# Satisfaction Survey Checklist for Accounting Firms

What your firm needs to win at every stage of the survey process

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# INTRODUCTION

Here's an idea that won't surprise you: client retention is a key driver of success for your accounting firm. But in an industry where service providers ubiquitously recognize the value of cultivating healthy, profitable, long-lasting client relationships—we find a significant gap between *believing* in a client-centric philosophy and taking the steps to *execute* on one.

Even the best laid retention strategies fall short when your firm fails to close the loop on client satisfaction. When you consider that **less than 50% of accounting clients will reach out to their existing firm when in need of additional accounting support or services,** you can start to see how these shortcomings ripple through the client experience.

A natural solution to this problem is a client satisfaction survey program. But where, and how, should your firm begin when designing a satisfaction survey initiative? And what steps can be taken to maximize the ROI of a survey program for your team, your clients, and even your prospects?

**3 out of 4 accounting clients say they would like a consistent way to provide feedback**

**BUT**

**only 10% of accounting clients report their firm has reached out and asked how they can improve.**

Inavero has compiled the following checklists (yes, multiple checklists—you'll see why) to help your team build an execution roadmap, avoid common survey pitfalls, and make sure you gain the most valuable insights possible from the initiative. With more than a decade of experience administering satisfaction surveys for B2B service providers—we're thrilled to share with you these hard-fought lessons from the field.

As you'll no doubt come to realize, we didn't skimp on the details (or the opinions!). We encourage you to think of this checklist as a starting point. Use it to guide your strategy and decision-making throughout the survey process, and refer back to it for insights, inspiration, and best practices.

One of the single largest mistakes you can make is to spend more time designing and analyzing your survey than you do taking action on your client feedback! So try not to get too bogged down in the details. At the end of the day, your survey initiative should be a fun, enlightening experience.

And of course if you ever have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to the Inavero team for help or guidance!

PRE-SURVEY | SURVEY FIELDING | POST-SURVEY

# Before Launching Your Satisfaction Survey

## PRE-SURVEY CHECKLIST

*Taking the time to set yourself up for success prior to launching a survey is a key ingredient for generating the most ROI from your survey program and the feedback you receive.*

### ☐ 1. Clearly define your firm's goals for the survey initiative.

- What insights will you target? What would a "successful" survey program deliver by way of satisfaction metrics, service issue identification, feedback, and testimonials?

**BEST PRACTICE**

*Net Promoter® Score offers a single metric to measure satisfaction and compare your firm's service quality against competitors' and even across industries. Learn more about NPS—"the one number you need to grow."*

### ☐ 2. Decide if you will execute your survey internally or work with an outside vendor.

- If you choose to execute internally, there are many easy-to-integrate software programs out there.
- Going the vendor route? Be sure you really understand what you want from the program and if they can deliver on your needs.

### ☐ 3. Enlist an internal champion—who will be your survey logistics engine?

- This person is the key to ensuring the program doesn't lose steam across the company and should be an advocate for your client satisfaction needs.
- Do you have someone at the partner level who is a strong advocate for client satisfaction across your firm?

### ☐ 4. Determine your survey frequency.

- What cadence works best for your firm? 1x per year, multiple times per year, or end of engagement?

**BEST PRACTICE**

*Survey your clients at least annually—once every couple of years isn't a strong marketing or operational tool.*

## ☐ 5. Design survey questions that align with existing processes.

- The most useful survey questions will provide insight into how well your existing processes and internal expectations are aligned with the scores provided by your clients.
- Make it as easy as possible for surveyees to provide you with answers.

**BEST PRACTICE**

*Stick with simple yes/no or always/never questions (10 or fewer is preferable for most!).*

## ☐ 6. Build a triage plan—how are you going to handle a low score?

- We all get surprised by low satisfaction scores from time to time. Recovering from service failures is an opportunity to improve internally and cultivate healthy, sustainable relationships with your clients.

**BEST PRACTICE**

*Define and communicate your follow up process for when a low score or negative feedback is received. A well-executed follow up process is key to any service failure recovery!*

## ☐ 7. Build out a communication plan that creates awareness for your survey efforts.

- Internally: determine how you will communicate the "who, what, & why's" to your team—provide transparency into why you're investing in a survey initiative and lay out what the goals and expectations are for your firm.
- Externally: give your clients a heads up that the survey is coming. Why? Even if they don't answer—you're sending a positive message that you care about their experience and feedback.

## ☐ 8. Pull your contact lists (yes, that means all of your clients!).

- It's *crucial not to shortchange the importance (and accuracy)* of this part of the process. The most honest scores will include data from all of the appropriate people who should be giving you feedback.

PRE-SURVEY | SURVEY FIELDING | POST-SURVEY

# When Your Survey is Live

## SURVEY FIELDING CHECKLIST

*Your survey is in the field... high five! There are proven steps to take that will help you get the most out of the fielding phase of your survey. Use this checklist to keep your team engaged, excited, and proactively executing on the feedback you receive.*

### ☐ 1. Respond to issues as you receive them.

- If you're using a software that provides real-time feedback, begin to integrate your service recovery plan as soon as you start receiving any feedback categorized as an issue.

