

# Survey Checklist

University Assessment Services, Illinois State University

## Introduction

Evaluation checklists ensure quality research projects by creating a framework for project completion and ensuring essential tasks are addressed. This checklist addresses survey administration and use.

For more information about evaluation checklists, see the Western Michigan University Evaluation Center's *Evaluation Checklist Project*.<sup>1</sup>

## Purpose

- Identify survey purpose.<sup>2</sup>
- Write research questions.
- Identify survey variables.<sup>3</sup>
- Clarify if a survey is the best method for answering the research questions.<sup>4</sup>

## Logistics

- Identify project lead and research team.
- Select survey administration method (online, paper, telephone, etc.).
- Inform all units or individuals impacted by the survey.
- Establish timeline, including survey administration window.
- Obtain leadership endorsement of survey project.
- Publish survey in Qualtrics. Keep the survey in *Preview* mode until the survey is ready.

## Capacity

- Clarify research team qualifications and skills necessary to administer the survey.
- Clarify research team qualifications and skills necessary to analyze and use results.
- Ensure willingness to use results.

## Costs

- Identify direct and indirect costs.<sup>5</sup>
- If working with a vendor or purchasing a survey, contact the ISU Purchasing Office before signing a purchase agreement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Western Michigan University Evaluation Center](#).

<sup>2</sup> Examples: See what students are learning, program or curriculum improvement, improving a process, identifying student needs, clarifying the impact of a program, seeing if a program was implemented effectively, and formative evaluation. For more information, see [Centers for Disease Control](#).

<sup>3</sup> Examples: how students spend their time, engagement with faculty, or sense of belonging.

<sup>4</sup> Other data sources include ISU data sources or interviews / focus groups.

<sup>5</sup> Direct costs include instrument costs, fees, paid labor, software, supplies, etc. Indirect costs include staff time for survey administration, analysis and reporting.

<sup>6</sup> ISU Purchasing Office, [About](#).

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## Population and Sampling

- Ensure the survey population has the ability and subject-knowledge to answer the questions.
- Define population (first-year students, tenure-track faculty, civil service staff, etc.).
- Decide whether to survey entire population or sample.
- Determine appropriate or acceptable response rate.
- Determine if survey will be identifiable, anonymous or confidential.<sup>7</sup>
- Determine how non-responses will be addressed.
- Request survey population / sample list.<sup>8</sup>
- Determine how list of names will be gathered, if applicable.<sup>9</sup>

## Messaging

- Write recruitment invitation letter, e-mail, or script. Include the following information:
  - Who is administering the survey.
  - Why the survey is being administered.
  - How the results will be used.
  - Statement of confidentiality or anonymity.<sup>10</sup>
- Determine recruitment message or e-mail signatory.
- Decide if a notice is necessary before the recruitment.
- Determine number of reminders (if applicable).
- Write E-mail subject line.
- Determine if respondents will be e-mailed from Qualtrics, your own e-mail, or through ISU administrative technologies.<sup>11</sup>
- Contact options in Qualtrics:
  - Anonymous link*. All respondents receive the same link and are not identified (unless they voluntarily self-identify).
  - Traceable link*. Each respondent receives an individualized link. Respondents must be informed of this.

## Recruitment & Promotions

- Create marketing and promotions plan.<sup>12</sup>
- If the population is large numbers of ISU faculty, staff, or students, complete mass e-mail request through Administrative Technologies.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Difference between confidentiality and anonymity: [Qualtrics, Anonymous vs Confidential Surveys](#) and [Evergreen State University](#).

<sup>8</sup> ISU Planning, Research, & Policy Analysis (PRPA), [Data Requests](#).

<sup>9</sup> Generally, preferred or legal name.

<sup>10</sup> Difference between confidentiality and anonymity: [Qualtrics, Anonymous vs Confidential Surveys](#) and [Evergreen State University](#).

<sup>11</sup> ISU Administrative Technologies, [AT Help](#).

<sup>12</sup> Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, [Encouraging Student Participation](#).

<sup>13</sup> ISU Administrative Technologies, [AT Help](#).

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## Compensation and Incentives

- Determine if survey respondents will be compensated (gift cards, merchandise, cash, etc.)
  - If yes, ensure compensation meets ethics guidelines and tax regulations.<sup>14</sup>
- Track individuals who received compensation.

## Survey Question Guidelines & Flow

- Ensure responses are coded.
- Determine if demographic questions are necessary<sup>15</sup> or if demographic information can be matched from other sources.
- Ensure demographic questions are current with evolving terminology.<sup>16</sup>
- Do not ask respondents for information they don't have.<sup>17</sup>
- Do not place too much burden on respondent memory.<sup>18</sup>
- Avoid leading questions.<sup>19</sup>
- Avoid double-barreled questions.<sup>20</sup>
- Avoid acronyms.<sup>21</sup>
- Avoid negatives in questions.<sup>22</sup>
- Ensure survey questions are exhaustive.<sup>23</sup>
- Use "don't know," "no opinion," or "neutral" options, if appropriate.<sup>24</sup>
- Ensure survey questions avoid bias.<sup>25</sup>
- Reconsider using agree / disagree questions.<sup>26</sup>
- Include a progress bar or percent completion status.
- Include back and front buttons.
- Consider an open-ended comment box at the end to capture respondent information not addressed in the survey.

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<sup>14</sup> ISU Research Ethics & Compliance, [Human Subjects Payments](#).

