

Filling All the Seats in the Room

USING DATA TO ANALYZE ENROLLMENT DROP-OFF

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Meeting enrollment goals is as much a function of recruiting eligible participants as it is a function of helping them successfully complete the enrollment process. When recruiting to fill spots in a program, staff members focus on finding the right match between program services and requirements, and an applicant's needs and interests. A match is made when needs, interests, and requirements align, and results in a successful enrollment. Many programs, like those in MDRC's evaluation of the [WorkAdvance](#) project, find that just a fraction of those they initially recruit to participate in their program end up enrolling. In this post, we examine some key lessons from MDRC's evaluation of the WorkAdvance project to help turn program recruits into program success stories.

MDRC's technical assistance teams developed three steps and a few simple tools to help staff in the WorkAdvance program analyze their recruitment process, with these goals in mind:

- Use resources efficiently by recruiting at locations that yield a high number of eligible applicants
- Improve their understanding of when and why applicants drop out of the enrollment process in order to address barriers

On average, 1 in 5 people recruited for WorkAdvance were eligible for the program

A sector-focused workforce program such as WorkAdvance had a specific end-goal: Enrolling participants in structured training and employment services that would lead to jobs in a specific industry. Recruiters had to find applicants who met specific eligibility criteria, including whether they had the skills and background that employers sought. Recruiters also had to carefully assess whether potential participants were willing and able to attend program services.



THREE STEPS TO MORE EFFICIENT ENROLLMENT



Step 1: Mine your data

WorkAdvance programs used a Recruitment Questionnaire to gather some basic information, asking a short list of questions early in the enrollment process and recording responses in their Management Information System (MIS) for easy analysis. Here is some of the most important information to collect at this stage:

- How did the applicant learn about the program? Be as specific as possible. WorkAdvance programs tested out numerous outreach strategies for connecting with potential applicants. Recording this information in detail helps staff understand which strategies work best.
- Did the applicant enroll in the program?
- If not, why? Be as specific as possible. This helps staff understand potential barriers to enrollment.

Here is an example of a well-executed recruitment questionnaire:

NEW YORK

200 Vesey Street
23rd Floor
New York, NY 10281
Tel: 212 532 3200

OAKLAND

475 14th Street
Suite 750
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: 510 663 6372

WASHINGTON, DC

1990 M Street, NW
Suite 340
Washington, DC 20036

LOS ANGELES

11965 Venice Boulevard
Suite 402
Los Angeles, CA 90066

www.mdrc.org



Recruitment Questionnaire	
Today's Date:	Applicant Name:
How did the applicant learn about the program?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Media (specify newspaper, TV, social media; name exact sources.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Flyer (specify neighborhood, organization, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Online (specify website, search type)	<input type="checkbox"/> Referral partner (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Word of mouth (specify who)	<input type="checkbox"/> Referral from current participant or graduate (specify who)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)	
Did this applicant eventually enroll in the program? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
If no: Why did this applicant NOT enroll? Check all that apply and specify reasons if known.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not in target age group	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not meet educational requirements
<input type="checkbox"/> Over income limit	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not meet other eligibility criteria (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Did not have proper documentation (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> Was not interested in program
<input type="checkbox"/> Unable to participate at this time	<input type="checkbox"/> Barriers to participation (specify: transportation, child care)
Additional comments that would help staff analyze this case:	
Form completed by (staff name):	



Step 2: Target promising recruitment sources

MDRC technical liaisons used data from the recruitment questionnaire to create a referral sources matrix, which staff used to assess which recruitment strategies and sources brought in the most enrollees. In the sample matrix below, two takeaways stand out:

Recruitment source	Percent referred	Percent who enrolled
Media: Newspaper	3.7	0.0
Media: TV/Radio	1.2	7.3
Flyer: East Side neighborhood	6.1	0.0
Online: LinkedIn	22.9	14.3
Referral partner: Job Center	3.3	0.0
Referral partner: The Third Place	17.1	21.4
Referral partner: Veteran's Admin	3.3	0.0
Word of mouth: Friend	31.4	21.4
Program participant/graduate	1.2	7.1
Other: TechMark (employer)	1.2	7.1
Other: Spring job fair	8.6	21.4

Most applicants were referred from an online source, or by friends or relatives

BUT

Not all referrals, however, actually enrolled. The most promising referrals came from friends, partner organizations, and a job fair

These data may suggest that more complete information about the program's services and requirements could be communicated via online sources; and that resources devoted to some sources like newspapers, flyers, TV/radio, and direct outreach to employers may be put to better use elsewhere.

Programs can use a recruitment questionnaire to determine the reasons applicants may not enroll. Programs may discover, for example, that enrollees have trouble accessing their offices, or that their office hours make it difficult for working parents to attend. In response, staff and management can consider strategies like offering bus tickets or scheduling extended hours on certain days of the week.



