



**POWER TO OUR  
PEOPLE**

**PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH KIT:  
CREATING SURVEYS**

Artwork by Rini Templeton [www.riniart.org](http://www.riniart.org)

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*"Never again will a single story be told as if it were the only one"*  
- Emiliano Zapata

When we create grassroots research through surveys, oral histories and other projects we counter the belief that there is only one side to the story. Creating surveys can be an excellent tool to document what is happening in our community, help us understand ourselves better and let others get to know what is going down for our people. When we document our experiences, **we honor our day-to-day reality as knowledge**, while creating a powerful and strategic tool to help bring us closer to reaching our campaign goals and strengthening the movement. Part of oppression is keeping information and knowledge in the hands of the powerful. When we reclaim research, we walk one step closer to achieving liberation.

### **What is participatory research?**

For research to be participatory means that it is not only based on the experiences of the people affected by oppression but also that **it is the people most directly affected that are intimately involved in the research process**. Surveys are only one way of doing participatory research. Oral histories, background research for designing murals, even target research on companies can be participatory when you involve your community in the process, use your own experience to define the process and work collectively to create change. A great example of participatory research was a survey created by a community group in New York City which had their membership, predominately immigrant domestic workers, design and administer a survey on working conditions of domestic workers in the city. The survey questions were based on their own experiences as domestic workers and part of a larger campaign led by the group to push for stronger worker protections in labor legislation.

## **Acknowledgements**

The DataCenter has been fortunate to work with community-based organizations that are committed to developing participatory survey projects as a part of their social justice campaigns. We would like to thank Ai-Jen Poo, Erlene Browne and everyone at CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities and Domestic Workers United in New York City for giving us the opportunity to learn from their fierce analysis, practice and unwavering commitment to justice.

We would also like to thank Annette Bernhardt, Senior Policy Analyst with the Brennan Center at New York University; Richard Speigman, Research Program Director at the Public Health Institute; and César López, Youth Organizer with Movement Achieving Youth Activism (MAYA) for taking the time to review this guide and offer feedback and invaluable suggestions for making it more accessible and relevant to the needs of community groups.

## Glossary



**Cultural competence-** a consciousness, knowledge and skill to work effectively in cross-cultural situations that is grounded in a self-aware and political understanding of dynamics of power and oppression. *The term cultural competence is used and defined by a variety of people, from anti-racist groups to government social service providers. This definition reflects common elements from several sources, but is not authoritative.*

**Interview survey-** when someone asks someone the questions in the survey and writes down their responses.

**Individual survey-** when the person filling out the survey does it by themselves.

**Sample-** group of people that are given the survey.

**Population<sup>1</sup>-** the group of people that your survey is targeting. While you won't ever be able to survey everyone in the population you are looking at, you choose a certain amount and that is your 'sample', the sample then represents the larger 'population.'

**Participatory research- (from Center for Participatory Research)<sup>2</sup>-** recognizes that the people most affected by an issue are the experts. "Participatory research draws upon this expertise by engaging community members in the collective analysis of social problems in an effort to understand and address them."

**Probing-** interview techniques to draw out a response from someone without influencing their answers. Probing techniques include pausing and repeating back what someone has answered.

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<sup>1</sup> Trochim, William M. "[Sampling Terminology](http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/)," The Research Methods Knowledge Base (<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/>), version current as of June 7, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Popular Education & Participatory Research, "What Is Participatory Research?" [www.cpepr.net](http://www.cpepr.net)

# Surveys for Social Justice Campaigns

In the cycle of building, running and evaluating a campaign there are many types of research methods you will probably use, including library research, oral histories, and observation. Creating a survey is one great way to gather information as a part of your campaign strategy.

