Surveying Business Owners

A business owner survey is an important means to engage the business community in the market analysis process. It invites business owners to share their perspectives regarding the current and future economic health of a downtown or other business district. A survey also yields essential information on individual business needs and opportunities--information that can be used to support district-wide retention and expansion initiatives. Finally, a survey provides a vehicle for the business community to share new ideas, which creates synergy and vitality. This also lays the foundation for launching other market analysis initiatives with business owners, who are an important stakeholder group.

Conducting Survey Research – An Overview

Surveys are conducted to obtain data that can be used to assess trends and conditions, advance understanding, test theories, develop policy recommendations or business strategies, and much more. Surveys can be conducted by questionnaire (in writing) or by interview (by phone or in person.

One example of a survey is the nationwide poll conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau every 10 years. The census is unusual in that it seeks to query every member of its population base, i.e., every resident of the country.

More commonly, surveys rely on the responses of a sample population to gauge the feelings of a larger population. Two common examples are surveys to assess public opinion (mostly used by the media and elected officials or government) and surveys to assess consumer preferences and interests (mostly used by businesses and marketing firms hired by businesses). In our context, surveys are a way to assess business owner needs that goes beyond the information collected when creating a building and business inventory.

As in all science, survey measurement is not error free. Procedures used to conduct a survey have major effects on outcomes. Therefore, your goal as an analyst is to choose the most appropriate survey procedures that, when applied, will reduce error and maximize the likelihood to accurately describe what is being measured.

A community-based survey effort has five key components: **Sampling, Question Design, Mode of Data Collection, Interpreting Data, and Communicating Results.** Following best practices in each component will enable a community to make more informed decisions.

In this section we will both provide textbook style definitions of survey procedures, then explain how they work for community leaders seeking to assess their business environment. We will also discuss each procedure in the context of solving the example questions presented below.

> *Anytown Example*
> The leaders of "Anytown" are interested in improving the retail mix in their central business district by attracting new businesses in sectors they currently do not have. They ask you to identify the factors that make doing business in Anytown attractive. Consequently, you put together a survey research program that seeks to understand this research question. You envision surveying a sample of small business owners to obtain their opinion on why they operate their businesses in Anytown. Following the five key components, here's how a survey research program can be implemented in Anytown.

Sampling

Sampling consists of selecting a small portion of a population as representative of the whole population. It is this sample that you would actually survey. When sampling, you need to give all members of the population the same chance of being selected. **Note**: For small city downtowns (cities under 25,000), we advise that you attempt to contact ALL businesses and set a goal of achieving a 100-percent response rate.

> *Anytown Illustration:*
> Considering your budget, you decide to survey a sample of 200 small business owners by written questionnaire. Since you do not want your entire sample to come from the same business sector and you want to give all businesses an equal chance of being chosen, you decide to randomly pick 20 small businesses from the 10 business sectors operating in Anytown's central business district. You first sort all businesses by business sectors, then randomly pick 20 businesses from each of the 10 business sectors. After selection, you end up with a sample of 200 small businesses that reflect the different businesses operating in Anytown's central business district.

Question Design

Survey questions must be carefully worded, double-checked by a fresh pair of eyes, and pretested to insure they are understood the way you intend them to be. A poorly worded question will greatly increase the chance of response error and limit the usefulness of the survey data you collect. Simply put, designing good survey questions involves selecting those needed to meet the research objectives, testing them to make sure they can be asked and answered as planned, then formatting them to make it easy for interviewers to ask them and for respondents to answer them.

> *Anytown Illustration:*
> Now that you have selected your sample, you are ready to design the survey questionnaire itself. Since this is your first time designing a survey questionnaire and you do not want to hire a professional survey designer for budgetary reasons, you decide to search the web and ask around about communities that pursued a survey research program similar to the one you are commissioned to do. You found that Othertown ran a similar survey research program and is willing to share the questionnaire with you. Since Othertown has different amenities, you restructure its questionnaire to reflect both the objectives of your research agenda and the different business environment of your community.
>
> For a more comprehensive approach to data collection, you include both quantitative (forced-choice questions, such as yes or no, or true or false) and qualitative questions (open-ended questions that give respondents a chance to write their thoughts and feelings). After clearing the survey instrument of any possible confusion and receiving feedback from all your collaborators, you decide to test it by sending it to 10 small business owners of Anytown who you know personally and who are not part of your sample. After receiving honest feedback from your 10 "testers" and making any necessary changes, you are ready to send out the survey to your sample.

