

# **User Guide for** ***The Attitudes & Behaviors Survey***



*Discovering what kids need to succeed*

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Search Institute  
615 First Avenue Northeast, Suite 125  
Minneapolis, MN 5543  
612-376-8955  
[surveys@search-institute.org](mailto:surveys@search-institute.org)  
[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

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# Introduction

Welcome to the *Attitudes & Behaviors* (the A&B). This widely used survey is a reliable and valid assessment of the strengths, supports, and noncognitive factors that are essential for young people's success in school and life. It grows out of 20 years of research with millions of young people based on Search Institute's framework of Developmental Assets (see page 8).

The *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey and report offer powerful information on your youth, emphasizing the strengths and supports they have and need and showcasing how those positive indicators serve as protection against risk behaviors and promotion of thriving indicators. By using this survey, you will:

- Discover the *strengths and supports* that young people have.
- Listen to *the perspectives of young people themselves*.
- Learn about *risk behaviors and thriving indicators* that are impacting your young people.
- Gain a road map to guide you in *proactive and focused planning* to increase positive outcomes.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This step-by-step guide helps you successfully use the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey to generate meaningful, accurate, and actionable results. Here's a brief overview:

- Plan your study**—Bring together a team of stakeholders to design your study and its goals, and to build broad support for conducting the survey in your community, organization, or school.
- Prepare to conduct your study**—Undertake the practical steps needed, such as setting the time and location, training people who will collect data, as well as other necessary preparation.
- Conduct the survey with young people**—Conduct the survey with youth, taking the steps needed to encourage honest and thoughtful responses.
- Interpret, use, and communicate findings**—When you receive the report, use the results to improve, expand, or focus your efforts to increase positive outcomes for youth.

Be sure that you (particularly the person who has overall responsibility for the study) reviews this complete guide at the beginning so you have a clear understanding of the big picture. Share the overview of the process (p. 4) with your guiding team, so they also understand the overall process. You'll find worksheets and other tools for each step of the process.

### WHAT IS THE *ATTITUDES & BEHAVIORS* (A&B)?

- A reliable and valid assessment of strengths and supports (Developmental Assets) youth need to succeed in school and life.
- A look at thriving indicators and risk behaviors and their correlation to Assets
- A 160-item online survey that can be complete by most youth in less than 30 minutes.
- Designed for grades 6 to 12.

More information: Box 2.

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# Overview of the Process



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# A. Design and Plan Your A&B Study

## A.1. IDENTIFY YOUR SURVEY COORDINATOR

An effective, thorough, and respected Survey Coordinator is key to the success of your survey. One person needs to understand both the strategic purpose and the practical steps for implementation. He or she needs to be comfortable and effective with the following:

- Managing schedules, deadlines, budgets, computer set-up, and other details;
- Asking for support from key leaders, parents, and other stakeholders;
- Engaging colleagues, partners, volunteers, or others to be part of the survey process;
- Working with young people to complete the survey; and
- Protecting the confidentiality and integrity of the survey process.

Coordinating the survey will take time, so other responsibilities may need to be adjusted to allow adequate time. When done well, however, it is a rewarding and insightful experience as you learn (and help others learn) important new insights about the experiences and strengths of young people in your school, program, organization, or community.

Box 2 can help you summarize your plan.

## A.2. CONVENE YOUR GUIDING TEAM

Successful use of the A&B depends on getting the right people involved at the right stages of the process. Different members of this team will:

- Build support for and confidence in the survey process among stakeholders;
- Make key decisions about the survey purpose and process;
- Work together to complete each stage of the survey process; and
- Participate fully in the interpretation, use, and communication of the survey findings.

The specific people you need will depend on your overall goals, scope, and other specifics. Some key team members to consider include:

### *“Executive” Leadership*

- Leaders in your organization or coalition
- Key partners in your efforts
- Government or political leaders
- Young people and parents with leadership roles in your organization or coalition

### *Project Implementation*

- Teachers, youth workers, counselors or others who will be part of the process
- Young people who may be effective in encouraging youth participation
- Technical and support staff who will ensure smooth implementation

## **BOX 1. YOUR OVERALL SURVEY STRATEGY**

- 1. Why are you conducting the study? What is the purpose?**
- 2. What is the most important outcome you need from conducting the study?**
- 3. Who do you plan to survey? How many youth?**
- 4. Who are key leaders who support this project?**
- 5. Who will be on the team to successfully complete this A&B study?**
- 6. What issues and challenges do you anticipate in conducting the study? How will you prepare for and overcome them?**

Depending on your goals, scope, and practices, you may divide responsibilities between (a) “executive” leaders who set overall direction and build credibility for the study and (b) the people who implement the steps of the survey process. That said, it is important that the executive leaders have a firm grasp of the purpose and are active in data interpretation. This involvement will build their buy-in and help to ensure that the results are effectively used for positive change.

When your guiding team comes together for the first time, do the following:

- Invite them to introduce themselves to each other, including why they agreed to participate.
- Introduce them to the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey (see information in Boxes 2 and 7).
- Review plans and timing for survey administration.
- Then engage them in the next steps in the survey process.

### **A.3. ESTABLISH PURPOSE AND GOALS FOR YOUR STUDY**

It is critical to have a shared understanding of the purpose and goals of the survey. These will not only affect some of the processes you use, but will also help to build buy-in and commitment to the process and using the results. Communities and organizations conduct youth surveys for a variety of reasons:

- To gather baseline information for program or initiative design
- To strengthen programs or initiatives as part of a continuous improvement process
- To build awareness of and commitment to an issue or initiative
- To monitor growth or impact of your efforts
- To meet requirements of a funding or other partner

*What are you trying to accomplish with the survey?* State your purpose clearly and concisely so that all will understand and support the effort.

In addition, it is important to be clear about how the survey results will be used and who will use them. What decisions will be made based on the data? Will the findings be public? The more public and the higher stakes the decisions will be, the more care must be taken to ensure greater accuracy. These choices will affect sample size, overall study design, and how the findings are interpreted and used.

## BOX 2. What the A&B Measures

Whether you are focused on strengthening noncognitive factors, social-emotional learning, Developmental Assets, or some other positive youth development approach, the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey can be used to measure key widely-used indicators.

The A&B measures the following:

- 1) 40 Developmental Assets (See page 9)
- 2) 5 Developmental Deficits (alone at home, TV overexposure, physical abuse, victim of violence, drinking parties)
- 3) 8 Thriving Indicators (succeeds in school, helps others, values diversity, maintains good health, exhibits leadership, resists danger, delays gratification, overcomes adversity)
- 4) 24 Risk Behaviors (alcohol, tobacco, inhalants, marijuana, other drug use, driving and alcohol, sexual intercourse, anti-social behavior, violence, school truancy, gambling, eating disorder, depression, attempted suicide)
- 5) 10 High-Risk Behavior Patterns (alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, sexual intercourse, depression/suicide, anti-social behavior, violence, school problems, driving and alcohol, gambling)
- 6) Four Core Measures of Alcohol, Tobacco, Marijuana, and Prescription Drugs (past 30-day use, perception of risk, perception of parental disapproval, perception of peer disapproval)

# DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS FRAMEWORK

The first four asset categories focus on external structures, relationships, and activities that create a positive environment for young people.

