

DESIGNING A QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire can be a fast and relatively inexpensive way to collect information and views from residents. Questionnaires can have simple tick-box questions or can be more complex and allow participants to write in answers. However, in every situation, a questionnaire needs to be well designed so that it is fit-for-purpose and ensures you are collecting accurate, relevant data.

This module covers:

- Strengths and limitations of questionnaires
 - Designing your questionnaire
 - Your introduction
 - Question order
 - Open and closed questions
 - Using ordered scales
 - Routing questions
 - General principles
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- Other considerations
 - Demographics

This module provides general advice. You will always have to think about your specific circumstances – some of this information may not be relevant to your specific project

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE

Before you start, you need to have a clear idea about what information you want to get from your questionnaire:

- What is your aim?
- How does your questionnaire fit in with other activities in your project?
- How much time and capacity do you have for analysis?
- How will results be reported and who will they be reported to?

This will help you decide if a questionnaire is the best method and will also help you to design your questions.

If you choose to collect data using a questionnaire you need to think about who you want to complete it:

- Can anyone take part or are you targeting a specific group e.g. people who use a specific service?
- How will you communicate with this group and ask them to respond?

Usually, you will want to try and get as many people as possible from your target groups to fill in your questionnaire. You should contact the Communications Team to help you with a Comms Plan for your participation project.

Strengths	Limitations
Can reach a large number of people across the borough	If a low response rate, then what you can infer from the results is limited
Low cost in terms of time and money	Not easy for everyone e.g. those without digital access, visually impaired, poor literacy
Relatively easy way to get information from people	Wording of questions can have an impact of answers
Everyone is asked the same questions	Cannot correct misunderstandings or probe for more details
Analysis can be straightforward	No check on incomplete responses
Low pressure and effort for respondents	Self-reporting is not always accurate
No interviewer bias	How representative results are depends on sampling methodology

YOUR INTRODUCTION

Start by providing clear information and instructions. Respondents should be given a clear idea of what the information you collect will be used for:

- State who you are
- Outline the purpose of the survey
- Explain how the information they provide will be used and, where appropriate, reassure that responses will be anonymous and/or confidential
- Suggest how long it will take to complete
- Include your deadline for responses and ideally some contact details for request for further information
- Be clear who should and should not respond, e.g. only for residents aged 16 and over.

Where possible, you should provide a way for respondents to remove their consent to participate, even after they have submitted their response. You should make clear at the beginning if this will not be possible.

Also include a Data Protection Statement and how respondents can find out more about our Data Protection Policies

Example Data Protection Statement:

Your personal data will be confidential and used only so we can understand how different groups view the proposals and to inform our final decision. The information you provide will be protected by the Data Protection Act 2018, which ensures that the Council and its employees protect the confidentiality of data collected from individuals. We will only use the personal information you provide to deliver the services you have requested, or for our lawful, disclosed purposes. We will not make your personal details available outside our organisation without your consent, unless obliged by law.

Please be aware that any comments given on this form may be published in the report. However, the Council will always remove any reference that could identify individuals or organisations.

For further information please refer to the Council's privacy notice which can be found on the Newham Website (<https://www.newham.gov.uk/contact-information/processing-personal-data-privacy-notice/1>) or email InformationGovernance@Newham.gov.uk

QUESTION ORDER

Start with screening questions

- Can only certain people complete your questionnaire?
- E.g. ask for their age group at the start to make sure children do not fill out the questionnaire if your informed consent process is not suitable for children
- Do you want to analyse the responses of different groups?

Plan the flow of your questions

- Think about how the questions flow into each other, does the order make sense?
- Start with easier questions
- Keep more personal questions towards the end

