

Community Opinion Survey

The purpose of a community opinion survey is to find out what the community perceives to be as its main concerns and assets. With a community opinion survey you can find out what the community thinks about a specific nutrition and/or physical activity issue such as adult obesity, child lead poisoning, cancer, or the nutrition and activity concerns among children with special health care needs.

These handouts include tips to conducting a community opinion survey, guidance on surveying a mix of people in your community, survey distribution ideas, and sample survey questions.

How to Conduct a Community Opinion Survey

1. Decide who will be involved in administering the community opinion survey including the lead contact for this work.
2. Identify the topic(s) you will focus on in your survey and identify some of the perceptions you hope to assess.
3. Develop a survey. See pages 5 – 7 of this piece for some sample questions. Edit and modify the sample questions to meet your needs.
4. Decide on a distribution plan that includes who will be surveyed, how many people will be surveyed, and how you will administer the survey. Factors such as budget, time, politics, and the focus of the community assessment will affect these decisions. In addition, some distribution channels may limit your ability to get a representative sample of the population or may limit your ability to collect perceptions from your target audience. Some distribution ideas are listed below.
 - Insert the survey in the local newspaper or in a local agency newsletter. Be sure to promote the survey distribution plan so people can look for the survey.
 - Distribute the survey electronically.
 - Partner with other organizations to distribute the survey to people in different community programs such as the WIC program, county Extension clubs, Parent Teacher Associations, YMCAs, or community service clubs.
 - Randomly select community residents from the phone book and mail them a survey or call and do a phone interview. You could also use a voter registration list to randomly choose from, but understand the potential bias in only surveying registered voters.

- Interview people during a local radio call-in show.
 - Use the survey with key informants and/or community leaders. See the Key Informant Interview handouts in this Community Opinion section for more guidance.
 - Spend an afternoon in a mall or park and ask people to complete the survey.
 - Work with students in a high school or college class or club to administer the survey.
 - Ask committee members and partners to survey a specified number of community residents.
5. Tabulate. Use the “Community Opinion Survey, Survey Results” handout on pages 8 and 9 to tabulate and summarize your survey results.

Tips

- Confidentiality. Before the survey is designed, discuss with your team things like how results will be used, how results will be reported, and who will see the individual surveys. Be sure to tell the people you are surveying how confidential their results will be.
- Statistically significant sample. If you have access to a state epidemiologist or a university faculty person use them to help with this issue. However, local-level work is generally not research. Do the best you can given your real-world constraints. Keep in mind that the community opinion survey is just one way to assess community opinion and community opinion is just one element of the community assessment process.
- Representative sample. You should get surveys from a cross section of the community. Imagine the community opinion survey results if you surveyed only adolescents to determine community perceptions on breastfeeding. And, you would be remiss in only getting the opinion of health professionals about the adolescent obesity issue in your community. Use the “Community Opinion Survey, Community Representation” handout on page 4 for guidance on choosing a mix of people from your community.
- Length of survey. Be conservative on the number of questions you include in the survey – you are likely to have a better response rate with fewer questions.

- Response rate. Obviously, the more surveys you receive the more confident you can be with your survey conclusions. Be creative in your effort to get surveys returned. Below are some examples of strategies that communities have used to increase response rates.
 - One community required the community opinion survey be completed by participants in a community wellness program. They received 380 surveys.
 - Another community mailed a survey to randomly selected registered voters, and called to notify everyone they were going to receive the survey. The community assessment team even hand-delivered additional survey to non-responders. The team also held community meetings throughout the county where anyone could come and complete the survey. The community meetings were well promoted. And, public health staff helped clients complete the survey at various public health clinics. They received 300 surveys. (This community experienced particular difficulties with mailing surveys because the county changed nearly everyone's address in the county about a year and a half before the survey was mailed. However, the voter registration list did not include everyone's updated address, and the town post offices had stopped forwarding mail from the old to the new addresses.)
 - A small, rural community distributed a survey to every household in the county through a countywide household mailing. Immediately before the surveys were mailed, volunteers went through the phone book and called every 20th listing alerting them to the survey that was coming in the mail. The survey distribution plan was well promoted. The survey was printed in the local newspaper, advertisements were placed in the newspaper, and some articles were printed. Extra copies of the survey were also placed in waiting areas of local agencies. The survey included a tear off portion so people could enter a raffle for a \$50.00 cash prize. They received 491 surveys.

