

Community-Centered Research Series:

Measuring What Matters

SURVEYS AS TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED RESEARCH

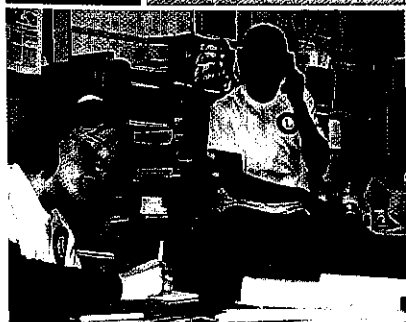
Community-based research (by and for the community) is important in planning for meaningful and positive community change.



This type of research is not only desirable, it is feasible.



By providing theory as well as tangible next steps, this series will get your community excited about moving forward with community-centered research.



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SURVEYS AS TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Community surveys, in one form or another, have been around for quite some time. As early as 1917 the community score card was used by citizens to score their communities on the basis of standards established by outside experts. Between 1940 and 1960, community check-sheets were used by members of civic organizations or ad hoc groups to select and/or rank the most serious potential community problems (Johnson and Meiller 1987). In the 1970s communities began adopting modern survey technologies and started systematically polling residents on community services and unmet needs. More recently, some communities are conducting community asset surveys, seeking to identify local talent and skills to build their community from the inside out, utilizing existing community assets (Allen, Cordes, & Hart, 1999). All of these efforts, in one way or another, involved citizens.

People involved in the community as elected officials, members of citizen committees, and the general public all have roles in community surveys. Elected officials use surveys to measure public opinion so they can make informed decisions; citizen committees delve into issues, which in some cases generates grass roots

impetus for conducting a survey to initiate change; and the public takes time to answer surveys hoping that their opinions will lead to an improved community. When community leaders or citizens' groups contemplate doing community research, the idea of using surveys invariably arises. Therefore, it is important to understand the benefits and limitations of community surveys.

COMMUNITY SURVEYS

There are two types of research: *action* research and *participatory* research. Action research is conducted from the local elected or appointed official's perspective. They or their appointed representative (i.e., city manager, department head, mayor, or council member) are the driving force behind a community-level survey, and they decide the kind of information to be sought. Participatory research is initiated by members of the public, or special interest groups, to gather information on their particular interest or cause.

Thomas A. Heberlein (cited in Johnson and Meiller, 1987) defines four major functions of public research: informational, interactive,

Two Types of Research:

- Action (initiated by officials)
- Participatory (initiated by public)

assurance, and ritualistic. Johnson and Meiller apply these four functions to community surveys. They agree with Heberlein that a properly conducted survey is an "excellent way to obtain information from the public" and it "usually meets ritualistic (legalistic or normative) requirements and is representative." Community surveys are not good instruments for giving information to the public; surveys are designed to collect information, not disseminate it. A survey is not interactive (allowing an interchange between officials and the public), and

is only fair in assuring the public that all viewpoints have been heard and taken into account. Given these functions,

a community survey is only one facet of community-level research.

Challenges

The limited resources of time, money, and expertise often discourage local government from conducting

community-centered research. Community leaders, particularly those in rural areas, face these same challenges. In addition, some local governments are apprehensive about conducting community research, particularly community surveys. Miller and Kobayashi (International City/County Management Association ICMA 2000) note that the oft-quoted statement by seasoned administrators, "anyone can lie with statistics," is generally accepted and reinforces a comfort zone that excludes the world of "random sampling, sampling design, and computer analysis." Many people are not comfortable with statistics and deem quantitative data analysis tedious. However, this does not need to be the case; community-centered surveys can be understandable and relevant to both community leaders and residents.

