

How can programs use text messaging to learn about participant experiences?

Text messages can be a useful tool for communicating with and gathering data from participants in real time. Here are some ideas for learning the most from this approach.

Get permission.

- Ensure that participants have given consent to receive text messages from the program. Consent can be obtained through the program's enrollment paperwork, for example.

Inform participants.

- Make sure participants know to expect text messages from the program, so that they do not mistake messages from the program for spam.
- Inform participants that their responses will be used to help improve the program, for example, and will not affect their participation in it.

Involve the staff.

- Have staff members confirm that participants can receive texts from the program when they enroll.
- Ask staff members to check in with participants regularly to make sure contact information is up-to-date and to encourage participants to continue to respond to text messages.

Personalize the introduction.

- Use a personal introduction that establishes whom the text is from.

Keep the burden low.

- Keep it short, around 3–10 questions.
- Ask questions about immediate reactions and feelings.
- Ask about experiences in the last day or week.
- Avoid questions that require respondents to retrieve additional information.

Don't give up.

- Develop a plan to follow up with participants who do not respond after receiving the first text message.