

7. Using Surveys and Interviews to Collect Local Market Data

In addition to quantitative market profile data, surveying customers, potential customers, merchants, and employers in your commercial district can provide valuable information for defining a successful revitalization strategy. In some districts, the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood are actually quite different from the demographics of actual customers, either because many customers are coming in from outside the area or because the district is mostly serving a specific sub-group of the neighborhood's population. Directly surveying customers shopping in your district can provide information about your actual customers and what they want to see in the district. Surveying local residents about where they shop, what kinds of products they buy and how often, will yield important information about why retail leakage is occurring and what you may be able to do to capture some of that spending potential. Additionally, surveying local merchants and employers can provide useful information about the current business climate as well as perceptions about consumer demographics.

GETTING STARTED

- Survey district customers and residents in the target area.
- Interview merchants.
- Interview large local employers, if applicable.

CONSUMER SURVEYS

Consumer surveys are a great tool for collecting information about consumer attitudes towards your district, shopping preferences and values, spending power, and demographics. They help reveal when, where, why, and how often people visit your district. Some types of surveys, such as phone surveys and focus groups, can also provide a means of assessing why people may not choose to visit your district, providing clues about aspects of the district to change.

While surveys generate invaluable information, they are challenging to administer and compile. Many organizations employ consultants and/or volunteers from a local university to help them conduct an effective survey. Additionally, it may be difficult to engage a range of people in the survey, so it is advisable to offer

a small “gift” i.e. candy or a coupon as motivation to take the survey or participate in the focus group. Regardless of whether you plan to administer the survey yourself or employ others, there are several things you will want to think about before designing your survey.

Types of Consumer Surveys

- **Consumer Intercept Surveys:** This technique employs interviewers to greet shoppers in the district and administer a brief questionnaire. To get a diverse and representative sample, surveying should be done at different locations and at different times of the day and week. These surveys capture information about the existing consumer base and are particularly useful for assessing which types of additional retail consumers want and areas that need improvement in the district. Intercept surveys are also good tools for understanding more about the existing trade area, the demographics of the consumer base, and their means of transportation to the district. Intercept surveys provide a good opportunity to assess consumer perceptions about provision of parking or safety in the district as well. (**Tool 7-1**)
- **Telephone Surveys:** Interviewers contact a random sample of phone numbers from a predetermined market area and interview them in much the same way as the intercept survey. Unlike an intercept survey, this type of survey provides a means of learning about the preferences and attitudes of *potential* consumers who may not currently shop in the district. This type of survey is a useful means of determining why individuals living in your market area do or do not frequent your district. It is an opportunity to find out from local residents what additions and changes would help make your district an attractive shopping location. (**Tool 7-2**)

To conduct a telephone survey you will likely have to purchase a random sample of telephone numbers from a company specializing in this practice. Be advised that numbers are often not fully up-to-date and/or may not be categorized as solely residential numbers. If you have a choice of number providers, be sure to ask them how recently their lists have been updated for accuracy and if they are able to provide only numbers which are assigned to residential customers.

- **Mailed Surveys:** This technique also allows you to reach potential as well as existing consumers as surveys can be mailed to a sample of addresses in the market area. A benefit of this type of survey is that you can ask more questions because individuals will likely have more time to fill out the survey. A downside is that the response rate for mail surveys will most likely be much lower than phone or intercept surveys. Additionally, individuals who take the time to fill out written surveys at home may not be truly representative of shoppers or potential shoppers in your district. Surveys can be mailed to your existing contact database or a purchased database. Additionally, the U.S. Postal Service will allow mailing to specific mail carrier routes. (**Tool 7-3**)
- **In-Store Surveys:** These are surveys that are left with merchants to distribute to their customers. This may be an option if you want to conduct a very short, multiple choice survey. They are appropriate for collecting information such as residential location by zip code, basic demographics, or frequency of visits to the districts. Often merchants are unwilling or unable to help you with the surveying. If you have engaged merchant stakeholders then you may consider this, otherwise it is advisable to conduct surveys independently.
- **Focus Groups:** Focus groups are structured interviews of a small group of people (six to 10) at the same time lasting roughly one and a half hours. Ideally, focus group participants will be chosen to represent a sample of your target market, i.e. a mix of men and women, diversity of races, incomes, and ages. You can collect a lot of good information about shopping habits, perceptions about your district, and desire for certain types of retail goods or services. Focus groups function best when structured around a pre-defined set of questions and are carefully facilitated to ensure full participation.
- **Zip Code Surveys:** These surveys, conducted by merchants at the register, ask only a single question: What is your zip code? They are useful for determining your target area for market analysis.

