

## Strategies for Increasing Survey Participation

Benefits, response burdens, and trust affect whether people attend to a survey request at all and, if they do, whether they are persuaded to respond.<sup>1</sup> Here, we summarize strategies Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014) offer for increasing survey response rates.

### *Increasing the Benefits of Survey Participation*

- **Specify how the survey results will be beneficial.** Describe both potential personal and/or distal benefits. People may feel compelled to contribute to something that benefits others, even if they do not believe they will personally benefit.
- **Ask your respondents for help or advice.** Because people often feel valuable when others ask them for advice, respondents more often complete surveys that seek their assistance.
- **Ask interesting questions.** When questions are interesting, people are more likely to feel they benefit from answering them.
- **Utilize sponsorship by a legitimate individual or organization.** An individual's or organization's endorsement of a survey can increase response rates by lending it legitimacy and evoking trust in its source.
- **Motivate respondents to act quickly.** Explaining to respondents that there is a brief window of opportunity to respond can encourage timely participation.
- **Use material incentives to encourage (but not coerce) reciprocity.** Incentives increase response rates, with monetary incentives sent in advance of survey completion having the greatest impact. Importantly, incentives have been shown to increase the response rate of typically underrepresented populations.

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<sup>1</sup> Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- **Do not underestimate benefits.** Remember that some respondents simply enjoy completing surveys, answering questions they find interesting, and/or contributing to research that may be helpful to others.
- **In follow-up communication, convey the current number of responses.** Knowing that others have already completed a survey can encourage people to participate.

#### *Decreasing the Response Burden of Survey Participation*

- **Minimize survey length and complexity to the extent possible.** Collect only the level of detail that is needed and ask only the questions that are necessary.
- **Use visual design principles to help respondents process and complete surveys.** Principles of visual design can clearly guide respondents in how questions should be answered and in what order.
- **Make it convenient to respond.** Methods for increasing convenience include sending a business reply or stamped return envelope for mailed surveys and a direct link that will open in the respondent's browser for Internet-based surveys.
- **Minimize requests to obtain personal or sensitive information.**

#### *Establishing Trust*

- **Provide opportunities for respondents to assess the authenticity and ask questions about the survey.** Provide a physical address for the origins of the survey and/or list a phone number to call for information about the survey.
- **Obtain the endorsement of a legitimate authority.** People are more likely to comply with a request if it comes from an authoritative source, such as a school principal or district superintendent.
- **Provide a token of appreciation in advance.** By providing an incentive with the request, before the survey is completed, the researcher demonstrates trust in potential respondents. It is critical that these incentives be neither too small nor too large; to engender trust, incentives must be commensurate with the request.