Internet surveys

Internet surveys are usually web-based response polls. On-line discussion rooms or chat rooms can also be used to explore the public's opinions on and attitudes towards particular issues. They offer an opportunity to gather information from the broad public and to find out what aspects and issues are important concerning the use and planning of a forest or woodland area. When setting up an Internet site the format should be designed carefully so that information input can controlled by the manager. For instance, chat rooms and discussion rooms can easily generate excessive or inappropriate information. Also see Websites toolsheet.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Good computer design skills and knowledge of web programming are essential.
- Depending on the design of the survey, analysis of responses may require statistical skills.

Equipment

- Standard computer facilities and servers to provide access for users are needed.

Time

- Careful design of a survey usually requires an extended time period.
- Considerable time may be required to analyse all the responses.

Useful sources of information

Books

- Making better decisions: report of an IPPR symposium on citizens' juries and other methods of public involvement. C. Delap (1998). Institute for Public Policy Research, London.

Web

- Downloadable survey software: www.statpac.com
- The International Association for Public Participation: www.iap2.org
- Making the Net Work: www.makingthenetwork.org/index.htm
- Partnerships Online: www.partnerships.org.uk
- Tips for on-line discussion list: www.e-democracy.org

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★

INVOLVING:

PARTNERSHIP:

Strengths

- Internet surveys provide an opportunity to gain information from people who are not likely to attend group meetings.
- Polls can potentially reach a large number of people in a short time.
- Input received is from a better cross-section of public compared to mailing lists.
- Response rate is usually higher than in other forms of communication.

Weaknesses

- Results can be easily biased.
- The survey only involves those with access to the Internet.
- It is difficult to assess whether the survey results are representative.
- The analysis phase may require a lot of resources.
- It may be impossible to control the geographic reach of the poll.
- Responses can be easily manipulated if the poll is not rigorously operated.

Training

- The Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research runs courses on surveys:
www.ccsr.ac.uk

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

Involving People in Forestry Toolbox