

**WORKBOOK H:**

**SELF-ADMINSTERED SURVEYS:  
CONDUCTING SURVEYS VIA  
MAIL AND EMAIL**

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## OVERVIEW OF SELF-ADMINISTERED SURVEYS

### What Communities Have Learned

**Communities can achieve successful results with self-administered surveys.** “I’ve been very satisfied with how the youth have actually completed the questionnaires. They took them pretty seriously when they realized what the research was about, and gave us thoughtful answers. They really did it well. When we analyzed the questionnaire to see whether or not their responses are reliable and consistent, they were. . . . So I think we’ve learned something about how kids respond to these questionnaires and how seriously they take them.”

*--Bob Goerge, Chapin Hall Center for Children. Conducted a multi-phase research project, including self-administered surveys of high school students in Chicago, in-depth interviews with students, and an inventory of OST programs in Chicago. The objective of this research was to better understand participation in OST programs and other activities among Chicago youth, as well as the effects of established programs.*

Like telephone and in-person interviews, self-administered surveys are a **quantitative research** method—that is, a research method that produces information from which you can generate percentages. Unlike telephone and in-person interviews, self-administered surveys do not require the use of an interviewer in administering the surveys. Respondents read the questionnaire and record their responses themselves.

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Self-Administered Surveys

#### Advantages

- ▶ **Cost:** They are less expensive than interviews because they do not involve the cost of hiring, training, and employing skilled interviewers.
- ▶ **Efficiency:** Surveys can be distributed in large numbers all at once, and involve less administrative time.
- ▶ **Anonymity:** The respondent is assured of anonymity and privacy, and can therefore feel freer to provide honest responses.
- ▶ **No interviewer error:** There is no possibility of interviewer bias.

#### Disadvantages

- ▶ **Bias:** Unless you achieve a high response rate, respondents will mainly be people who feel very strongly about your topic; for example, people with very high levels of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with OST activities.
- ▶ **Respondent error:** There is more potential for respondents to misunderstand questions, and there is no opportunity to get clarification. Respondents may answer questions without really understanding them, and the researcher will never know it.
- ▶ **Incomplete surveys:** There is a higher incidence of skipped questions and incorrectly filled-out surveys.
- ▶ **Low response rates:** In general, response rates for self-administered surveys are lower than they are for interviews, although this can vary depending on how invested potential respondents are in the topic and whether incentives are being offered.

## Self-Administered Surveys

All self-administered surveys involve similar steps, including:

- ▶ Developing a **sampling strategy**, or determining who it is you are going to survey.
- ▶ Writing a **questionnaire**.
- ▶ Distributing the questionnaire and **collecting the data**.
- ▶ **Entering the data** into your computer system for analysis.
- ▶ **Analyzing data**.

The **method you use to distribute the questionnaire** and collect the data (for example, by mail, online, or on-site) **is flexible**, and should be tailored to reaching the target population.

**The overall steps involved in conducting a self-administered survey remain fairly consistent, regardless of the distribution method.** In other words, how you choose to distribute the questionnaires may depend largely on who you decide to survey.

**On-site distribution:** Self-administered surveys are an excellent research method for obtaining information from area students. One way to conduct a self-administered survey of students is to distribute questionnaires **on-site** in the schools. In order to do this, you would first need to obtain permission to enter schools and have the questionnaires distributed in classrooms (see “Including Area Schools in Your Research Planning Process” on the next page). Students would then return the completed surveys to a central location at the school, and a member of your staff would collect the completed surveys.

Two other common ways of distributing self-administered surveys are through the **mail** and through the **Internet**, for which there are special considerations. Conducting mail surveys and web surveys will be described in detail in the following sections.

## Including Area Schools in Your Research Planning Process

If you plan to use students as research subjects, it is a good idea to **include area schools in your research planning process**. For example, one effective method of finding out what students are looking for in OST programs and activities is to conduct a self-administered survey of students. The best place to reach a large number of students all at once is in schools themselves, but you will first need to obtain approval and cooperation from the school superintendent.

It is helpful if someone on the project planning team has connections with the school department and can contact superintendents to get their buy-in and approval to use the school in the research. Ideally, the superintendent can assist you in contacting school principals to get their buy-in. It is critical to **obtain the approval of school principals**, as they generally have complete decision-making power regarding what occurs in their schools. Principals are also highly likely to want to notify parents before any research is conducted. **Remember to build time into your research schedule for schools to send notices to parents**. In addition, school systems have formal systems for reviewing research materials; there could either be a review board or an individual who will review and approve your research materials. Talk to the school superintendent to identify what the reviewing process is and who you should contact. **Build this review process into your research timeline as well**. In addition, there may be other organizations involved in the initiative, each with its own internal review processes.

Two good strategies for obtaining buy-in are to **emphasize the value of the research**, and **make it easy for schools to participate**. For example, make sure school superintendents and principals understand the importance of your research project and the direct benefit this research will have on your community's children. Try to arrange your research project so that it uses as few school resources as possible. For example, rather than relying on the school system to mail or transport surveys, arrange to transport surveys yourself if needed.

### What Communities Have Learned

**Enhance the value of participation.** “The challenge is convincing the principal to administer the survey in his or her school, and helping them find a way to get it done. Schools always have special projects, and fitting in a survey is often not the principal's first priority. What we tried to do after the first year was to feed back the principal's own school information, so that they got a direct benefit from participating. They were the only ones that received their own school's information—everything else we did was by the entire region. Principals had control over their own school's specific information.”

**You must get buy-in from principals even if you have conducted research at the school previously.** “This third year [that we've done the research], we didn't market to principals well enough. We thought maybe that they would have been more on board the third year. I think the big lesson is that every year you do research, you've got to treat it like it's the first year, and really sell it to the people who control whether or not your research is going to be successful. For example, just because you gave incentives the first year, you shouldn't think that incentives won't be necessary the second year. You can't let up on the marketing aspect of your research. You've got to constantly assume that people aren't necessarily on board.”

*--Bob Goerge, Chapin Hall Center for Children. Conducted a multi-phase research project, including self-administered surveys of high school students in Chicago, in-depth interviews with students, and an inventory of OST programs in Chicago. The objective of this research was to better understand participation in OST programs and other activities among Chicago youth, as well as the effects of established programs.*



## Passive Consent

**What is Passive Consent?** *Passive consent* is the process whereby consent is given by not returning an “opt-out” or “withdrawal” form. In other words, parents are given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the research. If they do not withdraw their child, then the researchers can include the child in the research. This differs from *active consent*, which requires that parents confirm in writing their permission for their child to participate in research. Many CBOs and school districts now use passive consent rather than active consent in order to secure the participation of students in important research. A sample withdrawal form is included on the CD of prototype materials included with this guide.

### **Why Use Passive Consent?**

- ▶ Active consent has been criticized as an overly rigid process that severely limits access to students for survey research. Proponents of passive consent note that survey research such as that proposed herein already has minimal risks, is anonymous or confidential, and is voluntary.
- ▶ Research suggests that passive consent results in a more representative sample. Students who would have been excluded by active consent because they or their parents simply forgot to sign and return an active consent form can now be included in the research.
- ▶ Passive consent generally involves less cost and labor for researchers.

### **Passive Consent Recommendations**

- ▶ Most importantly, specific schools, districts, or organizations may have their own consent policies. Always check with the schools or organizations you are working with to be sure that passive consent is permitted.
- ▶ Allow more than one way for parents to refuse their child’s participation. For example, they could return the form, call a telephone number on the form, or reply by email.
- ▶ Make sure all materials are language-appropriate. For example, if you anticipate a population with limited English-reading ability, be sure to provide forms in the appropriate primary language.
- ▶ Parents should be given sufficient time to refuse their child’s participation. We recommend that you hand out forms about one week prior to research. This provides adequate time for refusal, but is not so far in advance that the form is forgotten or deemed irrelevant.
- ▶ Be sure to include the following information on the withdrawal form:
  - Topic of research.
  - Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will not negatively affect the student.
  - No identifying information is recorded (the survey is anonymous) or if recorded, every effort is made to keep the information confidential.
  - The dates of the research, and how long the research will take (e.g., “the survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete”).
  - Any potential risks (for this type of survey research, risks are minimal. Be sure the student knows that if at any time they feel uncomfortable participating in the survey, they can stop).
  - Any direct benefit to the student for participating (for example, better after-school programs).
  - All relevant contact information (e.g., the school or organization conducting the research).



