

10 Tips for Neighborhood Surveys

1. The most important tip: Determine what you want to learn from your survey and how you will use that information. Document this and get agreement from others, before writing questions.
2. For annual or biennial surveys, include a mix of 'benchmark' questions that you ask every survey and one-time questions about current issues. The benchmark questions track opinion change over time.
3. Ask demographic questions. Demographics help you understand the make-up of your neighborhood. It can be very helpful to sort the answers to questions by demographic groups (e.g. new residents vs. established). Useful demographics include: time in neighborhood, age, family status, renter/homeowner, neighborhood association membership status, street or section of neighborhood, income. Make the demographic questions optional.
4. If at all possible, use an online survey tool with basic analytics. However, be wary of the 'canned' neighborhood surveys available on the online survey sites, as the questions are often too generic to provide useful data. Your website may offer survey functions, but most do not have analytic tools.
5. For most Buckhead neighborhoods, 90% + participation is needed to be statistically representative of the entire neighborhood. However, if you conduct regular surveys and demographics are similar each time, you are hearing from the interested residents.
6. Provide write-in comment opportunities. However, unless there is a theme in the write-in comments, use them as color commentary, but use the survey statistical data for planning. Comments are one person's opinion.
7. Keep the survey as short as possible—5 minutes or less. Delete any question that will not provide results that will be used. Intersperse longer, more involved questions with short, easy-to-answer questions, to keep survey takers interested. **HAVE SEVERAL PEOPLE TEST YOUR SURVEY BEFORE YOU SEND IT.**
8. In the introduction, explain briefly how the survey results will be used and if possible, remind the survey taker how results have been used in the past. In the survey conclusion, tell survey takers when and how they will get the survey results.
9. For an annual survey, allow 10-21 days for the survey period. Avoid holidays and generally, avoid the summer months. Send out reminders every 3-4 days. Yard signs can be helpful. If your neighborhood board wants to use annual survey information for planning the next year, here's a schedule that works well: August—develop survey. Last two weeks of September—survey open. October--analyze survey results. November/December—communicate results, use in planning.
10. Be sure to use the survey results for neighborhood decision-making and priority-setting. Then, tell residents that "In the survey, you said....We listened and that's why we are doing...." Also, include an article in your neighborhood newsletter or website with the results.