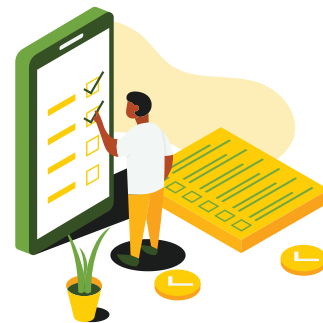


A guide to good survey design

Surveys can be a useful tool for obtaining information about a group of people or population. It involves collecting data from a group of individuals through a series of questions to gain insights into their thoughts, behaviours, or beliefs.



When is using a survey an appropriate tool to collect data?

Surveys could be considered an appropriate data collection tool when you want to gather standardized, objective, and (largely) quantitative data about a specific population in a systematic way. Here are some scenarios where using a survey is appropriate:



Surveys are ideal for collecting data from large or diverse populations, where it's not feasible to collect data from each individual on a one-on-one basis. For small or homogeneous populations, it may be more effective to collect data through other means such as interviews, focus groups or observation.



Surveys are useful when you want to collect data in an objective manner, without the influence of the researcher's biases or preconceived ideas.



Surveys are valuable for making comparisons across different groups of people or over time.



Surveys are best suited for collecting quantitative data that can be analysed statistically to identify patterns, trends, and relationships.



Surveys are most effective when there is a clear question or hypothesis that can be answered with standardized questions that are not on sensitive or complex topics that require detailed, in-depth, or nuanced explanations.

Design your survey in 10 easy steps

Designing a survey can be challenging, and poorly designed surveys can result in inaccurate or biased data. Therefore, it's essential to follow some best practices to ensure that your survey design is robust, reliable, and effective.

1 Write a list of the things you want to know and why

The first step in designing a good survey is to define your research question. This will help you identify who you want to survey, the type of information or data you need to collect, and the type of questions you need to ask. Your research question should be specific, measurable, and achievable/realistic. It should also be relevant and important to the people you want to survey.

2 Decide who you need to talk to and how many people

Consider who you need to survey and the number of people you will survey. Your sample size should be large enough to represent the target population accurately.

3 Decide on the most appropriate way to contact your target population

There are several methods to choose from, including hard-copy, telephone, online, and mail surveys. The method you choose will depend on several factors, such as the population you want to survey and their needs/preferences, the type of data you need to collect, and the resources available.



Surveys are not appropriate for every data collection scenario. It's important to consider the nature of the research question, the characteristics of the target population, and the potential limitations of the survey method before deciding whether or not to use a survey for data collection.



If you can't get more than 30-40 people to respond, think carefully about whether you could feel confident in the findings. Small numbers are hard to interpret. Likewise, when you have small numbers or a sample that doesn't accurately represent the entire population, it becomes challenging to draw meaningful conclusions or make statistical predictions based on the information.



Administering the survey in person (either using a hard copy or a link to the online survey that people can complete on their phone) will increase the number of responses you will receive. Surveys that are emailed tend to receive the smallest number of responses.

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4 Ensure confidentiality or anonymity

It's essential to ensure that the survey is confidential or anonymous. This will encourage respondents to be honest and truthful in their responses. Sometimes it can be appropriate to ask if people are willing to be contacted as a follow-up to ask more in-depth questions or if they would like to be informed of the results. If this is the case, you can ask people for their contact details but ensure to store these separate to the original survey.



When something is anonymous, it means that the identity or personal details of the person providing the information are completely unknown. When something is confidential, it means that the identity or personal details of the person is known but the information is shared in a way that it is kept private and protected, only accessible to individuals who have a legitimate need to know.

5 Clearly explain the purpose of the survey and what it will be used for

Explaining the purpose of the survey at the start can encourage participation, set expectations, increase trust, reduce confusion, and provide context for respondents. When the purpose of the survey is clear, respondents are more likely to provide accurate and honest responses.

6 Write create clear and concise questions

The questions you ask should be clear and concise. Avoid using technical jargon or ambiguous language. Use simple and straightforward language, and ensure each question has one clear meaning. You should also avoid leading or biased questions, which can influence the respondents' answers.

7 Limit the length of the survey

The appropriate length will depend on the complexity of the questions and the target population. Ideally, you should aim for your survey to be no more than 5 minutes (approximately 8-10 questions, with only one or two open-ended questions).

8 Decide on what method or tool you will use to collect the data

There are various methods for survey completion. The primary options include paper surveys, which are administered in person, and online surveys, which can be administered either online or in person. Generally, an online survey administered in person yields the highest response rate and saves time for later data entry.

9 Consider the use of incentives to increase your response rate

The best incentive for increasing your survey response rate is being extremely clear on the purpose of the survey and why the participants' response is important. It is also common to use incentives such as being given a chance to prize such as gift voucher.

10 Analyse and report the data

Once you have collected the data, you should analyse it using appropriate methods. This will help you identify any patterns, trends, or relationships in the data. You should also report the data in a clear and concise manner, using charts, graphs, and tables to illustrate your findings.



For every question, refer back to your original research question and/or ask yourself "What will I do as a result of knowing this?". If you don't know the answer, or your answer doesn't align with the research question, remove it.

Before administering the survey, you should test it with a small group of people (ideally people from your target group). This will help you identify any issues with the questions



Many online data collection tools are available, some of which offer free versions for creating basic online surveys. SurveyMonkey and Google Forms are two widely used platforms that are suitable for longer surveys. If you only have 2 or 3 questions, highly interactive tools like Polleverywhere or Mentimeter can be used.



For everything you describe, also consider and report on what that information means in terms of answering your original research question. What will you do now, because of knowing this new information?



The use of prizes will generally increase your response rate by around 25%. The most successful nudge is sending a time-limited reminder (e.g. the survey will close tomorrow).

For more resources check out our [Community Reef Protection Toolkit](#)



These resources have been developed as part of the People and Reef Organisations Tackling Environmental Change Together PROTECT project. This project is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.