

# University Survey Approval & Coordination Guidelines

Surveys of campus constituents (i.e., students, faculty, staff, and alumni) are widely recognized as an important means for collecting information that inform institutional practice, enable ongoing and continuous quality improvement, encourage engagement, and enhance institutional effectiveness.

## Purpose and Coverage

The purpose of this document is to provide clear expectations, guidelines, and processes regarding the administration of surveys to students, faculty, staff, and alumni at Boise State University. The goal is to encourage planning and coordination for maximum benefit of survey efforts while managing valuable University resources and mitigating survey fatigue.

Additional reasons for these guidelines include:

- Protecting response rates to important university surveys that inform planning as well as mandated reporting and survey efforts by other units that are critical to their operations
- Providing randomized samples so the same populations are not being surveyed repeatedly. Failure to do so results in survey fatigue and negatively impacts everyone's work.
- Making sure constituents are not repeatedly asked the same questions or receive surveys that do not apply to them
- Providing a check to make sure IRB approval has been secured if needed
- Providing guidance on scheduling a survey given other surveys that may be in the field
- Promoting best practices to inform the administration of quality surveys<sup>1</sup>
- Prioritizing efforts that benefit the broader interests and goals of the University as a whole
- Reducing the duplication of effort

The guidelines **do not apply** to:

- units on campus running surveys of constituents that are part of that unit's normal service area except if the service area is considered to be an entire population, in which case the guidelines do apply, and convenience surveys not targeting specific individuals, such as links posted in the UPDATE or Campus News or on an individual department's website
- students or others posting invites to surveys on their social media accounts
- course evaluations (course-embedded or end of term) and employee evaluations (such as 360° evaluation surveys)
- elections for campus governance roles or other similar voting that may be facilitated through surveying software

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<sup>1</sup> Helpful tips and suggestions can be found here: <https://www.boisestate.edu/ie/surveys/>

## Governing Policies and Guidelines

The Institutional Messaging Policy ([#8100](#)) provides requirements surrounding mass communications to students and employees, including a provision for contacting students with information that is unrelated to a specific course or program. These requests are routed to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (SAEM).

SAEM approves general messaging to students and SAEM oversees the associated [guidelines](#). SAEM has granted Institutional Effectiveness the responsibility for approving and coordinating all requests to survey students or ask them to participate in other types of research studies **through their email addresses**. IE also has similar agreements from the Provost's Office regarding faculty, with HR regarding staff, and University Advancement regarding alumni.

(Note that "Survey" is used as a general term throughout this document to refer to any request to participate in research.)

Individuals conducting human subjects research also are bound by Institutional Review Board (IRB) policy. See [IRB's website](#).

Alumni and other data managed by the University Foundation is governed by Foundation policies and procedures.

## General Procedures

**Making Requests:** Those requesting permission must submit a [University data request form](#) and provide the following information:

- the name and purpose of the survey
- the date range of when the survey will run including reminder dates (see below for additional details regarding launch parameters)
- criteria for the sample group, including any requested demographics (see below for additional details)
- an indication of IRB status and IRB #, where applicable, so that approval can be confirmed
- whether the survey is intended to be a regular survey and if so, how often

**Survey Samples:** The Office of IE will be responsible for generating random samples of students and/or employees. The Division of Advancement will procure samples of alumni of the University.

The Office of IE employs a framework for sampling that considers time requirements for a particular survey, use of incentives, and external requirements where applicable. The Office of IE will help determine appropriate sample sizes, aiming for an expected margin or error of +/- 4 percentage points on responses to items (+/- 5 percentage points for pilot studies) with a 95% confidence level. Samples provided by IE will always exclude deceased students; students under 18 years of age are generally excluded as well (unless approved by IRB). In addition, the Office of IE will manage populations so that the same individuals are not repeatedly sampled (generally not more than three times in a given semester). In general, the Office of IE will not provide additional samples for the same survey if it fails to meet a target response rate.

Permission is rarely granted to survey entire populations. Population surveys are reserved for surveys that are intended to inform university policies or critical university practices where every member of the population should be given an opportunity to provide input. (This does not include surveys that are solely meant to contribute to the scientific literature or surveys that are for informational purposes.) Executive leadership needs to approve such efforts and is informed as appropriate.

