

Approaches to Data Collection for NSF Non-Profit R & D Study

**For
Workshop on Measuring R & D Expenditures in
the U.S. Nonprofit Sector
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How Nonprofits to be surveyed may vary

- Some quite large with many employees; some quite small with no or few employees.
- Meaning of “research and development” clear and relevant to some, but unclear and not relevant to others.
- Most organizations can respond by web; some may be reluctant to use this mode.
- Convincing some to respond may take significant effort.
- One person may be able to complete and send the response; in others multiple people may need to be involved.

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How to increase chances of obtaining a survey response

- 1 Make an initial contact with organizations, especially larger ones for finding out the name and contact information for the person to whom request should be sent.
 - Purpose is to make sure multiple contacts get to the right person.
- 2 Obtain contact information for telephone, email and postal delivery.
 - Purpose is for use in building more effective implementation system, explained below

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How to increase chances of obtaining a survey response (2)

- 3 Use multiple contacts by different modes in predetermined sequence to encourage contacts.
- 4 May want to get statement(s) of support from non-profit sector for possible use in communications.
- 5 Use initial postal contact with request to respond by web followed by email to “make responding easier for you.”
 - This is known as email augmentation, for example:

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An example of changing a design to make data collection more effective

- We were doing a study for the National Science Foundation on the extent to which students were writing interdisciplinary dissertations in 2013.
- We could have done it by using only email contact, only mail contact or both. We expected:
 - Email only contact to get a web response would have put us in the 20-25% response range.
 - Mail only contact to get a web response would have put us in the 35% response range.
 - Mail only contact to get a paper response would have put us in the 35-45% range.
- Instead we designed a system to “push responses to the web” but also followed up with mail, while trying to build synergy across postal/email contacts.

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Contact procedures for a 2013 Survey of Graduate Students Working on Dissertations

- Day 1- Postal request to respond over the Internet with \$2 token incentive
- Day 4- Email Augmentation 3 days later
- Day 8- Another Email follow-up
- Day 16- Postal Follow-up with mail questionnaire (used this in anticipation of coverage problems from email alone)
- Day 21- Final Email-augmentation

(Millar, Morgan. July 2013. Determining Whether Research is Interdisciplinary: An Analysis of New Indicators. Technical Report #13-049. The Washington State University Social and Economic Sciences Research Center: Pullman)

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The 12 page paper questionnaire

Understanding the Doctoral Experience at WSU

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. This study will help us better understand the process students go through during the final stages of their doctoral education. As doctoral training in the United States continues to evolve, it is important that we learn more about students' perspectives and identify any obstacles that may stand in the way of successfully completing one's dissertation.

Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Trish Allen, the study director, by email at ball@wsu.edu or by phone at (509) 335-1722.

Q1. In what year did you officially complete your preliminary examinations?

Q2. Have you already selected a specific dissertation topic?

No → Skip to Q21 on page 5

Yes

Q3. If yes, which of the following best describes your current status in the dissertation process?

Have not yet begun any research or writing for your dissertation → Skip to Q21 on page 5

Working on a dissertation proposal

Have completed a dissertation proposal

Am in the early stages of researching for your dissertation

Am about halfway completed with the researching for your dissertation

Am nearly completed with the researching for your dissertation

Have fully completed your dissertation

Q4a. Please write the name of the primary field of your dissertation research.

Now, choose the code from the list on pages 10-11 that best describes the primary field of your dissertation research.

