Food Co-op initiative

Community Survey Users' Manual

A Guide for Retail Food Co-ops

This survey was derived from a member survey created by NCGA for their member stores. They have graciously shared this work with FCI and the people working to start new food co-ops.

NCGA acknowledges the contributions of David Trechter and Ramona Gunter of The Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and Marilyn Scholl and Ann Woods of Cooperative Development Services (CDS) in the development and refinement of NCGA's customer satisfaction survey and user manual.

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Background

As part of their 2008 business plan, NCGA contracted with CDS and Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls to develop a standardized co-op member/shopper customer satisfaction survey that would serve two critically important functions:

1. Provide individual co-ops with data that will:
   a. Help them better understand their customers, and
   b. Inform the co-op's strategic decisions.
2. Develop a national database of customer opinions about food co-ops that would:
   a. Benefit the sector as a whole by improving understanding of consumer opinions nationwide, and
   b. Allow the development of benchmarks or norms to which individual co-op results can be compared.

The process that produced this survey included soliciting and reviewing 55 prior surveys from 30 NCGA members of all sizes and regions, developing a questionnaire based on those surveys, drawing on the experience of CDS and SRC, and including feedback from the member co-ops.

NCGA donated this work to Food Co-op Initiave to use as a starting point for the creation of a similar survey that would meet the unique needs of co-ops in the organizing stage.

Co-op Participation Expectations

The survey instrument is being provided at no cost to retail food co-op organizers with the agreement that those co-ops who use it adhere to the following:

- Provide results to Food Co-op Initiative for review and analysis.
- Send all data to SRC and/or FCI in Excel or a compatible format
- Use the questions provided in each of the modules exactly as they are written
- Modify the questions that require/allow changes (but no others)

Users have the following options:

- Add questions or modules of local importance
- Delete sub-questions (only if not relevant)
- Use any research firm to assist with implementation
- Contract with SRC at a pre-determined rate
- Deploy as an on-line or mail out survey
- Use the module on communications or not – this module can be modified to meet your needs.

Further details for participation expectations are provided in this manual. Please read this entire User Manual, discuss your group's survey needs and your willingness to adhere to these guidelines. You can then obtain a copy of the survey template by contacting Stuart Reid at: stuart@foodcoopinitiative.coop

About FCI's Community Survey

Survey Modules

There are five modules in FCI's Consumer Survey:

1. Shopping Patterns
2. Satisfaction
3. Food Cooperative Formation
4. Personal Characteristics
5. Communication

The first four modules are required modules. This means that participants will be expected to include all four of these modules in their own surveys. Further, it is expected that members will use the questions provided in each of the modules exactly as they are written. This will help us to compare results from all groups' surveys.

Note: Users will be able to add questions of local importance and/or delete sub-questions in these modules if they are not relevant to their situation. See section titled *Modifying FCI's Survey Instrument* for more details.

The fifth module (Communication) is optional.

Implementing the Survey

Implementation of the survey is the responsibility of the individual co-op. The co-op may choose to use a research firm to assist with implementation or may contract with SRC at a pre-determined rate (see section titled *Cost to Co-op* below).

It is important to note that FCI's survey is designed to be deployed as an on-line or mail out survey. We strongly discourage its use exclusively as a phone or in-person survey. See Appendix A for steps involved in an on-line or mail out survey.

Cost to Co-op

As noted, FCI's survey instrument is provided at no cost in the expectation that results will be shared with FCI in the manner specified in the *Requirements for Sharing Data* section below.

However, users bear the cost of implementing the survey locally. FCI has negotiated a fee structure for any co-op interested in contracting with SRC. SRC offers a range of project types. Co-ops will be able to choose one of two methods of survey implementation: via the web or via postal mail. In addition, co-ops will be able to choose between two report types: an abbreviated report that consists of raw data, means, frequencies and a few highlights of the results or a full statistical analysis and report.

Negotiated fees with SRC are shown below:

Report Type	On-line Implementation	Paper/Mail Implementation
Abbreviated	$500 + $75/hr. to customize survey (add questions)	$3,000 - $4,000 + $75/hr. to customize survey (add questions)
Full	$2,000 - $3,000 + $75/hr. to customize survey (add questions)	$4,500 - $6,000 + $75/hr. to customize survey (add questions)

Note: The fee is guaranteed until December 2009, after which it will be reviewed and updated on a periodic basis.

<u>Requirements for Sharing Data</u>

It is expected that any co-op using FCI's survey will send results to FCI for analysis and program improvement. Data should be in Excel or a compatible format.

Appendix F contains a suggested spreadsheet format for data entry. The first row in the prototype indicates the coded values that are acceptable for responses to a given question. For example, the first question in the survey instrument (Q1WkExp) asks the respondent to indicate the approximate amount spent on groceries each week. The first option is “$50 or Less,” which should be coded as 1. The second option “$51 - $75” should be coded as 2 and so on up to “Don’t Know,” which takes a value of 7. Columns containing respondent comments are labeled “Specific text here.”

If your cooperative is not using SRC for implementation, you will also need to develop a data key (e.g. as above for the first question, the key will indicate that a value of 1 equates to $50 or less, a 2 equals $51 - $75, and so on). Both the data file and data key will need to be sent to FCI.

Modifying FCI's Survey Instrument

There are specific questions in FCI's survey that require some modifications, as outlined below. As previously noted, it is permissible to remove questions and/or sub-questions that do NOT apply to your co-op and to add questions.

