FS996



# **Fact sheet**

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# **Choosing a Data Collection Method for Survey Research**

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here are several methods that can be considered to collect data in survey research. Each has advan tages and disadvantages. The choice will depend upon the type and size of the audience being studied, the purpose of the study, timeline, budget and staff available, etc. This fact sheet provides information to help make the appropriate choice of data collection method for survey research and evaluation.

# **Mailed Survey**

This method uses a printed questionnaire that is mailed or delivered to respondents and permits them to respond at will and return the survey via mail.

#### **Advantages**

- Requires minimum staff to prepare & mail
- Relatively inexpensive

#### **Disadvantages**

- Takes time, requires follow-up to get responses
- Can get buried in junk mail
- Requires literacy
- Can be difficult to get accurate mailing lists

# **Telephone Survey**

This method involves calling respondents via telephone, typically on a spontaneous (as perceived by the respondent) basis, although it can also be done via scheduled appointment in consideration of the respondent's sched-

ule. It is also possible to use an automated system where users reply via touch-tone telephone to a computer-based interview system.

#### **Advantages**

- Quick response possible
- Can be inexpensive if dialing is local and staff/ volunteers are available

#### **Disadvantages**

- Caller ID, answering machines limit access. Must establish credibility in competition with telemarketers
- Not everyone has a telephone
- Unpublished phone numbers (unless random dialing is used)

Note: Language barrier could affect any method

# Personal Interview (face-to-face)

This method employs an interviewer who meets in-person with respondents either spontaneously (such as in a public place) or via scheduled appointment.

## Advantages

- Quick response possible
- Interviews can be done in one location
- Face-to-face contact offers personal element, trust
- Can interview groups of people (eg. families) at one time
- Can reach inaccessible audiences



#### **Disadvantages**

- Time consuming if interviews are conducted at subjects' locations
- Respondents may be more likely to give socially acceptable answers.

# **Web-based Survey**

This method involves posting a questionnaire on a web site, with respondents typically replying from individual computers remotely, although computers can also be set up at a central interview site.

### **Advantages**

- Quick response possible
- Can be inexpensive if web server, web designer, and software are available
- Web software can tally, summarize response data
- Postage is reduced or eliminated
- Easy for respondents to reply

#### **Disadvantages**

- Respondents must have access to Web
- Reminders still needed, although email may substitute for mailed announcement/reminder cards.

# **Summary**

Choose the method that is most appropriate for your audience and the type of information to be collected. Also, consider the possible ramifications of "self-administered" questionnaires versus interviewer-directed. Will the influences or knowledge of other individuals affect the responses of subjects completing questionnaires? Will disregard of the survey or misunderstanding of questions occur? Ultimately, the decision of data collection method will take into account all of these considerations, balanced with budget and efficiency concerns. Furthermore, using a combination of methods is a possibility, especially when using a second method (such as telephone interviewing) to follow-up with nonrespondents of the initial method (such as a mailed questionnaire).

# References

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