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Panel Discussion
Electronic Surveys: The Methodology of Participation by LIS Practitioners

Take my survey! Researchers in information studies often rely on questionnaires to survey large groups of geographically dispersed populations. However, getting information professionals to participate as a research subject is difficult. This paper examines how the authors have attempted to push their surveys to a wider information community, discussing the barriers they have encountered as well as the biases that may be inherent the methods that were used.

Electronic surveys or e-surveys as they are called could be considered a marvel of the 21st century. Those of us who do survey research have been told that this is the wave of the future and doing surveys any other way is obsolete; however, there is a catch. How do you get participants to *do* the survey?

The previous method was very labour intensive and expensive where the survey was copied out and mailed with a stamped return envelope. One of the researchers who had experience with this method; however, had excellent results. In the three surveys that were sent via mail in a four year period (2006-2010), the results were

over 61%, 39%*, and 48%*.  On two of the surveys marked with an asterisk, the survey was sent out twice to those participants that had not yet returned a survey.

In the last two e-surveys, it has been difficult to get practitioners to respond to the e-survey emails.  These surveys were two different populations – public libraries in the U.S., Canada, and Australia and the international institutional repositories.  When two of the authors attempted to survey library school participants at the schools where they were employed the response rate was low until the researchers used social media to recruit participants. Both Twitter and Facebook were used and a major part of the success was the result of retweeting or sharing the link on Facebook by other people.

This begs the question regarding the population of practitioners in library and information science (LIS).  Is there something that stops librarians from participating in e-surveys?  Does the LIS community prefer paper surveys?  Or is it that certain librarians just prefer not to engage in research?