

Altarum Institute Center for Survey Research

Survey Design

Survey research project plans can be assembled by the Altarum Center for Survey Research, which brings together all relevant specialties, including survey methodologists, survey operations specialists, contract, project management, and, budget experts, statisticians, and programming, data analysis, and IT staff. The overall survey design is created in close cooperation with client organizations and subject matter experts to ensure that the design fulfills the underlying research goals while incorporating time and resources requirements.

Elements of survey design can include the following:

- ▲ ▲ Questionnaire development, including literature searches, adapting standardized instruments, creating new instruments through qualitative research with focus groups and key-informant interviews, and testing instruments through cognitive interviewing and pilot testing.
- ▲ ▲ Sample design based on reviews of Census data, EPSEM designs, client and administrative databases, incorporation of power calculations and analytical strategies, reviewing post-field weighting strategies, and understanding client research goals to define appropriate stratifications and nesting designs.
- ▲ ▲ Mode selection, non-response strategies and mitigation techniques, bias source analysis, and strategies. The Altarum Center for Survey Research can field surveys using CATI, mail, Web, Interactive Voice Response (IVR), and onsite modes. Altarum Institute can coordinate combinations of modes using its centralized sample management system.
- ▲ ▲ Advanced statistical analysis and data visualization, with sophisticated results delivery through Business Intelligence Websites and custom briefings and reports.

Research Objectives

Because Altarum's Center for Survey Research is deeply connected with its health and public policy experts, research objectives for survey components are not developed in a vacuum; Altarum designs survey projects with the specific research objectives in mind. Design components flow backward from the analytical objectives of the study. Survey design must be oriented toward achieving research objectives with the minimum use of resources, consistent with meeting client goals for objective, statistically reliable, and actionable research findings. Because Altarum is frequently involved not only in conducting research but also in making recommendations based on research findings and being held accountable for successful interventions and initiatives based on those same findings, Altarum is especially sensitive to making survey research responsive to the overall policy goals. This holistic approach to research objectives gives Altarum a qualitative advantage over organizations that are simply concerned with survey data collection without cognizance of client objectives.

Sample Construction

Designing and constructing effective and efficient samples is central to any survey project. The Altarum Center for Survey Research has sampling statisticians on staff and can construct complex samples, including equal probability household samples, specialized lists, and targeted samples. Operationally, the Center for Survey Research can manage and coordinate samples that use multimode data collection methods or create and maintain panels for longitudinal studies. Altarum can develop customized sampling plans that start with such sources as Census data or administrative data from client agencies, health plans, government databases, and so forth. All sample construction is designed to achieve defensible statistical analysis plans with appropriate power calculations. Altarum can also adjust complex sampling schemes to accommodate appropriate weighting and design effects.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

No single mode of data collection can serve all research needs. Altarum can implement survey data collection using CATI telephone interviewing specialized onsite interviewers, very large-scale mailed questionnaire methods, Web-based surveying, and such technologies as IVR. Moreover, the sample management system fully integrates all these methods into a unified sample master database. In addition to diverse data collection methods, Altarum is also highly experienced in questionnaire design tools including focus groups, cognitive interviewing, formal pretests, and pilots.

Quality Assurance Plans

Data collection quality assurance is a continuous parallel effort for all projects. Each survey design and operations component has an associated quality assurance step. Because Altarum specializes in health services research from a systems perspective, Altarum has an unparalleled approach to quality assurance. Some of Altarum's larger clients use several data collection vendors, and Altarum has frequently been asked to perform oversight and quality assurance audit services on these other survey vendors, precisely because of Altarum's reputation for disciplined processes. Within Altarum, the Institute has a division that specializes in quality of care research and assessment for medical care delivery organizations. Altarum also has a group that delivers Lean Six Sigma services, which can analyze and engineer high-reliability processes for service organizations, using very sophisticated human factors engineering techniques. Quality is not just something that Altarum adds on at the end of projects; Altarum trains other organizations in quality assurance processes, and it is an integral component of all of Altarum's work.

Data Analysis

Because Altarum's data collection operations staff members are closely integrated with Altarum senior subject matter experts, Altarum can ensure that these components of an overall research plan remain integrated throughout the project and adhere to the research plan. Moreover, all of Altarum's survey methodology and operations experts also have in-depth experience in health and public policy research, so there is no disconnect across functional areas. Altarum's statisticians and analysts are very experienced in working with survey data and understand the

special techniques that must be applied to compensate for complex weights, typical categorical coding of survey data, imputation and management of missing data, non-response bias analysis, and related survey specific considerations.

Reports and Presentations

Whereas the Altarum Center for Survey Research has all the technical expertise, in-depth experience, and a very large operations capability, clients do not see Altarum primarily as simply a survey research and operations organization. Altarum's typical project requires it to design and implement complex surveys, but the primary deliverables are reports, presentations, and recommendations that are based on this research. Many studies require that Altarum prepares formal publications in peer reviewed journals.

Altarum research staff members are technically sophisticated and can prepare and present results in a variety of formats and modes, including PDF, HTML, and so forth. Beyond these capabilities, Altarum has a graphics and communications group that can prepare professional quality publication ready formats for print and/ or electronic release.