RESEARCH REPORT

Preparing and Fielding High-Quality Surveys

Practical Strategies for Successfully Implementing Neighborhood and School Climate Surveys in Promise Neighborhoods

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Introduction

Promise Neighborhoods are required to collect population-level data to report on 15 *Government Performance Results Act* (*GPRA*) indicators every year. (A complete list of *GPRA* indicators can be found in appendix A.) For several of these indicators, they must use surveys to collect information on children, parents, and families living within the Promise Neighborhood footprint and students attending target schools. Promise Neighborhood grantees collect data for these indicators through neighborhood surveys every other year and school climate surveys every year. Collecting high-quality survey data that are reliable, replicable, and aligned with the *GPRA* definitions can be challenging, particularly for community organizations that have not conducted surveys before. This guidance provides examples and best practices intended to help with the planning, management, and documentation necessary to successfully implement high-quality neighborhood and school climate surveys.

In addition to using surveys to collect data for a number of the 15 *GPRA* indicators, Promise Neighborhood grantees also use surveys to collect data to refine services and initiatives and to track other population characteristics and outcomes. Surveys, therefore, have become an indispensable tool for collecting vital data about the populations whom Promise Neighborhoods serve and communities in which they seek to change overall conditions of life.

Nevertheless, collecting high-quality, reliable survey data is a daunting and resource intensive activity. To be successful, Promise Neighborhoods need to plan their surveys carefully and adhere to recognized standards for data collection. The experience of the first three years of Promise Neighborhood implementation has shown how many grantees initially struggled to conduct successful surveys, but also how most have made enormous progress and even found creative solutions to a number of the challenges. A number of Promise Neighborhoods have also found surveys to be an important tool for building better connections with their communities.

This document builds on earlier guidance—basic information on preparing and administering surveys in chapter 7 of the *Measuring Performance: A Guidance Document for Promise Neighborhoods on Collecting Data and Reporting Results* (referred to here as the *Guidance Document*)—as well as specific lessons learned from the experiences of Promise Neighborhood implementation grantees to provide practical guidance on how to prepare and manage high quality neighborhood and school surveys (Comey et al. 2013). Where appropriate, specific examples from Promise Neighborhood grantees are provided to illustrate creative or effective solutions to particular survey challenges. Though geared toward the requirements of Promise Neighborhoods, much of this guidance should also be helpful to other organizations conducting similar neighborhood or school surveys in their communities.

Characteristics of a High-Quality Survey

In communicating with grantees, the Urban Institute (Urban) has stressed three important criteria when assessing the quality of surveys and survey plans.

- **Validity.** The survey should provide accurate, unbiased estimates of indicators on the populations for whom data are to be tracked and reported. Indicator estimates should have an acceptable level of precision so that differences between populations and changes over time can be accurately reported. To achieve this, grantees must base their surveys on a random sample of the population (either households within in the Promise Neighborhood or students attending target schools) and plan to collect a sufficient number of responses to ensure the survey estimates are representative and precise. They must achieve a sufficient response rate and create any survey weights necessary to create data that are representative of the population. Additionally, grantees must use properly trained surveyors and ask validated survey questions to minimize possible sources of biased responses.

- **Replicability and Reliability.** The survey methodology must be one that provides consistent results. The Promise Neighborhood should be able to replicate the methodology faithfully and consistently over time so that meaningful comparisons of data can be made from one survey to the next. To do this, grantees must carefully design and test the survey instrument and protocols to ensure reliability and replicability. They should also document all steps taken and all decisions made during the entire process of survey collection to inform the data analysis and planning for subsequent surveys.

- **Alignment.** At a minimum, Promise Neighborhood surveys should collect data that can be used to report on the mandatory *GPRA* indicators by using populations, questions, responses, and indicator definitions that are aligned with *Guidance Document* recommendations. When conducting the survey, Promise Neighborhoods should ensure that the right questions are posed to the right populations. Additionally, because Promise Neighborhoods also use these data for tailoring their programming of services and initiatives, they are encouraged to collect additional data to track other indicators that are of importance to them and the communities they are serving.

Grantees need to take a number of steps to ensure that their surveys meet the above conditions. Given the complexities of conducting a quality survey, Urban recommends that grantees that do not have relevant experience engage an experienced, reputable survey firm to assist with these tasks. A good source for finding a good survey firm is the list of organizations that belong either to American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) or the American Association of Academic Research Organizations.

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Even with the most thoughtfully developed survey plan and the assistance of an experienced survey firm, Promise Neighborhoods may still face unanticipated challenges while fielding surveys that could compromise these goals and adversely affect the quality of the data collected. Effective management of the survey process is necessary to ensure that procedures are consistently followed and staff are properly executing the survey plan. Promise Neighborhoods should have a solid grounding in effective survey management, even if they are relying on partners or a contractor to implement the survey.

To help address these challenges, this guidance provides recommendations, including best practices from Promise Neighborhood implementation grantees, for staff and survey administrators who are fielding surveys in their communities and schools. The first section focuses on the neighborhood survey and the second section covers the school climate survey. It is important to understand that there may not be one right way to address certain issues and achieve the desired results. The Promise Neighborhood should assess which approaches work best for its situation, in consultation with expert help.

