



Tips for Creating Good Survey Questions *

- Make the questions short and clear—ideally no more than 20 words per question.
- Avoid questions that have more than one central idea or theme. NOT this: “Did the staff provide a high-quality program and work well with your child?” BUT this: “Did the staff work well with your child?” and “How would you assess the program?”
- Do not use jargon. Your target population must be able to answer the questions you are asking. Tailor the survey to the audience you are reaching (e.g., children or adults, people inside or outside the program, special language or reading needs, and so on).
- Avoid words that are not exact (e.g., generally, usually, average, typically, often, and rarely). If you do use these words, you may get information that is unreliable or not useful.
- Avoid stating questions in the negative. NOT this: “What did you not like about the program?” BUT this: “Were there areas where the program could be improved?”
- Avoid bias. Slanted questions will produce slanted results.
- Give exact instructions to the respondent on how to record answers. For example, in multiple-choice cases, explain exactly how and where to write the answer (e.g., check a box, circle a number).
- Provide response alternatives. For example, include the response “other” for answers that do not fit elsewhere.
- Make the questionnaire attractive. Plan its format carefully, using subheadings, spaces, and so on. Make the survey look easy for a respondent to complete.
- Try out your survey with a few people before administering it to a large group. Ask your test audience for feedback on the clarity of the questions, the length of time needed to complete the survey, and any specific problems they encountered while completing the survey.
- Have respondents prioritize choices rather than just mark items in which they are interested. “Rank from 1 to 3 the top three programs you would attend, beginning with 1 as your first choice” is preferable to “Check the programs you are interested in attending.”
- Try to limit survey length to two pages. An unusually long questionnaire may discourage respondents.

This list is adapted from the online W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook, Chapter 5, the second section, called “Implementation Steps: Designing and Conducting an Evaluation.” This entire publication is available free at www.wkkf.org/documents/wkkf/evaluationhandbook/intro.asp. For “Acknowledgments” of Kellogg Foundation work on the Evaluation Handbook, replace “default.htm” in the above address with “acknow.htm.”