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Comparing Participant Recruitment Methods for Statewide Needs Assessment Surveys

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Abstract. Contracting with a paid survey vendor can be costly; are free and low-cost survey recruitment methods a sound option for Extension? The purpose of our study was to assess the feasibility of using free or low-cost recruitment methods as a substitute for contracting with a paid survey vendor when conducting a statewide needs assessment. The demographic characteristics and responses from paid survey panelists were compared with the same data from participants recruited via Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Observed differences suggest that Extension professionals should carefully consider whose perspectives are needed for a needs assessment and make survey recruitment decisions accordingly.

INTRODUCTION

Well-planned programs begin with the identification of needs (Boyle, 1981). However, needs assessments can be time-intensive and financially costly (Altschuld, 2015). Realistically, these criteria can be significant hurdles for Cooperative Extension. Martin et al. (2014) wrote about the challenges of conducting local assessments to meet federal requirements, noting, “We leaders realized that asking 114 county Extension offices to conduct an annual assessment of issues and review programs would fatigue local stakeholders unless the process was engaging and relevant to local programming” (para. 2). Further, the Extension professionals conducting needs assessments should possess necessary competencies to execute the process skillfully, but not all do (Heck et al., 2009).

Some Extension systems, such as Iowa (Gunn & Loy, 2015), Texas (Cummings & Boleman, 2006), and Utah (Narine et al., 2020), use faculty and staff with the appropriate expertise to lead needs assessments at the state level. Data can then be shared with local Extension professionals for their use in program planning. Yet even this approach has some challenges. Using for-profit survey vendors can be expensive; one for-profit survey vendor indicated the minimum cost for a project is \$3,000 (K. Nicholson, personal communication, August 9, 2023). A more economical means to recruit participants when conducting needs assessments

is needed. In an era when many people have access to the internet, using free or low-cost (FLC) recruitment methods may be a financially viable and efficient way to recruit study participants (Quach et al., 2013). In our 2022 statewide needs assessment, we sought to compare the use of FLC participant recruitment methods to the recruitment of a paid panel. Would both recruitment methods yield similar results?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Using paid online samples has advantages such as the ability to collect large amounts of data from many respondents rapidly (Pickering & Blaszczyński, 2021). Compensation can vary, but “respondents are often invited to complete surveys on a diverse array of unrelated topics and compensated with money, gift vouchers, or points (redeemable for cash or product rewards) on completion” (Pickering & Blaszczyński, 2021, p. 517). There are data quality concerns arising from respondent behaviors such as speeding and cheating. Such behaviors threaten the quality of the data obtained and may be related to the low compensation levels provided to paid survey panelists. Pickering and Blaszczyński (2021) recommended researchers implement measures related to study preplanning, participant inclusion, participant effort, and managing bias to improve data. Examples of these measures included monitoring IP addresses, using attention

checks, eliminating nonsensical responses, quota sampling, and poststratification weighting.

Existing research provides few answers on whether paid or unpaid surveys alter response rates. In 2011, Coughlin et al. conducted a study among U.S. veterans addressing whether survey response rates were affected by the inclusion of monetary compensation with surveys. Veterans were contacted about their health needs through paid and unpaid surveys, with little difference recorded between the two formats. Singer and Couper (2008) found participants offered a monetary incentive were not any more likely to complete the survey than if they were not provided with compensation. In 2017, Yu et al. administered a survey without compensation, then relaunched the same survey 5 months later with monetary compensation. No significant differences were found between the paid and unpaid trials. Similarly, Largent et al. (2016) researched the likelihood of coercion and undue influence because of monetary compensation received through survey completion. The researchers found no reason for concern and no significant adverse effects resulting from monetary compensation.

