



## Questionnaires

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### **Designing and Producing Questionnaires within a Parish Plan**

**Questionnaires are one of the most commonly used methods of consultation and through a great deal of forethought can be tailored to suit almost any project need. It is important, that questionnaires are carefully planned, designed, piloted and implemented in order to gain full benefits. When used in conjunction with a variety of other techniques, questionnaires can prove an extremely useful tool in community consultation. This presentation aims to provide guidance to Action Plan groups that have decided to produce their own questionnaire.**

#### **Why use a questionnaire?**

Questionnaires allow for the coverage of a wide variety of issues, and result in the same set of questions being addressed by potentially large identified groups, thereby ensuring each person has an opportunity to engage in the consultation process. They are very useful when undertaking consultation for a Community Led Plan, as people are able to complete them at their own convenience and within their own homes.

#### **Producing a questionnaire**

Whether consulting the whole parish or a specific group, covering a range of issues or just one, the following process applies:

# Why do you do surveys?

- To understand your community (we not me)
- To look at different groups
- To track change over time
- To promote a policy
- OR
- To delay making decisions
- To shirk responsibility
- Because you have to (tick the box)
- Just because you can



**Even more important!...**

**...why do respondents take part?**

To get an incentive?

To complain or praise?

Because they have to?

To make a difference/improvement

To get more engaged

**Let's be realistic**

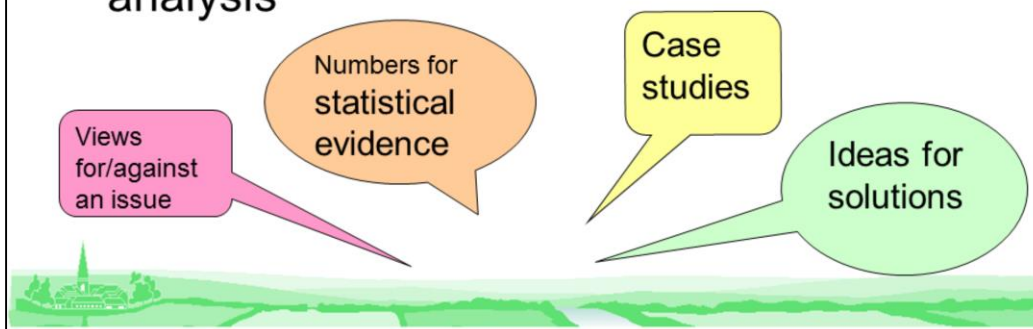
Surveys do NOT produce facts or the 'truth'

They don't tell you what to do

They help you decide what to do

## Define your aims

- What information do you wish to obtain?
- Consider the issues that are relevant to your community
- Keep it simple, sophistication lies in the analysis



