

Non-Survey Methods for Data Collection

Activity: Dot Voting

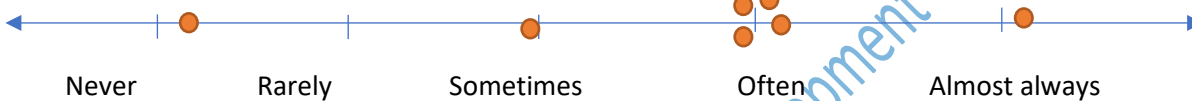
Materials: Dot stickers, large sheets of paper (+ tape if you want to hang on walls), markers

Instructions: Label the large sheets of paper with what you would like people to vote on. This can be done either just with options + empty space or options + scales. Decide how many votes you'd like each person to have and whether they can vote multiple times for the same thing.

Example:

<i>What else would you like to see offered here?</i>	
Diaper bank	•••
Clothing bank	•••••
Adult education classes	••
Parenting classes	•
Exercise groups (e.g., yoga class, walking club)	••

How often are you concerned about running out of food?



Notes: If you have different groups that you're interested in, you can give different colored dots to members of the different groups. For example, give your regular visitors green dots, your occasional visitors yellow dots, and your new visitors pink dots. Be sure to provide instructions on how many dots a person may place on a given option. Generally, if you want to know how many people support something, allow one dot per option. If you want to know how strongly people feel about the options, allow them to place as many dots as they want by any option (still making sure that every person gets the same number of dots as other people).

Advantages: Quick "at-a-glance" results; can easily ask multiple questions; can be done asynchronously

Disadvantages: People may hesitate to be completely truthful -- especially for a sensitive question -- if others are watching; people may be swayed by the other votes that they can see

Activity: Token Voting

Materials: Some sort of token or ticket, boxes/containers (ideally with lids with a slit cut into them)

Instructions: Label the boxes with what you would like people to vote on. Distribute an equal number of tokens/tickets to each person and ask them to place their vote in the box that corresponds with their choice.

Notes: One good way to incentivize participation is to use raffle tickets (i.e., ones that come as pairs with matching numbers on each ticket in a pair) as tokens, and have a drawing for some small prize for those who voted. To do this, remember to count and record the number of votes in each bucket before combining tickets for the drawing!

Advantages: More private than dot voting; can be done asynchronously

Disadvantages: Needs more surface space

Activity: Take-one Voting

Materials: Bowls, small items (e.g., Hershey's kisses). To figure out how many small items you need, multiply the number of people you expect by the number of choices they're voting on. For example, 20 people voting across 3 choices needs $20 \times 3 = 60$ items. You will have items left over, but you need this many to make sure that there's enough in each bowl that everyone in the group could vote the same way.

Instructions: Equally distribute the items across the bowls. Label the bowls with the choices. Instruct participants to take one from the bowl that reflects their vote. Once everyone has voted, count the remaining items in each bowl and subtract that from the original number in the bowl. The result is how many people voted for that choice. For example, if there were 20 items in each bowl to start, and Bowl A has 14 left, Bowl B has 9 left, and Bowl C has 17 left, then you know the voting results were: A – 6, B – 11, C – 3. B wins!

Notes: This only works if there is an equal number of items per bowl!

Advantages: Fun & tasty if you use edible items

Disadvantages: Easily messed up by people not following the instructions; not to be used for very important or serious matters; not ideal for asynchronous voting.

Activity: Carousel

Materials: several sheets of large paper; markers; tape (if want to mount to wall; could also leave on a tabletop); timer

Instructions: [Before activity] At the top of each sheet, write a question or prompt. Spread these prompts across the room, either on tabletops or stuck to walls. Make sure there's enough space between sheets for a small group to gather without being in the way of their neighboring group.

[During activity] Explain that you will divide the room into groups, and that within their groups, people will have a chance to brainstorm answers to the questions written on the sheet at that station. Explain that they will have about X minutes at each station before moving on to the next station ("X" will depend on how detailed or complex you expect responses to be). Divide people into as many groups as there are prompts. Aim for about 3-5 people per group. Send people to their first station and ask them to identify a volunteer to write their answers then begin to answer. After X minutes, instruct groups to rotate to the next station (bring their marker with them) and begin answering that question. If they find that one of their responses/answers is already recorded at the next station, they can put a star or a check mark by it. Continue until all groups have rotated through all stations.

Notes: It helps to know how many people you will have participating so that you can come up with enough prompts to divide the larger group into several smaller groups. If the group at each station is too big, people may not be able to hear others or they may get distracted with side conversations. You can precisely time the amount of time that each group spends at a station, or you can listen to the hum of the room and decide when it's time for people to rotate.

Advantages: Allows participants to interact with one another; can address several topics/questions at once.