<u>Shopping Patterns Module</u>

As noted, this module is designed to understand grocery shopping behaviors of the population you will be surveying (i.e., members and the general public).

Question 2 should be modified to replace the store category name with the specific names of your local competitors (e.g. replacing “local supermarket” with Ralph’s Pretty Good Grocery, or replacing “Supercenter” with Highway 51 Wal-Mart Supercenter). The categories included in the question (e.g. local supermarket, supercenter, etc.) will be used to translate your local competitor into a competitor class for comparison with other surveys. Suppose a Wal-Mart Supercenter is an important local competitor for your cooperative. Another food co-op elsewhere in the U.S.

doesn't have Wal-Mart as a competitor but does have a SuperTarget. In comparative analysis we will group these stores into the "supercenter" category in terms of quantifying the competition that food cooperatives face from different grocery store types. Note, you may have multiple competitors in a given grocery store type and none in others. It is important that FCI knows the category into which each of your local competitor falls. These categories are defined as follows:

- **Other food co-op** = any other member-owned, member-controlled food cooperative in your trade area.
- **Natural product retailer** = independent and chain stores that advertise themselves as natural food, health food, or vitamin-mineral-supplement stores. Examples would include local independent stores, GNC, Whole Foods, etc.
- **Internet/Mail-order** = stores that primarily don't have a "brick and mortar" presence. Examples might include Harry and David, Zingermans, etc.
- **Convenience store** = are small, limited selection stores that are frequently associated with gas stations. Examples include Kwik-Trip, 7-Eleven, PDQ Markets, etc.
- **Local grocery store** = locally-owned, small grocery store. This is the prototypical corner grocery store.
- **Limited assortment store** = as per the name, these stores carry a limited assortment of products (few, if any, perishables) and limited services are provided to customers. These are typically low-priced stores such as Aldi, Trader Joe's, or Sav-A-Lot.
- **Local supermarket** = A conventional supermarket that may have multiple outlets in the local trade area. These stores include members of the Independent Grocers Association (IGA), for example, and up-scale stores like Kowalski's in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area or New Seasons Market in Portland.
- **Regional supermarket chain =** Most supermarkets in the U.S. are regional chains. They have multiple locations spread over one or more states. Examples include Lucky, Cub, Giant, Winn-Dixie, etc.
- **National supermarket chain** = Supermarkets that are found in most parts of the country. The two premier examples would be Kroger and Safeway.
- **Supercenters** = sometimes called hypermarkets, these stores sell a broad array of goods besides groceries (clothing, hardware, electronic, etc.). Examples of supercenters include Wal-Mart, Target, Meier's, Costco, etc.

Question 3 asks where consumers purchase specific product categories. If necessary, modify the list according to the product categories you are considering for your store by adding or removing rows.

Please do not make modifications to other survey questions in the Shopping Patterns module.

<u>Satisfaction Module</u>

This module is designed to determine what your customers like and don't like about the stores where they currently shop.

Questions 8, 10 and 16 are open-ended questions to allow respondents to say whatever is on their mind. These are optional questions and if asked will incur additional charges for entry (unless electronic survey is used) and analysis if using SRC/CDS. (Please see section titled Costs for more information.)

Several Questions refer to “member-owners.” You may modify the question by using the term most commonly used to describe your members (members, owners, member-owners, shareholders, etc.)

Please do not make modifications to other survey questions in the Satisfaction module.

Food Co-op Formation Module

This module explores respondents’ current experiences with food co-ops and their interest in supporting a new store. You may wish to add questions about key planning decisions that are important to your co-op, but remember that too long a survey reduces response rates.

Personal Characteristics Module

Gathering data on the personal characteristics of respondents is important on several levels. First, this data can be informally compared to what you know about your supporters to determine if the mix seems to represent your community accurately. Second, in the analysis phase it is often useful and interesting to compare the responses of different demographic and lifestyle groups. For example, do women and men have similar opinions about the overall quality of their shopping experience? Do certain store features draw customers who drive further to get to their primary store? Third, personal and demographic information can be used for comparison with secondary sources such as census data and trade journal reports. Finally, the demographic data will be very useful for comparing your survey with others.

Please do not modify any questions in the Personal Characteristics module. You may add additional questions if desired.

Communications Module

The communication module is designed to find out what topics are of interest to your customers, how best to reach them, and to get their assessment of your current communication efforts. This module and the individual questions included in it are optional. They may be of great interest and importance to you and we do not want to discourage you from including a section on communications. The key factor to consider as you think about adding a communications section is the trade-off between the need for this information and the length of the survey. The longer the survey, the lower the response rate is likely to be. So, as you consider whether and how much of the communications module to include, keep these three questions in mind:

1. What do I fundamentally want to know as a result of this survey?
2. Does this question help answer my fundamental question(s)?
3. Is the answer to this question something I “need to know” or is it something that would just be “nice to know?”
4. Will knowing the answer enable me to take any action or inform any future decisions?

Additional Modules

Additional modules may be designed and added at additional cost to meet the specific needs of your co-op. Always keep in mind the tradeoff between length of survey and response rate.

Appendix A. Consumer Research 101

Introduction

Successful businesses understand their customers' needs and wants.

The economist Albert Hirschman contends that businesses find out when they are no longer meeting their customers' expectations in one of two ways: "exit" or "voice.[1]" Hirschman uses "exit" to describe unhappy customers who vote with their feet and take their business elsewhere. This is, by far, the most common way in which customers demonstrate their unhappiness. The other way is "voice," which is when the unhappy patron lets you have it right between the eyes with a litany of your store's shortcomings. While voice is generally a much less pleasant experience, it is also much more valuable. The customer is telling you precisely, and sometimes in colorful language, what you need to improve. With exit, you are left guessing at changes that are needed.

