

**Surveys: Milwaukee County
Departments Collect Information
Primarily from Program Users but
Guidance should be Provided to
Improve Data Collection Methods**

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**Milwaukee County Office of the Comptroller
Audit Services Division**

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Milwaukee County Comptroller**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jennifer L. Folliard", is positioned above a horizontal line.

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The Office of Equity at Milwaukee County lists one of its four service areas as Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships

We direct our recommendations to the County's Office of Equity. One of its goals is to develop standard practices and frameworks for community engagement, and to lead and support countywide community outreach initiatives and strategic partnerships with an emphasis on communities of color and vulnerable populations across the County



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Office of Equity



With as diverse a community and services within Milwaukee County, soliciting and hearing from all sectors of the County is a difficult task. Our overall objective was to determine whether Milwaukee County departments conduct scientific surveys and receive responses representative of the County's community.

There are three common types of assessments that come to mind when people use the word survey – scientific surveys, customer participation surveys, and community engagement.

Scientific Surveys collect information from a sample of people in a standardized way to better understand a larger population using methods such as questionnaires and in-depth interviews via phone, mail, email, and in-person.



Customer Participation Survey are used to understand the satisfaction levels with an organization's products, services, or experiences. It is often used to measure customers' needs, understand problems with products and/or services, or divide customers by their score.

Community Engagement includes strategies to organize individuals for collective action, as well as strategies to make sure that all voices in a community are heard as part of inclusive decision-making.



We researched standards for all three types of surveys and found a vast amount of information and many common items that crossed between each type of survey.

The four most common survey methods are: in-person, by telephone, online or by mail.

Even a random sample cannot be purely random in practice as some people don't have phones, refuse to answer phones, or are not home.

The Urban Institute recommends small work groups, individual work sessions and large group discussions when collecting community-based input.

Mail surveys are less likely to be filled out by young adults who are more likely to respond to online surveys versus older adults.

In surveys using a probability-based sample, the sample is not selected haphazardly or only from persons who volunteer to participate. It is scientifically chosen so that each person in the population will have a chance of selection.

According to Harvard University, demographic data should only be included in survey questions when it is needed to accomplish the goal or aims of the study.

We interviewed two centers dedicated to surveys and found valuable information from both the University of Wisconsin Madison Survey Research Center and the University of New Orleans Survey Research Center.



Robo calls reduces the costs of surveys and eliminates interviewer bias but the prohibition on cell phones causes problems with achieving a representative population.

The type of survey you select and the number of people you are trying to reach is the main cost driver of the overall survey but a survey may not be the best method to include hard to reach populations.

Sometimes a survey is not the tool to get hard to reach people. It can be that a survey would represent 98% of that group in the design, but the 2% of the group that is missing are the people that the survey needed to reach.

It is imperative that survey analysts accurately post weight the cases to reflect the demographics of the population of interest.

Most of the UW surveys are mail surveys because more people respond to a mail survey than on the phone. It is very expensive to conduct an in-person survey.

The cost of surveys conducted by UW range from \$2,500 to \$13 million with web survey being the least expensive. A web survey can range from \$5,000 to \$8,000, and a telephone survey could range from \$40,000 to \$80,000.



We contacted eight County departments and found they conducted over 160 surveys in recent years. Most were customer participation surveys. The County departments we contacted for survey results also provided community engagement activities conducted by their departments. We were provided with a list of over 446 events.

Summary of Surveys		
Department	Number of Surveys	Date Range
Airport	32	2015-2022
DHHS	46	2015-2022
Human Resources	3	2016-2020
Office of Equity	1	2020
Parks	26	2016-2022
Strategy, Budget & Performance	5	2018-2021, 2023
Sheriff	6	2015-2021
<u>Zoo</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>2015-2022</u>
Total	161	

We selected nine surveys for a more detailed review and answered six questions based upon the research we found from national survey centers and our interviews with the two university survey research centers. The results are below.

List of Responses to Questions Reviewed for each County Survey			
	Yes	No	N/A
Was it a customer participation based survey?	6	3	0
Was it conducted using scientific methods such as sampling?	3	5	1
Were other methods employed beyond a survey?	4	5	0
Were actions taken to increase the participation of historically underrepresented groups?	1	8	0
Was demographic data included?	6	3	0
Was the survey conducted by an outside vendor?	6	3	0

We conducted a review of two large city-wide engagement programs at the City of Philadelphia and the City of Charlotte that involved both scientifically conducted surveys and large community engagement activities. Our analysis of the cities' work showed that in addition to employing methods to ensure a representative survey, additional community based work with a variety of partners produces the most comprehensive results.



The City of Philadelphia:

- Primary methods for engagement included workshops, open houses, online surveys, and pop-up events.
- Data from 11,370 respondents was used and the survey was issued in English, Spanish and simplified Chinese.
- Asian, African-American and Hispanic households were oversampled to attempt to increase the response rates of those groups.
- Over a three month collection period, the City worked with over 60 partners to administer the survey.
- Over 1,500 residents provided input with pop-ups providing the largest input.
- Temple University was selected through a Request for Proposal process via a small contract that was not to exceed \$34,000 and has a panel of 10,000 Philadelphians who they use to provide input and answer survey questions.



The City of Charlotte :

- The rapid growth in the City of Charlotte led to a desire to produce a more comprehensive plan for the City.
- In 2018, the City embarked on a two and a half year community engagement process to develop its plan.
- The outreach portion of the plan focused on accessibility and gaining input from groups, including those typically underrepresented – people of color, youth, non-English speaking residents, and those with lower incomes.
- the City of Charlotte team had over 500,000 interactions with over 6,500 voices through more than 40 methods of engagement.
- Spent \$900,000 to complete their community engagement plan.
- Aspects of the City's process included analysis, community outreach, education and coordination.

We made three recommendations directed toward the Office of Equity as the lead entity.

Recommendation #1 *The Office of Equity lead efforts to develop a guide for departments to use when conducting surveys and gathering data. This guide should be completed and distributed to departments within a year.*

Recommendation #2 *The Office of Equity should lead efforts to encourage departments, via both its guide to surveys and when providing assistance to departments to include demographics of respondents and the methods used in conducting the survey including but not limited to: type of sample selection if applicable, conducted in-house or via contract, and cost of contract when results of a survey are reported to the public or the County Board.*

Recommendation #3 *The Office of Equity lead efforts to develop a guide to maximize the results of community engagements that departments are participating in and provide the guide to departments within one year.*

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