

# CREATING SURVEYS

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## Summary

This fact sheet is an introduction to creating surveys. It discusses the strengths and weaknesses of surveys, how to select questions, how to be sensitive to consent and confidentiality, and provides additional resources.

**Keywords:** community engagement, communication tools, collecting data

## What is a Community Survey?

A survey is a tool for collecting community information during the Indigenous planning process. This information is used to direct the planning process towards the communities' needs.

A community that is beginning the planning process can use surveys to understand where they have been, where they currently are and where they want to go. Surveys allow you to access the information, desires and priorities of community members in a cost-effective way. The collected information will point the planning team in the direction the community wants to go and ultimately guide the planning process.

## Why use a Community Survey?

During community planning, surveys are used to collect lots of information from the community. Depending on the type of information you want to collect, you can ask different questions. You may need to collect information on age, gender, marital status, or other demographic data that is used to give the planning team a comprehensive view of your community. Or, you may want to discover the priorities of community members. For example, would they rather have an ice rink or new community canoes? Surveys can be used to access information on nearly anything, including housing, infrastructure, health and nutrition, economic development, education, identity and governance. Surveys produce community relevant information that guide your planning process every step of the way.

## When are Surveys Done?

Although surveys can be used during every stage of planning, they are most commonly used during the actual planning phase!

## Who can Create a Survey?

Surveys are diverse tools that can be as simple or as complicated as you want them to be. Using online tools, you can easily create your own community survey – see Additional Resources for more information. You can also consult with a professional planner to help you design and administer your community survey!

For more information, see *Working With a Professional Planner*.

## How do you Create a Community Survey?

### 1 Identify the information you need

*Identify what information you want to collect.*<sup>1</sup> Do you need baseline information from the whole community or do you want to know what community members think about a proposed hydro line? Identifying the information you need will help you decide which type of survey to use, which questions to ask, and how to select your sample.

*Identify your target population.* A target population is the group of people you want to collect information from.<sup>2</sup> For example, you might want information from all community members, on-reserve members, or youth.

*Identify your sample.* A sample is the portion of a target population you are going to survey. Getting 5,000 community members to fill out a survey is a huge task. Getting a sample of 500 community members to respond is more practical and cost effective. Your sample should be small enough that it doesn't go over budget, but big enough that it reflects the target population.<sup>3</sup> A general rule to keep in mind is the larger the sample size, the more accurate it will be.<sup>4</sup> To get an accurate representation of the target population in your sample, you should use random sampling.<sup>5</sup> This means that everyone has an equal chance of receiving a survey.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 Choosing Your Survey's Format

There are two main types of surveys:

- **Census survey:** a survey that is distributed to everyone in your target population. This would be used to gather baseline data or to plan for infrastructure.<sup>7</sup>
- **Representative survey:** a questionnaire is distributed to a sample of your target population. This sample will give you results that reflect on the entire population.<sup>8</sup> This tool is cost effective and practical.<sup>9</sup> This fact sheet will be focusing on representative surveys – but many sections are transferable to census surveys.

### questionnaire

the document that contains your information and questions.<sup>10</sup> Survey respondents then record their answers on them and send them back.<sup>11</sup>

## 3 Designing Your Survey's Content

*Introduction paragraph:* Every questionnaire should have an introduction paragraph. This paragraph should explain what information you're looking for, why you're looking for it, who should complete the survey, and what will happen with the results.<sup>12</sup>

The first step in writing good survey questions is identifying what exactly you want to know.<sup>13</sup> There are several different kinds of questions that can be used to uncover different information. Select the type of question you use based off the information you need and your analysing ability. Different questions require different analysing tools.

### Types of Questions

- **Filter questions:** These are additional survey questions that are only relevant to a certain section of respondents.<sup>14</sup> See example below

10. Do you ever use the reserve's community centre?
  - Yes [If yes, answer questions 11 and 12]
  - No [If no, skip to question 13]
11. How often do you use the reserve's community centre a week?
  - Less than 1 time per week
  - 1 - 2
  - 3 - 4
  - 5 - 6
  - 7 +
12. What facilities do you use at the reserve's community centre? (check all that apply)
  - Gymnasium
  - Ice rink
  - Youth lounge
  - Canteen
  - Studio
13. Do you ever use the reserve's elders lodge?
  - Yes
  - No

**Figure 1 | Example of filter questions in a survey**

Adapted from (Blackstone, A. "Principles of Sociological Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods." Saylor Academy. 2012. [https://saylordotorg.github.io/text\\_principles-of-sociological-inquiry-qualitative-and-quantitative-methods/s11-survey-research-a-quantitative.html#blackstone\\_1.0-ch08\\_s04\\_s01\\_f02](https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_principles-of-sociological-inquiry-qualitative-and-quantitative-methods/s11-survey-research-a-quantitative.html#blackstone_1.0-ch08_s04_s01_f02)).

- **Open-ended:** These are questions that require a respondent to answer in their own words.<sup>15</sup> These questions provide deep and meaningful information, but are often harder to analyse.<sup>16</sup> Example: Why do you think community centres are important?
- **Close-ended:** These questions require only a brief answer, often either "yes" or "no".<sup>17</sup> Close-ended responses provide data that is easy to analyse.<sup>18</sup> Example: Do you think community centers are import? Yes or No.
- **Multiple choice:** This type of question allows the respondent to select between a variety of responses.<sup>19</sup> Example: How often do you use the community centre?
  - A. Never B. Once a year C. 2-11 times a year
  - D. Monthly E. Weekly
- **Likert Scale:** This type of question requires participants to rate items on a scale.<sup>20</sup> Example: Crime is a problem in the community.
  - 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree
  - 4 = strongly agree

### Questions to Avoid

- **Double negatives:** These questions that have two negative words.<sup>21</sup> This makes the question confusing and hard to read. Example: Do you think council shouldn't not buy more land?
- **Leading Questions:** These are questions that can sway a participants' response.<sup>22</sup> Example: Working on council is very difficult and time consuming. How much do you think council members should be paid?
- **Double Barrel Questions:** These are questions that are asking two things at once.<sup>23</sup> Example: "Are you happy with housing and postal services?" This should be separated into two questions.
- **Response options that are not exhaustive:** This means that there could be more response options than you are providing. A simple way to ensure your response options are exhaustive is to include an "Other" option, with a space to write.<sup>24</sup>
- **Response options that overlap:** Questions with overlapping responses are confusing and can skew your results. Example: How old are you?

