Improving Client Participation in GPRA Follow-up Interviews

Your behavioral health program collects Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) client data at intake, discharge, and follow-up about 6 months after the initial intake interview. This data is an invaluable source of information about your program and your clients. It can help you evaluate the effectiveness of your program and inform key decisions about services.

Obtaining follow-up data from clients after they have left your program can be challenging. It may be difficult to contact or locate clients. Furthermore, clients might express reluctance or unwillingness to participate in follow-up interviews.

About this Guide

This Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) Technical Assistance (TA) Guide developed by SAMHSA's Performance Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS) is designed to help behavioral health program staff enhance their ability to successfully contact and conduct follow-up interviews with clients.

What is in this Guide?

The three sections of this TA Guide focus on the importance of collecting follow-up data and strategies to increase the likelihood of clients participating in follow-up interviews.

- **The importance of collecting follow-up data.** This section provides a brief overview of the value of data ob-

Part One: The Importance of Collecting Follow-up Data

Evaluation is an essential component of behavioral health programs serving people living with mental, substance use, or co-occurring disorders. Evaluation data provides important information regarding the program's services, utilization, and effectiveness. Programs collect data to comply with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 and the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010, as well as various public or private funding sources.

Being able to contact clients after they leave a program is crucial to evaluating programs effectively. A high proportion of clients interviewed at intake, discharge, and follow-up greatly enhances the value of an evaluation to programs and funders.

Various circumstances and reasons, however, can make it difficult to locate or meet with clients after they leave your program. Some people will have moved without leaving contact information. Some may have moved forward

Part Three: Strategies to Increase Client Participation in Follow-up Interviews

General Guidelines for Approaching and Interacting with Clients

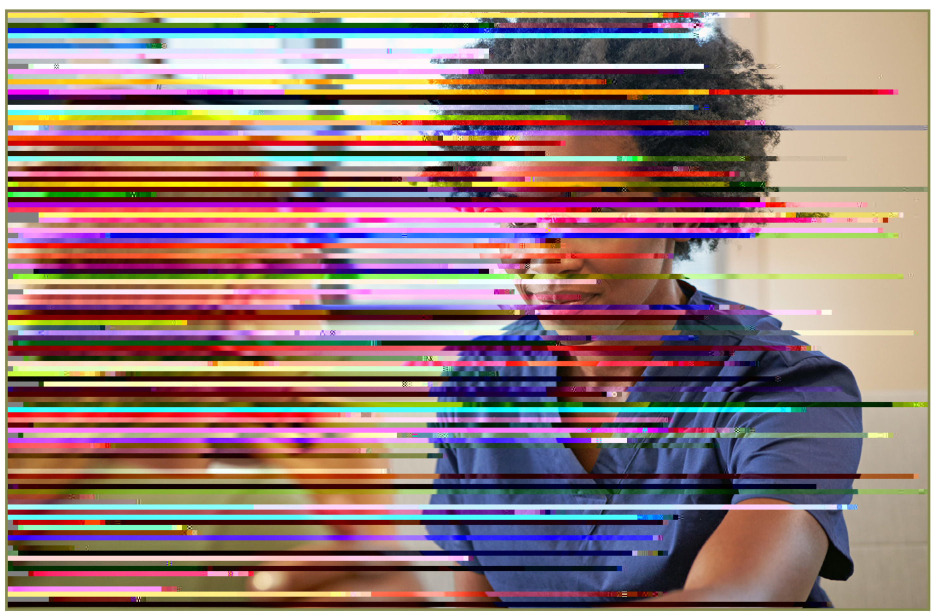
How interviewers engage and communicate with clients can have a significant influence on clients' willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. Clients will be much more receptive when interviewers:

- Greet them warmly and respectfully
- Create a sense of safety
- Introduce themselves by name and identify the program they represent (and any other necessary details)
- Ask clients' permission to conduct follow-up interviews
- Explain the purpose of the interview and respond to clients' questions
- Show genuine interest in who they are (not just extract information from them)
- Are calm and patient, not perfunctory or rushed
- Honor clients' right to make their own decisions, including whether to take part in the interview
- Affirm their efforts and strengths

A Framework for Conducting Follow-Up Interviews

Borrowing from the motivational interviewing approach, the Elicit–Provide–Elicit (EPE) framework can be a useful guide for interviewers to think about the flow—or back and forth—of respectful conversations when interviewers have a focus, in this case, to conduct follow-up interviews with clients[2].

Below you will find a brief description of each phase of the E–P–E framework followed by examples of statements that interviewers might use in each phase. The guide provides illustrations within each phase for clients who are 1) willing to participate in interviews, 2) reluctant to participate, and 3) are expressing a desire not to participate.



[2] Miller, W.R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Elicit

Upon greeting the client warmly, introducing oneself, and engaging briefly with the client, the interviewer will want to focus the conversation on conducting a follow-up interview. Rather than assuming the client's willingness to participate, it is wise to ask permission to conduct the interview. In addition to asking permission, it may be helpful to explain the context or reasons why you are requesting this information from them.

It can also be useful to give permission to clients to not participate, or to not feel compelled to respond to questions that they feel uncomfortable answering.

Even for clients who seem willing to participate, consider asking them if they have any questions before you begin. Some clients will likely have questions about how the agency will use the information, whether their responses are anonymous, and others.

Below we suggest ways to provide information and ask permission to conduct the interview, depending on how

When clients seem hesitant, reluctant, or

Provide

For those clients who are willing to participate, begin conducting the interview. Your role is not only to collect