**OVERVIEW OF  
CONDUCTING MAIL SURVEYS**

## STEPS INVOLVED IN CONDUCTING MAIL SURVEYS

Mail surveys are a type of self-administered survey that are cost-effective and require less administrative time than interviews. Mail surveys have a longer data collection timeline than other research methodologies, however. Mail surveys are a good option when contacting a population that is likely to be responsive and when the objectives of the study do not require a survey instrument of complex design.

### Steps Involved in Mail Surveys

#### **1. Developing Sampling Strategy**

(Who do you want to survey? How will you identify them and get contact information? How will you organize the survey population?)



#### **2. Developing Questionnaire**

(What information do you need to find out? What is the best way of asking questions in order to get the information that you need? How will you format the questionnaire?)



#### **3. Collecting Data**

(Includes mailing the questionnaires, tracking and reviewing completed surveys, and sending reminders to those who have not returned a questionnaire yet.)



#### **4. Entering Data**

(In order to analyze the data quantitatively, you will need to enter your data into computer storage so that statistical software can utilize it.)



#### **5. Analyzing Data**

(Making sense of the findings)

An example of a standard timeline for a mail survey is provided below.

TASK	Time Line
First mailing of questionnaire with cover letter	--
Mailing of first reminder postcard to <b>non-respondents</b> (i.e., those who have not submitted a completed questionnaire)	4 to 10 days
Second mailing of questionnaire with cover letter to non-respondents	35 days
Second mailing of reminder postcard to non-respondents	39 to 45 days
Third mailing of questionnaire with cover letter to non-respondents	60 days
Wait about 21 days for third wave of questionnaires to be completed and returned	81 days

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Mail Surveys

### Advantages

- ▶ **Cost:** Mail surveys are self-administered, so there are no interviewing costs. In addition, bulk postage rates are relatively inexpensive.
- ▶ **Privacy and convenience:** Respondents are able to complete the survey in the privacy of their own homes, which may make them feel more comfortable giving truthful answers. Respondents are also able to fill out the survey at their convenience.
- ▶ **Lack of interviewer bias:** This method removes the possibility that an interviewer's manner of asking a question may influence the respondent's answer.

### Disadvantages

- ▶ **Low response rates:** Mail surveys tend to have low response rates, especially if no incentive is provided. People who do take the trouble to complete the survey and send it back are often those who feel strongly about the topic.
- ▶ **Longer timeline:** Mail surveys require waiting for reasonable periods of time for people to return completed surveys. Methods used to increase the response rate for the study, such as sending reminder postcards and second and third copies of the questionnaire, add weeks to the timeline.
- ▶ **Incomplete surveys:** When filling out a survey on their own, respondents are likely to answer questions out of order and to skip questions.
- ▶ **Less depth of information:** Respondents are less likely to provide detailed and thoughtful responses to open-ended questions if an interviewer is not probing and recording their responses. Open-ended questions are more likely to be skipped than closed-ended questions.
- ▶ **Requires a short, simple questionnaire:** Long questionnaires may not hold respondents' attention, which will result in a lower response rate. Also, respondents cannot be expected to scrupulously follow complex instructions for answering some questions and skipping others, which makes a simple and easy-to-follow questionnaire necessary.

## Deciding Whether or Not to Outsource Mail Surveys

Mail surveys are more cost-effective and use fewer internal resources than most other research methodologies, such as conducting telephone or in-person interviews or conducting focus groups. The time demands for conducting any research project are significant, however, and you should consider whether your organization can coordinate the study effectively or if you should outsource the study. You should also consider whether or not your organization has the internal resources with the time and skills to conduct appropriate analysis after the data have been collected.

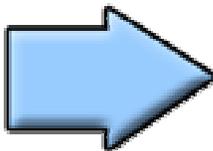
- ▶ **When to outsource mail surveys:** If you have sufficient financial resources and limited administrative resources in-house, mail surveys can be outsourced to a market research or data collection firm that will coordinate the entire project for you. A market research firm could also analyze the data and provide you with a written report of the findings.
- ▶ **When to conduct mail surveys using internal resources:** All aspects of a mail survey can be managed in-house with sufficient resources for the administration of the project and analysis of the data.

In the next sections, we will present more detailed information regarding outsourcing mail surveys and conducting mail surveys using internal resources. For communities conducting mail surveys using internal resources, we will present information about each step in the process.

## OUTSOURCING MAIL SURVEYS: A Guide to Hiring Vendors

<b>Who to hire:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Data collection firm</li> <li>▶ Full-service marketing research firm</li> </ul>
<b>What to look for:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Experience with similar types of research projects</li> <li>▶ Price</li> </ul>
<b>Where to find vendors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Internet searches for <i>data collection, marketing research, mail surveys, etc.</i></li> <li>▶ <b>Quirk's Marketing Research Review</b>, Researcher SourceBook™. Look for vendors offering the following types of research services: <i>data collection, mail surveys, etc.</i></li> <li>▶ Ask trusted associates for recommendations</li> </ul>
<b>What they will do:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Discuss your research objectives with you in detail</li> <li>▶ <i>Upon request:</i> Develop the questionnaire, based on your research objectives</li> <li>▶ Coordinate the entire process of mailing surveys, track who has responded, review surveys for quality, and mail reminders and additional copies of the questionnaire</li> <li>▶ <i>Upon request:</i> Data-enter or scan surveys into a database</li> <li>▶ Provide you with the data from the interviews</li> <li>▶ <i>Upon request:</i> Prepare a written report of the findings</li> </ul>
<b>What you will do:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide vendor with a clear understanding of your research objectives</li> <li>▶ Provide vendor with questionnaire (if not outsourcing)</li> <li>▶ Manage the firm to the extent you deem necessary</li> </ul>
<b>What you should expect to pay:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Will vary widely, depending on vendor and scope of project</li> </ul>

### POINTER



Mail surveys can be formatted using **OMR (optical mark read) processes**, in which respondents fill in response bubbles on a survey with a pencil and the surveys are scanned to record their data. Resources for outsourcing OMR survey design and scanning are provided on the following page.

**For more information on creating or outsourcing OMR surveys:**

- **Pearson NCS**, a specialist in this data entry method (<http://www.pearsonnccs.com/index.htm>)
- **Scanning Systems**, a data collection, management and processing company which sells and supports Bubble Publishing software ([www.scansys.com](http://www.scansys.com))
- **Data Blocks**, a developer of Scantron forms, which designs software for and resells OMR readers and scanners, in addition to offering training, design and printing services ([www.datablocks.com](http://www.datablocks.com))
- **Survey Systems Inc.**, a data collection vendor ([http://www.sur-sys.com/form\\_design\\_software.php](http://www.sur-sys.com/form_design_software.php))

## CONDUCTING MAIL SURVEYS USING INTERNAL RESOURCES: 1. Developing a Sampling Strategy

The following sections will discuss each step involved in conducting mail surveys in turn. They are:

- ▶ Developing a sampling strategy.
- ▶ Developing a questionnaire.
- ▶ Collecting the data.
- ▶ Entering the data.
- ▶ Analyzing the data.

The first step in conducting mail surveys is **developing a sampling strategy**: identifying who you should be contacting, how you will obtain addresses for these people, and how you would like to organize this population (for example, how many completed surveys would you like to collect, and of those surveys, how many should be from specific areas or subpopulations). **You need to have a good sampling strategy in order to obtain valuable information for your study.**

### Knowing Who to Survey

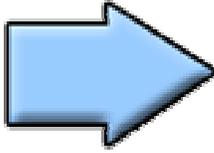
The first and most important step in developing a sampling strategy is to have a clear understanding of the types of people you are planning to contact for your research. Whose opinions and preferences will help your community make the decisions it needs to make for your OST planning? For example, given the types of decisions that your community needs to make, is it important for you to learn about how area parents feel about OST? Area school children? Perhaps the planning your community needs to undertake can best be guided by teachers and educators in the local schools, or by individuals who are operating existing OST programs in the neighborhood.

