

Surveys for Evaluation

Key considerations

Surveys can be a great way to gather evidence to show the impact of your engagement activities however, careful thought must be given to what to ask, to whom and what it means.

- **What do you want to change** and what information do you need to support this? Ideally work to a Theory of Change or Logic Model
- **Don't ask more than you need** and ideally no more than 10 questions / 2-3 minutes response time
- **Demographic or baseline information can be vital** to show change (age, pre-existing knowledge/opinion, partial postcode, etc), but try to do this anonymously and consider privacy and data regulations
- For REF Impact Case Studies, both the **reach** (how many) and the **significance** (how much) of the change must be evidenced
- Also think about how to show a **clear link to your research**
- **Consider other methods**, a survey isn't necessarily best and more creative methods are often better
- **Consider practical issues**; time, cost and people

Types of survey

Type	Pros	Cons
Written Surveys (Paper or Digital)	Cheap, easy to use / familiar Can get detailed info / free text Good for set timings (e.g. end of event / activity) Can build up data over time	Can be biased: not everyone will complete / is motivated and / or if answers can be seen / heard Return rate low if not monitored Questions must be clear
Face-to-face Interviews	More control on recruiting representative sample More likely for surveys to be filled out completely in person	High time / staff demand Numbers likely lower Can be biased: respondents could feel judged by others
Telephone Interviews	Less time/cost than interviews, no need for travel / location Can be done after event	High demand on time and staff resources Can irritate if cold calling
Postal Interviews	Less geographically restrictive, can be low cost	Return rate of surveys may be low
Web Surveys	Can be widely accessed	Return rate may be low and may exclude some audiences



What should I ask and how?

- Use plain English and test your questions on people with no prior knowledge
- Avoid long sentences, double negatives, jargon and acronyms
- When will you carry out your survey and how – who will be willing or able to respond, who will you miss?
- How can you address barriers e.g. language, (dis)ability, time?
- How will data be recorded, transcribed, analysed and stored?
- Can / should the same questions be used for multiple time points, events, situations, audiences?
- Check what others do. Museums, festivals, universities, artists and other grant-funded activities publish surveys and findings. Don't reinvent the wheel, but do make it specific to your aims / activities.

Open or closed? Qualitative or quantitative?

There are some key differences, although if possible you should use a mixture of both.

Type	Pros	Cons
OPEN E.g. What do you want to be when you grow up?	Responders own words Rich data and quotes Indicates range of possible responses May highlight important issues you didn't expect	Can generate unanticipated answers Answers may need to be grouped/coded Need to be carefully worded to get responses on specific/intended topic May not want to expand on answers, temptation to use 'yes', 'no', 'maybe'
CLOSED E.g. Do you want to be a firefighter or a banker?	Variety of ways to use from yes /no to multi-point scale (e.g. Likert) Easy to quantify and compare across groups / data sets	Responder can only choose from defined responses May be biased / exclude some important options unforeseen by question setter Need to ensure choices are mutually exclusive / defined (how often is often?)
QUALITATIVE E.g. Why would you like to be a ballet dancer?	Like open questions, allows you collect what can't (easily) be measured	Data collected requires interpretation to be meaningful Respondents answers and their actual behaviour may be different
QUANTITATIVE E.g. Out of 10, how much do you want to be a chef?	Can calculate (and track) degree of change (e.g. 10% more)	Quantitative change doesn't tell you everything; twice as many might not be twice as good.

The Likert Scale is a 5-7 point rating scale used to measure opinions, perceptions, etc. The scale must be balanced with equal numbers of positive and negative responses and a neutral mid point. For example: **What do you think of the Likert Scale?**



Love it



Like It



Neutral



Not Keen



Hate it



The take home: Use surveys wisely. All methods are open to bias and all approaches, questions and types have different pros and cons. Be clear on what the limitations are and pragmatic about what is reasonable. Like everything, there's no one-size-fits-all answer. Just try to be sure (and test) that your survey question data can convincingly show whether your expected or intended change has happened. For feedback, examples, or further help contact PER Team.



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