8 CATEGORIES MEASURED WITH THE DAP

EXTERNAL ASSETS

## 1 Support



Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.

1. Family support
2. Positive family communication
3. Other adult relationships
4. Caring neighborhood
5. Caring school climate
6. Parent involvement in schooling

## 2 Empowerment



Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe and respected.

7. Community values youth
8. Youth as resources
9. Service to others
10. Safety

## 3 Boundaries and expectations



Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules, and encouragement to do their best.

11. Family boundaries
12. School boundaries
13. Neighbourhood boundaries
14. Adult role models
15. Positive peer influence
16. High expectations

## 4 Constructive use of time



Young people need opportunities - outside of school - to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.

17. Creative activities
18. Youth projects
19. Religious community
20. Time at home

The next four asset categories reflect internal values, skills, and beliefs that young people also need to fully engage with and function in the world around them.

INTERNAL ASSETS

## 5 Commitment to learning



Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.

21. Achievement motivation
22. School engagement
23. Homework
24. Bonding to school
25. Reading for pleasure

## 6 Positive values



Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles to help them make healthy live choices.

26. Caring
27. Equality and social justice
28. Integrity
29. Honesty
30. Responsibility
31. Restraint

## 7 Social competencies



Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions, and to cope with new situations.

32. Planning and decision making
33. Interpersonal competence
34. Cultural competence
35. Resistance skills
36. Peaceful conflict resolution

## 8 Positive identity



Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.

37. Personal power
38. Self-esteem
39. Sense of purpose
40. Positive view of personal future

40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

#### A.4. FOLLOW PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR RESEARCH WITH YOUTH

Anyone administering a validated survey (such as the *Attitudes & Behaviors*) with youth is expected to assume professional responsibilities for appropriate conduct in collecting and using personal data from young people. These principles involve commitments to:

- Protect the safety, health, and welfare of all study participants;
- Know and comply with relevant state, federal, or other applicable laws;
- Follow procedures to ensure the quality and integrity of the results; and
- Perform all responsibilities with honesty, integrity, and fairness.<sup>1</sup>

The procedures and guidelines provided in this user guide are designed to assist you in following the necessary guidelines for use of the *Attitudes & Behaviors* for relatively low-risk uses in aggregate group assessments with automated reports.

Here are key obligations you have as a survey administrator (which you must agree to during the process of signing up to use the A&B), along with recommendations for where you can access additional information, if needed:

- **Ethical research practices**—Follow the requirements of your institution, state, country, or funder for appropriate conduct of human subjects research. These standards address how people are fully informed about the study and its purpose (no manipulation or hidden motives), their rights when completing the study, and issues of confidentiality. Your organization may have an Institutional Review Board or other research oversight committee that provides this guidance. State departments of education or human services often have this information as well. Other widely used resources are:
  - Extensive information on protection of human subjects is available from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services:  
[http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/hs/ethical\\_guidelines.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/hs/ethical_guidelines.htm).
  - To access NIH’s free online training on ethical issues in research with human subjects, including children and youth, visit <http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>.
- **Seek appropriate permission for youth to participate**—You will need to seek consent from parents for anyone under age 18 to participate in the study. The type of consent needed will depend on how you are conducting your study and the specific requirements of your organization, state, or funder. There are two basic approaches:
  - *Active consent* is required in most cases when personally identifying information is linked to the survey and when the survey asks sensitive questions, such as risky behaviors, or when younger children are involved. With active consent, one or both parents/guardians must agree in writing that their child may participate in the study. If a consent form is not

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

returned, it must be assumed that parents do not grant permission. Active consent can be labor-intensive to obtain, but it is necessary in some cases. Some organizations include consent to participate in research as part of program registration.

- In some cases where the survey is lowest risk, *passive consent* may be an option, at least for middle and high school youth. Any survey research with elementary school youth typically requires active consent. With passive consent, parents/guardians are informed about the study, and they may ask that their child not participate in the study. If they do not reply, it is assumed that the child may participate. There can be no penalty to the child or the family for not participating. It is important to note that many federal agencies, Institutional Review Boards, and funders rarely accept passive consent for research with youth under age 18. It is important to check on the requirements in your own organization.
- **Understand the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey and its appropriate use**—*The information in this guide provides you with what you need to standardize the administration of A&B. You are expected to follow these procedures.*
- **Create conditions for completing the survey honestly**—The quality of your results will depend heavily on young people feeling comfortable and taking the time to complete the survey thoughtfully and honestly. Procedures in this guide help you take steps to create an environment where this is possible. Key features include the following:
  - Ensure that young people *participate voluntarily* (which includes taking the time to explain the value of the study). The sample youth assent letter (Box 10) and the administration instructions (section C) are designed to encourage participation without coercion.
  - Create a *safe, hospitable, and relaxed environment* where young people can complete the survey with minimal distractions and with assurance of confidentiality. More information is provided in section C.1.
  - *Provide extra supports for youth* who need help in completing the survey. This may include, for example, accommodating young people with disabilities or with low literacy levels by adjusting the format, setting, timing, or scheduling (without altering the content of the survey questions). This may include oral administration of the survey when young people are not able to read the survey on their own. More information is provided in sections A.7 and C.2.
- **Confidentiality**—You are expected to protect the confidentiality of individual participants' results by giving youth privacy when completing the survey, securing the data from completed surveys so that only those who are authorized have access to it, and ensuring that individuals' responses cannot be identified from group results. For guidance, see section C.8.
- **Reporting**—Youth, parents, and other stakeholders have a right to receive timely reports on combined results (unless circumstances demand that results be withheld). The report you receive based on your survey will provide the information you need to fulfill this expectation.
- **Copyright**—Survey users are expected to uphold Search Institute's copyright of the A&B and related materials by utilizing it only within the terms of the purchase, not altering the survey in

any way, and not permitting unauthorized use of the survey by any other organization or individuals. This expectation of honoring copyrights is true for any survey you use.

Though some of these ethical expectations may seem inconvenient, they have been established in the professional research community as a foundation to both protect the young people who are involved and to increase confidence in and credibility of the research findings. Following these guidelines is not only expected, but it also helps to ensure that your efforts in conducting the study will be of high quality and valued.

#### A.5. SET THE SCHEDULE FOR YOUR STUDY

Determine when you will collect data from young people so that you can communicate this information to people who will help with the survey, the parents, and young people themselves.

