

Family Feedback Survey Strategies & Best Practices

6 Rules to Use When Gathering Data



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1 Know the What, Why, How

Remember that you only need the data that will **help you make the decision in front of you**. Before you ask families to spend time on your survey, solidify the following:

- 1. What do you need to know?** Are you making decisions about scheduling, technology, etc? What information do you need to help you make that decision?
- 2. Why do you want to know it?** What is the decision you are going to make based on this information? If there's no actionable outcome from the information, do not ask it.
- 3. How are you going to use it?** Take the time to think about how this information will actually impact your decision. If family input will not change your decision or if you don't know how the input can be used, don't ask!



2 Keep it Short – Low Lift, High Reward

How do you make sure to keep families engaged? By making your surveys and input requests low lift and high reward. This means keep it short! The longer and more frequent surveys are, the more people grow weary of them. If you create an expectation that the surveys you share are easy to fill out, families are more likely to keep responding. There are a few ways to do this.

- 1. Keep it to no more than 5 questions.** These are not academic surveys but rather dipsticks into community opinions about real issues. With a little reflection, you can pare down your questions to the few, highest-value questions you really need answered.
- 2. Take the survey yourself and time it.** People tend to stop paying attention to surveys as they progress, so if it takes longer than about 5 minutes, consider cutting it down.



3 Only Ask the Questions You Want Answered

Make sure that the question you're asking will give you the information you actually need by being specific and avoiding vague language.



EXAMPLE: A school has recently changed the 3rd grade social studies curriculum.

They've changed their "Explorers" unit to add more information about Christopher Columbus' role in colonization and the impact on the indigenous communities. What school and district administrators want to know is **whether families are satisfied** with the new content because it is an important but controversial issue.

<p>What do you think of recent changes in the 3rd grade curriculum?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Assumes families know what the changes were X Doesn't ask about what was actually changed recently
<p>How do you feel about the changes to the 3rd grade Social Studies "Explorers" unit?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Assumes families have background knowledge about the curriculum X Asking how they feel is open-ended and the responses will be hard to synthesize ✓ Highlights the unit under discussion
<p>The 3rd grade Social Studies "Explorers" unit was changed. It now reflects Christopher Columbus' role in colonization and harm to native populations.</p> <p>How would you rate the quality of the new "Explorers" unit?</p> <p>Choose One: Very Good, Good, Neutral, Bad, Very Bad</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Focuses respondents' attention on the issue at hand ✓ Calls for responses to the question administrators want answered ✓ Uses the Likert Scale, making for easier interpretation and analysis ✓ Could couple the question with an open-ended question like "please elaborate," to further unpack the respondents's feelings



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Use the Right Type of Question to Get the Type of Answers You Want

The question type, or variable, you choose should reflect how you are going to use the information. Wait to select the style of survey until you know what information you need. Let's use the simple example you might use when you're planning an end of year pizza party.



→ Multiple Choice/Binary – You are trying to get a vote or ranking

Example: If you're choosing how much of each type of pizza to order, you give a set of choices.

Which of the following kinds of pizza do you plan to eat?

- A. Cheese
- B. Pepperoni
- C. Veggie
- D. All of the above

→ Likert Scale – You are trying to get a sense of preference/comparing phenomena

Example: Maybe you want to know how many people will actually show up, so you don't over-order pizza. If everyone is definitely going to be there, order more pizza! If lots of people are only a "maybe," then you can dial back that order.

On a scale of 1-4, how likely are you to come to the Pizza Party?

1 (not likely) 2 3 4 (very likely)

→ Continuous – You are trying to understand a distribution

Example: This can be helpful if you want the analysis to give you answers like "80% of attendees anticipate eating 3 slices of pizza or fewer."

Enter the number of slices of pizza you expect to eat at the party.

→ Open Response – You are trying to capture stories

Example: This can capture stories and help you to plan your events at the pizza party. "What kind of activities would you like to see at the party?"

What would you like to do at the party?

5 Consider Questions Over Time

One of the more powerful and often-overlooked aspects of surveying is that it can be used to plot changes over time. This can be simple and powerful with surveys of any length. The key is to ask the same question (or as similar as possible) each time.

Example: In September, 78% of parents were happy or very happy with the communication they were receiving from their school, but by November that had fallen to 35%.

When writing your questions, consider that they should be “timeless.” Avoid overly-specific or time-keyed language, and try to ensure that the question works in a variety of circumstances.



6 Show Families Their Impact – Creating a Positive Feedback Loop

Taking a survey, even a short one, can feel like a chore. A way to combat this is to ensure that you are transparent, not only in your intent to use the data, but when the data has informed your decision-making. Make sure families know that you have heard them and that their involvement has guided actions. For example, you might reference family feedback when you announce a program change.



Tips to Help Improve Response Rates:

- Translate your survey. Include commonly spoken languages.
- Level your text, both in the survey and in the request for feedback.
- Enlist your staff.
- Reach out to community groups for assistance.

Full representation on any single survey, let alone all of them, is nearly impossible. Your best strategy is to have a plan for inclusion and to be vigilant. If you can, evaluate responses through the use of demographic questions so that you can track the success of your efforts and make any necessary changes.