

# IRDS SURVEY GUIDELINES

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## GUIDELINES

The Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS) directs institutional efforts for collecting, managing, and analyzing survey research related to key university stakeholders including students, faculty, and staff. These efforts are conducted at an enterprise level, viewing the university population holistically on behalf of the Office of the Provost.

### Populations and Scope of Work

IRDS conducts survey research on behalf of the institution. Surveys conducted by IRDS are intended to be comprehensive analyses of full institutional populations. While feedback on items such as course evaluations and targeted program surveys are important, these are best left for individual units. IRDS may be consulted for assistance on school level initiatives as tied to the strategic priorities of the institution. Survey software licenses and rosters managed by IRDS will not be shared with school or program units unless otherwise authorized. However, in an effort to assist with the survey research being done across campus, IRDS is welcome to consulting with all levels of those interested in conducting survey research. In particular, we can assist with helping to identify populations, instruments, and timelines that are best for the institution and project. While IRDS cannot always conduct or analyze the survey results, we are more than happy to help during survey design.

### Survey Sponsorship

When conducting surveys, IRDS will always designate the survey sponsor transparently, indicated that this survey is being conducted by IRDS on behalf of a sponsored party. IRDS does not conduct surveys independently but serves as a neutral party conducting research on behalf of institutional stakeholders. When surveys are identified as affecting multiple offices or units across campus, IRDS will help to facilitate conversations among key stakeholders to avoid duplication of efforts and encourage data transparency.

IRDS may assist sponsors in various aspects of survey research, as requested. This assistance may include designing survey instruments, setting up survey collection using specialized software, administering data collection, and analyzing results.

In instances where third-party survey designers are hired as consultants or as administrators, IRDS will provide them with rosters and contact information in a format that protects the privacy of the respondents according to the agreed upon design.

### Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Record Level Data

All surveys administered by IRDS will designate how the data will be used. Surveys listed as confidential will include unique identifiers that may be matched to other administrative records across campus including data found in the student information system, HR system, and others. Surveys indicating anonymity will not include any identifying information and will have no mechanism for including additional data. For all surveys, a disclaimer will be included specifying that any response provided to open-ended questions will be given back to the survey sponsor as-is with no redaction. This warning includes a suggestion to avoid including identifiable information in these free-response questions.

# IRDS SURVEY GUIDELINES (CONT.)

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In addition to confidentiality and anonymity, any survey sponsor requesting unit record responses will need to disclose this designation to respondents in the survey instructions. Unless otherwise specified and clearly included on the survey, IRDS will only provide aggregated results to the sponsor. Unit record data will not be shared unless specified ahead of time to the respondents.

Where in question, standard research protocol as specified by the institutional review board (IRB) and collaborative institutional training initiative (CITI) on human subjects research will be applied to surveys. While most of these surveys are for administrative purposes and not considered traditional research, the same principles of ethical conduct will apply.

## Survey Development

Typical survey design takes approximately one month to develop and test before launch. The design process proceeds:

- Meet with the client to review scope and intent (Varies based on scheduling)
- Revise or Design survey instrument – Questions, scales, and responses (2 weeks depending on the size of the survey)
- Review and revise instrument (1 week depending on the number of stakeholder)
- Load and test instrument in survey software (1 week depending on complexity of skip logic)

Where necessary, additional time may be required for executive review and sponsorship.

When designing survey instruments, best practices outline that the length and breadth of the instrument is of utmost importance. Surveys should be designed as efficiently as possible in order to maximize survey responsiveness and completion rates. More specifically, questions should directly address the stated intent of the survey to avoid becoming prohibitively lengthy or cumbersome for the respondent. Questions not directly related to the topic or population of interest may best be included as a supplement or separate survey.

## Data Collection

As the institutional representative for survey research, IRDS must adopt procedures that will encourage survey success. In particular, this requires that response rates are maximized for every survey and that students, faculty, and staff are not overwhelmed with survey requests to produce survey fatigue. For these reasons, IRDS has outlined two guidelines for the timing of surveys.

First, IRDS will publicly post a survey research calendar listing all scheduled surveys for the semester with associated topics and populations. Where possible, we encourage others conducting research on campus to contribute to this calendar and include their scheduled surveys. This calendar is intended to transparently provide information to students, faculty, and staff on campus about current or upcoming surveys they may receive. This transparency provides a better understanding of the survey research being conducted on campus, topics of interest, and provides legitimacy of the request to respondents when receiving notification to participate.

## IRDS SURVEY GUIDELINES (CONT.)

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Second, IRDS must manage the requests to conduct surveys to ensure there is not significant overlap of instruments at the same time. This approach ensures each survey has the best opportunity to maximize response rates. To facilitate this process, survey requests must be submitted to IRDS at the degree application deadline for the term prior to data collection. For example, a survey intended for distribution in Fall 2019 would need to be submitted to IRDS by July 5, 2019 – the official degree application deadline for Summer 2019 as listed on the Emory University Academic Calendar. After each deadline, a survey research committee will review all surveys that have been submitted for the upcoming term and schedule them accordingly throughout the semester based on relevance, topic of interest, and population.

### **Analysis**

Analysis of survey results can take many weeks to complete based on the complexity of the data and the requested deliverable. Executive summaries and descriptive statistics may only take two weeks while interactive dashboards or advanced statistical inference may take six weeks or more. If additional data is merged into the survey results, the analyses may take even longer. For recurring surveys, templates can be developed to pre-populate results and update the findings. Designing the templates and dashboards may take a longer time investment to set up, but they pay dividends if results are replicated multiple times over terms or years.

### **Exceptions to these Guidelines**

Instances may arise where immediate feedback from institutional stakeholders is necessary to facilitate decision making. In these cases of urgency, typical application deadlines and timelines may be waived in order for data collection and analysis to be expedited.

Effective Date: April 26, 2019