The Engage West! committee is still discussing possibilities, but all measures will be taken to protect a respondent’s identity. The survey will be administered by a neutral, external, third party. Once that entity is chosen, we will work with them to ensure procedures to protect everyone.

Anonymity is typically protected using a three stage process that is totally automated. Users’ email will generate a random access key to get into the system and take the survey. That key is only recorded in the software and is used to make sure no one takes the survey twice. Once completed, an ID is generated (typically in numerical order) that in no way is associated with the key or the email.

Confidentiality is more complex (Baez, 2002; Kaiser, 2009), in part due to the size of some units and a process that has been termed deductive disclosure. This is the ability of someone to identify a particular respondent based on characteristics in the survey. For example, if you are the only female staff member in the unit who has been here less than five years and that data is reported to your supervisor, people may be able to deduce your identity. There are several methods for reducing this possibility. A two stage process during data cleaning and reporting is being explored. Data cleaning and reporting is not altering any data, rather simply removing those items that could be used for deductive identification. For example, demographics can be reported only within divisions (or institutionally should that be necessary), thus disassociating them with individual responses. Likewise, open-ended comments may only be reported institutionally or not at all. Therefore if someone reports in an open ended comment that their supervisor may not be entirely fair, there is no way to identify the respondent or the supervisor in question. If someone is reported by name and/or title, that information will also be removed. Data cleaning and reporting will, if possible, be fully automated using a process outlined by Sweeney (1996), who was able to eliminate 100% of potential personal identifiers in medical records using a complex series of algorithms.

Baez B. Confidentiality in qualitative research: Reflections on secrets, power and agency. Qualitative Research. 2002;2:35–58.
