



Association of
Title IX Administrators

Considerations for Climate Surveys

20-Minutes-to... *Trained*

Please note that this video module and some of the supplemental materials were created prior to the 2020 Title IX regulations, thus the information contained within may not coincide perfectly with current regulations, as it was filmed in 2019. Any deviation is minor.

Table of Contents

- Learning Outcomes #3
- Discussion Questions #4
- Application Activity #5
- Supplemental Documents #6
 - Campus Climate Surveys, U.S. Department of Justice #6
 - NotAlone.Gov - Climate Surveys: Useful Tools to Help Colleges and Universities in their Efforts to Reduce and Prevent Sexual Assault #7
- Presentation Slides #23



Learning Outcomes

- Participants will differentiate between prevalence, knowledge or awareness, and response-focused climate surveys.
- Participants will understand how the intended audience impacts the necessary structure for demographic information collection in order to maximize usability of data from survey responses.
- Participants will compare the benefits and challenges of collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.
- Participants will explain the importance of streamlining questions in order to capture accurate data.
- Participants will integrate knowledge of survey fatigue and culture change when structuring the distribution of climate surveys.

Discussion Questions

- What type of survey is most needed at your institution (e.g., prevalence, knowledge or awareness, or response-focused) and why?
- Who should be involved in developing the survey questions and structure?
- What incentives are most effective for eliciting survey participation based on your institution's culture?
- What information do you want to learn through the result of your survey?
- Should focus groups be facilitated post-survey?
 - If so, who should facilitate them?
 - How should they be structured?

Application Activity

Using your responses to the discussion questions regarding survey type and information sought, draft five to ten questions you view as critical for your climate survey. After drafting your questions, evaluate them based on the following:

- Does each question ask for a response to only one item/topic?
- If terminology is used, has a definition been provided to ensure data accuracy?
- Does any word or phrase in the question have an alternative meaning to that which is intended?
- Who is the audience for the question?
- What information will the responses to the question tell you?
- How will the information gained in response to the question help you?

Supplemental Materials

Campus Climate Survey, U.S. Department of Justice

Campus climate surveys are essential because they generate data on the nature and extent of sexual assault on campuses, as well as campus attitudes surrounding sexual assault. Armed with accurate data, administrators and students can then begin to direct resources where they are most needed. Both the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault and the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights have identified campus climate surveys as best practices.

The Office on Violence Against Women's Student Action Packet is designed to help students navigate the complexities of conducting a campus climate survey on sexual assault at their own college or university. The items in the Packet give students resources to help them effectively engage with their college or university's administration.

The Office on Violence Against Women's has also developed an Administrator Information Packet to guide college and university administrators through the process of developing and implementing a campus climate survey on campus sexual assault.

NotAlone.Gov - Climate Surveys: Useful Tools to Help Colleges and Universities in Their Efforts to Reduce and Prevent Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a significant challenge for colleges and universities nationwide, affecting the health, mental health, and academic success of students. Many schools are working to address sexual assault, but lack assessment tools to understand the scope or nature of the problem. Schools are looking to climate surveys to fill this gap in knowledge, and conducting regular climate surveys is a best-practice response to campus sexual assault.

However, surveys not based on science and best practices may not accurately measure the sexual assault problem at a given school. Universities may have both the capacity and the will to conduct meaningful climate surveys, but they might not be sure of where to start, how to conduct the survey, and what questions to ask. Given the demand for more information and the demonstrated value of climate surveys, this resource presents examples of climate survey questions that are among the best currently available and provides an outline of issues to consider when conducting a climate survey.

Why are climate surveys important for colleges and universities?

We know from decades of research that victims rarely report sexual assault to law enforcement. Many victims do not even access formal services, like crisis centers. Thus, official statistics underrepresent the extent of the problem on any one campus. Further, campus response, intervention, and prevention efforts will be more successful if they are tailored to the needs of each campus community.

Understanding other climate issues, such as students' knowledge about reporting policies and resources for victims, their attitudes about prevention, and their perceptions about how their community is addressing the problem of sexual violence, are critical pieces of information for improving campus responses.

Schools may see additional benefits from conducting climate surveys. For example, when campuses address sexual violence, victims may feel more comfortable coming forward and reported rates of assault might increase. This may enable campus or local law enforcement to deal with serial perpetrators, or help victims heal from the trauma they have experienced, enabling them to stay in school and feel confident in the school's handling of the assault.

What is the purpose of this document?

This document aims to share key concepts and best practices for conducting a climate survey as part of a comprehensive effort to address sexual assault on campus. Many of the suggestions and guidelines offered in this resource pose crucial questions that schools need to ask when doing a climate survey.

