

River Voices



Public Opinion Polling

Condensed from the book, *Public Opinion Polling: A Handbook for Public Interest and Citizen Advocacy Groups*

by Celinda Lake with assistance from Eugene LeCouteur

A poll is a systematic, scientific, and impartial way of collecting information from a sample, or subset, of people that is used to generalize to a greater group, or population, from which the sample was drawn. A poll is not designed to persuade or identify individuals—there are cheaper and more efficient ways of doing that (telephone canvass, for example). A poll is a measurement at one point in time that reveals attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, attributes, and the interrelationship of all these parameters. These generalizations can then be extended to the larger society.

A properly selected subset enables you to generalize your findings reliably to a greater population after attributing a known margin of error to the sampling. Careful interviewing, questionnaire construction, and analysis also minimize other forms of error that are difficult to measure. Because a poll is not designed to influence or persuade people, the interviewing should be kept as neutral as possible.

THE VALUE OF POLLING

Polls can help your organization determine:

- **What people are thinking** – what they see as important problems, what their opinions on policy and issue questions are, what they think are appropriate arenas for public involvement.
- **What people know** – what political figures and groups they are aware of, which issues and arguments about issues they know about, and what factual information they have.
- **How people perceive issues and political objectives** – how they evaluate political leaders' and institutions' performances, what emotional attachment they have for groups and individuals, for whom they would vote, and what reactions they have to certain slogans or information about political figures and issues.
- **Characteristics of people** – what their social and political characteristics are, how interested they are in a topic or event and where they get their information.



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River Network is a national organization whose mission is to help people understand, protect and restore rivers and their watersheds.

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From the President



Photo: Ralczok

Why Poll?

Julius Caesar never took a poll. He didn't need to. He didn't care what his subjects wanted or how they felt about things. He simply told them.

It doesn't work that way in a democracy. Large-scale change happens when many people understand and subscribe to similar ideas. If we can link those ideas to basic values already held by the general public, then we are that much closer to achieving change.

Take recycling as an example. Fifteen years ago, recycling was not a regular part of most people's daily lives. Our landfills were filling up and the sheer waste of reusable materials was staggering. Today, recycling is a way of life for many Americans.

We need to achieve that same depth of understanding and action around river and watershed conservation issues. No matter what size a river or stream council is, it is always reaching out to new people. We know that to achieve our goals we need to move beyond those most familiar with—and supportive of—our arguments about how and why to save river ecosystems.

The true challenge for our organizations lies in reaching “beyond the choir” to larger and larger communities of interest. To be successful in our work, we need a continuous flow of two-way information that allows us to apply the principles of adaptive management. Polling—obtaining selected information from a significant proportion of a target population—is one essential part of that dynamic.

Polls provide crucial feedback that we need for planning strategies. They help us choose new directions, as well as hone in on concepts and language that best present our case. Polls can highlight widespread myths, so that we can conquer those myths with educational outreach. And, polls help us justify our work. When we can demonstrate to community leaders and decision-makers that support for our cause is widespread, they will be more motivated to do right by rivers.

Kenneth Ralczok

Public Opinion Polling

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The most valuable aspect of polling, however, is not just looking at these parameters individually, but linking them—seeing who feels what, where they live, how they can be reached, what points are important to them and what issues are linked for them. Polls also have tremendous internal value for your group in developing strategies and assessing the impact of strategy and events. They can also be used externally. Polls can be released as the basis for news items; they also can be used to obtain money, political support, and media attention by demonstrating the viability of your ideas. Polls can be used to influence the behavior of public officials or rally the support of volunteers.

TYPES OF POLLS

There are four basic types of polls: in-depth surveys, short polls, tracking polls and panels.

In-depth Surveys, the most common type of poll, are 20-60 minute surveys that assess public opinion on one or more topics in depth. This type of survey sometimes can serve as a benchmark when followed by **short polls**, 10-15 minute surveys that assess change over time and the impact of events and strategy.

A **tracking poll** is used to assess a rapidly changing trend occurring over a short period of time. This type of poll asks a few key questions of a small sample (100-200 people) in 5-10 minutes at short intervals (for example, every other night). Tracking

polls are often used in the late stages of political campaigns.

If you are interested in understanding change and why it occurred, you need to conduct a **panel poll**, in which you interview the same people at two or more points in time. Panel polls often are used to assess the effectiveness of a public education campaign to influence opinion or knowledge on an issue.

GETTING STARTED

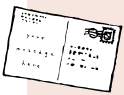

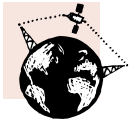
The first step in any poll is to determine the study objective—what information do you want and how do you plan to use it? Your objectives should be clear and every question should contribute to them. Think about what information you want, how you plan to use it and then consider what questions you need to ask to both understand and utilize your findings.

Planning the who, what, when, and how of the survey is called laying out the study design. A detailed plan will help you determine what people need to complete what tasks and by when.

Once you know who you want to interview and what you want to ask them, you are ready to determine what method of polling you want to employ: telephone, in-person, on-line or by mail. Each method has tradeoffs in terms of cost, types of resources needed, coverage of the population, response rate, types of questions that can be asked, control over the interview, ease of administration, types of training needed, and type and amount of error incurred.



PROS & CONS of SURVEY TYPES

	Mail Survey	In-person Survey	Telephone Survey	On-line Survey
ADVANTAGES	<p>Generally inexpensive; requires a minimum of personnel and organization; relatively easy to ask complex questions.</p> 	<p>Generally considered the best for obtaining in-depth and complex information and for controlling the interview; yields higher quality answers; better for longer surveys; maximizes sample coverage; physical presence of interviews can establish the legitimacy of the poll; higher response rates.</p>	<p>Fastest turn-around; cost about 50% of in-person surveys and yields good quality data; requires fewer interviewers; less interviewer contamination over the telephone than in-person because the interviewer's behavior is better controlled through more immediate and direct supervision; respondents cannot see interviewer and therefore refrain from passing judgment about what the interviewer wants to hear.</p>	<p>Fast turn-around; easy to complete; less expensive than in-person or telephone; results can be instantly downloaded into analytical programs; high control of question order and follow-ups by programming; can complete at their convenience.</p>
DISADVANTAGES	<p>Low response rate (often around 30%); difficulty in attaining complete, accurate mailing lists leads to poor samples; difficult to control the respondent behavior (i.e., clarify questions, probe for more complete answers, order in which questions are answered, etc.).</p>	<p>Cost; demands of recruiting interviewers, supervising them, and administering the survey increase when sample becomes more geographically dispersed.</p> 	<p>Lack of coverage (5% of U.S. population is without a phone); sampling from telephone directories is biased by unlisted numbers, duplicate listing, out-of-date listings and nonworking numbers; length of interviews are more limited; poorly conducted telephone interviewing has a greater tendency to yield low-quality; there is a limit to the complexity of questions and open-ended questions elicit shorter answers over the telephone than in person.</p>	<p>Lack of coverage of total population (limited Internet users); response rates are highly variable; hard to control respondent behavior (e.g., clarity of questions; probe for more complete responses).</p> 

QUESTIONNAIRE WORDING

There should be a specific reason for every question asked because unnecessary questions waste time, money and energy. Especially beware of asking questions because it would be interesting to know the answer. All questions should fit into the study objective.

