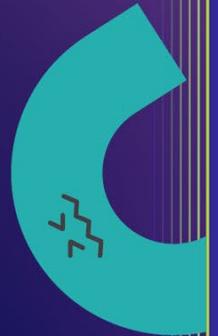




Why One-Size-Fits-All Incentives Stop Working

A Practical Guide for Designing programs
for multiple participant types



Why This Matters

Most incentive programs don't fail at launch. They fail when engagement drops and no one can explain why.

Leadership asks:

- Is the program still working?
- What changed?
- Should we keep funding this?



If all participants are treated the same, those questions are impossible to answer.

Segmenting participants into participant-level ICPs makes incentive performance diagnosable, defensible, and improvable.

What is a "Participant ICP"?

A **Participant ICP** is a behavioral segment within your incentive audience—defined not by job title or geography, **but by how people engage**.

This is not persona fluff. These are **operational segments** you can design for, measure, and adjust.

Instead of asking:

“ How is the program doing?

You can ask:

“ Which participant segment is underperforming—and why?



The Four Core Participant ICPs

Most incentive audiences naturally fall into four segments. The percentages vary, but the patterns are remarkably consistent.



1. Growth-Core Performers

The Middle Majority (≈50–60%)

Who they are

- Capable, but inconsistent
- Want to perform, but don't always prioritize the program

Why they matter

This segment produces the majority of incremental ROI. If engagement drops here, the program is effectively failing—quietly.

What works

- Clear progress visibility
- Achievable milestones
- Short-cycle rewards
- Momentum mechanics (streaks, checkpoints)



2. Elite Self-Starters

Top Performers (≈10–15%)

Who they are

- Already motivated
- Would likely perform without incentives

Key risk

Over-incentivizing this group inflates cost without moving overall performance.

What works

- Status and recognition
- Exclusivity and access
- Early visibility into opportunities

What doesn't

- Heavy point multipliers
- Over-engineering mechanics they don't need



3. At-Risk or Dormant Participants

Early Drop-Off Group

Who they are

- Logged in once (or twice), then disappeared
- Often forgotten after launch

Why they matter

This group explains why engagement decays—and why most programs become indefensible after the first few weeks.

What works

- Re-entry mechanics
- Low-friction wins
- Timely reminders tied to actual behavior

What doesn't

- Long leaderboards
- Multi-month goals



4. New or Unproven Entrants

Onboarding Segment

Who they are

- New hires, new partners, new locations
- Evaluating whether the program is “worth their time”

Why they matter

If this group fails to activate early, they rarely self-correct later.

What works

- Guided onboarding missions
- Early validation
- Fast first rewards

Why One-Size-Fits-All Programs Break

Programs built with:

- One leaderboard
- One reward structure
- One cadence
- One message

...are designed for nobody in particular.

They create:

- Early spikes
- Unexplained drop-off
- Budget pressure
- Internal doubt

Segmenting participants allows you to run multiple experiences inside one program—without multiplying admin effort.

What Segmentation Unlocks

When participant ICPs are in place, teams can:

- Adjust mechanics without rebuilding the program
- Run parallel incentive experiences cleanly
- Diagnose engagement decline instead of guessing
- Tie budget decisions to segment-level performance
- Defend the program with evidence, not anecdotes

The question shifts from:

“ Is the program working?”

To:

“ Which segment is breaking—and what do we change?”

That's a fundamentally stronger position.

How to Start (Without Overcomplicating It)

You don't need perfect data or complex models.

Start with:

Engagement Behavior

logins, actions taken, recency

Performance Signals

sales activity, goal completion

Lifecycle Stage

new, active, drifting, dormant

Even **three to four** are enough to dramatically improve clarity and control.

The Bigger Picture

Participant ICPs aren't an "advanced feature."



They're what incentive programs need once:

- Budgets are scrutinized
- Teams are small
- Audiences are large or diverse
- Leadership wants answers, not activity reports

Final Thought

If you can't explain why engagement changes, you can't protect the program.

Participant ICPs give you that explanation—and the levers to act on it.

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