Best Practices & Considerations When Conducting Survey Research

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Best Practices for Survey & Public Opinion Research

- Surveys are a popular and systematic approach to collecting quantitative data that will provide statistical information about a population.
- Wide variety of methods “or modes” of collecting survey data.
  - Phone
  - Face-to-Face
  - Paper and Pencil
  - Web
- While surveys can be diverse in subject and varied in methodology, there are some standards to conducting “quality” survey research.
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- The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) is the leading professional organization of public opinion and survey research professionals in the U.S., with members from academia, media, government, the non-profit sector and private industry.

  - [http://www.aapor.org/bestpractices](http://www.aapor.org/bestpractices)

- The PSU Institutional Review Board. All research to be conducted must first be approved by the IRB
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1. Have specific goals for the survey.
   - Specific
   - Clear cut
   - Unambiguous
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2. Consider alternatives to using a survey to collect information.

- Is a survey the best method?
- Advantages
- Disadvantages
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Advantages of a survey.

- Large samples are possible
- Wide range of information
- Relatively easy to administer
- Economical
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Disadvantages of a survey.

- Subject Dependent
- May have Validity Issues
- Errors due to non-response
- Limited by response choices
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3. Select samples that represent the population to be studied

- Should be a replicable or repeatable plan
- Guard against unplanned selectiveness
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4. Use designs that balance costs with errors.
   • Utilization of resources
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5. Take great care in matching question wording to the concepts being measured and the population studied

- Clearly define topics, concepts & content
- Attention to question wording and order
- Attention to survey length & format
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6. Pretest questionnaires and procedures to identify problems prior to the survey.
   - Ensure that questions are understood by respondents
   - That survey is properly administered by interviewers
   - That procedures do not adversely effect survey cooperation
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7. Train interviewers carefully on interviewing techniques and the subject matter of the survey.

• Insist on high standards for recruiting & training
Training Interviewers

- Obtain informed consent
- Stay neutral
- Know study thoroughly
- Read each question verbatim and in order
- Record responses accurately
- Deal with inconsistencies politely
- Be courteous and professional at all times
- Probe for answers
- Maintain confidentiality
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8. Construct quality checks for each stage of the survey.

- Check & verify each step
9. Maximize cooperation or response rates within the limits of ethical treatment of human subjects.

- Use proper sample management & control
- Follow-up with non-respondents, reluctant & refusals
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10. Use statistical & analytical reporting techniques appropriate to the data collected

• Data analysis and interpretation should be competent & clear

• Findings should be presented fully, understandably & fairly
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11. Carefully develop and fulfill pledges of confidentiality given to respondents.

- Establish clear intentions to protect confidentiality of information collected
- Train researchers and other staff to maintain confidentiality
- Potential for statistical disclosure of respondent(s)
12. Disclose all methods of the survey to permit evaluation and replication.

- Who sponsored the survey
- Purpose of the study, with specific objectives
- Survey or exact full wording of questions
- Instructions or explanations that might effect results
- Description of population and sampling frame used
12. Disclose all methods of the survey to permit evaluation and replication.

- Completion rates and if possible how non-respondents differ
- Special scoring, editing or data adjustments
- Discussion of precision of findings (sources of error)
- Description of percentages on which conclusions are based
- Interviewer characteristics
- Copies of instructions or manuals
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- Visit or contact the SRC for questions regarding conducting surveys at Penn State.

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