

Step by Step Tips for Your Market Survey

Chapter 3: Markets Count! Collecting, Managing, & Deploying Your Data

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Collecting information and asking for customer feedback is a great practice for any business, including farmers markets and vendors. The good news is that there are more and more online tools to help collect, analyze, and even display information. Usually there is a free version with the basics and a paid version that offers more bells and whistles.

Online Survey Tools	Charts and Infographics	Word Clouds
Google Forms Survey Monkey Wufoo	www.tableau.com www.infogr.am	www.tagxedo.com www.wordle.net

The challenge is that despite the free online tools, designing a survey can be tricky. Starting with what to call it. In some contexts, the word “survey” is interpreted negatively. It evokes endless questions on long forms more akin to doing your taxes than simply helping out the market. If possible, go for the friendliest term possible to avoid immediately turning off a potential **respondent** (the person who does your survey). For convenience, the term survey is used in this piece.



The best designed surveys are nicely formatted, easy to complete, often short, and provide easy to report information that meets your market or business needs. Ten step-by-step tips follow to help you get started.

1. Know your purpose: why are you doing a survey?

The very first question when you start designing a survey is the most basic: why are you doing this? There are many valid reasons and no “right answer.” The important thing is to articulate it so that everyone involved has the same expectations.

Common reasons include:

- **Discovery.** You need to find out about a topic but have very little good information or experience to build upon. What's out there? What are people thinking about your topic?
- **Information gathering.** You are trying to make a decision and need data to inform or quantify your options so you can move forward.
- **Evaluation.** In other cases, you may need to collect information for a project evaluation (especially if it was grant funded). There may be specific metrics or you may simply want to know how your project worked and what you can learn from doing it?
- **Proof of concept.** In this case you think you know something, but need to test your assumptions. A variation of this might be if you have a great project in mind and need to collect data to support your ideas to win over a funder or recruit additional support.
- **To Resolve an Impasse.** There may be a contentious issue that can't seem to be resolved. Gathering relevant information may help move the conversation forward, especially if done by an external party.
- **Public relations.** Sometimes there is no burning issue. It may be that "good customer service" is part of your brand. You may ask customers what they think simply as a routine practice to reflect who you are and pick up general feedback.

2. Pinpoint what you need to know

Now that you know the general purpose of your survey, reflect on what it is you really need to know. Resist the temptation to start formulating questions at this point. Think about what it is, that if you knew it, would make a difference? Do you need new information, feedback about a proposed idea, drilling down to narrow a field of options, or quantifying something? Do you need information, feedback, or the perspectives from a particular group of people?

3. Think about who will respond

What it is you need to know will determine the best and most targeted audience for your survey. Typical market survey audiences include:

- Vendors.** Do you mean all vendors or a subset? Current vendors? Past vendors?
- Shoppers.** People who are in the market on a particular day or range of days? Everyone or just those who buy something? Are you looking for the primary shopper in a "shopping group" (usually a household) or individuals? Do you want to target core shoppers or occasional market shoppers? Shoppers of particular products or those who use a particular market currency such as credit/debit or SNAP and FMNP?

- **Non-shoppers.** This is harder and happens less often but can be really important to reach out to this audience, depending on what it is you need to know.
- **Neighboring businesses.** How this gets defined depends on the context of the market. It may be a downtown core or the entire county.
- **Market sponsors, supporters and partners.** This also is defined by the context in which the market operates but speaks to any individual or organization that helps make the season happen in some way.

4. How will you reach this audience?

Once you know who it is you want to collect information from (and why), the next question is how best to reach them. Every method has its pros and cons.

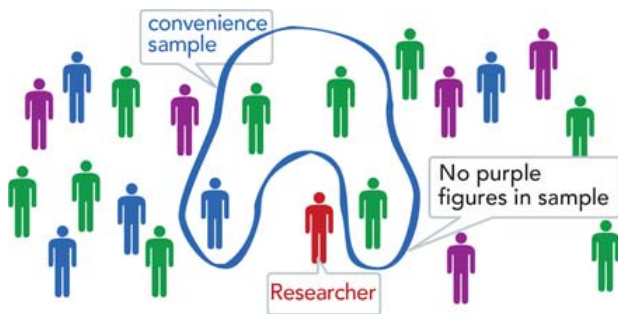
Method	Pros	Cons
Paper survey – email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easy to manage, inexpensive (if you have Internet and a good computer); ▪ Most people have email. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not everyone has email. ▪ Not everyone who has email checks it (especially farmers). ▪ You need correct emails for everyone on your list. ▪ People may not return your survey. ▪ Data entry.
Paper survey – mailing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easy to manage because you know who you sent the survey to. ▪ Can get good results because you can send targeted reminders and people still like paper. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be expensive to make all the copies, assemble the mailing, and pay for postage. ▪ It may be added work to get everyone’s current mailing address (and resend the ones that come back.) ▪ Can take longer to reach people. ▪ Data entry.
Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of good online survey tools available for cheap or free. ▪ Tools help design questions and responses. ▪ Greatly reduces data entry. ▪ May be linked to reports and even graphic functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need good emails to send to everyone. ▪ If you are relying on people finding the survey on your website or online newsletter, you don’t necessarily know if you are getting the right audience or a representative sample.
Phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be more effective for certain audiences. ▪ Can increase the likelihood of someone responding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time consuming ▪ Need to train callers ▪ Data entry ▪ Need correct phone numbers

Of course, you could also do a combination of these methods. Or get creative and take a more participatory approach by setting up a dot survey, having shoppers “vote” by putting beans in a jar, doing a “photo novella,” or other fun techniques.

Whatever method you choose, remember to be mindful of the language(s) you choose to use as not everyone speaks English. Likewise, not everyone is fully literate and not every culture privileges writing things down.

5. Sample vs Census?

Now that you know who you want to talk to and how you will reach them, a key design question is if you want to do a sample or census. A **sample** is a subset of all the possible respondents who fit your target group and could respond to your survey. People worry about sample size and whether or not it is statistically significant. If your bottom line objective is to influence policy or peer reviewed research, this becomes more important. Typically, market surveys are less formal and likely to be “convenience samples” as opposed to a formal random sample. For most purposes, what is important is whether your sample is **representative** of the mix of people you want information about or from.



By taking a **census** approach, you are trying to get every possible respondent or person (business, farm, etc.) in your target audience. This is simpler in the sense that you’re going for everyone, but that also means you need correct names and contact information for everyone. It also means more materials and more people to track. Taking a census approach with your vendors or neighboring businesses makes sense because you know who they are, where to find them, and they are usually a manageable number. Doing this for non-shoppers, for example, would be far more challenging and work.

6. What kind of analysis and report do you need?

By thinking about what kind of analysis and report you need up front, you can be sure to design your survey in such a way that you are sure to get it. Think back to your purpose and who will be reading the report. Try to match the style of the report to the purpose. For example, the more official and formal the audience, the more official and formal the report should look. Options may include:

- Colorful two-pager with easy-to-read graph summarizing key data.
- Power point with key points.
- A brochure-style piece with the survey results backing up your key message.
- Detailed written document with formal style and every footnote included.
- Standardized annual report that has a predetermined template.

- Or something in between!

Regardless of the style of report you use, be sure to include the following method notes so that this information is easy to find in the future.

- Number of people you sent the survey to (or received the survey).
- How they received the survey and when (could be a range of dates).
- How many people completed the survey.
- The *response rate* which is the number of people who received the survey divided by the number of people who completed it.

