Capacity Building
CENTER FOR COURTS

CQI Quick Sheet

Survey Basics

The CQI Quick Sheet series is meant to assist Court Improvement Programs plan for evaluating an area of focus. It includes some specific questions to ask, as well as some useful tips on methodologies to help achieve goals to improve in this area.

What are Surveys and Why Do We Use Them?

- Surveys are questionnaires used to gather information from a sample of individuals.

- Survey respondents represent the larger group being studied, as it is often difficult to survey every person in a group (e.g., all of a lawyer's clients, all parents with a child in foster care).

- Survey results are used to:
  — evaluate and assess how people view systems, agencies, processes and programs, and to identify trends and themes.

  — help with CQI processes to highlight practices that need improvement.

- Surveys are a great first step to evaluate your program, get a baseline measure or to use for comparison purposes. Combine with follow-up in-person or telephone interviews to deepen your understanding of respondents' views and perceptions, satisfaction and knowledge.

How Do You Know What Questions to Ask?

- The questions must be **understood** by the people being surveyed, with any terms **explained,** and the language used **appropriate** to their age and position.
- Use the CQI process to help identify the needs/issues to be addressed.
- Ask questions to see: if your theory of change is clear, if your objectives are measureable, or if your intervention is having the desired effect. For example, if you want to know if parents feel they are getting quality representation, you need to **define** what the elements of quality representation are. Then you can ask parents, e.g., "Does your attorney contact you in enough time before the hearing for you to feel prepared?" not "Is your attorney giving you quality representation?"
- **Use available resources,** such as your liaison or a local university to access help in developing questions.

Pros and Cons of Surveys

Court user surveys have been used to gather various pieces of information from youth, families, and stakeholders. These can be useful in understanding perceptions, satisfaction, and knowledge.

User Survey Pros

- Easy
- Fast
- Standardized
- Inexpensive
- Ability for many different groups to be involved in decision making processes
- Easy to distribute
- Versatile
- Reliable

User Survey Cons

- Scope of data can be limited
- Inability to probe for more information
- Usually requires data-entry step
- Subject to misinterpretation

Survey Development

Purpose: Decide what kind of information you want to gather:

- *Knowledge*
- *Perspectives, perceptions, understanding, opinions, attitudes*
- *Satisfaction*
- *Trends*

Methodology: Decide if you want to capture information at one point in time, or to evaluate changes from one point in time to another:

- **Baseline** *determines where you are, gives an idea or foundation on problem at one point*

- **Pre-Post** *helps to assess changes between two events*

- **Post-Pre** *helps to assess changes between two events if you only want to survey once*

Type: Each type has advantages and challenges.

- *On-line surveys (e.g., Survey Monkey) are anonymous and quick to complete, but you don't have as much control over who completes the survey and how many choose to complete.*

- *Phone surveys allow you to schedule calls at times convenient for participants, but require staff time to schedule and complete.*

- *Other methods include mailing surveys (very low response rates) or handing them out to be completed immediately in front of you. In-person surveys ensure you know who is completing, but potential participants may be reluctant to let people see they are participating, even if you do not have them put in any identifying information.*

Sampling: Who are you trying to reach?   A "sample" is the people you are surveying who will represent all of the people who are in the category. For example, there may be 50 judges in a jurisdiction, but you will survey a sample (i.e., 20).

Questions: The type of question must match the survey's purpose. All questions should be neutral ("Are you satisfied or unsatisfied with your representation?" vs. "What is your attorney doing wrong?")

- *Quantitative (can be measured: how many, how often, length of time)*

- *Qualitative (descriptive, characteristics: difficult, satisfaction, attitude)*

- *Closed-ended (a list of answer choices from which they must choose: yes/no, 5-10%)*

- *Open-ended (requires an answer to why, how, what, opinions, perceptions)*

Implementation and Analysis

- **Pretest** survey with a few people in the sample to ensure the questions are getting the information you want, and to see how long it takes to complete. Make changes as necessary and finalize.

- **Implementation**. Distribute survey and ask for completion by due-date.

- **Analyze and Report**. Put data in tables and graphs and write narrative on what it means, and write so information is meaningful and accessible to readers. Make recommendations for changes to current processes, if necessary.