Mode of Data Collection

A survey can be administered by mail, telephone, web, or face to face—either one by one or in a focus group. Each of these survey alternatives has both benefits and shortcomings. The analyst must use good judgment to identify the survey method or methods based on project objectives, sensitivity of questions, and budget.

> *Anytown Illustration:*
> After considering the pros and cons of the various modes of data collection, you decide to conduct a mail survey. A week before mailing the actual questionnaire, you send a letter to your sample explaining the survey and its importance to the betterment of Anytown. Since their participation is voluntary, you include an incentive to encourage them to complete and return the questionnaire promptly.
>
> You later include the same letter when you mail the actual survey one week or so later and emphasize the importance of returning the survey by the deadline. The deadline you provide is approximately two weeks before the deadline you set for yourself to start analyzing the data. After the deadline passes, you send another reminder to those businesses that have yet to respond and you include another questionnaire just in case they misplaced the previous one. After all the data has been collected, coding may be necessary for use in computer software programs and to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Coding may also enable easier transfer of data to other users.

Interpreting Data

Once you deem the dataset complete, you can begin using it to address the research questions previously identified. You may want to calculate the average, mean, median, or variance. Or you may want to estimate the association between and among key variables of interest. Such analyses can be done using software such as Microsoft Excel, SPSS, Stata, SAS, R, and others.

> *Anytown Illustration:*
> Once you have collected data from your central business district businesses, you can tally and rank factors that respondents said made doing business exceptional in Anytown. Specifically, you tally and rank them by business sector to see why the rankings might differ by sector so you can use this information to propose sector-specific business development priorities.
>
> Depending on how sophisticated you want to be in interpreting data, you may run regression analysis to estimate, for example, the relationships between the various determinants of better business environment and retail sales. You may find that the statistical results reflect the qualitative responses of your sample and you are now ready to write your report.

Communicating Results

You can tailor communication of the results of your survey to different audiences. For example, a short news release with key information should be sent to the local media outlets.   more comprehensive report should be made available to survey respondents. And you may consider a policy brief for an audience concerned with that type of interpretation.   Consider the audience as well when including charts and tables explaining the results and their implications.

Closing Thoughts

Like all social science research, you must administer your survey in ways designed to avoid risks to the respondents, participants, and interviewers. Federally-funded research must meet certain criteria for protection of human subjects. It's a good idea to follow these criteria even if your research project is not federally funded.

Finally, findings from your business survey should be integrated with other elements of your market analysis. The results of your survey of business owners help shape other components of your research.   For example, the business owners' survey might identify what additional market information should be collected or what business or real estate opportunities should be analyzed in more detail.

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Types of Business Owner Surveys

There are five basic ways to survey business owners: **1) written surveys, 2) telephone surveys, 3) web-based surveys, 4) business visitations, and 5) focus groups.** Other methods, including "secret shopper" surveys, can also yield useful information.

Written Surveys

Written surveys (questionnaires) involve printing and distributing questions to business owners. Use a written survey if you want to collect comprehensive business information. You   must keep written surveys short, or if you need to ask a lot of questions, format and organize them in such a way that compel business owners to complete it.

It is best to hand deliver written surveys to ensure the survey receives more immediate attention and to personally explain the survey. Hand delivery is possible for downtown business owner surveys due to the relatively small number of surveys involved and the ability to walk from business to business. You should also include a brief cover letter that states how the survey will help the owner's business, provides instructions, guarantees only aggregate data will be made public, and asks for participation. Volunteers should also voice this same message at the time of delivery.

Pros:
- Can reach a large geographic area;
- People are used to completing paper-and-pencil surveys;
- Allows respondents to take the survey with them and complete it anywhere and anytime;
- Are ideal for sensitive issues; and
- Have an easy to monitor response rate

Cons:
- Can be difficult to obtain mailing lists;
- Cost of printing and mailing can be prohibitive;
- Provide no quick way to answer respondents' questions or provide clarification of wording;
- Need a motivated population to return the survey ; and
- Requires respondents who can see, read, and write.

