



Selecting a Survey Approach Guide May 2018

The guide is part of a series of experiments to determine whether human-centered design survey approach can improve the quality, diversity and usability of data collected. The goal is to increase the agency or voice of individuals through the data survey process. There is not one survey approach to meet all needs, but this guide helps organisations select an approach to its needs. Which of the approaches below best describe you needs?

Diverse Participants and Unknown Issues

The event hosted individuals from a range of backgrounds with little to no experience of giving feedback. There is a need to discover unknown issues, especially with those individuals that rarely complete traditional surveys or feel empowered to give critical feedback.

If this describes your situation, consider the *Five Open-Ended Question Approach*.

Measuring Satisfaction that is both Reliable and Easy

The individuals are available through e-mail. They feel empowered to give critical feedback and are comfortable with scales.

If this describes your situation, consider using the *Net Promoter Score Approach*.

Creating Reports and Communication Materials

Often we also need survey data for funders, participants and create marketing for future events. In these cases, we advise creating the story you want to tell from the event first, and then creating the questions that will provide evidence. However, the process and questions must still be done in a way that allows the data to surprise you with a new unexpected story.

If this describes your situation, consider advise using the *Mixed Approach*. This includes at least one of the above methods with additional questions about demographics, outcomes, stories and if possible, impact.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALL APPROACHES

INCREASE PARTICIPANT AGENCY AND VOICE

Regardless of the survey, use the survey process to show, not tell that your organisation values its participants by using it to increase his/her agency or voice in matters. Key points for showing include

- 1) **Pilot** – Don't assume you know the best approach or questions. Pilot the survey questions and the survey process with participants to assure the experience is empowering and easy.
- 2) **Agency** – Make the survey about and for the individual. Be transparent about what the data will be collected, how it will be used, and how it will be handled. Ask questions that ask what the individual has done because of the event.
- 3) **Close the feedback** - Share the analysis and actions taken or planned from the survey process. Ask whether the analysis is complete and accurate from the participants. Celebrate and share the stories about what the participants have done because of the event.
- 4) **Responsible Data Practices** - Safeguard your participants and the data by limiting data collected, controlling access to the data, and destroy the data when no longer needed. Research and follow laws concerning data collection and storage.
- 5) **Actionable** – What will success look like for all stakeholders in the process? Define it for those taking the survey, creating a report and communications based on the data as well as those making decisions based on the analysis.

Align Expectations – Only collect what will be used, otherwise unmet expectations occur, which weaken the relationship.

Less is more – Focus on small, frequent focused surveys because participants will be able to provide more useful information on events that occurred within the past week.

Subject questions – Subject questions ask about the topic you want to learn more about eg. an event. When first asking subject questions, begin with with open-ended responses to avoid bias responses. However, once you can predict 95% of the response, change these questions to closed to reduce the burden to the participant and staff analyzing the data.

Segment population – By identifying unique groups within your population (eg. INGs, grassroots, geographic) and creating a survey tailored to them, you can reduce their burden to respond and reduce your burden in analyzing responses.

SURVEYS FOR VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS AND SENSITIVE TOPICS

This guide is insufficient to address special survey security, ethical and harm reduction techniques needed for certain vulnerable populations and regarding sensitive topics. For such surveys, seek specialized resources and techniques to limit potential harm to participants and the wider community. This guide is not acceptable for those unable to give free and informed consent such as minors, felons, and mentally challenged. In addition, simply contacting some targeted or marginalized groups may put them at risk. If you are surveying about sensitive issues including but not limited to politics, religion, personal health, violent acts, and/or sexual orientation, this guide is not applicable and should not be used.

This guide can be used for surveys from individuals, groups and issues that present little to no risk.