Purposes

Elected officials, planning and zoning commissions, and other civic groups have used community surveys to better understand the preferences of local residents. In turn, the public

Good policy and good local management require a clear understanding of the preferences of local residents.

generally appreciates local officials who actively seek their opinions. Elected officials may commission a survey for a number of reasons; they may want to know how citizens feel about traditional services such as roads, streets, garbage collection, police, fire, and emergency services. They may also want to determine citizen attitudes and opinions on other areas of concern, such as recreation programs, senior services, business and economic development, and community planning. Miller and

Kobayashi (2001) state that, "Good policy and good local management require a clear understanding of the preferences of local residents. The fairest way to bring the voice of the public to the table in deciding important public issues is through a good citizen survey." To help find the "public voice" a survey should take into account and allow for objective, fair, and encompassing points of view. Key stakeholders, including citizen representatives, should examine these points of views as survey instruments are being developed.

Besides gathering residents' opinions, community surveys often fill critical information gaps. State and county leaders rely on many sources for economic and demographic data including the U.S. Census Bureau, State Data Centers, and other federal and state agencies. Many federal agency websites indicate that they have community information, which usually means county data.

The U.S. Decennial Census has some very valuable information at the community and lower levels. However, the need to gather this type of data grows as the length of time increases since the last census. In addition, while the census effort is enormous, communities often need even more detailed information to make good policy decisions. For example, the decennial census asks questions on households and types of housing (ethnicity of occupants, number of rooms, plumbing, kitchen facilities, home value and year of construction, etc.) but it does *not* address the condition of housing. How many homes in a community need weatherization services, or upgraded wiring, plumbing, or access to the Internet? What are the types of housing a community wants? If a community truly desires "community information" it needs to do community-centered research rather than rely solely on federal or state agency statistics.

Legislation over the past two decades has affected citizen participation. Many federal agencies now require more input from citizens during planning processes; up-front public participation, and accountability to the public for the programs and services

The process of setting goals and objectives, particularly those that impact communities, encourages community-centered research.

provided, is mandatory. The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) requires that federally funded agencies develop and implement an accountability system based on performance measurement, to include setting goals and objectives and measuring progress toward achieving them. The process of setting goals and objectives, particularly those that impact communities, encourages community-centered research. The need for this type of research increases as rural economies continue to shift from agricultural and manufacturing to information, tourism, and service economies.

Some surveys are done for the wrong reasons—or perhaps at the wrong time. Surveys done to get respondents' attention for purposes such as political gain or to garner votes, and surveys collected on information that already exists, are probably not worth doing (ICMA 2000). One community survey, conducted in the months leading up to a municipal election, showed that residents were satisfied with their government services. While the survey sought the opinions of residents on legitimate growth issues, which either candidate could use, the challenger saw survey results indicating a high level of satisfaction as giving the incumbent an unfair advantage, and suspected that the timing of the survey was politically motivated. Of course,

had the survey shown that citizens were dissatisfied with municipal services the challenger would never have questioned motives for doing the survey.

COMMUNITY SURVEY OPTIONS

Historically, communities have conducted surveys in three ways. Frequently they attempt to do a "survey" by including a question on a municipal billing, or by posing a question in a citywide newsletter asking people to send or call in their responses to the city office, mayor or city council. The American Statistical Association (1995) refers to these types of opinion polls as SLOPs (self-selected opinion polls). In SLOPs, persons with strong opinions (often negative) are more likely to respond. This technique is not useful and should never be relied upon to gauge community opinions or attitudes.

The second way for communities to conduct surveys is to enlist the services of a professional researcher or survey firm. This method is one of the easiest to apply, but it is often too costly for small communities to hire a professional researcher or firm.

The third solution is for communities to do a self-administered survey in which volunteers do much of the work in developing, administering, interpreting, and moving to action based on survey results. While not as easy to do, this method creates broad community-based ownership of the survey.