Neighborhood Survey

Every other year, Promise Neighborhood grantees should conduct a neighborhood survey with a random representative sample of residents living in the Promise Neighborhood footprint with the goal of achieving a response rate of 80 percent. Neighborhood surveys are used to collect data for indicators that cannot be uniformly collected or obtained through administrative or other data. For Promise Neighborhoods, this includes *GPRA*s 1, 3, 12, 13, and 14 (see appendix A for definitions), with data collected in year one of the implementation grant as a baseline and in years three and five of the program to measure progress. The *Guidance Document* provides a timeline for designing and implementing a neighborhood survey with planning beginning approximately one year in advance.

Response Rate

The *response rate* is an important measure of the success of a survey, although it is not the only measure. Urban recommends that Promise Neighborhoods strive to achieve a response rate of 80 percent for their surveys. But how should a response rate be calculated? The AAPOR defines a response rate as, "the number of complete interviews with reporting units divided by the number of eligible reporting units in the sample" (2008, 4). The AAPOR has a response-rate calculator—a spreadsheet that can be downloaded and used to calculate different types of response rates as well as other survey success measures, such as cooperation and refusal rates.

AAPOR, "Outcome Rate Calculator," version 3.1, Deerfield, IL: AAPOR, 2010, http://www.aapor.org/AAPORKentico/Education-Resources/For-Researchers/Poll-Survey-FAQ/Response-Rates-An-Overview.aspx.

Mode of Survey Data Collection

To collect high-quality survey data from a neighborhood survey, grantees must choose the right mode of survey data collection for their Promise Neighborhood. Most urban Promise Neighborhoods have found that an in-person, door-to-door survey is the best method for reaching a sufficient number of households in their footprint, thus much of the guidance here is based on using this approach as the core of the survey design.[1] Regardless of the method of data collection used, care must be taken to ensure that data are collected only from a random sample of the population.

Considerations When Constructing a Survey Sample

Good survey data begin with a sample that is large enough to produce reliable estimates that are representative of the populations targeted. The most straightforward sampling design for the neighborhood survey would involve obtaining a list of addresses of all households in the community, such as from commercial firms or local tax assessor records. A number of addresses would then be

selected randomly from this list to obtain the desired sample size. Some Promise Neighborhoods may be able to cross-reference the full list with addresses of families with children enrolled in the target schools before sampling, which would allow further stratification to obtain representative subsamples of families with school-age children.

If a comprehensive list of addresses is not available, an alternative method would be to sample randomly selected street or census blocks within the neighborhood and then randomly sample individual addresses within those blocks. Though sampling of blocks should be done in advance at the survey office (using maps or databases), sampling of individual addresses within blocks will probably need to be done in the field, based on observing conditions on the ground. Nevertheless, clear procedures (e.g., selecting the first address at random and then every n addresses after that, where n depends on the total addresses found in that block) need to be established to ensure an unbiased selection of survey households within blocks.

If sampling addresses based on tax assessor records, it may not be possible to obtain individual apartment numbers for multifamily rental properties in advance since each apartment building will be a single property record. In those cases, survey takers will need to select randomly one or more apartments within the chosen building in the field, using methods similar to those discussed above for sampling addresses within blocks.

Once an individual household address has been selected and the interviewer arrives to administer the survey, further sampling may be needed to select appropriate focal children for particular survey questions. As discussed in the next section, certain *GPRA* indicators are aligned with particular subpopulations (such as children from birth to age 5) and so the grantee wants to make sure that the survey asks the appropriate questions for individuals of the right ages. If there is more than one child in a specified age group, then either the appropriate questions should be asked of all children in the age group or of one randomly selected focal child. The approach for selecting a focal child is discussed in the first scenario in the "Recommendations for Sample Training Scenarios" section below.

Preparation and Logistics of Survey Field Management

In addition to the important planning tasks outlined in the *Guidance Document*, grantees should take the following steps to lay the foundation for successful survey field management and to ensure survey teams have the tools and training necessary for them to conduct a high-quality survey.

1. Create a Field-Ready Survey Instrument

Before fielding, Promise Neighborhoods should make sure the survey instrument results in accurate data including correct skip patterns for each sub population.

- *Test the application and survey instrument*s. Whether the survey will be administered with a tablet or on paper, the survey teams should test the survey instrument and application under conditions that are as close as possible to the conditions they will encounter during survey

implementation. It is important for training to be as realistic as possible, including anticipating possible complications that might occur in the field, to prepare survey teams adequately. If changes are made to the survey instrument or procedures because of initial testing, then those changes should themselves be tested to make sure that they are producing the desired result.

▪ *Ensure the right questions are asked of the right populations.* Survey questions for different *GPRA*s each focus on children in specific age groups. For example, *GPRA* 1 (children who have a medical home) focuses on children from birth to age 5, while *GPRA* 13 (children with parents or family members who encourage them to read) focuses on children in kindergarten through eighth grade. (See appendix A for a complete list of *GPRA*s and appropriate populations.) With these cohorts in mind, it is important for survey instruments to capture data for either all age appropriate children in the household or for one randomly chosen focal child within each age range. When conducting the survey, it is critical that interviewers be able to identify easily which questions need to be asked to different age groups. The Indianola Promise Community case study (below) is an example of how to make a paper survey format that is easy for interviewers to use in the field. For computer-based surveys, the software should be programmed to pose the appropriate questions for individuals based on their ages.

Case Study: Indianola Promise Community

Stratifying Survey Questions by Age in a Clear, Easy to Understand Format for Survey Teams
Neighborhood survey questions target specific age groups. Indianola Promise Community's survey packet for interviewers included color coded sheets, with each color representing different age groups: yellow for everyone; pink for households with child/children from birth to age 5; blue for households with child/children K through eighth grade; and green for households with child/children in high school. For example, if a household had a 3 year old, then the survey team asked the household questions on the yellow sheets (for everyone) and the pink sheets.