- Additional benefit. A community opinion survey builds awareness of your program, community assessment, and/or agency.

Community Opinion Survey

Community Representation

Below is a list of criteria to consider when deciding who will be surveyed to help you get a representative sample of community opinion.

Age

- young child adolescent young adult adult elderly

Note: have your team define these age categories by including age ranges.

Note: When surveying children and adolescents you need to pay special attention to issues such as privacy and parent/guardian permission. Your organization may have guidelines when working with this population, and/or there are federal guidelines such as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act that you may need to adhere to.

Religion

- Protestant Catholic Judaism Islam Buddhism
 Other:

Ethnicity

- Asian Black Caucasian Hispanic Native American
 Other:

Elected Officials

- Local State National

Human Service Agencies

- Education Health Social

Business Sector

- Agriculture Construction Finance Industry Retail

Education Level

- No high school High school graduate Some college
 College graduate

Community

- City/neighborhood: _____
 City/neighborhood: _____

Community Opinion Survey

Sample Questions

Included on this page and the next two pages are some questions that you could include in a community opinion survey. This survey as is would be too lengthy if you were to mail it out to randomly selected individuals in the community. When working on your survey, make sure you can answer the question, “How will we use the results of this question?” before including the question in the survey. These questions could also be used when conducting Key Informant Interviews.

1. What do you think are the strengths and positive aspects of our community?
2. Name three specific aspects of our community that help people eat healthy and/or be physically active.
3. Name some programs in our community that promote good nutrition and/or physical activity.
4. What do you think are the main health concerns in our community?
5. Which one of these problems do you consider to be the most important one in our community?
6. In your opinion, what factors in our community contribute to this problem?
7. What do you think should be done to address this problem?
8. What barriers, if any, do you see to implementing a project to prevent this problem in our community? (If none, go to question #10.)
9. How would you suggest overcoming these barriers?
10. What strengths and assets could we build on in our community to improve this health problem?

Thank you for taking time to answer these questions. Your answers will help us make decisions about future community health programs. Your answers are confidential.

11. What role could you play to help us implement this project in our community?

- Serve on a coalition, task force, or committee
- Public endorsement/testimonial
- Appoint a person to work on the project
- Donate resources (i.e., meeting space, advertising, personnel, and funds.)
- Other:

- None of the above

12. Could you suggest other organizations/groups in our community that could be involved with this project?

13. Who in our community needs to be involved with this project to make it successful?

14. Are there any other suggestions or ideas that you can give me as we prepare to get this project started?

15. Thank you for your time and support. May I get in touch with you again to let you know how the project is progressing and to discuss how you can best help ensure its success?

Yes Name: _____
Phone: _____ e-mail: _____

No

16. Other Comments:

To help us make sure we get opinions from a cross section of the community, we ask the following questions. Your answers are confidential.

What is your age?

____ 9-17 ____ 18-45 ____ 46-64 ____ 65+

What is your gender?

____ Male ____ Female

What is your highest education level?

less than high school
 some college

high school graduate or GED
 college graduate

What is your ethnicity?

Hispanic or Latino

Not Hispanic or Latino

What is your race?

Asian
 other:

Black

Caucasian

Native American

Thank you for your time. Your opinions are important to our work.

Do not distribute

Community Opinion Survey

Survey Results

Total number of surveys received: _____ Dates collected: _____

Community Strengths

Summarize the community strengths identified through the community opinion survey (from questions 1, 2, 3, and 10).

Community Health Concerns

List the most important health problems identified in your survey and rank them in order of most frequent responses.

Most Important Health Problems (from question 5)	# of Times Identified	Total # of Responses	Percentage	Rank

List the top three health problems and the nutrition-related and physical activity-related factors contributing to each problem, if applicable, in the right column.

Health Problem

Nutrition- and Physical Activity-Related Factor(s)

1.

2.

3.

Summarize the ideas people had to address the top health problems (from questions 7 and 10).

Community Partners

List the roles that people are willing to play. (Question 11)

List the other organizations, groups, and people that should be involved with our project. (Questions 12 and 13)

Miscellaneous

Other important points gleaned from the community opinion survey