DATA PROTECTION BY DESIGN

- More data leads to more risks - Do not collect direct identifiers unless need clearly outweighs the additional risk, time and cost to handle it from collection, analysis, and destruction.
- Keep identifiers separate from responses – Use unique IDs and keep the list linking respondents to IDs in a separate secure location.
- Protect indirect identifiers that can be use to identify individuals and groups when used together. For example, one study in the US found that 87% of Americans were uniquely identifiable when using the indirect identifiers of date of birth, gender and zip code together¹. Other groups have been identified by looking at the pattern of who is interviewed and deducing those individuals shared common health issues, members of the same organisation or held similar views.
- Control access to data to key personnel. Limit actions to role in the survey.
- Protect data through device and account password and physical protection. Do not collect sensitive or personal identification on personal devices, invest in work specific and maintained devices, software and accounts.
- Plan for the Entire Data Lifecycle. Remove personnel that have left or no longer need access. Plan for the ability, training and time to entirely delete data or certain cases archive data.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

This guide also considers a section of important additional considerations when conducting a survey. This section should be especially useful for those planning a *Mixed Approach*.

Topics in the Additional Consideration Section

¹ Latanya Sweeney, Simple Demographics Often Identify People Uniquely. Carnegie Mellon University, Data Privacy Working Paper 3. Pittsburgh 2000.

Address Non-Response Bias
Ability to Use the Survey Data
Is It Impact Data?
Leave Room for Surprises
What Does Success Look Like?
Example of Consent

FEEDBACK

This guide is being continually being updated to reflect experiences and best practices. Please e-mail Hannah.Wheatley@CIVICUS.org to learn of updates and submit experiences about this guide.

Details on Approaches

FIVE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS APPROACH

The value of the Five Open-ENDED Questions is the equal opportunity to be selected and versatility. Typically, only 20-30% of the individuals sent an online survey will complete that survey. Those that complete the survey are likely to be those that already feel empowered to give feedback as well as those that feel very strongly negatively or positively about the event. To address these challenges, we find that by seeking out random participants and asking them the following open-ended questions, provide insights that more general reflect the general experience of the majority.

- 1) Please tell me about your role around the [name of the event].
- 2) Please tell me about your experience with the event.
- 3) Have you recommended the event to others? Why or why not?
- 4) Please tell me a moment that surprised you about the event?
- 5) What else should we know about improving the next event?

If this is an approach you would like to learn more about or try, please refer to the accompanying guide, "Five Open-ended Questions Approach".

NET PROMOTER SCORE APPROACH

The value of the Net Promoter Score is in its ease, frequency, ability to track performance over time, and the opportunity it provides for follow-up. Many survey approaches take significant time and resources to complete, which reduces the response rate, frequency of surveys and therefore usefulness of the feedback. Furthermore, response bias encourages individuals to provide positive feedback rather than open feedback, which makes receiving insightful information by directly asking about satisfaction difficult. Private and non-profits are moving to the two-minute Net Promoter Score to address these challenges. The Net Promoter Score is a one question survey, that allows organisations to benchmark their customer or participants' loyalty to the organisation or event better than asking directly about satisfaction. **Survey Monkey has a template for Net Promoter Score that automatically calculates your score.**

important. Triangulation can be done by adding a third question as a check for understanding.

- 3) Have you recommended CIVICUS to your colleagues or friends?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Net Promoter Score: Relationship Strengthening

To capture direct views from participants to capture unanticipated concerns and praises, consider adding one final question.

- 4) Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the questions above or anything else related to your experience at CIVICUS. We read all your comments and value your input.

Net Promoter Score: Real Value in the Follow-up

Organisations that can invest time in following-up with detractor and passives to improve their experience. Following up with promoters to share their positive experience is another successful technique. Organisations that use the survey as an opportunity for further engagement will benefit most from this approach.

May we contact you to discuss your experience in more detail? If Yes, please include your preferred contact information.

- 5) Name
- 6) E-mail
- 7) Organisation (If any)

Net Promoter Score: Closing the Feedback Loop

After the individual has completed the survey, let them know that their time was appreciated and what can be expected next. Continue the dialogue by posting your Net Promoter Score learnings and actions taken in a public place.

Thank you for completing the survey. We publicly post our learnings from the survey. Join us at [link to online posts] to continue the conversation.