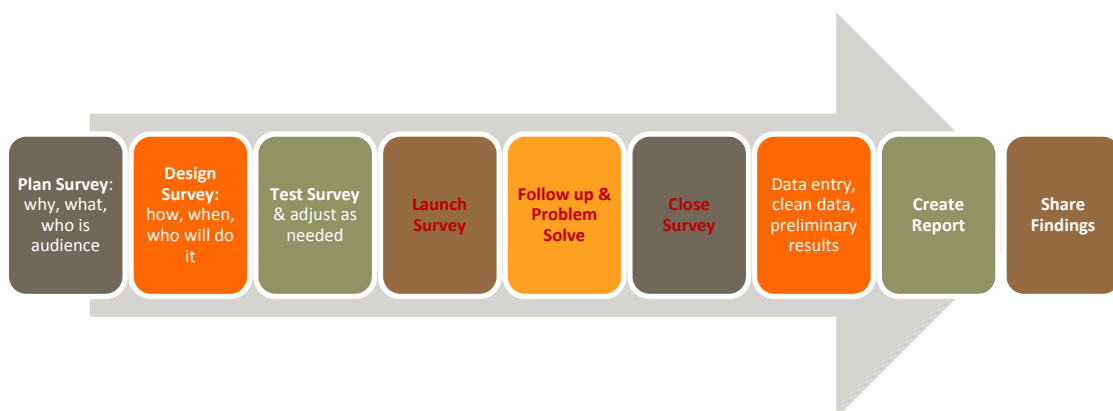
Not all reports need to be confidential or anonymous. However, people are far more likely to respond to your survey if they know that their privacy will be respected. A *confidential* survey and report is one in which you know who took the survey, however, no names are used (or sometimes even collected) and none of the reported data reveals the identity of the source. An *anonymous* survey is when you don't know who responded, such as with a dot survey at a market. It is impossible to know who put which dot where.

7. What is your budget? Timeline?

There's a tendency to think about surveys as "free" since there are so many great online tools. They definitely don't have to be expensive. However, there are always some direct and/or opportunity costs involved. Knowing your budget can help to reign in your survey design. General costs include:

- people-power to design and implement the survey, and then to analyze the results and write a report;
- possible investment to upgrade one of the online survey tools;
- computer and communication costs including any printing for the survey or the report.

Another important planning consideration is your timeline. The first question is: when do you need the report finished? Once you have this date, work backwards and figure out what you can do in the time you have.



8. What information will achieve your goal?

All of the work up to now will help to realistically define your survey project. The next step is to brainstorm the *specific information* you would like to collect.

For example, you are going to do a survey to get shopper feedback to inform a decision on whether or not to add a second market day (Step 1). And what you need to know is what your shoppers think about this idea (Step 2). And you want to hear from current shoppers and non-shoppers (Step 3) through an online survey (Step 4) and you're hoping for a representative sample (Step 5). Your goal is to have a concise report with data tables for a board meeting (Step 6). The board meeting where the consideration of adding a second market day will be discussed is in two months and you have no budget but some volunteers are willing to help (Step 7). So, in this example, you have a very specific need, low-cost approach, and tight timeline.

The next big question is what information do you need to be able to help you make this decision? Start by brainstorming:

- Is the person responding a current shopper? Are they a non-shopper?
- How likely is it that the person would go to a new market? Would they stop going to the current one?
- What kind of vendors would the person like at the new market?
- What day of the week should the new market be on?
- Is there a time of day that would be more likely to draw shoppers?
- Should the new day be in the same location or a new one?

Once you have brainstormed and researched what information you want to know, step back and reflect on the purpose of your survey. Would this information help us to achieve our purpose and provide the exact information we need?

The hardest part of any survey is keeping it short! But the shorter it is, the more likely it is that people will respond and that the report will be completed on time and within budget. As they say, "don't measure with a micrometer what you cut with a chainsaw." Given the way our brains work, sets of five or ten questions tend to work. More than that and it gets harder to manage.

9. What types of questions and what are the responses?

Finally, we get to think about the actual questions! Now that you know what you want to know, what are the best questions for your goals?

For the most part, market surveys tend to be *quantitative*. That is the responses are in the form of a number. However, you may also ask *qualitative* questions that have words as responses. The trick is to have the select a type of question that will get you the information you need in the quickest and easiest format for your

respondents. Typically, your survey will be a combination of question types. The following table describes the pros and cons of the most common question types.

