

01 / THE NOTE TO SHARE • PREPARED 10 SEPTEMBER 2026

The decision in front of us.

A working note to circulate before the meeting. Prepared from the answers supplied; suggestions below are starting points for the team to agree.

THE QUESTION IN YOUR WORDS

Should we renew the after-school program for another two years, and what should change before the next funding cycle?

FOR	NEEDED
A board or governing body; Me or the program team	Within 30 days · Monday’s leadership meeting (illustrative example)

THE UNCERTAINTY TO RESOLVE

Whose experience is missing

A USEFUL FIRST MOVE

Put the numerator and denominator beside the headline result. Trace available counts from eligibility to follow-up, marking unknowns before interpreting the percentage.

LEAVE THE MEETING WITH

A population pathway, an honest denominator, and one feasible coverage improvement.

PREPARATION NOTE

This brief reflects the answers supplied. Prova has not reviewed the underlying information, and the brief does not establish program effect or make the decision.

02 / A FIELD NOTE FOR YOUR QUESTION

Put the missing people back in view.

Chosen for the uncertainty you selected: whose experience is missing.

Follow people from eligibility through access, participation, completion, and later observation. A percentage describes its denominator; it does not automatically describe everyone the work was meant to reach.

01 Reconstruct the pathway

Write the count eligible, offered access, enrolled, started, completed, and observed later. Mark counts that are not available.

02 Locate the denominator

Place the numerator and denominator beside the headline percentage. State whose outcomes the number describes.

03 Ask why people disappear

Consider whether missingness could be connected to the outcome. Nonresponse is not evidence of either success or failure.

04 Improve coverage with care

Choose a feasible way to hear from missing groups. Consider burden, privacy, access barriers, and whether people can decline safely.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE / NOT A FINDING ABOUT YOUR WORK

Of 160 people who started training, 80 responded at follow-up and 56 were employed. The 70 percent employment figure describes respondents. Outcomes are missing for half of those who started.

03 / WORK WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

Make the first evidence pass count.

These checks follow the kinds of information you said are available. Availability is a starting point; usefulness still needs to be checked.

01 Reports or evaluations

Bring the methods and limitations as well as the summary. Check the population, period, comparison, and whether the conclusion answers today's question.

02 Program or administrative data

Start with a field list and a small permitted sample. Check the unit counted, definitions, coverage, missingness, and whether records can be linked appropriately.

03 Participant or stakeholder feedback

Record who was invited, who responded, and how accounts were selected. Use experience to illuminate delivery and meaning; do not assume it represents everyone.

The first source we will examine

Record its keeper, the question it can answer, one limit, and who will check it.

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04 / A WORKSHEET TO USE TOGETHER

Put the missing people back in view.

Work on your actual question. Type into the PDF fields in a compatible reader, or print this page and write on it. Save the completed file to keep your notes.

What are the counts at eligibility, access, start, completion, and follow-up? Mark unknowns.

Who is missing, and could the reasons for missingness relate to the outcome?

How should the headline be worded now, and what one change could improve coverage?

05 / FROM THIS CONVERSATION TO ACTION

Give the next move an owner.

Your window is within 30 days. Use existing information for the immediate question, test what can finish in time, and explicitly carry longer work into a later cycle.

01 Before the next meeting

Put the numerator and denominator beside the headline result. Trace available counts from eligibility to follow-up, marking unknowns before interpreting the percentage.

02 In the first evidence pass

Examine the uncertainty with the source checks and worksheet. Mark what is supported, qualified, or unresolved. Keep the agreed limit on staff time.

03 Before the decision closes

Agree the next action, who authorizes it, and a review point. If waiting, record its cost and the question it would resolve.

SAFEGUARDS FROM YOUR PRIORITIES

01 Consequences for people

Include an affected perspective in interpreting the options. Name who could be harmed by acting, waiting, or withdrawing support, and what safeguard is needed.

02 Protecting staff time

Set a time budget for the first evidence pass. Reuse existing material and agree what work can pause before adding a collection request.

03 Responsible use of funding

Name the commitment at stake, feasible alternatives, and the cost of waiting. Keep a spending decision separate from any claim that the program caused an outcome.

Thirty minutes, well used.

Open with this: Today we need to agree what this question asks of us, what the information can honestly support, and one useful next move. We do not need to resolve every uncertainty in this meeting.

TIME	USE THE ROOM TO	CAPTURE
0-5 min	Read the decision note. Correct the question, purpose, audience, or useful date.	The question and who can act.
5-10 min	Review the available sources. Separate observations, interpretations, and assumptions.	What the current record can support.
10-22 min	Use the three worksheet prompts. Invite independent responses before discussing differences.	Responses to the three worksheet prompts.
22-27 min	Check the priorities and consequences. Name a disagreement or missing perspective that matters.	One safeguard and what remains open.
27-30 min	Agree one next action, its owner, useful date, and review point.	A commitment someone accepts.