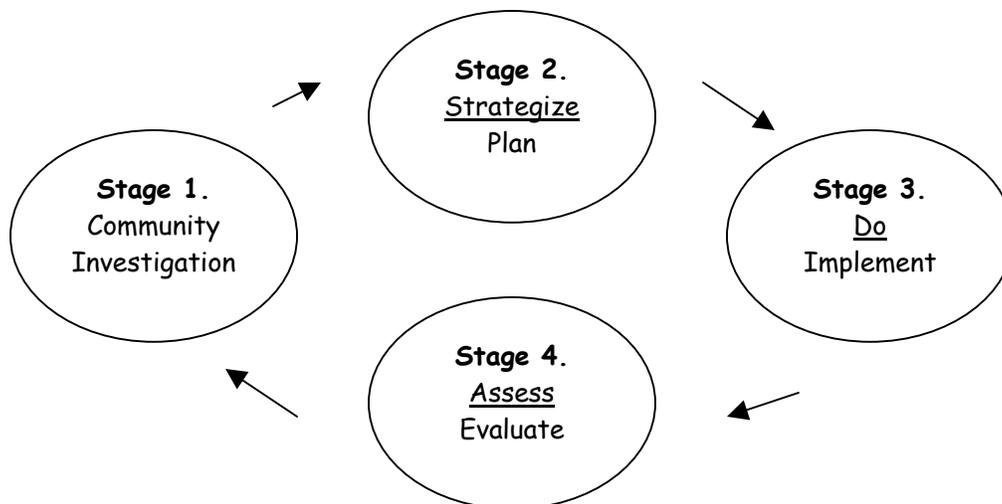
Community surveys can be used at all stages of a social justice campaign. For example, when your group is in the early stages of a new campaign and you are doing community investigation, **a survey is helpful to find out what issues the community identifies as being important.**

Other ways surveys have been used by community groups include:

- to identify the issue they will work on
- to gather information on a specific part of the issue
- to document working conditions
- to record the effects of pollutants on the local community
- to evaluate how their campaign impacted the community

When you do a survey, you can get a large amount of information from a broad range of people, **use the responses to back up your campaign and involve your community in the research process all at the same time!**

## Four Stages Of Building A Campaign<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Modified from "Four Stages of Building A Campaign" in *Community Organizing 101: Training Guide*, Asians & Pacific Islanders for Community Empowerment (API Force), [www.apiforce.org](http://www.apiforce.org)

# Survey Planning

## Should We Use A Survey?

Surveys are just *one* tool for getting the information you need. Before you decide to conduct a survey you may want to ask yourselves the following questions:

### Who is the audience for the results of the survey?

Will the results be used to convince elected officials that an issue is important? Policy makers and the media often need to see that the public is concerned about something in order to sway them to pass legislation or to give your issue media attention. Survey results are one way to communicate what people are experiencing especially if little information is already out there on the issue. A survey also shows that people took the time to investigate and document what is occurring in the community.

### Does the information we need already exist?

You don't want to put your time into doing a survey if you don't need to. Many times you can find the information you need on the Internet or at the public library. Government agencies also collect data that you can get by submitting a public records request. Often times the information the government collects will not be what you are looking for, either because they asked questions that don't match what your group would have asked or they asked a different set of people. In this case, creating your own survey lets you have control over what kinds of questions are asked and who will be surveyed. A survey may not always go deep enough, however. When this happens, interviewing members of your community and collecting their stories will be the best method. You may want to run through the following checklist to see if a survey is the right tool for you. If you answer 'yes' to the following, you may **not** need to use a survey.

	Yes	No
Is the information available on the Internet?		
Is the information available at the library?		
Can we get the information by filing a public records request with a governmental agency?		

## Do We Have the Time & People Power?

Most surveys take a lot of time to develop and require people willing to develop and distribute the survey. The time spent on the survey will vary depending on a number of factors. Many groups take one to two months to develop the survey, taking advantage of membership meetings to decide on a list of areas your group wants the survey to focus on and then using a survey committee or smaller group to turn the list into questions. Distributing and collecting the survey will also vary in time. Some groups prefer taking one to two days to distribute the survey door-to door in a neighborhood, mail out or post

on a website. Others may need three, four or more months to have the survey spread through the community. This is up to your group to decide after taking into account costs, your people power and what kind of survey people will respond to best. You will also want to factor in enough time to input the data into a format where you can analyze the results of your survey. This is a good piece for volunteer graduate students or others who have skills using Excel or other software and may be looking for ways to get more involved in the community, to work on.

