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SURVEY

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and

COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION

by

NICK
EGLESON

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The Survey and Community Organization

-- Nick Egleson

This paper is based on surveys taken one summer in Cambridge, Maryland, and one fall in Chester, Pennsylvania. The information from Cambridge was not tabulated until just before the project disbanded in late August, and the information from Chester has not yet been compiled. Yet both surveys contributed immeasurably to the community organization programs of which they were a part. That is the theme of this paper. The indirect more than the direct results of a survey can make it an important link in the process of organizing a community.

A survey can perform four functions. It can supply accurate statistical information. It can provide a way of making contacts within a community. It can furnish informal knowledge of an area of a variety which cannot be tabulated, but which is organizationally useful. It can educate the canvassers.

1) The direct statistical results speak for themselves, except for two words of caution. In all but the rarest cases it is possible to estimate on the basis of informal conversations what the results of surveying will be. This is particularly true of basic needs and of attitudes. A survey is not necessary to decide whether or not housing is substandard of the community is upset about the scarcity of jobs. From the point of view of community organization and action on a problem, it is far more important to find and to implement methods of improving housing conditions than to establish with certainty the number of overcrowded rooms, broken sinks, and non-functioning toilets. The length of time needed to collect and tabulate information necessitates the second word of caution. Unless the project is of long duration, or the number of people surveyed very small, the results of the survey will not be ready in time to be of any use.

Perhaps two examples to illustrate these points will be helpful. a) Before we had canvassed three hundred of the twenty seven thousand Negroes in Chester we had to find an issue for a first attempt at organization. Working closely with three residents of the community it was not difficult to determine that the poor conditions at one of the elementary schools could form a focal point with wide and immediate appeal. We canvassed the surrounding area and the results verified our guess. The Franklin School became the first issue of demonstrations in Chester. b) After a week in Cambridge we theorized from casual conversations and observations that any man who passed twenty would leave the jobless town as soon as he could raise the money and find a way. Three months later when we tabulated the results of a 50% sample survey, this hunch was clearly substantiated. The population broken down by ages followed roughly the normal curve until age 20, and then dipped to a low at 28 before rising slowly back to the normal line.

2) The canvassers who went from door to door in Cambridge and Chester did not just ask their questions and leave. Whenever they could they stayed to talk at length and some of the contacts they made came to play an active part in the organization. In an unfamiliar or completely unorganized area these people would be the starting contacts. The conversation may be about the bombings in Birmingham, the way to fix a sink, or the platform of a local committeeman, and the intended ten minute interview may stretch to an hour, the time is never poorly spent.

3) If these informal conversations in the course of the survey provide a way to meet people, they also provide a way to find information which could not be asked for by a routine questionnaire, and which would not be useful for tabulation. In Chester through this method we learned that an eighteen square block area was threatened with razing to make way for a new bridge. Weeks of pouring over urban renewal plans or back issues of the newspaper might not have brought this program to light. Information on the tactics of the local political organization or machine is not printed anywhere. Only the community's residents know the unofficial leaders of the community.

4) The survey serves its fourth function by educating those who conduct it. People are forced to learn. Two days in the field going door-to-door can tell the conditions better and more honestly than many well chosen words. And people are forced to think. Each canvasser has gathered only a small share of the information, and the shares must be pooled and analyzed. Each person has had slightly different experiences; these must be compared.

Yet one does not need specialized knowledge to set up a survey, nor previous experience to run it. In this respect it is an ideal initial project for a new group or campus organization.

Statistics, contacts, indirect information, and experience are the four functions of the survey. I have divided the remainder of this paper into five sections, each one dealing with specific methods or problems in running a survey. These are: Which questions to ask. How to ask questions. How to choose a sample. Notation and card layout. Tabulation of results.

Which Questions to Ask:

A facsimile reproduction of the cards used in Cambridge and Chester is attached at the end of this paper, and will serve as a list of the questions asked. These lists will, of course, have to be varied to fit different situations. As an indication of why we chose certain questions, here follows a rationalization of the questions asked on the Cambridge forms.

Address: To assure an even and thorough distribution of samples, and so that we could locate again the interested people.

Name: To locate interested people. Very few people were reluctant to give their name, in spite of the fact that we asked some questions which middle class people might consider controversial or personal. In all our survey work we found this openness typical of the lower class community, and attribute it in part to the fact there is little status motivation within it.

Relation to head of household: We had assumed that the woman often served as the acting head of the household, and sometimes the titular one, even when a man was still part of the family. We wanted to prove or disprove this assumption. It was also useful in determining how many heads of households held full time work, as opposed to other adults.

Birthplace: We asked this to get an idea of mobility patterns. For Cambridge Maryland the possible answers were: Cambridge, elsewhere in Dorchester County, elsewhere in Maryland, and out of state.

Registration: We were conducting voter registration drives in the city, and tried to tabulate this information early and use the list of the unregistered people to facilitate the drive.

Schooling: In particular we were interested in finding how many people were working below their educational level, and how many children were completing school.

Opinion of CNAC: CNAC (Cambridge Non-violent Action Committee) was the organization for which we worked. We found many people reluctant to rate one demand in the movement's program above another. All seemed important to them.

Boycott: CNAC had called a boycott of the downtown stores in Cambridge, and we were trying to gauge the extent of participation.

Housing, Employment and Income: Here again few people hesitated to give the information; they did not consider it confidential. We had considerable trouble, however, getting accurate information on income, because few people at this low income level kept any records at all.

We did not try any systematis approach to the informal conversations, and tried only to make each one as informative as possible. Many people in the communities in which we worked had never had an opportunity to generalize their feelings about the conditions in which they lived. If asked if anything were wrong with the schools they would shrug and say no, but they might register strong complaints if asked specifically about the playgrounds at the schools, or the distance their children had to walk to them. Few of these people have had a chance to compare their condition to conditions elsewhere, and often they fail to make judgements for want of a comparative standard. No one will know to complain of 40 children per classroom if they have not had contact with other conditions. These remarks lead to two conclusions: the canvasser will get the most interested response in talking about specific problems of the community (instead of general conditions or possible solutions), and he must be careful to pursue each issue to the full (even when this is not the most rigorous sociological approach).

How to ask questions:

Although the preceding remarks apply as well to the methods of asking as to the questions themselves, it would not be too helpful to set down a list of rules on how to ask questions. Instead, the practice of talking about and comparing techniques after several days of field work will do much to develop sound approaches to canvassing.

How to choose a sample:

Cambridge had a Negro population of 4000. Although we aimed at first for a 100% sample, we retrenched towards the end of the summer and canvassed fifty percent of every street. In Chester we attempted to hit one family in four. If you are striving for a high degree of statistical accuracy, several factors must be taken into account. Without a master street list giving every apartment as well as every house (this can sometimes be obtained from the post office, sometimes from the Chamber of Commerce or the local board of realtors) it is difficult to determine whether or not you have hit the target percentage accurately. The time of day when most surveying is done is also

appendix I

DIAGRAM I: The forms used in Cambridge, summer 1963

street - - - no. - block - - - name
age - sex - rel. to head of household - birthplace
length of residence in city - county - state
Registered: city - affiliation - voting since
 county - reason not registered
last year of schooling - school now attending
other training - - means of transportation to school

religious affiliation - - - active - inactive
membership in other groups

Opinion of CNAC demands VERY important important unimportant
 1. Employment _____
 2. Housing _____
 3. Education _____
 4. Public Accommodations _____
 5. Police _____
Boycott participation: since when:
Where does shopping:
Transportation for shopping:

Attend mass meetings - - - marches - - - sit-ins - -
Comments on CNAC, techniques _____

Rooms - - Bath - - owned - - landlord's name
rent - - upkeep

place of employment - - - type of work - - -
rate of pay - - -
other training - - -
attempts to get other jobs - - -
weeks worked last year - - -

individual income last year - - - family income - - -
benefits: welfare
 social security
 veterans
 other

(N.B. These are smaller than the originals, and only approximate copies.
The originals were printed on 5 x 7 cards).

appendix II

DIAGRAM II: The Chester forms:

