

Questionnaires and Responses

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Easy
Cost	Low (up to \$1,000) Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000)
When might you use it	To discover community issues
Number of people required to help to organise	One - three people
Time to organise	Short (up to six weeks) Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Staff or volunteers; Access to expertise in developing questionnaires; Small trial group for trialling questionnaire and ensuring that the data you collect is the data you are seeking.
Innovation level	Low

Description

Questionnaires are the basic research tool used to collect information, and are usually developed and tested to ensure that they are easily understood and will collect the information required. Questionnaires ensure that exactly the same questions are presented to each person surveyed, and this helps with the reliability of the results. Questionnaires can be delivered via face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, self-complete forms, mail outs or online. Questionnaires can be distributed by email as well as posted or faxed. Response sheets can be collected at a workshop, or can be picked up at a workshop and mailed back. These can also be mailed out in ways that reduce postage costs, when they are included in routine mail-outs such as the distribution of fact sheets or accounts.

Objectives

- To measure of community opinion about an issues at a certain time or in a certain area.

Desired Outcome

- Information on which to base decisions about planning and management of community and/or natural resources.

Uses/Strengths

- Less personal than interviewing, their anonymity can encourage more honest answers.
- Works well to reach respondents who are widely scattered or live considerable distances away.
- Provides information from those unlikely to attend meetings and workshops.
- Permits expansion of the mail list.
- Can be used for statistical validation.
- Allows results to be extrapolated by subgroups.
- Allows the respondent to fill out at a convenient time.
- More economical and less labour intensive than interviews and telephone surveys as they provide larger samples for lower total costs.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Generally only useful for qualitative data.
- Low response rates can bias the results. Can involve follow up telephone calls and letters to encourage returns.
- Needs a return envelope/freepost address to encourage participation.
- Depends on a high degree of literacy.
- Wording of questions needs to be unambiguous to avoid bias, and should be pre-tested on a sample audience to ensure that you receive the information you desire.

Step by Step Guide

1. Draft questions. Keep as short as possible.
2. Trial questions with a small sample (pilot group) to determine whether they are unbiased, straightforward and not open to misinterpretation.
3. Indicate the purpose of the questionnaire at outset.
4. Include qualitative data (e.g. age, sex, address, education, etc.) to allow for further extrapolation of the results.
5. Include any new names/addresses in the mailing list.
6. Send out with printed information materials.
7. If the budget allows, provide free mail reply (stamped addressed envelope; freepost mailbox, etc.) to improve responses.
8. Document responses as part of the public involvement process.