## How to Tame the "Survey Beast"

Overview of strategies for reducing the time and resources needed to conduct evaluation surveys on a shoestring budget
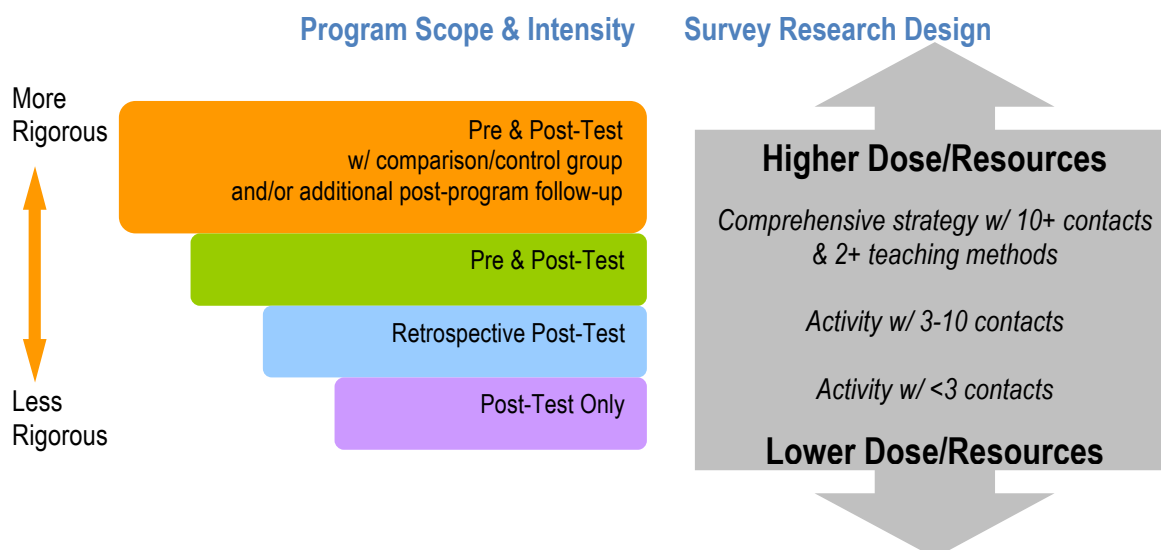
Local programs are often required to collect data for evaluation and accountability purposes. Surveys are commonly used as a way to gather the information. Finding the resources to process and analyze all that data can feel overwhelming and sometimes you may not be sure where to begin. The following tips are designed to reduce the burden of managing surveys and to make the most of the data you collect.

### Use short, smart surveys

- Delete any survey questions that don't tie directly to your program objectives and critical demographic information. Be sure to develop a list of concrete, specific objectives (desired outcomes) that you hope the program will accomplish; use this list as your guide for what should be covered in the survey.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Before you start to develop your own survey, look for existing survey tools that might be useful. If you are using a curricula or model that was developed by someone else, check to see if it comes with any surveys or other assessment tools. If you are using a survey developed by someone else, make sure that it is in the "public domain" or that you permission to use it. Sometimes it makes sense to create a "patchwork" survey that incorporates some existing items from other sources with some new items you develop yourself.
- Limit the number of open-ended questions you ask on surveys. These "write in" questions can yield some interesting information, but they can also take a lot of time to process. If possible, use three or fewer open-ended questions.

### Collect fewer surveys: sampling and research design tips

- If your program has 100 or more participants, you can consider using sampling to reduce the number of surveys you collect. Cluster sampling allows you to systematically choose some groups of participants to fill out surveys, and others who do not. Sample size calculation helps you to identify the minimum number of surveys you need to collect, given the number of participants in your program.
- The scope of the survey should match the scope and intensity of the program being evaluated. If you are doing a one-time presentation, it does not make sense to collect a pre and post-test. If you are doing a comprehensive strategy that involves 18 sessions, you will want to consider a more extensive survey design, such as pre/post-tests. The following diagram provides general guidance on how to match the scope of a program with the scope of research design:



**Program Scope & Intensity** — **Survey Research Design**

More Rigorous / Less Rigorous

- Pre & Post-Test w/ comparison/control group and/or additional post-program follow-up
- Pre & Post-Test
- Retrospective Post-Test
- Post-Test Only

**Higher Dose/Resources**

*Comprehensive strategy w/ 10+ contacts & 2+ teaching methods*

*Activity w/ 3-10 contacts*

*Activity w/ <3 contacts*

**Lower Dose/Resources**

**Make data entry as easy as possible, or skip it all together**

- Design your survey to be data-entry friendly. Consider putting response category numbers on the survey (such as having respondents circle a number or putting subscript numbers next to check boxes). Make instructions and formatting as clear as possible to avoid respondent confusion and errors.
- Avoid manual data entry by using any of the following methods:
  - o Online survey or other direct computer entry by respondents (using Survey Monkey, Survey Gizmo, etc.)
  - o Scanning (need software to use scanable survey forms)
  - o Get someone else to do your data entry: professional data entry firm, volunteers, college students, etc.

**Make data analysis as easy as possible**

- Make sure all the hard work you put into collecting surveys is worth it: analyze your data!
- If you cannot afford to hire a consultant or academic to analyze your data, you can crunch your numbers in-house using any of the following methods:
  - o Summary report functions on online survey sites
  - o Excel (you can calculate percentages and averages, and even run statistical tests in Excel)
  - o StatCrunch.com (online analysis tool)
  - o MyStat (free student software available at www.systat.com/Products.aspx)
  - o Epi Info (free software from CDC available at  http://wwwn.cdc.gov/epiinfo/ )