



Adolescent  
Girls Initiative

## Selecting and Recruiting Adolescent Girls

**D**etermining which girls to work with and deciding how to recruit them are initial steps in program design. In many places these tasks are complicated by restrictive conditions and norms that govern the lives of girls and young women. When trying to attract girls into a program, consider these lessons that can make the selection and recruitment processes more “girl-friendly”.<sup>1</sup>

### **Lesson Learned: Take the time to understand the specific needs of girls in the local context.**

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It is very important to take the time to analyze girls’ situations before designing the intervention and to engage with girls directly. Deciding which girls to reach and understanding their particular vulnerabilities will largely determine the intervention design. In Haiti, the AGI team conducted focus groups with girls to better understand their needs, interests, challenges and capacities. AGIs in Rwanda and Liberia also conducted vulnerability assessments that included focus groups, surveys, and key informant interviews. These types of assessments can help determine reasonable selection criteria for the program and provide important information about the type of intervention that is likely to be successful and appropriate in the given context.

### **Lesson Learned: Define the target group so that it is not too narrow or impractically broad.**

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There are important differences among adolescent girls, including with respect to:

- Their age. Girls 10 to 14 have different needs than those 15 to 19, and from those ages 20 to 24.
- Whether they are in-school or out-of-school, and whether or not they are literate.
- If they work (either within or outside the home).
- If they are married.
- If they are mothers.
- If they are engaged in sex work or transactional sex.
- If they are migrants, refugees or internally displaced.
- If they have a disability.
- If they are orphans.
- If they are domestic workers.
- If they live in an urban area or a rural one.
- And so on...

It is critical to determine which of these girls the program intends to serve and to find out where they are located. Programs probably can’t work with just one segment of the population; nor can they work with them all. If a recent census or household survey data is available, consider using this data complemented by rapid assessment methodologies to determine if the girls you are trying to recruit are available in sufficient numbers in the given location.



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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see the AGI Learning from Practice Series on How to Make Youth Employment Programs “Girl-Friendly.”

### Selection Criteria in the AGI Pilots

Afghanistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Completion or near-completion of high school.</li> <li>b. Age 18-30.</li> </ul>
Haiti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Basic literacy (Creole).</li> <li>b. Out of formal school for at least one year.</li> <li>c. Age 17-20.</li> </ul>
Jordan	Community college final year students who have passed graduation exams.
Laos PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Marketplace Competition: entrepreneurs under 35, at least half female.</li> <li>b. Career Offices: University/TVET students, at least half female.</li> </ul>
Liberia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Age 16-27.</li> <li>b. Not in school past 6 months (flexible in round 2 if had returned to school).</li> <li>c. Basic literacy.</li> <li>d. Residence in community.</li> </ul>
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Socially and economically disadvantaged, based on a matrix of characteristics and conditions.</li> <li>b. Age 16-24.</li> <li>c. Have not completed high school.</li> </ul>
Rwanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Basic literacy.</li> <li>b. Out of formal school for at least one year.</li> <li>c. Age 15-24.</li> <li>d. Socially and economically vulnerable per govt. social protection categories.</li> </ul>
South Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Permanent resident of the village where the club is located.</li> <li>b. Age 15-24.</li> </ul>

## Lesson Learned: Working with the most vulnerable girls may increase the complexity of the intervention and affect the expected outcomes.

Working with more vulnerable girls may entail meeting greater needs. Vulnerable girls may also need emotional and behavioral support services in order to be able to meaningfully gain from other types of interventions. Poor girls may need a stipend to cover transportation and attendance costs. Carefully consider whether the needs of the targeted girls can be met before selecting them. In South Sudan, the program explicitly sought to work with vulnerable girls, most of whom are mothers, and thus the program needed to include childcare. In Rwanda, the AGI provides psycho-social and counseling services to vulnerable girls. The objectives and results indicators should be realistic; for a more vulnerable population it might be appropriate to set lower targets. Carefully discuss the targets with the implementing partners and set-up the appropriate incentive structures, as they may (understandably) prefer to work with girls who are easier to recruit. The Nepal AGI induces training providers to accept trainees from marginalized groups (who are often more challenging to place in jobs due to social stigma). The training provider is compensated with higher payment for the training of a more marginalized girl than for an average recruit.

## Lesson Learned: Ensure that selection criteria are realistic and appropriate.

When defining the selection criteria think about the type of girls the program is designed for and the type of girls the program is likely to attract. For example, a vocational training program may be more likely to attract older girls who are out of school; setting a maximum age that is relatively young may not work well in this case. In Liberia, the program decided that literacy would be a requirement for selection because international experience suggests that youth training programs are generally more effective for beneficiaries with some basic literacy skills. However, the girls who were interested in the program were mostly illiterate. As a result, the project piloted a literacy and numeracy component in the second round of training. Also be careful that the selection criteria do not trigger adverse effects. For example, if the program is trying to attract girls who are out of school, it is important that the selection criteria do not incentivize girls who are currently attending school to drop out. AGIs in Liberia and Haiti require that girls be out of school for at least one year in order to be eligible to participate in the program.

## Lesson Learned: Selection criteria are only as valid as the means of enforcing them.

Selection criteria are important so that the “type” of girls who can best benefit from the intervention are admitted. Selection criteria may also be particularly important if the project has a limited budget or scope. However, it is useless to create selection criteria that cannot be verified. For example, “vulnerable” as a criterion for selection needs to be further specified because it can be interpreted in many ways. In some contexts, it may be difficult to verify quantifiable criteria. For example, age can be difficult to verify in places where girls do not commonly have birth certificates or other forms of national identification. Selection criteria should be kept to the minimum of what is reasonably verifiable in the particular setting. To the extent possible, selection criteria should not be advertised during recruitment so that they do not lead people to represent themselves in a certain way.



## Lesson Learned: It takes time and often multiple strategies to recruit the target girls.

In many parts of the world adolescence is a restrictive time when girls' visibility to the outside world diminishes. Recruiting girls may require more time and resources than for other types of beneficiaries. There are a variety of recruitment tactics—including word of mouth, through parents, through community leaders, through schools, using fliers or radio. Each tactic has pros and cons in terms of time and cost, ability to reach the most girls, and ability to garner community support for the program. There are also important implications about which girls will be reached and who will not be reached with each strategy. For example, if recruitment is done through fliers, illiterate girls may not be reached. Girls with low self-esteem may be able to read a flier but not feel that they themselves are eligible for such a program. If recruitment is done through community leaders important leadership buy-in may be gained, but girls who are unknown or seen as unfit by the leaders may be excluded, even if these girls match the profile of who you are looking for. For these reasons a multi-pronged recruitment strategy is typically needed to reach girls. In Liberia, traditional means of recruitment were having limited effects, so the project team took to the street with loudspeakers.

### Recruitment Strategies

- ✓ Word of mouth
- ✓ Messaging through community leaders
- ✓ Community theatre
- ✓ Partnering with youth centers, health clinics, and networks of local NGOs
- ✓ School-based recruitment
- ✓ Tasking girls who have been identified as leaders to recruit other girls in their neighborhoods or communities
- ✓ Door-to-door mobilization
- ✓ Organizing through parents or men/boys as fathers or partners
- ✓ Fliers
- ✓ Radio announcements
- ✓ TV commercials

## Lesson Learned: Recruiting girls is often a community affair.

Adolescent girls often do not have sole authority to decide on their own actions. To reach girls, multiple stakeholders and even entire communities may need to be engaged. It may also be important to work with boys and men and to identify male leaders who will support the program. In Afghanistan, the AGI is targeting communities that are accessed through an existing education project. In South Sudan, the AGI conducted a door-to-door census to target recruitment. While conducting the survey, interview teams talked to the parents and adolescent girls about the objectives and activities of the AGI in an effort to spread information and grow community support for the program. The Liberia AGI held community meetings to build support for the project and prevent potential suspicions or backlash. In Haiti, the AGI is working through a network of local NGO's to help with community outreach and to identify vulnerable girls.

### Recruitment Strategies in the AGI Pilots

Afghanistan	Social mobilization through an existing education project.
Haiti	Recruitment through a network of local NGOs.
Jordan	In selected geographical areas the program is advertised to firms.
Laos PDR	a. Call for proposals, outreach at schools, business associations etc. b. Career Counseling Office outreach to students.
Liberia	Recruitment through widely advertised community events.
Nepal	Recruitment through outreach & communications campaign.
Rwanda	Widely advertised public campaign to raise awareness about the project in selected sectors.
South Sudan	Door-to-door census to target recruitment.

## Lesson Learned: Younger and more vulnerable girls are often the hardest to recruit.

Every AGI has faced challenges recruiting girls under age 18; in both Liberia and South Sudan girls age 15 to 17 had to be recruited house-to-house. Women over 20, especially if they have children, may be more motivated to join programs because they have pressing and immediate financial needs. However, if part of the objective is to offer economic opportunities to young women so that they might avoid early pregnancy, then it is just as important to target those young women even if they are not as eager to come forward. Recruiting younger girls will take time and planning. The extremely vulnerable girls will also be hard to reach, as their guardians or other authority figures in their lives may need to be convinced. Married girls may need the permission of their husbands or mothers-in-law; domestic workers may need the permission of their employers. The girl herself may also need to be persuaded that she is worthy of and welcome to participate in the program. In Nepal, the AGI conducted an outreach and communications campaign to ensure that poorer, less educated and more vulnerable girls could access the program. The program also provides financial incentives to training providers to accept more disadvantaged girls.

## Lesson Learned: It may take additional effort to retain more vulnerable girls once they have been recruited.

Recruitment is just a first step—programs may need to take extra steps to prevent more vulnerable girls from dropping out. In Liberia, trainees sign a commitment document which spells out exactly what is expected of them and what the project will and will not do for them. This assists in managing expectations and is continually referred back to during the training period. Program participation is also creatively incentivized through positive competition techniques and coaching.

### Summary Checklist for Selecting and Recruiting Girls and Young Women

- ✓ Is the program targeting the right girls for this type of intervention?
- ✓ Are girls' constraints and needs well understood?
- ✓ Did the program conduct an assessment or use existing analyses to verify assumptions about girls?
- ✓ Are the selection criteria realistic for this setting?
- ✓ Can the selection criteria be easily verified?
- ✓ Can the program meet the needs of the girls it will be attracting?
- ✓ Are the selection criteria carefully designed so as to not cause adverse effects?
- ✓ Is the recruitment strategy appropriate for girls the program is trying to reach?
- ✓ Has the program gained community approval and buy-in from the necessary adults?
- ✓ Has the program allowed enough time to recruit the targeted girls?

