



## How to Develop an Effective Survey

What should your service-learning project aim to achieve? In order to better answer this question and develop a plan that focuses on the identified community need, you can design and administer surveys to key groups of people. To gain a better understanding of the community need, your service-learning planning team may choose to survey students, teachers or administrators, and community members.

### Objective

The purpose of conducting a survey is learn more about the experience, observations, and perceptions of community members. You can then use this data to make more informed decisions about the service-learning project you develop. Research will help you identify the genuine needs of your school or community. Analyzing the results of this data collection will also help you assess the community as a whole.

### Directions

1. Use the chart titled “Potential Survey Questions,” located at the end of this document, to help brainstorm questions to include in your survey. The chart identifies key subject areas and sample questions to ask survey respondents. In most cases, you will design a much shorter survey.

It's recommended that your survey be no longer than 10-15 questions.

The chart of potential survey questions is only an example; you're encouraged to think of your own questions related to your project.

2. Consider the following when designing a survey:
  - Who do you want to gather information and opinions from? (Students, teachers, and/or parents? Community members such as business owners, local government employees, and/or neighbors?)
  - If you'd like to gather information from more than one group of people, will you administer the same survey or will you use different surveys for different groups? (Will you ask the same questions of each group? What are the key subject areas that you'd like to gather information about?)
  - What type of data would you like to gather? Qualitative data, quantitative data, or both? Depending on your answer to this question, how will you create a survey that seeks to gather this type of data?
  - Where and when will you administer the survey? How would you like to administer the survey? Do you want to pass out paper copies of the survey or would you like to administer the survey online?
  - Do you need permission from anyone to administer the survey?
3. Work with your service-learning planning team members to develop one or more surveys to address chosen subject areas. Keep in mind that shorter surveys, ten to fifteen questions, tend to elicit greater response rates.
4. Work with an adult mentor to create unbiased questions that do not lead the survey respondent to answer in a particular way. Avoid leading questions.

5. Develop open-ended questions that allow for free response or explanation as well as questions that collect quantitative data or have a list of answers for survey respondents to choose from.
6. Once the survey is created, test it out on a group of five to ten people. Ask for feedback on the content, format, and framing of the survey; then make any necessary changes and improvements to the survey before administering it officially.
7. Your service-learning planning team should also decide what identifying information you'd like to collect from survey respondents. While many survey respondents like to fill out surveys anonymously, you could provide a space for respondents to write in their name and contact information if they would like to be contact for a follow-up interview.

What other information are you hoping to collect from survey respondents?

- Role?
  - Race?
  - Socioeconomic status?
8. When you have finalized the survey, prepare to administer it. Decide how you'd like to administer the survey—online, paper, etc. Share the following with survey respondents before they complete the survey:
    - The purpose of the survey.
    - The estimated time it will take to complete the survey
    - Who to direct questions to/who to contact if they would like to ask questions
    - A deadline for completing the survey.
  9. Once all respondents have completed the survey, analyze the data you've collected. How many people responded? Who are they? If you're surveying students, did you receive responses disproportionately from specific groups of youth? Look for general trends as well as atypical results in survey responses and discuss what type of conclusions can be reached from this data.

In most cases, the respondents who complete the survey represent only a sample of the overall population. Keep this in mind when developing service-learning projects or creating solutions to needs identified by the respondents. It's always helpful to conduct follow-up interviews with survey respondents who have a lot to share in order to learn more about their concerns, ideas, and perspectives.