Some factors to keep in mind when deciding when to collect the survey data:

- Schedule all the survey data collection within a one-week period, if not all on the same day. Keep in mind the capacity you have for youth to complete the computer-based survey.
- Do not schedule the survey right when you begin a new program or school year. Wait two or three weeks so that young people relax a bit and know that they will be taken seriously.
- Avoid major testing periods, major holiday periods, or other major events when youth are easily distracted.
- Give adequate time for the preparation and planning work, including notification of youth and parents.

Though completing the survey itself will take most youth less than 30 minutes, you will want to include time for set-up and, potentially, an icebreaker activity that helps young people relax. If you need to rotate youth through a computer lab, you will need to factor that into your schedule as well.

#### A.6. DETERMINE WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE WILL BE SURVEYED (YOUR SAMPLE)

Determining which young people to include in your study is a key decision, since it determines how you interpret the findings. The *Attitudes & Behaviors* can be used with a wide range of youth from grades 6 to 12.

The first key question is what you consider to be your “study focus population” (often called “target population”). That is, *what group of young people do you want to be represented in your study?* The conclusions you draw will be based on your answer to that question.

There are two basic approaches for determining who will be in your survey: census and sample. There are three ways to draw a sample, two of which may be appropriate, depending on your circumstances.

**Census**—In a census, you actively recruit *all young people* within the desired age group in your total population (program, school, or community) to be part of the survey. If the vast majority of them participate, this is the most accurate way to collect data from a specific population. It is also easier to explain to the public, who may be skeptical about whether a sample truly represents the population or

a sub-population. *Thus, Search Institute recommends conducting a census survey, when possible.* If you choose to survey all students, you must make every effort to include them all.

**Sample**—You may also choose to collect data from a sample of the young people in your total population. Doing this well requires careful calculation and follow-through to ensure that your sample adequately represents the total population. *To be scientifically valid, you must make a concerted effort to survey only those people selected by the sampling method. Similarly, it is important to survey as many of those selected as possible.*

1. Random (or representative) sample. A random sample implies that each young person in the total population has an equal chance of being included in the survey.
2. Stratified sample. This approach first breaks down the total population into subgroups (such as locations or racial-ethnic groups), and then completes a random sample from within each subgroup. This approach can ensure adequate representation from each subgroup so that they can each be analyzed in disaggregated data. Keep in mind that each subgroup must be proportional to the total population, or it will skew overall results.
3. Convenience sample. In this approach (*which is not recommended*), you invite the young people who are most readily available (those who come to a particular program on a particular day). Unless all young people participate in that program (making it a census), it is highly unlikely that this sample will be representative of your total population. Thus, you will not be able to generalize to the total population based on the responses of this convenience sample.

If you choose to use a sample of youth, keep in mind that Search Institute only reports disaggregated data for a sub-population if there are at least 30 youth of a particular group in the sample (in order to protect confidentiality). So if your sample only includes 10 eighth graders, you will not see results specifically for eighth graders in your report, though their results will be included in overall totals.

### BOX 3. Needed Sample Sizes

This table shows the number of youth needed *in the final sample* in order to be 95% confident that the study results represent the population as a whole within each level of margin of error, presuming that the youth who participate were randomly selected from the total population.

There are a number of online sample size calculators that you may also use, including:

- [www.researchinfo.com/docs/calculators/samplesize.cfm](http://www.researchinfo.com/docs/calculators/samplesize.cfm)
- [www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html](http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html)
- [www.macorr.com/sample-size-calculator.htm](http://www.macorr.com/sample-size-calculator.htm)

Total Number of Youth*	Desired Confidence Interval (or Margin of Error)			
	± 1%	± 2%	± 3%	± 5%
<300	Census recommended (survey all students)			
300	291	267	235	169
500	476	414	341	218
1,000	906	706	517	278
1,500	1,298	924	624	306
2,000	1,656	1,092	696	323
3,000	2,286	1,334	788	341
5,000	3,289	1,623	880	357
7,500	4,212	1,819	935	366
10,000	4,899	1,937	965	370
12,500	5,432	2,015	984	373
15,000	5,856	2,070	997	375
17,500	6,201	2,112	1,006	376
20,000	6,489	2,144	1,014	377
50,000	8,057	2,291	1,045	382
>50,000	9,604	2,401	1,068	385

\* This number is the total population that you wish to be represented in the study. If your survey is designed to represent those in your program or school, then this number would be for the program or school. If you wish to represent all young people in your community, it would represent all young people in your community.

SOURCE: Excerpted from Pacific Institute (2002). *Guide to conducting youth surveys (updated edition)*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Downloaded from [www.udetc.org/documents/YouthSurveys.pdf](http://www.udetc.org/documents/YouthSurveys.pdf).

## BOX 4. Steps in Drawing a Random (or Representative) Sample

**1. Determine the sample size needed.** Box 3 gives you a needed final sample size based on the size of your total population. Since every young person selected will not agree to participate, you need to increase the total number of youth invited to participate by about 65%<sup>1</sup>, assuming a 65% response rate, particularly with active consent requirements (see below).

For example, if your total population is 3,000 and you want a 3% margin of error, your final sample size needs to be 788 (Box 3). Thus, you need to invite 1,213 youth ( $788/.65$ ) to participate in the survey. So that is the total number you need to identify in identifying your random sample.

*Note: A number of computer programs can generate random samples, so the following steps may be handled automatically.*

**2. Determine the sampling interval.** The sampling interval is calculated by dividing the total number of youth in the population by the total you intend to invite to participate in the survey. In the example above, it would be:  $3,000 \div 1,261 = 2.37$ , which you round to the nearest whole number: 2. Thus, after selecting the first person (see next step), you would skip two people on the list.

**3. Determine a random start number.** Once a sampling interval is determined, a random start number should be used to determine which young people will be the first to be included in the sample. This number can be generated by a computer. A quick method for obtaining a random start number is to use a deck of cards. After shuffling five cards, choose one card by chance. The face value of the card (1, 2, 3, 4, and so forth) determines the first student from the list to be sampled.

**4. Select the sample.** Count down the list to the youth corresponding to the random start number. Include that young person in the sample and then include each student that corresponds to the sampling interval. If the random start number is 7 and you are skipping two people, you would select the 7<sup>th</sup> young person in the list, followed by the 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, etc. These young people—and only these young people—should be invited to participate in the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> A review of 500 studies of school-based evaluations found that, on average, studies that used active parental consent achieved mean participation rate of 65.5%. That said, the response rate can vary widely, depending on the strategies used to obtain consent. See Blom-Hoffman, J., Leff, S. S., Franko, D. L., Weinstein, E., Beakley, K., & Power, T. J. (2009). Consent procedures and participation rates in school-based intervention and prevention research: Using a multi-component, partnership-based approach to recruit participants. *School mental health, 1*(1), 3-15. doi: 10.1007/s12310-008-9000-7

## A.7. ENSURE THAT ALL SELECTED YOUNG PEOPLE CAN PARTICIPATE

When you identified the group of youth who you want to include in your study based on your goals (section A.6), you may have identified some groups of youth who may have extra challenges in participating in the survey. They may not be participating actively in school or other programs. They may have low literacy levels in English or any written language. They may have other disabilities that limit their ability to complete a computer-based survey such as the A&B.

