Program Participant Estimation and Sampling Drop-In Program Participation for Annual Reporting

Manual

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Contents

List of Resources

1. A **Drop-In Program Sampling Tool** (in Excel). This workbook includes:
    a. A "Participant Sampling Approach" to determine how many days to sample (or whether to track all days) and offers a proposed sampling approach, based on information you share about your drop-in program.
    b. A "Participant Tracker" as a place to track participant interactions on your sampled days.
    c. A “Review your Sampling" strategy as a way to check mid-way through the year to ensure your sampling approach is working.
    d. "Annual Reporting” guidance for calculating the number you will report annually based on the sample data and use of the "Participant Tracker".
2. A **Sampling Program Participant Estimation and Sampling Drop-In Program Participation for Annual Reporting** *(this document!),* which includes:
    a. Descriptors of participant interactions
    b. Description of how to estimate participation counts for registered programs
    c. An overview of sampling
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Reporting Number of Program Participant Interactions

The purpose of this document is to offer you options for how to track and report participant interactions for FCSS program annual reporting.

If sampling is too complicated, don't use it! You always have the option of tracking all participants and reporting them in the same way you have in the past.

This guide is intended for:

- FCSS Directors to make decisions about how to track and report participation
- FCSS staff who make run programs to receive guidance on how and when to track participation

What is a Participant?

- The following types of participants should be counted as participants in FCSS reporting:
    - Anyone who formally or informally engages in an FCSS program, such as registered individuals and those using drop-in services or single-session programs.
        - The same individual can be counted multiple times as a participant for reporting purposes if they are participating in multiple programs.
        - Participants are accounted for in every engagement. A participant who registers for a program that has multiple days or sessions (e.g., a 6-week skill building program, or a daily after-school program) would count for each attendance.

Examples

- *Someone who registers in two different programs can be counted as a participant two times.*
- *Someone who registers in one program that has 10 sessions would be counted 10 times.*
- *Someone who shows up to a drop-in program every week for 6 months (26 weeks), would be counted 26 times.*

An estimated number of participants can be used:

- **For multi-day programs, you are permitted to count the registrants and multiply this number by the number of sessions, rather than track participation at each session.**
- **For drop-in programs you can track participation on certain days of the year to estimate total participation.**

- The following types of participants should not be counted as participants in FCSS reporting:
    - A person who receives information or referrals is not reported as a participant.
    - An attendee in a Community Development and Capacity Building activity.
    - Any volunteers should be counted in total volunteer counts for reporting.

Examples

- *Anyone who attends a one-time FCSS program counts as a participant.*
- *A senior comes every week to a senior's games day as a drop-in. This senior would be counted for each attendance over the course of a year: ~52*
- *A child is registered in an after-school program that runs Monday-Friday for the duration of the school year. This child would count for each attendance: ~1 registration X 150 school days = 150.*
- *A volunteer attends a volunteer appreciation event. In this instance, this volunteer is an attendee at an event, not a program participant*
- *An individual attended two community events and participated in a registered single-day program. This individual would be counted three times (as an attendee once for each event and as a participant once for the program).*

Counting Participants in Annual Reporting

- One Key Performance Measure in the Accountability Framework relates to participation:
    - *Number of times Albertas participated in local FCSS programming.*
- In Annual Reporting, you are asked to report the number of participants for each program you report.
- You may use estimation or sampling to count program participants.
- You are not reporting "unique participants" but rather the number of times people engaged or interacted with the program.
- The number you report may seem very large, especially for things like after-school programs that happen every day.
- The value of counting participant interactions for FCSS activities is to understand the engagement with community members that builds protective factors over time, and every interaction supports that.

Estimating Participation for Registered Programs

- Counting participation for each day of a registered program can be quite complex and time-consuming. Estimating participation is an acceptable approach.
- A basic estimate is achieved by multiplying the number of registrants by the number of sessions in a program. This is your *maximum* number of participants. However, it is unlikely that every registrant participated in every session, so you may need to use an **adjustment factor** to account for missed sessions.
    - Your adjustment factor may be determined by gathering anecdotal information from program staff or facilitators.
    - Your adjustment factor may be determined using a rule of thumb about program length:
        - Short programs (1–3 sessions): 90% participation rate
        - Medium programs (4–9 sessions): 80% participation rate
        - Long programs (10+ sessions): 70% participation rate
    - You may also want to consider seasonal or contextual factors, e.g., a session in December may have more missed sessions than a spring session
- Remember, you are <u>not</u> counting unique individuals.

It is best to decide if you will use estimation at the start of the year so that you don't have to track every attendance at every session.

Step by Step Guidance for Using Estimation for Program Participation for Registered Programs

STEP 1: Start with the basic calculation:

Sum or count the total number of registrants in your program over all cohorts over the year. The video tutorial shows an example of this.

- number of registrants * number of sessions

STEP 2: Apply an Adjustment Factor:

- Because not all registrants participate in every session, multiply by an adjustment factor:
    - Short programs (1–3 sessions): 90% participation rate
    - Medium programs (4–9 sessions): 80% participation rate
    - Long programs (10+ sessions): 70% participation rate

    Alternatively, you may gather information about program participation and use your discretion for an appropriate adjustment factor.

Example 1

You have a program where adults register to participate in a weekly session over 8 weeks. You run this program 4 times over the year:

- *In the first cohort you had 10 registrants.*
- *In the second cohort you had 11 registrants.*
- *In the third cohort you had 8 registrants.*
- *In the fourth cohort you had 15 registrants.*

Multiply the number of sessions by the number of registrations:

- *Cohort 1: 10 registrants *8 sessions = 80*
- *Cohort 2: 11 registrants * 8 sessions = 88*
- *Cohort 3: 8 registrants * 8 sessions = 64*
- *Cohort 4: 15 registrants * 8 sessions = 120*
- *TOTAL = 80 + 88 + 64 + 120 = 352*

You know some registrants missed some sessions, and some dropped out after participating in only a few sessions, so you know 352 is not the right answer.

*From speaking with the program facilitator, you know that program participation rate is fairly consistent, and registrants only tended to miss if they were ill or had other commitments. The program facilitator figures that, on average, one person was missing per session. Over 32 sessions (4 cohorts * 8 sessions), this reduces your total by 32: 352 – 32 = 320.*

You report 320 participant interactions in this program. This is an estimate based on real data and it is acceptable to report!

Example 2

You have a program where youth participate every day for two weeks (that is, 10 days) in the summer. You only offer this program once. You have 30 registrants.

*If all youth participated every day, your participant count would be 30 *10 = 300, but you know that participation varied quite a bit, with some youth missing a whole week.*

*You estimate that on any given day about two-thirds of the youth were present. You multiply 300 by two thirds (300 * .66) to get an estimate of 200. You report 200 participant interactions in this program.*

Example 3

You have a program where adults register to participate in a weekly session over 4 weeks. You run this program 2 times over the year:

- *In the first cohort you had 40 registrants.*
- *In the second cohort you had 35 registrants.*

Multiply the number of sessions by the number of registrations:

- *Cohort 1: 40 registrants *4 sessions = 160*
- *Cohort 2: 35 registrants * 4 sessions = 140*
- *TOTAL = 160 + 140 = 300*

*You are not sure if participation is consistent or varied and cannot get enough information from the program facilitators to make any adjustment. You use an adjustment factor based on a rule of thumb. For this mid-length program, you multiply the total by 80%: 300 * 80% = 240.*

You report 240 participant interactions in this program.

Example 4

You run an after-school program that operates on each school day of the year (~180 days a year). 40 children are registered in the program.

Multiply the number of sessions (180) by the number of registrations (40) = 7,200.

