

# questionnaires



Questionnaires are useful when gathering information from large groups. They can be targeted to particular groups or sent to a random sample of residents. They can be carried out by doorstep interviews, by telephone or distributed by mail or be handed out at special events or locations for self-completion. Questionnaires can be either open, so that the respondent formulates the response in his/her own words, or structured, when set alternative answers are given; they can also be a combination of the two. The data produced by structured Questionnaires is usually easy to quantify, whereas open Questionnaires are likely to provide partly qualitative information. Multiple-choice Questionnaires with a few open-ended questions are often a good option. Questionnaires must always be tested to find out the possible design faults and they should be kept as short as possible to receive a high response rate. If possible, they should be kept anonymous in order to achieve a larger response rate.

## Resources & requirements

### Skills

- Designing and testing the Questionnaire usually requires experts.
- Good writing skills are needed in order to make the questions as clear as possible.

### Equipment

- Standard office facilities are needed for writing and printing the Questionnaires and for analysing the information received.

### Time

- Open-ended Questionnaires are time-consuming to analyse.
- Adequate time is required in order to produce statistically valid results.

## Useful sources of information

### Books

- Creating involvement. Environment Trust Associates (1994). Local Government Management Board.
- Participatory approach to natural resource management: a guide book. T. Loikkanen (1999). Forest and Park Service, Finland.
- Reference manual for public involvement, 2nd edn. J. Barker *et al.* (1999). Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Authority, London. Covers self-completed questionnaires.

### Web

- The International Association for Public Participation: [www.iap2.org/index.html](http://www.iap2.org/index.html)

### Training

- The Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research provides courses on 'Questionnaire design': [les1.man.ac.uk/ccsr/courses/shorthome.htm](http://les1.man.ac.uk/ccsr/courses/shorthome.htm)

### Case study

- Cross-plan integrated participatory planning as a tool for rural development. S. Bell and M. Komulainen (2001). University of Oulu, Finland.

## LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

INFORMING: ●●●●●

CONSULTING: ★★●●●

INVOLVING: ●●●●●

PARTNERSHIP: ●●●●●

## STRENGTHS

- This is generally an inexpensive way to gather information.
- Questionnaires can collect relevant information from large numbers of people or from representative samples.
- When open-ended questions are used, participants are able to comment on topics that they find important.
- Mailed Questionnaires can reach people who would be unlikely to attend meetings.
- Person to person Questionnaires can help to create interaction with local people.

## WEAKNESSES

- There is no interaction between the respondents and planners when postal Questionnaires are used.
- Questions and responses can be easily misinterpreted.
- There is a risk that the sample may not be very representative as the returning rate may vary between different groups in the population.
- The response rate is generally low in mailed surveys.
- Professionals may be needed to design and analyse an effective Questionnaire.