One of the ethical responsibilities for research (section A.4) is to make reasonable accommodations to include all young people who are eligible to be part of the study. Where possible, this must be done in ways that both meet specific needs while also maintaining the integrity of the research design and the survey. Here are accommodations that are often made with the A&B:

- *For youth with low reading levels:* If youth cannot read at a sixth-grade level, you may deliver the survey orally, reading the survey verbatim to the youth. These may be individual interviews with the youth are still recording the responses. It is important that the survey is not in your view to ensure honest responses. Or, if youth have some level of literacy, this can be done in a group setting where an administrator reads the questions aloud and youth individually complete the survey, following along with the words or numbers. Instructions for oral administration are included in section C.7.
- *Youth with sight or other impairments that preclude computer use:* Deliver the survey orally through individual interviews, with the youth entering responses. Instructions for oral administration are included in section C.7.
- *Youth who are literate in languages other than English:* At this time, the A&B survey is only available in English. We do not recommend on the spot oral or written translation that has not been tested for reliability and validity.
- *Youth with very short attention spans.* Most youth can complete the A&B in less than 30 minutes. However, you may find that some youth may have trouble staying focused. Encourage them to stick with it (perhaps taking a short break while sitting at the computer), since they must complete the survey in one setting; otherwise, they have to start over.

The following are areas where *changes should not be made* because doing so would undermine the quality of the research:

- Any changes to the wording of questions in an effort to make them more understandable to particular groups of youth. This includes survey administrators deciding to delete or not ask a question.
- On the spot oral or written translation that has not been tested for reliability and validity.

## A.8. CONSIDER WHETHER TO OFFER INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

One way to increase participation in a study is to offer modest incentives for people to participate. If you wish to include young people who are difficult to reach, incentives can help. Here are options to consider (which will also need to be approved by your Institutional Review Board):

- Refreshments or a party for each class or group that participates.

- Modest gift cards (\$10 to \$20) for teachers or youth workers who help with the study.
- A drawing for a gift for all families that give consent for youth to participate.
- A gift or honorarium for a school or program that participates in the study.
- Sometimes a business partner in the community will provide gifts for youth who participate.

The important balancing act is to ensure that the gift is meaningful, but not so much that it becomes the sole reason people participate (and is thus considered coercive or potentially undermining honest answers). In addition, incentives can be more difficult to administer when you survey only a sample of youth, which then makes other youth ineligible for the incentive.

#### **A.9. DETERMINE HOW YOU WILL MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE LEVELS OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

It is the responsibility of the A&B coordinator to keep young people's individual A&B surveys confidential and consistent with the promises made to youth and their parents in the permissions process (section B.2). Here are guidelines to follow:

- Provide young people with appropriate privacy when completing the survey.
- Do not press youth to talk about how they responded to questions. They are free to talk about the survey and the results, but they should not feel any pressure to reveal their responses.
- Carefully protect survey information such as lists of participant names in secure, locked settings. Whether at home or in transit, keep all materials out of sight in a secure place.
- Be sure that young people close out the browser window after completing their survey.
- Only aggregated data from the group as a whole should ever be published or discussed, even with program staff, funders, or other stakeholders.



#### **JUST CHECKING: AT THIS POINT, YOU HAVE**

- θ Identified your survey coordinator to guide and manage the survey process.
- θ Brought together a guiding team to build support for the survey and making key decisions about how you will conduct the study.
- θ Established a clear purpose and goals for your study.
- θ Have a shared understanding on your team about the Developmental Assets framework.
- θ Built a shared understanding on your team regarding the professional and ethical standards of conducting survey research with young people.
- θ Set a schedule for conducting your study.
- θ Identified which youth you will include in your study (your sample).
- θ Taken steps to ensure that all eligible young people can participate in the study.
- θ Put in place mechanisms for maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality.

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## B. Prepare to Conduct Your Study

### B.1. INTRODUCE THE STUDY TO YOUTH, FAMILIES, STAFF, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

An important step in ensuring high participation in and support for the survey is to communicate with key stakeholders about the survey, why you are conducting it, and how your organization or community will benefit from the study. This outreach will also give you an opportunity to address any concerns that may come up regarding confidentiality of data, how the findings might be used, or who is or is not included in the study. Being proactive in reaching out to them also reduces the chances that they will be suspicious of or raise questions about the study in ways that could undermine your goals.

Depending on the scope of your survey, these stakeholders may include:

- Young people who may be asked to be part of the study;
- Parents of youth who may be asked to participate;
- Staff and others who will be asked to assist in administering the survey; and
- Key leaders in your organization, coalition, or community.

There are many ways to communicate with different stakeholders, and you will be in the best position to select the appropriate approaches based on your past experiences and the specific stakeholders you seek to reach. You may, for example, set up one-on-one meetings with influential leaders to get their buy-in and advocacy for the survey and using its results. Or you can introduce the survey at a parent meeting or other forum where people have gathered.

In many cases, young people who are part of your guiding team can be important messengers for why the study is important. Their perspective on why the study matters and the value of full participation can increase support and model the value of youth voice and leadership.

Box 5 offers some guidance for how to shape messages for stakeholders about the survey. Note that these informational meetings can also be opportunities to ask parents to give consent for their youth to be involved in the study.

## BOX 5. Ideas for Introducing Your Study to Key Stakeholders

*As your team plans to administer the Attitudes & Behaviors, use these questions to think through how you will discuss the planned survey with youth, parents, and other stakeholders.*

1. In your own words, how would you describe the *Attitudes & Behaviors* and the purpose for conducting this survey in your program, organization, or community?
2. How will participation in the study benefit the young people and families who participate? How will it benefit the program, organization, or community?
3. What does participating in the study mean for the young people and their families who participate? What will it mean for others who are part of the process?
4. How will people be involved in learning about, interpreting, and using the results of the survey?
5. What concerns might people have about the study? What might your team do to address those concerns?
6. What do you hope each type of stakeholder will do to make the study successful?

## B.2. SEEK PERMISSION AND COMMITMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

As discussed in section A.4, obtaining appropriate parental consent and youth assent to participate in the study is an important, often challenging, and part of any research with youth. However, investing this time and energy is essential for generating meaningful, credible results. As a side benefit, the efforts to communicate with parents and youth to receive permission and commitment can help to increase their interest in the study and, potentially, their readiness to partner with you in taking action based on the study findings.

**Parental consent**—You will need to inform parents about the study (see Box 7 for a fact sheet you can adapt). You will also need to obtain consent from parents to survey young people. The approach you take to obtaining consent is based, in part, on your survey approach and the requirements of your state or organization (as described in section A.4).

