

Gathering the Information You Need

This guidebook reflects changes in the ways we create surveys.

By Terrence Fernsler

How To Conduct Surveys: A Step-By-Step Guide

By Arlene Fink. Paperback. Sage Publications, sagepub.com.

Surveys are often included in the evaluation portion of programs and projects. Most often, we have to rely on outsiders to perform the survey without knowing how well it's done (until it's challenged). Is there a way for us to learn enough about surveys to understand the professionals?

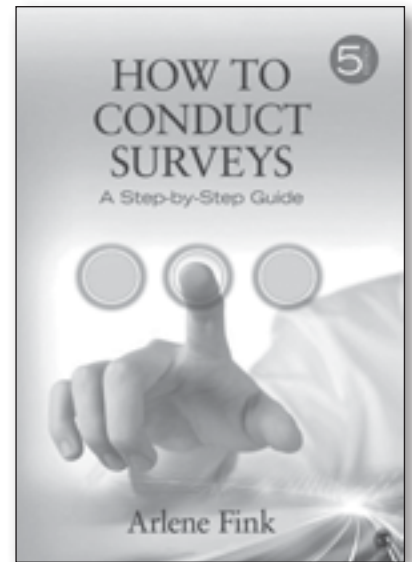
How To Conduct Surveys: A Step-By-Step Guide is the answer. This handy guidebook teaches us enough to monitor surveyors and to ask them the tough questions. It also gives us the tools to design, create, administer, and report on surveys.

First, the authors tell us, decide on the content, and clarify your terms. Be sure you can get the information you need, and don't ask for information unless you can act on it. Be careful not to ask questions in a way that raises hopes you can't fulfill, they urge. Their discussion of types of forced-choice questions — wording that works and wording that doesn't — is excellent.

The explanations are so clear that we begin to feel we can write our own simple survey — from purpose to specific questions and types — after reading this book. Our feeling of confidence grinds to a halt, however, when we get to the section on analysis. We suspect that all but the statisticians among us will get lost in the mathematical discussion. The complexity of this section reinforces the authors' recommendation that we have our survey results reviewed by a professional.

The revised edition of this book reflects many changes in the ways people conduct surveys today. It answers such questions as:


- How do computer surveys differ from traditional survey methods?
- What are the benefits and downsides of interactive questionnaires?
- What are the best ways to increase a survey's reliability?



“How do you ask people about their ethnicity without offending them?”

- When will you need to translate your survey into other languages, and how can you do so most reliably?
- How do you decide what to include in a written survey report or present in an oral one?

In recent years, surveys have come under increasing scrutiny for possible violations of privacy. To help with that hurdle, this edition provides guidelines on preparing informed consent statements and asking personal questions. How, for example, do you ask people about their ethnicity, income, and gender without offending them? Rather than asking, “What was your income last year?” the authors advise listing categories from which to choose. They also recommend placing sensitive questions toward the end of the questionnaire.

Surveys are often the best way to collect information about people's feelings, ideas, backgrounds, and beliefs. When you're planning a project or evaluating a program's effectiveness, this guide is the place to turn for the information you need. 

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Coming Up in Nonprofit World

- Why Telling the Right Brand Story Matters So Much
- The Best Marketers Money Can't Buy
- How to Measure Your Volunteers' Success
- The Power of Your Messages
- Please Give Generously: How Your Nonprofit Can Help For-Profit Corporations
- Are You Feeling Lucky?
- Ten Reasons to Move to the Cloud
- Fourteen Questions to Ask before You Hire an Attorney
- Three Tools to Evaluate Your Impact
- Extend a Grant-Funded Program with Corporate Dollars