

# PPM Panels: A Guidebook for Arbitron Subscribers



## Introduction

In any given month, more than 70,000 people are serving as Arbitron Portable People Meter™ (PPM) panelists nationwide. Arbitron recruits and manages these panelists through a series of procedures and techniques developed through years of experience. This guidebook will discuss the selection, recruitment, retention, and retirement of panelists, and will provide insights into the benefits of using panels in radio audience measurement.



## The Advantages of Panels

Arbitron's Diary service utilizes a survey methodology in which each household member participates for one week, actively writing his or her radio listening in a survey diary. Because diarykeeping requires active participation by respondents, the quality of diarykeeping would likely diminish if households were asked to keep diaries for extended intervals.

PPM methodology asks comparatively little of participants. The participant must wear or carry a Meter during waking hours and dock the Meter at bedtime. The Meter captures the participants' radio listening for them. Because the PPM system is a passive measurement system, participants are able to reliably participate for extended intervals. Each PPM household is part of a panel whose members generally participate for a number of months<sup>1</sup>.

Each panelist (aged 6 or older) receives his or her own Meter. A household is comprised of the individuals who reside together (e.g., in a house, apartment, or mobile home) and may contain people who live alone, families, unrelated persons, or combinations of relatives and non-relatives.

PPM panels have at least two key advantages over survey methods in which people participate on a "one-time-only" basis:

- The PPM service captures radio exposure passively. Panelists need only wear or carry the Meter with them and dock the Meter at bedtime. The Meter captures their radio listening automatically. Panelists may therefore find compliance with the researcher's instructions a routine matter, requiring little conscious effort.
- Panelists who participate for an extended period add stability to the ratings by enabling a larger sample to be available on any given day and providing more total observations of behavior compared with one-time surveys.

### Panels and Weekly Sample

Although members of PPM panels may be replaced with new panelists for a variety of reasons, many panelists participate for an interval sufficient that participation becomes a part of their daily routines.

On average, 75-80% of the members of installed PPM households are part of the In-Tab sample during an average day. This contrasts favorably with the Diary service, in which, on average, only one-twelfth of the total In-Tab sample (for the 12-week report period) is likely to be in-tab for any individual survey week.

For example, in a hypothetical market with 3,600 In-Tab diaries during a 12-week survey period, the average weekly sample size would be roughly one-twelfth of the total, approximately 300 diaries. If that same market had a PPM panel of 1,200 daily average In-Tab panelists, the PPM sample would be approximately four times the size of the Diary sample for a given day. This increased weekly sample size allows for the presentation of data with increased granularity and frequency.

<sup>1</sup> At the time of publication of this guidebook, PPM panelists participate for an average of 12 months.

## Sample Acquisition

Arbitron includes in its sample frames: households with landline telephones; households with cell phones and landlines they rarely or never use; Cell Phone households; and households with no telephone access<sup>2</sup>.

### Landline Telephone Households

Households with landline telephones may be included in Arbitron's Random Digit Dial (RDD) telephone frame. Known business and institutional exchanges are excluded from the sample frame, but the remaining households may potentially be contacted for recruitment as PPM panelists<sup>3</sup>. Households with landline telephones may also be recruited using telephone contact information acquired through an Arbitron questionnaire (described below).

### Cell Phone Households

Arbitron includes Cell Phone households in the PPM sample frame. These Cell Phone households include households with only cell phones, as well as households with landline phones that are rarely or never answered by anyone in the household.

Cell Phone sample is acquired as follows:

- **Randomly Selected Addresses.** The sample frame begins with randomly selected addresses. Addresses are matched to landline phone numbers where possible. Generally, slightly more than 60% of addresses match landline telephone numbers.
- **Questionnaire.** The remaining households are mailed an Arbitron questionnaire that confirms a household's telephone usage and contact telephone numbers, while also authorizing Arbitron to contact the household by phone. Households that provide telephone numbers on their returned questionnaire may be contacted for recruitment by phone.

### In-Person Recruiting

Arbitron has introduced In-Person Recruiting for telephone households that can't be reached by telephone, or for whom in-person recruitment may be more effective, in High-Density Black/Hispanic areas in select Metros.

<sup>2</sup> The descriptions under "Sample Acquisition" apply to all Arbitron PPM markets except Houston-Galveston, which employs a different, but comparable, sample acquisition approach.

<sup>3</sup> The telephone sample frames originate as lists of telephone numbers. As telephone exchanges that include both residential and business numbers may initially be included in those sample frames, contacted telephone numbers may not always initially reflect residential households. Business and other non-residential telephone numbers are excluded based on available information or upon contact.

## Panel Recruitment

Panel recruitment is a multi-step process. Arbitron attempts to recruit selected households through a series of telephone calls and written communications introducing the household to Arbitron and PPM measurement, obtaining information about the household, and encouraging the household to participate as PPM panelists.

### Basic and Alternate Households

Prior to the start of recruitment activities, Arbitron assigns households as “Basic” or “Alternate” sample. Basic households are recruited immediately after Sample Preparation. Eligible Alternate households are held in reserve status.

