Introduction to Community Surveys in Law Enforcement

"Community policing, recognizing that police rarely can solve public safety problems alone, encourages interactive partnerships with relevant stakeholders. The range of potential partners is large, and these partnerships can be used to accomplish the two interrelated goals of developing solutions to problems through collaborative problem solving and improving public trust. The public should play a role in prioritizing and addressing public safety problems."

- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

As suggested by the quote above, policing is an inherently community-oriented activity that requires ongoing communication with the public to identify problems and implement solutions. Law enforcement agencies often have several formal mechanisms for incoming communication from the public (e.g., 911, non-emergency numbers, online complaint forms) and outgoing messages to the public (e.g., press releases, news briefings, website, Facebook, Twitter). Informal mechanisms for communication are also common (e.g., public meetings, "coffee with the chief", "meet & greet" visits by patrol officers). Many agencies have added another option to their communication arsenal: community surveys. In the 2013 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics survey (LEMAS), 31.6% of local police departments, "Utilized information from a survey of local residents about crime, fear of crime, or satisfaction with law enforcement." This includes nearly one-half (49.2%) of all agencies with 100 or more sworn officers. [1]

Benefits of Community Surveys

Community surveys have several benefits when it comes to soliciting information from the public. The first benefit is that you can design a community survey to collect very specific types of information from local residents. This information can be incredibly helpful in strategic planning, but also has value for assessing past performance. Some the more common topics assessed include:

- **Confidence in the police** (e.g., "Can the police in this area be relied upon to be there when you need them?")

[1] United States Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS), 2013. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2015-09-22. https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36164.v2

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- **Police performance** (e.g., “How are the police doing at preventing crime in your neighborhood?”)
- **Police legitimacy** (e.g., “Should you trust the decisions made by the police, even if you think they are wrong?”)
- **Satisfaction with police contacts** (e.g., “Were you treated fairly by the officer who stopped you?”)

- **Racial/ethnic differences in attitudes towards the police** (e.g., “Do you think the officer treated you differently because of your race, ethnicity, age, or gender?”)
- **Awareness of police services** (e.g., “Have you participated in the police department’s Citizen’s Academy program?”)
- **Collaboration in crime control efforts** (e.g., “Are you willing to participate in a neighborhood meeting to address crime in your area?”)
- **Victimization & exposure to crime** (e.g., “Has anyone stolen something from you, your car, or your residence in the past 12 months?”)
- **Social & physical disorder** (e.g., “In the past 30 days, how many times have you seen people camping in public locations?”)
- **Fear of crime & perceived safety** (e.g., “How safe do you feel walking alone at night in your neighborhood?”)

The second benefit of community surveys is that you may be able to hear from a more representative sample of your community. Formal public meetings sponsored by the police often draw many of the same people time after time. While the information shared by this group can be quite valid and important for agencies, their opinions may or may not be characteristic of the community as a whole. The same holds true for people who participate in informal meetings (e.g., “coffee with the chief”, “meet and greets”) and those who file complaints about officers through official channels. Community surveys can address this by attempting to contact a representative sample of the community or, in smaller jurisdictions, by offering the survey opportunity to all households.

Surveys conducted by mail or online are an efficient strategy for soliciting input from the community. While in-person meetings with residents are probably ideal with regard to establishing rapport and trust, the resources and time needed to meet with a large and representative sample of the community may be considerable in larger jurisdictions. Surveys can be conducted on a limited budget and over a relatively short time-frame, and the scientific basis of survey research is not terribly complicated. Concepts like sampling (i.e., how do you

pick the households or people to survey), representativeness (i.e., does you sample look like the city as a whole), and response rate (i.e., proportion of people sent the survey that actually filled it out and returned it) are easily understood with a little study.

Finally, one of the lesser discussed benefits of community surveys is that people in the community often appreciate it when the police ask for their input. Many of the people we have surveyed over the years for different projects have asked for more communication with and from their local police department. Here are some examples that illustrate this point (see below):

The survey asked what the local police department could do to improve relations with the community.

- "*Work more within the neighborhood communities, and provide information for those who may be unable to attend meetings or get information online*."
- "*Include a Police Department one-page newsletter in the monthly water bill that, among other suitable topics, speaks to monthly enforcement activities, citizen outreach, etc."*
- "*This survey, for example, soliciting feedback from the community is very encouraging*."
- "*Surveys like this are great, more information on where to provide feedback and/or concerns*."
- *"Giving the public a vehicle to provide feedback to the police department like I'm doing now*."

Community Survey Toolkit

The goal of this toolkit is to provide law enforcement agencies with entry-level guidance on conducting community surveys. This includes tips for designing surveys, developing survey questions, and analyzing data. We also demonstrate how to use surveys in Problem-Oriented Policing projects (POP; Goldstein, 1979) and several real community surveys are available as further examples. Along the way, we provide references for those who are interested in learning more about designing and implementing community surveys. This includes some of the more technical issues related to sampling, different survey strategies (e.g., in-person vs. telephone vs. mailed vs. online), data analysis, and statistics. Readers interested in these topics should consult the references listed below:

Topics Covered

- Tips for Designing Surveys (link)
- Survey Questions and Data Analysis (link)

- Tips for Writing Survey Questions (link)
- POP Survey Demonstration (link)
- Examples of Community Surveys (link)

Additional Resources

- Bureau of Justice Assistance (1993). *A police guide to surveying citizens and their environment* (Monograph NCJ 143709). US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

- Goldstein, H. (1979). *Improving policing: A problem-oriented approach*. Crime & Delinquency, 25(2), 236–258.

- Skogan, W. G. (2014). *Using community surveys to study policing*. In The Oxford Handbook of Police and Policing (p. 449). Oxford University Press.

- Weisel, D. L. (1999). *Conducting community surveys: A practical guide for law enforcement agencies*. Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

Designing and Formatting Surveys

The formatting and general design of a survey has much to do with the eventual success (or failure) of the project; this includes the quality of the data generated by your survey questions, your sample size (number of people who complete the survey), and your response rate (the proportion of people who receive the survey that actually complete it). The latter relates to the concept of "representativeness". Surveys are often sent to a sample or subset of the people you are interested in learning about, referred to as your population of interest. Sending the survey to a smaller subset saves time and money and the results can be highly accurate as long as your response rate is high. Careful attention to the following suggestions can help in this regard.

1. Clarify your objectives.

It is important to establish clear goals before you start designing a survey. Your goals determine the questions you ask, your approach to sampling, the method you use for delivering the survey, and the analyses you eventually conduct. A lack of clarity in the purpose of your survey will lead to data that may not answer your key questions.

Start by asking yourself the following: "*What do we want to learn from this survey?*" Write down all of your objectives in the form of research questions and then prioritize the list. Surveys that try to do too much or answer too many questions, often run into problems. Try to narrow your focus to three to five topics at most.

For example, one police department might establish the following research questions for their upcoming community survey:

- How safe do people feel in our community?
- What crime/public safety issues are of greatest concern to our residents?
- What crime prevention strategies do residents support?

Another police department might have a very different focus:

- How many residents had direct contact with a police officer in the past 12 months?
- Do people feel that they were treated fairly during these encounters?
- Are there racial/ethnic differences in how residents evaluate these interactions?

It should be clear that the final questions asked, the sampling process, and the data analyses for these two community surveys would be quite different.

Once you have documented your research questions, you can use them to evaluate every step of the survey process. Will the questions on the survey form produce data that answer your questions? Is the proposed sampling process going to access the right people given your primary objectives? If not, then you know more work is still needed before you launch the survey.

2. Make it short (and then shorter).

The competition among people administering surveys is stiffer today than at any time in the past. Visit your local coffee shop and your barista asks you to rate their service on a short questionnaire. Get the A/C fixed in your house and the technician gives you a web link to their feedback system. Buy something online and ten days later, an email arrives asking you to rate the product. Everyone is doing surveys.

This is the current environment law enforcement agencies face when they decide to conduct a community survey. Your survey will be one of many that local residents receive in a given period and they will weigh the potential value of participating against the time/energy it takes to complete the survey. Perhaps the most important thing you can do to help shift their decision in your favor is to keep the survey SHORT. A good rule of thumb is to keep the survey under 15 minutes for the typical respondent. Ten minutes is even better unless you have reason to believe that your survey will tap into a lot of intrinsic motivation. If necessary, you might need to revisit your prioritized list of research questions and drop some of the items. It usually is better to get valid data on a small number of topics than questionable data on a large number.

3. Make your survey easy to fill out.

In addition to being short, your survey should be easy to complete. Avoid anything in your survey that might confuse or frustrate people. Consider the following suggestions:

   a. Provide instructions where needed.

      Things that seem obvious to you after working on a survey for several days may not be so clear to someone looking at it for the first time, especially if they are multi-tasking while filling out your survey. Give simple instructions for anything that might not be immediately obvious to a respondent.

   b. Help people transition from one topic to the next.

If your survey addresses different topics, provide brief transitions from one section to the next. Sometimes it is also helpful to explain why you are asking certain questions. For example, "*In this next section we ask a few questions to describe the people who participated in the survey*."

c. Use consistent formatting.