#### WHO SHOULD YOU SURVEY?

Begin with a clear understanding of the types of people you plan to contact for your research. This will be determined by your research objectives. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- ▶ What decisions will you need to make once the research is completed?
- ▶ Whose feelings, beliefs, attitudes and preferences will help your community make the decisions it needs to make for your OST planning?
- ▶ Who will be most affected by the decisions you will make?

## POINTER



To decide who you need to contact for your research, know the objectives of your research. Good research depends on having well-defined goals. Putting your goals in writing will help you focus and clarify exactly what shape your research should take.

There are probably many populations in your community who have opinions on OST programming—parents, children, teachers, OST program leaders, community organizations, business leaders, policy makers, et cetera. Be as specific as possible in defining your target populations. The chart below illustrates some sample research goals and survey populations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	TARGET POPULATION(S) TO SURVEY
What do neighborhood children really want to do with their OST time?	School-age children in your community
What OST programs exist in the community?	Educators, OST program leaders
Why aren't parents enrolling their children in neighborhood OST programs?	Parents of school-age children living in your community

### Knowing How Many People to Survey

When determining how many people you should include in your survey, remember that your ultimate goal is to obtain meaningful and usable findings through the analysis of the data. The more respondents included in your survey, the lower your margin of error, and the greater your ability to find meaningful differences among subpopulations. Larger surveys generally mean greater costs, however, so you will need to keep your survey size in line with your budget.

There are some basic guidelines that will allow for accurate statistical analysis:

- ▶ **Major groups of the target population**, such as those living in specific areas, should include a minimum of 100 respondents. For example, if you are surveying parents in two discrete geographic areas such as counties, and you want to analyze any differences between the residents of these counties, you should survey a minimum of 100 people in each county.
- ▶ **To compare smaller subgroups** in your analysis, such as parents of students in specific age groups, you will need to have a minimum of 20 respondents of each type. In other words, if you want to understand the point of view of parents of sixth-grade students vs. parents of eighth-grade students, you will first need to have enough people in those categories. Again, your ability to identify meaningful differences among groups of people with specific characteristics will increase with the number of people in those groups.
- ▶ **You will not be able to meaningfully compare groups with less than 10 respondents in your analysis**—it is generally recognized that groups consisting of less than 10 respondents cannot be analyzed statistically.



## Sampling Methods

**What is a sample?** A sample is a subset of a population. Let's say that your community is hoping to identify the barriers preventing parents from enrolling their children in existing OST programs, and to do this, it plans to get information from local parents. In some communities where there is a very small population of parents, it may be possible to send a questionnaire to the entire population of parents in the study (i.e., conduct a census). In most communities, however, it would be prohibitively time-consuming and unnecessary to try to contact every parent. Rather than mailing surveys to the entire population of parents, you can send surveys to a sample: that is, **a portion or subset of the population** of parents.

**Representative sample:** It is important to remember that you are not hoping to learn what *parents who completed a survey think* about their children's OST activities—you are hoping to learn what *parents in your community think* about their children's OST activities.

**All survey results do not automatically apply to the larger population.** If you need to generalize the findings of your research to the larger population, you will ideally have a representative sample. For example, if 50% of parents in your community are Caucasian, 25% are African-American, and 25% are Latino/a, then ideally, 50% of your survey respondents will be Caucasian, 25% African-American, and 25% Latino/a parents.

In some cases, however, this type of surveying may be too costly or time-consuming. It also may be less important for your community to survey a representative sample of the total community, depending on your research goals. For example, if your community was interested in developing OST programs for area children with special needs, you might want to sample from area parents of special needs children.

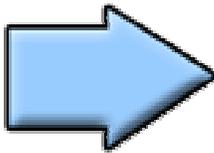
**Generating sample:** There are a variety of ways to generate a list of potential survey respondents, depending on the resources available.

- ▶ **Purchasing databases:** You can purchase databases of addresses from research sample vendors, such as Survey Sampling International (SSI) ([www.surveysampling.com](http://www.surveysampling.com)), ASDE Survey Sampler ([www.surveysampler.com](http://www.surveysampler.com)), and other vendors. Such vendors can also supply lists for targeted samples (e.g., residents with specific characteristics, such as age, income, ethnicity) and business samples. These databases are more expensive than other methods, but can yield high-quality samples for many different sampling strategies in a small amount of time.
- ▶ **Local telephone books:** Local telephone books are a less costly alternative to purchasing databases of residents' addresses. If you use this method, be sure to employ a randomizing strategy, such as selecting phone numbers that fall on particular lines in the phone book. For example, you could choose to take phone numbers from every 15th, 27th, and 40th line in the telephone book. In order to do this efficiently, you can measure the space between the top of the page and the 15th, 27th and 40th line, and mark these spaces on a ruler. Because these spaces will be

consistent on each page, you can then use the ruler to quickly go through each page and find the telephone number or address for the resident on each of these lines.

- ▶ **Targeting a nonrandom sample:** Depending on the population you wish to reach, you might decide to distribute questionnaires to a **convenience sample**—that is, a group of potential respondents that is chosen because it is readily available rather than at random. For example, if you want to interview ninth graders and their parents about OST activities, one avenue to pursue would be to gain permission to have questionnaires distributed through the school system and then returned to you by mail.

## POINTER



In some cases, surveying a representative sample of the population may be too costly or time-consuming, especially if resources are limited. Using a **convenience sample** is less costly, and may be appropriate for your study, depending on your research goals.

**Achieving the Number of Interviews You Want:** An important consideration when generating the sample for your survey is the number of completed surveys you ultimately want to collect; you need to mail a sufficient number of questionnaires to generate the desired number of surveys returned. Guidelines for determining the number of surveys you will need to mail in order to achieve your goal are provided below.

### Achieving the Number of Interviews You Want

For a typical mail survey, the basic ratio of surveys you will need to send in order to get the number of completed surveys you need is **15:1**. For example, you would need to **mail 3,000 surveys in order to receive 200 completed surveys back**.

You can **expect this ratio to change depending on the nature of the research you are conducting**. For example, if you have a short questionnaire on a topic that is of great interest to your target population, you will probably only need to mail a smaller number of surveys to get the number of completed surveys you need. Conversely, a long questionnaire on a topic that is not of great interest is likely to require a higher ratio of surveys mailed to surveys completed.

In order to determine the ratio of surveys you will need to send out, consider doing a **test mailing**.

- ▶ Mail the questionnaire to 100 members of your target population.
- ▶ The number of completed questionnaires you get back within two to three weeks of sending out the test mailing will allow you to **calculate the response rate** you can expect to achieve.
- ▶ Use the response rate to **calculate the minimum number of questionnaires** you need to send out to achieve your targeted number of completed surveys.
  - Divide your targeted number of completed surveys (200) by your response rate (30% or 0.3).
  - In this example, you would need to send out about 667 questionnaires to receive 200 completed surveys back.

## 2. Developing the Questionnaire

Your community can use the questionnaire to find out what people think about local OST programming by asking questions about their beliefs, feelings, opinions, needs, and personal characteristics. Keep in mind that **formatting is a key consideration** for mail surveys, as it is likely to affect your response rate (the proportion of people who receive the survey who will complete it and mail it back) as well as cost.

- ▶ People may be less likely to complete a survey that is too cramped or difficult to follow.
- ▶ The more pages your questionnaire has, the more it will weigh. **The more it weighs, the more you pay.** You will be mailing the questionnaire out as many as three times. For example, you can expect to pay a little over \$390 in postage to mail 1,000 copies of a survey approximately four pages long.<sup>1</sup>

This section provides detailed information about developing questionnaires in general as well as tips for making your questionnaire appropriate for a mail survey. The formatting and length of a mail survey will change depending on the number and types of questions you include; refer to the sample mail survey questions provided later in this workbook to see examples of mail survey formatting.

