**New Jersey Institute of Technology University Policies and Procedures**

**Policy on Surveys Conducted at NJIT**

**Revised: July 2024**

**Policy Statement**

The purpose of this policy is to govern the administration of surveys within the university community. Its framework is designed to support effective surveying, streamline survey timelines, uphold the protection of human subjects, and elevate the overall quality and efficiency of campus-wide surveys. This policy applies to all surveys conducted by internal and external organizations using survey platforms like SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, Sogolytics, Google Form, etc.

It is essential to emphasize that surveys depend on the cooperation and goodwill of respondents. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) partners with members of the university community who wish to conduct surveys to thoughtfully review proposed survey questions to ensure each question’s relevance and significance, while respecting the value of respondents' time.

**Approval Process**

Before initiating a survey involving a population exceeding 100 individuals, including student class projects, please write to njitsurvey@njit.edu to obtain approval. The OIE team will contact the appropriate senior staff member overseeing the relevant area(s) for the respective survey population and survey questions of interest.

* For Students: VP for Student Affairs & Dean of Students
* For Postdocs: Senior Vice Provost for Research
* For Faculty: President of the Faculty Senate or the Provost
* For Staff: Vice President for Human Resources
* For Alumni: Vice President for Development and Alumni

The OIE team will then meet with the requestor to discuss the survey, to the extent that resources allow and that is warranted by the survey. Once approved, the survey will be added to the survey administration schedule posted at <https://www.njit.edu/oie/survey-schedule>.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**

If the survey is conducted for NJIT administrative purposes, approval by the NJIT IRB is not required. However, IRB approval or an exemption is required for all other surveys. If approval is obtained from both the IRB and through the approval process detailed above, the survey will be added to the survey administration schedule posted at <https://www.njit.edu/oie/survey-schedule>.

**Scheduling**

OIE oversees the NJIT Survey Timetable <https://www.njit.edu/oie/survey-schedule> , which lists only official surveys, to optimize the survey process, ensuring respondents are not over-surveyed and maximizing response rates across all surveys. It is important to adhere to the scheduled administration period to prevent conflicts with other surveys.

**Incentives**

Survey incentives should be positive. Negative consequences for non-respondents are prohibited except in very rare administrative surveys. Additionally, incentives should not be directly relevant to the survey topic to avoid potential response bias. Researchers should seek guidance from OIE or consult legal counsel to ensure compliance with federal laws and regulations governing survey incentives for NJIT students and employees.

**Protecting Confidentiality**

NJIT survey reporting conforms to the best practices for protecting respondent confidentiality established by universities and research institutions with strong survey methodology and statistics programs. For details about reporting survey data, please see the <https://www.njit.edu/oie/survey-research>

**Guidelines for Designing Effective Surveys**

**Defining the Population Profile**

The sampling frame, or population profile, for the survey must be clearly defined and must be the appropriate population for addressing the research questions. The number of responses sought should not be more than required to answer the research questions. In some cases, this will mean the entire population of NJIT students or staff. In many cases, however, a portion of the full population should suffice. We limit the distribution to the necessary population out of respect for respondents' time. If it is not necessary to have a large number of responses to achieve the desired margin of error, it is not appropriate to survey the entire NJIT community.

**Identifying Research Questions**

The research objectives to be addressed in the survey should be clearly defined and summarized. In many cases, specific questions need not be provided but it is important to have a summary of the research objectives available when requesting permission and scheduling. Stakeholders are advised to consult with the OIE office to explore alternative data sources for the research objectives before proceeding with permission and scheduling.

**Designing the Survey**

When designing a survey, defining the research questions the survey aims to answer is essential. A concise and specific purpose ensures effectiveness and prevents surveys from becoming overly lengthy or challenging to analyze. Following this, developing a meaningful survey entails identifying key theoretical constructs in a process known as "conceptualization." Define the specific aspects of the phenomenon or topic of interest to study, with each construct representing a fundamental idea or concept to explore. Next, "operationalization" transforms these abstract concepts into measurable indicators by developing survey items or questions that accurately capture their essence. This systematic approach ensures that survey items effectively measure theoretical concepts, aligning the survey's objectives with its questions and yielding valid and reliable data for meaningful insights.

Once the target question or topic is identified, review existing information to determine if it can answer the question using data collected by another office or from existing surveys. Additionally, consider alternative research methods such as focus groups for certain contexts where surveys may not be the most suitable approach. Contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) for a survey design consultation, where OIE staff can discuss using existing data to answer your question or provide feedback on survey items. OIE also welcomes specific requests for information if your research question could be addressed by analyzing existing survey or university data, such as by gender, race/ethnicity, college, cohort, etc.