Telephone Surveys

Telephone surveys are a technique where interviewers call business owners to ask questions. Use a telephone survey if you want to collect specific information that can be difficult to obtain in written surveys. When using volunteer interviewers, try to set up a phone bank (with multiple phone lines) where they meet as a group to make calls. For business owner telephone surveys, call during regular business hours but not at busy times. The caller should first briefly state how the survey will help the owner's business, guarantee only aggregate data will be made public,

estimate how long the survey will take, and ask for participation. The best telephone surveys use "quality" interviewers instructed to use similar techniques, speak clearly, ask a few simple questions and do not sway the opinion of the business owner.

Pros:
- Can be initiated rapidly;
- Requires a limited initial investment; and
- Have an easy to monitor response rate.

Cons:
- Are labor intensive;
- Can have a low response rate;
- Are limited to selected households with listed numbers;
- Access to cell phone numbers may be difficult; and
- Recipients may consider calls a nuisance.

Web-Based Surveys

Web-based (online) surveys involve programming and emailing a web based set of questions to business owners. This method can include many of the same questions and formats as written and telephone surveys. Depending on the type of data needed, online surveys can be specific or comprehensive in nature.

These surveys are distributed via a hyperlinked URL embedded in an email and can be sent by one person with one mouse click. No volunteers are needed to distribute or administer the survey. The email that contains the survey link should also include a statement explaining the purpose of the survey, provide instructions, and guarantee the anonymity of private information. Online surveys are active and available 24 hours a day, typically for a week or two. You should also include the date and time that a survey is scheduled to close so respondents can complete the survey before the deadline.

Pros:
- Can be distributed worldwide, if necessary, at low cost;
- Low distribution costs;
- Order of questions can be preprogrammed;
- Can include links that provide additional explanation;
- Responses are automatically entered in a database and can be easily analyzed or exported;
- Allows easy tracking of user response rate;
- Allows automatic reminders, thank yous, spell checks, and math calculations;
- Allows easy pilot testing;
- Can show respondents a "progress bar" to indicate the percentage completed; and
- Can be programmed to enforce mandatory response to questions.

Cons:
- Respondents must have ready access to the internet and be "computer literate," i.e., must be able to use a browser, a mouse and/or keyboard; and

- Computer system can go down or be unreliable.

Business Visitations

Business visitations are a technique in which two-member teams visit all downtown business owners and ask questions. Use business visitations if you want to collect detailed business information and perspectives; visitations also leave the owner feeling the most appreciated. Visitation teams should include a mix of service and retail members who are non-competitors of the business visited. The team should call ahead to set up an appointment, explain how the visit will help the owner's business, estimate how long the visit should last, and ask for participation. Teams must ensure the confidentiality of the information obtained. During a business visitation, team members ask prepared questions and document the answers. The best business visitation programs have quality interviewers who are well trained, use similar techniques, and are skilled listeners.

Pros:
- High rate of survey completion;
- Can ask followup questions, explore answers with respondents;
- Can assist respondents with unfamiliar words or questions; and
- Yield more qualitative data.

Cons:
- Can be difficult to reach certain populations;
- Expensive and time consuming (requires many resources);
- Some respondents may feel reluctant to share personal information or beliefs;
- Need trained interviewers;
- Must find a suitable place to conduct an interview:
- Interviewer bias (verbal or non-verbal).

Focus Groups

Focus groups bring together a representative group of business owners for organized discussions to gain information about their views and experiences of owning a business downtown or in another business district. Use focus groups if you want to collect rich and deep business information. You should personally invite 7 to 11 representative business owners to a 90-minute meeting by telling them why a focus group will help their business. Hold the meeting in a comfortable room and provide refreshments. An experienced interviewer or moderator should facilitate the dialogue and new idea development. At the end, thank participants through gifts, coupons or other tokens of appreciation. For more information, see the Focus Group section of this toolbox.

Pros:
- Great for pre-testing initial ideas;
- Can generate, explore, and identify key ideas/concepts;
- Helps you better understand your population/customer base;
- Can read non-verbal feedback;

- Aids in formal survey development;
- can assist respondents with unfamiliar words or questions;
- Can ask followup and clarifying questions as they arise;
- Can explore related and unanticipated topics as they arise; and
- Good for identifying themes and capturing ideas.

Cons:
- Potential for bias due to small group size;
- Require trained interviewers or moderators;
- Moderator may influence quality of data;
- Participants may feel reluctant to share personal information or beliefs;
- Cannot necessarily generalize findings to the broad population, thus—
- Unable to make major decisions based on the information provided; and
- Must find a suitable place to conduct focus group.