*Program participation varies widely and depends on many factors. You opt to use an adjustment factor for long programs based on a rule of thumb (as mentioned earlier). You multiply the total by 70%: 7,200 * 70% = 5,040.*

You report 5,040 participant interactions in this program.

Example 5

You have a program where adults register to participate in a weekly session over 8 weeks; 10 adults have registered. However, over the course of the program, some new participants have joined (perhaps through word of mouth) without registering.

*You begin with your basic calculation: 8 * 10 = 80 participant*

interactions.

You consider an adjustment factor of 80% but also consider that at least two new individuals (~20%) participated in most of the sessions.

You decide that any adjustment factor is balanced by these new additions and opt not to adjust at all. You report 80 participant interactions.

Sampling Method

Overview of Sampling

What is Sampling?

- Sampling means taking a small part of something to learn something about the whole; in other words, sampling is selecting a portion of something larger.
    - In this case, counting participation interactions on only some days of a drop-in program can be enough to estimate participation over the year.
- Sampling is generally used in research where researchers take a sample of a large population they are studying.
    - For example, a researcher might test a new therapy on a sample of cancer patients. They don't need to test the therapy on all cancer patients, but by sampling from a large group, they can make accurate predictions about how well that therapy would work for anyone with that cancer.
- Sampling can help determine the average number of participants in a day, which can be used to determine an estimated annual count.
- There are lots of types of sampling. You've probably heard of "random sampling", but there are others, too:
    - **Random Sampling** – when every part of the bigger group has an equal chance of being chosen
    - **Convenience Sampling** – when you choose parts of the group that are easiest to access, like participants in one session of a program
    - **Stratified Sampling** – when you divide the bigger group into sections (like age groups or gender or other important characteristics) and sample separately from each group
- The sampling strategy you use depends on your knowledge of your drop-in program. You may use **random sampling,** or, if you have days in the year that are busier for participation than other days, you may use a form of **stratified sampling** to account for those exceptional times.

Using a sampling method will not be 100% accurate, but it should be representative of the participation rate and is accepted by the Ministry in annual reporting. Sampling is an effective strategy because it saves time and effort and it can help you learn information quickly and efficiently. Good samples are representative, unbiased, and large enough.

How does Sampling work?

- **You will track every program participant for specified days** to arrive at an average number of program participants per day the drop-in program is offered. The average can then be multiplied by the number of days program is offered in a year to estimate the total number of program participants in the year.
- If you are comfortable with the concept of sampling, you can create your own sampling strategy. If not, an Excel workbook called the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool has built-in tools that will recommend a sampling strategy to you.

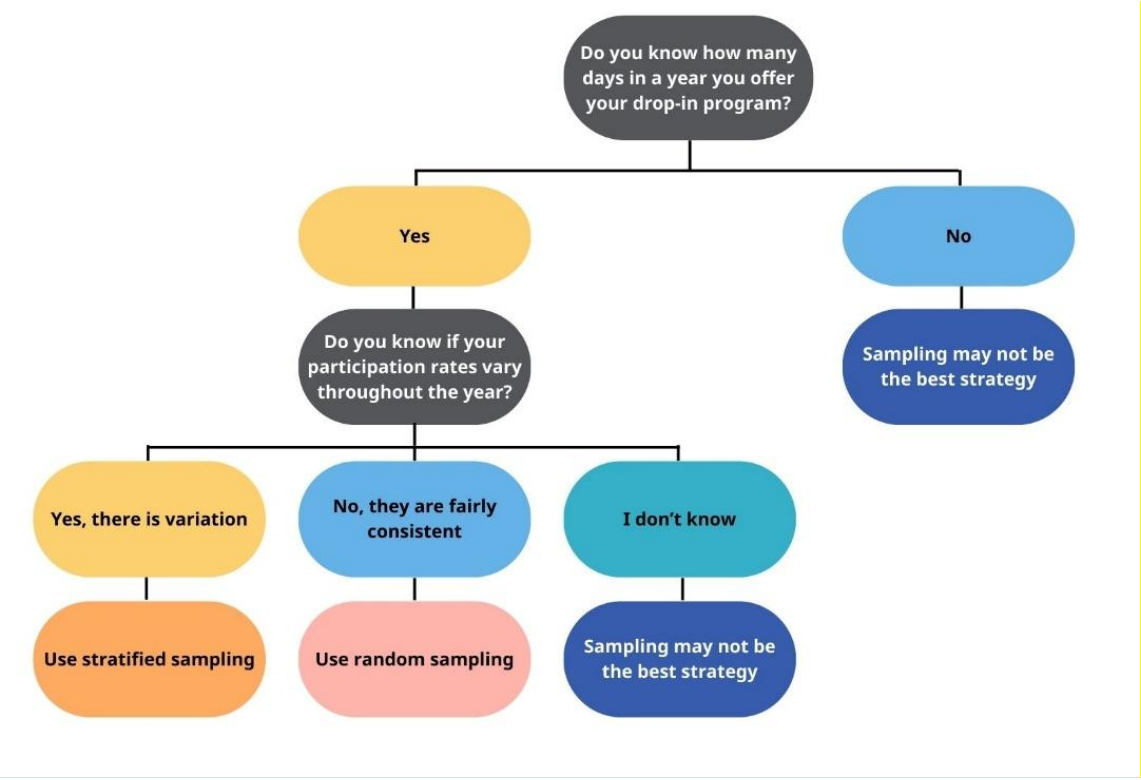
You need to be able to estimate how many days in a year you run your program

You will need to be able to answer if your program participation rate varies throughout the year by days of the week, weeks of the month or months/seasons in a year.

The sampling is based on days that you offer the program, which means that **the unit of sampling is a day**. Based on the number of days you offer the program in a year; the sampling strategy will determine how many of those days you will track program participants.

If the program is new for your FCSS program, or if you don't feel confident in your ability to answer questions about the approximate number of days it is offered in a year, sampling may not be the best strategy. Manually tracking for at least one year may provide you with the details you need to sample in a subsequent year.

The following flow chart may help you decide if sampling is the best strategy for you:



If you would like to try sampling, you may determine your own sample size based on your knowledge of your program and sampling statistics, or you may use the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool. If you are using the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool, follow the steps below. Begin by familiarizing yourself with the instructions on the first tab.

Note there are several tabs at the bottom of the workbook. Guidance for each section is provided in this manual.

