
Reimagining
the Civic Commons

How to use the Neighborhood Survey

Neighborhood Survey

The goal of a neighborhood survey is to understand the habits and perspectives of people who live near the civic asset that you are assessing for social impact. Over time, as new investments are made into the civic asset, the answers that neighborhood residents give may change.

You can customize the neighborhood survey to meet the needs of your organization. The survey includes eight sections and a number of questions that you can adapt or eliminate depending on your priorities.

Note that although we have placed each question under a subject header, some questions may speak to multiple goals. Read through the whole survey before deciding which sections or questions to include.

If you do customize the survey, we recommend including sections A, B, and G, as these include important introductory information and a way to capture the demographic details of people who participate or decline.

SECTION	TOPIC	USE
A	Introduction & Screener	Introduces the purpose of the survey and sponsoring organization and determines if the potential respondent is eligible and willing to participate.
B	Declines	Provides a method for capturing basic demographic data about those who decline to take the survey. This helps you understand how representative the respondent population is of the general neighborhood population.
C	Civic Engagement	Provides data on the signals of public life, stewardship, advocacy, and trust.
D	Socioeconomic Mixing	Provides data on reputation and bridging social capital.
E	Environmental Sustainability	Provides data on access to nature, ecological indicators, walkability, and bikeability.
F	Value Creation	Provides data on safety.
G	Demographics	Offers demographic data on respondents and additional data for understanding neighborhood diversity.
H	Raffle Entry	Optional questions if you choose to offer an incentive for survey participation.

Neighborhood Survey

Each question is tagged with the following markers to help you select which to include:

KEY

These questions relate to core metrics that can help understand the impact of public places in our communities. We recommend asking these questions in every survey. These questions are shown in bold in the survey tool for visual clarity.

OPTIONAL

These questions are optional but may help encourage people to take the survey or broaden public engagement efforts in the work.

ADDITIONAL

These questions expand on key questions and are recommended to be included in any survey efforts.

Select Your Method

To ensure your data accurately represents the views of neighborhood residents, it is recommended to survey a random sample of at least 200 residents. If you do not survey a random sample of neighborhood residents – if, for some reason, the group you survey represents a particular sub-group of neighborhood residents, such as “people who are likely to come to public events” or “people who are walking in their neighborhood in the evening” – then your data will only reflect the habits and opinions of that sub-group. The data will not accurately represent the views of all neighborhood residents. The following table outlines methods for performing a neighborhood survey. They are organized in order from the most reliable for surveying a random sample of residents to the least. Since the most reliable method also requires the greatest investment of leadership and resources, it may not always be feasible to survey in this way. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that there are better and worse ways to survey depending on the neighborhood context and your organizational capacity. If you choose to repeat your neighborhood survey again in the future in order to assess change over time, it is best to use the same surveying method again – and to make every effort to execute that method in exactly the same way as before.

Use this chart to decide which method is most appropriate based on the neighborhood you plan to survey and your organizational capacity.

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	Door-to-Door Survey	Intercept Survey	Snowball Sample Survey	List-Based Sample Survey
METHOD	Survey of every other or every third home within the study area, with up to three attempts made at each home	Survey on neighborhood street corners with significant pedestrian traffic or in locations highly trafficked by neighborhood residents, such as residential building lobbies	Survey in which one or more well-connected neighborhood residents or leaders are enlisted to distribute the survey throughout their social networks. They then ask respondents to provide contact information for others who might take the survey, and so forth.	Survey using a list of addresses or emails from a neighborhood organization, resident's group, or building manager(s)
BEST IF...	The dominant housing type in the neighborhood is single family homes and/or small apartment buildings that you can easily survey door-to-door	The dominant housing type in the neighborhood is large multi-family buildings that you cannot enter to do a door-to-door survey	Performing an in-person survey (door-to-door or intercept) is not feasible, but you have access to a diverse group of well-connected community members	Performing an in-person survey (door-to-door or intercept) is not feasible, but you have access to a large contact list of community members
PROS	The best method for getting a random sample of neighborhood residents Excellent tool for engaging residents who may not normally come to public events or meetings	Requires less organizational capacity to manage Good tool for engaging residents who may not normally come to public events or meetings	Requires little organizational capacity to manage May reach some individuals who are not normally engaged through existing social networks	Requires little organizational capacity to manage
CONS	Requires a significant amount of organization, a team of resident surveyors, and one or more managers who can devote significant time throughout the study period	Will not produce a random sample of neighborhood residents Requires a moderate amount of organization, a team of surveyors, and one or more managers who can devote time throughout the survey period	Will not produce a random sample of residents Not a good tool for engaging residents who may not normally come out to public events or meetings	Will not produce a random sample of residents Not a good tool for engaging residents who are not already connected to the organization or group

Surveyor Protocol

Below are best practices for running each type of neighborhood survey. You may wish to add or modify elements of these instructions to make this system work for you.