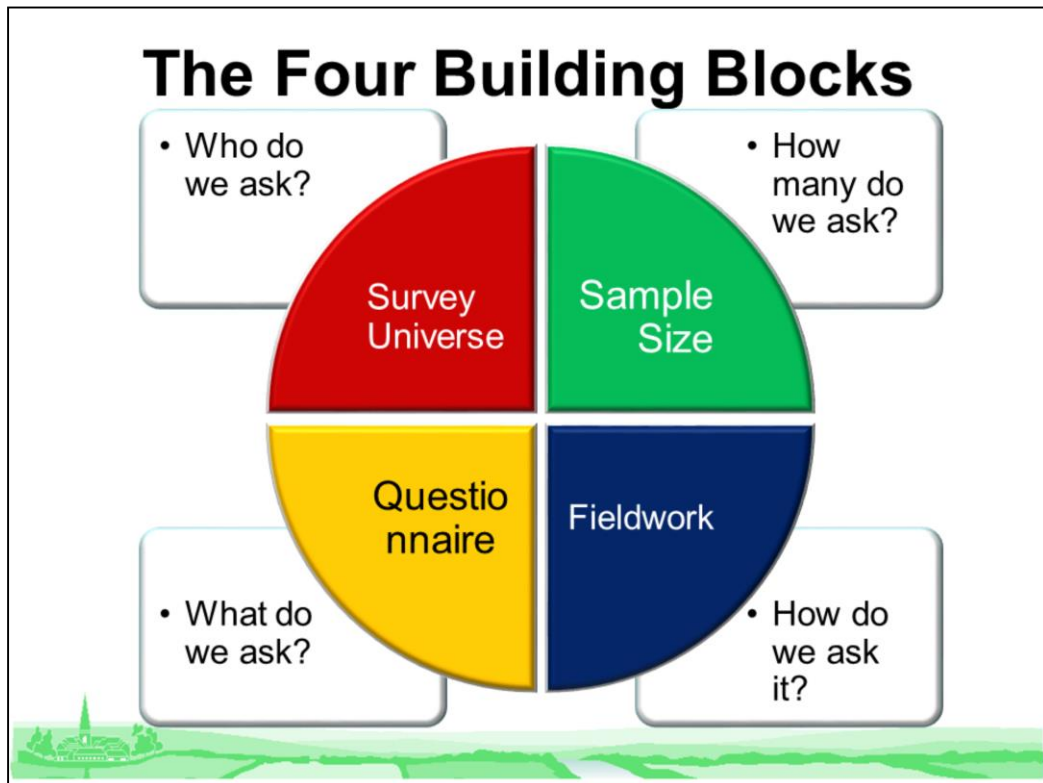
### Overall Design Philosophy

- Up to three parties in any survey exercise; you, the CLP steering group, and the respondent
- The respondent is the most important, yet the least involved, concerned, or interested
- So the questionnaire must be simple and relevant
- The sophistication lies in the analysis

### Designing a questionnaire

- Use the information you have already gathered from previous consultations (including your launch event) to guide the choice of topics and questions.
- Members of steering groups may work on a few questions themselves and discuss them together coming to an agreed wording and format.
- Involve local authority partners and other community organisations in drafting your questions
- Decide whether you are going to produce single or multiple (i.e. household) response questionnaires

**Please do contact ORCC before you start work on your questionnaire as we can provide lots of useful information and experience that may save you time, effort and money.**



ALL ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT!  
and give confidence to the reader

## Survey Universe

The population of relevance

ALL RELEVANT PARTIES

residents, businesses, visitors, passers-through, in-commuters, etc

## Sample Size

Dependent upon.....

Degree of accuracy required

The extent of sub-group analysis (eg women think this and men think that)

The budget available!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

AND, a realistic assessment of just how accurate you need the results to be!

## Fieldwork Methods

The key considerations:

Can it reach your target audience (universe)

Can it produce your target (representative?) sample?

Can it deal with the length and complexity of the survey's issues and questions?

Can it be undertaken within the project's budget and time constraints?

Where will you carry out the survey?

- On-street/walk-about
- At-site
- Hall tests
- Telephone
- (Postal) Self-completion
- In-home
- E-surveys

### **The Questionnaire**

!!!!!!! VERY IMPORTANT!!!!!!

You spend 30 or more person days designing a cunning questionnaire

You give the respondent between 5 and 20 minutes to answer it, off the cuff

Remember, the sophistication lies in the analysis, the questions themselves must be simple.

In most surveys the respondent is giving you his/her time for free  
.....respect that.

# Layout

- Questionnaire layout should be clear and simple. An over complicated format will appear more complex and time-consuming.
- Use a logical structure with titles and an introduction for each set of grouped questions.
- Use one font style throughout, no smaller than size 12 ideally 14 if possible.
- Number each question.
- Leave a space at the end for comments as necessary.



## Set the Scene!!!!

Always start by telling respondents:

- why you are doing the survey
- what's in it for them
- what other consultation is underway
- how and when they will learn of the results

## After the intro:

- Let the respondent have their say with a general open-ended question
- Explore behaviour first.....the most factual?
- Then address attitudes and opinions
- Then introduce 'your issues' so as not to lead
- Be as non-intrusive as possible
- Beware the 'pc' questions and answers
- Have balanced rating scales
- Then collect the background data, but only what you may need, and what you can use

If you are in South Oxfordshire or the Vale then SODC will format your questionnaire using SNAP software (which is used to scan in completed questionnaires for you).

All you have to do is to decide which questions you will ask.

# Decide on the questions

- Are your questions relevant?
  - Try not to 'over question' people, but only ask what is necessary.
- Are you repeating yourself?
- Do your questions lead to actions?

example

a:

Should the village have its own recycling centre?

yes ☐

no ☐

example

b:

Should the village have its own recycling centre?

yes ☐

no ☐

If you answered 'yes' please list where it might be sited:



This is where all the data you have collected from your other consultations will help you to ask the right questions.

Ask a stupid question.....

...and you will get a stupid answer.

But, if you ask the 'correct' question will you get the 'correct' answer?

The larger the questionnaire the less likely people are to take the time to complete it.



# Open questions

- Open questions allow the respondents to write down whatever response they wish. As a result this type of question will produce a wide variety of responses including some that you may not have anticipated.
- A reasonable amount of space should be provided for the respondent to record their answer in.
- Open questions can prove time consuming to analyse. (SNAP cant do it for you).
- After piloting it is often possible to change some of these open questions into closed questions due to a number of common responses.



## Question type

The way a question is asked will affect the response you receive. There are several question types you should consider when designing your questionnaire. Limit the amount of open questions you ask – you will have to process and record ALL written answers. Having too many open questions may indicate that you need to do more background research.

## Closed questions – single response

- In the case of a closed question respondents are faced with options from which to choose. They are required to mark a box or circle the number they feel best represents their opinions.

example

a:

Should the village have its own recycling centre?

yes

☐

no

☐

Example “a” shows a simple yes/no single response closed question

## Closed questions – multiple response

- Example C shows several possible options for the respondent to choose from. In this case you can ask the respondent to choose either one option, making it a single response or several, making it a multiple response.
- It is important to clarify how many ticks you would like the respondent to give.
- The inclusion of 'Other' is added in an attempt to catch all options not listed; you may then decide to provide space for the respondent to specify further.

example

C:

What leisure activities would you like to see in the Parish?

Please tick as many as appropriate:

Badminton	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tennis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Football	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rugby	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cricket	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>



A good alternative to open questions – much easier to analyse.

## Closed questions – Ranked

- Ranked questions ask respondents to provide an order of preference.
  - When using this type of response it is preferable not to include a large number of options as it becomes hard for respondents to make meaningful decisions
- Ranked questions can be difficult to analyse, especially when a multiple number of people are completing the survey.

example

d:

Please tick the following leisure activities in order of importance:

	Badminton	Football	Tennis	Cricket
Important				
No opinion				
unimportant				

Use the same kind of format throughout the questionnaire for ranked questions. However be very wary of using ranked questions.- they can be difficult to analyse and may not provide data clear enough to help you see priorities.

## Closed questions – Ranged

- Range is a good format to use with sensitive data as shown in example below (e).
- People may not feel comfortable giving their age but feel less sensitive when the data is grouped.
- You may want to expand the options for the under 18's as the feedback and ideas you get from a 10 year old will be different from a 17 year old.
- Profile data is extremely important and involves compiling data on the respondent's age and sex and is usually a few questions at the beginning of the questionnaire.

example

e:

Please indicate your age by placing a tick in the appropriate box.

Under 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	19-25	<input type="checkbox"/>	26-39	<input type="checkbox"/>
40-49	<input type="checkbox"/>	50-59	<input type="checkbox"/>	60 +	<input type="checkbox"/>



### Profile data

Profile or background data is extremely important and involves compiling data on the respondent's age and sex and is usually a few questions either at the end or beginning of the questionnaire. Following analysis it will identify groups you may need to target further due to a lack of response. However, it is important to identify whether the responses from particular ages or groups are proportional to their number in the community as a whole (sample size).