**BEST PRACTICE**

*Programming survey feedback to be non-anonymous allows you to quickly identify who you should be reaching out to. Remember, we all make mistakes—make up for them in your follow up efforts!*

### ☐ 2. Share updates with your internal staff.

- Sharing feedback as it's received helps get your team excited and creates elevated awareness about the survey while it's in the field.

### ☐ 3. Circulate service "wins" across your team.

- It's important to avoid taking only recovery-based or punitive action with your survey results. Celebrate where you're excelling and keep your team from worrying about a big brother experience.
- Don't miss the opportunity to recognize team members that go above and beyond to provide a great experience to your clients!

### ☐ 4. Push for responses from your clients—the more responses you receive the better you get.

- Reach out to clients you want to hear from (it's a good phone call to have!).
- Reiterate the message that your firm cares a lot about the service you provide, and that you're committed to providing an avenue for them to formally provide you with feedback.

### ☐ 5. Create a communication plan for discussing results.

- Internally: build out a plan for how you will share survey results and how you plan to take action on making improvements in your process.
- With key clients: schedule meetings with your key clients who have reported having a service issue to discuss their survey feedback and how you can improve their overall service experience.

**BEST PRACTICE**

*Generate at least one action item in each of your meetings that directly integrates with one of your service improvement goals.*

PRE-SURVEY | SURVEY FIELDING | **POST-SURVEY**

# Take Action on Client Feedback

## POST-SURVEY CHECKLIST

*Your survey is complete, but you're not done just yet. Ensuring you close the loop between the survey feedback you've received and how you plan to use the data will take your client satisfaction efforts to the next level and allow you to improve for your next survey.*

### ☐ 1. Close the loop with your clients.

- Send an email to everyone on our survey list (whether they responded or not) with what you've learned from the feedback you received.

### ☐ 2. Share analysis with firm leaders.

- Make your survey scores transparent and available to all leaders across your firm.
- Focus your analysis bottom up (if possible). Instead of leading with the mindset "the firm needs to do these things" you lead with "our clients are telling us we need to improve in these areas."

**BEST PRACTICE**

*We recommend the "2-1-1" follow up methodology. First things first - thank anyone who took the time to give you feedback. Take the opportunity to 'toot your own horn' by sharing 2 things you learned that you're doing really well. Next, share 1 area you learned you can improve on. And finally, share 1 action you plan to take right away based on the feedback.*

### ☐ 3. Discuss findings firm-wide.

- Don't keep survey results sequestered to the managing partners or shareholders. Foster a sense of ownership around the firm's satisfaction metrics by sharing results openly.
- Provide employees with visibility into areas of improvement to encourage team-wide problem-solving and improvement efforts.

### ☐ 4. Segment scores to identify areas for focus.

- How do your satisfaction metrics vary by location? By practice area? Segmenting your scores will ensure that your firm strategically focuses efforts and takes action where it matters most.

## ☐ 5. Celebrate service wins.

- Noticing a trend in positive feedback from your clients? Identify it and celebrate it both publicly (to the entire company) and privately (to the team involved). Understanding what works makes all the difference in your improvement strategy.
- Did your firm beat its goal for overall client satisfaction? Are there specific accounts that you focused on for improved service? Goals and milestones will help ensure you have every opportunity to rally the troops internally and communicate your commitment to service quality to the world at large.

## ☐ 6. Get to the 'why' on service issues.

- Take the opportunity to dive deep with respondents who provide low satisfaction scores. What is driving their dissatisfaction? Are there trends across accounts / clients that can be addressed at the process-level?
- Remember, the most important thing to do when you become aware of a service issue is to take action to recover and resolve. The faster you are able to address an unhappy client (real-time is preferable), the more likely you are to build trust and loyalty with a meaningful response and immediate action.

## ☐ 7. Set goals for your firm's next survey.

- What is your NPS goal company-wide? Does it vary by client? How about a goal for individual locations or practice areas?
- You may choose to focus on a threshold metric or year-over-year improvement, but don't forget that the first step towards improvement is measurement! Even if you don't reach your goals next year, you will learn an amazing amount of valuable information in the process.

**BEST PRACTICE**

*If your survey initiative has identified multiple areas that require improvement, prioritize one or two specific elements to focus your team's efforts on. Chances are, you'll still see improvement across the board without daunting goals that can be difficult to rally around.*

# READY. SET. GO!

Congratulations! You're off to the races with your next survey initiative. We hope you find these checklists to be a valuable resource as you design and execute your satisfaction survey program. Be sure to follow us on social media for access to upcoming survey resources and accounting industry insights, to share your ideas for future resources, and to showcase how you're using these checklists in the field. Onward!

# ABOUT INAVERO

At Inavero, we believe it's ***good business*** for accounting firms to place client satisfaction at the heart of their growth strategy. Since 2015, the Inavero team has worked with accounting firms across the United States to design, deploy, and analyze client satisfaction surveys. We launched the Best of Accounting program to recognize accounting firms providing exceptional service quality as rated by their clients and job candidates. In 2017, we found that clients of Best of Accounting award winners were more than 4x more likely to be satisfied than the average accounting firm client.

If you are interested in speaking with a member of our team about the Inavero survey program—call 1 (800) 921-2640, or fill out our contact form and one of our consultants will follow up with you in 24 hours.

Fill out our contact form

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