

# Using questionnaires for open homes events

*If you can, it's well worth asking your visitors for a bit of feedback about who they are, why they came, and what they thought of the event.*

*Here are some tips on writing and using questionnaires.*

## **Why do a questionnaire?**

Event organisers ask participants to answer questionnaires for a number of reasons:

- To understand better who their audience is
- To learn about what worked well, and what needs improving
- To provide evidence of the event to funders, key supporters and stakeholders
- To provide a snapshot in time, against which future events can be compared
- To invite participation in future open homes events, or other projects you run

Your reasons for conducting a questionnaire will determine the type of information you need to gather. When you are designing your questions, be clear about what you need to know, and what you'd like to know. If you have insufficient resources to conduct a detailed questionnaire and follow-up, perhaps you could ask a volunteer, student or researcher to help you.

## **Format**

Think about how you will be able to administer the questionnaire. Which method will best meet your needs and maximise the response rate? Here are few suggestions:

### **1. Online (e.g. via SurveyMonkey.com)**

It's easy to collect data, and provides basic analysis of your results for you.

It saves time for organisers / volunteers.

Can be done online at the event, or sent in a follow-up email immediately after the event, although response rates may be lower post-event.

## **2. On paper, at or after the event**

If volunteers can distribute and collect questionnaires at the event, you can collect an immediate response. But keep it short -two sides of A4 maximum.

If there are insufficient volunteers, pens or space, there is a risk that visitors will not fill them out.

If you send questionnaires after the event, they can be longer. It's always best to include a stamped addressed envelope to encourage returns.

## **3. Postcard-sized. e.g. three questions plus contact details, to drop into a box at the event.**

You may get more responses.

You can ask for an email address to send on a longer questionnaire later.

But a short questionnaire limits the number of questions and your opportunity to compare your feedback with other events.

## **4. Verbal interview (face-to-face or by telephone)**

If you have a good interviewer or team of interviewers, questions can be asked consistently and quickly. But interviewing is a skill in its own right so choose interviewers carefully, and provide some brief training if necessary.

You might need to prioritise a few locations at your event where you can position interviewers.

If you interview people after the event, how will you choose your interviewees?

There's more possibility of positive bias (i.e. respondents saying what they think you want to hear).

## **How to maximise response rates**

How can you get lots of people to fill in your questionnaire? A voucher, reward or prize draw as an incentive can be useful, but they're not essential. The best way to achieve a high response rate is to have a well-designed questionnaire in the first place. Good, clear questions, which allow respondents to fully express their views, are really important for making sure people start and finish a questionnaire. Taking time to get the questions right also means that the data collected is more likely to be useful and relevant.

So, what makes a well-designed questionnaire?

Below are some things to focus on and some common things to avoid.

### **Key features of a good questionnaire:**

- Clear and concise English.
- Neutral language which doesn't pre-judge the response.
- Questions which people can answer. This may sound obvious, but many questionnaires are let down by not taking enough account of what questionnaire respondents can reasonably be expected to know.
- Each question has a clear underlying purpose, i.e. you know why the question is being asked and what you can use the data for later on.
- Mostly closed questions (because it's quicker for people to fill out, and makes your analysis easier) but space for some open questions or comments too (because that adds richness to your data).

### **Things to avoid**

- Jargon or specialist language.
- Spelling mistakes.
- Ambiguous language.
- Leading questions, e.g. where it is harder to give a negative reply than a positive one.

- Questions which are actually two or more questions merged into one. For instance: ‘Do you think you are more likely than the average person to renovate your home?’ is a combination of ‘How likely are you to renovate your home?’ and ‘How likely is the average person to renovate their home?’ Your respondents can’t be expected to know about ‘the average person’ either.
- Borrowing questions from another questionnaire without asking yourself if they really suit your purpose properly.
- Multiple choice questions with too few possible answers listed. If most people tick ‘other’, it’s much harder to analyse your data.

## Devising survey questions

Closed questions are ones which have a finite set of responses (e.g. “Did the event meet your expectations?” which has a yes or no answer). Open questions are ones where the answer is much less predictable (e.g. “What expectations did you have of this event?”). Questionnaires are good at recording answers to closed questions but not so good for open questions. A questionnaire therefore has limits, but you can maximise each question’s potential.

For multiple choice questions, include as many possible answer options as you can think of, along with an ‘other’ category. You want to avoid too many people ticking ‘other’. Make sure you leave space for them to tell you what their ‘other’ option is.

