Securing District Recruitment for School-Based Studies

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Disclaimer

This presentation summarizes the general results of research undertaken by staff at NORC at the University of Chicago. The views expressed are attributable to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of NORC or those of the study sponsors.

Overview of Discussion

- District recruitment for school-based research
  - School reform initiatives have led to increased research requests
  - District response: research clearance processes
  - Led to the necessity of a "recruitment" phase for school-based studies

- Our focus today:
  - Examination of district recruitment level of effort data for one (1) sample batch (Batch 5) of districts from the Healthy Communities Study (HCS)
  - Recruitment considerations when planning and implementing district/school-based studies

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Study Characteristics and Overview

- Healthy Communities Study
  - Sponsored by the National, Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) under the umbrella of the National Institutes for Health
  - Under subcontract to Battelle Memorial Institute, one of NORC's primary tasks was district and school recruitment for the communities in the study

- Study Characteristics
  - National study with the goal of collecting data in approximately 130 communities across the country; up to four elementary/middle schools per community (approximately of 500 schools total)
  - A community is defined as a "high-school catchment area"

HCS Study Components

- Study Components
  - District online survey (1 per selected school)
  - School online survey (1 per school)
  - School visit for observation and staff interviews
  - Parent recruitment for at-home visits

- NORC was provided with the sample in 'batches'

- Today we are focusing on Batch 5.

Characteristics and Timeline for Batch 5

- Recruitment efforts for Batch 5 cases began in June of 2014

- Recruitment and data collection occurred on a rolling basis, based on districts' decision to participate

- In preparing to examine Batch 5, NORC grouped the cases into the following categories:
  - First-time districts
  - Re-Approachers
  - Out of Scope and Not Needed

"New" Districts & "Re-Approachers"

- Overall, Batch 5 included a total of **67** unique districts, **60** of which had not been approached yet in previous sample batches.

- The three categories that we will focus on today are Batch 5 districts that approved, refused, or provided no decision to participate in the study (Total of **57** cases).

Table 1: Batch 5 "New" District Case Status

District Approved	7
District Refused	44
No Response (District did not provide a decision)	6
Out of Scope (OOS)	1
District Was Not Needed	2
TOTAL	**60**

"New" Districts - Urbanicity

- For purposes of this analysis, we removed cases that were considered ineligible (out of scope) or 'Not Needed' because those cases did not receive the full recruiting treatments.

- The eligible "New" (57) cases can be broken down by rural, suburban, urban.

Table 2: "New" District Cases Breakdown

Rural (1)	14
Suburban (2)	30
Urban (3)	13
Total	57

Days to a Decision & Recruitment Contacting

- "Days to a Decision" is a calculation that NORC created and monitored that totaled the number of *calendar days* from the point of Advance letter mailing to the district requesting participation, to the point at which the district decided (yes or no) to participate.

- For those districts that chose **NOT** to participate, NORC captured their "reason for refusal" which will be discussed later.

- The "Number of Contacts" describes both email and phone treatments.

Days to a Decision & Recruitment Contacting (2)

- The following Summary Table breaks down the Days to a Decision by the Number of Contacts (email and telephone) to each "New" district in Batch 5.

Table 3: Average Days to a Decision and Number of Contacts

	Total Average		Approvals		Refusals		Non Responders	
	Total Average Days to a Decision	Total Average Number of Contacts	Average Days to Approval	Average # of contacts to Approval	Average Days to Refusal	Average # contacts to Refusal	Average Days for Non Responders	Average # contacts to Non Responders
Rural	57.8	10.8	27	3	60.2	11.4	N/A	N/A
Suburban	61.3	12.1	51.5	13	55.1	11.7	122	15.3
Urban	120.1	17.6	73	19	53	9.5	129.7	9

Days to a Decision & Recruitment Contacting (3)

- Overall, regardless of approval or refusal, districts took an average of **79.7** days to make a decision or be considered a passive refusal (non-responsive).

- The average number of contacts per district, regardless of approval, refusal, or non-response was **13.5**.

- More contacts were made for approvals than refusals (**11.7** versus **10.9** contacts).

Recruitment Contacting – Number of Contacts

- An important piece to assessing expected level of effort for this type recruitment is related to the number of contacts it will take to eventually get a decision

- The following table breaks down the number of contacts (email and telephone):

Table 4: Breakdown of the Number of Contacts

	Rural (14 cases) Range: 3 -25 contacts	Suburban (30 cases) Range: 2-26 contacts	Urban (13 cases) Range: 5-25 contacts	Total Cases Range: 2-26 contacts
0-10 contacts	8 (57%)	15 (50%)	7 (54%)	30 (53%)
11 – 20 contacts	5 (36%)	12 (40%)	5 (38%)	22 (40%)
21+ contacts	1 (7%)	3 (10%)	1 (8%)	5 (8%)

Reasons for New District Refusals

- In an effort to convert refusals, recruitment staff were instructed to inquire why a district decided not to participate.

Table 5: Counts of Reasons for District Refusal

Reason	Count in Batch 5
Inability to Recruit Sufficient Number of Schools	1
Burden on Participants	2
Planned Restructuring or Staff Change	3
No Benefit to the District	5
Too Busy	13
No Reason	20
Total New District Refusals	**44**

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Re-approached Districts

	Number of Districts	Avg Days to Decision	Avg Number of Contacts
Batch 5 Approvals	6	47	5.6
Batch 5 Refusal	1	31	6
Original Approvals	**7**	**91.5**	**14.8**

- Proposal requirements
  - Notify district– **4 districts**.
  - A small "change of request" form was required – **1 district**.
  - A full application for re-approval was required – **2 districts**.
- Reason for the re-approached refusal:
  - District overburdened with internal projects and felt there were no resources available to take part in HCS

Types of Research Clearance Submissions

- Types of Formal Submission Requirements
  - General proposals (prepped ahead of time by the research team) accepted, but with specific formatting conditions or instructions
  - Proposals with specific section ordering and formatting, as per district request
  - 1-2 paged submission forms, some 10+ pages
  - Conference calls with IRB coordinators and PI

Table 7: Comparison of Effort for Generic Proposal Submissions and District-Specific Proposal Submissions

Proposal Type	Number of Districts	Average Days to Decision	Average Number of Contacts
Generic Proposal	52	60.4	12.2
Specified Proposal	15	75.8	10.7

Conditional Approvals

- In some cases, districts will grant approval provided that certain conditions are followed. Researchers will need to alter their approach and methods to maintain this approval. The following are examples of such conditions:

  - Finger printing, background checks, TB testing, and FBI clearance for data collection staff
  - Recent ethics certificates for all staff
  - No compensation allowed for district/school employees
  - Written informed consent for all methods
  - Submit required documentation of principal approval to district
  - Provide district approval letters to schools upon first contact

Summary of Considerations

- Plan ahead:
  - Sampling – when possible have a set of replacement districts
  - Once you know your districts, look online for any useful information (research clearance steps, requirements, monthly board meetings where decisions get made, etc.).

- Anticipate at least 2-4 months to recruit a district (the more complicated the study, often the longer the review time)

- Continual follow up – email and telephone calls work!

- Be flexible
  - What can the research team do to mitigate a refusal? Can researchers make accommodations?

Questions? Please email us at: Simko-Cynthia@norc.org

Thank You!

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