



Explanation

Food surveys have been used by many SFP Food Partnerships to take a snap-shot and provide an overview of their local food system both when the partnership and strategy are being developed and later in the partnership's life. Food surveys can range from quick fact-finding questionnaires and interviews gathering opinions on key food issues, to detailed consultation including on-line surveys, public consultation and focus group workshops.

Scope and scale of surveys

The scope and detail of the food survey will depend as much on the purpose and aims of the survey as on the capacity, expertise and resources available to the partnership.

In the SFP programme food surveys generally involve gathering information on the local food environment and culture and creating an information and data baseline against which changes in attitudes and behaviour can be assessed and measured. More detailed surveys can include gathering and understanding the opinions and perspectives of people across the food sector and from different communities/neighbourhoods and communities of interest.

It is important to acknowledge that surveys, depending on their scope and scale, will require significant time and energy commitment, often beyond the capacity of new food partnerships just starting out. Experience has shown that it is usually (but not always) only possible where a partnership is strongly supported or hosted by a resourced Local Authority or statutory agency.

Benefits

Whilst not obligatory it is worth emphasising how valuable a survey can be to a new food partnership or to a partnership assessing its impact after a number of years in existence.

The key benefits include:

- Providing evidence for the need to address issues in the food system
- Gaining commitment towards food partnership buy-in, particularly from Local Authorities
- Offering leverage for food issues to be included in local policies and agendas
- Providing opportunities to build momentum in communities towards establishing a food partnership and developing a food strategy
- Providing opportunities for awareness-raising about the issues and about the establishment of a cross-sectoral whole food system food partnership
- Encouraging engagement and participation in the process
- Galvanising the partnership Steering Group
- Developing experience, skills and capacity to carry out future surveys.

The Food Survey is extremely valuable when combined with food system mapping activities identifying who is doing what, where (see the [Food System Mapping](#) tool) and when this information is incorporated into the development of food strategies and action plans.

Surveying specific groups and communities

Food surveys can be extended to include more detailed information gathering from distinct interest groups or communities. This can include, for example:

- local food businesses (food retailers, food producers etc.)
- food surplus organisations
- groups linking food, health and wellbeing
- academic institutions, and
- food procurement and catering organisations.

It can also include different communities such as:

- migrants
- refugees and asylum seekers
- care leavers
- people with different disabilities
- elderly people
- students and school children, and
- different cultural and ethnic communities.

Lack of resources or capacity may mean it is not possible to include focus group consultation in an initial baseline survey. However, they should be considered when building community and citizen participation in food strategy and action plan development (see [Food Focus Group Facilitation](#) and [Food Group Workshop](#)).

Food survey implementation

The food survey carried out by the **Tameside Food Partnership** provides an exemplar of an approach for other partnerships to consider following. The survey was developed through collaboration between the partnership Steering Group – identifying objectives, themes and stakeholder groups – and the survey consultants, Social Marketing Gateway – who helped rationalise and distil the survey's scope and content and carried out data analysis and presented the outputs.

Tameside's food consultation report explains the ways in which the on-line survey was publicised and distributed to a wide range of people via:

- Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council website
- Tameside Big Conversation mailing list (150 people)
- Tameside Food Network members (90 people)
- Social media
- Strategic neighbourhood forum meetings in Tameside's 4 neighbourhoods
- Street team promotion and engagement (on-line survey completed by 964 people) at 6 different locations across the Borough

- Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council staff portal (reaches 2464 people)
- Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) staff portal (84 people)
- TARGET GP meeting (70 people)
- Tameside Adult and Community Education (100 people)
- Neighbourhood delivery groups (reaching over 50 people)

As the report states: the online survey had 1370 respondents, of which 975 were Tameside residents. The remaining 395 are likely to live close to and/or work in Tameside.

Repeat surveys

Having established an information baseline and developed survey experience partnerships often repeat and extend surveys when developing SFP award campaigns or when refreshing food strategies.

Literature and data reviews

Before embarking on a food survey, it may be useful to carry out a local literature and data review. Useful information on, for example, indicators of health and deprivation, may already be available. The review should include reports and data provided by the Local Authority and Public Health as well as other local community development organisations.

There are no hard and fast rules around how surveys should be structured and what questions should be asked. This guide offers a basic **food survey template** that can be used and adapted according to the survey's purpose and scope as well as the partnership's capacity and resources.

Introduction

- This **food system survey template** is based on the surveys carried out by:
 - **Tameside Food Partnership**, developed by Social Marketing Gateway, (commissioned by Tameside Borough Council on behalf of the Tameside Food Partnership) prior to Tameside becoming a member of the SFP Network, and
 - **Birmingham City Council**, Public Health Division when developing their Healthy Food City strategy.
- The survey template includes four main sections:
 1. **Healthy eating and drinking**
 2. **Access to food**
 3. **Food and its environmental impact**
 4. **What needs to happen?**
- Whilst it is suggested that all four themes are used the survey could use fewer themes or add additional themes depending on the specific purpose and focus of the survey. For instance, in Birmingham the survey included additional sections on **food policy**, **drinking**, **cooking**, and **on-line shopping**.

