An introduction to sampling for

CLIENT SURVEYS

Why Sample?

- It may not be necessary to ask all clients to participate in a survey if a sample can be large enough to represent the experiences and views of the client population with sufficient precision.
- An example of a client population would be “all clients that received advice services during 2021”. Within a client population there may be a number of groups of interest for which separate findings would be useful, such as “female clients receiving family law advice services during 2021”.
- Sampling is done to reduce survey costs and to eliminate unnecessary burden on clients.
- Sampling is not appropriate when the number of clients in the client population is small, as all eligible clients will then have to be asked to participate to achieve sufficiently precise findings. Our Sample Size Selector will tell you when this is the case.

Who to sample?

- The aim is for the views and experiences of the clients that participate in the survey to represent those of all the clients in the population from which they are selected.
- It may be appropriate to narrow the eligibility in some limited circumstances. For example, where client safety and wellbeing may be compromised, or there are issues with client access, such as under 16s, prisoners and the homeless.
- Clients whose first language is not English can be offered surveys translated by interpreters or may use family members. Online translation tools are not yet sufficiently nuanced for survey questions.
- Exclusions should be noted when reporting findings, so it is clear whose views are not represented.
- Narrowing eligibility to exclude clients who did not receive a positive outcome limits the validity and usefulness of survey findings.
- Asking staff to recommend clients to participate in the survey is not good practice, as it risks bias.

What about clients of multiple services?

- A client survey can either be undertaken on a sample of clients or a sample of services, depending on how the sample is selected, and this should be clearly stated in the report of findings.
- If the aim is to report on a sample of clients, a client who received multiple services in the reporting period only needs to complete the survey once, reducing the burden on those clients.
- Asking multiple service clients about the most recent service they received will be easiest for client recall and should introduce minimal bias, compared to asking about their most useful or memorable service for example.
- As the experience and views of multiple service clients are likely to differ from those of single service clients, it may be useful to distinguish between multiple and single service clients in the data analysis and reporting, by linking to client service data.
- Where a new sample is selected for each month over a reporting year, it should be recognised that there is a potential for bias if clients receiving multiple services are mainly sampled in the early months of the year and not again. This can probably be ignored unless analysing by month.

JUSTICE METHODS

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An introduction to sampling for Client Surveys

How to sample?

- The sampling method must ensure there is no bias in who is asked to do the survey.
- This is achieved by ensuring that everyone in the eligible population has a known, and non-zero, chance of being selected to participate.
- Random sampling is one method to do this but be careful that the selection from the client population is genuinely random. For example, if selecting from a list of clients, the list is not ordered on any criteria that could be related to client experiences and opinions.

What is stratification?

- Data stratification is the separation of data into smaller, more defined strata based on a predetermined set of criteria
- Stratification of the sample, prior to random sampling, can help ensure sufficient clients are included from each of the groups of interest. It also increases the precision of estimates for the same sample size.
- Stratification can be on any criteria for which information is held in the client service data from which the sample is selected. This could include, any client demographic, area of law, mode of service, office location, and type of service. Although it is feasible to stratify by multiple criteria, one or two criteria will be most manageable.
- For example, if there is interest in comparing the views of male and female clients separately for family, civil and criminal law, first divide the client population into the three areas of law, and then into male/female within each area of law. Select separate samples of clients from each of the resulting six separate groups of interest. Use our Sample Size Selector to calculate the necessary sample size for each of the six groups of interest.
- Where the sample selected from each group is not proportionate to the number of clients of that type in the population, it will be necessary to weight the data prior to reporting findings.

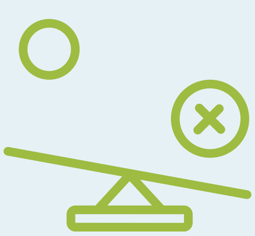
How many to sample?

- The number of clients sampled will determine how precise the findings are, and therefore the conclusions that can be drawn when comparing different client groups or different service modes or different periods of time.
- Consider how the findings will be disaggregated when reporting. If findings will be reported separately for different groups of interest, ensure there is adequate sample for each of these groups. Examples of groups of interest include area of law, service type, mode of service and any of the client characteristics. Some may be groups within groups, such as gender within service type within area of law.
- The smaller the sample the less precise the findings. If there is insufficient sample size for some groups, report the findings as ‘indicative only’ as they can’t be generalised to the relevant client population with sufficient confidence.
- Determining the appropriate sample size is challenging, particularly as not all relevant information is known prior to conducting the survey.
- The Foundation’s SampleSize Selector can help you decide the sample size to aim for.

What is weighting?

- Weighting should always adjust for bias introduced by the sampling strategy used.
- For example, if an equal number of male and female clients are sampled in the survey, but the client population from which they are selected is 20% male and 80% female, it will be necessary to down-weight the contribution of the male respondents and up-weight the contribution of the female respondents when reporting for men and women combined.

- Weighting can also be used to adjust for differential response from some types of clients, but this is more complex and can impact on the precision of findings, so advice should be sought.



How to sample across a year?

- Sampling weekly or monthly ensures clients are asked about recent experiences and that the views of clients from throughout a reporting year are captured.
- Assuming that reporting will be for the entire year, first calculate the total number of clients that should be sampled each year using our Sample Size Selector.
- Although for analysis purposes, this number should be divided between each week/month in proportion to the total number of clients seen each week/month, in practice it will be easier to select a roughly equally sized sample for each week/month.
- If equally sized samples are taken, it will be necessary to weight the data prior to analysis to reflect any large variations in the number of clients actually seen each month. Small variations can safely be ignored.
- For example, an equally sized sample is taken from each month of the year, but twice as many clients were provided with a service in December as in each of the other months. When reporting findings for the entire year, the data from December clients must be given twice the weight when combined with data from the other months.

What is a quota sample?

- A quota sample has some similarities to stratification in that it also divides the population of interest into groups and samples from each of these.
- However, it is not such a robust methodology because once the quota is filled, there is no further attempt to contact clients selected for the sample.
- In practice this means that survey participants will over-represent the easy-to-reach clients. How much this matters depends on whether the easy-to-reach differ in their views.
- Quota sampling is used to save costs but it is not generally considered an appropriate methodology to draw robust conclusions about the client population.

What is clustering?

- Clustering is used when it isn't practical to sample from, for example, all parts of an organisation or all geographic areas. Each cluster could comprise one or more offices, or one or more adjacent suburbs.
- Sampling is in two stages. First a random sample of clusters (e.g. office(s)) is selected, and then a random sample of clients is selected from within each cluster.
- Because of the risk of bias, it is preferable to sample a smaller number of clients from a larger number of clusters, but this is balanced against practical and cost constraints.
- Clustering increases the sample size required for the same level of precision as a non-cluster sample. Our sample size selector tool should not therefore be relied on for a cluster sample.