For more information on companies that conduct surveys or provide phone or mailing list data, visit www.greenbook.org a free, interactive database of market research companies worldwide.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION DO YOU WANT TO COLLECT?

Surveys have the potential to provide a wide variety of information, but you should try to focus your questions to generate information which will be most useful to your planning process.

Consumer surveys are a useful tool for determining such information as:

- Existing trade area
- Current demographics (*age, gender, ethnicity, household income, presence of children, education level, occupation, primary language, housing tenure*)
- Consumption preferences: (*chain stores vs. independent retail outlets, specific types of retail that people would like to see in the neighborhood*)
- Frequency of visits to the district
- Time of visits (*day of the week and hours*)
- Point of origin for shopping in the district (*home, work, child care, school, tourist*)
- Which features consumers value in retail districts (*cleanliness, lighting, public open space, active façades, public art/murals, police presence, gathering space*)
- Where else people shop and why
- Access to district (*drive, walk, bike, public transit*)
- Need for parking
- Specific stores visited
- Amount spent per visit
- Interest in special events
- Perceptions of the district (*safety, cleanliness, availability/quality of goods and services*)
- Interest in participating in revitalization planning activities

The possibilities for surveys are great, but don't try to collect all of this information in one survey. Decide what questions you need answered at any given point in the planning process and target your survey question accordingly.

Collecting many examples of recent consumer surveys conducted in your region is one of the best ways to generate ideas about what type of questions to ask. Many CBOs have engaged the assistance of local universities or research institutes in their region to help them formulate and refine their questions and survey approaches. University students, potentially on a volunteer basis, can also be a great asset when administering and processing surveys.

Profile: Central Avenue Customer Survey

The Northeast Community Development Corporation (NECDC) conducted both a consumer intercept survey (Similar to Tool 7-1) and a telephone survey (Tool 7-2) to gain more information about why people do or do not shop along Central Avenue in Northeast Minneapolis.

Over a 15-day period, several trained volunteer interviewers were positioned at various locations throughout the district to survey consumers. Surveys were conducted on all days of the week for two shifts, noontime and early evening, each day. Several of the interviewers had Spanish and Arabic language fluency in recognition of the rapid increase in Latino residents and the concentration of Middle Eastern businesses in the district.

The survey revealed important information for the planning process such as:

Top Five Businesses Desired on Central Avenue are:

1. Live music or entertainment venue
2. Ice cream shop
3. Copy center/mail store
4. Coffee shop
5. Health and fitness facility

Top Five Businesses to Avoid Attracting to Central Avenue are:

1. Tobacco store
2. Fast food restaurant
3. Bagel shop
4. Gift/card shop
5. Interior decorating store

A few months later, NECDC conducted a telephone survey to collect data on local residents' perceptions of the district regardless of whether they regularly visited the commercial area. Over the course of four evenings, NECDC staff and volunteers used 3,700 random phone numbers, which had been purchased to represent an even spread throughout the census tracts in the market area. A total of 2,025 phone calls were made resulting in 194 completed surveys. Unfortunately, many numbers turned out to be disconnected. Although NECDC reduced the number of questions in the original survey for use on the phone, they found that phone surveying took as much time if not more than intercept surveys.

Nevertheless, NECDC found the phone surveys very worthwhile because it allowed them to learn that safety issues and lack of interesting retail options deterred residents from visiting the district more frequently. Improving safety and having a full service grocery store were among the most popular responses regarding what would draw consumers to the district.

The survey results and market data provided the research base for a structured public meeting to discuss options for a prosperous business mix on Central Avenue. The survey data was also distributed to local businesses as a way to encourage them to further penetrate the marketplace and respond to consumer preferences. Detailed summaries of the surveys can be found on the Northeast Community Development Corporation's website at www.NECDC.org.



MERCHANT SURVEYS

Merchant Surveys (**Tool 7-4**) are another method of gathering information about existing retail conditions in your district. Many local merchants have a wealth of knowledge both related to their own business and to the key issues of the district in general. These surveys provide a means of not only assessing business needs but also of increasing merchant interest and involvement in the revitalization planning process. Business surveys can be conducted by mail or phone, but most community development organizations find that surveying is most fruitful when conducted in person, at the place of business. Merchants can be questioned both on their perception of the consumer base as well as what businesses or business types they feel could add or detract from the overall commercial vitality in the district.