2. Set the Survey Teams Up for Success

Even though professional survey firms are recommended, many of the people involved in a Promise Neighborhood survey may not have participated in conducting a survey before. Grantees should take several steps to ensure the success of their survey teams.

▪ *Have a survey administrator who is able to ensure quality and support teams in the field.* An important role is that of the survey administrator. This person will be responsible for overseeing the day-to-day management of the survey process, ensuring that procedures for obtaining hiqh-quality survey results are followed, and providing support to survey teams as they collect the data. The survey administrator should be available at all times when the survey teams are in the field to be able to answer questions and make decisions if teams encounter unexpected situations.

- *Create survey teams that reflect the neighborhood population.* Most grantees use small (generally two-person) teams to conduct in-person surveying. Best practice has shown that the composition of the survey teams should reflect the neighborhood population. For example, if many households speak Spanish, then at least one of the survey team members should be a Spanish speaker. If the community is generally distrustful of outsiders, it may be helpful for each survey team to have at least one local community member. Some grantees have assigned specific roles to members of the survey teams. For example, the community member might do the initial outreach, introduce the survey, and secure the respondent's agreement to participate. The survey itself would then be administered by a second team member, who is not from the community. Using an outsider to administer the survey can avoid any potential discomfort the respondent might feel in answering sensitive questions in front of someone from their community.

- *Train survey teams.* Survey staff should be well trained on the goals, methodology, and instrument for the survey, including any technology that will be used. For example, survey staff should know how to identify eligible survey respondents and compose a household roster; how to identify target age groups for each survey question and select the appropriate focal child(ren); how to track visited households or note households not at home or requiring further follow-up; and when and how to offer incentives to encourage participation in the survey. Training should include preparing staff for any problems or complications that they may encounter, such as those discussed in the next section.

- *Assign consistent survey teams to specific neighborhood sections.* Each team should be assigned to survey a specific group of households or addresses and continue working with that group until they are complete. This means the same survey team will return to the same addresses until all surveys are successfully completed or the required number of follow-up visits are made without obtaining a response. By using consistent teams in an area, households (and neighbors) will become familiar with the survey team and the team will get to know better a specific area.

- *Create batch address lists to distribute to survey teams in rounds.* To effectively manage the sample, Promise Neighborhoods should consider releasing limited batches of survey addresses to survey teams over multiple rounds. Using this process, survey teams will be given only the first 20 percent of the addresses in the entire sample population. After sufficiently working this batch of addresses, as discussed above, the survey administrator may release another 20 percent of addresses from the sample population, and continue doing so until the target response rate is achieved. This method focuses the survey effort and allows the survey team to fully work each address instead of providing a large sample within which the survey team may jump from household to household only achieving success in households that are easy to interview.

Case Study: Chula Vista and Mission Promise Neighborhoods

Recruiting Community Members for Fielding the Survey
Chula Vista Promise Neighborhood and Mission Promise Neighborhood both use *promotoras,* local Spanish-speaking residents who are liaisons between their community and Promise Neighborhood partners, to administer their surveys. These grantees paired promotoras with research associates so that households felt comfortable speaking with members of their community. The promotora completed surveys and the research associate acted as quality control, tracking survey outcomes and minimizing missing data. Promotoras in Chula Vista completed training through a four-hour Mini Promotora Academy.

3. Strategize to Improve Broad Participation

There are a number of effective strategies to prepare community residents to generate interest and maximize broad participation from a representative sample of the population:

- *Publicize the survey before implementation.* Promise Neighborhoods conducting interviews in the community should conduct pre-survey outreach to households. At a minimum, grantees should send a letter to households in advance of the survey. The Promise Neighborhood may also post flyers, leave door hangers, use social media, or do other outreach to let households know that survey teams will be trying to reach neighborhood residents. The outreach should inform households how taking the survey will help their community, describe the ease of the process, explain the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, and encourage respondents through incentives.

- *Offer incentives.* Research has shown that incentives create a sense of goodwill and reciprocity that will lead to an increased chance that the household will take a survey. The incentive can be given to everybody who is asked to respond, not just survey takers. Incentives can be given in advance, before the survey has been completed, with an advance letter introducing the goals of the survey (even a one or two dollar bill). Alternatively, the Promise Neighborhood can plan to provide the incentive after the respondent has completed the survey, if appropriate.

- *Time the visits.* Promise Neighborhoods should develop a survey schedule that fits their community. Survey teams should try to visit and revisit each household on different days and, just as importantly, various times of the day (morning, afternoon, and evening) until an outcome is achieved. For example, teams should try to visit households on *both* Saturday and Sunday. The Promise Neighborhood can also reach out to community members to learn which times and days would work best for households.

- *Reach out to apartment buildings and gated communities ahead of time.* Although they may be difficult to reach, the survey should not exclude households living in locked apartment buildings and in gated communities. Because access to these addresses can be difficult, it is critical for the survey administrator and survey teams to plan ahead and reach out to the building or gated

community's management in advance to explain the purpose of the survey, inform them of the planned timing of the survey, and get their assistance in reaching any selected addresses within their building or community. Setting up this relationship ahead of the survey increases the likelihood that the survey teams will be able to access these important, hard-to-reach addresses.

