

# Use of Incentives in Survey Research

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# Traditional View of Survey Incentives

“Incentives are an **inducement** offered by the survey designers **to compensate** for the **absence of factors** that might otherwise **stimulate cooperation**”

- Singer, E. (2002)

# Historical Perspective on Survey Incentives

- Shuttleworth, 1931, *Journal of Educational Psychology*
- Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) Incentives Conference, March 2008
- Accepted Best Practices on Use of Incentives
  - Pre-paid (i.e., **noncontingent**) is more effective than Promised (i.e., **contingent**)
  - “Cash Is King”
- Often Forgotten When Using Incentives
  - **Material rewards are not the only benefits** that a respondent may gain and value from survey participation
    - Enjoyment, Interest, Civic Duty, and Altruism
- A **great deal of uncertainty remains** about the deployment of survey incentives
- Far too often, **inadequate planning** goes into incentive deployment

# Historical Perspective on Survey Incentives (cont.)

- No One Theory Explains the Effects of Incentives on Cooperation and Compliance
  - **Social Exchange Theory**
    - Obligation, Reciprocity, Trust
      - Dillman's Total Design Method
  - **Economic Exchange Theory**
    - Rational, Equitable "Compensation"
  - **Cognitive-Dissonance Theory**
    - Reduce Internal Tension/Discomfort, Obligation
      - E.g., some respondents return the incentive along with their refusal
  - **Leverage-Saliency Theory**
    - Incentives are the factor that is needed to "tip the balance" for some respondents
      - But which respondents are these?
- Common Practice of "**One-Size-Fits-All**" makes no theoretical sense

# Topics to Cover on the Use of Incentives in Survey Research

- Today's topics
  - **Goals** of Using Incentives
  - **Portion** of Sample to be Treated
  - **Value** of the Incentives
  - **Types** of Incentives
  - **Ethical** Considerations
  - **Cost** Implications for Total Survey Costs
  - Other **Operational** Implications
  - Anticipated **Effects**
  - **Evaluating** Effects/Success
  - Incentives **Worksheet**/Framework
- Today's Focus is primarily on **Material Incentives**

# Goals of Using Incentives

## 1. Improve Overall Response Rates

- Assumed indicator of survey quality
  - Has come into question in past two decades
  - Sometimes important even if unrelated to nonresponse bias
- Reduce size of the designated sample needed to achieve desired final sample size
- Effect of incentives on interviewer morale

## 2. Improve Demographic Characteristics of Unweighted Sample

- Reduce amount of nonresponse adjustments
  - E.g., Education, Age, Race, Language, etc.
  - But, possible “double-edged sword”

## Goals of Using Incentives (cont.)

### 3. Decrease Missing Data and/or Other Improvements to Response Quality

- Reduce need for and thus cost of imputation
- Reduce variance (and possible bias) introduced by imputation

### 4. Decrease Nonresponse Bias

- Nonignorable Unit Nonresponse
- Nonignorable Item Nonresponse

# Goals of Using Incentives (cont.)

## 5. Reduce Total Survey Costs

- Possible Survey Cost-Reduction Effects
  - Process less sample
  - Fewer follow-up contact attempts
  - More effective refusal conversion attempts
  - Shorter field periods
  - Reduce the need for interviewer-administered data collection in mixed mode surveys
    - Greater success with, and thus increased use of, self-administered modes
      - E.g., in address-based sampling
  - Savings on other costs for Panel Maintenance

# Portion of Sample to be Treated

- **Treat All** Sampled Households/Respondents
- **Treat Only Subgroups** of Households/Respondents
  - **Traditional low cooperating groups**
    - Young Adults
    - African Americans
    - Spanish-Dominant Hispanics
    - Lower Educational Attainment
  - **Leverage-Saliency Theory**
    - Tailoring via Real-Time Interviewer Discretion
    - Response Propensity Modeling

# Q & A #1

# Incentive Value

- More May Not Always Be Better
  - Possible **undesirable side-effects**
    - “Please the Researcher” Syndrome
- Law of Diminishing Returns
  - **First \$1** has the greatest incremental impact
- **Perceived Incentive Value** relative to Cost of Other Expenditures
  - Cost of Special Postage
    - Respondent resentment and thus possibly counterproductive?
- Differential Impact Due to **Outcome of Prior Contact Attempts**
  - Trussell & Lavrakas, *POQ*, 2005

# Incentive Types

- Contingent and/or Noncontingent
- Cash, Other Monetary, and/or Nonmonetary
- Temporal Aspects
- One-Time and/or On-Going
- Fixed Value and/or Variable (Differential) Value

# Incentive Types (cont.)

- **Contingent**

- **Promised**

- With certainty
    - Without certainty (e.g., lottery)

- **Performance-based** (earned) threshold(s)

