



**IN PRACTICE**  
*Lessons for  
and from  
Practitioners*

**JUNE 2019**

# Recruiting New Participants

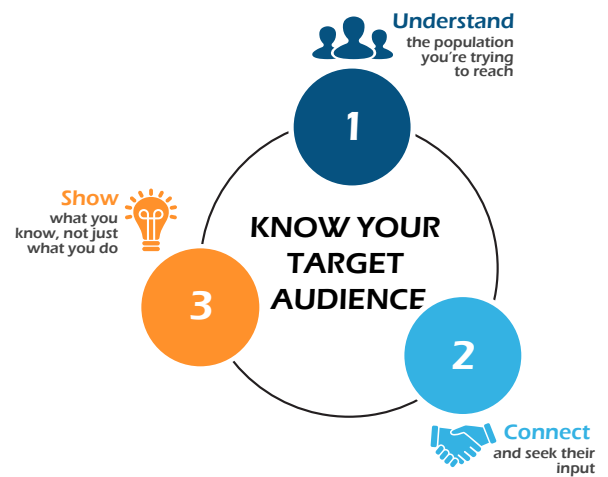
## EIGHT STEPS TO FULL ENROLLMENT

*Samantha Wulfohn, Jennifer Miller Gaubert, and Donna Wharton-Fields*

Many programs grapple with the challenge of recruiting eligible participants. Finding the right person to take part in a program at the right time is a complicated task that may require more staff time than anticipated. MDRC field liaisons and the [Center for Applied Behavioral Science](#) have spent years gathering evidence about the best recruitment strategies for a broad range of programs. In this post, we share insights from our experience on the ground to share what works — and what doesn't — when it's time to recruit participants.

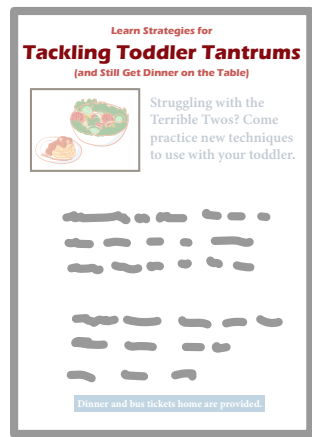
### KNOW YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

- Understand the population you're trying to reach and determine what your program has to offer them. Here are some key questions to consider:
  - Who is a typical participant? What services would be of interest to them?
  - When can they participate? What barriers — logistical, practical, emotional — might prevent participants from enrolling in the program or attending an event?

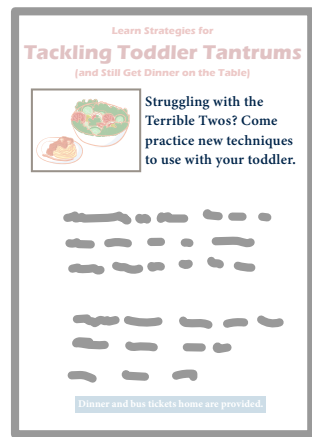


- Connect with your target audience and seek their input. The feedback you receive will help refine your recruitment approach.
- Organize participants by traits and customize information and approaches for each group.
- Use simple prose to keep your materials at a fourth to sixth grade reading level.

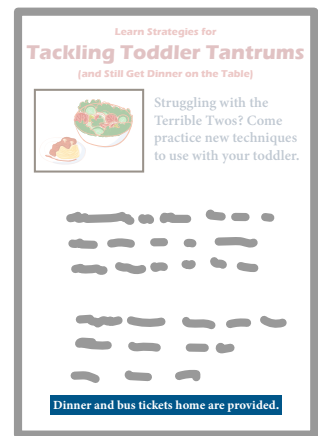
### Market the Benefits of Your Program



**Emphasize the benefits of participating in your program**



**Illustrate how your program solves a problem for your target population**



**Make it clear that the program has participant needs in mind**

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## ESTABLISH AND TRAIN A RECRUITMENT TEAM

- Assign responsibility for recruitment tasks. Is there a dedicated staff member for recruitment, or can everyone help? What role does each staff member play?
- Train recruiters. They should be well-versed in explaining eligibility criteria and have an engaging and practiced “pitch” that focuses on how participants will benefit from a program’s services.

## GET THE WORD OUT

- Assign staff members to specific recruitment strategies and keep a checklist. Use varied forms of communication.
- Ask participants to distribute program flyers and promote the program among family and friends.
- Set deadlines for new enrollments and send multiple reminders. To learn more about the power of these and other behavioral strategies, see [MDRC’s Center for Applied Behavioral Science](#).
- Use social media to help your team build a cohesive program identity that can be quickly disseminated to a wide range of prospective participants. Social media outreach should complement other methods of recruitment, not replace them. Flyers, phone calls, text messages, and emails are still necessary.

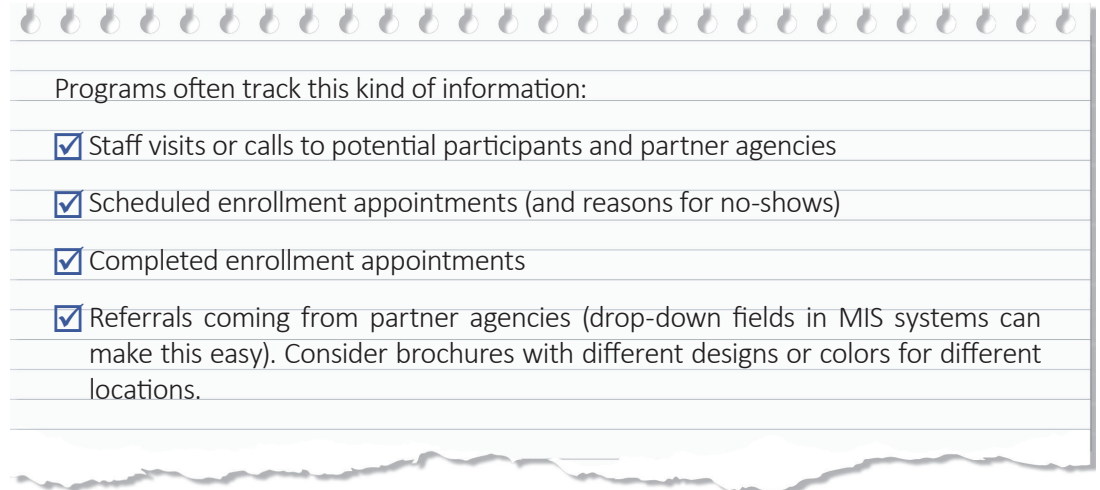


## CONNECT WITH REFERRAL PARTNERS

- Understand your referral partners. What does their typical day look like? Why might they refer someone to your program? What are their objectives?
- Make a detailed plan for optimizing relationships with referral partners:
  - Decide whether relationships will require a formal memorandum of understanding or be informal.
  - Assign one staff member to serve as a central contact for your referral partners.
  - Schedule regular check-in calls, emails, or texts to assess what’s working well and what’s not.

## SET REALISTIC RECRUITMENT GOALS AND TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

- Develop goals that account for the cyclical nature of enrollment. See this [In Practice](#) post for more on enrollment.
- Use MIS or other data systems to track your efforts and regularly review data.



Programs often track this kind of information:

- Staff visits or calls to potential participants and partner agencies
- Scheduled enrollment appointments (and reasons for no-shows)
- Completed enrollment appointments
- Referrals coming from partner agencies (drop-down fields in MIS systems can make this easy). Consider brochures with different designs or colors for different locations.

## PUT YOUR RECRUITMENT PLAN IN WRITING

- Writing out your recruitment plan helps organize multifaceted recruitment activities, and also helps program managers communicate goals, core tasks, and timelines to their recruitment team.
- Establish a budget before recruitment activities begin.

## REVIEW PROGRESS REGULARLY

A “learn-do-reflect” model encourages staff to analyze their experiences, identify what works (and what doesn’t), and sharpen strategies along the way.

## REWARD SUCCESSES

Acknowledge the hard work of recruitment staff and referral partners. Gestures of appreciation don’t have to be elaborate. Think gift certificates to Starbucks, coffee and cookie breaks for your team, or a jar of candy or a bouquet of flowers for a referral partner’s front desk when you next drop off flyers.