The approach described here is designed to yield data on campus sexual assault that are meaningful, reliable, and useful. Climate surveys can seem burdensome, but when done thoughtfully and effectively they yield valuable information that can contribute to the success of sexual assault prevention and response efforts.

This document has limitations because it cannot cover in detail how to address the specific needs of each school. Further, it cannot provide detailed training on data collection and analysis. Every school is different, and campus leaders will need to work with research experts to conduct a climate survey.

Please note this document does not constitute legal advice, and institutions that implement a climate survey using the suggestions in this document may still be found to be out of compliance with federal law(s) (e.g. if the institution fails to effectively address a hostile education environment created by sexual misconduct).

What do we mean by a climate survey?

This document is an overview of issues to consider when determining how to conduct a climate survey on campus. As described in this document, a climate survey examines both the amount of sexual assault occurring (prevalence or incidence) and perceptions of campus climate.

Perceptions of campus climate are attitudes among students, faculty, staff, and/or administrators about the campus atmosphere regarding sexual assault. In practice, perceptions of climate are measured in many different ways, including asking what members of the community think about factors like: the way the campus – including fellow students – responds to sexual assault; the viability of campus policies; how much campus leadership cares about sexual assault; and how safe students feel. Schools currently use a variety of climate surveys, but those surveys often focus only on perceptions of climate and do not measure prevalence or incidence of sexual assault.

We use the term “survey” to mean a standard set of items given to participants, usually in a questionnaire, to assess different aspects of campus climate. As discussed in this document, there are many issues to consider (including how the sample of participants is gathered) that must be considered in order to produce survey data that is trustworthy and useful. The set of campus survey questions included here represent current promising practices for measuring campus climate from previous studies. Additional research is planned to refine this set of questions as a best practice survey instrument.

What is the value of climate surveys?

- Climate surveys can provide information about community perceptions, knowledge and attitudes relevant to sexual assault.
- Incident rates assessed via confidential or anonymous surveys can be another source of data about the extent of the problem.
- Regularly administering surveys can show changes over time, such as decreases in sexual assaults and increases in awareness or reporting.
- Surveys can provide information about the problem in a particular campus community, enabling schools to tailor prevention and response efforts.
- Conducting a climate survey can demonstrate the university's commitment to addressing sexual assault and build trust with students, faculty, parents, and others.

Is it possible to do a climate survey at my college, community college, or university?

Universities and colleges are well positioned to do this work, either because of the research expertise on their own campuses or because of relationships they have with other campuses in their region with whom they can partner. Generating knowledge, cultivating learning among students, and using knowledge to improve student learning are core values for campuses, and they are values that align with the importance of climate surveys. This document provides information for campuses of different sizes, needs, and resources.

GUIDELINES AND KEY QUESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING A CLIMATE SURVEY

What Do You Want to Know?

Each community needs to set particular goals for their climate survey to guide what information they want to collect. The most important information to collect is about rates of sexual violence and knowledge of policies and resources. Campuses should identify the key individuals who will help define the goals of the survey.

This document includes examples of measures for assessing questions related to some of the most common goals of a campus climate survey: How many students have experienced sexual assault? How many know a friend who is a victim? In what context did the assault occur? How do students perceive campus leaders' trustworthiness? How do students perceive campus responses to sexual assault? How do they perceive campus safety? What do students know about campus policies and resources related to sexual assault? What sexual assault prevention education have they had? How many students report that they have been victimized? Do victims disclose their experiences and to whom? Where did these victimizations occur? What are students' attitudes about being helpful bystanders? These are organized into a core set of concepts that should be at the center of any campus' goals for a survey, along with additional modules that address topics that may be useful for some more specific campus goals. In preparing this document, we sought out example items that represent best practices in measuring victimization and climate and compiled an evidence-informed survey.

What Resources Do You Have?

There are a range of methods that can be used to conduct a campus climate survey. Each has strengths and weaknesses, though a number of factors are important for gathering credible data (see discussion below). Campuses will want to do the best survey possible with the resources they have available. This requires first that campuses examine what resources they have available for the project: what campus faculty or research personnel are available to help with survey design, data collection and analysis? Will they conduct the survey as part of their regular job or for additional pay? Does the campus already have access to an online survey platform or will one need to be purchased? Will incentives such as a lottery for gift cards or prizes be offered to participants who complete the survey as an incentive for participation? These are a sample of the types of questions a campus climate survey committee should ask at the outset of planning for the survey.

Is the Data Trustworthy?

Survey research methods can be quite complex and there are many factors that go into gathering data that are credible and useful. Below are key questions and issues to consider. These are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to provide some guidelines for a practical approach to climate surveys. Schools should prioritize gathering the best information within the constraints of available resources.

