How to Create an Effective Survey
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The three A’s of a successful survey are:

- Assessment
- Analysis
- Action

These guidelines cover Assessment: Creating an Effective Survey

1. Set Objectives
   - What do you hope to gain from your survey questions?
   - What changes will you make using the results?
   - Be detailed and specific when identifying your survey goals

2. Prepare
   - Solicit input from colleagues to ensure your library is evenly represented
   - Choose a survey instrument (SurveyMonkey, Zoomerang, etc.)
   - Determine the type of patrons to survey (i.e., students or faculty)
   - Determine the number of patrons to survey
     - Entire population
     - Random sample
   - Gather e-mail addresses
     - Determine source (university or library patron database)
     - Check for any restrictions
   - Contact your university’s Institutional Review Board
   - Select a date for the survey launch
     - Consider when patrons are more likely to respond
     - Coordinate with other offices that may have survey plans
   - Select the length of time the survey will run
   - Select the dates on which you will send reminders
   - Incentives
     - Select prizes you will offer (if any)
     - Consider how you will ensure anonymity
       - You need to collect entries separately from the actual survey, so that entries are not tied to survey responses
       - The easiest way to do this is to create a 2nd survey (asking only for name and email address) that respondents are directed to after they complete the satisfaction survey
Create a survey FAQ that answers commonly-asked questions
  o Example: http://www.law.edu/library/library-information/surveyfaq.cfm
  o The FAQ link should be sent in your email invitation and also posted on your website

3. Create the Survey

The survey should:

  • Contain a brief introduction which:
    o States the purpose of the survey
    o Explains the benefits of completing the survey and how important it is that certain patrons (e.g., graduating students) complete the survey
    o Assures anonymity
  • Be divided into sections
    o For example: services, resources, facility, equipment
  • Include room for comments
    o Consider placing comment boxes after specific questions and as the last question on the survey
    o Comments can be difficult to analyze, but are extremely useful
  • Conclude with a thank you page

Types of questions to ask:

  • Demographic questions
    o Example: year in law school, day/evening student
    o Demographic questions are useful for cross-tabulating results
  • Benchmark questions
    o Examples: how often do you use the library, why do you use the library
    o Benchmark questions are useful for tracking trends year to year
  • Questions about satisfaction with current resources and services
    o Ask for input from other departments when formulating these questions
  • Questions that promote existing services (especially those you feel are underused)
  • Questions about possible new services

Be sure to:

  • Ask only those questions that support your survey objectives
  • Avoid survey fatigue
    o Aim for 15-20 questions
    o If you have over 20 questions, consider eliminating benchmark questions, or questions that aren’t crucial to your overall objective
    o Aim for a completion time of 10-15 minutes
    o Questions should be short, simply-phrased, and easy to understand and answer
  • Avoid library jargon
    o Example: Please rate your satisfaction with the Library’s discovery service.
  • Avoid leading questions
    o Example: The library recently completed a successful redesign of its website, making it more user-friendly. Please rate your satisfaction with the new and improved website.
• Avoid unnecessary questions
  o Questions should support your survey objectives
• Avoid questions that ask two things
  o Example: Please rate your satisfaction with the library’s print and electronic resources
• Avoid implying something that cannot be delivered
  o Example: Don’t ask if students would patronize a library coffee cart if you know a coffee cart will never be installed.
• Pre-test the survey on library staff

4. **Promote the Survey**
   • Email, web page, posters, flyers

5. **Communicate Results**

   Let patrons know that the survey results and their comments are valuable and will be used to assess services and make changes.

   • Post the preliminary survey results within a few days of the survey’s completion
   • Set and post a timeline for analysis to be completed and action to be taken