EMPLOYER INTERVIEWS

In districts where employees represent a significant market, it is worth considering interviewing or surveying major employers to get more information about the likely spending patterns of their employees. Some of the things you might want to know include:

- Number of full- and part-time employees.
- Range of annual incomes.
- Hours that employees work.
- Whether there is a cafeteria at the location.
- Whether employee parking is provided.
- Whether the employer is interested in supporting the revitalization effort.

It is best to conduct these interviews in person, at the place of work, but if there are a significant number of large employers in your district and resources are limited, then a short written survey can be distributed to local employers.

TOOL 7-1: CUSTOMER INTERCEPT SURVEY

[Include an introduction briefly describing your revitalization efforts and the boundaries of your business district]

How much time do you expect to spend in this shopping district today?

Which specific businesses have you visited or do you plan to visit today?

What additional types of businesses would you like to see in this district?

What additional types of businesses would you NOT like to see in this district?

Please circle the answer that best describes you

How much did you spend or do you plan to spend at businesses in this district today?

\$0 \$1 - \$10 \$11-\$25 \$26-\$50 \$51-99 \$100 or more

How often do you visit this shopping district?

Daily 2 - 4 times/wk Once a week 2 times/month Once a month
 3-6 times/year Not regularly

When do you usually visit this shopping district?

Weekdays Weekday Evenings Weekend days Weekend evenings No set times

How do you usually access this shopping district?

Car Public Transportation Walk Bike

Do you have difficulty parking?

Frequently Rarely Never

How safe do you feel during the daytime in this district?

Very Safe Somewhat Safe Not Very Safe Not at all Safe

How safe do you feel at night in this district?

Very Safe Somewhat Safe Not Very Safe Not at all Safe

Do you live in this neighborhood? Y N

Do you work in this neighborhood? Y N

What is your gender? M F

What is your zip code?

Are you aware of the Commercial District Revitalization Planning Process? Y N

If you would like to be involved please include your contact information at the bottom of this form.

Do you have any suggestions for changes in this district?

TOOL 7-2: RESIDENT TELEPHONE SURVEY

[Include an introduction briefly describing your revitalization efforts and the boundaries of your business district]

How often do you visit [NAME] shopping district?

- More than once a week Once a week Few times a month Once a year Never

If you are not a frequent shopper in this area, what is the primary reason for this?

Which business do you visit most frequently?

Which other businesses do you visit?

What would motivate you to shop in this district more frequently?

Are you aware of the Commercial District Revitalization Planning Process? Y N

Would you like to be involved in this process? Y N

If yes, ask for contact information.

TOOL 7-3: RESIDENT MAIL SURVEY

ENCoRe is a partnership of the Excelsior Action Group and the Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center to revitalize Mission Street's Commercial Corridor in the Excelsior. As part of this effort, we are gathering information from Excelsior residents in order to serve the neighborhood, identify service gaps, and fill them with community feedback. This information will be used solely to serve Excelsior residents the best way possible and will not be used to solicit respondents with other commercial interests, nor will it be sold to third parties. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey and return it to the address listed below. So tell us what you think! Thank you.

Name and Address (optional):

Gender (check one): M F

Age range (check one): Under 20 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61 +

National origin (check all that apply): Asian Hispanic African American Caucasian
 Native American Other

1. How often do you shop or eat on Mission Street in the Excelsior? (Circle one)

- a) 5-7 times/week b) 2-4 times/ week
c) Once/week d) Less than once a week

2. How do you get to Mission Street in the Excelsior?

- a) Car b) Public transportation c) Walk d) Bike
e) Other

3. What types of stores do you think are needed on Mission Street in the Excelsior and that you would shop at? Check yes or no.

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) Groceries | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| b) Health food store | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| c) Bakeries | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| d) Clothing | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| e) Electronics | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| f) Housewares | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| g) Furniture | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| h) Garden supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| i) Book stores | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| j) Pet supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| k) Bike shop | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| l) Music store | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| m) Other | | |

4. What types of services do you think are needed on Mission Street in the Excelsior and that you would use? Circle yes or no.