- The survey also includes a fifth section on **sociodemographic information**. Responses from this section help to provide evidence that the survey was completed by a cross-section of residents or to identify where there are gaps in the sample and where promotion of the survey may be required. Responses can also help those analysing the survey to understand certain responses that may be influenced by specific sociodemographic factors. It is worth noting that at the time of your survey you may not think this information is relevant, however, subsequently you may be asked for specific evidence that this information provides.
- Analysis, handling and reporting of the information collected in the Tameside Survey was carried out by Social Marketing Gateway – an independent company commissioned by the Council to carry out the survey. It is important to recognise that analysis needs to maintain objectivity and avoid any bias that could be applied by partnership members towards any aspects of the local food system. External consultants can help to achieve this objectivity, however, financial constraints often make this difficult. To avoid bias the survey analysis could be carried out by a representative group of partnership/Steering Group members working together collaboratively.
- Analysis of information whilst the survey is being carried out can help to identify where there are gaps in the data and where communities, neighbourhoods and specific groups of people (gender, age, ethnicity etc.) are being missed. This allows specific targeting of survey promotion to fill the gaps.
- Whilst a survey is an excellent way to begin developing a food strategy you may want to start by doing some initial strategy planning with a small group of stakeholders (see the [Stakeholder Engagement and Steering Group](#) tool). This initial work can then provide the basis for a consultation survey by including an overarching question: ***Here's what some stakeholders suggested – what do you think?*** This type of survey offers consultation on an emerging strategy through a process of refining and confirming what has already been suggested. This process was used in Brighton and Hove when developing their original food strategy.
- The **Food Survey Template** suggests themes and questions that could be included in a food survey. It is not a blueprint or rigid model of what you should do – that will depend on your local context and the opinions and perspectives of your food partnership steering group.

Food Survey Template

Introduction

The **XXXXX** (insert name) **Food Partnership** would like to know what residents think before developing a sustainable food strategy for the city/town/borough (delete as appropriate).

All the information we collect from you will be kept by the Food Partnership steering group in the strictest confidence and the findings will be completely anonymous – i.e. you won't be linked in any way to what you tell us. So please share your honest views.

There are no right or wrong answers – we are just looking for open and honest feedback.

We plan to publish the findings from the survey at a population level – i.e. we will add up all the answers and report the summary results, not by individuals – and where we use quotes from the responses, they will be anonymous.

Thank you for your help, it's really appreciated.

A. Healthy eating and drinking

When we talk about a healthy diet, we mean eating a balanced diet that meets nutritional and energy needs and includes appropriate portions of fruit and vegetables, carbohydrates, dairy (or alternatives), and protein, as recommended by Public Health England. See the [Eatwell Guide](#) for more information.

1. How easy or difficult do you find it to eat healthily?

- Very easy
- Quite easy
- Neither / nor
- Quite difficult
- Very difficult

2. Do any of the following things make it difficult for you to eat healthily at home?

Please select all that apply.

- Not knowing/not being sure of what makes a healthy diet
- The cost of healthy food
- Lack of cooking skills and confidence
- Lack of time - it takes too long to cook healthily
- My family won't eat healthy food
- Not having the right equipment e.g. a cooker
- Not having the right equipment e.g. knives and pans
- Not having transport to get to a supermarket
- Food labelling not being easy to understand e.g. recommended daily allowance, amount of sugar/salt etc.
- The cost of gas or electric for cooking
- Something else (please specify)

3. Do any of the following make it difficult for you to eat healthily out of home e.g. whilst at work or during leisure time when you are shopping/socialising etc?

Please select all that apply.

- Having trouble finding healthy options in supermarkets
- Having trouble finding healthy options in local shops
- Having trouble finding healthy options in cafes
- Having trouble finding healthy options in restaurants
- Having trouble finding healthy options in hot food takeaways
- The high number of places that unhealthy snacks and drinks are available
- A high number of local hot food takeaways
- Food labelling not being available
- Food labelling not being easy to understand e.g. recommended daily allowance, amount of sugar/salt etc.
- I often buy less healthy products on multi-buy offers (e.g. '3 for 2') to save money
- Healthier food tends to be more expensive
- Something else (specify)

4. How would you rate yourself in terms of healthy eating? Think about the past 3 months in particular.

1 = do not eat healthily at all

to

10 = eat an extremely healthy diet

5. How would you like to make your diet healthier?

Please select all that apply.

- Reduce the amount I eat/portion size
- Reduce my salt intake
- Reduce my sugar intake
- Reduce my fat intake
- Eat less processed food
- Eat more fruit and veg
- Drink less sugary drinks
- Cook from scratch more often
- Improve cooking skills and confidence
- Drink less sugary drinks
- Drink less alcohol
- Drink more water
- Something else (specify)
- I'm not interested in improving my diet

B. Access to food

1. Which of the following statements best describes the food eaten in your household in the past 12 months?
 - You and other household members always had enough of the kinds of foods you wanted to eat.
 - You and other household members had enough to eat, but not always the kinds of food you wanted.
 - Sometimes you and other household members did not have enough to eat.
 - Often you and other household members didn't have enough to eat.

To what extent have the following statements been true for your household food situation in the last 12 months?

2. We worry that food will run out before we have money to buy more.
 - Often true
 - Sometimes true
 - Never true
 - Don't know/Prefer not to say
3. The food we bought just didn't last, and there wasn't any money to get more.
 - Often true
 - Sometimes true
 - Never true
 - Don't know/Prefer not to say
4. We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
 - Often true
 - Sometimes true
 - Never true
 - Don't know/Prefer not to say
5. What do you think about the number of hot food takeaways in Tameside?
 - Too many
 - About right
 - Too few
6. Where do you buy most of your food?
 - Supermarket
 - Local convenience store/7-11
 - Market stalls
 - Independent food shops
 - Discount store e.g. Poundstretcher
 - Frozen food shops e.g. Iceland
 - Takeaways
 - Community food schemes e.g. food pantry
 - Somewhere else (please specify)

C. Food and its environmental impact

1. To what extent do you think about the environmental impact of single use plastics when buying food and drink? (Single use plastics are those that are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. Examples include water bottles, straws, plastic bags, plastic film on foods etc.)
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Never

2. Which of these apply to you?
 - I avoid buying food and in excessive packaging where possible
 - I carry a refillable water bottle often
 - I avoid buying single use water bottles
 - I carry a refillable coffee/hot drink cup
 - I recycle food and drink packaging where appropriate
 - Something else (please specify)

3. How important do you feel it is to reduce the amount of edible food that we throw away?
1 = Not at all important
to
5 = Very important

4. On average, how often do you find food in the fridge/cupboard that has gone off and needs to be thrown away or throw away unwanted edible food e.g. leftovers?
 - More than once a week
 - Once a week
 - Once a month
 - Once every few months
 - Less often

5. Which of the following would you say most accurately describe the reasons that you/your household waste food? (Please select up to three reasons)
 - I do a weekly shop and buy too much
 - I do not check what I have in my fridge before I buy food
 - I buy too much because many of the products I want are only offered in multipacks
 - I buy too much because of multi-buy and other similar offers
 - I do not have time to prepare the food and it goes off
 - I buy food that is on offer (close to its 'best before' or 'use by' date) and end up having to throw it away
 - I prepare too much food which then goes uneaten / is left on plate
 - I buy food and then my plans change
 - The product has gone past its 'best before' date

 - The product has gone past its 'use by' date
 - Other (please specify)

D. What needs to happen?

There are many reasons why people might find it difficult to have a healthy balanced diet that meets nutritional and energy needs and that leads to a healthy weight.

1. Please tell us about what you think would help you or other people in XXXXXX to eat more healthily?

The growing, rearing, farming, processing, transporting, storing, cooking and disposing of the food we eat all has an impact on the environment. Some of the environmental issues linked to food are greenhouse gases, plastic packaging and food waste.

2. What could we do in XXXXXXX either individually, in families, communities or organisations to reduce the impact of the food we eat on the environment?"

E. Sociodemographic questions

The last set of questions will help us analyse the survey. Your individual responses will be held confidentially by the Food Partnership steering group.

1. Age: Which age group do you fit into?
 - 16-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65-74
 - 75+
 - Prefer not to say

2. Gender: Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?
 - Man (including trans man)
 - Woman (including trans woman)
 - Non-binary
 - In another way
 - Prefer not to say

3. Sexual orientation: Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?
 - Gay
 - Straight or heterosexual
 - Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Other (please specify)
 - Prefer not to say

4. Which of the following best describes your living situation?
 - I live on my own
 - My partner and I live together without any children
 - I live with my children with no partner
 - My partner and I live with our children
 - I live in a shared house/with friends
 - I live at home with parents/other family
 - Other (please specify)

5. Including yourself, how many people live in your household?
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6+

6. Please indicate to which occupational group you belong.
- Employed for wages
 - Self-employed
 - Out of work and looking for work
 - Out of work but not currently looking for work
 - Stay at home parent/home-maker
 - A student
 - Military
 - Retired
 - Unable to work
 - Other (please specify)
7. How would you describe your ethnicity?
- White (British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish traveller or Other White)
 - Mixed/Multiple ethnic group (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Other Mixed)
 - Asian/Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other Asian)
 - Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (African, Caribbean, Other Black)
 - Other ethnic group (Arab, Any other ethnic group)
 - Prefer not to say
8. What is your religion?
- No religion
 - Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
 - Buddhist
 - Hindu
 - Jewish
 - Muslim
 - Sikh
 - Any other religion (please specify)
 - Prefer not to say
9. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? Include problems related to old age. (Please tick one box only.)
- Yes, limited a lot
 - Yes, limited a little
 - No
10. Are you a carer?
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
11. What is your postcode? (This will be used for data analysis purposes only)