Combination is Best

Most communities are best served by using a combination of survey techniques. A written survey would give you your best chance of getting comprehensive information from all businesses in the downtown or other business district under study. Adding a telephone survey would provide a quick way to obtain simple followup information from those same businesses. Employing the online method accommodates specific and comprehensive approaches and does not require the help of as many volunteers as telephone and written surveys. Adding business visitations would allow you to interact with business owners, clarify questions and expand answers. Adding focus groups would allow you to delve deeper into business owner attitudes. What may determine your choice of a technique are the complexity of the questions you want to ask and the importance of a 100 percent participation rate.

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Business Owner Survey Questions

Once you have selected a survey technique or techniques, you must determine what questions you want to ask. Because business owners will want to spend a limited amount of time on a survey, you must design yours to ask only the most important questions. Unlike typical written surveys where respondents may remain anonymous, business owners must be identified so you can give them followup assistance. This is called an "open" business owner survey. Open surveys must avoid sensitive areas, such as income and expenditures. You can also design a second, anonymous business owner survey to collect sensitive information.

Information Sought in an Open Business Owner Survey

The following are kinds of information organizations such as economic development associations, chambers of commerce and the like typically seek in an open business owner survey. Use this list as a guide to formulating your questions. You will probably think of additional questions; your goal is to gather information that is most important to your market analysis efforts.

Contact Information

Needs and Opportunities Assessment—determine:
- If they are experiencing any business challenges;
- What information or assistance they or their employees could use;
- How useful are your organization's existing products and services to their business;
- How useful would products and services proposed by your organization be to their business;
- What other business incentives or assistance have they used or plan to use;
- Their attitudes about being a business owner in your community;
- How satisfied they are with their present location;
- If they have plans to expand or reduce operations; and
- If they, or the building owner, are considering any building improvement projects.

Business and Workforce Data—determine:

- Their business or professional activity code (NAICS);
- How long they have been in operation;
- How long they have owned the business;
- Whether their business owns or rents its space;
- How many square feet are devoted to sales, production, office and storage or are unused;
- How many people they employ;
- Where their customers typically park;
- Where their employees typically park; and
- What percentage of their employees lives in the local community.

Market and Marketing Data—determine:

- Their hours of operation and their thoughts on store hours;
- Their busiest times of the week;
- Their busiest months of the year'
- How many customers/clients visit their business per week;
- Community events that increased their foot traffic or sales volume;
- Top zip codes from which their business draws customers;
- Percentage of their annual advertising budget spent on various media;
- Their target market;
- Radio stations, publications, and other media included in their annual advertising budget;
- Products and/or services that best differentiate their business from the competition;
- Their toughest competition;
- Traits that make their business more competitive;
- Their target price point;
- Downtown businesses that complement their business the most
- The biggest non-work reasons people stop downtown;
- Other businesses they would most like to see locate downtown; and
- Community assets they would like to see developed (expand existing assets or create new ones).

Information Sought in an Anonymous Business Owner Survey

The ultimate goal for an anonymous business owner survey is to calculate sales per square foot, sales per employee, and rent per square foot. These statistics are calculated and used by chains, franchises and shopping centers for business planning but are not readily available for small independent downtown businesses. By pooling and summarizing this information, you can maintain confidentiality and still tell your downtown businesses how their sales and rent compare to similar businesses. You can also tell them how their rent compares to the average rent in your downtown. What's more, you will also have generated valuable statistics for expansion and recruitment analysis, and for business planning. Use the following numbers to calculate the preceding statistics.

- Net sales;
- Annual rent;
- Gross leasable area in square feet;
- Number of full time equivalent (FTE) employees; and
- Wages.

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Administering the Business Owner Survey

The best way to ensure successful administration of any project, including a business owner survey, is to develop and follow a work plan. Work plans are a fundamental strategy employed by Main Street and downtown revitalization organizations across the United States. Below we outline tasks identified for a hypothetical business owner, written survey work plan. Many of the steps assume you are using *the Standardized Business Owner Written Survey* developed by the Wisconsin Main Street Program (see Appendix 1).

Step 1. Review Examples from Other Communities

Many communities have administered a business owner written survey and most are more than happy to share their methods and results. There is little advantage in trying to design your business owner written survey from scratch. If your community is like most, you will lack volunteers with significant survey design experience. It is easy to make costly mistakes. If a question is poorly worded, it will yield less useful or even incorrect information. If your community has administered a business owner written survey in the past, consider using some of the same questions in order to see if answers, and thus businesses, have changed over time.

For answers to be useful, questions must be unambiguous and should not lead the business owner to a particular response. Asking about existing behavior is the best way to predict future behavior. For easier analysis and interpretation, to the extent possible ask multiple choice rather than open-ended questions. Match questions on demographics with census categories so they can be compared. Even subtle differences in the wording of similar questions will prevent comparisons. This advice is not meant to discourage you from administering your own business owner written survey, but we do encourage you to be cautious when writing questions.

Step 2. Accept/Reject Standardized Questions

The *Standardized Business Owner Written Survey* (in Appendix 1) includes questions that Wisconsin Main Street Program staff consider important in a comprehensive downtown market analysis and useful for business retention, expansion and recruitment. You are free to eliminate questions that are not important to your efforts. Keep in mind that each question you use *as designed* will allow you to compare answers from with other communities that used the same question. This cross- community comparison will enhance the power of your survey. You should not modify the wording of a question without good reason. If you believe questions should be modified, please contact the Wisconsin Main Street Program so we can consider revising the standardized survey.

When reviewing standardized questions for inclusion or omission from your survey, remember that you will want to pair some with questions from your consumer survey. The paired

questions allow for comparisons between the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of business owners and their potential customers.

Step 3. Draft Customized Questions

Always customize any borrowed survey questions to fit your unique local needs. The *Standardized Business Owner Written Survey* provided includes questions you can personalize. We also provide instructions for personalization   in Appendix

Step 4. Draft Introduction

An introduction is an important part of any type of survey. For written and web-based surveys, the introduction is usually included in a cover letter. For telephone surveys, business visitations and focus groups, the introduction will be presented verbally. The introduction should explain how the survey results will help the owner's business. It should also include instructions and an estimate of the amount of time required to take it, state that only aggregate data will be made public, and ask for participation.

Step 5. Proofread and Pretest Your Survey

It is always good practice to proofread and pretest your survey, including your cover letter, before full distribution. Sometimes volunteers drafting the customized questions get too close to their work and fail to see the obvious. Have a few business owners who are active volunteers in your organization, but who have not been involved in survey design, take your business owner written survey and give you feedback. Instructions and questions that are unclear and misinterpreted will show up in a pretest and can be corrected. Use the pretest to estimate the time required to take the survey.

Step 6. Approve Final Survey

Eventually, editing must come to an end. Because distribution and collection require a significant commitment of volunteer time and energy, it is important to have the organization or committee overseeing the project formally approve the final version of your business owner written survey.

Step 7. Answer Distribution Questions

To establish your organization and community as business friendly, as well as aid in business retention, you should aim for a 100 percent response rate for your business owner written survey. You can achieve this level of response only by hand delivering surveys to every business owner and personally explaining the importance of their participation. Your resources will determine how you accomplish hand delivering the surveys. You may need to use volunteers; if so, it's a good idea to recruit them from owners of businesses or buildings and name some of them "block captains." Block captains take responsibility for distributing and collecting the surveys to others on their block. (Once recruited, you can also ask block captains to distribute other information, as needed, to businesses on their block.)

Step 8: Develop Distribution Plan

To stay on task, you must set deadlines for delivery and collection of your business owner written survey and assign specific responsibilities. We also suggest you mail a letter ahead of time announcing future delivery of the survey. In addition, we recommend announcing survey plans in your organization's newsletter and press releases. Business owners will be much more likely to participate if they understand the project and why it will help their business. Finally, it is important to train the staff or volunteers who will be delivering and collecting the survey.

Step 9. Print Survey

The number of businesses you plan to survey will affect your printing decisions. Photocopying surveys is more cost effective for low volumes, while professional printing is more cost effective for high volumes. If photocopying, make sure the quality of the copy is good. Stray marks that sometimes show up on poor copies could affect the accuracy of computerized optical mark recognition software.

Step 10. Distribute Surveys

The printed surveys from Step 9 need to be hand delivered to every business owner. Although the cover letter explains how the survey will help the owner's business, provides instructions and asks for participation, volunteers should repeat the same messages at the time of delivery. Give business owners an estimate of the amount of time required to complete the survey and when to expect a return visit for collection.

