

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR SURVEYS

Ethics are a system of moral ideas and rules about our conduct and what we believe is “right” that reflect international standards, the values of the cultures we work in and of the communities we serve. It is important to carry out data collection with ethics in mind, especially if the organization works with marginalized children and young people. Please see below some basic ethics to consider during the design and implementation of data collection activities.

Informed consent / permission

When collecting information from participants, consent or permission must be explicit, informed, voluntary and re-negotiable. Always provide participants (both individuals and communities) with enough information about the data collection that they can make an informed decision about whether they want to participate or not. A written consent statement is best (this is provided in the Action Impact survey), or verbal consent if applicable.

Consider the rights of children and their capacity to provide informed consent— do they really understand the reasons why they are being surveyed? A participant may verbally agree to something from fear, perceived peer pressure, or psychological difficulty in asserting her/his true feelings. The person requesting the action may honestly be unaware of this. Consent is expressed, but is not actually internally provided. A participant may express an understanding of the data collection process while giving consent, but in fact does not understand.

It is best to obtain consent from both the children and their parents or guardians where possible. Another alternative would be to send a simple notification to parents explaining the surveys and reasons for it.

Please make sure that staff and participants are aware that all participation in data collection efforts is voluntary. No one may be refused services because he or she does not want to provide information. Everyone has the right to refuse to participate. Never coerce people into participating.

Example to read out loud to the participant before beginning:

The purpose of this survey is to learn about the experiences of everyone at the organization. This survey is voluntary and confidential. That means that if you do not feel like answering the questions you do not have to, and if you feel like stopping part way through that is ok, you can stop at any time. It also means that your name will not be attached with your answers and [if appropriate] only the person interviewing you will know your answers.

There are no wrong answers. Please answer the statements as truthfully as possible for you. This survey will help the Coaches/Educators make classes a better experience for everyone. Thank you for your time!

Privacy

Consider whether you and your team can ensure that data is collected, stored, and reported in a way that protects respondents' privacy. Privacy is especially important when you are collecting personally identifiable, sensitive or geographic data. Always make participants aware of how much privacy they can expect, be it confidentiality or anonymity.

Do not discuss an individual's answers, and be sure staff and community volunteers observe the same protocol. Use “blind data.” Do not put names on the data in files or reports. Use codes if possible. If you choose to do the survey on paper, please use one sheet per participant, circle their answers, do not write their name on the sheet.

The Environment

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A positive environment plays a big part in making sure the participant feels comfortable answering questions or filling out the survey. Some factors to consider would be a quiet, calm space where participants can answer questions privately, without peers overhearing or influencing their answers. It is also important that the space is not similar to a school/classroom situation, to ensure respondents are clear on the fact that the data collection is not compulsory.

Language

Wherever possible, survey questions should be translated into the native language of the participant.

Inclusion / Exclusion

The data collection sample may mean that there is an inclusion of some participants and exclusion of others. How will this be communicated/carried out to avoid participants feeling left out/put on the spot?

- Explain to participants that they have been sampled at random
- Choose a particular class of students to avoid anyone being left out
- Have alternative activities available for participants who do not wish to take the survey - ensure these activities are also available to participants who took part in the survey

Sensitive questions

If the survey deals with sensitive matters, is there a risk the process might cause distress? How (if possible) can this be mitigated?

- Identify questions that pose a risk to participants
- Choose to re-order sensitive questions i.e. ease the participant into the survey by not asking sensitive questions straight off. Re-order this to the middle (and end survey on a light question)
- Choose to skip cultural/age inappropriate questions as required

Integrity

How truthful is the data you are collecting? Has it been affected by bias? How (if possible) can this be mitigated?

- Determine if participants are filling out the survey alone, or with peers around, or with a staff member reading the questions allowed (for those who can't yet read/write)
- Participants may feel more inclined to tell the truth with a staff member they trust and know well
- Participants may feel perceived pressure to impress the staff member they trust and look up to
- Participants may not understand the question. If it cannot be explained simply, it is best to skip the question and provide feedback to the Action Impact network

Incentives

For non-profit programs that serve marginalized or underprivileged communities, using incentives are not recommended as they may cause divisions based on exclusion / inclusion.

Misrepresenting Data

Never misrepresent or falsify data. This can include adding missing data during collation; making up data; or changing responses.

Creativity!

Working with children and young people means we are always striving for new and creative ways to learn, and this extends to its data collection, which can be fun, playful and engaging if explored in this way. Why not use emoticons to represent answers? Facilitate the session: take breaks for games throughout the survey - some questions can even be turned into a game!