

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

2019 Workshop: Interviewers and Their Effects
from a Total Survey Error Perspective

Sociology, Department of

2-26-2019

Effects of Innovative Motivational Strategies and New Staffing Model on Interviewer Attrition: A Data Collection Year in Review

Theresa Camelo

Maureen O'Brien

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociw>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2019 Workshop: Interviewers and Their Effects from a Total Survey Error Perspective by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Problem

Increased interviewer attrition which led to increased project costs and decreased response and completion rates.

The study on which this presentation is based is a national survey of men and women 15-49 year of age, and includes:

- 1) listing, screening and interviewing.
- 2) 8 years of continuous data collection,
- 3) A field staff of 45-50 interviewers per year (including approximately 20 core interviewers who work year to year, and approximately 25 new hires each year).

In 2016-2017, at 6 months post training, attrition was 24% and 9 of the 35 areas were unstaffed (with new hires accounting for most of the attrition).

The cost of the attrition to the project in both dollars and on production were fairly substantial:

- 1) An attrition training was required at a total cost of \$165,000 (including recruiting),
- 2) Iwer travel required to cover the unstaffed areas totaled an additional \$245,000
- 3) For a total cost of \$410,000.

Additionally, we saw decreased response and completion rates as well as a decrease in the number of main interviews completed.

Innovative Motivational Strategies to Reduce Interviewer Attrition and a New Staffing Model: A Data Collection Effort in Review

Theresa Camelo, Maureen O'Brien, and Heidi Guyer



The Solution

With the goals of decreasing attrition, improving interviewer performance, and increasing productivity, three strategies were implemented in the fall of 2017 including:

1) **A new staffing model:** In previous data collection years including 2016-2017, 1 interviewer was staffed in each area at a 30+ hour/week commitment.

When that interviewer was unable to meet the hourly commitment, or left the project (either through resignation or removal), negative effects on both production and the project budget resulted.

In the 2017- 2018 data collection year, a 15-20 hour per week staffing model, with 2 lwers staffed per area, was implemented.

2) **An earlier training:** In previous data collection years including 2016-2017, project training was held during the last week of the prior year, and, in part, the first week of the current year. In 2017-2018, training was held 2 weeks earlier than it had been in previous data collection years.

3) **And innovative motivational strategies:** Motivational Strategies were implemented both at training, as well as post-training (some at the organization level, others at the study level).

At training:

- An orientation session was held for a new interviewers by a veteran HR staff member (study level)
- We held an evening reception on campus in the ISR offices, with pizza and desserts, welcome speeches by Institute administration and study Pis, and a Q&A session (study level)
- And we provided lwers with UM car magnets for use when working in the field (organization level)

Post-training:

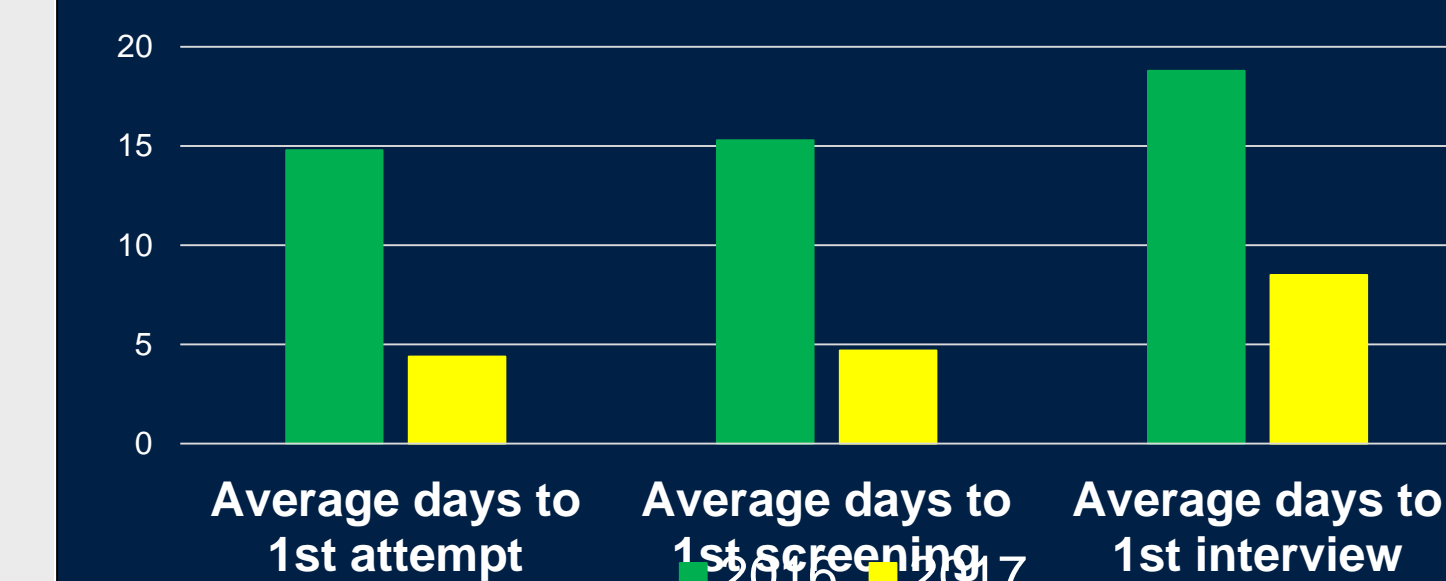
- Interviewers received a welcome home/welcome to the project gift basket (organization level)
- At 3 months of successful employment, interviewers received a cash bonus (organization level)
- Each new interviewer was assigned an experienced mentor who was available by phone, email or in person (study level, though some other studies do this as well).



