

SBC Monitoring Guidance

Omnibus Survey

What is an Omnibus Survey?

Omnibus surveys are quantitative research surveys that collect data on a variety of topics during the same interview. Multiple clients, including individuals and organizations, share the cost of the survey by purchasing and adding standard, pre-developed questions or custom-developed questions to the questionnaire. Because the biggest expenditure of conducting a survey is setting up the survey and recruiting a statistically representative sample of participants, it often makes sense to pool resources to conduct a shared, larger survey. Omnibus surveys are usually rolled out and data is collected on an ongoing basis or predetermined schedule (such as quarterly), so it is an ideal method for collecting monitoring data as you can continuously monitor the progression of your outcome of interest.

When Should You Use Omnibus Surveys?

There are two essential factors to consider when deciding whether an omnibus survey makes sense for monitoring an intervention:

1. **The number of questions you want to ask.** Omnibus surveys are ideal for clients who have a small number of questions they would like to field. Typically, no more than five or six questions is ideal for an omnibus survey because any more than that usually can be fielded as a short custom survey at a competitive price; cost per question in an omnibus survey is usually high so overall costs could rival that of a regular survey as the number of questions increases.
2. **Who you want to survey.** Since omnibus surveys have multiple clients, this method will work only if a program's target population is demographically similar to the omnibus sample. As such, omnibus surveys are generally ideal for population-based representative monitoring. If the monitoring of an intervention is for a more specific target population, a custom survey that can recruit from this specific population is optimal.

To justify the use of an omnibus survey, both of the above conditions must be met—the monitoring team must have only a handful of questions that need to be fielded and their target population must match that of the omnibus survey. Additionally, an omnibus survey is particularly ideal when a project needs to:

- Receive quick answers to questions of immediate interest
- Pilot or test potential survey questions
- Sample participants or pose follow-up questions
- Field questions about simple issues that participants are likely to broadly understand
- Use a low-cost approach for collecting a limited amount of data





STRENGTHS

- Can be affordable if a team is looking to field only a few questions.
- Can track engagement in real time.
- Can be implemented quickly as the survey infrastructure is already in place and results can be provided quickly.
- Clients do not develop the research tools and processes or manage the logistics of survey field work; this is the responsibility of the organization fielding the omnibus survey.
- Surveys are fielded regularly, often frequently, making this an ideal channel for monitoring.
- Can be implemented through multiple approaches including face-to-face, by phone, and online.



WEAKNESSES

- Omnibus surveys often use quota sampling, which can be challenging for teams or organizations that prefer random sampling.
- There is limited ability to negotiate the location of questions within a survey, and therefore it can be difficult to mitigate the potential impact of other questions that come before a team's questions of interest.
- Omnibus surveys are not an ideal vehicle for complex questions or those that are applicable to only a small subset of a population.
- Monitoring teams have less control over the timeline, and there may be delays in survey administration and receipt of results.
- Monitoring teams have little or no control over data quality and data validation checks.

Ethical Considerations

When using an omnibus survey to obtain data, it is essential to know whether the organization executing the omnibus has received Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance and is using proper ethical guidelines. It is important that these organizations, when recruiting participants, obtaining consent, and collecting, storing, analyzing, sharing, and reporting on the data, are carefully considering and protecting the interests and privacy of the study participants. Seek guidance from your institutional IRB regarding requirements for client-developed questions submitted to the omnibus, as well as the use of data from the omnibus.