### Components of a Questionnaire

- ▶ **Introduction.** This is an introductory sentence or paragraph explaining the reason the research is being conducted, and asking the respondent to complete the survey.
- ▶ **Survey questions.** There are two main types of questions you can use in questionnaires, depending on the type of information you are trying to get:
  - *Closed-ended questions.* The respondent is asked to answer on a scale (e.g., excellent, good, fair, poor) or select from a list of possible responses. Closed-ended questions will generally make up most of the questions in your survey.
  - *Open-ended questions.* The respondent is asked to respond to the question in his or her own words. Due to their length and complexity, open-ended questions are usually kept to a minimum in surveys.
- ▶ **Demographic questions.** At the end of your survey, you may ask respondents questions about their demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, race or ethnicity, primary language, income, etc.), in order to identify how different types of people feel about different OST issues.
- ▶ **Conclusion.** Thank the respondent for completing the survey.

<sup>1</sup> Assumes a survey that would require one \$0.39 postage stamp.

## Steps Involved in Questionnaire Design

### Begin by Identifying Goals for the Survey

- ▶ Start with goals, rather than specific questions.
- ▶ What issues are important to cover?
- ▶ What decisions do you need to make?
- ▶ What information do you need in order to make those decisions?
- ▶ What information is critical for decision-making, and what is just interesting?
- ▶ Are there other sources that could be used to get this information?

### Organize and Set Priorities

- ▶ Weed out interesting points that are not tied to decisions.
- ▶ Focus on the most important, key goals.
- ▶ Organize goals in an order that seems logical and reasonable.

### For Each Goal, Write Questions

- ▶ What specifically do you need to know regarding this goal?
- ▶ Should you ask one question or several to address each goal?
- ▶ It is easier to measure behavior, and harder to measure attitudes.

## Writing Good Questions

### Use Plain, Simple, Understandable Language

- ▶ Write as though you were speaking: use oral language.
- ▶ Use complete sentences.
- ▶ Avoid fancy or clever sentence structure.
- ▶ Avoid slang, jargon and lingo.
- ▶ Avoid abbreviations unless you are sure they are commonly understood.
- ▶ Short questions are easier for people to answer than long ones.
- ▶ If you do not understand the question, no one else will.

### Ask Purposeful Questions

- ▶ Questions should be logically related to your research objectives.

### Ask Concrete Questions

- ▶ Questions should be precise and unambiguous, so that two different respondents can be expected to interpret them and respond in a consistent manner.
- ▶ More specific questions lead to more reliable responses.
- ▶ For questions about behavior, include a time frame (e.g., how often have you done this in the past three months).

## Behavior Versus Attitudes

- ▶ Behavior = what people do.
- ▶ Attitudes = what people think about what they do.
- ▶ Attitudes are not always a good predictor of future behavior.
- ▶ If you can measure both behavior and attitudes, do so.
- ▶ Do not be afraid to ask about unpopular behavior.

## One Issue Per Question

- ▶ If you are covering two issues, ask two questions.
- ▶ Make sure the categories you give for responses match the question.

## It is Unethical to Waste People's Time in a Survey

- ▶ Ask the questions you need to help you make decisions; do not ask unnecessary questions just because the answers might be interesting.
- ▶ People will usually tolerate spending up to ten minutes filling out a survey; beyond that, you risk them not finishing the survey.

## Possibility of Bias

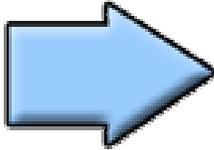
- ▶ If you are trying to express an opinion in the question, you are creating a bias.
- ▶ If you are afraid your question will get the wrong response, you are creating a bias.

### Tips for Formatting Your Mail Survey

- ▶ Space is money. Your aim is to format your mail survey so that it **fits on as few pages as possible**.
- ▶ **Print double-sided** to reduce the number of pages you are mailing.
- ▶ If possible, use a **lighter-weight paper**. Standard copy paper weights are 16 lb., 20 lb., and 24 lb. Heavier papers tend to be thicker and more expensive.
- ▶ Group questions with a similar scale into a **horizontal layout** (see next page for example).
- ▶ Where you have skips (i.e., the respondent should skip to another question based on their response to a question), make sure these are easy to see and interpret (see example on page 23).
- ▶ Use **blocks of color or boldface type** to draw the eye, such as for introductions, key words, or other important text.
- ▶ **Do not sacrifice legibility**. Use a font size that is large enough to be read easily, and include enough white space around your questions so that the page does not appear cluttered. Ask yourself, "If I received this survey in the mail, would I find it easy and clear enough to complete?"
- ▶ You must be able to identify specific surveys and response options when you are doing data entry. Assign a **unique number or case ID** to each survey that you mail out. Always **number your response options** for easy data entry later.
- ▶ Your first page should include **survey instructions** (see example at end of this workbook).

**Options for Formatting:** You can format the mail survey yourself using **word processing software**; the examples in this manual were formatted using the table and form tools in Microsoft Word. This may be time-consuming, and requires some facility with page layout and knowledge of the particular software you are using. Before you begin to format your questionnaire, try to make sure you have a finalized list of questions in a finalized order; if you add, drop, or move questions after the fact, you will need to spend additional time and effort reformatting.

## POINTER



Your local copy center may be able to format your questionnaire for you. Many offer document creation services. After you have approved the layout, you can order as many copies as you will need—remember to factor printing costs into your budget.

Mail surveys can also be formatted using **OMR (optical mark read) processes**, in which respondents fill in response bubbles on a survey with a pencil and the surveys are scanned to record the data. (You may recognize these forms from those used in schools for certain tests.) You may be able to design and read these forms yourself using in-house resources, but would have to purchase specialized software and hardware, and receive training. You should be able to outsource OMR survey design and scanning. If you are interested in this option, speak with administrators at local schools to find out if they use OMR forms, and if so, how they design and read the forms. Also, refer to the outsourcing OMR survey resources listed earlier in this workbook.

## Question Review Process

In order to ensure that your questionnaire is in good shape, review each question by asking yourself the following:

- ▶ Does the question make sense? Do I understand it?
- ▶ Can the question be answered? Could I answer it?
- ▶ Is this the right question?
- ▶ How would I react if someone asked me this question?
- ▶ Am I asking only one question, or do I need two questions?
- ▶ Does the question include jargon? Complex language? Could I ask it differently without using those terms? (If not, provide a clear explanation of the terms so respondents know what you are talking about.)
- ▶ Would someone who is not like me and who does not think like I do understand and be able to answer this question? For example, someone who:
  - Belongs to a different race, ethnicity, or culture
  - Lives in another part of the country or world
  - Is less educated, or more educated than I am
  - Is from a different generation
  - Has a different political or religious orientation than my own
  - Grew up in or is part of a different socioeconomic class
  - Is part of a group whose views I do not agree with or who I dislike

## Sample Formatting for a Mail Survey

**Similar questions grouped into a horizontal layout**

	Very	Somewhat	Not interested	Don't know
<b>How interested are you in the following activities:</b>				
Learning new skills like carpentry, clothing design or architecture?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community service activities, like helping the elderly or cleaning up local parks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talking to other kids your age about important issues, like violence-prevention or health?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talking with caring adults you can relate to about problems at school or home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-school sports activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arts and culture programs like photography, theater, dance, art, music, poetry, etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having time to do homework, get help with homework, or get tutoring?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning about computers or other technology, or doing fun things with science or math?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After-school field trips, like visiting museums, aquariums, planetariums, zoos, etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Formatting introductions or other important text**

**Now, I want you to think about the after-school or weekend activities that your child spent the most time doing during the past school year.**

**Did you feel that the adults in charge really cared about the kids, or did too many act like it was just a job?**

- Really cared
- Just a job
- Don't know

**Formatting skip patterns**

**1. How much do you like how your child spends [his-her] time after school?**

- A lot → PLEASE SKIP TO QUESTION 3
- Some
- A little
- Not at all
- Don't know



**2. What do you dislike about how your child spends [his-her] time after school, or what would make it better?**

**ENTER RESPONSE:**

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**3. Who decides what kinds of things your middle school child does after school?**

- You
- Your child
- Both you and your child
- Don't know

**11. Is there a youth center or community center near your home where kids your child's age can go in the evenings to hang out and do things?**

- Yes
- No → PLEASE SKIP TO QUESTION 13
- Don't know → PLEASE SKIP TO QUESTION 13



**12. How often does your child use it?**

- Regularly
- Just for special events or programs
- Hardly ever
- Never
- Don't know

**13. For your child, when is it hardest to find interesting things for them to do? Is it during:**

- The summer months
- The hours after school
- The weekends
- Never hard
- All equally hard
- Don't know

## Strategies For Common Types Of Questions

The following section provides examples of successful question wording and response scales for the types of questions your community may want to include in a survey. You can use these examples as a guide for developing questions to add to the prototype survey included in this manual.

