Extension Lakes
College of Natural Resources
University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point

800 Reserve Street
Stevens Point, WI 54481
uwexlakes@uwsp.edu | 715-346-2116 | uwsp.edu/uwexlakes

A membership survey is a tool that allows membership to voice their concerns and opinions in an anonymous way. Providing a membership survey is a good way for your organization to hear from all members, even those who do not attend meetings.

Steps to conduct a successful membership survey

1. Set your objectives for the survey. What do you want to learn from your members and how will the survey help you? You do not want to do a survey and then ignore the feedback you receive.
2. Determine how you will send your survey and how you will keep answers confidential or anonymous. Options include:
    a. Direct mail – this will require you to print surveys and provide return envelopes, possibly with postage paid, which will remove a barrier and increase the return rate. This will also require you to collect and analyze all the data yourself, which is time consuming; however, depending on your population, this may be a good option if those being surveyed do not have access to the Internet or you do not have their email addresses.
    b. Email – this will require you to use an online survey tool; however, most online survey tools will provide graphs and make data analysis very easy.
    c. Phone – you can call your audience directly. This technique requires you to either record their answers or you'll have to take notes as they talk. This could be a beneficial option as it will allow you to ask follow-up questions and get to know your community in a way that a direct mail or email survey doesn't; however, it isn't anonymous.
    d. Door knocking – this method is time consuming and requires you to personally visit each community member you are hoping to survey; however, this method allows you to meet each person and establish a relationship, as well as ask follow-up questions and answer any questions they might have. This method is not anonymous.
3. Decide if you will incentivize the survey. Incentives will increase the rate of return of your survey and could include monetary incentives, gift cards or coupons, or merchandise such as t-shirts or water bottles. To provide the incentive, you will need to know who completed the survey, so this method is not anonymous.
4. Develop your survey questions and make sure they are not biased. Having multiple people review your questions for bias is encouraged. Keep your survey short enough that people can quickly complete it and aren't overwhelmed with the length (no more than 10 questions). There are three ways that you can frame your survey questions:
    a. Open-ended questions in which respondents write detailed answers
    b. Multiple choice questions in which they choose from given options
    c. A mixed questionnaire with both open-ended and multiple-choice questions
5. Test the survey internally or on a focus group. Testing the survey helps you to work through any issues or confusion that may arise from particular questions.
6. Send the survey out to the target audience. Be sure to provide a "due date" and follow up with a reminder when that due date is getting near. Set the due date to be not too far into the future, but also give respondents time to complete the survey. Two weeks is a good amount of time.
7. Analyze the responses.
8. Discuss the results at an open meeting so the membership can see that you've taken the time to review and analyze the results and are serious about addressing their concerns and taking their perspectives into consideration.

Extension Lakes
College of Natural Resources
University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point

800 Reserve Street
Stevens Point, WI 54481
uwexlakes@uwsp.edu | 715-346-2116 | uwsp.edu/uwexlakes

Example survey

Name (if you would like to be contacted about your ideas or concerns):

Email address (if you would like to be contacted about your ideas or concerns):

Phone number (if you would like to be contacted about your ideas or concerns):

Purpose of survey: The [lake organization] is conducting this membership survey to identify the most pressing concerns as well as hear your ideas regarding lake issues and opportunities.

Goal of [lake organization]: To [***protect*** *and* ***improve*** *the water quality and fishery of lake for the benefit of the lake residents and general public*]. (Goals are action oriented)

Sample Questions

1) How do you benefit from the lake?
2) Are there any issues you're concerned about regarding [name] lake? This could be an open-ended question, or you could provide options, such as:
    a. Water quality
    b. Water levels
    c. Invasive species/weeds
    d. Erosion
    e. Overuse of lake (i.e., too much activity, too loud)
    f. Decreased wildlife habitat/fishery
    g. Algae
    h. Other – provide a space for people to write in what other concerns they have.
3) How do you think the [organization] should address the issues above?
4) Why do you support this organization?
5) Are you interested in helping us to work on lake-related issues? If so, which issue(s)?
6) Would you be willing to:
    a. Serve on the board of directors of [lake] organization?
    b. Serve on a committee of [lake] organization?
    c. Become a volunteer/lead a group of volunteers for [lake] organization?
    d. Organize a fundraiser?
    e. Provide educational materials?
    f. Other – provide a space for people to write in other possibilities

Remember to thank each respondent for their time and keep their answers anonymous.