

What's **trending** in higher education program participant tracking?

Stacey Neves, MA, Melissa Sullivan, BA | University of California Davis | Schools of Health Evaluation

In higher education, a program's or initiative's impact usually cannot be determined immediately upon participants exiting a program. It is important for evaluation plans to include a well-thought-out tracking strategy to collect their post-program outcome data.

sleuthing

How do I find program participants?



Collecting contact information on participants can be a lengthy process. **Program leaders** are a great starting point in obtaining last known contact information details.



Information from **mentors, colleagues**, or even participant-provided **CV** and **bio-sketch** data can help narrow the scope when searching for updated contact (and outcomes!).



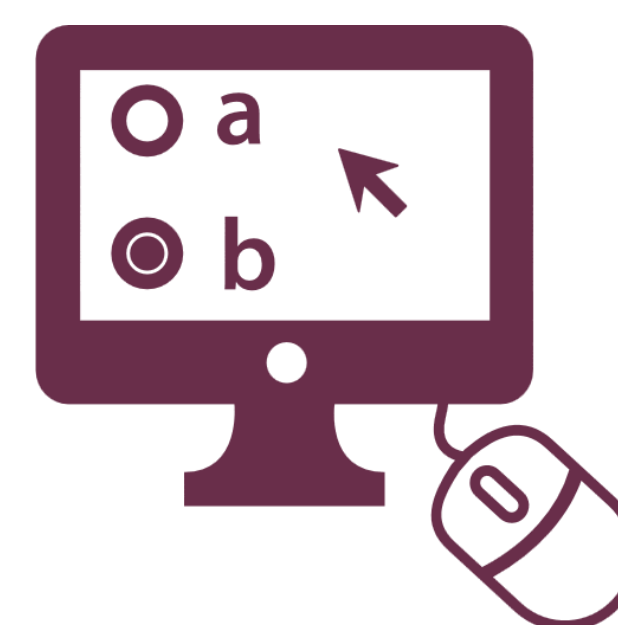
Social media can provide clues for determining location, employment, and other activities¹ that can help paint a picture of where they are today. Using this info *alone* should be a last resort because accounts may be inactive or inaccurate.

data gathering

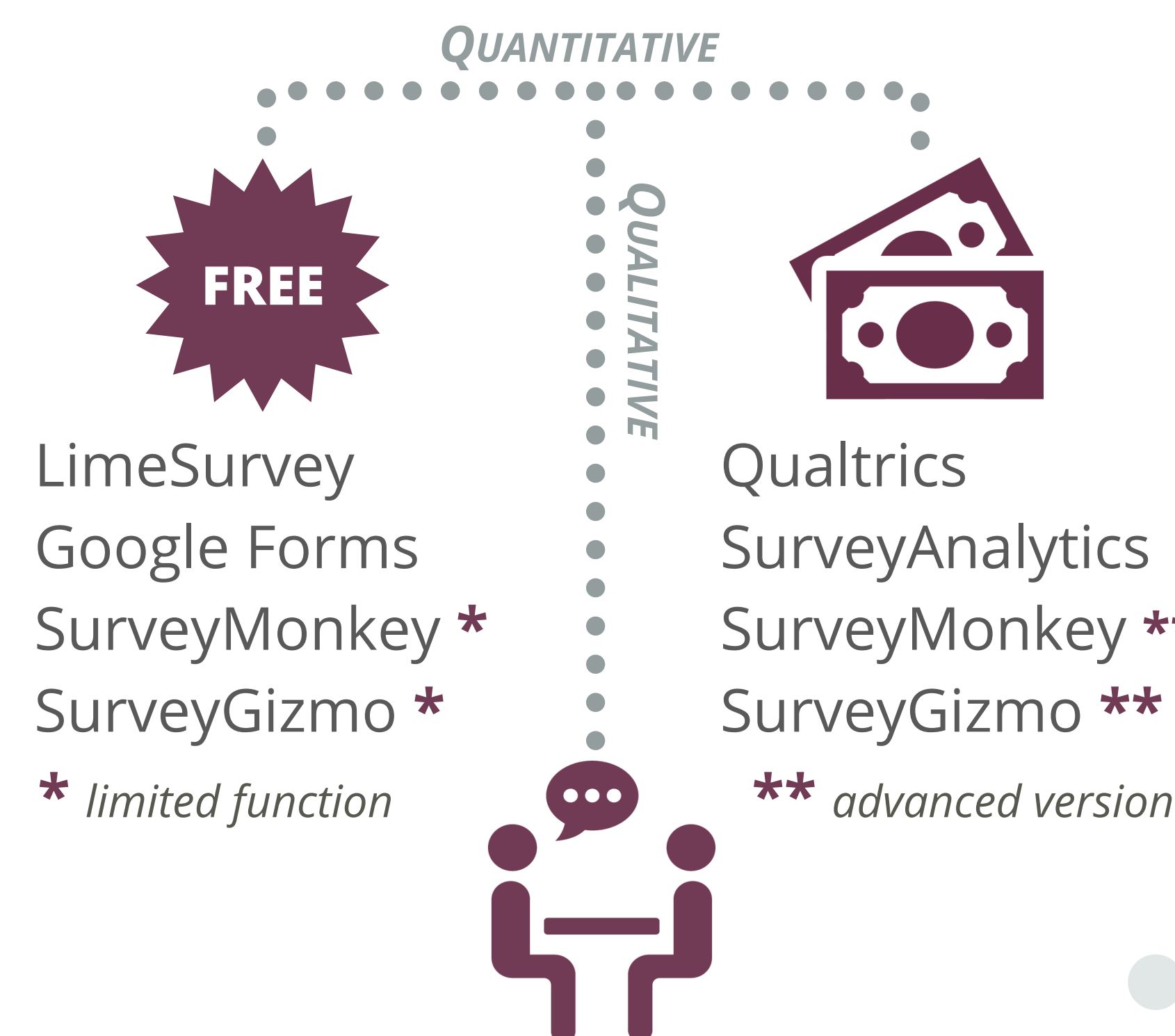
How can I gather participant information?



