



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

NHMRC August 2007 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions

Retention: If Participants Were Boomerangs

August 15, 2007

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center broadcasted a webinar entitled “Retention: If Participants were Boomerangs...,” on August 15, 2007. During the course of the webinar, we received more questions than we were able to answer. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is a follow-up to many of the questions posted during the webinar.

1. Can you clarify OFA’s “eight hour rule”; does it refer to being able to count people as served or as completed?

The Office of Family Assistance has provided the guidance to their grantees that in order to count an individual or couple as “served,” they must participate in eight hours of marriage education. “Completion” is a different issue. Many curricula have a minimum number of hours for completion associated with them. Additionally, you may have indicated in your proposal what number of hours or percent of classes attended is considered “completion” for the purpose of your program. Completion is usually dependent on the length of a class or curriculum. For example, some programs are delivered in 8 hours, while others may have a 2 hour a week, 12 week model. Typically, grantees define a percentage of the total class hours, like 75%, 80% or 90%, as a completion. Just like you didn’t have to attend every day of high school to graduate, few programs require all hours for completion. That doesn’t mean that the returns to class participation are the same, though. A client that attends more hours is likely to learn and retain more from a class than one who attended fewer classes.

Remember, definitions of “served” and “completed” are likely to differ among funding programs, and even within grantee service delivery models. Be sure to talk with your Federal Project Officer to get specific guidance concerning your grant requirements.

2. Do you have any recommendations for ways to track what kind of incentives participants are receiving?

If you provide incentives, like gift cards, coupons or goody bags, to your clients, you might want to collect that information. Your data collection could be

as simple as indicating on your attendance sheets which people received an incentive. That data can be entered into your management information system (MIS). If you don’t have an MIS, you can use Excel spreadsheets that have a row for each person that enrolls in your classes. No matter how you collect your data, make sure you are using it. For the incentive data, look to see if people who received incentives had higher participation and retention rates than others. If they do not, you might want to change or suspend your incentive plan.

3. Can you suggest low or no cost retention strategies that I can use in my grant?

Retention strategies are tools you can implement to increase the chances that participants continue to come to your class and program. They fall into several main categories: program supports, such as child care and transportation; welcoming and social activities that facilitate friendships among participants and trust for the program; and incentives, gifts or services that entice people to attend, like “buy one get one free” restaurant specials. Although some incentives are expensive (gift cards, celebrations, etc.), many tools that increase retention cost little or no money. Please check with your FPO for guidance on whether your grant can cover these costs. Some examples of low or no cost retention strategies that represent the above categories include:

- Take a photo portrait of each participant family
- Call local restaurants for coupons or post-class discounts
- Learn each participant’s name and call them by it every week
- Develop a suggestion book of ways couples can show their love for each other
- Ask each family to bring in their favorite week-night dinner recipe and distribute recipe collections on the last day of classes
- Help families to set up a baby-sitting co-op so they can have date nights on the weekend

- Organize a men's group that meets every Sunday at a sports' restaurant to watch the game
- Create IOU coupon books that couples' can use with each other (i.e., I promise to do two loads of laundry)

As you can see, with some creativity, you can provide small tokens or actions that make clients look forward to their next class that don't break the bank!

4. What are some ways I can make sure that the classroom itself is inviting and welcoming to clients?

Making sure your classroom is welcoming can really increase your retention rates. The best way to do this is to pretend you're a client. Follow this exercise at the time clients are coming to class – i.e. nights or weekends: Google your location's address. Are the directions correct? Can you figure out how to enter the parking lot? Walk to the class from the closest bus stop. Do you feel safe? Walk up to the building – can you figure out if you're in the right place? For grantees that advertise their program name rather

than their organizational name, it will help clients if the program name is clearly displayed on your building's front entrance. Can you open the door or do you need to be buzzed in? Are there signs directing them to the room or does the receptionist know the program's name, description and directions to the room?

Once you walk into the room, it should feel like a grown-up place that's conducive to learning more about relationships or reconnecting with your partner. It should be colorful and comfortable. Even simple decorations like paper tablecloths or magazine pictures of people in love taped to the wall can set the stage. Is there enough light and seats? Is the room too cold or hot? Do you have refreshments available? Is the facilitator waiting to greet participants? For the first class, some people may be nervous. If you have something for them to do or read the moment they walk in, you can ease their jitters. Some grantees have found that putting chairs in a semi-circle facilitates conversation better than classroom formation. Finally, ask your clients. If you seem sincere in your need for objective feedback, they will let you know – and your current clients are your best source of information.