- One amount: All or nothing
    - Tiered: Hierarchy of amounts

- **No trust or social obligation built** towards the researcher

- **Economic Exchange Theory**

- If large enough, then serves as “payment” to help offset Respondent Burden

# Incentive Types (cont.)

- **Noncontingent**

- **Given in advance** of cooperation and compliance
- **Builds good will and trust**, and develops **social obligation** toward the researcher
  - **Social Exchange Theory**
    - Norm of Reciprocity
  - **Economic Exchange Theory**
    - How to “frame” the purpose of giving incentives to the respondent?
      - “Token of Appreciation” and/or “Payment for Your Effort”

# Incentive Types (cont.)

- **Cash**
  - Cash is King
  - **Denomination of Bills** may be important
    - In-person or Mailed noncontingent cash incentives
    - In-person or Mailed contingent cash incentives
- **Other Forms of Monetary Incentives**
  - Check
  - Cash/Debit cards
  - Gift cards
- **Nonmonetary**
  - Donations to charity
  - Entertainment event tickets and other nonmonetary gifts

# Incentive Types (cont.)

- Temporal Aspects
  - **Advance Contact**
    - Given in Mailed Advance Letter or Email or Left on Door-Step
    - Mentioned in Advance Letter or Phone Message or Email
  - **At First Contact** for Initial Recruitment
    - Mail; In-person; Internet; Phone
  - As Part of **Refusal Conversion**
    - Size relative to size of possible previous offer of an incentive
  - During **other Contact Attempts**
    - Include mention in answering machine messages
  - **Upon Completion** of the Survey Task
  - **Between Panel Waves** to Maintain Contact and Commitment
    - Include in letter with return postcard to update contact information

# Incentive Types (cont.)

- Frequency
  - Cross-sectional Survey: **Once**
  - Panel Survey: **On-Going**
    - How often?

# Incentive Types (cont.)

- Fixed Value and/or Differential Value
  - All Respondents get the Same Value of Incentive
  - Different “Types” of Respondents get Different Values of Incentives
    - Some respondents may not get any incentive
    - Keeping differentially incented respondents “blind”
    - Response Propensity Modeling
  - Panel Surveys
    - Same value each time or different value?
      - If different, how often a change in value and by how much?

# Incentive Types (cont.)

- Fixed Value and/or Differential Value (cont.)
  - **Response Propensity Modeling**
    - Information learned about a respondent prior to making the survey request and/or after making the survey request is used to create a *response propensity score*, which then is used to determine which, if any, incentive will be offered to that respondent
      - Data about the address or phone number
      - Area-level census data
      - Contact history data
      - Prior data gathered from the respondent
      - Interviewer ratings
    - **Static or Dynamic** within the Field Period?

# Ethical Considerations

- Are Incentives **Coercive**?
  - Are people “forced” to do something they would otherwise prefer not to do?
  - Do respondents regret having done it afterwards?
- **Other Harm** Incentives May Cause
  - Feelings of unfair (i.e., inequitable) treatment
    - Need reasonable justification for differential incentives
- Possible Need to **Debrief Respondents**
  - Immediate
  - Delayed

# Ethical Considerations (cont.)

- **Benefits of Incentives to Respondents**
  - Extra spending money
  - Feeling appreciated
  - Enhanced feeling of self-worth
- **Balance of Benefits vs. Harm**
  - Do the potential beneficial outcomes for the respondent outweigh the potential harmful outcomes
    - What is the “Greater Good”?

# Incentive Costs

- Cost of the Incentives
  - **Fixed Costs vs. Variable Costs**
    - A function of the form in which the incentive is given
      - Cash – Fixed cost
      - Checks, Cash Cards
        - Fixed – Issuing fees
        - Possible Variable costs – but must be cognizant of **“unclaimed property” laws**
      - Gifts – Fixed cost

# Incentive Costs (cont.)

- **Cost of Managing** the Incentives
  - Infrastructure needed to “fulfill” incentive distribution
    - Before data collection – advance contact
    - At the time of data collection – noncontingent
    - After data collection – contingent
      - Fulfillment Errors/Complaints
    - Between Panels – noncontingent
- **Cost of Delivering** the Incentives
  - Separate (e)mailing?
- **Security Issues** when Processing Cash

# Incentive Costs (cont.)

- Anticipated Savings in Other Expenditures
  - **Potential Reduction in Costs:**
    - Less sample to process
    - Fewer contact attempts
    - Shorter field period
    - Reduced use of interviewers by maximizing data collection via mail and/or internet
    - Reduction in other panel maintenance costs

# Incentive Costs (cont.)

- Total Cost of Using Incentives

**(\$Incentive + \$Infrastructure + \$Delivery) –**

(\$Sample Reduction + \$Reduced Contacts +

\$Reduced Field Period + \$Reduced Use of Interviewers +

\$Reduction in Other Panel Costs)

