Tips For Recruiting and Retaining Youth in Virtual Programs

On February 25, 2021, the RHNTC presented a webinar entitled: Recruiting and Retaining TPP Program Participants Virtually—Strategies From the Field and Peer Sharing. Three adolescent health experts, along with webinar participants, shared the following tips on how to recruit, support virtual implementation, and retain youth in virtual programs. Access the archived webinar materials on rhntc.org.

Recruit Youth Virtually

- **Use social media for participant recruitment.** Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, or YouTube can be effective recruitment tools. Poll youth on their preferred social media platforms before using.
- **Solicit feedback from youth to improve your virtual program.** Offer easy and anonymous ways, such as using social media (Instagram) and/or a google form for youth to give feedback.

Support Virtual Implementation

- **Work with the curriculum developer to adapt your intervention/curriculum to a virtual setting.**
- **Create a virtual implementation toolkit** that may include materials to help implement the curriculum, including PowerPoint slides with facilitator notes to go along with the intervention.
- **Seek out a fellow TPP grantee implementing the same curriculum.** Share challenges and what strategies have worked when recruiting and retaining youth virtually.
- **Engage parents virtually.** Send a quarterly eNewsletter to update parents/guardians about your program and how they can get involved. Hold a trivia game night as a fun way to involve families.

Retain Youth Virtually

- **At the start of the program, drop off swag bags to youth that are participating.** A swag bag could have your program's logo and contain snacks, water/juice, program/curriculum materials, and hygiene items. Consider delivering food, along with the bag, to each participant’s home before the program starts to ensure they have something to eat.
- **Provide headphones to youth** for privacy from others in their home.
- **Create a welcoming and nurturing virtual environment.** Create group agreements that provide youth with an environment where they feel respected, valued, and safe.
- **Have at least two facilitators during virtual implementation.** Ensure facilitators are skilled at virtual facilitation and participant engagement.
- **Send frequent reminders to youth on program time.** Discuss with your participants the most effective way to get reminders.
- **Be flexible and adaptable.** Technology issues may occur beyond your control. Don’t get discouraged and ask for help.
- **Incorporate easy-to-learn EdTech tools.** Research shows that these tools benefit youth: Kahoot (quizzes), Animoto (animated videos), Padlet (post board), Mentimeter (polling), Jamboard (brainstorming), Flipgrid (facilitate video discussions), and Pear Deck (interactive slides).
- **Support online engagement by using Nearpod.com.** This online student engagement platform can be used to create interactive presentations with quizzes, polls, videos, collaborative boards, and more.
- **Present a lesson/session over multiple days.** This can reduce participant burnout.
- **Schedule frequent breaks and encourage youth to get up and move.** Consider sending youth on a scavenger hunt in their homes to find random objects. Have them come back on camera at a set time with all the objects they could find.
- **Let youth know when cameras can be optional.** Make it clear that there will be times when it is fine to have cameras off. Brainstorm with participants when it will be best to have cameras on.
- **Create a Google Form to allow youth to submit sensitive questions anonymously.** This is an alternative to youth using the public virtual chat box to ask questions.
- **Provide incentives.** Announce that gift cards will be given to the most valuable participant (voted on by the youth), or during a random drawing at the end of a lesson and/or end of the program.
- **Create an incentive tracker spreadsheet** if you are giving incentives to youth participating in your program. This example captures the details needed for audit tracking.

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