Disadvantages: Not anonymous; answers may be swayed by what other people are saying; not everyone may be comfortable speaking their answer to a group; harder to do asynchronously; needs space for people to move around

Activity: Graffiti wall

Materials: large paper; markers; tape (if want to mount to wall; could also leave on a tabletop)

Instructions: Have a written prompt (or set of prompts) at the top of the page. Encourage people to write and/or draw their response.

Notes: You can also provide post-it notes for people to write ideas on, then stick to the wall/paper. This can give people a bit more privacy when writing down their thoughts. The downside is that it's easier to lose a thought if the post-it note gets knocked off. You can encourage other creative formats, e.g., hashtags, that might make participation more interesting to some people.

Advantages: easy to do asynchronously; doesn't have to rely just on words (i.e., people can draw)

Disadvantages: not everyone may be comfortable writing their answer in public; if the wall stays up unsupervised in a public or semi-public place, you may get joke answers or illustrations

Activity: Comment Box

Materials: box, paper (can use a printed prompt at the top), pens/pencils

Instructions: Ask people to submit their response to a prompt by completing a comment card/note.

Notes: It helps to make the box attractive and noticeable and to personally invite people to share their thoughts. Consider handing out blank comment forms rather than just making them available in a stack. If you can, translate the prompt into languages that you know your clients speak.

Advantages: easy to do asynchronously; takes up minimal space; offers people privacy and anonymity

Disadvantages: potential for low response rate; deciphering some handwriting may be challenging; better suited for collecting information about one question than many

Activity: Interviews

Materials: interview guide (a list of questions you want to ask, often with additional reminders about things that you might you might ask as a follow-up questions depending on the response you get)

Instructions: We suggest starting by introducing yourself and an explanation of the purpose of the interview and what you'll do with the information that is collected.

Notes: Can be done in person, over the phone, or using web conferencing technology (e.g., Skype, Zoom). Consider interviews with different kinds of stakeholders and key informants, e.g., your clients, parents at a local school, other community leaders (including faith leaders), representatives of other social service agencies serving your community, etc. You can also consider training peer interviewers to conduct community interviews. This would be a way of both expanding your reach into pockets of the community you may not interact with and potentially making the interview feel more like a casual conversation than a formal data collection effort.

Advantages: Can engage in follow-up questions and delve more deeply into a topic; interviews may work especially well with members of populations that have strong traditions of oral history/story-telling or those intimidated by written forms; responses can be recorded privately. Key informant interviews with other community leaders may be helpful in getting big-picture ideas about what's happening in the community.

Disadvantages: More time-consuming to schedule, lead, and participate; more time-consuming to review responses; people may be more or less inclined to speak openly depending on their comfort with the interviewer; leading interviews in other languages requires substantial fluency

Activity: Focus Groups

Materials: interview guide (a list of questions you want to ask, often with additional reminders about things that you might ask as a follow-up questions depending on the response you get); bringing refreshments for participants is strongly encouraged. We also suggest bringing at least 2 facilitators – one to ask questions/guide the discussion and one to take notes.

Instructions: We suggest starting with a brief ice-breaker of your choice to learn a bit about who is in the room, along with an explanation of the purpose of the focus group and what you'll do with the information that is collected.

Notes: Consider how the scheduling of your focus group will affect who is in the room. For example, a 4pm session may mean that parents of school-age children can't attend unless you provide child care, and that those with 9-5 jobs can't leave work to participate. You may consider holding multiple focus groups with the same questions to reach a diverse set of participants. Take any steps that you can to minimize burdens to those who agree to participate (e.g., holding the focus group at a location that is convenient to participants, ensuring that parking is available and/or that the location is accessible by bus).

Advantages: Like an interview, you ask follow-up questions that enhance your understanding. Participants can also interact with one another, potentially resulting in a rich discussion of issues that might not have happened in an interview setting.

Disadvantages: Challenging to coordinate; more time-consuming to participate; more time-consuming to review responses; people may be more or less inclined to speak openly depending on their comfort with who else is in the room (including discussion leader); leading focus groups in other languages requires substantial fluency

Activity: Video reporting

Materials: recording device(s) (e.g., iPad, laptop), prompts

Instructions: Familiarize yourself with the recording feature on your device. Create a prompt that asks people to describe something that you want to learn about. Depending on the technical capacity of the audience you are hoping to reach, you can

1. Give people instructions and have them record the video themselves
2. Have a designated videographer/interviewer that reads a prompt and manages the technology.

Notes: Try your prompt out with a few people first (i.e., do a pilot test) to make sure that it is readily understood and that people are able to respond with the kind of information that you are hoping to gather.

Advantages: May be especially appealing to members of populations that have strong traditions of oral history/story-telling or those intimidated by written forms; responses can be recorded privately; no handwriting to decipher!

Disadvantages: More time-consuming to participate; more time-consuming to review responses; can be hard to identify themes; not anonymous