

# Program for Research in Survey Methodology



RTI International is dedicated to understanding and improving all stages of the survey research process: development of the research design, instrument construction and evaluation, translation, administration, quality assessment and control, and final analysis and reporting. Our expertise enables clients and researchers to effectively design studies, implement data collection strategies, and analyze data.

## Overview

RTI's survey methodologists have considerable training and experience in identifying and resolving methodological, measurement, and data collection issues. Our capabilities in survey methodology provide survey managers and subject matter experts with an invaluable resource to aid in the development of appropriate survey questionnaires, forms, designs, and analyses.

The Program for Research in Survey Methodology has a strong interdisciplinary focus, with researchers from a variety of academic backgrounds using their skills to address operational challenges associated with conducting survey research. These academic fields include survey methodology, psychology, statistics, sociology, foreign languages, political science, demography, and cultural anthropology.

## Research Design and Consultation

RTI staff develop methodological innovations for improving data quality and minimizing costs or time needed to conduct a study. We prepare comprehensive methodology plans that document procedures to implement these steps.

Our recommendations stem from the research literature and our wealth of applied experience conducting survey research. Some examples of our areas of expertise include the following:

- Methods for maximizing response rates
- Survey design for mobile platforms such as cell phones and handheld computers
- Development and use of advance notification
- Interview-length and respondent-friendly questionnaire design
- Translation issues and cultural appropriateness
- Surveys focusing on sensitive topics such as income, sexual behaviors, or drug use
- Development of materials for low-literacy survey populations
- Recruitment of hard-to-reach populations such as physicians
- Responsive design
- Mixed-mode studies
- Surveys with special populations such as disabled persons, inmates, or recent immigrants.



## Questionnaire Design and Evaluation

We design questionnaires using best practices and the latest techniques from the survey research literature. We have skills essential for developing questionnaires to support any mode of data collection, from paper-and-pencil administration to computer-assisted interviews, including surveys for use on handheld devices and smart phones. We also develop surveys to be implemented in special situations, such as in prisons, in hospitals, or aboard ships.

We ensure that our questionnaires are of the highest quality by applying a variety of testing methods, including expert review, use of RTI's Questionnaire Appraisal System, behavior coding, various pretesting strategies, and field testing.

## Cognitive Interviewing

Cognitive interviewing methods provide important tools for examining the thought processes that affect the quality of answers provided to survey questions. We offer special expertise in developing cognitive interviewing protocols (including probes), recruiting participants, conducting interviews, and preparing reports with findings and recommendations for improving questionnaires.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups are small groups of individuals assembled to discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator. RTI's survey methodology staff have extensive experience conducting focus groups. We prepare topics for discussion, coordinate meeting logistics, identify and recruit participants, moderate discussions, take notes, analyze data, and prepare reports, all tailored to project needs. We also offer in-house training sessions for those who wish to learn more about the focus group process.

## Usability Testing

Usability testing is vital to designers of computer-assisted and Web-based survey instruments. RTI survey methodologists are experienced in assessing automated instruments from the user's perspective. Cameras and microphones record a respondent's keyboard actions, facial expressions, and comments, and a scan converter captures images from the

respondent's computer screen. Sophisticated video processing technology allows testers to synchronize these images and replay them simultaneously for review and analysis.

Researchers can directly but unobtrusively observe respondents in real time through a one-way mirror. In-depth observation allows RTI experts to recognize nonverbal cues that suggest confusion or distress associated with the survey.

## Nonresponse Analysis

RTI designs studies that measure and reduce the degree to which nonresponse may bias survey data. We develop response propensity models, which predict the likelihood of an individual, household, or other sampled unit participating in the survey. This information is useful to target cases with special survey methods or encouragement before initiating data collection efforts.

## Translation and Cross-Cultural Survey Methods

Our language methodologists have the experience and cultural background to translate, edit, and proof survey materials in Spanish, Chinese Mandarin and Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Topics include education, information technology, health, drug and alcohol use, sexual behaviors, and HIV. Survey materials include questionnaires, consent forms, lead letters, brochures, training materials, contracts, focus group scripts, and other technical documents. We can administer language proficiency protocols to field and telephone interviewers, conduct cognitive interviews or focus groups, lead interviewer trainings, and respond to incoming calls from non-English speaking respondents. We can also advise clients regarding issues related to Latin American and Asian cultures.

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### More Information

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