However, Saleh and Bista (2017) concluded that motivations affecting response rates varied by population, with older adults being more motivated by the promise of reward. Wessling et al. (2017) found widespread evidence of character misrepresentation (i.e., lying on the screening questions to gain access to the survey) by Amazon Mechanical Turk panelists that did not exist when financial incentives were not involved. Similarly, an overview of concerns about data quality and sample integrity associated with online panels was well described by Smith et al. (2016). Further research is needed to determine how paid compensation affects survey validity and response rates among different populations.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of our study was to compare FLC and paid panel participant recruitment methods for conducting a statewide needs assessment. The objectives were to:

- compare the respondents' demographics based on participant recruitment method; and
- compare the respondents' perceptions of how much effort the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension should apply to priority issue areas and individual issues based on participant recruitment method.

METHODS

We conducted a nonexperimental descriptive study to investigate our objectives. Our target population was Florida

residents aged 18 and over. We used two methods to recruit participants, consistent with our goal of comparing the use of FLC recruitment methods with a paid panel. The first method of recruiting participants was to contract Qualtrics to provide a paid panel at an approximate cost of \$5 per respondent. We sought to have Qualtrics recruit a representative sample of 1,500 Florida residents. To do so, we provided Qualtrics with quotas for racial background, age, ethnicity, and income level based on the U.S. Census Bureau's (2022) American Community Survey.

The second method of recruiting participants was by using FLC participant recruitment procedures. We coordinated with UF/IFAS Communications to create three survey promotions that were posted on UF/IFAS's Facebook, Twitter (now X), and LinkedIn accounts. Each promotion included at least one photograph or graphic to accompany the text. For Twitter, we had to create a thread because including the required institutional review board language caused the text to exceed the character limit for a tweet.

We used a shortened version of our 2020 needs assessment instrument (Harder et al., 2023). Questions about the importance and availability of various community assets were removed to reduce the length of the survey by 33 items. Additionally, the screening questions at the start of the instrument were revised; the screening questions were primarily used by Qualtrics in its efforts to recruit a sample consistent with the targeted demographics. We eliminated Qualtrics' recommended question about respondent commitment after finding it had made no apparent difference in response quality in 2020. Instead, we started with the Florida residency question so that anyone who indicated they were not a Florida resident would be redirected to the end of the survey immediately, a feature anticipated to be important for screening individuals reaching the instrument through one of the FLC pathways. We retained questions about age group and residential zip code in the same format as the 2020 survey. However, expanded response options were added to the question about gender to enable participants to better describe their identities. Ethnicity and racial background were split into separate questions. We provided fewer response options to describe total household income to be consistent with the format used by the U.S. Census.

The screening questions were followed by a section asking respondents to indicate how much effort they thought UF/IFAS Extension should spend on various issues. There were 43 items in the issues section. Response options were: 1 = *no effort*, 2 = *low effort*, 3 = *moderate effort*, 4 = *high effort*, and 5 = *very high effort*. The scale was interpreted as: 1.00–1.49 = *no effort*, 1.50–2.49 = *low effort*, 2.50–3.49 = *moderate effort*, 3.50–4.49 = *high effort*, and 4.50–5.00 = *very high effort*. An open-ended item asked respondents to describe the most

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pressing issue for UF/IFAS Extension to address and their reasons for thinking that way.

We also added an Extension section to the instrument to better compare the paid panel respondents with the FLC respondents based on an assumption FLC respondents would be more familiar with UF/IFAS Extension because we used UF/IFAS social media accounts for recruitment. The first question asked respondents to indicate if they had heard of any of seven organizations or groups related to UF/IFAS. The second question asked respondents to indicate if they or a member of their household had participated in or received information from UF/IFAS Extension in the preceding 2 months.

The instrument concluded with a demographics section. We used the same questions about length of Florida residency, language spoken at home, and employment as the 2020 instrument. For level of education, we combined doctorates and professional degrees into one category in 2022 because both types were terminal degrees. We discarded one question about where respondents lived and replaced it with two questions that would help us better determine how place of residence might influence perceptions of issues. The new questions asked respondents to indicate if the community they lived in was urban, suburban, or rural, and if the area they lived in was a coastal area (not an island), island, or inland area.

