RESILIENT MUNICIPALITIES: A RESOURCE FOR COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY THE SYRIA CRISIS

MODULE 4: INCREASING TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

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This module provides guidance for how you as a municipal leader can increase two-way communication with your population by (1) implementing public awareness campaigns and (2) collecting information on dynamics in your municipality. The module focuses on efficient approaches that do not require specific expertise to implement, and in fact represent opportunities to encourage youth to volunteer and become more active in municipal affairs. Specifically, the module includes the following four approaches:

INTRODUCTION TO METHODS FOR GATHERING INFORMATION

Throughout the resource, you have learned how these three techniques can be used to collect information from your municipality for the different tools that the Resource has described. Before moving on to the detailed description of the three methods, regard the table below, which displays which of the three methods is useful for gathering information for the specific tools that this resource has described. The "x" marks that the method (columns) is a useful method for collecting information for the tool (rows). The "(x)" means that elements of the method can be useful for collecting information for the tool.

Table 1: Information gathering methods to use in implementing the Resource

Module	Tool	Small group discussions	Interviews with WIPs	Neighborhood surveys
1. Municipality needs and assets database	Step 1: Define database scope	X	X	
	Step 2: Collect the information	X	X	X
	Step 3: Create and update information database	X	X	X
	Step 4: Municipality needs and assets reporting			
2. Participatory problem identification and prioritization	Step 1: Prioritization of issue areas		X	
	Step 2: Create multi-stakeholder working group per issue area			
	Step 3: Identify root causes		X	
	Step 4: Formulate strategic goals and sub-objectives	X		
3. Collective action planning	Step 1: Assets and stakeholder analysis		X	X
	Step 2: Set performance targets		X	
	Step 3: Create collective action plans		X	

As a municipal leader, you know a lot about your community. This module of the resource is to help you enhance your knowledge about the people living in your municipality, using best practices for municipal governing and planning information collection. Together with the other modules in this resource, this will help you—local leaders—understand the needs of your community and work together to create and implement a plan for improving municipal services, the local economy, and community cohesion. Once you feel comfortable with these best practices, they can be incorporated into a system for regular collection of data and data management, which is a hallmark of a modern municipality.

Community engagement begins with getting input and opinions from diverse groups of people. Some people feel comfortable calling on local leaders and sharing their ideas or opinions. It may seem that everyone is calling you or stopping by your office. However, there are many people who feel uncomfortable approaching local leaders. That is why it is important to have special processes to find out what they think and how they can contribute to local development.

Here we describe three methods for how you can hear from your municipality: small-group discussions, interviews with well-informed persons, and neighborhood surveys. You don't have to be an expert to implement these methods effectively, and you can conduct them relatively quickly and inexpensively.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Your municipal administration or council can implement these activities, or you can partner with civil-society organizations that have good networks within the community and skills in facilitation or research to collect the information.

Whoever is collecting the information needs to demonstrate neutrality and yet show interest and sympathy toward the participants. This will encourage subjects to participate fully and feel open to sharing information and opinions.

It can help to work in teams. Two people may need to conduct interviews, for instance, so one can discuss issues with the participants while the other records the respondents' answers. You may also need different teams to work with different groups of respondents. For example, you may want a female team to gather responses from women. Or, you may find that people from different ethnic groups or socioeconomic backgrounds respond better to interviewers who share similar backgrounds. It is extremely important to think carefully about how people will respond to your team—if they will feel comfortable giving honest and open answers to the questions—as you prepare to gather information.

It is also important to pay attention to how the data collection is proceeding and to adjust if there are issues. Sometimes you will find that the questions you ask are not clear to respondents, or that they elicit vague answers or even hostility. You want to be consistent in how you collect the information, but you should plan to adjust your procedures in the early stages to be sure that you are collecting the information you need.

DEFINING PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF DATA COLLECTION

Before jumping into gathering information from your municipality using these methods, consider the kind of information you are trying to collect, how you are going to use it, and from whom you need to collect it. It is best to organize the collection of information around a few topics that will become the core questions you ask. Neighborhood surveys are most appropriate when there are questions specifically related to a particular neighborhood. Small-group discussions are effective when you want to have more dialogue with participants to get their ideas or understand their perspectives. They are useful when different demographic groups (e.g., women, youth, minorities) may have different experiences and insights to a particular challenge. Throughout the Resource, suggestions are given for when it may be appropriate to use one or more of these best practices to achieve a particular purpose.

