

INTERSTATE COMMISSION FOR
ADULT OFFENDER SUPERVISION

01-2014 - SURVEY POLICY AND STANDARDS

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I. Overview

For this policy, the definition of a survey is the gathering of information through questionnaires, interviews, etc., to make inferences about a sample, population, or process. The ICAOS national office serves as the Commission's survey clearinghouse. All surveys intended for distribution to compact members or the compact community (e.g. deputy compact administrators, compact office staff, ICOTS users, victim advocates, etc.) must be approved by the national office using the procedures described herein. National office approval is not required for a survey resulting from an action stemming from a standing committee.

Surveys will be administered using an electronic format.

Acceptance of authorization to administer a survey establishes an obligation on the part of the national office to use these data responsibly. The survey request must provide direction to the national office on its authority to distribute the data and identify potential recipients authorized to receive the data.

II. Policy Violations

Failure to adhere to the policies and guidelines relating to the use of surveys shall result in a written notice to the Compliance Committee. Violators of this policy must receive clearance from the Executive Committee to request any future surveys for a period determined by the Executive Committee.

III. Procedures

A. The Request Process

Individuals and offices wishing to conduct a survey covered by the survey policy must provide required information to the national office in writing.

Information required to conduct a survey includes but is not limited to:

- a description of the survey project, including the purpose and intended use of results;
- the specific population receiving the survey;
- a time-frame for administering the survey, including beginning and end dates; and,
- a current draft of the survey.

Recurring surveys approved in an earlier year only need to submit information about the proposed administration dates. Surveys approved in prior years with significant changes must be re-approved.

The national office will review the survey request and respond within five (5) business days of the received date of the proposal. The national office may provide a change notice based on the following criteria:

- Is there a clearly explained purpose of the survey?
- Does the survey provide information useful for planning or improving services?
- Is the survey well designed and of an appropriate length?
- Are the questions easily understood and interpreted?
- What is the target population? Will the entire population or a sample be surveyed?
- Is there a clear explanation of the rights of perspective participants (including confidentiality)?
- When will the survey be conducted? What is the optimal timing to ensure it does not compete with other surveys and activities?
- How will the results be used?
- Will the findings be disseminated to appropriate audiences? Who will have access to the information and will it help them make better decisions as a result?
- Has the appropriate standing committee reviewed the proposed survey (if necessary)?
- Can the proposed survey be combined with other planned surveys?
- Are there other data available that will allow the survey to be avoided?

IV. Guidelines for Conducting Survey

All surveys conducted by the Commission should adhere to the guidelines listed below.

A. The Rights of Respondents

- The survey form must include the contact information of the requestor (name, e-mail address, telephone number), should the respondents have any questions about the content of the form or the use and/or publication of survey results.
- All participants must be notified that their participation is voluntary.
- Respondents must be notified in advance if the data collected will not be anonymous.
- Respondents must be protected from the risk of unreasonable harm, including any risks regarding confidentiality or privacy.
- Surveys that request individual health information may be subject to HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act).

- A summary should be made available on request to persons who completed the survey.
- Respondents should be informed if the data or survey results will be published or distributed, including whether individual responses will appear in the published results.
- In some circumstances, data may be confidential and not publicly available to the respondents. Any such limitation should be made clear to respondents at the time the survey is conducted, as well as within the report itself. When restrictions apply, publication and/or presentation of survey results must honor the stated restrictions.
- If respondents are promised anonymity and a login is required to access the survey (e.g., email addresses), the national office must ensure that login information will not be collected and stored in a way that it can be connected to survey results.

B. Sponsorship

- All surveys should clearly identify the group or person who is requesting the survey.
- Information from surveys conducted by administrative offices, committees, and others is the property of the Commission. The national office must be consulted before the release and distribution of the survey's findings.
- The use of mass e-mailing lists to promote or distribute a survey to compact members, compact office staff, and others is limited to official surveys approved by the national office.

C. Confidentiality

Identifiable information should be collected only as required concerning the expressly stated purpose of research or a project.

D. Data Security

The national office is responsible for managing and releasing the data collected. Raw data from surveys are typically not shared with people outside of the Commission except under special circumstances (e.g. a data-sharing consortium). If survey data are shared, (a) its' use should conform to applicable policies and guidelines, (b) the data should not contain any information that will identify a respondent, and (c) its' release must be approved by the Executive Director.

E. Committee and Legal Review

The Commission and the requestor may incur legal liability if the treatment of survey recipients is unethical, if data resulting from the survey is misused, or if any part of the survey violates certain protected rights of individuals or ICAOS Rules. Survey requestors should be aware of their responsibilities and make reasonable efforts to protect the rights of survey recipients and to comply with ICAOS Rules.

ICAOS Rules Committee, Training Committee, and legal counsel's approval may be required if the survey findings are used for any purposes related to data collection about commission programs, practices, curricula, or outcomes.

F. Use of E-mail for Administering Surveys

E-mail is a convenient and effective way to contact and communicate with potential survey subjects; however, e-mail is a fundamentally insecure medium. E-mail messages are typically transmitted to many different computers before reaching their final destination. At each intermediary computer, backups can create additional copies of the original message. Thus, messages may reside on one or more servers for extended periods, during which time they may be read, subpoenaed, etc. Theoretically, subjects can return surveys through anonymous re-mailers, but interception and duplication remain possible during the initial transmission. It is possible to conduct secure e-mail surveys with encryption technology, but this is rarely used in actual practice. In short, subjects cannot be assured of the confidentiality of their data in e-mail surveys. E-mail may be safely used as a vehicle only to contact potential subjects, who may then be given the option to (a) print and return an anonymous survey via mail, or (b) go to a web link to complete an online survey.

G. Survey Publicity

Surveys can be publicized through media such as the Commission newsletters, e-mail, message boards, and other forms of direct contact with selected respondents.

H. Assistance with Survey Development, Administration, and Reporting

The Commission will consider requests for assistance with the development, deployment, and analysis of surveys conducted by academic departments, committees, task forces, and other administrative units as time permits or as required. Assistance with external projects (e.g. grant-related projects) conducted by third-party organizations may also be considered, but will have a lower priority. The Commission reserves the right to deny any request for assistance, if office resources are not available.