



A community survey is a compilation of survey questions sent out to a specific audience, particularly those of a common community, to learn more about them. Community surveys give you valuable insights into what people and/or organizations want and value, thereby aiding in future planning and decision-making processes. For nonprofits, community surveys help understand people’s preferences about what issues they wish to support and how they want to extend their support.

Steps to conduct a successful community survey

1. Set your objectives for the survey. What do you want to learn about the community and how will the survey help you?
2. Determine how you will send your survey and how you will keep answers confidential. Options include:
 - a. Direct mail – this will require you to print surveys and provide return envelopes, possibly with postage page, which will remove a barrier and increase the return rate. This will also require you to collect and analyze all the data yourself, which is time consuming; however, depending on your population, this may be a good option if those being surveyed do not have access to the Internet or you do not have their email addresses.
 - b. Email – this will require you to use an online survey tool; however, most online survey tools will provide graphs and make data analysis very easy.
 - c. Phone – you can call your audience directly. This technique requires you to either record their answers or you’ll have to take notes as they talk. This could be a beneficial option as it will allow you to ask follow-up questions and get to know your community in a way that a direct mail or email survey doesn’t.
 - d. Door knocking – this method is time consuming and requires you to personally visit each community member you are hoping to survey; however, this method allows you to meet each person and establish a relationship, as well as ask follow-up questions and answer any questions they might have.
3. Decide if you will incentivize the survey. Incentives will increase the rate of return of your survey and could include monetary incentives, gift cards or coupons, or merchandise such as t-shirts or water bottles.
4. Develop your survey questions and make sure they are not biased. Having multiple people review your questions for bias is encouraged. Keep your survey short enough that people can quickly complete it and aren’t overwhelmed with the length (no more than 10 questions). There are three ways that you can frame your community survey questions:
 - a. Open-ended questions in which respondents write detailed answers.
 - b. Multiple choice questions in which they choose from given options.
 - c. A mixed questionnaire with both open-ended and multiple-choice questions.
5. Test the survey internally or on a focus group. Testing the survey helps you to work through any issues or confusion that may arise from particular questions.
6. Send the survey out to the target audience. Be sure to provide a “due date” and follow up with a reminder when that due date is getting near. Set the due date to be not too far into the future, but also give respondents time to complete the survey. Two weeks is a good amount of time.
7. Analyze the responses.





Example survey

Name:

Organization:

Email address:

Phone number:

Mission Statement: The [lake organization] is conducting a community survey to find local organizations and businesses who share a similar mission. The goal of the [lake organization] is to [protect and improve the water quality and fishery of lake for the benefit of the lake residents and general public]. Please provide your mission statement here:

Questions

- 1) Does your organization/business benefit from [name] lake?
- 2) If so, how?
- 3) Do you personally benefit from [name] lake?
- 4) If so, how?
- 5) Are there any issues you're concerned about regarding [name] lake? This could be an open-ended question, or you could provide options, such as:
 - a. Water quality
 - b. Water levels
 - c. Invasive species/weeds
 - d. Erosion
 - e. Overuse of lake (i.e., too much activity, too loud)
 - f. Decreased wildlife habitat/fishery
 - g. Algae
 - h. Other – provide a space for people to write in what other concerns they have.
- 6) Are you interested in partnering with [lake] organization to work on lake-related issues?
- 7) Please let us know how we can work together on future initiatives related to [name] lake?
 - a. Serve on the board of directors of [lake] organization
 - b. Serve on a committee of [lake] organization
 - c. Become a volunteer/lead a group of volunteers for [lake] organization
 - d. Invite a [name] lake property owner or board member to serve on your board
 - e. Organize a fundraiser
 - f. Provide educational materials
 - g. Other – provide a space for people to write in other possibilities

Remember to thank each respondent for their time and keep their answers confidential.

