Washington State
Liquor and Cannabis Board

Standard Operating Procedures

Surveys

August 2024

LCB Research Program

The Research Program at the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) is a non-partisan, transparent resource focused on public health and safety outcomes related to the products, policy, and regulation of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and vapor products.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to communicate the standard operating procedures related to the development and process of surveys within the LCB Research Program.

Contact

For more information about the Research Program and its work, please visit: lcb.wa.gov/research_program.

For specific questions, please email the Research Program at lcbresearch@lcb.wa.gov.

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What are surveys?
Surveys are a research tool used to systematically collect information from a sample of people with the goal of learning something about them or making inferences about a larger population. When done effectively, surveys can be a helpful and cost-effective method to provide meaningful insights.

Surveys can be used for many purposes and are typically used to collect quantitative data that can be analyzed with statistics. Two examples of quantitative data that can be collected with surveys include (1) understanding the prevalence of substance use in Washington or (2) gathering feedback on general perceptions and beliefs about proposed or existing policies. While survey questions are most often quantitative, they can also include open-ended questions to collect additional, more in-depth information. However, it is best to limit these types of questions because they require more time and effort on the part of the respondent, which can lead them to discontinue the survey.

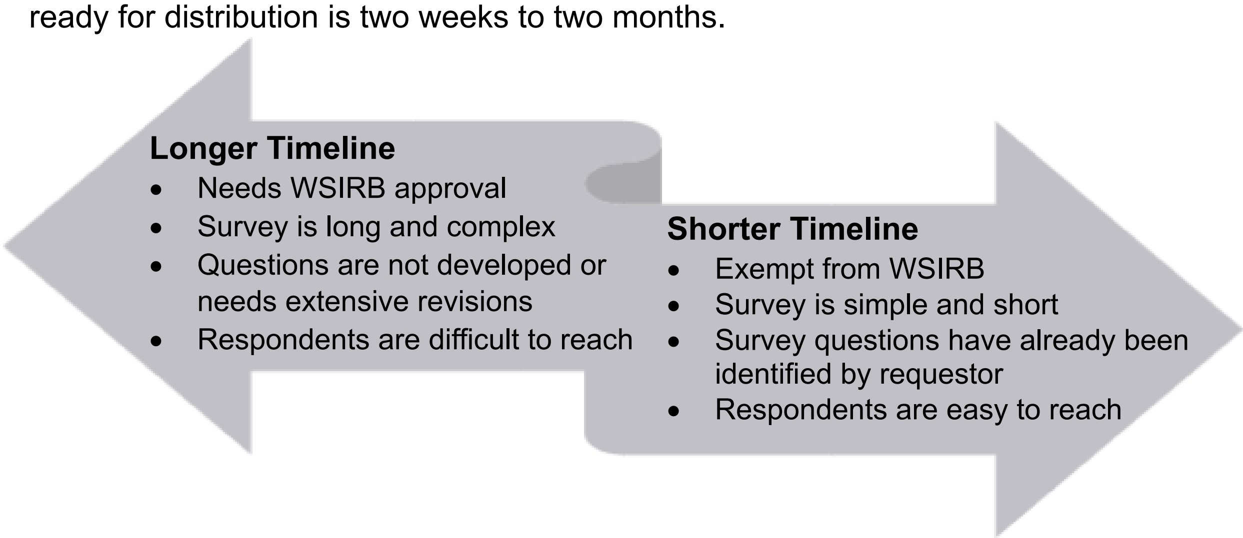
When should surveys be used?
As with any research method, there are strengths and limitations to using surveys. Surveys are not ideal for every situation. In general, if you have a limited understanding about the group or individuals you are interested in gathering in-depth perspectives on a specific topic, qualitative approaches such as interviews, focus groups (group interviews), or listening sessions might be more useful for answering your question.