### Sample Preparation

Randomly selected Basic and Alternate households are contacted by Arbitron. At this stage, the household’s address is confirmed, and household-level characteristics are determined – such as the presence of an 18- to 24-year-old in the household and the household members’ race/ethnicity.

### Sample Recruitment

During the recruitment of households to participate as panelists, Arbitron obtains demographic and other information for each eligible household member. Arbitron’s recruitment specialists also employ various techniques to help ensure that household members understand how to participate as panelists.

### Media-Affiliated Households

Media-affiliated households are not eligible to participate. All households are asked questions to determine whether any household member is media-affiliated.

## Stratification

Sample stratification is a widely used sampling method designed to enable greater control over sample selection. Stratification identifies households for recruitment, using a variety of characteristics for selection, including age, race/ethnicity, and language-usage characteristics.

Eligible Alternate households are held in reserve status, remaining available for recruitment after stratification.

Stratification entails the classification of eligible Alternate households into categories (or “strata”) based on the information obtained during Sample Preparation. Alternate households are recruited to replace refusing Basic households. Arbitron selects an Alternate household for recruitment at random from among those demographic strata from which sample is needed to better represent the demographic characteristics of the market.

The Alternate Selection Pool is maintained so as to be proportionate geographically (by county or sampling unit). In addition, stratified households are classified based on variables that include:

- Presence of person 18 to 24 years old
- Presence of person 25 to 34 years old
- Presence of person 35 to 44 years old
- Race/Ethnicity
- Language usage of Hispanic households (where applicable)

## Installation

Once all household members agree to participate, the household receives Arbitron PPM equipment that includes Meters and docking stations for household members in the panel, and a household data collector.

### The Meter

Each panelist is issued his or her own Meter. The Meter collects exposures to encoded stations via a small microphone. The Meter also contains an internal clock, a rechargeable internal battery, a motion detector, and a small green light that remains steadily illuminated while the Meter is in motion. (Routine body movement is sufficient motion to keep the light illuminated.) The Meter is always “on” – it collects exposures to encoded stations automatically.



Household Collector, Docking Station/Recharger and Meter

### The Docking Station

Each panelist is issued his or her own docking station, generally kept by the panelist's bedside. Panelists are instructed to dock their Meters when they retire for the day. The docking station includes an LCD display through which Arbitron may provide information and messages to the panelist. The docking station recharges the battery in the panelist's Meter and transmits listening and motion data to the household data collector.

### The Collector

The household receives one data collector. The collector transmits the household's collected listening and motion data to Arbitron via a landline telephone line or cellular telephone modem.



*Note:* Arbitron's new PPM 360™ technology will allow for mobile data retrieval at any time, without the need for a docking station or household collector. The technical procedures described in this guidebook reflect the PPM technology in place in the majority of markets at the time of publication.

## Panel Management

Arbitron has a staff of Panel Relations Specialists who act as liaisons between Arbitron and the panel. These specialists help panelists install household equipment, train new panelists, monitor panelist compliance, and provide coaching. Panel Relations Specialists interact with panelists by telephone, e-mail, text messages, in-person visits to the household, and other means.

### Online Status

Once the household has installed the equipment and provided sufficient motion data, the household is placed in "Online" status. Members of households in this status are eligible for inclusion in the sample on any day in which the panelist meets Arbitron's In-Tab criteria.

### Wearing the Meter

Panelists are asked to wear or carry the Meter during their waking hours. The PPM Meter contains a motion detector that helps ensure that the Meter is being worn or carried by the panelist when exposures to encoded stations occur. Although the Meter collects exposures to encoded stations at all times, a panelist's exposures become part of the In-Tab sample only if the panelist has met the minimum daily motion requirement.

Arbitron has several ways to assist panelists in complying with this requirement. These include reminders, accessories, and special measures for panelists who are under 18 years old.

- **Reminders.** In addition to instructions from Panel Relations Specialists, panelists receive visible reminders to comply with Arbitron's instructions. When the Meter has been out of motion for 20 minutes, the green light on the Meter flashes to remind the panelist that he or she has put the Meter down, and to prompt the panelist to resume wearing or carrying the Meter.
- **Accessories.** Arbitron makes accessories available to panelists to allow them to customize their Meters, and provides clips and lanyards to help ensure the Meter can be readily worn or carried.
- **Special Measures.** The minimum daily motion requirement (for inclusion as In-Tab for the media day) for persons under 18 is five hours, rather than the eight-hour minimum for adults 18 years old and over. (On average, In-Tab panelists carry their Meter between 14 and 15 hours per day.) In addition, Arbitron provides special instructional materials for children aged 6 to 11 and will provide young panelists with customized letters for school authorities, where warranted, explaining the importance of participation in PPM research.



### Docking the Meter

Panelists are instructed to dock their Meters at bedtime each day. Panelists receive visible reminders (in the welcome packet provided to each household) to dock their Meters each day, as well as reminders from Panel Relations Specialists.