- If you use *active consent*, you must receive written permission from a parent for a youth to participate. If you do not receive that written permission, the young person should not be included. Box 8 offers a sample letter and form that you can adapt for active consent.
- If you use *passive consent*, you must notify parents fully, but they only respond if they *do not* want their child to participate in the study. Box 9 offers a sample letter and form that you can adapt for passive consent.

Survey administrators must make concerted efforts to ensure that parents receive the consent materials, pay attention to them, and have sufficient time and opportunities to decline to participate in the study. Here are some recommendations for the process:

- Highlight the value and purpose of the study, showing its value to the youth and families.
- Emphasize that the study is voluntary and there are no penalties for not participating. Do not to do anything that would make a young person feel uncomfortable for not wanting to participate. Also make it easy for parents to decline participation.
- Contact families multiple ways. Don't assume a memo in a teen's backpack will make it to the parent. Use meetings, email, mail, and other channels to inform and engage parents.
- Make information about the study available in appropriate languages for parents with limited English reading ability.
- Give parents access to a copy of the survey questions for their review. Do not, however, send the survey home for review. Some parents might share it with youth, which could influence their responses to the questions.

### BOX 6. INCREASING RESPONSE RATES

Sometimes people struggle to get high participation rates for youth surveys. A review of youth survey research in schools found that the following strategies enhanced participation rates:

- Promoting the research to school leaders, teachers, parents, and students;
- Talking about the study through direct contact with parents (phone or face-to-face);
- Providing modest incentives to teachers, youth, and groups that participate;
- Sending reminders about the study; and
- Having a member of the project team closely monitor the recruitment process.

Wolfenden, L., Kypri, K., Freund, M., & Hodder, R. (2009). Obtaining active parental consent for school-based research: A guide for researchers. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 33(3), 270-275.

- Keep track of all the ways you have notified parents in case questions arise later.

**Youth assent**—Young people should also be given the option of whether or not to participate. Even if parents have given permission, no young person should be required to complete the A&B. In addition, completing the survey should never be a requirement for program participation or other benefits (though a small incentive may be appropriate for those who complete the survey).

That said, almost all young people will *want* to take the survey, particularly when they understand its purpose and have confidence that their individual results will remain private and will not be used to penalize them in any way. Box 10 offers a sample letter that invites youth to participate.

## BOX 7. Fact Sheet: *Attitudes & Behaviors Survey*

The *Attitudes & Behaviors*\* is a survey that examines young people's own sense of their strengths, supports, and skills that are essential for success in school and life. Based on 25 years of research on youth development, it has been used with more than 3,000,000 youth around the country and around the world. The results help to create a common understanding of the strengths and supports in young people's lives in a school, program, organization, or community so that young people can be better supported.

### CONTENT

The A&B examines the supports young people have in their families, schools, and communities in four categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. It examines young people's internal strengths in these categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. It will also look at specific behaviours and activities, both good and bad, that they are involved in.

### FORMAT

The A&B is a 160-question online survey for use by youth in grades 6 to 12. Most youth can complete the survey in less than 30 minutes.

### COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SURVEY

***How will young people's answers be used?*** A&B results will be used to strengthen school and community programs and opportunities for youth. ***NOTE: This response will need to be revised to fit your own survey goals.***

***How do you know whether the youth are answering truthfully?*** Search Institute has tested the survey with many young people. Consistent results have confirmed that the vast majority of youth respond honestly, if they are allowed to take the survey in a time and place that encourages thoughtful responses. In addition, several methods are used to determine whether youth are answering truthfully, and surveys that are clearly not being taken seriously will be eliminated through data analysis.

***Who will have access to young people's survey answers?*** The survey administrator for your study determines who is qualified to have access to survey data, and access is limited to professionals who have appropriate expertise to handle data responsibly and confidentially. Results for the whole group will be used when reporting results. No youth will be identifiable at an individual level.

\* The *Attitudes & Behaviors* was developed by and is the property of Search Institute, a Minneapolis-based non-profit organization. **For more information, visit [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)**

## BOX 8. Sample Active Parental Consent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian:

On [date(s)], our [organization] will be surveying our youth. We are giving this survey in order to [why are you conducting the study?].

The survey focuses on the strengths and supports that youth have and need in their lives. This survey will help our organization and other partners work with you to ensure that young people in our community have the opportunities they need to be successful in life. The survey focuses on young people's own perceptions of their attitudes and behaviors.

### Additional information

- [When and where the survey will be conducted]
- On average, the survey takes less than 30 minutes to complete.
- Youth are told that their participation is voluntary and that they can skip items if they so choose.
- The survey is not a test and there are no consequences if your child chooses not to participate. Non-participating youth will be [e.g., asked to play quietly] while the survey is administered.
- You will have opportunities to review and help to interpret the findings. [Add details, if available.]

In order for your child to participate in the study, we must receive your signed consent. The form at the bottom of this page allows you to say yes or no to your child's participation. Please give serious consideration to this request. The value of a survey of this kind depends upon the participation of many youth. If no consent form is received from you, your child cannot participate in the study.

A copy of the survey is available for your review in the [location] between [days and time]. Consent forms must be returned by [date]. If you have any questions, please contact [person and title] at [phone, days, times]. Thank you.

Sincerely

Name

Title

-----  
☐ Yes, I give permission for my child to participate in the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey.

☐ No, I do not give permission for my child to participate in the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey.

Child's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## BOX 9. Sample Passive Parental Consent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian:

On [date(s)], our [organization] will be surveying our youth. We are giving the survey in order to [why are you conducting the study?].

The survey focuses on the strengths and supports that youth have and need in their lives. This survey will help our organization and other partners work with you to ensure that young people in our community have the opportunities they need to be successful in life. The survey focuses on young people's own perceptions of their attitudes and behaviors.

### Additional information

- [When and where the survey will be conducted]
- On average, the survey takes less than 30 minutes to complete.
- Youth are told that their participation is voluntary and that they can skip items if they so choose.
- The survey is not a test and there are no consequences if your child chooses not to participate. Non-participating youth will be [e.g., *asked to play quietly*] while the survey is administered.
- You will have opportunities to review and help to interpret the findings. [Add details, if available.]

Please give serious consideration for your child to participate in this study. A copy of the survey is available for your review in the [location] between [days and time]. The value of a study of this kind depends upon the participation of many youth.

If you do not want your child to participate, you **must** return the form at the bottom of this letter by [date]. If no form is received, your child will be asked to participate in the study.

If you have any questions, please contact [person] at [phone, days, times]. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

-----  
Please withdraw my child from participation in the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey.

Child's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## BOX 10. Sample Youth Assent Letter

### About This Study

The survey is called the *Attitudes & Behaviors*. It focuses on the strengths and supports you have and need in your life as well as activities you are participating in. It will help our organization and community work with you to ensure that young people in our community have the opportunities they need to be successful in life.

### What Will Happen?

The survey will be conducted on \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ in [location].

