

Session: Applied Research - Understanding Your Constituencies

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Using research to understand needs, for use in decision-making

Ron Sushak:

SCORP data from DNR survey completed 2005 – results are available on DNR website

Funded through LCMR grant – usually do this type of survey every 5 years.

Survey helps identify what people are doing – most noteworthy of 2005 study,

participation in outdoor recreational activities is decreasing

Ron Nickerson:

Explained Mankato's role in working with practitioners in research. The University can help you design surveys and research tools; you can contract with the University for consulting, and to help managers figure out what to do with the information they do compile in their organizations. Grad students looking for research projects, professors also will use interns to help them, gain experience too. Can help you write questions too.

Jonathan Vlaming:

You can do research yourself – with a little “research on research”

If you have a squeaky wheel, dowse it with some data of what people think

If your policy makers respect in house research, then do it yourself. Otherwise, go outside to hire someone to do it

- When designing survey, first- define “your universe” – who you want to get feedback from
- Second, define what information you need – it is about issues or conflicts?
- Third, decide how you are going to get the information
 - Phone, mail, interviews
 - Mail costs \$4 per person
 - On-site interviewing gets highest response rate
 - On written survey, have a map, and have people mark where they go to in the park

Keep on mind; goal is to get a representative “sampling”

Random selected – 250 is enough and representative of the universe

Generally, we get very high response rate to parks and recreation surveys (50% + usually)

Jonathan has found that about 5% will not respond (and will tell you that too- that they do not want to respond to your survey!)

Future – with cell phones use

Problem because there are no directories- this will be a challenge in the future in order to reach a younger generation of users. Most students do not have land lines and a very mobile

Designing surveys – wording on question

- Look at what questions others ask – and steal those
- Go on to internet- use them
- Good resources book: How to Conduct Your Own Survey (Priscilla Salant, Don A. Dillman)
- should we ask open ended questions ? or specific checklist ?
open ended, can be valid, if carefully written/ but easier to tabulate and interpret surveys with specific questions.

Focus groups

are fun to do – to explore issues – We should do more focus groups in our field- opportunity to get “stories” and stories are much more powerful than quantitative research sometimes.

- Good resource book: Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research (Richard Krueger, Mary Anne Casey)
Includes samples, letters to mail out.

Questions?

How to get the silent majority to respond to your survey (general population surveys)
Have to call them – may only care about those who did respond

Mail surveys techniques for higher response rate:

- use real stamps, sign letter with blue ink
- if haven't responded ? send follow up survey, with a thank you
- Include a \$1 bill- if can't give money, season passes, free ticket admission
- Include on survey- tell them even if they don't use the park – we still need their feedback- and then jump them to another part of survey relevant to non-user feedback wanted
- if you hire someone else to do your survey, use your letterhead and envelopes so people know it is coming from you
- need to keep own personal biases out of the question

Getting feedback on more ethical or issues focused questions:

Have to go deeper with question, and not just ask a yes or no answer

Example: “If the 3/8 cents tax is approved, where do you want your money to be spent?”

Stay focused on your mission) of what you provide) and make sure question is relevant to your area and your situation

Remember- you only need 250 responses for it to be scientifically significant

Suggestions for Best Practices web site:

- add “research “ link on site and include:
Include a research library of good books, experts groups, etc.
Link to National Park Service web site “Community Technical Assistance” link
Survey methodology ideas
Link to Mankato professor contacts to help with research projects (Ron Nickerson)

Professor could put their bios on line for practitioners to review- depending on their expertise, they could be a resource for your organization – they are also looking for research projects to be involved with, as part of their tenure positions- could also include their publication records

- sample surveys
- Samples of special use permits
- Samples special interest group requests- how to handle each different group's request
- Fees structure- for certain activities, facility uses
- solicit ideas from people on "how to estimate visitor use "at your facilities

Voyageurs National Park- asked their visitors "what they want out of their park" in a questionnaire...most said "quiet place"

Caution – Dakota County experienced difficulties, when a "special interest user group" developed a survey and distributed it to similar groups- then reported it as the opinion of the general public (like a random sampling) misrepresented – this can happen if agencies are too busy and can not monitor this activity. Result, bias information presented. Gets agency in a box.

- What are the **3 most important factors/ideas** to emerge from this session?
 1. Suggestions for BP website: samples of surveys, survey design and methodology, research library, links to NPS and other relevant websites, pitfalls to avoid, different survey topics, etc.
 2. Recognition of the challenges in creating objective surveys, avoiding bias, making sure the survey is aligned with the organization's goals, potential conflicts between results and policy.
 3. Importance of sharing information, knowledge, and techniques, creating survey tools that can be used by multiple entities within a region.