

Employers Achieve High Response Rates on CTR Surveys

The experiences of employers has shown that the following techniques can be very effective in increasing survey response rates:

- Group administration/collection
- Tracking and follow up
- Providing incentives

And, experienced ETCs report that perhaps the single most important factor in achieving a high response rate is management commitment to the survey project. Managers should let employees know why they are being surveyed, why it is important to the employees and the organization, and how the results will be used.

71% of worksites in King County received response rates of 70% or greater during the 1998/99 survey.

22% achieved a 90% or better response rate.

Group Administration:

Questionnaires may be distributed and completed in group settings. This method works best when all employees (or all employees in a work group) are eligible for filling out CTR surveys. This may either be a regular group session, such as a staff meeting, or a special group session scheduled specifically for the survey.

A tracking system should be set up to show who would normally attend the meeting and who filled out questionnaires. Those unable to attend the meeting should be followed up with and encouraged to complete a CTR survey.

United Airlines sent word about the upcoming CTR survey to their 450 affected employees at the reservation center in downtown Seattle via e-mail. The ETC distributed and collected the questionnaires at a series of short 'mini-meetings'. With the support of management and efficient planning, the employees were relieved of their

phone duties to attend the meetings and complete the survey. This strategy allowed them to achieve a remarkable **100% response rate**.

Tracking and Follow-up:

1. Send a short cover letter with the questionnaire stating the purpose and importance of the survey (do not staple or clip the cover letter to the survey form.) Give a deadline and specify a method for returning questionnaires.
2. The questionnaires can be sent out in an individual mailing, with paychecks, or distributed by supervisors.
3. Set up a tracking system to determine which questionnaires have been returned and which have not. Care should be taken to ensure confidentiality.
4. Questionnaires can be returned directly to central company return address, departmental return address, or supervisors.
5. Just prior to the return deadline, send a reminder announcement (if possible) about completing the survey.
6. After the completion deadline, determine how many have been returned. If the response rate is below 70 percent, do one or both of the following for non-respondents:
 - send a reminder note, using the company communication method. The reminder should tell the person that the questionnaire has not been received and ask for return within two days. If needed, send another questionnaire.
 - contact employees who have not returned their questionnaires to encourage them to complete and return it.

City University received a **100%** response rate at both its Bellevue and Renton locations. A "Top-down" plan was implemented by the ETC to encourage participation. City University's Vice President personally distributed the questionnaires to each supervisor with a personally signed cover letter. Each supervisor was responsible for the return of questionnaires from his or her employees. The ETC utilized a payroll list to track each questionnaire, with names checked off as questionnaires were returned.

“Regardless of whether a worksite surveys CTR-affected employees or all employees, the response rate will be calculated as the number of questionnaires returned divided by the number of questionnaires distributed. It is therefore advantageous for the employer to identify the target survey group as best as possible. This will enable them to plan an effective survey process and maximize response rates.” (WA State DOT - Guide to Employee Surveys, August 2000)

Incentives:

Incentives for returning the survey can also boost response rate. Incentives need not be expensive. Incentives make participation more fun and underscore the importance management places on the survey. Local merchants may be willing to provide incentives, either donating them outright or providing a discount. Some ideas for incentives include:

- Beverage or food treats
- Transit tickets
- Coupons for discounts on local goods or services
- Small gift items, such as mugs, magnets, T-shirts, or hats
- Gift certificates or entry blanks for drawings. Prizes may include transit passes, tickets for entertainment or sporting events, restaurant meals, savings bonds, bicycles, or running shoes.

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center surveyed all 1,800 employees at their 4 affected worksites in Seattle. Prior to surveying, the ETC ran some newsletter articles about the law and the purpose of the upcoming survey. The questionnaires were then distributed through inter-office mail with a cover memo from the department manager explaining the logistics of completing and returning the questionnaire.

Free latte coupons were given to the first 100 people to return surveys. Response rates at the 4 sites varied from 60% to 96%. The ETC believes

the results reflect the level of support shown by the worksite managers, and the level of importance placed on completion of the survey with their department managers. Some good-natured competition between worksites, fueled by these response rates, is planned for the next survey process by the ETC.

70% is the minimum response rate required to avoid “fill-in” affecting NDAT and VMT adversely. However, every worksite must follow the distribution and collection guidelines to achieve their response rate.

The state also requires a *minimum* response rate of 50% on all surveys for the survey to be considered valid. Employers who do not meet this minimum response rate will need to re-survey their employees during the same survey cycle.

Four Seasons Olympic Hotel in downtown Seattle achieved a 100% response rate from their nearly 550 employees through ETC enthusiasm, management support and by getting all department heads involved. The ETC introduced the CTR survey at the monthly Board of Operations meeting. Department heads provided the ETC with employee lists including indicating which employees were CTR affected. The general manager stressed the importance of getting a 100% response. The whole management team agreed that making the ‘survey experience’ enjoyable for employees would be the most effective approach.

Consequently, the head of one of the smaller departments decided to take the whole department out for lattes to complete the questionnaires. The Executive Housekeeper reserved the cafeteria several times throughout the week and served snacks to the housekeeping staff while they completed their questionnaires. Because of the diversity of the housekeeping staff, hotel translators were available to help employees with English as their second language.

Final responsibility for getting a 100% response remained with the ETC, who followed up with those employees whose names had not been checked off by the department heads.