Door-to-Door Survey Protocol

Staffing

- Hire local residents as surveyors, if possible.
- Surveyors should be outgoing and comfortable talking to strangers. Ideally, they can be enthusiastic ambassadors of the work you are doing.
- You will probably need a team of at least six to ten people, including one or more people who will manage the surveyors and be available to help them at any time.
- For safety, surveyors must ALWAYS survey in pairs – never alone.

Scheduling Surveyors

- You will likely need at least two weeks to complete your survey.
- Schedule surveyors for shifts of two to four hours. Always schedule surveyors to go out in pairs.
- Survey from mid-afternoon to early evening, on weekdays and weekend days. You will get the most responses during these times. It is important to include evenings and weekends in order to catch people who work during the day on weekdays.
- Schedule a training session for surveyors before you start to familiarize them with what they will be doing and to practice giving the survey.
- Compensation: We recommend compensating surveyors at a minimum of \$15 per hour, if possible.
- Instruct surveyors to arrive 15 minutes before their shift, to “dress for the weather,” and to wear comfortable shoes.

Gathering Responses

- Surveying can be completed on paper, with data entry occurring later, or, if possible, on a touchscreen device. If your touchscreen device has a data plan, SurveyMonkey is a good option. If your touchscreen device does not have a data plan, the survey tool Crowd Signal allows for remote data collection with data upload at a later time.

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Survey Management

- Select homes to survey randomly, with no bias. Decide to survey every other or every third home in the neighborhood. If possible, plan exactly which homes you will approach with a neighborhood map or list of addresses. It is OK for surveyors to remove a home from the list if something about it makes them feel unsafe or unwelcome.
 - In our experience, you will get surveys from about 20 to 30 percent of the homes you approach (as long as you stick to the three-attempt rule, outlined later in this section). So, in order to get somewhere between 150 and 200 responses, you will need to survey between 500 and 1000 homes. Decide on a target number of homes, and divide that by the total number of homes in the neighborhood. If the result is about half the homes in the neighborhood, then survey every other home; if the result is about a third of the homes in the neighborhood, survey every third home.
- Provide surveyors with a paper list of homes to survey along their route. If you cannot produce a list of addresses, provide them a blank spreadsheet in which to write the address that they approach, along with 3 columns for notes on up to three survey attempts.
 - Instruct surveyors to note the date and time of each survey attempt, as well as the result: “survey completed,” “nobody available/try again,” or “survey declined/do not return.” Once three attempts are made OR if a surveyor writes “survey declined/do not return,” no more attempts should be made at that home.
- Instruct surveyors to make up to three attempts at each home if there is no response; make additional attempts at different times of day. If you collect a survey at an address or if someone tells you they do not want to take the survey, do not come back to the home.
 - Consider making a “Sorry we missed you” flier that you can leave at homes where nobody answered. The flier should briefly explain what you are doing and that you will try again another time.
- For small apartment buildings, buzz only the first apartment. Make up to three attempts buzzing that apartment. Do not attempt to survey the other apartments in the building.
- Only survey people over 18. There are screener questions in the survey that aim to stop you from surveying adolescents. If a child answers the door, ask for someone over 18. If they are not available, come back another time.
- The survey will be complete once you make up to three attempts at all homes that you approach.

What to Provide to Surveyors

- A branded t-shirt, hat, and/or nametag that they MUST wear while surveying.
- A small handout about the project and your organization to hand out in case people ask.
- A “Sorry We Missed You” flier they can leave at homes when nobody is available and they intend to return again.
- Enough paper surveys for their shift, or a touch-screen device with the survey loaded.
- A map and/or list of addresses along with room for notes about how many attempts were made and the results.
- A one-page reference guide with emergency phone numbers, contact information for the survey manager, general instructions, and possibly their shifts.

Neighborhood Survey

Common Issues to Avoid

- Going to the wrong homes / going to more homes than you should. If you do not provide an explicit list of addresses, a map, or otherwise make it very clear that only every other home should be surveyed, surveyors may accidentally survey the homes in between your target homes. Since you will be covering the same ground multiple times (in order to make second and third attempts), it is important to be very clear about which homes are “in” and which are “out” of the survey.
- Letting surveyors set their own schedule or not scheduling days fully. The less time you schedule surveyors, the longer it will take to complete the survey. If you do not explicitly set out to fill your surveying schedule, you will find it difficult to execute this method correctly.
- Using a hands-off management style. The door-to-door method requires a hands-on manager who will be readily available throughout the survey period, keep track of how many surveys have been completed, and regularly work with surveyors to address issues and ensure an efficient and methodologically sound process. A hands-off management style will not result in a well-run door-to-door survey. The best survey manager is someone who is in the neighborhood, possibly surveying or ready to survey if needed, and always available to answer questions and direct the work.

Intercept Survey Protocol

- For full instructions on how to run an intercept survey, see the [Intercept Survey DIY Toolkit](#). Modify strategies in that toolkit so that, instead of performing the survey in your public space, you are performing it on key neighborhood street corners or in a well-traveled resident hub, such as the building lobbies of neighborhood apartments and condos. Do not use the survey included in that toolkit for the neighborhood survey; make sure to use the neighborhood survey included here.
- Make sure to add a question to the survey verifying the respondent’s home address or nearest intersection, to make sure they actually live in the area you are surveying.

