

## Questionnaire and survey guidelines

Most projects and programmes can use questionnaires as part of their monitoring framework – for example:

- Annual community surveys to gather views on progress on key issues.
- Follow up surveys for customers once they have left courses.
- Current user surveys for any type of project.

Designing and administering questionnaires is a skill. Good design increases response rates and provides useful information. The following guidelines will help you use questionnaires effectively.

### Main Survey Methods

There are several survey methods – choose the most suitable method for the target group and data needed:

- Face-to-face** – expensive but collects good qualitative data and guarantees responses.
- Telephone interviews** – expensive but cuts down on travel costs, gives personal contact, response rate of around 70% with some chasing.
- Postal surveys** – less expensive for a large number of responses, from issuing to analysis can be up to 2 months, limited response rate of 20-25% more likely.
- Self-completion surveys in project location** – usually inexpensive but depend on staff or volunteers encouraging or arranging for users to complete them, so response rate can be variable.
- E-mail surveys** – least expensive to issue, instant response and analysis, response rate of up to 50% depending on the target group.

### Face-to-face surveys



These surveys work best when:

- Trying to collect qualitative data.
- Started with some closed questions and interviewee then expands on these.
- Assessing a programme, project, or organisation.
- Interview lasts no longer than 10-20 minutes, keep to time stated.

### Telephone surveys



Guidelines for telephone surveys:

- No longer than 10-15 minutes with closed questions, for structured or semi-structured surveys allow 20 minutes.
- Ensure all questions are relevant and avoid repetition.
- Add an open question at the end for further comments.

### Postal surveys (self-completion)



Postal surveys are the best method when:

- Looking for a large sample and a wide variety of responses.
- Dealing with residents of an area.

Improve the response from the typical 20-25% by:

- Contacting target group first.
- Including a clear explanation of what the survey is for and who will use it.
- Providing a contact name, address and telephone number for queries.
- Sending out a reminder letter.

### E-mail surveys



This method works best for contacting people that have e-mail and Internet access at home and regularly use it. For people in disadvantaged areas and older people these numbers are limited. The main advantage is the cost and ease of analysis.

# Questionnaire design

## General



Try to ensure that:

- The questions are fit for purpose.
- The design of the questionnaire is suitable for the audience.
- Respondents are able to answer the questions in a way that reflects the view they want to express.
- The answers are clear and unambiguous.

## Preliminary Work

Before designing the survey write out the answer to these questions:

- What is the purpose of the questionnaire?
- What data are you collecting?
- Who are the target group and what are their characteristics?
- Discuss internally which survey method is suitable.
- How you want to analyse and disseminate the data.

Then use the answers to the questions to start thinking about survey method and questions.

## Content

- Ensure that questions follow a natural progression
- Put questions relating specifically to the study at the beginning
- Keep the routing in the questionnaire easy to follow and to a minimum
- Give instructions for each question for example "Tick one box only."
- Use suitable question type, closed, open or scale – keep questions as short as possible
- Write in Plain English
- Avoid jargon
- State the purpose of the study, who has commissioned it, who will have access to the analysis and that it is confidential

## Layout

- Ensure there is enough 'white space'
- Keep the same style throughout

## Pilot Phase

This is one of the most important stages of development and most often overlooked. Allocate time for piloting the survey in your plans. Main elements in this phase:

- Internal pilot.
- Pilot questionnaire with some of the target group – ask for feedback from respondents (and interviewers if suitable).
- Remove or change any questions that are unclear.

## Market Research Society Guidelines and Data Protection Act 1998

It is good practice to follow Market Research Society Guidelines and you must follow the Data Protection Act 1998 (and any revisions). The key points are:

- Any data collected is only for the stated purpose.
- Any personal data is held securely.
- Data controllers must keep contact details up-to-date.
- Any data with personal identifiers should only be held for up to one year.
- Data held without personal identifiers can be held indefinitely.

Links and further information

Market Research Society <http://www.mrs.org.uk>

Data Protection Act 1988 <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>

## Quick comparison of survey methods

Survey Method	Cost	Advantages	Disadvantages	Return
Face-to-Face	Most expensive	Able to read non-verbal communication People more likely to respond	Rely on the interviewers neutrality Expensive	~100%
Telephone	Expensive	Instantaneous response Can call from a remote location	Excludes those with no phone Expensive Difficult to ask questions with a long list of choices	Around 70%
Postal	Fairly cheap but time-consuming	Able to reach most people Gives respondent time to complete Costs are lower than face-to-face and telephone	Low return rate Whole process can take time, around 2 months Disadvantage those with literacy problems or visual impairments Reliant on individuals interpretation of the questions	20-25% with reminder letter
E-mail	Cheap	Cheap Quick response time Instantaneous analysis Design layout templates provided	Excludes those with no e-mail and internet access No interaction with participants Reliant on individuals interpretation of the question	Up to 50%