Our action, owner, date, and review point

Record the commitment, what remains open, and dissent that could change the action.

07 / YOUR COMPLETE DECISION RECORD

Keep the context with the decision.

Your selected answers and writing are preserved here, followed by the suggested next move and questions. Return to the Brief on the website to revise the inputs and generate a new packet.

WHAT IS HAPPENING

A renewal or funding decision

WHAT WOULD HAVE TO BE TRUE FOR THIS TO CONTINUE?

We need a responsible basis for renewal and a clear account of who the result represents.

WHAT THIS NEEDS TO ANSWER

Should we renew the after-school program for another two years, and what should change before the next funding cycle?

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO GET RIGHT

Consequences for people affected; Protecting staff time; Using funding well

WHOSE DECISION OR LEARNING THIS SERVES

A grantee's or partner's decision or learning

WHO NEEDS TO RELY ON THE ANSWER

A board or governing body; Me or the program team

WHEN IT IS NEEDED

Within 30 days · Monday's leadership meeting (illustrative example)

WHAT IS ALREADY AVAILABLE

Reports or evaluations; Program or administrative data; Participant or stakeholder feedback

WHAT REMAINS UNCERTAIN

Whose experience is missing

07 / YOUR COMPLETE DECISION RECORD / CONTINUED

ROLES TO AGREE

Who pays, supplies information, directs the question, and uses the answer may be different. Agree those roles before beginning work.

A PRACTICAL NEXT MOVE TO CONSIDER

List who was eligible, who participated, and whose experience is visible. Identify the people you still need to hear from before relying on the headline result. For the next 30 days, bound the first pass to what can inform the immediate use; record what needs longer. Include someone able to speak to the consequences for affected people, and record whose perspective is still missing. Set a staff-time limit for this first pass and check existing material before asking for more collection. Name the funding at stake and what would count as a responsible use of it.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM

1. Who directs the question and can act on the answer, and how does that differ from who pays or supplies information?
2. Who is missing from the information, and could their experience change our interpretation?
3. Who bears the consequences of getting this wrong, and how will their perspective be included?

BOUNDARY

This brief reflects the answers supplied. Prova has not reviewed the underlying information, and the brief does not establish program effect or make the decision.

08 / A GUIDE TO KEEP

Who Is Missing From the Result?

The following pages are the complete Prova Field Guide selected for your packet, with its original examples, exercises, and page numbering.

WHY THIS GUIDE IS HERE

Chosen for the uncertainty you selected: whose experience is missing.

INSIDE THE GUIDE

See who disappears between eligibility, participation, and follow-up—and what that means for the result you report. A population pathway and a denominator check.

HOW TO USE THE PACKET

Send the opening decision note ahead of the meeting. Use the field note to frame the discussion, fill in the worksheet together, and keep the action and meeting records. Read the full guide when a question needs more depth.

SOURCE AND EDITORIAL CONTEXT

Adapted from Prova Field Guides and selected using the answers supplied. The packet has not examined underlying records or established a finding about the program. Examples are illustrative.

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THE GUIDE ONLINE

<https://byprova.com/resources/who-is-missing-from-the-result.pdf>

Who Is Missing From the Result?

How to see the people who disappear between eligibility, participation, and follow-up

FOR

program teams, evaluators, data staff, boards, funders, and anyone interpreting a reported rate or outcome

USE WHEN

a positive percentage may describe only respondents, completers, or people whose later outcomes could be found

INCLUDES

a population pathway, denominator check, missingness test, claim rewrite, and a 15-minute team exercise

A report says that 72 percent of participants reached the intended outcome. The number is precise. The chart is clean. Yet the report does not say whether “participants” means everyone eligible, everyone enrolled, everyone who started, everyone who completed, or only the people who answered a follow-up call.

Those can be very different groups. The result may be accurate for the people behind its denominator and still create a misleading picture of the program as a whole.

The short answer

Reconstruct the path from the intended population to the people in the reported result. Name how many people were eligible, offered access, enrolled, started, completed, and had an outcome observed. Then ask whether the people who disappeared could plausibly have different experiences.

A percentage can only describe the people included in its denominator. The missing people are not a technical footnote when their absence could change the interpretation.

The population pathway

Most program results pass through several gates.

Eligible

People met the stated conditions for access. Eligibility rules may already exclude people with different needs or circumstances.

Offered or referred

Some eligible people may never receive an offer, may not be reached, or may be filtered by referral practices.

Enrolled

People accepted the offer and completed whatever process counted as enrollment. Those who decline may face different constraints from those who join.

Started

Some enrolled people never receive a meaningful amount of service.