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Snowball Sample Survey Protocol

- Reach out to and employ a handful of well-connected local residents to act as your surveyors. The ideal group of community members is well-connected, trustworthy, and – as a group – are representative of the demographic makeup of the community.
- Ask your surveyors to each make a list of 10 to 20 people they know who live in the neighborhood, then reach out to and survey those individuals.
- Your surveyors should then ask those individuals to think of a few people they know who live in the neighborhood, and – if they are comfortable doing so – provide those neighbors' contact information to your surveyor. If possible, it would be best if respondents introduce your surveyor to the neighbors they recommend, either in person or with a text message, phone call, or email. Your surveyor may then reach out to those additional neighbors and repeat the process. The more times you repeat this process, the deeper you will reach in to your community's various social circles.
- Compensation: Pay your surveyors a lump sum for their efforts. It is a good idea to set a goal with your surveyors for the number of surveys you want to collect, but do NOT connect compensation to the number of they collect. It is better to provide a standard amount for a job well done.
- Schedule: Plan on allowing surveyors to continue collecting surveys for two or three weeks. If you need additional time, it is OK to extend your schedule, but avoid entering into an open-ended process with no defined end.
- If you wish, you may ask your surveyors to provide the contact information of everyone they attempted to survey – both to add those people to your organization's contact list and to implement some level of accountability.
- Make sure to add a question to the survey verifying the respondent's home address or nearest intersection, to make sure they actually live in the area you are surveying.
- If you employ six surveyors, each gets ten surveys from people they know, and each of those respondents provides three contacts that complete a survey, you will get 240 completed surveys.
- You may combine this method with the following method (List-Based Sample) by adding a question to the end of your online survey asking for additional contacts who live in the neighborhood and might be willing to take the survey. In this way, you can expand the reach of your list-based sample.

List-Based Sample Survey Protocol

- Many organizations keep mailing lists of local residents who are interested in keeping up with their work. If your organization or another in the area has access to such a list, you may consider sending out an online survey to that list.
- As with the door-to-door survey, you can make up to three “attempts” to survey everyone on your list by sending out follow-up emails to addresses that have not completed the survey. Wait about a week between attempts.
- Add a question to the survey verifying the respondent's home address or nearest intersection, to make sure they actually live in the area you are surveying.

Data Collection Tips

- 1. Survey respondents' answers must always remain anonymous.** Always keep any contact information you collect in a separate file from survey responses. Survey respondents trust you when you tell them that their responses will remain anonymous, and they may provide sensitive information based on that promise. Never compromise that trust.
- 2. Decide whether you will provide an incentive for people to complete the survey.** We have included a question about whether respondents would like to enter a raffle. Feel free to modify this question to fit whatever kind of incentive you would like to provide – or remove the incentive question entirely. Incentives can increase response rates, so providing one could help you complete data collection more efficiently.
- 3. Hire local and make the most of your surveyors' expertise.** Hiring local surveyors serves multiple purposes: drawing highly involved community members deeper into your project team as partners and advisers; building trust among the community by ensuring that the faces of your project are community members themselves; and utilizing the local expertise of your surveyors to think more about how particular questions will be received, which method of surveying will work best, and best practices for going out into the community.
- 4. Note that some questions in the Neighborhood Survey are also in the Site Intercept Survey,** which is intended for visitors to your public asset. The results you get from these two surveys are not directly comparable because they represent responses from two different survey populations. Comparing the results can tell you the difference between people who visit your site and those who live in the neighborhood, but you cannot say that the site has caused any differences between the two populations' responses or that change has occurred between the times that the two surveys were fielded.
- 5. Multiply the value of your data collection by thinking of your neighborhood survey as an engagement tool.** The sorts of interactions that many of the neighborhood survey methods outlined above require are also excellent ways to reach community members you may not normally encounter. Think of each conversation between a surveyor and respondent as an opportunity to introduce your organization, project, and/or public asset. The survey is an integral part of these conversations – but it doesn't have to be the first or most important thing you talk about. The interactions that occur as a result of the neighborhood survey can advance the very goals it seeks to measure.

How to Analyze Data

1. **Open the [Neighborhood Survey Data Analysis Spreadsheet](#)**
2. **In the first tab, titled “ENTER RAW DATA HERE”**
 - Each row represents a separate survey. Each column is a separate question. For each completed survey, fill out a new row.
 - Fill out a row for each person who chose not to take the survey. For non-respondents, you will only fill out questions B-1 to B-3. You will NOT fill out these questions for people who DID take the survey.
 - For every multiple-choice question, the cells contain a dropdown menu for you to select the respondent’s answer. For open-ended questions, you will just type in the respondent’s answer.
3. **Charts and tables on the remaining spreadsheet tabs are automatically generated based on the data in the first tab.** Be careful to enter data into the first tab correctly to ensure tables generate correctly.
4. **For open-ended questions, you will need to copy responses to a new tab and analyze them yourself.**
5. **You can see an example of data entry and analysis in the [Neighborhood Survey Data Analysis Example](#)**