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# Do You Need a Foot-in-the-Door or Is A Toe Enough? Scripting Introductions That Induce Tailoring and Increase Participation in Telephone Interviews

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# Do you need a foot-in-the-door or is a toe enough?

Scripting introductions to induce tailoring and increase participation in telephone interviews

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## Motivation

- Survey designers/managers often require interviewers to read introductory text verbatim, and some interviewers are more comfortable with a strict script.
- *HOWEVER*, cooperation success is highest when interviewers tailor their introduction to the person on the phone (e.g., Groves & Couper, 2002; Lavrakas, Kelly, & McClain, 2016).
- We wanted to see whether a **new introduction** could **increase cooperation** in the Washington Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS).

## Experiment Design

### Phase 1 (Aug 2018): Hook Questions

One of the following was randomly assigned to 50% of interviews (8,477) and added to the intro script:

- *“Have you heard of this survey?”*
- *“Can I take a minute to tell you about it?”*
- *“Have you seen any news stories about this survey recently? It’s often published in major newspapers and reported in the nightly news because it’s such a large and important survey about health in Washington.”*

### Phase 2 (Sep 2018): Schedule-a-callback

The following was added to the intro script in 50% of interviews (9,891):

- “Is this a safe and convenient time to talk?”*
- If anything other than yes, then interviewers said: *“If not, I can schedule a more convenient time to call you back.”*
  - With an option to ask: *“What’s a better time to call you back?”*

## Research Questions

- 1) Will the revised intros...
  - a. Increase cooperation?
  - b. Reduce refusals?
  - c. Increase scheduled callbacks?
  - d. Recruit respondents with different characteristics?
- 2) Are there other efficiency gains or losses from the new intros?
- 3) Can the revised scripted introductions engage the potential respondent, get a foot-in-the-door, and facilitate interviewer tailoring?

## Results

- No significant impact in cooperation rates.
- Reduction in eligibility rates in the hook question script.
- Significant increase in contacts with the schedule-a-callback script.
- Only household income showed a significantly higher percentage of lower income respondents in the schedule-a-callback script.
- More phone numbers per complete were required in the hook question script.
- A toe in the door appears to be sufficient. Overall, there was no clear/consistent pattern of improvement or harm in using either experimental script.

## Future Directions

### Evaluating Interviewer Effects

- Does the revised script help some interviewers more than others?
- Is variability in script effectiveness due to an interviewer’s ability to implement the revised script?
- What interviewer characteristics predict the effectiveness of the script or ability to implement the modified script?

### New Experiments

- Use volunteer interviewers interested in testing alternative introductions.
- Allow for more training and longer fielding time to allow interviewers to acclimate to the new script.
- Use unscripted introductions with guidance on tailoring.