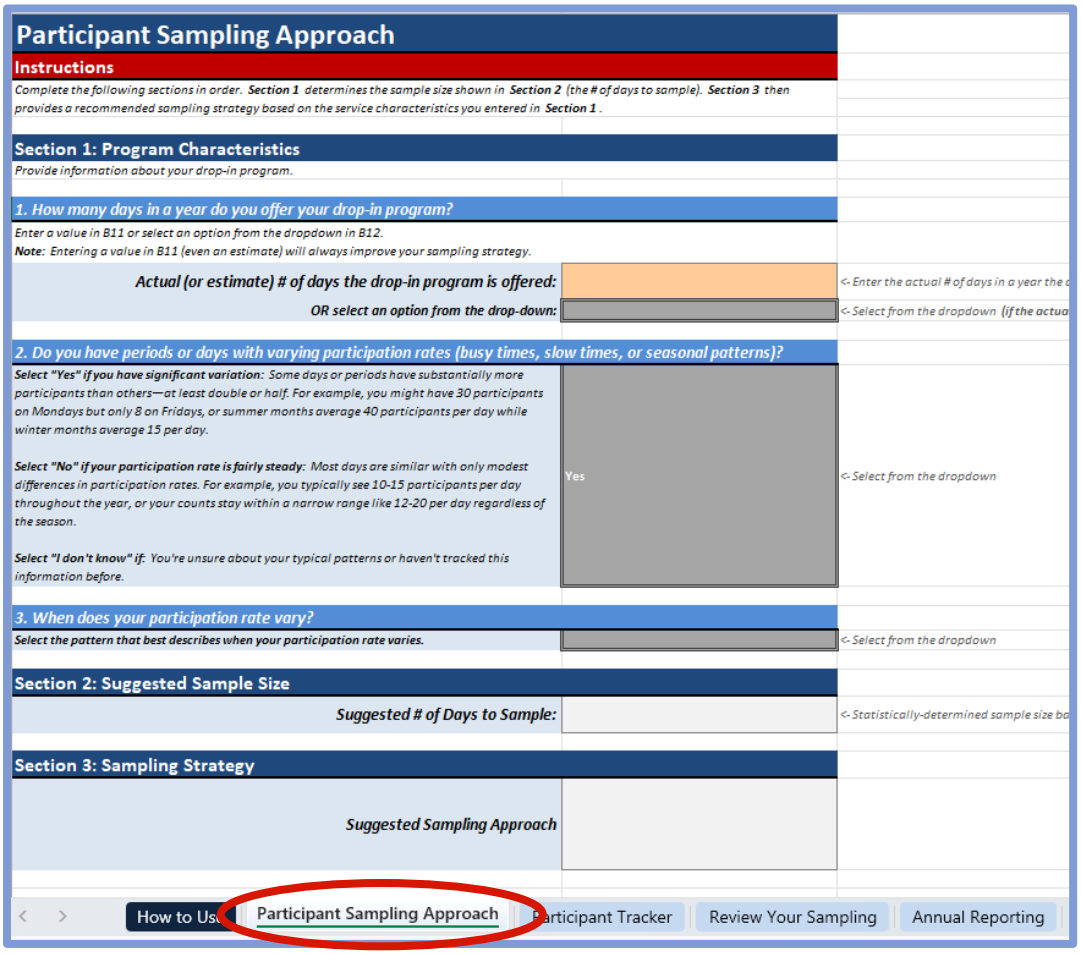
- How to Use
- Participant Sampling Approach
- Participant Tracker
- Review your Sampling
- Annual Reporting

Step by Step Guidance for Sampling Program Participation Rates for Drop-in Programs

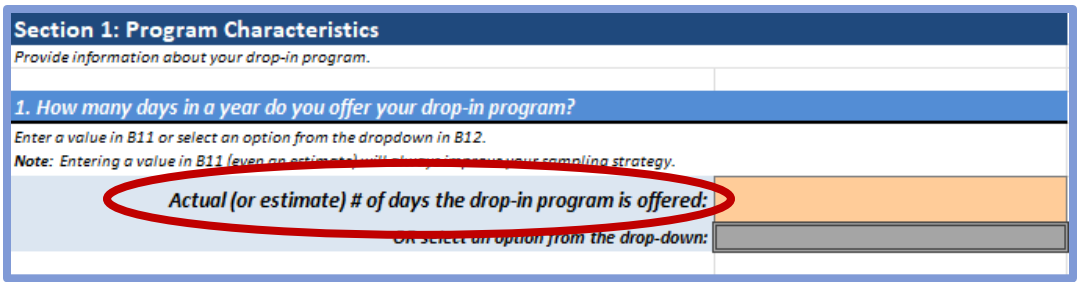
It is best to decide if you will use sampling at the start of the year. You can use the tools and guidance to set up your approach for the year so that you don't have to track participant counts for each day of the drop-in program.

STEP 1: Identify a sample size

- Begin with the "**Participant Sampling Approach**" tab.



- **SELECT DROP-IN PROGRAM DAYS.** You must have an idea of how many days in a year you offer your drop-in program. You have two options:
  1. Answer the question in A9 by entering the estimated number of days into B11 that you think you will offer the drop-in program for the upcoming year.

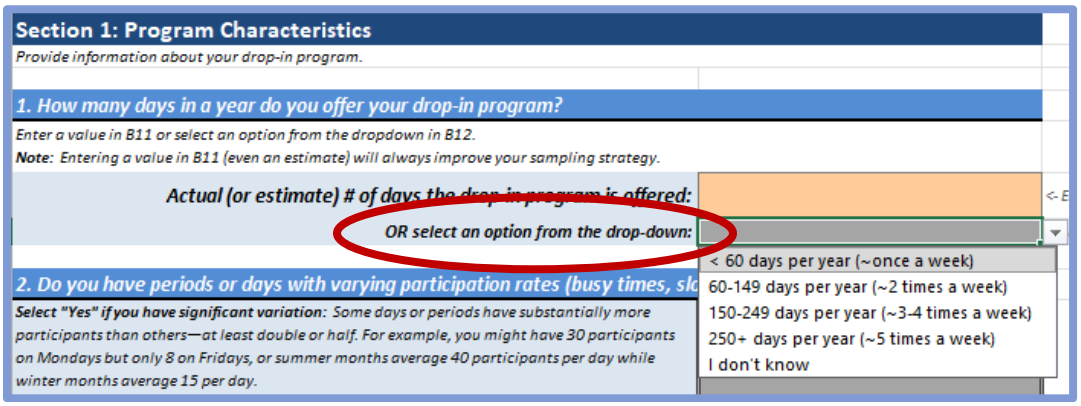


The more precise or specific you can be, the better the sampling strategy will be.

- Entering an actual number still doesn't have to be 100% accurate, you can enter an estimate or best guess.
- If you do not know an estimate but your best guess is better than the ranges offered in the drop-down menu in B12, then enter your best guess in B11.

OR

2. Answer the question in A9 by selecting from the drop-down options in B12.



It is recommended that you use a best guess over the drop-down options whenever possible.

Tips for Estimating Drop-In Program Days (Cell B11)

- **Start with your typical schedule:**
  - Think about how often you normally offer the program (e.g., every Monday).

> ***Example***
>
> *Offering a drop-in program one day a week would be ~52 times a year; twice a week would be ~104 times a year, etc.*

  - If you offer the program full time, that is, every working day of a year, consider using the estimate of 252. This is all working days in a year, minus statutory holidays.

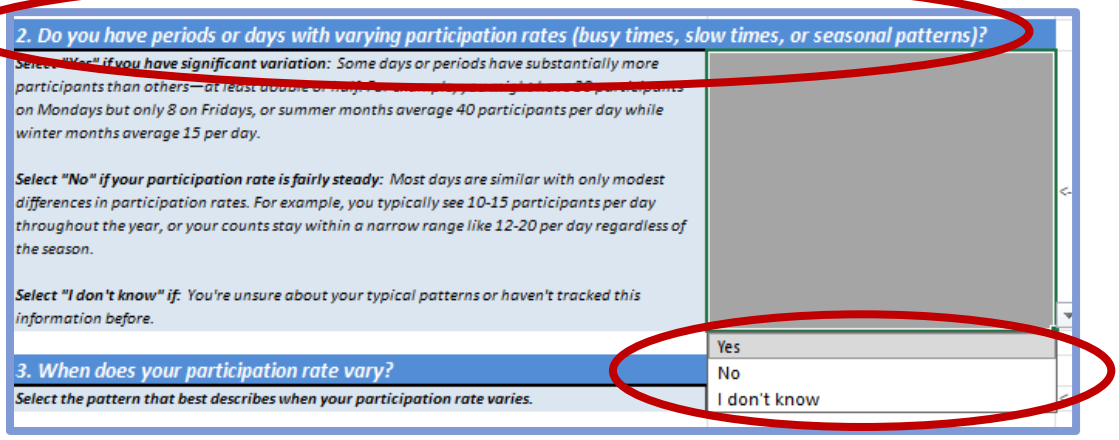
- **Adjust for exceptions:**
  - Subtract days when the drop-in program won't run due to staff holidays, staff shortages, or other disruptions.

