

Webinar Handout

# Developing Questions for Effective Surveys

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The recording, slides, and handout for this webinar are available from [evalu-ate.org/events/jan\\_2013/](http://evalu-ate.org/events/jan_2013/)

## The Role of Surveys in Evaluation

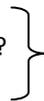
Surveys are one of many data collections options. If used, a survey should yield data that will help you answer one or more of your evaluation questions. (If specific evaluation questions have not been formulated, you can refer to the evaluation's purposes or objectives). Evaluation questions are usually about a project's reach, quality, and/or impact and typically require multiple data sources and methods to answer. In contrast, survey questions, are simply items on a questionnaire.

There should be a clear rationale why each item on a survey instrument is included. To crosscheck alignment of your survey items with your evaluation questions/purposes, ask yourself and other stakeholders if the responses to an item will help you...

identify ways to improve?

determine the project's quality and impact?

account for use of our grant money?



If the answer to at least one of these questions isn't "yes," then seriously consider dropping the item from your survey instrument.

## Survey Item Construction

The Question Appraisal System (QAS-99) ([appliedresearch.cancer.gov/areas/cognitive/qas99.pdf](http://appliedresearch.cancer.gov/areas/cognitive/qas99.pdf)) was developed for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to facilitate review of survey items. A condensed, checklist form of the QAS-99 is also available ([www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief15.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief15.pdf)). This guide alerts survey developers for problems to look for, classified into eight categories.

In this webinar, we focused on four aspects of the QAS-99:

Assumptions: Don't assume that respondents think like you do—be especially careful when asking about attitudes.

Clarity: Aim for precision in language use, don't be wordy, and never ask about more than one thing at a time.

Bias: Minimize bias by making sure questions are not leading and be aware that anonymity conditions and size of respondent group can affect how comfortable respondents are providing candid responses.

Response categories: Response options should be aligned with question prompt, nonoverlapping, and exhaustive.

For additional guidance, StatPac has an online tutorial on designing surveys and questionnaires:

[www.statpac.com/surveys/index.htm#toc](http://www.statpac.com/surveys/index.htm#toc)

## Implications for Analysis

When developing a survey instrument, in addition to crafting good questions that align with evaluation purposes, it's important to plan ahead for analysis. Some elements to consider in terms of analysis are the implications of:

Check all that apply items (appropriateness depends highly on intended use)

Ordinal data: A common mistake is to calculate and report mean ratings.

Even v. odd-numbered scales: There is not a right or wrong way to go, but make sure you think about what you need to know and how you'll use the information. See Michael Quinn Patton's article about this in our Winter 2013 newsletter ([evalu-ate.org/downloads/EvaluATE\\_Winter\\_2013.pdf](http://evalu-ate.org/downloads/EvaluATE_Winter_2013.pdf)). Also useful is this guide by the CDC for using ordinal response options: [www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief23.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief23.pdf).

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## More Great Resources

Dillman, D. A., Smythe, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Patton, M. Q. (2012). *Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation*. Sage.