Tennessee Department of Children's Services **Work Aid for Developing Quality Research and Surveys**
Supplemental to DCS Policy: 1.33 Research, Surveys, Grant Proposals

OVERVIEW

The Department of Children's Services (DCS) adheres to State and Federal law, Rules and Regulations and provides structure to protect the confidentiality and ensure the safety of potential participants while providing support for research efforts.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

This work aid provides guidance, tips, and a planning worksheet for all research in the form of surveys, questionnaires and data analysis conducted by DCS staff. Research is a multiple step process with a defined protocol at each step. In order to get reliable results or have good data quality research projects are planned, data is collected and managed, and reports are created and shared with the decision makers who can act upon them. It is also important to consider ethics surrounding confidentiality and informed consent when conducting research.

Data Collection: Data collection is the process of gathering information about the objectives of the research in a systematic fashion. Accurate data collection is critical to the integrity of the research. Determine the mode of data collection (e.g. SurveyMonkey, focus groups, interviews, paper surveys, etc…) and what team member are responsible for maintaining and gathering data. Faulty data collection may result in wasted resources and compromised research findings which could cause harm to research participants.

Research Objectives and Questions: Identifying the objectives of the research is critical to obtaining the information that is needed. Objectives answer the questions:
Why conduct the survey?
What information is needed?

Once the objectives are identified, the questions to ask are developed.

<u>Tips on Developing Research Questionnaires</u>

- A survey question accomplishes three goals:
  1. It measures the underlying concept it is intended to.
  2. It measures only one concept.
  3. It means the same thing to all respondents.
- Keep the Questionnaire Short**:** Respondents are less likely to answer a long questionnaire than a short one, and often pay less attention to questionnaires which seem long, monotonous, or boring.
- Avoid Complex Sentences**.** Sentences with too many clauses or unusual constructions often confuse respondents.

- Pre-Test the Survey: Administer surveys to a few potential respondents (or co-workers) to get feedback. Ask people to think out loud as they answer the survey questions. Probe them: "What does that mean to you?"

Common pitfalls to avoid when constructing your questions. Creating well-structured, simply written questions promotes collection of accurate and meaningful survey responses. The goal is to create survey questions that read well and are easy to answer. While there are no set rules on the wording of survey questions, avoiding some common pitfalls improve the overall quality of survey questions. The table below highlights a few of these.

Pitfall	Description	Example	Revision
Double-barreled questions	Double-barreled items contain two or more things that are being asked in a single question. It is a question that touches upon more than one issue, yet allows for only one answer.	Has this child had their EPSDT and Psychological Assessment?"	Separate into two questions: 1. Has this child had their EPSDT? 2. Has this child had their Psychological Assessment?
Introducing bias	Leading items introduce bias and may influence the way a respondent answers a question. Also, check to make sure that a previous question does not influence how a respondent answers a later question.	Cases with an educational assessment are best; does your case have an educational assessment?	Does this case have an education assessment? □Yes □No
Balanced question and response	Not including an adequate range of response categories may require respondents to choose answers that do not accurately reflect their experiences or may cause respondents to be frustrated and skip the question.	In a typical year how often do you use self-care techniques? □ Weekly □ Monthly	In a typical year how often do you use self-care techniques? □ Once per week □ One time each month □ Two times each year □ One time each year □ Never
Negative items	Answering negative questions can be confusing to your respondents.	Do you typically **not** enter your case recordings within 15 days? □ Always □ Sometimes □ Never	Do you typically enter your case recordings in 15 days? □ Always □ Sometimes □ Never

Common Types of Survey Questions

Multiple Choice Questions: Allow the respondent to select one or more options from a list of answers. Use multiple choice questions when there is a fixed number or options.

Rating Scales: Respondents select a single rating for a question among a continuum of choices. Rating scales are often used in satisfaction surveys and use a Likert scale to measure customer opinion or attitudes.

Open Ended: Are designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the respondent's own words. Open ended questions often begin with words such as "Why" and "How" or phrases such as "Tell me about…"

Demographic Questions: Information about a respondent's background or income level may be useful. When gathering demographic information, it is important to include a confidentiality statement that is upfront about why the information is gathered and how it will be used.

Target Population and Response Rates In order to ensure that research is being conducted on the correct population and that the information gathered best reflects the answers of the entire population, it is important to identify the target population and report the response rate in the findings.

