



## **Getting them to Come Back: Strategies for Retaining and Engaging Participants**

Selma Caal, Brigitte Vaughn, and Isaac Castillo

January 30, 2013

# Who are the Presenters?



**Selma Caal**

Research Scientist  
Child Trends



**Brigitte Vaughn**

Senior Research &  
Policy Analyst  
Child Trends



**Isaac Castillo**

Senior Research Scientist  
Child Trends



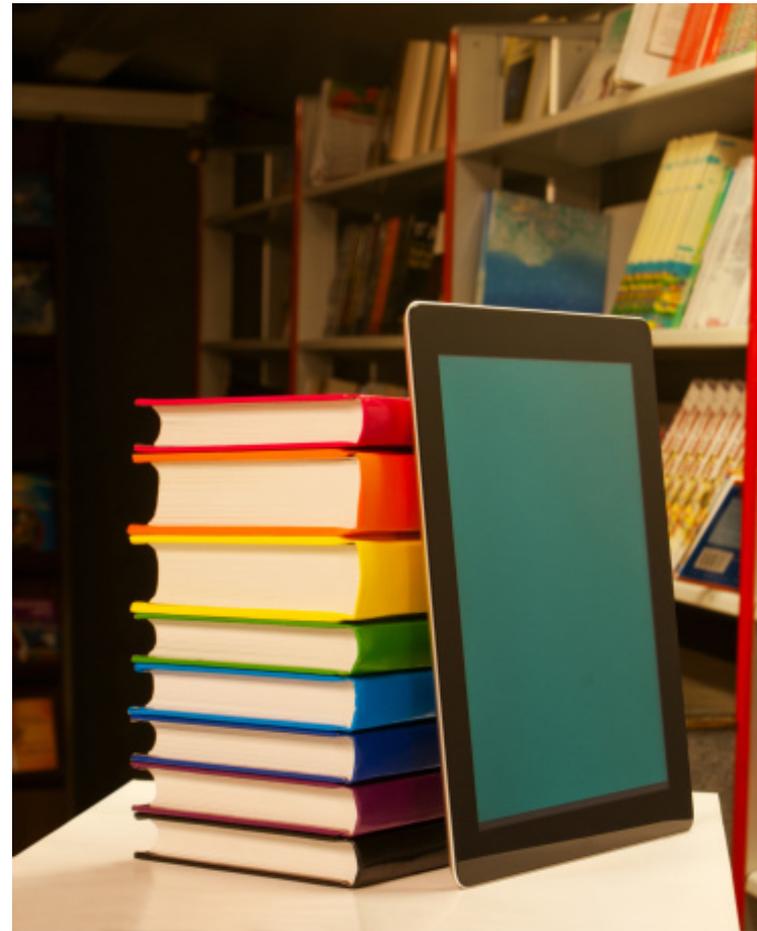
# Why We're Here: Webinar Objectives

On today's call, we'll provide you with:

- **Tips and strategies to retain and engage** program participants according to adolescent age, setting and target population;
- An understanding of “**real-time monitoring,**” and how to effectively apply this practice to improve retention;
- Ideas for how programs can use **texting, Facebook, Twitter, and Four-Square** to improve retention and adolescent engagement.

# Sources of Information

- Review of evaluations of various types of youth programs with different target populations;
- Preliminary findings from six focus groups with Latino youth ages 15-17; and
- Discussions with select OAH grantees





# Our Guest Grantees

**Suzanne Markoe Hayes, Ph.D.**

Evaluation and Program Development

Volunteers Of America, Greater Los Angeles

**Danette McLaurin Glass**

CHAMPS Project Recruiter

More Than Conquerors, Inc.

# Why is Retention Important?

- Having a viable participant retention plan is key component of any program
- Retention rates have implications for program success



# Real-Life Retention Challenges



# Important Retention Concepts

- Transportation
- Flexibility
- Engaging activities
- Engaging staff
- Providing incentives
- Accommodating to youth's circumstances



# How, Where, and When: Logistics and Retention

- **Participants have to get there first!** Take a poll and find out their transportation methods. Once assessed:
  - Ensure youth have safe means of arrival/departure
  - If needed:
    - Facilitate carpooling
    - Provide tokens
    - Provide transportation
- **Location, location, location:** make it accessible and consistent
  - In the community
  - In their school
  - Close to transportation hubs



## How, Where, and When: Logistics and Retention

### **Flexibility is key.**

- During an orientation (and consistently throughout!) ask about availability. Adjust accordingly.
- Be as flexible as possible with program days and times
- Provide make-up sessions and, if possible, drop-in sessions.

