

# Should I conduct a survey?



A survey is a uniform series of questions to help you collect ideas or opinions from a sample of individuals to understand the ideas or opinions of a larger population.

**Survey advantages:** efficiency, low cost, no need for interviewers or interview training, and the ability to collect responses from many individuals.

**Survey disadvantages:** low response rates, bias presented by who chooses to complete the survey, limited room for open-ended or alternative responses, limited ability to ask follow-up questions, and that participants may skip questions.

A survey may be the most appropriate method when you are seeking to **efficiently** collect **new** information from a **large number of individuals**, and **perform quantitative analyses on the results**.

## Survey Considerations

- Explore the literature. Someone else may have already developed a validated survey measuring the behaviors or attitudes you want to measure.
- Determine the best method to administer the survey, **based on your resources and the targeted population**. Options could include telephone, e-mail, in-person, social media or mail.
- Survey questions and instructions should be concise, specific, and at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level.
- Do not use double-barreled questions. Instead of asking participants how “easy to understand and follow” the instructions were, you should break this up into two questions, since not all instructions that are easy to understand are easy to follow.

## Other Methods to Consider

**Process improvement methods** apply a systematic approach to resolve problems and reduce barriers to improve efficiency. These strategies can be useful for researchers and teams seeking to better understand and ameliorate challenges encountered in research studies. Instead of a survey, it may be possible to apply stakeholder feedback into quality improvement tools to select the most promising change strategies. If you are a faculty or trainee at a Tufts CTSI partner and collaborator institution and you have a research project that may benefit from process improvement strategies, please reach out to any of the staff members at the [Center for Research Process Improvement](#) to schedule a consult.

**In-depth Interviews** with individuals can collect data on *why* people think, feel, or behave a certain way. Interviewers use a semi-structured interview guide to standardize their research questions while allowing for probes or follow-up questions based upon the interviewee’s responses. A downside to qualitative interviews is that conducting and analyzing the data can take considerable time and effort; however, if conducted well, interviews can elicit an abundance of rich information about interviewees’ experiences.

**Focus Groups** can collect the ideas or reactions of individuals who all share an experience (i.e., research coordinators), by having a guided or open discussion. Focus groups facilitate a conversation around the topic of interest; therefore, participants may build off of what others in the group share. You should organize the groups to avoid any power dynamics that may affect the conversation (i.e., inviting employees and their supervisors to participate in the same group). Be prepared to act as a neutral facilitator for the group, ensuring everyone has opportunity to share their views while conveying there are no ‘right’ answers.

## Resources and Further Reading

*Community Tool Box. Chapter 3. Assessing Community Needs and Resources.* (2014). University of Kansas.

<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>

*Questionnaire Design Tip Sheet.* (2007). Harvard University Program on Survey Research.

<https://psr.iq.harvard.edu/book/questionnaire-design-tip-sheet>