MIXED APPROACH

The value of the MIXED APPROACH is the ability to collect specific data needed for reporting as well as data needed for improving. This approach general takes a significant greater investment in planning, piloting and analyzing than the two previous approaches. It may require one or both of the former approaches as well as requiring additional considerations and questions. Foremost for this approach is to consider the data needs for reporting and presenting the event experience as a story that will resonate emotionally and be supported by evidence to stakeholders. These often include questions on

- Demographics – Gender, age, geographic, identity, etc.

This following section asks for context about your responses.

- 8) Which best describes your role at [full event name]
 - a. Participant
 - b. Speaker
 - c. Vendor
 - d. Organiser
 - e. Other
- 9) Gender: To which gender identify do you most identify with
- 10) Which category best describes you
 - a. Youth
 - b. Not youth
- 11) Which country best describes where you traveled from to attend?

Many thanks for taking the time to answer this survey and to help [full event name] to understand your experience and improve. We will share the results within six weeks.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Consider the following points to improve the quality of your survey process.

Address Non-Response Bias: The typical e-mail response rate to a survey is 20-30%. Generally, those that complete an online survey or provide feedback differ significantly from those that do not respond; this is called the Non-Response Bias. When this bias is not addressed, survey responses often misses those that are marginalized or have less strong views. Generally a response rate of 80-95% is needed to avoid Non-Response Bias.

Non-response bias can be reduced by

- Having an individual known to the respondent send the request
- Sending in a language and format familiar to the respondent
- Having regular communication with the participant between the event and the survey
- Sending follow-up e-mails and phone calls to complete the survey (typically in three to seven day intervals)

What steps can be taken to reach a 80-95% response rate for your survey?

Ability to Use the Survey Data: Typical surveys collect more data than can be analysed, used, and shared back with those submitting the responses. In addition,

asking a question about an issue generally creates social expectations to act on that feedback. Therefore, the following techniques can better align the questions asked to expectations about how that data will be used.

- Do not ask for feedback on issues that your organisation will be unable to act upon for financial, political or other reasons.
- Ask about what he/she has done, not about what they will do
- Use open-ended questions to discover issues that are not well understood
- Use close-ended questions to quantify well established issues
- Hypothesis expected responses to each question. Envision how that data will be used differently depending if the expected responses are or not received.
- Piloting the survey with four to ten randomly selected participants until the process, questions, and analysis align with actionable improvements, reporting and stakeholder needs.

Is it Impact Data?

Impact data needs a counterfactual – a control group that would have participated in the event but didn't. Although we can rarely do random control trials in our work, sometimes circumstances can create the approximation of the counterfactual. This may happen if more individuals expressed interest in attending than spaces or scholarships available. If possible, speak to those that would have attended but could not to and compare their changes to changes that did attend.

Leave Room for Surprises

Prior to beginning your survey work, describe what might be learned that is unknown versus what is believed to be known but needs verified. Because of how we process data, we will tend to create a survey process, questions and analysis the data in a way that provides data to confirm our assumptions. We cannot eliminate this from our survey process, but we can do the following to minimize it.

- Use open-ended questions that do not assume a positive or negative result
- Ask for a colleague outside the organisation, even outside the field, to give feedback on the questions
- Present the analysis to the participants and ask what is missing
- Code the data to confirm, neutral, surprised. Did anything surprise you in the data? Did you change your mind or actions based on the data collected? If no, seek those outside your normal circle to discuss the data to determine if the survey was designed only to confirm what is already believed

What does success look like?

What reports, communication and stories will be created? What changes will be tracked to measure the value of the insights? How will the survey process empower the participants?

Example of a survey consent

[Full hosting organisation(s) name(s)] would like to thank you for completing this survey about [full event name] on [date] held at [location]. The survey will help us to understand your experience and improve. The survey typically is completed between five and ten minutes.

We value your open feedback and do not collect any information to link the responses back to the individual or organisation unless you want us to contact you for follow-up. Data will be protected following our Responsible Data Guidelines including strong password protection and only allowing key staff to access the data.

Within six weeks, we will share what we have learned from the survey and the actions we plan to take based on the analysis.

Warm regards,
[Full event name] Team