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2006 RMI Community Survey
Lessons Learned

1. Surveyors

Best option is to advertise, screen, test and hire the most literate, bilingual, outgoing and professional surveyors. Using volunteers (e.g., Ebeye) and govt workers (e.g. Majuro) means compromising quality. Also, the better the pay, usually the better the quality of surveyors EPPSO can attract. Paying \$5 per HH is on the very low end of the typical range for surveys these days. All in all, perhaps 1 in 5 surveyors in this survey was very good, 3 in 5 were so-so, and another 1 in 5 probably should not have been hired.

2. Training

1.5 days of training was barely enough – the most important part that needs to be expanded is the practice interviewing. EPPSO only did this for half a day or so and EPPSO should have done it for at least one day. This ensures that EPPSO catches errors early and raise the overall potential for good quality data collection. For example, the employment questions ended up being problematic especially for the surveyors who weren't as easily trainable – more training and practice up-front could have improved this.

3. Questionnaire

It became obvious very quickly in the first month of the project that survey design, testing and finalization (formatting, printing, etc.) takes at least a month to do. Sufficient time should be allotted to preparing and finalizing questionnaires, especially considering the other prep work that needs to be done before actual surveying begins. As for length, this questionnaire was at the very high end of typical questionnaire lengths – many questions results in interviewer and interviewee burden – EPPSO noticed this in this survey! Some households took over 3 hours and multiple visits to complete! That's too much for this type of survey. EPPSO also needs to ensure that none of the questions were "leading." Some people raised this issue. Also, EPPSO needs to ensure that the sequencing of questions makes sense.

4. Project Management/Staffing

This project's organizational structure was very "flat" - two full-time supervisors overseeing nearly 40 surveyors. That means that insufficient supervision was sometimes occurring – rule of thumb can be to have at least one supervisor for every 5 surveyors. Supervisors need to stay on top of surveyors, track their progress, manually edit their forms – all to ensure highest quality. EPPSO sacrificed a bit in this area because EPPSO did not have sufficient eyes watching over the surveyors. Also, using EPPSO staff to do surveying and other work is okay, but it often detracted them from their EPPSO work, and vice versa (their EPPSO work detracted them from survey work). The more dedicated staff the better.

5. Ebeye

Next time, someone MUST stay on Ebeye full time. EPPSO should not have supervisors go back and forth from Majuro – the gaps created problems and delays.

6. Coding and Keying

The Industry and Occupation codes were not done according to “international best practice” and as a result the data are not as usefully presented as they could be. EPPSO needs to have a standard set of I/O and other codes and perhaps EPPSO can do this as a side project before the next large survey or census. EPPSO has different codes, for example, for types of toilets, income sources, etc. This needs to be standardized so EPPSO can compare over time.

The two keyers EPPSO hired made mistakes, especially early in the process. EPPSO did not sufficiently train them before EPPSO threw them into the deep end. Because of time constraints, EPPSO rushed and this resulted in keying errors on their part – errors that required 3 full days to “clean up” by John and Ben later on... Next time, EPPSO MUST give them sufficient training and verification and practice. Surely, some of the keying errors weren’t caught. Also, the keying screens needed more time to develop and perfect. Keyers should not scroll at any time between screens as that increases room for error.

7. Edit and Tabulation

Originally, EPPSO had scheduled for our programmer (from U.S. Census Bureau) to be here for 3 weeks to do all the edit and tab. Looking back, this was a much better idea than having him do the edit and tab from abroad. But even 3 weeks would have probably been insufficient, in hindsight. Next time, a programmer should be in Majuro, and at least 3 weeks should be available to do the edit and tab AFTER the keying is all done!

8. Schedule/Timing

Twenty weeks were allotted for this project, from start to finish. EPPSO did not build in sufficient slack time, and as a result of the delays in surveying, coding, keying and edit/tab, the project ran over its final date of May 19. Next time, more time should be allotted. For this size of survey, perhaps 24 weeks would have been perfect.

In less than 5 months, nevertheless, the survey successfully covered nearly 10,000 in 1,200 homes across 6 far flung islands and atolls! 90% of the total work expended on this project was Marshallese.

26 May, 2006