Try to develop a consistent pattern in the design, formatting, and layout of your survey. If you use *italics* to provide instructions on page one, then use italics for instructions throughout the survey. If you give people boxes to check for their answer on a multiple-choice question, then stick with the same boxes for all of the remaining multiple-choice items.

d. Limit how many open-ended questions you include.

Open-ended questions require a participant to write/type a response using sentences or full paragraphs. While the information you collect from these items can be extremely valuable, they take people a lot more time. For surveys distributed by mail or online, you should probably limit yourself to no more than two to four open-ended questions.

e. Use filter questions.

Some of the questions that you want to ask may not apply to all of the respondents. You can save them time and frustration by using filter questions like the one below. Online survey platforms provide advanced options to control the flow of a survey and save people time.

Did a local police officer contact you in the past 12 months? (This includes a police officer contacting you to investigate a crime, give you a warning, issue a citation, make an arrest, etc.)

☐ YES… (continue with the next question)

☐ NO……(skip to question 8)

4. Build commitment to the survey.

A key goal in conducting surveys is to maximize your response rate, or the proportion of people contacted who actually complete and return the questionnaire. Anything you can do to build commitment to the survey, and avoid the trash bin or delete button, will help in this regard.

a. Provide a cover letter or introduction to the survey.

The first thing a potential respondent should see in a mailed or online survey (or hear in an in-person survey) is a cover letter introducing the project. A well-designed cover letter builds commitment by engaging their interest and, in some cases, by appealing to their sense of civic responsibility. At a minimum, your cover letter should answer the following questions: 1) who is conducting the survey, 2) what you are asking them to do, and 3) why you want them to participate – how will your agency use the data. Other things to consider in the cover letter include brief instructions for filling out the form and returning it, limits that may apply to confidentiality of the data, and a contact number for questions.

Regarding the first item above, who is conducting the survey: Someone known and respected in the community should sign the cover letter. This might be the Chief of Police or, if some degree of separation is needed given the purpose of the survey, perhaps the Mayor or a University partner. Printing the cover letter on official letterhead adds to the professionalism of the communication and may generate additional interest in the task.

Provided below are two examples of cover letters from law enforcement surveys:

- Fairfax County Police Department Survey (PDF)
- Parkrose Portland Police Bureau Survey (PDF)

b. Make the survey look professional.

We have probably all seen surveys that were disorganized and unprofessional in appearance. There may have been spelling errors, major grammatical issues, formatting inconsistencies (e.g., font, font size, margins, spacing, numbering, etc.), and poorly articulated questions. When you see these surveys, you have to wonder why anyone would fill them out when the developer(s) put so little time into the project to begin with. Making your survey look professional is critical to your success (i.e., response rate), so take the time to get feedback, revise, and improve your form before you distribute it to community members.

c. Make it interesting.

Fortunately, crime and public safety are topics that most people in the community find interesting and personally relevant. It should be a lot easier for law enforcement

agencies to get residents to fill out a community survey than the local water bureau. Try to capitalize on this interest in your cover letter. Likewise, the initial questions you ask should be the most engaging and relevant items from the survey.

d. Be as neutral as possible.

We live in highly political times where boundaries are drawn, sides are chosen, and positions are heavily defended. In this context, people are highly attentive to the tone of communications, including surveys arriving in the mail or their in-box. Even a hint of your opinion on a given topic may be enough to lead a person to reject your survey.

For example, a large city in the Northwest used to have the following question in their annual community survey: "*How do you rate the City's efforts to control misconduct by local police officers?*" Let us think about this item for a moment. The framing of the question suggests that the survey administrators presumed that police misconduct was a significant problem. The wording of the question might also suggest to community members that police misconduct is "out of control". Finally, how likely is it that a typical resident in the city would even know what steps the police department has taken to address misconduct?

This kind of question or tone in a survey might divide your potential respondents into two groups: Those who are generally supportive of the police and those who are not. If large numbers of the former get angry and discard the survey, your results will not accurately reflect the community as a whole. It is important, therefore, that all aspects of your survey, from the cover letter to the individual questions, remain as neutral as possible.

e. Save difficult, upsetting, and controversial questions for the end.

If you have difficult, potentially upsetting questions that you are required to ask, it is usually best to put these toward the end of the survey. Once people have invested a certain amount of time in a task, they are more likely to complete it, even if it involves a little discomfort.

f. Do not ask for anything you do not need.

Any single question in your survey might be the proverbial "*straw that breaks the camel's back*" for one or more people. This might be due to the nature of the question (i.e., controversial, overly personal, seemingly unrelated) or the fact that the survey just looks longer with it in there. Either way, you should carefully review

the draft of your survey and ask whether each question is really needed. Is it critical to answering your top research questions? If not, you should delete the question.

5. Pilot-test your survey (at least once, maybe twice).

"*Better is possible. It does not take genius. It takes diligence. It takes moral clarity. It takes ingenuity. And above all, it takes a willingness to try*." — Atul Gawande

Consistent with the quote above, every single survey ever designed could be improved. Probably the single-most important thing you can do to improve a community survey is to conduct a pilot-test before you distribute the form to your full sample. It should be relatively easy to find people at work, family, friends or even a small community group to fill out your survey and provide feedback. Time how long it takes them to complete the survey and directly ask about the cover letter, instructions, layout, formatting, wording of questions, and response formats. It is also good practice to enter the data from the pilot test into a computer or download the data into MS Excel if you are using an online survey program. Does the survey design facilitate accurate data entry? Does the export from your online system go according to plan? Are you able to run the analyses needed to answer your primary research questions? A thorough review at this stage can save a ton of headaches down the road.

Additional Resources

- Dillman, D. A. (1991). *The design and administration of mail surveys*. Annual Review of Sociology, 17(1), 225–249.

- Fanning, E. (2005). *Formatting a paper-based survey questionnaire: Best practices*. Practical Assessment Research & Evaluation, 10(12), 1–14.

- Sills, S. J., & Song, C. (2002). *Innovations in survey research: An application of web-based surveys*. Social Science Computer Review, 20(1), 22–30.

Types of Survey Questions and Data Analysis

There are several types of questions to choose from when you design a survey. The broadest distinction that we make is between **close-ended** and **open-ended** questions. Closed-ended questions provide participants with pre-established response options or answers. This is why some people refer to these questions as "fixed choice." Open-ended questions allow respondents to write anything they want in the space you provide.

Each type of question has strengths and weaknesses. Closed-ended questions generally take respondents much less time, because they just check a box or circle their answer from the list provided. Data entry, analysis, and presentation of the findings are all a lot easier with closed-ended questions. The down side of this approach is that the survey designer has to pre-specify all of the answer choices. If you are talking about something like a person's current age, this is usually straightforward (e.g., 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, etc.). If you are asking for someone's preferred strategy for preventing crime, it may be harder.

Researchers have found that the way you group response options in closed-ended questions assessing frequency or quantity, can also influence how people respond. Take for example the following question with two alternate response options:

- "*How many times in the past month did you see someone driving 10+ miles an hour above the speed limit in your neighborhood?*"

☐ 0 times	☐ 0 times
☐ 1 to 4	☐ 1 to 9
☐ 5 to 9	☐ 10 to 19
☐ 10 to 14	☐ 20 to 29
☐ 15 or more	☐ 30 or more

Let us assume someone's real answer is 21 but they are not 100% sure. Giving them the answer choices on the left suggests that 21 might be somewhat high – it is after all, the last box in the list provided. This could lead them to change their answer and check a different box. The same number, 21, does not seem quite as deviant when you look at the second set of responses.

The main benefit of open-ended questions is that they can provide a wealth of information. For example, you are likely to get a wide variety of responses if you ask people for suggestions about reducing crime in their neighborhood. The responses would likely include things that you never thought of before and would not have added as discrete choices in a closed-ended version of the same question. As for drawbacks, adding too many open-ended questions can overwhelm or fatigue your potential respondents, possibly resulting in fewer people completing

the survey. Moreover, the large quantity of text produced from open-ended responses can burden the people who do the data entry and analysis.

In the end, the choices you make regarding the use of these two types of questions will depend on the nature of the project, the level of commitment you can expect from your respondents, and your capacity to manage the resulting data. Provided below are detailed examples of the six most common closed-ended questions and one example of an open-ended item.

1. Dichotomous (close-ended)

   The simplest form of a closed-ended question is a dichotomous item, where you give the respondent just two options for answering. Coding the answers with 0 (no) and 1 (yes) allows you to determine the frequency of the "yes" answers by taking the average of the scores. Adding codes like this to printed surveys greatly expedites the data entry process and numbers are more efficient to store in computers than text. When it comes to analyzing dichotomous variables and presenting the results, simple pie charts or text statements work best (e.g., "*88% of the respondents drove a motor vehicle in the city at least once per month over the last 12 months.*").