Data collection for the paid panel was conducted from May 24 to June 3, 2022, with a pretest of the survey conducted by Qualtrics the week prior. We received 2,297 responses; it is unknown how many additional responses were discarded by Qualtrics, as it conducted an initial review of the data and discarded bogus responses. The final usable number of responses was 1,728. Reasons why responses were discarded are displayed in Table 1.

Data collection using the FLC participants recruitment methods ran from May 24 to June 19, 2022. There were 425 total responses received, of which 313 were considered usable. Of the usable responses, 294 came from the Facebook pathway, 5 from unspecified pathways, 9 from the Twitter pathway, and 5 from the LinkedIn pathway. To promote the survey, we spent \$50 on a Facebook ad that ran from May 31 to June 7. The unspecified pathways were the result of two possible errors, either the possible posting of the survey link without the source code at the end of the URL or a respondent failing to progress in the survey to the point of reaching the source field at the end of the survey flow.

Data analysis was conducted for the first objective using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to describe demographics in three broad categories: individual characteristics, socioeconomic characteristics, and residency characteristics. For the second objective, a principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was conducted to simplify the data, consistent with Narine et

Table 1. Type and Frequency Discarded Responses by Recruitment Method

Type	Qualtrics % (n)	FLC % (n)
No consent provided	6.14 (141)	0
Non-Florida resident indicated	1.66 (38)	0
Non-Florida zip code provided	.22 (5)	.50 (2)
Speeders (a)	7.00 (161)	4.5 (19)
Straightlining and/or poor-quality open-ended responses	.65 (15)	4.23 (18)
Potential bot (b)	1.52 (35)	.71 (3)
Duplicate respondents (c)	.61 (14)	.50 (2)
Partial responses	5.40 (124)	16 (68)
Underage respondents	5.40 (36)	0

Note. (a) Speeders completed the survey in fewer than 168 seconds, a time threshold calculated by taking the median completion time of the initial legitimate responses and dividing by two. (b) Based on the Recaptcha Score and Relevant ID Fraud Score used by Qualtrics. (c) Based on the Relevant ID and Ballot Box Stuffing features used by Qualtrics.

al. (2020) and Harder et al. (2023). The PCA was conducted using responses from the paid panel. The data was found to be suitable for PCA based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (.98) and a significant result for Bartlett's test of sphericity ($X^2 = 57,862.10$, $p < .01$). Four factors were retained in the model after examining a scree plot (Cattell, 1966) and conducting exploratory analysis (see Table 2). Applying a coefficient value threshold of .50 (Pituch & Stevens, 2016) yielded the most meaningful results. The factor analysis resulted in the identification of four priority issue areas: Healthy Environments, Healthy Food Systems, Healthy Communities, and Healthy People. Descriptive statistics were used to describe perceptions of the priority issues by area (means, standard deviations) and individual issues (frequencies and percentages).

FINDINGS

Our first objective was to compare respondents' demographic characteristics based on participant recruitment method. There were seven age brackets included in the survey (see Table 3). Three of the seven age brackets had a greater than 5% difference in representation when comparing by recruitment method. The greatest difference existed for the 18–24 years bracket, with nearly a 10% difference in representation. Similar representation existed for the 35–44

