

# Surveys

Engagement range	Consult
Difficulty level	Medium to Hard
Cost	Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000) High (over \$10,000)
When might you use it	To discover community issues To communicate an issue
Number of people required to help to organise	One -three people
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months) Long (over six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Staff/volunteers
Innovation level	Low

## Description

Surveys are a method used to collect information from a specific population. Surveys are used to gauge the level of public information about an issue and provide a 'snapshot' of attitudes and ideas at a particular time. They can be used to determine community attitudes or target a particular group.

Surveys can be used to collect broad general information from or about a large audience or specific information from targeted groups. Surveys can seek information that can be quantitative (facts and figures) and/or qualitative (opinions and values). Surveys can use questionnaires to collect information, and these can be delivered through face-to-face interviews, self-completion written forms, telephone surveys, or electronic surveys. (See also Questionnaires and Response Sheets)

For a well-conducted survey using a large, random sample, surveys are usually high cost. Small-scale surveys using opportunistic sampling and volunteers can be relatively low cost, but may not produce results that can be generalised beyond the specific people sampled.

Sampling so that you can generalise from your results to the general community or a specific segment of the community requires expert knowledge.

## Objective

- To collect information from community groups in relation to a particular issue or issue. The results of the surveys provide information about the demographics and/or opinions of a specific group of people. This information can permit decision-making bodies to make better informed decisions or to better inform the community in relation to an issue or proposal.

## Desired Outcome

- Information about a community and its opinions (e.g. a survey can indicate the number of people who support or oppose specific proposals, their reasons and their demographics).

## Uses/Strengths

- Provides traceable data.
- Can serve an educational purpose.
- When properly constructed using good sampling techniques can reach a broad, representative public or targeted group.
- Can derive varied information from the results.
- Can help in future planning.

## Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Poorly constructed surveys produce poor results.
- Can be expensive if surveying a large audience.
- Care must be taken that wording of questions is unambiguous to prevent skewed results.
- Care is needed in sampling to make sure representative samples are taken.
- Surveys with tick boxes are the fastest and easiest to process, however this limits the detail in the information collected.
- Can be seen as 'counting heads' without necessarily telling you what is in them.

## Step by Step Guide

1. Find out what is already known, and what relevant surveys are being done or planned elsewhere. This will avoid duplication, and will help establish what you need to find out from your survey.
2. Talk to locals with strong views and local knowledge to sharpen the focus of the questions.
3. Survey writing is a skill that improves with practice and feedback, so seek expert advice on the pitfalls and requirements of survey writing, but rely on your own understanding of the issue or topic.
4. Preliminary investigations (e.g. focus groups or interviews) with people on a 'convenience' basis (outside the Town Hall, or in a shopping centre) can help to develop some of the issues/range of questions needed.
5. Determine how the information is to be obtained. Surveys can be done by asking people questions through the mail (see Questionnaires) in personal interviews, or by a combination of methods.
6. Select your target audience. How will you sample them? Who in the community or organisation do you need to reach? How will you ensure that your survey gives a representation of the ideas of the group?
7. Draft the questionnaire or interview guide.
8. Trial this with a pilot study to ensure the answers will give you the information you wanted (check readability and clarity of questions).
9. Undertake the survey.
10. Collate and analyse the results.
11. Write a report and make available to those surveyed to appropriate authorities and to the media. If the report is lengthy and/or detailed, provide a synopsis of the key points.