



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS

1. What is a campus climate survey on sexual assault?

A campus climate survey on sexual assault generates school-specific data on the nature and extent of sexual assault as it exists on a campus, as well as data on the attitudes and perceptions about sexual assault among different campus groups. The survey itself asks as [series of questions](#) that may address students' experiences with sexual victimization both before and after joining the campus; knowledge of the school's policies and procedures for reporting incidents; perceptions about how well campus authorities and local law enforcement handle reports of sexual assault; and the frequency and nature of sexual assault experienced by students on campus.

2. What are the goals of a campus climate survey?

Campus climate surveys can serve multiple purposes; however, one of their main goals is to generate school-specific data to improve institutional responses, including targeted prevention, intervention, support for victims, and accountability for offenders. These efforts are always more successful when they are tailored to the unique needs of individual campuses, which is why it is so important to have accurate school-specific data. When schools have a clear understanding of the climate around sexual assault as it actually exists on their campuses, they are in a better position to effectively prevent and respond to incidents of campus sexual assault.

3. Why are campus climate surveys important?

Campus climate surveys provide campus-level data on sexual assault in a way that national data, or even data from similarly situated schools, cannot. For example, decades of research has shown that victims rarely report sexual assault to law enforcement, and in many cases do not even access formal services, such as crisis centers. The result is that official statistics may not represent the full extent of the problem on any one campus. They also fail to provide a nuanced view of a complicated issue that usually has contributing factors that may vary from one school to the next.

4. Do campus climate surveys have any benefits outside of data collection?

In addition to the direct benefits that schools receive from the data generated, the act of conducting a survey can in itself have a positive effect on the campus climate because it reflects a school's genuine commitment to combat campus sexual assault. For example, when campuses address sexual violence, victims may feel more comfortable coming forward to report incidents. This can help campus and local

law enforcement identify and deal with serial perpetrators, making campuses safer in the process. When victims come forward, it can help them heal from the trauma and get better access to support services (such as counseling). Plus, when they feel supported by the community and are confident in a school's handling of an assault, they are more likely stay in school.

5. Are there best practices for conducting campus climate surveys?

Yes. Best practices for campus climate surveys have been established, and surveys are most effective when they follow these practices. One of the first steps is to do a thorough review of the best practices, with a particular emphasis on the materials referenced in question 6 below.

6. How can I find out what these best practices are?

Many of the established best practices came out of the 2015 Department of Justice [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study](#) (CCSVS). The DOJ survey instrument and methodology are free. The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) is available to answer questions about them. Contact us at: ovw.campus.surveys@usdoj.gov.

Additional resources for campus climate survey best practices include a [lessons learned guide](#) from the Rutgers School of Social Work Campus Climate Assessment team, as well as the many resources developed by the [Prevention Innovations Research Center](#) at the University of New Hampshire, the result of UNH's many years of experience conducting campus climate surveys.

7. Are there best practices for developing the content of a campus climate surveys?

Yes. When developing the content for a survey, it is important to keep in mind the goal of the survey and the characteristics of individual campuses. The questions should strive to assess campus-specific rates of sexual violence and also gain a perspective on the campus-wide knowledge of policies and resources. Specific guidelines for creating the content for a campus climate survey can be found in the materials referenced in question 6 above.

8. Are there best practices specific to protecting survivor confidentiality in surveys?

Protecting confidentiality is crucial in a campus climate survey on sexual assault. It is of particular importance when incentives are offered to increase survey response rates, something that is a recommended best practice. Resources to aid schools in determining best practices on climate survey confidentiality include the CCSVS final report; chapters four and six of the lessons learned [guide](#) from the Rutgers School of Social Work Campus Climate Assessment Team; and a school's own Institutional Review Board (IRB), which should always be consulted at the beginning of the survey process.

A few examples of best practices for maintaining confidentiality were demonstrated in the CCSVS:

- Provide a disclosure at multiple points during the survey to make participants aware that no identifying information would be stored with or linked to their survey data.

- Program the survey so that IP addresses are not collected when individuals participate in the survey.
- Provide students with a Survey Access Code that they use to log into the survey website, rather than asking them to log in with personally identifying information, such as an e-mail address or student ID number.

9. Are there best practices for publicizing the results of a campus climate survey?

Yes. The Prevention Innovations Research Center at the University of New Hampshire has [developed a guide](#) for campus administrators, faculty, and staff to aid discussions about using and communicating climate survey data. The guide can be used as a reference for schools that want to follow best practices for sharing the results. It is also a useful reference for discussions around campus climate survey confidentiality.

