

CORE GUIDE / 08

Survey & Questionnaire Design

Build respondent-friendly questions, pretest tools and protect data quality.

START WITH A DECISION, NOT A FORM.

Ask what decision the evidence should inform before deciding what to measure.

The essential idea

A questionnaire is a tool for collecting structured responses. Good questionnaire design begins with a decision and ends with a pretested tool that respondents can understand and safely answer.

WHY IT MATTERS

Every item should have a defined purpose and a planned use in analysis.

Move from decision to question

Every item should have a defined purpose and a planned use in analysis.

- Write the decision first.
- List the information needed - not every interesting question.
- Use one idea per question.
- Choose response options that match the respondent's reality.

Pretest before fieldwork

Pretesting reveals unclear language, missing options, burden and workflow errors.

- Test with people similar to your respondents.
- Observe where respondents hesitate.
- Ask what they thought each question meant.
- Revise and document changes.

Worked field example

A youth programme wants feedback on whether sessions feel safe, useful and accessible.

Programme question	Evidence to use	Decision it can support
What do participants experience, and what improvements are actionable before the next cycle?	Short anonymous survey, optional open comments, attendance records and facilitator debriefs.	Improve session timing, facilitation practices or referral support based on recurring barriers.

Try it in your work

- Draft five questions for a decision you must make.
- Check every question for a single clear idea.
- Plan one pretest and one revision conversation.

<p>Common mistakes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking a question the programme has no plan to use. • Using technical language or vague time periods. • Mixing two concepts in one rating question. 	<p>A stronger habit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use plain language. • Keep sensitive questions optional and justified. • Pilot the entire data-collection flow, not only the form.
---	---

REFLECT	What could your team stop collecting because it does not currently support a decision, accountability requirement or learning conversation?
----------------	---