

# Questionnaires, Focus Groups and Interviews



## Why do research?

Within your role in Scouting you may find that you need to undertake research for example before decision making, in order to better understand an issue, in creating a development plan or when proposing / implementing changes.

This fact sheet aims to explain the differences between the different types information / data, describe various methods of research and show you where you can get further help.

## Information and Data

Data can be divided into two main types:

Primary data – which is collected for a specific purpose

Secondary data – information that is already collected and available

The benefit of primary data is that it is collected to answer your own particular questions. Secondary data has the advantage of being available immediately, is often cheap and easy to obtain but the disadvantage is that it may not meet all your needs. Never-the-less, it is important to discover whether

## So how does this help with research?

Firstly it is important not overlook existing information. Your Group, District, County/Area or team will have many sources of secondary data that has already been generated. Examples of this include census details, reports from Groups or Districts and development plans. Although this information may not provide the answers to all your questions, it is likely to be a good starting point for primary research.

## Research Methods

There are several ways to collect primary data and this fact sheet considers:

Questionnaires or surveys

Depth interviews/Group discussions

Observations

## Questionnaires or surveys

When planning a survey to collect information you need to consider:

- **How you are to communicate whether it be by mail, telephone or personal survey**

Various factors need to be taken into account when deciding what method to use. For example, you need to consider the complexity of the questions you want to ask, the amount of information you want to collect and the cost. If your questions are very complex then a personal survey may be appropriate, if you are looking for a lower cost option then mail or telephone surveys may be more appropriate.

- **Questionnaire Design**

You need to take into account what information is required, from whom you need it, what will be the best method of communication, the questions you need to ask, the type of questions used (open, closed etc), and a logical sequence for the questions.

Constructing a questionnaire is not always easy – it can take several goes at setting a question that generates the type of information you need. It is useful to pilot the questionnaire to identify these problems before rolling out the full-scale version.

- **Who you will survey**

You need to decide whom you will survey – will it be everybody or will you use a sample?

By using a sample, you take a small number of people or items and draw from them conclusions about the whole population. For example if you wanted to survey Cub Scouts about what activities to put on at the next County/Area Cub day you could ask every Cub Scout or ask a sample of say 25% of them. If you sample you need to carefully consider how you choose your sample. If you only ask Cubs Scouts from the two packs at 1<sup>st</sup> Anytown Group or only those in the County/Area aged 8, then the sample would be *biased* and probably tell you little about what the rest of the Cub Scouts in the county wanted for activities.

## **Depth interviews / Group Discussions**

Sharpe, JA & Howard, K "The Management of a Student Research Project" (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

These involve a researcher undertaking a face to face depth interview with an individual or facilitates a group discussion of around 2-25 people.

When interviewing an individual the interviewer will have a list of subjects to discuss rather than a structured questionnaire and can probe and create questions to fully explore a topic.

In a group discussion, the interviewer is responsible for leading the discussion and exploring interesting comments. The advantage of this method is that as the group interacts fresh information and ideas are generated. It is usual to record these interviews.

In deciding to hold a depth interview or discussion you need to consider what you are trying to achieve, where it is to be held, who would be an appropriate interviewer/facilitator, who will be interviewed etc. You may find that the information you gather in this form of research will need to be followed up and checked by other forms of research.

## **Observation**

You can also gather information from directly observing behaviours, activities and by listening to situations. For example in deciding to purchase new tents for the District if one of your criteria is that they must be easy to put up you might decide to observe young people putting up a variety of tent types.

## **Summary**

Before undertaking any research you need to identify what information you are looking for and check whether it already exists by using various sources of existing data. When you need to undertake primary research you need to choose a method appropriate to the information you need.

### **Further information you may find useful:**

*Facilitating* fact sheet (FS310601)

*Approaching Tasks & Problems – Diagrams* factsheet (FS310600)

(Both available from the Scout Information Centre  
0845 300 1818)

Text books on Management or Research from your local library

## **References**

Open University MBA Course text B800 "Marketing Analysis"