> ***Example***
>
> *If you usually offer a drop-in program on Mondays (52 Mondays in a year) but miss about 10% of them because of staff time off, your estimate would be: 52 - (10%*52) ≈ 47 days.*
>
> *Round up to the higher whole number.*

- **Use past records if available:**
  - Previous calendars, staff schedules, or reports can help refine your guess.

> ***Example***
>
> *You generally offer a drop-in program twice per week, but this varies if there are Statutory holidays or staff time off.*
>
> *You could select 60 – 149 days per year, but you also know you are close to 104 (twice per week over the year). A better option would be to enter 100 into B11, to account for some time off.*
>
> *Even though the actual number of days may be slightly less or more, this will give you a more accurate sampling approach than choosing from the drop-down options of ranges.*

- **INDICATE VARIATION IN DROP-IN PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES.** Answer the question in A14: *Do you have periods or days with varying program participation rates? (busy times, slow times or seasonal patterns)? (Yes ; No ; I don't know)*



  - Answer "**Yes**" if the difference between your busiest or slowest participation days and a typical day is about the same or greater than the number of participants on a typical day.
  - Answer "**No**" if the difference between your busiest and slowest participation days and a typical day is less than the number of participants on a typical day.
  - **<u>If you are unsure,</u>** selecting "No" will encourage you to sample randomly, which is a better strategy than stratified sampling when you are unsure.

Example

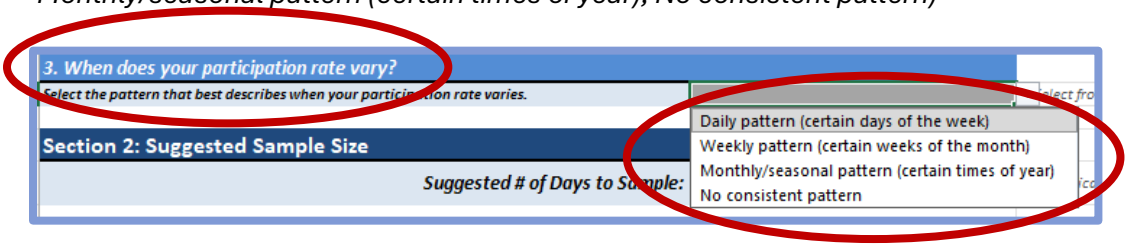
If your busiest days have about 50 program participants, and your typical days have about 20 program participants, the difference (30) is more than a typical day and also more than double a typical day. This is high variation. Select "Yes".

Example

If your busiest days have about 15 program participants, and your typical days have about 10 participants, the differences (5) is less than a typical day, and the difference is less than double a typical day. This is low variation. Select "No".

Note that "variation" can refer to days that are busier (e.g., Mondays are busier than other days) or days that are less busy (e.g., Fridays are less busy than other days). Variation refers to any days that are <u>exceptional</u>, compared to <u>typical</u> days.

- **INDICATE WHEN THE VARIATION OCCURS.** If you answered "Yes" in B15, that your participation rates do vary, answer the question in A17: *When do your participation rates vary? (Daily pattern (certain days of the week); Weekly pattern (certain weeks of the month); Monthly/seasonal pattern (certain times of year); No consistent pattern)*



- Your suggested sample size—that is, the number of days that you should track program participation—appears in cell B21, next to "Suggested # of Days to Sample".
    - You may see "**Don't sample. Track all days**" if you have:
        - selected "I don't know" in response to the number of days you the drop-in program, or
        - entered a value in B11 less than 30.
    - When you don't know the number of days you offer the program, you don't have enough information for sampling to work. If you aren't confident in the number of days you will offer the program, tracking program participation everyday will set you up with the information you'd need to use a sampling method the following year.
    - If you offer your program less than 30 days per year, sampling is not the best strategy, and you are recommended to track every day.
- The output in B21 is the <u>minimum</u> recommended number of days to sample. You are always welcome to do more. Increasing your sample size makes your estimate more accurate.
- Your suggested Sampling Strategy—that is, how you should determine your sample and whether or not use random or stratified sampling—appears in B24.
- **Note that for your sample size and strategy to appear, you must have answered B11 or B12 and B15 (and B18 if relevant). If anything is missing, nothing will appear.**

Saving the information you enter into the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool will prepare you to use the rest of the tools in the workbook.

STEP 2: Identify the days you will sample

- Once you've identified a number of days to sample, you'll want to have a plan for what days to track throughout the year.

When you do not have variation

- **If you answered 'No' in B15 (that your participation rates do not vary),** you will use **random sampling.**
    - To randomly select dates, you have two primary options:
        1. Use an online tool[1]:
            - EveryRandom.com
            - GigaCalculator.com
            - RedStagLabs.com

            Consider using a generator that allows you to exclude weekends.

        OR

        2. If you are comfortable with Excel, you may use the following formula

```
=WORKDAY(DATE(2026,1,1)-1,RANDBETWEEN(1,NETWORKDAYS(DATE(2026,1,1),DATE(2026,12,31))))
```

            - This formula will generate a random workday between January 1 2026 (2026,1,1) and Dec 31 2026 (2026,12,31).
                - To update the year, simply update the dates in the formula.
            - Copying this formula down a column will generate multiple dates. You can copy into as many rows as you need to generate as many dates as you need (as recommended in cell B21).
            - Note that this formula will keep producing new dates every time anything in the spreadsheet is edited. To avoid this, use the formula in a blank spreadsheet to generate your dates, then copy the dates and ***Paste Values*** (not the formula), into the Participant Tracker.
                - The video tutorial offers an example.
            - Note that you may get duplicate dates; in this case, simply choose the next available date.
            - In any case, if the days generated do not align with days that you offer services, you may move the date to the next best date.

[1] This is not an endorsement of any particular site; these are just examples of tools to help you generate random dates. There are several free online tools, you can explore which ones work best for you.

Example 1

Your output suggests you randomly sample 20 days in the year.

You use an online calculator that suggests: 2026-01-27 ;2026-05-25 ; 2026-12-28 ; 2026-06-30 ; 2026-10-19 ; 2026-11-06 ; 2026-10-22 ; 2026-09-04 ; 2026-09-08 ; 2026-10-05 ; 2026-12-24 ; 2026-08-27 ; 2026-02-10 ; 2026-10-29 ; 2026-08-18 ; 2026-04-24 ; 2026-10-29 ; 2026-08-21 ; 2026-03-04 ; 2026-10-14

You know your program coordinator is on holiday June 22 – June 30. You can swap out June 30, for the next best available date: July 2nd.

Example 2

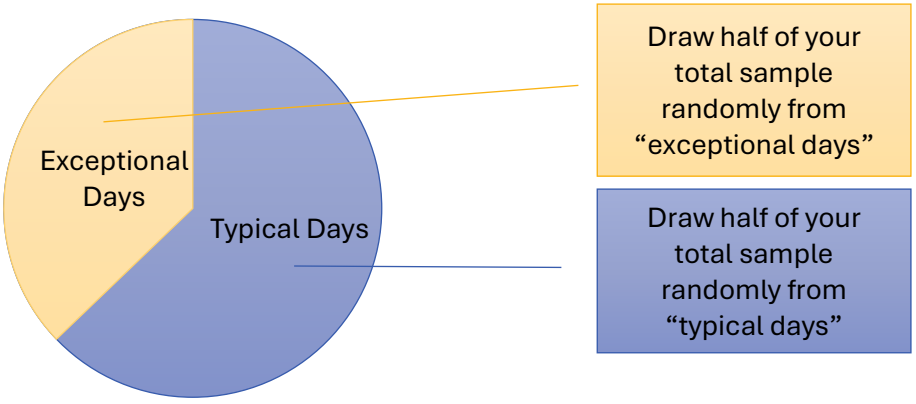
Your output suggests you randomly sample 15 days in the year.