For the customer, exit is easy (which is why it is common); voice is hard (which is why it isn't common). Hirschman argues that "loyalty" is what determines if a customer is going to use exit or voice when things start to slip. If a customer is loyal, if they feel somehow connected to a business, they are more likely to go to the trouble of telling you what they are unhappy about.

Cooperatives have some unique advantages with respect to gathering "voice" from their customers. Typically, they are governed by a board of directors composed of co-op customers. The board is empowered to act as the "voice" for members. In addition, because members are generally required to invest something in the co-op, they have at least a small financial stake in the co-op, which would be expected to increase loyalty to the business. For these reasons and others, co-ops are more likely to have customers who use the voice option before they use the exit option.

In this Appendix we will discuss the reasons for and means of deepening a food cooperative's understanding of their customers; going beyond the information gathered when their members provide them with the benefits of their voices. While much of the information describes customer research in stores that are already open for business, the principles apply to any consumer research.

Uses and Purposes of Consumer Research

Consumer research should be viewed as an extension of the "voice" that food co-ops get on a regular basis from their loyal customers. Voice, as noted, is much preferred to exit. However, voice is idiosyncratic and truly does depend upon the existence of loyalty. It is improbable that all of your customers have a sufficiently high level of loyalty to your cooperative that they will opt to tell you of their concerns rather than taking their business to your competitors via exit. In short, voice is extremely valuable but may not be representative of the opinions of your customer base as a whole.

A consumer survey is a systematic means of better understanding your customers. Such a survey allows you to take the pulse of what truly may be a "silent majority." It may validate the voices you are hearing in the store ('yes, you do have the best produce in town,' or 'yes, your staff are not as attentive to the needs of your customers as they should be.'). Alternatively, you may find that the vocal ones complaining about prices or store hours are really just a small minority of the overall customer base. If done correctly, this type of research can provide an accurate and statistically valid, snapshot of how your customers, as a whole, view your cooperative.

[1] Albert O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States, Harvard University Press, 1970.

Types of Customer Research

The best method and tool for implementing customer research depends on what you want to know and your cooperative's previous efforts to understand your customers. Methods you may consider include focus groups or customer/member surveys.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were developed starting in the 1930s and 1940s to get around perceived limitations associated with data gathered via formal interviews (concerns about interviewer bias) and via questionnaires (set questions with, typically, a limited set of response options). Krueger defines a focus group as, ". . . a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment."[2] Focus groups generally have a carefully crafted sequence of questions that will be asked. However, moderators of these groups generally encourage discussions that expand on the question sequence in fruitful, if unanticipated, ways. Focus groups are excellent vehicles for gathering nuanced information about complex topics that might be facing the co-op.

Focus groups can also be used in concert with a customer/member survey. If done in advance of a survey, they can help identify question topic areas. If done subsequent to a survey, they can be used to follow-up and gather additional, contextual information. For example, a survey might tell you that members are not satisfied with communications from the cooperative. A focus group can be used to dig deeper into this issue. Are they dissatisfied with the communication vehicles (e.g., newsletter, website)? The topics covered? The frequency of contacts? The writing style or editorial perspective? The layout or accessibility?

The composition of a focus group is both its strength and weakness. Participation is not intended to be a random sampling of co-op members/shoppers. Rather, focus groups are typically composed of people who you think have important perspectives on the cooperative, are articulate and comfortable talking about issues in a group setting. A good focus group is a lively discussion at which the moderator is, often, a fairly inconspicuous guide. A group of invested and articulate people can generate incredibly valuable qualitative information about complex issues facing the cooperative. However, because they typically are not a random set of shoppers/members and there are rarely more than 10 or 12 participants, a focus group may not represent the opinions of all co-op customers. Focus groups offer anecdotal snapshots, not statistically valid summaries, of customer/member opinions.

Customer/Member Surveys

There are several ways a cooperative could implement a survey of members and/or customers: in-store/intercept surveys, phone surveys, on-line surveys and mail-out surveys. Each method has advantages and disadvantages but all depend upon defining a "population" and drawing a "random sample" from that population. A population is a set of customers who are believed to share certain characteristics (e.g. they are all members or shoppers of the cooperative). A random sample is one in which every individual in a population has an equal probability of being selected for inclusion.

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[2] Page 18, Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, Richard A. Krueger, Sage Publications, Inc, 1988. This is an excellent summary if you are interested in holding a focus group and need to know how to do it properly.

- **In-Store/Intercept Surveys –** occur in the co-op over some defined time period. The co-op may have paper surveys or may set up a computer kiosk as a means of collecting information from shoppers. The advantage of this type of survey is that can be completed relatively quickly, saves a bunch on postage and, if done electronically, can save on data entry costs. A key advantage is that you can get information from customers who are not members of the co-op. The downside is that you are only going to get data from people who come into the store during the survey period. Not only might this be an unrepresentative sample of the overall customer base, but it is also going to miss customers who are, arguably, those from whom you most want to hear – people who aren't regularly shopping in your store. While it is possible to have an agreed-upon protocol (e.g., request every 10th customer to complete the questionnaire), it may be difficult to get a truly random sample of shoppers during the data gathering period (co-op workers get busy and forget to ask, they ask the people they know because that is both more comfortable and less likely to elicit a rejection, etc.). In short, this is not a method we recommend for a consumer survey.