<sup>15</sup> J. Frederick, Jan. 2021, Ithaka-SR, [When to Ask or Not Ask Demographic Questions](#).

<sup>16</sup> J. Frederick, Nov. 2020, Ithaka-SR, [Four Strategies for Crafting Inclusive and Effective Demographic Questions](#).

<sup>17</sup> Example: "How effective is the online XYZ application in helping you plan your schedule?" Solution 1: [Pre-question]: "Are you aware of the XYZ scheduling application?" Solution 2 [response options]: "Very effective, not effective, no opinion, unaware of XY scheduling application."

<sup>18</sup> Example: "How many times did you meet with your advisor last year?" Solution: "About how many times did you meet with your advisor last year?"

<sup>19</sup> Example: "Experts believe studying five hours a day is extremely important. Do you study five hours a day?"

<sup>20</sup> Example: "I feel welcomed by faculty, staff, and other students." Example 2: "Rate the presentation on clarity, style, and use of graphics." Solutions: Create three questions for each example.

<sup>21</sup> Example: "How often have used services provided by SHS?" Solution: "How often have you used Student Health Services?"

<sup>22</sup> Example: "Agree or disagree: There are not many fun things to do on campus that do not involve alcohol." Solution: "There are lots of fun non-alcoholic events on campus."

<sup>23</sup> Example: "What type of family did you grow up in?: One father and one mother; one mother; one father." Solution: "Grandparents, foster family, two parents (father and mother), two mothers, two fathers, other:"

<sup>24</sup> Example: "Graduate assistants receive more training than in the past: yes or no." Solution: "yes, no, not sure." See also: footnote 17.

<sup>25</sup> Biased survey questions are: 1) offensive to certain groups and 2) unfairly penalize individuals based on their representation.

Examples: Depictions of people in stereotypical manners, assuming individuals represent or speak for a group, or language that can be interpreted in an offensive or emotionally charged manner.

<sup>26</sup> Example: "My instructor provides clear instruction: agree or disagree." Solution: "How clear is your teacher with instruction: Extremely clear, not clear at all."

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## Piloting & Testing

- Pilot survey with a similar population (first-year students, civil service staff, etc.).
- Consider a panel or informal group of experts or colleagues to review the survey.
- Things to look for in a pilot:
  - Appropriate survey length and completion time.<sup>27</sup>
  - Biased or inappropriate questions.
  - Style and grammar.
  - Logic skip patterns and display logic.
  - Unnecessary / unactionable questions.
- Pilot on multiple devices, including desktop and laptop computers, tablets, and phones.
- Add research team to survey distribution list for testing.

## Research Ethics & IRB

- Verify if project requires an IRB.
  - Contact UAS to see if your assessment or evaluation project warrants an IRB.<sup>28</sup>
- Read instructions on submitting an IRB protocol at ISU.<sup>29</sup>
- If a collaborative study with another institution, check with Research & Ethics Compliance.<sup>30</sup>
- Write informed consent statement.<sup>31</sup>
- Check survey compliance with accessibility standards.<sup>32</sup>
- If the research takes place outside the United States, ensure data collection and use is compliant with international standards.<sup>33</sup>
- Verify if minors are or could be included in your study.<sup>34</sup>

## Data Security

- Identify *where* data will be stored.
- Identify *how* data will be protected.
- Identify *who* will have access to the raw data files.
- Clarify *how* data will be presented and displayed. Set a minimum 'n' to protect respondent information.

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<sup>27</sup> Qualtrics provides an estimated response time. UAS has found the time to be a reliable estimate.

<sup>28</sup> ISU Research Ethics & Compliance, [Research Requiring IRB Review](#).

<sup>29</sup> ISU Research Ethics & Compliance, [Submitting a Protocol](#).

<sup>30</sup> ISU Research Ethics & Compliance, [Collaborative Research](#).

<sup>31</sup> ISU Research Ethics & Compliance, [Tips on Informed Consent](#).

<sup>32</sup> ISU Technology Solutions, [Website and Digital Accessibility](#) and Qualtrics, [Survey Accessibility](#).

<sup>33</sup> ISU Research Ethics & Compliance, [IRB International Research Requirements](#).

<sup>34</sup> ISU Environmental Health & Safety, [Minors Activity Compliance Committee \(MACC\)](#).

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## Use of Results and Analysis

- Clarify who is responsible for using results.
- Identify audiences (leaders, committees, etc.).
- Determine analytic method.
- Determine analysis tool (Excel, SPSS, Power BI, qualitative software, etc.)
- Choose data presentation methods (online analytics, written reports, etc.).

## Resources

- Biddix, J. (2018). *Research Methods and Applications for Student Affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Creswell, J., & Creswell, J. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gehlbach, H., & Artino, A. (2018). The Survey Checklist Manifesto. *Academic Medicine*, 93, 360-366.
- ISU [Research & Ethics Compliance](#).
- ISU [University Assessment Services](#).
- Qualtrics, Survey Basics [Overview](#).
- Qualtrics, [How to Increase Response Rates](#).
- Rea, L. (2014). *Designing and Conducting Survey Research: A Comprehensive Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Vogt, P., Gardner, D., & Haefele, L. (2012). *When to Use What Research Design*. New York: Guilford.
- Vogt, P., Vogt, E., Gardner, D., & Haefele, L. (2014). *Selecting the Right Analyses for Your Data: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. New York: Guilford.