State-of-the-Art Research Operations

RTI International offers research data collection and data management services at our state-of-the-art, access-controlled Research Operations Center. We deploy sophisticated systems and processes for interviewing, quality monitoring, respondent locating, sample mapping, data capture, and fulfillment.

These centralized capabilities are complemented by a nationally distributed home-based interviewer workforce. Across our survey projects, RTI employs approximately 1,800 trained survey interviewers and supervisors distributed across the country in all time zones.

RTI
INTERNATIONAL

RTI's Research Operations Center in Raleigh, North Carolina, houses the staff and infrastructure for telephone, field, and mail surveys. Our data collection staff of 450 specialists is managed by more than 40 supervisors who conduct training and mentoring and monitor performance for all projects.

Survey Research Projects

Each year, our Research Operations Center

- Supports more than 50 projects
- Handles more than 5 million phone calls
- Processes 1.5 million pieces of mail
- Scans 1 million pages of questionnaires and other documents
- Abstracts more than 100,000 administrative records.

The center complies with the confidentiality and data security guidelines set forth by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in *Recommended Security Controls for Federal Information Systems and Organizations*. We can accommodate both low- and moderate-risk projects, as defined by NIST's Federal Information Processing Standards Publication 199, *Standards for Security Categorization of Federal Information and Information Systems*.

Multilingual Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) Capabilities

The Research Operations Center includes 240 networked CATI stations used by approximately 450 data collection specialists who collect data to inform a broad range of public policy issues. Using a Citrix-based virtual call center, we augment our centralized data collection staff by integrating home-based interviewers with equivalent supervision.

RTI conducts telephone data collection using a CATI system that supports high-quality survey research by automating sample management tasks, survey calling protocols, and

High-Capacity Telephone Survey Capabilities

- 240 networked telephone interview stations
- 450 data collection specialists
- 40 supervisors
- Multiple shifts, 7 days/week
- Unlimited virtual interviewing capacity
- Data collection in seven languages

case routing rules. The system records all contact attempts and provides summary and case-specific tracking reports for survey managers.

We use Voice over Internet Protocol technology for sophisticated inbound call routing and queuing, call recording for quality control and training purposes, and Web-based reporting and management tools. We can also support interviewing and tracing capabilities anywhere on RTI's data network, including offices outside North Carolina.

Approximately 10% of our data collection specialists are bilingual or multilingual and regularly conduct interviews in Spanish and six other languages.

Training in Critical Interviewer Skills

With two 35-seat multimedia training rooms, the Research Operations Center is equipped for instructor-led training and small group sessions suitable for demonstrating concepts, conducting hands-on learning, and testing comprehension.

We supplement classroom training with a multimedia application known as iLearning, developed by RTI. Using iLearning, our field and telephone interviewers can access standardized, high-quality training courses—in general and project-specific skills—from remote locations. We have created more than 36 courses to develop critical skills such as refusal aversion, respondent tracing, and questionnaire navigation.

Real-Time and Post-survey Quality Monitoring

We use direct observation, silent monitoring, computer audio-recorded interviewing, verification interviews, and survey data reviews to authenticate interviews and ensure that proper protocols are followed. Our in-house quality evaluation system, QUEST, enables both real-time and post-survey monitoring to provide

- Actionable feedback to improve interviewer performance
- Specific data on problems presented by complex, challenging, or sensitive questions
- Inter-rater reliability metrics that can help train monitors and minimize rater variability
- The ability to review 100% of interviews in case of suspected malfeasance or falsification.

Our survey sponsors can access recorded sessions using a secure Web portal and thereby actively participate in quality monitoring.

Cost-Effective Respondent Tracing

Tracing is the art of locating/finding respondents who may have relocated since being selected as a sample member or participating in an initial wave of a longitudinal survey. RTI's proven methods for locating hard-to-reach respondents improves response rates and minimizes nonresponse bias.

Tracing is customized for each project and incorporates the cohort profile, known tracing identifiers, and supplemental information derived from known data. We select appropriate reference databases based on the age and source of the information, the method of data collection, and the project's schedule and budget.