CONDUCTING SURVEYS AND COLLECTING DATA

Planning for the Survey: Consultation and Technical Assistance

The aim for any survey is to collect high-quality data. In the planning process, campuses should identify technical experts with research training who can consult on all aspects of the survey, including design, sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, and report writing. This expertise can be found in a number of places.

- Partnerships with faculty researchers on campus or with staff at a campus institutional research office. Strengths: Local experts may be able to work on climate surveys as part of their regular service on campus. They are also easier to meet and talk with since they are located on campus. Their involvement demonstrates faculty and school commitment to understanding the problem of sexual assault on their campus. Limitation: As members of the campus community, they may not be able to be completely impartial or independent in reporting findings of the survey.
- Regional partnerships. Not all campuses have internal resources for conducting research. Therefore, states or regions should consider regional partnerships. For example, a survey could be located and hosted at a campus that has a survey center or faculty with survey expertise and offered to other campuses regionally. Strengths: Provides research resources for campuses that have fewer resources. This model can also allow for aggregate data to be collected for a region in

the event that some schools do not wish to have specific data identified with their campus.

Limitations: Technical experts are located off campus. Campuses in the regional partnership will have to reach agreement upon the goals of the survey and there will be less room for tailoring to individual campuses in the questions asked, and, possibly, in how the findings are reported.

- Private research firms can also be used to conduct surveys for campuses. Strengths: They serve as independent entities that are located outside the campus. They often have the specialized experience, methodology, and corporate capabilities to conduct these surveys using industry standards and best practices. Limitations: Using a private firm requires allocation of resources to pay their fees and their researchers may not know the unique issues on campus.

How Data Is Collected

Many different methods can be used for surveys, including in-person interviews, phone interviews, computer-assisted interviews, paper and pencil surveys, and online surveys. All are self-report, meaning that the information gathered depends on what respondents are willing to share. Beyond this, each has strengths and limitations and it is beyond the scope of this document to describe them all.

It is important to consider is what methods will best reach the sample of participants you need, and what resources exist to support your choice. For example, it has become a challenge to get people to respond to phone surveys because technology allows people to screen calls easily.* Interviews require personnel who are well trained to make the phone calls or conduct in-person interviews. Paper and pencil surveys may be easy to distribute in classes but may make privacy of research participants difficult to ensure if students sit near each other or if disclosing victimization results in answering more questions in a way that others in the room can notice.

This method also requires resources for data entry. It is likely most practical for campuses to use online surveys. One advantage of using online surveys is that most students on college campuses use electronic communication such as email or texting and have access to computers. Having a list of student e-mails makes it much easier to identify eligible respondents and to distribute the survey link. With a complete roster of eligible students, you can invite all possible participants and have a basis for making appropriate adjustments for nonresponses. However, unless a system for tracking participation is developed, it is often possible for students to take the survey more than once. Further, to ensure confidentiality for participants, the survey needs to be programmed so that IP addresses are not collected and responses of individual students cannot be identified. Online surveys can be programmed so that students are directed to a different place to register for a lottery with incentives. This may discourage students from taking the survey twice but also protects students' confidentiality because their responses to the survey are not linked to their lottery entry. Campus surveys that have most recently appeared in the research literature used online surveys. Considerations when conducting an online survey include:

- Developing an online survey specific to the campus with a link sent to all students or a sample of students. Many online survey platforms exist that can be used and many campuses have access to these.
 - The complexities of planning a phone survey with college students are beyond the scope of this document. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) uses a phone interview strategy that is quite comprehensive, though tailored for the general population rather than college students.
- Adding questions to a survey that is already being used on your campus. The strength of this approach is that it capitalizes on resources already available. The challenge is that there is likely little room for many questions to be added.
- Anticipating the possibility of multiple responders. Some individuals may try to take the survey more than once. There are techniques to work against this, such as requiring students to report their student ID number. This unique number could be used to prevent a student logging into the survey twice, or allow researchers to examine whether any students took the survey more than once. However, students may worry that researchers will be able to identify who they are and associate their names with their survey answers. This can make it less likely that students will take the survey. Software can be used to decouple the unique identifier from the survey results. Using this technique does not guarantee anonymity, but may help students feel more comfortable. Another option to maximize participation is NOT to ask for any identifying information, and assume that some individuals may take the survey more than once. In that case, campuses should work with research experts to address the statistical challenges of duplicative surveys.

