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Evaluation Tip

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Hot Tips for Avoiding Leading Questions:

Before deciding to create a survey, ask yourself what you are trying to accomplish. Are you hoping that respondents will answer a certain way, which will support a particular argument or decision? Exploring the underlying goals of the survey may help you expose potential biases.

Ask colleagues to review a working draft of the survey to identify leading questions. You may be too close to the subject matter and introduce your opinions through the question wording. A colleague's "fresh set of eyes" can be an effective way to tease out poorly phrased questions.

Leading Question	Alternative Wording	Reason for Change
"In general, how healthy are you?"	"In general, how would you rate your health?"	A health rating is neutral since it doesn't lean in one direction ("healthy" vs. "unhealthy").
"To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements?"	"To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?"	Stating both sides of the agreement scale is preferable to including the positive side only.
"We encourage employees to enhance their skills. Would you be interested in receiving training?"	"Please rate your interest in receiving training?"	Avoid coercive language.

Test the survey. Using cognitive interviews is another way to detect leading questions. This type of interview allows researchers to view the question from the perspective of the respondent.

Adapted from the American Evaluation Association AEA365 post February 28, 2018.