Public awareness

You should let the people living in your municipality know that you will be collecting information from the community and why you are doing so. This will help to encourage them to participate. It will also help to prevent false rumors from spreading. When people see information gathered but do not know why, it is easy for them to become suspicious and unwilling to cooperate. If possible, hold a town meeting to explain the project, or meet with citizens in small groups at mosques, schools, associations and other gathering places in your community. Create a public awareness campaign, as described below, that can get the community to see this as their project. If possible, you should provide childcare or transportation to make it easier for women, the poor and others to be part of the process. Make people feel welcome, especially if they are not the ones who already feel comfortable stopping by your office.

1 PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Running a public awareness campaign requires a conscious effort to define the problem, shape a message and get the message to the community in an effective, inclusive manner. There are several steps to an effective public awareness campaign.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE YOU WANT TO ADDRESS?

Before anything else, you must clearly define the issue that requires raised public awareness. Is the topic being addressed broad and general, or a very specific element of a problem? For example, will the campaign address the refugee crisis or social tensions broadly? Or is it discussing the need to mobilize over a specific issue (e.g., waste management, traffic congestion)?

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE?

The message is the theme around which all the various communication methods in the campaign will be based; this ensures that the different methods all relate to the message, which serves to alter public awareness of the issue. It should be designed to specifically relate to the issue. You should be able to describe exactly how the message will influence the topic. This is very important: if the message is not simple and clear, it will not affect public understanding of the chosen issue. For example, if the issue is social tensions, the message might be as simple as "be neighbourly to each other" or "working together, we'll succeed."

- In defining a specific issue and related message, it is good to work in a group. This allows the inclusion of various opinions in the formulation of the campaign.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

Who in the community is involved in the issue? Are these individuals well educated? Do some of them speak particular languages or dialects? Where do these members of the community live? Is there a specific religious institution the population is affiliated? What kinds of media do they receive—do they watch TV? Listen to the radio? Read the newspaper? Drive on specific routes?

- This is important because the habits of the target audience help you determine what methods of communication might be useful to transmit the message. If the audience does not watch television, it does not make sense to place advertisements on the local channel. If the audience attends a specific religious institution, then that might be an appropriate space in which to communicate the message. If the audience speaks another language or dialect, then the message must be in the appropriate language, or languages. When bridging gaps between different communities, it can be particularly important to conduct public awareness campaigns in multiple languages.

HOW SHOULD THE MESSAGE BE COMMUNICATED?

At this stage, it is time to determine how the message should be communicated to the audience. Normally, the campaign should include multiple, broad methods of communication—one or two is normally not sufficient. The methods of communication must be chosen specifically to reach the target audience.

There is no limit to the ways which communication can be approached. Some common methods are:

- Media: Radio, television, newspapers, magazines;
- Advertisements: Posters, signs, SMS, billboards;
- Internet: Facebook, Twitter, other websites, email;
- Public institutions: Schools, religious institutions, community leaders, government;
- Direct outreach: Meetings, street canvassers, word-of-mouth.

These are only a small handful of common ways to communicate with the target audience. Which strategies are selected will obviously shift depending on the issue and the audience, as well as the budget available. Each specific method has its own set of strategies for effective communication—there are too many to list here, but searching the internet can be a fast and easy way to learn about how to use each method effectively.

HONING THE MESSAGE

How the message is written in each communication method may be different, and you can be creative and even playful with the message. But remember, whatever the communication method, it should clearly transmit the message to the audience. Often, it may be useful to have a slogan or set of slogans that are common across all the communication methods. Having a logo or color scheme can help in ensuring the public notice the message. Communication can be approached with a top-down strategy, where community leaders present the message. It can also be approached with a bottom-up ("grassroots") strategy, where the message volunteers or employees from inside the target audience present the message.

- Before the communication strategy is implemented, you should workshop the various communications strategies with multiple individuals, to test whether the message is communicated clearly.

CONTINUING THE CAMPAIGN

It is useful to implement all strategies over time. If a message appears and disappears too quickly, the audience will not have the time to absorb and understand, and many will not see the material.

An effective public awareness campaign will have:

- a well-defined issue;
- a clear message;
- an identified target audience;
- multiple communications strategies – including use of volunteers for peer-to-peer messaging.

When these elements are carefully designed and implemented, a public awareness campaign can have major influence on public opinion or understanding on a topic.

2 SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

WHAT IS A "SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION"?

