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RESPONDENT RELATIONS
IN LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS

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Debbie Lutz, Household Surveys Division

The SLID Research Paper Series is intended to document detailed studies and important decisions for the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. These research papers are available in English and French. To obtain a summary description of available documents or to obtain a copy of any, please contact Philip Giles, Manager, SLID Research Paper Series, by mail at 11-D8 Jean Talon Building, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, CANADA K1A 0T6, by INTERNET (GILES@STATCAN.CA), by telephone (613) 951-2891, or by fax (613) 951-3253.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) will follow individuals and their families for six years. Should incentives be used to increase response rates, or can we rely solely on motivational material to maintain our response rates throughout the years?

This paper describes the experiences of other surveys in dealing with respondents. It also documents several viewpoints and findings from surveys on incentives, their effect on response rates and ways of maintaining interviewer morale.

This information will help SLID develop its own respondent material with the hope of sustaining high response rates without offering monetary incentives. A proposed respondent relations plan is also presented.

The author appreciates the review of this document by Jill Bench, Survey Operations Division, Statistics Canada.

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1. Introduction

It was recognized from the beginning that the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) could encounter difficulties maintaining response rates. It was therefore important to investigate ways of keeping respondents interested in the survey for six years. The first step was to contact other organizations conducting longitudinal surveys to ascertain how they cope with this issue. We also looked into whether the use of incentives increased response rates.

The surveys which have been investigated use a variety of methods to maintain a good response rate. These include a long collection period, advance letters, newsletters and motivational material for interviewers. Most of the longitudinal surveys use incentives to motivate respondents. However, there is a lack of studies to support the idea that incentives make a difference in response rates. For this reason, and because it is the policy of Statistics Canada not to use monetary incentives, SLID will rely on motivational material and the excellent interviewer-respondent relationship to maintain high response rates.

2. The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)

2.1 Overview

Conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, PSID began in 1968 as a poverty study with a planned duration of five years. However, it has continued and is still operational. It is a longitudinal survey with a representative sample of American individuals (men, women, children). Data are collected on income, family composition, and employment as well as occasional supplements on health, wealth, and retirement plans.

Respondents are in the survey for life. PSID follows respondents as they grow older, and their children as they grow into adulthood forming families of their own. New household members are also interviewed. In 1992 the sample included 7500 families plus 2,000 households in a special sample of latinos. That year an attempt was made to re-contact previous non-responding families bringing the number of families in the sample to 10,800. Respondents who move are traced to their new location. Tracing is even required for respondents who move outside the United States. A self-administered questionnaire is sent if the respondent has been traced outside the country.

A respondent in prison will be interviewed if he/she is the only original sample member left in the household. A letter is sent to the Prison Warden asking for permission to interview the inmate. If there are other members currently living in the household, a special status is attached to the respondent who is interviewed after leaving prison.

Respondents in nursing homes are also interviewed. An advance letter is sent to the respondent and a telephone interview is attempted if possible; if not, a personal interview will follow.

Ninety percent of the interviews are by telephone and 10% are personal interviews. Respondents are interviewed once a year unless there are errors detected, in which case a second contact is made. The collection period is between March and September. The collection period is quite lengthy to allow for tracking sample members who have moved away or to persuade reluctant respondents to participate. If necessary it will be extended to maintain a 90% response rate.

2.2 Incentives

PSID respondents have always been paid for their time. However, there have been no comparisons done between a group with incentives and a group without incentives. Therefore PSID cannot be completely sure that incentives are the key factor in maintaining the response rate of about 90%.

In a panel survey maintaining high response rates from one wave to the next is crucial. The difficulties of retaining respondents cooperation requires a considerable amount of effort.

In addition to having a long collection period, the following strategies are used by PSID to maintain a high response rate:

- $15 for an interview, $5 for change of address card and a $5 finder's fee for anyone providing the interviewer with information on a respondent who has moved away. Payment is by cheque, but if the respondents refuses to participate he/she will be offered cash after the interview for his/her participation. A money order will be issued to respondents who cannot cash a cheque.

- Annual mailings to respondents of a PSID booklet summarizing how data are analyzed and used in policy debates. This report is sent out one month before interviewing begins.

- Personalized persuasion letters for reluctant respondents signed by the Director.

! Requesting two names per household of friends or relatives who might know the respondent's location if he or she moved.

! A Staff person with ready access to this information who will help interviewers "troubleshoot" difficulties.

! Trying to ensure respondents always have the same interviewers even if the respondent moves. The telephone interviewing is centralized, therefore it is easy to keep the same interviewers.

! Personal interviews where telephone interviews are a problem (for example: speech, hearing problems).

! Periodic first class mailings of cheques, respondent reports, announcement of upcoming interview. The mailings are spaced throughout the period between interviews. All mailings are sent out in an envelope affixed with a return to sender label. This label indicates to the post-office that a new address must be located for this respondent if possible. The new address label is then affixed to the envelope and returned to PSID. This is one way of finding respondents who move.

