

# Do Incentives Increase Response Rates to an Internet Survey of American Evaluation Association Members?

## Findings From a Randomized Experiment

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### PURPOSE

This randomized experiment examines the effect of different incentive types on online survey response rates.

The primary objective of this study was to determine the most effective incentive type to increase response rates to online surveys of American Evaluation Association (AEA) members, specifically.

### BACKGROUND

The use of online surveys has become increasingly popular as it provides feasible means to gather information from large numbers of people. Compared to other survey dissemination methods, online surveys are perceived to be faster, less expensive, and more effective. According to meta-analysis by Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) 39.6% is the average response rate for online surveys. Surveys of American Evaluation Association members average slightly above 25%, with some as low as 15% or 16%.

### METHODS

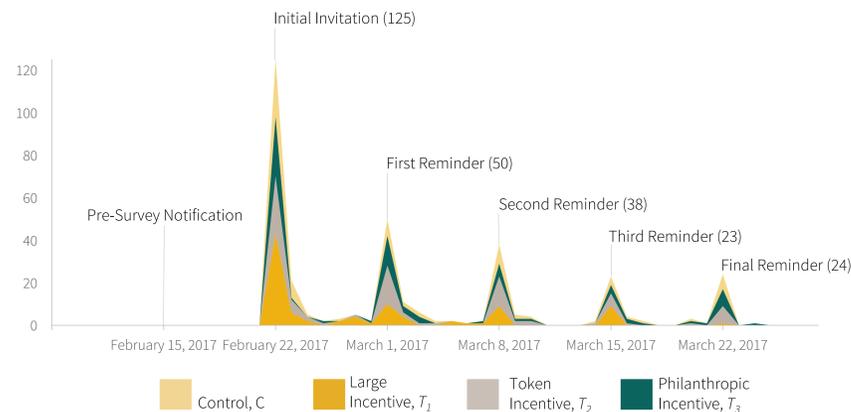
#### DESIGN

This study used a between-subjects three-treatment and one control randomized experiment (i.e., a four-group experiment) in which a randomly selected sample of AEA members were randomly assigned to either a non-incentive control condition (C), large incentive condition ( $T_1$ ), token incentive ( $T_2$ ), or philanthropic incentive condition ( $T_3$ ).

#### SAMPLE

With a statistical power of .80<sup>1</sup>, the total necessary sample size was determined of  $n = 904$ , with  $n = 226$  randomly assigned to each of the four conditions. A random sample was drawn using simple random sampling from a sampling frame ( $N = 7,280$ ) of AEA members obtained in November 2016 from the AEA Executive Board. Although the four groups were randomly assigned to each condition, the deliver rates for each of the conditions varied, resulting in the following total usable sample:  $C n = 218$ ,  $T_1 n = 223$ ,  $T_2 n = 219$ ,  $T_3 n = 225$ , for a total  $n = 885$ .

#### PROCEDURE



<sup>1</sup>For the design, power was estimated to reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) under the following alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ): (1) for the control group the response rate would be  $p = .30$ , (2) for treatment three ( $T_3$ ) the response rate would be  $p = .40$ , (3) for treatment two ( $T_2$ ) the response rate would be  $p = .50$ , and (4) for treatment one ( $T_1$ ) the response rate would be  $p = .60$ .