- *Plan to visit again.* It is important for survey teams to plan to revisit an address several times until they get a response. Such persistence helps to improve response rates and ensure that data include information from busy households that may be harder to reach. As discussed in the next section, survey teams should visit an address at least three times and maybe more if they believe that additional visits will be worthwhile for increasing response rates.

Case Study: DC Promise Neighborhoods Initiative

Talking with Community Members to Determine Days and Times to Conduct Survey
The DC Promise Neighborhoods Initiative talked with staff who lived in the community and a focus group of community members ahead of launching the survey to determine what would be the best days and times to conduct the survey. They also tried a soft launch on the one recommended weekday ahead of their first full-scale weekend day, and they found responses to be much better on the weekend than during the week. By doing this work ahead of time, they were able to more efficiently use their time to reach as many as households as possible.

Case Study: Hayward Promise Neighborhood

Reaching Out to Apartment Building Managers and Owners
Hayward Promise Neighborhood found that when their community outreach team proactively reached out to apartment building managers and owners before the survey launched, they faced fewer challenges to gaining access to locked apartment buildings than when they did not reach out ahead of time. Such outreach included mailed letters to the building and follow-ups with building managers or owners, in person or on the phone, to confirm approval. They also supplied teams responsible for surveying the buildings with copies of these letters. In addition to gaining access to these harder to reach addresses, by getting apartment building managers and owners on board they were able to publicize the survey inside the building with specific times that the surveyors would be there, and they were able to confirm vacant units from a reliable source.

4. Make a Plan

Solid planning is essential to the success of a complicated undertaking like a neighborhood survey. Promise Neighborhoods should anticipate and develop contingencies for possible problems and challenges.

- *Plan for every scenario.* The survey administrator should plan for and develop detailed processes and procedures for every likely scenario that survey teams may face. This ranges from training teams on how to answer to difficult questions to being prepared for inclement weather. The "Recommendations for Sample Training Scenarios" section provides possible scenarios to plan for, such as vacant households, initial refusals, and gated apartment buildings, and it provides the recommended responses.

- *Provide constant support.* Supervision should be available at all times while survey teams are in the field. The survey administrator should be easily accessible to survey teams to provide on-the-go, consistent, and informed support should any unforeseen questions arise.

- *Integrate quality control.* The survey administrator should plan for regular and frequent quality checks during implementation. Supervisors should be engaged in data collection, directly ensuring surveys are implemented appropriately and information on household responses is recorded accurately. Particularly in the beginning of implementation, it is important to check the raw data survey teams collect to ensure that they are recording information in the right format and that the survey instrument is working the way one expects. By looking at raw survey data as it is being collected, the survey administrator can quickly find and correct errors in skip patterns or incomplete responses.

5. Document the Work

Proper recordkeeping of all aspects of the survey process, including instrument development and testing, sample selection, team training, survey implementation, and respondent follow-up, is essential to ensuring that data are collected according to high-quality standards and to inform data analysis and subsequent survey efforts.

- *Create a tracking form.* Survey field teams need to accurately record which of the sampled addresses they have visited, when they visited each address, and the outcome or follow-up recommendation of that visit. It is normal in surveys that many households will require follow-up visits, some more than one. A good tracking system should record the address, the outcome, and a specific time to return if the selected respondent was not available. Table 1 is a sample tracking form that can be used to record up to four attempted visits to a household. The sample reports the results of the first two unsuccessful attempts to survey a particular household, with a successful completed survey on the third attempt. The completion code 1.1 is recorded in the outcome box to indicate that a complete instrument was returned from the household. Other codes are used to indicate partially completed surveys or situations in which a household refused or could not respond to the survey. Appendix B has a list of example final disposition codes. Properly identifying outcomes for each sample household is necessary for calculating accurate survey response rates.

TABLE 1

Sample Household Tracking Form

Sample address	Attempt 1	Attempt 2	Attempt 3	Attempt 4
104	**Date:** June 1, 2014 **Weekday:** Sunday **Time:** 4 PM **Outcome:** No answer	**Date:** June 2, 2014 **Weekday:** Monday **Time:** 8:30 AM **Outcome:** Head of HH leaving for work. Request return after 6 PM.	**Date:** June 2, 2014 **Weekday:** Tuesday **Time:** 7:00 PM **Outcome:** Complete (code 1.1)	**Date:** **Weekday:** **Time:** **Outcome:**

- *Keep track of incentives.* The survey administrator should also create a system to track incentives, which could be as simple as numbering envelopes with the incentive inside and creating a list of all of the numbered envelopes. Survey field teams should collect receipts, recording who received which incentives and when. At minimum, these receipts should include the date of the survey, identification to track which incentive it is (e.g. the number on the envelope), a way to contact the respondent, and the respondent's signature confirming receipt. In addition to being good practice in prevention of fraud and loss, these receipts are yet another set of documentation to help track which households have already participated in the survey.

Additional Survey Preparations

The guidance presented above focuses on the preparation necessary to lay the foundation for successful survey implementation. Along with preparing for implementation, there are other necessary considerations not covered here, such as receiving approval from an institutional review board for research activities, determining whether to offer an "opt out" process for parents whose children will be invited to participate in the school survey, and planning for post-survey data cleaning and analysis, including nonresponse bias analysis. Some additional resources on these and other questions are provided at the end of this report.

Postscript: Using Documentation for Survey Weights

For each sampled address, sample disposition information must be kept at each stage of the process so that it is possible to calculate correct response rates and sampling weights for the survey and to ensure replicability of the sampling process for future years. Sampling weights are based on the probability of a household or individual being selected for the sample.[2] For sampling that involves multiple stages, the probabilities at each stage are multiplied to obtain the overall probability. To determine the probability at each stage, it is necessary to know how many blocks, addresses, apartments, or individuals were selected and the total number that were potentially eligible for selection, as figure 1 illustrates.