If you agree to participate, you will fill out the survey. It takes less than 30 minutes.

If you do not want to participate, or your parent(s) do not allow you to, you will be instructed to do something else by an adult who is helping with the survey

### Are There Benefits or Risks?

The survey is NOT a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

This study will give you a way to express yourself to our organization and the community in a way that is confidential. No individual responses will be identifiable. We will only be looking at results at an overall group level.

### Who Can I Ask Questions About This Study?

If you have any questions about this study, you should ask the survey administrator now or during the survey.

### Do I Have To Be In The Study?

NO. The decision to be part of this study is up to you and your parent(s).

You can leave questions blank if you do not want to answer certain ones. You may stop answering any questions or being in the study at any time you choose. If you refuse to participate or stop filling out the survey, you will not be punished.

### What Should I Do If I Want To Be In This Study?

If you agree to be in the study, please read and sign below.

-----  
I understand my rights and I want to participate in the *Attitudes & Behaviors* survey.

Please Print Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade level: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### B.3. PREPARE MONITORS WHO WILL ADMINISTER THE SURVEYS WITH YOUTH

People who oversee youth completing the surveys play a vital role in the quality of the survey results. If they are warm, welcoming, and affirming of the importance of the survey, youth are more likely to respond thoughtfully and honestly. If they are flippant and fail to introduce the survey accurately and consistently, they undermine the entire study.

In general, you will need at least one monitor who works with each group of up to 20 youth who complete the online survey. (If you are conducting individual interviews to accommodate youth who may have trouble with the online survey, you will need more monitors with that training.)

Survey monitors can include teachers, youth workers, volunteers, older youth, or independent research staff who are hired to collect data. Keep in mind that having familiar adults monitoring the survey may influence choices. Young people may be less likely to mark lower levels of “commitment to learning,” for example, if a teacher is monitoring their surveys. That said, safeguards can be put in place through the training to minimize these kinds of risks.

The monitors’ roles are as follows (aligned with step-by-step instructions in section C):

- Ensure that the youth who participate feel comfortable, safe, and not distracted or intimidated.
- Support youth in going to the survey link and using the survey effectively.
- Read aloud, verbatim, the instructions for completing the survey.
- Offer minimal information in response to young people’s questions.

In advance of collecting data, take time to train survey monitors and answer all their questions. The more they are fully prepared, the more likely the survey will be administered consistently. You will want to provide the following information through training:

- An overview of the purpose and goals of your study.
- A basic understanding of the underlying approach to youth development in the survey (the developmental assets framework and the research behind it).
- An understanding of the content of the *Attitudes & Behaviors*. (You may even want to have them complete the survey as though they are 15. It will stimulate great conversations!)
- A complete understanding of the recruitment and consent process if they are helping to recruit youth and gain parental consent.
- How to introduce the survey to participants and other tasks of survey administration, following the scripts you provide (based on the tools in this User Guide).
- The importance of remaining neutral, answering questions appropriately, and not “steering” how youth answer questions.
- How to deal with any distractions or other issues while youth are completing the survey.
- Their responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality throughout the process.

#### B.4. MAKE FINAL LOGISTICAL PREPARATIONS

Just before you begin having young people complete the surveys, make sure all the logistical preparations are complete. Confirm the following:

- List of survey participants (eliminating those whose parents either opted out of the survey [passive consent] or did not return their permission form [active consent]).
- All the computers or tablets you plan to use for the survey are in good operating order (if doing surveys in a group setting).
- Youth will be able to use the surveys with appropriate privacy so their responses can be kept confidential.
- Any distractions from the survey have been eliminated or minimized in the survey room(s).
- Any incentives you intend to provide are ready for distribution.
- Refreshments are available (if planned).
- The instructions for survey monitors are available on the site.



#### JUST CHECKING: AT THIS POINT, YOU HAVE

- θ Introduced the A&B to young people, families, staff, and other stakeholders.
- θ Have identified and sought permission for selected youth to participate in the study.
- θ Identified, prepared, and oriented people to monitor the survey administration.
- θ Completed final logistical preparations, such as ensuring that the rooms and computers are ready and that refreshments are available.

# C. Conduct the Survey with Young People

## C.1. CONFIRM THAT THE SURVEY LOCATION IS READY AND WELCOMING

Key to successful survey administration is ensuring that the place where youth complete the surveys is conducive to honest, thoughtful responses to the survey questions. In addition to scheduling the survey administration when youth are more likely to be able to focus (see section A.5), set up the room (or rooms) where they will take the survey so that young people feel welcomed, relaxed, not rushed, and safe to be honest in their responses. Some ways to do this include:

- Match the size of the group with the size of the space where you will be administering the survey (and the number of computers available). If you have a larger group, rotate youth through the survey process.
- Minimize distractions, such as noise or clutter. You may even want to put up signs asking others to be quieter while youth complete the survey.
- Make sure that computers and chairs are not too close together so that young people know their responses will be private.
- Check all the computers in advance to ensure that they are in good working order and ready for the youth to use.
- If the location is not readily familiar to the survey participants, post signs directing them to the survey location.
- If you plan to offer refreshments, set them up so they are ready when youth have completed their survey.
- If youth are completing the surveys on their own and will be able to leave when they are done, be sure that you have other activities ready to go for those who finish early.

## C.2. KEEP A FOCUS ON CONSISTENCY, EVEN WHEN MAKING ACCOMMODATIONS

The way in which you administer and monitor the A&B can affect the results. For example, if some youth complete the survey in a quiet room with a relaxed schedule while others do it in a noisy room with pressure to finish quickly, the second group may not take the survey as seriously. So it is important to follow the same procedures for all young people, wherever possible.

That said, some changes may be appropriate to accommodate some young people, such as those

### BOX 11. SURVEY ADMINISTRATION TIMEFRAME

(For each group that completes the survey at one time)

#### **Option 1: Self-administration (When youth complete the survey on their own on the computer)**

Registration and welcome	5 minutes
Icebreaker activity (optional)	5 minutes
Verbal introduction/instructions	5 minutes
Complete the survey	45 minutes

**Option 2: Group oral administration** (When the monitor reads the survey questions aloud to youth, and they enter their own responses into the computer. This approach works when youth have limited written literacy.)

Verbal introduction/instructions	5 minutes
Complete the survey (reading aloud)	75 minutes

with disabilities or low literacy levels. Appropriate accommodations may include changes in format, setting, timing, or scheduling that does not alter the content of the questions in the survey. This may include, for example, oral administration of the survey when young people are not able to read the survey.

Even in these cases, however, the *content* of the survey questions cannot be changed. These changes make it impossible to integrate young people's responses with other surveys, since the items are different.

### **C.3. WELCOME AND REGISTER PARTICIPANTS**

Greet participants as they arrive, thanking them for agreeing to be part of the study. Sign them in for the session so that you can keep track of who has completed the survey.

