
TIP SHEET: INCREASING SURVEY RESPONSE RATES

One of the drawbacks of using surveys is that it is sometimes difficult to get people to answer them. And often those who do answer are not representative of the larger group to which they belong. This tip sheet provides some tricks and tips to get survey responses from as many people as possible.

- 1. Lead with the why.** The communication that surrounds your survey is as important as the survey itself. Make sure you introduce your survey in a friendly and personalized way. It is critical to let potential survey takers know that you value their input, and to let them know *why* you are conducting a survey and *how* you intend to use the information they provide.
- 2. Be where they are.** Print or online? In person or by mail? Try to offer your survey in a format that works for the audience you are trying to reach. If access to the internet is an issue in your community, a paper survey may be preferable. If you are surveying youth, a mobile option may be most appropriate. You might find that the best way to generate youth response is to set aside program time for survey completion. Have your survey translated into the language(s) spoken by your community members, and finally, consider whether a survey is the most culturally appropriate way of getting input from your intended audience.
- 3. OR, bring them to you.** It can be very difficult to get survey responses from families. You might find it worthwhile to incorporate a survey into a community event, or to otherwise find a way to get input from families in person.
- 4. Send out reminders.** If you are attempting to collect surveys online, it is important to decide in advance how long your survey will remain open, and to schedule reminder communications to potential respondents during this time. When deciding on how many reminders to send, balance your desire to generate additional response with the need to avoid pestering your community. If you leave a survey open for 4-6 weeks, then 2 or 3 reminders will probably suffice.
- 5. Consider the timing.** Try to avoid times of year that you know are busy for your potential respondents. For example, you might not want to survey young people when you know they are taking school assessments. Also think about sending an online survey during a time of the week that you think would work best (i.e. when people are likely to open and respond to e-mail). Send your reminders at a *different* time from your initial invitation so that you can reach different people.
- 6. Always follow up.** Think of the survey work you do in your program as an opportunity to build trust with your community. If people have given their time to provide you with input, show them that you have heard them and that you are responding. You may want to publish survey results or write a newsletter article or blog post about changes you are making based on survey data.