

Toolkit: surveys and consultation



Description

An event would provide volunteers from the Friends group an ideal opportunity to carry out surveys or questionnaires on a range of topics with the general public who have come to the event. A captive audience from a wide background is provided and there would be a wide cross section of park users to interview.

Surveys could be used for a variety of purposes, including feeding into park management plans, strategic work by the Friends or a restoration or improvement plan for the future of the park. They could also be used to gauge people's interest in joining a community group providing an opportunity to recruit new volunteers. Surveys can identify what people like and don't like, what needs to change or improve or just to assess the level of local support for (or against) something.

How to do it

Decide what the survey wants to achieve

You should firstly work out what you want to test. You should also give consideration to how the information will be used. Surveys can be used to determine topical issues within the park, but there may be something which is affecting the park already (e.g. dog fouling, lack of childrens play, development threat, future restoration etc). If this is the case, decide with the Friends group and the local authority what issue(s) you would like to consult about. Some examples of the possible uses of surveys include:

- Whether people would like to join a Friends group or what the barriers to involvement are;
- What people would like to see developed within the park. This could be linked to a current or planned restoration project or just what people would like to see ideally;
- Patterns of use of people, in terms of when and why they visit and what they do;
- Why people don't use the park more often;
- Test the popularity of a particular idea or proposal;
- A satisfaction survey of what people thought of the event or whether they would like to see further events and what they would like to see featured.

Design the survey

Work closely with the local authority's parks department who will have designed visitor survey questionnaires before and will be able to offer help.

Print out enough copies for the day of the event. Have some promotional material on the Friends group or about the survey for people to take away if they wish.

Plan the practical survey

Organise a group of people (most likely members of the Friends group) who are willing to act as surveyors on the day of the event.

Decide on the time the survey will be carried out, how long people will survey, the location and where different people will be located. It is best to carry out a survey in pairs of volunteers.

Properly brief the people who will be carrying out the survey

Make sure they all understand the basic rules and the reason why they are carrying out the survey, who they represent, what the information will be used for and who will see it etc. They should be able to answer any question from the recipient.

Collect all surveys and keep them in a central location after the event

Nominate someone within the Friends group or local authority to carry out the data entry and statistical interpretation of the information.

Carry out simple statistical analysis (using a computer programme such as MS Excel), summarise the information and present in a report if necessary.

Share the information with the local authority (they may be able to help with data entry, analysis and promotional) or use for your own purpose.

Must do's

Explain to the participant why you are carrying out the survey, where you are from, what the information will be used for and that individual responses are confidential.

Make sure the survey is logical, divided into steps which follow one another and is understandable by the recipient. This is particularly relevant if you are letting the recipient take the survey away and complete in their own time before returning it to you (it should be self-explanatory or have simple, straightforward instructions for completion). It should also be designed to be filled in quickly and easily by the surveyor. The information you gather must be able to be analysed simply in statistical terms. Someone should know how to do this using programmes such as MS Excel. Ask the local authority for help if not.

Make sure questions cannot be misinterpreted at both the time of asking and at the analysis stage.

Keep the survey as short as possible. It shouldn't take more than ten minutes (e.g. two sides of A4) of someone's time otherwise they will get bored.

Always ask people when they look like they don't mind stopping and always be polite. If people are busy in conversation or are hurrying to somewhere, they are best left alone. Pick a suitable time during the day, and avoid clashes with popular parts of the event (e.g. a headlining band appearing).

Do not ask personal questions such as income, marital status, age or sexual orientation. However, you should work out what (and how) you are planning to record about the recipient, as some demographic information will be useful.

If you survey children, ask permission from a parent or guardian before you start the survey.

Always thank the person afterwards and tell them where they can get more information if they want, including when the results will be available and where it will be published etc.

Make sure all the completed surveys are collected and stored in a safe, dry place on the day.

Do not swamp the site with people surveying as this will intimidate your audience. Have a sensible number of people surveying in different areas of the event and make sure you survey in pairs.

If you are carrying out the survey outside of the event environment (or on behalf of someone or an organisation), you may need to carry a letter of authority, giving you permission to carry out the survey to show to people.

Questionnaire design

There are plenty of good books offering advice and guidance on the development of questionnaires.