The key to cutting time and resources is to bring in people to help with the project. Setting up an advisory committee is a great way to draw in people who have experience in developing surveys (and entering and analyzing data) and who possibly bring financial resources for the project. Advisory committees can include academics with experience in survey and statistical research, union leaders, and community members with experience in the area you are researching. The advisory committee can help you with questions that may arise, assist in any research or pilot testing that may need to be done before the survey goes out, and vouch for the rigor of the survey methodology if the findings are put under public scrutiny. Being clear about the responsibilities of the advisory team is important to ensure that your group remains in control of the direction of the survey project.



## **Interview or Individual Survey?**

Time and resources will vary depending on what *kind* of survey your group chooses to create. There are many ways you can develop your survey and there are benefits and drawbacks to each.

### **Interview Survey**

An interview survey is a survey designed so that one person asks another each question and records their response. This is a more time-intensive method, the interviewers will need to be trained (see p.13) and more time will be needed for each survey to be answered. A drawback to interview surveys is that they don't allow the survey to be completely anonymous. In addition, the interviewer can influence the way someone answers the questions, even unintentionally. The benefits of interview surveys are that

they let the person answering the survey develop trust with the interviewer and you have a higher chance that every question will be answered. There are other reasons you may want to use an interview format:

- *Is everyone literate?*  
If there is a possibility that some people who take the survey may have difficulty reading or writing and people may not be comfortable asking for assistance you may want to use an interview format.
- *Cultural sensitivity*  
You may want to use an interview format if you know that the people who will be answering it may need more time to develop trust of your group, or if they already know your group and are more likely to answer if they are certain that it is your group who will be using the responses to move a campaign. It is important that the interviewers are familiar and culturally competent with the community.

### **Individual Surveys**

Individual surveys are surveys answered by the person on their own. Individual surveys require much less time to answer and people are needed only to distribute and collect the surveys.

- *Will people need to refer to their records?*  
If you are asking questions that involve personal finances or other information that may require the respondent to consult their cash stubs, bank statements or other records, you may want to create a take-home survey.

*Other questions to consider:*

### **How do we get a representative sample?**

It is extremely difficult to get a truly representative sample without doing a very time- and cost-intensive random selection of phone numbers or addresses. Survey companies can do this, but it is really not necessary. Your group can be confident in your data and stand by your claims if you sample as many different *types* of people within the parameters of the group you are looking at and by having enough people fill out the survey. To capture the attention of media and policymakers, a survey of at least 500 people is considered solid; having 500 to 1,000 completed surveys is even better.

### **What if our community does not speak English?**

Surveys should be translated into appropriate languages and if you are conducting an interview survey the interviewers should be ready to answer any translation questions that may arise. Often times a question doesn't translate directly into a second language. It is best to have surveys translated into the second language, and then from the second language back into the first, in order to see how the translation affects the questions.

## **What about safety?**

Questions regarding working conditions, immigration status, and violence in the home can have serious repercussions for the person answering the survey. **Your group will need to be as sensitive as possible to the privacy of the people who have volunteered to answer your survey.** You may also consider where you choose to ask the survey questions. Surveys of working conditions may be done best away from worksites, for example at community centers, grocery stores or outside places of worship. Surveys of home-life conditions should also be asked away from the home, with the confidentiality ensured.

The safety of the interviewers must also be a high priority. If you are taking the survey door-to-door or to less-populated places, you should have interviewers travel in pairs and be familiar with the neighborhood they are in or have maps of the area.

