Big Questions
EFFECTIVE SURVEY DESIGN WORKSHOP

We conduct studies to get information to inform our learning, action, and decision-making. Before you start, think carefully about these big questions. They are the foundation of your survey and guide its development.

1. What do I need to know?
Identify your need in clear language. This is the big picture purpose of your survey. Don't lose sight of it!

2. Who knows it?
Given your need, who should you ask for information? They are your audience.

3. How will I use the results?
Identify the actions you are going to take with the results. Check to make sure the questions in your survey will get the information you need to take those actions.

4. What is the best method?
Think about your purpose, audience, and usage. Is a survey the *best way* to get information that fits your need? What type of survey would work best? Would another method work better? Is there existing information that could help you without the need to ask people questions.

Big Problems

You may have big problems, if you don't consider the big questions. Here are some of the fundamental problems that keep surveys from being successful.

1. What do I need to know?

A survey without a clear purpose either doesn't answer any of your questions or tries to answer way too many, which is the same thing.

Your survey may lack purpose if:

- You don't know why you are doing the survey.
- You have a hard time figuring out what to ask about on the survey.
- You feel like you have way too many things to ask about.

2. Who knows it?

Sometimes we ask the wrong people. Other times, we ask questions that no one can answer!

You may have the wrong audience if:

- Many questions are skipped.
- You have a hard time getting people to start or finish the survey.

If *you* can't answer the question, you may be asking a question to which no one knows the answer.

3. How will I use the results?

If you don't consider how you are going to use the results of your survey, you may get results that you can't use!

You may need to think about use if:

- You can't identify who is going to use the results.
- You can't say how the results from previous surveys have been used.

4. What is the best method?

If you ask questions that aren't appropriate for a survey, you get bad results and survey takers experience frustration. The same goes if a survey is not appropriate for your audience.

You may need to consider another method if:

- Your questions are mostly open-ended.
- Your questions are multi-faceted or complex.
- Your audience would struggle with accessing, understanding, or completing a survey.