



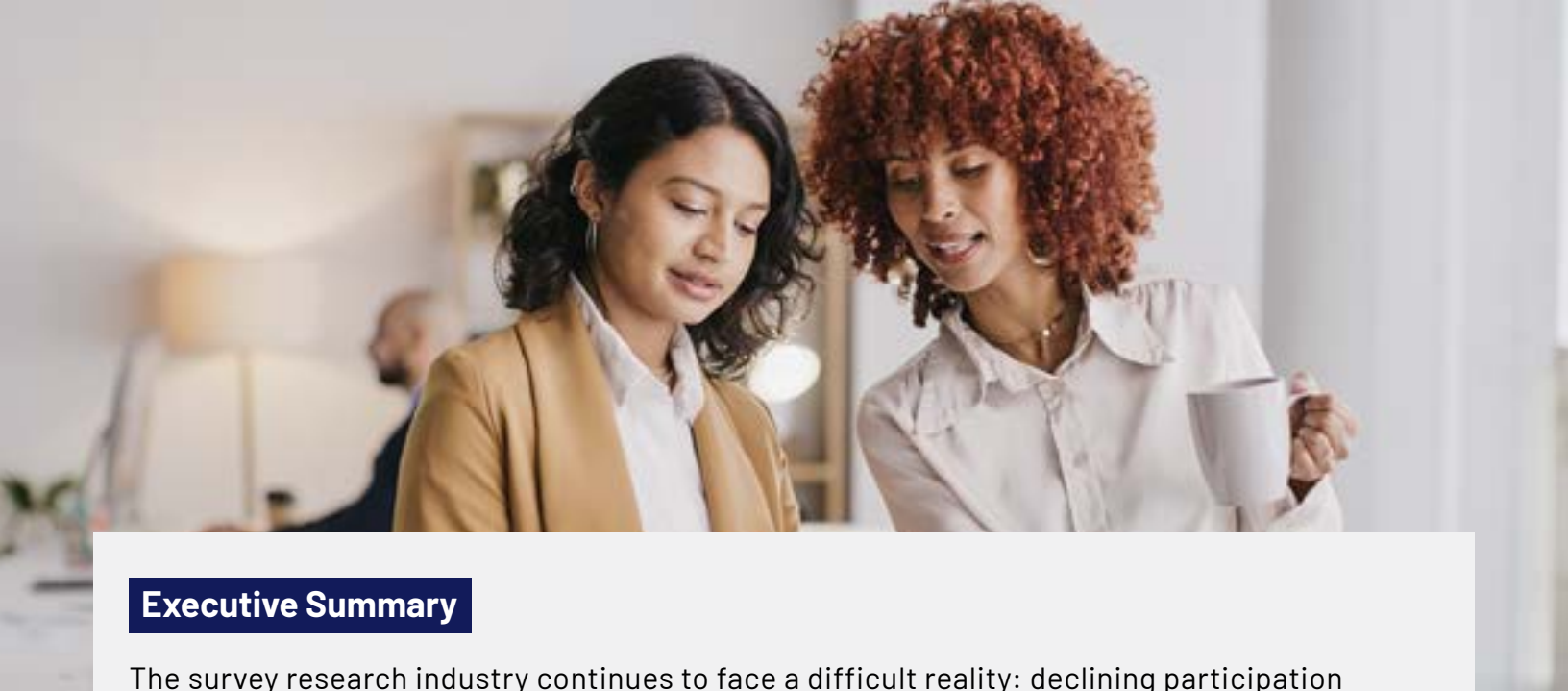
PANEL MEMBER FIRST 2.0

How a Human-Centered
Panel Strategy Is Defying
Industry Trends

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Executive Summary

The survey research industry continues to face a difficult reality: declining participation rates, increasing respondent fatigue, growing panel attrition, and rising concerns about data quality. Researchers across academia, government, and the private sector have documented persistent challenges associated with falling survey response rates and participant engagement. Studies from the U.S. Census Bureau and other survey methodologists describe declining survey response rates as an industry-wide challenge that increases costs and threatens data quality (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024a), (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024b), (Eggleston, 2024).

Yet amid these headwinds, Ipsos' KnowledgePanel has experienced the opposite trajectory.

Since implementing a Panel Member First philosophy in 2023, KnowledgePanel has achieved:

01

Three consecutive years of increasing survey completion rates

02

An overall completion rate reaching 70% through June 2026, up from 55% in 2022

03

Three consecutive years of declining panel attrition

04

Monthly attrition reduced to just 2.5% through June 2026, down from 4.8% in 2022

These outcomes are especially noteworthy because they occurred during a period when many researchers have reported growing difficulty maintaining engagement and participation in survey panels (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024a), (Eggleston, 2024).

The lesson is both simple and profound: when **panelists are treated as valued members**

rather than sample inventory, they are more likely to participate, stay engaged, and provide high-quality data.

This paper outlines the evolution of the Panel Member First approach and demonstrates why putting panelists at the center of panel management is not merely good ethics. It is good science and good business.

The Industry's Participation Problem

For more than a decade, survey researchers have grappled with declining participation. Recent research published in the *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology* found evidence that the growing number of survey requests individuals receive contributes to lower response rates over time (Eggleston, 2024).

Similarly, researchers at the U.S. Census Bureau note that survey response rates have been declining across the survey industry, creating concerns about nonresponse bias and increasing data collection costs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024a), (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024b).

At the same time, attrition remains one of the most significant threats to longitudinal and panel research. Researchers consistently identify participant dropout as a major source of potential bias and a challenge requiring active management (Cabrera-Álvarez & Lynn, 2025), (Alrababah et al., 2026), (Maris, 2026).

The conventional response to these problems has often focused on statistical correction after participation has already declined. The Panel Member First philosophy takes a different approach: prevent disengagement before it occurs.

