



## Nonprofit member surveys: Dos and don'ts for the 5 D's

You can't serve the needs of your not-for-profit's members unless you know what those needs are. Many organizations take the pulse of their membership with regular surveys but fail to conduct them strategically — and end up with useless information. Instead, maximize your next survey's effectiveness by focusing on your objectives during every stage of the process:

**1. Define.** *Do* determine exactly what you want to learn. Keep a clear focus and sense of purpose. *Don't* ask members for information you can't or won't use. You must be prepared to take action based on the results of your survey.

**2. Design.** *Do* determine format (multiple choice or open-ended questions, or both) and medium (print or online) upfront. *Do* make sure your questions are as clear and specific as possible. Overly broad queries can result in too wide a range of answers to be actionable. Use consistent scales, avoid confusing terms and keep questions short and to the point. *Don't* ask for demographic information unless it's useful and actionable. People value their privacy and are more likely to provide honest answers when they remain anonymous.

**3. Deploy.** *Do* explain how you plan to use the results. *Do* set a deadline for responses and send reminders. *Don't* email surveys on a weekend. People tend to pay more attention when information is received midweek.

**4. Discuss.** *Do* relay survey results to participants along with your action plan, sharing as much information as possible. *Don't* wait long periods before compiling and distributing results. If you fail to communicate at this stage, people will be less likely to help in the future.

**5. Demonstrate.** *Do* use survey results to enact positive changes that will better serve your members. Regularly reassess your action plan to ensure the changes are effective. *Don't* forget to keep participants informed of your progress. Link your actions to survey results so that your membership knows you're accountable, responsive and actively engaged in meeting their needs.