



How to ...

Carry out a community survey

Understanding the community that you are seeking to serve and the context in which your church is situated is really important. This process also helps us to connect effectively with our communities and understand how we can demonstrate and declare the good news effectively. If we do not seek to properly understand the community in which we are situated, how can we properly understand the opportunities for effective mission here?

What is a community survey?

A community survey or audit provides a broad view of a community: its people and their circumstances, its organisations, its strengths and weaknesses, its hopes, resources and the ways in which it is changing and developing. A survey can help to identify how your church can be good news in your particular area responding to specific, identified needs in your community.

It is important to identify at the outset who will be involved in carrying out the survey and what its scale, scope and boundaries are. Will there be a working group to do the work? How long will you spend on it? Will it be a large comprehensive process covering a large area with a large number of questionnaires carried out, or is it more appropriate for it to be a smaller, simpler exercise speaking to just a few people you are already connected to? You should try to be objective and fair and be aware that you have a vested interest in this community and may hold biased views and opinions as a result. Throughout the process never lose sight of why you are doing this and how you will make sense and use the information you discover.

A Possible Process To Follow:

Start with a map

Use Ordnance Survey or Google Maps to produce a map of your area, then begin to annotate and illustrate it. Add the community and parish boundaries, highlight key buildings and organisations, note any different distinct communities or housing areas that exist and identify things that may divide the communities like roads, train lines and rivers.

Decide what is it you want to find out

This enables you to be clear about the scope of your survey and what its purpose is. Questions you ask could include: Who lives here? What characterizes these people? What is unique about this community? What is this community lacking? What is the history of this area? What assets are there in this community and how are they used and maintained? Where do people like to go? What interests do people here have? What do people here want from their lives? How many people here are 'Christian', but unchurched? How will this community change in the coming 5-10 years?

Find government and local authority statistics

www.gov.uk/government/statistics will give you demographic information including: age profile, housing tenure, levels of deprivation, families with children, single households, range and proportion of faith communities and minority ethnic communities.

Search for local reports and documents

Search local authority websites to see what information is published about your area or local pieces of research that other organisations may have carried out. Annual reports from other organisations, parish council parish plans, and consultations and reports from local authorities can all be useful sources of information. Government neighbourhood statistics are available [here](#). Church Urban Fund, Ofsted, Mosaic, neighbourhood statistics and NOMIS can all be good sources of information available online.

Structured listening: visit local organisations; talk to individuals

Listen to local people and their experiences. You may need to organise a focus group or carry out a community questionnaire. Remember to listen to a range of voices to obtain a representative view. You should talk to people of all ages and consider speaking with local businesses, councillors, police officers, social housing managers, schools, health visitors and people on the streets!

You should ask people their views of the community, what they feel its strengths are, what concerns they have about it and also what they would love to see happen in their community to improve it. Ask them who they feel are the groups that are most supportive of their community. Ask them what they think about the church and how the church is viewed and connected to their community. You may choose to ask them about their engagement with the church and their views on the Christian faith.

Think carefully, in advance, about the questions you will ask and ensure you are consistent in your data gathering.

Church Links

Where do those who attend your church, or current church activities live on the map? These people will likely have links with their neighbours; are they spread across the community or coming from a specific part of it?

Organise a prayer walk

Spend time praying “on-site”, covering areas with God's presence and spending time slowly passing through the area, seeing it through His eyes.

Draw your conclusions together

Bring together all the information, research and listening that you have done to produce a Survey Report. Your report should highlight the best things about the community; how the community is changing and developing; and where you feel there may be opportunities for the church to connect, serve or support the community. You may find it helpful to use photographs in your report to illustrate certain points you are highlighting or simply to help present the report in a way which uses more than just words.

Make sure your report is clear, readable and draws some concise conclusions about the community. This is designed to be a useful and informative process that will benefit the mission of your church; it should not simply be a paper producing exercise that is filed away never to be seen again.

A possible structure for the report could be:

- The scope and purpose of the survey
- Describing the community
- Statistical findings and information
- What's happening in the area and how it is developing
- What people are positive about within the community
- People's concerns about their community
- Opportunities within in the community
- How the church is viewed
- Conclusions, highlights and things of note

Possible questions you could ask within your Community Survey

2 sample surveys from Parish Resources can be found [here](#):

Questions could include:

- What are the best things about this community?
- What's the most exciting thing that has happened here in the last 5 years?
- What do you think are the important issues here?
- What changes would you like to see here to improve the community?
- What role do you think the church plays in the community here?
- What would you like to say to the church here?
- Is there anything that the church could do to help people in the community better?

What are the biggest areas of need in the community here?

Use 3 words to describe the community here

Remember to frame your questions in a positive light and ideally aim for open questions that provide you with useful insights, rather than just yes/no responses.

Written by: Chris Priddy; Head of Parish and External Relations, Diocese of Bristol