If you are doing a group administration, wait until all participants are present before starting the survey. Ask an assistant to manage non-participating youth and/or latecomers so that they do not distract survey takers. You can schedule a make-up session within one week for youth who arrive late or do not show up.

### **C.4. LEAD AN ICEBREAKER ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL)**

If you are administering the survey to a whole group of youth at the same time, you may want to have an icebreaker or warm-up activity that helps them relax. The activity should be short, interactive, and low risk for youth. This activity should not relate to content of the survey, as that could influence responses. You likely have activities that work well for your young people. Additional activities are available in the following resources from Search Institute ([www.searchinstitutestore.org](http://www.searchinstitutestore.org)):

- *Great Group Games: 175 Boredom-Busting, Zero-Prep Team Builders for All Ages*
- *Best of Building Assets Together: Favorite Group Activities That Help Youth Succeed*

### **C.5. HAVE YOUTH COMPLETE THE SURVEY**

You already should have set up the survey page on all the computers that youth will use to complete the survey. If not, provide the link information to all youth at this time.

Give them time to review the assent form in which they indicate whether they agree to participate in the survey. Answer any questions they may have. If anyone decides that he or she does not want to participate, confirm their choice, and then let them go do other activities. (The survey needs to be completely voluntary.)

### **C.6. GUIDE YOUTH THROUGH THE SURVEY: SELF-ADMINISTRATION**

Even though it may feel stifling and inflexible, it is important that you *follow standardized protocols, surveys, and processes when administering the A&B* (or other surveys). Deviating from the standards undermines confidence in the results. Follow the script verbatim in Box 12 (or a standardized script that your organization develops based on this model). This script should be followed every time with all youth to ensure consistent instructions for everyone who participates in the study.

## BOX 12. Script for Introducing the A&B

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I work with **ORGANIZATION**. Today you have the opportunity to complete a survey that will bring your perspective to our efforts to support your healthy development and success. **[Briefly state the purpose of the study.]**

This survey is an online survey in which you will be asked to answer a number of interesting questions about yourself and your life. This is NOT a test. There are no wrong answers. Each of you will answer the questions in different ways based on your own experience or current situation. We ask you to be as honest with yourself as you can be. Your answers will be kept private. No one who knows you—your teachers, parents, or anyone else—will ever see your responses without your permission.

You don't have to participate in this survey if you don't want to. If any of the statements make you feel uncomfortable, you do not need to respond to that statement or you can stop participating in the study. All youth who are participating in this study are volunteering and will not receive any gifts (compensation). **[If you are offering small incentives, you would mention them here instead.]**

*Ask if anyone has questions. Then continue:* You should be able to complete the survey in less than 30 minutes. It has 160 questions about your life. Please take the time to complete it in full.

Each of you will now have the opportunity to interview yourself by thinking about some of the things you experience with your family, friends, neighborhood or the place you learn. Please be sure to carefully read the response options as they will change as you progress through the survey.

Please only check one answer for each item. If you do not want to answer an item, leave it blank. But please try to answer all of the items.

To keep things simple we use a number of expressions in this survey that are meant to be flexible in their meaning. When a question asks about your parents this means the adults who are responsible for raising you. When it asks about your school this means the place you go to learn, which might be a school, a learning center, or a skills training program. When it asks about your home or community, these refer to the place you currently live and spend your time.

Remember, there are no wrong answers. Each one of us will have our own unique way of responding to these different questions. Take your time answering each one. You can submit your survey on the final page. Be sure to hit next at the end. Let me know if you have questions.

In addition to the script in Box 12, the following guidelines should be consistently followed:

- Provide **overall supervision** of the group, making sure that young people are not distracted by (or distracting) others and that they focus on completing their survey.
- Be available to **answer questions**. You may need to clarify and explain the instructions, or show a participant how to use the computer interface. If participants say they do not understand a question, re-read it to them and encourage them to do their best to answer it. You may ask them what they think it means and be supportive if their answer seems to be on track. However, **do not re-word or re-phrase any questions**. If a young person still does not understand after going through the above steps, let them leave it blank and move on.
- Participants are **not required to answer** all questions, but may leave items blank if they choose. However, gently encourage youth to respond to all the questions, since the results of the survey will be stronger if all youth complete the whole survey.
- Let **nonparticipants or late participants** who try to join the group know that a survey administrator will talk to them later. Ask them to wait outside to give the others a chance to complete the survey.
- **Stay with all participants** until they have finished, excusing early finishers to leave quietly and go participate in other activities that are planned.

### C.7. GUIDE YOUTH THROUGH THE SURVEY: GROUP ORAL ADMINISTRATION

The “Script for Introducing the A&B” in Box 12 can be used for group oral administration. As noted earlier, even though it may feel stifling and inflexible, it is important that you *follow this script verbatim*. Deviating from the standard protocols undermines consistency, particularly with oral administration. This script should be followed every time with all youth to ensure consistent instructions for everyone who participates in the study.

Once you have completed the introduction and all young people understand the instructions, carefully go through the following five steps to administer the survey orally:

1. Let participants know that the group will be **going step-by-step** through each of the questions. Ask them not to go ahead on their own, but to follow your direction. Those assisting the administration may need to monitor this request at the beginning, letting everyone know that it is not a race and asking them for their patience and support so everyone will have a chance to complete the survey.
2. **Read each item at least twice.**
3. **Check with the group** if they are ready to go to the next item and keep an eye open for participants who may need more time or a further repetition of the item.
4. **Remember**, the tone of your voice and the way you read the questions will have an impact on participating youth. Try to use a calm and relaxed voice and continue to create an atmosphere in which young people feel comfortable interviewing themselves versus trying to please you or guess which answers you might be looking for.

## C.8. KEEP SURVEYS AND PARTICIPANT LISTS CONFIDENTIAL AND SECURE

It is important to remain vigilant about confidentiality. Here are things to keep in mind:

- Do not ask youth to tell you how they responded to questions.
- Store any print materials (e.g., participation lists) in locked files or cabinets that are accessible only to authorized personnel. Keep any electronic files on password-protected computers.

If you used any paper surveys, store them in a locked drawer or file cabinet until you send them back to Search Institute.



### JUST CHECKING: AT THIS POINT, YOU SHOULD HAVE

- θ Ensured that the setting was conducive to administering the survey.
- θ Administered the A&B to students, ensuring consistency in how it was given.
- θ Guided youth through the survey, either through self-administration or oral administration.
- θ Developed a plan for maintaining confidentiality of any lists or paper surveys.

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## D. Interpret, Use, & Communicate Findings

Your thorough and thoughtful efforts to engage young people and other stakeholders in the survey process pays off when you have the results of your study. Now you have reached the point of using the data to accomplish the goals you established at the beginning of the process.

### D.1. RECEIVING AN A&B REPORT

Once all the youth in your sample have completed the survey, you should inform Search Institute of the closure of your administration period via this online form (<http://tinyurl.com/ABReportRequest>) so a report can be generated.