A small-group discussion is a conversation between a small group of people on a specific topic. It is different from a meeting because it is moderated or managed by a person (perhaps from the secretariat or Task Force), who asks specific questions on a topic—with the most important questions prepared beforehand. Small-group discussions work best when they are between six and 12 people, since this allows everyone a chance to contribute. They should also be long enough to allow everyone to speak, but not so long that people feel bored or anxious to leave. Often, they are about one-and-a-half hours long.

WHAT ARE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS GOOD FOR?

Small-group discussions can be a great way for you to understand your community. The conversation can be more natural than in a one-on-one interview, as participants may feel less singled out than when speaking alone. As people discuss and debate their thoughts on an issue, a topic tends to be explored more fully than when someone from the secretariat or Task Force, who is unfamiliar with the topic, is the only other person in the conversation. Many unexpected pieces of information come out of small-group discussions. Small-group discussions allow you to find out a lot of information and different perspectives from the municipality in a single meeting.

- Importantly, however, a small-group discussion is not just a free-flowing meeting of a small group of people. It is a structured discussion, with well-planned questions that will guide the discussion.

WHAT ARE WEAKNESSES OF SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS?

Small-group discussions require a lot of organization and take more time than canvassing, so the number of people who are able to participate is limited. Sometimes, too, people are shy in groups. You need to be aware of these problems and use the suggestions below to guard against them.

PLANNING A SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

There are several questions you need to consider as you prepare a small group discussion.

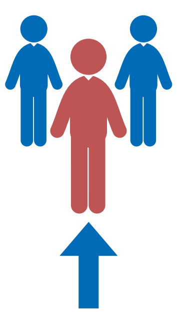
WHO? THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION WHEN PLANNING A SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION IS WHO TO INCLUDE IN THE GROUP. OFTEN, YOU WILL WANT TO CHOOSE PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE RELATIVELY SIMILAR—THE SAME AGE, GENDER, BACKGROUND, AND IDENTITY.

This helps participants to be more comfortable speaking in front of one another and limits reasons for conflict within the group. For example, a group that is all women will have a different conversation from a group that is mixed. Similarly, when young people are having a conversation with elders, they will often be more careful and guarded with their responses. Schoolteachers may have different conversations about the challenges of education when parents are not present, and vice versa. You often want to hold several small-group discussions with different categories of people in order to get information on a topic from multiple points of view.

Of course, sometimes conversations between mixed groups can give interesting information, especially on how two different communities interact, for example, or how people with different backgrounds experience a problem differently. The moderator must be aware of the challenges of controlling this sort of discussion, however.

Finally, try to select groups of strangers, even if they have similar backgrounds. Strangers have fewer assumptions about one another, and in a conversation with a stranger there are fewer expectations that what is said may affect a relationship. This also includes the interviewer. If people are uncomfortable and unwilling to voice their true feelings in conversations because of these concerns, the group discussion will not give you accurate information.

- **It is important to reach beyond your usual circles of colleagues, friends, and acquaintances when you establish small-group discussions.** It can be easier to do so, but you run the risk of missing important information and insights from those you don't know well.



You will want to be sure you hear from people you don't usually talk to, in order to get a wide range of perspectives. From a scientific point of view, the best way to find participants is to be completely random in their selection. You can do this if you have a large database of all possible participants. For example, if you are discussing education, you may be able to choose randomly from teachers working in the community's schools. However, this is often not feasible. Another good way to find possible participants is to approach organizations or individuals already working with the community, such as community-service organizations, local community leaders, NGOs, or schools. Once you have found your first participants, you can find more participants by asking people if they know other people who would be willing and appropriate to participate. To avoid your discussion including only the friends and acquaintances of one contact, make sure to ask a number of people to recommend possible participants.

Different types of people often settle in different areas. Therefore, you should select people from different areas. This will help to make sure that the information represents your whole municipality. For example, people living in the center of a city may have different experiences from people living on the edges of the city, who again may have different experiences from those who live in a village that is included in the greater municipality. One way to include different geographical areas is to divide a map and into roughly equally sized areas and find participants through initial contacts with the community within each area.

WHERE? THE LOCATION OF A SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION CAN HAVE A LARGE IMPACT ON THE SORT OF INFORMATION A PARTICIPANT FEELS COMFORTABLE REVEALING.

Is the conversation taking place in a public space, or a private one? Is it a place that the participants are familiar with, or is it a new, strange environment? What kind of relationship do participants have with the space? Having a small group discussion at the workplace of the participants or in a government office, rather than a neutral place, may affect how they respond.

