VIRTUAL INCENTIVES

NORC

VI

Case Study

Boosting Panel Equity: How NORC & Virtual Incentives Used Incentive Behavior to Deepen Trust and Representation

NORC's AmeriSpeak panel is a gold-standard resource for nationally representative research. As participant needs and expectations evolve, NORC recognized the opportunity to **deepen engagement through more tailored reward strategies**.

Virtual Incentives collaborated with NORC to better **understand what participants truly valued**. Together,

we analyzed thousands of reward choices, uncovering how age, race, gender, and income shape preferences.

The results elevated NORC's approach, turning a data study into a **blueprint for building trust** and creating more inclusive research experiences.

The Challenge: Strengthening Representativeness Through Participant-Centered Rewards

As AmeriSpeak expanded, NORC recognized the importance of aligning incentives with **participants' diverse preferences**. The research explored whether more personalized approaches could enhance engagement across different demographic groups:

"People don't just want to be paid — they want to be seen," explains Frank Kelly, VP Strategy at Virtual Incentives. This insight underscored the opportunity to use behavioral data to design more personalized, effective incentives.

Participation patterns:
Could tailored incentives improve participation across all demographic groups and reduce recruitment challenges?

Representation opportunities:
Would personalized rewards help ensure all communities felt equally motivated to participate?

Connection building:
Could understanding preferences help create more relevant rewards that strengthen participant engagement?

![Virtual Incentives logo]

The Solution:
Using Redemption Data to Drive Equitable Participation

NORC and Virtual Incentives analyzed thousands of real redemption events to uncover statistically significant patterns in participant preferences. The data revealed strong correlations between reward choice and key demographic factors such as **age, income, gender, and race**.

These insights opened up new possibilities for NORC's AmeriSpeak rewards catalog with greater intentionality, aligning offerings to participant needs and expectations. NORC and Virtual Incentives used these findings to **reshape catalog offerings** and guide incentive design for equity and engagement.

Age **Income** **Gender** **Race**

The Results:
Achieving a More Inclusive and Engaged Research Panel

The analysis **surfaced actionable insights** that deepened NORC's understanding of panel participation. The data revealed clear generational differences in reward preferences, emphasized importance of financial flexibility, and demonstrated how personal interests shape reward choices:

82%
Of 18-30 Year-olds
Chose gift cards under $51

74%
Of 50-64 Year-olds
Chose gift cards $51 or higher

NH-Black panelists were 67% more likely
To choose Mastercard than other groups

Lifestyle cards like Starbucks Target, & Xbox
Showed strong appeal by gender and age

The collaboration enabled NORC to develop a more tailored, equitable reward model that better reflects participant preferences across demographic groups. This work demonstrates that when participants feel understood and valued through personalized rewards, research quality improves and retention increases.

The Collaboration:
Combining Expertise to Advance Engagement

This collaboration made meaningful progress possible. Research methodology experts at NORC joined forces with Virtual Incentives' behavioral analytics specialists to address a specific challenge: aligning rewards to better reflect participant needs and close representation gaps.

Together, the teams built a model for pairing research expertise with behavioral analytics to elevate participation, creating more inclusive panels that **better serve both researchers and the communities they study**.

The collaboration delivered impact for the broader research community:

Joint research showcased at AAPOR 2025, sharing insights with fellow researchers

Integrated Virtual Incentives platform data with NORC's panel engagement goals

Enabled ongoing improvements to catalog personalization, helping close representation gaps

Interested in exploring behavior-based reward design for your research?

Let's talk about building trust, enhancing equity, and strengthening representation together.

Contact us