Step 11. Collect Surveys

Again, your goal is a 100 percent response rate and that can only be accomplished face to face. If a business owner has not completed his or her survey by the deadline, the individual collecting surveys should schedule a new return visit with the business owner. (Obviously, this also requires building late returns into your schedule). You could also switch techniques at this point and conduct business visitations to survey business owners slow in returning the surveys.

Step 12. Tabulate Surveys

Enter data into a spreadsheet or database program. The Wisconsin Main Street Program's *Standardized Business Owner Written Survey i*s scannable for automatic data entry.

Step 13. Verify Data and Enter Open Ended Responses

While most computerized optical mark recognition software is surprisingly accurate, there are always answers that will be unrecognized or incorrectly recorded. In addition, most programs are still unable to automatically recognize handwriting and open-ended responses. For these reasons it is necessary for someone, preferably a volunteer, to verify and correct any errors in scanned answers, as well as type hand-written open-ended answers. You will also need to transfer information to the business portion of the downtown inventory—including owner

contact information, business classification, primary products and services, date established, business hours, space use, and employment information.

Step 14. Review Raw Data

The simplest way to summarize survey results is to report the frequency of each response to each question.

Step 15: Summarize/Interpret Data

With frequencies in hand, look for patterns in the results that would be useful for your downtown business owners to know. Also, make note of "red flags" that might warn of the need for business assistance. Finally, take care to protect the confidentiality of the information collected.

Step 16. Review and Print Summary

Invest your human and financial resources in quality editing, rather than expensive printing.

Step 17. Distribute Summary

Remember to share the results of your survey with your business owners. Mail or hand delivers the summary report to them. Sharing this information is a valuable business retention activity. The report will demonstrate the importance of the time they spent filling out the survey, as well as how they might personally benefit from the results.

Step 18. Repeat

Your organization should plan to survey business owners on a regular basis, ideally every year, but at least every other year. For questions where the answer is unlikely to be different from the last time you surveyed, include owners' former answers and allow them to change it if necessary. Use the exact wording for as many questions as possible in order to see if answers, and thus businesses, have changed over time.

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Appendix 1 – Standardized Business Owner Written Survey (Wisconsin Main Street Program)

The Wisconsin Main Street Program's *Standardized Business Owner Written Survey* includes 35 questions in the following categories:

- Needs and Opportunities Assessment - Questions 1-9;
- Business and Workforce Data - Questions 10-18; and
- Market and Marketing Data - Questions 19-35.

You may download the survey in Microsoft Word (.doc) or in Portable Document Format (.pdf). Answers can be entered by hand in either version, but the Word version also allows keyboard entry.

Microsoft Word version

PDF version

Instructions for Customizing the Standardized Survey

When reviewing standardized questions for inclusion or omission, keep in mind that some of the questions in the *Standardized Business Owner Written Survey* are designed to be used together with questions from the *Standardized Consumer Mail Survey*. The paired questions allow for comparisons between the business owners' answers and those of their current or potential customers.

Overall: Insert the name of your community wherever you see "City X".

Cover Letter: Print the cover letter on your organization's letterhead. Insert the correct dates, addresses, phone numbers, names, and signatures. The cover letter was designed for Wisconsin Main Street communities, so you may need to do some rewording. The survey instructions reflect the fact that the survey was designed for scanning and automated optical mark recognition. If you are planning to manually enter data, you may adjust the instructions accordingly.

Question 1: The standardized list under this question includes typical business challenges. Answers to this question should provide ideas for future business retention efforts. So if your local study team is aware of unique local challenges, feel free to expand the list. You may also reduce the list if you know a challenge is not an issue locally.

Question 2: The standardized list under this question includes typical business training workshop topics. If your local study team has additional training ideas, feel free to expand the list.

Question 3-4: The standardized list in question 3 includes typical products and services offered by Main Street organizations to assist their downtown businesses. Use the list to customize question 3 and 4 for your community. In question 3, list up to eight of your organization's primary business assistance products and services, including any not found in the standardized list. In question 4, list up to four products and services your organization or community has seriously considered creating. Delete the extras. Also be sure to delete the instruction notations that are in italics.

Question 5: Question 5 is intended to provide feedback on the awareness and use of business assistance available to your downtown businesses through other programs. List up to four incentives your organization is most curious about and delete the rest.

Question 6: The statements in question 6 are intended to gauge attitudes that influence business behavior and to gauge perceptions about the downtown business climate. A range of possible statements is included in the standardized survey. You may want to eliminate statements that are not important to you, or add statements to address issues unique to your situation. You will have room for 16 statements.