The only way to write clear, unambiguous questions is to be clear beforehand about what you want to learn from each question. Questions are poorly worded when they are unclear, too broad, ambiguous or assume too much knowledge on the part of the respondent. Poor question wording can have

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extremely harmful effects on your results by introducing a degree of error that is impossible to measure. Question wording is particularly important in telephone interviewing, where communication is completely verbal and questions need to be less complex and more repetitious.

There are two basic types of questions, both of which are useful for obtaining different types of information and performing different kinds of analysis.

Close-ended questions offer respondents a choice among two or more answers. For example: Are you a member of Friends of the Creek – yes or no?; How often do you visit the river – daily, weekly, at least once a year, or never? Close-ended questions are the quickest to ask and the easiest to answer.

Open-ended questions allow people to respond in their own words. For example: What do you feel is the most important issue facing the river? Open-ended questions are useful when you want to see how respondents discuss an issue or discover what is on their minds without imposing an agenda. These questions are often over-used and work only when the topic is relevant to the respondent, and the interviewers are trained to probe and reinforce respondents, so the latter know when they have given a complete answer.

There are a variety of things to watch for in question wording:

Vocabulary: questions should be grammatically correct and avoid the use of jargon or complex vocabulary. Don't use slang or folksy phrases. Your goal is to use words that are clear and unambiguous and have the same meaning to all the people interviewed.

Length: if a question is too long, it can be misunderstood. Clear, simple question

wording usually leads to shorter questions. On the other hand, longer questions sometimes increase the quantity and quality of the response. As a general rule, the best way to maximize question length is to allow the most important, sensitive or complex questions to be longer and have no more than every fourth question be lengthy.

Content: Each question should only ask one thing at a time. A poorly written question sometimes implies the answer to a previous question. For example: Do you favor conserving America's rivers by regulation or incentives? A person answering "no" could be referring to not favoring river conservation or to favoring conservation but not by regulation.

Avoid Assumptions: Avoid questions that assume too much knowledge on the part of the respondent or assume that the respondent holds a particular opinion or has behaved in a certain way.

Repetition: Avoid a series of questions which differ only slightly in ways that seem important to you but which may be too subtle for the average respondent. If respondents think they are answering essentially the same question, they will be reluctant to continue the interview.

Don't Know: You should have a "don't know" category in your set of answers for almost every question. Groups often resist this rule in the mistaken belief that everyone has an opinion and simply must be coaxed into giving it.

Loaded Questions: A question that has one answer that is obviously more prestigious, more socially desirable, or reflects the status quo is a loaded question. The tone of certain words also can load the question. In a famous experiment, half the respondents were asked, "Do you think the United States should allow public speeches against democracy?"; whereas the other half were

asked, “do you think the United States should forbid speeches against democracy?” Of the first group, 44% said such speeches should not be allowed, but only 28% of the second group said they should be forbidden (Schuman and Presser, 1981).

Balanced Questions: To get accurate answers, your questions must present both sides of an issue with equal weight. Unbalanced questions skew the answers, but you have no way of knowing how much.

Response Categories: The wording of answers, similar to the wording of questions, must be created with care. The categories need to be exhaustive and mutually exclusive. They should not be so subtle that respondents can't differentiate between them. Respondents should feel they fit into one and only one category. If incremental scales are used, they should have categories of equal distance. For example, the categories “excellent,” “fair,” or “poor” are not of equal distance; the categories “good,” “fair” or “poor” are much better.

Don't Forget the Respondent: Your respondent has to remember the question, think of the answer, and fit that answer into the categories you have given. If it is not a written survey, it helps to repeat the answer scale at the end of the question and also to group together questions that use the same response scale. However, beware of fatiguing respondents by having too many of the same kind of question in a row. The longer the survey, the more aware you should be of the respondent's needs.

Acquiescence Bias: People tend to agree with questions on which they don't have an

opinion. If you use agree/disagree questions, be sure to vary the question/response pattern so that people of one opinion will need to use both “agree” and “disagree” responses. Thus you can determine inconsistency in responses and separate good responses from acquiescent responses.

QUESTION ORDER

Questions need to be ordered to create a coherent whole that flows well and promotes accurate responses. The first questions should be easy to answer, non-threatening, and fairly neutral in context. Demographic questions (age, sex, etc.) should come at the end of the survey. If income is asked, it should be last because that question has a high refusal rate.

Questions about religious affiliation also often bring refusals.

In general, sensitive questions should be asked no sooner than the middle of the questionnaire to allow time to establish rapport.

Early questions establish the tone of the survey and also give the respondent some reference about what the “real” topic of the survey is. Questions should also be grouped by topic to contribute to a sense of having a rapport with the respondent.

Questions should move from open-ended to close-ended on a given topic and from the general to the specific. Asking general questions first gets the respondent thinking about the topic; asking the specific question first more narrowly focuses and constrains the answer for the following general question. In short, try to avoid situations where respondents feel required to answer a specific way to a question because of how they responded to a previous question.



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QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN CONSIDERATION

Questionnaires need to be written and printed with the interviewer, coder and data-entry person in mind, as well as the respondent. You should include instructions, probes, and transitions for your interviewers. The questionnaire should be easy to mark. Ample space should be provided to write in the answers to open-ended questions. The format for each question should be standardized. Anything the interviewer does not read aloud, such as instructions and coding categories, should be capitalized. Avoid abbreviations.

