that requires participation, such as training, mentorship, internship or apprenticeship programmes.

Introduction

Survey and programme attrition are common for development labour market programmes (Mckenzie, 2017), including those that focus on youth (Löwe, Maré, Guilhin, 2016). On average, 20-40% of participants drop out from the programme or do not participate in the follow-up survey (ibid).

Programme attrition is where those enrolled in a programme drop out before it ends. Programme attrition may be positive for programmes. For example, less suitable participants may drop out at early stages, or participants may leave for better opportunities. However, attrition often decreases programme effectiveness: participants do not get the full set of skills, and programmes become less cost-efficient.

Survey attrition is where programme participants do not participate in programme surveys. Since the characteristics of those who did not complete the programme or survey may differ from those who did, it is difficult to understand when and why a programme works and what could be done to improve it.

This briefing note provides suggestions on how to decrease survey and programme attrition in development initiatives, based on the literature (Lee 2003, Hill 2004) and experiences of the programme staff of the Youth Forward initiative. While these suggestions are appropriate for different settings, especially for youth training programmes, programme staff and researchers should take into consideration local context, financial constraints, programme aims, data security aspects and ethical concerns.

How to decrease programme attrition

1. **Plan.** Clearly outline desired outcomes, timelines and procedures to the programme staff to ensure that consistent information is given to participants.
2. **Streamline the process.** Reduce the time between informing, screening, enrolling, and commencing the programme.
3. **Screen.** Select applicants who are likely to benefit from the programme and are motivated.
4. **Make participants aware.** Sensitise participants about the aims and importance of the programme throughout the entire process.
5. **Do not overpromise.** Manage expectations of participants and the community on an on-going basis. Be clear on what the project brings and what is not included.
6. **Communicate with participants' close circle.** Keep parents, legal guardians and spouses informed about the programme and its importance. Get their consent and support. If needed, request lower involvement of programme participants in household activities.
7. **Create a sense of community participation and ownership.** Use games, events, social media and radio to keep people engaged and informed about the programme.
8. **Have mentors and role models.** Use local structures and actors in the programme, such as youth groups and craftspeople - especially those participants can relate to.
9. **Give support.** Provide life and career counselling for participants.
10. **Be inclusive.** For example, to increase parent's participation, especially women, consider providing day care for children.
11. **Do programme activities in accessible locations.** Avoid running programmes on market days and during busy periods, e.g. during planting, harvest, funerals and festive seasons.
12. **Keep track of attendance.** Follow-up with participants who have been absent to understand why.

Some tips from the next section may also provide relevant information on how to decrease programme attrition.

How to decrease survey attrition

1. **Create clear procedures and explain the study's importance.** Inform and regularly sensitise interviewers about the study's procedures and make sure they understand the value of the data being collected.
2. **Record all available contact information.** This will allow you to identify respondents for follow-up surveys. Record respondents' full names, including informally used or local names, respondents' photos, addresses with landmarks, GPS coordinates, phone and WhatsApp numbers, email and Facebook account names, and names of churches or other social groups they are a part of. Explain to respondents that the study will be more powerful if they can be found again.
3. **Gather extra contact information.** Ask for contact information of next of kin, best friend(s) and other household members. They are most likely to know of a respondent's whereabouts in the future.
4. **Make it clear to respondents how their data will be used.** Use informed consent to explain procedures to respondents, ensure confidentiality of respondent information, and create and follow data security procedures.
5. **Stay in touch.** Provide respondents with an institutional phone number and email address. Ask them to contact your organisation if they move or change contact details. Consider rewarding respondents by giving gifts such as airtime.
6. **Hire local officers.** They can monitor migrations within communities. In addition, their familiarity with respondents can make them more willing to participate in the interview and respond to questions.
7. **Use the same interviewers for all rounds of surveys.** Their familiarity with locations and respondents will make conducting follow-up surveys easier.
8. **Create a tracking form.** It will capture information on those who cannot be reached - interview next of kin, family, neighbours and other informants to determine any new locations and contact details of the respondents.
9. **Make contact early.** Reach out to respondents one or two months before the follow-up survey. Remind them about the programme and survey, update contact information, and tentatively schedule an interview. This will help to assess the extent of migration, and will inform how much respondent tracking is needed.
10. **Use time strategically.** Make use of holidays and festivals to look for participants who have emigrated from the community to update contact information, and schedule or conduct an interview. However, consider the appropriateness and ethical implications of interrupting people and asking interviewers to work during this time.
11. **Plan the budget.** Follow-up surveys are usually more expensive than baselines/intake surveys.

Notes

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About Youth Forward

The Youth Forward initiative is a partnership led by the Mastercard Foundation, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Global Communities, Solidaridad, NCBACLUSA and GOAL. Its focus is to link young people to quality employment or to starting their own businesses in the agriculture and construction sectors in Ghana and Uganda. The Youth Forward Learning Partnership works across the initiative to develop an evidence-informed understanding of the needs of young people in Ghana and Uganda and how the programme can best meet those needs. The Learning Partnership is led by ODI in the UK, in partnership with Development Research and Training in Uganda and Participatory Development Associates in Ghana.



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