

# Supplemental Online Content

## Survey Tips

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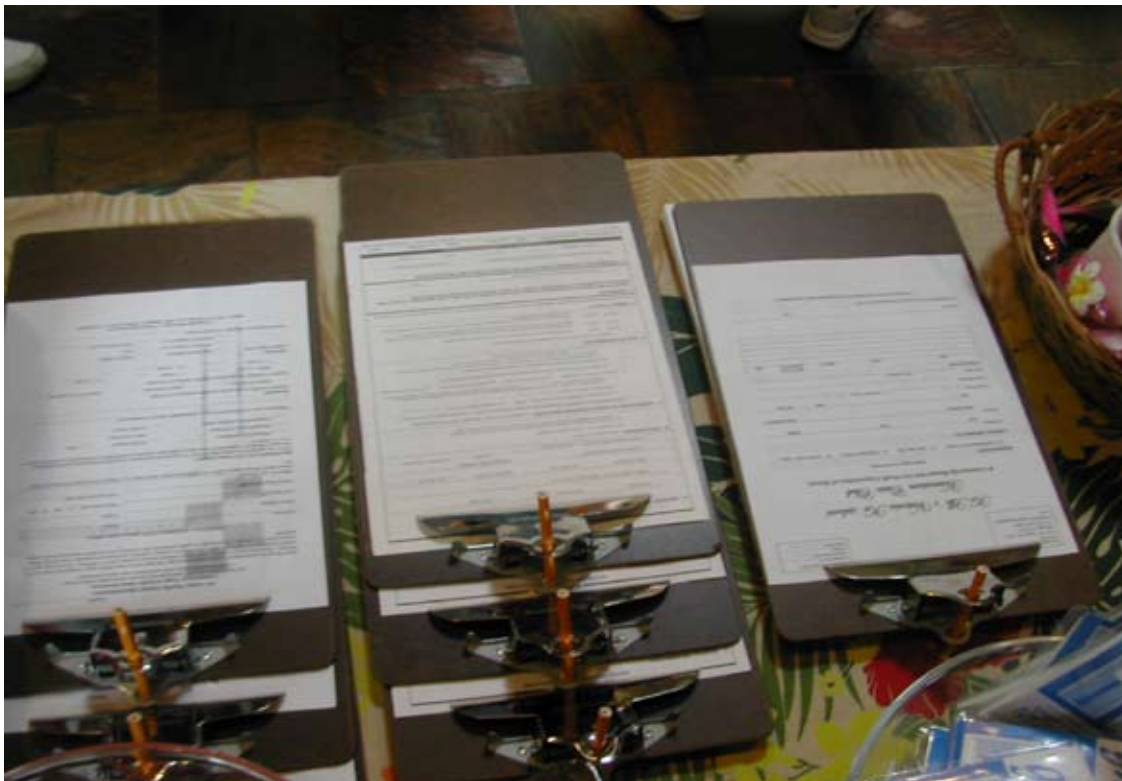
The following tips can help your Main Street program volunteers conduct successful surveys for your district's market analysis or promotions work.

- **Be sure to use random-sample methodology to conduct the survey.** Statistically speaking, every person who visits the district or lives within the trade area should have an equal chance of being selected to complete the survey. If a survey is conducted in a truly random manner, it will give you a nearly exact subset of all the people in the group you are surveying. In other words, the results you get should be nearly identical to those you would get if you surveyed every person in the district or trade area. In-person intercept surveys should be conducted at random locations throughout the district. In order to get a random sample, you must also collect surveys at random times of the day and random days of the week. Select sidewalk locations near major points of pedestrian entrance and egress into the district, near major parking lots, major places of employment, bus or subway stops, and other places that most people visiting the district pass by. Do not conduct surveys inside stores or other businesses! That will limit your surveys to people who shop in certain stores, excluding those who visit the district for other reasons. Choose a standard method of selecting people, for instance, every 15th person who walks by the surveyor or the first person who walks by after every five-minute increment. Stick with this method consistently throughout the entire survey. For distance surveys, randomly select names, street addresses, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, etc. For phone surveys, call people at different times of the day and week.

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This content was developed to be used in conjunction with Chapter 9: Improving Commercial Dynamics in *Revitalizing Main Street: A practitioner's guide to comprehensive commercial district revitalization*.

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- ◉ **Provide a brief introduction.** An introduction is an important part of all survey techniques. The introduction should briefly explain the purpose of the survey (how the survey will help the community) and for whom it is being done. It should also give an estimate of the amount of time required, provide instructions, and ask for participation.
- ◉ **Train survey volunteers.** Make sure volunteers understand the purpose of the survey and that they remember to speak clearly, be courteous, and take care not to sway the opinion of the respondent. Allow them to practice with each other and work out any kinks before they are sent out.
- ◉ **Reassure the survey participants that all information is confidential.** Do not ask their names. Do not volunteer your name. For intercept surveys, hand people the survey on a clipboard so they can complete it themselves and then let them put it into a sealed cardboard box with a slit cut in the top. This will emphasize the fact that the survey is confidential.
- ◉ **Publicize the survey beforehand.** Many communities have found it helpful to run an article in the local paper a week or two before conducting a survey. This informs the public that the survey will take place—and that it is being conducted for a worthy cause.
- ◉ **Keep the survey short and succinct.** Surveys should take no longer than five to eight minutes to complete. At a minimum, you should ask:
  1. Demographic characteristics of the people being surveyed (household income, age, gender, and maybe other characteristics, like ethnicity, depending on your particular needs);
  2. Where the people being surveyed live and work;
  3. How frequently they visit the commercial district;
  4. When they visit the commercial district;
  5. Where they shop for various goods and services for which you are analyzing demand; and
  6. Attitudes about the commercial district.

Keep in mind that both survey takers and analyzers prefer to work with multiple-choice questions rather than open-answer or fill-in-the-blank questions.

- ◉ **Pretest the survey.** It is always a good procedure to proofread, pretest, and practice your survey, including the introduction, before conducting it. Ask a few volunteers who weren't involved in the survey design to take the survey and give feedback. Instructions and questions that are unclear or could be misinter-

preted will show up in a pretest and can be corrected.

- ◉ **In general, to achieve a  $\pm 5\%$  degree of accuracy, you should gather 385 survey samples.** It doesn't matter what size your community is; the number of samples is a factor of accuracy and probability, not population size.
- ◉ **Make respondents feel comfortable.** Find ways to make interaction enjoyable. For example, hold focus groups in a comfortable room and provide refreshments as well as a token of appreciation, such as a coupon or raffle ticket. During intercept surveys, provide people with a place to sit in the shade, a writing surface, and refreshments. Don't forget to thank them for their help and have an organizational brochure or two on hand in case they are interesting in learning more about Main Street.
- ◉ **Tabulate the surveys using the computer database or spreadsheet program of your choice.** Be sure to design the spreadsheet or database template so that you can sort the surveys for more than one characteristic at a time—for instance, so that you can easily figure out the percentages of people who visit the commercial district frequently, sorted by household income.

The longer you sort and re-sort your survey data, using different criteria each time, the more you will learn about your commercial district. To get started, sort your surveys according to these characteristics:

- Overall percentages of respondents, divided by household income, age, gender, residence, workplace, and ethnicity;
- Attitudes about the district, according to household income, age, gender, residence, workplace, and ethnicity;
- Places where people shop for various products and services, according to household income, age, gender, residence, workplace, and ethnicity; and
- Frequency of visits to the commercial district, according to household income, age, gender, residence, workplace, and ethnicity, and attitudes.



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