

Questionnaires

Overview

Questionnaires can be conducted on a range of public engagement projects and activities. They can, for example, be used at events with participants. Many projects use questionnaires as a means of evaluation.

Why use it?

Questionnaires are useful to build background and baseline information, but, generally, not as the main source of evidence for evaluation. In our experience, they are useful as a first way to draw out information to be used as basis for either group workshops or for developing interview questions. Questionnaires can also be used to confirm issues that have come up through more exploratory techniques, but ideally should be supported by more in-depth methods of evaluation.

For example, questionnaires can be used to understand:

- who is involved in/attending the activity;
- why people are involved;
- how (if at all) people were involved in the project (e.g. consulted, informed, helped make decisions);
- how and when people undertook certain activities (e.g. attended meetings);
- perceptions of the quality of certain features (e.g. venue, handouts, speakers);
- potential outcomes of the project on an individual.

Using a standardised questionnaire on a range of public engagement projects allows the comparison between different activities.

Instructions for use

Questionnaires can be conducted face-to-face (i.e. where an interviewer asks the questions and writes down the responses) or be self-completing (e.g. postal, online). If the latter is used there must be clear instructions on how to respond.

The presentation, the wording, the layout and the length of a questionnaire are important considerations. There are some general rules for using questionnaires for evaluation:

- Try not to make the questionnaire too long; if possible keep the questionnaire to a couple of pages in length i.e. a maximum of 10 minutes to complete.
- Ensure that the questions are worded in a simple clear language, free of unnecessary jargon.
- It may be necessary to have mixture of open and closed questions, as different styles of questions elicit different types of responses. Also, questionnaires requiring a choice of optional answers (closed questions) work better for self-completion questionnaires than it does for face-to-face ones, as people have time to consider the options and pick one.
- It is very important to ensure that the questions are not biased or leading in any way, as this will influence the results you obtain.

- Undertake a pilot study – it is worth building in time to draft a questionnaire and try it out on someone, such as a colleague who is not involved in the project.

Who to use it with

Anyone involved in your activity, such as project partners, stakeholders, staff and/or audience members.

When to use it

Asking the same questions at the start of the activity and again at the end will provide a method for understanding the potential changes that have been brought about by your activity.

Limitations

- Questionnaires sent by post or online frequently produce a lower response rate than those administered face to face.
- Self-completion questionnaires are really only worth doing if the person writing/compiling them has experience of using them - specifically, in asking a question that clearly communicates its meaning.
- Questionnaires do not tend to reveal the underlying reasons for responses, why and how a person gave that response.
- The information that you get from questionnaires is often of limited value unless you have enough of them completed, which can be challenging and can use up time that could be spent on more in-depth qualitative or creative methods.
- Questionnaires requiring a choice of optional answers are better for providing statistical outcomes, but you do need enough people to complete them for the statistics to mean anything.
- Questionnaires with open-ended questions, requiring an opinion or qualitative response (not chosen from a selection), are often problematic on self-completion surveys. People tend to respond in quite cryptic ways, and you usually have little opportunity to find out what they meant.
- Consider offering an incentive (e.g. a prize) to encourage people to complete and return the questionnaires.

Considerations

If you are collating any personal or sensitive information, you may need to assure respondents that their responses will be kept confidential. You may also need to declare the collection and storage of any personal data (i.e. information about a living person by which that person can be identified), under the Data Protection Act. More information on this matter can be obtained from your department's data protection officer and <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/efd/recordsoffice/data-protection/>

Timing

It will take at least a couple of hours to design and pilot a questionnaire. The overall timing depends on how it is administered (i.e. self-completed, phone, online, face to face).

Link with other methodologies

Questionnaires can be undertaken in a range of ways; they can be particularly useful to collect background factual information before using interviews or focus groups.

Further reading

There are lots of articles and books on designing questionnaires, if you are interested in finding out more, below are some examples that come strongly recommended:

Boynton P. and Greenhalgh T. (2004) Selecting, designing and developing your questionnaire, British Medical Journal, 328:1312-1315, also available at: <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/328/7451/1312?ecoll>

Bryman, A. (2004) Social Research Methods, Oxford University Press: Oxford

Example 01

This questionnaire was developed and used by Deafness Cognition and Language (DCAL) Research Centre as part of the evaluation of 'The Deaf Brain and Sign Language Open Day', a Beacon Bursary project, funded by the UCL Public Engagement Unit. The questionnaire was used as technique to capture participants' initial thoughts of the open day. The question was self-completed.

Deaf Open Day: Evaluation form

Please let us know what you thought of the day by answering the questions below. Your opinions will be invaluable for future DCAL events. You can also leave feedback in BSL at the Deaf Open Day if you prefer.