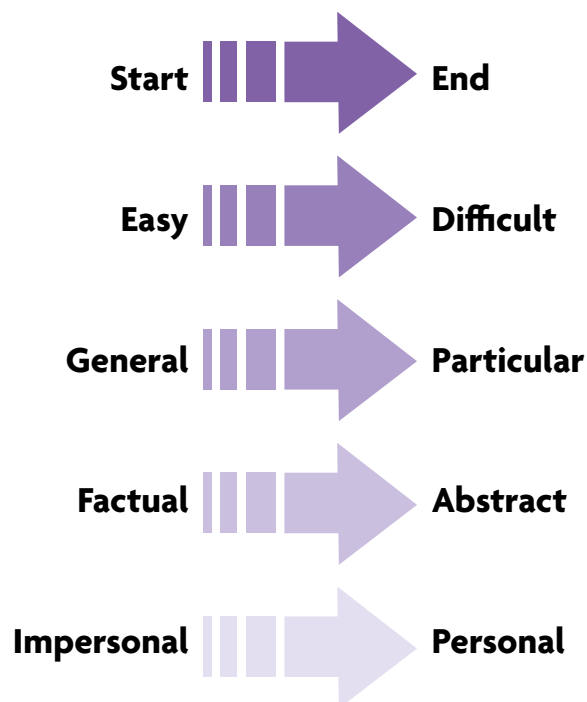
Leave demographics questions to the end

- These questions are sensitive and some people prefer not to answer them. Leave them to the end so that more people complete the main body of questions
- These questions should always be optional.
- A set of questions are available at the end of this module

Example of a screening question:

Q: how are you responding to this questionnaire?

- As a Newham resident, living in the private rented sector
- As a Newham resident, not living in the private rented sector
- As someone who lives outside of Newham
- As an organisation
- Other: please state



OPEN AND CLOSED QUESTIONS

There are lots of different types of questions but mainly, these fall into two categories: open and closed.

Closed question

Gives pre-defined options and asks the respondent to tick one or multiple boxes. This question type will provide quantitative data. Generally, closed questions should make up most of the questionnaire.

Example: Have you used any of the following public transport in the last 7 days? Please select all that apply
1. Bus 2. Tube 3. DLR 4. Tram 5. Other (please state)

Open question

Allows respondents to answer in their own words and will provide qualitative data. Generally would recommend that open questions are limited to 2-3 in a survey as analysis of this information is more labour intensive.

Example: Please tell us why you used these types of public transport in the last 7 days

Strengths

- Useful for data that is easy to categorise
- Quick and easy to answer
- Can be quicker to analyse than qualitative data
- Can allow for analysis by sub-groups e.g. how does the types of public transport used by respondents differ by age group?

Limitations

- Must provide a comprehensive list of mutually exclusive answers (but can provide an 'other' option if you cannot cover all possible responses)
- Don't allow for respondents to present their own answers
- Could be too blunt / crude to categorise responses for some questions

Strengths

- Useful to understand the 'why' and 'how'
- Can develop a richer understanding of an experience/view
- May provide unexpected answers that could be missed by a closed question

Limitations

- Require more effort from respondents
- Answers could be incomplete or irrelevant
- Answers must be coded after survey which is time consuming

USING ORDERED SCALES

- Using scales is a good way to gain an understanding of strength of response. Respondents are asked to choose the point closest to their opinion, belief or experience. Scales are usually a range of 5 points.
- You can remove the neutral choice- some evidence that leaving this out improves responses as it removes the 'easy' option BUT it could be unhelpful if you are forcing respondents who are neutral to provide an answer
- Generally recommend avoid using only numerical scales, (e.g. how do you rate this product on a scale of 1-5?) as numbers will have a different meaning to each respondent.
- **Make sure your scale matches your question! Don't ask about satisfaction with a service then have a scale for level of agreement!**

Examples of ordered scales

How satisfied are you with the service that you received?

1. Very Satisfied
2. Fairly Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Fairly Dissatisfied
5. Very Dissatisfied

How likely are you to recommend this service to people you know?

1. Very likely
2. Fairly likely
3. Neutral
4. Fairly unlikely
5. Very unlikely

How often do you feel lonely?

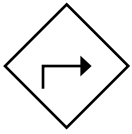
1. Always / often
2. Some of the time
3. Occasionally
4. Hardly ever
5. Never
6. Prefer not to say

ROUTING QUESTIONS

- You can direct respondents to questions based on their previous responses. This makes sure respondents are only asked relevant questions which makes your questionnaire more user friendly
- If you are using an online questionnaire tool such as 'Typeform', you can build this into your questionnaire design so respondents are automatically routed to the right questions.
- Keep routing simple, especially if you are providing a paper/hard copy version of the questionnaire.

