ACTIVATING INCLUSION TOOLKIT

Using Evidence to Advance EDI: Considerations for EDI Surveys

This tool supports groups interested in using a survey to gather information about equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) experiences or climates in their unit (department, Faculty, division) with key considerations for how to decide whether to conduct a survey and how to conduct it in a way that is consistent with EDI principles. After using this tool, teams will have made and documented important decisions contributing to the effectiveness of an EDI survey.

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Overview

As units seek to use evidence in their efforts to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), many view conducting a survey of unit members as a valuable way to gather evidence. Surveys can be a useful method of information collection because they allow for anonymous feedback, they can streamline the process of gathering feedback from many people at one time, and they generate data that allows for evidence based decision-making.

When done well, surveys (and other forms of evidence gathering) might be used to demonstrate the need to dedicate resources to a particular EDI intervention, to help build a common story about EDI in a unit in order to take action, or to establish a baseline to measure the effectiveness of EDI initiatives in the future.

Challenges of EDI surveys

Surveys on EDI topics require careful attention to avoid undermining efforts to advance EDI. Conducting an EDI survey creates an ethical responsibility to take action based on what you have learned and raises expectations of actions on the survey topics. If no action is taken, this can create frustration for respondents--resulting in negative experiences for the very people whose experience the unit is hoping to improve, and risking leading to disengagement with the initiative as a whole.

Surveys also involve an inherent power dynamic between the researcher and the "researched." In a typical survey, respondents provide their responses without any input into how those responses are contextualized and used. Surveys may also perpetuate existing power structures through privileging particular forms of evidence or ways of knowing as more "valid" than others. For example, a unit may feel that they can only take action to address the experiences of marginalized staff in their unit after a survey demonstrates a difference in their experiences, rather than taking action when marginalized staff members share stories about their experiences in informal ways.

Finally, the data generated by surveys requires skilled and thoughtful analysis and interpretation to be used effectively. It requires time and effort, as well as subjective judgments of how best to make meaning from the data. For example, is an increase in the perception that a departmental climate is hostile to women a sign that the environment is indeed more hostile, or could it also signal increasing awareness and attentiveness to these issues? Units conducting an EDI survey should ensure they are prepared for a process of interpretation, meaning-making and sense-checking.

Guiding principles

To respond to these potential pitfalls, surveys on EDI topics in the context of a unit's internal change processes should be:

- **Equity-informed:** Units should do as much as they can to mitigate the inherent power dynamics involved in conducting a survey.
- **Actionable:** Units should run high quality, effective surveys that generate actionable information. Units should be prepared to take action based on the results of the survey.
- **Harm-reducing:** Units should do everything they can to protect respondents' privacy and avoid causing harm. Respondents should feel respected throughout the survey process, including during the process of making meaning and taking action based on the survey data.

This guide supports units to decide whether a survey is the best tool for their needs in relation to EDI planning, and then to design and conduct the survey in ways that are equity-informed, actionable, and harm-reducing. It is intended to be used alongside other tools in the Using Evidence to Advance EDI series of the Activating Inclusion Toolkit.

Documenting your Survey Planning Process

The survey planning checklist consists of four sections and invites you to document a series of decisions that will shape your survey project:

1. Deciding to conduct a survey
2. Survey approach
3. Survey questions
4. Planning for post-launch

Documenting your decisions about the survey allows you to remember your own rationales and enables you to respond to questions that may arise at a later stage in the process, for example from respondents or unit leaders.

Document your decisions for the entire project before launching your survey. For example, you could dedicate one planning meeting to each section of this checklist, with work taking place between each meeting to prepare for the next section.

1. Deciding to Conduct a Survey

In this section, you will consider factors that will help you determine whether a survey is the best tool for your project, including your purpose, your project team, the survey's scope, and your capacity and expectations for the survey.

Purpose
What is the desired change that we hope to achieve, and how do we think running a survey will contribute to it?
What is our research question, or the specific question we hope the survey will answer? • *The Inventory of Existing Knowledge tool can help narrow down what information you need. For additional guidance, see We All Count's What is a Research Question?*
Is the information we hope to gain from this survey available from other sources? • *Consider institutional data, departmental administrative data, and informal sources of information.*

Scope

What is our sphere of influence? Do we have the capacity to take action in the areas we want the survey to address?

- *Limit the topics your survey covers to areas in which you can expect to take action.*

How will the results of this survey support us to take action? Be as specific as possible.

