



Chapter Member Survey Tools and Best Practices

ONS Chapters are in a unique position to shape the member experience for the over 35,000 individuals that call ONS their professional home. With some members finding national events too expensive or time-consuming, they look to their local chapters for engagement opportunities and professional development. Chapters also rely on its engaged members to keep the chapter alive and thriving. Because of these factors, it is imperative that chapter leadership send out member needs assessments and chapter satisfaction surveys to help guide its program planning and get a pulse on how the chapter is performing in the eyes of its members.

Types of Questions to Ask

The two main types of survey questions are closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions are typically Likert rating scale choices (i.e. scale of 1 to 5), multiple choice options (usually lettered like, A, B, C, or D), or yes/no options. Open-ended questions provide the respondent with the option of providing personal comments, usually in a text box. The best surveys use mostly closed-ended questions, with perhaps one or two open-ended questions max. An ideal place to list an open-ended question would be at the end of your survey, such as asking the respondent for an overall opinion.

It's important to ensure each question is stated in a neutral way as to not 'lead' or influence the respondent's answer. For example, try to avoid stating questions like, 'Our Program Committee does an amazing job every year with lining up the chapter's programs. How would you rate the chapter's programs for this year?' A more neutral way to word this would be 'Using the scale below, please rate the chapter's programs for the year.'

Using different style closed-ended questions helps to keep the respondent interested in your survey. Consider combining different styles of questions that feature a Likert scale answers, multiple choice answers, and yes/no answers.

Types of Answers to Offer

Just as important as the types of questions to ask is the importance of deciding on the survey questions' answer options. This is particularly true with Likert scale and multiple-choice options. Be sure your answer options cover the full scale, from 1 to 5, from positive to negative, or from excellent to poor. This shows your chapter members you're sincere and honest about getting their true opinions of the chapter's programs and services.

Other Tips on Types of Questions

Each question should be limited to just one topic or issue. For example, you wouldn't want to ask, 'Which day of the week do you prefer for meetings and which location?' These are two different topics and should be separated into two independent survey questions. Try to keep all your questions different from each other, each with its own topic or issue.

How Many Survey Questions Should You Ask?

The simple answer is the fewer the questions, the better your response rate will be. If your survey is going to be more than 7 or 8 questions, consider offering an incentive for completing the survey such as a gift card or a random drawing/raffle prize. It's a good idea to tell the respondents your survey is short and easy to complete, plus stress the importance of why your chapter needs and wants their input.

Consider Different Types of Surveys

Before you and your board draft a survey, ask yourself what are you hoping to find out, plus what important program or service areas does the board need to immediately address versus other things that can wait. Depending on the amount of feedback and input the board wants to gain, consider using short-and-sweet survey methods throughout the year instead of one, larger full-membership survey. Consider very short (2 or 3 questions) surveys using 3"x5" cards and placing them at each dinner table at your meetings. Each month, you can change the questions so over the course of a year, you'd have a variety of input from the members attending your meetings. Also consider having just one 'Question of the Month' that can be accessed and answered on your chapter's virtual community site/web site, or in your email communications to your members. If you do a different question each month, there's your 12 questions for the year. There are a variety of creative ways to ask your members for input, so don't limit yourself to just the standard email survey – think outside the (survey) box!

Other possible survey types and tools:

- *SurveyMonkey or other online survey platform.* An online survey platform allows the chapter to design a more sophisticated survey and easily collect and analyze results.
- *Paper surveys with 2-3 questions at chapter meetings.* Sometimes the chapter needs to collect a few pieces of feedback and a full survey is not necessary. During a chapter meeting, distribute a short, 2-3 question survey on paper for members to complete before leaving.
- *Poll or survey through Zoom.* If your chapter programs are broadcast using Zoom, you can utilize their polling feature throughout your meeting. Zoom also allows for a survey to be distributed electronically following your meeting or program.

Survey Response Rates

Yes, there is a science to survey methodology when it comes to response rates. Even if you're not familiar with survey science, you've probably heard of response rates having a 'margin of error'. The smaller your survey response rate means the margin of error is going to be larger. This then factors into what's called the level of confidence of the survey. For example, if your chapter has 200 members and only two members respond to your survey (a 1% response rate), how valid are those two surveys? Not very. Obviously, the larger your response rate, the more accurate the survey input and data will be.

There are several barriers that may contribute to a low response rate.

- *ISP firewalls and spam filters can be a roadblock.* For a link to be single use only, an email is generated directly from the survey platform, which increases the likelihood of the email being caught in spam filters, especially for those members with institutional email addresses.
- *No incentive given.* ONS members, and the general population, are over surveyed. Incentives help to increase participation.
- *Timing.* To ensure optimal participation, surveys should be timely and not request input for experiences that took place too much in the past.
- *Most members are satisfied with their chapter experience.* The assumption could be made that most members are satisfied with their chapter experience. It is commonly accepted that feedback is not provided unless the person has a negative experience.

Tips to increase response rates

- *Generate a universal survey link that can be posted to your ONS Chapter Community page.* This will ensure that the survey link is accessible to all chapter members instead of relying on an email being able to pass through ISP firewalls or spam filters.
- *Provide an incentive to complete the survey.* Consider offering a chance to win a gift card or free ONS membership for completing the survey.
- *Be strategic in the timing of survey delivery.* It is important to fully understand your expectations from the survey and send it at the best time to gather that information. For example, if your chapter is interested in collecting the satisfaction of your chapter members for the previous calendar year, it is best to get the survey in your members hands soon after the end of the year before you move into a new program year.
- *Consider the day of the week.* Be sure to send your surveys out during the middle of the week (not on Fridays, Mondays, or weekends) to help ensure a larger response rate.
- *Announce the chapter's survey initiative* at upcoming chapter dinner meetings and events, plus promote the upcoming survey in your newsletters and virtual communities.

Final Notes

- Be mindful of open-ended questions and your members' comments listed in the returned surveys. Often, disgruntled members may use the comments section to unload a complaint about a chapter program, service, or maybe even another member. It's important to be respectful of members' opinions but also of members' privacy. When designing your chapter survey, consider providing a place where the respondent can list their name and email, should they want a response from the board. Again, this should be optional and not required.
- Consider adding an optional section where the respondent can volunteer to help the chapter. In addition to asking for their name and contact info, provide a list of opportunities for which a member can volunteer. And don't forget to follow up with volunteers right away!