Question

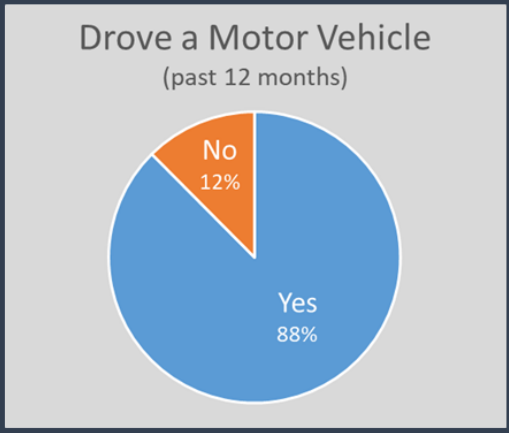
1. Have you driven a MOTOR VEHICLE at least <u>once per month</u> over the last 12 months?

- ❍ 0 No
- ❍ 1 Yes

Data

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	ResponseID	Drove 12M	Drive Safety	Drive Unsafe Text	Driving Map 1	Driving Map 2
2	38	1	10		0	0
3	41	1	7	There are not always good signs. Some of the s	0	0
4	158	1	4	The roads around here aren't always the best,	0	0
5	103	1	5	There are too many people that sleep at the wh	0	0
6	26	0	9	The main thing that makes driving in my comm	0	0
7	189	0	5	I live in a city so people are always in a rush in	0	0
8	140	1	6	The presence of aggressive drivers, jaywalkers,	0	0
9	93	1	10		0	0
10	48	1	9	I live in a relatively small town and do not enco	0	0
11	111	1	5	The main thing that makes driving less than saf	0	0
12	66	1	8	I feel a lot of the drivers in town aren't very goo	0	0
13	123	1	9	We have a lot of drivers that run red lights on r	0	0
14	191	1	9	There are many people that do not check their	0	0

Analysis



2. Multiple Choice - Single Answer (close-ended)

Most people are familiar with multiple-choice questions from school. They are used with equal frequency in community surveys. The most common version of a multiple-choice survey question involves forcing the respondent to choose just one answer from the list provided. The answer choices should not overlap (i.e., be mutually exclusive) and everyone should be able to find an answer that works, even if that requires adding "Other" as an option (i.e., exhaustive).[1] Frequency tables like the one shown below and bar/column charts are a good way to analyze and present the findings from this type of question.

Question

13. What is your AGE?

- ○ 0 18 to 24
- ○ 1 25 to 34
- ○ 2 35 to 44
- ○ 3 45 to 54
- ○ 4 55 to 64
- ○ 5 65 or older

Data

	AS	AT	AU	AV	AW	AX	AY
1	Gender	Age	Race White	Race Black	Race Asian	Race Am Indian	Race Hawaiian
2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
4	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
5	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
6	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
7	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
8	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
9	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
10	0	4	1	0	0	0	0
11	1	3	1	0	0	0	0

Analysis

Survey Respondents by Age

Age	#	%
18 to 24	20	9.6%
25 to 34	94	45.0%
35 to 44	53	25.4%
45 to 54	20	9.6%
55 to 64	16	7.7%
65 or older	6	2.9%
Grand Total	209	

[1] See our *Tips for Writing Survey Questions* for more details about the concepts mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

3. Multiple Choice - Check all that Apply (close-ended)

The second version of a multiple-choice question is a bit more complicated. There are times when you want/need to give people the option of selecting one or more answers. Race is a good example: the U.S. Census Bureau allows people to select more than one race using the options shown below. While this looks like a standard multiple-choice question on paper, in a data spreadsheet you actually have a separate column or field for each of the options presented. Each race becomes a dichotomous question or variable. If a person checks the boxes for White and Black/African-American, as seen in the fourth row of data, you would enter a "1" or "yes" into each cell. The analysis of these data can be simple or a bit more complicated. The easy version is to analyze and report the findings each racial group separately: 75% of the people were White, 12% were Black, etc. The problem with this is that your percentages will probably add to more than 100%. You are also not taking into consideration the fact that some people self-identify as bi or multi-racial. The more complicated approach is to look across all of the individual categories to identify the people checking more than one box. We have demonstrated this in the data sample below. As for presenting the results, bar/column charts and frequency tables work well for this type of closed-ended question.

Question

14. What is your RACE? ☑ one or more boxes

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Some Other Race

Data

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Race White	Race Black	Race Asian	Race Am Indian	Race Hawaiian	Race Some Other	Race Count	Race Final
2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	White
3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Black/African-American
4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Some Other Race
5	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	Two or More Races
6	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	Asian
7	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	White
8	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Black/African-American
9	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	Asian
10	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	White
11	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	Asian
12	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Some Other Race

Analysis

Survey Respondents by Race

Race	#	%
White	166	79.4%
Non-White	43	20.6%
Am. Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.0%
Asian	12	5.7%
Black/African-American	13	6.2%
Some Other Race	7	3.3%
Two or More Races	9	4.3%
Grand Total	209	

4. Likert Rating Scale (close-ended)

Rating scales differ from multiple-choice items in that the latter usually ask a respondent to pick a discrete option from a list of arbitrarily ordered categories. In other words, the options provided may not have an inherent quantitative value that allows you to order them meaningfully from low to high. Rating scales assess where someone falls along a single continuum. One of the most popular versions of a rating scale is the Likert scale. With a Likert item, you provide the respondent with a positively or negatively worded statement and ask them to indicate their level of agreement on a symmetrical scale (e.g., “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”). The response scales are usually set up to have either five or seven options with a neutral choice in the middle. We provide three examples of Likert items and the resulting data in the image below. When it comes to analyzing Likert scale questions, you have several choices. In the first sample chart we “collapsed” (i.e., combined) “agree” and “strongly agree” into one category and calculated the percentage of people in this category for each item. With the second chart we plotted the average score for each item using the original scaling from 0 “strongly disagree” to 4 “strongly agree”. A third option with Likert scale variables assessing a similar construct (i.e., impact of how people drive) is to combine the items into a single global score.

Question

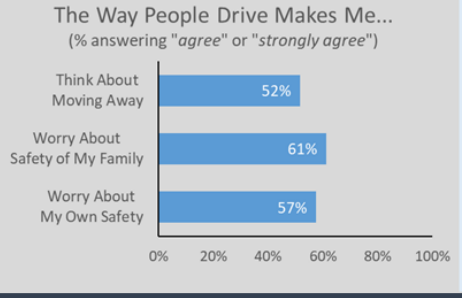
7. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements:

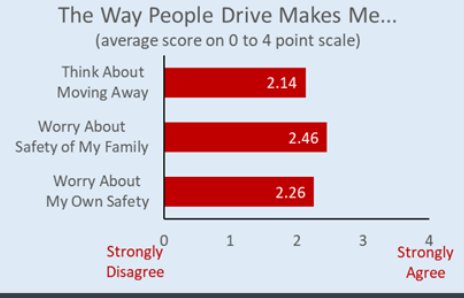
The way people drive here makes me worry about my own safety.	**The way people drive here makes me worry about the safety of my family.**	**The way people drive here makes me think about moving away from the city.**
❍ 0 Strongly Disagree	❍ 0 Strongly Disagree	❍ 0 Strongly Disagree
❍ 1 Disagree	❍ 1 Disagree	❍ 1 Disagree
❍ 2 Neither Agree /Disagree	❍ 2 Neither Agree/Disagree	❍ 2 Neither Agree/Disagree
❍ 3 Agree	❍ 3 Agree	❍ 3 Agree
❍ 4 Strongly Agree	❍ 4 Strongly Agree	❍ 4 Strongly Agree

Data

	AC	AD	AE	AF	AG
1	**Biggest Threat**	**Worry Own Safety**	**Worry Family**	**Leave City**	**Police Do**
2	6	2	3	3	I think they are doing a good job in all honesty. It i
3	1	2	1	1	They could repair the roads. I think that having saf
4	7	3	3	3	They took basic road safety classes out of schools
5	4	3	1	3	There are already many police cars around, the pr
6	1	3	3	2	Actually enforcing the laws that are already in plac
7	4	3	3	3	The increased use of public transportation and ride
8	4	1	2	0	They could start handing out more fines and possi
9	6	1	4	3	I guess just be more alert for distracted drivers. I'n
10	7	3	4	4	Enforce the law more stringently; I live on a corner

Analysis





5. Semantic Differential Rating Scale (close-ended)

A second type of rating scale, the Semantic Differential scale, is used to assess a person's attitudes or feelings towards a given object, event, or construct. The primary feature distinguishing this item from Likert scales is that the latter forces the surveyor to make a clear statement in one direction or the other then people respond to it. The following examples illustrate the difference:

- Likert

  Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: **The police are doing a good job controlling crime in the city.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

- Sematic Differential

  How are the police doing at controlling crime in the city?

Very Poor Job				Very Good Job
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Analyzing the data from questions using a semantic differential scale is similar to the approach used with Likert items. You can collapse responses at one end of the spectrum or calculate the average score (see demonstration below).

