

Neighbor Compensation Recommendations for Data Collection

Neighbor compensation/incentives: monetary payment given to an individual in exchange for their time, input, feedback, and/or participation in any data collection, evaluation, or research.

Purpose of document: To provide compensation recommendations for neighbor-level data collection, such as surveys, focus groups, or interviews. The below are recommended practices curated by the Feeding America research team, informed by national evaluation experts, local data collectors, and neighbors.

Why compensate neighbors: Feedback is essential to better serve neighbors. By compensating neighbors for sharing their experiences, neighbors are more likely to share feedback and contribute to the shared goal of improving programs and services. Below are further motivators to compensate neighbors:

- Acknowledges and values the time, experience, and expertise of neighbors
- Builds trust, relationships, and sense of goodwill between neighbors and data collectors
- Can encourage participation and increase response rates, particularly for neighbors who may not typically provide feedback, such as those with competing time demands or lack of interest
- Demonstrates a commitment to equity by compensating marginalized communities

Recommended compensation types and amounts

Generally, the compensation amount should match the effort required by the participant. The more a neighbor is asked to contribute their time, experience, or expertise, the greater the compensation (though compensation amounts should not be too high in that it could coerce neighbors to participate). A brief survey, for example, is a lighter request than an in-person interview.

Compensation format considerations

In choosing a format for compensation (such as cash, e-gift cards, physical gift cards, or money orders), there are several considerations to keep in mind. In our goal to keep neighbors at the center of our work, we recommend choosing a format that is low barrier to access and preferred by neighbors:

- Neighbor preferences of format
 - cash vs. gift card
 - electronic card vs. mailed cards
 - Visa/Mastercard gift card vs. gift cards to local stores
- Finance department preferences
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) considerations
- Safe handling and storage for data collectors

Data collectors may choose to provide physical gift cards (during in-person data collection or by mailing the gift card after a survey is completed) or electronic gift cards. For electronic surveys that the respondents take on their own, integrated tools can be used to provide participants with emailed electronic gift cards (e.g. Rybbon). See the following page for more recommendations.

Below are rough guidelines of typical compensation amounts:

- \$5-\$10 for a survey less than 20 minutes
- \$15-\$20 for a survey between 20 and 30 minutes
- Focus groups/in-depth interviews: ~\$50 for 45-60 minutes, ~\$75 for 60-90 minutes

What to do if providing compensation is not feasible: If providing incentives is not feasible due to budget constraints or other barriers, it is even more imperative that data collection should be designed for minimal time and effort required from participants.

Practice Recommendations for Neighbor Compensation

Before data collection:

- Ask the community for their incentive/compensation preferences. If your options are fixed or limited and you do not have the ability to enact the preferences you hear, be transparent about the possibilities with neighbors and save the feedback for future projects
- Consider offering more than one option for compensation, such as electronic gift card versus mailed gift cards, or gift cards to different vendors, and invite participants to choose which they prefer
- Prioritize making compensation as accessible and easy-to-redeem as possible (e.g. electronic universal Visa or Mastercard gift cards, community grocery store gift cards, avoid gift cards with a fee to use, etc.)
- Create a management system for tracking compensation/incentives, including safe handling of physical gift cards and secure tracking of distribution (including, when required by an IRB or accounting, an anonymized tracking log or compensation receipts)
- Train all data collectors on appropriate practices
- Right-size the incentive amount to the cognitive effort required to avoid coercing participation. For example, a \$100 gift card for a 10-minute survey may be considered coercive and may also bias your results

During data collection:

- Make clear that receipt of services is not dependent on participation in data collection or the responses provided. Taking a survey does not impact what, when, or how much food is received at a distribution
- Keep neighbor contact information separate from survey responses to maintain confidentiality
- Make sure participants have a way to contact you if there is trouble redeeming compensation or if compensation is not received

After data collection:

- Follow up with participants to ask about barriers in redeeming compensation
- Ask data collectors about successes and challenges in providing neighbor compensation
- Talk to your development and partnerships teams about procuring future incentives
- Share back with participants what was done with their responses

Additional Best Practices:

- Though cash is highly accessible, some organizations are not able to dispense cash due to organizational or Institutional Review Board guidelines. Some food banks have also shared security concerns with managing cash compensation
- Consider the accessibility of the incentive. For example, is an ID needed to redeem the incentive? Will the respondent face difficulty in activating the gift card or accessing a vendor?
- Do not give unequal compensation to participants. Each client must be offered an incentive of equal value for the same request

- Do not give donated products or items from food distributions as incentives. Giving food and non-food from your inventory is prohibited under 501(c)(3) tax laws regarding non-profit entities that receive donations. However, you may distribute donated incentives that were procured for the express purpose of being used as an incentive, and you may provide refreshments to neighbors during data collection
- For focus groups, consider providing additional amenities based on the populations. For example, if young parents are the target audience, consider offering childcare
- Other products or branded merchandise are not recommended to be given to participants in the place of monetary compensation

If you have questions or feedback about this document, please email facs@feedingamerica.org!