# Q & A #2

# Other Operational Implications

- When Used with **Mail Surveys**
  - Can be immediate (noncontingent) gratification for respondent
  - But envelopes must be opened for an incentive or mention of an incentive to have any possible effect
    - Type of Postage
    - Delivery Service
    - Aesthetics of Envelope
    - Imprimatur of Sending Organization
- When Used with **Internet Surveys**
  - Respondent must be made aware of incentive
    - Can be immediate gratification for respondent
      - Quasi-Noncontingent is possible

# Other Operational Implications (cont.)

- When Used by **Telephone Interviewers**
  - Interviewer Training
    - Effectiveness
      - Will interviewers know how to best leverage the incentives?
    - Discretion in amount
  - Noncontingent only possible with advance mailing to matched addresses; in RDD & ABS sampling
  - Effectiveness of Contingent is based on trust of the interviewer
- When Used by **In-Person Interviewers**
  - Interviewer Training
    - Effectiveness
      - Will interviewers know how to best leverage the incentives?
    - Discretion in amount
    - Safety
  - Immediate gratification possible for respondent
    - Noncontingent: in advance mailing
    - Contingent: upon completion of interview

# Anticipated Effects

- On Response Rates
- On Demographic Characteristics
- On Missing Data and Other Response Quality
- On Nonresponse Bias
- On Total Survey Costs
- On Other Factors
- Undesirable Side-Effects

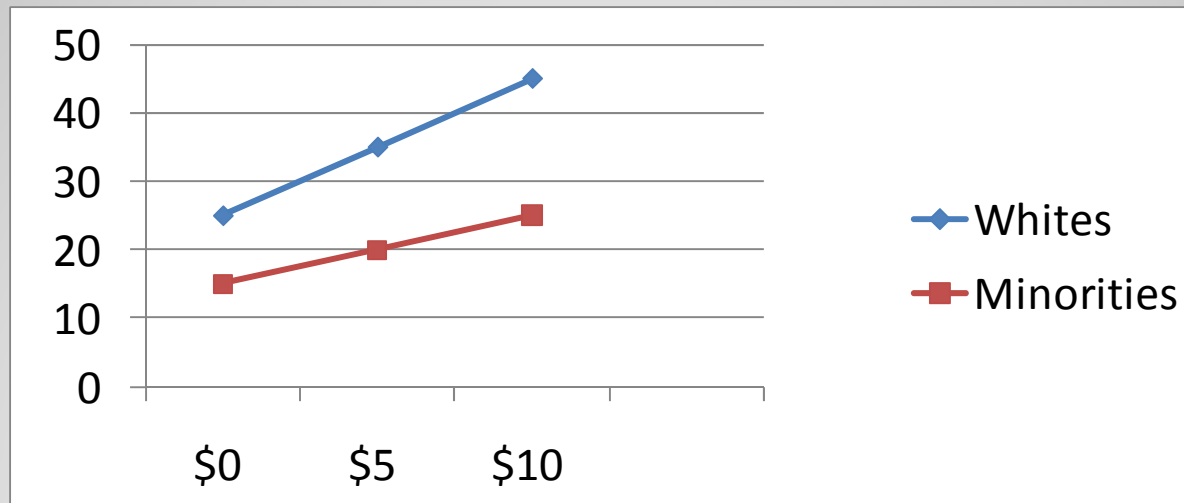
# Anticipated Effects (cont.)

- **On Response Rates**

- Advance contact incentive (e.g., \$2) in an RDD survey to matched addresses
  - Upwards of 10 pp gains
  - Follow-through effect on subsequent surveys
- Supplementing Noncontingent with Contingent
  - Lotteries as low-cost contingent
- Impact on Interviewer Morale and Effectiveness
- If no reduction in Nonresponse Bias, does this matter?
  - It still may...
    - Clients and other consumers of the findings still may care

# Anticipated Effects (cont.)

- **On Demographic Characteristics**
  - Striving for a Balanced Sample
    - Likely to need differential incentives
  - Need to avoid the “fan-spread” effect, which is counterproductive to this goal



# Anticipated Effects (cont.)

- **On Missing Data and Other Response Quality**
  - Reduced Amount of Missing Data
  - More effort to answer accurately and completely, i.e., less *satisficing*
  - May impact mood of respondents
    - Possible measurement bias

# Anticipated Effects (cont.)

- **On Nonresponse Bias**

- Essentially unknown what the effects may be
- Leverage-Saliency Theory
  - Logic suggests that incentives stimulate cooperation from some respondents for whom other factors do not motivate them to cooperate
  - If respondents who primarily are motivated by incentives differ on key survey measures from those who are not primarily motivated by incentives, then nonresponse bias should be reduced because of the incentives
    - But how to identify which respondents for targeting?

