

Designing and using questionnaires

A community group's guide to creating and using questionnaires.

Questionnaires can be used by community groups to find out things like:

- ♦ if people want or need a new service (such as a playgroup or a youth club)
- ♦ the impact a project or activity is having on people's lives
- ♦ the opinions of a community about an issue (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 you accurate information which reliably represents the respondents

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 into logical categories
- ♦ Give options for "don't know" or "not applicable" where relevant

Closed questions

Closed questions allow a limited range of responses, usually by using tick boxes.

Closed questions:

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

Here are some examples of closed questions:

How satisfied are you with the following services?			
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not satisfied
Grass cutting			
Refuse collection			
Recycling collection			
School crossing patrol			

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	
If yes, would you bring them to the Playgroup?	
Yes	
No	

Open questions

Open questions allow people 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

Here are some 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 the group to do?

Combining closed and open questions

It can be useful to ask closed questions to gather data that you can easily collate and analyse, and to include some open questions to give people a chance to give their thoughts and ideas. For example:

Why did you come to the drama workshops?	Tick as many as you like
To learn new skills	
To improve my English	
To meet people	
To feel more happy and confident	
Other (please write in your own words)	

Personal information and confidentiality

Gathering information about people's personal characteristics can help you to check whether you are reaching a range of different types of people (see our sheet *Equality and Diversity for small community groups*), but you should only collect this information if you are clear why you need it and how you will use it.

It is easier to interpret responses if you ask personal questions such as age, income or ethnicity by offering grouped categories with tick boxes. For example:

How old are you?	Please tick
Under 18	
18-25	
26-35	
36-45	
46-55	
56-65	
Over 65	

Only ask for people's names and addresses if you really need them. Asking this may put people off completing the questionnaire. Any personal information you collect about people must be stored securely, and only for as long as you need it.

Bias and leading questions

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

Do you think the grass cutting service is an appalling waste of public money?	Please tick
Yes	
No	

A better question would be:

What do you think about the grass-cutting service?	Please tick as many as you like
It is good value for money	
It is a waste of money	
It helps keep the estate looking tidy	
It should be stopped	
I want it to continue	

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
- ♦ If you make a paper questionnaire, space out the questions – dense print can put people off
- ♦ If you use an electronic questionnaire, the simplest thing is to use a website such as Survey Monkey¹, which will lay out your questionnaire for you
- ♦ Remember to include the name and contact details of your organisation
- ♦ 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 understand the purpose of the questionnaire.

¹ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

Who will 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 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 so that they understand the purpose
- ♦ 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)
- ♦ Use an electronic survey so that people can complete it online, and send email reminders
- ♦ Enter all completed questionnaires into a prize draw

Your data will be more representative if you get a high response rate. For example, if there are 200 houses on a street, and you only get 5 responses to your survey, the results may not represent the views of many residents. If you get 100 responses, you can be more confident that the results represent the views of the street.

Will everyone be able to read and understand the questionnaire?

There may be people who need the questionnaire in a different format, because, for example, they don't read English or have a visual impairment. 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 different languages and / or in large print

What will you do with the completed questionnaires?

Counting responses

The easiest way to collect together all the responses is to use a website such as Survey Monkey². Even if you have used paper questionnaires, you can enter the responses into Survey Monkey and it will calculate all the data for you. It will produce graphs and charts of your data, which will make it easy and quick to understand it.

If you would prefer not to use a computer, you can create a tally chart on a sheet of paper. It could look something like this:

Question 1. How old are you?			
0 – 16 yrs	-11	12	23%
17 – 25yrs	-111	23	44%
26 – 59yrs		10	19%
60yrs and over	-11	7	13%
Question 2. Which events did you attend in 2017?			
Summer picnic	111	28	53%
Christmas party	 1	31	59%
Drama workshops	-11	12	23%
Film showings	-111	23	44%
I have not attended any events	1111	4	1%

² <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

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

Activity attended	0-16 yrs	17 – 25 yrs	26 – 59 yrs	Over 60
Summer picnic				
Drama workshops				
Film showings				
I have not attended any events				

If you have used open questions you will need to read all the responses. Try to spot patterns or general trends. You may find it helpful to categorise the comments, so that you can easily see if there are many people with the same view as each other. For example, if you asked "What improvements would you like to see in the waste recycling service?" you could count the number of responses that included different themes, such as reliability, frequency, types of waste, etc. You could then get a better understanding of which issues are important to most people.

More help and information

We have more information about:

- ♦ *Monitoring and evaluation*
- ♦ *Reporting to funders*
- ♦ *Campaigning*
- ♦ *Organisations that provide information on community research*

If you are based in Brighton & Hove, the University of Brighton's Community University Partnership Programme³ may be able to offer you free support with conducting research.

³ <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp>