Office of
Research and Planning
MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Guidelines and Standards for Survey Research

The following guidelines and standards are based upon best practices in survey research methods and are set forth to ensure that valid and reliable research is conducted when using the survey research method.

PRE-SURVEY ACTIVITIES:

Before conducting a survey, the Research and Planning staff will complete the following steps.

1. Develop a clear and concise purpose statement – What the sponsor wants to know and why they want to know it (Be sure to include the sponsor in this discussion).

2. Develop the items (questions, scales etc.) for the survey instrument – Make sure items are clear, unambiguous and bias-free.

3. Test the questions on a group of at least 20 volunteers to determine the face validity of the items is adequate. Make any required changes in the items.

4. Develop the introduction to the survey, the correspondence that will accompany the survey, and the reminders after the survey has been sent out.

5. Determine the modality of the survey distribution (web, email, paper, etc.)

6. Schedule the sending of the initial message, the launching of the survey instrument, and the sending of follow-up message(s).

7. Avoid the "coverage error" by gathering a sample list of potential participants that matches the population of interest as closely as possible.

SURVEY PREPARATION GUIDELINES:

The following guidelines are provided for the preparation of survey items and all correspondence surrounding the survey administration. These recommendations should be followed for every survey.

TONE AND LANGUAGE IN INTRODUCTIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Where possible, have the most legitimate authority figure in the organization sponsor the survey and sign all of the correspondence.

2. Use a professional tone, a scholarly approach, and a business format for all survey correspondence.

3. Write so as to demonstrate respect for participants' time and regard for their opinions.

4. Set forth in very clear and concise language the purpose of the research and use of the information being collected.

5. Assure participants of their confidentiality or anonymity (whichever applies).

6. Clearly delineate how their voluntary participation in this survey can benefit others (the entity, the profession, or society).

7. Stress the unique and limited opportunity that the survey provides them to affect decisions, policies, procedures, etc.

8. Communicate the timeframes for data collection, analysis and reporting.

ITEM CREATION AND DESIGN:

1. Avoid the "measurement error" by constructing survey items to capture the concept of interest as accurately as possible.

2. Items should be relevant.

3. Items should be answerable by the respondents (knowledgeable and competent to answer the questions).

4. Items should be clear (simplest language possible) and concise (as short as possible).

5. Items should not have double negatives.

6. Items should not have biased or leading phraseology.

7. Items should not have double-barreled questions – one point only.

8. Response categories must be mutually exclusive.

9. Response categories must be inclusive.

10. Response categories must be properly scaled for the level of data required.

11. Whenever appropriate and possible, items should be modeled after those on nationally recognized surveys (i.e. – U.S. Census, NCES Surveys, etc.)

12. To the highest degree possible Research and Planning will reduce the psychological cost of completing the survey by (a) making it as interesting as possible, (b) making it as easy to complete as possible, and (c) making it as short as possible.

13. Open-ended questions and areas for respondent comments should be incorporated into survey instruments whenever appropriate.

EIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT EACH SURVEY ITEM:

1. Does the survey item require an answer?

2. Does the respondent have an accurate, ready-made answer to the survey item?

3. Can the respondent accurately recall and report past behaviors and attitudes?

4. Is the respondent willing to reveal the requested information?

5. Is the respondent motivated to answer the item?

6. Will the response categories influence the responses?

7. Will responses differ with collection modes?

8. Will changing an item disrupt any established time series?

DISTRIBUTING THE SURVEY:

The following are the general steps that will be followed during the distribution of a survey instrument by Research and Planning.

1. Avoid the "non-response error" by employing state-of-the-art survey research techniques.

2. To maximize response rate, each participant should be contacted multiple times, ideally:

    a. First contact will be a letter or email of introduction including the information specified above and announcing that survey will follow shortly.
    b. Second contact will be the mailing or dissemination of the survey itself.

c. Third contact will be a reminder.
d. Fourth contact will be the final reminder.

3. Each contact should be and look different since difference attracts attention.

4. Timing of the contacts will be determined by the nature of the population being surveyed and the medium being used.

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