When to use a survey	When ***not*** to use a survey
Many of your questions begin with "what", "how many", "how often", "when", or "to what extent"	You are interested in learning about nuanced contexts, themes, and new ideas
You want to measure general behaviors, attitudes, or trends over time	You are looking to gather in-depth personal accounts or thought processes
There is a large audience, and it is important to reach as many people as possible	There are a few key stakeholders
Everyone can be asked a pre-determined set of questions	You only care about in-depth perspectives on a topic, or pre-determined questions would not provide you with the level of detail needed
Questions can be answered in a short amount of time (e.g., about 10 minutes or less)	There are many questions and/or the questions will take a substantial amount of time to answer
You are planning to use results to inform next steps and future directions	Decisions have already been made and information will not inform future decisions

How does the Research Program decide when to create a survey?
There are several factors the Research Program considers when deciding whether a survey should be developed. While survey ideas are welcome from anyone, requests that come from LCB leadership are prioritized. The Research Program additionally monitors what surveys may be needed to collect timely information on public safety and health related to the products, policy, and regulation of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and vapor products. Another important consideration is survey fatigue – if people receive too many survey requests, they will be less likely to respond. As described above, surveys might not be appropriate in every situation and the Research Program will weigh whether there is a more appropriate or effective way to gather specific information.

What is required to develop an effective survey?
Effective survey design requires care and finesse. Survey questions, response options, survey flow, overall look and feel, and the coding of each question for data analysis all play a crucial part in the success of a survey. For example, it is important to ensure all questions are direct, easy to understand, and neutral (i.e., do not influence how people may respond). It is also critical to provide respondents with a full range of response options, but that range cannot be so broad that it is overwhelming. The look of the survey and the order of questions can also affect the overall quality of responses and completion rates. Determining why each question is being asked and how it will be used in the future will also impact how questions are coded for later analysis.

How long does it take to develop a survey?
The length of time it takes to develop a survey depends on several factors. Such factors include the length and complexity of the survey, whether the survey needs approval through the Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB), the extent questions from the requestor need to be revised to develop questions that provide meaningful insights, other projects/priorities that the Research Program is currently involved in, the urgency for the requested survey, and the review/approval process. In general, the estimated time to create a survey from initial question development to a final survey ready for distribution is two weeks to two months.



How do surveys get responses?
This is an often-overlooked part of the survey process even though it is one of the most important. Every survey needs a recruitment plan, which is a strategy for making the survey as available as possible to your target audience to maximize response rates. Because every survey has different groups of people that need to be reached, recruitment methods will be different. For example, at LCB some surveys are only sent via GovDelivery message to specific types of license holders. Other surveys may be posted on the LCB website, sent out via external list-servs, shared on social media, or advertised with printed flyers.

Different recruitment methods determine who will respond to the survey, which can also create bias in the responses you receive. As such, it is important to be careful and varied in your approach to solicit responses. The length of time it takes to get the number of responses needed can also vary. In general, the response rate, and thereby the quality of results, increases when the survey is available for an extended period (e.g., two weeks or more) and the recruitment method is active and diverse. Reminders are also helpful throughout the survey response period.

How long does it take to get preliminary results after a survey is complete?
As with the other steps for developing a survey, the length of time it takes to get responses can vary. After a predetermined amount of time or number of responses is reached, the Research Program will close the survey and download results. Responses will then be reviewed, and data will be cleaned. Cleaning data means preparing it for analysis. This can be the most time-consuming step. Cleaning data may include data quality checks, removing duplicates, checking for bots or invalid responses, handling incomplete responses, and reformatting variables.

A codebook may also be made to transparently describe the content and structure of each question, response options, and respective code. The next step is analysis. Typically, the first report will provide results on descriptive data. Depending on the survey length, need for comprehensive results, urgency of the request, and other projects/priorities that the Research Program is involved in, this process can take from one week to a few months.

What is the process for developing a survey and reporting results?
For LCB's Research Team, there are 20 basic steps for developing a survey and sharing results. Depending on the nature of the request, the following steps are subject to change:

Step 1. A survey is requested by an LCB team or is determined by the Research Program.

Step 2. A Research Program team member will review the request and meet with the requestor(s) to discuss:

(1) Whether a survey is the best way to collect the necessary information;
(2) The overall purpose or goal(s) of the survey;

(3) Example questions provided by the requestor(s);
(4) The target audience and how to reach respondents (i.e., the recruitment plan);
(5) Internal subject matter expert(s) on the topic who will be consulted throughout survey development;
(6) Expectations about the timeline to complete the request;
(7) Level of detail needed in initial report; and
(8) Ideally, an initial draft of the survey will be developed during this meeting.