- **Phone surveys** – have also become more problematic recently. Caller ID, cell phones and do-not-call lists have made phone surveys an increasingly difficult means of gathering information. While some of these impediments may not apply in the case of your cooperative (you may have current phone numbers for members and you have a "pre-existing" relationship with them so you probably wouldn't be subject to do-not-call regulations), you may still want to seriously consider the implications of doing a phone survey. First, if you are interested in gathering information from customers who are not members, their phone numbers would need to be acquired and, with the increased use of cell phones, this is becoming quite difficult. Do-not-call regulations might apply to these shoppers also. Second, even if you are surveying members only, there may be a public relations price paid by the co-op if members view the call as an unwanted invasion of their privacy. Third, phone surveys are the most expensive of the four options discussed in this section. Often ten or more calls have to be made per successful completion of a questionnaire in a phone survey. This is a time-consuming and, hence, expensive process.

- **On-line surveys** – have a number of advantages. Ecologically, they don't require nearly as many resources (e.g., paper, transportation) as do some of the other survey alternatives. They are relatively quick to implement and save on postage and data entry expenses. On-line surveys have greater appeal among the hard-to-reach under-35 age group than the other alternatives. If the co-op has a fairly comprehensive list of email addresses, a random sample can be drawn that stands a good chance of capturing the real opinions of co-op shoppers. Electronic surveys tend to be substantially less expensive to implement. The downsides of electronic surveys are the still-existent digital divide and accessing email addresses of non-member shoppers. While it isn't absolutely necessary to have email addresses to implement an on-line survey, the other options increase the work that respondents have to do to participate and, generally, result in much lower response rates.

- **Mail out surveys** – have the advantages of familiarity and "randomness." Most people are familiar and comfortable with doing paper surveys and, as with on-line surveys, it is generally not difficult to get a random sample of members. Mail out surveys also have a key methodological advantage. With any survey you have to be concerned that the people who don't complete the survey have systematically different opinions than those who do. With a mail out survey that includes a second mailing to people who don't respond to the first mailing, we can test for "non-response bias," which is what this concern is called. The test for non-response bias "validates" the sample and gives us greater confidence in the accuracy of the results. The disadvantages of mail out surveys include cost (e.g., postage, data entry), environmental impacts (paper use) and, frequently, low response rates from people under 35 years of age. In addition, unless the cooperative has a mailing list of non-member customers, this group can be difficult to reach with a mail out survey.

Components and Steps in a Mail Out Survey Project

Table 1 summarizes the eight steps, and estimated time required, for a mail out survey using FCI's survey instrument.

Steps 1 and 2 represent the preparation phase in which you lay the groundwork for the exciting parts to come. This is a creative period that can become somewhat frustrating because everyone is anxious to get on to the data collection and analysis phases. However, unless this phase is done well, the remainder of the process will be much less productive.

Step 1. From the perspective of the cooperative, the initial meetings are probably the most important step of the entire process. The initial meetings lay the foundation upon which the entire survey project is built. At these meetings, you will want to:

- Clarify the purpose of the survey – what are the fundamental questions to be answered?
- Ensure that the co-op's leadership group agrees on the need for and purpose of the survey.
- Define the population to be surveyed (i.e., members, non-member customers and/or prospective customers). Discuss how you will gather a mailing list.
- Briefly review FCI's survey instrument - determine if questions specific to your co-op's situation need to be added to FCI's standard questionnaire in order to answer your fundamental questions.
- Discuss the logistics of the survey: timing, budget, population to be sampled (e.g. will you be surveying potential customers or members only) and how you will implement the survey (i.e., in-house or with the help of a consultant).

Table 1: Steps in a Mail Out Survey Project

Step	Time Line
1. Planning	One or more meetings. It may take a month or more to complete this step.
2. Review the survey (modify if needed)	If you are adding questions or modules to FCIs survey, expect to develop 3 (or more) drafts of the questionnaire prior to reaching general satisfaction with the final instrument. Allot 3 or more weeks to this process.
3. The first mailing	This stage will take a minimum of 2 weeks (to print, address and stuff envelopes). If a mailing list has to be constructed, allow for at least another week.
4. Post card reminder	1 week to create, reproduce and address the postcards.
5. The second mailing	1 to 2 weeks to create, reproduce and address the second cover letter and reproduce and stuff the envelopes.
6. Data entry and verification	If data is entered as the questionnaires are returned, the data cleaning and verification phase may take only about a week. The length of time spent in this phase also depends upon the technology used (e.g., whether the data can be scanned into the computer or has to be entered by hand). Expect to spend 1 to 3 weeks on this phase of the process.
7. Data analysis	You should allow 1 to 4 weeks for the data analysis portion of the survey.
8. Reporting	You should allow 1 to 4 weeks for the reporting and revision process.
Total	13 to 20 weeks

If you work with a consultant other than Cooperative Development Services and the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin at River Falls, or if you conduct FCI's survey using in-house expertise, the expectation is that the data collected will be sent to FCI to review and compare with other start-up surveys.When choosing a consultant, the key factors to consider are familiarity with food cooperatives, technical/analytical ability, cost and customer service. If you plan to use a consultant, you should hold your initial meeting several months before you want to conduct the survey to ensure that your project gets on their work agenda.

<u>Step 2</u>. The key outcome of this step is to finalize your survey and cover letter; using FCI's survey as your starting point will save you a substantial amount of time. (See Appendix A for FCI survey template and Appendix C for a draft cover letter to accompany it.)

