



Using Mail and Telephone for Evaluation

What is new in evaluation to add to a county or regional extension office for agents' use?

For two decades, Dillman's *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method* guided the collection of data for evaluation, needs assessments, and market analysis. His specific recommendations emanated from a basic principle of survey design: "People are more likely to respond when they think the benefits outweigh the costs, when they think they—or a group with which they identify—will get more in return than they are asked to give in the first place."

In a recent book, *How to Conduct Your Own Survey* (1994), Salant and Dillman include information on topics not covered in the first book, such as drop off surveys, focus groups, random digit dialing, and analysis of data. Additionally, the authors present four fundamental errors in collecting survey data (coverage error, sampling error, measurement error, and non-response error) and as they recommend specific strategies for mail, telephone, and interviews, they explain how each recommended strategy helps to reduce the fundamental errors.

In an easy to read style, the book addresses many questions asked by extension agents. The authors emphasize the power and benefit of sampling, an important contribution since many professionals are often reluctant to consider sampling. They also consider: why sample; the number of persons to include; types of samples; how to evaluate a response rate; and how to calculate sampling error, the percentage typically given in reports of national surveys.

Because of the authors' experience in surveying in rural communities, many of the numerous examples they include in the book pertain to extension audiences. This inexpensive paperback (new=\$15, used=\$12) should be added to every extension resource shelf. You can order it from the publisher, Wiley and Sons, 605 Third Ave., New York, NY 10158, through the campus bookstore, or at Amazon.com.

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