RTI tracing specialists use a custom management system to support batch and interactive tracing efforts. The system tracks all tracing steps attempted for each case and provides individual and summary status information for survey managers. By linking the tracing system to our telephone interviewing system, we can, when appropriate, immediately interview a sample member when he or she is located.

RTI takes great care to protect personally identifiable information (PII) used to trace respondents.

- All tracing information is stored separately from survey data in a secure location behind RTI's firewalls and under appropriate access controls.
- All tracing staff members complete confidentiality and nondisclosure certification training and receive a 7-year federal and state criminal background check.

- We establish data use and security agreements that protect PII with credit bureaus, commercial data providers, and other vendors and partners.

Mapping and Sampling Services

In support of area household and other surveys, RTI uses state-of-the-art hardware and software to quickly generate accurate segmented maps for use by field staff. Our field staff use the maps to mark the location of houses, businesses, and other dwellings and create address listings, then return the segment maps to our statistical services group, which uses them to draw the sample for data collection.
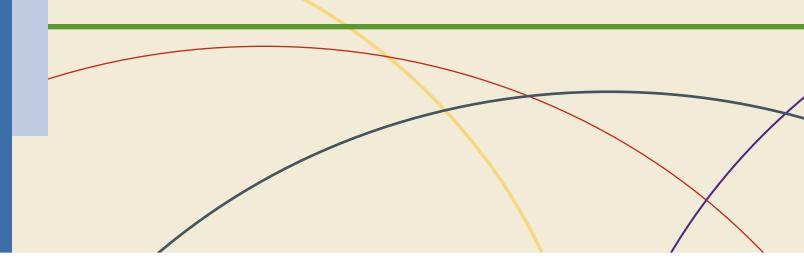
Our cost-efficient, automated map production system—based on U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line™ files—can support the demands of large-scale area household surveys, which may require tens of thousands of maps, as well as the needs of numerous concurrent survey efforts.

Records Abstraction

RTI employs approximately 100 record abstraction specialists to support the full range of data collection projects by extracting, coding, and entering data from course catalogues, school transcripts, health records, billing invoices, and other types of administrative records.

Our abstractors specialize in specific data forms and systems and are trained to identify and acquire missing items and correct inaccurate data.

Mail Surveys, Data Capture, and Fulfillment

RTI has decades of experience in designing and conducting mail surveys of individuals, households, and businesses in the United States and other countries.

We design effective questionnaires and implement efficient mail survey procedures that maximize response rates. Our processes and procedures are scalable to accommodate surveys and samples of all sizes—from mailing a one-page letter to a few hundred survey participants, to shipping boxes of biospecimen collection kits and ancillary materials to hundreds of interviewers, to shipping tens of thousands of data collection packages directly to residential respondents.

Using a fully automated survey control system, we are able to monitor each survey instrument from initial mailing through data collection. Our system incorporates high-volume mail preparation hardware and software for automated, efficient collating, inserting, and envelope sealing.

Mail Survey Experience Across Subpopulations

RTI has successfully conducted surveys of

- College graduates
- Nurses
- School teachers
- School administrators
- Elderly persons
- Unions
- Private employers
- Public agencies
- Industry groups.

Managing and Processing Incentives

We have secure storage, trained staff, and appropriate processes to manage and process monetary and non-monetary incentives.

Validated Data Capture Systems

RTI's data capture team focuses on the receipting, batching, editing, coding, scanning, and data entry of hard copy forms and the coordination of long-term records storage and retention. Our systems are validated for CFR Part 11 regulated studies. Completed questionnaires and other documents returned by respondents are scanned and managed by an automated receipt control and document management system. With state-of-the-art equipment and applications, we can enter respondent information quickly and accurately, enabling faster data analysis.

More Information

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RTI International is one of the world's leading research institutes, dedicated to improving the human condition by turning knowledge into practice. Our staff of more than 3,700 provides research and technical services to governments and businesses in more than 75 countries in the areas of health and pharmaceuticals, education and training, surveys and statistics, advanced technology, international development, economic and social policy, energy and the environment, and laboratory testing and chemical analysis. For more information, visit www.rti.org.

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