Type of Question	Pros	Cons
Multiple Choice asking for <i>one</i> response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is one of the easiest types of question to do the analysis on and report. ▪ You can use the response to sort your data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You have to really think through the responses offered. Getting the responses right can be tricky.
Check Box asking for <i>one</i> response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fairly easy to report on. ▪ Easy for people taking the survey to answer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You have to really think through the responses offered. Getting the responses right can be tricky. ▪ Analysis is harder than the multiple choice question.
Scaled question Asks for one response on a linear scale of some sort: poor to excellent, none to many, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fairly easy to report on. ▪ Easy for people taking the survey to answer. ▪ Responses can be converted to numbers for analysis. ▪ Can efficiently capture how people think or feel about something. Helps with any sort of evaluative measure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not appropriate for every type of information. ▪ Best not to overuse.
Grid Table with series of questions all using the same scaled responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easy for people taking the survey to answer. ▪ Great for opinion statements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be overused. ▪ Best to limit number of grid questions or the survey can look overwhelming and the results will be a pain to compile.
Ranking Asks respondent to rank series of responses in an order, usually from 1 to 5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forces people to choose and prioritize a response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not appropriate for all types of information. ▪ Need to really think through the responses. ▪ Can be harder for respondent to answer.
Short response Short written response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excellent for names and other basic information ▪ You can catch responses you may not have thought of. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data entry can be more time consuming. ▪ Can be less time efficient to report.
Open-ended Big space to write an answer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excellent for discovery of attitudes or thoughts that you haven't considered. ▪ Allows people to articulate what is on their mind. ▪ Quotes can be very powerful in a report or other communications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People tend to skip these questions as they require more time/thought from respondent. ▪ Transcribing responses takes time. ▪ Coding and analysis skills are harder to find and take more time.

Lastly, think about whether or not you need a *filter* question. This is a question, usually at the beginning, that helps to ascertain that the respondent is who you want to take the survey. This is especially important for convenience surveys online

where it's open to the whole world and you only want to look at the results from certain people.

For example, if you want to survey current farmers market shoppers, your filter question might be: Have you shopped at this farmers market in 2016? Yes or No. If no, the survey goes straight to "Thank you. You're done." (Or it could go to a question about: why not?)

10. Test your survey before launching.

The final tip for creating a survey for your farmers market is to test the survey before you launch it. Often, your perfectly crafted question has some simple error you didn't see. Or, quite often, people interpret the question differently than you expected. Ideally, you'd find a few people from the target audience. But if that doesn't work even having a few colleagues, friends or family do a test run will help surface little refinements that make a big difference.

Now that you're a survey pro, notice the surveys that you are asked to do! How are they designed? What questions do they ask? Is there anything you can borrow for your next survey?

Sample Market Questions and Responses

Question	Responses
<p>Did you attend the [insert name] Farmers Market in 2015?</p> <p><i>Note:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Great filter question. ▪ Think about if you really mean "you" the respondent or if care more about the "shopping group" or household. 	<p>Yes No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Could add a "Not sure" or "N/A" if appropriate. The good thinking about a Yes-No is it forces a response.
<p>How often do you shop at this farmers market?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Shop" is different than "visit." Which do you care about? ▪ Question may be time bound by adding "this season" or "in 2016" and "do" changed to "did" if season is over. ▪ A variation could be "How many times did you visit or shop..." in which case the responses would be numbers. Key is to select numbers that make sense and can be used for analysis. 	<p>Weekly Twice a month Once a month Once or twice a season This is my first visit Other?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If you have more than one market in the same location each week, you'll need to be more specific in the question if you only mean the Wed or Sun market OR add a response that is "Twice a week" ▪ This is designed for someone in the market. If the survey is given anywhere outside of the market, the response of "None" needs to be added.

Question	Responses	
<p>Where do you live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoid questions like “Where’s home?” which typically evoke far more possible answers and cultural reference points. This makes it harder to answer and less likely to have consistent responses. ▪ If your market is in a community where there are a lot of second homes (i.e., San Juan Island), the question needs to reflect this reality. “Where do you live during the summer?” “Where is your primary residence?” 	<p>Okanogan Omak, Conconully, or Riverside Tonasket/Oroville Brewster/Bridgeport/Pateros Methow Valley Republic/Ferry County Chelan/Douglas County Other - Eastern WA County Western WA County Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a temptation to put a map up and have people stick pins or dots “where they live.” This may work if your primary goal is to engage people in a fun way. In terms of actual data, it is usually extremely difficult to use. ▪ There is also a temptation to use zip codes. This is usually maddening and too much detail. However, there may be cases where this is exactly what a market needs to know for whatever reason. ▪ Be careful when the city is the same name as the county as with Okanogan. ▪ Whether you use streets, neighborhoods, city names, or counties, try to lump them together whenever possible to minimize the number of responses. ▪ If you don’t know where people live, you can make this a “short response” question instead of a multiple choice. ▪ Always have an Other. 	
<p>How much have you (or will you) spend at the farmers market today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You could change “today” to anytime period that you want. ▪ You could also use the same question and substitute “neighboring businesses,” “neighboring businesses and restaurants,” “downtown” or whatever is appropriate for your market. 	<p>\$0 \$1 to 5 \$6 to 10 \$11 to 15 \$16 to 20 \$21 to 30 \$31 to 40 \$41 to 50 \$51 to 75 \$76 to 100 Over \$100</p>	<p>RMA’s show that, on average, shoppers spend just under \$20 per market day. However, many shoppers spend more than this so the higher spending ranges are important.</p> <p>The \$0 allows you to sort shoppers from non-shoppers.</p> <p>You could ask people to fill in a blank with the exact amount that they spent. However, you may not get as high of a response rate as this feels more intrusive.</p>
<p>Overall, how would you rate the selection of farm and artisan products at this farmers market in 2016?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoid jargon like “product mix” that most shoppers don’t understand. Even referring to “market” for a farmers market is a little too much shorthand when talking to shoppers. ▪ You can narrow the question to focus on one type of product category or vendor. 	<p>Poor Fair Good Very Good Excellent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start with the “lowest” or worse option and then build to the best option. ▪ Provide 3 or 5 options. ▪ Consider if you need a “N/A” (not applicable) option. 	

Questions	Responses
<p>When you came to this farmers market in 2016, how often did you buy farm, food, or artisan products?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>This question asks for a behavior instead of an attitude.</i> <i>Adjust the time period and verb tense as needed. If the season isn't over yet, you'll need present and past tense.</i> <i>Here again you can narrow the question to focus on one product category, vendor type or whatever you need.</i> 	<p>Never Sometimes Always N/A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>You could also reformulate the question to be "how many times" (instead of "how often") and provide number ranges as responses.</i> <i>If you use the question as it is, then you'll want to be sure and find out how often they came to the market in the same time period.</i>
<p>What is your favorite thing about the [NAME] Farmers Market?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Very friendly positive question. People really like to share what they love about markets.</i> <i>Helps people to think about what they like (instead of what they would improve).</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>You could leave this as an open-ended question.</i> <i>If there are features of the market that you are trying to evaluate you could use a ranking question or scale.</i> <i>You could also use a multiple choice and "force" people to select their one favorite thing.</i>
<p>How did you first hear about the XXX farmers market?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>If you leave it as "how did you hear," then people who have been coming to the market for years have a hard time responding.</i> <i>An alternative is "How do you get news and updates about this farmers market?"</i> <i>OR, "What is the single best way for you get news and updates about this farmers market?"</i> <i>You can also preface the question with something like "To help us do more effective promotions [or outreach], please tell us..."</i> <i>Nice open-ended example from the Seattle FMs: "We're always looking for new market outreach opportunities. Do you have a suggestion of a favorite community board, local newsletter, neighborhood blog or another media outlet?"</i> 	<p>Local newspaper Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) The farmers market's website A different website, which? _____ The farmers market's newsletter or email Posters or signs around town Noticed from the street Word of mouth Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The responses for this need to fit what the market is doing for promotions.</i> <i>This could be a Multiple Choice question (pick one) or a Check box (check all that apply).</i> <i>Always have an "Other" as there are ways that you never dreamed of.</i> <i>Word of mouth always rates highly and might be worth digging into somehow.</i>
<p>Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I enjoy cooking. I look for kids activities. I have a garden. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The list could go on. Select lifestyle preferences that distinguish your shoppers from non-shoppers.</i> 	<p>Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Agree very much N/A</p>