To ensure comparability of your results with those of other co-ops around the country, do **<u>not</u>** modify the wording of the questions provided in FCI's survey. You may modify the questionnaire in other ways. First, identify questions and/or sub-questions that have no relevance to your cooperative and which can be deleted. For example, question 9g. asks respondents to rate their primary store’s beer and wine category. Delete this option if you do not plan to sell beer/wine. Please only delete those questions or sub-questions which truly have no relevance.

Second, determine if you are interested in asking any of the optional questions (e.g. Communications module).

Third, identify issues unique to your cooperative that require additional questions to be developed. We recommend that you engage a professional who specializes in survey research. Without experience and objectivity, it is easy to unintentionally bias results with poorly worded questions.

As you consider adding questions, ask yourself:

- What do I fundamentally want to know as a result of this survey?
- Does this question help answer my fundamental question(s)?
- Is the answer to this question something I "need to know" or is it something that would just be "nice to know?"
- Will knowing the answer enable me to take any action or inform any future decisions?

Once drafted, you may want to circulate the modified questionnaire to a committee or group of informed/interested people for review. You may want to pre-test the questionnaire with 4 or 5 members/shoppers to ensure that the questions and directions are clear. It usually takes 2-3 iterations before people are satisfied with the survey and cover letter.

Finally, you'll need a data entry key that indicates how the data you receive will be entered into a spreadsheet. If you work with a consultant other than the SRC/CDS, or if you are entering the data yourself, it is expected that your data will be provided to FCI in the prescribed format for our review. SRC will be happy to work with you or your outside consultant to ensure this happens as seamlessly as possible. Once data entry and transfer are complete, identifying information should be destroyed to ensure the anonymity of respondents.

Steps 3 through 5 are the data gathering phase which is generally contracted out as there are a number of relatively tedious tasks that need to be completed: constructing the mailing list, printing and stuffing envelopes with cover letters and questionnaires, mailing the survey and keeping track of who has responded and who hasn't so you can follow-up (post card and second questionnaire) with non-respondents. Start-up groups with active supporters can save some money by recruiting a volunteer survey team for this phase.

<u>Step 3</u>. This is the initial mailing of the survey to a random sample of customers. Several things happen in this stage of the process.

First, you and/or your consultant need(s) to realistically estimate the return rate you will get in order to determine the total number of surveys to be sent to the population you identified in Step 1. For example, suppose that based on the size of the population you are surveying, you will need 350 surveys returned in order to have estimates with the statistical properties you want (e.g. a margin of error of 5% with 95% confidence). If you think that you'll get back about one-third of those sent, you will need to mail out 1,050 surveys (=350/.333). The return rate you can expect depends upon a number of factors: the length of the survey, the inherent interest (or lack thereof) of consumer surveys to the sample, the target audience (younger populations are more difficult than older ones, for example), how difficult the questions are for respondents to answer, etc.

For consumer surveys, typical return rates fall in the 30-40% range. If your cooperative needs statistically valid results for specific demographic groups (e.g. women in the 35-54 age groups), you will need a substantially larger sample and the costs of the survey will also increase.

Once you know the number of surveys to be mailed, you need to develop your mailing list and reproduce the questionnaire. Sometimes you will have access to a mailing list (e.g. your contact and membership lists), sometimes you can buy a mailing list for a nominal amount of money and sometimes you have to construct a mailing list from web or other sources of contact information. It is difficult to generalize how expensive and time consuming the mailing list acquisition will be. Sometimes this is a non-event, sometimes it is a major hurdle to get over.

Once you have the mailing list in hand, copy the questionnaire and cover letter (an example is provided in Appendix B) and make the mailing labels for the envelopes. We find that it is good practice to number each questionnaire and link that number to a mailing address to assist with data entry, data cleaning and reminder mailings. Folding, stuffing and putting address labels on the envelopes can be a time consuming and tedious process. To help boost return rates, some advanced publicity about the survey should be arranged (e.g., an article in local newspapers or co-op newsletter).

Step 4. This is the stage at which we send a post card reminder to non-respondents. We recommend that one week to ten days after the first mailing, a post card reminder be sent to those who have not returned their questionnaire. The post card needs to be printed on card stock and be brief. An example is provided in Appendix C. You will need to adjust your mailing list to account for those from whom you have received a questionnaire.

Step 5. The final step in the data collection phase is a second mailing to non-respondents. One week to ten days after the postcard is sent, a second survey should be mailed to non-respondents. You will need to draft a second cover letter (example provided in Appendix D) and continue to edit your mailing list to account for those from whom you received a questionnaire in response to the first mailing or the post card. Again, you will copy the estimated number of questionnaires and cover letters; fold, stuff and affix the mailing label; and mail the survey.

The second mailing is important as a means of boosting the response rate. It is also important for methodological reasons. The second mailing is designed to enable the analyst to test for "non-response bias." Non-response bias exists when people who don't complete the survey have views that are systematically different than those who do complete it. The second mailing is, in effect, a sample of non-respondents (since they didn't respond to the first mailing). The answers of those who responded to the first mailing can be compared statistically to those responding to the second mailing to see if there is response bias. If there is, the answers given by the second mailing respondents can be given more weight to better reflect the opinions of the whole population.

Steps 6 through 8 focus on data entry, sample verification, data analysis and summarizing the results. This is the most technical portion of the process and, unless the cooperative has in-house expertise, should be done by a qualified consultant.