Questions 3-6: This group of questions should occupy only one page. Prioritize the options/choices you include to stay at that length.

Question 11: Knowing the age of businesses in your downtown offers insight on where each business stands in its lifecycle, which in turn provides insight into its business assistance needs. Asking for a specific date in question 11givesyour organization an opportunity to plan special events for businesses near their anniversary dates.

Question 22: This question can be simplified if you don't expect a seasonal fluctuation in foot traffic.

Question 23: You should list all downtown events that your organization plans for the express purpose of increasing sales (retail events) or foot traffic (special events). Also include other major events taking place within the community or region that you want to evaluate for their impact on sales or foot traffic. If the number of events exceeds 12, you may want to consider only listing the most important. Choices should match question 8 from the *Standardized Consumer Mail Survey*.

Question 24: The purpose of this question is to 1) collect information that can be used to determine the primary trade area for the whole downtown, and 2) provide a gentle push to downtown businesses to collect information about the origin of their own customers (if they aren't already). Asking customers their home zip codes is the easiest way for any business to begin tracking where their existing customers live. It is also information that can easily be shared with your organization without the business fearing they are giving away valuable secrets (such as the actual customer's name or address). Furthermore, demographic data is available at the zip code level. The zip codes you list for this question should be those zip codes that your local

study team intuitively believes have the greatest potential for selection by the most businesses. While each business will draw from a unique geographic area, the goal is to determine the area that generates the majority of the customers for your downtown. Please see the Trade Area Analysis section of the toolbox for more information.

Question 26: This is a question that many downtown business owners may have trouble answering. They may not have thought about their target market, but they should. It is almost never true that a business appeals to all demographic categories equally. The answer is important to your organization because when it is combined with the answers from all other downtown businesses you will be able to describe the most typically targeted downtown customer. The choices are designed to match questions 27, 28, and 34 in the *Standardized Consumer Mail Survey* and to match the standard census demographic categories.

Question 27: For this question it is important to list specific radio and television stations, publications and other media. It is important for your organization to know specific media outlets so you can better coordinate cooperative advertising opportunities. The list will also allow you to target your downtown image advertising to those broadcast outlets and publications preferred by your downtown businesses. List the primary local radio and television stations by using both the call letters and dial number to ensure business owners recognize their options. Be careful to make your lists complete. Choices should match question 37 from the *Standardized Consumer Mail Survey*.

Questions 28-31: These questions are designed to get downtown businesses to think about their competition and what sets them apart in the eyes of their customers. Answers to these questions are more important to the business owners themselves, but may prove useful to your organization.

Question 32: Like questions 28-31, answers to this question are more important to the business owners themselves. Encouraging businesses to take the time to think about other specific downtown businesses that complement their own may help foster future cooperative advertising and promotions.

Question 34: List the businesses for which you are most interested in evaluating market potential. This is your wish list of businesses. Choices should match question 18 from the *Standardized Consumer Mail Survey*. Asking business owners this question will help identify potential complementary businesses.

Question 35: Customize the list of choices for question 35 to include community development projects planned or proposed through comprehensive planning, town meetings, or strategic/work planning. Choices should match question 20 from the *Standardized Consumer Mail Survey*.

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Appendix 2 – Sample Customized Business Owner Surveys (Ohio, Vermont, Wisconsin)

Customized and shortened versions of the Wisconsin Main Street Program's *Standardized Business Owner Written Survey* provide additional examples for your use. The sample survey instruments that follow may include some additional questions not in the Wisconsin standardized survey. They can be downloaded in Microsoft Word (.doc) and Portable Document Format (.pdf) here.

Main Street Warren, Ohio, Business Owner Survey - City population: 46,000 - User: Ohio State University Extension - Used both web-based and written survey instruments.   Download: .doc format   .pdf format

Newport, Vermont, Business Operators Survey - City population: 5,000 - User: University of Vermont-Extension - Used with a scannable written survey.   Download: .doc format   .pdf format

Downtown Madison, Wisconsin, Business Operators Survey - City population: 240,000 - User: University of Wisconsin-Extension - Used with a scannable written survey and a web-based survey instrument.   Download: .doc format   .pdf format

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Appendix 3 – Online Tools to Assist in Survey Research

A variety of reliable web-based survey instruments are now available. Some of these survey tools include Zoomerang®, SurveyMonkey®, and SurveyGold®. This appendix aims to give you a short explanation of each, as well as advantages and disadvantages.