Example of routing question:		
Q1: Do you ever use public transport? Yes (go to Q2) No (go to Q3)	Q2: Do you ever travel by bus? Yes No	Q3: Do you own a car? Yes No

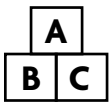
GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR QUESTIONNAIRES



Avoid leading questions: Don't start question with "do you agree that...", "Isn't it fair to say..." as this can encourage respondents to answer in a certain way



Avoid ambiguity: make sure your questions are clear, accurate and only have one meaning



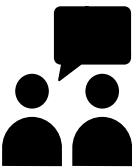
Avoid jargon and colloquialisms: use Plain English that everyone can understand. Do not assume prior knowledge



Only ask one question at a time: make sure you haven't accidentally asked two questions in one e.g. If you asked "How satisfied are you with the cleanliness and safety of local buses?", you wouldn't know if respondents were satisfied with the cleanliness or the safety – you should separate this into two questions



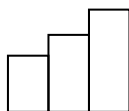
Avoid double negatives: these are confusing and hard to answer



Handling difficult or embarrassing questions: if you need to ask a personal question, explain why you need to know that information and how it will be used. Try to leave these questions to the end of your questionnaire



Make sure answer options are mutually exclusive: Particularly if you are asking on a numerical scale e.g. "how many days of the week do you use the bus on average? 0 ; 1-2 ; 2-5 ; more than 5" then it is confusing which option to choose for 2 days



Benchmarking: consider questions that are already asked in established national or regional surveys to allow you to compare data

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Do respondents have all the information they need to complete the questionnaire?

- If you are asking respondents to comment on specific proposals or information, make sure this information is easily available e.g. including it before the question, or providing a hyperlink to a document or website
- This will help your respondents to give informed answers

Can you co-design your questionnaire with your population of interest?

- This could make your questionnaire more relevant and more user friendly
- This will improve the information you collect

Take time to consider the presentation and layout of your questionnaire

- Clear instructions and headings
- Clear and consistent layout
- Enough space to answer
- Clear font and font size
- Appropriate page breaks, don't have too many questions on each page

Proof reading and testing

- Always take the time to check your spelling and routing works correctly before putting your questionnaire out to the public
- Ask a colleague or volunteers from your target group to test out your questionnaire

Look at the Inclusivity module for more information about making your questionnaire accessible

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Demographic questions help you to make sure you are getting responses from a range of residents and this data will support an Equalities Impact Assessment if you are required to complete one.

Collecting demographic information is also important so you can analyse your responses to see if there are differences in responses between groups – e.g. do younger residents answer differently to older residents?

You can see a list of demographic questions for you to choose from in the appendix.

However, many of these questions are considered personal or special category data and you should only ask these questions if they are relevant. If you don't plan to use this information, you should not ask for it.

You must ensure any data you collect and process is:

- Adequate – sufficient to properly fulfil your stated purpose;
- Relevant – has a rational link to that purpose; and
- Limited to what is necessary – you do not hold more than you need for that purpose.

If you are asking for any special category or personal data, you need to complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment (search DPIA on the Intranet Forms Portal) and submit this to the Information Governance Team. This is a GDPR requirement

Personal and special category data

The Information Commissioner's Office says:

Personal data includes information that a person can be identified by, either directly or indirectly in combination with other data.

Personal data can include (but is not limited to) name, an identification number, location, or an online identifier, like IP address.

Special category data is personal data that needs more protection because it is sensitive. GDPR defines special category data as:

- personal data revealing **racial or ethnic origin**;
- personal data revealing **political opinions**;
- personal data revealing **religious or philosophical beliefs**;
- personal data revealing **trade union membership**;
- genetic data**;
- biometric data** (where used for identification purposes);
- data concerning **health**;
- data concerning a person's **sex life**; and
- data concerning a person's **sexual orientation**.

You must always ensure that your processing of this data is generally lawful, fair and transparent and complies with all the other principles and requirements of the UK GDPR. To ensure that your processing is lawful, you need to identify an Article 6 basis for processing.

If in doubt, talk to the Information Governance Team (information.governance@newham.gov.uk).

APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

TBC