The Fundamentals: SURVEYING PRESENT PARTICIPANTS

"The Fundamentals" is a concise overview of the important aspects of programming noncredit classes for the community. It is produced and copyrighted exclusively by the Learning Resources Network (LERN) for its subscribers and members. Programs should use "The Fundamentals" as a checklist for successful operations.

1. Market research seems like a huge and expensive undertaking, done only but experts, by market research for a program of courses for the community starts with an inexpensive survey of your present participants. This survey will yield important data.

2. Survey your present participants to find out:

- what their demographic and psychographic characteristics are, so you can find other people with the same characteristics to market to;
- what your participants like and don't like, so you can improve your programming;
- what motivates your participants, because retaining your present participants is not only the key to success for your program, it is also six times as easy as getting a new participant.

3. Write down as many questions as you would like to ask your participants. Don't limit yourselves to just sex, age, and the basics. Utilize the whole staff in this brainstorming process.

4. Take your list and whittle it down. Eliminate:

- any question for which you can get the answer somewhere else. Don't ask what course they enrolled in, where they live, and so on. You know that. You have records.
- any question that is not critical to know.
- any question for which you cannot use the information to make positive changes. For instance, don't ask if there were too few people in the class.
- any question which the reader might misunderstand or interpret in more than one way.
- any question which does not tell you what to do. "Do you want more classes on Saturdays" tells you to offer more, or fewer, classes on Saturday.

5. Now whittle down your questions even further to get only the absolutely most critical information to the most important questions you have. Your survey should be no more than two pages long, and we recommend one page maximum for best response.

6. Don't use more than two open-ended questions. Instead, ask yes-no; true-false; and multiple choice questions for best response.

7. Distribute your survey at your classes, at registration, online, or by mail. If by mail, enclose an envelope for a higher response.

The higher the response rate, the more valid and useful the results.

8. Below is an outline of the kinds of questions you might want to consider, starting with the basic questions and proceeding towards the more advanced questions. You may not be able to ask everything you want in one survey. Consider building with the basic questions, and then moving on when you have answers to those questions.

Present Participants

A. Demographics

1. Numbers 2. Ages 3. Sex 4. Residence by Zip 5. Income Level

6. Formal Education 7. Marital Status 8. Lifestyles 9. Type of Employer

B. Their Needs

1. Content 2. Format 3. Style

C. Incentives: Why they come

1. Miles Traveled 2. Tuition Cost 3. Living/Overall Costs 4. Quality Instructors 5. Social Environment

6. Equipment/Technical 7. Job Placement

D. Their Price: What they're willing to pay

E. Recognition Level

1. Name 2. Location 3. Slogan 4. Logo 5. Purpose/Definition

6. Activities 7. Participants 8. Advantage/Pros/Positives

 If you survey a non-participant, find out their level of awareness of your program: Never heard of you, have heard of you, interested, would like to, intend to, is a former participant

F. Image

1. The organization is: (examples) 2. People who go there are: (examples) 3. What I like about it are:

4. What I don't like about it are: 5. I would/would not 6. What is different about it is:

7. Rank or impression of organization regarding important program characteristics