Survey Methods

Community surveys are conducted either face-to-face, through telephone interviews, by drop off and pick up, or by mail. Face-to-face interviews are more expensive than mail or telephone surveys, but may be necessary when complex information is to be collected. Telephone interviews are an efficient method of collecting some types of

data, and lend themselves to short surveys and situations in which time is critical. Drop off and pick up surveys allow for rapid dissemination and collection. Figure 1 outlines a process for citizen involvement in a self-administered drop off and pick up survey. Mail surveys can be relatively low in cost, but problems arise when insufficient effort is made to promote cooperation and response. Surveys can generally be done within a one to six month time period. The greatest length of time should be allocated for mail surveys. One week after the survey is mailed a postcard is sent thanking early responders and asking those who have not responded to complete the questionnaire. Three weeks later, a second request, includ-

ing another copy of the questionnaire is mailed. If response rates are low, sometimes a third request is mailed to people who have not responded. Some researchers conduct surveys on the Internet, which has its own unique set of problems such as inadequate representation from households without Internet access, varying computer literacy, and the challenge of blending computer logic with questionnaire logic (Dillman 2002).

Involving Citizens

Citizen groups can be enlisted to help cities conduct surveys to define community issues in the areas of planning, human relations and cultural enrichment, economic development,

Self-Administered Drop Off and Pick Up Survey

With assistance from a survey specialist, the community develops a survey instrument on community issues and

1. Mobilizes 60 to 80 volunteers into 30 to 40 two-member teams;
2. Publicizes the survey;
3. Designates an evening to conduct the survey;
4. Prepares a Mayor/City Council cover letter encouraging residents to participate;
5. Randomly selects 30 to 40 starting points (residential addresses) to create districts containing 15 to 30 households.

On the evening designated for conducting the survey, the survey committee, the survey specialist, and the two-member teams meet to receive instructions on door-to-door drop off and pick up survey method.

1. Each two-member team takes 15 questionnaires and return envelopes to designated households in the area. If necessary, they review the cover letter with an adult household member (over 18 years). After requesting that the survey be filled out immediately, teams proceed to the next home.
2. Survey teams return to the homes that received questionnaires and collect them in the sealed envelopes.
3. All team members return to City Hall to help code the results for data entry.

Don't forget to hold a public meeting to report survey results.

Figure 1. Self Administered Drop Off and Pick Up Survey.

physical environment, and community services. Questionnaires are mailed to randomly selected households, or dropped off and picked up by volunteers in randomly selected blocks or neighborhoods. It is always a good idea to publicize surveys in advance, and to have the mayor endorse the survey through a cover letter explaining why it is being conducted, and how the results will be used. The sample press release (Figure 2), and the sample cover letter from a mayor (Figure 3) can be tailored to meet individual community needs.

When a volunteer group has been identified, local governments should appoint a survey chairperson and provide support to the chairperson. The city also provides information to be used to select the survey sample. Often city utility lists can be used to obtain addresses. When addresses have been selected, lists and maps for each team are prepared. Figure 4 is a questionnaire that was jointly developed and administered by a local municipality, community volunteers, and Utah State University Extension using the process outlined in Figure 1.

The cost of doing surveys varies. Cities typically budget for community surveys based upon their level of staff and volunteer support. The biggest cost associated with doing surveys is labor expense; surveys done through research firms can cost \$10,000 or more, but it is much less expensive if community volunteers are involved.

The amount of time needed to conduct a survey varies according to the degree to which it must be customized by the survey committee.

Sample Press Release About a Community Survey

According to an announcement today by (insert Mayor) of (insert community), residents of (insert community) will soon have an opportunity to tell what they think is right or wrong with the community.

In coming weeks, Mayor (insert Mayor) will circulate a Community Attitude Survey covering nearly every phase of the community including planning, human relations, cultural enrichment, economic development, physical environment, and community services. Community Development specialists from (insert University) will assist with the survey.

According to the Mayor, the primary purpose of the survey is to find out where the community is doing a good job and where it needs to improve.

"With this information we can identify problem areas and develop action programs. We want to know how (insert community) measures up as a place to live, and the only way we can be sure that we are getting a complete picture is to ask the people who really know – the people who live here. We would appreciate your cooperation when one of our local citizens comes to your door with the survey."