# Wording

- Use plain English.
- Avoid asking intrusive questions (eg amount earned).
- Explain why you are asking each question
- Don't avoid difficult subjects or contentious issues.
- Make sure you can do something with the answers you get.
- Encourage people to get involved in the solutions



## Personal details

Avoid intrusive questions that are neither relevant nor useful and likely to prevent people completing the questionnaire. Most people would feel that being asked how much they earn per year is a very private and unnecessary question.

If you must ask about embarrassing or 'pc' issues then do not ask about what 'you' think or do, instead ask about what 'you' think or feel about what other people think or do.

## Complex concepts

Break them down into their constituent parts

For awareness, ask about each part in turn; such informative questioning reveals levels of awareness and informs the respondent without 'lecturing' or imputing ignorance

For reactions, test each element separately.

## Have you thought about including a volunteer sheet?

A volunteer sheet can be included at the back of a questionnaire in an attempt to find people to volunteer around particular actions; communities have found this very successful. Link the volunteer sheet to specific questions to get

people thinking. This sheet can be removed from the main questionnaire at the time of collection to maintain anonymity. Chalgrove were able to get 600 volunteers to help with specific projects that were identified in their questionnaire.

# Things to avoid

- Leading Questions
- Negative Questions
- Double Questions
- Using too many questions



example

f:

Are you against the incinerator being built next to our village and the danger from pollution it will cause?

yes

☐

no

☐

## Leading questions

*“Do you agree that the level of street lighting is sufficient?”*

Everybody has the right to an opinion and regardless of whether or not it is in accordance with yours they have an equal right to be heard.

## Double questions

*“Are you satisfied with the current frequency of bus and train services from the parish to Oxford?”*

Avoid double questions – people may have separate opinions on the two subjects being covered, by grouping them you are missing out on valuable information.

## Negative questions

Negative questions can confuse the respondent as seen in example “f”



# Distributing the Questionnaire

- Publicity – make sure people know it is coming
- Confidentiality – keep it anonymous
- Include a covering letter
- Consider using existing delivery methods
- For best results use a trained team of volunteers to hand deliver and collect



## Publicity

Publicise your questionnaire before it is sent out. Think about placing an advert in the Parish newsletter detailing when people can expect it and what it is for. It is important that the process is made clear and advertised to all.

## Confidentiality

It is important confidentiality is ensured as many may feel reluctant to complete anything they feel will be seen by others. A note of how confidentiality will be achieved can be included in the covering letter and will allow for a higher number of responses and honest opinions.

## Covering letter

It is a good idea to include an introductory letter outlining who you are, why you have produced a questionnaire and what the results will be used for. This will set the scene and may encourage those who would otherwise not have considered taking part.

## How will you distribute your questionnaires?

In some cases questionnaires can be included in existing delivery schedules such as the parish newsletter or as part of the newsletter. Otherwise you may be able to gather sufficient volunteers together to hand-deliver. If hand-delivering you may be able to identify those that may require assistance, for example those that are hard of sight may require a copy in a larger font size. Consider a briefing event for questionnaire deliverers.

# Collecting your Questionnaire

- Hand delivering and collecting will increase your return rate – between 60% and 80%
- Stamped addressed envelopes will return between 30% to 40%
- Collection or drop-off boxes will return less on their own but could be used in conjunction with other return methods
- Set a deadline for return and print it on your questionnaire



## Hand collection

This can increase your response rate dramatically. High return rates can only be achieved this way. Those that have encountered problems in completing their questionnaires can be given help.

- Advertise for volunteers in advance.
- Agree roles and responsibilities.
- Make sure the workload of those conducting the questionnaires is not too large – ideally no more than 20-30 houses per person.
- Create a briefing or a clear set of guidelines on how it is to be administered. This is especially important for those who have not been involved in producing the questionnaire. (A full guide for collectors is available on [www.clp-se.org.uk](http://www.clp-se.org.uk))
- Take spares in case people have lost the original.
- Think about producing name badges.
- **Before you start**
  - Who will visit what house?
  - What time are you going to visit?
  - How many times are you going to visit a household before classing it as a non-respondent?
  - Create a sheet to record times you have visited and who did not

want to participate.