Step 3. The initial draft of the survey will be reviewed by Research Program team members and the internal subject matter expert(s) identified in *Step 2* for suggested revisions and feedback.

Step 4. The Research Program will determine if the survey needs to be approved by the Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB). Depending on the project, a submission to the WSIRB may be necessary to receive an exempt determination or a research project approval. Plan for more time if a WSIRB approval is needed.

Step 5. A Research Program team member will then upload the revised survey to Qualtrics, our survey management platform. This includes:
(1) Importing the drafted questions;
(2) Formatting the survey to align with LCB branding and style (e.g., including LCB logo on all pages, changing font of all text to Arial);
(3) Incorporating response requirements, validation, display and skip logic to questions as appropriate; and
(4) Coding response options and naming export variables to assist with later data cleaning and analysis.

Step 6. Once the survey draft has been uploaded to Qualtrics, a link will be shared with Research Program team members, internal subject matter experts, and requestors to review the survey as it will appear to respondents in Qualtrics.

Step 7. A final meeting will be held with the requestor for final feedback, suggested edits, and approval.

Step 8. The survey will be given to the target audience using the recruitment plan identified in *Step 2*. During this time, the Research Program will monitor response rates and work to broaden survey reach.

Step 9. When the survey closes, the Research Program team members will begin reviewing responses and cleaning the data. The time to complete this step depends on the length and complexity of the survey.

Step 10. Responses will be summarized with descriptive statistics. If appropriate, analyses will be done using appropriate statistical approaches. Sensitivity analyses may also be conducted to determine the extent to which findings remain stable. Research

Program team members will be consulted throughout this process to ensure appropriate statistics are being conducted.

Step 11. Descriptive statistics will then be compiled into a draft preliminary report. The preliminary report will typically only include aggregated data (e.g., data that is anonymous and de-identified) and descriptive information. The goal of this report is to provide preliminary information about survey findings to the requestor for their use. Components of preliminary findings may include:
(1) Key Takeaways;
(2) Brief Introduction;
(3) Brief Methods;
(4) Results;
(5) Figures and Tables; and
(6) Comprehensive responses to any open-ended questions.

Step 12. The draft preliminary report will be reviewed by the Research Manager and sent to the requestor(s).

Step 13. The Research Program will meet with the requestor to determine whether additional analyses are needed to meet the goals of the request.

Step 14. Once the most critical information has been given to the requestor, and unless otherwise discussed, the Research Program will then finalize results and may develop a more comprehensive survey report. The more comprehensive report may include:
(1) More thorough methods section;
(2) Non-technical statistical analytic approach;
(3) Technical statistical analytic approach (if appropriate);
(4) Additional analyses to provide further insights;
(5) Open-ended questions summarized as themes;
(6) Conclusions;
(7) Limitations; and
(8) Future directions.

Step 15. The draft survey report will be reviewed by all Research Program team members and undergo revisions and feedback.

Step 16. Once approved by the Research Manager, the draft survey report will be sent to the Director of Policy and External Affairs for further revisions and approval.

Step 17. The approved draft survey report will then be shared to requestors for review and feedback. The Research Program will openly discuss any concerns expressed, remain responsive to feedback, and ensure findings remain transparent.

Step 18. The report will then be finalized with the Communications team to ensure formatting is standardized and aligns with LCB branding.

Step 19. The report will then be sent to the Agency Director. Depending on the nature of the survey, the finalized report may be sent to all LCB employees to notify all teams and promote transparency.

Step 20. Unless otherwise discussed, the final survey report will be uploaded to the Research Program public webpage with the appropriate Consumer Information Brochure Number (CIB) and shared with the Board. Additional presentations may be made to other internal and/or external project stakeholders.

Will the Research Program do anything else with the findings?
The Research Program values sharing research using methods such as conference presentations and peer-reviewed manuscripts. However, we also recognize some findings may not be appropriate to proactively share in these settings. We also know there are complexities related to ethical standards of approved WSIRB studies, as well as public records policies for Washington state government agencies. We are happy to discuss these specific details for each research project.