## **How will we reach people for the survey?**

Where are your potential respondents located? If you are trying to reach a broad range of people across the country you may want to do telephone interviews. While mailing surveys is a cheap way to get your survey out to a large number of people, there are many drawbacks to consider. Mailed surveys have a very low response rate. Respondents also tend not to answer write-in response questions, so check-the-box questions may be more appropriate. Groups have used various places to conduct surveys including worksites, community centers, grocery stores and outside places of worship.

# Creating & Administering the Survey



## Step 1: Identifying Information You Are Looking For

Make a list of the information your group would like to receive from the survey.<sup>4</sup> Write down what your goals are for each piece of information and why finding it out is necessary. Ask yourselves what is most important for you to find out. This will help you narrow down what to ask and which questions to use. Often times a survey becomes too long and you will need to cut out many questions. **Taking the time to prioritize the information you are looking for will help if you need to shorten your survey.** Prioritize things that give you information to support your argument and the goals of your campaign.

Take time editing and re-editing the list.



### Information We Want to Find Out

1. wages per hour
2. do they get paid sick leave?
3. have they been fired without notice?



## Step 2: Designing The Survey

Use the list created in Step 1 to develop questions that target what your group wants to know. Look through other surveys designed for communities or groups similar to the one you want to survey to get ideas of ways a question can be asked. It can take multiple questions to get to the answer you are looking for.

### Design Tips<sup>5</sup>

- **Keep your language direct, use common words.** If an uncommon word is used, include a definition.

<sup>4</sup> Suggestion from Annette Bernhardt, Senior Policy Analyst, Brennan Center for Justice, New York University

<sup>5</sup> *Developing A Downtown Survey: Basic Principles of Good Surveys*  
<http://www.emich.edu/public/geo/557book/e112.survey.html>

- Close-ended questions receive the highest response rate. Close-ended questions include: **Yes/No, True/False, Multiple Choice**
- Providing close-ended questions instead of open-ended questions narrows the range of answers, helps avoid un-useful information and makes it easier to compare your responses later. However, you can learn a lot from open-ended questions and often times people will write in something you never anticipated, letting you learn something extremely important about the issue or community.

*for example:*

<b>Instead of asking:</b>	<b>Ask:</b>
Where do you live? _____	What neighborhood do you live in? _____  Which borough is this? <input type="radio"/> Brooklyn <input type="radio"/> Bronx <input type="radio"/> Staten Island <input type="radio"/> Queens <input type="radio"/> Manhattan

- Be specific. For complex issues you may need to create multiple questions

*for example:*

<b>Instead of asking:</b>	<b>Ask:</b>	<b>You could also ask:</b>
Do you get hurt on the job a lot?	Has your employer ever committed the following:  <input type="radio"/> Hit me <input type="radio"/> Yelled at me <input type="radio"/> Pushed me <input type="radio"/> Raped me	Check the following injuries that have occurred while on the job:  <input type="radio"/> Slipped and fell <input type="radio"/> Burns <input type="radio"/> Cuts <input type="radio"/> Exposed to cleaning agents that made it difficult to breathe, see or hurt your skin

- Fill-in-the-blank questions are good to use when you don't need specific answers, you don't want to limit the types of responses or when you want information that is testimonial.
- People often tire quickly when taking a survey. To avoid "survey boredom" it is good to mix up the types of questions you ask. For example, place true/false questions after a multiple choice question, etc.
- Avoid questions that can be answered with "I don't know"

- Do not combine two questions into one.
- Stay away from questions with multiple answers. (For example: *Circle all that apply*) These will be more difficult to work with when you are analyzing your data.
- Adding a “What else do you want me to know?” is a useful way to end a section or survey.

## Length of survey



**Try to keep the survey as short as possible – 30 minutes at most for individual surveys.** You will need to allow more time for interview surveys, but keep in mind that a respondent may get tired and not complete the interview.

