Encouraging Participation in The HERI Faculty Survey

Faculty participation is critical to survey success. Simply put, the more respondents you have, the more confidence you have that your results accurately represent your faculty as a whole. However, many institutions struggle with challenges related to obtaining a satisfactory response rate. HERI’s templates for invitation and reminder messages to faculty emphasize the survey’s value for the institution. In addition, efforts on campus can effectively supplement the invitation and reminder messages sent to your faculty.

Factors that Contribute to Higher Response Rates
Each campus will want to take some time to assess local culture and determine the best way to reach their faculty. While there is no single magic bullet that will increase response rates, research (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009) does indicate several factors that contribute to higher response rates:

- Perceived importance of the survey (value to the faculty member, perceived legitimacy)
- Level of interest faculty have in the research
- Trust that the data will be used and maintained properly
- Perception of reward for participation
- Minimizing respondent burden

These factors are worth thinking about as you plan your survey administration and promotion. Survey publicity such as announcements from Deans or Provosts as well as incentives for participation can reinforce the message to faculty that survey results are valued and used on campus. Suggestions for promotional activities frequently used by campuses administering the HERI Faculty Survey include:

- Customizing survey invitation messages
- Using incentives (see below for additional information on incentives)
- Frequently reminding faculty that their responses are confidential
- Using faculty or committee meetings—Do include information about why the survey is important, its purpose, how the results will be used on campus, etc.
- Posting notices on the institutional website or course management systems (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle)
- Using Facebook or Twitter to share information and/or selected results during and after the survey administration

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Incentives
Incentives can be an effective means of increasing survey response rates. Gift certificates to the bookstores, food, donations to departmental funds or charities, or an automatic entry into some type of raffle or lottery are all possible incentives. You might consider structuring HERI Faculty Survey incentives in a few different ways:

- Offer a small incentive (e.g., gift card) to each participant before or as the survey is administered.
- Offer a small incentive (e.g., donation to departmental development fund) to each participant who turns in a completed questionnaire.
- Offer a lottery or drawing. Under this plan, faculty should receive information detailing the odds of winning, the number and type of prizes being offered, and the date of the drawing.

In the case that you create an incentive plan that differs from the above options, we strongly encourage you to check with your local IRB or other appropriate campus personnel to review the structure of your incentive program.

There are important guidelines for using incentives in the HERI Faculty Survey, including:

- Any incentive program may require local IRB approval. We recommend that you check with your institution’s IRB as soon as you have made a decision regarding incentives.
- Incentives for survey participation should be designed in a manner that maintains the voluntary nature of the survey.
- Survey promotion for incentives should not emphasize the incentives to a degree that minimizes the requirement of survey participation.
- The amount or value of the incentive should not be so large as to seem coercive.
- Each institution that decides to conduct a drawing (i.e., raffle or lottery) should first consult applicable state law to determine whether such a drawing would be legal.
- The Survey Information Sheet covers the rights of participants with respects to all aspects of survey administration except incentives. Therefore, if you plan to utilize an incentive for your HERI Faculty Survey, you must add an addendum to the Survey Information Sheet. This section should be titled “Payment for Participation” and would describe, in detail, the incentive program including the amount that could be won, an estimate of the odds (if you are utilizing a drawing), and how any drawing or other incentive program would be conducted. This information should be included on the “Welcome” page.