



## Increasing Your Survey Response Rate

Research across the country has demonstrated that the response rates of mail surveys can be significantly increased with a series of reminders to survey recipients. To increase your confidence in the scientific worth of the survey results, you want to strive to achieve a 100% return rate.

One very effective design, adopted by researchers nationally in the last twenty-five years, has brought response rates close to 95%, especially among *homogeneous audiences like those in an Extension program* (Dillman 2000, 1978). After sending the recipient a mail survey, send three reminders in the following time frame to achieve these results.

	<u>Send Out</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Expected Returns Based on Research</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Mailing	Survey, cover letter & postage-paid return envelope to entire sample	---	19-27%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Mailing	Postcard reminder to entire sample	1 week	34-56%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Mailing	Survey, 2 <sup>nd</sup> cover letter & postage-paid return envelope <i>only</i> to respondents not heard from	3 weeks	--
4 <sup>th</sup> Mailing <sup>1</sup>	Postcard/telephone reminder to respondents in 3 <sup>rd</sup> mailing	4 weeks	72-95%

### Extension Examples

The effect of multiple reminders can be seen in response rates in Extension surveys in PA.

<u>Sheep Producers Survey (N=725)</u>		<u>Date</u>	<u>Cumulative Returns</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Mailing	Survey (10 pages, 5 questions) Cover letter & postage-paid envelope	January 31	--
2 <sup>nd</sup> Mailing	Postcard reminder to all	February 7	52%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Mailing	Survey, 2 <sup>nd</sup> cover letter & postage-paid envelope	February 21	71%
4 <sup>th</sup> Mailing	Survey, 3 <sup>rd</sup> cover letter & envelope & postcard for those in sample 'no longer in sheep'	April 3	84%



Small-Scale Agriculture Survey (N=989)

1 <sup>st</sup> Mailing	Survey (6 pages, 22 questions), cover letter & postage-paid envelope	June 9	33%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Mailing	Postcard reminder only to respondents not heard from	June 29	54%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Mailing	Survey, 2 <sup>nd</sup> cover letter & postage-paid envelope	July 22	71%

Survey Concerning Predators at Fish Hatcheries (N=287)

1 <sup>st</sup> Mailing	Survey (14 pages, 23 questions), cover letter & postage-paid envelope	October 4	44%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Mailing	Postcard reminder to all	October 26	67%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Mailing	Survey, 2 <sup>nd</sup> cover letter & postage-paid envelope	November 20	---
4 <sup>th</sup> Mailing	Postcard reminder	December 10	85%

Survey of Landowners Surrounding Gettysburg Historical Areas (N=340)

1 <sup>st</sup> Mailing	Survey (2 pages), cover letter & postage-paid envelope	November 11	32%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Mailing	Postcard reminder	November 27	---
3 <sup>rd</sup> Mailing	Survey, 2 <sup>nd</sup> cover letter & postage-paid envelope	December 17	64%

Survey Will Remain Nameless to Protect the Guilty! (N=700)

Only 1 Mailing	Survey, cover letter & return envelope (no postage included)	Spring	10%
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To increase the likelihood of achieving a scientific representation of your audience, as well as to reduce secretarial work, consider surveying a sample rather than the entire population. See the following tipsheets for information on sampling, including how to use sampling when the participants do not attend the program consistently.

[Tipsheet #57: Random Samples: How & Why.](#)

[Tipsheet #58 Sampling a Diverse Audience.](#)

[Tipsheet #60: How to Determine Sample Size.](#)

[Tipsheet #68: How Do I Evaluate Impact When The Make-Up Of The Audience Is Not Consistent?](#)

<sup>1</sup>Dillman used certified mail in his fourth mailing, but this is not generally recommended.

#### **References**

Dillman, Don A. 1978. Mail and Telephone Surveys. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Dillman, Don A. 2000. Mail and Internet Surveys. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Salant, Patricia and Don A. Dillman. 1994. How to Conduct Your Own Survey. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

[Tipsheet #22. Cover Letter for a Survey.](#)

[Tipsheet #34. Increasing Response to Surveys.](#)

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