Figure 2. Sample Press Release About a Community Survey

Sample Mayor's Cover Letter

Dear Citizen,

Tonight we are conducting a public opinion poll of citizens within the city. A volunteer has been asked to deliver this survey to your home. Please take a few minutes of your time to fill out the survey to help us better understand your feelings and concerns about our community.

The City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission will use the information from the survey to revise the City Master Plan and some of our city ordinances. *Your opinion is important.*

Your responses will be kept confidential and any public reporting will be in broad categories so individual respondents cannot be singled out.

The volunteers will leave the survey with you and return to pick it up later this evening. Thank you for your participation in this effort.

Sincerely,

(insert Mayor)

Figure 3. Sample Mayor's Cover Letter

Hyrum City Survey

Note: This two-page survey is sponsored by Hyrum City with assistance from Utah State University Extension. We appreciate your cooperation in completing this survey. Please do not sign your name. Thank you.

A. PLANNING

1. Please choose the three (3) most important issues you feel Hyrum will face in the next five years by writing the issue's letter in the appropriate box: (ENTER ONLY ONE ISSUE PER BOX)

- a. Irrigation water MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE
- b. Adequate drinking water
- c. Economic development/job creation 2ND MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE
- d. Residential growth
- e. Community planning
- f. Inadequate housing 3RD MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE
- g. Sewer service
- h. Electricity
- i. Other (Please Specify _____)

2. Has the pace of growth in Hyrum City been: (CIRCLE THE NUMBER OF YOUR REPLY)

- 0. TOO SLOW 2. TOO FAST
- 1. ABOUT RIGHT 8. DON'T KNOW

3. The 2000 Census shows 1750 housing units in Hyrum. A housing unit may be a house, apartment, mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room that is occupied (or, if vacant, is intended for occupancy) as separate living quarters. Should the housing units in Hyrum over the next 10 years be allowed to: (CIRCLE ONE REPLY)

- a. Increase by fifty percent 1
- b. Increase by twenty five percent 2
- c. Increase by ten percent 3
- d. Increase by five percent 4
- e. Remain the same with no new homes 5
- f. Don't know 8

4. Multifamily housing is multiple dwelling units within the same building, such as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, condominiums, and apartments. As Hyrum develops, which of the following types of multifamily housing does Hyrum need?

| | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|
| a. Duplexes | 1 | 0 |
| b. 3 or 4 dwelling units per building | 1 | 0 |
| c. 5 or more dwelling units per building | 1 | 0 |
| d. Condominiums | 1 | 0 |
| e. Apartments | 1 | 0 |

In Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) the rigid lot size, setback and side-yard requirements found in conventional ordinances are waived to permit the clustering of housing units and other creative site development. Areas left undeveloped by clustering are committed to common open space in the development site.

5. Should Hyrum city encourage increased use of PUDs?

| YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|-----|----|------------|
| 1 | 0 | 8 |

6. "Inner block development" is development of vacant land within block centers. Which of the following types of inner block development should Hyrum City allow?

| | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|-----------------------------|-----|----|------------|
| a. Single family home | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| b. Duplexes | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| c. Fourplexes | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| d. No inner block | 1 | 0 | 8 |

7. In the future should Hyrum City: (CIRCLE ONE REPLY)

- a. Encourage inner city block development before developing outer city areas 1
- b. Encourage development of outer city areas before developing inner city blocks 2
- c. Allow development of inner city blocks and outer city areas at the same time 3

8. Should Hyrum City have building ordinances that limit the number of:

| | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|---------------------------------------|-----|----|------------|
| a. Building permits for houses | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| b. Subdivisions approved each year .. | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| c. PUDs approved each year | 1 | 0 | 8 |

9. Rather than having standard lots sizes and similar homes in Hyrum would you support changing subdivision ordinances to encourage diversity in:

| | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|--------------------------|-----|----|------------|
| a. Lot sizes | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| b. Housing design | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| c. Open space | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| d. Other (List _____) .. | 1 | 0 | 8 |

10. Do you feel having home-based businesses in a neighborhood affects that neighborhood?

| | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|-------|-----|----|------------|
| | 1 | 0 | 8 |