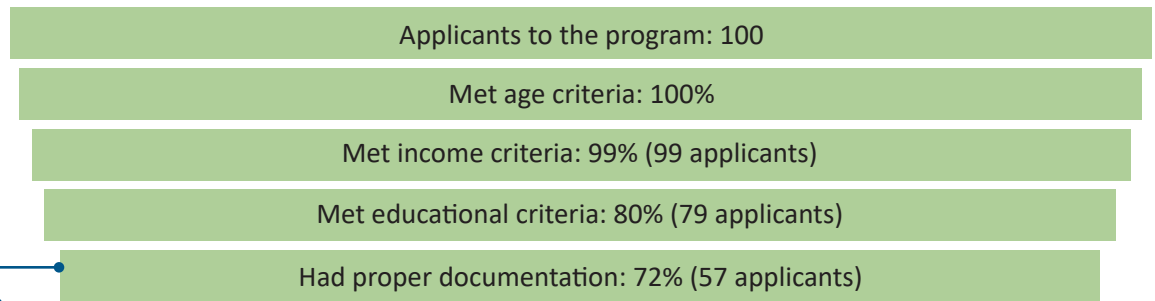
Step 3: Analyze where drop-off happens

WorkAdvance programs used a third tool, the recruitment funnel, to understand where participants were most likely to drop out in the recruitment and enrollment process. Did applicants not meet the enrollment criteria? Did they meet the criteria, but come to the initial enrollment appointment without the necessary paperwork? Did they complete the paperwork, but neglect to return for the orientation meeting? Let's examine what the program learned in this example funnel:

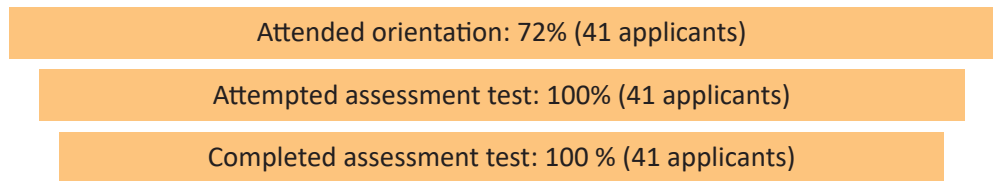
A recruitment funnel provides clear data and an important opportunity for program administrators to critically examine what's working in their processes and make changes.

There are numerous options for addressing challenges at each drop-off point: Programs can test different solutions that fit their program context, reevaluate the funnel, and adjust strategies based on new data.

Day 1



Day 2: Orientation



Day 3: Initial meeting

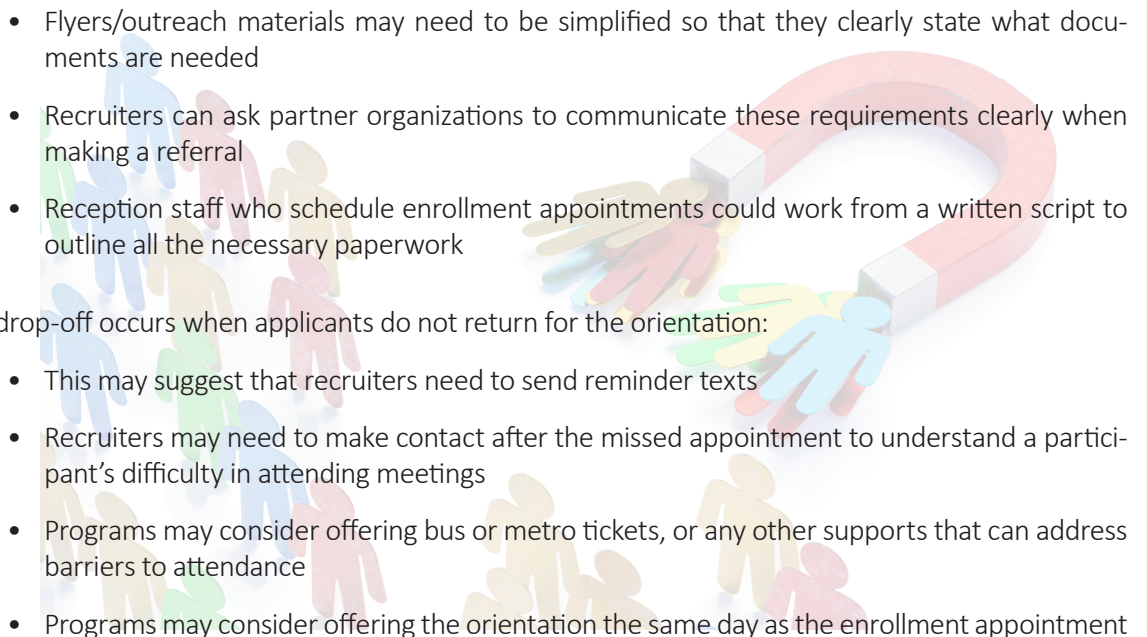
Attended first required meeting with case manager: 50% (20 applicants)

Most attrition occurred at two main points: When applicants came to the enrollment appointment without the right documentation; and when new enrollees did not return for the first meeting with their case manager.

About one out of every five interested individuals made it through enrollment, orientation, and participated in the first program service.

MDRC's Center for Applied Behavioral Sciences (CABS) [SIMPLER framework](#) can provide guidance in diagnosing problems at each step of the funnel and help to brainstorm possible solutions. SIMPLER stands for **S**ocial influence, **I**mplementation prompts, **M**ake deadlines, **P**ersonalization, **L**oss aversion, **E**ase, and **R**eminders—seven practical behavioral techniques that can be applied to service delivery challenges in a variety of ways. For example:

If drop-off occurs because applicants come to the enrollment meeting without the right documentation:

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- Flyers/outreach materials may need to be simplified so that they clearly state what documents are needed
 - Recruiters can ask partner organizations to communicate these requirements clearly when making a referral
 - Reception staff who schedule enrollment appointments could work from a written script to outline all the necessary paperwork

If drop-off occurs when applicants do not return for the orientation:

- This may suggest that recruiters need to send reminder texts
- Recruiters may need to make contact after the missed appointment to understand a participant's difficulty in attending meetings
- Programs may consider offering bus or metro tickets, or any other supports that can address barriers to attendance
- Programs may consider offering the orientation the same day as the enrollment appointment