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These guidelines are intended to support your effort to collect data for an assessment of plus 50 workforce programming needs in your college’s service area. The first section contains practical tips for any survey development effort. The second section discusses the particular sections that you might want to include in your own survey, and tailor to your college and community. It should be read through with the companion Sample Survey, also provided to you as part of the Needs Assessment Tool Kit.

Practical Tips for Survey Development

For the survey introduction:

- Explain the survey purpose.
- Ensure anonymity (names of respondents are not known), or confidentiality (names of respondents are not associated with the results in any reporting).
- Tell the respondents how long the survey is expected to take.

Good practices for constructing survey questions:

- Questions should be mostly closed-ended.
- Avoid asking two questions in one (including an “and” or an “or” in the question wording) unless you really do not care about knowing the difference between the two things included.
- There should not be too many response categories. For example: “strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree,” is better than: “strongly disagree, disagree, disagree slightly, agree slightly, agree, strongly agree.”
- Think about whether there will be a middle category. For example, an agreement scale can include a neutral category: “strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree.” When you give people a choice of “neutral,” they are likely to choose it when they don’t have a strong feeling, but they actually may be slightly more positive or negative. If you want to “force a choice,” leave out the middle category. But you may really want to understand what percentage of your respondents do not have a strong opinion either way, so in this case, include the middle category.
- Sometimes, but not always, a “don’t know” or “does not apply” option is necessary. Put yourself in the position of the respondent to figure out if it is needed. Think about the question without such an option, and see – as a respondent – if you would want the option for marking this.
- When you have a “check all that apply” question, include a “none of the above” option.
- When you have a “check all that apply” question, you may also want to include an “other, please specify” option.
- Include instructions for “check one” or “check all that apply.”
- Use vocabulary that is appropriate for an eighth grade comprehension level. Avoid technical language and terms.

Pilot test your survey:

- Find five people who are representative of the group you are trying to reach with your survey, and have them take the survey and provide you with feedback.
• Ask them how long it took them to fill out.
• Interview them about the questions: were they clear? Did the response options make sense? If they were not clear, what changes would have made them clear?
• If you can, pilot a new version to double-check improvements in the survey.

How to Develop a Survey for Workforce Training and Career Development Services

These guidelines are accompanied by a Sample Survey, so you may use some or all of that Sample Survey. However, you will most likely want to tailor questions to your college’s and community’s needs, and write some entirely new survey questions. Here are some guidelines to how to write those questions. We have general guidelines, as well as references to specific survey items as examples of particular types of questions you may want to include.

In General: How to Approach a Survey Item

• **Identify what it is you want to know.** Why would you ask a particular question? For example, the Sample Survey contains a question about what obstacles people see to attending courses. Some of the responses are designed to find out what people need they feel to brush up on, and answers could inform decisions about classes or workshops. Some of the responses will inform marketing of the program. For example, people might be worried that courses aren’t physically accessible. If that is a worry, and the college has taken steps to ensure accessibility, those efforts should be made known in marketing brochures. The bottom line is to ask yourself what do we really need to know?

• **Think about whether a particular question will really get you the information that you want.** A good way to figure this out is to imagine presenting the results. Imagine that you find out that 50% of the respondents say they want to pursue a career in a new field. Now that you “know” that, what do you do with this information? Does it tell you that you want to emphasize services that help people change careers? Or is there really something else you need to know in order to think about where you would concentrate your services during the program development phase?

• **Figure out if the question asks what you think it is asking.** Here we emphasize the good practice of pilot testing. Sometimes the question designers have one thing in mind, but those reading the question don’t understand it that way. It is a good idea to spend time during pilot testing asking the test respondents what they thought the question was asking them. If they didn’t understand the question the same way the question designers did, work with them to see if asking it another way would help. Pilot the new survey items with additional test respondents.

Q1: Ask demographic questions you care about.

• **Gender.** This is a common demographic question, and you may want to know if women tend to be those who are returning to a career after being out of the workforce. You may be interested in creating a networking group just for women. However, it may be that you will not make any programming decisions based on gender, and you can leave this question out.

• **Age.** You will probably want to know the age breakdown of those in your sample. For example, those 50-64 may be more interested in career programming than those 65 and older. It is also very important to find out if you have a high rate of people in the community 65 and older who are interested in career programming, because this age group may need additional tailoring to their interests and needs.

• **Household income.** You may want to know this because you might want to calculate how answers differed for people in different income categories. For example, are people with lower household income saying that they are interested in some of the classes or certificate programs that may be more expensive? If this is true, the college may need to find a way to link prospective students with sources of financial assistance.
• **Zip Code.** Knowing the zip codes of your respondents helps you to understand how your respondents are distributed geographically, and how that matches (or doesn't match) the distribution of the population in your service area. It may also serve as a proxy indicator for household income.