During one of the supplements, PSID offered mugs and pens to thank respondents for participating in the supplemental survey. The respondents did not like the mugs (they complained that they broke), but they loved the pens. There was no difference in response rates during the supplement.

2.3 Interviewers

It might be difficult to keep interviewers motivated and interested in a longitudinal survey. One of the key elements in the motivation of interviewers seems to be the relationships that they establish with the respondents over the years. Some of the interviewers have been with PSID for 25 years. However, some procedures are in place to boost interviewer morale when the need arises.

- A PSID newsletter is sent to interviewers informing them about the different studies going on at the Survey Research Center as well as the progress of the studies. It also contains stories about themselves and other interviewers. From time to time the newsletter is used to thank the interviewers for a job well done.

- Thank you letters for long service are also sent to the interviewers.

- Some of the interviewers are in the same building as the PSID staff. While these interviewers get face-to-face pep talks, others receive letters of encouragement.

3. The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

3.1 Overview

The Survey of Income and Program Participation is a U.S. Bureau of the Census survey which began in 1983.

The data collected are used to study federal income support programs such as food stamps, social security and medicare.

The sample size for this survey is 26,700 households. The respondents are interviewed every four months for 2 1/2 years. Waves 1,2,6, are personal interviews, waves 3,4,5,7,8, are telephone interviews. Personal interviews are conducted in waves 1,2,6, because the managers feel that a face-to-face contact is needed to re-establish rapport with respondents.

Response rates vary from wave to wave but in 1992 the overall response rate was 90%.

3.2 Materials sent to respondents

Prior to the first interview the respondents are sent a letter informing them about the upcoming interview, a SIPP brochure, a Census brochure, a calendar and a change of address form. The brochure explains the purpose of the survey, sample selection etc.. The Census brochure explains the mandate of the Census Bureau along with statistical charts depicting the information that was collected. The calendar identifies the months when the interviewer will be contacting them. The letter and the brochures are sent in a SIPP folder.

"Statistical Brief" report

A report entitled "Statistical Brief" is handed to the respondent at the interview. If it is a telephone interview, the report is mailed to the respondent. The report contains charts and statistics from data collected during the survey

Other letters

The regional offices have designed letters tailored to respondents according to their demographic features such as seniors, low income. These letters are sent to:

- difficult to contact respondents

- ! reluctant respondents
- ! refusal/conversion cases

Thank you letters

A thank you letter signed by the Director, Bureau of Census and a certificate of appreciation is sent to the respondent at the end of the panel.

3.3 Incentives

An experiment was conducted with a l987 panel evaluating whether a gift (small calculator) would increase response rates. The calculator was presented immediately after the interview to wave 1 households. The results indicated that the gift lowered non-response at the national level and at two regional offices. However, the reduction in non-response seems to be similar when there are follow-ups.

It was not possible to determine whether a gift and follow-ups together would reduce non-response rates even further. There is no evidence of the gift having any effect after the first interview. SIPP believes that giving a gift every wave would not lower non-response. However giving a gift more than once (preferably in the middle of the panel) could possibly reduce the non-response rate.

3.4 Interviewers

A newsletter is produced every three months by each regional office (R.O.). It is used to enhance communications between the R.O. and the field staff. The newsletter contains information about the survey as well as recipes, field stories from the interviewers, and information about the interviewers (e.g., retirements, birth announcements etc.). The newsletter is important because it makes the interviewers feel they are part of the team.

Interviewers are provided with copies of news clippings of articles using SIPP data. This information could potentially convert a refusal. The articles showing published data add realism to the survey, gives the survey credibility and makes the respondent feel his/her participation is important.

4. National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience (NLS) and National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience - Youth Cohort (NLSY)

4.1 Overview

These surveys are conducted by the National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) at the University of Chicago on behalf of the Center for Human Resources Research at Ohio State University. The NLS began in the mid 60's with four cohorts: men 45 to 59 years, women 30 to 44 and men and women 14-24. The cohorts were designed to represent the civilian non-institutional population of the United States for their age group. The four groups were interviewed annually for five years. The sample size was 5,000 individuals in each age/sex group. To cut cost, older men and women are interviewed biennially rather than annually. Younger groups are interviewed annually because of their mobility.

For the most part NLSY uses personal interviewers while about ten percent are telephone interviews. They believe that telephone interviewing is not practical because the respondents find it exhausting and they lose interest after a while (especially in a long interview). The length of the interview is approximately one hour.

In 1977 the survey was extended for five years, as long as attrition did not become a problem. At that time two new panels were introduced: young men and women. This new group became known as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The youth sample has an over-representation of Blacks, Hispanics and economically disadvantaged whites. A group of persons serving in the Armed Forces was also selected for the sample. The NLSY sample was interviewed for the first time in l979. Contact is once a year in June. Respondents who have refused to participate in the past are also contacted on an annual basis.