- Your survey purchase includes an aggregate report containing all youth as one group with demographic breakdowns. If additional reports are needed, either to aggregate or disaggregate, these must be purchased separately.
- Report generation may take up to two weeks, depending on factors such as time of year and number surveyed.
- As soon as you receive the report, **review it to ensure that it is accurate**. This includes checking to see that the total sample in the report matches what you expected and there are no other obvious gaps in the report. If you find anything you question, contact Search Institute's survey services department to resolve the issues.
- The report you receive provides basic analyses of your survey data. Search Institute can also provide more advanced and customized analyses and interpretation of your study.

#### BOX 13. ABOUT YOUR REPORT

The baseline group report provides you complete results from your survey as well as a guiding questions for focused planning and improvement based on your results.

Results will be disaggregated by gender, and grade if this information was provided by the youth. If not, the results will come back strictly as an overall group score.

Criteria also need to be met regarding minimum sample size (to protect young people's confidentiality). The group report requires a minimum of 50 youth, and a sub-category (i.e. grade) will require at least 30 youth for scores to be reported by that cohort.

### D.2. UNDERSTAND AND INTERPRET THE SURVEY RESULTS

The report you receive on your data will provide the information needed to understand, talk about, and use the findings from your study. In the same way that you engaged stakeholders in preparing for the survey, you will want to invite them to be part of interpreting, using, and communicating the results to improve your work with youth and to engage others in providing young people with the support and challenge they need.

The recommended process includes the following key steps (which are explained in the report):

- Review the **demographic profile** of the youth who completed the survey. This will confirm your efforts to engage the youth you planned to engage in the study. If the sample is quite different from what you expected (for example, significantly smaller), it likely means that you were not fully successful in gaining participation. In these cases, you may have to limit how broadly you

generalize your results. If you were successful, however, the profile will give you confidence in using the results as you intended.

- **Begin by examining the broad data**, giving you an overall sense of what is happening with your youth. Here you will focus on the total assets, total thriving indicators, and total risk behaviors.
- **Focus on individual assets that are of particular interest to your school, program, or initiative.** Reflect on how the findings either align with or offer a counterpoint to the general patterns you noticed earlier. Note any patterns, surprises, or questions. Talk with others. Then make plans for short- and long-term action, based on the goals you set when launching the study.

As you use the survey results, it is important to remember that these survey data represent just one source of information. No single source of information—no matter how valid—can tell the whole story about how your youth are doing. Thus, it is important to review these data critically and in the context of other information, experience, and research. If it reinforces other data points, you can have more confidence in it. If it contradicts other findings or perspectives, dig deeper to understand the reason for the differences.

With these general guidelines in mind, we believe you will find important results, patterns, and insights in this report that offer a fresh perspective on how young people are growing up and experiencing life in their families, schools, and communities.

### D.3. COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE OTHERS IN USING THE RESULTS

Giving youth, adults, and other stakeholders a chance to hear about and reflect on the results not only honors their efforts to be part of the study, but it also can help with interpreting the findings in light of other experiences. For example, if a particular finding doesn't make sense, talk with youth about it. They will likely be able to shed light on the finding, what it means, or how it can be interpreted. In addition, sharing the findings with youth and families reassures them about your motives and how the results are being used. More guidance on sharing the results is included in the report you will receive.

In addition, remember that many parts of young people's lives (including young people themselves) play roles in boosting strengths and supports. What opportunities do you have to link with others, either through informal sharing and coordination or through more formal collaboration or partnerships? How might these opportunities benefit young people and help you achieve your goals?

### D.4. SET LONG-TERM GOALS AND IDENTIFY "QUICK WINS"

What are you trying to accomplish in the long-term? Focus on areas where you believe your organization can have a direct impact. Consider the strengths and resources that you can bring to bear as well as the available evidence on effective principles and practices that are included in the report.

Some aspects of the goal require broad buy-in, investment, and long-term commitment. These should be noted and integrated into the organization's strategic planning process in order to align resources, build staff capacity, engage formal collaborations, and other actions needed for systemic change.

Though it is important to address long-term systemic issues, there are specific tangible and important things that individuals and small groups can do intentionally that do not require major resources or planning. For example, if many young people do not feel empowered in their lives, you might develop

ways to give them more of a voice in program planning and leading activities. These “early wins” can create a sense of positive change and possibility.

#### **D.5. GET GOING WITH SPECIFIC STRATEGIES AND EXPERIMENTS**

Identify individual steps you will take individually and collectively based on what you know. (Some things won’t be clear yet, but it’s important to start where you can. Otherwise, you’re likely to get caught in analysis paralysis!) Naming what each person will do, then checking in with each other gets you started. Again, you will find many ideas for getting started in the data report.

#### **D.6. PREPARE TO COLLECT FOLLOW-UP DATA**

If your goals include tracking change over time, you may want to consider administering another Search Institute survey, the *Developmental Assets Profile*. Information can be found on [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).

As you are reviewing your findings, also think about the process. What can you learn from the data collection? As you internalize, share, and use your results, you will also want to reflect on the process of data collection to identify how you will approach future surveys. Questions you might ask include:

- What processes went smoothly?
- Where were there glitches, and how might those issues be resolved the next time?
- Were there important problems with the design that you want to do differently the next time?
- Did you identify opportunities in the community that would enhance your next efforts? For example, you may have identified individuals who really enjoy helping with data collection. Or you might have found young people who would be articulate spokespeople for the study.

#### **D.7. LISTEN, LEARN, AND GROW**

Survey data—from the A&B or any other instrument—can be invaluable and powerful sources of information to strengthen support for and work with young people. However, it is only powerful if it is used. Furthermore, it is only one piece of information to consider. It should be interpreted in light of young people’s experiences, the expertise of leaders and parents, and other information that is available. It is most valuable when it is viewed as a resource for discovery and improvement, offering key insights for focusing strategies, monitoring progress, and identifying ongoing needs for action.

If youth, parents, and other collaborators view the data in this way—rather than as another study that seeks to cast blame—then your study can play an important role in building a collective commitment to growth and improvement in which all stakeholders recognize and work together to bring about the positive change needed for young people to grow up successfully.



### JUST CHECKING: AT THIS POINT, YOU SHOULD HAVE

- θ Notified Search Institute of your readiness to have the data analyzed.
- θ Used the information in the report to interpret the results.
- θ Communicated to engage others in using the survey results.
- θ Set long-term goals and short-term “wins.”
- θ Started some specific strategies and experiments.
- θ Prepared to collect follow-up data.



*Discovering what kids need to succeed*

Search Institute is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide catalytic leadership, breakthrough knowledge, and innovative resources to advance the health of children, youth, families, and communities.

### **Contact Us**

615 First Avenue Northeast, Suite 125  
Minneapolis, MN 55413  
U.S.A.

(612) 376-8955  
[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)