Sample of Participants

A key aspect of whether you can trust the information your survey has gathered, and therefore whether your survey is useful as a foundation for policy and program development, is the sample of people who actually complete the survey. For example, it would be difficult to critique campus policies or conclude that prevention efforts were unhelpful for students on a campus if a survey asked questions of ten students, all of whom had just transferred from another school. Likewise, it would be difficult to have a full picture of victims of sexual assault if only men in their senior year on campus completed the survey. Below are a few key issues to consider, along with suggestions for how to address them. Again, this list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to prompt discussion about sampling and encourage consultation with researchers as part of the campus survey process.

- Representativeness. For data to be most useful for decision-making and campus programming, the sample of participants who provide information in the survey needs to closely resemble the community of students on the campus. If your sample looks like only a certain segment of your campus population, then your findings will only pertain to that group rather than to students as a whole. A number of strategies can be considered.

- Campuses have a finite number of students. One strategy involves a census by sampling the full population using an online survey and inviting all students to participate. Offering an incentive, such as a lottery for a gift certificate, increases participation and increases chances of a good census sample, though research studies typically report that between 25% and 50% of students complete surveys.
 - Even with a census approach, it is unlikely that all students will respond. Collect demographic information in your climate survey so you can assess how the students who took the survey compare to the population of students on your campus. This allows for more targeted recruitment if needed. Be careful, however, about how data will be reported so that small demographic groups on campus are not potentially identified by reporting of data. Nonresponse bias analyses should be conducted to examine underrepresentation of certain groups in the final sample of participants (see, for example, Krebs et al, 2009). Data can still be useful but will need to be qualified in terms of what segments of your community they really describe.
 - If it is impractical to get most students to complete the survey, then you will need to make a plan to draw groups of participants from across key demographic categories (gender, race, year on campus, major, etc.). Examine the plan for bias toward certain groups or away from others. Again, Krebs et al, 2009, provides an example of drawing a random sample of students from registrar enrollment lists.
 - In some circumstances, you may be interested in understanding the experiences of a particular subgroup on campus and thus will oversample from this group.

This has the advantage of improving the information obtained for that group, but presents some data analysis challenges if you are also putting all the data together to talk about the campus as a whole. That is, if certain groups are sampled at a higher rate than others, their impact on the overall estimate will be over-represented compared to how much of the population of students they make up, potentially introducing bias. For example, if you oversample women, given that we know women experience higher rates of sexual assault than men, your overall rate for the full survey will be higher than if the proportion of women in the survey had been similar to the proportion of women students on campus.

- Ensure that survey tools and results are accessible to students with disabilities and English language learners, and conduct targeted outreach to those students in a manner they can understand.
- Consider advertising the survey and its importance to different subgroups of students who may be hard to reach.
- Leadership is key – consider an invitation written by student and campus leadership, highlighting the importance of the survey and encouraging students to complete it.
- If, in spite of all your efforts, your sample over represents some groups (through self-selection), or underrepresents others (through non-response by those groups), there are statistical techniques

such as weighting adjustment that can be used. Consult with technical experts for data analyses as recommended above.

Size of Sample

If you choose to select a sample rather than interviewing the entire universe of students on campus (i.e. conduct a census), in general, the larger the sample, the better the data will be. Statistics performed on small sets of participants can be misleading. This is particularly true for trying to generate estimates of issues like sexual assault. You need a sufficiently large sample to generate enough examples of the problem so that follow up questions, like where the assault happened, can be meaningfully examined (e.g. it would be difficult to make any conclusions about where sexual assaults are occurring if your sample only included five assault victims).

Response rate

This is an estimate of how many people actually took the survey, compared to everyone who was given the opportunity to do so. In general, the higher the response rate, the more trustworthy the data. Incentives for participation can be helpful in boosting response rates (though you want to identify incentives that appeal to all students, not just some subgroups). Also consider the timing of the survey. If it is given too close in time to other surveys on campus, students may feel over-surveyed and ignore requests to participate. Further, consider the length of your survey. Surveys that require a lot of time to complete may not generate high participation rates.

Results of the Survey

Sampling has important implications for data analysis and reporting. If your sample is small, your response rate is low, or the demographics of participants do not match the demographic patterns of your students overall, then it will be difficult to use the information as a marker of what is happening on your campus overall. Rather, it is more an indication of what a subgroup of students thinks or has experienced. Getting a representative and large sample of participants is a priority for climate surveys.

Conducting the Survey: Consult with Your Institutional Review Board

All survey teams must consult with your campus Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure your survey complies with ethical requirements. Working with your campus IRB throughout the process is an important component of any survey or research project. Key ethical considerations the IRB addresses will include:

- Age of research participants. Some college students are not yet 18 years of age, which means they may not legally be able to provide consent to do the survey themselves.