Step 6. The primary goal of this step is data entry of responses. Data entry can be a tedious and time-consuming process but it is critical that the data be entered accurately; if not, the entire project is undermined. You can set up checks in your spreadsheet to identify columns in which data have been entered that are smaller or larger than the minimum or maximum expected values. For example, if acceptable values range from 1 to 6, using an "if" function in the spreadsheet can help flag values less than 1 or greater than 6.

Flags indicate that data needs to be "cleaned." You will have to find the questionnaire from which the data was entered to verify the correct value and re-enter it. Again, this can be somewhat time-consuming. Once data entry and verification are complete, identifying information should be destroyed to ensure the anonymity of respondents. We recommend outsourcing data entry to someone who specializes in this work.

As noted above, if you work with a consultant other than the SRC, you need to provide your data to FCI in the prescribed format. Contact Stuart Reid at stuart@foodcoopinitiative.coop if you need assistance.

Step 7. In this step, we analyze the data entered in step 6. There are a number of levels of data analysis that can be considered. At the most basic, you will want to calculate average values for the variables in your questionnaire and the frequency with which respondents answered each question in a particular way. For example, suppose you have a question asking respondents how important local sources of food are to them with response options varying from "very important" to "very unimportant." Each response option will need to have a numeric value (e.g., very important = 5, important = 4, neutral = 3, unimportant = 2 and very unimportant =1). You will probably want to calculate the average value of responses to this question and the frequency of which respondents said this was "very important," "important," and so on.

A second level of analysis is done to validate the data, which is the non-response bias testing described in Step 5.

A third level of analysis starts to look at associations between variables. For example, you might be interested in analyzing differences based on demographics (e.g., seeing if men and women place equal importance on how important locally-sourced food is to them). You can examine this type of question with "cross tabulations" or, more formally, via t-tests (using chi square tables). To do this most easily, you will need access to SAS, SPSS or some other statistical software package.

A fourth level of analysis attempts to "explain" observed variation in a key outcome variable. Suppose you have an overarching question that asks respondents how likely they are to support a new food co-op. Their opinion about this might be related to their income level, their age, their satisfaction with existing stores, past experience with co-ops and so on. Regression analysis can be used to test for such associations. Again a statistical software package and an advanced level of statistical understanding will be needed to do this sort of analysis.

Many will find the statistical analysis of data to be difficult and faulty analysis can doom the credibility of results. We recommend using outside expertise with statistical analysis; such as universities, CDS/SRC or another consultant.

Step 8. This is the reporting phase and probably the most interesting/exciting. The goal is to tell "the story" that the data presents. If you have done a good job of identifying the fundamental questions to which you want answers and crafted questions that shed light on those questions, the structure of the report should be fairly straightforward:

- Describe the fundamental question(s) you are attempting to answer.
- Describe the process you have followed, including information about how reliable the results are likely to be (e.g., the confidence interval for the data).

- Describe your results and what you think they say about your fundamental question(s). It is generally a good idea to have an executive summary that, in a page or two summarizes the key results of the survey.

As you write the report, consider the likely audience in terms of their probable understanding of/tolerance for statistics and their preferences for words versus tables versus graphical presentation of results. Having a knowledgeable person not directly involved in the process review your report ensures objectivity and adds useful perspective.

Components and Steps of a Web-Based Survey Project

Table 2 summarizes the steps associated with a web-based survey. You will note that other than the data gathering phase (step 3 in Table 2), they are similar to those outlined under Components and Steps of a Mail Out Survey Project.

Step 1. As with the mail out survey, you will need to clarify the purpose of the survey, determine questions to be added to or subtracted from FCI's questionnaire, discuss the time line for the survey and determine the population to be surveyed. (Members and contacts in your database will only give you information from people who have already indicated support. What coverage will you need to get information from throughout your potential market area?)

Step 2. As with a mail out survey, you will need to modify your questionnaire using FCI's survey as a starting point, draft the cover letter to accompany it, and set up the data entry key. We recommend using professionals with survey research expertise for writing questions.

Step 3. In this step you/your consultant need(s) to develop an email list of survey recipients, determine how the survey will be deployed (e.g. by the co-op using survey software such as Survey Monkey or by the consultant using their software), decide if you want/need to do a pre-test of the questionnaire, determine when the survey will be launched, how long it will be run and the frequency with which non-respondents are reminded that they should complete the survey.

If you don't have email addresses but do have mailing addresses for the population to be surveyed, you can send them a letter directing them to the web address at which the survey is located. This will, of course, require the respondent to take the letter to the computer and type in that address. This higher level of effort required generally reduces response rates significantly.

Table 2: Steps in a Web-Based Survey Project

Step	Time Line
1. Planning	1 or more meetings. It may take a month or more to complete this step.
2. Review the survey(modify if needed)	Expect to develop 3 (or more) drafts of the questionnaire prior to reaching general satisfaction with the instrument. Allot 3 or more weeks to this process.
3. Gather the data	This phase generally lasts 3 to 4 weeks and will include weekly email reminders to non-respondents.
4. Data entry and verification	1 week

5. Data analysis	You should allow 1 to 4 weeks for the data analysis portion of the survey.
6. Reporting	You should allow 1 to 4 weeks for the reporting and revision process.
Total	10 to 17 weeks

Step 4 (Step 6 in Mail Out Surveys). Data entry in an on-line survey is basically done by the survey respondent. Data cleaning will be necessary only if you have incomplete or partial responses.

If you work with a consultant other than the SRC/CDS, it is expected that your data will be provided to FCI for review. We will be happy to work with your outside consultant to ensure this happens as seamlessly as possible. Once data entry and transfer are complete, identifying information should be destroyed to ensure the anonymity of respondents.