Collecting data from publically available databases for **publications, grants, patents, clinical trials, and media** can provide historical reference and outcome data.



Online surveys are a good option for data gathering as they cast a wide net at minimal cost while lowering the burden on respondents to provide contact and outcome information.^{2,3}



Qualitative methods, like interviews, can provide in-depth perspectives on individual outcomes.

promising trends

How do we make this easier?!



"Big Data Analytics" (sifting through vast amounts of data within local and online data sources to find patterns, e.g. scraping/mining) has been promising for many fields. How about outcome tracking?

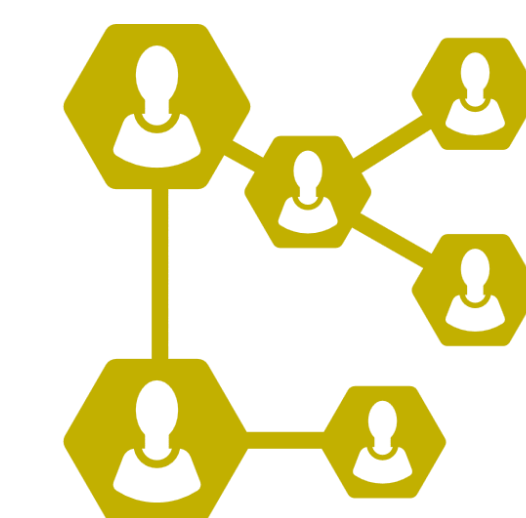
Considerations:

Pros:

- Free and/or open-source support (Apache, R, etc)
- As tech advances, tools will become easier to use

Cons:

- Steep learning curve for new programmers
- Doesn't mitigate initial lack of data sources
- Likely more effective for participant *recruiting* rather than tracking
- Data can possibly be re-identified⁵



The use of **automated tracking systems** can expedite the tracking process by pre-populating outcome related fields or helping to locate "lost" participants by integrating alumni data and social media.



GTSS⁴ ***
WebCAMP ***

*** developed for CTSA Centers



Graduway
EverTrue

Summary

Tracking participants is an essential component of assessing program outcomes. This often necessary task can be time consuming when completed manually. Implementing a robust tracking system can improve overall outcomes. However, the development of automated tracking systems and Big Data methodologies are the next potential step for overcoming tracking issues.

Considerations

- ▶ Create a culture of evaluation by engaging participants early to ensure long-term tracking successes.
- ▶ Employ multiple strategies to ensure you can mitigate any gaps in communication or outcome measurement.
- ▶ Dedicate appropriate resources (e.g., staff, time, money, etc.) to conduct thorough participant tracking.
- ▶ Communicate your plans to protect participant data and establish best practices in safeguarding participant data.
- ▶ Enlist the assistance of technical experts to explore automated data tracking systems or Big Data methodologies.
- ▶ Consider exploring standards for tracking participants effectively and streamlining efforts.

References

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- 2 May, T. (2011). *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Research*. McGraw-Hill International.
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