

WCSS Survey Administration Protocol¹

Preparation Activities

Customize all documents (e.g., the survey and consent forms) to reflect site-specific language. For example, use facility specific terminology to reference housing units (e.g., unit, pod, quad, dorm, block, cell, etc.) custody line staff (e.g., deputy, correctional officer, detention officer, etc.), and insert the name, title, and contact information of PREA officers or counseling staff. Ensure consent forms satisfy federal human subject protection regulations, applicable state law, local ordinances, agency policy, facility field instructions, etc. Once all survey documents are prepared, assemble related materials (pencils that meet security requirements, information and consent documents, definition sheets, envelopes for filing completed surveys, erasers, sign in sheets, extra reading glasses, and the like).

Arriving at the Site

The survey research team should meet with the executive staff of the facility prior to survey administration. At this meeting, the survey research team should introduce themselves and review the survey arrangements. Facility staff should also be given additional copies of the survey instrument. The survey research team should also confirm and finalize the logistical components of the inmate housing units to be surveyed. The survey research team should also be provided with an up-to-date roster of each housing unit to be surveyed. Inspection of the survey location and facility tours can often be part of this first meeting.

The Survey Day

Advise facility staff that they should not be physically present during the survey administration. Review an up-to-date roster of each housing unit to be surveyed. Set up the survey room. Set out surveys, definition sheets, information sheets/consent forms, and pencils for inmate arrival. Customize specific processes to check inmates into the survey location using housing unit rosters for each location. Make arrangements for Spanish-speaking inmates, those with reading limitations, and other considerations.

Seriously consider administering the survey in the housing units. This will most likely enable the participation of many more women in the survey process as well as allow the survey team to cover many more housing units in less time.

When inmates arrive, welcome them and ask them to settle into individual tables. Acknowledge the fact that the women may have been called away from their regular programming. Be prepared to answer questions, particularly from those who may indicate an unwillingness to

¹ For most applications of the WCSS, we recommend that an entity outside of the agency administer the WCSS, analyze the results, and prepare a report for the agency. The next phase of this project will produce detailed instructions via a User Guide and Administration Software that will facilitate as well as automate much of this process.

participate. Be prepared to respond to the question “Do I have to do this?” with a polite request to first listen to the orientation before making a decision about participating in the survey.

Inmate Survey Orientation

Utilize as needed the written “Talking Points” that outlines the survey purpose and process. After thanking the women for attending, have the survey team individually introduce themselves. Announce the availability of the survey and consent forms in Spanish, help with reading, or other assistance (e.g., extra pairs of reading glasses are available). Emphasize the survey team’s commitment to confidentiality at every stage of the survey process. Assure the women that they have the right to decline to participate without any repercussion. Briefly review the content of the survey, the definitions and instructions for completing the survey, and procedures for handing in the survey to members of the research team. Remind the women that the survey provides opportunities for open-ended comments.

For those women who choose to complete the survey, ask them to sign the informed consent form. After they sign it, have a member of the research team also sign the consent form. After obtaining the two signatures, have a research team member remove the copy of the consent form intended for the participant and hand it to the inmate.

Collecting the Surveys

Surveys should be collected in a way that protects the confidentiality (and if possible, the anonymity) of respondents. For example, all inmates present in the survey session should be allowed to submit their surveys into a large box or basket at the same time to ensure they are mixed and thus can’t be paired with the individuals who completed them.

After all completed surveys have been turned in, make initial calculations regarding the number of eligible inmates, number present for the survey administration, number agreeing or declining, and other issues related to accountability and response rate. If some or many inmates were not available to participate, consider coming back to the housing unit later when they might be available. Place completed surveys in envelopes indicating housing unit name and type. Keep surveys under the control of the research team, and do not allow facility staff members to have access to them. Remove the completed surveys from the facility daily and if necessary, twice daily. Never leave the completed surveys unattended in the facility.

Exiting

Conduct a courtesy briefing for any interested executive staff before leaving the facility. Note and acknowledge the degree inmates and staff were very cooperative. Point out any “generic” safety concerns that warrant immediate attention and that do not compromise the confidentiality or anonymity of the respondents who participated in the survey.

Cleaning the Surveys

At the end of every survey day, meet with the survey research team to review the collected surveys, clean stray remarks, and clarify written comments. Although every effort should be made to identify problems with the surveys upon collection, this second review process will most likely identify some ineligible and invalid submissions. Prepare completed documents for travel to the survey research team's office.