

GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONAL SURVEYS

Overview: These guidelines are issued by the Office of the Provost through the Center for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (CIPE) and the guidelines are applicable to all large scale surveys (more than 100 potential respondents). The following guidelines outline the process by which surveys can be administered to students, faculty, and/or staff at the University of San Francisco.

Goals/Purpose: These guidelines are issued as a way to prevent survey fatigue, the collection of invalid or unusable data, and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents. At a minimum, the guidelines should:

- Increase the quality of the information collected through surveys to ensure that survey results can be used for evaluation, assessment, and planning;
- Help the University to coordinate the timing and populations of surveys;
- Have applicability to the furthering of the Mission of the University and the enhancement of the student experience.

Guidelines: Any survey administered by any individual associated with the University of San Francisco, with a desired sample of more than 100 students, faculty, and/or staff, is subject to these guidelines. Further, any individual conducting a survey (even those exempted and listed below) must contact CIPE to receive contact emails for populations or for randomized samples.

Some surveys or questionnaires are excluded from these guidelines (although feedback and review can still be provided by CIPE staff) these include:

- One-time surveys for the purpose of event/program evaluation – that is, surveys sent to individuals that participated in a specific, one-time program or event (consultation is available through CIPE upon request)
- Surveys administered within a course or a class
- Faculty research surveys

In general, individuals not associated with the University of San Francisco cannot access the University community (faculty, students, staff, alumni) with surveys or other types of research. Exceptions are only granted by the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

These guidelines do not replace approval by USF's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) when applicable.

Benefits to the Researcher: Staff in CIPE have worked in surveys and research administration for many years and have been trained in survey item writing, administration, and analysis. Meeting with CIPE staff for a survey review can lead to better or more clearly written items, a survey that is easier for the survey-taker, and perhaps a more streamlined survey tool. In addition, CIPE Staff can help to think about how to analyze the data that is collected and help choose a sample of survey-takers. CIPE also welcomes requests for consultation for any research project at USF.

Procedures: In order to achieve the goals listed above, the following steps have been established:

1. Before developing a large scale institutional survey, faculty and/or staff should consult with the Center for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (CIPE). Involving CIPE early may speed up the process of survey creation. Questions can be directed to the Director of Educational Effectiveness and Assessment, Deborah Panter (dpanter@usfca.edu)
2. Once the survey is developed, all basic information about the proposed survey is to be submitted to CIPE through Data Assist <https://usf.service-now.com/navpage.do> including: a description of the survey project, a copy of the survey instrument, purpose and intended use of results, desired sample or population, and suggested timeline for survey administration. The purpose of this submission is not to limit or prevent survey administration, but to coordinate the timing, distribution, and to improve the quality of surveys through a review by CIPE staff. Survey respondent email addresses and other information will not be released without this submission. Data Assist may be accessed from the CIPE Homepage (<http://www.usfca.edu/provost/cipe/>), under the left tool bar, click on Create New.
3. After the request is submitted, CIPE will review the survey for method and design, sampling technique, data collection and will possibly provide feedback to the research (see best practices below).
4. After the review, CIPE will identify the sample or population to be surveyed, release the contact information, and work with the researcher to schedule the timing of the survey. Surveys are recommended to be administered through the USF supported survey tool, Qualtrics, and to comply with USF communication guidelines.

Survey Best Practices: The following is an established list of best practices for surveys, and will serve as the basis for much of the CIPE survey review.

- **Informed Consent:** All surveys should disclose to survey takers why they should complete the survey, how the information will be used, how the data will be maintained (confidential, anonymous, etc.), approximate time needed to complete the survey, and whom to contact if they have any questions.
- **Ability to Opt-Out:** Any surveys should notify participants that they are not required to complete the survey, and can opt-out. This opt-out should remove them from future communications about the survey (i.e., reminder emails).
- **Survey Length:** Overall, the more concise a survey is, the more likely it is that survey-takers will complete it.
- **Item Clarity:** Survey items should be easy to read and respond to. Common problems with items are confusing response scales, items that are double-barreled or ask more than one question, or items that are just unclear.
- **Beware of asking overly sensitive information:** Asking for personal information can lead to a survey taker exiting your survey, please be aware what and how you ask.
- **Using samples is recommended:** Simple Random Sampling or Stratified Random Sampling is a good way to gather information about your population in question. Depending on the kind of analysis planned, CIPE can help determine the number of survey takers to be invited. By using sampling, the number of surveys sent to any one individual is lower, and hopefully, the likelihood of response higher.

Definitions: Many statistical and research terms are used in these guidelines, please use the definition list below as a reference.

Event/Program Evaluation: For the purposes of these guidelines, event/program evaluation refers to the direct evaluation of a program or event at USF that is only sent to participants of the event. The data from the evaluations is generally collected to gauge participant satisfaction, gain feedback on program delivery, or other program related information.

Population: A statistical term that refers to a group representing all available cases of interest. In the case of surveying, a population may be all undergraduates, all international students, or all of the USF community.

Sample: A subset of a population that can be evaluated to made inferences about the population in question. Samples are usually randomly selected from the available population. The sample size needed to make inferences about the population can be calculated by CIPE.

Survey: Although surveys take many forms for the purpose of these guidelines, a survey refers to any instrument used to collect information, typically electronically, from groups of interest.