### **One size doesn't fit all. Methods vary based on:**

- Age: Challenges/Barriers according to participant age.
- Program setting: School, After-School, Clinic, and Community.

# Voting with Their Feet: Youth Engagement Tactics



## Facilitate engagement between participants

- Offer “chill days”
- Smaller groups facilitate a more intimate social setting
- Encourage participants to develop friendships within the group
- Encourage friends to participate

## Keep it Lively. Some ideas:

- No talking heads: give opportunities to ask questions
- Bring in guest speakers
- Group discussions
- Age-appropriate games

# Voting with Their Feet: Youth Engagement Tactics

**It's no secret: Dynamic staff are key to retention success.**

What does it take? Characteristics of engaging staff include being:

- Caring and respectful
- Responsive
- Enjoy being involved in activities
- Listen openly and suspend judgment
- Manages group dynamics effectively
- Knowledgeable
- Represent youth's background and ethnicity

Involve youth to help in the hiring process and/or ask participants what they need in an instructor.

# Incentives for Retention: What Works

## A range of options:

- Community service hours
- Internship hours
- Monetary incentives
- Food and refreshments
- Field trips

**Again, no one size fits all.**

**Adjust incentives according to:**

- Setting
- Age
- Group size



# Incentives for Retention: What Works



Clearly communicate to your participants at the beginning and throughout the program:

- Attendance expectations
- The type of incentives you will provide

# Real-Life Retention Successes



# Critical! Real Time Monitoring

Simple strategies to implement RTM on a consistent basis:

- **Keep attendance records**
  - They can help you identify attendance patterns possibly linked with activities or facilitator
- **Call participants immediately after a missed session**
  - Be non-judgmental, express genuine concern, and gently ask why the participant was absent
  - Identify patterns of youth missing sessions and use this information to solve the problem
- **Be open to ongoing adjustments to reflect RTM results**



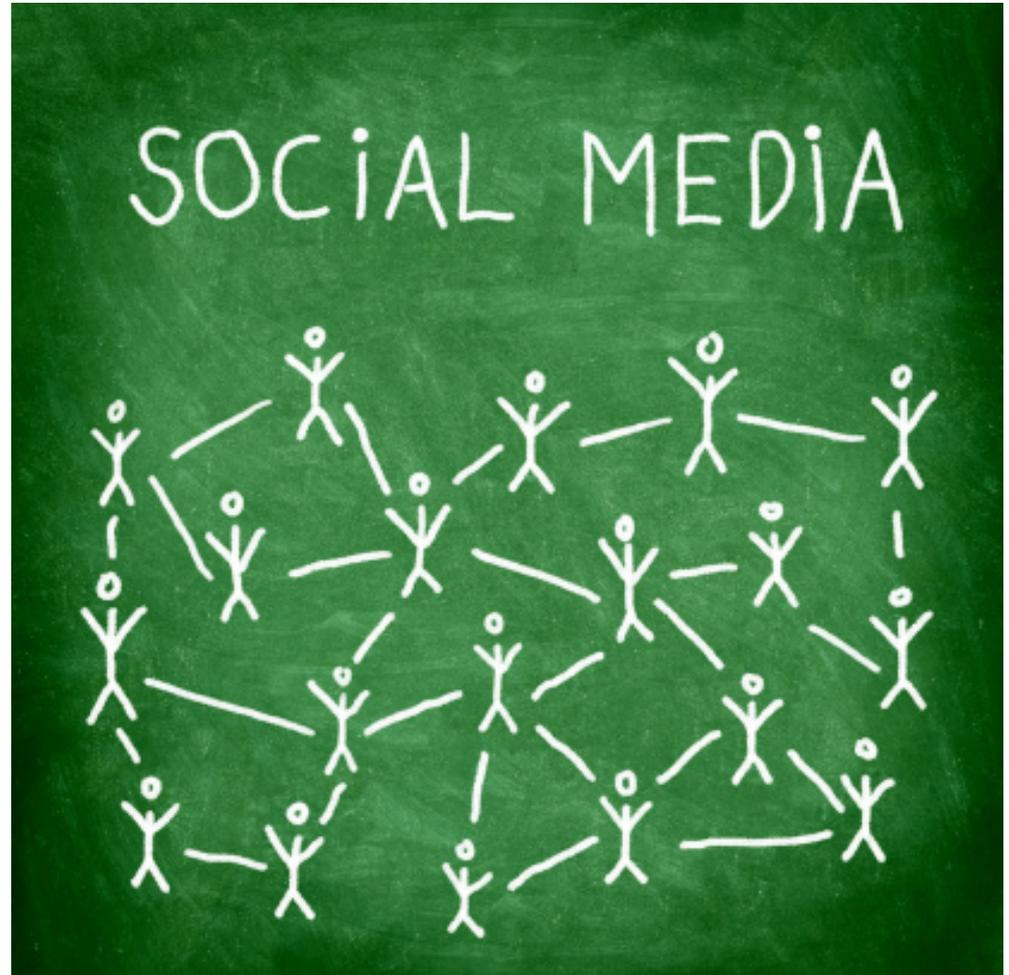
# Just Remember....

