



Employee Engagement and Retention

The success of any employee wellness initiative—including chronic disease prevention programs like the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP) lifestyle change program—depends largely on keeping participants engaged so they complete the program.

Research has shown that the longer a person stays in the National DPP lifestyle change program, the better their outcomes. [One study](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that participants who stayed in the program for 17 or more sessions (the second 6 months of the program) achieved more average weight loss than those who stayed for only the first 16 sessions (the first 6 months of the program).¹

This document describes proven methods for engaging and retaining participants in the National DPP lifestyle change program.

How to Keep Participants Engaged

You can use a variety of strategies to keep your employees engaged in your National DPP lifestyle change program. The ideas outlined in this document draw on best practices and commonly used methods promoted by CDC, State Health Departments, and the [National DPP Coverage Toolkit](#).

Work closely with your program provider or administrator to decide who will conduct the activities described here.

Use Diverse Incentives

Incentives promote engagement and help participants maintain interest in the program. Examples of common incentives include:

- **Nonmonetary, health-related incentives**, such as gym memberships, cookbooks, and athletic gear.
- **Monetary incentives**, such as a points-based system that allows program participants to reduce their health insurance premiums.

For more information on types of incentives and factors to consider when deciding whether to use incentives, see the National DPP's [Emerging Practices guide for using incentives](#).²

Host Promotional Activities

Promotional activities and events can increase interaction and stimulate interest in your program. Encourage your program provider to:

- Host an introductory session, called a Discovery Session or Session Zero, to recruit and enroll employees into your program.
- Hold interactive events, like cooking demonstrations, to boost attendance.
- Host engaging guest speakers, especially past participants who can share insights and speak about their struggles, achievements, and “aha!” moments.

Reach Out to Participants Outside of Class

What happens outside the classroom can be almost as important as what happens in class. Participants should be kept engaged throughout the duration of the program.

Work with your program provider to:

- Call or text participants between classes to check in and encourage healthy behaviors, provide support, and remind them of upcoming classes.
- Encourage participants to use the interactive [Personal Success Tool Modules](#) to help them track their activity and eating habits, manage stress, and get the support they need.
- Set up a private social media group for the class. Participants can use this group to trade recipes, share tips, and talk about their personal strategies and experiences.
- Suggest supportive activities for participants, like sharing healthy eating habits, recipes, and coping strategies or walking and exercising together.
- Help participants create social connections among themselves so they can support each other.

Provide Flexible Class Options

Work with your program provider to identify ways to remove barriers that might make it hard for your employees to participate.

Encourage your program provider to:

- Offer make-up classes by phone to make it easier for participants who miss a class to meet attendance requirements.
- Record classes and share these recordings to help participants make up missed classes.
- Offer virtual classes for employees who would benefit from this option, such as those who work off-site. Or provide all classes virtually if your program is approved for this delivery option.
- Offer classes in different locations if your employees work or live in different geographic areas.

Create a Network of Program Champions

Program champions are usually past participants who can share their experiences and advocate for the National DPP lifestyle change program. They are an important part of program engagement because they may be able to develop trust with your employees more quickly than a Lifestyle Coach from outside your organization.

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Program champions can also be leaders and influencers in your organization, such as wellness program managers, human resources staff, and senior executives.

To develop a network of program champions, you can:

- Invite people who have participated in past National DPP lifestyle change programs to share their success stories.
- Recruit people with a personal interest in health and wellness, such as those who have participated in past health promotion programs, or those who often use worksite health facilities like a gym or walking trail.
- Identify members of your staff who have both the influence and capacity to promote the program.
- Promote stories about employees who agree to be program champions through internal communication channels, like newsletters and intranet sites.

How to Retain Participants

In addition to keeping your employees engaged in your National DPP lifestyle change program, you also want to make sure they complete the program. Participant retention is crucial for improved health outcomes, and you can use a variety of strategies to achieve your objectives.

Make Sure Your Incentives Support Retention

Incentives can give participants a reason to be excited about joining and staying in a wellness program.

In the National DPP lifestyle change program, the classes provided in the last 6 months help reinforce the strategies learned in the first 6 months. Make sure the incentives you choose encourage consistent participation across the full 12 months.

Consider the following questions to help you identify a good incentive program:

- Who will receive the incentive?
- What types of incentive will be given? Examples include cash, vouchers, and gifts.
- What target or goals do participants need to achieve to receive the incentive?
- When will participants receive the incentive—for example, immediately after they achieve a target or goal or on a fixed schedule?
- What will the value of the incentive be?
- Will the incentive be guaranteed? For example, if you use a lottery, the incentive is not guaranteed.
- Will you use a positive (carrot) approach, where participants receive an incentive when they engage in a healthy behavior? Or will you use a negative (stick) approach, where participants lose something when they don't engage in a healthy behavior or achieve an outcome?
- Is the incentive aligned with your program goals? Does it provide additional support to help participants achieve the desired outcomes?

