When You Need Community Support:
Using Low-cost Research Tools to Make Informed Decisions

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What We'll Cover

- Why Conduct Research?
- Qualitative vs. Quantitative
- Case Study: Addison, Texas
- Using Online Surveys
- Using In-depth Interviews
- Using Focus Group Research
- Questions

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Why Conduct Research?

- Listen to the community and key stakeholders
- Understand
  - Attitudes
  - Assumptions
  - Misunderstandings/misconceptions
  - Fears
  - Concerns
  - Questions

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Why Conduct Research?

With research results, you can:

- Better understand your audience
- Better engage the public
- More fully inform them of problems you are trying to solve
- Achieve "informed consent" – willingness to go along with a course of action even if originally opposed
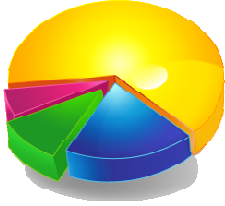- Make better decisions!

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Quantitative vs. Qualitative

- **Quantitative**
  - Scientific random sampling
  - Statistically accurate results with specific confidence level
  - Results can be projected to entire population

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Quantitative vs. Qualitative

- **Qualitative**
  - Answers "why" questions
  - Offers insight and direction
  - Provides a sense of a group's attitudes, motivations, behaviors, opinions and preferences

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Do Both?

- Depends on your goals
- For large scale decisions: quantitative offers added measure of security
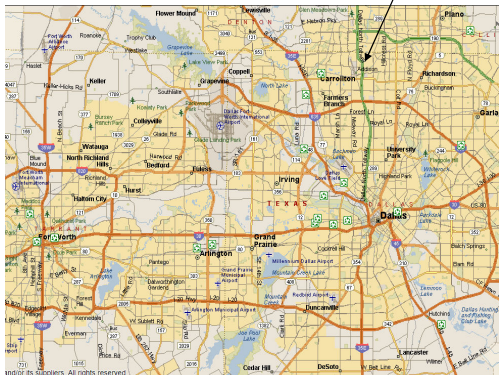- One option: use qualitative to test hunches; confirm with quantitative

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Case Study

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Current situation

Proposal

- Goal: Improve recycling, achieve collection efficiencies
- Close market for trash collection to businesses, orgs., multifamily
- Procure single trash collection provider who would offer recycling
- Recycling not mandatory
- Town could issue permits to other recyclers

Research Questions

- Would Town's businesses, organizations and multifamily complexes embrace proposal?
- What were questions, concerns?
- What hurdles would Town need to overcome to implement new system?

  Research provided answers!

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What We Did

– Online survey – obtain baseline information from staff responsible for solid waste decisions

– In-depth interviews – dig deeper

– Focus groups – understand why, hear opinions, questions, concerns
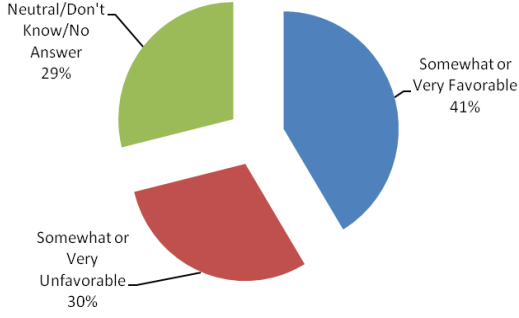
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Online Survey

- Used **SurveyMonkey**
- Short survey
  - Collection rates and services
  - Recycling rates and services
  - If not recycling, why not
  - Satisfaction with current services
  - Opinions about Town's proposal
- "Volunteer" respondents
- Promoted through direct mail, email, website, Addison Business Assn.
- 102 responses

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Online Survey Results
Opinions about Proposal

Neutral/Don't Know/No Answer 29%

Somewhat or Very Favorable 41%

Somewhat or Very Unfavorable 30%

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In-depth Interviews

- 25 interviews with select group of SW decision makers in businesses, organizations and multifamily complexes
- 20% had recycling programs
- Misperceptions about what could be recycled
- Mixed opinions about proposal

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Focus Groups

- 3 focus groups
  - Multifamily SW managers
  - Office buildings and institutions
  - Retailers, restaurants, hotels
- Held in focus group facility
- Primary focus: Town's proposal
- "Homework": Questions about current trash and recycling services

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Focus Group Results

- Gave rich, nuanced range of opinions about the proposal
- Provided insights into questions and concerns
- Gave clues as to what would make the proposal palatable (flexibility, choice, involvement)
- Told us they want recycling to be mandatory, not optional!

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Value of Addison Research

- Gave new insights, direction
- Obtained unfiltered, candid comments from target audiences
- Gave Town a sense of what to expect in the way of opposition – and why
- Cost less than direct mail or phone surveys

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Research Tools You Can Use

4 questions to ask before you begin:

1. What do you hope to accomplish?
2. What specific research questions do you want to answer?
3. What will you do with the data?
4. Who can best provide answers?

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Online Surveys

Advantages:
- Lots of data collected quickly
- Unlimited questions
- Various types of questions
- Instant analysis
- Flexible, randomization of question order, skip patterns
- Costs less than making phone calls or sending a mail survey
- Results can be generalized to entire population, if random sampling used

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Online Surveys

Disadvantages (if sample is not randomly selected):

- Results may not be representative
  - Internet users tend to be younger
  - Some ethnic groups not represented
  - Respondents may be those most passionate about issue
- Can be subject to fraud, skewed results (use ID or track with email or IP address)

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Online Survey Software

- Survey Monkey
  www.surveymonkey.com
- Zoomerang
  www.zoomerang.com
- Survey Gizmo
  www.surveygizmo.com
  (Offers discounted pricing for nonprofits)

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Tips for Your Online Survey

- Keep it short and simple; clear wording
- Introduction: Tell respondents who you are, why their response is important
- Put least controversial questions at beginning
- Avoid leading, redundant questions
- Minimize open-ended questions
- Offer "don't know" "not applicable"
- Have a market research expert review your questions
- PRETEST your survey
- Link back to your website

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What's wrong with this question?

Do you participate in the City's recycling program?

__ Yes   __ No

If you answered no, why not? (sorting is confusing, don't like sorting, messy, no lids)

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What's wrong with this question?

- "Pay as you throw" garbage collection is limited to one cart per household. Additional containers/bags set out for collection require an extra fee. Would you be in favor of a "pay as you throw" form of garbage collection?
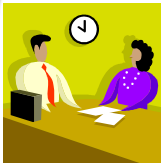
__ Yes   __ No

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In-depth Interviews

Advantages
- Explore perspectives, behaviors, attitudes in greater depth than with online survey

Disadvantages
- Can reflect bias on part of interviewer
- Take time
- Results cannot be generalized

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Tips for In-depth Interviews

- Ask: What information is needed from whom?
- Identify stakeholders
- Develop interview protocol
- Develop interview questions
- Ask factual questions before opinions
- Train interviewers
- Analyze by grouping themes, patterns of comments

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Focus Groups

What they are:

- Bring together 7-10 people who represent target audience
- Moderated discussion designed to elicit opinions
- Answer "what do you think" and "why" questions
- Opportunity for participants to interact with one another
- Window into attitudes, feelings, behaviors

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Focus Groups

What they are NOT:

- Not a means to persuade
- Not a means to "correct" misconceptions
- Not designed for group to reach a consensus on an issue
- Results can't be generalized

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Focus Groups

Logistics

- Do you need a focus group facility?

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Focus Groups

Logistics
- Taping/audiotaping
- Honorarium
- Food/beverages
- Length of group: 1.5 – 2 hours
- Recruit homogeneous groups with recruiting script
- Essential: discussion guide – worksheets
- Start with general discussion – then focus and become more specific
- Objective, trained facilitator

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Tips for Focus Groups

- Develop recruitment screening questionnaire
- Recruit 3 or 4 more than needed
- Send reminders
- Prepare moderators guide
- Arrange for venue, moderator
- Plan for way that moderator can communicate with observers (if any)
- Prepare report that organizes data by themes, concerns, questions

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Questions?

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