UFSRC Questionnaire Development Procedures

At the University of Florida Survey Research Center (UFSRC), we can help investigators take a concept they would like to measure and translate an idea into a reliable survey question.

Review of Previous Studies
Whenever possible, we try to use questions that have already been validated. Many survey items have undergone a rigorous development process including those used by the American Community Survey (employment and housing) and Consumer Assessment of Health Plans Survey (health care utilization and satisfaction with providers). So checking for available items with a strong pedigree is the first step in our process.

Item Testing
When we need to write a new question, we subject it to testing by using appropriate techniques. This always incorporates professional review of our interviewing staff and investigators. We sometimes conduct "think aloud" exercises where a subject tells us what the words mean to them and points out confusing or vague terminology. We play mix-and-match by re-ordering parts of the question, or offering alternative versions of response scales. We try to use pretest subjects who are as close as possible to the target population. The process is always iterative, as observations from one session are incorporated into new versions. Some testing is done with individuals and we may use focus groups to encourage productive discussion and collect input from multiple participants at one time.

The testing is conducted in the mode planned for that survey's administration, and some of the item testing we do is to turn a reliable web survey item into a format for the ear, or move a phone survey item into a readable version for self-administration.

Questionnaire Testing
Once the items have been selected and tested, we need to put them together into a questionnaire. We do "card sort" exercises in which subjects put questions into a logical order and identify the items which are least threatening. We can also estimate the average elapsed time of administration.

Visual Design
If the questionnaire is to be administered by mail or web, then additional care needs to be taken to ensure that the respondent understands all directions and has cues as to how to navigate through the questionnaire, whether to choose one answer or all that apply, and how to skip over questions that don't apply.

Field Testing.
When time and budget permit, we can conduct a field test with a limited number of cases in order see how the questionnaire performs. We can listen to the interviews to ensure flow and understanding, and also produce a dataset to check that that the output will be usable.