MAXIMISING THE OUTCOME OF SURVEYS

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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
“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.
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?