Completed

Completion often requires time, stability, transportation, trust, or administrative persistence. Completers can therefore differ systematically from people who leave.

Observed later

An outcome exists in the reporting system. People may be missing because they cannot be reached, decline, move, use another system, or experience an outcome that is recorded elsewhere.

At every gate, write both the count and the reason people move out of view.

Start with the denominator

The numerator tells you how many people met the outcome. The denominator tells you which population the percentage describes.

If 54 of 75 respondents were employed, the reported rate is 72 percent among respondents. If 120 people started the program, the same 54 outcomes equal 45 percent of starters. Neither calculation automatically tells the whole story, but they

answer different questions.

Always put counts beside percentages. “72 percent (54 of 75 respondents; 120 people started)” gives the reader a more honest basis for interpretation.

Why people are missing matters

Missingness is not one problem. The reason affects what can be inferred.

Some outcomes are missing because of routine administrative delays. Some people cannot be contacted. Some decline because questions feel intrusive. Some leave because the service was a poor fit. Some do well and no longer want contact. Some have unstable housing, phone access, work schedules, immigration concerns, or distrust of institutions.

The safest default is not to assume missing people did poorly. It is also not to assume they look like the observed group. Investigate the pattern and preserve the uncertainty.

A worked example

A job-training program enrolled 200 people. Of those, 160 started, 110 completed, and 80 responded to a six-month follow-up. Fifty-six respondents were employed, producing a reported rate of 70 percent.

The team compares available baseline information. Respondents were more likely to have completed the program and less likely to have reported unstable housing at enrollment. The 70 percent result therefore describes a group with different starting conditions from many people who disappeared from follow-up.

A responsible report might say:

At six months, 56 of 80 respondents were employed. Outcomes were available for half of the 160 people who started. Respondents were more likely to have completed the program and had more stable housing at enrollment, so the result should not be treated as the employment rate for everyone who started.

This does not erase the favorable outcome. It places it inside the population actually observed.

A practical missingness check

For the people with and without outcomes, compare only information that existed before the result:

- Referral source.
- Age or other relevant demographic characteristics.
- Starting level of need.
- Location.
- Program dose or completion status.
- Timing of enrollment.
- Known barriers to contact.

Large differences do not automatically tell you what the missing outcomes were. They show why treating the observed group as representative may be unsafe.

Do not turn the exercise into a hunt for personal details that have no decision use. Use the minimum information needed to understand coverage and improve follow-up fairly.

What you can say

- “Seventy percent of respondents were employed at six months.”
- “Outcome records were available for 80 of the 160 people who started.”
- “People with follow-up differed from those without it on these starting characteristics.”
- “The observed result is encouraging, but it may not represent everyone served.”

What you cannot say yet

- “Seventy percent of participants were employed,” when only respondents are represented.
- “People lost to follow-up probably had the same outcomes,” without support.

- “Completers prove the program works,” when completion selected a more stable or engaged group.
- “More follow-up will solve the issue,” if the collection approach itself discourages honest participation.

What to do next

Minimum useful step: Put the numerator and denominator beside every headline percentage. Replace broad population labels with the exact observed group.

Stronger step: Reconstruct counts at each population gate and compare known characteristics of people with and without outcomes.

Prospective step: Improve consent, contact options, timing, participant trust, and data-sharing arrangements before the next cohort. Decide which level of coverage is needed for the actual decision.

A 15-minute team exercise

Choose one important rate in a current report.

1. Write the numerator and denominator.
2. Draw the population pathway from eligible to observed later.
3. Add the count available at each gate.
4. Name the main reason people disappear at each transition.
5. Ask whether those reasons could be related to the outcome.
6. Rewrite the headline so it names the exact observed group.
7. Choose one feasible change that could improve coverage or candor next time.

If the team cannot reconstruct the pathway, state that openly. Finding the denominator may be the first useful evidence task.

A note on trust and burden

People may disappear from a record because the measurement relationship does not feel safe or useful. Repeated contact, sensitive questions, unclear data use, and fear that answers could affect services can reduce both participation and candor.

Better follow-up is not only a technical system. Explain why the information is requested, make refusal safe, offer accessible ways to respond, and avoid asking for details that do not serve the stated use. The quality of the relationship can affect the quality of the evidence.

When to bring in help

Outside support is useful when missing outcomes are extensive, linked records are needed, the result will support a consequential claim, or the pattern of missingness requires methods the team cannot assess confidently. It may also be warranted when data collection creates privacy, legal, or safeguarding concerns.

The goal is not to manufacture a complete-looking rate. It is to determine which population the evidence can fairly describe and what uncertainty must remain.

Questions to carry forward

- Who is included in the denominator?
- Who disappeared before the outcome was observed?
- Could their experience change the interpretation?
- What would make follow-up more trustworthy and less burdensome?