



**VETERINARY  
MEDICAL  
ASSOCIATION**  
EXECUTIVES

## Survey Suggestions and Tips

Conducting research among your members can be an exciting and fruitful exercise. Done methodically and properly, a membership survey can prove to be invaluable to the growth and development of your organization. The following suggestions and tips are designed to provide guidance to you in implementing a successful survey.

### Questionnaire Development

When crafting your membership survey, include only those questions that are truly relevant to your organization. Shorter surveys are preferred by participants over longer ones. Include questions on your survey that will yield data that will be useful and actionable. Also, consider whether you need to add questions that are unique to your own organization. While the bank of survey questions is comprehensive, there may be issues that your organization needs to explore that aren't included. If you need assistance in crafting additional questions, please contact Tesha Hoff or Charlene Wandzilak at VMAE and she will put you in touch with a market research expert who can work with your organization to customize the survey to better meet your needs.

### Survey Distribution Options

When it comes to collecting survey data from your members, there are two primary ways to administer the survey—an online survey or a hard copy that is mailed to members. Typically, an online survey will be less expensive since there will be no printing costs or postage and handling fees. However, if you don't have up-to-date email addresses for the vast majority of your members, this is not your best option. Sometimes, organizations will conduct a multi-mode survey, collecting information from as many audience members as possible via an online survey, with the balance being conducted by standard mail. If you need guidance on the best way to administer your organization's survey, please contact Tesha Hoff or Charlene Wandzilak at VMAE and she will put you in touch with a market research expert who can advise you.

### Tips for Conducting Online Surveys

If an online survey turns out to be the appropriate data collection method for your organization, here are some tips and guidelines that will help make your survey more successful.

- Be sure to use a data software program that will allow you to look at your data not just in total, but also by various demographic subgroups within your membership. Many times, the most eye-opening and useful information is found when looking at how certain types of members respond compared to other types (e.g., new members compared to long-time members, males compared to females, etc.).
- Test, test, test. Once your online survey is programmed, make sure it is tested many times before it goes live. Pay particular attention that skip patterns are set up and working properly. For example, if a member answers one particular question a certain way, he/she may not need to be asked follow-up questions on that same topic (i.e., a skip pattern).
- Set up your survey so that there is a minimal amount of scrolling up or down and try to avoid left/right scrolling all together.
- Make sure that your survey looks attractive and clean. The use of color and fonts can enhance the appearance; just don't go overboard.
- If you set up a question that requires an answer (in other words, the member cannot move to the next question without choosing a response), make absolutely certain that you include all possible response options to the required question, keeping in mind that choices such as "don't know" or "not applicable" may need to be added. There's nothing more frustrating than being forced to choose an answer when there isn't one that truly applies.

- Include a progress bar at the top of the screen.
- When it comes to the survey invitation email, be sure to personalize it (Dear Dr. Jones), and include information about why the survey is being conducted, how the information will be used, and why it is important to hear from everyone. Don't forget to include the deadline for participating, as well as how long it should take to fill out the survey. The email should come from someone within your organization who is in a position of authority and/or is widely respected (typically the President).
- If the survey has to be completed in one sitting, be sure to alert members of that fact. The other option is to have the survey password-protected, which will allow members to re-enter the survey at the point they left off if they prefer to fill it out in multiple sessions.

### **Tips for Conducting Surveys by Mail**

If mailing hard copies of the survey turns out to be the appropriate data collection method for your organization, here are some tips and guidelines that will help make your survey more successful.

- An attractive survey invariably will lead to a higher response rate than an unattractive one. Spend some time and effort in making your survey instrument visually appealing. Use color, include your logo, and make sure you have ample "white space" so that your survey appears user-friendly. Divide your survey questions into logical sections and identify those sections throughout. If you number the questions, restart with question #1 in each section—a survey with 100 questions numbered sequentially "appears" more intimidating (and longer) than one with five sections, each with only 20 questions.
- Don't forget the importance of the envelopes. The outer envelope should include your logo and be addressed appropriately; including professional designations if those are known. The return envelope should be postage-paid to increase the response rate.
- Be sure to include a personalized (Dear Dr. Jones) cover letter on your organization's letterhead. This letter should include information about why the survey is being conducted, how the information will be used, and why it is important to hear from everyone. Be sure to include the deadline for participating, as well as how long it should take to complete the survey. The letter should come from someone within your organization who is in a position of authority and/or is widely respected (typically the President).

If you don't have the internal resources to conduct your organization's membership survey, please contact Tesha Hoff or Charlene Wandzilak at VMAE, and she will put you in touch with a market research expert who can provide a proposal and cost estimate for administering the survey on your organization's behalf.

### **VMAE Contact Information**

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