If yes, do you feel home-based businesses affect a neighborhood by:

| | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|-----------------------------------|-----|----|------------|
| a. Increasing traffic | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| b. Increasing noise | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| c. Increasing visual blight | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| d. Other (_____) .. | 1 | 0 | 8 |

11. Please list the type of stores/ services *not* in Hyrum that you would like to see in Hyrum.

- 1st _____
- 2nd _____
- 3rd _____

B. NEIGHBORHOOD

12. Which, if any, of the following are problems with housing in Hyrum?

| | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|--------------------------|-----|----|------------|
| a. Cost of housing | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| b. Condition of housing | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| c. Unkempt yards | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| d. Not enough apartments | 1 | 0 | 8 |

13. Do you feel there is currently affordable housing in Hyrum for first time homebuyers?

| YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|-----|----|------------|
| 1 | 0 | 8 |

14. Which, if any, of the following conditions are problems in your neighborhood? [CIRCLE 1 OR 0]

| | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|
| a. Commercial expansion | 1 | 0 |
| b. Vacant buildings | 1 | 0 |
| c. Crime | 1 | 0 |
| d. Vandalism | 1 | 0 |
| e. Unattended dogs and cats | 1 | 0 |
| f. On street farm machinery/vehicle parking .. | 1 | 0 |
| g. Unkempt lots | 1 | 0 |
| h. Abandoned vehicles | 1 | 0 |
| i. Incompatible land use | 1 | 0 |
| j. Off road vehicle noise | 1 | 0 |
| k. Recreational Vehicles stored on lots | 1 | 0 |
| l. Animals (specify _____) | 1 | 0 |
| m. Other (specify _____) | 1 | 0 |

15. How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?

| | VERY SAFE | SAFE | NOT SURE | UNSAFE | VERY UNSAFE |
|---------------------|-----------|------|----------|--------|-------------|
| a. During the day | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| b. During the night | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

C. SERVICES

16. How would you rate the following in Hyrum:

| | EXC | GOOD | FAIR | POOR | DON'T KNOW |
|------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|------------|
| a. Police protection | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| b. Fire protection | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| c. Garbage collection | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| d. Ambulance service | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| e. Animal control | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| f. Park upkeep | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| g. City power company ... | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| h. Sidewalks | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| i. Recreation programs | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| j. Senior programs | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| k. Library | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| l. Streets | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| m. Snow removal | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |

17. Following is a list of services that generally require taxes for maintenance and construction. Would you be willing to pay more taxes if you knew the money would be spent in Hyrum City for that particular purpose?

| | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|--|-----|----|------------|
| a. Improve police protection | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| b. Improve fire protection | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| c. Improve garbage collection | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| d. Improve ambulance service | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| e. Improve sewer service | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| f. Improve drinking water service .. | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| g. Improve schools | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| h. Improve streets/roads | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| i. Improve or install sidewalks | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| j. Develop storm drains | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| k. Improve/install street lights | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| l. Improve library services | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| m. Improve city office | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| n. Improve parks and recreation .. | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| o. Build and run a golf course | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| p. Other (Specify _____) .. | 1 | 0 | 8 |

D. DEMOGRAPHICS

18. For the person completing this survey, are you:

- 1. MALE 2. FEMALE

19. Which category best represents the age of the head of household?

- 1. 18 24 4. 45 54
- 2. 25 34 5. 55 64
- 3. 35 44 6. 65 or older

20. How many people are in your household?

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 or more

21. Which of the following categories best describes your total family income (from all sources, including children) last year?

