



The CM Manual

A Guide to Instituting Low-Cost Motivational Incentives

Designed by: Christine Higgins, Dissemination Specialist,
Mid-Atlantic Node, chiggin2@jhmi.edu



The CM Checklist

Getting Started

Here, we have provided some recommended guidelines with examples. As you begin to develop your program, ask yourself, if you have followed these steps.

Step 1

Target a Behavior

We tend to focus on one of three things when we consider incentives in drug abuse: abstinence, attendance, or compliance with the treatment plan. Most of the research done to prove the efficacy of incentives has involved abstinence as the goal; however, it is an advanced application of contingency management. While, abstinence is certainly a compelling behavior to target, the execution of an incentive program can be costly in both time and money. It will require increased urinalysis, technical expertise in data collection, an increased workload, and an increased amount for prizes.

If you target attendance at group or achievement of a treatment goal, it will be an easier program to implement and monitor, and it can be done for less money. The rationale here is if consumers can adopt new, helpful behaviors, they may also be able to reduce harmful behaviors.

- Is the expected behavior reasonable and achievable for your group?

Start out simple. Focus on one drug for abstinence rather than complete abstinence. Or focus on reduction of use overall rather than complete abstinence. If employment is your goal, break it down into achievable steps. Focus on the simplest task as your baseline, then add increased goals as you progress, i.e., incentivize a consumer to complete a written job application before a scheduled interview.

- Did you target a specific behavior?

If want to focus on more than one behavior can you pair them or group them together: meal planning & grocery shopping, or doctor's visits & test results? You don't want to confuse the consumer about the objective.

- **Did you make clear your objective?**

Do you want consumers to show up for women's group, or show up on time for women's group? How will you create an objective that isn't a sanction in disguise: You're late, no prize for you!

- **Is the behavior measurable?**

Attendance is measurable with signed attendance sheets; it's pretty straightforward. How will you measure participation? Will the consumer just raise his hand and say anything to get a soda or candy? Some counselors say they want their consumer to be "less disruptive" in group, but how do you measure that?

- **Did you target a specific group?**

HIV+ men, new patients, fee-payers, the women's group, your caseload, the entire consumer population?

- **Did you pick a behavior that you can motivate your group to adopt?**

You don't want to simply end up rewarding those persons who are already capable of the behavior. You don't want to set the bar so high that no one in the group can achieve it, e.g. drug-free for a week.

- **Did you come up with a name for your program?**

Try naming your incentive program. This will help you and your consumers to understand the contingency: Pay to Play, Attend to Win, Keep Coming Back, Reach For It! Also, you need to advertise; consumers should see signs up (in appropriate locations) that invite them to participate. Every poster reinforces the importance of the targeted behavior.

Step 2

Pick a Reinforcer

- **Did you ask your customers what they would like as an incentive?**

Do teenagers want phone minutes, frozen drinks from 7-11, or a gift card for the movies? You have to ask, and it's not always about the amount of money. For instance, \$75.00 of phone minutes can be more valuable than a \$75.00 gift card to a store that's out of the way. A Twix candy bar can be more valuable than a Reese's peanut butter cup.

- Is the magnitude of the incentive in keeping with the magnitude of the behavior you want to change?

Are you hoping your consumers will stop using cocaine by offering weekly candy bars? If attending one group is worth one coupon, then attending 4 groups should be worth 4 coupons.

- Is there an opportunity for consumers to choose?

If you're using gift cards from stores, it's nice for consumers to be able to choose from a selection: Wal-Mart, Target, Walgreen or CVS. If you're giving away \$1.00 items such as toiletries, offer toothpaste, deodorant, a comb, shampoo.

- Do you have a way to display the items?

Glass cabinets that lock can be expensive if your clinic doesn't already own one. Is there a way to display the items behind a glass window in the reception area? Or could you use a digital camera and post a picture of the prize? If it's something common like a TV or a walkman, you can go on-line and do an image search or find a generic picture.

Step 3

Design a Monitoring System

- Have you considered all the possible contingencies?

If you're targeting attendance what will you do about consumers who are "excused" from attendance because of work. If you discharge patients for non-compliance or zero tolerance, how will this affect the data derived from the program? If you're rewarding patients to complete education/orientation groups, what will you do if one person has five groups to complete and one person only has one more group to complete?

- Have you communicated with all support staff?

Have you invited everyone to the table who needs to know how the incentive program will work? The bookkeeper, the part-time evening counselor, the receptionist? If you're incentivizing fee-payers have you explained the program to the weekend staff who also takes fees? If you're incentivizing consumers to show up on time for group, have you notified the receptionist that he/she needs to record arrival times?