Question

2. How safe is it to DRIVE on public streets in Sara City?

[Circle a number on the scale below from 0 'very unsafe' to 10 'very safe']

Very Unsafe										Very Safe
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Data

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	ResponseID	Drove 12M	Drive Safety	Drive Unsafe Text	Driving Map 1	Driving Map 2
2	38	1	10		0	0
3	41	1	7	There are not always good signs. Some of the s	0	0
4	158	1	4	The roads around here aren't always the best,	0	0
5	103	1	5	There are too many people that sleep at the wh	0	0
6	26	0	9	The main thing that makes driving in my comm	0	0
7	189	0	5	I live in a city so people are always in a rush in	0	0
8	140	1	6	The presence of aggressive drivers, jaywalkers,	0	0
9	93	1	10		0	0
10	48	1	9	I live in a relatively small town and do not enco	0	0
11	111	1	5	The main thing that makes driving less than saf	0	0
12	66	1	8	I feel a lot of the drivers in town aren't very goo	0	0

Analysis

How Safe Is It to Drive on Public Streets?

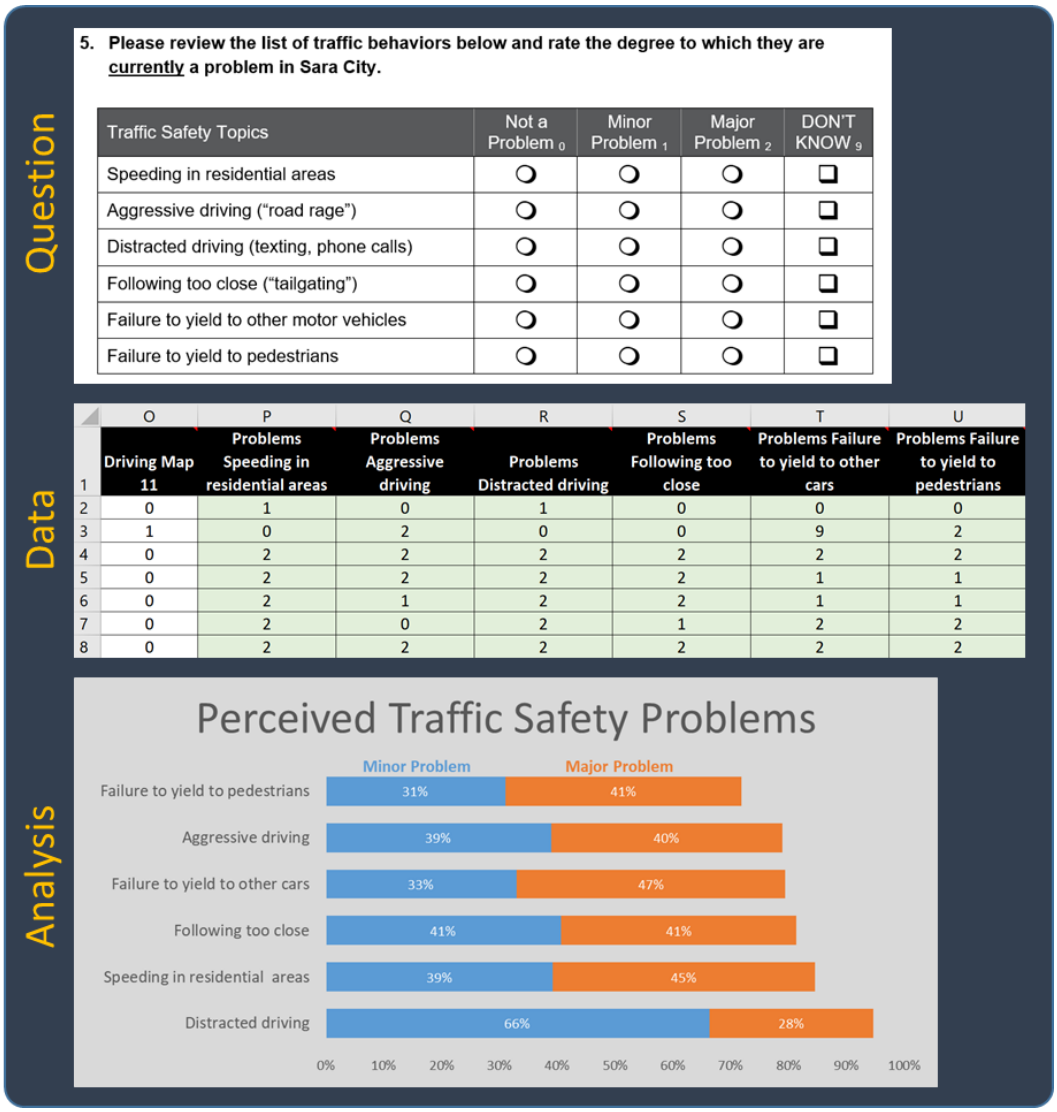
Average Rating[a]	7.8	
% Rating this as Unsafe[b]	9.1%	

[a]Rated from (0) "Very Unsafe" to (10) "Very Safe".

[b]Percent answering 4 or less.

6. Matrix Rating Scale (close-ended)

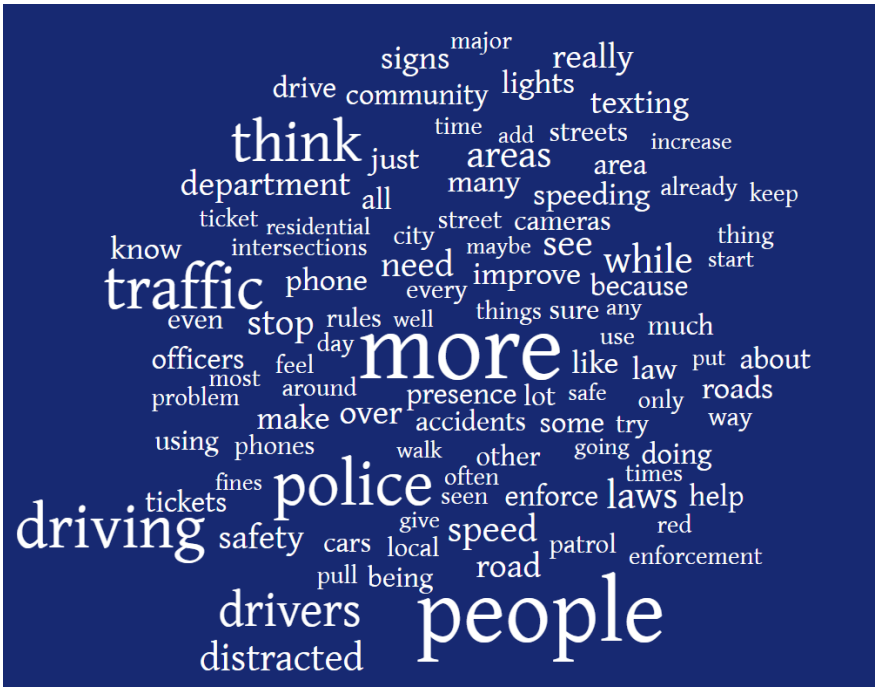
An efficient way to incorporate ratings scales in a survey, including Likert and Semantic Differentials, is to present them in a matrix rather than have individual questions. A matrix saves space and facilitates a quicker response by listing the response anchors just one time. The data produced by a matrix also allows for nice comparisons across different items. The one caveat to matrices is that their width can be a problem in online surveys, especially if people try to complete the survey on a mobile device.