### MEASURING AWARENESS

#### Aided Awareness:

**How familiar are you with Hillside Afterschool?**

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not familiar or don't know

This is a good scale to use to assess the extent to which respondents feel familiar with a particular organization or program.

#### Knowledge:

**Before this interview, were you aware that Hillside Afterschool has two competitive sports leagues for students in grades six through eight?**

- Yes, aware
- No, not aware, or don't know

### INTEREST OR DESIRE

**How interested are you in having your middle school child learn new skills like carpentry, clothing design, or architecture?**

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Somewhat uninterested
- Very uninterested
- Don't know

This scale is balanced: there is an equal number of responses for "interest" and "lack of interest."

**How interested are you in having your child help others through community service activities, like helping the elderly, mentoring younger children, or cleaning up local parks?**

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Somewhat uninterested
- Very uninterested
- Don't know

**Which of the following arts and culture programs are you most interested in for your child?**

- Photography
- Theater
- Dance
- Art
- Video or radio production
- Music
- Writing or poetry
- Don't know
- OTHER (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

This type of question is good for understanding what the highest priorities are. You may find that many respondents are *very interested* in numerous activities, and this type of question will help you identify the one or two activities that are of greatest interest. You can include an option for respondents to write in additional activities if you choose.

## IMPORTANCE

**How important are each of the following things to you in choosing an after-school activity for your middle school child?**

**That it teaches your child new skills?**

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important
- Don't know

**That the activity is fun?**

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important
- Don't know

**That it makes your child feel safe?**

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important
- Don't know

Three-point scales like this are good for assessing familiarity (see above) and perceived importance. For these types of measures, you generally will not need an option for *somewhat unimportant* or *somewhat unfamiliar*—people are likely to be familiar with something, or not at all, and find things important to some extent, or not at all.

**Which of the following would be MOST important to you in choosing an after-school activity for your middle school child?**

- That it teaches your child new skills
- That the activity is fun
- That it makes your child feel safe
- Don't know

This type of scale can be used in conjunction with or instead of a three point scale. Respondents may consider all of these factors *very important*, but forcing them to choose which factor is MOST important to them provides a measure of respondents' priorities in choosing after-school activities.

## PAST AND LIKELY FUTURE BEHAVIOR

**When your middle school child is at home after school, how often does [he or she] have responsibility for watching younger brothers and sisters?**

- Almost always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never
- Don't know

This is a good scale for measuring the frequency with which something occurs. If you are measuring something that could realistically happen *always*, you could include this option on the scale.

**Out of five weekdays, how many days does your child spend at someone else's home after school, where there is an adult present?**

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five
- Varies
- Don't know

This scale accounts for each weekday and includes options for *none*, *varies*, and *don't know*. You can use this type of question to find out the average number of weekdays respondents are engaged in a particular activity.

**If a program offered after-school activities you were interested in, how many weekdays would your child go there?**

- None
- One day a week
- Two days a week
- Three days a week
- Four days a week
- Five days a week
- Varies
- Don't know

## SATISFACTION

**Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of Hillside Afterschool's sports activities?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know

**How much do you like how your child spends his or her time after school?**

- A lot
- Some
- A little
- Not at all
- Don't know

## PREFERENCES

Imagine that we are creating an after-school program. The program could be in one building with a variety of different activities or there could be activities at different locations. For example, your child might go play basketball at one location and go to another location for music lessons.

Which of these two do you prefer?

- All activities located at a single location
- Different activities located in different locations
- No preference
- Don't know

This type of question forces respondents to choose between two options.

On weekdays, would you prefer that your middle school child participates in activities:

- Right after school, beginning around 2:30 or 3:00
- In the late afternoon, beginning around 4:00 or 5:00
- In the early evening, beginning around 6:00 or 7:00
- No preference
- Don't know

## BARRIERS

Of the following reasons your middle school child might not participate in activities:

How much of a problem is transportation, or not having a good way to get to and from activities?

- A big problem
- A small problem
- Not a problem
- Don't know

How much of a problem is having other kids in the program who have bad attitudes, or seem threatening to your child?

- A big problem
- A small problem
- Not a problem
- Don't know

## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

The final questions are for statistical purposes only.

**What is the language that is spoken most at your home?**

- An Asian language (e.g. Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian)
- English
- Spanish
- OTHER (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Which of the following best describes the grades your middle school child is getting this year?**

- Mostly As
- Mostly As and Bs
- Mostly Bs
- Mostly Bs and Cs
- Mostly Cs
- Mostly Cs and Ds
- Mostly Ds and below
- Don't know

Demographic questions like these will help you understand the characteristics of the people you have included in your research, and will enable you to break down responses and attitudes by these characteristics. For example, if you ask about ethnicity, you can understand what types of activities are preferred by Caucasian students, which activities are preferred by African-American students, and which are preferred by Hispanic students.

**Which of the following broad categories best describes your total household income for the past year before taxes:**

- Under \$20,000
- \$20,000 to \$35,000
- \$35,000 to \$50,000
- Over \$50,000

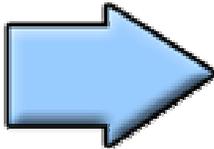
**What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

### 3. Collecting the Data

Mail surveys are fairly straightforward and often can be managed in-house, provided you have the capacity to handle bulk mailings. The overall procedure for data collection is to mail a questionnaire with a cover letter explaining the study to members of the population targeted for the study, followed by a pre-determined number of reminder postcards.

#### POINTER



Questionnaires may be sent multiple times to households that do not respond within a certain time period in order to increase the response rate.

**Response rates are a major concern with mail surveys**, even in cases in which the sponsoring organization is clearly identified and potential respondents are asked about something that might directly affect them.

- ▶ With low response rates, you cannot be certain that the results accurately represent, for example, what most area parents think about their children's OST activities.
- ▶ You can **minimize this concern by designing the questionnaire carefully**, making sure the **mailing list used is accurate and complete**, and sending people **reminder postcards** or making **follow-up telephone calls** to encourage them to return their survey if they have not already done so.

Many people who receive questionnaires in the mail will not complete and return the questionnaires if they perceive it to be too much trouble. Some ways that researchers can overcome this problem are provided in the chart on the following page.

## ENSURING THE RETURN OF MAILED QUESTIONNAIRES

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<p><b>Include an introductory letter.</b> This letter should introduce the study and its purpose. It should explain why the study is being conducted, how the potential respondents were selected, the importance of responding, and how to return the questionnaire. If possible, the letter should also identify the sponsor of the survey. Be sure to let respondents know that their responses are anonymous, and provide them with a telephone number and/or an email address in case they have any questions about the survey.</p>
<b>LENGTH</b>	<p>Be sure the questionnaire is of <b>appropriate length</b>. If the questionnaire is too long, potential respondents may decide not to complete the survey.</p>
<b>SIMPLICITY</b>	<p><b>Be sure the questionnaire is relatively easy to complete.</b> If the questionnaire is too complex, or demands too much writing of the potential respondent, they may decide not to complete the survey.</p>
<b>PROVIDE A METHOD OF RETURN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope</b> in which to return the questionnaire.</li> <li>■ <b>OR: Use self-mailing questionnaires.</b> A self-mailing questionnaire requires no envelope. When the questionnaire is folded a certain way, the return address appears on the outside.</li> <li>■ <b>OR: Use bound booklets.</b> Some researchers have used bound booklets with a two-panel back cover featuring an adhesive strip. After completing the questionnaire, respondents simply fold out the extra panel, wrap it around the booklet, and seal the package with the adhesive strip running along the edge of the panel. The foldout panel contains the return address and postage.</li> </ul>

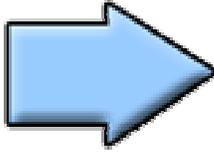
Samples of introductory letters for mail surveys and related materials are included on the CD of prototype materials included with this guide.

