

# The Pros and Cons of Sampling

One of the most important decisions in the planning of a survey is the number of people that should participate. Ideally, everyone would take part, but limited resources sometimes preclude a census. Accordingly an appropriate sample must be determined.

The sample size necessary for a survey depends on the desired precision. Precision is defined as the size of the confidence interval that one is willing to tolerate in a survey. For example, in public opinion polls it is common to hear statements such as “55% of the sample approves of the way the president is conducting foreign affairs. The margin of error is +2%.” This statement means that we can be confident that the approval rating for the population from which the sample is drawn is somewhere between 53% and 57%. That range of values reflects the uncertainty that comes with using a small part of a population--the sample--to estimate the opinion of the entire population. Larger samples provide greater precision.

There is more to good sampling than size. A projected sample size is rarely achieved because the return rate is often considerably less than 100%. This projected return rate must be taken into account. It is likewise important to eliminate bias in sampling by using random samples.

The failure to plan the sampling strategy carefully can leave a considerable gap between the group that completes the survey and the group about which decisions will be made. *To get a sampling strategy done for your program, call 314.645.8585.*

<p><b>PROS</b></p>	<p><b>Sampling</b> (Census/Total Population)</p> <p>Best when used for projects with large populations and no demographic segments within the population.</p>	<p><b>CONS</b></p>
<p>Smaller Initial Budget</p>	<p><b>Costs</b></p>	<p><b>Less Comprehensive Data:</b> Typically requires that you spend more on consulting to identify problem areas. Sampling strategy should be designed by Statistician.</p>
<p><b>Administration Logistics</b></p>		
<p>Can provide high level of confidence in the overall data if properly administered.</p>	<p><b>Overall Data</b></p>	<p><b>More Complex Administration:</b> Only some are surveyed, need to produce random selection guidelines, and deliver surveys only to those chosen, including alternates to replace those unable to participate from original list. Requires more logistical administration on behalf of the client to complete survey administration.</p>
<p><b>Demographic Level Data</b></p>		
<p><b>PROS</b></p>	<p><b>Full Survey</b> (Census/Total Population)</p> <p>Best measurement of a survey group. Recommended when you have demographic segments that must be considered within the group, as it produces enough participation in each segment to have reliable data for action planning.</p>	<p><b>CONS</b></p>
<p><b>More Comprehensive Data:</b> Typically requires that you spend less on consulting to identify problem areas.</p>	<p><b>Costs</b></p>	<p>Larger Initial Budget</p>
<p><b>Administration Logistics</b></p>		
<p><b>Simple Administration:</b> Everyone is surveyed, no need to produce random selection guidelines and deliver surveys only to those chosen. Requires less logistical administration on behalf of the client to complete survey administration.</p>	<p><b>Overall Data</b></p>	<p>You most likely lose the demographic level data, and will only be able to understand what the survey group as a whole is thinking. You will not easily identify who the issues belong to in order to address them.</p>
<p><b>Demographic Level Data</b></p>		