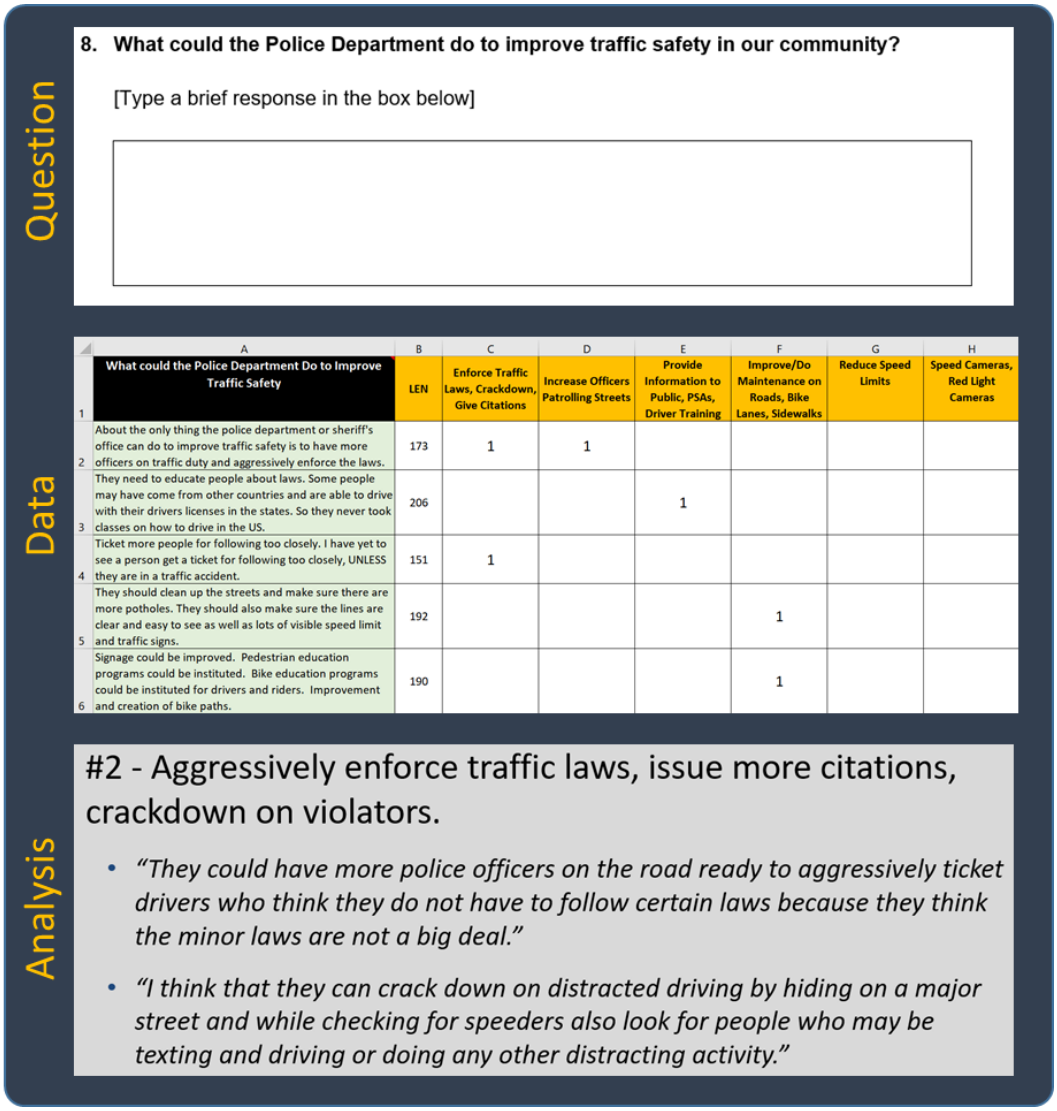
7. Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions can vary in length from asking for a single number (e.g., "*How old are you?* __"), a brief response (e.g., "*What type of crime worries you the most?*"), to an unlimited text field *(e.g., "What could the police department do to improve safety in your neighborhood?").* What distinguishes these questions from the closed-ended items above is that you, as the survey designer, do not predetermine the answer choices presented to the respondents. Instead, you provide space for the person to respond. This does not mean you have no control over the answers. On a paper form, you can manipulate the size of the lines you give and the height of the boxes you provide to guide the respondents on how much text to provide. Even more control is possible in online surveys: you can specify the type of data that a field will accept (e.g., date, number, text) as well as the minimum and maximum number of text characters required. Still, you have less control than you do with a closed-ended question. People can write or type whatever they want, including on occasion things that have nothing whatsoever to do with the question you asked.

Probably the biggest challenges with open-ended data is the analysis process. For the sample below, we asked 209 people the following question: "*What could the Police Department do to improve traffic safety in our community?*" Nineteen people skipped the question rather than type a response into the box provided. The responses for the remaining 190 participants ranged from 101 characters to 1,016, with a combined total of 47,863 characters. This is a lot of text and there is no easy way to automate the analysis process beyond doing something like a word cloud (see below):



The analysis of open-ended questions generating whole sentences and paragraphs usually involves several steps. First, you read many if not all of the responses to identify 6 to 10 common themes. You should clearly articulate each theme to differentiate it as much as possible from the others. You would then read the first response and "check off" all of the themes that apply. You repeat this until you have coded all of the responses. At this point, you can calculate a frequency for each theme and extract sample responses to share with others. A further improvement to this process involves a second coder that uses your thematic system to independently code a random sample or all of the responses. Ideally, the second rater will "check" the same boxes you did, or at least most of them. If not, then your approach to defining the themes may need revision. Provided below is an illustration of this process.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	What could the Police Department Do to Improve Traffic Safety	LEN	Enforce Traffic Laws, Crackdown, Give Citations	Increase Officers Patrolling Streets	Provide Information to Public, PSAs, Driver Training	Improve/Do Maintenance on Roads, Bike Lanes, Sidewalks	Reduce Speed Limits	Speed Cameras, Red Light Cameras
2	About the only thing the police department or sheriff's office can do to improve traffic safety is to have more officers on traffic duty and aggressively enforce the laws.	173	1	1				
3	They need to educate people about laws. Some people may have come from other countries and are able to drive with their drivers licenses in the states. So they never took classes on how to drive in the US.	206			1			
4	Ticket more people for following too closely. I have yet to see a person get a ticket for following too closely, UNLESS they are in a traffic accident.	151	1					
5	They should clean up the streets and make sure there are more potholes. They should also make sure the lines are clear and easy to see as well as lots of visible speed limit and traffic signs.	192				1		
6	Signage could be improved. Pedestrian education programs could be instituted. Bike education programs could be instituted for drivers and riders. Improvement and creation of bike paths.	190				1		

8. Additional Resources

- Bruce, C. W., & Stallo, M. A. (2009). *Better policing with Microsoft Office 2007*. BookSurge Publishing, USA.

- Clarke, R. V., & Eck, J. E. (2005). *Crime analysis for problem solvers in 60 steps*. Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Dept. of Justice.

Tips for Writing Survey Questions

The old saying, "you get what you ask for," is certainly true when it comes to community surveys. Poorly designed survey questions will yield data that are of questionable worth to your agency. That equates to lost time, money, and opportunity. Perhaps even worse, confusing or badly written survey questions can frustrate the very people you are trying to engage with, the residents, business, and organizations in your community. It is well worth your time to learn more about writing survey questions. The following tips are a good place to start.

1. Use words and terms that most people understand; avoid acronyms, technical language, jargon, and informal expressions.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Which of the four UCR violent Index Crimes scares the most?

- ☐ Murder & Non-Negligent Manslaughter
- ☐ Rape
- ☐ Robbery
- ☐ Aggravated Assault

People may get upset with you, and your survey, if there are questions they do not understand. If they throw your survey away as a result, that is a problem. If they go ahead and answer the questions without fully understanding them, that is also a problem. The solution is to be very careful in your assumptions about what people know. It is usually best to assume people are unfamiliar with policing topics like the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system and the definition of "non-negligent manslaughter".

BETTER

Which of the following violent crimes causes you the most concern?

- ☐ Murder
- ☐ Rape
- ☐ Robbery (taking something by using or threatening force)
- ☐ Assault

2. Simplify your sentence structure and reading level.

Kris Henning (Portland State University) & Christian Peterson (Portland Police Bureau)

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Thinking about your most recent trip downtown and the things you may have observed there, how worried were you for your own safety and the welfare of any family members accompanying you on the excursion?

- ☐ Not at all worried
- ☐ A little worried
- ☐ Moderately worried
- ☐ Very worried

Overly complex questions can lead to inaccurate and/or unreliable answers. Try to write your questions at a 6th to 8th grade reading level. You can test the reading level of your survey questions using free online calculators or MS Word. For example, the reading level of the question above is college (Flesch-Kincaid scoring). The revised question below reads at the 7th grade level.

BETTER

How worried were you about your safety during your most recent trip downtown?

- ☐ Not at all worried
- ☐ A little worried
- ☐ Moderately worried
- ☐ Very worried

3. Develop questions that are specific and concrete.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Do you think red light cameras are a good idea?

- ☐ Very Bad Idea
- ☐ Bad Idea
- ☐ Good Idea
- ☐ Very Good Idea

The wording and specificity of your questions can make a big difference in the interpretation and use of your findings. If you want a general sense of people's support for red light cameras, the question above could work. If you are trying to gauge support specifically for red light cameras at high-risk intersections in your city, adjust your wording accordingly.

BETTER

Do you support/oppose the police department adding red light cameras at high-risk intersections in your city?

- ☐ Strongly Oppose
- ☐ Oppose
- ☐ Neither Support nor Oppose
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Strongly Support

4. Ask just one question at a time.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Do you want the police department to prioritize crime downtown next year and do you support increasing police patrols in this area?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Double-barreled questions, where you ask about more than one thing, create problems for the survey respondents and the person who eventually analyzes the survey data. How would a respondent answer the question above if they wanted the police to focus on crime downtown, but did NOT want additional patrols? Perhaps they prefer other crime control strategies (e.g., CPTED). Likewise, if someone answers "yes" to this question what does this mean for the data analyst? Does analyst just assume the person supports both things, prioritizing downtown and increasing patrols? Revise double-barreled questions by breaking them up into two distinct items.

BETTER

Do you want the police department to prioritize crime downtown next year?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Do you support the police department adding additional patrols downtown?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

5. Revise negatively (and double negatively) worded questions.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Should the police not give more citations for not parking properly downtown?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Negatively worded questions are often difficult to interpret. If you select "yes" for the question above, does that mean you support more ticketing or less? If you had to read the question more than once to figure this out, then the wording is probably going to confuse your respondents. Confused participants produce confused survey results. You can improve your survey questions by removing negative and double negative wording.

