

My Survey Results Are In. Now What?
***By Dr. Roseann Hogan, Assistant Vice President,
Institutional Research and Assessment,
California State University, East Bay***

Many quality improvement metrics use perception or opinion surveys to gauge how satisfied customers and students are with a service or program, or to solicit information about a variety of issues. There are a few rules of thumb to keep in mind to help you clearly and credibly explain the surveys to your audience.

1. *Draft out your bullet point summary BEFORE you finalize your survey.* If you are clear about what you want to be able to say at the outset, you won't forget to ask the obvious questions, and it will make your summary all the easier to write.
2. *Describe who responded and under what conditions.* Who was your targeted population and what percentage of them responded? Did one particular group respond more than another? Was there a bias in who had access or who had time to complete the survey? Keep these factors in mind as you interpret your results, and think about what actions, if any, need to be taken for improvement.
3. *Take a first run at your analysis.* First look at the frequencies for each question to get an overall feel for your information. Next, break out the data by groups—one department versus another, or people who are frequent users versus those who only use the service on rare occasions. Your data will tell you what might be underlying the results you receive. A simple correlation matrix can often help dredge out areas to explore in more depth.
4. *Provide statistics that are easy to interpret.* Use frequencies rather than averages and standard deviations. People relate to these in more concrete

ways. For example, to say "the mean was x for this question and lower for that" doesn't communicate needed action very clearly. But saying that 30% of people think we are too slow to complete a purchase order tells management what they need to know.

5. *Identify response patterns and context.*

Sociologists and psychologists often talk about response sets for surveys. They are referring to a tendency for some people to answer negatively or positively to statements in a survey, perhaps because they are rushed, or perhaps because they had a good or bad day. My experience in higher education surveys of students is that about 10–13% of students or alumni will disagree or give negative responses in a 5-point response scale. So examine the patterns of negative responses across questions. Is your group a negative or positive one? If 15% of your survey participants rated most services as low, but purchase orders in particular had 30% low ratings, then you know you have hit an area of concern for your customers.

6. *Keep your summary short and to the point.*

The most effective way to communicate the results of a survey to a general audience is through an executive summary with a simple description of the goals and methods used to collect the information, the targeted group surveyed, and a list of bullet points that summarize the key findings of the survey. When you finish, ask someone outside the area if they understand it. Student workers are brutally honest. Did I need to say that?