



How to design evaluation questionnaires to gather meaningful data

Poorly designed Program Evaluation questionnaires can lead to wasted time and erode stakeholder confidence. Worse, they can result in faulty data, which can lead to flawed decision-making and have serious impacts on the outcome of a program.

This guide will help you appraise your evaluation questionnaires and ensure you're collecting the right data to truly measure the success of your program.

Indicators

Ask Yourself

Check your questionnaire

Outcomes

What information do I need?

The design of your questionnaire will determine the type of information you'll be able to extract from respondents.

Open-ended questions are used to explore ideas and gather detailed, descriptive insights.

Closed questions use predetermined choices to gather measureable, comparable data.

Are you asking the right questions for the information you're trying to gather?

Yes No

Audience

Who do I want to respond?

Defining your target respondents is an important step to ensure the data you are collecting is fit for purpose. It will also determine if you need to include screening questions in your questionnaire.

For instance, you may only be interested in responses within a certain age range, or from people who have been involved in a certain part of the program.

Do you have clearly defined target respondents?

Yes No

Time
commitment

How much time am I
asking respondents to give?

Balance your data requirements with a consideration of what is a reasonable amount of effort to expect from your respondents.

If in doubt: remember the more engaged the respondent is, the greater amount of input and time you can expect from them.

Are you asking a
reasonable time effort?

Yes No

Data
requirements

How much data do I actually need?

Consider what you need the data for, and balance this with the time and cost you have available to collect and interpret it.

At the end of the day: only include questions that will directly inform the progress of the program you are evaluating.

Are all your questions
necessary and useful?

Yes No

Question
order

Are my questions in a logical order?

Grouping similar topics together creates an order that will make sense to your respondents.

Save your challenging or sensitive questions for the later stages of the questionnaire. Otherwise, respondents are likely to abandon the questionnaire before completion.

Are your questions grouped
in a way that makes sense?

Yes No

Clarity

Are my questions clearly worded
and unambiguous?

Questions which are unclear or ambiguous affect the quality of the data and its reliability. It can also encourage respondents to abandon the process early.

Keep your questions focused and concise. One way of doing this is to avoid double-barrelled questions by making sure your questions are focused on one point only.

For example: "How satisfied are you with the quality of food and drinks?" could be split into two questions: "How satisfied are you with the quality of food?" and "How satisfied are you with the quality of drinks?"

Are your questions grouped
in a way that makes sense?

Yes No

Plain English

Have I eliminated acronyms and technical terminology?

Any language or terms which are not familiar to the respondent groups should be eliminated from your questions, including jargon and acronyms. These are likely to lower response rates and affect the quality of responses.

Is your wording plain English and acronym-free?

Yes No

Question formats

Have I used a healthy variety of question types?

Repeatedly using the same question type can lead to respondents habitually responding, without giving the question proper thought.

Vary your question types to encourage respondents to fully read the question and consider their response.

Mix it up with multiple choice, rating scales and comment boxes.

Are all your questions necessary and useful?

Yes No

Easy outs

Am I offering options for people who don't know how to respond?

Responses such as "don't know" or "not applicable" are valid responses for some respondents. Offering these responses gives a helpful 'easy out' that can prevent respondents from getting frustrated and abandoning the questionnaire altogether.

Have you offered 'easy outs' where appropriate?

Yes No

Delivery method

What's the best delivery method for my needs?

Different methods of data collection have different benefits.

Face-to-face interviews allow you to capture non-verbal cues and give you the option to clarify questions and responses. However, they are also much more resource intensive and costly.

Online surveys don't allow for the same level of data accuracy and may even encourage false data if wrongly incentivised. However, they can allow wider distribution at a much lower cost, as well as quick, precise, quantitative analysis.

Consider the format that suits both the objectives of your questionnaire and the preferences of your respondents.

Have you chosen the best delivery method for the job?

Yes No



A well-designed Program Evaluation Questionnaire is a combination of the questions you need answered, balanced against the questions your respondent is happy to engage with. Following the guidance above should help you collect accurate and relevant data, empower decision making and lead your program in the right direction.

Want to know more?

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