For questions with more subjective answers, use a rating scale (e.g. from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’) to make the answers easier to analyse.

For questions where the answers may be sensitive (e.g. respondent age or income) you can bracket the possible answers (e.g. age 20-31). Making categories like this will also make your data much easier to analyse where there’s a large range of possible answers - you probably don’t want to know what everybody aged 51 thought, but what everybody in a certain age range thought.

Personal questions can be offputting for some, so ask them at the end of the questionnaire.

Questionnaires give you a broad picture of the views of large numbers of people. If you want to explore some of the feedback in more depth, consider conducting a few interviews with a small number of the respondents.

## Piloting your questionnaire

Given the need to get the questionnaire design right, it makes sense to test it first – ideally with someone who is not involved in the project. This may seem like a lot of bother, but it will often throw up important changes you need to make before giving it to the public.

## Good intentions and follow-up

Some event organisers like to collect pledges or indications of what visitors intend to do as a result of coming to their event. These can be a useful guide to the resultant change in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that your event may have inspired, if people follow through. Communicating people’s stated intentions back to the wider community can also be useful to help make ‘green’ behaviours seem more normal.

There is some evidence that making a public commitment will increase the likelihood that a person will carry out that action. But don’t assume that they will. Research shows that good intentions don’t necessarily result in action.

What is increasingly demanded for policy or funding purposes is evidence of outcomes, i.e. what resulted from a person attending a specific event, and how much the event contributed to that outcome. To find this out, recording intentions isn’t enough. You’ll need to use follow-up questionnaires or interviews with a sample of your visitors to find out what actions people actually took, and why these may have differed from what they intended.

If you want or need to do follow-up work like this, an

important question is when to do it. A few weeks is probably too little time for intentions to have been turned into actions. Leave the follow-up for several years, and the event may be long forgotten or the person may prove impossible to find. In general, a follow-up after 6-12 months works well.

A note of caution when you're looking at your event's impact: due to the long timescales involved with home renovation, it is unlikely that you will see large-scale renovations inspired by one event. Research suggests that major changes are made at opportune moments, such as when moving house, doing other renovations, or coming into some money.

## Using and evaluating your data

Collecting data on green open homes events can provide important evidence, both for group learning, and for national evaluations – like comparing the impact of different types of open homes events.

No matter how good or extensive your data, if you do nothing with it, all that time designing and using the questionnaire will be wasted.

So think about how you will collate your data (and who will do this), how you will analyse it and present it, and how you will use it. For example, you might:

- Collate all your data in a spreadsheet and generate charts to help interpret it
- Design an infographic to present key data in a more visual way
- Pull out facts, figures and good quotes to support your publicity and awareness-raising activities in the community
- Use data on numbers and outcomes in reports and feedback to funders
- Hold a meeting to share feedback with the team who organised the event so you can improve next time

- Go back to individual visitors to respond to specific queries or comments, or invite them to share at future events
- Feed data into national evaluations of green open homes events

## Data Protection

If you are collecting and storing personal details about individuals who come to your event, think about data protection. This won't be an issue if all your responses are anonymised, but you may want to collect personal information or contact details – for example if you send out a newsletter, or intend to carry out a follow-up questionnaire.

Whatever information you decide to ask for, include a data protection statement at the end of your questionnaire clarifying how you will store and share the information. Check that you comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

### An example data protection statement:

*Your personal information will not be passed on to anyone outside the green open homes network. We will only contact you if you have given your permission (see above). You will be given the means to unsubscribe from our newsletter at any time. Your postcode may be used to help organisers understand where visitors have come from, but your name and contact details will never be published. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact the event organisers.*

## More information

For more in-depth guides to designing and implementing your own monitoring and evaluation, see Oxford University's "Monitoring and Evaluation for Sustainable Communities" at [www.bit.ly/1mO05PR](http://www.bit.ly/1mO05PR)

There are template visitor questionnaires for green open homes events at [www.greenopenhomes.net](http://www.greenopenhomes.net).

The **Green Open Homes** network supports low carbon retrofit by promoting existing open homes events and helping new initiatives get going with resources, practical support and funding.

We've produced lots of other information sheets like this one covering legal and insurance issues, volunteers and marketing. See [www.greenopenhomes.net](http://www.greenopenhomes.net)