BETTER

Should the police give more citations for parking violations downtown?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

6. Avoid leading questions that push respondents to answer in a certain way.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

The police department is working hard to improve safety and we have achieved many successes in the past six months. We want to know how safe do you feel when walking alone in your neighborhood?

- ☐ Very Unsafe
- ☐ Unsafe
- ☐ Neither Safe nor Unsafe
- ☐ Safe
- ☐ Very Safe

Most people have a natural inclination to please others. This can be a problem in surveys, because respondents may give you the answer they think you want, rather than provide their true opinion. The way you word, or frame, a question influences the extent to which happens. The first sentence in the question above makes it clear that the police department would like you to answer "very safe". Wording the question this way might make your department look good in a report, but it would probably not accurately reflect how safe people actually feel in your community. The solution is to be as neutral as possible in the wording of your survey questions.

BETTER

How safe/unsafe do you feel when walking alone in your neighborhood?

- ☐ Very Unsafe
- ☐ Unsafe
- ☐ Neither Safe nor Unsafe
- ☐ Safe
- ☐ Very Safe

7. Do not make people feel bad about telling you the truth.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

If you saw a crime happening on your street, would you care enough about your neighborhood to call the police to report it?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

People usually want others to see them in a positive light. This can lead survey participants to offer socially desirable answers rather than give their honest response. Answering "no" for the question above suggests that you do not care much about your neighborhood. Even if this was how you truly felt, you might not want to acknowledge it to strangers conducting a survey. If the goal of your survey is to assess what people really think and how they behave, then you need to word your questions carefully. Try to remove language that is judgmental, critical, or self-incriminating. Another strategy for minimizing socially desirable responding involves "normalizing" the different responses a person might have. Adding a preface to the question below, "*People have different opinions about contacting the police*", suggests that neither answer is abnormal.

BETTER

People have different opinions about contacting the police. If you saw a crime happening in your neighborhood, would you call the police to report it?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

8. Replace words/terms that could bias your results.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Do you think we are spending too much money, too little, or just about the right amount on WELFARE?

- ☐ Too much
- ☐ About right
- ☐ Too little

Some words, including a few associated with policing (e.g., racial profiling, police brutality), have become politically charged. These words may unfairly influence your findings when they are used in a community survey. The above example is a good illustration: The question was used in the 1998 General Social Survey and 45% of the respondents answered "*Too much*", suggesting a high degree of dissatisfaction with this government program. Interestingly, a slightly revised version of the question (see below) was included in the same survey and it generated a very different result: only 12% of the respondents thought that "*Too much*" money was being spent on assistance to the poor. The difference between 12% and 45% is substantial, and goes to show just how much your findings can hinge on a single word. Use words carefully when designing your survey questions and think about replacing emotionally charged words with neutral alternatives.

BETTER

Do you think we are spending too much money, too little, or just about the right amount on ASSISTANCE TO THE POOR?

- ☐ Too much
- ☐ About right
- ☐ Too little

9. Make your response options exhaustive.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

In the past 12 months, how many times did you visit a city park?

- ☐ Every day
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Once or twice for the year

The response options you provide should be exhaustive. This means you need to consider all of the possible answers that people might generate. For the example above, how would someone answer if they never went to a city park? Leaving this option out is likely to frustrate some participants and/or lead them to choose a response that does not accurately reflect their use of city parks. Inaccurate responding leads to inaccurate findings.

The question below does a better job covering the full range of experiences that people might have with their city parks. In some cases, you may need to consider adding an option for "other". If you are asking about race, for example, you could list the five most common options and then add as a sixth choice, "*Some other race*" to ensure that people from more infrequent groups still have a box to check.

BETTER

In the past 12 months, how many times did you visit a city park?

- ☐ Never (0 times)
- ☐ Rarely (1 to 4 times)
- ☐ Occasionally (5 to 10 times)
- ☐ Often (11 to 20 times)
- ☐ Very Often (21 or more times)

You might also consider using an open-ended item during a pilot-test of your survey if you are unsure about the range of answers participants might give on a question. For example, we guessed at the upper limit (i.e., 21 or more times) when setting the answers for the prior question about city parks. A more informed approach to calibrating the response intervals would involve asking people an open-ended question during the pilot-test:

*In the past 12 months, how many times did you visit a city park?....*_____

You could use the answers to set the response options for your final fixed-choice question. Try to set the ranges to differentiate the respondents. In other words, try to avoid having everyone end up in the same bin (e.g., "1 to 999 times", "1,000 to 2,000 times", etc.).

10. Make response options mutually exclusive.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

How old are you?

- ☐ 18 to 25
- ☐ 25 to 35
- ☐ 35 to 45
- ☐ 45 to 55
- ☐ 55 to 65
- ☐ 65 or older

While there are occasionally situations where you want people to "check all that apply", it is much more common that you want survey respondents to choose just one answer. You can control this by setting up your response options to prevent people from selecting more than one answer. In the question above, someone who is 25 could be in both the "*18 to 25*" group and the "*25 to 35*" group because age 25 is overlapping. You can easily correct this by making sure the response options are mutually exclusive ("18 to 24"; "25 to 34").

BETTER

How old are you?

- ☐ 18 to 24
- ☐ 25 to 34
- ☐ 35 to 44
- ☐ 45 to 54
- ☐ 55 to 64
- ☐ 65 or older

11. Provide balanced response options.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

How satisfied are you with the police department's efforts to improve traffic safety over the past year?

- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Slightly Satisfied
- ☐ Moderately Satisfied
- ☐ Very Satisfied
- ☐ Extremely Satisfied

The use of unbalanced response options in a survey can also bias your findings. In the example above, there is only one choice for "dissatisfied" while "satisfied" comes in four flavors. This might suggest to the respondent that you prefer or expect them to be satisfied. A more neutral approach is to provide symmetrical response options.

BETTER

How satisfied are you with the police department's efforts to improve traffic safety over the past year?

- ☐ Very Dissatisfied
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Very Satisfied

12. Think carefully about "fence sitters" and "don't knowers".

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement: I have confidence in the local police.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Don't Know

Some people have difficulty making up their mind on survey questions and rely extensively on the neutral or middle response (i.e., "fence sitters"). Others opt out of answering questions by selecting "*Don't know*" whenever it is available. If people are choosing these answers to save time or reduce their cognitive load, it may bias your findings. Remember, we want to know the truth: how people really feel about an issue. If you think a little extra time will help them make a decision, you can remove their escape routes by dropping the neutral response and "don't know" options.

At the same time, people may indeed be neutral on a given topic or they may not feel they have enough information to decide one way or the other. Unfortunately, there is no ultimate answer to the question of whether you should provide a neutral response. It

depends on the nature of the question and how you want to analyze the data (e.g., agree vs. disagree; agree vs. neutral vs. disagree). Experienced survey researchers have stronger opinions about "don't knowers" – they suggest that you avoid them when possible by not including it as a response option.

BETTER (under some circumstances)

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement: I have confidence in the local police.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

13. Provide a timeframe for your questions.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Have you been stopped by a police officer in our city while driving?

- ☐ No ------> Skip next question
- ☐ Yes

Did the officer treat you fairly during this stop?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Usually when we conduct a survey to learn about people's experiences, we are interested in learning about their recent experiences. This means that our survey questions should identify our target timeframe. Otherwise, like the question above, we have no idea whether a respondent is referring to a recent event or one in the distant past. Under ideal circumstances, you should standardize the timeframe used throughout your survey (e.g., "past 12 months", "past month"). This depends, however, on the potential frequency and emotional significance (i.e., salience) of the given experience you are asking people to recall. "*How many times in the past month…..*" may be better for events that are highly frequent and/or of lower salience. Things like the number of times you went downtown, the number of times you drove a car, etc. Events that happen less often and/or are highly memorable might be better suited for a longer timeframe like a year.

If you are asking about experiences people may have had, you should also consider the possibility that they have had multiple incidents during the given timeframe. How would a

respondent answer the question above if they had two contacts with police officers, one that went poorly and one that went much better? Chances are that they are going to report on the more salient of the two – the one that left them feeling mistreated. This might bias your results in a negative direction. Explicitly identifying the incident they should report on is a good option, as demonstrated in the example below (i.e., "*In the most recent stop…..*").

BETTER

During the past 12 months, have you been stopped by a police officer in our city while driving?

- ☐ No ------> Skip next question
- ☐ Yes

In the most recent stop, did the officer treat you fairly?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

14. Counterbalance response options.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Which of the following offenses should the police department prioritize over the next 12 months?

- ☐ Violent offenses (e.g., assault, robbery)
- ☐ Property offenses (e.g., auto theft, shoplifting, burglary)
- ☐ Drug/alcohol offenses (e.g., driving under the influence, illegal possession)
- ☐ White collar offenses (e.g., fraud, forgery, identity theft)
- ☐ Vandalism (e.g., graffiti, destruction of property)

Survey researchers have found that the ordering of your response options can lead to bias in your findings. In the example above, "*Violent offenses*" is the first option listed. Putting this first could suggest that this crime is more important than the other crimes listed. Some respondents also just read questions until they find the first answer that seems reasonable. This biases the responses toward the items at the top of a list.

