



Tool 3.26: Crafting Survey Questions

Why is this tool useful?

This tool lays out several tips for crafting good survey questions, which is important to get useful data. Before you start crafting survey questions, you will want to first develop your research questions ([See Tool 2.1](#)) and research plan ([See Tool 2.4](#)). This tool is based on the survey instrument from a PAR project with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities focused on Asian tenants in public housing ([See Case Study 3.9](#)).

Turning Research Questions into Survey Questions

A good place to start brainstorming survey questions is to look to the overarching research questions for the project (See Tool 2.1). Looking back at the research questions will help determine which information can be found through a survey.

The following steps are recommended to ensure that survey questions relate directly to research questions, and that you collect information that will help to answer your research questions and meet your organizing goals.

- 1) **Review research questions and identify those that can be best answered through a survey.** These are research questions that can be answered with quantitative data (numbers and statistics) rather than qualitative data (stories and experiences).
- 2) **Brainstorm thematic categories that** relate to each of the research questions. These categories provide a guide for developing the actual survey questions, and ensure that the questions you brainstorm remain tied to research priorities.
- 3) **Within each category, develop specific survey questions.** These questions should relate directly to the category, since those are your priority areas. If you have questions that don't relate to a priority category, you may want to consider cutting them.

The following are examples of research questions from the CAAAV project mentioned above:

- ***What existing data is there about Asian residents in public housing?***
- *What are existing public housing policies that impact Asian residents?*
- *What are the biggest issues and needs facing Asian public housing residents?*
- ***What are the conditions in units?***
- ***What is the experience of Asian residents with public housing staff? With public housing management? With maintenance and repairs process?***
- *What is the experience of Asian residents in applying for public housing?*
- ***What works, what doesn't work and what is missing in terms of language access policies and procedures for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) public housing residents?***

The questions in bolded text can best be answered by a survey. After this step, identify broad categories of questions that shape the layout of the survey questions:



Research Question	Category of survey questions
<i>What are the conditions in units?</i>	Repairs and Maintenance
<i>What is the experience of Asian residents with public housing staff? With public housing management? With maintenance and repairs process?</i>	Repairs and Maintenance
<i>What works, what doesn't work and what is missing in terms of language access policies and procedures for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) public housing residents?</i>	Language Access
<i>What existing data is there about Asian residents in public housing?</i>	Demographics

Tips for Crafting Good Survey Questions

We have developed some tips for developing good survey questions:

- **Avoid vague questions.** It is best to leave little to the respondent's interpretation. For example, you might want to ask a question such as ***"Do you work out regularly?"*** However, people can interpret the word regularly in different ways (as well as often, frequently, and sometimes), so it is best to quantify as much as possible. So a better question in this case is ***"How many days per month do you work out?"***
- **Limit time periods** when asking questions about the past. We do this to avoid memory bias.
 - Ex: Have you received overtime pay?
 - Rather: In the past 3 months, did you receive overtime pay?
- Where possible, **define unfamiliar terms** that appear in questions/answers within the survey.
- Avoid **leading questions** that assume how a respondent might feel about a certain issue. For example, asking ***"How short was Napoleon,"*** is leading because it assumes that the respondent thinks that Napoleon was short. A better question is, ***"What would you estimate Napoleon's height to be?"***
- Avoid asking **"double barreled"** questions, which ask two questions at once. An example of this is ***"What is the most affordable and appealing in this list of products?"*** Something that is the most affordable might not be the most appealing! A better approach is to ask two separate questions:
 - ***What is the most affordable in this list of products?***
 - ***What is the most appealing in this list of products?***

Tips for Developing Answer Choices

We've also put together some tips for crafting good answer choices for multiple choice questions.

- When asking "yes/no" questions, also offer ***"I don't know"*** as an option where appropriate
- "Other" option choice should ask respondents to ***"please specify"***
- When applicable, specify if respondents should select only one answer choice or can select all answer choices that apply



- Opt for **ranges/check boxes** over write-ins whenever possible. It is also a good idea to pull ranges from other sources of data such as the census whenever possible. For example, if you are asking for household yearly income, income ranges from the census are good answer choices ([See Tool 3.20](#)).
- Be sure that answer option categories **don't overlap**. For example:

<i>The below answer choices overlap. If you work 5 hours per week, both the first or second answer choice will work!</i>	<i>These are clear options that don't leave room for ambiguity.</i>
<p>On average, how many hours do you work per week?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> 5 hours or less <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 10 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 10 to 15 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 15 to 20 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 20 to 30 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 30 to 40 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 40 or more hours	<p>On average, how many hours do you work per week?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 5 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 10 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 11 to 15 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 16 to 20 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 21 to 30 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 31 to 40 hours <input type="checkbox"/> More than 40 hours

Pulling Survey Questions Together

After identifying the categories, it is time to craft survey questions. As you develop the survey, it can be helpful to look to other similar surveys for questions you can use. See [Tool 3.22](#) on building the survey instrument itself.

Below are some examples of the survey questions that this organization used:

Language Access	5) How difficult would it be for you to understand written information from public housing staff (such as a letter or a lease) in English?			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Extremely difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Not very difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all difficult
	6) How difficult would it be for you to have a conversation about housing matters (such as at a hearing or an interview) in English?			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Extremely difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Not very difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all difficult
Experiences in public housing	27) Do you have any of the following conditions in your apartment? (Mark all that apply)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Leaks		<input type="checkbox"/> Mold	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Peeling paint/ cracked walls		<input type="checkbox"/> Mice/Roaches/Bed bugs	
	<input type="checkbox"/> No heat		<input type="checkbox"/> Building is not cleaned	
	<input type="checkbox"/> No hot water		<input type="checkbox"/> Other needed repairs	
	28) Were you satisfied with the quality of public housing staff's repairs?			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		<input type="checkbox"/> No	