You use the Excel formula: =WORKDAY(DATE(2026,1,1)-1,RANDBETWEEN(1,NETWORKDAYS(DATE(2026,1,1),DATE(2026,12,31))))
and copy it down 15 rows:
***25-Feb** ; 09-Jul ; **25-Feb** ; 12-May ; 17-Mar ; 23-Jul ; 23-Mar ; 10-Dec ; 07-Oct ; 26-May ; 30-Nov ; 20-Apr ; 03-Jun ; 24-Apr ; 14-Jan*

You notice that one date is duplicated. You swap out 25-Feb for 26-Feb.

When you have variation

- **If you answered 'Yes in B15 (that your services do vary),** you will use **Stratified sampling**. This means you will divide the days you offer the drop-in program into two: one group that is exceptional, either by being busier or slower, and one group that is typical. You will sample *more* from your exceptional days than from your typical days.
    - Once you have divided into two groups, you will use random sampling within each group.



VARY BY DAY OF THE WEEK

- The output in B24 will ask you to sample half of your suggested sample size from your exceptional days of the week and half from your typical days.
    - Where your sample is not easily divisible in half, one extra day will be added to your exceptional days.
    - Reminder: "exceptional" days vary from a "typical" day usually by being busier or slower.
- To randomly sample from each of the groups:
    - Exceptional days: Use an online tool[2] and exclude the typical days of the week:
        - EveryRandom.com
        - GigaCalculator.com
        - RedStagLabs.com
    - Typical days: Use the same online tool but select the remaining days of the week, excluding your exceptional days.

Example 1

Your output suggests you sample 55 days in the year. You indicate that your program participation varies by day of the week. You know that Mondays are always busier and Tuesday – Friday are less busy.

You should sample half your sample from Mondays, rounding up. Since 55 isn't easily divided by 2, sample 28 Mondays randomly in the year, and 27 days randomly from the rest of the days throughout the year.

You use an online tool to generate 28 days from Mondays, excluding all other days of the week. You use the same online tool to generate 27 days from Tuesday-Friday, excluding Mondays and weekends.

Example 2

Your output suggests you sample 70 days in the year. You indicate that your program participation varies by day of the week. You know that Friday are the busiest days, and that Mondays are much slower. Tuesday – Thursday are stable, 'typical' days.

You should sample 35 days randomly from Mondays and Fridays (perhaps 17 Mondays and 18 Fridays in the year), and 35 days randomly from Tuesday to Thursday.

Even though Mondays vary by being more busy and Fridays vary by being less busy, they are both "exceptional" days and should be targeted in stratified sampling.

[2] This is not an endorsement of any particular site; these are just examples of tools to help you generate random dates. There are several free online tools, you can explore which ones work best for you.

You use an online tool to generate 35 days from Mondays and Friday excluding weekends, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. You use the same online tool to generate 35 days from Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, excluding Mondays, Fridays and weekends.

VARY BY WEEK WITHIN A MONTH

- Since your program participation varies by week, the sampling strategy output in **B24 will switch the sampling unit to weeks instead of days**; the output will always be a multiple of 5 to keep whole weeks together.
- The output in B24 will ask you to sample half of your suggested sample size from your exceptional weeks and half from your typical weeks.
    - "Half" will always round to a multiple of 5, and by default more days will be given to exceptional weeks.
    - Reminder: "exceptional" weeks vary from a "typical" day by being busier or slower.
- You should aim to keep weeks together; that is, do not try to sample specific days within weeks. Instead, you'll track for an entire week at a time.
- Sampling whole weeks is more complex than days. **You may wish to number all the weeks in a year and manually identify which are your anticipated exceptional weeks.**
    - Create a new list of the weeks you have identified as exceptional and use an Excel formula to help you randomly select from those weeks:

      `=INDEX($A$1:$A$12, RANDBETWEEN(1, COUNTA($A$1:$A$12)))`

        - Where your numbered weeks are in column A
        - Where 12 is updated to reflect the number of weeks you will be sampling
    - For the remaining, typical weeks, use the same process with the remaining numbered weeks

Example

Your output suggests you sample 55 days in the year. You indicate that your program participation varies by weeks within a month. You know that the first week of the month is always busiest.

You should sample ~30 days (or 6 weeks) randomly from the first week of the month, and 25 days (or 5 complete weeks) randomly from the remaining weeks in the year.

You should keep entire weeks together, do not try to sample specific days.

You number all 52 weeks in the year, and identify the first weeks of the month to be weeks: 1, 6, 10, 14, 19, 23, 28, 32, 36, 41, 45, 49. You enter these numbers into column A of a blank workbook and use the

formula to generate 6 random weeks: 10, 23, 28, 41, 45, and 49.

You will sample all five workdays of weeks 10, 23, 28, 41, 45, and 49.

You enter the remaining week values (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52) and use the Excel formula to generate 5 random weeks: 8, 15, 16, 29, 42, 46

You will sample all five workdays of weeks 8, 15, 16, 29, 42, 46.

Together you will be sampling all five workdays of weeks, 8, 10, 15, 16, 23, 28, 29, 41, 44, 46, and 49, for a total of 11 weeks (55 days).

SEASONAL or MONTHLY VARIATION

- Selecting "Monthly or seasonal pattern" can apply for groups of months, e.g., winter season may be October – Dec, or for individual months, e.g., January is always busy.
- The output will ask you to sample half of your suggested sample size from your busy or exceptional season (or months) and half from the remaining seasons (or months).
    - "Half" will always round up to add an extra day to your exceptional season (or months).
- To randomly sample from each of the groups:
    - Busy or exceptional season: Use an online tool3 and set your start and end dates to define your busy season:
        - EveryRandom.com
        - GigaCalculator.com
        - RedStagLabs.com
    - Typical seasons: Use the same online tool but select the remaining days of the year, excluding your exceptional season.

Example 1

Your output suggests you sample 55 days in the year. You indicate that your program participation varies by season. You know Oct-Dec is the busiest time.

You should sample 28 days from October to December and 27 days from the rest of the year.

You use an online calculator with Start date of Oct 1 and end date of Dec 31 to sample 28 days. You use the same online calculator with a start date of Jan 1 and an end date of Sept 30 to sample the other 27 days.

[3] This is not an endorsement of any particular site; these are merely examples of tools to help you generate random dates. There are several free online tools, you can explore which ones work best for you.

Example 2

Your output suggests you sample 70 days in the year. You indicate that your program participation varies by season. You know that Jul – Sep is the slowest time of year.

You should sample 35 days randomly from July – Sept and 35 days randomly from the rest of the year.

You use an online calculator with a start date of Jul 1 and an end date of Sep 30 to sample 35 days.