One way to address this with paper surveys and interviews is to have two versions of the form and reverse the order of the response options. We refer to as "counterbalancing". Online survey tools provide an even better option – you can completely randomize the presentation of the answers. Just be careful to leave things ordered when the order actually

matters. You would not want to randomize the order for a scale like: "*strongly agree*", "*agree*", "*neutral*", "*disagree*" and "*strongly disagree*".

BETTER

(version 1) *Which of the following offenses should the police department prioritize over the next 12 months?*

- ☐ Violent offenses (e.g., assault, robbery)
- ☐ Property offenses (e.g., auto theft, shoplifting, burglary)
- ☐ Drug/alcohol offenses (e.g., driving under the influence, illegal possession)
- ☐ White collar offenses (e.g., fraud, forgery, identity theft)
- ☐ Vandalism (e.g., graffiti, destruction of property)

(version 2) *Which of the following offenses should the police department prioritize over the next 12 months?*

- ☐ Vandalism (e.g., graffiti, destruction of property)
- ☐ White collar offenses (e.g., fraud, forgery, identity theft)
- ☐ Drug/alcohol offenses (e.g., driving under the influence, illegal possession)
- ☐ Property offenses (e.g., auto theft, shoplifting, burglary)

15. Consider the tradeoff between accuracy and information.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

How many times in the past 12 months have you seen a police officer inside the city limits?

_____ (enter # times)

We often want our survey respondents to quantify some experience they had. As in the case of the question above, this might involve documenting how many times they saw a police officer over the past 12 months. The challenge here is that most people will likely have difficulty accurately recalling something like this. By accuracy, we mean the truth or the correct number of times they saw an officer. With the exception of people living in rural areas, those in towns with no police department, and people who are housebound, chances are that most people see police officers in their community on a regular basis. Accurately quantifying how many times you saw an officer over a 12-month period might be impossible. Therefore, when people respond to a question like this, they usually write down their best guess - maybe "59 times". Guesses contains some degree of truth, but also some margin of error. Error is something we try to minimize in survey questions or measurements.

One way to reduce measurement error is to revise the response options. Rather than ask people to write down a number, you could just ask, "*Have you ever seen a police officer inside the city limits in the past 12 months?*" The answers people give to this question are more likely to be accurate and consistent. The problem is that we have traded off accuracy for potentially important information. We have lost the distinction between someone who saw a police officer once versus someone who saw an officer 300 times.

Ultimately, there is no right answer to how you should ask this question. Your job when designing survey questions is to strive for a reasonable balance between accuracy and useful information. The example below might be a reasonable compromise.

BETTER

How many times in the past 12 months have you seen a police officer inside the city limits?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ 1 to 10 times
- ☐ 11 to 20 times
- ☐ 21 or more times

16. Do not re-invent the wheel.

There is a very good chance that some, even most, of the topics you want to include in your survey have been covered in prior surveys. This includes questions addressing perceived safety, fear of crime, and victimization, along with multi-item scales measuring constructs like social and physical disorder, police legitimacy, and collective efficacy.

A good starting place for your survey, therefore, are the resources listed below (most are free!). Next would be a search of the academic literature using an online tool like Google Scholar. For a demonstration, try searching with this tool for "police legitimacy scale". As you will see from the abstracts, a number of interesting possibilities come up for questions you could use on a survey.

Unfortunately, many of the articles you find in Google Scholar are inaccessible to people outside of academia or the publishers charge a lofty fee. One way to get around this is to collaborate on your survey with a local university or college. An alternative approach is to look for other community surveys on the Internet, as many other agencies and cities have surveyed their communities about crime and policing. Lastly, we provide several sample surveys in the current toolkit and hope to add more in the coming years.

Additional Resources

- Krosnick, J. A. & Presser, S. (2010). Question and questionnaire design. In *The Palgrave handbook of survey research* (pp. 439–455). Springer.

- Weisel, D. L. (1999). *Conducting community surveys: A practical guide for law enforcement agencies*. Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

- Bureau of Justice Assistance (1993). *A police guide to surveying citizens and their environment (*Monograph NCJ 143709). US Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

- Bradburn, N. M., Sudman, S., & Wansink, B. (2004). *Asking questions: the definitive guide to questionnaire design–for market research, political polls, and social and health questionnaires*. John Wiley & Sons.

Problem-Oriented Policing Survey Demonstration

Problem-Oriented Policing (POP; see http://www.popcenter.org/) involves a proactive, "upstream" approach to improving public safety. Rather than responding separately to isolated events, police work to identify clusters of incidents (aka problems) that have something in something in common (e.g., same offense, location, victim type, offender type, etc.). These problems are then subject to in-depth analysis to detail who is involved, what the problematic behaviors and harms are, when the incidents are happening, where they are occurring, and why – factors that are contributing to the problem. Armed with the information, police and collaborating partners are better equipped to generate effective strategies for preventing further incidents.

Provided below is a demonstration of the use of community surveys in POP. This includes the actual survey forms used, the datasets and analyses, and the final presentation of results from each phase. For the sake of this demonstration, we created an imaginary location (Sara City) with roughly 36,000 households and 80,000 residents. The local chief of police, Herman Gold, directed his staff to complete a POP project for a long-term, persistent problem over the coming year, including three community surveys conducted at different stages of the process.[1] Before we get to the surveys, we provide a brief summary of the SARA model and the use of community surveys in POP.

1. The SARA model

The four key stages of a POP effort should be conducted via the SARA model. SARA stands for Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment.

- Scanning involves identifying public safety issues (crime, quality of life, fear) that are of concern to the community, cause some type of harm, and are within the scope of police responsibility. Problems can be identified by officers, crime analysts, or community members.
- During the Analysis phase of a POP project, personnel (crime analyst, officer, etc.) work to detail the five W's noted above. The primary objectives of analysis are to narrow the scope of the problem, to identify contributing factors, to evaluate prior strategies for dealing with the problem, and to look for intervention opportunities.
- In the Response phase, efforts are taken to form partnerships with key stakeholders, generate and weigh possible interventions, and then implement the selected strategy(ies).

[1] We administered the surveys to a national sample. Hence, the data are real, just not from Sara City.

- Lastly, the Assessment phase requires an ongoing effort to document the implementation of the chosen strategy (i.e., process evaluation) and assess whether the target problem is reduced (i.e., outcome evaluation).

2. Community Surveys in POP

Community surveys can play a key role in POP and implementation of the SARA model. At the Scanning phase, surveys can used to identify ongoing or emerging public safety problems that affect the local community. This often uncovers issues that are not fully documented in official police data systems. Community surveys can help to narrow the scope of a problem during the Analysis phase, including gathering data regarding temporal and geographic patterns as well as why the problem may be occurring. There are several benefits of community surveys when it comes to brainstorming and prioritizing intervention strategies during the Response phase. Community members may suggest novel or innovative approaches to a problem. Likewise, surveys are useful for gauging community support for intervention strategies proposed by the police. Practices that anger or alienate large sections of the community are unlikely to be productive in the end (see Engel & Eck, 2015). Asking people for input on a problem, usually increases their commitment to collaboration, and most efforts to prevent crime require some degree of community engagement. Finally, when it comes to Assessing the outcomes of a POP project, community surveys can be invaluable. You can ask community members about changes they observed in the target problem, their perceived safety, and their satisfaction with police efforts to address the issue.

3. Scanning Survey Demonstration

The primary goals for the Sara City Police Department's scanning survey were to identify problems that are of concern to community members and businesses to assess the impact of these problems. Secondary goals included learning more detail about the issues identified, determining where in the city these problems are worst, and learning what community members and business want the police to do about these issues.

The ultimate outcome of the scanning phase was to identify one overarching public safety topic that the city could focus on in the coming months. Clarke and Eck (2005) suggest that POP initiatives should prioritize problems that: a) impact the community, b) cause harm to people or institutions, c) are perceived to be within the scope of police authority, d) involve discreet events that share something in common, and e) are recurring. The results of the survey supported a POP initiative focusing on traffic safety.

Files for the Scanning survey:

- Invitation to Online Survey (PDF)

- Online version of the survey (Link)
- Paper version of the survey (PDF)
- Data file (Excel)[2]
- Presentation of findings (PDF)

4. Analysis and Response Survey Demonstration

The Sara City Police Department used a single online survey to cover the Analysis and Response phases of their POP project. Their first objective was to dig deeper into traffic safety and identify the specific behaviors that were of concern to residents. They used both open-ended and fixed-choice questions for this purpose. The second objective was to identify potential intervention sites. The survey presented respondents with a map that divided Sara City into 10 areas. People then 'clicked' with their mouse to identify the three most dangerous locations for driving, biking, and walking. A third goal was to solicit intervention ideas from the community. This involved a single open-ended question: "*What could the SCPD do to improve traffic safety in our community?*" Finally, the police department had already generated a list of possible interventions (e.g., improve road design, lower speed limits, increase traffic stops). They used the survey to assess whether residents supported or were opposed to these strategies.