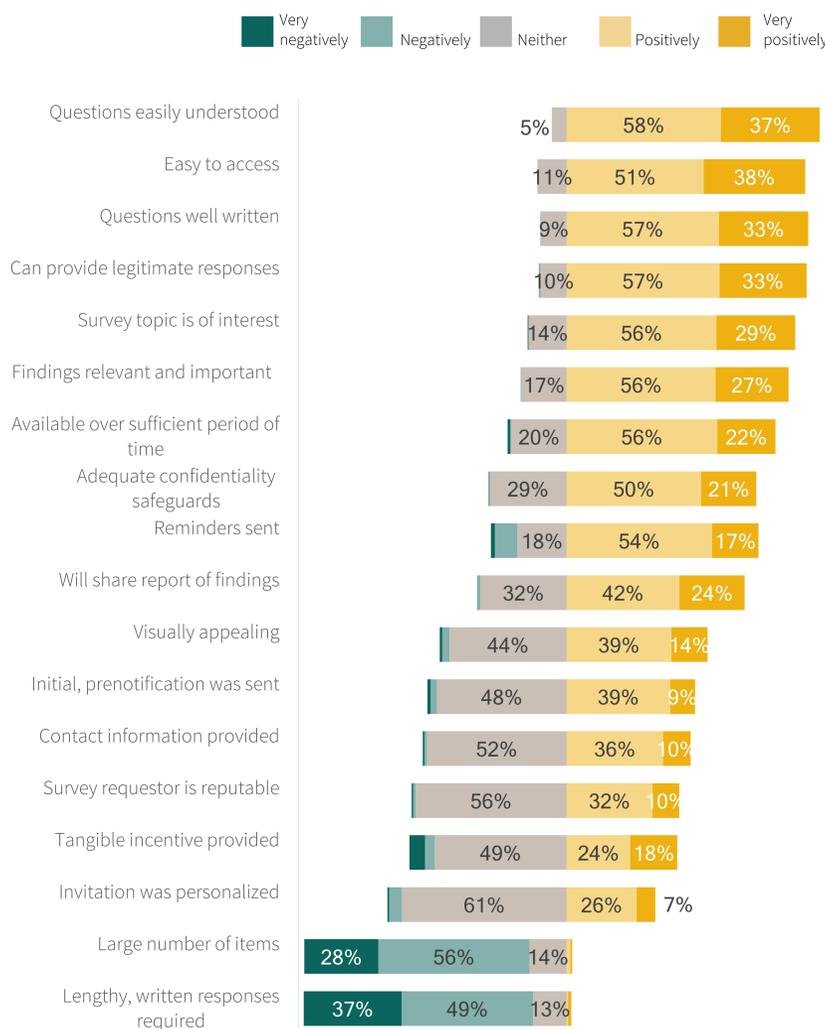
### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do **incentives increase response rates** to online surveys of AEA members?
2. What traits or characteristics of respondents, if any, moderate differences in response rates?
3. What factors, if any, positively and/or negatively influence response rates?

### FINDINGS

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which a variety of factors positively or negatively influence their willingness to respond to online surveys.

Respondents respond positive to surveys that have **easily understandable questions** and are **easy to access**, rather than surveys with **lengthy, written responses** and a **large number of items**.



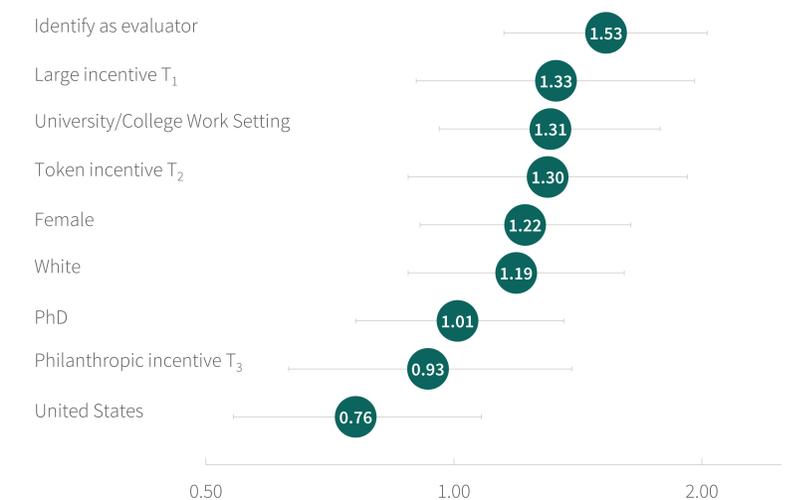
### FINDINGS

The group with the large incentive ( $T_1$ ) received the largest response rate with 44%, followed by the token incentive ( $T_2$ ) with 43%. All of the groups received higher response rates than the average for previous AEA online surveys (25%).



Identifying your **primary work as "evaluation"** increases the changes of responding to the online survey by **1.53**.

Receiving a **large incentive condition ( $T_1$ )** increases the chances by **1.33** and receiving a **token incentive ( $T_2$ )** increases changes of response by **1.3**.



### CONCLUSIONS

For this audience, members of the American Evaluation Association, a large incentive is more effective at increasing response rates than a token incentive, philanthropic incentive, or no incentive. However, given that all response rates were above the average response rates of prior online surveys there may be other factors that influence response or nonresponse.

The questionnaire used in this investigation was intentionally kept brief and simple. On average, it required less than 10 minutes to complete. Given initial analysis of the qualitative data from open-ended responses, this greatly contributed to respondents' willingness to complete the survey. In the future, researchers utilizing online surveys should be mindful about the length and complexity of their survey in order to promote higher response rates.