

Systematically Classifying Retention Strategies: Applications for a Tobacco Cessation Research Study

Dawson Mills, BA, Krista Schaefer, MPH, Jaedon P. Avey, PhD

Background and Purpose

Smoking rates are higher among Alaska Native/American Indian people, so exploring how to improve the **effectiveness** of tobacco cessation programs **is critical**.

However, **retention** in tobacco cessation research studies **is often low**, limiting power and generalizability of results.

We **categorized our study's retention strategies** using a classification scheme recently described in the literature and identified **associations between study processes and retention**.

Methods

We conducted a secondary analysis of retention among 151 Alaska Native and American Indian participants in a longitudinal tobacco cessation study that involved 3 study visits over 6 months. We utilized Teague et al.'s categorization scheme to classify the retention strategies into (1) barrier-reduction, (2) community-building, (3) follow-up/reminder, and (4) tracing strategies. We probed a contact log to identify study design attributes (e.g., the number of times participants were contacted and contact method). We then identified correlations between these variables

and study retention

Results

Barrier Reduction

- Flexible hours
- Direct phone number

Community Building

- Topical engagement
- Advisory group
- Tribal review

Follow-up/Reminder

- Multiple contact attempts
- Phone, letter, email, and/or text reminders
- Financial incentives

Tracing Strategies

- Alternative contacts

Associated with retention:

- + Successfully reaching a participant by phone (OR = 1.36 retention at 26 weeks)
- + Participant contacted the research team (OR = 2.29 retention at 26 weeks)
- Unsuccessful calls (where a participant could not be reached and a voicemail was left when possible; OR = 0.71 retention at 26 weeks)

Conclusion

Future studies could make use of additional barrier reduction and tracing strategies. Transportation vouchers, a barrier reduction strategy, could be used. When a participant cannot be reached, alternative contact methods (e.g., email) should be used immediately, instead of continuing to make unsuccessful phone calls.

This project was supported by a NIH grant, U261IHS0079.

Retention Strategy Categorization Reference

Teague, S., Youssef, G.J., Macdonald, J.A. *et al.* Retention strategies in longitudinal cohort studies: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Med Res Methodol* **18**, 151 (2018).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0586-7>

