

TRELLIS RESEARCH

Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS) Process to Participate

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Participation Process

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Trellis will partner with you to navigate your IRB review process

It is important to check with your institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to determine if a full review is necessary. Oftentimes an IRB will waive or expedite review due to the low-risk nature of the project, but some IRBs may want to review the study before approving on campus. Your Trellis contact will work with you to provide all materials necessary for IRB review and to obtain all necessary IRB documentation of waived review and/or approval.

Note for IRB approval: To encourage response rates and protect student anonymity, Trellis will not provide participating institutions student-level responses from the SFWS. Trellis will obtain student consent to potentially use their educational records in analysis of survey responses.

Please submit a letter providing confirmation of institutional participation in the Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS). This letter should be signed by a senior campus official (e.g., President, Vice President, Dean of Students, etc.) and must include:

- Permission to conduct research on campus, pending all necessary institutional processes and approvals.
- Permission to share publicly that the institution participated in the Student Financial Wellness Survey. Trellis requires this permission in order to highlight the national footprint of the survey.
- A statement describing if an IRB review will be needed or if it will be waived or expedited.

The [letter](#) can be submitted electronically with a digital signature. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to your Trellis contact.

Sample Letter of Institutional Awareness/Support

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to provide confirmation that [College/University] is participating in the Student Financial Wellness Survey, implemented by Trellis. I am aware that Trellis intends to conduct research at our institution by administering an online survey to a sample of our students.

As [Title], I grant Trellis permission to conduct research at [College/University], pending all necessary institutional processes and approvals. I confirm that [IRB review is not required; Exempt IRB review is required; Expedited IRB review is required; Full IRB review is required]. I also grant permission for Trellis to share publicly that [College/University] participated in the Student Financial Wellness Survey.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact my office at [phone number] or [email address].

Sincerely,

Name

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Data needed to administer the survey

Trellis will need student contact information to send unique links to the survey and certain student data fields to reduce survey burden and track response representativeness. Institutions will provide a roster of students via secured file transfer to Trellis after the fall semester census date, but no later than September 25th, 2023.

The file should contain information for enrolled undergraduates aged 18 and over. Institutions with undergraduate enrollment above 10,000 students may provide a random sampling of 5,000 undergraduate students from their population.

Please provide the contact and demographic information outlined in the table below. A data dictionary detailing the format of the data request will be provided by your Trellis contact after your institution provides the letter of institutional support. Your Trellis contact will also provide instructions to set up the secure FTP (File Transfer Protocol) system. Data files should be provided in CSV format. **PLEASE DO NOT SEND ANY FILES CONTAINING STUDENT DATA THROUGH EMAIL, ONLY THROUGH OUR SECURE CRUSH FTP SYSTEM.**

SFWS Data Request: Institutional Sample and Demographic Fields

FIELD NAMES	DESCRIPTION
Email 1	Institutionally assigned email address
Email 2	Secondary email address for the student
First Name	Student first name
Last Name	Student last name
Unique SFWS Student Identifier (Preferably not the official institutional student ID)	It is our preference that this not be the official student ID. A unique student identifier that can be used with a crosswalk to potentially match survey responses to future data elements provided by the institution for additional analysis. If there are issues creating a unique identifier that is not the official institutional student ID, please discuss with your Trellis contact.
Age	Age of student (Not date of birth)
Race/Ethnicity	Race/Ethnicity of student
Gender	Gender of student
Credit Hours	The number of credit hours the student had enrolled in for the semester
Total Credits Earned	Total credit hours earned at institution as of the end of the prior semester
Cumulative GPA	Current cumulative GPA on a 4.0 scale

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Effective promotion will ensure robust student participation

Trellis will work with your institution to encourage student participation in the survey. This includes:

Trellis will provide a recommended schedule and sample email language for your institution to communicate to students about the survey. This communication can improve survey response rates by legitimizing the third-party survey invitation students receive. We request that your institution send a “heads up” email to students in the week prior to the survey to inform them that it is coming, and at least one reminder email during the survey implementation.

Coordinate with Trellis any additional student incentives to participate. Promoting the survey and providing incentives are good ways to get higher response rates from your students. Trellis will provide survey-wide incentives across all participating institutions. However, providing your own incentives and educating students about the importance of completing the survey is highly encouraged and on average can increase your response rate by two to three percentage points. Your Trellis contact will consult with you about best practices for promoting and providing incentives.

Data Stewardship

Data sharing and FERPA considerations

Your Trellis contact is available to discuss Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations and how institutions that have participated in prior SFWS implementations interpreted the permissibility to provide the SFWS data requests. For additional context on data sharing, you can also visit the resources below.

- U.S Department of Education's student privacy website: <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/>
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) Data Sharing Decision Tree: https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/NASFAA_Data_Sharing_Decision_Tree.pdf

Types of data and records

- **Survey response data:** Survey response data refers to all student-level information collected through Trellis' SFWS tool as a component of participation in the study.
- **Education records:** Student-level records may be used to provide context and analysis for response data making the resulting reports more decision-focused for the institution. Students will be fully informed of Trellis' data security and records retention protocol and informed of potential risks associated with sharing data with personally identifiable information. Proof of digital consent will be stored in a secure, password-protected folder on Trellis' secured servers.

Storage and destruction

Survey response data and education records will be located on Trellis' servers, will be password protected, and will be accessible only from computers connected to Trellis' internal network. All computers will be locked and password protected when not in use. Furthermore, access to the files will be limited to the Research team with role-based access.

All digital copies of personally-identifiable survey response data or personally-identifiable education records from the SFWS data transfers from institutions will be deleted no later than 18 months from the survey close date. All digital copies of de-identified survey response data and education records held by the SFWS will be deleted no later than ten years from the survey implementation date

Data Security

Trellis Company has nearly 40 years of experience as responsible stewards of student data. Trellis adheres to a consolidated matrix of security controls that incorporates NIST Moderate Controls, GLBA, and a number of other security frameworks. Data stores are maintained on encrypted network SAN storage in compliance with NIST moderate controls. Our servers are maintained to those same controls, using CIS benchmarks. Identity and Access Management also adheres to NIST moderate controls. Access is role-based and denied by default. All data is backed up for recovery purposes and stored on encrypted media. Data will be destroyed according to the Student Financial Wellness Survey policies described previously. Trellis has a strict asset disposal procedure. All storage media, such as hard drives or tapes, are destroyed and rendered unrecoverable prior to disposal.

About Trellis Research

Trellis Research provides colleges and policymakers insight into student success through the lens of college affordability. With more than three decades of experience on the forefront of issues such as student debt, student loan counseling, and financial barriers to attainment, our research team continues to explore the role of personal finance and financial aid in higher education.

About Trellis

Trellis Company (www.trelliscompany.org) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation focused on helping people leverage the power of post-secondary education and learning to improve their quality of life and the communities where they live.