

# Top tips for recruiting and retaining participants in a programme undergoing evaluation



## Who is this guide for?

This guide is for project teams and independent evaluators working on YEF funded evaluations. Project teams typically lead on recruitment but with active support from the evaluator. The precise balance of roles and responsibilities can vary between projects.

## Background

Within the context of YEF's funding, each intervention or programme will need to recruit a certain number of participants, typically children and young people (CYP), to ensure that the evaluation can meet its objectives. In impact evaluations (e.g. randomised controlled trials), this number is based on a specific calculation conducted by the independent evaluator. It is important that each project recruits and retains the required number of children and young people to ensure that the evaluation has the best possible chance of demonstrating whether the project has an impact on intended outcomes.

Recruitment is one of the most consistent challenges in evaluations and we encourage all project teams and evaluators to plan mitigations from the outset. Challenges can arise at the stage of getting referrals to the project, consenting participants into the evaluation, and finally, retaining participants in the trial. Through YEF's previous grant rounds there has been substantial learning on successful recruitment strategies used by project teams and evaluators.

We outline some tips below to support both project teams and evaluators to meet recruitment targets. This is by no means an exhaustive list and not all tips will be relevant in each context. Therefore, please use your judgement and expertise to determine whether the below examples would be appropriate to the context of your project and evaluation. We also encourage both project teams and evaluators to implement other strategies that may not be listed to improve recruitment and retention.

# Top tips for recruiting and retaining participants in a programme undergoing evaluation



### **Budget:**

It's important to highlight that these mitigations may have resource implications. For new projects/evaluations please consider this when preparing your budget. For evaluations already underway you would need to consider what's possible within your existing budget and timelines before further discussions with YEF.



### **Tips for ensuring enough referrals to the programme/intervention:**

- Ensure key stakeholders and partners in your local area are aware of your programme/intervention, for example the Violence Reduction Unit or Local Authority
- Depending on the cohort of CYP you will be working with, have you spoken to the local Youth Offending Team/Service? Local schools? Youth clubs? Relationships with referral partners are crucial.
- Attend local community events. If you've completed a pilot study within your YEF-funded evaluation, share the learnings and gather support!
- Other active and creative outreach work, e.g. recruiting via social media and marketing campaigns can be effective, especially where participants / families self-refer.
- Think about how many referral pathways would realistically support you to reach the sample size based on your organisations previous reach and existing networks/referral partners.
- Ensure referral pathways are as simple as possible, eligibility criteria is clear and objective, and that referrers have a clear understanding of the eligibility criteria.

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- Create easy to read and understand resources (physical/online) that tell people what your programme/intervention is and how CYP can be referred.
- Project and Evaluator teams should ensure that where possible timelines don't have a significant lag between referral through to consent and collecting baseline data.
- Think about the timing of gathering referrals and make realistic predictions of recruitment rates accordingly. I.e. in some settings/contexts referrals are likely to be lower in summer months and over Christmas.
- Identify any areas of concern or challenges arising with referrals as early as possible – projects and evaluators should work as a team to implement mitigation strategies and inform their YEF Programme and Evaluation Manager at the earliest opportunity.

**Getting enough referrals is a crucial start to recruiting enough CYP into the trial, however ensuring that the CYP/their parents/carers consent into the evaluation is critical.**



### Tips for recruiting participants to the evaluation:

- If project teams are gaining consent, ensure evaluators provide training and support on how to gather informed consent, and ongoing support and troubleshooting as needed.
- Be creative when developing your information sheets for example could these be in a video/audio format to make them more accessible?
- Hold in-person recruitment days inviting CYP, parents/carers to provide information on the evaluation.

## Guidance

# Top tips for recruiting and retaining participants in a programme undergoing evaluation



- Send reminders for completion of consent/baseline data questionnaires – this could be via text message instead of email.
- Ensure processes are racially equitable – do resources need to be translated? Do you need to budget for a translator? Are there extra steps you need to take to ensure there is understanding of the trial and the consent process?
- Provide incentives for CYP completing data collection timepoints. This would normally be in the evaluator's budget.
- Ensure the service you are recruiting from is suitable e.g. in a randomised controlled trial, the intervention being tested should not be part of services as usual.

**Once required sample size is reached, it then becomes even more important to retain and continue to engage participants through the duration of the trial to ensure completion of any follow up surveys/data needed.**



### Tips for retaining participants in the evaluation:

- Ensuring that control group participants feel involved and excited e.g. at the recruitment stage, present it as recruitment to a valuable study rather than a potential programme.
- Schedule regular check-in calls/text message reminders with all participants involved in the trial.
- Provide incentives for completion of any endline surveys to assist with maximum participation.
- Keep an up-to-date record of participants' contact details.
- Keep note of reasons for dis-engagement and plan suitable mitigations to reduce attrition.

## Guidance

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*Please note this list is not exhaustive and we encourage project teams and evaluators to consider whether other strategies would work in your context. Teams may also want to consult independent research on how to successfully recruit in your context. For example:*

- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740912002551>
- <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/engaging-disadvantaged-and-vulnerable-parents-an-evidence-review>