- *Imagine some potential survey results. How might you use them to take action? Next, imagine your survey produces the opposite results. How would this change your actions?*

Considering our purposes in conducting this survey, do we need to seek approval from UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB)?

- *In general, surveys for research purposes need BREB approval while surveys for quality assurance and administrative improvement do not. If you are unsure, consult BREB FAQs and Checklist.*

Project team

Who is involved in the decision of whether to run a survey? What perspectives and experiences are represented in our planning team? Is anyone missing?

How will we ensure that survey respondents and other people who will be impacted by the survey will be able to shape the project?

What power dynamics are important to keep in mind as we plan and implement our survey? How will we be attentive to them?

- *Consider decision-making on survey topics, results interpretation, power dynamics between faculty, staff, and students, etc.*

Capacity and expectations

Have there been previous surveys or other information gathering about EDI in our unit? How will this impact the expectations for our survey?

- *Consider the expectations of the project team, unit leadership, survey respondents, etc.*

Do we have sufficient time, resources and appropriate skill to:
- plan and run the survey?
- analyze and interpret quantitative and/or qualitative data?
- report the results in a meaningful way?

Consider hiring a research assistant with appropriate skills or designing a shorter or simpler survey to reduce the amount of time and specialized skill needed.

Are we confident in our unit's commitment and capacity to take action based on the findings? Does our unit have the resources, or know how to access resources, to take action based on the findings?

Will a typical survey response rate of between 10% and 50% (even when using targeted strategies) be sufficient for our purposes? What strategies will we take to increase our response rate?

- *Consider how response rate will affect the overall number of responses available for analysis, the numbers of respondents from sub-populations you may be interested in, and also how decision-makers may respond to survey findings in light of the response rate. Also consider possibilities for supplementing your survey with other information-gathering.*

Decision point

After considering our purpose, scope, team, capacity, and expectations, are we convinced that a survey is the appropriate tool?

If you determine that a survey is the appropriate tool for this project, continue with the survey planning checklist.

If you decide that a survey is not the appropriate tool, but you still need to gather information to move forward, consider alternative methods, including:

- Adding a set of questions into an existing survey or program evaluation in your unit to allow you to make more efficient use of survey infrastructure and analysis.

- Using a different method of data collection, such as focus groups, key informant interviews, or informal information gathering such as via emails or existing meetings. You may find the Inventory of Existing Knowledge helpful to get started. Keep in mind that qualitative methods also require time, resources, and specialized skills.
- Conducting a literature review or a review of best practices and proceeding without specific data collection from your unit.

You may also decide not to do a survey if you find that you are able to move forward without the need to gather additional information. For example:

- If you are primarily interested in demonstrating the need to dedicate resources to a particular EDI intervention, consider using the prioritization tool and exploring the intervention's connection to the IAP through the Getting Started with UBC's IAP tool to help establish the relevance of your intervention.
- If you are primarily interested in building a common story about EDI in the unit in order to take action, consider using the Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool, or organizing a visioning session within your unit.
- If you are primarily interested in establishing a baseline to measure the effectiveness of EDI initiatives in the future, consider whether you can use measures that are already collected through other means. Even if imperfect, the fact that these measures have been collected over a longer time period will give you greater context with which to evaluate your intervention.

2. Survey approach

In this section, you will consider what topics your survey needs to address, who will respond to your survey, and how you will provide a positive experience for survey respondents.

Topics
What topics do we need to address in this survey? What are our "must-knows"? • *Limit your topics to areas that will help answer your research question or overarching question.*
What topics will we add to a "parking lot" to hopefully be addressed another time?

Respondent experience
Who is our respondent pool? Who do we want to hear from? Which (if any) specific groups within our pool are we particularly interested in hearing from?
How long should the survey take to complete? What is a reasonable (and respectful) amount of time to ask our respondents to give to this project?
How will we ensure respondents feel respected and valued as they participate in our survey? • *Consider messaging about the survey's purpose and how the results will be used, question wording, ability to opt out, and sharing the results of the survey with respondents. Be mindful of the inherent power dynamics between survey conductors and respondents as well as respondents' contexts and previous experiences with similar surveys or initiatives.*
How will we protect respondents' privacy and reduce the risk of harm from our survey? • *Consider creating a protocol for the analysis team covering in which contexts the data they review can be shared and with whom, and procedures for if they encounter potentially identifiable data.*

3. Survey questions

With the above information in mind, draft a set of survey questions. You might draw on survey questions that have been developed by others running similar surveys—if so, remember to evaluate them with consideration for the topic areas and respondent pool you have identified.