## Survey Format

### Introduction

Avoid long introductions. The introduction should be short and name the organization doing the survey. It should also include how the information gathered will be used and let people know it is anonymous and/or confidential.

### The First Questions

The first questions will set the tone for the survey. The person should feel they have information to contribute. By making the first few questions relatively easy to answer, you may have a higher success rate of getting surveys completely filled out.

### The Last questions

Don't leave the most important questions for the end. Many surveys never get completely filled out.

### Immigration questions: Develop Trust Up Front

If you must ask questions about immigration status place them later in the survey. Use the first part of your survey to develop the trust of the respondent and then place these questions near the end of the questionnaire.



### Step 3: Testing the Survey

**Before doing your survey, you should test it on at least 5 to 10 people who are not familiar with the survey** and who also are people you would ask to participate in the survey later (i.e., if you are doing a survey of restaurant workers then test the survey on restaurant workers, etc.). Look at the questions they answered, did not answer and *how* they answered them. If it appeared that certain questions gave them problems, were unclear, or did not get a response, then edit your survey. If possible, ask them which questions didn't make sense or were difficult to answer. You can also debrief with the interviewers and see what their thoughts were about the how the survey went. Ask yourselves if the responses get to the information you are looking for. If not, then you need to refine your questions to bring out the type of data you need. Keep track of the survey time. If it is beyond 30 minutes for an individual survey it is probably too long.



### Step 4: Interviewer Training

**If you are using an interview survey you should hold an interviewers' training session.** The training should include:



#### **Understanding the questions and their intent**

If your questions are unclear to interviewers, they may be unclear to people taking the survey. Make sure everyone understands what the questions mean.

#### **Identifying people who qualify to answer the survey**

It is important to let the interviewers know who you want to answer the survey. If you are interviewing residents in a neighborhood and want input from each house or apartment, you may need to let the interviewer know how many people per home should be asked, and if you want only one family per home. Many homes have multiple families or an extended family living under one roof, so making clear who you want to answer the survey will help avoid possible confusion later.

#### **Drawing Out Responses<sup>6</sup>**

It is important for interviewers not to influence the answers given. You want people to answer honestly and not answer the way they think someone wants them to answer. Probing is a technique used by the interviewer to draw out a response without putting

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<sup>6</sup>Trochim, William M., "[Interviews](#)," Research Methods Knowledge Base (version current as of June 7, 2004).

forward their own opinion or biasing the person's answer. There are different kinds of probing techniques that may work for you:

- Silent probe  
**Allow the respondent to have time to think about their answer.** Staying silent for a minute after asking the question may give the respondent time to answer the question more accurately.
- Verbal recognition  
An interviewer can also get the respondent to answer by letting the respondent know they are listening. The best way to do this without putting too much outside influence on the respondent is by saying "ok" or "uh huh" after the respondent finishes a sentence.

### **Recording the Responses**

- Write the responses immediately.
- Keep notes of any probing techniques used.

### **Tips For Interviewers**

1. Ask questions word for word as written.
2. Ask questions in the order they are given in the survey.
3. Ask every question.
4. Don't finish other people's sentences, don't assume you know how someone will answer.
5. Don't "clarify." Clarifications can bring in an undocumented bias of the interviewer.
6. Let the people answering the survey know they have the right to skip any questions they want or to stop the interview completely when they want.



## **Step 5: Analyzing Your Data**

After you have collected the completed surveys, it is time to analyze the data. Data can be analyzed by entering it into an Excel sheet and computing your numbers or by using a statistical software program. Getting volunteers on board is a great way to save your organization time and resources during this stage.

*Note: If someone has not responded to a question it is often assumed they would answer as others have. However this is not always the case and assumptions cannot be made from a non-respondent. Only consider information that has been actually answered.*

## Web-based survey sites

A number of web survey sites are now offered at varying prices. These sites allow you to develop the survey (including on-line surveys), input your data and analyze your data. Depending on the costs, you can get different levels of analysis. Here is a list of a few online sites:

### SurveyMonkey

[www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)

\$19.95 per month and includes up to 1000 responses per month. CAUTION: We were told that if you miss a payment you could lose all your data, so either pay ahead or keep a back-up copy.