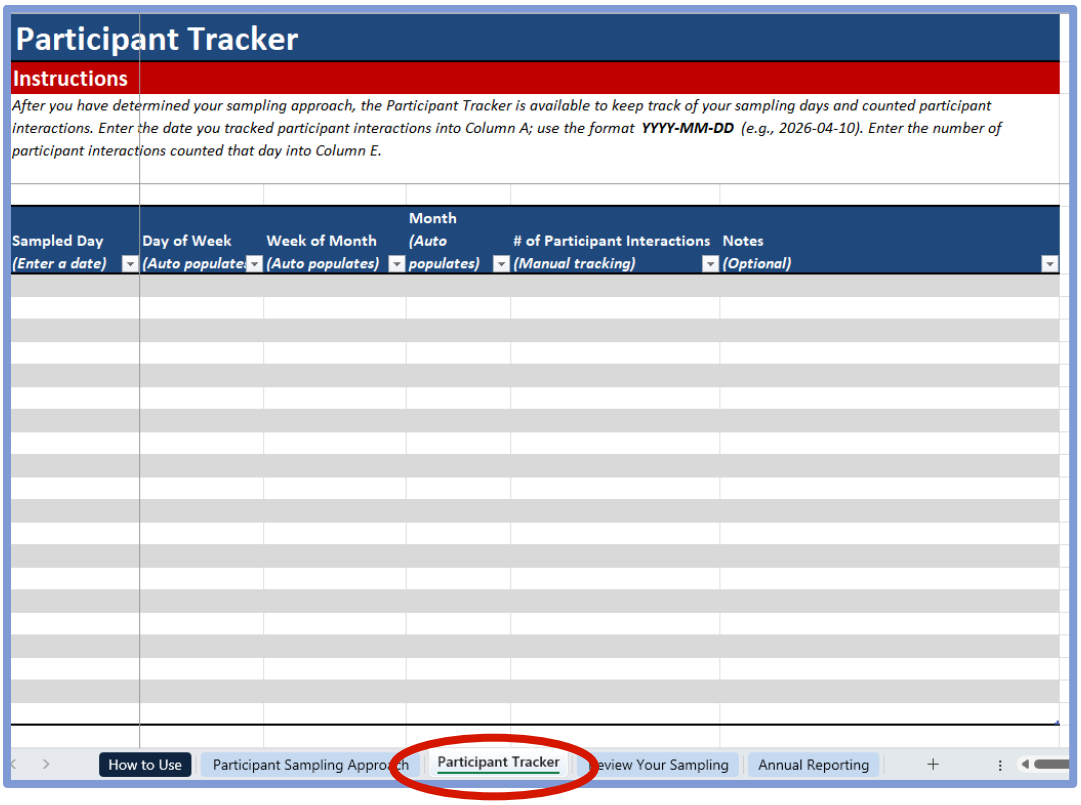
You use the same calculator to identify dates from the remaining part of the year, however it is split over two sections: First, use a start date of Jan 1 and end date of Jun 30. This 6 month period is two thirds of your "typical" period (6 months out of 9 typical months), so you identify two-thirds of your sample: 23 days (Two thirds of 35 is ~23). You then use start and end dates of Oct 1 – Dec 31 to identify the remaining 12 dates (one third of 35).

Keep it simple! Sampling is intended to be easier than tracking every program participant. If your approach is more complicated than tracking all interactions, don't use it!

The goal is to ensure that the tracking days cover the average days, the busy days, and the slow days, to be representative.

STEP 3: Populate the Participant Tracker and set reminders for your selected days

- Once you have identified which dates you will be tracking participation, you may enter them into the Participant Tracker tab of the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool.
- If you saved the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool after answering questions on the Participant Sampling Approach, use that same file.



- Use of the Participant Tracker is not required. You may use any other method you already use to keep track of the days.
- Make sure your program coordinator(s) or staff have a way of knowing which days to track! Calendar reminders are likely a good strategy.

Saving the information you enter into the Participant Tracker will prepare you to use the rest of the tools in the workbook.

STEP 4: Start tracking

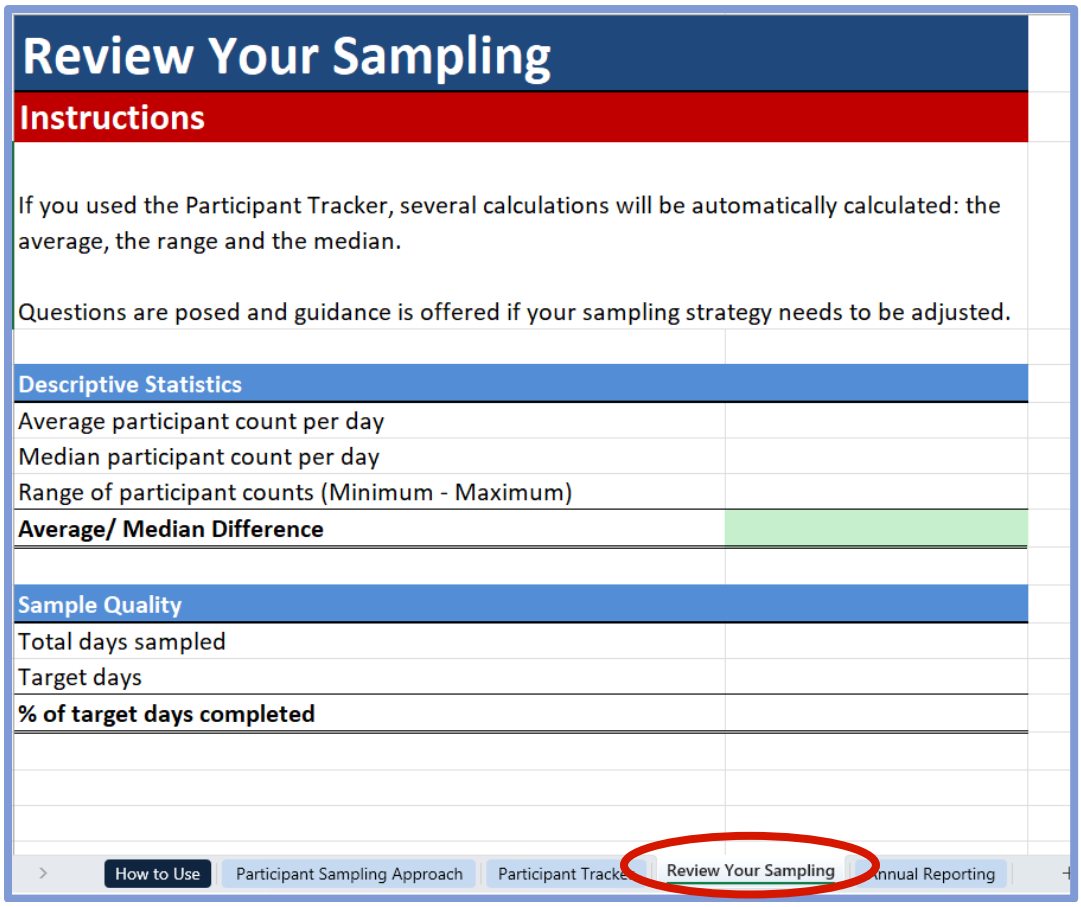
- Now it's time to start tracking. On the days you selected to sample, track the number of program participants on those days, using any method (e.g., tally sheets).
- At the end of the day, enter the daily total in the Participant Tracker tab Column E from Step 3 next to the appropriate date.
    - You may choose to jot down any notes about the day.

If, for any reason, you missed a planned day, leave it blank.

If participation was a 0 that day, be sure to enter the 0. Do not leave it blank!

STEP 5: Checking your sampling strategy

- To increase confidence in your sampling strategy, it's recommended that you do a check-in, perhaps around midway through the year, or when you have sampled about half of your selected dates. This is optional.
- A check-in is a good idea if anything about the drop-in program changes (e.g., staffing, capacity, turnover, services offered).
- The "Review your Sampling" tab in the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool offers some guidance.



- If you have been using the Participant Tracker, four statistics are calculated for you:
  - **Average**: the average number of participants per day that you have tracked
  - **Range**: the lowest number of participants and the highest number of participants you have tracked so far, as a range: Minimum – maximum
  - The **median**: the midpoint of the participants you have tracked
  - **Average/Median difference**: the percentage of difference between the calculated average number of participants, and the calculated median.
- After reviewing the statistics, use the red outlined box in the tool to reflect on your data.
  - Look at the average and ask yourself, "Does this seem right?"
    - If it seems plausible, keep tracking as planned.
    - If it seems too high or too low, consider adding days to your sampling strategy. Adding ~10% more days will decrease the margin of error in your

strategy.