**Postal Options.** You have two basic postal options for sending your questionnaires through the mail: **first class or bulk-rate postage**. First class is more expensive, but it is also more flexible and provides better service. Bulk-rate postage can provide effective service as well at a cost savings.

### Standard Postal Rates

Weight	Single-piece rate	Weight	Single-piece rate
1 ounce	\$0.39	8 ounces	\$2.07
2 ounces	\$0.63	9 ounces	\$2.31
3 ounces	\$0.87	10 ounces	\$2.55
4 ounces	\$1.11	11 ounces	\$2.79
5 ounces	\$1.35	12 ounces	\$3.03
6 ounces	\$1.59	13 ounces	\$3.27
7 ounces	\$1.83	<i>U.S. postal rates as of June 20, 2006</i>	

## POINTER



Postal rates change frequently. You should always check current postal rates when planning your study, and allow for extra funds for postage if you anticipate any delays in beginning data collection.

### Bulk-Rate Mailing

- ▶ For **bulk-rate mailing**, you must send a minimum of 200 pieces of mail.
- ▶ Each piece of mail must be printed with a **bulk-rate permit**—the permit must be set in type for printing on the envelope, or a rubber stamp can be created and used. You need to obtain a permit number from the post office. The bulk-rate mailing permit takes the place of a stamp on the envelope.
- ▶ The pieces of mail must then be arranged in bundles by zip code. This way, the post office can send the bundles of questionnaires to a zip code without separating and sorting them.
- ▶ Always check with your post office for any other specific details regarding bulk-rate mailing.

One possible **disadvantage** with bulk-rate mailing is its **policy regarding changes of address**. Bulk-rate mail will generally only be forwarded to a potential respondent if they still live within the same city as their previous address—however, forwarding sometimes does not occur at all. First-class mail is clearly a better option if you anticipate a significant number of address changes.

You also have two basic postal options for **return postage** for questionnaires: stamps or a business-reply mailing permit. The **business-reply permit** is printed on the mail in place of postage stamps, and so can save researchers time they would normally spend affixing stamps to envelopes.

- ▶ Business-reply rates are often more expensive than first-class mail because the outgoing postage rate is the same, and the post office includes a surcharge per piece returned.
- ▶ If the return rate is low, you may save money with business-reply postage, but if the return rate is high, it will likely cost more than using first-class stamps.
- ▶ The presence of **stamps** on return envelopes may be regarded as a sign of sincerity, and respondents may be more inclined to return the questionnaire.

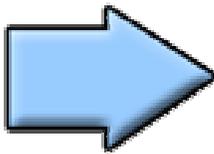
### Monitoring Returns

As questionnaires are returned, review them to see if what proportion of the questions are answered. You may want to establish a guideline for surveys to keep and surveys to discard, based on how much of the survey the respondent completed.

- ▶ Use the identification number on the survey that you assigned to it before it was mailed to record that that person has completed a survey. This way, you will know not to send this person any follow-up postcards or additional questionnaires to complete.
- ▶ Assign each returned questionnaire a new number. The numbers should be assigned sequentially as the questionnaires are returned.
  - This can provide valuable insight for later analysis; for example, if an event occurs during data collection that may have had an impact on respondents' attitudes, you would be able to note the difference in people's responses to the survey before and after that event.
- ▶ Chart a **return rate graph**. The day the questionnaires are mailed should be Day 1 on the graph.
- ▶ For each day, note the number of questionnaires that arrived that day, and the cumulative number of questionnaires that have been returned.
- ▶ Not only is this a satisfying way of monitoring data collection, but it can guide your follow-up mailings.

**Follow-Up Mailings.** Follow-up mailings are an effective method for increasing return rates in mail surveys. In general, the longer potential respondents delay replying, the less likely they are to reply at all. Well-timed follow-up mailings can provide an effective reminder to respond. The effects of follow-up mailings should be apparent on the rate of returns—in other words, the initial mailing will be followed by a rise and subsequent decline in returns, the follow-up mailing will create a resurgence of returns, and further follow-ups will do the same. **Three mailings** (the original plus two follow-ups) **are generally sufficient**. Samples of follow-up mailings are included on the CD of prototype materials included with this guide.

### POINTER



Timing the follow-up mailings is important. Usually, a follow-up mailing should be mailed two to three weeks after the initial mailing.

There are **two basic types of follow-up mailings**, as follows:

- ▶ The **reminder letter or postcard** is the simplest and most cost-effective type of follow-up mailing. The reminder letter or postcard encourages the potential respondent to participate by completing the questionnaire they received. This method, however, relies on the respondent to locate and complete the original questionnaire they received two or three weeks earlier.
- ▶ While more expensive, sending potential respondents a **new copy of the questionnaire** generally yields more responses.

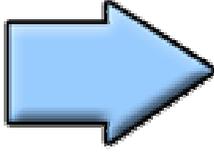
## 4. Entering Data

Before beginning quantitative analysis, you will need to enter your data into computer storage so that you can run statistical tests. There are many options for data entry—for example, if you have decided to use SPSS software to analyze your data, you can simply enter the data directly into an SPSS database. Some organizations on a budget will use Microsoft Excel to enter and analyze data. EpiData is a free data entry program available online. Other programs available for sale include Unibase by DMAC and WinCross.

### Pros and Cons of Specific Data Entry Software

<b>SPSS</b>	<p><b>PROS:</b> One major pro is the one-stop shopping aspect of SPSS—you enter the data into storage in SPSS, and then use the same program to run statistical analyses of the data.</p> <p><b>CONS:</b> SPSS is not primarily a data entry program, however, and so the lack of “tabbing” or use of the “enter” key can be frustrating.</p>
<b>Excel</b>	<p><b>PROS:</b> The major pros are cost-effectiveness and availability—Microsoft Excel is usually a standard software package available on PCs using the Microsoft Office suite.</p> <p><b>CONS:</b> Like SPSS, Excel is not primarily a data entry program, and so entering data can be time-consuming. In addition, Excel cannot handle questions with multiple responses (i.e., respondents have the option of “checking all that apply” for a question).</p>
<b>EpiData</b>	<p><b>PROS:</b> EpiData is free and available online, and is fairly user-friendly and accessible. It also outsources materials such as codebooks for use in analysis, and offers a validity check for your data.</p> <p><b>CONS:</b> EpiData is limited to 200 cases per file, however.</p>
<b>Unibase</b>	<p><b>PROS:</b> Unibase is very flexible and accessible, offering data entry and a variety of data outputs, as well as compatibility with most other data analysis programs.</p> <p><b>CONS:</b> Unibase is costly, however, with a price range of \$600 to \$1,000.</p>
<b>WinCross 6.0</b>	<p><b>PROS:</b> WinCross 6.0 is also very flexible and accessible, offering a separate data entry module for sale, and a variety of data outputs, as well as compatibility with most other data analysis programs.</p> <p><b>CONS:</b> WinCross 6.0 is quite costly, however, with prices beginning at approximately \$2,000 and proceeding up to \$50,000.</p>

## POINTER



When choosing data entry software, be aware of any **limitations** of that software, such as maximum number of cases (i.e., number of interviews it can hold) or maximum number of questions per case. Also be aware of what **format** the data is saved in, and what other **software platforms the data will be compatible with**. If entering directly into a database file such as Excel or SPSS, the standard way of entering survey data is one line for each respondent, one column for each question.

In general, you must **pay close attention when entering data into computer storage**. It is important to minimize or eliminate errors that occur at the data entry stage of survey research.

- ▶ **Pace yourself.** Pay attention to what you are entering and where, and spot-check your own work.
- ▶ **Some programs will check for errors** as data are entered if you set a range of acceptable responses beforehand—for example, if gender responses are “1” (male) or “2” (female), and you enter a “7” by mistake, the computer may be able to prompt you for another response.
- ▶ Another option is to **look at the distribution of responses** for a question after data entry is complete—if you see that 175 respondents answered “1” (male), 250 respondents answered “2” female, and 25 answered “7,” then you know to investigate and re-enter the data for those 25 surveys. A small number of errors is usually acceptable in survey research.