> Target Population: Define the target population or group of respondents that need to be included in the research. The target population holds characteristics that make them suitable to provide information about research objectives. Indicate the number of people in the target population during the planning phase of the research in order to calculate a response rate for reporting purposes.
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> Response Rates: Response rates refer to the number of people who answered the survey divided by the number of people in the sample. It is usually expressed in the form of a percentage. For instance, if there were a 100 people in the target population and 90 people responded the response rate is 90%. The greater the response rate, the more likely the information reflects the general consensus of the target population. If 100 people are in the target population and 10 people respond with a 10% response rate the information gathered does not accurately reflect the entire target population.

Data Management and Analysis Data management refers to what is done with the data during and after the research. Questions to answer have to do with: When does data collection begin and end? For survey research, when does the survey open and close? Where is the data stored? (e.g. SurveyMonkey, shared drive, file cabinet? How long is the data stored? What is done with the information after the storage time (how is the information deleted/destroyed, after the storage time period?)

Data analysis is the process of extracting useful information from collected data in order to make informed decisions. Most analysis conducted by DCS is descriptive data analysis, which allows the researcher to summarize findings and get an accurate description about the research objectives. Questions to answer have to do with: Who analyzes the data and develops a summary of findings in a report? What tools are used? (e.g. Excel, SurveyMonkey)

Reporting Once data is collected and analyzed; a report of the findings is developed and disseminated. The goal of the report is to create easy to comprehend results for decision makers who can quickly understand and act upon the provided information. Questions to answer have to do with: At what frequency are reports issued? (Monthly, yearly, quarterly…) Who receives the reports? Are the reports planned for posting on the DCS website or other public forum?

Research Ethics

- In general, when conducting survey research on clients, community partners, and DCS employees observe the following standard: Do no harm to the people, organizations or communities who participate in research projects.
- Get permission or informed consent from the people or organizations who are the subjects of the research before doing a study.
- Maintain the privacy or confidentiality of the people and organizations participating in the research project.
- Do not falsify or make up data on a research study.
- Report accurately and completely research findings.
- Report research findings to those involved in the survey.

Confidentiality: Upholding the individual's rights to confidentiality and privacy is critical for ethical research. Also, research participants are more likely to provide honest responses when their identity is protected. In all DCS research, participants are informed of what is being done with the information they provide and if any personal information is required. All research conducted by DCS has a statement of confidentiality informing the respondent that:

a) They are not required to provide answers;

b) Whether or not their personal information is collected.

The statement of confidentiality must be in a language understandable to all of the respondents. The standard reading level is about eighth grade level. Professional jargon is avoided.

DCS Statement of Confidentiality: The following statement may be used at the beginning of each questionnaire with any needed adjustments.

"This research is being conducted by Department of Children's Services (include program area). The purpose of this research is… Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. Your responses are confidential and identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address is not (is) collected. If you have questions about this research, please contact (name and contact information)."

Work Aid for Developing Quality Research and Surveys: Worksheet

Researcher Name:		Email:		Phone Number:		DCS Program Area:	
Research or Survey Name:							

Please complete the following worksheet PRIOR to beginning data collection and email to: CQI EI-DCS CQI.EI-DCS@tn.gov. You will receive an approval email within 5 business days of submitting this worksheet at which time data collection may begin.

Data Collection	
1. What is your mode of data collection? (e.g. SurveyMonkey, interview, focus group)	
2. Who is responsible for collecting data?	
Research Objectives	
1. What is the purpose for the research?	
2. What information do you want to know?	
3. What types of questions will you use to get at the objectives?	
Target Population	
1. What group of people will be included in the research?	
2. Why is this group part of the research?	
Data Management and Analysis	
1. When does data collection begin and end? For survey research, when does the survey open and close?	
2. Where will the data be stored? (e.g. SurveyMonkey, shared drive, file cabinet)	
3. Who will analyze the data and develop a report?	
4. How long will you store the data?	
5. What will be done with the information after the storage time period is over?	
Reporting	
1. At what frequency will reports be issued? (Monthly, yearly, quarterly…)	
2. Who will receive the reports?	
3. Will the reports go on to the DCS website or other public forum?	
Confidentiality	
Please describe the statement of confidentiality included on your research tool:	