1-20          20-30          30-40          40-50

If someone was 30, they would fit in two groups. This would confuse survey participants. Instead use a scale that doesn't overlap!

1-19          20-29          30-39          40-49

### 4 Pretesting

Pretesting is when you give your survey to a small group of people to gauge how user friendly it is.<sup>25</sup> This is done before you administer your survey to the target audience. You should pretest on people who represent your target audience. Ideally, you should also have easy access to these people.

Pretesting helps you:

- Identify confusing, offensive, boring, or pointless questions
- Get feedback on question ordering
- Get feedback on survey length and design

### 5 Administration

There are several ways of administering a survey:

#### Delivery in person

The survey can either be completed on the spot or an arrangement can be made to pick it up later.<sup>26</sup> In person delivery typically provides a high response rate.<sup>27</sup> Door to door survey delivery can also provide community employment opportunities.

#### Snail-mail

Although this is both practical and convenient, response rates may turn out low.<sup>28</sup> It's harder to convince someone to take the time to fill out a survey when the researcher isn't standing there asking them to.

If snail-mail is the selected administration tool, a follow up letter will serve 2 purposes:

- Thanking those who have already returned the survey
- Reminding those who haven't filled it out yet.<sup>29</sup>

#### Online

This method of delivery is becoming increasingly common. It is easy to use, cheap and much quicker than knocking on doors.<sup>30</sup>

Considerations for using an online survey:

- Does everyone in the community have internet access?
- Do you know everyone's email address?

#### Telephone

This method is becoming increasingly difficult as landlines become obsolete.<sup>31</sup> You may be able to get phone numbers from local white pages or you may need to work with a consultant to obtain phone numbers.

### 6 Analysing

Different questions require different analysing tools.

For more information, see *Analyzing Surveys*.

### 7 Implementation

After you've analyzed your survey results, you will have summary information about your community. Depending on the questions you asked, this can be demographic information, community concerns, requests, or other data. This information can inform and direct your Community Plan! Taking action based on survey results guide the plan in the direction that is best for the community, while also showing community members that you are listening to them!

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### What About Confidentiality?

Is your survey going to be anonymous or will you ask for information that will allow you to identify the participant?

Participants may be more inclined to give honest answers when they take a confidential survey.<sup>32</sup> However, you might need identifying information to give away incentives or compare survey results to service records, background information or other documents.<sup>33</sup>

Including identifying information doesn't have to be a deterrent. If you request identifying information, just explain why you need it!

## ***Examples of Using Survey Data in the Planning Process***

### ***Demographic Data***

Through your survey results you may see that there is an average of 7 people living in one house on the reserve. You can use this demographic information to plan the number of additional houses that need to be built!

### ***Community Concerns***

The survey may reveal that community members are concerned about the lack of light around the community centre at night. You can use this to plan future infrastructure, such as building new street lights!

### ***Community Requests***

Your survey results may tell you what your members want to see in their community. For example, if a large number of members want a healing lodge built, you can use this to plan future spending and infrastructure!

## ***When Should You Use a Survey?***

Surveys are a good tool when:

- You're looking to gather lots of information in a cost-effective manner
- You have well defined questions with a limited range of responses
- You have the contact information for the people you would like to survey
- You're collecting information on a sensitive topic

You might consider other tools when:

- You want information from people with limited literacy skills such as young children
- You need detailed information. Surveys are not flexible because potential answers to questions are fixed. For example, a respondent's answer may be more complex than a simple "yes" or "no"
- You only need information from a few people. A small number of people surveyed (sample size) has the potential to skew the results
- When return rates may be low – Discussed in Administration of the Survey section
- You do not have a way to contact participants.

## ***What About Consent?***

Consent forms are typically not necessary for surveys.<sup>34</sup> Although, in certain circumstances they are advised:

- Working with children or others who cannot legally provide their own consent. A consent form should be signed by their legal guardian<sup>35</sup>
- Using the results for publication. If you will be making survey results public, you should ensure your participants are aware and consent<sup>36</sup>

### ***Tips for Success***

- make the surveys look attractive
- be brief and to the point
- make the font size readable
- make sure the instructions are very clear

## ***Further Reading***

### **Survey Monkey**

An online tool used to create free surveys!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com>

### **Community Tool Box - Creating Surveys** by Chris Hampton & Marcelo Vilela

This online resource provides an indepth guide to creating comprehensive surveys!

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-surveys/main>

### Endnotes

- 1 Wilder Foundation, "Survey says: The role of surveys in your evaluation. Tips from Wilder Research program evaluation workshop series," *Wilder Research*, 2009, <http://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Publications/Studies/Program%20Evaluation%20and%20Research%20Tips/Survey%20Says%20-%20The%20Role%20of%20Surveys%20in%20Your%20Evaluation%20-%20Tips%20From%20Wilder%20Research%20Program%20Evaluation%20Series.%20F-act%20Sheet.pdf>.
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