
If you are using your questionnaire to monitor the success of activities you may also find our 'Monitoring and Evaluation' information sheet useful.

If you are collecting information to try to change council policy or procedures, or to campaign on an issue, we also have information sheets on 'State your case' and 'Organising a petition'.

For more detailed guidance on using questionnaires, and other aspects of community research, you may want to look at 'Community Research - Getting Started' which is produced by the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector, and available to download from their website at: <http://www.arvac.org.uk/docs/publications.html>



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Designing and using Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be used to find out:

- ★ if people want or need a new service (such as a playgroup or a youth club)
- ★ how successful or effective an event or project was
- ★ the opinions of a local community (such as plans to open a new supermarket, refuse collection services or changes to bus routes)

To be effective questionnaires should:

- ★ be easy to fill in
- ★ give you clear information that you will be able to understand and use
- ★ give respondents enough choice to express their views and opinions

To achieve this you need to think carefully about the content of your questionnaire, how you will persuade people to fill it in, and what you will do with the information afterwards.

Writing the questions

- ★ keep the questionnaire as short as possible
- ★ only ask questions that you really need to know about
- ★ use clear and simple language - avoid jargon, slang or technical terms
- ★ put straightforward questions at the beginning of the questionnaire, and more sensitive or complex questions towards the end
- ★ put the questions in a logical sequence, or group them
- ★ insert a category for 'don't know' or 'not applicable' where relevant
- ★ only include one topic per question.
For example, do not ask if people would like a new pelican crossing AND traffic calming measures in the same question. They may want one OR the other.

Closed questions

Closed questions come with a series of boxes that respondents can tick. They:

- ★ take less time to answer
- ★ are easier to analyse
- ★ limit the responses that can be given

See Appendix 1 for examples of open and closed questions

Open questions

Open questions give respondents space to answer in their own words. They:

- ★ take longer to answer
- ★ are more complicated to analyse
- ★ give people more freedom to say what they think or feel

Use closed questions for as many questions as possible, with possibly a few open questions to give respondents the opportunity to express their own thoughts, feelings or opinions.

See Appendix 1 for examples of open and closed questions

Designing the questionnaire

The appearance of the questionnaire will affect how many people take the trouble to complete it.

- ★ Explain clearly and briefly the purpose of the questionnaire
- ★ Give clear instructions on how to complete it
- ★ Space out the questions - dense print is off putting and will affect the response rate
- ★ Make sure there is enough space for people to write their answers
- ★ Remember to include the name of your organisation and contact details
- ★ Test your questionnaire on a couple of people and ask them:
 - ★ how easy it was to fill in
 - ★ if all the questions were clear
 - ★ if they think you have included anything that is not necessary or missed out anything important.

Other things to consider

Personal information and confidentiality

It is better to ask personal questions such as age, income or ethnic origin by offering grouped categories with tick boxes.

E.g. Which age group are you in?

1 - 15yrs 16-30yrs 31-45yrs 46 yrs and over

If you are asking for personal information, some people may prefer not give their name and address. Think about if you really need to ask for this information. What will you do with the questionnaires after you have evaluated them? Will you need to keep them in a safe place?

Bias and leading questions

Try not to ask questions in a way that will lead respondents to a particular answer.

For example, the following biased question:

Do you think the grass cutting service is an appalling waste of public money?

Yes No

Could be changed to:

*What do you think about the grass cutting service:
(tick as many boxes as you wish)*

It is good value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is a waste of money	<input type="checkbox"/>
It helps keep the estate looking tidy	<input type="checkbox"/>
It does nothing to improve the estate	<input type="checkbox"/>
It should be stopped	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want it to continue	<input type="checkbox"/>

Who do you want to complete the questionnaire?

Before you write the questionnaire you need to know who will be filling it in. This could be:

- ★ Members of your group
- ★ People who in live in a particular area
- ★ Users of a service
- ★ Everyone attending an event/course/activity

Distributing the questionnaires to everyone is not always feasible, so you can take a sample of people instead. However, it is good to try and get a good cross section of your members, users, or local residents.

You could do this in several ways, such as:

- ★ Everyone at your Annual General Meeting
- ★ Every tenth house in each local street
- ★ Everyone that uses your services during April

How will you ensure as many people as possible fill in the questionnaire?

It can be very difficult to get people to fill in questionnaires, so it is worth thinking about a few strategies to persuade people. Having a questionnaire that is short and easy to fill will make this a lot easier. You could also:

- ★ Explain to people why you are carrying out the questionnaire and encourage them to fill it in
- ★ Have volunteers to interview people and complete the questionnaire with them
- ★ Have a fixed time when you distribute the questionnaires and ask everyone to complete them and return them straight away (at an event, course or activity)
- ★ Provide a Freepost address or Stamped Addressed Envelopes (if you do this give a deadline by which questionnaires should be returned)
- ★ Enter all completed questionnaires into a prize draw

Are there potential respondents who cannot read and write in English?

If there are, consider offering people a range of ways that they can fill in the questionnaire, such as:

- ★ With a volunteer interviewer
- ★ With an interpreter
- ★ Written in their mother tongue

What will you do with the completed questionnaires?

Keep a record of how many blank questionnaires you give out, and count how many are returned to you. You will then be able to work out what percentage of people completed the questionnaire – your ‘response rate’.

If you give out 200 questionnaires and only 10 are returned, the responses you get are probably not very representative. However, if you give out 200 questionnaires and 150 are returned your information will have a lot more weight.

Counting responses

The easiest way to collect together all the responses is to create a tally chart on a sheet of paper or on the computer. It could look something like this: (see over)

You may be able to get more help with questionnaires and other research from the Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP). This team based at Brighton University offers free support to community and voluntary organisations which need some help or advice with doing research. Contact Polly Rodriguez on 01273 643229 or p.v.rodriguez@brighton.ac.uk to find out how they could help you. The CUPP Website has more information about this service.

<i>Number of questionnaires distributed</i>		90	
<i>Number of questionnaires completed</i>		52	
<i>% response rate</i>		57%	
		<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Q1. Age</i>			
<i>0-16yrs</i>		12	23%
<i>17-25 yrs</i>		23	44%
<i>26-59yrs</i>		10	19%
<i>60 yrs and over</i>		7	13%
<i>Q2. Which events did you attend in 2007</i>			
<i>Summer picnic</i>		28	53%
<i>Christmas party</i>		31	59%
<i>Drama workshops</i>		12	23%
<i>Film showings</i>		23	44%
<i>I have not attended any events</i>		4	1%

If you have used open questions you will need to record all the responses. It is worth seeing if there is a pattern, general trends, or suggestions, ideas or comments that need to be acted on.

You may want to analyse your findings in a bit more detail. This can be done by using a large sheet of squared paper and 'cross tabulation'.

	<i>0-16</i>	<i>17 - 25</i>	<i>26 - 59</i>	<i>60 & over</i>
<i>Summer picnic</i>				
<i>Christmas party</i>				
<i>Drama workshops</i>				
<i>Film showings</i>				
<i>I have not attended any events</i>				

Appendix: Sample questions

Examples of closed questions:

Which events did you attend in 2007:

- Summer Picnic
- Christmas Party
- Drama workshops
- Film showings
- I did not attend any events

How satisfied are you with the following services?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not satisfied
Grass cutting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refuse collection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recycling collection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School crossing patrol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you think Anyplace Estate would benefit from having a Playgroup?

- Yes No Don't know

Do you have children aged 2- 4 years? Yes No

Would you bring them to the Playgroup? Yes No n/a

Examples of open questions:

What improvements would you like to see in the waste recycling service?

.....

What new skills have you learnt on this course?

.....

Is there anything else you would like to see the group do?

.....

Sometimes you can mix open and closed questions:

Do you feel the drama workshops have:

(Tick as many boxes as you like)

Made you feel more confident

Helped you to improve you spoken English

Enabled you to make new friends

Helped you to think about issues that affect young people

Other (please specify)

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