FIGURE 1

Sampling Probability Example

Stage 1: Probability of address being selected from neighborhood

> 500 addresses selected out of 2,000 total addresses in neighborhood = 25 percent

Stage 2: Probability of apartment being selected from rental building at chosen address

> 1 apartment selected out of 20 at building's address = 5 percent

Stage 3: Probability of focus children from birth to 5 years old being selected at address

> 1 child selected out of 2 children from birth to age 5 living in apartment = 50 percent

Combined probability of sample selection for focal child = 25 percent X 5 percent X 50 percent = 0.625 percent

Recommendations for Sample Training Scenarios

In addition to having supervisors who can respond to unanticipated questions or problems once survey teams are in the field, Promise Neighborhoods should train survey teams on how to respond to a number of different scenarios they might encounter (and when to ask for help from a supervisor). Below are a set of common scenarios survey teams might face in the field that could be incorporated into survey training.

Scenario 1: A Member of the Household Opens the Door

- *What if the household member seems wary of the survey?* When a respondent initially says that he/she does not want to take the survey or is seem unsure, survey teams may be inclined to code it as a refusal. However, research experts agree that it is acceptable for survey teams to attempt to persuade households to reconsider.

  As part of the strategy for convincing households to take part in the survey, teams should explain the purpose of the survey and how the information will be used to help improve the community. For households concerned about protecting their privacy, one way to alleviate concerns is to allow the household member to answer the questions without the interviewer seeing the responses. In this case, the person administering the survey reads the questions and answer options out loud from a blank copy of the survey. The respondent, meanwhile, holds the clipboard or the electronic device with the answer options. The respondent writes down the responses to the questions, and then returns the completed survey in an unmarked sealed envelope or saves the survey in the electronic device, without the survey teams ever seeing the completed form with the answers.

Some households might not be able to take the survey immediately during the time of the initial visit, but they may be willing to take it at another time. In this case, the survey team should schedule a time when they may return. The survey team should leave a phone number so a member of the household can follow up, if needed. Grantees might also consider letting the respondent take the survey over the phone instead. The survey team may even leave a small incentive with the request that the household call back for the survey, so the household may feel more inclined to follow up.

- *What if the household ultimately refuses to take the survey?* Despite best efforts to minimize survey refusals, a household might still refuse to participate. A refusal occurs when contact has been made with a member of the household and a consenting adult has declined to participate. *Refusals must remain in the sample and will count in the denominator of the response rate calculation.* That is, all refusals will lower the effective survey response rate.

  The AAPOR Task Force on Survey Refusals (2014) distinguishes between interim or temporary refusals and final refusals. Both the reason the participant gives for not participating and the particular person in the household who expressed the refusal (e.g., the head of household or a youth) are considerations in determining how the survey team should label the outcome of the visit. For example, if a member of a household opens the door and then closes it without actually saying "no" before the survey team could speak, then the survey team might label this address as an interim refusal. They could then follow up with the hope of having a chance to better explain the survey on a revisit. Ultimately, it is up to the survey administrator to decide how to define and treat refusals; these decisions should be made ahead of time and clearly explained to survey teams so that all teams follow the same procedures.

  Regardless of the refusal status, the survey team should leave behind contact information with all households in case the respondent changes his or her mind or wants to take the survey over the phone. The survey administrator can also send follow-up letters to households who have initially refused. These letters should be tailored to the specific household, addressing any of their concerns, reiterating the benefits of the survey, and helping to build trust. These letters should only be sent to households who have shown reluctance or been coded as an interim refusal; they should not be sent to households who have been marked as final refusals.

- *What if an ineligible member of the household answers the door?* A key goal of the neighborhood survey is to learn about children in the household. As such, the survey teams should ask for the person responsible for the children to take the survey, *not* a random adult (e.g., a 19 year old is an adult but may just be an older sibling, not the primary caregiver of the children). The respondent does not have to be the parent. For example, if a grandparent is the primary caretaker for the children, then the grandparent is the ideal survey respondent. If the person in charge of the children is not home, the survey teams should ask when the primary caretaker will return, track the response on the form, and come back at that time; or they should schedule a time that works for the person in charge of the children. Regardless, survey teams should leave behind contact information.

If the Promise Neighborhood decided to also survey households *without* children, then the survey team should administer the survey to a random adult in the household.

- *What if the household contains multiple children in the target age ranges?* For every household, after the introduction and before asking the survey questions, the survey team should complete a family roster. A family roster specifies how many children are in the household and the children's ages. In the case of Promise Neighborhoods, this is necessary since the *GPRA* questions need to be asked of parents with children in specific age groups. Survey teams do not have to collect names. A family roster can be simple (see table 2).

Promise Neighborhoods should determine how survey teams should proceed with households containing multiple children in the target age ranges and train the teams in the proper procedures. Survey teams may be instructed to proceed in one of two ways, but all teams should be told to use the same method. The first approach is to ask the relevant survey questions for *all* children in the household. The second approach is to ask the relevant questions about *one* focal child in each target age group (birth through age 5, K through eighth grade, and high school). If the survey administrator believes that responses within households are likely to be highly correlated, that is, children in the same age group will have similar responses, this would argue strongly for selecting just one focal child in each age group.