Table 2. Sources of Integrated Pest Management Information

Item	Rotated Factor Loadings			
	HP	HFS	HC	HE
Addressing prescription drug abuse	.85	.15	.13	.14
Preventing suicide	.83	.21	.03	.18
Addressing illegal drug abuse	.82	.13	.10	.13
Addressing alcohol abuse	.82	.15	.20	.11
Addressing mental health	.82	.24	.04	.18
Teaching healthy relationship skills to teens	.71	.09	.33	.22
Helping first-time homeowners make smart financial decisions	.68	.13	.35	.17
Strengthening couple and/or marital relationships	.66	.01	.42	.13
Strengthening workforce readiness	.64	.11	.32	.27
Strengthening the financial well-being of small businesses	.61	.06	.42	.27
Building healthy families	.60	.17	.43	.24
Preventing chronic disease	.57	.45	.25	.13
Addressing hunger issues	.53	.39	.25	.25
Providing physical fitness education	.51	.37	.43	.07
Protecting water quality	.05	.76	.00	.37
Ensuring safe food handling practices to prevent foodborne illnesses	.21	.75	.07	.20
Strengthening the local food system	.12	.73	.27	.18
Protecting air quality	.16	.73	.08	.30
Preserving farmland	.00	.68	.19	.25
Assisting farmers in agricultural production	.03	.68	.29	.21
Promoting economic development	.29	.63	.26	.08
Ensuring individuals have access to affordable healthy food	.34	.63	.23	.17
Helping youth develop leadership, citizenship, and other life skills	.42	.53	.32	.11
Assisting local businesses with land use decisions	.17	.26	.71	.22
Assisting local government with land use decisions	.11	.32	.61	.27
Building the capacity of community nonprofits	.45	.22	.61	.14
Helping urban communities improve their quality of life	.43	.30	.56	.19
Helping households reduce water use	.31	.08	.55	.41
Preserving foods for home use (e.g., canning, dehydrating)	.37	.24	.53	.20
Helping consumers make healthy food choices	.40	.41	.52	.12
Helping rural communities improve their quality of life	.36	.40	.52	.19
Helping households become more energy efficient	.38	.30	.51	.29
Protecting the coastal environment	.18	.23	.16	.80
Protecting freshwater resources (e.g., lakes, rivers, springs, wetlands)	.21	.31	.10	.78
Protecting natural habitats and ecosystems	.24	.26	.12	.77
Protecting the marine environment	.26	.26	.08	.77
Reducing saltwater intrusion	.18	.21	.25	.72
Controlling invasive pests (e.g., animals, insects)	.17	.23	.24	.70
Controlling invasive plants	.02	.12	.44	.63
Eigenvalues	9.21	6.66	5.66	5.65
% Variance	21.42	15.49	13.17	13.14

Note. Priority issues: HP = Healthy People, HFS = Healthy Food Systems, HC = Healthy Communities, and HE = Healthy Environment.

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Table 3. Respondents' Personal Characteristics by Recruitment Method

	FLC % (n)	Paid Panel % (n)
<i>Age (years)</i>		
18–24	.6 (2)	15.2 (263)
25–34	8.6 (27)	12.4 (214)
35–44	16.6 (52)	17.1 (296)
45–54	19.8 (62)	15.5 (267)
55–64	24.6 (77)	16.1 (279)
65–74	24.3 (76)	17.1 (295)
75–84	5.4 (17)	6.3 (109)
84 or older	0 (0)	.3 (5)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	12.5 (39)	53.7 (928)
Female	86.6 (271)	45.5 (786)
Transgender	0 (0)	.6 (11)
None of these	1.0 (3)	.2 (3)
<i>Hispanic</i>		
Yes	7.7 (24)	26.0 (450)
No	92.3 (289)	74.0 (1278)
<i>Racial Background</i>		
White	96.5 (302)	74.0 (1279)
Black	.6 (2)	18.4 (318)
Asian	.3 (1)	3.9 (67)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0 (0)	.6 (11)
American Indian or native Alaskan	1.6 (5)	1.8 (31)
Some other race	2.6 (8)	5.4 (94)
<i>Regularly Speak a Language Besides English at Home</i>		
Yes	8.3 (26)	26.6 (460)
No	91.7 (287)	73.4 (1267)

years bracket (<1% difference) and 84 years or older (.3% difference), but the latter had no FLC respondents and only five paid panelists. In terms of gender, there were nearly twice as many female respondents in the FLC method (86.6%) as the paid panel method (45.5%).

Respondents were asked to report their ethnic and racial backgrounds. Over one in four paid panelists was Hispanic (26%), while only 7.7% of the FLC respondents identified as Hispanic. Similarly, there were more racially diverse respondents reached with Qualtrics, with the biggest difference existing for percentage representation of Black respondents (see Table 3). Paid panelists were three times more likely than FLC respondents to regularly speak a language besides English at home (26.6% versus 8.3%).