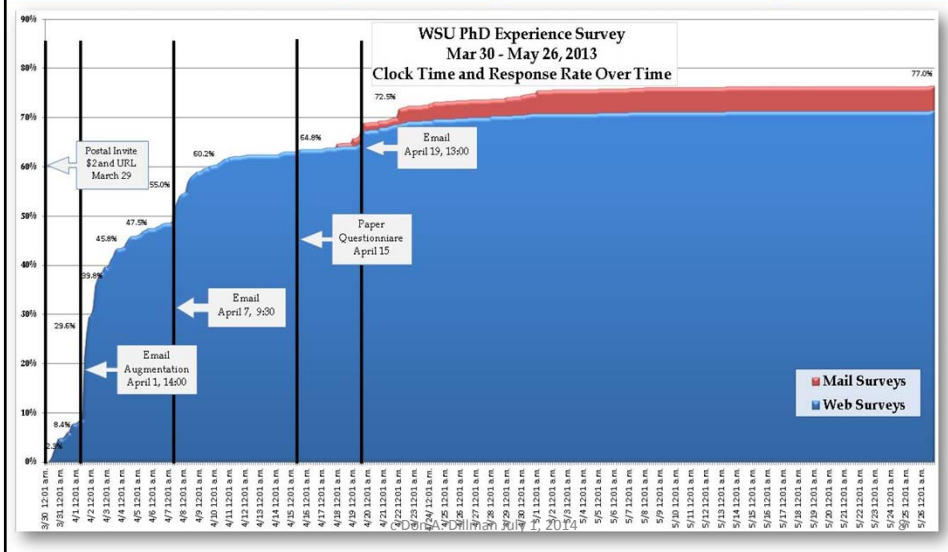
None of above, feel

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Email Augmentation of postal letter+\$2 pushed response rates up 21 percentage points in 10 hours, and 40 points in five days!



Elaboration

- We achieved synergy from placing postal/email contacts in support of each other. (Postal contact had incentive; email had message, “Here’s a electronic link to make responding easier”)
- It’s likely that some people don’t open emails; some don’t open mail. “Pairing” them increased the likelihood of the other being read and acted upon.
- Use of both also improves coverage (wrong email or postal addresses).
- The connection between the two gave us speed as well as higher response rate, 77%.
- Response rate increased an additional 12 percentage points after postal questionnaire sent; ½ responded by paper and ½ by web, but we don’t know whether it achieved lower non-response error .

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How to increase chances of obtaining a survey response (3)

- 6 Do not offer a choice of response mode unless you make it easy to respond by both modes. Doing so lowers response rates.
It is okay to push respondents to one mode initially; save alternative mode (postal) until late in the process as a means of “improving” response.

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How to increase chances of obtaining a survey response (4)

- 7 Do not rely only on email contact. Mail needs to be used to legitimize the study (some nonprofits will not know who NSF is; email only surveys get much lower response than when other contact modes are used to amplify effectiveness of email contacts).
- 8 Use of postal mode response option is effective when no web response has been achieved, but not vice versa.

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Non response follow-up

- Nonresponse is most likely to occur if organization does not undertake R & D or understand what it is.
- A follow-up phone call might be made that includes the “screener” items to see if the organization is eligible.
- If eligible, then additional contacts by email (and/or mail) can be made.

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What the complete implementation process might look like

- An initial contact by telephone to obtain contact information.
- An initial postal letter that explains and legitimates request for R & D information.
- A quick email follow-up to make it easier for person to respond.
- Another postal letter requesting a response.
- Another email augmentation
- Telephone calls for nonresponse follow-up.
- Additional Email and/or postal contacts.

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The Survey Science that undergirds this kind of implementation protocol

- Different modes of contact are used to increase likelihood of organizations becoming aware of the survey request, and defining it as important.
- Offering multiple response modes will improve response by providing another way of attracting attention to the survey.
- Getting people to respond by a particular mode requires making it easier (an electronic link), but getting people to use that link requires first defining the request as important.

{For elaboration, see Dillman, Smyth, and Christian, 2014 (August) Internet, Phone, Mail and Mixed-Mode Surveys; The Tailored Design Method, 4th edition. John Wiley Co., Hoboken, NJ}

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Final Comment

- We are in an era of tailored design- different connection between contact modes and response mode for different populations and data collection situations.
- The science of data collection is moving forward rapidly, and in general it's not sufficient to simply pick-up procedures from other studies and use them in the same way as done in the past.
- We need to think forward instead of just doing what we did in the past.

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Thank you!

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