If the survey uses the focal child approach, then the survey teams must *be consistent* with how the focal child in each target age groups is *randomly* selected. A simple way to randomly select a child is to ask respondents to answer questions for the child with the most recent birthday. For example, two children from birth to age 5 have birthdays of April 16 and December 4. For an interview conducted in May, the child with the April birthday would be the focal child. Alternatively, choosing the younger child would be consistent but *not* random; as such, Urban advises against this method of selecting a focal child.

As previously discussed, each of the *GPRA* questions is about children in specific age groups. Though the survey team may understand this clearly and have explained this at the beginning of each set of questions pertaining to an age group, the person asking the questions should also constantly make sure that the respondent understands which child is being asking about for each specific question. This can be done, for example, by starting questions with "For your 4 year old," "for your middle schooler," or "for your high schooler." The family roster is important to help the survey team make these references. Even simpler than this, the survey administrator can structure the questionnaires so that all questions that refer to a specific age range are asked in the same section of the interview, as exemplified by the Indianola Promise Community survey discussed earlier.

TABLE 2

Sample Family Roster

Role	Information grantee would like to collect
Primary caretaker of child/children	E.g., Mother
Other adults Adult A Adult B, etc.	 E.g., Grandmother E.g., Unrelated adult
Children from birth to age 5 Child A Child B , etc.	 Age, and other info that grantee seeks. (e.g., enrollment in pre-K) Age, and other info that grantee seeks.
Children in grades K to 8 Child A Child B , etc.	 Age, and other info that grantee seeks. (e.g., grade) Age, and other info that grantee seeks.
Children in grades 9 to 12 Child A Child B , etc.	 Age, and other info that grantee seeks. Age, and other info that grantee seeks.

Promise Neighborhoods should determine how survey teams should proceed with households containing multiple children in the target age ranges and train the teams in the proper procedures. Survey teams may be instructed to proceed in one of two ways, but all teams should be told to use the same method. The first approach is to ask the relevant survey questions for *all* children in the household. The second approach is to ask the relevant questions about *one* focal child in each target age group (birth through age 5, K through eighth grade, and high school). If the survey administrator believes that responses within households are likely to be highly correlated, that is, children in the same age group will have similar responses, this would argue strongly for selecting just one focal child in each age group.

If the survey uses the focal child approach, then the survey teams must *be consistent* with how the focal child in each target age groups is *randomly* selected. A simple way to randomly select a child is to ask respondents to answer questions for the child with the most recent birthday. For example, two children from birth to age 5 have birthdays of April 16 and December 4. For an interview conducted in May, the child with the April birthday would be the focal child. Alternatively, choosing the younger child would be consistent but *not* random; as such, Urban advises against this method of selecting a focal child.

As previously discussed, each of the *GPRA* questions is about children in specific age groups. Though the survey team may understand this clearly and have explained this at the beginning of each set of questions pertaining to an age group, the person asking the questions should also constantly make sure that the respondent understands which child is being asking about for each specific question. This can be done, for example, by starting questions with "For your 4 year old," "for your middle schooler," or "for your high schooler." The family roster is important to help the survey team make these references. Even simpler than this, the survey administrator can structure the questionnaires so that all questions that refer to a specific age

range are asked in the same section of the interview, as exemplified by the Indianola Promise Community survey discussed earlier.

Scenario 2: No One Answers the Door

▪ *How should this be recorded?* The survey team should note on the tracking form that there was no answer. Survey teams may also leave behind a flyer or door hanger with information about the survey and contact information if the household would like to schedule an appointment to take the survey or, if it is offered, take the survey by phone. Survey teams may also ask any neighbors who may be out around the neighborhood when members of the household (particularly, the primary caretaker for the children) might return. As stated above, the survey team should attempt to reach a household on different days and at different times of day.

Just because no one answers the door does *not* mean that the address should be considered vacant, even if there is no answer after three or four attempts. These situations still count as nonresponses in the response rate. Survey teams should only count houses as vacant when they are absolutely certain that the house is empty and no one lives there (see Scenario 3 below).

▪ *How many attempts should the survey team make?* Ideally, the survey team should attempt to reach each household at least three or four times, but possibly more if needed. Depending on the community, the survey administrator may find extra visits to the households to be useful for improving the response rate. One Promise Neighborhood found that over 20 percent of their total completed surveys were from households who were visited four times or more, including one household that responded on the eighth visit. Each attempt date, time, and outcome should be noted on the tracking form.

Scenario 3: The House Is Vacant

▪ *Which houses should be labeled as "vacant"?* Only houses that survey teams know for certain are vacant and do not have anyone living inside should be categorized as vacant. Although there are some addresses that are obviously vacant, for example an empty house with no cars in the driveway, there are other addresses that are more difficult to discern. In such cases, the survey administrator should try to reach out to someone knowledgeable about the property, such as the apartment manager, landlord, or a real estate agent. If such sources are not available, the survey administrator should try to contact neighbors who might also know if the address is vacant. If no such sources are available, survey teams, with the consent of a supervisor can deem a housing unit vacant by observation. Although not definitive, survey teams can also leave flyers about the survey for nonresponding households, which note the date and time of each survey attempt.

▪ *What should survey teams do if a house is vacant?* Survey teams should make a note on the tracking form that the house is vacant. Survey teams should *not* attempt to survey the next-

door neighbor or some other substitute; survey teams should only survey households on their sample list. Anytime survey teams deviate from their sample address list, survey results may be biased in unintended ways; quality control by survey supervisors is critical to helping survey teams maintain their sample lists. Survey teams must be given clear instructions to replace selected addresses only with authorization from the survey administrator.