In 1980 NLSY told respondents they would be in the survey for five years. After five years the survey was extended, and in 1986 there was a considerable drop in the response rates. That year NLSY lost 300 cases out of 1,200. As a result of this, NLSY does not inform respondents about the duration of the survey. The organizers also feel that it is difficult to tell respondents how long the survey will last when they do not know themselves from one year to another if the survey will be extended.

The response rate for 1992 was 91.7 %.

4.2 Material sent to respondents

Advance letters

Three weeks before the survey begins the respondent receives a letter, a NORC brochure, and a toll free calling card. The letter is short and informative and is used to remind the respondents about the upcoming interview.

The brochure has general information about NORC, as well as information about sample selection, interviewing techniques, confidentiality and the interviewers. This brochure is sent with the advance letter.

The respondent also receives a calling card with a toll free number for NLSY. Respondents can call in to complain, ask questions about the survey or phone in a change of address. The cards are usually given to the respondent at the end of the interview. They are requested to call if any changes occur during the following year.

Refusal Letters

Uncooperative respondents are sent a letter encouraging them to continue their participation in the survey. The letters are often written by the field managers who tailor the letter to each respondent.

Prison Warden Letters

The NLSY interview respondents who are in prison, a mental institution, nursing home, or hospital. A letter is sent to the prison warden asking permission to interview the inmate. Permission is not needed to interview respondents in the other institutions. A proxy interview is accepted if the respondent is incapable of participating in the survey.

Brochure on the NLSY

This brochure describes the uses of the data by using statistical charts depicting survey results. The brochure is sent to the respondent halfway through the collection period. The collection period is between late January and mid-August.

"Sorry I missed you" card

If the respondent is not home or he/she has missed an appointment, the interviewer leaves a "Sorry I missed you card". The respondent can then call back to reschedule the appointment.

4.3 Incentives

A payment of $10, in cash or cheque, is given to the respondent at the end of the interview. The respondent is asked to sign a receipt for the money he/she received. The amount of the incentive might be increased depending on the circumstances. For example, a respondent was located after 13 years and was paid $100 for 13 years of data.

The decision to increase the monetary incentive is not usually made by the interviewer. These cases are referred to the field supervisor and then the case is sent to the Field Manager. The Field Manager has the authority to increase the amount. However, if the interviewer feels they will lose the respondent, they will make the decision to increase the amount (within reason) without consulting head office.

In 1985 the $5 incentive was increased to $10. Since it has been seven years since the last increase, the respondents are now starting to ask for a minimum increase of $5. Only the Bureau of Labor Statistics (the survey sponsors) has the authority to increase the incentive amount and has not yet made a decision.

NLSY has never conducted a study comparing incentive groups to non-incentive groups. Therefore there is no evidence supporting the fact that money increases the response rate. However, survey staff believe that respondents would only participate if they were paid.

4.4 Interviewers

There is little interviewer turnover in NLSY and not much is needed from Head office to motivate their interviewers. NLSY has about 60-70% of the same interviewers they had 14 years ago. The interviewers are self-motivated because they have been visiting the respondents since they were teenagers and have established a relationship with them. These respondents have become "family" to them.

However, last year NLSY brought in their field supervisors to Chicago for a celebration banquet with guest speakers. The purpose of the banquet was to thank the supervisors for a job well done. The interviewers received University of Chicago sweatshirts and coffee mugs. They also received a refrigerator magnet. Most interviewers felt that the magnet and pen were their favourite gift. A newsletter is also produced by NLSY and sent to the interviewers two or three times a year.

5. British Household Panel Study, University of Essex, Colchester, England

5.1 Overview

Conducted from the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change, the Living in Britain Survey began its first collection of data in 1991. The objective of the survey is to collect data on health, training, pensions, housing, as well finding out about changes taking place in people's lives.

The survey is conducted by the University of Essex. The sample size is 5,600 households (10,250 individuals).

Everyone 16 years of age and over is interviewed. An outside agency is hired to do the collection, coding and editing of the data. Head office has the responsibility of writing the specifications.

The survey is done in two stages; a pilot is conducted from April to May (sample size of 1,000 people). At this time the questionnaire is tested. The main survey is conducted from September to December. The respondents are paid a $10 gift voucher for the interview.

The Living in Britain Survey has debated whether or not to inform respondents about the duration of the survey. The Survey currently has funding through 1994 and is hoping for funding until 1999. The organizers feel it is unwise to inform respondents of the length of the survey mainly because they do not know if they will have funding after 1994.