# Anticipated Effects (cont.)

- **On Total Survey Costs**

- Essentially Unknown

- Very little has been reported about the circumstances when Total Survey Costs are reduced by use of incentives
- May Be Survey Specific
- Need good work done to investigate this

# Anticipated Effects (cont.)

- **Undesirable Side-Effects**

- Bias in the variables being studied
  - Do people change their behavior, e.g., reporting data, to “please” the interviewers and/or researchers
  - Mood changes could lead to different responses to attitudinal and psychographic questions
- Long-term Consequences of Extrinsic Rewards
  - Respondent Expectations
    - Undermining the respondent pool’s *intrinsic motivation* (e.g., altruism), thus lowering response propensity and/or response quality when incentives are not used

# Evaluating the Success of Incentives

- **Methods**

- **Experimental**

- Random assignment to treatment(s) and control
    - If interviewer-administered, must avoid interviewer confound
      - Assign interviewers to one and only one condition
      - If possible, keep them “blind” to the experiment

- **Quasi-Experimental**

- Nonequivalent control group

- **Nonexperimental**

- Qualitative Debriefing of Interviewers and Respondents

# Incentive Worksheet

- An Outcome of **COPAFS 2008 Incentive Seminar**
  - Lack of structured approach to guide thinking about whether to deploy, and how to best deploy, survey incentives
  - Lavrakas expressed commitment to develop such a worksheet
    - Reviewed with, and input from, JPSM (U-Michigan and U-Maryland) faculty and grad students
  - See Incentive Worksheet in Slides 38-46
    - You can adapt and modify the worksheet as best seems fit
      - Please send feedback, [pjlavrak@optonline.net](mailto:pjlavrak@optonline.net)
    - Word version of worksheet available upon request

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework

Name of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Goals: What are the incentives meant to achieve?**

\_\_\_\_\_ **A. Improve overall response rates**

\_\_\_\_\_ **B. Improve demographic characteristics of unweighted sample**

\_\_\_\_\_ **C. Decrease missing data and/or otherwise improve response quality**

\_\_\_\_\_ **D. Decrease nonresponse bias**

\_\_\_\_\_ **E. Reduce total survey costs**

\_\_\_\_\_ **F. Other (e.g., Improve Panel Maintenance):**

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 2)

**II. Sample Treatment: Who will receive incentives?**

\_\_\_\_\_ **A. All sampled respondents**

\_\_\_\_\_ **B. Select/targeted subgroup(s) of respondents**

**If so, which subgroup(s):**

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 3)

## III. Type of Incentives

A.  Contingent  Noncontingent

If contingent, based on what:

B.  Cash  Other Monetary  Nonmonetary

If cash, in what value and in what denomination(s):

If not cash, in what form and value:

C.  Advance Contact  At Contact  Post-Contact

If advance- and/or post-contact, when:

D.  One-time  On-going

If on-going, with what frequency:

E.  Fixed Value  Variable/Differential Value

If differential, in what way:

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 4)

**IV. Ethics: What are the ethical considerations for and against using these incentives in this study?**

**A. Are these incentives coercive to respondents, and if so, in what way(s) and to whom?**

**B. What other harm might these incentives cause, and if so, in what way(s) and to whom?**

**C. Are there benefits that will accrue from these incentives, and if so what are they and who will receive these benefits?**

**D. Is the potential for harm from these incentives greater than the benefits that are anticipated, i.e., what is the Greater Good?**

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 5)

## V. Cost Considerations

A. Cost of the incentives:

B. Cost of administering incentives:

C. Cost of distributing incentives:

D. Anticipated savings in Other Survey Expenses:

E. Total cost/savings of using incentives:

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 6)

**VI. Other Operational Considerations, if any**

**A. Are there mode-specific considerations?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No**

**If Yes, what are the implications:**

**B. How will the incentives be explained (i.e., framed) to respondents?**

**As Token of Appreciation    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No**

**As Payment    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No**

**Other Explanation(s):**

**C. If interviewer-administered survey, how will interviewers be trained to best leverage the incentives:**

**D. Other:**

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 7)

## VII. Anticipated Effects

A. On overall response rates (including interviewer morale effects):

B. On demographic characteristics of unweighted sample:

C. On missing data and response quality:

D. On nonresponse bias:

E. On total survey costs:

F. Other (e.g., Improve Panel Maintenance):

G. Possible Undesirable Side-Effects:

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 8)

**VIII. How effect(s) of Incentives will be evaluated: What methodologies will be used to determine if anticipated effects were achieved?**

**A. Description of Research Design(s), e.g., true experiment**

**B. Statistical Procedures, e.g., ANOVA, ANCOVA, Multiple Regression, Logistic Regression**

# Incentive Worksheet/Framework (cont., p. 9)

**IX. Relevant Literature**

**Citations:**

# Q & A #3

# Use of Incentives in Survey Research

**Thank You!**