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Make Sure Your Program Meets the Needs of All Participants

Your program should be as inclusive as possible to accommodate all employees. Work with your program provider to address factors such as the cultural background, language preferences, gender, age, literacy level, potential disabilities, and income levels of your employee population.

EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTICS	STRATEGIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL POPULATIONS
Culture and Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize diversity and inclusion as a central component of the program. • Ensure that program materials are inclusive of all cultures represented in your employee population. For example, food norms may differ by faith, tradition, and cultural background. • Recognize and address language differences among your employees and offer resources in multiple languages. • Provide incentives that are not culturally specific or provide a range of incentives that participants may choose from that align with their cultural backgrounds. • Foster awareness of diversity and inclusiveness throughout program delivery.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of how health issues might be experienced differently because of a person's gender identity.
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailor program activities to meet the needs and learning styles of all adult age groups. • Identify generational health goals. For example, older adults might want to address chronic disease or weight loss, while younger adults might want to address sleep or stress management.
Literacy level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use simple graphics to communicate information. • Use easy-to-understand words and plain language. • Avoid using complex medical terms. If you have to use complex terms, always define them.
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a process for people to request a disability accommodation if your organization doesn't already have one. • Make sure participants know how to request accommodations. • Provide alternative physical activities for people with activity limitations. • Provide extra guidance and resources for people who have intellectual disabilities. • Offer paper tracking or easy-to-use devices to people who may not be familiar with online tracking systems. • Tailor participation and outcome goals for people with disabilities. • Facilitate transportation for people who may have challenges with driving or walking.

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EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTICS	STRATEGIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL POPULATIONS
Income level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide incentives that address the needs of people with low incomes, like grocery store gift cards or transportation support. • Educate program staff about the implications of different income levels and how that may affect attendance. • Focus more on equity (fairness) among participants, not equality (sameness). Equity will allow for a tailored approach to program delivery to better accommodate participants' needs. • Provide supplemental resources for employees who may not be able to attend classes as often, such as those who have second jobs, work overtime consistently, or travel frequently.

Consider the Social Determinants of Health

Efforts to improve retention in the National DPP lifestyle change program often require broader approaches that address social, economic, and environmental factors that influence health. These social determinants of health (SDOH) are conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes.³

Your employees likely have more resources than other groups, such as people who don't have employer-provided health insurance or who are unable to work because of disability. However, you should still address SDOH as part of your efforts to retain participants in your National DPP lifestyle change program.

Relevant factors to consider include:

- Variations in socioeconomic status among your employees.
- The conditions where your employees live and work.
- The types of work your employees do in your organization.

Examples of SDOH include access to reliable transportation, healthy foods, safe housing, quality education, and childcare. When people don't have access to the resources they need, it reduces their quality of life. For your employees, it can also be a barrier to their ability to access and complete the National DPP lifestyle change program. An increasing number of organizations recognized by CDC to deliver the program are working to help overcome these barriers. For example, they provide childcare vouchers so people can attend classes or grocery store gift cards so they can buy healthy food.

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Use Creative Solutions to Overcome Common Barriers

Work with your program provider to remove any barriers that may prevent your employees from completing the program. Anticipate common barriers, such as the timing and location of classes, family commitments, and language preferences. You also want to make sure employees can easily make up missed classes.

COMMON BARRIERS	STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS
General availability of classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide convenient options for people who may only be able to access the program at work. • Offer classes on the weekend. • Consider providing transportation or transportation vouchers to help participants get to classes. • Offer classes at different times each week so participants can choose the times and days that work best for them and their schedules.
Not being able to get away from work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide designated times during the workday when employees can attend classes, or offer classes during lunch breaks. • Work with managers to address any concerns they have and get buy-in for the program. • Create a culture of health and work-life balance where participation in wellness classes is normalized and encouraged.
Program access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver classes in multiple ways: in-person, online, and through distance learning. • Online and distance learning classes can increase access for employees who live in rural areas or who can't attend in-person classes because of their work schedules or limited transportation or childcare options.
Language preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources and programs in the preferred languages of your employees to remove language barriers. • Consider how language is interpreted by people in different age groups. • Use visual learning aids and universal communication strategies. • Use health literacy principles to ensure that your program is accessible to as many people as possible. • Encourage program leaders (like Lifestyle Coaches) to use positive language and provide positive reinforcement for participants.
Family commitments or lack of childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide flexible options for employees who may be caregivers for children or elderly family members. • Consider providing or facilitating childcare options. • Allow caretakers for people with disabilities to attend sessions with participants. • Provide ways for people to participate online. • Offer childcare assistance as an incentive for participation.
Ability to easily catch up on missed classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record classes and provide the recordings online so participants can make up missed classes. • Offer classes at different times each week to give participants more options and reduce absences. • Ask program champions to encourage participants to make-up missed classes.

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