Regardless of your choice, OIE is happy to help you develop, design and administer surveys. For examples of past survey questionnaires and reports, please visit <https://www.njit.edu/oie/survey-research>.

**Scheduling**

Surveys should be scheduled to avoid overlap between projects. Response rates fall when populations are over surveyed.

Although some critical surveys are administered to all students or all faculty on a regular basis, most surveys do not recur on an annual or semester basis. OIE collaborates with stakeholders to assess the necessity and frequency of surveys, considering factors such as the evolving needs of the university community, changes in institutional priorities, and the availability of alternative data sources. Alternative scheduling techniques may include:

* **Rolling Surveys**: Instead of administering surveys on a fixed schedule, surveys are conducted continuously throughout the year, allowing for more flexibility in data collection and analysis.
* **Event-Triggered Surveys**: Surveys are triggered by specific events or milestones, such as the completion of a major project, the implementation of a new program, or changes in institutional policies.
* **Biennial or Triennial Surveys**: Surveys are conducted every two or three years, providing a balance between regularly assessing the university community's needs and minimizing survey fatigue.
* **Targeted Sampling**: Instead of surveying the entire population, surveys are targeted towards specific groups or segments of the university community based on predefined criteria, ensuring more focused and relevant data collection effort.

**Survey Administration**

The options for survey administration are as follows:

* **Administer the survey yourself**: Commercial tools, (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, Google Forms, etc.) can allow you to create and host a survey yourself. When independently administering the survey, it is crucial to carbon copy (cc) njitsurvey@njit.edu in both the initial survey invitation and any subsequent survey reminders.
* **Have OIE administer and host the survey for you**: Subject to staff availability and the existing survey schedule, OIE may be able to assist you with the design of a survey and then host and administer it for you. This service may be subject to a fee. In these circumstances, OIE maintains editorial rights and the right to refuse or revise questions.
* **Include your questions in a survey already scheduled for administration**: Campus constituencies sometimes append questions to other surveys administered by OIE. In these circumstances, OIE maintains editorial rights and the right to refuse questions.

**Confidentiality**

Surveys can be either confidential or anonymous. For sensitive subject matters, anonymity may encourage more honest responses, but it limits opportunities to link responses to other data sets. If a survey is conducted confidentially it can be pre-populated with respondent information and linked to other data to streamline data collection and analysis. For both anonymous and confidential surveys, OIE may require adherence to National Institute of Statistical Sciences (NISS) data reporting standards and practices to protect respondent confidentiality.

In reporting confidential data, NJIT follows standards and practices endorsed by the National Institute of Statistical Sciences (NISS). NISS produces research and guidelines on statistical confidentiality and data protection methods. The standards and practices below are applied as appropriate, given the level of confidentiality required.

*Key Principles and Standards for Data Suppression*The standards are applied as appropriate to the type of data and required level of confidentiality.

* **Threshold Rule** (Minimum Cell Size):
	+ Suppress cells containing small counts to avoid identifying individuals. A common threshold is less than 5 or 10 respondents, ensuring that individual responses remain confidential.
* **Complementary Suppression**:
	+ Apply additional suppressions to prevent deducing suppressed values from row or column totals. When a primary cell is suppressed due to low counts, related cells are also suppressed to maintain confidentiality.
* **Dominance Rule**:
	+ Suppress cells where a small number of respondents (e.g., one or two) have a disproportionately large influence on the cell’s total value. This rule is used to prevent identifying these dominant respondents.
* **p% Rule**:
	+ Cells are suppressed if a single respondent or a small group of respondents contribute more than a certain percentage (e.g., 80%) to the total value of the cell. This protects against identifying individuals based on their substantial contribution to the data.
* **n/k Rule**:
	+ Suppress cells if the top k respondents contribute more than a specified proportion (e.g., 70%) of the total value of the cell, safeguarding the confidentiality of respondents with significant contributions.
* **Random Perturbation**:
	+ Introduce small random changes to the data in cells to obscure exact counts while maintaining overall data integrity and usability. This helps in protecting individual responses.
* **Aggregation**:
	+ Aggregate data to higher levels, combining categories or regions to prevent identification from granular data. This approach reduces the risk of disclosure while retaining the overall trends and patterns.
* **Rounding**:
	+ Round the values in cells to the nearest base (e.g., nearest 5 or 10) to obscure the exact numbers, adding an additional layer of confidentiality.