

Respondent Tracking

As elaborated in the *LSAC Discussion Paper No.2*, the intent is that all children included in the Dress Rehearsal and first wave will be followed in all subsequent waves. The only exceptions are likely to be children whose families move overseas. Wherever possible, the primary parent will continue to be the principal informant on the child and family and it is likely that the other parent will also continue to be asked to provide data. Contact information will be sought from both parents independently during Wave 1 to assist in cases where there is a later separation of the parents.

The potential for non-response is present at every wave of a longitudinal study. Since there is detailed information on the characteristics of all respondents at Wave 1, it will be relatively easy to apply weights to the data to compensate for any bias resulting from subsequent non-response. However, such procedures are only likely to be effective in the short-run.

Over the longer term it is important to minimise attrition because of the probability that those lost from the study are different from the ‘stayers’ in ways that may not be observable at Wave 1. Furthermore, high rates of attrition have obvious detrimental effects on the sample size then available for longitudinal analyses of developmental trajectories and pathways to outcomes. Finally, there are good reasons to be concerned about the adverse effects of high attrition on the perceived legitimacy of continuing the study.

The experience of several overseas longitudinal studies indicates that attrition is likely to be highest in the early years. In the Canadian National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth, for example, attrition between the first and second wave was approximately 11 per cent (NLSCY, 1999), but it is reported that retention has been maintained at 85-90 per cent over the later years (A. Zeeman, the Department of Family and Community Services Workshop, May 2001, Canberra). Similarly, in the Christchurch Health and Development Study the attrition rate was almost 9 per cent between birth and age 2, but dropped to less than 1 per cent per year subsequently, with a total attrition of 19 per cent by age 18 years (Fergusson et al 1989; Horwood & Fergusson, 1999). For these reasons, a minimum level of 85 per cent retention from wave to wave is expected across the entire life of the project. To achieve this will require implementing strategies that maximise the retention of sample within each cohort over the entire life of the project. The most successful sample retention strategies that are typically used are:

- inclusion of tracking questions in study instruments;
- maintenance and frequent updating of a database on respondents’ location;
- promoting participant identification with the study; and
- extensive communication with sample members, including training interviewers in interviewee friendly techniques.

Information will be obtained from both parents on names, addresses and telephone numbers of 2 relatives or friends not living at the same address, as well as their own email addresses, and business and mobile telephone numbers.



Season's Greetings cards will be sent to all families, and birthday cards to all children annually, together with change-of-address cards for notification of any intended moves. Participating children will be given a small gift (bowl and cup) with the *Growing Up in Australia* logo, and attractive 'fridge magnets' will be left with parents with the study's contact details. Contact will also be maintained with participants between study waves through regular newsletters.

In addition, the study will be promoted through marketing of the logo and tagline, and through media exposure to the study, and a 1800 telephone number and website will be maintained so that participants can contact the data collection agency and AIFS.

If a family cannot be located through the contacts they have given, then forwarding addresses or telephone numbers will be sought from residents at the address or telephone number of the original sample member. If these means prove unsuccessful, the Electronic White Pages, Australia Post and the electoral roll will be accessed to pursue contact details for persons who have changed address.

In addition, the use of a brief between-waves mail-back survey in 2005 may help in maintaining contact.

