

**Basic Best Practices when Designing and Implementing Culturally Sensitive Surveys**

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Respect for Persons is a key Belmont Principle for the protection of human subjects. Researchers must be sensitive to cultural issues when designing and conducting research. Special care should be taken by researchers in designing and implementing survey protocols that are sensitive to cultural differences and perspectives, particularly for online surveys where participants do not have the benefit of interacting with a trained interviewer. Cultural awareness is essential to building trust with and cooperation from research participants.

This guidance offers some basic best practices when designing survey and interview questions that are sensitive to cultural perspectives

* Develop awareness among study teams about cross-cultural differences (and include this as part of interviewer training for future face-to-face procedures). Cross-cultural differences may influence respondent perceptions of relevance, saliency, and social desirability of survey questions.
* Utilize diverse sampling procedures to well represent the population you intend to study. Consider how specific members of the sample might perceive survey questions about the research topic.
* Since sensitive topics often vary among cultures, societies, and individuals, take great care in matching question format and wording to the concepts being measured and the population being studied.
* Preliminary work should involve individuals from the intended subject population who could provide feedback and insights into question sensitivity. Respondents’ social reality and cultural framework shape their perceptions and reactions to survey questions.
* Inform respondents about the purpose for including potentially culturally sensitive questions. Sensitivity of topic can vary widely among participant groups. If comparing responses between groups, inform the respondent that this is the case, which may help diffuse some of the sensitivity surrounding the topic.

***Need Assistance?*** SRC Survey Research Operations (SRO) will provide 2-3 hours of consultation at no cost to faculty, staff, and students using surveys in their work.  This typically includes questionnaire review for potential sources of error in surveys and may include general review of a data collection protocol.  Consultation in basic sample design and implementation can also be provided in this manner.  CONTACT:  [lisafin@umich.edu](mailto:lisafin@umich.edu) (Lisa Holland).

*The IRB-HSBS wishes to thank our colleagues at the Institute for Social Research who developed* [*Cross-Cultural Survey Guidelines (2016)*](https://www.ccsg.isr.umich.edu/) *and who pointed us to the* [*American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) best practices*](https://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics/Best-Practices.aspx)*, both from which this guidance was developed.*