

Interactive methods for collecting public comment and opinion

Below are a selection of interactive and engaging methods that can be used to collect public comment and opinion or evaluate an activity. Before deciding on an approach, ensure you have a clear aim and a specific audience in mind. This will make the decision easier. If you are unsure about this, our planning resource will help you. Also see our resource on evaluating an engagement activity for further guidance on this.

Closed questions

Closed questions are ones in which you provide participants with various options to choose from or to which there are limited answers.

Example questions:

- Are driverless cars a good idea? (Yes/No)
- How many days per week do you consume alcohol?

Advantages:

- Often easier and quicker for people to answer.
- Answers are easier to compare and analyse.
- Response choices can clarify the question's meaning for participants.
- People may be more likely to answer about sensitive topics.
- Less articulate or less literate participants are not at a disadvantage.

Disadvantages:

- They can evoke ideas that the respondent would not otherwise have.
- Respondents with no opinion or no prior knowledge may not answer.
- Misinterpretation of a question can go unnoticed.
- People can be frustrated because their desired answer is not a choice.
- Giving an unintended answer is possible.
- They may force people to give simplistic responses to complex issues.

Be aware of group norming.

Group norming is where people follow the lead of early respondents. One way to avoid this is by hiding people's answers.

Paper ballot

You can list options on a piece of paper for people to vote on. It's anonymous and so may be a good option for contentious topics or questions of a personal nature.

Counters

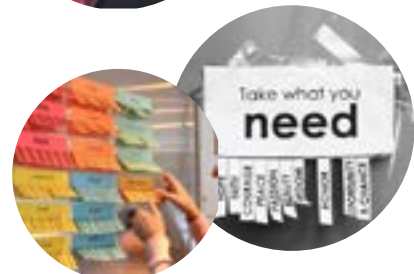
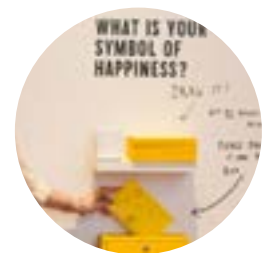
Counters can be used to cast votes in different ways for example in jars or perspex boxes. Alternatively you can use opaque receptacles to hide participants' answers.

Taking tabs

Multiple choice questions can be asked where visitors take a tab with the answer on. The number of missing tabs can be counted to calculate responses. You can also add contact details to these tabs to promote re-engagement.

Stickers

Stickers can be placed in answer to a yes / no question or can be used to collect responses on a scale, which provides easily interpretable data. Or visitors can take different stickers in answer to a question.



Open questions

These are questions that cannot be answered with a static response.

Example questions:

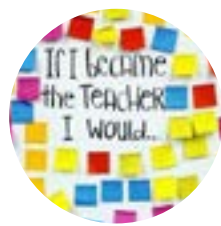
- What effect do you feel driverless cars would have on society?
- How would you describe your relationship with alcohol?

Advantages:

- They allow an unlimited number of possible answers.
- They enable respondents to answer in detail and qualify and clarify responses.
- Unanticipated conclusions can be discovered.
- They inspire creativity and self-expression.
- They reveal a respondent's logic, thinking process, and frame of reference.
- Because there is often no right or wrong answer, respondents may feel more comfortable answering.

Disadvantages:

- You may get varying degrees of detail in responses.
- Answers may be difficult to compare or analyse.
- People who are articulate and highly literate have an advantage.
- Questions may be too general for some respondents who then lose direction.
- They take more time, thought and effort to answer.
- Some people can be intimidated by these questions.



Post-it notes

Different colour post-its can be used to create categories and add colour. Post its can be stuck on 3D objects as well as walls. Notes can then be collected in and evaluated by categorising responses.



Graffiti wall

Graffiti walls allow more space for participants to express themselves and their views. They allow audiences to be creative, by drawing and writing with different coloured pens. Prompts on the wall will help to produce useful comments for evaluation.



Tags

Tags can be used for people to write their comments on - these can then be hung on a tree or other structure or on string like bunting. You can take this one step further by incorporating a scale into your string (e.g. agree to disagree).

Make it eye-catching.

Top tip

Take a photo of the responses you received before packing them away in case the original gets lost.

Going digital

There are a range of online and digital tools available that allow you to gather public comment and opinion either before, during or after your engagement activity. Going digital can make it easier to assess the responses and is often more environmentally friendly!

Buttons

We all love to hit those smiley green faces in the airport if we've breezed through security. Why not use them to get a feel for public opinion on your research - you could be asking, "How do you feel about vaccines?" for example.

Social Media

Most common social media channels have a feature that allows you to poll your audience. You can also easily display the live results on a screen. Want to try an open question? You can do that via social media too. Simply ask people to comment their response on a post or encourage them to tweet with a specific hashtag.

Slido

Slido is an online platform that allows you to ask your audiences questions and run polls.

Top tips

Tailor your method to your audience. For example, if you are working with young children, consider asking them to draw their response rather than write it down - they could draw an emoji for example. If you think your audience are active on social media, consider using this.

Consider capturing a before and after. This can be a valuable evaluation tool to determine whether your engagement activity had an impact on your audiences' perception of your work.