Even small considerations can have big impact on the conversation. Are the chairs comfortable? Is there an echo in the room that might make it difficult for people to hear? How far do respondents have to travel to participate? Selecting a good location for a small-group discussion seems easy, but it can be very challenging in practice.

WHAT QUESTIONS?

Be sure to compose questions that are simple and straightforward. Wording should not be technical or complicated, so that people with many backgrounds can understand the meaning of the questions. Questions should always be written to be as open ended and free of bias as possible, without restricting or suggesting answers to participants. Participants often follow the lead of the question's wording, if the questions indicate that you are looking for a specific answer.

For example, "Do you agree that the main problem in our area is garbage?" suggests that the answer is "yes." A much better way to understand the group members' attitudes is to ask, "In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing our area"?

There are a few common types of questions to avoid when preparing questions for small group discussions:

"MULTIPLE ISSUE" Questions:

- Every question should cover only a single issue, so that the participants discuss every question you want to ask. For example, the question "Do you feel that health care and education services are adequate?" covers two issues. It would be best to ask two questions: "What is your opinion on health-care services?" and, later, "What is your opinion on education services?"

"YES OR NO" Questions:

- It is best to avoid questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no," as this limits the amount of detail a conversation topic can provide. It is much better to ask a question in such a way that the conversation participants are required to describe their point of view with more detail. For example, instead of asking "Do you have a job?" it would be better to ask, "How do you earn money?"

"DOUBLE-BARRELED" Questions:

- When questions give participants a limited number of choices to select when responding, they are called "double-barreled" questions. These should be avoided. Like "yes or no" questions, they restrict the amount of detail that can be learned about a topic. Participants will often respond with the choice they most identify with, instead of thinking through their own feelings on the topic. "Would it be better to provide more financial aid and more livelihoods training?" is an example of a double-barreled question. A better question would be "What kinds of support do you need?"

"LEADING" Questions:

- When a moderator asks questions to the group, he or she must not ask questions in a way that suggests a specific answer. For example, "Can you tell me if UNHCR is doing a good job of supporting residents of this area?" is a leading question, because it might suggest that the moderator thinks positively of UNHCR and influence the way a person answers. A more appropriate way to ask would be, "What is your opinion about UNHCR's programs?"

If possible, it is important to take the time to test the small group questionnaire before formally implementing the discussion. A test usually means collecting a group of persons who could normally be included in the discussion and running through the small group questionnaire as normal. Afterwards ask the group to give feedback on questions they found confusing or misleading. This way, questions that present unexpected difficulties or confusion can be rewritten before you hold your real group discussions.

Testing can reveal several problems:

- A question leads participants to provide information on a topic different from what the researcher intended;
- A question makes respondents uncomfortable;
- The questions together take too much time;
- The questions are too dry or technical, too divorced from real life, and respondents seem bored.

RECORDING THE DATA

It is very difficult to write accurate notes during a small group discussion, because many people will be talking and many viewpoints will be raised. To be sure that information is not lost, it can be useful to record the discussion using a voice recorder (either a device designed for that purpose, or an application on a common smartphone). However, recordings take considerable time to listen to and transcribe, which should be considered when planning how the information from the small group discussion will be used.

CARRYING OUT A SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Successfully carrying out a small-group discussion is much more difficult than it may seem. The moderator of a small-group discussion has a surprisingly difficult job in ensuring the discussion produces information that is useful for the project.

The most important role that the moderator plays is to ask good questions so that participants are able to present their feelings and opinions in a natural way, without being influenced by the moderator. The moderator must be careful not to present any sort of bias during the discussion. For example do not respond, "good answer," as it makes people feel judged. Instead, "thank you for sharing your opinion," can encourage people to speak up without giving a negative or positive assessment. If participants feel that the moderator is looking for a certain kind of answer, they may say what they believe they are expected to say.

It is very important that the moderator initially ask questions exactly as they are written. This is important for several reasons.

- The exact wording has been tested beforehand specifically to avoid unexpected misunderstandings or difficulties. It is very easy to reword

a question accidentally, so that it falls into one of the categories above that should be avoided (multiple-issue questions, yes-or-no questions, double-barreled questions, and leading questions).
- Maintaining the wording ensures that information from different small group discussions can be compared, as even a slight change of wording can affect the way that participants start thinking about a question. Those differences may seem insignificant, but they can lead to misunderstandings when information is compared between groups:
- Sometimes in small-group discussions moderators have the responsibility of asking additional questions to the group, beyond the written questions in the questionnaire. This allows the moderator to learn about new topics that come up unexpectedly during the discussion.

