**Things to Consider When Deciding to Use Surveys to Evaluate Your Program**

* **Know Your Target Population**

**Identify all persons within your target population(s) in terms of the following characteristics (at minimum):**

* Age Group(s)
* Educational Level
* Ethnic Group(s)
* Gender
* Geographic Location (Rural/Urban)
* Marital Status
* Primary Language(s) Spoken
* Racial Group(s)
* Socioeconomic Status/Income

**Identify other factors and contexts that make your target population(s) unique.**

*For example:*

* Is literacy an issue?
* Will translation be needed?
* Is there any “red tape” associated with the types of questions that can be asked?
* Are the adolescents that compose your target population(s) in schools, adolescent in juvenile detention centers?
  + **Know Yourself (Program)**
* Do you need to change your existing survey instrument?
  + Has your target population changed or expanded?
  + Is your existing survey reflecting the content areas addressed in your intervention(s)?
  + Is the information (i.e., HIV facts) outdated?
* How was the survey you currently use selected?
* What do you want to achieve through use of a new or revised survey?

*For example:*

* Type of change among participants (e.g., pre- to post-intervention)
* Better understanding of current barriers to healthcare seeking
* Identification of current knowledge to help guide program development
* Which stakeholders (internal or external to your organization) are critical to the survey selection/development process?
  + **Know the Original Intent of Pre-Existing Surveys**
* Who was the survey originally intended to target (see items listed under **Know Your Target Population**)?
* What factors or contexts were considered in the original development of the survey (see items listed under **Know Your Target Population**)?
* Given your responses to the questions above, does this profile mirror your target audience and intended program goals and objectives?
  + **Considerations Prior to Utilization of a Preexisting or Newly Developed Survey**
* Pretesting is Important
* Process used to identify whether questions are clear, perceived as intended, and culturally appropriate in preparation for final survey administration.
* Pretest with people who are not familiar with the survey, but who represent the target population of interest as well as those who are experts in the subject matter.
* Look at the questions that are answered, those that are not answered and how they are answered.
* Keep track of how long it took people to complete the survey.
* Focus groups may be used to debrief, following completion of the pretested survey, to gain consensus surrounding which questions were unclear or difficult to answer, and solicit recommendations on how question may be revised.
* Assessment of readability components (e.g., reading level, reading ease) may be done during this process and through use of electronic software, if available.
* Training is Critical
* Do you or your collaborators have the expertise needed for survey selection or development (including skills in survey question design)?
* Are you or your collaborators skilled and available for pretesting?
* Are you or your collaborators skilled and available for survey interviewing or administration?
* Is there adequate technological support for data collection and analysis of completed surveys?
* Given your responses to the questions above, are external partnerships for survey selection and/or development necessary?
* **Survey Questions – Types & Considerations**
* **Close-ended**
* Answer choices listed
* Respondent selects from discrete categories
* Remember to specify if participants should select more than one option to reflect his/her opinion or situation

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| **Disadvantages** | **Advantages** |
| * Can draw misleading conclusions due to limited range of options | * Quick to answer |
| * Researchers cannot address potential qualification of responses | * Easy to code |

* **Open-ended**
* Question in semi-structured questionnaire or topic guide that allows participant to respond in their own words.
* May appear in a mostly close-ended survey as an “other” option.
* No pre-coded response, but the answer is recorded verbatim, or as answers are coded later

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| **Disadvantages** | **Advantages** |
| * Harder to code | * Greater freedom of expression |
| * Increased potential misinterpret of meaning | * No bias due to limited response ranges |
|  | * Good for discovering unanticipated response options |

* **Question Order**
* Ordering should reflect how respondents would perceive the sensitivity of questions
  + People may refuse to cooperate if survey questions begin with awkward or intrusive questions
  + People are more likely to provide genuine responses to personal questions if some rapport is built with interviewer/more general questions are asked in beginning
* Use introduction to prepare respondent for potentially objectionable questions
* Build to individual behavior questions
* Is drug use a problem in your community?
* Do you know anyone who uses drugs?
* Do you use drugs?
* **Opinions – How to Elicit a Response**
  + When asking respondents to give opinions or evaluations of services, scales are best used
  + Use numerical scales (1 to 7) rather than adjective scales (poor to excellent) because numbers are less subjectively interpreted across audiences
* **Things to Avoid**
  + **“No Opinion” or “Don’t Know” Options**
  + Increases likelihood of non-response to other items
  + May discourage respondents from “thinking” about the issues
  + People who choose these options may have provided substantive answers if provided exhaustive list developed through pilot testing, expert and literature review
* **Double-barreled Questions**
  + Questions that address several topics / issues with a single response

*Example:*

* Have you ever been tested for HIV?

*Versus*

* Except for when you were pregnant, have you ever been tested for HIV?
* **Leading or Loaded Questions**
* Questions phrased with “value-laden” terms (loaded) or that suggests a desired response
* *Check for superlatives in your questions*

*Example:*

* Please rate the quality of this program.

*Versus*

* How good was this program?
* **Vague or Ambiguous Questions**

*Examples:*

* What is your income?
  + Better to reword question to include ranges due to sensitive nature of question
    - Do you walk regularly?
  + Better to reword question to include ranges to decrease subjective interpretation of the word “regularly”

**References**

Babbie, E. (2004) The practice of social research (10th Edition). Wadsworth/Thomson Learning: Belmont: CA.

Wholey, J., Hatry, H., & Newcomer, K. (2004). Handbook of practical program evaluation (2nd Edition). Jossey-Bass: San Francisco: CA.