
TIP SHEET: DO YOU NEED A VALIDATED SURVEY?

When you are looking for survey tools, there are a number of things to keep in mind. Does the survey you are considering tell you what you need to know? Is it well suited to the population you serve? Is it affordable? Do you have the capacity (time, technology, etc.) to administer it? And finally, do you need it to be validated?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A SURVEY TO BE VALIDATED?

There are a number of different types of validity (see our [Psychometrics Tip Sheet](#) for a breakdown). Also remember that validity is relative. When a survey is described as “validated,” it has usually been tested with one (or more) specific population(s) in one (or more) specific situation(s). It is therefore considered valid for similar groups in similar situations.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

While it is generally considered desirable to use validated surveys, there are often tradeoffs in terms of cost and customizability. It is worth thinking about whether you truly need a validated instrument in your evaluation.

- **What is the purpose of your evaluation?** If you are involved in a rigorous impact evaluation, you may need to use a validated survey to bolster the credibility of your work. If your purpose is internal learning, then it is probably more important that your survey be *relevant* to your work than that it be validated.
- **Do you need comparison data?** If you want to compare your results to those of other, similar programs, you may want to use a validated survey that has been used elsewhere, and where aggregate data from other settings is available.
- **Will you publish your findings?** It may be more difficult to publish an evaluation study that uses instruments that lack evidence of validity.
- **Do you need to customize to your program or population?** Remember that validation is specific to a group and a situation. If you change a validated survey in any way, or administer it to a group that is different (in terms of age, language, etc.), then it may not be considered valid under these different circumstances.

SOURCES OF VALIDATED SURVEYS

If you decide you need a validated survey, there are a number of sources that can help you to identify one that meets your needs. These include:

From Soft Skills to Hard Data - <http://forumfyi.org/content/soft-skills-hard-data->: This report from the Forum for Youth Investment reviews ten youth outcome measures that cover “soft” or “non-cognitive” skills.

Every Hour Counts - <https://www.everyhourcounts.org/>: Every Hour Counts is focused on building regional afterschool systems for student success. Their comprehensive [measurement framework](#) includes recommended (proprietary) measures for system-level, program-level, and youth-level outcomes.

Also, our [worksheet on choosing a survey tool](#) is designed to help you in your decision-making process.