Consider whether it is more appropriate to have yes/no answers, categories or open questions. There are advantages to each and it depends on what you are trying to achieve. Open questions will generate more information and allow a respondent to describe things in their own words. Closed questions will be faster to complete and will be more suitable for statistical analysis and comparison. For example:

Closed (Y/N):	Do you use the park?	Yes / No
Closed (categories):	When do you use the park?	Mornings / Afternoons / Evenings
	Why do you use the park?	Children's play / Walking the dog / Relaxation / Other
Open:	When do you use the park?	(left blank for their response)
	Why do you use the park?	(left blank for their response)

Develop categories for closed questions carefully. If they are textual, always make sure you have an 'other' category which is left open. 'Don't know' options are also useful. If they are numerical (e.g. frequencies), make sure the total number of categories is sensible and makes sense. As well as making sure all options are accounted for, make sure that respondents are sure which box they must tick, for example:

How many times a month do you visit the park?

Poor: 0-5; 5-10; 10-20; more than 20 (if a respondent visited 5 or 10 times, they would not know which box to tick)

Good: 0-5; 6-10; 11-20; more than 20 (the categories are exclusive)

Issues to consider

Make sure you know who you are finding this information out for. Will it be for the local authority or for your own group? Do not carry out a survey without knowing what the information will be used for.

Whether the information will be able to be used for professional purposes such as management plans by the council. The local authority may require such information gathering to be carried out by professional market researchers or they may favour postal votes. How can you ensure that your sample will be representative of the community? Work closely with your local authority to resolve this issue.

Consider how you will be representative and to what extent this matters (dependent on the aim of the survey and what the information will be used for). You should try to ensure you sample a wide range of people (age, gender etc), but also try to make it as typical of the park user group as possible. Leaving surveys on a stall for people to complete themselves is one way to get around the issue of selection of recipients. Alternatively, you may decide that you want to survey one particular group of people, so being representative of the park users would actually prevent you from achieving your aims.

Whether this will be an independent survey or will fit into a wider part of a strategy by the local authority, for example finding out about wider restoration of the park in the long-term.

If you are trying to recruit new members or volunteers, remember to take some form of contact details if they are willing. Remember to say that the contact details will not be passed on to third parties.

Consider wearing a badge identifying yourself as a member of the Friends group.

Whether you will be reading the questions and filling in the answers or you will be giving the survey to the recipient to complete and to return to yourself later on. If the latter, as well as including instructions, you may need to consider production in a number of different languages, large print and Braille (there will be considerable cost implications here). You should think whether there is one particular.

Consider offering a prize or incentive to complete the survey. As well as encouraging people to take part, this can be a useful way to gather people's contact details to keep them informed about your work.

Consider using props to develop interaction (e.g. if you are surveying people on their opinion of different options for future development of the park, photographs or models can help people to visualise the proposals).

Useful organisations to work with

The parks department of the local authority who will have carried out surveys like this before.

Schools, other community groups or organisations (e.g. local Groundwork Trusts or BTCV) may also have carried out surveys in the past. They may also be able to help you develop your own.

Other event ideas to link to

Friends group stalls. The stall could provide information about the survey (for both people who have completed it and people who wish to find out more) and what it is trying to achieve. You could ask people whether they would like to complete a survey at the stall or provide self-completion surveys at the stall.

Park tours. Part of the tour could involve asking people the survey and it could be explained at the start of the tour.

Interpretation displays. The displays could contain information providing a background to the surveys, for example about restoration projects or about the Friends group and community involvement.

What to do if it rains

Wearing waterproof clothing should be sufficient, although the main problem will be lack of people to survey. Ask people when they are in a dry location where they will not mind stopping.

If you place the clip board within a clear plastic bag big enough to get your hand inside, you will be able to keep the paper dry.

What to do next

Use the information to feed into a park management plan or provide statistics for the local authority (eg. what would encourage people to use the park more often)

Use the information for a newsletter or interpretation leaflet about the park. The information could also be publicised on a website.

Use the information to lobby for further resources or promote the park and your work as a Friends group (e.g. 'x' number of people want a new playground). Percentages often have more impact and meaning for people than raw numbers.

Use the information to evaluate the success of the event and to feed into the management of the next one (e.g. what went well, or what people would like to see in another event, including would they attend a future event).

Where to get further information

'ILAM Model Customer Survey Questionnaires for Managers of Public Parks' (Reeves, N., 2002)

Placecheck (UDAL) - www.udal.org.uk/placecheck.htm

Placecheck is a method of assessing the qualities of a place. It is based on a system of questions and answers, Placecheck is a simple and powerful tool to identify the positive and negative qualities of a place, and can be easily used by both professionals and local residents.

Guide to the Design of Surveys (by Leeds University)

www.leeds.ac.uk/iss/documentation/top/top2.pdf

Learndirect - www.learndirect.co.uk

Provide a variety of comprehensive courses on how to use spreadsheets (for statistical analysis) and other computer programmes.

Excel Tip - <http://www.exceltip.com/>

Microsoft Online Training - <http://office.microsoft.com/en-gb/training/CR061831141033.aspx>