



# UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

## Policy Manual

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<b>Policy #:</b>	ACD-5301	<b>Policy Title:</b>	Policy on Surveys and Focus Groups
<b>Effective:</b>	1/18/2023	<b>Responsible Office:</b>	Office of Institutional Effectiveness
<b>Date Approved:</b>	1/18/2023	<b>Approval:</b>	Vice President for Planning and Policy
<b>Replaces Policy Dated:</b>	N/A	<b>Responsible University Official:</b>	Director of Institutional Effectiveness

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### PURPOSE:

High-quality surveys and focus groups can provide useful information for institutional decision-making, but they also impose a burden on respondents. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the surveys and focus groups administered to University community members obtain the highest quality information by supporting strong question design, limiting the number of surveys and focus groups that community members are asked to complete, and coordinating the timing of survey and focus group schedules. This policy is also designed to protect the privacy of and reduce the burden on survey and focus group respondents.

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### SCOPE:

This policy applies to students, faculty, and staff (including divisions, units, and committees) seeking to administer surveys or focus groups to any University constituencies. This policy further applies to any survey or focus group using a University software license and/or distributed through official University communications or via University-generated respondent lists. Surveys and focus groups conducted as part of academic research projects are not subject to coordination by IFX, though IRB and other requirements may still apply.

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## **POLICY STATEMENT:**

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### *ACD-5301.1 – Definitions*

**Anonymous Survey:** a survey in which responses cannot be associated with an individual by any means unless the respondent answers the survey questions in a way that uniquely identifies them

**Confidential Survey:** a survey in which each survey respondent receives an individual survey link that enables survey administrators to associate the response with the respondent. Demographic and institutional data may be merged with survey responses for analysis, but unit record data is not shared with anyone outside the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IFX), and respondents' identities are always protected whenever survey data is reported or shared.

**Focus Group:** a small group of carefully selected (intentionally sampled) participants who are gathered together to respond to interview questions as part of a research methodology. Listening sessions and meetings with stakeholders to obtain general feedback about institutional initiatives are not considered focus groups.

### *ACD-5301.2 – Policy*

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IFX) will coordinate institutional survey and focus group administration to ensure that surveys and focus groups are designed appropriately and conducted in a manner that provides maximum benefit to campus constituencies while minimizing redundancy and frequency.

All approved surveys and focus groups must have a faculty or staff sponsor and support of the relevant Dean or Vice President. Student surveys or focus groups unrelated to academic coursework must have a College Dean or the Vice President for Student Development as sponsor. Only approved surveys may be distributed through official University communications or via University-generated respondent lists.

Deans or Vice Presidents of University divisions are responsible for adherence to the University policies related to survey and focus group administration, data storage and security of any resulting information, and dissemination and use of results for surveys and focus groups sponsored by units in their division or school.

Surveys and focus groups conducted as part of academic research projects are not subject to coordination by IFX, though IRB and other requirements may still apply. See *ACD 5301.3 Exclusions* below.

### *Ethical Conduct of Surveys and Focus Groups*

All surveys and focus groups administered at the University of Richmond must be conducted ethically and responsibly. Every survey and focus group must comply with FERPA guidelines. In addition, surveys and focus groups that are considered research involving human subjects (as defined by federal standards) must also meet Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements.

All surveys and focus groups must be voluntary. Participants must be able to decline to participate without penalty.

### *Privacy and Sharing of Survey and Focus Group Results*

The identity of survey respondents or focus group participants and their responses to survey questions must be kept confidential.

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Survey administrators must state clearly in the survey invitation how respondent privacy is protected, typically by indicating that the survey is confidential or anonymous. Most University-sponsored surveys are confidential but not anonymous in order to protect respondent privacy while also ensuring that each respondent can answer the survey only once.

Results will be aggregated for all reporting such that the identity of specific individuals cannot be determined. Disaggregation of survey data is subject to cell sizes, and typically information on sub-populations smaller than five will not be reported.

Individually identifiable survey responses will not be provided to students, staff, or faculty outside of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Unit record data will not be shared.

Individually identifiable focus group responses will not be provided to any students, staff, or faculty outside of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and the individuals facilitating the focus group.

The identity of individuals who have participated or declined to participate in a survey or focus group will not be shared without permission of the respondent, even when that information is not connected to any specific responses.

## *Survey Schedules and Timelines*

Survey results should be used to inform or improve institutional practices and decision-making; to maintain, expand, and assure educational quality; to enhance institutional effectiveness; and/or to improve student success. IFX will review all proposed surveys to support appropriate question design and survey methodology.

When reviewing and prioritizing survey administration schedules, IFX will:

- Prioritize surveys that are designed to support and improve student academic outcomes and administrative strategic outcomes.
- Prioritize surveys that are part of a unit or department's process for continuous improvement, especially those that are part of a multi-year survey program providing longitudinal results
- Prioritize surveys that have been planned in advance and have been assigned an appropriate timeline in the University survey schedule
- Prioritize surveys that will provide important, actionable information
- Verify that the survey complies with FERPA guidelines and has received IRB approval (if necessary)
- Discourage the administration of a survey when alternative sources of information on the same topic are available (e.g., institutional data, results of other surveys, alternative (non-survey) assessments) or when a survey may not be the best way of obtaining the requested information
- Discourage the administration of more than one survey per year by a particular unit or office; whenever possible, offices sponsoring a survey should select or develop a single instrument that provides the information necessary for their work.
- Encourage appropriate intervals between repeat administration of surveys; whenever appropriate, offices will be encouraged to administer comprehensive surveys of their work no more frequently than once every three years

## *Survey and Focus Group Participation*

IFX will work with the survey sponsor to determine the best timing and schedule for each survey to minimize survey fatigue, avoid redundancy and overlap, and to achieve the best response rate for surveys.