- Informed consent. Participants will need to indicate their consent to participate in the survey and understand what that means. If participants are being asked for identifying information such as their student ID number, make sure the survey will not trigger mandatory reporting (either to law enforcement or to campus authorities) when students indicate victimization experiences.
- Confidentiality of responses. List in the IRB application all individuals who will have access to the survey data and insuring that data are reported in terms of aggregates that do not identify individuals or small groups on campus. Describe how and where the data collected will be stored, for how long, and if the data will ever be released as a public-use file. If so, what steps will be taken to eliminate the risk that any student information will be disclosed. Not releasing the file prevents others from verifying the findings and exploring other questions, but prevents any risk of disclosure. Disclosing a student's response either directly, or by putting together demographic information (probabilistic or indirect identification), could be extremely harmful.

Use Evidence-Informed Survey Measures

Choose items and measures that have been carefully researched. In preparing this document, we selected example items that represent the most well-researched or well-used scales for this work to date. Thus, the example survey here represents a promising practice survey.

Choose an Appropriate Timeframe

Choose the timeframe for your survey, preferably current academic year, past calendar year, or “since starting college.”

- It can be difficult for people to remember beyond 12 months. The use of a calendar highlighting key dates such as the start and end of the semester, semester breaks, holidays, etc. might be useful in aiding recall and may be very practical for online surveys.
- You will want to use a limited timeframe if you hope to repeat the survey in future years and look at trends over time. If surveys are given in the future, surveys should be administered at the same time for each panel in order for estimates to be comparable.
- The current academic year is a good choice (if you survey later in the year) because it provides a boundary on the timeframe that is easy to remember. Students can use the start of the academic year as a memory marker and more accurately report incidents that happened just during that year.

Protecting Participants: Ensure Participant Confidentiality

- To feel comfortable being honest in survey answers, people must know they cannot be personally identified in the data. Schools should not use data to identify specific victims.

- Tell participants upfront how their responses will be used. Who will have access to the data? Will results only be reported in the aggregate? Will data be available to others for further analyses after initial reports are produced?
- Gather demographic data in a way that is not potentially identifying. While data on race/ethnicity is important, on some campuses it may unintentionally identify individual students. Therefore, schools should have a clear plan for who will have access to the data, where data will be stored, and how data will be analyzed and reported. Schools are encouraged not to report specific data for small groups that may be indirectly identified by demographic variables. For example, if there are a small number of non-traditional students on campus, reporting information on that group may risk those students being identified in the survey findings.
- If conducting online surveys, disable collection of IP addresses and date stamps.
- If any identifying information is collected, like student ID numbers, remove this information once duplicate responses have been removed from the dataset.
- Work with your campus Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Protect Participants from Distress

- Researchers often worry about whether questions about interpersonal violence may cause participants distress. A growing body of research, mostly with college students, indicates that participants, including victims, do not find being asked such questions distressing. Many report benefiting from research participation. This should not detract from concerns that some participants may become distressed from questions. Survey instructions should remind students that they can choose not to answer questions and can discontinue participation. In fact, some students who experienced a sexual assault may choose to seek help or services after completing the survey. Providing information about resources and where to get help is important to include in the survey (see below).
- Provide an introduction to the survey that gives participants a preview that some of the questions they will be asked are personal and concern sexual behavior. Remind them that they can choose not to take the survey and can skip questions. Remind them why you are asking.
- Provide all participants with debriefing information at the end of the survey, including lists of contact information for local and national resources, hotlines, and advocacy in case they wish to speak with someone further after completing the survey. This can include information on how to report allegations of sexual violence to appropriate campus officials or campus or local law enforcement. Even if the survey is designed to assess student knowledge of sexual violence policies and procedures, providing access to such policies after the survey can help ensure the dissemination of accurate information.

Using the Data: Include on the Research Team Someone with Skills in Survey Data Analysis

As noted throughout this document, survey research is doable but complex. Data analysis will need to involve examining the representativeness of the sample and conducting statistical weighting when needed. The research team needs at least one person who can carefully analyze the data and work with the team on interpretation. These individuals can analyze the data in accordance with the goals the team has identified for the survey, or determine which questions cannot be answered because of sampling limitations. A skilled data analyst will help ensure that findings reported are consistent with the data collected.

Make Clear Who Will Have Access to the Data and Where Data Will Be Stored to Protect Privacy of the Participants and Integrity of the Data

Data that might contain any identifiable information must be carefully stored on password-protected devices and not on freely accessed networks. Typically, a few researchers in charge of data analysis have access to the data itself while other team members will be given aggregate numbers, summary statistics and analyses. Data are typically de-identified for data analysis as much as possible (for example, by removing student ID numbers once the dataset has been examined for duplicates). The Human Subjects Review Board (IRB) will want to know about and examine the qualifications of all individuals who will have direct access to the data.