The guide identifies important questions to think about when considering how to publicize the results of a campus climate survey, including:

- Who has ownership of the data?
- Who will write and speak about the results?
- What will your community use the data for?
- What formats will you use to share the findings?
- What should the report(s) look like?
- Who do you need to communicate with prior to the release of the data?
- How will reports and findings be distributed?
- How are you going to respond to people who are challenging your findings?
- How do you use the data to highlight the areas that are in need of change and attention?
- How do you put your local findings in the context of national cases/data?
- How do you use information to mobilize community response?
- How are you going to respond to individuals who are using false data or misconstrued data to counter the findings both in and outside of the institution?
- How will you acknowledge underserved populations and any limitations of your findings based on who responded to the survey?

10. How much does it cost to conduct a campus climate survey?

The cost to conduct campus climate survey depends on several variables, including campus size; type of school; whether the school is participating in a consortium with other schools in the area; and the existing resources at a school's disposal, such as faculty or staff who can help implement the survey as a part of their regular job functions. However, as a general rule, the cost of a campus climate survey can run from tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

11. That sounds expensive. Are there ways for schools to cut down on costs?

Yes. However, it is important to remember that cost-cutting measures should never be at the expense of conducting a survey that follows established best practices.

One way that schools can significantly cut down on the costs associated with survey development and still conduct a scientifically valid survey is to use the survey instrument and methodology tested and validated in the CCSVS. These tools are freely available for any school to use and can be found in the [CCSVS final report](#) and [the survey instrument as revised based on the results of the CCSVS study](#), which are both available online.

Another one of the largest costs associated with campus climate surveys are the incentives offered to students for survey completion, a recommended best practice to ensure that surveys produce scientifically valid results. The CCSVS tested monetary incentives at several levels and found that cash incentives should be in the \$25 per person range; offering less had a negative impact on survey results. One option that schools can experiment with is providing the incentive in the form of gift certificates or credit to school-owned entities, such as campus food establishments. Schools may also want to consider forming partnerships with businesses or other organizations that want to support the fight against campus sexual assault by providing gift certificates to students who complete the survey.

It is also important to remember that while campus climate surveys can require a large up-front allocation of resources, the data generated by a scientifically valid survey will ultimately help schools save money and conserve resources. With the knowledge gained from the survey, schools will be able to target resources where they are needed most to reduce incidents of campus sexual assault and provide better responses to students when incidents do occur.

12. Are there financial resources available to schools or student groups who want to conduct campus climate surveys?

Yes. The Office on Violence Against Women at the Department of Justice has [grants](#) available for activities designed to reduce sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking on campus.

The Office on Women's Health of the Department of Health and Human Services also funds colleges and universities to address sexual assault through their [College Sexual Assault Policy and Prevention Initiative](#). Grants are awarded to implement policies and practices – including climate surveys – that will prevent sexual assault at post-secondary schools.

There is also potential for grant money through other non-governmental sources, as well as through certain departments at the schools themselves. Student advocates may want to help research additional sources of public and private grant funding for schools to conduct campus climate surveys.

13. Are there best practices for increasing diverse participation in campus climate surveys?

The survey should be made available as widely as possible using various devices, especially phones, and with all types of people in mind; for instance, consider the accessibility of the survey for international students and those with disabilities. Working collaboratively with a wide variety of student organizations

to encourage broad participation in the survey also can be helpful. To ensure the survey accurately represents the campus makeup, demographic information can be requested in the survey and then used to create a representative sample. A school's Institutional Review Board (IRB) should also be consulted on the best methods for getting diverse representation in a campus climate survey.

14. Can campus climate surveys be conducted by students? Or does it have to be conducted by the school administration?

Smaller student-conducted surveys can always play a role in the conversation. When student groups are considering conducting their own campus climate survey, however, they must think about all the different pieces necessary to conduct a valid campus climate survey. Such pieces include gathering a representative sample of students; ensuring confidentiality; analyzing the data; using incentives to ensure sufficient participation to obtain valid results; and the development of a campus-wide action plan to address the issues identified in the data generated by a survey. Students can play a key role in helping to make a survey happen, but administrative resources are likely to be important to the success of a survey of the nature being discussed here.

15. What happens after a campus climate survey has been completed and the results disseminated?

As discussed above in question 9, the main purpose of a campus climate survey is to generate valid campus-specific data that schools can use to develop targeted and effective prevention and response efforts. The real benefit to conducting a survey is the campus action plan that is developed as a result of the information gained from the survey. In the [Rutgers School of Social Work's Lessons Learned Guide](#), Chapter 6, "Action Planning and Dissemination," you will find specific examples of steps that Rutgers took as a result of their campus climate survey.