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IFX will work with the survey sponsor to identify the best survey population and ensure that the survey is administered to the appropriate population based on University-defined data fields. Recipient lists will not be provided to survey sponsors unless the sponsor is administering the survey.

When sampling is appropriate, or in the case of focus groups, IFX will create a randomly-generated sample of the identified population to receive the survey or invitation to participate in a focus group.

## *Cost and Participant Incentives*

Costs associated with survey administration, where applicable, are paid by the sponsor of the survey, with the exception of institutionally sponsored surveys such as NSSE, LSSE, COACHE, and alumni surveys.

The use of gift cards or other incentives for survey or focus group participation is permissible, so long as the incentive adheres to the University Gifts, Prizes and Awards Policy, and permission of the University Controller is obtained in advance.

## *ACD-5301.3 – Exclusions*

The following types of surveys and focus groups are not subject to oversight or coordination by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Adherence to ethical, privacy, and other policies is still required:

- Surveys conducted by students as part of academic coursework or student research.
- For surveys conducted by students as part of coursework, it is the faculty member's responsibility to ensure that student surveys are ethical, adhere to IRB requirements, and follow survey best practices and relevant University policies.
- Surveys conducted as part of faculty-led academic research projects are not subject to oversight by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, though they may be subject to IRB requirements. In addition, if the survey population includes more than 50 University community members, coordination with IFX with respect to timing/scheduling of the survey is preferred.
- Surveys conducted within one classroom or course.
- Evaluation of an event or program by participants, if conducted among participants at the conclusion of or immediately following the event or program
- Feedback from clients at the point of service
- Survey research that involves fewer than 30 people; however, Institutional Review Board review may be required

In addition, the following are not considered surveys, though they may utilize survey software to obtain results

- Votes by Faculty Senate or other shared governance bodies
- Polls to coordinate meeting times
- Sign-up sheets and RSVPs
- Forms; contact UR Better to set up Dynamic Forms
- Stakeholder group meetings designed to obtain feedback but not research about an administrative or operational issue

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## *ACD-5301.4 – Procedures*

### **Survey Procedures**

Anyone desiring to survey any part of the university community (i.e. alumni, donors, prospective or current students, and employees) must complete the following steps before administering any survey.

1. Complete the IFX Survey Request Form. Fall surveys should be requested by June 1; Spring surveys should be requested by September 30.
2. Determine if UR Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required in addition to approval by IFX. Approval by IFX to administer a survey is not a substitute for a review by the Institutional Review Board. If a survey research project is subject to review by the Institutional Review Board, approval by both the IFX and the Institutional Review Board is required before administration.  
<https://irb.richmond.edu/submitting-proposals/is-review-necessary/index.html>
3. Coordinate with the IFX to determine an appropriate survey time frame and audience. Significant survey overlap, the last week of classes, course evaluation periods, and exam week must be avoided.
4. IFX will review the proposed survey to support appropriate question design, survey methodology, respondent privacy protections, and appropriate timelines. The review will also consider frequency and redundancy compared to other surveys administered at the University.
5. In cases in which the survey is administered by a third party to obtain information about the effectiveness of an administrative or academic program of the University, final results of the survey should be shared with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

*Qualtrics:* The University of Richmond has an institutional/enterprise license with Qualtrics for internal survey research. University members who are administering their own survey are encouraged to use Qualtrics instead of other tools for survey administration and development. Upon leaving the University, staff members should submit a request to transfer ownership of UR/unit surveys/forms to IFX. Faculty who are separating and wish to transfer their work to another university will need to submit the request to Qualtrics and UR and the other institution will need to approve. Students should not “own” university surveys/forms for units; a staff/faculty member should create the project and can then collaborate with students who are working on surveys.

### **Focus Group Procedures**

Anyone desiring to conduct a focus group with any part of the university community (i.e. alumni, donors, prospective or current students, and employees) must complete the following steps before administering the focus group

1. Complete the IFX Survey Request Form.
2. Determine if UR Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required in addition to approval by IFX. Approval by IFX to conduct a focus group is not a substitute for a review by the Institutional Review Board. If a focus group research project is subject to review by the Institutional Review Board, approval by both the IFX and the Institutional Review Board is required before administration.  
<https://irb.richmond.edu/submitting-proposals/is-review-necessary/index.html>

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3. Coordinate with the IFX to determine an appropriate time frame and audience. IFX will pull a random sample of the audience to receive invitations to participate in the focus group.
4. IFX will review the focus group methodology to ensure appropriate question design, respondent privacy protections, and appropriate timelines. The review will also consider redundancy with respect to other survey or focus group information already gathered by the University.
5. In cases in which the focus group is administered to obtain information about the effectiveness of an administrative or academic program of the University, summary results should be shared with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

### **RELATED POLICIES:**

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ACD-2004 – Privacy of Educational Records (FERPA) Policy

### **POLICY BACKGROUND:**

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Longstanding practices codified in policy approved 1/18/2023

### **POLICY CONTACTS:**

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Director of Institutional Effectiveness