When you have developed a draft set of questions, continue with the planning template.

Survey preamble
How will we communicate to potential respondents the purposes of our survey and how we will use the results?

How will we communicate to potential respondents the risks or potential harm that may arise from completing this survey, including risks to privacy? How will we communicate about the steps we have taken to mitigate these risks?

- *Consider including information on who within the unit will have access to the raw data, and in which contexts you expect to share the data.*

How will we obtain consent from potential respondents?

Survey questions

How will each survey question support us to answer our research question or overarching question?

- *For each survey question, imagine how you will analyze the question. What kind of statistics can be generated? Will these statistics provide useful insight on your research question or overarching question?*
- *If needed, you can create "placeholder" (fake) data visualizations to help make this more tangible.*

Will our mix of qualitative and quantitative questions support us to contextualize the survey results?

- *Imagine the data generated through your survey questions (as above). How could qualitative and quantitative questions complement each other to provide more useful information?*

Do we need to ask demographic questions in order to answer our research question?

- *For more information, see General Guidelines on Asking for Demographic Information. Advice on how to structure specific demographic questions is available for gender and sexual orientation, and coming soon for other identities.*

Do we intend to analyze survey questions in relation to demographic variables? Is this practical, given the number of respondents we expect?

- *Consider how your sample size will change when narrowing your analysis to a specific demographic group. For example, if you plan to analyze a specific question by gender, or to only look at how women have answered a specific question, you might expect the sample size to be roughly half of the number of respondents overall.*

Does our respondent pool have the information needed to answer our survey questions?

Do our survey questions use respectful and inclusive language?

- *Consider checking with members of your respondent pool or others with whom you have relationships who may have insights on the language used.*

How will we pre-test or pilot the survey before launching?

- *Ask at least a few people in your respondent pool to take the survey. Check whether the questions are clear, the survey flows as it should, and that the time taken to complete the survey aligns with your expectations.*

Survey logistics

How long will our survey be open for?

What strategies will we use to increase our response rate?

- *Strategies to consider include: communicating how the survey results will contribute to change, offering small incentives, or creating dedicated time(s) to respond to the survey.*

Final check

After considering the above questions, are we satisfied with our final selection of survey questions?

4. Analysis, interpretation, and taking action

Before you launch your survey, ensure that you have made plans for what happens afterwards. This includes how you will analyze and interpret the data, as well as how you will take action as a result of the survey.

Analysis and interpretation

What power dynamics are important to consider as we analyze and interpret the data?

- *Consider dynamics between different perspectives and understandings of the data, as well as dynamics about the validity of different forms of data.*

Who will be responsible for analyzing the data? How will decisions be made during the initial analysis phase?

- *Consider how your processes may need to be different for quantitative and qualitative questions.*

How will we ensure diverse perspectives and experiences inform the data interpretation? • *Consider using a collaborative interpretation process and/or seeking ways to sense-check your interpretation with survey respondents.*
Taking action and closing the feedback loop
How will we share the results and our interpretation? With whom?
How will we ensure that action is taken as a result of what we learn? Who is responsible for this?
How will we communicate about the action that has been taken as a result of what we learn?

Next Steps

Taking action as a result of the information you gain is the most important outcome of conducting an EDI survey. Your collaborative interpretation process may have started conversation about recommendations or a long list of areas in which your unit might want to take action, or you could use another process to brainstorm additional action ideas. The Prioritizing Your Inclusive Actions tool and Inclusion Action Planning Template can help position your unit to take action.

Some units find that they want to conduct an additional survey after some time, to understand what progress they have made. If you plan to do this, you can use the survey planning template again to ensure that you capture any adjustments needed to make your survey as equity-informed, actionable, and harm-reducing as possible.

Additional Resources

British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (2020). Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective. Accessed at: http://bchumanrights.ca/publications/datacollection/

Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (n.d.). Surveys and Questionnaires. Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, University of British Columbia. Accessed at: https://isotl.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2017/02/surveys-questionnaires.pdf

Varao-Sousa, Trish and Moghtader, Bruce (2021). Inclusive Survey Design Workshop. Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISoTL), University of British Columbia. Accessed at: https://isotl.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/03/Inclusive-survey-design-Feb-2021.pdf

We All Count (2021). Data Equity Framework. Accessed at: https://weallcount.com/the-data-process/