Those requesting the sample list are given the following:

- An Excel file with individuals' first name, last name, and email address.
- Demographic variables for the sample may be included if they fall into Level 3 data as outlined in the University Data Classification Standards. Level 2 demographic variables may be requested but approval for their release will be determined by the Registrar in the case of student data or AVP for Human Resources in the case of employee data.
- A statement of use such as a FERPA statement for student data, and a general use statement for employee or alumni data.

Individuals conducting the survey need to:

- comply with relevant regulations (e.g., FERPA or other) regarding the contact list and data they are provided
- include in their messaging a statement that the survey was approved according to the relevant guidelines
- notify the Office of IE if the dates for the administration of the survey change
- assume all responsibility for administration of the survey and management and use of the collected data

**Timeline Parameters:**

- Surveys will generally not be permitted during the first week of the semester, dead week, or finals week.
- Surveys will generally not run for longer than three weeks and will include no more than three reminders. It is recommended that the first reminder should be sent a few days after the initial invite.
- Requests for permission and survey samples should be made a minimum of 4-6 weeks in advance of the desired timeframe.

**Survey Calendar:** Surveys will be posted to a publicly available [survey calendar](#). Institutional Effectiveness will be responsible for maintaining and posting the calendar.

## Planning for Surveys

In an effort to identify University priorities and facilitate advanced planning, the Office of IE will contact leadership in each Division of the University on or around the following dates to begin to identify upcoming efforts: July 15 for fall term surveys, October 15 for spring term surveys, March 15 for summer term surveys.

The notification of planned surveys will serve as the first step only of the request process. Responsible individuals will still need to make requests for scheduling, samples, etc. In cases where multiple surveys are planned from the same Division or surveys with similar content or timelines, leadership may be asked to prioritize efforts in order to meet with the spirit of these guidelines.

## Unapproved Surveys

Due to the high volume and existing demand, some surveys are not approved as a matter of general practice, for the following reasons.

- To protect response rates to important university surveys that inform planning around university priorities as well as external reporting.
- Safeguarding contact information to mitigate the use or misuse of University data.
- Allowing an unchecked volume of surveys that could result in many such requests from units all across campus and would be unsustainable.

The following are generally not approved:

- surveys conducted by students for class projects or individual interest
- external organizations, individuals, or researchers not affiliated with Boise State
- units surveying students or employees outside of their unit or service group but within the University (e.g., a department wanting to survey students who left the major, or ask others outside of the department about curricular interests, etc.)

Surveys that are of a **legitimate interest** to the University or a unit on campus may be considered provided that the following criteria are met:

- it is directly connected to or stems from a University initiative or strategic planning committee,
- we have communication to that effect from leadership in that unit,
- the sponsor, or someone designated by the sponsor, agrees to do a quality check on the survey to at least make sure there is no improper language and there is communication about whether the responses will be kept confidential/reported anonymously, and
- the sponsor, or someone designated by the sponsor, of the survey assumes all responsibility for appropriate use of the provided contact list and data collected from the survey.

The requirements above apply regardless of who designed or is administering the survey. If approved, the survey must follow the procedures outlined in this document and include a note that the survey was approved by the supporting / sponsoring unit.

## Resolving Issues or Making Appeals

Any disagreements regarding the aforementioned procedures and expectations will be escalated to the director/AVP/leader of the relevant office to discuss with the Institutional Effectiveness Office. Issues that remain unresolved and for which appeals are desired will be referred to the Data Governance Committee, which will have final authority for resolution.

## External Survey Solicitations

**Requests to take surveys:** Members of the campus community may sometimes receive requests to complete surveys from external entities. Individuals can consult the campus survey calendar to determine if the survey is sanctioned by Boise State. If the survey is not sanctioned by Boise State, the recipient may participate if they believe the survey to be valuable or simply mark the message as spam and delete it.

**Requests to distribute surveys on behalf of someone else:** Members of the campus community may be asked to distribute surveys on behalf of individuals or organizations external to Boise State. As indicated above, Boise State generally does not grant permission to external entities to survey Boise State populations, so individuals should decline to distribute surveys on behalf of another individual. If the request appears to be connected to a legitimate University interest, the individual may forward the message to the relevant University office. Should a desire to participate be determined, the procedures outlined in this document would apply.