The Core Idea: Put the Member Before the Measurement

In 2024, Ipsos publicly introduced the concept of a Panel Member First approach to KnowledgePanel. The central premise was straightforward: the quality of research depends on the quality of the participant experience. A panel cannot be representative, accurate, or sustainable if the people within it feel overburdened, undervalued, or ignored (Bertoni et al., 2024).

The philosophy was built around several principles:



Treat panelists as people, not a commodity.



Respect their time.



Minimize unnecessary burden.



Communicate clearly with transparency and intentionality.



Reward participation fairly.



Continuously listen and improve (Bertoni et al., 2024).

At the time, the argument was largely conceptual, supported by promising early results.

Three years later, the evidence is unmistakable.

The Results: Performance That Continues to Improve

When Panel Member First was first implemented, KnowledgePanel experienced a meaningful increase in completion rates and reductions in attrition (Bertoni et al., 2024).

What makes the story even more compelling today is that the improvements did not plateau.

Through the first half of 2026, KnowledgePanel has achieved:



KnowledgePanel’s overall completion rate has increased year after year since the implementation of Panel Member First, reaching **70% through June 2026** from 55% in 2022.

In an environment where many organizations are struggling to maintain participation, this level of engagement demonstrates that respondent fatigue is not inevitable.

Rather, engagement is strongly influenced by how participants experience the research process.

2.5% Monthly Attrition

Equally important is what is happening between surveys.

Monthly attrition has continued to decline, falling to **2.5% through June 2026** from 4.8% in 2022.

Every panelist retained is one less panelist requiring replacement, one more voice preserved in the research, and one more opportunity to maintain representativeness over time.

Attrition reduction is often overlooked compared with recruitment, but from a panel management perspective it may be one of the most important performance indicators. Recruiting a panelist is expensive. Retaining an engaged one is far more efficient.



Why the Approach Works

Respect Creates Engagement

The most effective retention strategy is not a retention strategy at all. It is respect.

KnowledgePanel actively manages respondent burden by carefully controlling survey frequency, limiting excessive demands, and designing surveys with participant experience in mind. This includes aggressive mobile optimization,

thoughtful questionnaire design, and avoiding unnecessarily long surveys (Bertoni et al., 2024).

When participation feels reasonable, panelists continue participating.

When participation feels like work, they leave.



Fairness Builds Trust

Panelists are contributing something valuable: their time, attention, opinions, and lived experiences.

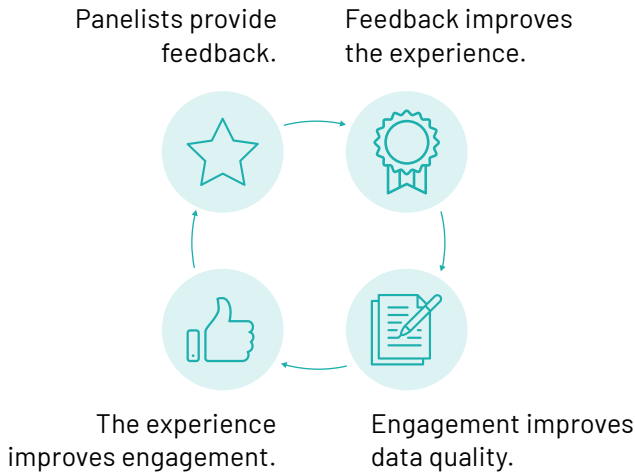
The Panel Member First philosophy recognizes this reality through fair incentives, targeted bonus programs, and proactive efforts to ensure underrepresented voices remain engaged (Bertoni et al., 2024).

Listening Improves the Experience

A defining feature of the Panel Member First approach is treating panelists as stakeholders in the design of the panel itself.

Ongoing feedback mechanisms, including direct requests for member feedback, provide actionable insight into what is working and what needs improvement (Bertoni et al., 2024).

This creates a virtuous cycle:



Why This Matters for Research Quality

Higher completion rates and lower attrition are not simply operational metrics.

They represent improvements in the quality of the underlying data.

When participation rates decline, researchers face a greater risk that certain segments of the population will be underrepresented. When panelists leave, longitudinal representation can erode over time. Researchers across government and academia have repeatedly highlighted these risks (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024a), (Cabrera-Álvarez & Lynn, 2025), (Maris, 2026).

By maintaining high participation and low attrition, KnowledgePanel preserves access to voices that might otherwise disappear from the research process.

This is particularly important for groups that are traditionally harder to engage and retain such as minorities, young adults, and those with high school or less educational attainment, among others.

The result is not only more efficient fieldwork but also more representative and reliable insights.

The Business Case for Panel Member First

The argument for Panel Member First is often framed as a respondent experience strategy.

That framing understates its impact.

Panel Member First is equally a business strategy.

Lower attrition means

- Reduced recruitment costs
- Lower replenishment requirements
- Greater panel stability
- Improved operational efficiency

Higher completion rates mean

- Faster fieldwork
- Lower incidence costs
- Better client experience
- More reliable project delivery

Most importantly, both contribute to stronger data quality.

In other words, the same practices that improve panelist experience also improve business performance.

That alignment is what makes the model sustainable.



Looking Ahead

The broader survey industry will likely continue facing participation challenges. Survey requests are increasing, attention is fragmenting, and respondents have more demands on their time than ever before (Eggleston, 2024), (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024a).

The response to these challenges cannot be purely technical.

Weighting adjustments, modeling techniques, and statistical corrections remain important. **But the most sustainable**

solution begins earlier, with the relationship between a panel and its members.

KnowledgePanel's experience over the last three years demonstrates that a different path is possible.

The lesson is clear:

The future of high-quality survey research belongs to organizations that put panel members first.

Citations:

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