- Look at the range and ask yourself, "Is this larger than expected?"
  - If it is what you expected, keep tracking as planned.
  - If it is a smaller range than expected, keep tracking as planned.
  - If it is a larger range than expected, consider adding days to your sampling strategy. Adding ~10% more days will decrease the margin of error in your strategy.
- Look at the Average and Median (and Average/Median difference) and ask yourself, "Are they similar or far apart?"
  - If they are close—that is, if the Average/Median difference is less than ~20%—do nothing, keep tracking as planned.
  - If the Average/Median difference is greater than ~20%, consider adding days to your sampling strategy. Adding ~10% more days will decrease the margin of error in your strategy.

Example

To add 10% more days, multiply your original sample size by 0.1 (or 10%).

If your original sample was 30 days, multiply by 0.1 (10%):

*30 * 0.1 = 3*

to add 3 days to your sampling, for a total of 33.

- **The examples below show you how to account for sampling approaches that used random sampling or stratified sampling.**

Example 1 – No change

Your sampling check-in shows:

- *Average: 2.8*
- *Range: 0 – 7*
- *Median: 3*
- *Average/Median difference: 5.3%*

Your average seems reasonable; your range is narrow and expected and your median/average difference is less than 20%. No change required, keep tracking with your selected dates.

Example 2 – Random Sampling

Your sampling check-in shows:

- *Average: 2.8*
- *Range: 0 – 21*
- *Median: 4*
- *Average/Median difference: 33.7%*

Though your average seems reasonable, your range is larger than you expected and the percent difference between your average and your median is greater than 20%. This suggests that some days have had more participants than you anticipated.

*Your sampling strategy was 55 days in a year, randomly sampled because you indicated low variation. You have completed 25 of those days. Adding 10% (55 * 0.1) adds 5.5 days (round up to 6). You should now sample a total of 61 days, or 36 more (30 already planned + 6 new days).*

You will need to update your selected dates by using the same online calculators or Excel formula. Keep the dates you have already identified and generate 6 more. If you have duplicates, select the next available date.

Example 3 – Stratified Sampling

Your sampling check-in shows:

- *Average: 6.1*
- *Range: 0 – 25*
- *Median: 3*
- *Average/Median difference: 68%*

Your average seems potentially high, your range is large, and your average/median difference is greater than 20%.

Your sampling strategy was 70 days in a year but stratified with half the sample from the winter season and half from the remaining seasons.

***If your busy season has already passed, do not adjust your sampling strategy**. If you do your check-in after the exceptional time period has passed, adding new days to sample to your typical periods will throw off the results. Instead, do nothing. If your "exceptional" periods were days of the week or weeks of the year, however, you can probably still add more days.*

If you still have upcoming exceptional days, *add half o the new days to the exceptional days and half of the new days to the typical days.*

By adding 10% (7 days), you should split those 7 days over your two groups, and sample more (4) additional days from your busy season and 3 additional days from the remaining seasons.

Using a random date generator, set the dates to your busy period, e.g. "winter season" might be November 1 and December 31. Set the number of days to generate (4). If you have dates that duplicate a day you already sampling, choose the next available date.

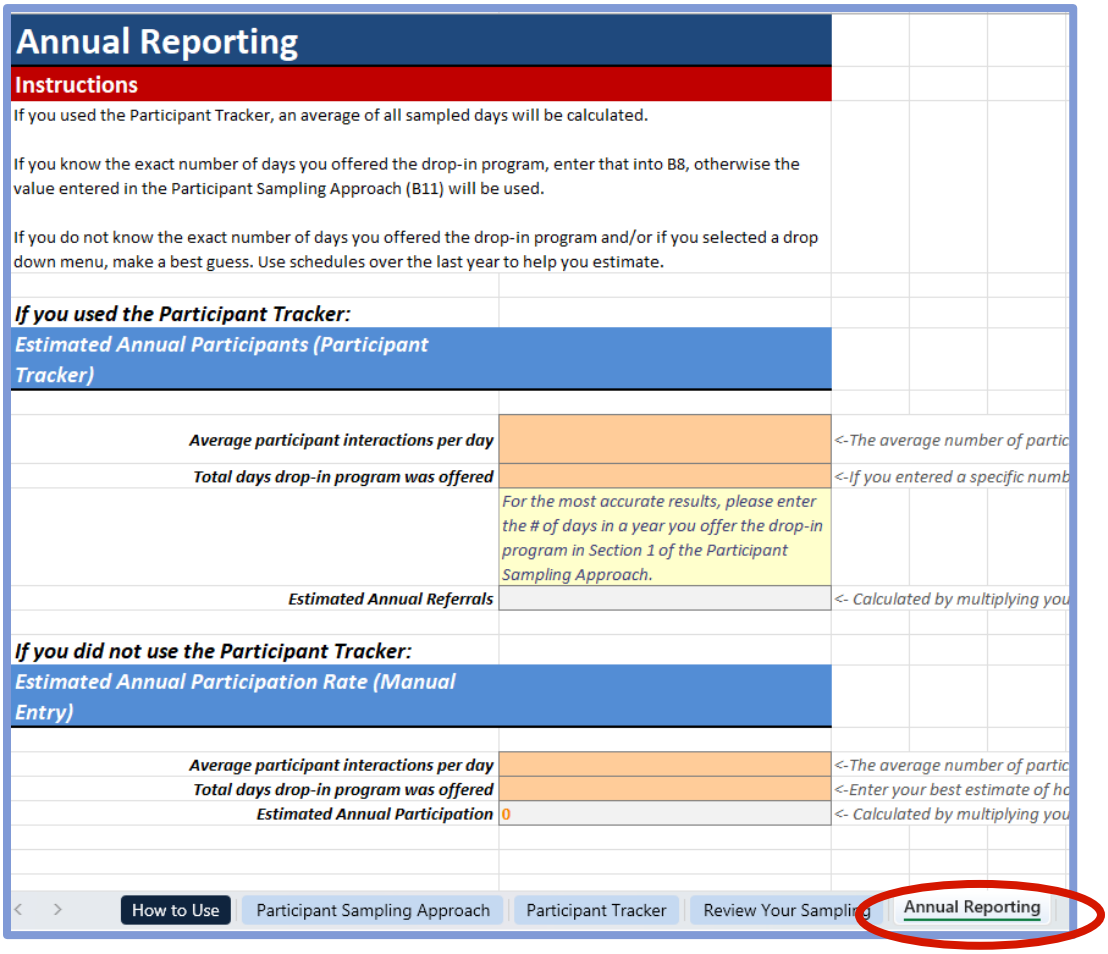
Use the random date generator again and set the dates to the remaining dates in the year, minus your busy period. In this example, it might be July 1 – Oct 31. Set the number of dates to 3. If you have dates that duplicate a day you already sampling, choose the next available date.

Add these dates to your Referral Tracker.

NOTE*: These examples suggested adding 10%, while the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool suggests 20% if your difference is greater than 20%. You will have to assess what is feasible for you. As a rule of thumb, the more you sample ,the more accurate your sampling will be. These are guidelines, not hard rules.*

STEP 6: Calculate the number you will report.

- The Annual Reporting tab in the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool offers guidance on how to calculate an annual count, regardless of whether you used the Participant Tracker or not.
- If you saved the Drop-in Program Sampling Tool and Participant Tracker, use that same file, the Annual Reporting tab will auto-calculate an annual count for you in cell B11.
    - You may update the number of days referral services were offered in B9; otherwise, it will take the value entered in the Referral Sampling Approach



    - If you did not use the Participant Tracker, take your average number of participants for all tracked days (including days where you recorded 0 participation) and enter it into B16.
        - Enter the number of days you offered the drop-in program into B17.
        - The number you obtain in B18 will be an estimated count for the entire year.

