DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SURVEYS

Institutional Effectiveness
Office of Analytics and Institutional Effectiveness
aie.vt.edu
OVERVIEW

• Evaluation & Assessment Methods
• Survey Types
• Survey Process
• Design Considerations
• Question Design
• Tips for using surveys
• Resources
EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT METHODS

- Counting – cost data, activity records, etc.
- Observation – individuals or groups
- Documents/Records – logs, texts
- Interviews – individual, oral history
- Case studies – portfolios, critical incidents
- Focus Groups – user panels, peer group assessments
- Questionnaires/Surveys
- Visual Techniques – photos, drawings
Surveys are an approach to gathering opinion-based data that rely on respondents answering questions and responding to statements that have been developed in advance.
EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT METHODS

So….is a survey the best method?

• What data do you want to collect?
• What other methods might be useful?
• Does relevant data already exist?
  • If so, can you access/utilize it?
SURVEY TYPES

• Face to Face
  • Costly

• Telephone
  • Time consuming
  • Can be costly

• Mail
  • Most time consuming

• Web
  • Distributed electronically
  • Response rates tend to be lower
IRB APPROVAL

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) must approve all research
- Anything that may be used for external dissemination should be approved
- For more information, visit http://irb.vt.edu
SURVEY PROCESS

• Guiding Questions:
  • What do I want to know?
  • Who should I ask? Why?
  • How many questions are needed to get the information I want to obtain?

• Process:
  • Design
  • Pilot
  • Distribute
  • Analyze
  • Report
WHAT DO I WANT TO KNOW?

• Define exactly what information you want to obtain

• Draft as few questions as necessary to acquire that information

• You should be able to easily justify the purpose for having each question

• Ensure that questions relate back to the bigger picture
WHO SHOULD I ASK?

- Do these questions apply to a wide variety or a specific group of people?

- What is their interest in the topic?

- What is their educational level?

- What other characteristics of this group relate to your study? How do you know?
WHO SHOULD I ASK?

• Need to identify participants who:
  • Are accessible for your survey to reach
  • Can meet the study objectives
  • Can provide reliable information

• Sampling Methods:
  • Random – completely by chance
  • Systematic – fixed sampling interval
  • Stratified – random sampling from subgroups
  • Convenience – readily available
WHY SHOULD THEY CARE?

• Establish Trust
  • Convey the survey’s importance
  • Provide a sense of legitimate authority
  • Explain how collected data will be used

• Increase Rewards
  • Pique their interest
  • Value their responses
  • Convey appreciation

• Decrease Challenges
  • Quick & painless
  • No subordinating language
  • Don’t embarrass or devalue
WHY SHOULD THEY CARE?

• Expanding on how data will be used:
  • Gives individuals a sense of transparency
  • Influences their decision to participate
  • Best practice of the informed consent process

• Use consistent and clear language:
  • Confidentiality:
    • Responses could be identified, but the data is protected and only accessible by specific individuals.
  • Anonymity:
    • Responses are not identifiable or trackable in any way, by anyone.
SURVEY DESIGN

• Your introduction is important

• Maintain simplicity and avoid clutter

• Provide item numbers

• Be consistent in wording and fonts

• Use *italics* and **bold** only if there is a purpose

• Limit the use of *color* and graphics
• Especially when designing electronic surveys:
  
  • Create intentional sections
  
  • Use a progress indicator
  
  • Limit to 20 minutes
  
  • Determine if respondents should be able to re-enter survey or forced to complete in one session
SURVEY DESIGN

• Begin with interesting & easy

• Progress to interesting & more difficult

• Personal/confidential questions should follow content

• Maintain logical groupings and flow

• Keep scales consistent & group items using the same scale together

• Provide clear and concise directions
QUESTION DESIGN

• Open-ended vs. Closed-ended
  • Open-ended are easier to write & draw people in
  • Closed-ended are easier to standardize & analyze

• Single vs. Multiple Response
  • Choose one vs. all that apply

• Ranked Responses
  • Order of importance; generate a list

• Rated Responses
  • Likert/Agreement Scales
QUESTION DESIGN

• Reliability (Consistency):
  • Will respondents interpret the question in the same way on a different day?
  • Will the item mean the same thing to everyone in your sample?

• Validity (Accuracy):
  • Does the item address your research/guiding questions?
  • Will the item provide accurate and relevant data?
QUESTION DESIGN

• Don’t leave room for interpretation
  • Where is your favorite place to shop?

• Avoid double-barreled questions
  • Is Verizon the fastest and most economical service for you?

• No leading questions or assumptions
  • Why do you prefer restaurant X more than restaurant Y?

• Avoid using negative statements
  • Are you against a ban on smoking?

• Be precise
  • How old were you on January 1st, 2021?
QUESTION DESIGN

- When using response scales:
  - Allow for variability
  - Ensure consistency between roots & stems
  - Balance positive & negative points
  - Order response categories in a logical way
  - Use “neutral” or “no opinion” vs” I don’t know”
  - May want to include a non-response option
TIPS FOR USING SURVEYS

• Keep it short and simple

• Be mindful that you are using someone else’s time

• Surveys are a process, not just an instrument

• Be careful of extending your results to make them mean more than they do

• Don’t expect a normal distribution


QUESTIONS?

Thank you for your time!

For more information, visit our website at aie.vt.edu