



Delphi surveys

The Delphi survey is named after the oracle at Delphi, a city of ancient Greece. The oracle would be asked difficult questions about the future and would then provide advice about likely happenings and how to proceed. In the present day version, experts in a particular field act as 'oracles'. Their views on well-designed subjects are requested and analysed by a surveyor. This is done by a short questionnaire, often anonymously in written form, and usually with the experts remaining in their own surroundings. Example questions might include: 'What are the issues of concern to the conservation community with regard to my woodland, and why?' or 'How do you recommend improving the local economy through activities in the woodland?' After a set of answers have been returned by the experts, the surveyor compiles them and circulates them all back to each expert, who then comments on the answers from others and provides further suggestions. In this way, after several repetitions of the process, certain issues may be highlighted as important, and the surveyor has an idea of which topics have found agreement among the experts and which ones have generated controversy. The results can be used to generate further discussion at committee or different forms of meetings.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Expertise in designing questionnaires is necessary.
- Good writing skills are helpful in reformulating and summarising responses.
- No statistical analysis is necessary.

Equipment

- Writing and printing facilities are required to produce the questionnaires and process the information reached in the survey.

Time

- Requires several weeks to months, depending mostly on how quickly experts can return answers, and how many repetitions are desired.
- Time can be shortened by doing face-to-face interviews rather than circulating questions by mail.

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING:

INVOLVING: ★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★

Strengths

- Expertise from a variety of sources can be combined to provide an overview of the situation at comparatively low cost.
- The survey is designed to get experts to exchange ideas, and generate collected wisdom that should help to ensure that no important issues are forgotten.
- Anonymity reduces the risk of confrontations.

Weaknesses

- Validity of opinions of the 'oracles' varies with who they are, so a crucial element is the correct selection of experts.
- Relatively long-term commitment is required from the experts.
- A very limited number of participants are included.

Useful sources of information

Books

- Participatory approach to natural resource management: a guide book. T. Loikkanen (1999). Forest and Park Service, Finland.

Web

- PPPM 613 Planning Analysis by R. G. Parker:
darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rgp/PPPM613/class10summary.htm
- Public involvement techniques for transportation decision-making by United States Department of Transportation: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/smlgroup.htm

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox