

## Tip Sheet 6

### How can we do a simple, quick, low cost but robust survey of an issue?

#### Planning the survey:

Can you survey this population online using [SurveyMonkey](#) or a similar low/no cost mechanism? Find out the uses and limitations of free online survey tools [here](#).

**Do you know the real demographics of the population you want to survey?** (e.g. the demographics of “people with HIV under 25” or “over 50” will differ from “all people with HIV”) You will want to broadly match your responses to that – if 25% of your population are migrants but you have 1% of your responses from them, it won't be robust.

#### Can you organise an advisory panel to give you support?

This might include social researchers, clinicians and anyone whose advice you could use, alongside well-connected/well-respected people from your key demographic groups who can help distribute it.

#### Do you have access to a large mailing list or key social media influencers?

Most NGOs have mailing lists; they might be willing to circulate a survey on your behalf. Whose tweets are most read by people in your target group and will they tweet a link for you?

#### Is there data from another country, or for the general population/another appropriate control group, which could inform your questionnaire and allow you to make useful comparisons?

Comparative data can be very helpful in establishing whether there is an issue or problem specific to your group of people, and whether it is similar elsewhere.

#### Have you piloted your questionnaire with a range of people to make sure it is clear, concise and won't get unhelpful/unusable responses?

Language needs to be clear and jargon-free while questions need to be unambiguous and easily understood.

**Have you asked the right questions to eliminate people outside your catchment group?** (e.g. are you living with HIV? - some people will fill in any survey they find even if not meant for them) There are many different ways of categorising things like age or employment – have you picked the most helpful categories for your findings?

#### Have you checked your questions with a friendly researcher?

You need to ensure good practice and check ethics considerations (see box at end) and confidentiality procedures.

#### Have you timed how long the questions take, and have you made as many of them as you can quantifiable (i.e. tick box responses) rather than qualitative (text boxes allowing narrative/wordy responses)?

Tick box responses will give you easy statistics, whereas narrative answers can be harder to categorise – though they may give you good quotes material for any report.

#### Have you asked the most important questions early on?

People sometimes give up part way through a survey.

Survey Monkey's website has a lot of useful tip sheets about the questions above and many other issues. If you are thinking of doing an online survey, they are useful reading.

#### **Doing the survey:**

##### **Can you track the responses and target under-represented groups?**

You will need to ensure that the final cohort broadly matches the population you want to survey (see previous page)

##### **Can you recruit a statistics or social studies research student?**

They can help compile and interpret the responses as well as construct a good questionnaire - and this can often be done as part of their studies.

##### **Can you offer a “raffle prize” (free prize draw)?**

It is expensive to pay every respondent but often people will be incentivised by telling them that every finished survey will be entered into a prize draw for a sum of money (e.g. 100 Euros) or a new phone or iPad. An email contact for this can also be used to inform the respondents of your findings afterwards.

##### **Can you circulate the survey through multiple free channels and make paper or e-posters for appropriate venues with a link to the survey?**

These could include HIV services, social media, target population media (e.g. gay press), patient and self-help groups?

##### **Can you involve any peer recruiters and give them some brief training in helping people fill in paper forms?**

This is particularly helpful with populations with low levels of access to the internet, or greater reluctance to come forward without support. If you do this, you'll also need a volunteer to input the data from the paper forms.

#### **Using the survey:**

##### **Can you write a simple one-page “executive summary” of key findings as well as a longer report giving all the findings that are useful?**

Most people are too busy to read a long document; make it easy for them to understand your key findings and why they are important.

##### **Can you make sure the people who participated who have left their contact details get access to these reports?**

They may be your best ambassadors in spreading the findings.

**Do you have the resources and time to interview a small number of anonymised respondents?** Interviewing some people with typical experiences or those that illustrate your key findings will help people connect with the issues and may also help with media coverage of the subject.

##### **Can you write a media advisory/press release about the findings in an interesting but brief way?**

A short, easy language release with a link to the key findings is the best way to get coverage or further interest. Don't use jargon or more than a couple of paragraphs.

**Are the findings appropriate for presentation at a scientific or social issues conference?**

A simple powerpoint presentation can be put online and used by anyone at local meetings.

**Can you get a meeting with the most important audience for the data's use?**

These may be key civil servants, a commissioning/purchasing group, strategic planners.

**Can you make the findings accessible online for other countries or groups to learn from or copy?**

AIDS Action Europe has a clearing house for community research and information, for example.

**Ethical considerations:** any project should consider the ethical implications of a piece of research, including surveys. You may require formal “ethics committee” approval to be able to access and interview clinic patients or get approval from a supervisory body. Even if not, you should always consider issues of confidentiality, understanding, emotional impact, access to support and others. An internet search for “ethics issues in research” will give you lots of information including recommendations for particular types of research such as online.

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