

## **Tool #32: Community Listening Survey**

A survey is a systematic way of gathering information about the neighborhood that also opens doors for dialogue. The most important skill in an effective survey ministry is to be a good listener. Surveys are best conducted door-to-door by pairs of church members. This creates opportunities for your congregation to develop personal relationships with residents in the process. If most church members are not from your community of ministry, it is a good idea to pair a church member with a local resident who knows the people in the community.

Note that this survey asks people to describe what they like about the community, not only the problems. It also asks people what interests and gifts they might have to share with others. Through this conversation, your church may discover community leaders and ministry partners. These questions can also be a step toward bringing people together to discern a community vision – "a process through which any community can develop a picture or series of pictures for its future" (Jay Van Groningen, *Communities First*).

It may help to practice giving the survey to one another until you are comfortable asking the questions, wording them in a way that feels natural to your context. Do not ask to come in to people's homes. Many people are, rightfully, uncomfortable talking with strangers let alone inviting them into their home. If you encounter someone who is reluctant to participate, end the survey early and graciously rather than prolong an unwelcome intrusion on their time. It is more important to make a positive connection with residents than to comply with the survey format.

Although the primary purpose of the survey is not evangelistic, you can be sensitive to the spiritual and personal needs of the people you contact. If people have immediate needs, you can ask how the church might be able to help. If you offer prayer or aid, however, be sure that you follow up and keep your promises! Enlist volunteers to pray for the needs revealed by the survey.

*DO* wear a name badge or give the person surveyed a contact card to identify the members of your survey team. However, *DON'T* convey the impression that the ulterior purpose of the survey is to recruit people to your church (because it's not!). If you want to lay the foundation for future contacts, one non-intrusive option is to coordinate the timing of the survey with a special event — like a church barbeque or a concert — and invite the people you survey to participate. Later, follow up with a thank-you note to residents who completed the survey to show your appreciation for their time.

On the next page is a sample survey. The questions are open-ended, with space for survey-takers to write in people's responses. You can adapt or add questions as appropriate. For example, you can list several possible initiatives that are being considered by the church and ask people for feedback: "Our church is considering getting involved by ..... in this neighborhood. Do you have any suggestions for how you'd like to see us do this?" *Warning:* Only ask this sort of question if your church is, in fact, on track to develop a community ministry. Otherwise, you risk damaging your reputation in the community by generating false expectations.

After gathering sufficient surveys, compile a report of the major themes that were expressed, which you can share with church and community leaders. The tools, "Community Asset Inventory" (#34) and "Community Needs, Assets and Dreams" (#40) provide tools for summarizing key information. In particular, take note of people who indicate they would like you to follow up with them about working together to benefit the community (see the last question on the survey).

## Community Survey

*Hello, my name is ..... and I'm with ..... church. We are conducting a survey of residents to help us learn more about this community. The information will be used by our church to help us plan how we can be involved in positive ways with the neighborhood.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time lived in this community: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you like best about this community? What makes this a good place to live?

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2. What are one or two changes you'd like to see that could make life better in this community?

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3. Do you have any ideas about ways a caring church or community group could make a difference in this neighborhood?

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4. Can you share a story about a time when people in this neighborhood helped one another out? Or about an organization that is having a positive impact on the neighborhood?

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5. Do you or your family participate in any local clubs, groups, or organizations? *(for example: sports league, school booster club, church, Boy/Girl Scouts)*

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6. Is there any way we as a church can specifically pray for you?

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7. Would you like us to be in touch with you about working together to benefit the community?

No  Yes *If Yes:* Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for sharing your time and opinions!*