- If social media was hard, it wouldn't be so popular!
- Social (& mobile) media are here to stay
- Constant evolution: Facebook this morning, Instagram this afternoon
- Listen, listen, listen
- Be yourself!



# Step-By-Step Tip Sheets

1. Rules to Live By:  
Using Social Media  
to Engage Youth
2. Create a Social  
Media Policy in Ten  
Steps
3. Best Practices for  
Facebook and  
Twitter
4. Getting Started on  
Foursquare



# Tell Us! Does Your Program Staff:



Currently text with your participants?

Use social media (Facebook, FourSquare, Twitter) to connect with participants?

# A Love Affair: Teens and the Internet

- **95%** of American teens are online.
- **Demographic skew:** 97% and 95% of white and black adolescents are online, respectively; this figure stands at 88% for Hispanic teens.
- **Socioeconomic equity:** Almost all higher income teens are online, and so are 93% of teens living in households making <\$30,000.



# The Ubiquitous Cell Phone

**77% of all teens ages 12 to 17 have a cell phone.**

- Just over half have a “regular” cell phone;
- About one quarter have a smart phone (which lets them go online);
- 23% of teens don’t have a cell phone at all.



## Teen cell phone owners in the lowest household income category are most likely to use their handset to go online

Annual household income	Go online with cell phone	Computer in the home
Under \$30,000	41%*	70%*
\$30,000-49,999	27%	84%
\$50,000-74,999	22%	93%
\$75,000+	23%	97%

\* significantly different than all other cells in the respective rows

Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, Teens and Mobile Phones Survey conducted from June 26 - September 24, 2009. N=800 teens ages 12-17 and the margin of error is  $\pm 4\%$ .

## Less Talk, More Texts

Texting is an extension of engagement: Teens will respond to texting—to any communication—from adults they feel care about them.

Texting lessons learned:

- Texting in; E-mail out.
- Need them to be somewhere? Text them!
- Texts are effective in enforcing healthy habits



## Texting Take Aways

- Reinforce health messages
  - No more than two a day
  - Use an active voice
  - Recommend specific actions
  - Come from a reputable source
- Support and remind, on a mass or individual level
- Increase class engagement
- Leverage additional resources



\*Be careful of cost considerations! Take a poll.

# The Juggernaut: Facebook

93% of all teen social media users are on the site.

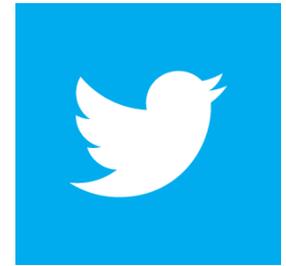
## Lessons Learned & Takeaways

- Ask questions and listen to the answers
- Communicate key messages that resonate.
- Keep it fresh! New content = more engagement.
- Use youth ambassadors.



# Tweeting for Success

Twitter use has historically been low among teens – but it's growing fast.



## Lessons Learned & Takeaways

- Twitter = the new “message board”
- Encourage students to tweet questions about logistics or other q’s
- Support learning by tweeting main lesson points from lessons, host a Twitter chat, Etc.!

## What on earth is Four-Square?



A location based social networking website.

This application can help you keep more teens participating in your programs!

## FourSquare Lessons Learned & TakeAways

- Reward consistency!
- Augment program records
- Need to pay attention to important privacy concerns.
- More effective for older youth and smartphone users.





# Going for It: Main Takeaways for Using Texting and Social Media for Retention

- Establish a plan detailing permissions and frequency
- Just go for it – the learning curve is steep, but quick
- Use well-networked students, with influence among their peers, to help show you the way
- Multiple touches work best for retention: consider implementing ALL of these mediums to increase success!
- Don't just put it up and forget it: think video posts, twitter chats, contests, and more!



# Questions & Answers

Selma: [Scaal@childtrends.org](mailto:Scaal@childtrends.org)

Brigitte: [Bvaughn@childtrends.org](mailto:Bvaughn@childtrends.org)

Isaac: [icastillo@childtrends.org](mailto:icastillo@childtrends.org)

# Register! Setting-Specific Calls



Talk with other OAH grantees about retention challenges at calls scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, February 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>