What did you find the most useful about the day?

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.....
.....

What did you find the least useful about the day?

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.....

Is there anything we could have done better?

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.....
.....

Was the use of academic language (in presentations and on posters) easy to understand (select one)?

It was easy to understand / it was just right / I found it difficult to follow

How did you hear about the Open Day?

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.....

How would you like to hear about our research in future (newsletter, another open day etc)?

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.....

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Example 02

This simple self-completed questionnaire was recommended by a partner of the Beacon for Public Engagement programme, at Camden Council (LBC), as a means to capture feedback from participants following training or learning activity.

Evaluation & Feedback

event
.....

title

a lot some a little none

specific and/or improvements? highlights suggested

Enjoyment: Did I enjoy the event?

New knowledge and ideas: Did I learn what I needed to, and did I get some new ideas?

Applying the learning: Will I use the information and ideas?

Effect on results: Do I think that the ideas and information will improve my effectiveness and my results?

Any other comments?

Example 03

These are a selection of questions taken from an online, self-completed questionnaire designed and administered by the 'Interior Traces' team, an Innovation Seed project, run by the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience at UCL. Part of the project was funded by UCL's Public Engagement Unit. This questionnaire had three broad aims: 1. capture the background of those who attended project events; 2. understand the experiences of attendees; 3. explore potential learning of the audience who attended the dramas.

Thank you for clicking on the survey. The data you are providing will help us improve Interior Traces in the future. On the last page, you can enter your email address for the chance to win a £25 Amazon voucher.

First of all, we'd like to find out about which events you came to and why.

1. If you are happy to do so, please indicate your age and gender so we can better understand who has experienced Interior Traces:

Age - Under 18 / 18-25 / 25-40 / 40-65 / Over 65 / Prefer not to say

Gender – Male / Female / Prefer not to say

2. Which versions of Interior Traces have you heard or seen? (Please tick all that apply)

Live event on 5 May 09 (Science Museum's Dana Centre)

Live event on 6 May 09 (Birkbeck Cinema)

Live event on 7 May 09 (Wellcome Collection)

Broadcasts on Resonance 104.4fm

Mp3 downloads or streamed from the website

Cheltenham Science Festival event on 4 June 09

Secret Garden Party screenings

Other event (please specify)

3. Which episodes of Interior Traces have you heard or seen? (Please tick all that apply)

Episode 1 (set in 1906) / Episode 2 (set in 1906) / Episode 3 (set in 2009) / Episode 4 (set in 2009) / Episode 5 (set in 2030) / Episode 6 (set in 2030)

4. How did you find out about Interior Traces?

Wellcome Collection website

Science Museum's Dana Centre website

LCACE website

Resonance fm website

Guerilla Science listing

Time Out listing

Email list

Word of mouth

Flyer

Facebook group

Other (please specify)

5. What was your primary reason for coming to or listening to Interior Traces?

About the dramas. We'd like to find out what you thought about the dramas.

1. If you didn't go to the live events in London, Cheltenham, or the Secret Garden Party, please go on to Question 2.

If you did go to the live events, what did you think of the short introduction to the performances?

I would have preferred to have jumped straight in to the dramas with no introduction.

I would have preferred a shorter introduction to the dramas.

I would have preferred a longer introduction to the dramas.

The amount of introduction to the dramas was about right.

Please add any further comments or suggestions about the introduction:

2. How would you rate the following aspects of the dramas overall?

Quality of scripts (scenarios, dialogue, characters etc.) - Very good / Quite good / OK / Poor / Don't know / doesn't apply

Quality of acting - Very good / Quite good / OK / Poor / Don't know / doesn't apply

Quality of video works - Very good / Quite good / OK / Poor / Don't know / doesn't apply

Quality of music - Very good / Quite good / OK / Poor / Don't know / doesn't apply

Please add any specific comments below:

3. Do you think the music and videos added to the drama?

Do you think the music and videos added to the drama?

Definitely / To some degree / No / It didn't affect me / N/A

If you have any comments on the interaction between the drama, music, and videos please tell us here:

4. Was there any aspect of the episodes you saw or heard that stood out as being particularly good or bad? Please fill in as many of the boxes below as you wish.

Episode 1 (Catherine - 1906)

Episode 2 (Mick - 1906)

Episode 3 (Cathie - 2009)

Episode 4 (Michael - 2009)

Episode 5 (Catie - 2030)

Episode 6 (Mike - 2030)

About the content

We'd like to know if you learnt anything new from Interior Traces and if it provoked any new ideas.

1. Did you learn something new about brain science? Yes / No

If yes, please tell us what you learned:

2. Did your ideas about the relevance of brain science to our society change? Yes / No

If yes, please tell us how: