

# MASTERING PARKS & REC SURVEYS: THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO BETTER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



# Introduction

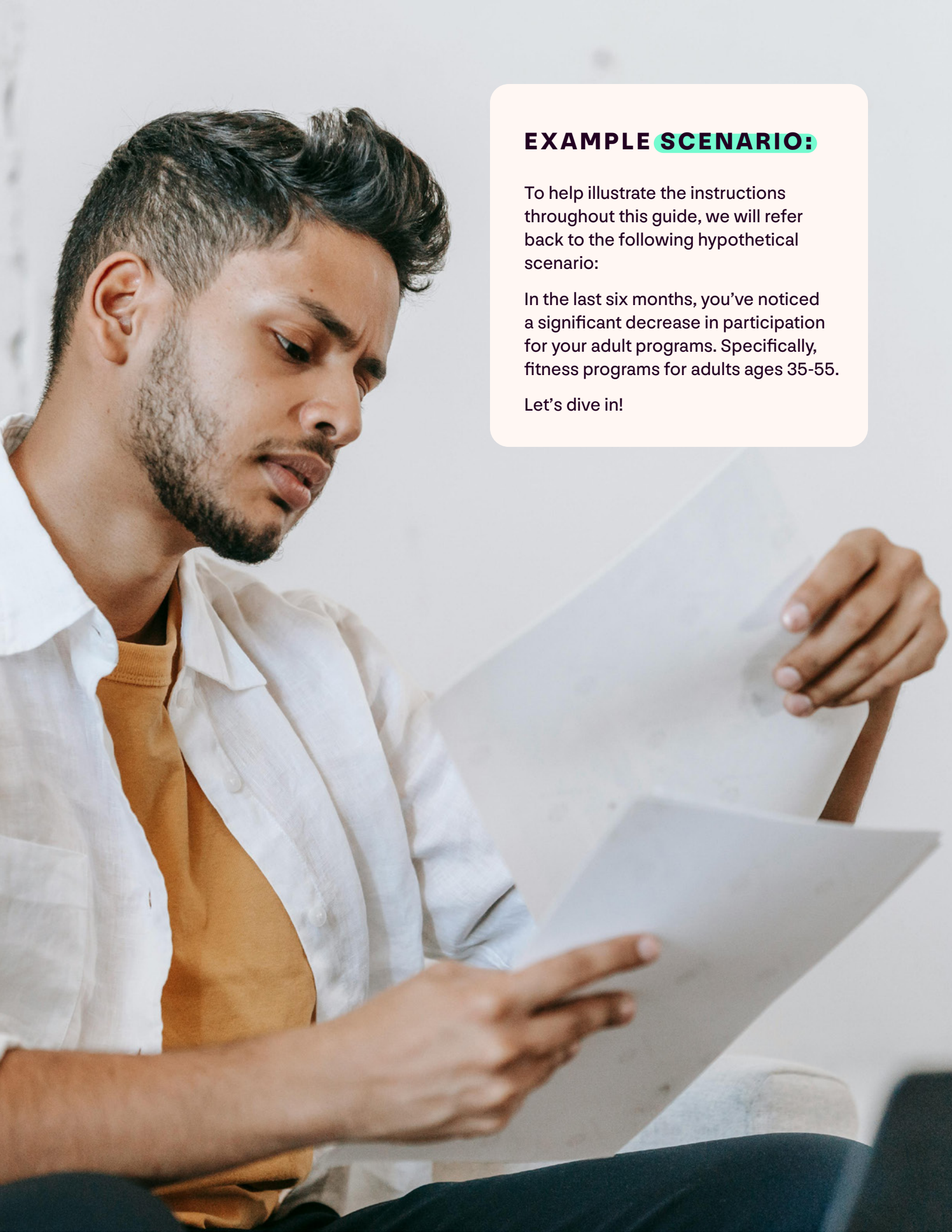
Welcome to the Guide to Effective Surveys for Parks and Recreation Agencies, where we explore the art and science of leveraging surveys to enhance community engagement and optimize recreational experiences for your community members.

Surveys are invaluable tools for gathering feedback from your patrons, assessing their needs, and making informed decisions to improve how your agency supports its community members in enriching their lives through parks and rec.

Throughout this guide, we will reference an example scenario and use it to help you learn about:

- **The Fundamentals of Survey Planning and Creation:** Explore the essential principles and techniques for planning and creating surveys tailored to the unique needs and demographics of your community. Understand how to design surveys that align closely with the preferences and priorities of your patrons.
- **Common Pitfalls to Avoid:** Identify and steer clear of common survey pitfalls that can undermine the validity and effectiveness of your data collection efforts. Ensure that your surveys yield reliable and meaningful insights by avoiding common pitfalls such as leading questions, ambiguity, and survey fatigue.
- **Effective Response Collection:** Discover strategies for effectively collecting survey responses, including targeted outreach campaigns, incentivization tactics, and logistical considerations to maximize participation rates. Learn how to engage your community and ensure high response rates to your surveys.
- **Survey Result Analysis:** Learn how to analyze survey results with clarity and precision, extracting actionable insights that inform strategic decision-making and drive continuous improvement in your parks and recreation operations. Understand how to interpret survey data and translate it into actionable recommendations for your agency.

Whether you're a seasoned survey researcher or embarking on your first data collection endeavor, this guide will equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to harness the full potential of surveys in advancing your agency's mission of enriching lives through parks and recreation. Let's embark on this journey together, as we unlock the transformative power of effective survey methodologies in shaping vibrant and thriving communities.



## **EXAMPLE SCENARIO:**

To help illustrate the instructions throughout this guide, we will refer back to the following hypothetical scenario:

In the last six months, you've noticed a significant decrease in participation for your adult programs. Specifically, fitness programs for adults ages 35-55.

Let's dive in!



# THE FUNDAMENTALS OF PLANNING AND CREATING A SURVEY

Before you jump into creating your survey, it's important to understand the fundamentals of surveying to ensure you effectively capture the responses you need to make insightful decisions.

## 1. DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES:

The objective of your survey will influence every factor of your survey creation process. Clarifying your goals upfront is the most important step in creating effective surveys. To help define your objectives, ask yourself:

- a. What specific questions are you trying to answer?
- b. What decisions are you looking to make based on the results?
- c. Are you looking to gauge sentiment or answer quantifiable data (IE: how much/how many?)

In our **example scenario**, the answer to these questions might look like this:

- What specific questions are you trying to answer?
  - a. What's causing the decrease in participation in our adult fitness programs?
- What decisions are you looking to make based on the results?
  - a. What adjustments do we need to make to our programming to increase participation? Do we need to:
    2. Diversify our fitness program offerings?
    3. Adjust times?
    4. Change instructors?
    5. Etc.
- Are you looking to gauge sentiment or quantifiable data?
  - a. In this case, we'll likely want to gather information on both.

## 2. IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE:

Understanding your target audience is essential for crafting relevant survey questions. Consider the demographics, interests, and preferences of the people you're surveying. Tailoring your questions to resonate with your audience will increase response rates and yield more valuable insights.

In the case of our **hypothetical scenario** above, our goal is clear, making it easy to define the audience group we're looking to get feedback from:

**35-55 year olds that have previously participated in fitness programs but haven't in the last six months.**



### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Surveys can include a variety of question types, each serving a different purpose. Here are a few of the most common types of questions you can ask in a survey with examples tying back to the scenario we've outlined above:

#### YES OR NO

- IE: Have you registered for any of [agency's name] fitness programs in the last 6 months?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No



#### MULTIPLE CHOICE

- Single-Select
- IE: What's the primary reason you haven't registered for any of [agency's name] fitness programs in the last 6 months?
    - ☐ Cost
    - ☐ Scheduling conflicts
    - ☐ Lack of interest in programs offered today
    - ☐ Injury
    - ☐ Program difficulty
- Multi-select
- IE: What types of fitness programs do you like to participate in? (Select top 3)
    - ☐ Team sports
    - ☐ Group fitness
    - ☐ Aquatics
    - ☐ Dance
    - ☐ Yoga
    - ☐ Martial arts
    - ☐ Other

## RATING SCALES

→ IE: On a scale of 1-5 (5 being the highest), how happy are you with the variety of fitness programs we offer?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

## OPEN-ENDED

→ IE: How can we better support you in achieving your health and fitness goals?

**NOTE:** While asking open-ended questions is a great way to collect detailed insights from survey participants, it does create extra work when it comes to analyzing your survey results. When designing your survey, be sure to keep in mind – especially if you're expecting a high volume of responses.

## TIP

When designing your survey questions, make sure to:

1. Ask questions that tie back to the primary goal of your survey and will help you determine what actions you need to take.
2. Consider thinking ahead to how you will analyze the data you collect when formatting your questions. Will you be able to easily extract insights from the questions you are asking?
3. Ensure you are using the question type that is best suited to the question you are asking for.





## 4. CREATING YOUR SURVEY:

There's an abundance of freemium surveying tools agency's can use to easily produce powerful surveys. Here are a couple of the most popular options out there:

### SURVEY MONKEY

A household name when it comes to survey tools. SurveyMonkey is easy-to-use and loaded with great features. They offer a free plan, and their starter plan is relatively affordable if you need to upgrade.

They've also tapped into the power of AI to help make survey creation even easier. You can use prompts to start your survey creation process.

Here's a prompt we could use to start building a survey for our **example scenario**:

"I work in the parks and recreation department at a local municipality, and we've noticed a steep decline in participation in our adult fitness programs year over year. We are trying to understand the cause of this decline and are looking to collect feedback from adults ages 35-55 who have previously participated in fitness programs but haven't in the last 6 months."

### JOTFORM

This is another freemium survey tool that has gained lots of popularity over the years. What sets JotForm apart from other survey tools is its ability to easily create visually pleasing surveys and its flexibility. JotForm has a ton of pre-made "widgets" that you can use to create really powerful surveys with ease.





# COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID WHEN CREATING SURVEYS

Surveying can be a delicate art, and it's easy to make mistakes that can hinder the effectiveness of your survey efforts. Here are some common pitfalls you'll want to steer clear of when creating your surveys:

## 1. LEADING QUESTIONS:

Asking “leading questions” is one of the most common mistakes folks make when creating questions. These are questions that might unintentionally create bias to an answer and can heavily compromise the integrity of your survey results.

⊗ **IE:** How much do you love the types of our incredible fitness programs?

✓ **Suggestion:** On a scale of 1-5 (5 being the highest), how would rate the quality of our fitness programs?

## 2. AMBIGUITY IN QUESTIONS:

Ensure that survey questions are clear, specific, and easy to understand. Ambiguous or vague language can confuse respondents and lead to inaccurate or unreliable data.

⊗ **IE:** Do you like our fitness programs?

✓ **Suggestion:** Do our fitness programs support you in achieving your personal health goals? Please explain your answer.

## 3. SURVEY FATIGUE:

Keep surveys concise and focused to prevent respondent fatigue. Lengthy or repetitive surveys will reduce your participation rates or lead people to skew your data by randomly selecting options to complete the survey quicker.



#### 4. LIMITED RESPONSE OPTIONS:

Provide comprehensive response options to accommodate diverse perspectives and ensure that they can accurately express their opinions. Limited response options can prevent respondents' from providing meaningful feedback to your agency.

##### TIP

This is a common problem folks might run into with multiple choice questions. It's challenging to consider all the possible responses options that best represent your audience's views. It's always recommended that you include an "other" free text option for multiple choice questions to avoid this pitfall.

#### 5. NOT COMMUNICATING THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY:

Time is scarce, and most people won't take time out of their busy days to fill out your surveys unless it benefits them in some way. Be sure to clearly communicate why you are asking your community members to participate in your surveys and what actions their insights can help drive.



## 6. NOT ASKING FOR QUALIFYING AND DISQUALIFYING QUESTIONS:

If you plan to distribute your survey through various channels, you may end up gathering responses from folks that don't fit the criteria of your target audience. To address this, you'll want to ask qualifying questions to ensure they you're only counting responses from your intended audience.

In our **example scenario**, qualifying questions would include:

- What's Your Age?
- When's the last time you participated in a recreation program offered by [agency name]?
  - ☐ Never
  - ☐ 0-3 months ago
  - ☐ 3-6 months ago
  - ☐ 6+ months ago

### TIP

Some people may not feel comfortable sharing their specific age, so instead, you can use a multiple-choice question type to provide age ranges that a participant can select instead of requiring them to share their specific age.





## **7. LEAVING QUESTIONS AS OPTIONAL ON YOUR SURVEY:**

When creating your survey, remember to set all of the important questions you are looking to get answered as “required.” Leaving key questions as optional will reduce the number of responses you collect.

## **8. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY CONCERNS:**

Address respondents’ privacy and confidentiality concerns by clearly communicating how their data will be used and assuring them of data confidentiality. Implement measures to protect respondents’ privacy and anonymize survey responses where necessary.

By being mindful of these common pitfalls and implementing strategies to avoid them, you can maximize the effectiveness of your survey initiatives and ensure that your data collection efforts yield reliable and actionable insights.



# STRATEGIES TO BOOST SURVEY PARTICIPATION

What's the point of a survey without responses? Now that you've created an effective survey questionnaire, you'll need to collect your responses. As a rule of thumb, the more engagement you get, the more conclusive your data will be.

So how can you effectively promote your survey to gather responses?

## 1. TARGETED EMAIL CAMPAIGNS:

- Email marketing still remains one of the most effective ways to reach your community members – this is no different when it comes distributing surveys and gathering responses.
  
- How to set up a targeted email campaign:
  1. Using your recreation management software platform,
    1. Create your audience list using the criteria you defined in the planning phase. In our case:
      1. Adults (ages 35 – 55)
      2. Have previously participated in fitness programs
      3. Have not participated in fitness programs in the last 6 months
    2. Create your email copy:
      1. Include a link to your survey
      2. Be sure to mention its purpose and how the information you gather will benefit your community members
    3. Evaluate your email performance and schedule follow-ups accordingly.
      1. **IE:** send follow-up email 3 days later to anyone who didn't open the original email

With Xplor Recreation, you can easily create target audience lists using any of the data you collect in your CRM and quickly create marketing emails to distribute your surveys to your intended audience.

## **2. INCENTIVIZATION TACTICS:**

Consider offering incentives to encourage survey participation, such as gift cards, discounts on recreation programs, or entries into prize drawings. Incentives are a great way to motivate folks to participate in surveys but be careful not to offer too big of an incentive as it may lead people to game the system – corrupting your results.

## **3. LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Pay attention to logistical considerations such as survey timing, frequency of reminders, and accessibility of survey platforms. Ensure that surveys are accessible across various devices and accommodate respondents' scheduling constraints.

## **4. UTILIZE MULTIPLE DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS:**

Maximize survey visibility and reach by utilizing multiple distribution channels, including email, social media, community newsletters, and in-person events. Diversifying distribution channels increases the likelihood of reaching a broader audience. But remember, your survey needs to include qualifying questions if you are distributing it broadly through various channels – especially if you're offering some sort of incentive for participating.

## **5. FOLLOW-UP COMMUNICATIONS:**

Schedule follow-up communications to remind respondents to complete the survey and express appreciation for their participation. Follow-up messages can serve as gentle reminders and reinforce the importance of their feedback. Better yet, once you've had the time to analyze the feedback and determine the actions you will take as a result, communicate your plan to your community members to show them how much you value their input. This will go a long way, especially when it comes to increasing engagement in future surveys you share out.

## **6. ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS:**

Ensure that your survey is accessible to all community members, including those with disabilities or language barriers. Provide alternative formats or accommodations as needed to ensure inclusivity and maximize participation.

By employing these effective response collection strategies, you can maximize participation rates, enhance data quality, and gather valuable insights that inform decision-making and drive positive change in your parks and recreation agency.



# HOW TO EFFECTIVELY ANALYZE SURVEY RESULTS

Congratulations on collecting your survey responses! Now, let's dive into the exciting world of analyzing your data.

Below we'll look at important factors to help you analyze the results and extract valuable insights from your survey responses, even if you're new to the process:

## 1. DATA CLEANING AND PREPARATION:

→ Start by cleaning up your responses. This involves:

- **Removing duplicate responses:** Look for any identical submissions and keep only one instance to avoid skewing your data.
- **Filtering out disqualified responses:** Identify responses that don't fit your target audience criteria and exclude them from your analysis.
- **Handling missing data:** Decide how to address missing responses—either by filling them in with an appropriate value or marking them for later consideration.
- **Standardizing open text responses:** If applicable, categorize or code open-ended responses to make them easier to analyze. We'll explain this in more detail soon!

## 2. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES:

The responses you gather in your survey to non-open-ended questions are considered “quantitative.” The most straightforward way of analyzing these results is through “descriptive statistics.” Don't worry, this sounds more complicated than it is! It's basically a fancy way of saying calculations of things like averages, means, etc.

### TIP

Most survey tools provide some level of built-in analysis for you as a starting point. If they don't, you can get started easily by:

- a. Exporting your results from your survey tool
- b. Using a tool like excel to create bar chart visualizations of your quantitative results

Bar charts are great because they clearly illustrate differences across answers, making it easier for you to interpret and make sense of your findings.



### 3. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS:

Responses to your open-ended questions are “qualitative” data. If your survey included open-ended questions, you’ll want to analyze these qualitative findings by:

- **“Coding” the Results:** In other words, you want to look for recurring themes or patterns in open-ended results and group them by “codes.” In doing so, you’ll be able to aggregate your open-ended data like you would for qualitative. You can [learn more about “coding” here](#), but one option to help speed up your “coding” efforts is to copy responses to an open-ended question and paste them into a [free word-cloud generator](#).
- **Content analysis:** Examine the content of responses to uncover underlying meanings or sentiments expressed by participants.

Looking back at our **example scenario**, we shared the following example of an open-ended question:

“How can we support you in better achieving your health and fitness goals?”

For this example, we may see themes in our responses that we could “code” or categorize, such as:

- Adding more program variety -> Program Variety
- Offering more time options -> Time Conflicts
- Reducing the cost of our programming -> Cost
- Etc.

By assigning these “codes” to our results, we can treat the data quantitatively and produce a bar chart to visualize it.

## 4. CROSS-TABULATION AND COMPARISON:

Comparing quantitative and “coded” qualitative data for each of your individual questions is a great starting point for your analysis. But to really unlock the power of your survey responses, you need to combine and segment responses across multiple questions.

Here are common ways of achieving this:

→ **Demographic comparison:** This is the most common way to group and compare your survey results. For example, you can segment based on demographic questions like:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Location (proximity to your facilities)
4. Marital status

Using our **example scenario**, here are some hypothetical findings we could uncover by segmenting and comparing demographic data:

- Segmenting 35-45 year old's responses vs 46-55 year olds'
  - From here, we could look at combining responses for the most common reasons this group stated for not participating in the last 6 months.
  - Let's say our findings show that the majority of 35-45 year olds aren't participating as much because of scheduling conflicts.
  - Now we can look at surveying this group again to understand which times work best for this demographic group and evaluate how we can adjust our programming to accommodate them better.
- Segmenting Female respondents vs those who identify as belonging to other gender groups:
  - From here, we could look at combining responses for the types of fitness activities they like most.
  - Let's say that our findings show that most female respondents like participating in Group Fitness activities.
  - Now we can audit the Group Fitness activities we are offering and investigate if we have enough options or determine if there's further analysis we need to do to better understand the issue.



- **Response comparison:** Demographics aren't the only way to group and compare your results. You may start by segmenting your data using responses to specific questions.

In our **example scenario**, we asked which types of fitness programs our community members like to participate in. We can start by grouping and comparing our data based on the responses to this question then look at layering in further segmentation like demographics or additional response data.

There's no shortage of ways you can cross-tabulate and compare survey responses. This is one of the most challenging aspects of data analysis, but don't get discouraged. This is a skill that you can easily improve on through practice and is worth investing time into.

## 5. BENCHMARKING AND COMPARISON:

Often times, surveys are used reactively to seek answers to questions as they come up. Of course, surveys can and should be used proactively too. Either way, it's just as important to redistribute surveys periodically where it makes sense. Doing so allows you to establish benchmarks that you can use to:

- **Compare results** – have the results changed since the last time you gathered feedback on your survey, and how?
- **Measure progress** – have the actions you set out achieved the results you wanted to see?
- **Identify trends** – are there any new emerging trends you need to consider and/or address?



## 6. INTERPRETATION AND INSIGHTS:

Interpret your survey results thoughtfully:

- **Identify key insights:** Look for significant findings or patterns that emerge from your analysis.
- **Consider implications:** Think about what the results mean for your agency's goals and how they can inform decision-making or program development.

## 7. COMMUNICATING RESULTS EFFECTIVELY:

Present your survey findings clearly and persuasively:

- **Use plain language:** Avoid jargon and technical terms to ensure your findings are accessible to a wide audience.
- **Highlight key findings:** Emphasize the most important insights or recommendations to draw attention to key takeaways. It's easy to get carried away, especially if you're new to surveying, so be mindful of keeping things nice and concise.
- **Visual aids:** Use charts, graphs, and other visual elements to illustrate your findings and make them easier to understand.

By following these detailed steps for survey result analysis, you'll be able to derive actionable insights from your data and use them to make informed decisions and improvements in your parks and recreation agency. Don't worry if you're new to survey analysis; we'll guide you through each step and help you unlock the full potential of your survey data. Let's get started!



# About Xplor Recreation

## INNOVATIVE, EASY-TO-USE SOFTWARE FOR PARKS AND RECREATION AGENCIES

Better engage your clients, make life easier for your team, and partner with a technology provider you can rely on.

Xplor Recreation's frictionless, intuitive, and easy-to-use platform is designed to empower your team and community members, so you can focus on delivering the service your clients deserve.

## GIVE YOUR CLIENTS AND TEAM MEMBERS THE TECHNOLOGY THEY DESERVE

Book a 30-minute introductory call and discover all the ways Xplor Recreation can support the unique needs of your agency and help you empower the community members you serve.

[BOOK A DEMO TODAY](#)



"[Xplor Recreation] is like going from an old Nokia Brick Phone to a Smart Phone. The Nokia still does the basic things you need it to do, but the quality and user experience just isn't there.

The world has evolved and so have people's expectations. We were stuck in the past when it came to serving our staff and clients. So, we decided it was time to ditch the 90s Nokia Phone and get ourselves onto something more modern, fluid, and innovative."

**John S. – City of Ocala**