Code	Date	Canvasser	Page	of	Card Number
1.	Relation to Head	Δ			23. Address
2.	Sex	A			24. # rooms
3.	Age	Δ			25. rent
4.	Date moved to Chester				26. mortgage
5.	From where				27. Condition
6.	How registered	Δ			28. Bath(s)
7.	How voted last election	/			29. Hot Water
8.	When last voted	Δ			30. Electricity
9.	Last grade completed	Δ			31. Heat
10.	Course	Δ			32. Phone
11.	Why leave school	Δ			33. TV
12.	Post high school training	/			34. Car
13.	Job	Δ			35. Construction
14.	Position	Δ			36. Bad Foundation
15.	Wages	Δ			37. Pests
16.	Hours @ week at present	Δ			38. Local news sour
17.	Weeks worked last year	Δ			39. National news so
18.	Needing a job	Δ			<i>church</i>
19.	Amount earned before taxes	Δ			<i>Regular</i>
20.	Other income last year				
21.	Benefits @ month, amt, kind	Δ			
22.	Which union a member of	Δ			

List below children in school or too young for school:

Age Sex Rel. to head Where born Last grade completed Summer job last year

Age	Sex	Rel. to head	Where born	Last grade completed	Summer job last year

- 40. Ages of children in household interested in being tutored _____
- 41. Whom would you like to see win the 1964 National Election? _____
- 42. Who in the household has moved out of town? _____ When? _____ Where? _____
- 43. Is there anyone disabled or chronically ill in the household? _____ Explain _____
- 44. Is there temporary illness, colds, hospitalization? Explain _____
- 45. What would you like to see done with regard to the school system _____
- 46. to employment _____ rate _____ str _____
- 47. to housing _____ Schools _____
- 48. to medicine _____ Unions _____
- 49. to police force _____ Police _____
- _____ Housing _____
- _____ Employment _____
- _____ Medicine _____
- _____ NAACP _____
- _____ Comments: _____

Appendix III

Diagram III: The middle stage tabulation forms.

1. Code No.	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	etc.
28-009-03	H	M	3	3	6	Y	R	C	0	0	9	4	N	Y
28-009-03	A	F	2	8	6	N	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
28-009-03	C	9	U	9	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
28-011-01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
28-012-06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Each horizontal row represents one card-person.

Each vertical column represents one class of statistics - age, or income group, for example.

Diagram IV: The categories and notation for tabulation

The vertical columns (see diagram III) were labeled from left to right:

1. Code number. See explanation on page 8.
2. Relation to head: either head, other adult (18 yrs +) or child.
3. Sex.
4. Age - actual figures
5. Age group.

1. 0-5	6. 26-35
2. 6-12	7. 36-45
3. 13-17	8. 46-55
4. 18-21	9. 56-65
5. 22-25	0. 66 +
6. Registered - yes, no.
7. Party affiliation - rep, dem, ind.
8. Where born - Cambridge, elsewhere in Dorchester County, elsewhere in Maryland, out of state.
9. Boycott participation, by shopping district: downtown, The Colonial Store (to be used only in emergencies), local shops in the Negro community, and out of town.
10. Education level - last grade completed.
11. Rating demands. We kept track of any of the demands which the interview gave special emphasis.
12. Number of rooms
13. Telephone
14. Bath - full bath, only toilet inside, outside.
15. Hot water
16. Electricity
17. Rent (amount. 0 signified ownership)
18. Skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled.
19. Number of weeks worked last year.
20. Personal income
21. Family income

A list of the statistics which we compiled from the Cambridge data:

1. total population
2. number of households
3. population by age

Appendix IV

4. moving patterns
5. registration and voting statistics
6. affiliation by age
7. " by education
8. average education of age groups
9. no. of persons at each education level
10. density of population
11. overcrowding
12. density charts
13. utilities - electricity, telephone, hot water, bath
14. ownership
15. weeks of employment per year, average education at each level
16. weeks of employment per year, by head and non-head
17. weeks of employment per year, percent of population at each level
18. unemployment at time of interview
19. skills
20. income, by individual, household, total community
21. length of employment, by sex
22. percentage of each age level working at each employment level
23. percentage of each employment group at each age level
24. no. of persons at each education level, by level of employment
25. no. of persons at each income level, total, and by levels of employment
26. attitude toward CNAC demands
27. boycott participation
28. mass meeting participation.