The results of the survey suggested that areas 3 and 9 in Sara City were of greatest concern. There was also a high degree of agreement among residents regarding the primary traffic safety problems, including speeding, distracted driving, aggressive driving, and poor road design (e.g., no bike lanes, crosswalks, traffic control devices). With regard to possible intervention strategies, the majority of community members supported increased traffic patrols and citations for driving infractions. They also advocated for improved road design and maintenance, along with public safety messages to educate drivers.

Files for the Analysis & Response survey:

- Invitation to Online Survey (PDF)
- Online version of the survey (Link)
- Paper version of the survey (PDF)
- Data file (Excel)
- Presentation of findings (PDF)

5. Assessment Survey Demonstration

[2] Your web browser may or may not open Excel files directly depending on the plug-ins and security you have in place. If you cannot access the file try a different browser.

Based on the findings of the second survey and other data sources, the police department developed and implemented a three-pronged intervention that lasted six months. First, they collaborated with community organizations and the news media on public service announcements, billboards, and presentations to local high schools addressing the dangers of distracted driving. Second, they increased traffic patrols and citations in areas 3 and 9, focusing on speeding and distracted driving. Third, in areas 3 and 9, they worked with the city's transportation department and city planners to add bike lanes, improve crosswalks, repair streets, and monitor construction sites that interfered with traffic.

To evaluate the impact of these efforts the police department conducted a pre-post analysis (see Eck, 2017) looking at motor vehicle crashes and serious injuries in the two target areas versus the city as a whole. In the target areas, they also measured the speed of vehicles in six discrete locations before and after the intervention. Finally, they administered a third online survey to a random sample of residents. The survey asked people how safe they felt driving, biking, and walking in the city as compared to 12 months earlier. Other survey questions asked about any changes observed in problematic driving behaviors. Finally, the survey asked residents about traffic safety improvements they may have seen over the past year, and where these changes happened. Analyses of these data, along with the findings from the pre-post comparisons, suggested that the police department's efforts to improve local traffic safety may have been successful.

Files for the Assessment survey:

- Invitation to Online Survey (PDF)
- Online version of the survey (Link)
- Paper version of the survey (PDF)
- Data file (Excel)
- Presentation of findings (PDF)

6. Additional Resources

- Boba, R. (2003). *Problem analysis in policing*. Police Foundation Washington, DC.
- Bynum, T. S. (2001). *Using analysis for problem-solving*. Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Dept. of Justice.
- Clarke, R. V., & Eck, J. E. (2005). *Crime analysis for problem solvers in 60 steps*. Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Dept. of Justice.
- Eck, J. (2017). *Assessing responses to problems: Did it work? An introduction for police problem-solvers, 2nd edition*. Center for Problem-Oriented Policing.

- Engel, R. S., & Eck, J. E. (2015). *Effectiveness vs equity in policing: Is a tradeoff inevitable*. Washington, DC: Police Foundation.

- Goldstein, H. (1979). *Improving policing: A problem-oriented approach*. Crime & Delinquency, 25(2), 236–258.

- Scott, M. (2015). *Identifying and defining policing problems*. Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Dept. of Justice.

Community Survey Examples

1. Portland Police Bureau – Neighborhood Involvement Locations (NI-Loc)

Henning, K., Stewart, G., Kahn, K., Peterson, C. Renauer, B., Mitchell, R., Labissiere, Y., & Sothern, S. (2017). Portland's Neighborhood Involvement Locations Project (final report). Portland, Oregon: Criminal Justice Policy & Research Institute, Portland State University.

This project was supported by Grant NO. 2014-WY-BX-0004; awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA).

The purpose of the surveys were to collect data on residents' attitudes toward the police, contact with the police, and the residents perceived safety after the completion of a randomized hot-spot policing intervention; which was conducted in 90 Neighborhood Involvement Locations (500' hotspots) and buffer areas throughout Portland, Oregon. Theses 90 location are divided into three groups: control (no additional treatment), two additional community engagement patrols, or four additional engagement patrols. The Survey elicited responses from residents on their perceptions and experiences over the previous three months, while the intervention was occurring.

The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) identified all of the household addresses in the 90 NI-Locs and each location's 500' buffer. These areas differed considerably in size, ranging from zero households (2 NI-Locs) up to 877 households. For more populated areas, a random sample of addresses from the mailing list were included. For the smaller areas, all households in and around the NI-Locs were included. A total of 11,760 paper surveys were mailed out with a cover letter, a paper survey, and a pre-paid business reply envelope. One thousand five hundred and thirty-seven were returned for a response rate of 13.1%. The number of surveys distributed and the response rates were fairly consistent across the three study conditions: control (3,420 mailed, 466 returned or 13.6%), 2 CEPs/day (3,458 mailed, 448 returned or 13.0%), and 4 CEPs/day (4,882 mailed and 623 returned or 12.8%). The final usable sample for the analyses consisted of 1,423 surveys. One hundred fourteen surveys were excluded because respondents indicated that they did not spend any time in the designated NI-Loc area during the area's active phase.

Supporting Files:

- Cover letter (PDF)
- Survey form (PDF)
- Final Report (PDF)

2. Portland Police Bureau – Parkrose POP project

Kris Henning, Ph.D., Portland State University
Jason Jones, MS., Portland Police Bureau
Christian Peterson, MS., Portland Police Bureau

The purpose of the survey was to provide residents with a greater voice in where police work is taking place in their neighborhood, what problems are addressed, and what interventions are introduced. The survey also provides the residents, businesses, and community organization(s) with data they can use to leverage additional resources to improve public safety. The survey elicits resident's responses on five themes: resident's public safety concerns, perceived safety, strategies to address public safety, perceptions of the police, and collective efficacy.

The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) identified 3,163 households in the Parkrose Neighborhood. Each household was mailed a letter from the Commander of North Precinct with a link to an online survey as well as a paper survey. The PPB also posted links to the neighborhood survey on a community forum, and handed out 3X5 cards to community members at local events and while on patrol. A total of 349 useable surveys were submitted. Unfortunately it is impossible to accurately determine the response rate for the survey, when the true number of people exposed to survey is unknown.

Supporting Files:

- Cover letter (PDF)
- Survey form (PDF)
- Final Report (PDF)

3. Bend Police Department – Community Assessment

Greg Stewart, MS., Portland State University
Kris Henning, Ph.D., Portland State University

The purpose of the survey was to provide feedback on the agency's recent performance in achieving the community oriented goals of the strategic plan and to provide direction for the coming years. The survey examined seven themes: residents feeling safe, trust in police, individuals contacted perception of treatment, have the police been successful managing public safety, have the police been successful at engaging the community, how can the police increase public trust and cooperation, and finally, what the residents primary public safety concern were and how should the police address the issue (s) moving forward.

The police department identified all of the residential addresses in Bend, Oregon. A random sample of 4,000 households, representing all of the zip codes in Bend, were then selected; each receiving a letter from the chief and a link to a short web survey. Fourteen days later a follow-up postcard was sent as a reminder to increase response rate. A total of 523 usable surveys were submitted from the sample. Resulting in a final response rate of 13.1%.

Supporting Files:

- Cover letter (PDF)
- Survey form (PDF)
- Final Report (PDF)

4. Fairfax County Police Department – Community Survey

Cynthia Lum (PI), Devon Johnson(co-PI), Jordan Nichols, Julie Grieco, and Xiaoyn Wu (GRAs) George Mason University Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) Department of Criminology, Law and Society.

This research is part of a broader program within the CEBCP, funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, called the Matrix Demonstration Projects.

The goal of the survey was to provide the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) with a scientifically sound assessment of community views of the police. Specific areas of information gathered were on resident's opinions about FCPD treatment of residence by police, procedural justice, residents' fear of crime, and other community concerns.

George Mason University procured 4,250 residential households from a commercial entity because the county did not have an available database of apartment level addresses. Each of these locations were mailed a cover letter, a paper survey, and a pre-paid business reply envelope. Two subsequent post cards were mailed to each location to increase the response rate. In all, 626 surveys were returned for a 15% response rate.

Supporting Files:

- Cover letter (PDF)
- Survey form (PDF)
- Final Report (PDF)

5. Brooklyn Park Police Department – Increasing Collective Efficacy at Crime Hot Spots: A Patrol Force Approach

David Weisburd (PI), Charlotte Gill (co-PI), Alese Wooditch, and Tori Goldberg
Bureau of Justice Assistance Smart Policing Initiative (with Brooklyn Park Police Department), 2013-DB-BX-0030, $700,000

The Center of Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) and the Brooklyn Park Police Department collaborated to develop a problem-solving approach BP-ACT (Brooklyn Park-Assets Coming Together to Take Action). The purpose of these surveys were to examine collective efficacy and indicators of social control at the city block level prior to the introduction of BP-ACT and after the implementation to gain further understanding social context of crime at places, or the role of the community in crime prevention.

Supporting Files:

- Baseline survey form (PDF)
- Follow-up survey form (PDF)