### What Communities Have Learned

**Pay close attention when entering data into computer storage.** “Gathering data is hard, and then cleaning it all and trying to get things to be on a comparable basis . . . You set up an Excel spreadsheet and have drop-down menus that have to be “yes” or “no,” and they end up putting in “42” and you wonder how it got there.”

*--Bonnie Rosenberg, Project Manager for OST Initiative, City of New York. Conducted secondary research and utilization research of OST programs operating in New York City. This research project was designed to inventory existing OST programs and enrollment measures in order to direct resources to underserved and high-need areas.*

The following section discusses conducting surveys via the web. The final step in conducting a research project, analyzing the data, will be presented at the end of this workbook, following the section on web surveys.



**OVERVIEW OF  
CONDUCTING WEB SURVEYS**

## STEPS INVOLVED IN CONDUCTING WEB SURVEYS

### What Communities Have Learned

**Web surveys offer an efficient means of collecting information.** “The web survey tool was an efficient way to get important information from the provider community. The most challenging part was coming to agreement on a manageable set of questions and developing a comprehensive list of out-of-school time providers. There was such a dearth of information about the out-of-school time provider community that the original survey was much too long to be practical. Once we were able to come up with a set of questions that were the most immediate and timely and useful to us during the planning process, the web survey tool was very efficient, and it’s a very non-threatening way for people to answer the questions. So we got a pretty high return rate on the survey.”

-- Catherine B. Walsh, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Conducted a multi-phase research project, including focus groups and a telephone survey of middle-school students and parents in Providence, Rhode Island and, later, a web survey of OST providers. The purpose of the research was to understand middle-school students’ and parents’ perspectives relating to OST activities with the goal of developing OST activities that most effectively meet their needs.

### Steps Involved in Conducting Web Surveys

#### 1. Choosing a Web Survey Software Provider

(Identifying an appropriate provider based on the complexity of the survey, sample management, analysis, and cost.)



#### 2. Entering the Questionnaire

(Entering the questionnaire, testing for appearance on screen, checking for errors, and making the survey active.)



#### 3. Managing the Sample List

(Assembling a list of email addresses and sending invitations to complete the study, including a link to the site. Sending reminders if necessary.)



#### 4. Ending Data Collection

(Downloading completed surveys, closing down survey when finished with data collection.)



#### 5. Analyzing the Data

(Making sense of the findings.)

Web surveys are a type of self-administered survey that are cost-effective and time-efficient. In general, members of the population targeted for the study are emailed an invitation to participate in the study, with a link to the survey location included in the email. Web surveys are a good option when contacting a population that is likely to have access to the Internet, such as business people, and when the objectives of the study do not require a long or complicated survey instrument.

## WEB SURVEY

### Advantages

1. **Cost-effective:** Costs vary depending on the level of service of the provider and the capabilities of the software, but this is generally the least expensive way to conduct a survey. Service providers tend to charge on a monthly or yearly basis, rather than on a survey basis. There are no interviewing costs, and no data entry costs (that may be associated with conducting a mail survey).
2. **Time-efficient:** Depending on the amount of sample available, turnaround time on web surveys is very quick. Hundreds of surveys can be completed within a few days.
3. **Minimizes use of internal resources:** This process can be managed fairly easily by one person. Entering and reviewing the questionnaire is the most time-intensive aspect, and in most cases should take less than a day.
4. **No scheduling:** This is a fairly unobtrusive way of contacting potential respondents, and they can complete the survey when it is convenient for them.

### Disadvantages

1. **Requires short, simple questionnaire:** In order to minimize the number of people who terminate before they are done filling out the survey, the questionnaire should be designed so it takes no more than 10 minutes to complete. Most web survey software does not allow for a very complex questionnaire design.
2. **Requires Internet access:** Before deciding to conduct a web survey, determine about what proportion of the population you are trying to reach is likely to have access to the Internet. For example, do you want to survey parents with middle school aged children or do you want to survey parents who have middle school aged children and have Internet access?
3. **Must have email addresses:** Obviously, you will need some way of informing the targeted population of the survey and of how to participate in it. This generally will require that you have or can get the email addresses of the population you are trying to reach.
4. **Quality of data:** There is more potential for respondents to skip questions when doing a self-administered survey. Also, open-ended responses tend to be very short and general, or left blank.

- ▶ **When to outsource web surveys:** If you have sufficient financial resources, you can outsource aspects of conducting a web survey that you would otherwise have to do in-house, such as entering and testing the questionnaire. Service providers can also manage your sample list and send reminder messages to people who have not yet responded, if necessary. This is a good option if your questionnaire or sample management needs are fairly complex.
- ▶ **When to conduct web surveys using internal resources:** This is a good option so long as you are able to follow the instructions for entering the questionnaire and managing the sample fairly easily.

In the next sections, we will present more detailed information regarding outsourcing web surveys and conducting web surveys using internal resources. For communities conducting web surveys using internal resources, we will present information about each step in the process. When conducting a web survey, you will have to outsource at least part of the project, in that the survey will be hosted on your web survey software provider's site; you will not be downloading software and hosting the survey internally.

## OUTSOURCING WEB SURVEYS: A Guide to Hiring Vendors

<b>Who to hire:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Hire a web survey service provider. This will be true whether “outsourcing” or conducting in-house.</li> </ul>
<b>What to look for:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ A phone number to call for technical support rather than just an email link</li> <li>▶ Online training demonstrations of how to use services</li> <li>▶ Functionality in terms of sample management. In most cases you will want to be able to track (a) whether someone is eligible to participate in the study; and (b) if that person has participated in the study already, particularly if you are offering incentives to complete.</li> <li>▶ Options for types of questions you can include—look for the ability to designate that respondents (a) should choose only one response; (b) choose all responses that apply; and (c) can enter open-ended data. Also, look for the ability to enter a series of questions that have the same scale in “table” format, in order to minimize space.</li> </ul>
<b>Where to find vendors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Internet searches for <i>web surveys, online surveys, web survey software, etc.</i></li> <li>▶ Go to: <a href="http://www.google.com/Top/Computers/Software/Marketing/Surveys/">www.google.com/Top/Computers/Software/Marketing/Surveys/</a> for an extensive list of service providers to choose from</li> </ul>
<b>What they will do:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Program your questionnaire</li> <li>▶ Send out email invitations to do the survey</li> <li>▶ <i>Upon request:</i> Send out reminders to people who have not completed the survey yet</li> <li>▶ Provide you with simple frequencies of responses at the end of data collection</li> <li>▶ <i>Upon request:</i> Provide you with the raw data at the end of data collection</li> </ul>
<b>What you will do:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide vendor with a questionnaire</li> <li>▶ Provide vendor with a list of email addresses for the study</li> <li>▶ Provide clear instructions regarding how many surveys you want to collect and how you want to manage the response rate. For example, if you have 10,000 email addresses and you only want 500 surveys, you may not need to contact 10,000 people all at once. If you contact 10,000 people to begin with, your maximum response rate will be 5%. If you only contact 2,000 people, you could achieve a response rate of 25%.</li> </ul>
<b>What you should expect to pay:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Will vary widely, depending on vendor and level of service</li> <li>▶ Vendors may charge by the month or by the year for hosting, rather than on a per-survey basis.</li> </ul>

## CONDUCTING WEB SURVEYS USING INTERNAL RESOURCES:

### 1. Choosing a Web Survey Software Provider

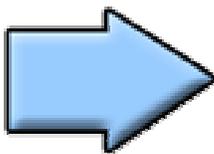
The following sections will discuss each step involved in conducting web surveys in turn. They are:

- ▶ Choosing a software provider.
- ▶ Entering the questionnaire.
- ▶ Managing the sample list.
- ▶ Collecting the data.
- ▶ Analyzing the data.

In order to conduct a web survey, you must first **choose a web survey software provider to host your survey**. Providers are easily found through **Internet searches**; also go to [www.google.com/Top/Computers/Software/Marketing/Surveys/](http://www.google.com/Top/Computers/Software/Marketing/Surveys/).

