Tips for Writing and Giving Community Surveys

Writing the Survey

- **Surveys are conducted for many reasons.** By wording the questions and deciding how the format of the answers surveys can be used in many ways and for many reasons. When compiling a survey don't lose sight of its purpose.

- **Make the survey as short as possible.** Every question that is asked should be asked for a reason. This means that you must do some serious thinking about what it is you really want to know. Focus on 'need to know' questions and not 'nice to know' information.

- **Use clear, plain language.** Care must be taken in wording a question. If a question is not clear then there is every chance that respondents may interpret the question differently than you intended. This makes analysis of the data meaningless or misleading.

- **Avoid Double Negatives.** Compare these two questions:

    "I would not be willing to pay for garbage pickup service." Yes/No
    and
    "I would be willing to pay for garbage pickup service" Yes/No

    The first question is confusing. Some people will answer with a "no", meaning, "no, I am, not willing to pay", other will interpret "no" to mean the question is false—in other words, they don't mind paying for pickup service. The resulting data will be muddled and invalid. By contrast, the second question is unmistakably clear.

- **Try to use short sentences wherever possible.** Long questions tend to cause respondents discomfort and can lead to more respondents abandoning a survey.

- **Avoid allowing a respondent to rank every issue as a top priority.** All items may be of importance to the respondent, but write the questions in a way that forces the respondent to choose what the most important issue is.

- **Ask one question at a time.** Avoid confusing the respondent with a question like "Do you recycle and take your trash to the dump?"

- **Avoid influencing the answer.** A question like 'Should irresponsible polluters be forced to clean up their mess?' is unlikely to have any value.

- **Instead of asking a question that only allows an open response, consider grouping answers.** For example "How long have you lived?" - 'less than 1 year', 'between 1 and 3 years' and 'more than 3 year'. Include a "Don't know" response option and/or an "Other" option with a space to write in comments.

- **Use questions that can be answered with a range of possible answers.** It's better to avoid simple yes/no questions when you can measure the degree of intensity (like strongly agree, somewhat agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and don't know or neutral). Use words that make sense. If no one in your community would say "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree", then use something like "don't agree very much" and "agree very much", or other wording to show the "intensity" of opinion in **your** community.

- **Before using the survey, proof-read the survey several times and practice with a few volunteers to make sure it flows properly.** Only when the questions are clear and the answers are meaningful is your survey ready to launch.

Giving the Survey

- **It is OK to tell respondents why you are doing the survey but make sure your explanation doesn't influence their answers.** Read the questions neutrally and wait to answer questions until the survey is over.

- **If they answer a question with "don't know" make sure that that is what they really mean** (they could be stalling for time or just thinking).

- **If you have assured the respondents that the survey is confidential, ensure that the individual data is not to be shared with anyone** and the information is not going to be used for any other purpose. Otherwise, trust is lost.

- **Make sure you give the survey to enough households to make the results reliable.** The more households you give the survey to, the better your results. The survey should be given to **at least** 10-20% of households. Ideally you should give the survey to 100% of households, but if this is not possible, here is a guide you can follow:

If your community has:	You need to survey at least this many households:
20 or less households	Try for half, but at least 5 households
Between 20 and 50 households	Try for at 10 –15, but at least 7 households
Between 50 and 100 households	Try for 15 – 20, but at least 10 households
Between 100 and 150 households	Try for 20 – 30, but at least 15 households
Between 150 and 200 households	Try for 25 – 40, but at least 18 households

- **If you are interested in finding out how your entire village feels about something, you need to sample people from all over the village**, not just one area.

- **Remember to say thank you.** You may want to consider incentives such as a prize draw or small tokens.