

Introduction

The International Field Directors and Technologies Conference (IFD&TC) is a voluntary organization of practitioners of survey data collection for nonprofit organizations. Its 1993 charter describes the IFD&TC as providing “an opportunity for survey research personnel who are involved in the direction of survey field operations, the technological aspects of survey data collection, and their management to meet and exchange ideas and information at an annual conference.¹” This entry describes the current focus and somewhat unusual characteristics of the IFD&TC as a professional organization, its membership and governance, and its origins and development from predecessor organizations.

The Conference

The intent of the IFD&TC (according to its Charter) “is to provide **informal** [emphasis supplied] interaction between field director, field technology, and survey management personnel of a type not usually available in professional conventions or through professional journals. The sessions [are] informal and focus on work in progress or recently completed, and on exchanges of information, practices, and opinions on relevant subjects of common interest. Finished papers ready for publication, public distribution, or production in official formal proceedings are not required [and not encouraged].”

Extensive time is provided for discussion during sessions and for casual interchange

¹ <http://www.ifdte.org/charter.htm>. As both of the authors of this entry were among the authors of the original Field Technologies Charter which became the Charter of the merged organization, we feel comfortable in quoting it at length.

during lengthy breaks between sessions. Because the attendees generally do not represent organizations in competition with each other, the discussion also are unusually frank, open, and mutually sharing. These characteristics have fostered strong personal loyalty by regular attendees and a welcoming attitude toward those new to the field.

Presentations frequently focus on the practical aspects of survey data collection by personal interviews, telephone interviews, mail questionnaires, e-mail, the web, and by FAX. Topics often include: the hiring, training, and supervision of interviewers; methods of improving response rates; and the technical issues of designing and managing computer-assisted personal, telephone, web, and multi-mode surveys.

The annual conference is typically held in May, immediately following the annual conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. The IFD&TC is typically held in the same city (or a nearby city) as AAPOR; starting with an informal party on a Sunday evening and continuing through Wednesday morning. For details about the conference, see the IFD&TC web site.

To limit conference size and to maintain the tradition of openness, candor, sharing, and informality, attendance restrictions are part of the charter. Attendance is limited to “persons involved in survey research who have responsibility for field direction, technological aspects, or management of survey data collection, and who are associated with academic institutions, government agencies, or other nonprofit organizations.¹” Speakers from profit making organizations have been invited to attend sessions on topics of common interest. No organization may send more than 16 attendees, and these must be

divided between field director and field technology interest areas. All attendees are encouraged to participate in the program as presenters, facilitators, chairs, panelists, etc. The 2007 conference had about 250 attendees; a conference size the organizers and members have found appropriate for a good mix of topics and informal interaction. While the bulk of the attendees are from the United States, major contingents generally attend from organizations in Canada, Great Britain, and the Netherlands with less frequent attendance from other countries.

Membership and Governance

There are no dues or membership fees beyond conference registration. The active membership consists of persons in attendance at each annual conference. The IFD&TC mailing list consists of those who have attended any of the past 10 conferences. Each year nearly half of the participants are first time attendees, often people who are relatively new to survey data collection. They often regard the conference as a learning experience and an opportunity to establish a network with more experienced members of the field.

The conference includes an open meeting at which the officers of the organization are elected and the sites and dates of future meetings are chosen. Those in attendance at that conference are the voting membership. The only officers are the two program chairs, one each for field directors and field technologies for the next two years plus a treasurer. The organization is incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia. An active web site is maintained at <http://www.ifdtdc.org>.

History

In 1951, Charles F. Cannell organized a successful but non-repeating conference on “Field Methods in Sample Interview Surveys.” In 1968, John Scott of the University of Michigan following similar concepts authored “A Suggestion for a Conference on Field Problems in Survey Research,” which established the continuing Field Directors Conference (FDC), which later became the IFD&TC. The FDC was held annually through 1988, with attendance growing from the 20’s to 65. It is significant among the history of professional organizations that FDC had 26 successful annual meetings with no written charter. At that time, each participating organization was allowed only two attendees plus two more on the program. In 1988, CATI had become a more frequent topic and a need was felt to expand the meetings from their 1½ day length and add a focus for those interested in the technical side of survey data collection. William Nicholls of the U.S. Bureau of the Census convened a meeting with seven other FDC regulars and they wrote a charter for a Field Technologies Conference.

From 1989 through 1993 the FDC and FTC had separate programs and registrations and met for 1½ days each, consecutively in the same locale. In 1993 a joint meeting of the attendees adopted a common charter, based on the FTC charter, and the IFD&TC as it presently exists was formed.

Authors

Shapard Wolf, Arizona State University

William L. Nicholls, II, U. S. Bureau of the Census (Retired)

Cross-references

American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR)

Field director

Further Readings

Cannell, C. (Ed.) (1951) *Field Methods in Sample Interview Surveys* (Conference Proceedings). Retrieved November 21, 2007 from http://www.ifdte.org/cannell_report.htm

IFD&TC (2007). *Past Conferences*. Retrieved October 22, 2007 from http://www.ifdte.org/past_conferences.htm

Scott, J. (1968). *A Suggestion for a Conference on Field Problems in Survey Research*. Retrieved October 22, 2007 from http://www.ifdte.org/scott_memo.htm

Wolf, S. (1998). *A Brief History: International Field Directors and Technologies (1993-Present), Field Technologies (1989-1992), and Field Directors (1951-1992)*. Retrieved October 22, 2007 from <http://www.ifdte.org/history.htm>

References

IFD&TC (1993). *IFD&TC Charter (as amended 1999)*. Retrieved October 22, 2007 from <http://www.ifdte.org/charter.htm>