The moderator is responsible for keeping the conversation on the intended topics, so that the information that is collected is useful for your municipality. This can sometimes be the most difficult responsibility of the moderator, as too much control over the conversation can eliminate the benefits of a natural conversation and too little control can let the conversation move off-topic or even break down. Especially when dealing with difficult subjects, the moderator must be sensitive to the feelings of the participants and the dynamics between them. Arguments can arise, or participants can become upset and withdraw from the conversation. So, too, some participants will talk a lot, while others will be quiet. The moderator needs to find a way to quiet the overly talkative and be sure the quieter participants speak up.

3 INTERVIEWS WITH WELL INFORMED PERSONS

Another useful tool for gathering information is the interviews with Well Informed Persons.

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW WITH A "WELL INFORMED PERSON" (WIP)?

An interview with a WIP is a semi-structured discussion on topics that you want to collect information on, with someone selected because of his or her knowledge of the subject. The WIP is interviewed because s/he has more extensive, detailed, or exclusive knowledge than ordinary people about individuals, important events, and processes in your municipality. The person being interviewed might be a well-respected member of the community, a government official, or somebody who works with the community—anybody whose experience and position gives him or her knowledge that might be useful in understanding the subject on which you are collecting information. In most cases, one team member will interview one WIP, but sometimes more interviewers may participate. Usually, WIP interviews are face-to-face or telephone interviews. The interview varies in length, from short (15 minutes) to long (two-and-a-half hours), often taking about 45 minutes to one hour.

WHAT ARE WIP INTERVIEWS GOOD FOR?

They are especially useful early in the project, to get a "starting point" from which to understand the groups and topics at hand. WIP interviews help you understand the outlines of a situation: concerns, common practices, community relations or activities, or other facts that can be reliably communicated from a small number of respondents. They can also be useful in finding entry points for contacting the community for focus groups or surveys. Through their particular knowledge and understanding of the topic in which you are interested (as experts on their community with firsthand knowledge about what is going on in the community), the WIPs can provide insight on the nature of problems and give recommendations for solutions

Furthermore, a WIP interview can be a useful method for discussing sensitive topics, getting respondents' candid opinions of the topic, or getting the depth of information you need. Individual conversations can create a comfortable environment in which individuals can have a frank, in-depth discussion, as a group dynamic can sometimes deter some participants from voicing their opinions about sensitive topics. In the interview, the interviewer is able to establish a rapport with the respondent and clarify questions, and may therefore get more rich data. Further, it is also possible for the interviewer to contact the informant afterward, to clarify issues as needed.

WHAT ARE WEAKNESSES OF WIP INTERVIEWS?

Often, WIPs will present a very specific point of view. The interviewer must always keep in mind that WIPs may be misinformed or may have their own reasons for representing a topic in a certain way. This sort of information, however, can in itself be very useful when attempting to understand how an agency interacts with its beneficiaries, for example.

Because WIP interviews are carried out with only a few individuals, information given about the community can never be assumed to be general without using supporting study tools. In fact, selecting the "right" WIPs may be difficult, as they represent diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. Other weaknesses of WIP interviews are that the WIP may be affected by the interviewer's opinions, and that the collected information may be difficult to synthesize, compare, and quantify. Further, it is difficult to generalize results to the larger population; the results of WIP interviews will not necessarily be representative of the entire community and may overlook the perspectives of community members who are less visible. WIP interviews cannot replace more extensive ways to discuss a topic, such as small-group discussions or surveys, but they do an excellent job of supplementing them.

PLANNING A WIP INTERVIEW

WHO? **The WIP is interviewed because he or she has more extensive, detailed or exclusive knowledge than ordinary people about individuals, important events and processes.** Through his or her specialist knowledge, the WIP can provide valuable information for your municipality. The WIP is often a leading player in the community that is being studied. It could be a public official, community leader, professional, or resident. But the interviewees can also be agency representatives, local business leaders, or even the most disadvantaged community residents—as long as they have specialized knowledge concerning the subject on which you want to collect information.

WHERE? **Although interviews can take place either face-to-face or over the phone, it is advisable to hold them in person.** Place the interview where it is convenient for the person you are meeting and where he or she will feel able to answer freely. The place is also affected by the type of information you are seeking: if you are looking for official information it may work to meet the respondent at a workplace.

WHEN? **If interviewees are extremely busy, it may be best to hold the interview over the phone.** However, with the phone interview you lose the personalized interaction that you get from a face-to-face interview. If choosing to conduct a phone interview, keep it short (15–25 minutes) and prepare a structured list of questions to address, to make sure that you extract the valuable information you are looking for.

WHAT QUESTIONS? **When performing a large number of WIP interviews, it is normal to have a general outline that the interviews will follow.** Asking some personal questions, such as how long a person has been working with the community or organization, or how their position relates to the community, is common. Questions should be open-ended and allow for broad discussion, but should be closely relevant to the topics about which you want to collect information. It can also be useful to bring a list of topics the interviewer will cover, so that no topics are forgotten in the course of the interview.

- **It is common to include specific questions designed for each WIP. WIP interviews are usually semi-structured.** This means that the interviewer will have a basic interview questionnaire to help provide shape to the interview, but the interviewer is encouraged to ask new questions throughout the course of the interview, to explore unexpected topics that may come up in conversation.

When doing an interview, use "probing questions" to get more information. Probing questions are follow-up questions, asking the respondent to elaborate on the answer s/he has given. "Why is that?" or "How did you come to decide that?" or even "Can you tell me more about that?" are good ways to be sure you get the full information you need. It is good to start with more close-ended/direct questions that are possible to answer with a direct answer, and move in to more abstract, open-ended questions towards the end of interview.

A good way to develop questions is to 1) define a set of topics you want to cover, 2) define the objective of the information you want to find for each topic, 3) develop a set of 3 to 5 questions you need information about to achieve the objective, and 4) prepare some additional probing questions, in case your interviewee does not elaborate on his or her own.

CARRYING OUT WIP INTERVIEWS

WIP interviews are quite straightforward. Much of the interview is a flowing conversation with the informant about topics concerning the project, so interviewers must be familiar enough with the study in order to guide the conversation in useful manner.

- Be sure to take notes, of course, or—if possible—record the interview with a voice recorder (and the interviewee's permission).

4 NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEYS OR CANVASSING

The final method in this Resource for you to use to collect information from your municipality is surveys or canvassing.

WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY OR CANVASSING?

A survey is a fixed questionnaire that is written specifically to produce data that can be analyzed with statistics. The questions are set in advance and tend to give space only for very short answers that can be put into fixed categories. For example, responses might be a choice between "yes" and "no," a single-word answer, or a number—anything that is simple and quick. Surveys are usually designed so that questions can be answered as quickly as possible, so that the largest number of people possible can be included in the study.

In a neighborhood survey, the researcher walks around a neighborhood with a list of standardized questions that he or she asks the residents in the neighborhood. This technique can also be called canvassing. When canvassing, the researcher seeks direct-contact individuals, e.g., by knocking on doors. The main aim of the canvassing is to record individuals' opinions on certain issues.

WHAT ARE SURVEYS OR NEIGHBORHOOD CANVASSES GOOD FOR?

Surveys have a number of advantages:

- **Surveys are excellent for including the opinions or experience of a large number of participants in a study.** Because surveys are designed to be done quickly, hundreds of people might be surveyed in the time that only a small number could be interviewed or included in focus groups. This means that you can be more certain that the information gathered represents the entire population of your municipality relatively accurately.

- **Responses can be sorted into categories and produce data that is very good for statistical analysis.** Statistical analysis can provide insight into the broader dynamics of how a situation affects a community; these trends may not be easy to see when considering the problem from the perspective of individuals.

WHAT ARE WEAKNESSES OF NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEYS?

Surveys are very good for understanding what is happening, but they are weaker at explaining why something is happening. Because surveys provide space for only short, quick responses that fit into simple categories, complicated responses involving long explanations or a wide range of possible answers do not fit well into this type of information-gathering. This can mean that the teams carrying out the surveys and the later analysis are often able to record only a small amount of the information presented by participants—lots of detail can be lost. For this reason, surveys are best when combined with interviews and small-group discussions (which do a better job of explaining the reasons behind what is happening).

PLANNING A NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

A great deal of planning beforehand is required to implement a survey.

WHAT QUESTIONS? **Writing good survey questions is very important.** Questions should be simple and straightforward. Only one issue should be included in any question. The questions should be answerable with short phrases: a single idea, even one word. While yes-or-no questions or questions in which participants choose between options limit responses, these questions are sometimes useful in surveys because the answers are intended to be simple. However, double-barreled or leading questions should still be avoided. (See the section on small-group discussion for more information).