- 0. LESS THAN \$20,000
- 1. \$20,000 - \$29,999
- 2. \$30,000 - \$39,999
- 3. \$40,000 - \$49,999
- 4. \$50,000 - \$59,999
- 5. \$60,000 - \$69,999
- 6. \$70,000 - \$79,999
- 7. \$80,000 AND OVER

22. How many years have you lived in Hyrum?

- 1. Less than 1 year 3. 5 to 9 years
- 2. 1 to 4 years 4. 10 or more years

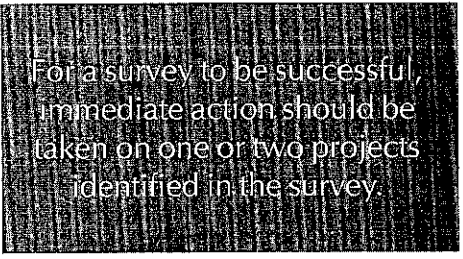
23. If you have additional concerns or comments about Hyrum please feel free to add them here:

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING OUR SURVEY.

Figure 4. Hyrum City Survey. Sponsored by Hyrum City with assistance from Utah State University Extension.

Challenges

Careful analysis of survey data will identify areas of concern and issues that citizens may be willing to support for improvement. Some projects or programs will require financing while others can be achieved by community volunteer action. For a survey to be successful, immediate action should be taken on one or two projects identified in the survey. These may include short term projects such as tree planting, community clean up, or the organization of a community celebration. Survey results may also be used to develop a long-range master plan to establish and enforce zoning regulations, improve the appearance of the city, initiate economic development, or improve the library.



For a survey to be successful, immediate action should be taken on one or two projects identified in the survey.

City councils and community groups have used survey results to initiate many beneficial community projects. Results can also be used to facilitate the decision-making process in planning meetings. City councils can use information from surveys to train new city council members and in the development of city master plans. One city, using information gained from a survey, doubled its mill levy; increased its water and sewer rates; and worked to build or improve six priorities that had been identified. These included construction of a fire station, installation of storm drains, improvement of the culinary water system, upgrading of criminal justice, resurfacing of city roads, and installation of curbs, gutters and sidewalks.

Community Survey Principles

There are a number of surveying principles that should be followed to increase validity and usefulness. These include:

- Survey objectives should be as specific, clear-cut, and unambiguous as possible. Trade-offs typically exist, and sometimes this only becomes apparent during the planning process.
- The *community* should decide on the appropriate method to conduct a survey.
- A critical element in any survey is to locate (or “cover”) all the members of the population being studied so they all have an equal chance to be sampled. In a bona fide survey, the sample is not selected haphazardly. It is scientifically selected so that each person in the population has an equal chance of selection.
- Information should be collected by means of standardized procedures so every individual is asked the same questions in more or less the same way. A survey’s intent is not to describe the particular individuals who, by chance, are part of the sample; its purpose is to obtain a composite profile of the sample and population.
- Surveys can employ various types of questions to avoid monotony. There are a few simple rules to follow when creating questions.
 - Close-ended questions list the responses that can be chosen by those completing the survey.
 - Response categories should be exhaustive and include all responses that might reasonably be expected of those completing the survey.
 - Response categories should be mutually exclusive; the respondent should not feel compelled to select more than one.

- Response categories may be some type of scale or ranking. When ranking questions are used, the number of items to be ranked should be limited.
- Open-ended questions are used to better understand why people feel the way they do. They are often used so people can respond if they have additional answers not addressed by the researcher.
- Questionnaire items should be precise so that the respondent knows exactly what is being asked. Surveys should be logically organized and provide instructions on filling them out. Be consistent. If a question has a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree,” have other scales aligned in the same direction. Don’t switch and have 5 represent strongly disagree and 1 represent strongly agree later in the same survey.
- The first question in a survey should be easily answered by all, and should clearly pertain to the objective of the study. This will increase the respondent’s comfort level in filling out the survey. Place demographic questions such as age, family income, household size, etc., at the end of the survey.
- Avoid double-barreled questions. As a general rule, whenever the word “and” appears in a question or questionnaire statement, you should check to see if you are asking a double-barreled question.
- Use short, relevant questions. In general, you should assume that respondents will read items quickly and give quick answers. Provide clear, short items that will not be misinterpreted under those conditions. You should also avoid questions that use negative terms. A sizeable portion of respondents will read over the word “not.” The word “not” also makes

interpreting responses more confusing, so avoid using it.

- Have people who were not involved in designing the survey review it and/or complete it prior to distributing it to your sample. Did they understand the questions? The response categories? Was it simple to complete? Were there any questions that they left blank, skipped, or could not answer?
- Researchers should provide confidentiality by using only number codes to link the respondents to a questionnaire, and should store the name-to-code linkage information separately from the questionnaire. Refuse to give the names and addresses of survey respondents to anyone outside the survey organization, including clients. Present statistical tabulations in broad enough categories so individual respondents cannot be singled out (Guy 1998).

Summary

Community surveys can be used by elected or appointed officials (action research) or citizen and special interest groups (participatory research). Either way, communities benefit from doing community surveys. The process of developing resources, framing issues, and creating a survey helps officials and citizens focus on ways to improve their communities. Surveys are excellent tools for obtaining information from the public so that informed decisions can be made. Surveys also help citizens feel more connected to their local governments. By stimulating interest in vital issues, they often prompt people to get involved in civic matters.

The right method for conducting a survey depends upon time, money, and expertise available to communities.

Groups conducting surveys often have to overcome negative perceptions or misgivings about them. This is best overcome through education and involvement of stakeholders and citizens in developing, and in some cases administering, the survey. Because surveying is labor intensive, it can be expensive to hire a firm to do it for you. An alternative is to develop and implement a survey utilizing community volunteers and your local land grant university extension system. Many land grant universities have faculty who can guide communities through the process. Whichever method is chosen, citizen involvement will result in a better survey that is more widely accepted.

There are many well established principles for conducting community surveys. These include having a clear objective, knowing the population to be sampled, carefully crafting and pretesting the survey, and using random sampling, as appropriate, so results can be applied to the broader population. It is important to assure confidentiality. By using well established principles, communities can use a survey as a public involvement technique.

When a survey is properly designed (employs techniques that improve communication, and promotes participation and accurate understanding), it emerges as a powerful tool for community-centered research.

About the Author

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

The *Measuring What Matters* series provides encouragement, support, and tools for communities engaged in self-assessment. It is a comprehensive road map for understanding 1) what community-centered research is, 2) what forms it might take, and 3) what it might accomplish.

The series consists of an overview (CCR1, Winter 2003) and subsequent articles written by university faculty from across the West. The authors have experience working with rural communities, knowledge of self-assessment principles and techniques, and a good sense of the issues rural communities face.

We encourage you to collect the entire series. Each issue is three-hole punched for easy storage in your own resource binder. Other *Measuring What Matters* issues include:

- *Take the Plunge! An Overview of Community-Centered Research* (CCR 1)
- *Using the Internet for Community Analysis: Sources of Western Data* (CCR 2)
- *Video as a Tool for Community-Centered Research* (CCR 4)
- *Truth, Ethics and Credibility in Community-Centered Research* (CCR 5)

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Annotated Bibliography

Allen, John C., Cordes, Sam M., & Hart, Jeff G. (1999). *Vitalizing Communities Building on Assets and Mobilizing for Collective Action*. The Center for Applied Rural Innovation. Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources. Lincoln: University of Nebraska-Lincoln

This community guide created for the Center for Applied Rural Innovation (CARI) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is used by CARI as they work with communities. Their approach is to identify individual, associational, institutional, and local business assets in a community and utilize these existing community assets to build the community from the inside out, utilizing existing community assets.

American Statistical Association. (1995). *ASA Series What is A Survey?* Retrieved April 17, 2003, from www.amstat.org/sections/srms/brochures/survwhat.html

The American Statistical Association has a series of brochures covering surveys. The series includes What is a Survey, How to Plan a Survey, How to Collect Survey Data, Judging the Quality of a Survey, How to Conduct Pretesting, What are Focus Groups, More About Mail Surveys, What is a Margin of Error?, Designing a Questionnaire, and More About Telephone Surveys. The "What is a Survey?" brochure describes basic survey concepts.

