



Dunedin City Council 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey: Media Briefing

What is a Residents' Opinion Survey?

The Dunedin City Council (DCC) has been running an annual Residents' Opinion Survey (ROS) since 1994. These surveys measure residents' satisfaction with the Council's performance and with city facilities in which the Council has a significant interest. The output of these surveys enable the Council to assess the extent to which the Council has met its performance objectives. In addition, each year subsequent surveys add to a growing body of research about what Dunedin residents think about their city and their Council.

What is the Goal of the 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey?

The 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey is designed to measure residents' satisfaction with DCC's performance and with Council owned facilities. In addition the Survey is required to measure residents' satisfaction with Dunedin itself¹. The topics covered in the Survey include (but are not limited to):

- Overall Satisfaction with Dunedin City Council;
- Rubbish Collection;
- Water, Drainage and Sewerage;
- Roads, Footpaths, Lighting and Parking;
- Regulatory, Monitoring and Enforcement;
- Consultation and Communication;
- Economic Development and Promotion;
- Elected Representatives;
- Planning and Urban Design; and
- City Facilities.

How will the 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey be Conducted?

The 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey is being completed using a mail (i.e., postal) survey. Participants will be randomly selected from an up to date copy of the Electoral Roll. The survey will also include the option of an on-line questionnaire (to help increase response rates). The online questionnaire will provide those people selected in the mail survey sample with an alternative way to complete the survey questionnaire.

The online survey will also be made available to all Dunedin residents who wish to complete the survey however the opinions of those who were not randomly selected to participate in the survey will be analysed separately to ensure the validity of the randomised results

Why a Mail Survey?

Mail surveys provide an efficient way to collect significant amounts of data from large and geographically dispersed populations. In addition, mail surveys share the advantages of all self-completed questionnaire designs. In particular:

- The asynchronous nature of the data collection² lowers the risk of initial refusal; and
- It is possible for participants to refer to other reference material while completing the questionnaire, increasing the complexity of the topics the survey can address.

Who Will Get Sent the Survey?

4,500 survey questionnaires are being sent out. These are being sent out to residents randomly selected from the 2012 Electoral roll³. The questionnaires are being sent to individual residents and not households. The Electoral Roll is being used because DCC wishes to survey residents and not just ratepayers.

Why Such a Large Survey?

In survey research the quality of the survey results depend on how well the sample represents the population whose views you are interested in. Larger samples mean more accurate results because they are less likely to be coloured by the strong opinions of small groups of respondents. Researchers call this kind of problem 'sampling errors'⁴. Researchers call these errors 'unsystematic' because they arise from probability (i.e., 'chance') factors.

Also, having a large sample enables the DCC to 'zoom in' on the views of particular groups of interest in the city. The results for the subgroups will not be as precise as for the survey as a whole because the precision of the sample results is a function of the size of the sample⁵.

Why the Additional On-Line Component?

One potential disadvantage with mail surveys is that, if poorly designed, they can have low response rates. To address this, the design of the 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey has a number of mechanisms to optimise the response rate. These include media coverage of the survey (to raise awareness); personally addressed surveys; an introduction from the Mayor and CEO about the importance of the survey; a reminder letter to those who do not respond within the first two weeks; and the option of completing the questionnaire on-line. The on-line component was added because one way to increase response rates in survey-based research projects is by increasing the number of ways that participants can complete the survey questionnaire. On-line research has been shown in recent studies to particularly appeal to certain kinds of respondents⁶.

Including an on-line survey also means that the Council can offer all Dunedin residents the opportunity to complete the 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey. This gives everyone the opportunity to have their say and will provide a wider range of feedback to the Council

NOTE: The online survey will be open to all residents from 15 June 2012 and is accessible at www.dunedin.govt.nz/ros.

A Summary of the 2012 ROS Survey Process

The 2012 Dunedin Residents' Opinion Survey will use the following design elements:

1. A probability sample drawn from the electoral roll⁷;
2. A questionnaire that enables trends in satisfaction and opinions to be identified (i.e., survey results that can be compared with previous years' surveys), and for specific contemporary issues to be explored;
3. A questionnaire that is pretested to ensure it is easily comprehended and does not create a burden for respondents;
4. The inclusion of an on-line version of the questionnaire, to increase the number of ways potential respondents can complete the questionnaire and to give all residents the opportunity to complete the survey;
5. The use of a reminder letter (including an explanation of the reason for the letter) to prompt the maximum response rate among the randomly selected sample; and
6. Reports for each individual suburb cluster as well as the District as a whole.

Timeframe for the 2012 Residents' Opinion Survey

| Task | Date |
|--|----------------------|
| Media briefing | 12 June |
| Data Analysis and Reporting | 23 July – 27 July |
| Presentation/Briefing to Council and media | From 17 August (TBC) |
| Results publicly available | From 17 August (TBC) |

Who Will Lead the Project?

Carl Davidson will lead this project for DCC. Carl is one of New Zealand's most experienced market and social researchers. He has worked in the field of research since 1990 in roles as a Social Scientist with the DSIR, as an academic with Massey University (Albany), and as a market researcher. In addition, Carl has written or edited a number of key local books about research practice in New Zealand, including *Evaluating Policy and Practice: A New Zealand Reader* (Prentice-Hall, Auckland, 2004), *Knowledge Management: An Introduction to Creating Competitive Advantage from Intellectual Capital* (Tandem Press, Auckland, 2002), *Social Science Research in New Zealand* (Pearson Education, Auckland, 1999), and *An Introduction to Qualitative Research in New Zealand* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1998). A number of these books have become standard textbooks in research methods courses at New Zealand universities and ITPs.

Endnotes

- 1 And the usage of a number of Council-run facilities
- 2 Where participants are able to complete the survey questionnaire at their leisure.
- 3 Technically, electoral roll as there are separate rolls for Dunedin North and Dunedin South.
- 4 That is, if we were to repeatedly select random samples of a fixed size from a population of interest we would find that the sample statistic would vary from sample to sample. This variation is called sampling error and it simply represents the fact that different random samples contain different people with somewhat different opinions and experiences. Thus, the result of any one survey should be thought of as an estimate of some true population parameter. The more sampling error there is associated with an estimate, the less precise the estimate – and thus the less useful the estimate. Sampling error is unsystematic, in the sense that sample statistics vary randomly about the “true” but unknown population parameter (sometimes the statistic will be less than the parameter, sometimes greater). Moreover, because the random sampling process is unbiased, the level of sampling error associated with a statistic is a relatively simple function of sample size (i.e., the magnitude of sampling error decreases with increasing sample size).
- 5 The accuracy of the sample results is a function of the size of the sample. The size of the population is largely irrelevant. More specifically, the margin of error (and thus the width of the confidence interval) is inversely proportional to the square root of the sample size. A consequence of this inverse square root relationship is that to double the precision of our estimate (i.e., halve the width of the confidence interval), we must quadruple size of our sample.
- 6 Adam and McDonald (2003): On-line versus postal data collection methods; An examination of issues and comparative results, *Australian Journal of Market Research*, 11:1 pp3-9
- 7 Ensuring a representative sample of residents, in contrast to the sample of just *ratepayers* that would result if the Council’s databases were used.