Scenario 4: The Address Is Inaccessible

- *What if the address cannot be reached door-to-door because it is in an apartment building or gated community?* As noted above, once a household has been selected to be in the sample, it must remain in the sample. For hard to reach households such as apartment buildings, gated communities, or houses with discouraging signage, typically, you can use reverse phone lookups and call households in advance of the survey to let them know when you are coming to the neighborhood or to schedule a time when the household can take the survey. This can save time and money and help to raise awareness about the survey and the Promise Neighborhood. Alternatively, you can conduct outreach to these buildings and communities through a targeted advance mailing, as discussed in the earlier section. Whatever the strategy for outreach, do *not* replace these households with new addresses or label them as vacant or as refusals. Instead, they should be labeled as "Unable to reach."

- *What if there is a sign at the front door that says, "No Solicitation" or "Beware of Dog"?* All addresses that have been selected to be in the sample must remain in the sample and count toward the response rate, unless they are vacant. Of course, all survey teams should have robust safety procedures that govern if and how they approach such households. In such cases where an address is determined to be unsafe, it is important to record it as such.

Four Tips for Increasing Neighborhood Survey Response Rates

Although Promise Neighborhoods should strive for survey response rates of 80 percent or higher, the priority is maintaining a representative random sample (even with a lower response rate). Along with the other tips in this document, consider the following practices to further increase response rates while maintaining the integrity of each survey:

1. Encourage survey participants and other community members involved in the Promise Neighborhood to talk with their neighbors and others about taking the survey.
2. Motivate survey staff through mini-competitions to see who can get the most completed surveys each week.
3. Intensify efforts for one week with a "blitz." Focus on getting as many survey completions as possible for a specific batch.
4. After survey responses are collected and analyzed, share the results with the community. This will help create buy-in for future surveys.

School Survey

Promise Neighborhoods should conduct a school climate survey for students who attend target schools in each year of their implementation grant. Normally, the survey of students will be self-administered and ask questions about physical activity, food consumption habits, perception of safety, and internet connectivity. The school climate survey collects data for *GPRA*s 8–10 and 15 and should be administered to middle and high school children attending the Promise Neighborhood's target schools.

The school climate survey can be given to a randomly selected sample of students or to all middle and high school students in the target schools. Urban recommends fielding the survey to the full population of enrolled students, given that the costs of a self-administered survey of all students would not be much greater than a survey of a random sample of students. Target school partners will likely determine the timing of the school climate survey, so that disruption of the school's routine is minimized. Like the neighborhood survey, the school survey should strive to achieve a high response rate of 80 percent based on the number of students *enrolled* in the school, not just those in attendance on a particular day. Thus, it may be necessary to administer the survey on "make-up days," for students who were absent on the main survey day.

Several aspects of the school climate survey make it somewhat easier to plan and implement than a neighborhood survey. However, it is still critical to think through the following steps and considerations to design and manage successful school surveys that result in high-quality data.

- *Conduct outreach with parents and school leaders.* Promise Neighborhoods should engage with school staff, parents, and students before the date the survey will be administered to explain the importance of the survey and generate interest. Any concerns from parents or school partners should be addressed before survey distribution begins so as to minimize refusals to participate.

- *Train school partners.* Most likely, the Promise Neighborhood will rely on teachers and other school staff to help administer the school survey. Promise Neighborhood staff should conduct in-person teacher training to explain the survey and methodology, review the questionnaire, clarify each teacher's role in administering the survey, and answer any questions. Teachers asked to administer surveys should be given a detailed script to read that explains the survey's purposes and the importance of providing complete and accurate responses and that ensures the students of the anonymity of their answers.

- *Test the survey.* The survey administrator should test the final survey instrument under as close to actual conditions as possible, ideally with students from the target schools and in the same format that will be used for fielding the survey. This means that computer-based surveys should be tested using the same computers and the same software as will be used for the actual fielding. A test run will also give administrators a better idea of the time required for the entire process, including reading the introduction and instructions as well as actually completing the

survey. Omitting this step increases the risk of problems during the survey administration, complicating the data collection and jeopardizing the success of the survey.

- *Keep it simple.* For computer-based surveys, keep the survey link, usernames, and passwords as simple as possible, excluding case-sensitive letters and little known characters to avoid errors that might inhibit survey completion.

- *Allocate enough time.* In addition to the questions for *GPRA* data collection, grantees may want to ask students additional questions to inform Promise Neighborhood programming. The survey administrator should know (from survey testing) how much time to allocate for the whole process and any necessary follow-up, such as incentive distribution.

- *Schedule make-up day(s).* Urban recommends scheduling a make-up day to survey students who were absent, did not finish because of time restraints, or did not complete the survey for other reasons. To allow for proper management and quality control, Urban recommends that the survey be administered for an entire week (5 days) to give every student a chance to complete the survey.

- *Consider incentives.* If appropriate, offering an incentive to students taking the survey may increase the response rate. After discussion with appropriate school officials, the survey administrator should ask for student and teacher feedback on appropriate incentives for classrooms with high participation rates.

- *Keep track of respondents.* Even though the student survey will be anonymous and therefore not link individual students to their survey responses, the survey administrator must keep accurate records of which students complete the survey. Counting the number of students who do and do not participate is insufficient. Tracking will help to ensure that students do not take the survey more than once and allow for follow-up with students who did not yet complete the survey.

