

## New Survey Policy for Communities

Reflecting the increased visibility of and interest in technical communication, STC is receiving a growing number of requests for surveys of our members' activities. Some of these, such as the Aberdeen Group's study, conducted last year, titled *The Next-Generation Product Documentation Report: Getting Past the "Throw It over the Wall" Approach* (see the article summarizing this report in the May 2007 issue of *Intercom* or visit [www.aberdeen.com](http://www.aberdeen.com) for more information) can be of great value to STC and its members by providing valuable information to support the profession's continued advance. One of the side effects of the heightened interest, however, is what statisticians call "respondent fatigue"—or what happens when too many surveys are conducted. Such fatigue leads to lower response rates, less accurate answers, and—perhaps of greatest concern—the growing irritation of those being continuously surveyed.

After learning of this phenomenon, STC's Board of Directors discussed looking into the number of surveys that members receive from both chapters and special interest groups (SIGs), as well as those sponsored or endorsed by the Society staff. STC strongly prefers to "self-police" the survey process rather than set a formal policy identifying a specific number of surveys that may be distributed. As part of the self-regulation process, STC would like to make communities aware of the possibility of respondent fatigue.

So that the Society office may remain cognizant of the number of surveys that communities are interested in distributing, the Board recommends that individual communities set their own limits on the number of surveys that they conduct.

Communities need to obtain Society office approval for surveys of a substantive nature—defined as those that seek to collect information in the purview of the Society as a whole. Examples would include a survey examining issues affecting technical communicators working in the banking field, or one that explores training needs or certification issues within the technical communication profession. Surveys related to community matters, such as those requesting ideas about speakers and topics that members would like to see at community meetings, do not require Society office approval.

In addition, please note that if a community wishes to engage Society staff in the survey process, or plans to ask the Society office to publish or otherwise distribute survey results, then Society office approval is needed.

To obtain approval to conduct a survey for your community or for more information, please contact Maurice Martin, Director of Communication

## STC Scholarship Applications Due February 15

The deadline for receipt of applications for STC scholarships is **February 15, 2008**. Four scholarships of \$1,500 each will be awarded, two to graduate students and two to undergraduates. Application forms and additional information can be found on the STC Web site at [www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01\\_national.asp](http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01_national.asp). Completed applications should be sent to the following address:

Scott DeLoach  
834 C Dekalb Avenue NE  
Atlanta, GA 30307

STC scholarships benefit students enrolled in technical communication programs at universities, colleges, junior colleges, and technical schools. Since the program's inception in 1971, the Society has awarded more than \$465,000 to deserving students. ❶

and Marketing, at [maurice@stc.org](mailto:maurice@stc.org).

Thank you very much for your cooperation. Keeping the Society office informed about any substantive surveys you conduct helps it gauge the risk of respondent fatigue and both identify and prevent duplicate efforts. ❷

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