Strategies for Increasing Survey Response Rates

There are multiple strategies to help you improve your response rates (RR) when implementing a survey. Different approaches may be used throughout the design and implementation processes. Some strategies may require adapting your approach, survey tool or other aspects of the process.

Survey purpose and response rates
- Integrate purpose of survey with other program materials so that families know about it and see value in participating
- Share results of survey back with families
- Use the data to make changes: this shows families the importance and value of their input.
- Ask families to help in administration/implementation of surveys and evaluation of results

Examples from states’ 2011 C4 APRs
- Service coordinators provided with talking points re: administration of the survey (state RR=40%)
- Information on assessing family outcomes included on all program materials: informing families is integrated through the program

Survey design and response rates
- Tailor the survey to specific characteristics of the intended audience (e.g., language, reading level, etc.)
- Appearance matters! The survey layout should be clean and attractive
- Make the survey user-friendly: Use simple, easy-to-understand items and response choices
- Keep the survey to a reasonable length. Having too many questions can affect not only response rate, but also the quality of the data.

Examples from states’ 2011 C4 APRs
- Response rate increased from 49% to 58% with revised, shorter survey (FOS to revised FOS)
- Response rate increased from 20% to 30% with abbreviated NCSEAM questionnaire (22 questions to 10)

Survey administration and response rates
- Utilize multiple means of administration & return (mail, online, phone, in person)
- Inform parents about who will have access to the results and how the information will be used; ensure confidentiality
- Send pre-notification that the survey is coming; follow up with non-respondents; send thank-you notes
- Use incentives such as random drawing for prizes
Survey administration and response rates (continued)

Examples from states’ 2011 C4 APRs

  o The six states with the highest response rates (58% -100%) all used in-person distribution, typically by service coordinator
  o One state found that for urban districts using hand delivery, RR= 72%; for other districts, using mail-only, RR=21% and RR=6%
  o One state that moved from mail to in-person delivery of survey increased its RR from 30% to 42%
  o One state that cut out follow-up mailing experienced a 5% drop in RR
  o One state that used follow-up calls to families who had not responded reported RR=40%
  o One state instituted random drawings for gift cards: for surveys in English increased RR 28% to 32%; for Spanish increased RR 16% to 29%
  o One state offered incentives to programs to improve RR

Tracking responses and administrative support

  ➢ Ensure that family contact information is up-to-date
  ➢ Establish scheduled alerts to prompt appropriate staff regarding administration and collection of survey
  ➢ Monitor responses/ non-responses periodically
  ➢ Ensure that relevant staff have sufficient resources to inform families about the survey, encourage families’ participation, and follow up with non-respondents

Examples from states’ 2011 C4 APRs

  o Providers required to develop improvement plans if RR< 20% (state rate=31%)
  o Targeted strategies to improve response rates for programs w/low RRs (state RR=47%)
  o Monthly monitoring of surveys returned (state RR=70%)
  o Tracking local progress for accountability (state RR=40%)

References