THINK **carefully about what sorts of questions and categories should be included.** Because the questions are all pre-written and asked in the same way to all respondents, there is little room to explore unexpected topics of interest. If important questionsor answer categories are missing, it can be very difficult to get an understanding of the situation. Therefore, it is important that you have a clear idea of what information is needed and how that information will be used, to write a successful survey.

- Be sure to ask demographic questions in your survey, even if you are interested in other issues. Knowing the person's gender, age, education level, and other basic information will help you determine how these factors are related to the questions you are asking. Are women or men, for instance, more likely to be satisfied with health, education, or other services in your municipality? Are young or old more likely to participate? You can also use aggregates of these to determine whether there are disparities in income, access to services, or attitudes toward your municipality that are related to ethnic backgrounds, social class, or other factors.

CREATE **an extensive list of possible responses for each question.** Often, answers are coded—assigned corresponding codes of numbers that ease in the analysis—when they are entered into a computer for statistical analysis. Consider how questions will be coded when writing the survey. It can be useful to include a possible response of "other" with space to fill in unexpected answers. Sometimes surveys include a blank page on which notes can be written to explain unexpected responses or missed topics.

HOW **a survey is laid out can be very important.** You want to ask all relevant questions, but make sure the survey is not too long. If it is, you risk people not answering all questions, or answering the questions at the end of the survey without thinking carefully.

TESTING. Be sure to test your survey before you administer it. Normally, surveys are tested with people who could be included in the study. When testing, the survey team looks for subjects that are confusing, topics that are not covered thoroughly, or questions that produce responses that are not accounted for. Consider how long it is taking people to answer the questions, and whether they are willing to answer to the end of the survey. If people are taking the survey by reading it and filling out forms, check that they have enough space on the survey to answer the questions. Surveys should not be changed once the formal study begins, because data cannot be compared statistically between differently worded questions, so all changes to questions must be made during the testing.

WHO AND HOW MANY? **Planning who will be included in the survey and how to contact them is very challenging.** Ideally, you would contact people completely randomly, but this is only feasible if a list or database of all possible respondents exists. This is unlikely, particularly as your population is changing rapidly. Instead, you can canvass by going door-to-door to every home and apartment in a certain neighborhood, or other delineated geographic region. Or, you can randomly choose a number (n) and go to every nth house. For example, if you choose the number 10, you go to every tenth house. When you are inside the house, find a way to randomly choose the person who answers. For instance, you may choose to ask who in the household, over the age of 18, had the most recent birthday. This will help you avoid having people who are more likely to be home (e.g., older residents, women) disproportionately included in the survey. The aim of canvassing is to ensure that the voices of all segments, including the marginalized, are heard. You should thus include as many entry points into the community as possible.

BE CAREFUL **to avoid geographical bias** (see small-group discussion, above, for a similar discussion of geographical bias). The best way to avoid this sort of bias is to divide a map of the study area into squares and find multiple contact points in each defined subregion.

- Deciding how many people should be included in the survey can be very difficult. Ideally, a survey should include enough respondents to be "statistically significant"; functionally however, it may be difficult to achieve such large numbers. Try to get as many participants as possible, selected from across your municipality in as random a manner as possible.

WHERE? **When planning a survey, you need to consider carefully where the surveys will be conducted.** Will the respondents be met in their homes, or in a public place where they often gather? If meeting people in their homes, then time must be scheduled to locate addresses and move between locations. If the survey is carried out outside the home, they may be more efficient, but then the study may be biased as individuals who do not access public agencies or who are less willing to travel may be missed. Also, the space in which a person responds to a survey can affect the answers given. When the answers can be overheard by friends or strangers—as they usually can in public spaces—the responses are more likely to be what people want others to hear, rather than their true attitudes and experiences. It is best to avoid surveys that randomly choose individuals in public spaces.

CARRYING OUT A SURVEY STUDY

When carrying out a survey, teams must be well trained. Teams should be aware that all questions must be asked completely and exactly as worded. Questions are designed carefully and tested thoroughly, so even what seems like a small change can introduce large differences in the final answers. It is especially important that teams do not rephrase questions to be leading questions or otherwise lead the participants to believe that the survey teams "expect" a certain answer.

Training should include teaching teams how to fill out the survey forms. All forms must be filled out completely to make sure that no questions are missed. Even if, for example, the answer to a question may be "no" or "zero," the space must never be left blank. This makes analysis much more reliable.