We also asked respondents to describe their socioeconomic characteristics (see Table 4). The FLC

respondents tended to have higher annual household incomes and higher levels of education completed. There were smaller differences in employment, with 47.6% of FLC respondents fully employed versus 41.9% of the paid panelists. However, the percentage of retirees was 8.2% higher in the FLC group than in the paid panel.

Finally, respondents were asked to report their residency characteristics (see Table 5). Similar percentages of respondents reported living in suburban or island communities regardless of recruitment method. The FLC respondents were twice as likely to reside in a rural area and were more likely to be long-term Florida residents than the paid panelists. Conversely, the paid panelists were twice as likely to reside in an urban community.

Respondents were asked to indicate if, in the preceding 12 months, they or a member of their household had

Table 4. Respondents' Socioeconomic Characteristics by Recruitment Method

	FLC % (n)	Paid Panel % (n)
<i>Total Annual Household Income</i>		
Less than \$50,000	23.6 (74)	44.2 (764)
\$50,000–\$99,999	39.0 (122)	31.6 (546)
\$100,000–\$199,999	29.1 (91)	20.0 (345)
\$200,000 or more	8.3 (26)	4.2 (73)
<i>Highest Level of Education Completed</i>		
Did not complete high school	0 (0)	2.7 (46)
High school degree or equivalent	2.9 (9)	18.6 (321)
Some college credit, no degree	8.9 (28)	21.4 (369)
Trade/technical/vocational training	1.3 (4)	6.1 (105)
Associate degree	10.5 (33)	14.3 (247)
Bachelor's degree	32.3 (101)	23.1 (399)
Master's degree	30.0 (94)	10.5 (182)
Doctorate and/or Professional degree	14.1 (44)	3.4 (59)
<i>Employment</i>		
Employed full time	47.6 (149)	41.9 (723)
Employed part time	7.3 (23)	12.3 (213)
Unemployed and looking for work	2.2 (7)	6.7 (116)
Unemployed but not looking for work	2.9 (9)	2.7 (46)
Retired	32.9 (103)	24.7 (426)
Student	.6 (2)	4.3 (75)
Unable to work	1.9 (6)	4.3 (74)
Military	0 (0)	.3 (5)
Other	4.5 (14)	2.8 (49)

Table 5. Respondents' Residency Characteristics by Recruitment Method

	FLC % (n)	Paid Panel % (n)
<i>Community Type</i>		
Urban	16.6 (52)	31.2 (539)
Suburban	57.5 (180)	56.2 (970)
Rural	25.9 (81)	12.6 (218)
<i>Area of Residence</i>		
Coastal	28.1 (88)	37.2 (643)
Island	5.1 (16)	4.9 (85)
Inland	66.8 (209)	57.8 (999)
<i>Length of Florida Residency</i>		
Less than a year	1.6 (5)	3.4 (59)
1–5 years	7.7 (24)	13.2 (228)
6–10 years	7.7 (24)	11.6 (200)
More than 10 years	83.1 (260)	71.8 (1240)

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participated in or received information from UF/IFAS Extension, including their local Extension office. There were 73.8% of FLC respondents who indicated they had. In contrast, only 5.9% of paid panelists reported participating in or receiving information from UF/IFAS Extension.

Our second objective was to compare respondents' perceptions of how much effort UF/IFAS Extension should apply to priority issue areas (see Table 6) and individual issues (see Table 7). All respondents tended to believe Healthy Environments was the most important priority issue area, but they also perceived high effort should be applied to the Healthy Food Systems and Healthy Communities priority issue areas. Differences were observed for the Healthy People priority issues area, with the FLC respondents tending to perceive that moderate effort was needed and paid panelists reporting a high level of effort.

