



## Promoting Survey and Opinion Research & Protecting Consumer Privacy

### **Who are Survey and Opinion Researchers?**

The Survey and Opinion Research profession is dedicated to the secure collection and analysis of data that guides decision-making and advances public, business and government interests. The profession is a multi-billion dollar worldwide industry, comprised of pollsters and government, public opinion, academic and goods and services researchers. Purchasers of opinion and survey research include the government (the world's largest purchaser), media, political campaigns, and commercial and non-profit entities.

### **What is Survey and Opinion Research?**

Survey and opinion research is the process of acquiring opinions from the public. Researchers seek to determine the public's opinion regarding products, services, issues, candidates and other topics. Such information is used to develop new products, improve services, and influence policy. It is used by all kinds of entities, including health care providers, airlines, private businesses and academic institutions. In fact, government is the largest consumer of survey and opinion research in the United States.

### **How is Research Different from Sales-Related Activities?**

Researchers measure public opinions of services or products or social and political issues. Conversely, telemarketers and other sales-related activities attempt to sell goods or services to the public. Researchers *never* ask for money or attempt to sell products or services. Moreover, sales or solicitation is not acceptable or permitted in legitimate and professionally-conducted survey and opinion research. It is a violation of the MRA Code, and, if conducted via telephone, would be in violation of the federal *Telemarketing Sales Rule* (15 U.S.C. 6101).

### **How Do Researchers Manage Personally Identifiable Information?**

As part of the research process, researchers gather information about respondents' attitudes and opinions. Interviewers often ask for "demographic" information to help define the interest that the sample is likely to have in the product or service being studied. This information is *never* looked at by individual answers. Instead, each person's answers are combined with those of many others reported as a group to the client who requested the survey. Most research companies destroy individual questionnaires at the end of the study, and names and addresses of participants are separated from the answers if additional tabulation of the results is done. Again, *all of the personal records are usually destroyed after the study is completed or the validation check has been made*, and all of a respondent's personally identifiable information is kept strictly confidential.

### **How Does The Research Profession Regulate Itself?**

The research profession aggressively self-regulates. Our codes & standards address issues of confidentiality and privacy. Our self-regulation also includes academic discipline that requires us to be statistically accurate in our data and in the recommendations we provide to our clients.

### **Who is the Marketing Research Association (MRA)?**

*The Marketing Research Association (MRA) is the leading and largest association of the survey and opinion research profession. MRA promotes, advocates and protects the integrity of the survey and opinion research profession and strives to improve respondent cooperation in research.*

Howard Fienberg  
Director of Government Affairs  
Marketing Research Association (MRA)  
1111 16<sup>th</sup> St., NW, Suite 120, Washington, DC 20036  
Ph: (202) 775-5170 • Fax: (202) 775-5172  
Website: [www.mra-net.org](http://www.mra-net.org) • Email: [howard.fienberg@mra-net.org](mailto:howard.fienberg@mra-net.org)