

# About Surveys: Why Do One and How

## Why Conduct Surveys?

Surveys are one way to get feedback from other people. For youth who are active in their communities or in their local governments, surveys can be a valuable tool for making sure your projects are on the right track. In addition, surveys are also a good way to get people thinking about issues they might not have put much thought into, such as community design. Being able to cite the results of surveys, focus groups, or other needs assessments, can also build your credibility. Look at the following examples:

- One California Center group working on teen pregnancy prevention surveyed more than 500 high school students to learn the best strategies for preventing teen pregnancy. The results helped the group select local projects and develop statewide policy recommendations.
- Another group surveyed more than 300 high school students to determine the greatest needs in youths' communities. The results were incorporated into recommendations presented to policymakers at a national conference.
- Youth in your project could choose to survey local elected officials to gauge their support of youth participation in planning decisions.

## What's Goes In a Survey?

You can include whatever questions you want. We have provided a sample to get you started. Our sample asks youth about their ideal community, challenges facing their communities, the design of their communities, and different approaches to planning. You can customize the survey to provide information most helpful to your project. You'll need to decide your questions' format. Some options include:

- multiple-choice
- ratings on a scale (i.e., 1 to 5)
- ranking items least important to most
- open-ended

When trying to figure out the best type of questions, think about how you will use the survey results. You can also include optional questions that ask about the respondent, such as the name, age, school they attend, race/ethnicity, and/or a way to contact them.

## **Who Should Complete the Survey?**

Surveys have the advantage of being able to collect information from a wide cross-section of people, as opposed to focus groups, which collect information from a smaller, pre-selected group. You or your adult supervisor will have to determine the best number of people to reach. Depending on your project, you may want to only get the opinions of a particular group of people, such as high school students living on your block or you may want to know what youth from all over your county think. You could also choose to survey a group like seniors citizens, to see which of their opinions are the same or different from youth. Taking into account factors such as income, ethnicity, neighborhood, school, etc., you will want to try to have the survey completed by students that reflect the demographics in the area you are trying to represent (whether that is a school, neighborhood or state.)

## **Tips for Administering the Survey**

- Don't be afraid to ask people you don't know to complete the survey. This could be a great way for you to meet more people in your neighborhood/school/community.
- When you pass them out, be prepared to explain in a sentence or two what the survey is about, why it is important that they complete it, and how the results will be used.
- If possible, have them fill it out on the spot. If not, arrange how and when they will return the survey. You can also offer to read them the questions and then record their answers.