In their opinion it would be misleading respondents to tell them they are in the survey for four years when in fact the survey could be extended. They suggest telling respondents about the survey one year at a time. There has been some evidence in other panel surveys that telling respondents about the length of the survey decreased the response rate. NLSY, as well as a transport survey that was conducted in Holland, encountered this problem .

5.2 Materials sent to respondents

Advance letter

Prior to wave 1, respondents are sent advance letters. Prior to wave 2, non-contacts or refusals from wave 1 also receive an advance letter. Both of these letters explain the purpose of the survey, topics covered in the survey, confidentiality and method of payment.

Thank You letter

The letter is sent with a $10 gift voucher, a report and a change of address card within 4-6 weeks of the interview. The report contains general information about the survey as well as statistics showing how the data are used. The change of address card is filled out and returned to the Research Center when the respondent moves.

Confirmation of address slip

The slip is sent with a letter, a report containing statistical charts, an analysis of the data and a return envelope two months before start of field work. Respondents are asked to confirm their addresses and give the addresses of any household members who have moved and return the card in the postage paid envelope.

6. Ontario Health Survey Pre-test, Statistics Canada

6.1 Overview

A pre-test was done for the Ontario Health Survey. One of the objectives was to determine if the use of incentives would encourage response. The test was conducted in Peterborough County with 800 dwellings.

There was a self-completed questionnaire and an interviewer completed questionnaire. The incentive offered during the test was three draws of $1000 each or the equivalent in sports and recreational oriented prizes.

Several of the interviewers were concerned that respondents might perceive the incentive as a waste of government money. Although this did not happen in the pre-test, they expected it to happen during the survey if an incentive was offered. There was also concern expressed that this would set a precedent; several interviewers would have preferred to see everyone get a small token such as a Canada Food Guide.

During the pre-test four different versions of the self-completed questionnaires were used.

Version A: basic questionnaire (short version)

Version B: basic questionnaire plus additional questions on nutrition

Version C: basic questionnaires plus nutrition questions and a series of questions designed to permit respondent's answers to be combined with other information about the respondent (long version)

Version D: same questionnaire as C with a letter explaining the details of a response incentive designed to increase response rates. This version was sent to determine the impact of the incentives on the response rates.

6.2 Results

The different versions of the self completed questionnaire had varying response rates. The length of the questionnaire may have had a greater effect on the response rate than the incentive.

Table 1 below presents the response rates received using each of the four approaches.

The long form (version D) with an incentive had the effect of raising the response rate (for individuals) by 3.4% compared to the short version (A) without an incentive. However, in terms of household response rates, the short form version A performed better than version D with the incentive.

The different response rates associated with the different versions tested seem to depend on how many people responded initially without any follow-ups. The effect of the follow-ups did not vary much from version to version.

TABLE 1: Response rate (person level)

	# OF FORMS 05 DISTRIBUTED	# OF COMPLETED FORMS 05	PERSON RESPONSE RATE
VERSION A (short)	325	234	72%
VERSION B (basic)	307	212	69%
VERSION C (long)	314	190	60.5%
VERSION D (with incentives)	342	258	75.4%
OVERALL	1288	894	69.4%

The following recommendations resulted from this pre-test:

! To achieve a response rate of 75% it is recommended to use an incentive with any version of the questionnaire.

! Telephone follow-ups are essential: slightly less than half of the forms were returned without any follow-ups.

! Consider the possibility of interviewers picking up completed questionnaires instead of having them mailed back. This would increase collection costs but may be necessary if one of the longer versions of the questionnaire is chosen without the incentive feature.

! If an incentive is not offered, the best alternative is to use Version A (short questionnaire)

7. Ontario Mental Health Survey - Pre-test, Statistics Canada

7.1 Overview

The Ontario Mental Health Survey tested the willingness of respondents to participate in the survey and to monitor response rates. It used an interviewer administered questionnaire.

A gift of a lottery ticket was used as an incentive. Each respondent was presented with this gift at the beginning of the interview. Some respondents and some interviewers did not like the lottery ticket for religious reasons.

The lottery ticket as an incentive was dropped during the main survey. This was a result of the Ontario Health Survey getting better response rates using a draw of money as an incentive.

7.2 Results

The response rate for the test was 68.5%. The low rates were blamed on the fact that a fixed completion date led to some interviewers not finishing their work. Had the collection period been longer, the rates would have been higher. There was not enough time for refusal conversions or to follow-up on respondents that were not home. During the main survey five prizes of $1,000 each were offered to respondents as an incentive.

The response rate in the main survey was 78.7%, substantiating the thoughts about the low rates in the pretest.

8. Medicare - Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) - Westat Inc., (research firm), Rockville, Maryland, U.S.A.

8.1 Overview

This survey of American Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries began in September 1991. The sample consists of 12,000 seniors of all ethnic groups. There is over sampling of persons 80 years and older and of those under 65 who are disabled. This is a longitudinal survey that also produces cross-sectional data.

