

Quick Steps to Improve Programs Using Behavioral Insights

Behavioral Strategies for Labor Programs

Behavioral science has shown that small changes to the ways we structure programs can have a large effect on their impact. Start making changes in these three areas:



MOTIVATE PEOPLE:

Encourage people to complete a certain action.



ADDRESS LIMITED ATTENTION:

Help people remember to complete tasks.



STREAMLINE OPERATIONS:

Remove barriers to action.

<p>Invoke social norms: People often consider what “others like me” do when making important decisions. Give people information about what others are doing, and encourage them to follow their peers’ example.</p>	<p>Simplify options: When presented with too many options people become overloaded and tend to not make a choice at all. Limit options to the most relevant choices.</p>	<p>Be specific: Give specific, yet simplified, information on the benefits of your program, instead of providing general information and asking people to seek additional details.</p>
<p>Remind people of their values or goals before important actions: Evoke values by prompting people before they take an action. For example, place a signature box (certifying the entered information is true) at the beginning, not the end, of a form.</p>	<p>Provide clear action steps: Clearly state the next action the user must take and any relevant instructions, if needed. Set deadlines and provide a simplified task list allowing people to check off tasks as they are completed.</p>	<p>Reduce hassles: Small inconveniences can prevent people from following through. Minimize or reduce unnecessary hassles. For example, give people an appointment time, instead of asking them to call to schedule an appointment.</p>
<p>Provide “fresh starts”: People are more likely to follow goals after important landmarks (New Years, birthday or the start of a week). Contact people then to give new opportunities to take action.</p>	<p>Provide reminders: Remind people about important actions they need to take at a time that is likely to be helpful.</p>	<p>Change the default: Have people opt out of the desired, beneficial action, rather than asking them to voluntarily opt in.</p>

Behavioral Insights for Labor-Related Programs

Effective Department of Labor programs often require people to take action to get the benefits offered, but people often fail to do so. The reasons can be varied: they aren’t motivated to participate or they intend to but get distracted, or they begin and then are deterred by seemingly minor operational hassles. Fortunately, behavioral scientists have developed many techniques to improve the effectiveness of program procedures—techniques that have been applied successfully in many Department of Labor programs.

(Read about pilots conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and ideas42 for the DOL Chief Evaluation Office, as well as other tools for applying behavioral insights, at <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/BISStudy/>.)