Dillman, Don A. (2002). *Mail and Internet Surveys the Tailored Design Method*. New York, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

The book is the first revision of *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method*, which was published in 1978. The book responds to the profound changes in the technology available for conducting self-administered mail surveys, and also discusses how to conduct surveys over the Internet and by Interactive Voice Response (touchtone data entry) on the telephone. The author presents general procedures for writing questions, constructing questionnaires, and developing an implementation system that applies broadly to the design of most self-administered surveys and discusses tailoring individual surveys for collecting data by more than one mode (e.g., mail, telephone, web and/or other methods). Tailored designs are described for delivery of mail-back questionnaires in-person and in group situations. Tailoring procedures to the challenge of collecting government survey data and the special issues needed for conducting surveys of businesses are discussed.

Dillman, Don A. (1978). *Mail and Telephone Surveys The Total Design Method*. New York, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

The book provides specific guidance in using the total design method (TDM) for mounting mail and telephone surveys. The TDM approach to surveying is built upon the premise that to maximize both the quality and quantity of responses, attention must be given to every detail that might affect response behavior. The book provides guidance as to the advantages and disadvantages of various methods of writing questions, constructing questionnaires, and implementing telephone and mail surveys.

Guy, Stanley M. (1998). *Do's and Don'ts of Community Surveys*. [Fact Sheet]. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Extension

The author abridges information from the American Statistical Association series "What is a Survey?" and Don A. Dillman's "Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method" in this two page fact sheet on the "Do's" and "Don'ts" of community surveys.

International City/County Management Association. (2000). *Citizen Surveys, How to Do Them, How to Use Them, What They Mean* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Author

The International City/County Management Association is the professional and educational organization for the chief appointed management executives in local government. The authors, Thomas I. Miller and Michelle Miller Kobayashi, present the case for citizen surveys and how to conduct a citizen survey. This includes laying the groundwork, reaching the right citizens, what to ask and how to ask it, and translating data into knowledge. Chapters also cover making sense of survey results and putting survey results to work for improving municipal services.

Johnson, Donald E., & Meiller, Larry R. (1987). *Community Level Surveys*. In Johnson, Donald E., Meiller, Larry R., Miller, Lorna Clancy., & Summers, Gene F. (Eds.). *Needs Assessment Theory and Methods* (pp. 126-141) Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press

The authors discuss how community citizens can play a variety of roles in the survey process in addition to serving as passive respondents. The authors believe this involvement can be attained without losing any significant level of survey integrity and accuracy. By increasing the types of interaction between change agents, survey specialists, and the leaders and citizens of the community, the likelihood is increased that survey findings will lead to further action aimed at the resolution of community problems and issues.

Miller, Thomas I., & Kobayashi, Michelle M. (May 2001). *The Voice of the Public: Why Citizen Surveys Work*. *Public Management* (US). Vol. 83, Issue 4. Retrieved January 23, 2002, from MasterFILE Premier Publications Database

The authors discusses the use of citizen surveys in public management; the purpose of citizen surveys; advantages of citizen surveys; and suggestions for using citizen survey results. *Public Management* contains articles, special reports, commentary, interviews, ethics and news of note for managers and is published for members of the International City/County Management Association

Ryan, Vern E. (1987). *Use of Action Research*. In Johnson, Donald E., Meiller, Larry R., Miller, Lorna Clancy., & Summers, Gene F. (Eds.). *Needs Assessment Theory and Methods* (pp. 171-187). Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press

The author describes the strengths and weaknesses of various needs assessment techniques that incorporate action research. Action research is based on the premise that communities or organizations can obtain valid information, action, and solving capabilities through their playing an integral part in all aspects of the research process. People who are actively involved learn to appreciate the value of sound research. They also benefit from the assurance that salient issues will be included in studies. The author focuses on synchronized surveys (needs surveys that are completed to provide information from the point of view of policymakers), self-administered surveys, and participatory research. The author reviews case studies of programs that incorporate numerous features of action research.

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