They have two methods of collection, CAI (computer-assisted interviewing) for household interviews and paper questionnaires for institution interviews. The latter is used in the institutions because the information is gathered not only from the respondent, but from many other sources such as a care giver and the accounting department.

Respondents are not paid directly for their participation, but MCBS will pay them $3 for the electricity used during the CAI interview.

The response rate for the survey in 1992 was 92%. In the opinion of Westat, the response is high because the survey is sponsored by Medicare and the respondents are all on Medicare. In addition, the respondents are seniors and are easier to trace and have more time for an interview than younger people.

8.2 Materials sent to respondents

Advance Letter

A letter from the US Department of Health and Human Services and a MCBS brochure are sent before the survey.

The letter explains the objectives of the survey and confidentiality. The brochure answers questions the respondent might have on the objectives of the survey, the importance of their participation, sample selection.

Certificate of appreciation

After the first year in the survey the respondent receives a certificate of appreciation from the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) signed by the project director.

Thank you Card

This card signed by the Project Director thanks the respondent for participating in the study.

Birthday Card

A birthday card is sent by the interviewer. Westat provides the interviewer with a list of birth dates for each respondent.

Change of address notification

If the respondent moves before the next interview, they are requested to complete this card and return it to Westat.

"Sorry I missed you card"

If the respondent wasn't home, the interviewer will leave this card informing him/her that he/she will return in the next few days.

Information Card

This card gives the respondent a toll free number to call if they have any questions about medicare.

Calendar

A binder (with a calendar, stickers and receipt envelopes) is given to respondents to help them keep track of their medical events, bills, insurance statements etc. Some of the respondents like the calendar and regard it as gift but others consider it burdensome. There is no obligation on the part of the respondent to complete the calendar.

8.3 Interviewers

Interviewers are provided with the following material:

- A copy of the advance letter that is sent to the respondent.
- A letter to postmasters introducing interviewers and the survey. The letter also asks the postmaster's assistance to help the interviewer trace respondents who move away.
- An endorsement letter from the American Association of Retired Persons.
- Numerous newspaper articles about medicare.

! A copy of the press kit sent to the local newspapers.

To maintain interviewer morale, a newsletter is produced two or three times a year. Interviewers are asked to voluntarily keep a diary of their experiences. These stories are then gathered and an interviewer's newsletter is produced. Westat believes the newsletter is a useful way of keeping the interviewers informed about each other and making them feel they are part of the team. Interviewers meet weekly with their supervisors to discuss problems and find solutions.

As well, they are encouraged to call the supervisors at any time if they are in need of support.

9. Large Monetary Incentives and Their Effect on Mail Survey Response Rates by Richard Bolstein and Jeannine James, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia

9.1 Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not incentives had an effect on response rates.

The respondents were given a two-page questionnaire asking them to provide information on their employees. As a high response rate was necessary to provide reliable information, the association decided to use monetary incentives to try to achieve it.

In order to determine the best amount, a pilot study was conducted in the spring of l990 to test a range of incentives. Since no studies could be found indicating whether a cheque or an equivalent amount of cash would result in different response rates, such a comparison was included in this study.

The sample consisted of 1200 member companies currently not enrolled in the national trade association of construction subcontractor's health insurance program.

The sample was divided into seven groups, $1 cash, $5 cash, $5 cheque, $10 cheque, $20 cheque, $40 cheque or an offer of a $50 cheque to be sent once the questionnaire was returned. The incentives were included in the first mailing. The groups were compared against each other and against a control group with no incentives.

The overall response rate was 67%.

9.2 Conclusion

- A prepaid incentive of $1 significantly increased the response rate over no incentives regardless of the number of mailings.

- In a one- and two-wave mailing, $5 was more effective, and the $20 incentive increased the rates even further. However, above the $20 threshold the response rates declined.

- A $5 cheque versus $5 in cash had similar response rates. Since not all are cashed, cheques are more economical.

- Incentives seem to encourage a greater effort on the part of the respondents as well as favourable comments about the sponsor. The extra effort made by the respondent could be important if you are asking the respondent to verify his/her records.

! A promised incentive even as large as $50 was ineffective in increasing response rates. This may be explained by social exchange theory.

The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964, Homans, 1961, Thibaut and Kelly 1959) states that by giving the respondent a prepaid incentive as little as $1 you are extending a token of trust which then elicits a social obligation on the part of the respondent to participate. When the amount is increased, the response rates usually increase as well. This is based on the equity theory (Adams, 1965) that the more money respondents receive, the greater the effort they feel they must make.

However, in this study a $20 cheque had a significantly higher response rate than the $40 cheque. A possible explanation is that this amount ($40) could be perceived as payment for time. As Dillman (1978) points out "the closer the monetary incentive comes to the value of the service performed, the more the transaction tends to move into the realm of economic exchange and the easier it becomes for many people to refuse it".