### Minimum Daily Motion Requirement and In-Tab Status

A panelist's exposures are included in Average Weekly Cume estimates and Weekly Time Spent Listening estimates if the panelist was In-Tab for at least six days during the seven-day media week. A panelist must meet the minimum daily motion requirement to be included as In-Tab for the media day (8 hours for adults 18 years old and over; 5 hours for persons under 18).

### Demographic Characteristics Updates

Arbitron contacts each panelist to reconfirm or update the household's demographic characteristics several times a year.

## Traveling Panelists

A panelist who is traveling or away from home for a brief interval is instructed to take the Meter while traveling. This helps keep the panelist accustomed to wearing or carrying the Meter.

### Travel and Meters

The Meter's battery will retain a charge for several days. Travel rechargers are available upon request for panelists who travel, as well as for panelists vacationing for up to two weeks.

The Meter's memory may retain listening and motion data for two weeks or more without being downloaded. When a panelist docks the Meter, exposures from the last seven days may be included in ratings calculations. The listening will be counted for the market in which the panelist resides.

### Temporarily Ineligible Panelists

Household members who will be away from the household for two or more weeks (but for less than six months) are classified as "Temporarily Ineligible Panelists." These panelists remain installed, but are not included in In-Tab calculations. They are also instructed to leave the Meter docked. Persons who will be away for more than six months are not considered to be part of the household and are deinstalled.



## Panelist Compliance

Panel Relations Specialists contact PPM households as necessary throughout the household's tenure in the panel, encouraging panelists to wear or carry their Meters and to comply with other requirements for participation.

Arbitron employs a combination of incentives for panelist compliance – including monetary premiums, gift cards, and various promised incentives – with a variety of coaching and monitoring techniques that help ensure compliance with Arbitron's instructions.

Arbitron reads motion and other data from panelists' Meters to help identify whether individual panelists are meeting established thresholds.

Panel Relations Specialists make every reasonable attempt to gain cooperation from non-compliant panelists. Compliance coaching may take place via telephone, e-mail, text messages, in-person visits to the household, or other means. Households that fail to respond to these and other initiatives may be deinstalled.

## Panel Integrity

Arbitron takes very seriously the importance of preserving the integrity of its audience estimates. A number of analytical tools and policies are in place to help ensure that panel integrity is not compromised by panelists either intentionally or unintentionally. These include safeguards to protect the confidentiality of panelists, as well as safeguards to identify the use of Arbitron Meters or household equipment for purposes other than those for which they were intended.

### **Panelist Confidentiality**

Arbitron treats the identity of all panelists as confidential.

### **Panelist Anonymity**

Arbitron instructs panelists to avoid disclosing their participation to the public. Panelists who make such disclosures become ineligible.

### **Station Contact With Panelists**

Arbitron may treat as Rating Distortion any effort by a station to learn the identity of PPM panelists, or to gain control over Meters or other PPM household equipment. Such activities may result in a station being delisted from all Arbitron reports.

### **Improper Use of PPM Equipment**

A key feature of Arbitron's PPM methodology is its capacity to measure the listening behavior of each household member by issuing each person his or her own personal Meter. Throughout the household's tenure in the panel, the panelists are instructed to wear or carry their own Meters.

Arbitron uses proprietary software programs and procedures to help identify instances in which panelists may be carrying another household members' Meter or attempting to circumvent compliance requirements. Although details regarding these programs and procedures must remain confidential to help ensure their effectiveness, Arbitron will investigate and take appropriate action anytime they indicate investigation is warranted. Depending on the specific circumstances, responses may include special coaching, deinstallation, or other actions.



## Turnover and Sample Retirement

On average, households remain in the panel for approximately 12 months, but may participate for two years or more. Approximately 25% of panelists reach the two-year anniversary of participation.

Household members may retire from the panel for a variety of reasons. Panelists may leave because they are moving out of the market, are deinstalled for non-compliance, have reached the scheduled end of their tenure on the panel, or for other reasons.

### Panelist Retirement

Effective October 2010, Arbitron amended its policies regarding the retirement of panelists.

Arbitron retires panelists at the end of an eligibility period based on the time frame during which the panelist was selected for recruitment.

- Panelists selected during the first year of a panel will be retired between 18 and 30 months of the initial recruitment for that market. Panelists will be randomly selected for retirement in equal-sized groups during that interval.
- Panelists selected a year or more after the first recruitment in the market will be assigned a retirement date between 18 and 24 months after the panelist agreed to participate.

## Contact Information and Resources

We hope you find the information in this guidebook helpful, and welcome questions from our subscribers. Please feel free to contact us and to review the materials available on the Arbitron PPM Web site [www.arbitron.com/ppm](http://www.arbitron.com/ppm):

- 2011 PPM Data Delivery Schedule
- PPM Encoding Handbook for Radio
- Arbitron's Rating Distortion and Rating Bias guidelines for PPM markets

### Arbitron Contact Information

Megan Troidl (410) 312-8721  
Michelle Barker (410) 312-8487

### Additional Arbitron Information

[www.arbitron.com](http://www.arbitron.com)  
[www.arbitron.com/ppm](http://www.arbitron.com/ppm)  
[www.arbitrontraining.com](http://www.arbitrontraining.com)

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