



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR COURTS

CQI Quick Sheet

Surveys: What **STOP** NOT To Do

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.

Why Use a Survey?

Surveys are an efficient way to obtain information. They provide a means to receive valuable insight, are easy to implement, and are not resource intensive. However, it is important to know when **NOT** to use them and what **NOT** to do when you decide to implement them.

Thinking About Using a Survey?

Below are some things to think about **before** deciding if a survey is the best option for you.

DON'T USE:

If You Can't Explain the Purpose of It

It is important to explain why you are using a survey and what the goals of it are. Otherwise, implementing a survey could be a waste of resources or could reduce engagement of stakeholders in future projects. Consider these questions:

- *What information will this survey provide?*
- *Is this information going to be useful to this project?*
- *How will this information be used?*
- *Who is going to provide me with this information?*

If The Information You Need Will Not Be Obtained

Surveys can provide a breadth of information. Surveys are especially great for gaining qualitative data, such as perspectives, opinions, or satisfaction. Consider these questions:

- *What information do I want to gain from this?*
- *Will a survey be able to answer the questions I have?*
- *Are there other methods of data collection that would fit better?*

If You Don't Know Any Other Ways of Collecting Data

While implementing surveys can be very beneficial, there are other data collection methodologies you can use. These include: court observation, case file review, or focus groups. It would be useful to understand the benefits and limitations of each type of methodology in order to decide which one would be the best fit for your project.

Developing Surveys:

An important component when you are creating surveys is the development of questions. Here are some common question mistakes to avoid.

DON'T:

Ask Leading Questions

These are questions that suggest a particular answer. You want your questions to be free of bias so that answers are accurate and impartial.

Example: "Wouldn't you agree that the judicial officer treated you fairly?" vs. "To what extent do you believe the judicial officer treated you fairly?"

Use Ambiguous Questions or Answers

These are questions or answer choices that are too similar from one another. You want respondents to be able to distinguish between choices/questions.

Example: "Did you see your attorney before court?" It is unclear in this question if "see" means visually saw OR interacted in some other way.

Use Indirect Questions

These are questions in which the respondent has to interpret what is being asked. You want to make sure the respondent is able to give the information that you are requesting of them.

Example: "What do you think about your experience with mediation?" vs. "How did you feel about your involvement in the case planning of your mediation experience?"

Use Double-Barreled Questions

These are questions that require two different answers to respond. You want to ensure that respondents are answering one specific question at a time.

Example: "What was the most and least helpful component of the training?" This question is asking respondents to report two separate pieces of information.

Implementing Surveys:

When you have made the decision to implement a survey, here are some useful things to avoid.

DON'T:

- **Implement Without Doing Your Research**

You can examine the the need or issue of our project first by looking to the literature, other jurisdictions & states doing similar work, or existing data you may have available. This will help inform your work.

- **Implement Without Reviewing or Piloting**

Surveys need to be reviewed to ensure they are appropriate. You can pilot a survey to see how it will work in the field and assess if the information gained is useful. You should consider involving stakeholders in the review process to increase buy-in, promote collaboration, and highlight gaps or issues with the tool.

- **Distribute to the Wrong Audience**

It is important to identify your audience before implementing a survey. This will help to ensure that questions are appropriate to your audience. For example, a survey for youth will be much different than one for judicial officers. The wording of questions needs to be age appropriate and easy to understand.

- **Overwhelm Respondents**

Participation in surveys is voluntary. Respondents are providing you with valuable information you might not otherwise receive. It is important your survey process is not overwhelming, overly complicated, or demanding.

- **Distribute Without Follow-Through**

Once a survey has been implemented, you should have protocols in place for data collection and analysis. This will help to determine how data is going to be received, analyzed, and used.