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Child Welfare League of America • National Center for Research and Data • Research to Practice (R2P) Initiative

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*Keeping Child Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being at the Forefront*

# Surveys for Beginners

*This guide describes how surveys can help agencies improve program services, defines survey types, provides hints on survey questioning, and includes helpful websites.*

### **Surveys will help an agency:**

- Collect information on an issue,
- Measure respondents' interests and well-being,
- Focus agency priorities, and
- Determine whether services are helpful or useful.

### **Sample:**

A sample is a subset of a population (i.e., sample of 10 children out of the whole population of children in foster care). If possible and practical, it is preferable to study the whole population.

### **How to pick your sample:**

- Decide whom you want to survey, such as social workers, foster parents, or agency directors.
- Determine the number of respondents needed for good results. A 25% response rate to mailed surveys is good.

### **Types of surveys:**

- Mailed questionnaires,
- Face-to-face administered questionnaires,
- Telephone surveys, and
- Online or e-mail surveys.

### **Survey design:**

- Descriptive surveys are concerned with information gathering (i.e., census or service delivery surveys).
- Explanatory surveys are interested in why things work (i.e., program satisfaction surveys).
- Exploratory surveys are preliminary surveys used at the beginning of a study.
- These designs are not mutually exclusive.

### **Writing survey questions:**

- Be specific, rather than general.
- Present closed-ended questions rather than open-ended ones.
- Offer a "no opinion" or "not applicable" choice.
- Be sensitive to the order in which questions appear.
- Ask multiple questions on a topic.

### **Take care to avoid:**

- Biased words and charged statements (i.e., "Don't you agree that. . .?"),
- Two questions in one statement,
- Jargon, and
- Lengthy surveys.

### **Ethics of research:**

- Surveys should undergo a participant protection review.
- Surveys should protect participants' identities.
- The researchers must inform participants of the purpose and procedures of the survey.
- The researchers must inform participants of risks of and benefits to participation.
- Participation is voluntary. Nonparticipation will not adversely affect services.

### **Visit these websites on survey design:**

<http://www.amstat.org/sections/srms/whatsurvey.html>

Contains 10 brochures on a variety of survey design topics.

<http://www.websurveyor.com/pdf/designtips.pdf>

Provides recommendations for writing effective questionnaires.

<http://achrn.cche.net/Survey%20Design.htm>

Offers questions to consider when developing a survey.

### **Reference:**

Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

*"To accelerate the rate at which communities and agencies prepare for and adopt the most effective known practices in support of a comprehensive system for ensuring healthy child, youth, and family development."*