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) Movie theater | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| b) Live music establishments | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| c) Nightclub/bar | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| d) Family entertainment place
i.e. roller rink, bowling | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| e) Live theater | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| f) Video rental | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| g) Gym | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| h) Hair/beauty salons | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| i) Banks/financial services | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| j) Medical services | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| k) Child care | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| l) Dance/fitness classes | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| m) Cultural event/meeting place | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| n) Other | | |

5. Would you shop at any of these establishments if they were on Mission Street? Circle yes or no. (Some believe that chain stores may have a negative impact on smaller, independent businesses/stores. Others believe that chains increase the number of clientele that will visit the commercial corridor)

- a) Ross Dress for Less Yes No
- b) Old Navy Yes No
- c) Gap Yes No
- d) Independent clothing store Yes No
- e) Barnes and Noble Yes No
- f) Independent book store Yes No
- g) Pasta Pomodoro Yes No
- h) Starbucks Coffee Yes No
- i) Peet's Coffee Yes No
- j) Independent coffee shop Yes No
- k) Other _____

6. What types of goods and services do you purchase/use on Mission Street? Circle yes or no.

- a) Groceries Yes No
- b) Clothing Yes No
- c) Restaurants/Bars Yes No
- d) Entertainment Yes No
- e) Banking Yes No
- f) Medical Yes No
- g) Laundry Yes No
- h) Haircut/nails Yes No
- i) Auto repair Yes No
- j) Other _____

7. What are the major disadvantages of shopping or doing business on Mission Street/Excelsior? Circle yes or no.

- a) Limited hours Yes No
- b) Poor selection goods/services Yes No
- c) Lack of entertainment Yes No
- d) High prices Yes No
- e) Lack of restaurants Yes No
- f) Unfriendly/poor service Yes No
- g) Lack of parking Yes No
- h) Dirty Yes No
- i) Not safe Yes No
- j) Inconvenient location Yes No
- k) Other _____

8. What are the major advantages of shopping or doing business on Mission Street/Excelsior? Circle yes or no.

- a) Convenient location Yes No
- b) Less traffic/crowds Yes No
- c) Friendly services Yes No
- d) Fair prices Yes No
- e) Within walking distance Yes No
- f) Support local businesses Yes No
- g) Easy to find parking Yes No
- h) Good selection of goods/services Yes No
- i) Cultural/ethnic/linguistic diversity Yes No
- j) Other _____

9. Where besides this neighborhood do you do most of your shopping?

10. Where besides this neighborhood do you go for dining out and entertainment?

11. If this neighborhood could be like another neighborhood in San Francisco, which would you want it to be like, and why?

Services follow up: Contact Information

What is the best way to contact you about future revitalization efforts?

- Phone: _____
- E-mail: _____
- Personal Visit or
- Mail

Name/Address: _____

TOOL 7-4: MERCHANT SURVEY

Name:

Business:

Address:

Phone Number:

E-mail:

Business Type:

PART I - About the Merchant

I'd like to ask you some questions about your business here on Mission Street.

1. How long have you been in business at this location?

2. Over the last five years, has your business:

- Improved dramatically
- Improved somewhat
- Stayed the same
- Decreased somewhat
- Decreased dramatically
- Wasn't here

3. Do you own or lease your space?

- Own
- Lease

[If lease] What is the length of your lease?

4. In terms of the following, roughly how would you describe your customers by **percentage**?

Trade Area: from the Neighborhood
 from SF/Daly City from outside SF

Age: Under 20 21-34 35-49 over 50

Ethnicity: Chinese Filipino Latino
 Afro-American White Other

PART II - About the District

5. What would you describe as the boundaries of the shopping district? What is the heart of the district?

6. What do you think are the greatest strengths/ characteristics/assets of the shopping district?

7. What do you think are the weaknesses/challenges of the shopping district?

8. How would you rate the district on the following characteristics

	Good	Fair	Unacceptable
Attractiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parking Convenience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shopping Hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pedestrian Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Variety/Quality of Goods/Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special Events/Festivals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Storefront Appearance/ Window Displays/Signage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. What changes need to occur in the shopping district to bring more shoppers in?

What are the things that you think keep change from happening here?

10. Are you familiar with any organizations or nonprofits that serve the community in the neighborhood? What are they? Any other important institutions in the neighborhood?

11. Are there any business/merchant associations you have been involved with in the community?

12. Are you aware of any organizations providing business assistance to you or other business owners in the Excelsior?

13. What would you say are the biggest needs of businesses on this street?

14. To what extent do business owners talk to each other and work together here?

Is that enough? Y N

If No, what kind of communication and organization among merchants would you like to see?

15. Are you aware of vacant retail property in the neighborhood?

Which ones?

16. What kind of businesses would you like to see more of here?

17. We are exploring a commercial revitalization program which aims to make the businesses more inviting and increase the profitability of individual businesses. This kind of program would require participation and coordination of merchants, residents and others through various committees. Would you be willing to attend meetings to explore the possibilities of such a program?

Yes No Don't Know

18. If Yes, what times are you available for meetings?

Evenings, after what time? _____

Mornings before what time _____

Lunchtime at _____

19. Are there other merchants (or other residents) we should talk to about neighborhood improvement? Who are they?