Example 1

You have a drop-in program that runs once per week over an entire year. You estimate that while some days are busier than others, there is no clear pattern and over the entire year, an average is probably accurate.

Using the Drop-In Program Sampling Tool, you generate a sample size of 30. You randomly identify 30 days in the year and use the Participant Tracker to keep track.

Using the Annual Reporting tab in your Drop-In Program Sampling Tool, the average is calculated as 20.

To calculate the annual count, you multiple the average (20) by the total number of days you offered the drop-in program in the year. IN this case you offered the program once a week, or 52 times. This value is taken from your Participant Sampling approach.

*20*52 = 1,040 participant interactions over the year.*

You report 1,040 participant interactions in your annual reporting

If you determine that the estimate of 52 is no longer accurate, you can update the value in the Participant Sampling Approach. For example, you may know, retrospectively, that you actually offered services on 45 days, by updating 52 to 45 in cell B11 of the Participant Sampling Approach, the annual count is now 900.

FAQs For Sampling Drop-In Program Participation

I IDENTIFIED A SAMPLING STRATEGY BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN, WE ARE BUSIER THAN I ANTICIPATED, WHAT DO I DO?
If anything changes with how many days you offer the program or how busy the drop-in program is, follow one of the check-in methods to determine if you need to add (or cut) the number of days you sample.

I IDENTIFIED A SAMPLING STRATEGY BUT WE'VE HAD TO CUT BACK SERVICES, WHAT DO I DO?
Rather than cutting your sampling strategy, try to stick with it. If the dates no longer apply, update to dates that do work. If you do not have as many days available anymore, consider not sampling at all.

I CHECKED IN ON MY SAMPLING AND I'M NOT SURE IF THE AVERAGE IS ACCURATE OR THE RANGE IS EXPECTED. WHAT SHOULD I DO?
If you used a check-in method and you're not sure if the average or the range are expected, what you do depends on whether you used Stratified Sampling (that is, variation), or Random Sampling (no variation).

If you used Stratified Sampling, with varied times throughout the year, it may be best to do nothing. Adding extra days unnecessarily may complicate things and may actually risk skewing your sample if you are using stratified sampling. Your original sampling strategy was selected based on what you knew to be true and if that hasn't changed, don't change your sampling strategy.

If you used Random Sampling and you have the capacity, adding 10% extra sample days will always result in a more accurate estimate.

HOW DO I RANDOMLY SELECT DAYS?
You have several options. You can use any online random date selector, here are few options:

- EveryRandom.com
- GigaCalculator.com
- RedStagLabs.com

You can also use Excel to help you create random dates, using this date generator:
=WORKDAY(RANDBETWEEN(DATE(2026,1,1),DATE(2026,12,31)),0)

I IDENTIFIED DAYS TO SAMPLE AND I STARTED, BUT NOW SOME OF THE UPCOMING DAYS DON'T WORK ANYMORE, CAN I CHANGE MY SELECTION?
Yes, if you will not be the drop-in program on a date selected, move it to the next available date that does work.

WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW DETAILS ABOUT MY DROP-IN PROGRAM?
Appropriate sampling does require that you know some things about your services. If it is your first year of offering a new drop-in program, or you just don't know much about your numbers, you may want to manually track for at least a year, so that you have the information available to choose a sampling approach the following year.

CAN I MAKE UP MY OWN SAMPLING STRATEGY?
It is important that sampling is based on statistical information, not just convenience. Yes, you can come up with a different sampling strategy than the one available to you in the Excel workbook, but you should be able to justify it. You should also be using 90% confidence intervals and a 10% margin of error.

WHAT IS THE MINIMUM I CAN SAMPLE?
The minimum sample depends on how many days you offer the program and whether or not there is variation. However, if you offer very few days of the drop-in program in a year (< 30), you should consider not sampling but tracking each day. Likely a sample size would be very close to the actual number of days anyway.

I'M NOT SURE HOW MANY DAYS WE OFFER THE DROP-IN PROGRAM. WHAT DO I DO?
If you have no idea at all, it is best that you don't sample. Track the number of days so that in the next year you will be able to use a sampling strategy.

If you just don't know the exact number of days, the drop-down menu options likely has wide enough ranges for you to make a best guess.

If you don't know the exact number of days, but could estimate within 30 days or so, enter your best guess number into A12. A best guess is still better than using the drop-down options.

THE NUMBER OF DAYS WE OFFER THE DROP-IN PROGRAM IS LIKELY BETWEEN TWO OF THE DROP-DOWN GROUPS, WHAT DO I DO?
If, for example, you think your days of offering the drop-in program is between 200 and 300, you should select the higher of the two options (250+) which will result in more sampling days and a more accurate estimate. Alternatively, you could enter 250 into A11 for an even more accurate estimate.

WE HAVE MISSED SEVERAL OF OUR IDENTIFIED TRACKING DAYS, WHAT DO I DO?
If you identified dates but, for any reason, have been unable to track on those days, try to add the next best available date to your sample. It is ok to miss <10% of the days, but if you miss more than that there is risk that the sampling won't be an accurate representation.

CAN I START SAMPLING MID-WAY THROUGH THE YEAR?
Yes. If you have been tracking participation manually for the start of the year but want to switch to sampling, follow all of the guidance in this manual as if it were planned at the start of the year. For dates generated that you have already tracked use that information in your Participant Tracker, and then continue to sample on the remaining dates in the year. The other data you've gathered will not be used.

I HAVE QUESTIONS, SOMETHING DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. WHO CAN I ASK?
If your sampling approach is complicated or uses complex calculations or strategies, it may be best for you to stick with manual counting.

We also encourage you to talk to other FCSS programs to see if they have encountered similar questions or challenges.

Appendix - Sampling Formula Details

This section allows you to understand the math, logic and decision-making behind the sampling tools. Dive in if you love statistics and fine print!

- For the purposes of this guidance, "full time" is considered 252 days:
  - A year has 365 days (or 366 in a leap year).
  - Removing weekends:
    - There are 52 weeks in a year → 52 Saturdays + 52 Sundays = 104 weekend days.
  - Remove statutory holidays:
    - Alberta has 9 statutory holidays (New Year's Day, Family Day, Good Friday, Victoria Day, Canada Day, Labour Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Day). Plus one floating holiday (like National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, if observed).
  - So: $365 - 104 - 9 = 252$ working days per year
  - You may adjust this based on your program offerings.

- The Participant Sampling Approach uses a standard formula for calculating sample size:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 * p(1-p) * N}{Z^2 * p(1-p) + E^2 * (N-1)}$$

  - Where:
    - n = required sample size (number of days to sample)
    - N = total population size (actual drop-in program days)
    - Z = Z-score for confidence level (1.645 for 90% confidence intervals)
    - p = estimated proportion (0.5 for maximum variability)
    - E = margin of error (0.1 or 10%)
  - This formula is derived from Cochran's sample size formula for finite populations, commonly used in survey sampling and research design.
  - Academic published research uses a standard of 95% confidence intervals (to calculate the z-score) and a 5% margin of error.
    - For FCSS programs, we are using a 90% confidence interval and 10% margin of error to minimize tracking burden for programs, while still allowing the Ministry to have confidence in the estimation.

- In the Participant Sampling Approach, the groupings for the drop-down menu options about the number of days you offer services were chosen based on the number of times per week services may be offered:
  - <60 (about once a week)
  - 60 -149 (about 2 or 3 times a week)
  - 150 – 249 (about 3 to 4 times a week)
  - 250+ (about 4 or 5 times a week)

  We did not have historical data on which to base these groupings.