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Generating Higher Response Rates for User-based Evaluation Instruments in Archives and Special Collections

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Archival Metrics Toolkits

- Developed to meet the needs of academic archivists in evaluating their services to specific user groups:
  - Researcher
  - Archival Website
  - Online Finding Aids
  - Student Researcher
  - Teaching Support

Survey Research

- A **survey** is a method of gathering information from a sample of individuals. This **sample** is a fraction of the population being studied.
- The **survey** is comprised of the questions asked, the methodology used, and the data collected.

Questionnaires & Interviews

- A **questionnaire** is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents.
- Questionnaires can be delivered either remotely (mailed/emailed) or in person (**interviews** or telephone interviews).
- Strengths and weaknesses of each delivery type.

Archival Metric Toolkits

- Researcher Questionnaire
- Administering the Researcher Survey
- Preparing your data for analysis
- Excel spreadsheet pre-formatted for data from the Researcher Questionnaire
- Pre-coded Researcher questionnaire
- SPSS file pre-formatted for data from the Researcher Questionnaire
- Sample Researcher Report

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Sources of Measurement Error

- Questionnaire
- Respondent
- Mode of Data Collection
  - Interview Survey
  - Self Completion Survey

Dangers of Low Response Rates

- Lack of representativeness and coverage of population.
  - Demographic questions are important.
  - More diverse the population; the larger the sample must be.
- Bias.
- Very little data.

Questionnaire Testing

- We tested each questionnaire thoroughly at different college and university archives or special collections in two phases.
- We have data from each of these tests.
  - Information about how to best build and administer the instruments.
  - User-based evaluation data – interesting but secondary to learning how to construct and administer the surveys.

Phase I Testing

- Early pilot testing
  - At least 10 individuals tested each instrument
  - We interviewed several of these respondents about the questionnaire and administration issues (e.g., length, paper versus online).
  - Focus groups critiqued the tools.

Phase II Testing

- Once we thought the questionnaires were stable, we tested administration at one site.
- This was followed by more extensive testing of the questionnaires at multiple sites .

Tested Administration Procedures

- Done sequentially in order to further refine the questionnaires and the administration procedures.
- After each test we analyzed the responses and incorporated changes to address any inconsistencies in the data which we attributed to problems in an instrument.
- Overall we tested the instruments in 9 separate repositories.

Administration Procedures

- These procedures included:
  - the format of the questionnaire (online or paper),
  - targeting different populations for the survey, and
  - generating a sufficient sample from that population.

Questionnaires	# of Tests	Type	Recruitment/ Distribution	Response Rate
Researcher	5	Paper-based	Reference archivist invited onsite users	10%-88%
Teaching Support	2	Web-based	Email invitation from archivists	84%
Students	2	Paper	Instructors invited students to participate in class	78%-96%
Website	2	Web-based	• Pop-up • Archivists emailed previous visitors and remote reference requestors	Less than 1%-56%
Online Finding Aids	4	Web-based	Archivists emailed previous visitors and remote reference requestors	38%-70%

Student & Teaching Support

- Poor response from students when questionnaire was originally online.
- We received high response rates (76%-96%) for the Student Questionnaire when distributed on paper in class.
- 84% response rate for Teaching Support Questionnaire.
- Timing was important.
  - End of term
  - Advanced notice to instructors.

Researcher Survey

Site	Date	Sample	# Resp.	Response Rate
B	October 2007	On-site researchers	35	46.7%
C	December 2007	On-site researchers	45	88.0%
D	January 2008	On-site researchers	23	10.0%
G	October 2007	On-site researchers	40	37.2%
I	November 2007	On-site researchers	34	20.2%

Researcher Survey

- Paper format.
- Interviewees liked this best.
- Test subjects said they preferred paper-based instruments administered at the end of their visit.
- Busy days might yield most respondents, but archivists had the least time to administer questionnaire on these days.
- Repository restrictions on paper.
- Cover letter helped with instructions.

Web-Based Administration

- Website and Finding Aids Questionnaires.
- Research has shown that the response rates for pop-up invitations and static links on the front page of a repository websites are low.
  - Groves, R.M., Fowler, F.J, Jr., Couper, M.P, Lepkowski, J.M., Singer, E., and Tourangeau, R. 2004. *Survey Methodology*. Hoboken, NJ, Wiley-Interscience.
- Only nine responses (for a response rate of .36%) at the one archives -and special collections where we tried this method.

Email Delivered Questionnaires

- An email invitation to recent researchers in the reading room,
- A rolling email invitation to recent email reference requestors, and
- An email invitation to retrospective email reference requestors.
  - Retrospective email requestors at Rep. A & D, some going back a year in time.
  - At Rep. B, C, & E we invited 50 individuals who had recently contacted the reference archivist for remote reference assistance to participate.

Email Requests

- This generated better response rates than a static pop-up questionnaire, but it took the archives a substantial amount of time to generate the subjects for testing.
- Administrated through SurveyMonkey, using the response monitoring function to facilitate the analysis of response rates.
- Email invitations sent to potential respondents, but the email contained the signature of, and appeared to come from the repository's reference archivist.

Length of Time Necessary to Generate Rolling Email Reference Requestor Samples

Archives	Survey	Number of email reference requests	Days for accumulation
B	Finding Aids	52	81
C	Finding Aids	36	65
E	Website	50	64

Finding Aids Survey

Site	Date	Sample	# Resp.	Response Rate
A	November 2007	Email reference requestors	44	43.0%
B	October 2007	On-site researchers	24	47.0%
C	November 2007	Email reference requestors	25	70.0%
D	January 2008	Email reference requestors	63	38.0%

Distribution Method	Total Sent	Invitation			Total Responses
		1st Reminder (#/%)	2nd Reminder (#/%)	3rd Reminder (#/%)	
A (Email Reference Retrospective)	102	16 (16%)	21 (21%)	7 (7%)	44 (43%)
B (In-house Researchers Retrospective)	51	14 (27%)	7 (14%)	3 (6%)	24 (47%)
B (Email Reference Prospective)	52	9 (17%)	11 (21%)	4 (8%)	24 (46%)
C (Email Reference Prospective)	36	11 (31%)	11 (31%)	3 (8%)	25 (70%)
D (Email Reference Retrospective)	16	24 (15%)	23 (14%)	17 (11%)	64 (40%)

Lessons Learned

- More vested users were more likely to respond – faculty, students, those who have asked for service.
- People forget over time so ask soon after use.
- Paper is best when you have the person in the repository.
- Generating good response rates can take time.