### PollCat

[www.pollcat.com](http://www.pollcat.com)

PollCat Survey Lite & Pro are free and give you:

1. an easy-to-use survey authoring tool that works in any browser;
2. a unique URL (link) for your survey;
3. periodic response tally notification reports via email;
4. instant access to report responses, tallies and graphs over the web;
5. management tools for all of your published and unpublished surveys.

For more features, such as more time to keep your survey up and greater capabilities, the price goes up (starting at \$9.95).

### Zoomerang

[www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com)

Free version for individuals and personal use has these features and limitations:

- ask up to 30 questions per survey
- utilize multiple pages
- create survey questions and answers in almost any language
- reporting on a maximum of 100 responses per survey
- survey data stored for only 10 days after survey launch
- limited analysis capability

Or subscribe for \$599 for 12 months and create an unlimited number of surveys and collect up to 10,000 responses across all surveys in the subscription period.

## Evaluating The Survey Process

When you have finished your survey it may be helpful to go through and take note of where questions weren't answered or what areas could be improved. It can also be useful to debrief with the people who did the interviews to find out what was difficult and what seemed to work. Recording this information can help you tailor your survey to your community's needs the next time you need to develop a survey and will be helpful if another community group asks you for assistance on their survey.

## Sources Cited

“Developing A Downtown Survey: Basic Principles of Good Surveys,”

<http://www.emich.edu/public/geo/557book/e112.survey.html>.

Trochim, William M. *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*

(<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/>), version current as of June 7. 2004.

## Resources

The following is a list of popular education and participatory research resources that we recommend:

### Center for Popular Education & Participatory Research

<http://www.cpepr.net/>

CPEPR is a student-initiated center at the University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Education. CPEPR's mission is to promote and support popular education and participatory research in order to strengthen the participation of everyday people—especially the poor, youth, immigrants, and people of color—in efforts for social justice. They offer support and post community research projects for graduate students to assist in.

### Highlander Research and Education Center

<http://www.hrec.org/links.asp>

The Highlander Center was founded in 1932 to serve as an adult education center for community workers involved in social and economic justice movements. The goal of Highlander was and is to provide education and support to poor and working people fighting economic injustice, poverty, prejudice, and environmental destruction. They help grassroots leaders create the tools necessary for building broad-based movements for change. Highlander has many books and other resources on popular education available in their library. See their website for more information.

### Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide

<http://www.projectsouth.org/>

Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide is a broad-based community-driven membership organization that develops and conducts popular political and economic education and action research for organizing and liberation. They develop indigenous popular educators and movement leaders from grassroots and scholar-activist backgrounds, bringing them together on the basis of equality to engage in building a bottom-up movement for social and economic justice. They provide popular education workshop curricula on a number of different topics.

## About the DataCenter

The DataCenter is a non-profit organization that works nationally to support the social justice movement. Our mission is to provide social justice advocates, especially the poor and people of color, access to strategic information, analysis, and research skills that will help our people conduct more effective campaigns.

For more information about our programs please visit our website at [www.datacenter.org](http://www.datacenter.org) or email us at [datacenter@datacenter.org](mailto:datacenter@datacenter.org)

We work in collaboration with grassroots social justice groups to provide campaign research support, and are building our expertise to assist groups with community surveys. If you are developing a social justice campaign and want assistance with a community survey project, please contact us. We will do our best to assist you ourselves or point you towards others who can help you out.

### **DataCenter**

1904 Franklin St., Suite 900, Oakland, CA 94612, USA  
tel: (510) 835-4692 or (800) 735-3741 • fax: (510) 835-3017  
[datacenter@datacenter.org](mailto:datacenter@datacenter.org) • [www.datacenter.org](http://www.datacenter.org)