- Do you have a well-defined system?

Data collection is important. Do you have the ability to track and record attendance in a reliable way? How about if you incentivize consumers to keep a doctor's appointment? How will you document this? Is there a central way of recording this information already? If not, can you design a system that will record what you want to know?

Consider a time frame when you will try out the incentive. You will have the opportunity to see rather quickly whether or not the program had some affect. If you pick a 12 week delivery schedule, you can then use an A-B-A method for collecting and comparing data—12 weeks prior to the start, 12 weeks of the incentive, 12 weeks after. This is

Step 4

Design An Incentive Delivery Schedule

- How will you deliver the incentive?

Learning occurs best when the time between stimulus and response is short, so you want the reinforcer to be immediate; you don't want to have to promise to look in the consumer's chart later, or give him the prize next week. You want the incentive to be directly related and associated with the behavior, and you want to motivate the consumer to repeat the behavior. So, you don't want to ask the consumer to show up 3 times in a row, and he will receive a coupon for free groceries. The first time the behavior is achieved is the time you want to dispense the incentive: You paid your fee; here is your free candy. You came to group; here is your free drink and chips.

Which delivery system would you like to use?

The Fishbowl method is a reward system that allows participants to draw chips from any large opaque container. The chips are labeled: good job, small, medium, and large. The ratio of chips is up to the facilitator, and obviously there will be more "good job" and fewer "large" chips. However, you don't want to use this method solely as a money saver and use an inequitable amount.

Raffle tickets can be a very good choice if you don't have enough money to reward the consumer for achieving the desired behavior with a prize each time. The more the consumer achieves the desired behavior within the designated time frame, the more chances he/she has to win a larger prize.

Tokens are another good choice for rewarding behavior without offering a prize each time. Consumers can earn privileges or prizes. Say, for example, you have a donated prize of gift certificate to a salon—you could give it a value of 3 tokens, and participants would have to complete 3 assigned tasks in order to earn a manicure.

Escalation and Reset means that your consumer will earn a reward as soon as he/she performs the desired behavior, i.e., keeping an appointment, testing negative for cocaine, attending group. The reward “escalates” each time the task is performed—day 1 earns one small prize or draw, day two earns two small prizes or draws, and so on, until a day is missed. Then, the reward system is “reset” to one. This is an extremely worthwhile system to encourage the consumer to not only adopt a new behavior, but to exercise it with consistency. Looking at a chart of such behavior would help him/her to see the benefits or consequences of certain behavior.

- **What are some typical prizes?**

Small prizes that are valued at a \$1.00 are still very valuable to your consumers. Dollar stores have become so popular and so abundant; they carry lots of toiletry items that could be helpful to your indigent population: toothpaste, shave cream, deodorant. They also have photo albums, notebooks, scented candles, hair accessories. Some even have scrap booking accessories.

Gift cards are very popular. They allow the consumer some autonomy in how he/she chooses the reward. You can get gift cards from places like 7-11 or Royal Farms for as little as \$3.00 (and they exclude the purchase of alcohol or cigarettes). A consumer could get a 2 or 3 doughnuts, a magazine, or baby wipes.

No Cost is probably hard to imagine. Can you think of privileges or items of value that are part of clinic operations? Early reporting time, a bus pass or tokens, a one time take-home methadone dose (assuming it's appropriate), a one-time reduction in fees. Could you ask for white elephant or nearly new items to be donated from co-workers? Could you print up inspirational cards and laminate them?

Step 5

Ensure Consistent Application

- Do you have the ability to see the program through?

If you want to encourage consistent behavior, you have to be consistent. If promptness is a desired result, then you must be prompt. If you're going to be away from the office, you need to identify a back-up person who can follow through for you. He or she isn't just covering your group or collecting fees in your absence, he/she must also be in charge of delivering the incentive.

- Is everyone on board?

Announce your plans to everyone at a staff meeting. It can't hurt for other people to know what you're up to—when your program takes off, consumers will start to ask around to find out what it's about. You want everyone to be well-informed and supportive.

A few more things to think about:

- Are you a believer in incentives?

There is plenty of literature that proves that incentives work. They are used in business, in education, in communities, and in health care, but still not everybody gets sold on incentives. You, or some of your colleagues, may simply feel that when it comes to drug treatment, you are rewarding someone for doing what they should be doing anyway. If you think to yourself, "I don't have the chance to win a prize for showing up at work." then you're probably not a fan of incentives. You might want to read the articles at the back of this manual which reflect the research of incentives in the field of substance abuse.

- Is your desire to incentivize really a sanction in disguise?

Sometimes our desire to incentivize a particular group comes out of our frustration with bad behavior: consumers who show up late; consumers who are still using; consumers who don't participate. So, you make the incentive for attending women's group, but you don't let people who come in late get a raffle ticket. It's okay to motivate for a specific behavior, but be careful you don't turn the incentive into a negative consequence. Make sure it can be seen as a motivator, and not another sign of the consumer's failure to meet expectations.

- Do you want to create an incentive program at your clinic, but you don't think your director will give you any money for incentives?

It's easy to say there's no money in the budget for incentives. But, believing in incentives means you have to make it happen. You can do low cost, or even no cost incentives—candy, certificates, a certain privilege. Be creative! Go on-line and find some websites that will let you order low-priced items in bulk. Or perhaps there's money in a budget line item, e.g. stationery where some money could be spent on coffee mugs or water bottles. Don't be afraid to ask for something you really believe in, especially if you know it can translate into added revenue for your agency.

- Can you be generous?

You can do a low cost or even no-cost incentive, but you will need to give out the candy you bought at Sam's Club on a silver platter, with a smile and a word of acknowledgement, "Nice to see you!" or "You made it!" or "Keep up the good work." Most consumers have a lifetime of failed attempts. A simple certificate printed on your computer that says, "Congratulations on successfully completing the Orientation Program" can mean a lot.

- Have you named your incentive program?

Try naming your incentive program. This will help you and your consumers to remember the contingency: Pay to Play, Attend to Win, Reach For It, Keep Coming Back. Also, you need to advertise: consumers should see signs up (in appropriate locations) that invite them to participate. Every flyer reinforces the importance of the targeted behavior. Examples of flyers, certificates, raffle sheets, etc. are located in the Sample section of this manual.



A Worksheet For Designing Your Incentive Program

What is the behavior you want to change?



What group of consumers have you identified that can be motivated to adopt this change?



What have your consumers told you they would like as an incentive?



What is the estimated cost of your incentive program for a 12-week period? Or, what money is available to you for designing this program?



What is the name of your incentive program?



Have you created a brightly colored sign that advertises your plan?

What kind of incentive are you planning: raffle, giveaways, prize draw, escalation and reset?

What is your delivery schedule?

What are the “exceptions” to the rule? Will any consumers be excused?

How do you plan to do data collection?

Do you have a way to display the prizes?

Christine Higgins
Dissemination Specialist
CTN- Mid-Atlantic Node
410-550-4316
chiggin2@jhmi.edu



Tips to remember when you're setting up incentives!

If you hit a roadblock, re-consider some of these guidelines:

Identify the targeted behavior.

Is it showing up or showing up on time? Is it total abstinence or abstinence from a drug of choice? Be clear. Make sure the behavior can be observed or measured.

Always ask the consumer about the intended prize.

This is not necessarily about value—a television vs. a keychain. But choice: KFC vs. Dunkin Donuts; CVS vs. 7-11. And you don't know until you ask!

Gather some pre-incentive data.

You won't be able to tell if the incentive is working if you can't compare it to the numbers before you started.

Advertise the incentive program.

If you only tell the members who are present in the room, it will take a long time for the word to spread. Put up a poster to motivate others to participate.

Make sure you have what you need.

Create a list of what it takes to run the incentive for 10 or 12 weeks in a row. Stickers, vouchers, raffle box, prizes, tickets, etc. Gather the items together in one safe location. Make sure you have budgeted enough money.

Be consistent.

If you are trying to encourage consistent behavior, you must model consistent behavior.

Give the incentive as close to the desired behavior as possible.

Don't find yourself rewarding clients for last week's behavior. Remember to bring the fishbowl to the group room every time.

Don't confuse rewards for good behavior with incentives.

Offering cupcakes or soda at your group is more of a treat, than an incentive. Incentives imply contingency: "If you do this, you will get that." And it must be immediate. Not do this for 4 weeks in a row, and you will get a gift card. That's about rewarding self-motivation.

Attitude! Attitude! Attitude!

If you appear hassled or bothered by the task, your clients will know it, and it will diminish their sense of accomplishment. Be a cheerleader; be generous with your praise.

Keep good records.

You want to know if it's working or not. And you want to know how much it would cost for a whole year so your agency can budget for the cost.

Use visuals to motivate change.

Let everybody see the prizes (or photos of the prizes) they are working to achieve.

Christine Higgins, Dissemination Coordinator: chiggin2@jhmi.edu

Maxine Stitzer, Ph.D., Principal Investigator: mstitzer@jhmi.edu

PAMI Website: http://www.nattc.org/pami/pami_home.html