- *Follow up with nonrespondents.* The survey administrator should create a list of absent students and other students who were not able to complete the survey during the originally planned timeframe. These students should be encouraged to complete the survey on the scheduled make-up day(s).

Conclusion

Because data collected from neighborhood surveys and school climate surveys are used both to measure progress on *GPRA* indicators and to inform decisions on programming of services and initiatives, it is crucial that the data be high quality. Creating and conducting high-quality neighborhood and school climate surveys requires significant effort before, during, and after the survey. As described in this report, there are many steps that can be taken by Promise Neighborhoods, and others doing similar surveys, to improve the quality of survey data, but it takes planning and dedication. Such effort is the only way to ensure reliable, replicable, and aligned survey data that will be of true value in guiding solutions and measuring progress.

Appendix A

Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Indicators for Promise Neighborhoods

GPRA measure	Data source and frequency	Target population	Age/grade category
GPRA 1. Number and percent of children birth to kindergarten entry who have a place where they usually go, other than an emergency room, when they are sick or in need of advice about their health.	Neighborhood survey conducted years 1, 3, and 5	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Birth to age 5
GPRA 2: Number and percent of three-year-olds and children in kindergarten who demonstrate, at the beginning of the program or school year, age-appropriate functioning across multiple domains of early learning as determined using developmentally appropriate early learning measures.	Administrative data collected annually	Children participating in targeted program(s)	Age 3 and those in kindergarten
GPRA 3. Number and percent of children, from birth to kindergarten entry, participating in center-based or formal, home-based early learning settings or programs, which may include Early Head Start, Head Start, child care, or publicly funded preschool.	Neighborhood survey conducted years 1, 3, and 5	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Birth to age5
GPRA 4. Number and percent of students at or above grade level according to state mathematics and English language arts assessments in at least the grades required by the ESEA (3rd through 8th and once in high school).	Administrative data collected annually	Children attending target schools	3rd through 8th and once in high school
GPRA 5. Attendance rate of students in 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grade as defined by chronic absenteeism.	Administrative data collected annually	Children attending target schools	6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th
GPRA 6. Graduation rate (as defined in the notice).	Administrative data collected annually	Children attending target schools	High school
GPRA 7. Number and percent of Promise Neighborhood students who a) enroll in a two-year or four-year college or university after graduation; b) matriculate to an institution of higher education and place into college-level mathematics and English without need for remediation; c) graduate from a two-year or four-year college or university or vocational certification completion; and d) earn industry-recognized certificates or credentials.	7a and 7c: Private third party that tracks high school graduates into post-secondary education collected annually 7b and 7d: Survey of high school graduates collected annually	7a-7d: Graduates from target high schools	Graduates from target schools

GPRA measure	Data source	Target population	Age/grade category
GPRA 8-9. Number and percent of children who participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily and consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily.	School climate survey collected annually	Children attending target schools	Middle and high school students
GPRA 10. Number and percent of students who feel safe at school and traveling to and from school, as measured by a school climate needs assessment.	School climate survey collected annually	Children attending target schools	Middle and high school students
GPRA 11. Student mobility rate (as defined in the notice).	Administrative data collected annually	Children attending target schools	Elementary, middle, and high school students
GPRA 12. For children from birth to kindergarten entry, the number and percent of parents or family members who report that they read to their children three or more times a week.	Neighborhood survey conducted years 1, 3, and 5	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Birth to age 5
GPRA 13. For children in the kindergarten through 8th grades, the number and percent of parents or family members who report encouraging their child to read books outside of school.	Neighborhood survey conducted years 1, 3, and 5	Children living in Promise Neighborhood	Kindergarten through 8th graders
GPRA 14. For children in the 9th to 12th grades, the number and percent of parents or family members who report talking with their child about the importance of college and career.	Neighborhood survey conducted years 1, 3, and 5	Children Living in Promise Neighborhood	9th through 12th graders
GPRA 15. Number and percent of students who have school and home access (and percent of the day they have access) to broadband internet and a connected computing device.	School climate survey collected annually	Children attending target schools	Middle and high school students

Appendix B

Example Final Disposition Codes for In-Person, Household Surveys

Classification	Code
Returned questionnaire	(1.0)
Complete	(1.1)
Partial	(1.2)
Eligible, noninterview	(2.0)
Refusals	(2.11)
Break-off	(2.12)
Noncontact	(2.20)
Unable to enter building/reach housing unit	(2.23)
No one at residence	(2.24)
Respondent away/unavailable	(2.25)
Other	(2.30)
Language	(2.33)
Miscellaneous	(2.36)
Unknown eligibility, noninterview	(3.0)
Unknown if housing unit	(3.10)
Not attempted or worked	(3.11)
Unable to reach/unsafe area	(3.17)
Unable to locate address	(3.18)
Housing unit/unknown if eligible respondent	(3.20)
No screener completed	(3.21)
Other	(3.90)
Not eligible	(4.0)
Out of sample	(4.10)
Not a housing unit	(4.50)
Vacant housing unit	(4.60)
Seasonable/vacation/temporary residence	(4.63)
Other	(4.70)
No eligible respondent	(4.80)

Source: American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2011.

Notes

1. Grantees can find additional information on choosing an appropriate mode of survey data collection in the *Guidance Document* and in Smyth 2014.

2. The sampling weight for a survey observation is proportional to the inverse of the probability of sample selection. In the example shown, the sampling weight would be proportional to 1 / 0.625 percent, or 160.

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