Surveys: Questions to Consider

Why do a survey?

- Quantitative data for prevention planning is missing key indicators.
- Existing data sources are not culturally appropriate or sensitive.
- Need to include respondents from a large geographic region.
- There is a need for consistency in data collected.
- Consistent data:
    - Allows for comparisons with other populations (if same items are used).
    - Allows you to monitor trends over time.

Why is it important to create a good survey?

- Your data is only as good as your survey – "GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT."
- A good survey keeps the responder interested.
- A good survey reduces error and frustration.
- A good survey facilitates data entry and analysis.

Where do you start?

- Don't reinvent the wheel! See if you can adapt existing surveys.
- Get key stakeholders on board early.
- Determine the level of resources you have available.
- Develop a clear set of objectives.
- Create a list of content areas to assess, then scale back.

Who needs to approve the survey?

- Community leaders
- Institutional Review Board
- Other collaborators

Do you have sufficient resources? These include:

- Time
- Money
- Staff / Consultants

Who "owns" the data?

- Funding agency
- Contract or consulting agency
- Community

Who is your target population?

- Consider if you are interested in gathering data for:
    - The entire community
    - Sub-populations within the community

How will sample your target population?

- Random sampling is more generalizable, but you need a sampling frame.
- "Snowball" sampling is good for reaching hidden populations, but is not generalizable.
- Convenience sampling is efficient, but who are you missing?

What mode of survey administration will you use?

- In-person (Face-to-Face)

    Advantages

    - High cooperation and low refusal rates
    - Allows for longer, more complex interviews
    - High response quality
    - Takes advantage of interviewer presence

    Disadvantages

    - Costly
    - Takes longer than other methods
    - Interviewer bias
    - May not be good for sensitive information

- **Telephone Interview**

    Advantages

    - Less expensive than in-person interviews
    - Can be faster than in-person interviews
    - Can cover a large geographic area

Disadvantages

- o Miss homes without phones or with unlisted numbers
- o Response rate can be low
- o Not good for sensitive topics
- o Can be difficult to build rapport

- **Self-Administered (Mail or Web)**

Advantages

- o Generally lowest cost
- o No field interviewers needed
- o Respondents can take their time
- o Data entry not needed (if web-based)
- o Good for sensitive information

Disadvantages

- o Low response rate (often need incentive)
- o Must be very short. Not good for complex issues
- o Difficult to clarify questions (no interviewer)

What types of questions will you use?

- **Closed vs. Open-Ended Questions**

Closed

- o Offers the responder a closed set of responses from which to choose
- o Data collection and analysis is much simpler
- o Amount of time it takes responder to complete the survey is less
- o Responses are complete and mutually exclusive
- o *Note:* Must be consistent in your answer response listings throughout survey

Open-Ended

- o Use when you are exploring new ideas and you don't' really know what to expect for the respondents

- Allows for more insight into respondents' thoughts and ideas about the subject
- Difficult to analyze the data
- Time consuming for responder

  Note: Consider offering partial list of responses combined with an "other" option

- **Single vs. Multiple-Response Categories**

Single

- Responder may only choose one answer
- Often preferred over multiple responses for analysis

Multiple

- Responders may choose all that apply
- *Note:* During data entry and analysis, response alternatives must be treated as a series of individual items coded as "yes" and "no."

How will you increase your response rate?

- Administer a well-developed survey
- Send at least one reminder
- Provide incentives, if possible
- Inform responder why the survey is important and how the findings will be used
- Thank your responder!!!

How will you handle sensitive personal information?

- If you must collect this information, place "sensitive" questions at the end of the survey
- Remove identifiers (name, phone number, address, etc)
- Train interviewers to ask questions in a manner that is non-judgmental

How will you protect a person's privacy?

- Keep the survey anonymous if you want to get the most honest responses
- If you can't offer anonymity, offer confidentiality
- Assign coding

How will you pilot test your survey?

- Administer your survey to a small group of individuals familiar and unfamiliar with the subject
- Make sure responder clearly understands the questions and instructions
- Collect feedback and suggestions such as:
- Clarity of instructions and questions, response choices, skip patterns, ambiguous terms, survey flow, appearance of survey, length of time to complete survey, sensitivity of questions
- Revise your survey based on feedback
- Make sure you are capturing the information you need to meet your objectives

How will you summarize the data? Options include:

- Trends over time
- Sub-group comparisons
- Comparison with national average
- Comparison with neighboring state(s)

How will you disseminate the results?

- Presentations
- Reports
- Fact sheets
- Web sites

Survey Resources

The Community Tool Box: Conducting Surveys:

http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1048.aspx

Harvard University Program on Survey Research:

http://psr.iq.harvard.edu/book/psr-resources