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Meeting of the NSF Standing Committee on the Future of NSF-Supported Social Science Surveys

January 20, 2016 Meeting: Questions for PIs and co-PIs

TOPIC 1: Balancing innovation with continuity in survey content and measurement

Discussion Leader: Jon Krosnick

1) Which do you think is more important for your project: (a) most accurately measuring opinions and behaviors during the next survey you'll conduct, or (b) being able to track trends in opinions and behaviors over time? Why? What are the implications of this issue for your survey?

2) What mechanisms do you have to solicit new ideas from the user community? How much are these used? How much of the survey content has been influenced by suggestions external to the PI team?

TOPIC 2: Applicability of recent advances in survey technologies

Discussion Leader: Michael Link

1) There has been a shift toward Internet surveys because they are inexpensive and because they sometimes offer novel opportunities for new ways to ask questions (e.g., better randomization, introduction of varied question formats, pictures, and even videos). Does your survey see a path towards an Internet mode that will ensure acceptable unit and item response, representativeness, and comparability over time?

2) What potential do you see in the use of mobile devices for data collection in your survey, either for traditional survey content or for the collection of other measurements (e.g., GPS for location) to extend and compliment what can be learned from survey questionnaires?

3) What potential do you see in the use of social media? Never before has the public had more ways of gathering information and expressing their opinions and views with relatives, friends and total strangers. Twitter in particular has become a source of such data for political and social studies, but not without its limitations and challenges. How (if at all) is social media being incorporated into your study? Are there future plans to do so? Why or why not?

TOPIC 3: Comparability issues within and across surveys

Discussion Leader: Henry Brady

1) There are examples (e.g., most notably the measurement of trust, but also other areas such as income, party identification, family structure, etc.) where the various surveys provide different results for a number of reasons including different question wordings, different levels of detail, and different samples. Is this unavoidable, or should we think about seeking greater comparability across surveys? How would we do this?

2) How important is representativeness to your survey and what are the threats to representativeness? To what extent is your design useful for making causal inferences given the need to continuously adapt your approach? Should the GSS and ANES move towards a PSID model to develop a survey that would be stronger in terms of causal inference? Should the PSID move in the opposite direction to develop a survey that would be stronger in terms of descriptive inference and representativeness? Or would it be best to think of two omnibus surveys – one with the design of the PSID that would ask about economic, social, and political matters with an emphasis upon the best design for causal inference about families and households within and across generations; and another that was a repeated cross-section that would cover some of the same subject matter but insure the best design for representativeness, continuous monitoring, and the identification of aggregate population changes?

TOPIC 4: Costs and funding sources

Discussion Leader: Dan Black

1) How many surveys have been fielded in the past five years? What were the sources of funding for these surveys? (Please answer in terms of % from NSF, % from other federal agencies, and % from other sources.)

2) Over the past five years, what was the relative share of resources devoted to each following tasks? (responses should sum to 100 percent)
    a. Instrument development;
    b. Data collection;
    c. Data preparation and management;
    d. Data dissemination;
    e. Other (please specify)

3) If it became necessary to decrease survey costs by 10%, what strategies might you employ?

TOPIC 5: Data dissemination

Discussion Leader: Pamela Herd

1) What is your general strategy for data dissemination? How have you involved experts in data dissemination in the development of this strategy?

2) What measures have been taken--or have been planned--to make data easy to access and use--especially related to data documentation. Have attempts been made to harmonize data across time?

TOPIC 6: Potential for using data from administrative records and other official sources

Discussion Leader: Darrick Hamilton

1) How much of your interview is spent collecting data that could be available from administrative sources? How soon might it be realistic to rely on these external sources for this information? What would be required before this could happen?

2) As information is now collected on nearly every activity in which people participate, researchers are finding ways of leveraging this information – often in conjunction with or adjusted using survey data. What external sources of information (outside of the questionnaire data collection) are being used or contemplated? Should the survey programs play in assembling data that can be linked by geocode and date of collection period, such as weather information (temperature, rainfall, etc.), neighborhood characteristics (SES, and other characteristics)? How will data be protected against disclosure risks? Are there synergies and efficiencies that can be gained from collecting, organizing, and disseminating such information in a centralized and longitudinal manner and shared with ANES, GSS and PSID? Is it possible or conceivable to partner with the U.S. Census depositories in existence?

TOPIC 7: Potential gains and losses from consolidated infrastructure and operations

Discussion Leader: Cynthia Thomas for Myron Gutmann

1) What opportunities exist for major surveys to collaborate or share operations and resources? What would be the advantages of doing so? Could they allow PIs to increase sample sizes or the number of questions? What expenses or other effort might be saved in doing so? Assuming flat budgets, how could those saved resources be employed?

2) What are the challenges and risks that you envision research teams would encounter if they attempted to collaborate or share operations and resources? How could one measure those challenges and risks?