Understand the Limits of Your Data

There are many sources of error in survey research. Having clearly defined research questions and critical estimates outlined prior to conducting the survey will help to clarify what should be reported and how. What are the key estimates of interest? What key subgroups should be described (e.g. gender, race, class)? Researchers rely on what participants are willing to self-report and on enough participants being willing to complete the survey. There is the potential for duplicate surveys. Schools should acknowledge the strengths and limits of the data they have gathered and the implications of those limits for what the information tells us about the campus. Reports of climate data should include reflections on data quality and caveats about interpreting or comparing data. Schools need to understand that at times, some of their climate survey goals may not be met if their sample size or representativeness is inadequate. Untrustworthy data can do more harm than good in efforts to change campus climate.

Have a Plan for What Data Will Be Reported

As noted above, data for some campus subgroups might not be reported if the groups are so small that data could be indirectly identifying. This can and should be known prior to conducting the survey and used to establish expectations for key stakeholders. Setting a reporting threshold means that some

results may not be reported, including results that may pertain to subgroups in the population. A related issue concerns the reliability of estimates, including percentages, that may be calculated from the data. For example, you would never want to report out an estimate that is based on only one or two students. Some federal surveys do not report data from 20 or fewer sample cases.

Begin Partnerships around Messaging

- Climate surveys, if they are to be most useful to campuses, should be shared not only
- with key professionals on campus concerned with climate issues and sexual assault, but also with students and with the wider community. This will maximize the use of the data as a tool for awareness and change. It will also make it more likely that community members will participate in future surveys since they have been shown the value of the survey data.
- It is critical that students believe that the survey is a tool to protect them and to ensure they have the opportunity to attend school in a safe and supportive environment. The administration can help get this message out through partnerships with student organizations (e.g. athletics, Greek life, etc.). Proactive messaging will help students see the value in participating.
- Results of climate surveys can be worthwhile for schools because they help identify effective policies as well as policies that need to be revisited. Sharing the findings shows that the school takes the issue seriously. Use the survey results as an opportunity to meet with students and student groups to share ideas for addressing issues and areas for growth revealed in the findings.
- Use examples from other schools that have worked with campus leadership to send a powerful and positive message about the role of climate surveys in a comprehensive approach to sexual assault response and prevention.

Plan for Sustainability

- It is advantageous to do climate surveys multiple times. This can show changes at a campus over time and be an indicator of whether policy and program changes are producing the targeted results.
- “Multiple times” can mean different things. It can mean a panel survey of the community every so many years, or it can mean following students over time during their college career. Schools can decide if they want cross-sectional panels of different students (every three or five years, for example,) or if they want to try to track students. The latter option is more complicated and resource-intensive and beyond the scope of the current document to describe.
- Repeating surveys during a student’s tenure on campus also reminds students that campus leadership takes sexual assault seriously, and that ensuring student safety and preventing violence require diligence and commitment by all members of the campus community.
- By approaching climate surveys in a way that is realistic given a school’s resources, the school can establish a plan for sustaining climate surveys over time and routinely using the findings of climate surveys to fine tune policies and programs related to sexual assault.

CONTENT OF CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS—ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

Introduction and Conclusion to the Survey

Include an introduction to your survey that gives participants a preview of what you will ask and why you are asking. Remind them that they can choose not to participate or can choose to skip questions. Remind them why the information is important to campus safety. Let students know that no individual information will be disclosed, as the purpose of the survey is to provide a statistical description of the school climate and of key subgroups such as gender, race, school class, and age.

Think about how questions will be sequenced in your survey. Begin with a few questions on more neutral topics, and lead in to more sensitive questions about sexual assault. Initial questions can include demographics, such as year in school and gender, or general climate questions, such as knowledge of sexual assault policies. Conclude the survey with resources for participants if they want to learn more about sexual assault or wish to speak with someone in an advocacy or resource position.

Assessing Number of Incidents or Victims Is Necessary to Assess Climate

As previously noted, official statistics from formal response agencies underrepresent the extent of the problem on any one campus.

Assessing rates of sexual assault via confidential surveys provides a different snapshot of the extent of the problem, and if surveys are given over time using representative and large samples, they can show how the nature and scope of the problem change over time. The rate of sexual assault is one of the most important things for schools to measure.

When measuring sexual assault rates, it is useful to ask about violence the individual experienced, and the context in which incidents occurred.

There are two ways to measure the extent of the problem of sexual assault on campuses: prevalence and incidence.

