Tip Sheet: Youth Surveys Step-by-Step

This tip sheet provides a step-by-step guide to designing a survey for use in a youth program. Key considerations and guiding questions are provided for each step of survey development.

Step 1: Identify questions or outcomes you want to address with your survey. Your survey outcome(s) should be based on your program's overall theory of change and/or research. In order to ensure that your survey data is used, ask yourself what you might do with the results. Also, make sure that your outcome or question is appropriate to a survey (i.e. addresses something that a survey taker might *think*, *believe, or do.*

Step 2: Brainstorm questions that get at these questions or outcomes. Remember that your questions might actually be statements that you will then ask survey takers to rate on a scale of some sort. Ask yourself, if a young person had the skill or belief or trait that I am trying to assess, what might they think, believe, or do? Alternatively, you can use or adapt an existing survey designed to address the outcome you are interested in.

Step 3: Review questions to ensure they avoid common pitfalls. If you have the opportunity to talk through your survey with young people, do it! You can ask them whether the questions make sense to them, and if the language is the language they would use. Also, ask yourself whether your survey is free of: ambiguous or unclear questions, confusing wording, double-barreled questions (only ask one thing at a time), and loaded or leading questions.

Step 4: Decide on the response categories you will use. These should match your questions. For example, if you are asking about behaviors, you might want to use a frequency scale (never-sometimes-often-always), whereas if you are asking about opinions, you might want to use an agreement scale (strongly disagree-disagree-neutral-agree-strongly agree). Also, ensure that your categories are somewhat balanced, or spaced appropriately. If one category is too large, you might not see much variation in your results. Response categories should also be comprehensive and mutually exclusive (all survey takers fall into *one and only one* category).

Step 5: Pilot test the survey with your target audience. Pilot testing is a luxury that may not be available in the context of many youth programs. However, it can provide valuable information. In the absence of a true piloting opportunity, consider revising your survey as needed from year to year. Some indications that your survey needs to be revised are: missing responses to certain questions, which can indicate a lack of understanding; no variation in responses, which can indicate a problem with the question *or* the response scale; unfinished surveys, which can indicate that the survey is too long.

Step 6: Revise, finalize, and decide on mode of administration. Once you have finalized the content of your survey, you will need to determine the "when" and the "how" of survey administration. There are a number of factors to consider, not least of which are the organizational resources that you can dedicate to surveying young people. If you want to do a pre-/post- survey, you will need to collect names or survey IDs so you can match responses. If you want to conduct your survey online, you will need access to technology. Also, make sure that you provide consistent instructions to those taking the survey *and* to those administering the survey.

Step 7: Administer, score, and report results. Once you have administered your survey, you will need to tabulate results. If you are using an online tool, some of this work may be done for you. If you are using your survey results for program planning, make the process of interpreting results as inclusive as possible. Ask staff, youth, and other relevant stakeholders to help you make meaning. If you are reporting your results externally, focus on accuracy in reporting by being clear about your methods and specific about where your information is coming from.