



## Overview of Survey Anonymity and Confidentiality

### Overview

The MCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) occasionally conducts survey research related to internal OIE research projects or on behalf of internal or external stakeholders. The information in this document describes the difference between anonymous and confidential surveys and OIE's effort to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, a goal of this document is to allay staff concerns regarding the anonymity or confidentiality of their survey responses. Please note that this information only applies to surveys conducted by OIE and not to other external entities or internal departments conducting their own surveys.

### Maintaining Anonymity

Anonymity means the state of being unknown, and surveys that promise anonymity will make it impossible for OIE or any other person to link survey responses back to the respondent. Anonymity is typical in surveys asking respondents to provide genuine opinions without fear of repercussions of perceived negative responses.

For online surveys, our approved college survey solution, Qualtrics, helps us maintain respondent anonymity via survey settings. The following information from Qualtrics confirms that, when anonymous survey settings are used, OIE has no access to data that can link survey responses back to the respondent because the identifying information is deleted from the dataset. OIE will only know who has and has not completed a survey for the purposes of sending reminder emails and reporting on overall survey response rates. To reiterate, when surveys are anonymous, OIE does not have access to link responses with respondents.

### Anonymizing Responses

Anonymizing your responses is an effective way to permanently scrub a response of identifying information before saving it in the data.

When responses are gathered with the [Anonymous Link](#), enabling this setting will remove the respondents' IP address and location data from your results. When responses are gathered with the [Individual Link](#), enabling this setting will remove the IP address and location data and disconnect the response from the contact who provided it. In this way, you can know which contacts have responded (through your distribution history and contact history), but not which response belongs to which contact.

*From Qualtrics Support Article "Survey Termination," accessed 13 September 2018,  
<https://www.qualtrics.com/support/survey-platform/edit-survey/survey-options/survey-termination/>*

## Maintaining Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that some identifying information is collected from the survey and is available to OIE staff for the purposes of analysis. For confidential surveys, we assure that we will not share individual responses with others outside of the communicated purposes of survey for analysis and reporting. When a survey is advertised as confidential, aggregate and not individual data is reported, and if individual comments are reported, they are not identified. The primary reason for confidential surveys instead of anonymous surveys is to connect survey responses with demographic information or other information available. In these instances, instead of asking respondents to provide information we already know, we can use key values (e.g. ID number or email) to connect survey responses with more internal datasets to assist with analysis. In these instances, OIE assures confidentiality and not anonymity. OIE staff will have access to individual responses, but we will not release any data or results tied to an individual, unless the use of individual data is approved by the respondent.

## Exceptions

Below are some exceptions to anonymity and confidentiality.

### Open-ended responses

If a respondent includes self-identifying information in an open-ended survey response, that information may identify the respondent to OIE staff or those reviewing survey results.

### Incentives

If we offer incentives to complete an anonymous survey, we will redirect respondents to enter identifying information in a separate survey so that the original survey responses are not tied to their incentive responses. If we offer incentives to complete a confidential survey, we will only use identifying information for the purposes of the incentive and data analysis.

### Legal Issues

OIE will comply with legal requirements or court orders to release survey data. Anonymous surveys will remain anonymous since Qualtrics removes any identifying information from the dataset. OIE will also report any threats of self-harm or harm to others made via a survey submission, even if that means breaking confidentiality.

## Contacts

If you have concerns regarding the anonymity or confidentiality of surveys, please contact:

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