• **Ethnicity.** In the Sample Survey, ethnicity was left out because it may not be relevant to the courses and services that help people advance their careers. However, perhaps your area has language diversity, or large ethnic sub-populations, and services may need to take language ability or culturally competent services into account.

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**Q2: Include a question that indicates whether people are interested in courses, services, both, or neither.**

• This provides information about the extent of the need in the community, and also whether people are more interested in taking workforce training and development courses, or whether they don’t want to increase their human capital, but rather want to concentrate on the job search.

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**Q3: The fields people are interested in.**

• This shows you where the demand is for particular course types or programs. We recommend that you include only those fields that are growth occupations in your area. (See the Assessing Local Employer Needs section for more information on how to determine what the growth occupations in your area are.) The Sample Survey includes suggested fields. You should only include the fields that your college currently offers or is considering offering. You may also want to include sub-fields under larger areas such as healthcare.

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**Q4: The approach people want to take to taking courses.**

• Plus 50 students are often not interested in a degree, but rather have in mind a few targeted courses that can help them upgrade or acquire specific skills. This question helps you identify what this group will be looking for, and thus what will be useful to make available to the community. It may inspire a more modular approach to course planning to increase flexibility for this group.

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**Q5: Identifying perceived obstacles to taking courses.**

• This question can help you identify where you need to ensure that certain obstacles are removed, and where marketing is necessary to ensure that people know that the obstacles in fact do not exist.

• For an example of data collection leading to change: if people are worried that they need their high school transcript to register, you may want to work with the registrar’s office to create a streamlined registration process for those 50 and older.

• For an example of data collection informing marketing: if people are worried that they don’t know enough about how to use computers, you can include in the brochures basic or refresh/review computer courses tailored to those 50 and older.

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**Q6, Q7, Q8: Understanding the schedules and course delivery modes that will work for your target population.**

• Research shows that plus 50 students need schedules that fit their lifestyle. They may need to work around existing responsibilities, and so need to take courses in the evening or on weekends. They may also have limited time during the week or – conversely – be able to commit many hours per week to classes. This latter possibility would indicate that they could take accelerated courses, which are popular among those wanting to get into or return to the workforce quickly.

• Students may want the flexibility of Web-based courses and telecourses, but they may also want to be physically on campus to stay connected to the community. This question can provide information on where to concentrate the course offerings for plus 50 students.
Q9: What are the career goals of this group?
• Knowing whether people simply need to find a job, or whether they have more flexibility is important to program planning. Do people need services that help them make the jump to a different field? Or do they want to upgrade skills in the field they already know? It is also important to know if there is a small or large group of plus 50 individuals pursuing an entrepreneurial path.

Q11: What are the specific skills this group wants to learn?
• This question contains a list of possible career-related skills people are looking for. This was not included simply as a “check all that apply” list because people may tend to check everything, thinking “why not, sure, I could use that.” The matrix of questions that asks people to rate how interested they are in something is helpful for discriminating among specific interests people have.

Q12: How would people like services to be tailored to the interests and needs of their age group?
• This question provides a way to find out how important it is to tailor the services in a specific way. You may wish to place different choices in this question, and if you have room, you may also wish to provide a space for open-ended comments on this topic.

Finding people to participate in a focus group.
Survey respondents are an ideal group that can provide you with further, more in-depth information, so you might want to take this opportunity to recruit focus group participants.
Dear [Recipient Name],

We are conducting an important survey of our workforce training and career development services! Please take 5-10 minutes today to help [Name of Community College] better understand what training and employment services for adults age 50 plus are needed in your community and how we can help meet those needs.

This survey is confidential and your individual responses will not be shared with anyone.

Please return the completed survey in the enclosed envelope by [Survey Closing Date].

Your participation is greatly appreciated! If you have any questions about the survey, please contact [Name] at [Email Address] or [Phone Number].

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Title]
[Name of Community College]
Sample Survey  
[Name of Community College]

Workforce Training and Career Development Services Needs Assessment Survey

Would you like to see more resources available in the community to support those 50 and older who are looking to jump-start their careers? Are you 50 or older? If so, then this survey is for you. The results will help [name of college] understand what the training and employment services needs in the community are, and how programming for plus 50 students can help meet those needs. Take 5-10 minutes to make your needs, interests, and career objectives known! (NOTE: Your answers will be held confidential.)