1. Prevalence rates are a count of how many unique people have been victimized during a given period of time (e.g. one in four college seniors were raped during the first four months of the academic year). This is one of the easiest ways to understand the extent of the problem.
2. Incidence rates measure how many times assaults have occurred over a set period of time (e.g. how many times you experienced X during the first semester of this academic year). Some individuals may be assaulted more than once, so total incidents will likely exceed the total number of victims. It is easier to understand incidence rates when they are paired with a count of the number victims (prevalence). Further, it may be very difficult for some victims to recall the exact number of incidents that occurred in a specific period of time. Work with your faculty or research experts to ensure your survey gathers the information you need.

Climate Has Many Dimensions

The campus climate survey example included in this document focuses on only the most critical aspects of understanding sexual violence on campus. Consider forming a work group to discuss whether measuring other aspects of climate in addition to the core elements would be helpful. Learning how many people are being victimized on campus is an essential element of a climate survey. Students' perceptions of campus climate are also important to examine. This is reflected in perceptions of campus leadership's responsiveness, how the campus would handle sexual assault and student safety, and the adequacy of training and resources. Knowledge of policies and resources indicates both the effectiveness of training and the extent to which students use sexual assault resources.

Established Measurement Tools Can and Should be Used

Validated and reliable survey tools exist and should be used when conducting a campus survey. This will ensure trustworthy data. It may also permit campuses to compare their data to other reports using the same measures. Questions that sound useful, but have not been evaluated for use in research, may not always result in information that is credible or helpful.

For example, decades ago it was common to ask about sexual assault by asking someone if they had ever been "raped." This seemed a direct and honest way of understanding victimization rates.

Researchers found, however, that few people labeled what happened to them as rape or were often unwilling to use that label on a research survey. People also had different definitions of rape. As a result, this resulted in underreports of rape and data that were neither precise nor accurate.

Researchers then designed questions that described behaviors that would constitute rape (and sexual assault more broadly) and asked participants if they had ever experienced those behaviors. These questions are, by nature, somewhat graphic, but there is substantial scientific evidence that they yield more accurate results. Through extensive evaluation, researchers – including the National Academy of Sciences and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – have validated these questions as the most effective and scientific means to assess whether someone has been raped or sexually assaulted.

Across topics assessed below, an effort was made to choose measures that focused on behavior rather than hypothetical situations or perceptions, as these attitude measures are not always strongly related to actual behaviors. Further, questions were chosen based on current best practices, when available, or promising practices from the field. Overall, items gathering information about the number of victims are evidence based and have been used often in previous research. Climate perception questions represent more promising practices.

Measuring the Extent of the Problem

- Researchers often recommend measuring academic year prevalence of the problem, how many people report at least one victimization during the current academic year? This keeps the survey from becoming overly long. (To assess true incidence you need to ask how many times each type of victimization occurred for each person and ensure that each person takes the survey at about the same time during the academic year).
- Incidence and prevalence are critical information. Victimization surveys are really the only direct voice of the victim, all other accounts are crafted, sanitized and recorded through official records. The value of hearing directly from the victim cannot be understated.
- In peer-reviewed research, the most widely used and most researched tool is Koss' Sexual Experiences Survey. It can be used to measure victimization and perpetration. It includes questions across the spectrum of sexual violence.
- Climate surveys may include measures of prevalence or incidence of other forms of harassment and discrimination.
- It should be noted that none of these measures provides collection of data that would permit evaluating whether the reported victimization was founded or unfounded.

Measuring Context

It is helpful to understand more about the context of victimization. This can be challenging since some participants may report more than one victimization experience on the survey and asking about each incident can be time consuming. Many surveys ask participants to answer follow-up questions based on choosing the most serious incident.

Types of questions often include: gender of perpetrator; whether the perpetrator was known to the victim; whether the perpetrator was a student on the campus; whether the victim disclosed to anyone; and where the assault/harassment took place.

Measuring Disclosure and Reporting

Given that campuses seek to encourage greater reporting and to understand barriers to disclosure and reporting, including questions about disclosure can be helpful.

The most researched measures in this area are of disclosure reactions by informal supports (e.g. Ullman's Social Reactions Questionnaire or Campbell's measure of secondary victimization by professional helpers). These are extensive measures that are not included here. Rather, brief measures of disclosure, reporting, and challenges to disclosure/reporting are used here and were taken from climate surveys already used by some schools.

Measuring Perceptions of Climate

More general measures of perception of climate appear often in research, though there is some disagreement among scholars about the best way to measure climate perceptions. Measures might include items about harassment and discrimination more broadly, as well as attitudes related specifically to sexual violence.