THE SAMPLE

The goal of a sample is the accurate representation of the opinions of a group of people without really talking to every member of that group. To choose a sample, you would choose a small subset of people (i.e., the sample) from the larger group that interests you (i.e., the population). After surveying the subset, you will know, with a known degree of confidence or certainty, the opinions of the larger group.

Selecting the sample is one of the most scientific aspects of polling. It must be done precisely, correctly and in an unbiased manner. In sampling, bias has a very specific meaning: the systematic over- or under-representation of certain kinds of people. To ensure an unbiased survey, you want your sample to be random.

Once you have defined your population, you'll need to get a list with the name, telephone number and/or address of every person in the relevant population. Four commonly used lists include:



- **Lists of registered voters** are the easiest to use because the list can be limited easily to only those people who are geographically in the district or state.
- **Telephone directories** frequently are used as sampling frames or lists because they are readily and cheaply available, frequently updated, accurate, and sometimes coincide with the geographic area of interest.
- **Crisscross, reverse, or street directories**, where available, are useful for all types of surveys and list telephone numbers and names by address. Like lists of registered voters, they can be limited easily to the geographic boundaries of a district, state, town, and so on.
- **Random computer-generated lists** of telephone numbers are one of the more accurate sampling lists for interviewing the general population because they include unlisted numbers and new numbers.

SAMPLE SIZE

Sample size is usually dictated by the precision required; the research budget; the number of interviewers and telephones available; the size and number of subgroups of interest; the homogeneity of the population; and your future goals for the sample. Contrary to popular belief, the error attached to a sample depends on the sample size, not on the size of the population from which the sample is drawn. The recommended sample size is no less than 200 completed interviews and for most major polls—no less than 400-500.

RECRUITING INTERVIEWERS

A good interviewer will be friendly, detail-oriented, able to follow directions, make a flexible schedule that allows them to call nights and on weekends, and have good

reading skills and a pleasant voice. You should monitor your interviewers' initial response rates and replace interviewers who are not successful in obtaining interviews.

Professional interviewers tend to complete more interviews per hour, have a higher response rate, and introduce less interviewer bias and error into your survey. They also cost money. Volunteers can be very successful as interviewers, but they must be well-trained, reinforced, monitored and given a well-organized task.

Thorough training is essential if you are to neutralize and standardize interviewer behavior. In addition, the ability of good training to motivate your volunteers can not be underestimated. Allow an hour to an hour and a half for the initial training of your core interviewers. Send out a packet beforehand if possible with the questionnaire and tips for interviewing. At a minimum, interviewer training should include: instructions on properly recording and editing answers; basic procedures (i.e., schedule for calling, where to put finished interviews, etc.); a read-through the questionnaire—question by question; role-playing; and how to respond to frequently asked questions (i.e., who is doing the survey; how did you get my number; how will this be used; and so on).

THE INTERVIEW

The goal of any poll is to obtain the most accurate information possible. If you utilize an interview to obtain responses, the interview needs to be neutral and not attempt to influence opinion. A good interviewer should do the following:

- Communicate a commitment to the interview as an important, professional task.
- Sound friendly and confident, yet neutral and nondirective; interested and positive, yet professional.

- Give respondents a clear idea of their role in the interview.
- Make sure respondents answer according to the categories provided, using professional reinforcement and probing.

As there are costs to the respondent in an interviewing situation (i.e., commitment of time; inconvenience, mental work; infringement on privacy; possible embarrassment, boredom and frustration) it is the interviewers job to quickly legitimize the survey and convince the respondent that the rewards (i.e., interesting nature of the survey; interest the interviewer shows in the respondent's answers; importance of the respondent's answers to the quality of the poll) offset the costs of the interview.

OBTAINING THE INTERVIEW

Most interviewers think it is more difficult to get an interview than it actually is. People hear about polls all the time, and many individuals are pleased to have an opportunity to give their views to an interested listener. In general, interview introductions should tell respondents that the interview is short and strictly confidential, that they have been chosen randomly, and that their views are important to your understandings of issues.



ANALYSIS

Before you begin your poll, you have in mind certain things you want to know. The questionnaire must be designed carefully so you find out what you really want to know without biasing the results. You want the truth as best it can be discerned, not an agreeable fiction that may lead you to make wrong decisions on the basis of the poll.

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There are certain basic things you should include in your analysis report including:

- The type of sample;
- The sample size;
- The type of interview; and
- The interviewing period (i.e., date on which interviews were conducted).



Your conclusions should be written up, along with the presentation of the appropriate data from which these conclusions are drawn. This allows readers to judge whether you have interpreted the findings correctly. All tables should include percentages and some indication of the number of cases used in the analysis. More important, you need to show by the patterns of the answers why you have drawn certain conclusions.

Common Mistakes in Analysis

- ✓ **OVERANALYZING RESULTS:** drawing conclusions that are not warranted by the data. The most common ways of doing this include ignoring sampling error, giving undue importance to meaningless relationships, and overstating cause and effect.
- ✓ **IGNORING SAMPLING ERROR:** For a sample of 200, the sampling error is $\pm 7\%$. This is a rough guide you can use when checking for significant answers.
- ✓ **GIVING UNDUE IMPORTANCE TO MEANINGLESS RELATIONSHIPS:** you may discover that there are very similar percentages of people who support river conservation and who eat pickles. Common sense tells you there is no meaningful relationship between the two concepts, so it doesn't make sense to waste time trying to see if the correspondence between rivers and pickles holds true for different segments of the public.
- ✓ **OVERSTATING CAUSE AND EFFECT:** Polls give us certain numbers with a fixed degree of certainty, but it is important not to conclude too much about the cause and effect of those numbers. We can say a lot about what things are associated or related, but we can only speculate and rarely prove much about what causes a given attitude or behavior with polling data.
- ✓ **CONFUSING ATTITUDE WITH BEHAVIOR:** For behavior questions such as, "Have you volunteered with Save the Creek in the last three months?" you do not have actual measures of behavior, but only self-reports that are subject to memory effects and to biases due to social desirability.
- ✓ **IGNORING THE CONTEXT:** At best, polling results are valid measures of attitudes at a specific point in time. In analyzing those results, you should be aware of the prevailing political and social atmosphere at the time of the interviewing and be alert to anything that may have happened before, during or after your poll that would be expected to influence your results.
- ✓ **ERRONEOUS THEORIES:** This last category of mistakes made occurs when a poll is based on erroneous theories. For example, if you incorrectly believe that a person's reaction to Friends of the Creek is directly related to support for major league baseball, your analysis may be colored.

Voices from the Field...

The world is ever-changing. Values and beliefs once strongly held by individuals change dramatically as they are influenced by economic, social and political factors. Learning and accepting the perceptions held by residents in our communities can strategically guide our watershed restoration efforts. Here's a quick look at how River Network Partners are incorporating survey results into their conservation work.

Compiled by
Kathy Luscher,
River Network



Alaska Statewide Political Opinion Survey

Alaska Conservation Foundation, AK

The Alaska Conservation Foundation worked with Ivan Moore Research to conduct the survey in early 2001. The purpose was to survey how many Alaskans considered themselves to be "conservationists"—a gauge from which they can use as a beginning benchmark for their public outreach and education work.

Attitudes of Kaw Valley Residents toward Surface Water Quality

Kaw Valley Heritage Alliance, KS

This research effort investigated attitudes toward surface water quality in the Kansas (Kaw) River Valley. A particular effort was made to distinguish between farm and non-farm households. The research is concerned purely with attitudes and beliefs, and took no position on the actual facts of surface water pollution.

Two data gathering methods were used for this study: focus groups and telephone surveys. Separate focus groups were conducted for non-farm households and farm households in order to be sensitive to potential differences between the groups. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore: what Kaw Valley residents currently believe about surface water quality in the Kaw Valley; what actions Kaw Valley residents believe most impact the quality of surface water; and what incentives and disincentives exist for residents to change their behavior as related to the quality of surface water in the Kaw Valley. Each of the focus groups lasted approximately 1.5 hours.

Two household telephone surveys were conducted: one for non-farm households and one for farm households. The research was funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) based on a grant to the Kaw Valley Heritage Alliance (KVHA). The cost was approximately \$50,000.

Attitudes of Kaw Valley Residents toward Surface Water Quality is available at <http://www.ku.edu/pri/resrep/pdf/m261.pdf>.



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People and the River: Perception and use of Chicago Waterways for Recreation.

Friends of the Chicago River; National Park Service – Rivers and Trails, IL



From Lake Forest to Lake Calumnet, the 150-mile Chicago River corridor transects a spectrum of physical environments and human experiences across metropolitan Chicago. Planners from the National Park Service and Friends of the Chicago River envisioned the river as the thread that could sew this diversity of people and places into a tapestry to achieve recreational and related goals. To do this, however, key information was needed about how the corridors' diverse stakeholders experienced and interacted with the river.

Studies and sampling locations were selected to embrace the diversity of landscapes, demographics and interest groups represented in the corridor and beyond. Ranging from brief chats to 2-hour long interviews, this combined effort resulted in contact with more than 5,000 stakeholders.

In order to get an in-depth look at how nearby residents perceived, used and valued the Chicago River, they conducted 9 focus groups in selected neighborhoods throughout the corridor, and another 2 groups in metropolitan Chicago with people who did not live near the river. Using a variety of structured and open-ended exercises and discussion, they

uncovered a rich understanding of local people's relationships with the river. In order to get a handle on how the Chicago river is used for recreation, an on-site survey of users at six popular site clusters throughout the study area was done.

The findings from *People and the River* have had significant, positive impacts on a variety of levels, from raising general public awareness of the river and river opportunities to providing critical information for designers, planners and policy makers. The research has also built an important bridge to local action by providing information and criteria for selection of a range of river-based demonstration projects.

For more information about this project, visit:
<http://www.ncrs.fs.fed.us/epubs/chicagoriver/people/>.

One of the principal objectives of the research was to find out what those who live near the river felt about it as a resource. Participants were each given a box of crayons and asked to draw the river as it flowed through their neighborhood. When they were finished drawing, they were told to turn the sheet over and complete the sentence: "I am the Chicago River in your neighborhood; I am..."



Measuring the Soft Stuff: Evaluating Public Involvement in an Urban Watershed Restoration

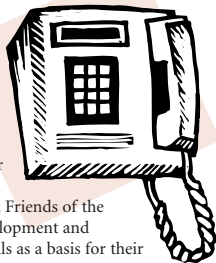
Friends of the Rouge River, MI

In 1993 and 1999 polling was conducted in the Rouge River watershed. The strategy was based on a series of interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, and a telephone survey of 400 individuals representing households in four distinct geographic units within portions of three southeast Michigan counties that comprise the watershed.

While the polling was not done by or for Friends of the Rouge directly, it was done by Public Sector Consultants, of Lansing, MI, to help establish a public education and involvement strategy for the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project. The Rouge Project, as it is better known, is a joint federal, state and local effort to improve water quality in the Rouge watershed. Friends of the Rouge, a 15-year-old nonprofit group, has played a significant role in the development and implementation of that strategy, and uses the information provided by the polls as a basis for their school-based and community-based education and public involvement programming.

Interviews, focus groups and public opinion telephone surveys were effective techniques in determining the level of public knowledge about the Rouge River, how best to communicate information to stakeholders, and in determining how to involve stakeholders in the development of action plans to improve the river.

For more information, visit: <http://www.wcdoe.org/rougeriver/pdfs/education/watershed2000-05.pdf>.



Q22. Which of those do you think is the most effective in helping you reduce water pollution?

Participants appear to consider newspapers (28%) and TV (26%), almost equally, as the most effective means for disseminating information to help reduce water pollution.

	STREAMSIDE	NON-STREAM
Total Participants	146	448
Newspapers	29%	29
TV	8	8
Newsletters	8	6
Word of Mouth	4	5
None	4	2
Brochures	4	2
First Hand Experience	3	3
Bill Insert	3	2
Radio	4	1
Work	3	1
Kids/School Materials	1	0
Meetings	3	0
Signs	1	3
Public Events	3	2
Miscellaneous		
Don't Know	4	

Tualatin River Basin: Public Awareness Survey

Clean Water Services, OR

Clean Water Services conducted regular public opinion surveys for more than 10 years to measure the watershed residents' awareness of the services they provide, water resources and how their daily activities impact water quality. Specifically, they worked with a survey firm to conduct two surveys in 1994 and 1997 on public awareness of non-point source pollution, how their daily activities impact water quality and what behavior changes they have made to improve water quality in their watershed. These surveys were conducted under the auspices of the Tualatin Basin Public Awareness Committee—a group of 14 cities, three counties and three state agencies that coordinate public information on water quality in the Tualatin Basin in suburban Portland, Oregon. The surveys cost roughly \$10,000 and were funded in part by grants from the Tualatin Valley Water Quality Endowment Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation. The survey results have helped measure the results of public information campaigns, tailor messages and target specific audiences.

continued on page 14

Voices from the Field...

continued from page 13

Integrating Models of Citizens Perceptions, Metal Contaminants and Wetlands Restoration in an Urbanizing Watershed

Stony-Brook Millstone Watershed Association, NJ

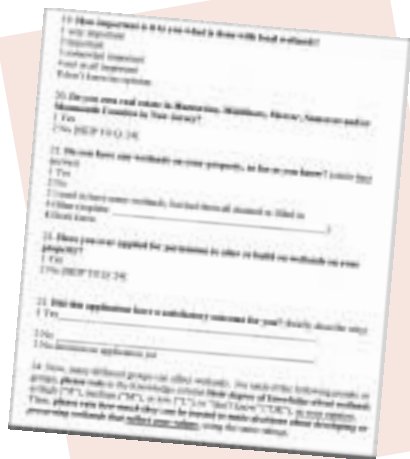
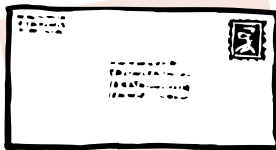
The overall goal of the project is to use the scientific information from the research to increase public understanding and support for the vital role wetlands play in the integrity of watersheds. The approach involves scientific investigations of metals interactions in wetlands, education and social science assessment of our outreach efforts.

Social science researchers compiled the data from interviews with wetlands experts and municipal officials, reviewed relevant literature on wetlands, and developed a random mail-survey instrument to be used with citizens and municipal officials in the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed. In Spring 2001, the survey was sent to 1,000 randomly selected residents of the watershed to obtain baseline data on citizens' knowledge and perceptions of the function and value of wetlands. A return rate of 47% was achieved for this survey. The survey was also sent to public officials in the Watershed, including those who sit on municipal councils, zoning and planning boards and environmental commissions; there was a 57% return rate from officials who received the survey. A three-wave (e.g., with reminders) mailing process increased the response rate in order to obtain a statistically valid sample. Results from the

survey will assist the Association in designing a comprehensive education program on wetlands for the general public, as well as for municipal officials. A follow-up survey of 1,000 randomly selected citizens in the watershed at least one year later and interviews with officials will aim at evaluating the effects of the education program.

The three-year U.S. EPA-Grant funded project is a cooperative venture between the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, Princeton University and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, with the Watershed Association, a volunteer non-profit citizens organization, administering and leading the research effort.

"At about the halfway point in our STAR Water and Watershed grant project, we believe the results are already making a substantial difference in environmental decision making at the local and state level."



Moncton Metro Quarterly Survey

Corporate Research Associates for Petitcodiac Riverkeeper; Moncton, New Brunswick

Over the past two years, the Petitcodiac Riverkeeper has made use of surveys to better monitor public support towards their efforts to restore our river. The Riverkeeper “purchases” a single question (worth CDNS400) from time to time in Corporate Research Associate’s quarterly survey of the region (CRA is a well established public opinion firm in Atlantic Canada which does opinion polls on all sorts of issues every quarter). The same question in the same order is always asked to allow them to compare results from year to year. When the results are positive, which they have always been, they put out a press release and usually get very good coverage on the story.

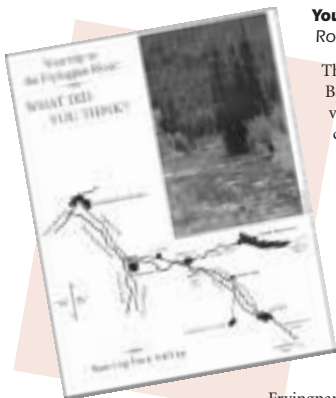


Your Trip to the Fryingspan River – What did You Think?

Roaring Fork Conservancy, CO

The Roaring Fork Conservancy, a watershed conservation group based in Basalt, Colorado, has developed and initiated an extensive survey of visitors along the Fryingspan River. The survey represents an important component of an economic study being done to quantify the impacts of river recreation on the local and regional economy. The Fryingspan River is well known for its excellent fly-fishing. It is a tail-water stream, affected by the operations of the upstream Ruedi Reservoir. As future management scenarios are contemplated for Ruedi, the Conservancy, along with its project partners, the Colorado River Water Conservation District and Ruedi Water and Power Authority, is seeking to gather credible, scientific information about the status and economic contribution of recreation in the Fryingspan Valley. A concurrent biologic study of the fishery will provide additional scientific information to present to decision-makers.

The Conservancy distributed 533 surveys to visitors on the lower Fryingspan River during 63 random days from November 2000 through October 2001. A majority of contacted visitors were anglers and were non-local (signifying new economic inflows to the area). The survey itself contains questions about trip statistics, visitor preferences (e.g. related to streamflows), visitation patterns, trip expenditures and visitor demographics. Contacted visitors were asked to complete the survey and mail it back. Follow-up reminder postcards and surveys were used, which helped bring the survey’s response rate to 72 percent. A survey, specific to Ruedi Reservoir, was also administered under the same format, in order to collect economic and other information from reservoir recreationists as well. For more information on the survey approach and/or results, please contact Kristine Crandall at the Roaring Fork Conservancy (970/927-1290, birke@rof.net).



Low-cost Alternatives to Polling

By Kathy Luscher
& Thalia Zepatos,
River Network

So, you wish you could do a poll but lack the funds to hire a pollster? Wonder why some groups in the community haven't shown any interest in your projects? Interested in testing a new message but just don't know where to begin? While not replacements for professional polls, there are low-cost alternatives available to conservation organizations that will help you get the community feedback you need to plan projects and craft your messages effectively. Here are some of the most commonly used surveys for nonprofit groups:

Community Discussions

You can conduct informal research and get valuable information about your audience through inexpensive community discussions. By listening closely, you can find out what people know about the watershed; how they feel about water quality, development and related issues; whether the language you are using conveys the meaning you want—and whether it moves people to get involved.

First, you need to determine your target audiences. Would you like more feedback from community leaders and decision-makers? People with key occupations or businesses? Members of all the groups that use the river or live alongside it? You may find it helpful to first hold a series (10-12) of one-on-one interviews with representatives of your priority audiences. Then follow up and organize larger group meetings in places comfortable for and convenient to the groups you are inviting. Depending upon your intended audience, consider holding these "listening exercises" in conjunction with your annual meeting or festival, during a neighborhood association meeting or community picnic. You may be able to recruit trained facilitators from the



community to help you with this process.

Door-to-door Surveys

While more time-consuming than other alternatives, door-to-door interviewing provides an excellent opportunity to involve staff, board and volunteers. Instead of assuming we know what the general public's values and concerns are, we can stand on their doorstep and ask them personally. Before setting off to pound the pavement, convene your "pollsters" together for a training session to ensure consistency and decrease bias among the questions asked. Remember, the people asking the questions will be representing your organization and appearance does impact first impressions. Though a rigid dress code is not necessary, to the extent possible, pollsters' appearances should be representative of the community being polled. Surveyors should also have general information about the organization available to leave with interested individuals they talk with. A follow-up meeting in the community surveyed, to report on survey results and help plan subsequent action steps, can also be advertised during the survey process.

Collaborate with a University

A nearby university or college professor may be looking for practical projects to assign classes studying statistics and polling. Universities often are eager to provide their resources, skills and expertise as a way to introduce students to practical applications of their academic work. Contact your local university, community-college or high school to learn of potential opportunities, and work with them to create projects that benefit the students as well as your organization. Ask the professor to serve in an advisory capacity as you draft a questionnaire, and help you conduct a telephone survey, focus groups or door-to-door survey to carry out the research.

Electronic Surveys

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than half of the households in the United States had one or more computers in 2000, and more than 80 percent of these households have at least one member using the Internet. As more and more people gain access to the Internet, electronic surveying—while still imperfect—presents a viable option. Many electronic survey formats are free to use, and are best utilized when your target audience is comprised of known Internet users. While not your best option for getting broad community input, a web survey can attract more attention to your web site. A follow-up reminder to complete the survey, sent a few days after the original message, can greatly increase your response rate.

- **Zoomerang** is an Internet service for businesses and individuals to conduct professional surveys, get prompt responses to questions and analyze the data in real time. Zoomerang is accessible through any web browser. The no-cost version allows users to create surveys up to 20 questions in length and report on a maximum of 50 responses. Surveys must be created from one of numerous templates and data is stored for 10 days after the survey is launched. For more information, visit: www.zoomerang.com.
- **FreePolls** provides a single question poll for your website. Those who answer the question will be able to view current results immediately. For more information, visit www.freepolls.com.
- **Survey Monkey's** basic (no-cost) subscription entitles users to a maximum of 10 questions per survey with a limit of 100 responses. Survey Monkey allows users to analyze data in real time using graphs and tables, export data to Excel spreadsheets and identify individual responses. For more information, visit: www.surveymonkey.com.
- **Sparklit.com** offers a web poll that consists of one question that you can post on your website. Sparklit also offers a web survey that allows up to 15 questions and 15 answers for voters to choose from. Choose from 4 question types to create your survey. For more information, visit: www.sparklit.com.

Many of the ideas presented here can be found in *River Talk: Communicating a Watershed Message*, by River Network.

A LOOK AT COSTS

Custom research costs can vary widely, depending on the vendor, the type of respondents you want to talk to, location, and topic. It is easier and less expensive to get homemakers to talk about detergent than it is to get Ph.D. chemists to talk about how the detergent pollutes the water and the damage it does to the environment. Within this in mind below is a range of prices for different research methodologies, as offered by several research firms.

Two focus groups can run about \$6,000 - \$10,000. This includes recruiting, facility fees, participant incentives, developing a discussion guide, audio taping, transcription, moderating, analysis, and a report of findings. This would not include costs for a moderator travel.

A custom phone poll of 5 minutes with 300 people would cost \$6,500 - \$8,000; 10 minutes with 500 people would cost \$12,000 - \$16,000. This includes developing a questionnaire, sample, interviewing, data tabulation, analysis, and a report of findings.

A custom mail survey would cost about three-fourths to two-thirds as much as a phone survey. This is because there are no interviewer costs, but there are additional costs for formatting and questionnaire layout, preparing questionnaires for mailing, postage (outgoing and return), and incentives (\$1-\$2 per questionnaire).

Omnibus surveys by phone or mail can cost from \$700 to \$900 for one question on a nationwide survey of 1,000. For this you get the answer to your question plus demographic data. For analysis of the data, add \$300 to \$400 per question.

Custom online surveys would fall somewhere between mail and phone survey. Formatting and layout for online surveys, programming and the cost of incentives can counterbalance some savings from interviewer or postage costs.

Omnibus online survey costs vary the most, predominantly due to the amount of support services offered. Some vendors will simply put a question you write into a survey which might only cost a few hundred dollars. More comprehensive services will have costs very similar to a phone or mail omnibus, with additional costs for analysis.

What the Polls are Telling Us

Compiled by
Laurie Harris &
Kathy Luscher,
River Network

Though your organization may not have conducted a poll, information from national polls can help your program and address specific issues. Below are some results related to river and watershed conservation from recently conducted national polls.

National Geographic Society's River Poll

Poll conducted in June 2001 by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates of Washington, D.C. Complete results of this comprehensive, nationally representative telephone study among 750 American adults can be found at http://www.rivernet.org/hottopics/Geography_IQ_.htm.

- Nearly all Americans (98%) said that protecting and conserving our rivers was an important environmental priority, and 3 in 4 (75%) said it was a very important one.
- Nearly 2 in 3 Americans (65%) said they were interested in getting personally involved in conserving and protecting rivers.
- Nearly 2 in 3 Americans (63%) wrongly believe that water is a renewable resource, and an even greater number (66%) believe that rivers contain both fresh and salt water.
- Nearly 7 out of 10 Americans (68%) say they are not currently involved in river conservation and protection, and only 7% say they are “very involved.”
- Many Americans (44%) have a great deal of trouble defining the term “watershed.”
- Four in ten Americans (40%) said that the pollution of drinking water (25%) and the pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs (15%) was the environmental issue that concerned them the most.
- Although only 19% said they were very interested in getting involved, poll results clearly show that addressing the lack of awareness Americans have about rivers will generate much higher interest in river conservation.

Environmental Defense Fund

Completed in 2000, the Environmental Defense poll compares environmental attitudes of young adults (500 18-25 year-olds), with those of the Baby Boom generation who came of age around the first Earth Day (500 45-55 year-olds) in 1970. Complete results can be found at: <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/EarthDay/earthdaypoll.PDF>.

- A majority of both generations believe environmental conditions to be worse today than thirty years ago, and the younger generation is remarkably skeptical about past progress, with 62% believing conditions are worse today and only 29% seeing conditions as better.
- Both groups refused to accept the proposition that environmental problems are so big that individuals can't make much of a difference (Young Adults: can make difference 65%; can't 34%; Boomers: can make difference 64%; can't 36%).
- An overwhelming majority of Americans ages 18 to 25 (85%) and Boomers (67%) indicated use of the internet for activities other than E-mail, with approximately one-third going on-line at least once a day.

Gallup

Gallup's Earth Day poll, conducted March 5-7, 2001 with 1,060 national adults. Complete results of this and other polls can be found at <http://www.gallup.com/>.

- A key question in this survey asks Americans to describe the current state of environmental conditions in the United States. Overall, Americans are closely divided in their assessment, with 46% viewing conditions as "good" or "excellent" and 53% considering them "only fair" or "poor." A different question finds that only 42% of Americans worry "a great deal" about the quality of the environment.
- Pollution of drinking water tops Americans' list of specific environmental concerns (64% worry a great deal about this), while acid rain is of the least concern (28%).

NEETF/Roper Starch National Report Card

The annual NEETF/Roper Survey evaluates public attitudes and knowledge on the environment and how these characteristics have changed over the past nine years. The August 2000 survey was based on a nationally representative sample of 1,505 Americans, age 18 and older, surveyed by Roper Starch Worldwide in August 2000 by telephone. Complete results of this and other polls can be found at: <http://neetf.org/roper/roper.shtm>.

- A majority of Americans say that environmental protection and economic development can go hand in hand. Of those surveyed, 63% agree with this option, rather than the alternative—that one must be chosen over the other (25%).
- Close to half (46%) of Americans hold the view that current laws "do not go far enough" to protect the environment. One-third (32%) hold the view that existing laws have struck "about the right balance," while 15% contend that laws and regulations already "go too far."
- Fully 95% of adult Americans (including 95% of parents) believe that environmental education should be taught in our K-12 schools.



League of Conservation Voters Education Fund

A summary of 2000 results involving 2 past-election telephone survey of 1,200 registered voters can be found at: www.voteenvironment.org/pdf/final_FINAL_LCVEF_polling_analysis.pdf. Results of polls by state and other national polls are on-line at www.voteenvironment.org.

- 80% of voters support strengthening the Clean Water Act.
- 71% of voters considered clean air, clean water and open space as either a primary consideration or one of several factors when making their voting decisions.
- Clean air and water rank in the top 3 concerns of issues behind education and health care.
- 83% of voters reject the argument that there must be a trade off between the environment and the economy.

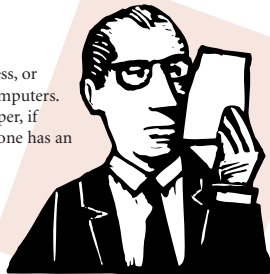
Pros and Cons of Electronic Surveys

By Joe Williams
Communications

Here are some tips on when to do paper and when to do electronic:

Do Paper Surveys When . . .

- not all of your respondents have electronic access, or when some only have access through shared computers. You can do a combination of electronic and paper, if you'd like. The point is to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the survey.
- the subject of the survey is sensitive. If you ask members to evaluate the effectiveness of the organization, any amount of concern over anonymity may cause respondents to give more positive scores than they truly believe the organization deserves. For these issues, paper is better. If you do conduct it electronically, consider using an outside firm and have them post it on their own internet site to give added assurance that the respondents are anonymous.
- the length of the survey is more than 100 questions. People may not have the patience to go all the way through a 125-question electronic survey; but if they can see the end of a paper survey, they're more likely to stick it out.



Do Electronic Surveys When . . .

- your organization already has a culture of electronic surveys (or is trying to build one).
- the subject of the survey is such that people would not be afraid to have their responses tracked back to their names.
- you need to obtain opinions about a current event. For example, you could do an on-line survey of a recent town hall meeting or of something that happened outside the organization.

Joe Williams Communications provides research, training and planning consulting services to organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada. This article was adapted from the on-line newsletter, "Face2Face."

*The article in its entirety can be found at:
<http://www.jwcom.com/Information.asp?action=display&record=175>. Phone: 800/833-5946*

Resources & References

Organizations

National Council on Public Polls

The National Council on Public Polls is an association of polling organizations that sets standards for public opinion pollsters, and advances the understanding among politicians, the media and general public of how polls are conducted and how to interpret poll results. The frequently asked questions and press release web pages can answer your general concerns about polls. E-mail: info@ncpp.org; Internet: www.ncpp.org/home.htm.

Public Agenda

Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit public opinion research and citizen education organization. *Red Flags* offers guidance on areas of public opinion research where findings may be misleading, unstable or easily misinterpreted. This section uses results from surveys related to the environment. *About Polling* is a handy guide to help reporters and citizens cast a critical eye on public opinion surveys with links to the following resources: *Best Estimates: A Guide to Sample Size and Margin of Error* and *The Seven Stages of Public Opinion*. Internet: www.publicagenda.org.

The Green Room

The Green Room, a media training site for environmentalists, explains the ins and outs of public opinion research and its importance in effectively getting your message heard. On the site you will find sources of public opinion research including free polling information, specific poll information searches, opinion researchers and sources for your own poll. Internet: www.green-room.org/polling/polling.html.

Trust for Public Land

"The Role of Public Opinion Polling" by Steven Glazer and Corey Brown highlights the important questions to ask in order to conserve public lands. In addition, the authors describe how a poll can be used to find the answers. The article includes a description of the tools Trust for Public Land uses for polling. Trust for Public Land, 116 New Montgomery St., 4th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105; Phone: 415/495-4014; E-mail: info@tpl.org.

Polling Results & Statistics

Interested in what people are saying? Check out these reports and organizations for polling results and analysis:

Economic Policy Institute's *The Pulse*

The Economic Policy Institute provides high-quality research and education in order to promote a prosperous, fair and sustainable economy. *The Pulse* is EPI's consumer's guide to public opinion data with credible analysis of polling on the environment, links to sites with data specific to the environment that include assessments of accuracy and links to sites with generally useful polling data. Economic Policy Institute, 1660 L Street NW, Suite 1200, Washington, D.C. 20036; Phone: 202/775-8810; E-mail: epi@epinet.org; Internet: www.epinet.org/pulse/pulse.html.

FedStats

Your gateway to statistics from over 100 federal agencies. Search by topic, federal agency or state. Internet: www.fedstats.gov.

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

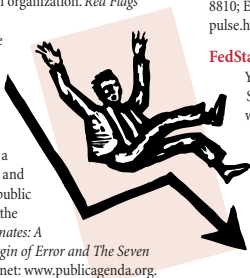
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research conducts public opinion and strategic research for issue organizations. A list of their reports on the environment are at: www.greenbergresearch.com/publications/environment.html. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research 10 G Street, NE Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20002; Phone: 202/478-8330; E-mail: info@greenbergresearch.com; Internet: www.greenbergresearch.com.

PollingReport.com

PollingReport is an independent, nonpartisan resource on trends in American public opinion. Survey results are compiled into categories, including the environment. Find out how the public rates safe drinking water and healthy rivers at www.pollingreport.com/enviro.htm.

Roper Center for Public Opinion Research

The Roper Center is a data archive housing the largest quantity of public opinion information from survey organizations in the United States and 70 other countries. Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, PO Box 440, Storrs, CT 06269-0440; Phone: 860/486-4440; E-mail: ISI013@uconnvm.uconn.edu; Internet: www.ropocenter.uconn.edu/.



continued on page 22

Resources & References

The Gallup Organization

The Gallup Poll is a leading source of public opinion polls in the United States. Visit their Gallup Poll News Service to read about current public opinion regarding popular and current topics. The Gallup Organization, The Gallup Building, 47 Hullfish Street, Princeton, NJ 08542; Phone: 609/924-9600; Internet: www.gallup.com.

National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF)

NEETF conducts an annual poll each spring to gauge the public's interest and knowledge regarding the environment. The current poll results are published in The Ninth Annual National Report Card on Environmental Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behaviors (May 2001) NEETF/Roper Survey. Read the Summary and view results and figures on-line: <http://www.neetf.org/roper/roper2001-a.htm>. To order a copy of *Lessons From the Environment*, contact Derek Young at 202/261-6472, or young@neetf.org. The report costs \$15 for hard copy, \$12 for electronic version and \$10 for government agencies.



Publications

Following are in-print and on-line resources to help you design and conduct your own poll.

Designing and Conducting Survey Research is a guide to conducting sample survey research. It explains all major components of survey research including construction of the instrument, administration of the process and analysis and

reporting of results. By Louis M. Rea and Richard A. Parker. 2nd edition (June 1997). (Jossey-Bass Public Administration Series).

Moving People from Belief to Action

Molly MacGregor describes how survey results identifying public attitudes toward the environment helped her establish a volunteer monitoring program that is effective at engaging citizens. The article, from *The Volunteer Monitor* is available on-line at <http://www.epa.gov/volunteer/fall97/pg02.html>. Hard copies are available from River Network, 520 SW Sixth Ave., Suite 1130, Portland, OR 97204; E-mail: volmon@rivernet.org.

Public Opinion Polling: A Handbook for Public Interest and Citizen Advocacy Groups

(1987) By Celinda C. Lake with Pat Callbeck Harper. Island Press. *Public Opinion Polling* provides practical information on planning, conducting and analyzing opinion polls, as well as guidelines for interpreting polls conducted by others. Island Press, 58440 Main St., PO Box 7, Covelo, CA 95482; Phone: 800/828-1302; E-mail: service@islandpress.org; Internet: www.islandpress.org

Research Methods Knowledge Base by William M. Trochim, is a comprehensive web-based textbook that addresses all of the topics in a typical introductory undergraduate or graduate course in social research methods. It covers the entire research process. The chapter on Survey Results can guide you through all aspects of surveys from designing the survey to completing the survey.

Internet: <http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/kb/index.htm>.

(version current as of August 2, 2000). Survey Chapter:

<http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/kb/survey.htm>.

River Talk! Communicating a Watershed Message

River Talk! is a hands-on guide for people who want to be more efficient and effective in encouraging key sectors of their communities to get involved in designing a river-and watershed-friendly future together. Refer to *River Talk!* for assistance in planning and conducting a poll and developing a message from poll results. Available from River Network, 520 SW Sixth Ave., Suite 1130, Portland, OR 97204; Phone: 503/241-3506; E-mail: marketplace@rivernet.org.

Upper Mississippi River Resource Book: A Survey of Research on Public Attitudes Toward the Environment.

In fall 1995, the McKnight Foundation conducted research among residents in the upper Mississippi River basin, in both rural and urban areas of Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois. The Resource Book contains the results of the research, including people's attitudes toward the Mississippi River and activities and programs that build a sense of commitment to the river. The publication is available from the McKnight Foundation, 600 TCF Tower, 121 South Eighth Street, Minneapolis, MN 55402-2825; Phone: 612/333-4220; E-mail: info@mcknight.org; Internet: www.mcknight.org.

What is a Survey? A brochure series to help with planning and conducting surveys. Topics covered include understanding error associated with surveys and details of mail and telephone surveys and focus groups. Each brochure in the series is free for the first copy. Additional copies cost \$0.50. They are available to view and order on-line. American Statistical Association, 1429 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3415 Phone: 888/231-3473; Email: asainfo@amstat.org; Internet: <http://www.amstat.org/sections/srms/whatsurvey.html>.

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- **Receive the myriad of Partner benefits,** including subscriptions to *River Voices* and *River Fundraising Alert*, a copy of the *Directory of Funding Sources for River and Watershed Conservation Organizations*, and a copy of either *Starting Up: A Handbook for New River and Watershed Organizations* or *How to Save a River...and more!*

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You will receive your initial set of Partner materials, including your choice of: (check one)

How to Save a River

Starting Up: A Handbook for New River and Watershed Organizations

River Talk!

The Clean Water Act: An Owner's Manual

Please make your check payable to River Network and return this form to:

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Register online at the River Network web site: www.rivernetwork.org. To request a Rally brochure or ask any questions, contact us at the River Rally hotline or by E-mail: 1.800.639.8108
riverrally@rivernetwork.org.

See you in Asheville!