> In no way is this appendix an endorsement of any of the products discussed. Information on these products is provided here for educational purposes only.

Zoomerang®

Zoomerang® offers three types of products; Basic, Pro, and Premium. The Basic service is free, but very limited. You can only ask a maximum of 12 questions per survey to a maximum of 100 respondents. The Pro service is reasonably priced and offers unlimited questions per survey and unlimited respondents. In addition, it includes features such as professional survey creation tools and advanced survey reporting. Finally, the Premium service costs roughly three times more than the Pro version; it offers web security services, mobile phone features, and technical support.

Creating a questionnaire using Zoomerang® appears to be quite easy. After you create an account consisting of your email address and an alphanumeric-symbol password, you have the choice of creating a new survey from scratch or using a pre-made template based on your survey objectives. Once you complete your questionnaire, Zoomerang® will send it to your targeted audience by email. After the respondents complete the survey, you can analyze the results to produce a report, then export it to the software of your choice for more rigorous analysis.

SurveyMonkey®

SurveyMonkey® offers a Pro and Unlimited service. The Pro service offers unlimited questions, a maximum of 1,000 respondents per month, and an expertly designed survey template for a very reasonable monthly fee. The Unlimited service provides unlimited questions, and allows you to survey an unlimited number of respondents for a one-time fee.

Creating a questionnaire using SurveyMonkey® requires you to first create an account. You can create either a Basic account (free but very limited), a Professional account, or Pro services. You can write and manage the questionnaire after logging into your account. You can create a survey from scratch, use a template, or use a preexisting survey. You also can add questions and pages following the directions provided on the initial page. SurveyMonkey® also give you have the option of choosing the types of questions, which range from multiple choice to descriptive text. After writing the questionnaire, SurveyMonkey® will email a link to the survey to addresses you have provided. You can check the response status, delete respondents, export data, create custom charts, create filters, and analyze the data.

SurveyGold®

SurveyGold® is software that allows you to conduct online surveys, Smartphone surveys, paper surveys, and others. The software is reasonably priced. You may buy web-based surveys after your first year of use for a nominal annual fee. SurveyGold® offers an unlimited number of surveys with no restrictions on the number of questions and respondents; it also offers discounts to non-profit organizations.

After downloading Survey Gold® software, you must design the survey in your computer—either creating a survey from scratch or using a pre-made template depending on the subject of the survey. Unlike Zoomerang® or SurveyMonkey®, you need not be online to design your survey on SurveyGold®. Once the survey is ready, you can upload it by clicking a button on your SurveyGold® web page. After uploading, respondents can be directed to the web page where they can complete and submit the questionnaire. SurveyGold® will notify you daily as new responses arrive. You can download responses to your computer where you can easily analyze them using SurveyGold® software, or you can export your data to other data analysis applications such as SPSS or Excel.

Pros and Cons

Choosing among the three web-based survey instruments depends on your program budget, its duration, and the characteristics of the organization conducting the survey program. Here are some points to consider:

Pros:
- Possible worldwide distribution;
- Negligible distribution costs; and
- Order of questions can be preprogrammed.

Cons:
- Respondents need reliable access to Internet;
- Respondents must be able to use a browser; and
- Survey can only be administered online (may not allow manual completion).

If a web-based survey tool is used, additional considerations might include:
- In-house technical expertise;
- Ability to link to many different type of media (web, email, social media, etc.);
- Ability to import pre-written questions from Microsoft Word or other word processing software.

About the Toolbox and this Section

The 2011 update of the Downtown and Business District Market Analysis toolbox is a result of a collaborative effort involving University of Minnesota Extension, Ohio State University Extension, and University of Wisconsin Extension. The updated toolbox was supported with funding from the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

The toolbox is based on and supportive of the economic restructuring principles of the National Trust Main Street Center. The Wisconsin Main Street Program (Wisconsin Department of Commerce) has been an instrumental partner in the development of this toolbox.

This section builds on work originally completed by Todd Barman and J.D. Milburn of the Wisconsin Main Street Program. This update includes new methods added by Greg Davis of Ohio State University Extension and Bill Ryan of University of Wisconsin Extension. Edited by Mary Vitcenda, University of Minnesota Extension.

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