There was very little consistency between the perceptions held by FLC respondents and the paid panelists for the 10 highest-ranked issues by recruitment method. The only issue for which they agreed was protecting water quality (see Table 7). Large gaps (more than 10 ranks of difference) were observed in the priority level perceived by respondents for controlling invasive plants; composting, reducing, and recycling consumer goods; and ensuring safe food handling practices to prevent foodborne illness. However, four of the top five priority issues for both groups were environmental issues.

Respondents reached via FLC participant recruitment methods and those serving as paid panelists shared the view that strengthening couple and/or marital relationships was the lowest priority issue for Extension (see Table 8). Similarities in rankings were also observed for issues such

as addressing alcohol abuse and strengthening the financial well-being of small businesses. Large gaps were observed for seven issues. Two issues, preventing suicide and assisting local governments with land use decisions, were each ranked as the 11th highest priority by one respondent group but were perceived to be issues of lowest priority by the other respondent group.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We sought to assess the feasibility of using FLC participant recruitment methods to avoid the financial burden of contracting with a survey vendor to recruit a paid panel when conducting a statewide needs assessment. Based on our data, FLC methods are not interchangeable with paid panel recruitment. Our conclusion is based on the findings related to participation quantity, dissimilar respondent demographics, and inconsistent perceptions of priority issue areas and individual issues when compared by recruitment method.

Quach et al. (2013) were able to effectively recruit a large sample of participants to complete screening questionnaires for focus group participation using FLC online advertising strategies. We did not experience the same level of success with our efforts. Despite keeping the survey open for 16 additional days beyond when the paid panel's survey closed, we still only obtained 425 responses from our FLC participant recruitment methods versus the nearly 2,300 panelist responses.

Past research has suggested data quality may be affected by survey recruitment method (Pickering & Blaszczyński,

Table 6. Perceptions of Priority Issues Areas by Recruitment Method

Priority Issue Areas	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Healthy Environment – FLC	4.35	.71
Healthy Environment – PP	4.01	.78
Healthy Food Systems – FLC	3.91	.63
Healthy Food Systems – PP	3.98	.71
Healthy Communities – FLC	3.50	.68
Healthy Communities – PP	3.58	.77
Healthy People – FLC	2.81	.95
Healthy People – PP	3.67	.87

Note. FLC = Free or low-cost recruitment. PP = Paid panel recruitment. 1 = *No effort*, 2 = *Low effort*, 3 = *Moderate effort*, 4 = *High effort*, 5 = *Very high effort*.

Table 7. Perceptions of Highest Priority Issues Areas by Recruitment Method

Issue	FLC Rank	FLC %	Panel Rank	Panel %
Protecting water quality	1	89.7	1	85.0
Protecting freshwater resources (e.g., lakes, rivers, springs, wetlands)	2	88.2	4	78.3
Protecting natural habitats and ecosystems	3	88.2	2	78.8
Protecting the coastal environment	4	83.1	7	74.3
Controlling invasive plants	5	82.8	28	56.2
Strengthening the local food system	6	82.1	9	71.5
Controlling invasive pests (e.g., animals, insects)	7	81.1	10	70.1
Protecting the marine environment	8	77.6	6	75.7
Composting, reducing, and recycling consumer goods	9	73.5	21	59.9
Reducing saltwater intrusion	10	71.5	18	64.9
Ensuring safe food handling practices to prevent foodborne illness	17	61.7	3	78.8
Protecting air quality	12	70.6	5	77.3
Ensuring individuals have access to affordable healthy food	16	62.3	8	73.4

Note. Possible rank values span from 1 to 43. % = combined percentage of respondents who indicated an issue was a high or very high priority.

