



# Telephone surveys

Telephone surveys and polls are normally used for gathering specific information on public attitudes and opinions. In addition, a phone poll in which people are asked to phone in can be used as a means to acquire anonymous information. Surveys are conducted by taking a random or representative sample of the population or they can be targeted to a segment of the community. The information gained with this method should be statistically valid. The survey should preferably be developed and administered by a professional in order to avoid bias. It is worth noting that this method is often not the best option when statistically valid results are not needed.

## Resources and requirements

### Skills

- The formulation of questionnaires and administration of surveys normally require professional skills.

### Equipment

- Standard office facilities including writing, printing and telecommunication equipment are needed.
- Computers and programs for data processing are also needed.

### Time

- Plenty of time is usually required to conduct Telephone surveys and process the data.

## Useful sources of information

### Books

- The guide to effective participation. D. Wilcox (1994). Partnerships Books, London.
- Public involvement in environmental permits: a reference guide. US Environmental Protection Agency (2000). Available from: [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

### Web

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

### Training

- The Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research runs courses on surveys: [www.ccsr.ac.uk](http://www.ccsr.ac.uk)

## Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★

INVOLVING:

PARTNERSHIP:

## Strengths

- Telephone surveys can build political support if they are considered to be administered fairly and are a valid measure of public opinion.
- If the survey is designed properly, it allows planners to make generalisations about large populations.
- They can be used to provide real opportunities to voice opinions on policy alternatives.
- Response rates are usually higher than in mail surveys.

## Weaknesses

- Telephone surveys can be expensive and labour intensive.
- They may oversimplify the issues and miss opportunities to dig deeply into opinions and feelings.
- Potential methodological problems could invalidate surveys which are poorly designed or administered.
- Poor response rates can be a problem unless incentives are offered.

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: [www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox)