

MAXIMIZING OUTPUT OF LARGE, DIVERSE STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Facilitating large groups can be a daunting challenge for even the most experienced facilitator. Due to the numbers involved, managing group dynamics with more than 40 people proves to be considerably more difficult than in smaller groups, especially when perspectives are polarized.

HSA and its associate firms, including ReWerx in British Columbia, have used a technique called "spider facilitation" to effectively manage large groups. With this technique, the facilitator prepares for the workshop by developing a series of questions for participants to answer. At the workshop the facilitator divides the participants into equal-sized groups, and each member of the group becomes the "champion" of a different question. In the group, each "champion" interviews the other members of his or her group about the question, and in turn is asked to answer the questions of the other

champions in the same group.

Once all questions have been asked and answered, the group breaks up and each "champion" meets with all the other "champions" of the same question. In these large groups, the "champions" share the responses they recorded to their question and prepare a summary of the responses. All the groups then present their findings to the entire workshop. It sounds more complicated than it is in practice. This technique has allowed HSA and its associates to successfully manage groups of between 30 and 80 individuals using only one facilitator. In the case of the 5th National Forest Strategy, spider facilitation played a key role in ensuring the success of the regional and national workshops, and enabled participants to identify current issues associated with Canada's forests, along with a vision, and objectives for the new strategy.

For more information, contact Marc Rose at 416-944-8444 x223.

LET'S ASK THE COMMUNITY! STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES

Whether our clients are monitoring the success of an ongoing municipal program or assessing peoples' perceptions of a new facility in their community, a formal survey is an effective method for discerning public opinion and perception.

Hardy Stevenson and Associates has completed many surveys in communities throughout Ontario (see Table 1 for a sample of our completed projects). Based on our experience, we find that the initial dialogue with clients is very important when designing a successful survey. It is important to be prepared by considering the following:

Define your research goals

Identify the purpose of your study. This will yield a clear set of research questions to be answered and inform the structure of your research tool. We typically prepare a research matrix that identifies goal and objectives and determines what information we want from specific questions.

Determine the best way to sample your population

Knowing who you want to hear from is an essential step in survey design.

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Participants engaged in a spider facilitation session.

TABLE 1. Sample Survey Projects

Client	Objective	Strategy	Results
Wastewater Treatment Facility	To identify sources, extent and significance of odour	Telephone questionnaire	402 respondents sampled
	To establish a baseline to measure effectiveness of odour control technology	Stratified sample (by Forward Sortation Area)	
Municipal Government	To identify community perspectives on the direction and vision for tourism	Mail out questionnaire	882 respondents sampled
Large Forest Base NGO	To identify whether rural landowners would be interested in participating in an afforestation program	Stratified sample (urban vs. rural households)	375 respondents sampled
		Telephone questionnaire	
Telecommunications Company	To identify local businesses wanting cellular telephone service	Stratified sample (geographic area)	60 businesses responded
		Telephone questionnaire	
		Full sample population	

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Are there specific sub-communities that you wish to gain the opinion of? Is it best to divide or 'stratify' your sample by geography, planning district or census tract?

Identify the best survey method

Whether you choose to contact your respondents by mail, phone or in person, you will have to consider your timeline, number of complete surveys required, type of information sought, staffing needs and study area, before selecting the best method for reaching your community.

Complete a pilot test

A pilot test allows you to verify the clarity and reliability of your survey questions. It answers such questions as, "Do questions flow in a logical order?" and "Are we getting odd responses to questions?"

Know the optimum time to contact your sample

Achieving a strong response rate is improved by knowing the 'best' times to contact people. Generally, it is more difficult to get a hold of people during July and August and the holiday season. Ensuring that you

contact people at different times of the day, both during the weekday and on the weekend, ensures that your sample reflects a range of people in your target community.

Encourage response

We've found that incentives such as promotional items are not effective in persuading people to respond more quickly to surveys. It is more effective to appeal to people's sense of community responsibility. When residents understand the importance of their contribution towards shaping their community and environment, they are more likely to respond.

Share information

Surveys are frequently viewed as way of receiving information from the public. However, there are opportunities to communicate information as well. For example, if you are asking people about traffic calming, you may include a description of traffic calming methods, their advantages and disadvantages and applicability in certain situations.

For more information on questionnaire design, please contact Kelly Skeith at 416-944-8444 x224.

About The Company

Hardy Stevenson and Associates was formed in 1990. The firm specializes in:

- ♦ Social Impact Assessment
- ♦ Environmental Planning
- ♦ Land Use Planning
- ♦ Public Consultation
- ♦ Facilitation / Mediation
- ♦ Management Consulting
- ♦ Communications
- ♦ Technical Services

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Over the last year, Hardy Stevenson and Associates has functioned as the Ontario Region Office of Economic Growth Solutions Inc. This summer, Dave Hardy was appointed Director of the company. He joins John Murray, Managing Director. Look for more updates on what the Ontario office is up to in our next newsletter.