Step 5 (Step 7 in Mail Out Surveys). The data analysis phase of an on-line survey is identical to a mail out survey: calculate averages and frequencies for the variables in your questionnaire, validate the sample, look for associations between variables and attempt to explain the pattern of responses.

Step 6 (Step 8 in Mail Out Surveys). Likewise, the reporting phase of an on-line survey is the same as for mail out surveys: use the numerical data to figure out "what the story is" and tell that story in as compelling a way as possible given the audience who will read it.

Appendix B. Sample Cover Letter for First Mailing

<Questionnaire Number>

<Co-op letterhead>

<Date>

Dear <Member/Customer>:

The input of our members and community is a critical component of our feasibility study. **I am asking for your feedback so that <name of co-op> may better plan for the successful launch of our new store.**

You have been randomly selected to give us feedback on these matters. In order for the results to truly represent the thinking of our community, it is important that each questionnaire be returned. The findings of this survey will help guide decisions by the <organizing team> and Board of Directors.

<If an incentive (e.g. a bumper sticker or window cling) is to be offered, describe the incentive here.>

Please return your completed survey in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope by <return date>.

Your responses to this survey are completely confidential. The Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls is implementing and analyzing the survey on our behalf. They have included an identification number on the survey for mailing purposes only. This number will be used to keep track of the returned surveys so that follow-up reminders won't be mailed to those who have already returned their surveys <and to make you eligible for the incentive (if applicable)>. SRC will supply <name of co-op> with their analysis and summary data only; your name will never be associated with your responses to the survey.

<You may describe how the co-op will share the results with its members here.>

If there is more than one adult in your household, please have the adult who is the primary food shopper complete this survey.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful responses. If you have questions about the motivation for and use of the survey data, please contact me at <local phone contact number>. If you have questions about the survey process, please contact the SRC at (715) 425-0701.

Sincerely,

<co-op official (e.g. board chair, committee or task force leader >
<Title>

Appendix C. Sample Reminder Postcard

A couple of weeks ago, we sent you community interest survey for <name of co-op>. Your input will help <name of co-op> plan for a grocery store that will serve you better. At the time of this mailing, we have not received a completed survey from your household. If you've completed and returned the survey, please accept our thanks and disregard this reminder. If you've not yet completed it, we ask that you please take some time to fill out the survey and return it - your opinions are important to us! If you did not receive a survey or no longer have it, another one will be sent in the next couple of weeks. Please watch for it and complete and return it upon receipt. Thank you!

Survey Research Center
University of Wisconsin-River Falls
124 RDI Building, 410 S. Third Street
River Falls, WI 54022

Appendix D. Sample Cover Letter for Second Mailing

<Co-op Letterhead>

<date>

Dear Member/Customer:

About three weeks ago, I wrote seeking your response to a survey regarding ways that <co-op name> could create a new store that will best serve our community. To date, your response has not been received by the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls.

I am writing you again because of the importance of your input. You are one of <number in sample> community members who have been randomly selected to receive the survey. In order for the results to truly represent the thinking of the entire <name of co-op> community, it is important that each questionnaire be returned. The findings of this survey will provide important information that will help guide decisions by the planning committee and board of directors.

Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope by **<'return-by' date>.** If you have already completed and returned your survey, please accept my thanks and disregard this request.

<If an incentive is to be offered, describe the incentive here.>

Your responses to this survey are completely confidential. The Survey Research Center (SRC) has included an identification number on the survey for mailing purposes and to make you eligible for the <incentive> (if applicable). The SRC will supply <co-op name> with their analysis and the raw data; your name will never be associated with your responses to the survey.

If you have questions about the motivation for and use of the survey data, please contact me at <local contact number>. If you have questions about the survey process, please contact the SRC at (715) 425-0701.

Sincerely,

<co-op official (e.g. board chair, manager, member services co-ordinator>
<Title>

Appendix E. Definition of Terms

Confidence interval	Sometimes called the margin of error, is the basis of the phrase we frequently read in the newspapers, “the estimates are estimated to be accurate to within plus or minus 5 percent.” With a confidence interval of plus or minus 5 percent we are saying that we expect 95 percent of the people in the population to have opinions that fall within these bounds. For example, if we say that a random sample of customers have given the co-op a grade of 83% (out of 100%) with respect to store cleanliness with a confidence interval of plus or minus 5%, 95% of all customers are expected to give the co-op a grade of between 78% and 88% (somewhere between a C+ and a B+!).
Confidence level	The probability that if we re-sampled the population, we would come up with results that are consistent with the results obtained in this sample. In the example used to describe the confidence interval we said that customers of a co-op gave it a grade of 83% with respect to the cleanliness of the store. If we have a 95% confidence level in our results, and we resampled the members of that co-op 20 times, only once would the grade given for cleanliness be expected to fall outside of the confidence interval range of 78% to 88%.
Exit	When customers of a business express their dissatisfaction by taking their business elsewhere.
Generalizability	Information gained from a sample that can safely be used to infer things about the overall population. To be generalizable, samples generally need to be random (see below) and the questions asked as free of bias as possible
Loyalty	The connection or sense of attachment that customers have with a business that induces voice rather than exit when they are dissatisfied.
Non-response bias	When people who don’t complete a survey have views that are systematically different than those who do complete it.
Population	A set of customers who are believed to share certain characteristics. The population for a consumer survey is generally the entire membership or the entire customer base for the cooperative. A particular co-op may, however, have multiple populations they want to consider (e.g. in a multi-store co-op the customers of one store may be seen as quite distinct from those patronizing another). The size of the population(s) dictates the number of questionnaires that will be needed to produce a statistically robust sample. The larger the number of populations to be studied, the larger the overall sample needed.
Qualitative information	Input that is generally descriptive in nature and that is not readily analyzed using statistical methods. Qualitative information often provides a more nuanced understanding of an issue.
Random sample	A sample in which every individual in a population has an equal probability of being selected for inclusion. For example, the 1,000 members of a cooperative might be arrayed alphabetically, a random number generated (e.g. 530) as a starting point and every 3rd member selected for inclusion in a random sample of 333.
Voice	When customers of a business express their dissatisfaction by complaining to workers/managers of the store.