10. Secodip - Société d'étude de la consommation de la distribution et de la publicité, France

10.1 Overview

Secodip was founded in 1969. Their objective is to collect data on the social-characteristics of consumers and the products they buy and use. They also collect data for manufacturers, by testing new products, helping them develop a media relations plan, improve their distribution methods, and the effectiveness of their communications plan.

Secodip manages two panel studies of households and individuals. Respondents are asked to complete a questionnaire on a weekly basis. They provide information on the products they buy, the brands, the price, the quantity, etc.

Respondents are in the survey for four years. There is no personal contact with the respondent except at the beginning of the survey after which the questionnaire is self-administered. There is a second contact only if the respondent does not return his/her questionnaire or if errors are found in the questionnaire.

10.2 Incentives

Points are awarded to the respondents whether they complete the questionnaire or not. The respondent then chooses a gift from a catalogue. Secodip is contemplating changing their methods so that the respondents would receive points upon completion of the questionnaire only.

To gain the respondents' cooperation, the emphasis is placed on the importance of the survey. Secodip also tries to appeal to the respondents' patriotic duty by telling them their participation is for the good of the country rather than emphasize the incentive itself.

The response rate in 1992 was 90%.

11. Conclusion

There is no conclusive evidence that indicates incentives increase the response rates. Yet, most longitudinal surveys pay their respondents and maintain response rates over 90%. If time and money permitted, a test of an incentive group versus a non-incentive group in a longitudinal survey would be useful, to determine the impact of incentives versus other factors.

The policy at Statistics Canada is to not pay respondents for their data. It is felt there is a lack of good research supporting the idea that incentives make a difference and that the cost involved cannot be justified. In view of this, SLID will put most of it time and money towards developing a dynamic respondent relations package, finding ways of keeping the respondents in the survey for six years and also sustaining interviewer morale.

A comparison of response rates and incentives among various surveys is provided in Appendix 1.

12. Recommendations for SLID

12.1 Respondent Relations Package

There are two factors to help maintain response rates:

- motivational material that is interesting and fun, yet informative.
- the interviewers' relationship with the respondents.

12.2 Motivational material

This material must be packaged in a way that will get the respondents' attention and at the same time not be perceived as a waste of government money.

The materials should be divided into two categories:

! promotional material: for example, brochures and letters, explaining the importance of the respondent`s participation..

! results from the survey which illustrate the uses of data.

The following is a suggested respondent relations plan.

JANUARY - Labour Interview

<u>Before the Labour interview:</u>

! the first year send a letter/brochure to respondents explaining the purpose of the interview and the dates the interview will occur.

! In January 1994, SLID respondents were sent a letter, brochure and a business reply card. Respondents were asked to return the business reply card to head office if they wanted more information on SLID. More than 650 cards were received, slightly more than 4% of the sample. A newsletter was sent to those respondents. (A copy of the business reply card and this first respondent newsletter is provided in Appendix 2.)

- In subsequent years, send a letter and a respondent newsletter. The newsletter would highlight the results of the survey by province in easily understood text and statistical charts.

- a change of address card could be sent at this time.

MAY - Income Interview

April before the Income interview:

- send a letter explaining the purpose of the interview and the dates the interview will occur.

- send conversion letters to those refusing the January interview.

- send a questionnaire for respondents to complete before the telephone interview (encourage respondents to use their tax forms and other financial records).

- guide to help respondents complete the questionnaire as well as a questions and answers section.

June:

- send a thank you letter or card (signed by the Regional Director) thanking respondents for their participation in the survey.

- postage paid change of address card could be sent at this time

12.3 Motivating interviewers

The motivational material is the first part in getting the respondents interested in the survey. The second part which is equally important, is the interviewer and his/her relationship with the respondent and with Head Office.

The relationship between the interviewer and the respondent is an integral part of our respondents relations plan. In June 1992, focus groups were held with respondents to the Survey of Consumer Finance. These respondents stated that the primary reason they participated in a survey was because of the interviewer.

It is important to provide the interviewer with as much information about SLID as possible. By doing this the interviewer is prepared to answer any questions the respondent might have. The more knowledgeable interviewers are about SLID, the easier it will be for them to convince reluctant respondents to participate.

It would be easy for interviewers to feel isolated from the SLID team. It is important that the interviewers feel they are part of this team. The following are a few suggestions on how to do this:

! keep interviewers informed about SLID through an interviewer newsletter. Ask the interviewer for some input into the newsletter (e.g., field anecdotes). These stories will keep the interviewers informed about each other and make them feel like they are part of a team.

! send thank you letters to the interviewers signed by the Regional Director or include a few sentences in the newsletter thanking them for a job well done.

The interviewers are an important part of the survey. Without the willing cooperation of the interviewers, SLID will not be a success.

