

Community Surveys



If people want to conduct a Community Survey, the 1st thing is to think about your aims – what do you want to research and why? The reason why you want the information will influence the questions you ask.

For example: If you're planning to build a Church extension that will be used by the Church and opened up to community use, you will want to ask people in the local community how they might want to use the new facilities. There is a lot of information at

www.churchbuildingprojects.co.uk and some free downloadable project resources including:

Sample Community Survey for a Church Building Project

Devise your own survey questions – but here's an example to get started

Include a covering letter, with the contact person's details, for initial delivery one week before you go door to door.

For each question please tick the answers you think are relevant and then underline the most important.

Elderly People

What do you think elderly people would appreciate most?

1. Regular day centre
2. Interest group (e.g. Scrabble, knitting, trips out etc.)
3. Lunch Club
4. Quiz afternoons
5. Dances

Further sections of the questionnaire continue, laid out in the same way, asking information about:

Parents – what do you think parents would appreciate most?

After school clubs (11-14) / After school clubs (primary age) / Creche

Young People – which of the following would best serve the young people in this area?

Pregnancy advice / Advice relating to sexual diseases / Safe place for young people to Meet / Advice relating to drugs and/or alcohol

Finance – advice for which of the following would be most helpful?

Debt counselling / Redundancy / Careers advice / Employment issues

Support or Advice – support or advice for which of the following would be most helpful?

Bereavement / Terminal illness / Carer support / Counselling

Classes/Services – what type of classes/services would benefit the community?

Fitness sessions / Parenting classes / English classes / Mediation

There is then a question about Ethnicity and options to tick, including “No comment”, and a question about age group with options 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-59, over 59, No comment.

Thank you very much for helping us with this survey. A summary of the results will appear on our church website in xx weeks time.

The process of asking people about the use of the Church building, in the above community survey, can also give good publicity - if people have stated a need for a particular activity, they are more likely to support it. Personally, if I was doing the above survey, I would want to add "Other – please specify" to each section, because there may be some ideas you haven't thought about that could emerge from the needs of the community.

A Community Survey is useful if you want to gain the views of a large number of people, and it can be useful for identifying and evidencing need. However, the typical response rate for a large-scale community survey is low, generally only 10-20%, though steps can be taken to improve this by combining the survey with other means of community engagement eg face-to-face interviews. Large questionnaire surveys can be time-consuming and labour intensive, but they don't have to be – you can go to a meeting where your key audience is, and ask them a few questions, either verbally or with a printed questionnaire. All the forms come back to you in ten minutes and in a few more minutes you can get results that will be helpful.

The main stages involved are:

- Defining the sample size and the type of information required.
- Deciding on the type of survey to be used (postal, drop and collect, telephone or interview).
- Survey design.
- Piloting the survey. This is important because it shows you if there are any misunderstandings.
- Undertaking the survey.
- Analysis of the results.

Some surveys are very broad, and ask about any and all kinds of needs. Others are narrow, and limit themselves to learning more about one or two. Both kinds of surveys are common and helpful. Which to choose depends on what you want to find out. It is often best to use a short and concise questionnaire where people's views on an issue are being sought. Increasingly email and SMS (text) are being used to provide a variety of ways for people to engage. These work best when a small number of questions are used and when views on a specific proposal or issue are being sought. There are hundreds of possibilities eg rubbish on the streets, vandalism, lack of local amenities – anything that might be perceived as a group or community issue or problem.

A typical Needs Assessment survey will have more questions and is a way of asking group or community members what they see as the most important needs of that group or community. The results of the survey then guide future action. Generally, the needs that are rated most important are the ones that get addressed.

A needs assessment based community survey is very useful at the start of a project because it can give you detailed information from a larger and more representative group of people than you could get from observation alone. This type of survey is required in many applications for funding, and is almost always helpful in advocating or lobbying for your cause. It also means that any actions you eventually take, or join in, are in line with needs that are expressed by the community.

It's important to tell people the results of your survey and to act on the results.

Example of a Needs Assessment Community Survey

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

People are given options to tick for each statement – definitely agree / tend to agree / neither agree nor disagree / tend to disagree / definitely disagree / not relevant to me

Quality of Life

I am satisfied with my local area as a place to live.

I feel there are job opportunities for me.

I have good access to life-long learning (e.g. adult education).
I have good access to sports and leisure facilities
I have good access to community activities.
I have good access to shopping facilities.
I have good access to 'green' open spaces/nature.
I have good access to cultural facilities (e.g. museums and cinemas).
I am able to meet relatives or friends at least once a week.
I feel free to practise my religion or belief.
I am treated with dignity and respect in the community.
I have good access to childcare services.

Community safety and crime

The police and local council are dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour in my area successfully.
I have a low fear of crime.
I feel safe outside in my local area after dark.
I feel safe outside in my local area during daylight.

Which of the things below, if any, do you think most needs improving in your local area?

(Please tick up to 5 boxes only).

Access to nature.
Activities for teenagers.
Affordable decent housing.
Clean streets.
Community activities.
Community relations (people getting on well together in your local area).
Cultural facilities (e.g. cinemas, museums).
Education provision.
Facilities for young people.
Health services.
Job prospects.
The level of crime.
The level of pollution.
The level of traffic congestion.
Parks and open spaces.
Public transport.
Road and pavement repairs.
Shopping facilities.
Wage levels and local cost of living.
None of these.
Don't know.
Other (please outline below):

What suggestions do you have for improvements?