Appendix F. Suggested Spreadsheet Format

In the following tables, each column represents a column in Excel. So the items "To be added by SRC" and "CoopCode" represent rows 1 and 2 of column A in a spreadsheet. If you contract with SRC, they will be happy to send participating cooperatives a spreadsheet in the preferred format upon request. If you implement the survey on your own or through another survey company you can request a customized spreadsheet from FCI (contact Stuart Reid at: stuart@foodcoopinitiative.coop)

The first (shaded) row contains instructions and possible response values. For example, the fifth column of the first table contains the values 1 – 7 in the first row, which represent the potential answers for the first question in the survey. That question is, 'How much does your household spend in an average week on groceries?', which we have abbreviated as Q1WkExp (Question 1, Weekly Expenditures) and included in the second row of the table.

The specific spreadsheet you develop will depend upon which sub-questions (if any) you choose to delete, what question (if any) you decide to add, and your decision regarding the optional Communications module.

To be added by SRC	To be added by SRC	Mail/Online	1 or 2	1 - 7	--------- Use names of local competitors in questionnaire and place them into these categories. Add/Delete columns as needed. 0 or 1 ------		
CoopCode	Year	Type	Mailing	Q1WkExp	Q2Coop	Q2OthrCoop	Q2NatRetail

--------- Use names of local competitors in questionnaire and place them into these categories. Add/Delete columns as needed. 0 or 1 ------							
Q2NetMail	Q2Cstore	Q2LocalGro	Q2Lmtd	Q2LocSuper	Q2RegSuper	Q2NatSuper	Q2SuperCtr

1 – 7	1 - 5	1 - 3	1 - 3	1 - 3	1 - 3	1 - 3	1 - 3	1 – 3
Q3CoopExp	Q4CoopFreq	Q5aGroc	Q5bDairy	Q5cF&V	Q5dFroze	Q5eMeat	Q5fDeli	Q5gAlc

1 - 3	1 - 3	1 - 3	1 - 3	Specific text here	1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4
Q5hCofTea	Q5iBake	Q5jBulk	Q5kOthr	Q5kWord	Q6aProd	Q6bQual	Q6cPrice	Q6dLoc

1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 4	Specific text here
Q6eHour	Q6fAtmos	Q6gClean	Q6hKnow	Q6iFriend	Q6jBrand	Q6kOrg	Q6lOther	Q6lWord

1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 – 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 – 6
Q7aProd	Q7bQual	Q7cPrice	Q7dLoc	Q7eHour	Q7fAtmos	Q7gClean	Q7hKnow	Q7iFriend

1 – 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	Specific text here	Specific text here	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 – 6
Q7jBrand	Q7kOrg	Q7lOther	Q7lWord	Q8Needs	Q9aGroc	Q9bDairy	Q9cF&V	Q9dFroze

1 – 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 6	Specific text here	1 - 4
Q9fDeli	Q9gAlc	Q9hCofTea	Q9iBake	Q9jBulk	Q9kHABA	Q9lVit	Q10Prod	Q11aOwn

1 – 4	1 - 4	1 - 4	1 – 4	1 - 4	Specific text here	1 - 5	1 - 5	1 - 5
Q11bDisc	Q11cRfnd	Q11dApp	Q11eBoD	Q11fOther	Q11fWord	Q12aCom	Q12bBus	Q12cEnv

1 – 5	1 - 5	1 - 5	1 - 5	1 - 5	0 - 1	0 - 1	0 - 1
Q12dTrust	Q12eEquity	Q12fPos	Q12gMeaning	Q12hStwrd	Q13a Recycle	Q13b SmBus	Q13c Nut

0 – 1	0 - 1	0 - 1	0 – 1	0 - 1	0 - 1	0 - 1	Specific text here	0 - 1
Q13d Coop	Q13e LocAg	Q13f Hung	Q13g Safe	Q13h Env	Q13i ComOrg	Q13j Other	Q13j Word	Q13k None

1 – 5	1 - 5	Specific text here	1 – 4	1 - 4	1 - 4	1 - 4	1 - 4	1 - 4
Q14Rcmd	Q15OvrAll	Q16Word	Q17aExc	Q17bNut	Q17cOrg	Q17dHlth	Q17eFarm	Q17fCom

1 – 4	1 - 4	1 - 4	1 - 2	Specific text here	1 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 7	1 - 4
Q17gLocal	Q17hSus	Q17iPol	Q18Gend	Q19Zip	Q20Age	Q21YrsSh	Q21YrsMem	Q22aAdlts

1 – 4	1 - 5	1 - 6	1 - 8	1 - 6
Q22bKids	Q23Miles	Q24Ed	Q25Inc	Q27Race