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APPENDIX 1

RESPONSE RATES FROM VARIOUS SURVEYS

NAME OF SURVEY	RESPONSE RATE	INCENTIVE
PSID	90%	$10 cash or cheque
SIPP	90%	no incentive
NLSY	91.7%	$10 cash
BHPS	70.% (1991 rate - 1st year in the field)	$10 gift voucher
MCBS	92%	$3 for electricity only
Secodip	90%	points accumulated towards purchase of a gift

APPENDIX 2

BUSINESS REPLY CARD AND FIRST RESPONDENT NEWSLETTER

Fall 1993

Statistics Canada
SLID
Debbie Lutz
11th Floor,
Section D8
Jean Talon Bldg.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0T6

Statistique Canada
EDTR
Debbie Lutz
11 ième étage,
section D8
Édifice Jean-Talon
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0T6

MAIL POSTE
Canada Post Corporation
Société canadienne des postes
Postage paid if mailed in Canada
Port payé si posté au Canada
Business Reply
Réponse d'affaires
0033371999 01

0033371999-K1A0T6-BR01

STATISTICS CANADA
120 PARKDALE AVE
OTTAWA ON K1A 9Z9

STATISTIQUE CANADA
120 AV PARKDALE
OTTAWA ON K1A 9Z9

Statistics Canada Statistique Canada

Canada

SURVEY OF
Labour
AND
Income Dynamics

To obtain free information on SLID, fill in your name, address and mail the card back to Statistics Canada.

L'ENQUÊTE SUR LA
Dynamique du travail et revenu

Pour obtenir sans frais de l'information sur l'EDTR, inscrivez votre nom, adresse et retournez le formulaire à Statistique Canada.

COMPLETE AND MAIL / COMPLETER ET POSTER

NAME/NOM: ______________________
(please print clearly/veuillez écrire lisiblement))

ADDRESS/ADRESSE: ______________________

____

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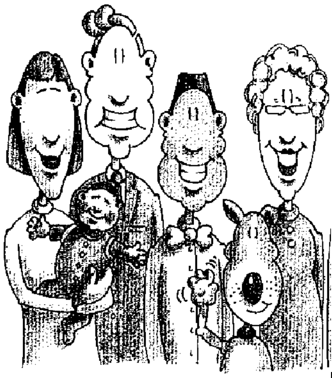
APT.No./APP.: ______________________

CITY/VILLE: ______________________

PROVINCE: ______________________

POSTAL CODE/CODE POSTAL: ______________________

☐ ENGLISH ☐ FRANÇAIS

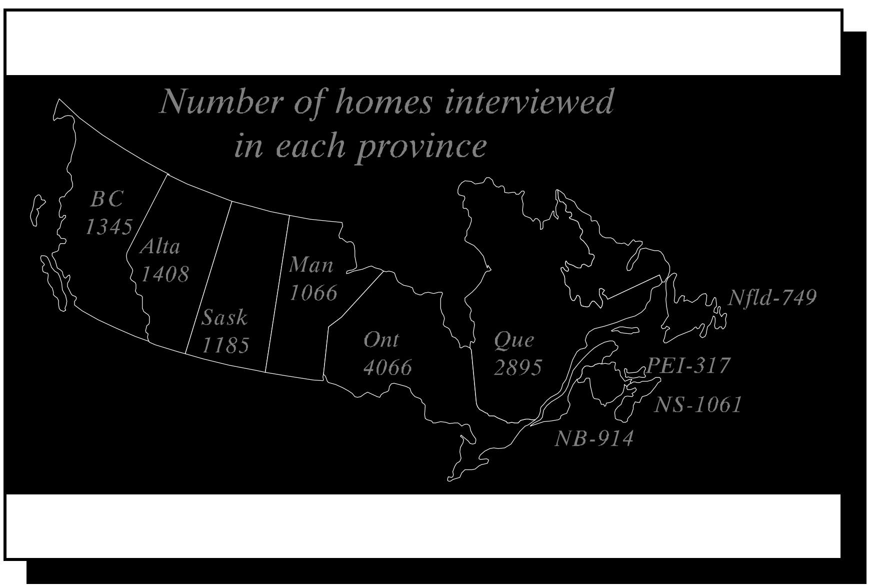


SURVEY OF
Labour AND Income Dynamics
NEWSLETTER

Number 1 Winter 1994

THANK YOU

Thank you for your interest in the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID). Your participation in this new survey is very important. Your household is one of about 15,000 homes selected across Canada.



The information you provide will represent many other families in your community and province—on average, every member of your household represents about 650 people.

Number 1 Winter 1994

WHAT IS SLID?

The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics will examine the relationship between income, working, moving, family changes and other events. The purpose is to look at the impact of these factors on the well-being of individuals and families. It is a longitudinal survey; that is, it will collect information more than once from the same respondents.