The Results

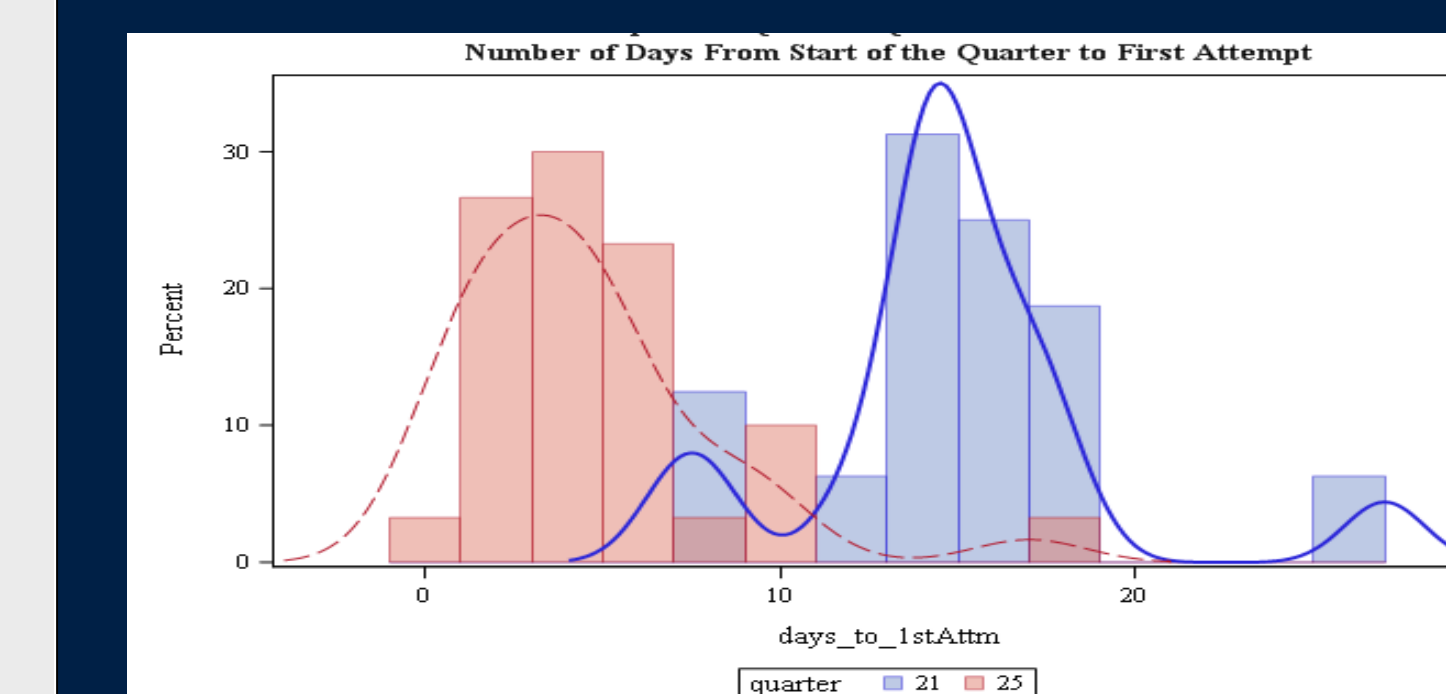
At the end of the data collection year, the attrition rate decreased from 29% in the previous year to 18% in 2017-2018, and just 3 of the 35 areas were unstaffed, compared to 10 the previous year.

With the earlier training and motivational strategies implemented, new interviewers began working in the field much earlier than the year prior. On average, new interviewers in 2017-2018 made their first attempts, and completed their first screener and main interviews 10 days earlier than did new interviewers in 2016-2017.



Previously, new interviewers spent the first week listing sample and were not able to begin screening households until that was complete: There was a wide range of time in when new interviewers began working (1-3 weeks) In 2017-2018:

- Interviewers began working much earlier
- Both screening and interviewing began much earlier than the prior year
- An early start is important given that each case is only active for 12 weeks



Comparing the data collection year 2016-2017 to 2017-2018, we saw an increase of 11% in the number of completed interviews (590 more interviews were completed in 2017-2018, as compared to 2016-2017). Response and sample completion rates increased during this time period as well.

Finally, cost savings were achieved. There was no need for an attrition training (nor the associated recruiting) and travel to unstaffed areas was also reduced, resulting in reduced costs of \$205,000.