

Guidelines for Conducting a Survey

Questions to Ask

Is a survey actually the best research method for your question? Keep triangulation in mind; What people do, what people say they do, and what people should do, or the ideal. Generally, the goal is to get somewhere in the center. Other possible methods could include interviews, focus groups, content analysis, or participant observation. Has someone else already collected the same or similar data that would be applicable to your research purposes? Contact The Office of Institutional Research to check the archive of previous research.

Determine Research Goals

Begin by defining the exact question that you would like to be answered or addressed. What are the population parameters? Would a census, which is surveying the entire population, or a sample, which is surveying a proportional amount of the population, be a better fit for the results you are looking for? If you decide to go with a sample, make sure the sample size is representative of the total population.

Use this formula as a guide:

$$n = \frac{t^2 \times p(1-p)}{m^2}$$

n = required sample size
t = confidence level at 95% (standard value of 1.96)
p = estimated prevalence of the variable of interest (%)
m = margin of error at 5% (standard value of 0.05)

How will you determine that sample? You could use a random sampling, stratified sampling, systematic sampling, convenience sampling, quota sampling, or purposive sampling.

Random - Every member of target group has equal chance.

Stratified - Members are split by common attributes before random sampling, which reduces sampling error.

Systematic - Every Nth name is chosen from list.

Convenience - Sample is taken from group easy to reach.

Quota - Combines stratified and convenience sampling to choose necessary number of members.

Purposive - Selecting sample members based on preset criteria, but must be confident of representation of total target population.

Snowball - Existing members of the sample recruit future members.

Determine Questions

Keep in mind that the survey should be succinct and to the point. The respondent's attention will only be held for so long. If they lose interest they may not fully answer the questions or just fill things in to finish sooner. Be sure that all questions are all necessary and direct in order to not to waste the participant's time. Be sure not to include any double-barrelled questions, where more than a single question is asked within a question. Also make sure that the questions are both mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

Mutually Exclusive - The answer could be any one of the options, but not multiple.

Exhaustive - Every respondent must fit into one of the answer options.

Avoid only having two answer options; instead use a response or Likert scale. Also, decide if you would like to include a middle/no opinion option as that may impact the data as it is an easy option to pick without getting their real opinion.

Remember to avoid leading or biased questions that guide the respondent towards one answer over another. Keep the population in mind when deciding on the language and tone of the questions. Decide what order the questions will appear on the survey. Think about the transitions of their thoughts, and the possible need to prime questions with others before asking them.

IRB Approval

Not all surveys need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Institutional surveys should contact The Office of Institutional Research at Carthage, sub-populations should contact IRB, but sometimes both should be contacted.

To contact IRB, contact Leslie Cameron, the IRB Chair at Carthage.

Visit The Office of Institutional Research website to find the data request form.

Carthage Information.

When preparing and sending a survey to Carthage Community, keep in mind that surveys are a frequent attack vector for cyber criminals. Therefore, it is important that the recipients are able to recognize it as a valid Carthage request, and not a phishing campaign.

Send the email out from a Carthage gmail account, if possible.

ALWAYS include a contact name and contact department. Individuals are coached to verify the sender before responding to emails that sound like phishing, so they need the department to contact to validate it.

Notify LIS so that the information desk can properly handle inquiries. LIS might also list it as a valid message on the Internet Security Threats Page.

If you are planning on collecting Confidential or Restricted data, you must consult with LIS, Security, The Office of Institutional Research, and have proper IRB approval in advance to ensure the data storage is adequately secure. If possible, minimize or avoid sending or collecting confidential or restricted data.

Prior to sending the survey, announce it on the Bridge with details about who it is from, and what the link will be.

Other Considerations

Do you want to offer incentives like payment, or entrance to a raffle to get a higher return? These are optional.

Decide anonymity and confidentiality of the survey.

Anonymity - The research participants' identities will either not be collected or the responses will not be connected with identifying information.

Confidentiality - The researchers may identify the individual's responses, however no one outside of the project will know.

Consider the timing of the survey in regards to possible response rates; check with The Office of Institutional Research to be sure different surveys are being spread out. If your sought out population of individuals is small, be mindful of how many times they are contacted for surveys to avoid a reduction in responses. Internal process efficiency surveys targeting students, faculty, and staff should be run through The Office of Institutional Research to avoid survey fatigue.

Consider the format of survey. Would an online survey or an in-person survey be a better fit?

Upon finalizing your survey draft, it may helpful for a second pair of eyes to review it. Questions or terms that may be clear to the author, may be open to interpretation when others read the survey questions.

When constructing your survey, in addition to thinking of the respondent's experience, it is helpful to also consider how your survey logic and types of questions chosen (ie question matrices, multiple choices, comment boxes) will impact your analysis upon completion of the survey. Also consider questionnaires that take more than ten minutes to complete add to the information burden on respondents.

Doing consultations with appropriate audiences and stakeholders also leads to successful surveys that meet the information needs around our campus, in our communities.

Questionnaires may also be customized, online or paper, with the Carthage logo or in other ways to get a professional look which enhances response rate.

If the survey will potentially go to residents of the European Union or other countries with data privacy regulations, additional privacy notices and acknowledgements, data security, and 'opt out' options are required.

Continue the preparation for the survey.

Contact the head of the area you would like to survey for permission as well. Administer the survey on a few people not to be included in the results to help catch any issues you may have missed before the actual survey is administered.

Invite the participants and send out your survey. If in-person, then plan time to administer the survey.

Consider sending out emails for reminders after a set amount of time to obtain more participants.

Administer the survey.

If the survey will be administered in person, who is going to administer the survey? It could be yourself, have The Office of Institutional Research help with administration, or if another survey is going to be administered already, you could see if your questions could be included on that survey.

The Office of Institutional Research will help you get started in this process.

Collect the data.

Transcribe the data. Number fixed-choice responses to use quantitative data and write out each qualitative question to code for analysis.

Analyze the data.

For quantitative data check out these guidelines:

<https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/data-analysis/quantitative-data-analysis/>

Analyze the quantitative data by entering it into a program. Some program options include Excel, SPSS (Access through Carthage), SAS, Stata, or R. Stata.

For qualitative data check out these guidelines:

<https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/data-analysis/qualitative-data-analysis/>

After data has been collected, consider archiving the survey details for future use by other faculty through The Office of Institutional Research.

Presenting the data.

When visually presenting the survey results to others, be sure to make the survey's sample size known. When presenting your results in percentages, be sure to also disclose the number of cases for any particular survey question being discussed.