Teams will be responsible for the timing of surveys, which can be challenging. Often, respondents will want to provide more detail than is required on a survey. The survey teams will have to keep participants on topic, but also be respectful to them. It can be a difficult task in diplomacy to control the length of responses without interrupting or otherwise being rude. However, if the team cannot control the amount of conversation that goes on, the surveys can take an unacceptably long time and the interviewee may get tired and quit before the survey is complete.

Training can be accomplished in one day, particularly when trainers are well organized and interviewers concentrate on the tasks at hand. The exact training outline can be adjusted to fit your circumstances, but a good training should include the following components:

1. **Welcome and goals of the survey**
2. **Discuss importance of inclusive canvassing:** assuring geographic, socio-economic and demographic representation
3. **Train interviewers on survey techniques**
   a. The Survey Introduction: Learn and practice introduction with a Partner.
   b. Standardized interviewing:
      i. Read every question as worded—every word, every time
      ii. Don't mention "don't know" or "refuse to answer"
      iii. Probe when people don't respond: ask "what answer do you feel is closer?" or "what do you think?"
      iv. Give unbiased feedback (say "thank you" but not "that's a good answer!")
4. **Consider challenges in the field**
   a. Encourage respondents to participate, emphasizing every person's opinion counts and survey is anonymous
5. **Discuss researcher commitments and ethics**
   a. Maintain all interactions with respondents confidential
   b. Conduct all work according to the proscribed procedures

HOW TEAMS ARE COMPOSED CAN BE IMPORTANT

Often, it is useful to have a mixed team of one male and one female, so that participants can choose the gender they are more comfortable speaking with. It is usually better to find team members who are familiar with your community but not a part of it—when team members are from inside the community, they may be reluctant to communicate inconvenient facts or they may make assumptions about participants, either of which can introduce bias. However, in some cases, having team members from inside the population can help with issues of trust; there is no one best way to design a team. Each new project must be considered independently.

RECORD THE DATA CLEARLY TO AVOID FUTURE CONFUSION

When the team carries out the survey, it is very important that all results from the respondents are recorded carefully and clearly on each page. To do this the team should follow these guidelines:

- Record the number of the respondent on each page of the survey;
- Do not erase any notes made;
- Double check that all questions have been asked. If a question was missed, ask it and make a note that that the question was asked out of sequence;
- If a respondent changes his/her mind on a question, record the new answer;
- Use a pencil, not a pen, for recording the answers;
- Agree beforehand on how you will record "I don't know" and refusal to answer (e.g. 999);
- Agree beforehand on how to write numbers (notably 1s and 7s).

To make sense of the large amount of data collected in a survey, sufficient time and resources needs to be devoted data analysis, to make the collected information useful. The main components of the data analysis are to 1) Create a dataset containing all the collected information and 2) Producing the final results for the report of the information collection.

To create a data set of the information, hire an experienced computer user to;

- Enter all the data into a spreadsheet
- Make sure the dataset it clean and entered into the Excel file in a clear and systematic way.

To turn the collected data into a report of the information:

- Summarize the data by calculating how many of the respondents said what
- Summarize the data in a meaningful way, for example, by seeing how many women had a certain opinion versus men, or a certain age group (youth) versus another age group (old). Display results—either as straightforward tables, or through visual graphs and figures.

Table 2: Summary comparison over three best practises

	Respondents	Structure	Cost/Resources needed and other implementing considerations	Advantages
(1) Small group discussions	Organized into small groups of people (about 12) who are similar and feel comfortable together	Semi-organized by core questions on a particular topic, but discussion among participants is encouraged	Requires a skilled facilitator and note taker; will have to be repeated with different types of groups to capture diversity in the municipality; needs appropriate room set-up	Can help explain results (the 'why?') because it investigates attitudes and motives of the respondents
(2) Interviews with Well Informed Persons	Respondents are selected because of their specialized knowledge or experience	The interview relies on open-ended questions with considerable follow-up to provide more detail and explanation.	Requires a skilled interviewer who can make the most of the time with the respondent; does not capture perspective of typical person	Delves deeply to capture detailed information from individuals who know the most about a particular organization, group or issue
(3) Neighborhood surveys	Attempts to reach a large share of the population in geographically-distinct areas	Structured around a short list of questions; may include one or two open-ended questions	Interviews should happen at different times of day to catch various people at home.	As the "catchment area" is small, respondents feel a direct relation to the survey. As the survey is short, volunteers can do this with minimum training.

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