There is a wide range in terms of the level of **technical support** that is available, from minimal to high. Generally, greater technical support means higher cost, so you will need to assess the cost-to-service value ratio for your study. If you are concerned about being able to get responsive technical support if needed, look for a technical support phone number on the website, rather than just an email address.

#### **POINTER**



Test whether the tools provided for entering the questionnaire are easy for you to understand and simple to use. If not, you might want to try another provider. Some web survey software providers have training programs available on how to use different services on their site.

## 2. Entering the Questionnaire

Regardless of the service provider you choose, there should be a fairly straightforward and simple procedure for entering your questionnaire onto the system. The tools for doing this will vary depending on the service provider. When entering your questionnaire, there are several aspects to consider. These are provided in detail in the chart below

<b>PREPARING A WEB-BASED QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	
<b>APPEARANCE OF QUESTIONS ON SCREEN</b>	First, <b>how are the questions going to look on the screen</b> to the user? The survey should be as simple as possible for the respondent to complete. It is a good idea to set up the questionnaire so respondents do not have to scroll down. Rather, fit as many questions as you can on one screen, and when the respondent is done answering them, he or she can press an arrow to see the next screen.
<b>TYPE OF RESPONSE</b>	<b>How do you want the respondent to respond to the question?</b> Do you want them to <b>choose only one response</b> , such as when they are answering on a scale (excellent, good, fair or poor), or do you want them to be able to <b>give as many answers as possible</b> to the question, such as when they are choosing from a list of activities in which they have participated in the past year?
<b>LIMIT NUMBER OF SCREENS</b>	<b>Minimize the number of screens</b> that have to load on the respondent's computer. If for some reason there is lag time each time a new page loads, the respondent could become frustrated and quit out of the survey. One way to do this is to use a "table" format when you have a series of questions that are all answered on the same scale.
<b>SKIP PATTERNS</b>	You should be able to program the questionnaire so that certain questions are skipped based on the respondent's answer to a previous question. Keep skips in mind when designating which questions show up on a screen.
<b>RESPONSE SCALES</b>	Look for the option to save scales that you are going to use repeatedly (excellent, good, fair, poor) to a " <b>library</b> ," so you do not have to enter them for every question.

## PREPARING A WEB-BASED QUESTIONNAIRE (continued)

### EXPORT DATA

If you want to get the raw data once data collection is complete, you will need to **consider how you want to export the data when you are entering the questionnaire**. You may need to designate the export value of each response label, for example, you can determine whether you want the export value to be the response label itself or a number for that response (i.e. excellent = 1, good = 2, etc.). Look for how to set the export value as you are entering the questionnaire, and if you do not see it, contact technical support. You want to make sure that you end up with data that will be in a usable format.

### PREVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Once you have entered your questionnaire, there should be an option to preview it. **Preview the questionnaire to make sure it looks the way you want it to** on the screen. If there are skips in your survey, run through the survey several times testing it systematically to make sure all of the skips are working correctly. You will need to enter fake data to do this, which is fine; just remember to remove the data before you publish the survey.

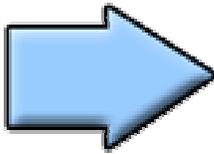
### PUBLISH SURVEY

Once you have tested all of the skips and you are satisfied with how the questionnaire looks on the screen, “publish” the survey, which will **make it possible for people to access the survey**. The publishing process creates a survey link that you will need to send to potential respondents. As a final step before inviting people to participate in the study, email yourself with the link and test it to make sure it works correctly.

### 3. Managing the Sample List

**Managing the Response Rate:** As discussed earlier, in order to notify your target population of the survey and provide them with a means of accessing it, you will need to have a list of their **email addresses**. Once that list has been obtained, consider whether the list is long enough, relative to your targeted number of completions, to **issue invitations to participate in the survey in “waves”** in order to ensure a **higher response rate**. If you are trying to get back 75 completed surveys and you have 100 email addresses, this will not be an issue. If you have thousands of email addresses, however, and your goal is to get 300 completed surveys back, only contact part of your list in the first wave. Consider **how responsive you think people will be** in order to determine the ratio of sample to send. If you expect people to be fairly responsive, a three to one ratio might be sufficient, in which case you would select 900 email addresses at random to send in the first wave.

#### POINTER



Given that there are not additional costs involved, you may decide to contact every address that you have and get as many completed surveys back as possible. If there are no open-ended questions in your survey, this should not be an issue. If there are open-ended questions, you should consider that these questions take longer to analyze than closed-ended questions.

Most web survey software providers will have **sample list management applications**—they will provide a means for sending out invitations with the link to the survey and for sending out reminders to people who have not completed the survey after a certain number of days (which you designate).

**Security:** Another benefit to contacting potential respondents via email is that you can set up a “gateway” that will **prevent people who are ineligible from completing the survey** and **prevent people from completing the survey multiple times**. An identifying code can be included in the sample list that will be passed on to the survey. Through this code, the software will be able to determine if a potential respondent is on the list of people who are eligible to complete the study, and whether that person has completed the survey once already. If you are offering incentives for completing the survey, these concerns are obviously much higher than if you are not. The software provider’s web site should provide information on how to set up a link to track this type of information, and you should contact technical support if you have questions.

## 4. Ending Data Collection

**It is up to you when to end data collection.** You may decide to stop accepting surveys after you get a certain number back, or you may decide that you want to keep data collection open for a certain period of time depending on your overall timeline needs, and then close it. All web survey software sites will have a mechanism to stop accepting new surveys.

Once you have determined that the data collection period is over and you have stopped accepting new surveys, the next step is to **download the data for analysis**. All sites should be able to **provide you with simple frequencies** for all variables, meaning the number of times respondents gave each response. Many will also allow you to download the raw data. There are usually **different options for downloading the data**, such as in an ASCII file, which can be imported into Excel, or into SPSS.

### POINTER



When you download the data from the web site, you will probably be provided with all of the current data. That means if you download the data more than once, you create the **potential for creating files with duplicate data**. This is not a concern if you wait until the end of data collection to download the data all at once.

## 5. Analyzing the Data

There are several steps involved in analyzing quantitative data, including (1) coding any open-ended responses; (2) organizing the information for analysis; (3) frequency analysis; (4) crosstabulations, (5) determining significant differences; and (6) calculating error rates. These steps are summarized below, and described in detail in Workbook I.

**Coding Open-Ended Data:** There is no way to quantitatively analyze raw open-ended data—first, you must quantify it. The first step in this process is called *coding*. When coding, you break down open-ended responses into categories, such as “wants more sports programs” or “wants programs available on the weekends,” and count how often that category of response was given. Workbook I will present detailed instructions for developing code categories and creating codebooks to be used in analysis.

**Organizing Your Data for Analysis:** Before beginning your analysis, you should organize the information for your study. Workbook I discusses strategies for organizing your data by general topic.

**Frequency Analysis:** A description of the number of times a particular response is given to a question throughout the entire survey is called a frequency distribution. Using gender as an example, you are reporting a frequency distribution when you report that 40% of respondents are men and 60% are women.

**Crosstabulations:** Crosstabulations, often called crosstabs or banners, are a way of presenting the data you have collected for assistance in analysis. Crosstabs are organized by rows and columns—you can choose the questions you would like to use as column variables, and then run all of the questions asked in your survey as row variables. Crosstabulations are effective at giving researchers an overview of the data.

**Significant Differences:** The only way to know if differences between categories (e.g., boys and girls) are important is to run a statistical test that will tell you if the difference is *statistically significant*. Statistical significance is the measurement of likelihood that this difference would occur in the “real world,” and is not simply a function of sampling error or chance. There are **three basic statistical tests** commonly used to test for statistical significance when analyzing crosstabs: the difference of proportion test, the t-test, and Chi square. These are discussed in detail in Workbook I.

**Error Rates:** An estimate from a survey is unlikely to equal the exact proportion of people who think or feel a certain way. This is because data for surveys are collected from a *sample* of the population being studied, not the entire population. Therefore, sample surveys involve a *margin of error*. Calculating error rates and factors affecting them are described in detail in Workbook I.

For more detailed information about data analysis



SEE WORKBOOK I