1. Please tell us a little bit about yourself!
   a. What is your gender?  □ Male  □ Female
   b. How old are you?
      □ 49 and under
      □ 50-64
      □ 65-74  □ 75+
   c. What is your zip code?  
   d. Approximately what is your household income? (Check one.)
      □ Less than $10,000  □ $10,000 to $14,999  □ $15,000 to $19,999  □ $20,000 to $24,999
      □ $25,000 to $29,999  □ $30,000 to $34,999  □ $35,000 to $39,999  □ $40,000 to $44,999
      □ $45,000 to $49,999  □ $50,000 to $59,999  □ $60,000 to $74,999  □ $75,000 to $99,999
      □ $100,000 to $124,999  □ $125,000 to $149,999  □ $150,000 to $199,999
      □ $200,000 or more

2. Which of the following are you interested in? (Check one.)
   □ Taking courses that can help me find employment, or change or advance my career
   □ Career services (career counseling, job fair, etc.)
   □ Both courses and services
   □ Neither  

   3. In which of the following fields do you have an interest? (Check all that apply.)
      □ Accounting  □ Automotive repair  □ Child care
      □ Construction  □ Cosmetology  □ Culinary
      □ Electrician  □ Financial services  □ General contracting
      □ General office work  □ Gerontology  □ Green building
      □ Healthcare  □ Home healthcare  □ Hotel management
      □ Information technology  □ Landscaping  □ Marketing
      □ Physical therapy  □ Plumbing  □ Property management
      □ Real estate  □ Retail sales  □ Social services
      □ Supply chain management  □ Teaching  □ Truck driving
      □ Web design  □ Wellness  □ None of the above
Sample Survey
[Name of Community College]
Workforce Training and Career Development Services Needs Assessment Survey

4. Which of the following would you like to pursue? (Check all that apply.)
   - □ A basic or refresh/review computer training course
   - □ A few targeted courses to upgrade a skill or acquire new skills (not including computer skills)
   - □ A license, professional credential, or certificate
   - □ None of the above: I have the training and skills I need, but I am interested in career services
     → You may skip to the section on career services, question 9.

5. Which of the following do you believe might be obstacles to your taking courses at [name of community college]? (Check all that apply.)
   - □ Classes are at times that do not fit my schedule
   - □ I need help choosing classes, and advising might be geared to young adults
   - □ The professors might be gearing their teaching style to young adults
   - □ Limited knowledge of how to use computers
   - □ Courses are too expensive
   - □ No access to easy transportation to campus
   - □ Classrooms are not physically very accessible (upstairs, desks uncomfortable, etc.)
   - □ To register, I might need to find my high school transcript
   - □ Concern about returning to a school environment after many years out of school
   - □ I need to brush up on writing skills
   - □ I need to brush up on math skills
   - □ I need to brush up on my study skills
   - □ None of the above

6. What time of day or week would you like to take classes? (Check all that apply.)
   - □ Daytime
   - □ Evening
   - □ Weekday
   - □ Weekend

7. How much time per week would you be able to attend classes? (Check one.)
   - □ 2-4 hours
   - □ 4-6 hours
   - □ 6-8 hours
   - □ 8-10 hours
   - □ 11+ hours

8. What delivery mode of classes would interest you? (Check all that apply.)
   - □ Classroom instruction
   - □ Web-based
   - □ Distance learning
   - □ Online and classroom

9. Please tell us about your current career goals. (Check all that apply.)
   - □ I am unemployed and want to find a job
   - □ I want to change jobs
   - □ I want to upgrade my skills to advance my career
   - □ I want to start or grow my own business
   - □ I want to stay in the same field
   - □ I want to pursue a career in a new field
   - □ I have to go back to work
   - □ None of the above
   - □ Other
10. Here is a list of services that can be tailored specifically to the needs and interests of those 50 and older. Which of the following would you use? (Check all that apply.)

- One-stop-shop career resources center
- Job fairs
- Database listing of available jobs
- Networking events
- One-one-one career counseling
- Career workshops
- Services for entrepreneurs
- Brushing up on computer skills

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<th>11. What are you interested in learning about?</th>
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<th>Extremely interested</th>
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12. Career services can be tailored to those 50 and older in a variety of ways. What are the ways that are personally important to you? (Check all that apply.)

- At least some of the staff there are 50 or older
- Career counselors have been trained specifically to understand the specific assets and challenges of a 50+ job seeker
- Job fairs include only, or mostly, employers that are “plus 50 friendly”
- The paper and electronic resources available focus on the job search and career issues specific to those who are 50+
- There are “brush-up” classes for adults getting ready to return to the classroom or workforce, helping them to refresh skills they have but have not used recently

Would you like to participate in a focus group with your peers about these issues? If so, please provide your contact info here, and someone from the college will contact you.

Name:  | Phone:  | Email: