

# MAXIMISING THE OUTCOME OF SURVEYS

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8 October 2014

# WHAT IS A SURVEY?

**Survey** – a method of collecting standardised information from a number of respondents

Surveys can be used:

- to collect opinions of respondents (qualitative data). Such data are normally weak as audit evidence
- to collect factual data or information on behaviours (quantitative data). These data can provide more robust evidence

# WHY A SURVEY?

- Set out the **objectives** of the survey
- Weigh the **added value** of the survey against its **cost**
- Evaluate **advantages** and **disadvantages** of the survey method

# PLANNING THE SURVEY: PREPARATION

- Research into whether similar surveys been conducted recently or similar data is available
- Determine the coverage of the survey. What is the target population?
- How could you contact and survey the population?
- Seek advice and expert assistance on the most appropriate approach to data collection, on the design of a survey and on evaluating the survey results
- Consider survey “in-house” or “contracted out”
- Consider using Software (Word, Excel, Access, other)

# PLANNING THE SURVEY: SURVEY DESIGN

- Know the population targeted: the population size, the location, any relevant groupings or profile
- Construct the sample design, if sampling is needed  
*(seek advice and expert assistance)*

## **Sampling techniques:**

- simple random selection
- systematic selection
- stratified random selection
- selection by clusters
- by quota

# PLANNING THE SURVEY: SURVEY METHOD

- Establish the appropriate survey method (*evaluate advant. and disadvant. of each method; decide based on the subject, the population, time and costs*)

## Self-completion:

- e-mail survey
- internet survey
- postal survey

## Interviewer led:

- face-to-face interview
- telephone survey

# CONDUCTING THE SURVEY: QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

- Good questionnaire design requires clear questions that are logically ordered (avoid misunderstanding)
  - clearly specify dates and time-intervals
  - only ask one question at a time; do not combine two questions into one
  - offer “other” or “don’t know” alternatives
- Questionnaires must be well presented, clear, simple and easy to complete without assistance (*seek advice and expert assistance*)
- Always explain to the respondent how the questionnaire will be used and whether anonymity is assured

# CONDUCTING THE SURVEY: TESTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

## Testing

- The questionnaire must be tested where possible on potential respondents, or at least on colleagues or experts in the subject of the survey

## Pilot survey

- A small pilot survey should be run if possible (particularly for a larger survey). Test the questions and the likely response to the survey between 10 and 30 respondents



# CONDUCTING THE SURVEY: COLLECTION OF DATA

- Well-executed surveys with well-designed questions should help avoid non-response
- An advance letter may make increase the response rate
- Manage the responses. Track responses and non-responses
- Improve response rate by **follow-up calls** or sending **reminders**. It is an important part of the survey process
- Ensure data entry and data validation procedures are carried out correctly

# EVALUATING THE SURVEY RESULTS

- Carry out checks on the survey results
- Ensure that the survey results are representative of the population. Check any potential inaccuracy due to non-response
- Produce summary tables for responses to each question and compare response by sub-group and between questions

# REPORTING THE SURVEY

- Give a short background to the survey then explain the survey method and the sample design (*it is appropriate to do this in an appendix to the report*)
- provide a summary of the fieldwork giving the time and location of the survey. Also report the number of call-backs / reminders and any validation procedures used
- explain how the survey respondents represent the population surveyed. Give the population size, the number surveyed and the actual number who responded (response rate)
- provide details of the questions asked. For larger questionnaires explain the areas covered and give the key questions

# ASSISTANCE FOR USING SURVEYS

- **“Contracted out” (external researchers)**
  - questionnaire design
  - questionnaire administration
  - interviews
  - omnibus surveys
  - sampling strategies
  - data entry and analysis
  - summary tables
  - reports

# ASSISTANCE FOR USING SURVEYS

- **Partnership (Academic, Social Research Org., etc.)**
  - provision of high quality expertise
  - on-request assistance in the development, review and discussion of surveys carried out within NAO
  - review of NAO surveys before distribution
  - participation in expert panels if a survey expert is required
  - provision of advice on sampling methodology for managed surveys
  - provision of full survey service
  - etc.

# ASSISTANCE FOR USING SURVEYS

- **Joint survey (with audited body)**
  - reduce NAO costs
  - allow to carry out a larger survey
  - increase the audited body's sense of ownership of the survey
  - lead to better acceptance of the results of the survey

# ASSISTANCE FOR USING SURVEYS

- **Expert Panels**
- **Internal Expertise**
- **Training**
- **Guidance**

# LITERATURE

- “Taking a survey”. Guide, NAO of UK
- “Managing NAO Surveys”. Guide, NAO of UK
- “Surveys”. Guideline, ECA
- “Surveys in audits”. Guideline, NAO of Lithuania
- “Collecting, analysing, and presenting data”. VFM Technical Guides, NAO of UK



**QUESTIONS?**