There are some validated measures of general organization climate in the organizational behavior literature. However, a review of many campus climate surveys reveals that campuses often create their own items, though there is similarity in what they choose to measure. There is, however, little discussion in campus survey reports about the constructs they are trying to measure or about research on their psychometric properties. We chose questions below that represent often used and promising practices from samples of climate surveys.

Other aspects of climate related to sexual violence include rape myth acceptance and bystander attitudes and behaviors.

Measuring Knowledge of Policies and Resources

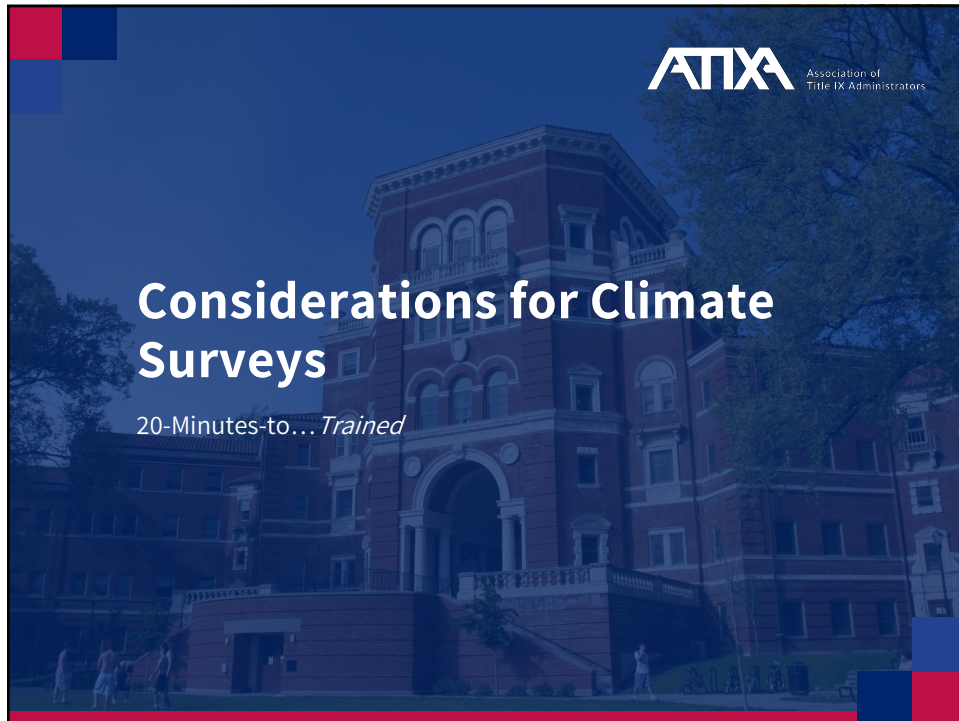
We know from research that people are not always good at estimating or understanding what they know about a topic. People often think they know much more or much less than they actually do. Questions that directly assess their knowledge are better than perception questions.

Items should be simple and jargon free, have answer choices that are detailed enough to provide specific information, and do more than assess an individual's perceived knowledge about a policy. Sample Items were drawn from climate surveys done on college campuses and represent current best promising practices.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV), also known as relationship violence, dating violence, or domestic violence, is also a problem facing many college and university students. The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act) was amended in 2013 to include domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. In response to the Clery Act changes, many schools are considering ways to address IPV on their campuses.

While included here as an optional module, schools are encouraged to measure IPV and use results to inform campus responses and determine needed resources.



1



2

ASSESSING CULTURE

- Purpose of Climate Surveys
 - Assess extent to which discrimination is experienced
 - What kind of discriminatory conduct
 - How severe
 - How frequent
 - Assess knowledge base of community members
 - Understand perceptions of various groups
 - Assess impact/efficacy of training

3

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION & DATA COLLECTION

- Consider audience
- Maximize number of people who complete survey
 - Painless as possible
 - Ensure participants are informed re: purpose & anonymity
- Make it easy to cull insights out of responses
 - Be precise
 - Describe key concepts in detail
 - Address one concept at a time
- Strive for candid feedback
 - *Avoid* leading questions/statements
 - *Avoid* agree/disagree questions (acquiesce bias)

4

SAMPLE SURVEY TOPICS

- Types of discrimination experienced
- Reporting
 - Ability/Awareness
 - Barriers
 - Experiences
 - Reasons for not reporting
- Efficacy of resolution process
 - Investigation
 - Responsive measures
 - Adjudication

5

RESULTS

- Publish results
- Hold feedback sessions
- Focus attention on problematic areas
- Organize efforts
 - Focus on most problematic areas
 - Establish game plan
 - Engage community
- Consider follow-up evaluation tools

6



Questions?

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7



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8