Other questions can be added depending on the reasons for the research. The above questions are part of a Community Survey by Devon County Council and the questionnaire continues with specific questions about the accessibility of Council Services and where people think cuts in Services might be possible in difficult financial times. The final section of the questionnaire asks people about themselves eg age, employment, disability etc.

A Community Profile

The Community Survey might be part of the preparation of a complete community profile, to help people address the correct issues in the area. There are many ways to do a community profile. Here is a broad list of the types of things you may want to know:

- **The people in your area and the problems they experience** – use meetings, interviews, surveys and official sources to find out as much as you can about:
 - People's practical needs and problems – concentrate on issues like housing, transport, health services, education, child care and local facilities.
 - Issues that worry or concern them – these could be things like crime, violence, not enough activities for young people etc.
 - Facts and figures about age groups, gender, employment status and income.

- **The physical environment** – make a list of what exists and what the problems are. Look at things like:
 - Types of housing.
 - Schools.
 - Roads.
 - Health services – doctors, hospitals, clinics, ambulance
 - Police services
 - Sport, parks and other recreational facilities
 - Shops, markets and banking facilities.
 - Places of employment
 - Places of worship
 - Community halls
 - Public transport
- **Access to Council services**
 - Where are the nearest offices?
 - How long is the waiting list for social housing?
- **Community life** – what else is happening in the community?
 - Make a list of all the organisations you can think of. Ask any organisations you meet to give you contact details for others they know of.

A Community Survey as a method of Church Engagement with the Community

Some Churches might want to use a community survey as a form of outreach to get to know residents in an area and introduce the local church and give information about activities and special events. In this case, the survey is conducted by means of a face-to-face interview and the interviewer will aim to engage the person in conversation with open questions. Lichfield Diocese has done a lot of work on this type of survey and has some good advice:

[Lichfield Diocese Top Tips](#) (*you will need to scroll down and click on the Community Survey pdf*)

In particular, the Lichfield Diocesan information emphasises the importance of prayer and has helpful information about overcoming possible issues with people being reluctant to talk on the doorstep. “Remember, these days, people are very suspicious of strangers who come to the door, thinking they are either Jehovah Witnesses or con men. A few days before you visit the street, pop a letter through the door saying that in the next few days someone from your local parish church will be calling to ask some questions, as you are concerned about the relevance of the church and want the opinions of the people who live in the area. State that the person who calls will be wearing an identity badge and give them a phone number to ring if they do not want anyone to call. Include the questionnaire and say they have the option of completing it in advance.”

The aim is to systematically visit all the homes in the parish (which could take a number of years). The encouragement is to link the visiting to a special event, like a “Songs of Praise” Service, and even ask people if they have a favourite hymn that will be sung at the Service. Another example is where the community survey is linked specifically to the use of the church halls and is a chance to remind the community that the church is there.

Possible Questions

Keep your questions simple and don't ask too many. If you have something specific you are asking about (eg use of a church building by the community), don't make it too complicated. Here are some general suggestions:

1. How long have you lived in the area?
2. What are best things about this area?
3. What are the main problems facing people in this community?
4. What do you think are the ways in which the church can practically support the community?
5. What do you think of the church?

6. Have you had any spiritual experiences of any sort?
7. Is there anything you would like us to pray for – for you, your family, or someone you know? (we'll be holding a service on _____ where you can come and light a candle or present a prayer card for the person)
8. What is your favourite hymn/religious song? (we'll be holding a Songs of Praise on _____ and be singing the favourite songs chosen)

Possible additional questions or alternatives:

As a Church we are considering putting on various courses for the community. Which of these, if any, do you think would be useful/relevant? Parenting Course / Marriage Course / Drug-proofing your kids / Do you have any other suggestions?

Do you believe in God? Yes / No / Don't Know

Who was Jesus? A good man / A fraud / the Son of God / Other

Do you have a Bible? Where is it? (Have some to give free – or at least a gospel).

Community Survey used by St. Mary's, Becontree (Barking & Dagenham Deanery)

COMMUNITY SURVEY

(A)

1. How long have you lived here?
.....
.....
2. Where were you living before?
.....
.....
3. We have day time activities for children and retired people. Will you be interested?
.....
.....
4. How many adults are in your household? What are the age ranges?
.....
.....
5. What age range are the children?
.....
.....
6. Which schools are the children attending?
.....
.....
7. What do you think is good about this area?
.....
.....
8. Have you experienced any problems so far?
.....
.....
9. Have you been to church before for:
a. Wedding b. Christening c. Funeral or
d. Sunday Service?

10. Do you know where St Mary's Becontree is?
.....
.....

(B)

1. Do you believe in some kind of God?
Yes / No / Not sure
[If they answer "yes"/"not sure"] What do you think God is like?
a. A force? c. Personal?
b. Distant? d. Something else?
2. What do you believe happens at the end of our lives?
We die and that's it
We return to earth in another form or as another person
We all go to heaven
Some people go to heaven but others to hell
I am not sure
Something else
.....
3. What do you believe about Jesus?
He didn't exist at all
He was an ordinary man and nothing more
He was a prophet or messenger from God
He is the only Son of God
Other

St. Mary's Church in Becontree (Barking & Dagenham Deanery) did some door-to-door interviews with residents of a new housing area based on the Lichfield Diocesan approach (survey questions on the previous page). Interviewers, in pairs, knocked on people's doors in a new area of housing. They introduced themselves as members of St. Mary's Church in Becontree. They asked permission to ask a few questions. After completing section (A), they asked if people would also complete a few questions about their beliefs in section (B). The new residents were given leaflets about Church activities and an invitation to a Church Picnic in the local park. The response of the residents was very positive.

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11/11/15