

## Trustee Tip June 2017

### Surveying Your Community

Gathering feedback from your community is an important step in planning your library's services, programming, and development. Surveying patrons and community members allows libraries to seek honest, meaningful opinions without the pressure of face-to-face discussion. Survey data and comments can be used to support requests your library makes to local government, community partners, grantmaking organizations, or other stakeholders.

#### **What is the purpose or goal of your survey?**

Defining the survey's scope will help your library to gather the most valuable information in as few questions as possible. Having a precise, narrow scope and indicating the number of questions can also encourage participants to complete the survey. Common purposes for library surveys may include:

- Assessing programming, materials or facilities needs of population(s) served by the library
- Gauging patron satisfaction with library services or facilities
- Determining why people aren't using library services and/or facilities
- Collecting demographic information for long-range or other planning purposes

#### **Whom should you survey?**

Your library may sometimes seek responses from the entire community, such as during a strategic planning phase. At other times, you may want to target a specific population, such as patrons who use public access computers or caregivers who attend children's storytimes. Keep in mind that surveys are also marketing opportunities; when respondents answer the question "Have you taken GED® practice tests through the LearningExpress Library database?" they discover that the library offers this service.

#### **How will you reach the people you want to survey?**

Online surveys are common for good reasons—they can easily be posted on websites & social media or emailed to patrons, and the results tally immediately. Paper surveys are an effective way to reach people who don't visit the library or have internet access at home. Consider partnering with community organizations such as municipal government agencies, which might include your survey in their mailings, or local stores that may let you collect responses near their entrance. Creating prize drawings or other incentives can boost participation.

#### **What will you do with the survey results?**

The survey results can benefit your library in several ways:

- Creating benchmarks – The results are a snapshot of patron behavior or attitudes, and comparing them to previous years can indicate how well the library is achieving its mission.
- Support for decision-making – If the results indicate the need to change library services, programming, or spaces, the library can create buy-in with patrons, staff, and the wider community by having objective information to back up decisions.
- Telling the library's story – Data or anecdotes collected through the survey can help the library to craft narratives about why its services matter to the community.

***This tip is not intended to serve as legal advice. If you feel you need legal advice, please consult an attorney.***