A Hitchhiker’s Guide to Library Surveys

Colleen Eggett
Training Coordinator, Utah State Library

&

Betti Grow
Assistant Online Trainer, Utah State Library

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Introductions

Colleen Eggett  
Training Coordinator  
Utah State Library  
c egett@utah.gov

Betti Grow  
Assistant Online Trainer  
Utah State Library  
bgrow@utah.gov

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Participant guide

On the WebJunction website

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Today’s Goals

By the end of today’s training you will be able to...

- Understand why and how to conduct a survey
- Describe the elements of an effective library survey
- Evaluate the survey results

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Why run a survey?

- Helps you make informed or “good” decisions
- Results might surprise you
- Fast & easy to administer
- Meeting their needs = success

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Surveys are good for:

- Ideas from many people
- Evaluations of programs
- Identification of issues
- Short answers to questions
- Support through statistics (numbers)

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Focus group instead of a survey?

- Ideas from specific people
- Discussion of issues
- Detailed answers to fewer questions
- Gathering stories or examples

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Special guest:
Dicki of Kanab City Library, Utah

- Our experience with doing a library survey

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How to conduct a survey

1. Write down the goal of the survey
   EX 1: To determine which computer classes patrons want
   EX 2: To find out if children have read more books as a result of Story hour

2. Decide whom to survey

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How to conduct a survey

- Consider your target audience & how to reach them
  * Library users & nonusers?
  * Parents of children in Story hour?
- Assess your survey resources: online survey vs. paper copy

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Examples of online survey tools

http://www.surveymethods.com

http://www.surveymonkey.com

http://www.zoomerang.com

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Create the survey

An effective survey has questions that are clear & not confusing...

1. What computer topics would you like to learn at the library?

2. At the library what would be most useful to you?

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KISS

- Simple, straightforward questions that are easy for everyone to understand
- No trade talk (EX: library acronyms)
- No highfalutin words

Keep it simple

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Find survey examples in a professional database

Use “vetted” questions: already asked & tested by professionals

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Avoid loaded or leading questions

- EX: Do you think it is unfair for training to only be offered when mothers are at home during the day?

- Better: When do you think training should be offered at the library?
Avoid questions with negatives

- EX: Are you against having avatar training for teens?

- Better: would you like avatar training for teens?

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Avoid double questions

- **EX:** Do you think the library should offer computer training **and** offer follow-up training as requested?

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Make sure the questions match your objectives

Objective: Children will read more books as a result of story hour

Ask: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following:

Story hour helped my child to read more books

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree

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An effective survey also has...

**Answers** that are clear & not confusing

- If using multiple choice, list *all* possible responses
- Give “other” option and let them write in their answer, if appropriate
- Choices need equal weight

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Which answers have more even weight?

Poor – Average – Above Average – Excellent – Superior

Poor – Below Avg. – Average – Above Avg. – Excellent

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Which answers are better? Why?

Yes — No

OR

Yes — No — Undecided — N/A

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Standardize the format of your answers

- If you are using a rating scale of 1-5 on one question, use the same scale on other rating questions
- Likert scales are good- How do you feel about the following:
  - Strongly disagree—Disagree—Neutral or not applicable—Agree—Strongly agree
You get better results when you

- Name the options
  NO: “on a scale of 1-5”
  YES: Poor, below average, average, above average, excellent

- Use 5 options rather than 10

- Only ask things you need to know (short is better)

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Use demographics

- Age in roughly equal ranges. EX: up to age 18, 19-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65-up
- Gender
- Computer experience
- Other things that may impact the results

- Male
- Female

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Add a comments section

- Can write in answers not found elsewhere
- You’ll get lots of positive feedback

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Pre-test your survey

- Ask 10+ people to take the survey
- Was anything difficult or confusing?
- Look at how people responded—did the right questions get asked?

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Get the survey out to people

Possible sources of help:

Staff members
Library board
City council
Website

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Publicize the survey

- Widely publicize the availability of the survey while it is open

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How long should your survey be open?

- The same day if you are evaluating a one day event
- For 3-4 weeks if you are surveying many people

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Tally the results (paper only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Number</th>
<th>1 computer class at lib yes</th>
<th>1 computer class at lib No</th>
<th>1 computer class not applic</th>
<th>1 computer undecided</th>
<th>2 which class blog</th>
<th>2 which class Avatar</th>
<th>A Age up to 18 yrs</th>
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</tbody>
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Evaluating the results

Sort by demographics

- Does age make a difference in what people want? In the day/time you offer it?
- Gender?
- Computer skills?

EX: Among those who are age 18 and under, what classes are wanted?
Summarize the findings

- Percent that responded one way
- Generalize: vast majority: over 75%; most: over 50%; few: under 25%
- Write-in topics: fewer votes → more popular than it looks??
- Comments are important

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Make the results available

- Always make the results available to those who took the survey

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Decide how to use the results

Improve your program
Evaluate it
Advocate for your library
Save the galaxy

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The point:

DON’T PANIC!

You can do it

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Questions? Comments?

Type your question/comments in the chat box

Or

Raise your hand and we’ll call on you

ceggett@utah.gov

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- Remember the archives!
- Next Webinar on 10/25/07 11:00 a.m. PT/ 2:00 p.m. ET
- Topic: Bringing people together at the library: Rural Libraries as Place
- Webinar Survey for your feedback and suggestions

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