- Think about dropping a piece of paper through the door of those that were out during collection detailing what to do next.

### **Stamped addressed envelopes**

Stamped addressed envelopes will almost certainly provide you with a higher response rate than those without stamps. Think about the address you give for returned questionnaires.

An address outside the parish may concern some, making them less likely to respond. Likewise an envelope addressed to a specific person within the community may also put people off.

### **What about a PO Box?**

A PO Box address can be obtained from Royal Mail for a fixed period of either six months or a year for a fee and with a proof of address. This allows mail to be delivered to your local Royal Mail delivery office, or for an extra charge, to your normal address. For more information please see the 'Reference and other useful information'.

### **Collection boxes**

Place these in local shops for people to drop off completed questionnaires. Make sure you publicise them well and explain what they are for.

**Set a date** – decide upon a date for collection or a deadline for return.

## How to increase your response rate

- Include an introductory letter or statement
- Hand deliver and collect your questionnaire.
  - Typically gets 60-80% return rate.
- Publicise your questionnaire before it is sent out.
- Send first draft out to partners for comment
- Pilot your final draft



### How to increase your response rate

- ✓ Hand deliver and collect your questionnaire.
- ✓ Include an introductory letter or statement.
- ✓ The larger the questionnaire the less likely people are to take the time to complete it.
- ✓ **Pilot your final draft and leave enough time to make changes if necessary**

### Publicity

Publicity is an extremely important part of any consultation. It is a good idea to pre-publicise your questionnaires with posters in local shops and articles in the parish newsletter explaining the importance of the questionnaire and what it will be used for.

### Prize draw

People often lack motivation when faced with a questionnaire. One way in which communities have tried to address this is by providing a prize draw. Perhaps your local shop or a local business could provide a prize?

Think about when you will announce the winner, and how? If undertaking an Action Plan think about drawing the winning ticket at an Action Plan Consultation event to draw people in.

## **Pilot your questionnaire**

Always pilot your questionnaire; circulate it to a community group, family and friends or even ORCC staff who have lots of experience with questionnaires.

A pilot will reveal any questions that confuse or perhaps aren't necessary, highlight mistakes, spelling errors, problems with the layout and bring about general suggestions for improvement.

Identifying problems before you distribute your questionnaire is a real advantage. It will almost certainly decrease the respondent's experience of confusion making the questionnaire more 'user friendly'.

# Things to consider

- Have you carried out a skills audit that could identify local experts to help?
- Include a volunteer sheet at the end to capture people who want to help with actions
- How will you collate and analyse your completed questionnaires?



## Have you carried out a skills audit?

Try and collect email addresses of people who could help during your other consultation events and opportunities.

Is there anyone in your parish with experience in producing questionnaires or undertaking market research?

Is there anyone with experience of data collation and analysis?

Are there people willing to help put the questionnaire together, photocopy, print and staple?

Are there volunteers to deliver and collect the questionnaire?

## How will you collate and analyse your results?

First look for volunteers locally, is there anyone willing to set up a spreadsheet? (most groups use Excel)

Enter data? Is there a local resident or business that could do this work for you?

Is there anyone with relevant experience who is willing to do it for free? For example students.

Perhaps there is a local resident prepared to carry out a short-term piece of work for a reduced rate?

Otherwise look to pay organisations in the wider locality making sure the fee

you pay to a professional for collating the results also covers analysis to help spot trends. (SNAP software does the analysis for you.)

### **Have you thought about including a volunteer sheet?**

A volunteer sheet can be included at the back of a questionnaire in an attempt to find people to volunteer around particular actions; communities have found this very successful. Link the volunteer sheet to specific questions to get people thinking.

### **Produce a separate Questionnaire for Children and Young people**

It is important that young people are consulted on the same issues as the rest of the community, just in a manner that is more appropriate to them.

Think about involving local schools in producing a questionnaire, perhaps a class could design it and all pupils complete it.

