Appendix N

Performing Operational Experiments

Included in PRAMTrac is an experimental design component. This component enables states to compare different approaches for conducting certain operational activities. These operational experiments can be carried out within PRAMTrac as a part of the regular data collection process. Conducting experiments is the only way to determine what impact specific components of the survey packet or data collection process have on response rates. This appendix outlines the basic set of experiments available and the process to use to record the experiments and their results.

There are a wide variety of experiments that can be conducted with PRAMS data collected on operations. The table below outlines the basic set of experiments that may be useful to most PRAMS states and that are currently supported in PRAMTrac. Other experiments can be designed and tested. Contact your state Program Manager to discuss these options.

Operational Experiments Available in PRAMTrac

Category	Experiment
Letter	Compare different types or colors of paper. Compare letters that use different font style or size. Compare different ways of addressing the mother (maiden instead of married last name, for example).
Letter Signature	Hand-written vs. computer-printed signatures. Blue ink vs. black ink. PRAMS staff vs. higher-level official.
Envelope	Mailing label vs. address printed directly on envelope. Compare different envelope sizes. Compare different types or colors of paper. Logo on envelope vs. no logo on envelope. Compare different ways of addressing the mother (maiden instead of married last name, for example). Compare return addresses: an address that is clearly for a state agency vs. an address that is not clearly for a state agency.
Questionnaire Packet	Compare different calendars. Compare different question-and-answer sheets. Compare including a pencil/no pencil. Compare including resource list/no list.
Questionnaire	Compare different cover logos. Compare different paper colors for cover. Folded vs. unfolded (may depend on envelope size).
Incentive/Reward	Compare different incentives or rewards. Compare incentive vs. reward. Compare incentive and reward vs. incentive only Compare incentive and reward vs. reward only

These experiments should be implemented based on the following guidelines:

- A state can conduct up to two simultaneous experiments.

- Each experiment will have two mutually exclusive groups. When a new batch is imported, PRAMTrac will randomly assign mothers to one of the groups in each experiment. Through the mail-merge process, the mothers will be automatically sorted into the specified experimental groups.

- Most experiments will require multiple batches. In general, CDC recommends that a minimum of three consecutive batches be used for most experiments. A statistical evaluation may be needed to determine adequate experimental groups sample sizes and experiment duration.

To coordinate state experiments and share results with all states, a form has been developed to describe operational experiments. The Operational Experiment Form is comprised of 3 sections: Experiment Design, Experiment in Progress, Experiment Results. Each state should first complete the Design section of the form that defines the parameters of an experiment. This should be discussed and sent to the state Program Manager. Once the experiment has been designed, CDC will assist with implementing it in PRAMTrac. PRAMTrac will be reconfigured so that a batch can be imported to initiate the experiment. Results for the experimental groups will then appear as part of the monthly reports for the designated batches.

Once the experiment has concluded, update the Operational Experiment Form with the test results and share it with the state program manager. Place a copy of the completed form in this appendix in the state protocol.

Protocol Development Task

If an experiment is conducted, place the completed Experiment Forms here.

Operational Experiment Form

State: _____ Date: _____

1. Experiment Design

a. Purpose of Research:
(What do you want to learn?)

b. Experiment Description:
(How do you want to test your research question? Include any definitions that will be used.)

c. Duration: _____
(Number of batches)

Starting Batch: _____

Ending Batch: _____

d. Statistical Notes:
(If there are sample size calculations or other consultations [e.g., power calculations], summarize those here.)

2. Experiment in Progress

Notes on Conducting Experiment:
(Provide comments regarding process of conducting experiment. Describe any problems encountered during experimental phase.)

3. Experiment Results

a. Summary of Findings:
(Present data results. Attach operational experiment reports from each batch.)

b. Assessment of Experiment:
(Interpret findings.)

c. Action Taken Based on Experiment Results:
(What changes, if any, were made as a result of the experiment? Include any methodological changes, cost issues, staffing, staff time.)