SLID is the first Canadian survey to follow the same people over time and link employment, income and family information.

The term “dynamics” in the name of the survey reflects its goal to measure changes in people's lives. This will tell us what changes are occurring and how often.

WHY IS THIS SURVEY IMPORTANT?

Jobs and income are the number one concern of Canadians. The deficit, free trade and population aging will increasingly affect our lives in very direct and personal ways.

Labour and income information from Statistics Canada are already widely used. For example, results on the monthly unemployment rate find their way into everything—even the daily news reports.

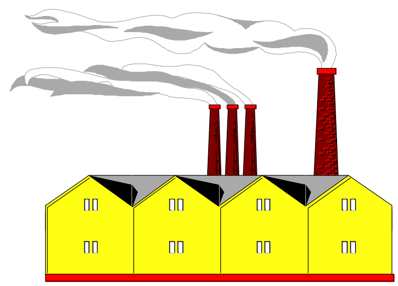
However, some of today's critical issues require a different kind of information—information that tracks over time the impact of key events and changes in a person's life. For example:

- Are workers accepting lower wages or fewer hours in order to stay employed?

- Do families that fall into poverty stay there a long time or is there a lot of movement into and out of poverty?

- How long does it take school leavers to find a job? Are drop-outs returning to school?

- Some unemployed people go back to school to upgrade their skills. Does this help them find suitable employment?



- How long does it take an older laid-off worker to find another job?

- How often do teenagers and older children return to live in their parents' home? What are the living arrangements before this move? What triggers it?

- How do older Canadians fare as they move from working into retirement?

- How often and under what circumstances do people move to find another job?

Questions like these are best answered by contacting the same people for several years. The answers will shed new light on important aspects of Canadian living.

WHO WILL USE THIS INFORMATION?

Good information is essential to deal with the social and economic issues that we need to tackle as a society.

Governments want to develop and change policies to best serve the people. To plan programs, social agencies need an understanding of how times are changing. The public wants to know and understand what is happening to Canadians.

Governments, social agencies, the public, the research community and journalists who help shape public opinion—all need reliable information. The data from SLID are expected to make a major contribution towards finding solutions to current problems.

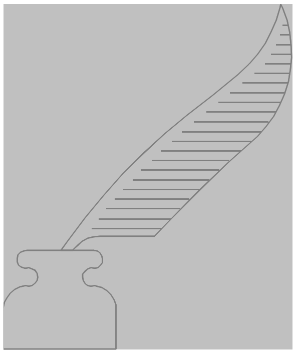
DID YOU KNOW?

. . . for the second time in a row, "The Economist" magazine ranked Statistics Canada as the best statistical agency in the world.

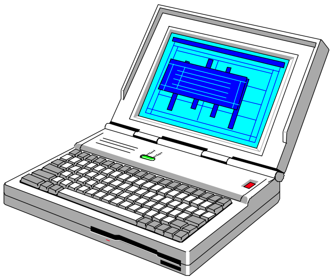
This recognition was due to our objectivity (meaning our data are free from political interference), the reliability of our numbers and our ability to look forward by developing new surveys such as SLID. We are proud of this honour as you should be—without the willingness and cooperation of our respondents, Statistics Canada would not have achieved this international recognition.

HOW IS THIS INFORMATION COLLECTED?

In 1605, missionaries, using a quill and parchment, recorded Canada's first statistics on births, deaths, and marriages. At Port Royal, today's Nova Scotia, only 44 of 79 settlers survived that winter.



Throughout its history, Statistics Canada has been a pioneer in making changes in survey and census taking. Today, as the best statistical agency in the world, it is moving into Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI). CAI is a new way to collect survey information that is replacing the old paper and pencil method. Computer-assisted interviewing saves time and money. One immediate benefit of using a computer is that it eliminates paper questionnaires and this reduces costs and helps protect the environment.



The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics is collecting information using the CAI approach. Statistics Canada interviewers will contact each household and enter the answers directly into a portable computer. Then the interviewer will send this information electronically from her/his home to a computer at the Statistics Canada Regional Office.

Number 1 Winter 1994

YOUR INFORMATION IS PROTECTED

To ensure that your information is protected the interviewers use a unique password to access and enter the information on the computer. Your responses are also “scrambled” while they are sent electronically to Statistics Canada.

The agency does not give out any information that could identify you or your family, recognizing that the trust of Canadians is essential to carrying out its mandate.

WHAT IS NEXT?

In January 1993, one of our interviewers asked you about your work experience and your family and educational background. The results of this year's labour and income interviews will be combined with the background information obtained last year. The information you provide will “grow” over time and become more valuable. To keep you informed as a respondent, we will send you a newsletter once a year to share with you the major results of the survey.

We thank you again for your continuing interest in the survey. If you have any specific questions on SLID, please contact your nearest Statistics Canada Regional Office.