What about young people and youth clubs or similar organisations? If you do use a questionnaire for young people make sure they are involved in designing it. They will be more likely to complete it if its online and linked to via a facebook advert.

# Writing the report

- Always do a report – Always!
- Always set out to draw conclusions
- Be confident about what you write
- Take the myriad strands of data and weave them into a narrative;



**Statistics: spins the data into yarn**

**Analysis: weaves the yarn into a narrative**



**Reporting: always do it?** Yes.

Even if you do not need to, still 'do' a report; it forces you to check the data and explore its strengths and its weaknesses

**Reporting; maximising its value**

Survey data is more than just a series of recorded 'facts' or events or behaviours....

( x% did this...)

It is a vast data source which will help you understand **why** the recorded events are as they are....

(A are more likely to do this than B, possibly because.....)

**Reporting; the big but**

Just how representative is the achieved sample compared to its universe?

Can you compare it to any official stats. eg Census?

...is it acceptable?

...is weighing/balancing required?

...are results influenced by method, location, timing?



## **Weaving the narrative**

Get the plot in your head and identify the major issues at the start

Remember your advantage: You know more about the data, and you know more about the area, than anyone else

Always set out to draw conclusions

“The difference between truth and fiction is that fiction must make sense.”

## **Start with the ‘facts’**

Establish behaviour; who does what?

Then, from this behavioural spread, develop your hypotheses

Introduce attitudinal and other analysis as back-up to such hypotheses

Present all the stats. that are necessary to justify your take, but also to allow the reader to test his/her take

## **Report; essential elements to give the reader confidence in the data**

Summary of results at the start this is a narrative, but not a ‘who dun it?’

Justify the thread of the story

Only discuss what is relevant

Refer to fieldwork disposition, method, dates, and any effectiveness data (response rates etc)

Refer to the target survey universe

Refer to sampling sources and method, if any

Highlight any abnormalities but Do NOT refer to everything that is ‘different’

Do NOT misinterpret the data

## **Why confidence?**

For the reader....

....to accept the results.

For the writer....

....to defend them.

## **Simple hints for reporting**

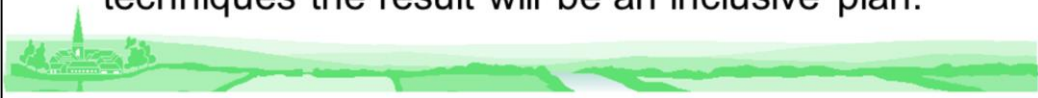
- Everything must be ‘free-standing’ (ie Every figure/table must state the question, the sample size and its composition)
- Set out your objectives as a series of 3 or 4 questions, then check that you

have answered them

- Would you be happy for any statement to appear as a headline in the local press? If in doubt, leave it out.
- Does it discuss the issues the survey sought to address?
- You might take two weeks to write it; the key reader may well give it no more than 10 minutes. So...
  - Keep a strict sub-heading regime
  - Do NOT get into complex sub-group analysis; if you do then your reporting structure or initial sub-group definitions are probably wrong
  - Make sure there are no typos or statistical errors in the exec. summary

## And finally ...

- Questionnaires provide an opportunity for the same set of questions to be answered by an entire community.
- If designed well and used correctly they can provide statistically valid and influencing information.
- Your questionnaire will be the last part of the inclusive consultation methods you have used to create your Community Led Plan
- When combined with other consultation techniques the result will be an inclusive plan.



**Keep everything SIMPLE**; the sampling, the questions, the fieldwork, and the basic analysis

Keep the respondent at the forefront of the design

Stick to the issue

Surprising (exciting) results = wrong (probably) results

You are the expert on all of this so do it all with **CONFIDENCE** !

**It is just common sense**, but remember....

Having a local team gives you a great start, but be aware of any hidden or even open agendas

Don't get adventurous with your analysis; simple analysis is easy, complex analysis is not and cost lots of money.

Be realistic, and do not over-promote your results; if there are flaws or biases, simply acknowledge them.

'It is simple to make things difficult; it is difficult to make things simple'.