Survey Methods, Pros & Cons
Sources: Arlene Fink, “How to Conduct Surveys”, 3rd Edition; Alan Aldridge; Kevin Levine, “Surveying the Social World”

Self-Completion Questionnaires

**Postal / E-Mail Questionnaire**
General Description:
Paper & pencil survey, sent in the mail; e-mail attachment, completed individually

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Uses</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pediatric Equipment on an ambulance – *i.e.* someone needs to physically stand in front of the ambulance… | - Can reach a large geographical area  
- People are used to completing paper-and-pencil surveys  
- Can take the survey with you and complete it anywhere and anytime  
- Great for sensitive issues | - No clarification available during completion.  
- Need a motivated population to return the survey (people have too much to do)  
- Respondents must be able to read, see, and write | - Need an up-to-date address list  
- Visual cues and illustrative figures |

*COSTS:*
- Follow-up mailings  
- Printing, paper, envelopes  
- Stamps  
- Incentives

*Email considerations:* include it as an ATTACHMENT (Word Document, PDF); could fill-out electronically or fax back.

**On-the-Spot Questionnaire**
General Description:
Paper & pencil survey, administered in person but completed individually

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Uses</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| After an advisory committee meeting, you survey the attendees about the current meeting compared to past meetings | - Captive population  
- Information is obtained immediately  
- Questions can be asked as they arise  
- In some cases, surveys can be done with groups of people  
- Can gauge an immediate response to an event, etc. | - Limited to responses from just those who are on site  
- Possible bias  
- Respondents must be able to read, see, and write  
- Possible bias from the administrator  
- Annoyance factor | - Visual cues and illustrative figures  
- Fill-out & return on site or take home & return  |

*COSTS:*
- Requires on-site staff/supervisor  
- Space and privacy for respondent  
- Printing & paper  
- Incentives
## Self-Completion Questionnaires Continued

### Internet/Web Based

**General Description:**
Online survey; email or distribute a link (URL) to a survey which is designed and completed online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Uses</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Determine the percentage of hospitals in the State/Territory that have written pediatric inter-facility transfer agreements | - Possible worldwide population  
- Negligible distribution costs  
- Order of questions can be preprogrammed  
- Only “acceptable” answers are allowed (validation)  
- Can give respondent links that give additional explanation  
- Data are automatically entered in a database and can be automatically analyzed OR exported to other software programs  
- Branching, Piping, & Skipping can be automatically programmed  
- Can easily track user response rate OR choose anonymous  
- Automatic Reminder, Thank You, Spell Check, and Math Calculations  
- Easy pilot testing (discover where people are abandoning the survey)  
- Progress bar to inform respondents of the percentage completed  
- Require the question to be answered | - Need reliable access to Internet  
- Respondent must be able to use a browser  
- Respondent must be “online”  
- System can go down or be unreliable  
- Respondents must be able to use a computer, a mouse, and/or keyboard | - Technical expertise in-house vs. respondent expertise  
- Link to many different media types  
- Does the software import pre-written questions?  
- Does the hosting company have a policy for back-ups?  
- Make sure the company has a solid “confidentiality” agreement  
- Is the survey taken and submitted on a secure URL (SSL) - security  
- Make sure you can export the survey data into various formats  
- Survey customization (branding) |

**COSTS:**
- Hosting & software $ - $$$$ (depending on features)  
- In-house programmer
**Face-to-Face Interviews**

**General Description:**
Conduct interviews in person with a written script and/or prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Uses</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Determine the qualifications and interest level of an individual to serve on the State/Territory EMSC Advisory Committee | - High rate of survey completion  
- Can explore answers with respondents  
- Can assist respondents with unfamiliar words or questions  
- Able to get more qualitative data | - Difficult to reach certain populations  
- Expensive and time consuming (lots of resources)  
- Some may feel reluctant to share personal information or beliefs  
- Need trained interviewers  
- Must find a suitable place to conduct interview  
- Interviewer bias (verbal or non-verbal) | - Longer more in-depth questions  
- If on-site need space and privacy  
- May be difficult or dangerous to go to person’s home  
- Visual cue cards  
**COSTS:**  
- Training  
- Space & travel  
- AV & transcription costs  
- Incentives |

**Focus Groups**

**General Description:**
A qualitative study; small group from target sample brought together to discuss the survey topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Uses</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Early on in the survey project, a group of 6-12 EMT-Ps are brought in to discuss their current comfort level in treating children; from this discussion initial survey questions can be developed and tested. | - Great for pre-testing your initial ideas  
- Generate, explore, and identify key ideas/concepts  
- Understand your population  
- Read non-verbal feedback  
- Helps with formal survey development  
- Can assist respondents with unfamiliar words or questions | - Bias / Small Group  
- Quality of data influenced by the moderator  
- Used to identify themes or capture ideas.  
- Some may feel reluctant to share personal information or beliefs.  
- Needed trained interviewers or moderators  
- Unable to make major decisions based on the information | - Avoid jumping to conclusions  
- Very broad questions, often with open-ended answers and limited prompting  
- Avoid Yes, No  
- Not a form of group interviewing  
- 6 to 12 people ideal  
**COSTS:**  
- Training  
- Travel for participants or
### Focus Groups Continued…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Uses</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calling different organizations to assess the inter-facility communication</td>
<td>- Questions can be asked as they arise</td>
<td>- Can’t necessarily generalize the findings to the population</td>
<td>moderator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between various care sites</td>
<td>- Explore related and unanticipated topics as they arise</td>
<td>- Must find a suitable place to conduct interview</td>
<td>- Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- AV &amp; transcription costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Telephone Interviews

**Telephone Interviews**

**General Description:**
Conduct interviews over the telephone with scripted questions and prompts or computer assisted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Uses</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calling different organizations to assess the inter-facility communication</td>
<td>- Able to use computer-assisted interview software (CATI) to help with prompts and survey</td>
<td>- Non-response may be high if there is no obvious benefit to participation</td>
<td>Up-to-date phone numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between various care sites</td>
<td>navigation</td>
<td>- Sales calls often masquerade as &quot;research&quot; calls (caller-id)</td>
<td>- Schedule for reaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Can explore options with respondents</td>
<td>- Need trained interviewers</td>
<td>respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Can assist respondents with unfamiliar words or questions</td>
<td>- Is the respondent reachable by phone?</td>
<td>- Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fast method</td>
<td>- If using computer-assisted interviews, will need technical knowledge</td>
<td>- Telephone charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Good for sensitive information</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Computer and technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Incentives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COSTS:**
- Training
- Telephone charges
- Computer and technical expertise
- Incentives