Table 8. Perceptions of Lowest Priority Issues by Recruitment Method

Issue	FLC Rank	FLC %	Panel Rank	Panel %
Strengthening couple and/or marital relationships	43	14.7	43	42.0
Illegal drug abuse	42	16.0	23	58.0
Addressing alcohol abuse	41	17.2	39	49.9
Addressing prescription drug abuse	40	18.6	25	57.3
Strengthening the financial well-being of small businesses	39	18.8	37	51.4
Providing physical fitness education	38	22.0	35	53.1
Building the capacity of community non-profits	37	26.9	42	43.1
Preventing suicide	36	27.5	11	69.2
Helping first-time homeowners make smart financial decisions	36	27.5	40	48.8
Strengthening workforce readiness	34	27.8	26	57.1
Assisting local business with land use decisions	19	54.9	41	48.8
Preserving foods for home use (e.g., canning, dehydrating)	23	48.9	38	50.5
Helping households reduce water use	18	58.8	36	52.2
Assisting local governments with land use decisions	11	71.2	34	53.8

Note. Possible rank values span from 1 to 43. % = combined percentage of respondents who indicated an issue was a low or very low priority.

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2021). Data quality threats were present in the responses for both recruitment methods but differed in prevalence, except for speeding as a common threat across methods. We found ~27% of the responses received from the FLC approach had to be discarded for reasons such as partial responses, speeding, straightlining, and/or poor-quality open-ended responses. In comparison, we discarded ~25% of the paid panel's responses. The leading reasons for us to discard a panelist's response were speeding, consent not being provided, partial responses, and respondents being underage. The issue with character misrepresentation (attempted completion by underage respondents) was unique to the paid panel and was consistent with prior research suggesting people may lie to gain financial benefits from survey participation (Wessling et al., 2017). We recommend researchers institute their own data quality checks beyond those offered by a survey vendor.

Respondents who were reached via FLC participant recruitment methods were substantially more likely to be familiar with UF/IFAS Extension, which is logical given the use of UF/IFAS platforms to distribute the link. Organizations exclusively looking to obtain perspectives from current clientele may find that using FLC methods may be a feasible option for collecting that data. Surveying current clientele with FLC methods might be especially helpful for local-level Extension professionals, who are more likely to lack the financial resources to devote to needs assessments. Facebook was the overwhelmingly the pathway most used by our FLC respondents. However, the population was heavily skewed toward older White, educated, and female respondents; this demographic profile is not representative of Extension clientele broadly. Disseminating the survey to known clientele contact lists or through program-specific social media platforms could be a more effective strategy for achieving samples representative of the target audience.

We found the paid panel was more demographically diverse and more representative of the state's actual population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The representation was made possible because some survey vendors allow demographic quotas to be built into survey recruitment, an option not possible when distributing a survey link through open sources such as Facebook or Twitter. We recommend Extension systems hire a vendor for recruitment when a representative sample is needed to answer the research question, such as determining programming priorities reflective of the views of a statewide population. States with limited resources to devote to paying for panels may want to consider collaborating with a nearby state and splitting the cost or to explore the possibility of working with research faculty to integrate the inquiry into a funded Hatch project, which could help cover costs.

The largely disparate views of respondents observed at the individual priority level were somewhat dissipated when considering the priority issues by area, except for views of the

Healthy People factor. Examining views of items contributing to the Healthy People factor using the demographic data may be useful to determine if the respondents' individual characteristics were likely the cause of the differences or whether it was the FLC respondents' greater familiarity with UF/IFAS Extension that influenced their responses. For example, a person highly familiar with Extension might have known that some of the Healthy People items (e.g., alcohol and drug abuse) are outside the scope of UF/IFAS Extension's traditional portfolio of programs and responded based on that knowledge. People unfamiliar with Extension may have been more likely to judge the issue based on how much of a priority they thought it was in general rather than considering its fit within the organizational mission. Either way, an aggregated priority area approach may obscure potentially important differences in respondents' views of individual issues, and so both methods of analyzing the data are recommended to provide a more informed view of the data.

Needs assessments will continue to be an important part of Extension programming. The resources required to execute needs assessments well are significant, but our study showed that the investment is likely worth it when the goal is to learn about the priorities of a representative sample of a statewide population. Continued efforts to find better ways to take advantage of FLC recruitment methods are encouraged to overcome some of the challenges noted in our study.

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