

SURVEYS

How to Conduct a Survey

Why use a survey?

1. To conduct a quick scan of differences in opinions, attitudes, knowledge, and practices among a specific group or comparing different groups.
2. To identify different needs, skills, etc. of people based on demographic data (e.g., socio-economic status).
3. To gather feedback on programs and services and seek input on possible improvements.
4. To test findings from other research methods on larger numbers of people. For example, focus groups allow for the gathering of richer data but are time consuming and can only be conducted with a small number of people. A survey is the opportunity to see if the focus group results are generalizable to the population.

Key considerations when conducting a survey

1. Ensure you choose a sample that accurately represents the population you are targeting.
2. Know what it is that you are measuring with the survey so that this information can guide the development of the survey questions. Questions need to be relevant to the topic.
3. Surveys will provide you with numbers but will not provide details to explain those numbers.
4. Choose the type of questions that you will include: multiple choice, ranking, rating, matrix of choices. See **Scales, Scales, and More Scales** in the toolkit for more information on the different types of survey questions.
5. Questions should not be leading or uncomfortable for participants to answer.
6. Questions should only ask for one piece of information and be organized in a logical manner.
7. When developing the questions, ask “Why are we including that question?” and “What is that intending to measure?”
8. Demographic information should be collected in the survey (e.g., gender, age, level of education).
9. The survey should not be too long and complicated. The population being surveyed should be able to easily complete it.
10. Questions should be reviewed for bias and clarity. Word the questions carefully to avoid confusion or different interpretations. Conduct a pilot with a similar group to ensure language is appropriate.
11. Ensure confidentiality and anonymity for participants whenever possible. If not possible, it is necessary to inform participants so they can decide if they will continue to participate.

For further information, consider the following:

Best Practices,
http://www.aapor.org/Best_Practices1.htm#VCwHCmdV1Y

Creating Good Interview and Survey Questions,
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/559/06/>

Designing Surveys that Count,
<http://www.keene.edu/crc/forms/designingsurveysthatcount.pdf>

Survey Research,
<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/survey.php>

Survey Research: A Summary of Best Practices,
<http://www.ethics.org/resource/survey-research-summary-best-practices>