

STRATEGIES TO KEEP PEOPLE COMING

When running your heart health program, you may find that some people drop out or miss sessions. This is normal in any program. While you cannot avoid it entirely, you can do certain things to keep most people coming. **Here are 10 strategies:**

#1 Over recruit

If you expect some people to drop out of your program, over recruit from the beginning. For example, if you want to have 10 people in your program but know from past experience that 5 may drop out, then recruit an extra 5. Then either plan to start with an extra-large group knowing that some people will drop out, or put the extra people on a waiting list. Keep in mind that waiting lists work only if you and the people in your program agree with having some participants start the program late. Also note that having some people start later than others will affect your evaluation.

#2 Make sure that your program is “easy” to attend

Offer your program at a time, day, and at a place that is convenient. If your program will run for a long period, be sure to check in with your participants after a month or so to make sure that it continues to be easy to attend.

#3 Have a graduation celebration at the end of the program

When people know they will be recognized for their hard work at the end of a program, they often feel motivated to complete the program. Encourage families and friends of the people in the program to come. Hand out certificates of completion and other awards to make the day extra special.

#4 Get feedback right away

If possible, after the first session, ask participants in your program to **share what they think about the program** so far. This will help you make any changes to meet their needs better. For example, if someone tells you that they do not like how the chairs are arranged or where the session is being held, you will know to set things up differently for the next session. Small things like this can keep people happy and coming back. You will not be able to do everything that each person requests, but you want people to know that you are listening to them and are doing what you can.

To find out what people think about the program, ask questions such as:

- What did you like about today’s session?
- What would you have changed about what we did today?
- What do you want to do in upcoming sessions?

Also, be sure to check out [Evaluate Your Program](#) in the toolkit. This includes additional questions you can ask to evaluate your program.

**#5
Describe the
benefits of your
program clearly
and often**

You will know what people find beneficial if you understand them and their needs. For example, if you work with senior citizens who have high blood pressure, they may have told you that they joined your program because you are teaching them how to lower their blood pressure and manage their medications. At different times, remind them how your program is doing that.

**#6
Show the people
in your program
that they are co-
owners of it**

The more people know that something is theirs, the more they will want to take part in it and keep coming back. Here are some ways to do this:

- Have people set up some of their own **goals and expectations** for your program. If, for example, they decide as a group to exercise together for the first 15 minutes of each session, then chances are good that they will do this. Why? Because they set up the goal themselves. For example, for the Healthiest Winner Program through Housing Opportunities Unlimited in Boston, participants decide weekly what their health goals are, such as “Lose one pound this week” or “Take my medication to bring down my blood pressure.”
- See **what roles people would like** to take. For example, one person could be the photographer, another could help lead activities, and another could organize ride sharing.
- Ask people in the program to **come up with a project** that they will help lead. For example, in North Carolina, residents at the Charlotte Housing Authority are pulling together their own healthy recipes that the group will put together into a cookbook.
- Let people in the program **take turns helping to teach**. This does not mean you will stop being the facilitator. It means that, when you know someone has knowledge or experience about a heart health topic, you allow them to share this with others. You will be there to help and correct them if needed.

**#7
Offer a mix of
things to do**

Keep things interesting so that people do not get bored. Mix it up! You will be the main person talking, but provide as many opportunities as you can for people to work with and teach each other. Try putting people in pairs and groups, having people share experiences, doing activities, watching videos, going on field trips or doing things outside, and using hands-on materials. This is described in more detail in [Help adult learners learn](#).

**#8
Make your
program perfect
for adult learners**

Keep in mind that **adults learn in different ways** than younger learners. Are you meeting their needs? Go back to [Help adult learners learn](#) if you are not sure.

**#9
Offer rewards and
incentives**

Some organizations like to give away things or offer services for free as a way to encourage people to attend their program. This is often effective. Just make sure the main reason people attend is the program and not the “free stuff.”

Here are some ideas for rewards and incentives:

- **Provide a meal** at the start of each session. The meal should be heart healthy so that people get to taste what they are learning! This is especially nice for people who do not have time to eat before coming or cannot afford regular meals.
- **Give away gift cards.** One idea is to give them out when people graduate from your program.
- **Provide free child care.** If possible, offer a child care program where the children are also taught heart health messages like being physically active and eating healthy foods.
- **Offer bus passes or other free transportation options.** If you know people struggle with getting to your program, see how you can help them. Maybe you can get a pack of bus passes donated or organize ride sharing. You can also give out or raffle off gas cards.
- **Have a raffle** at the end of each session. Include items that you know that people in your program will like. You can get many, if not all, of these items donated. For ideas on getting donations, read [Find Out What You Need](#) in the toolkit.

**#10
Add small touches
that have a big
impact**

What can you say or do to show the people in your program how much you value them coming? Here are some ideas:

- Learn the **name of each person** in your program right away. After that, refer to each person by name.
- Try to **point out the things that people do that are helpful** to what you are teaching. For example, “Thanks, Jorge, for describing what heart disease is. I can tell you have some experience with this and can help us all learn.”
- Try to chat with a different person before or after each session. This way, you can **get to know each one.** This is a good time to compliment people on things you have noticed, like them attending regularly or helping others.

