

COLLECTING & ANALYZING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK DATA

for Small Transit Agencies

Gathering feedback from your riders is critical to the success of your transportation services. It allows your agency to understand what it is doing well, what it is not doing well, and what the most critical areas of improvement are. In addition, gathering customer feedback can help your agency anticipate future ridership. For example, many agencies conducted surveys during the COVID-19 pandemic to gauge if riders planned to return to their pre-pandemic levels of public transit use. In addition, conducting surveys of your riders is great for strengthening the relationship between riders and the transit system, as conducting these surveys communicates that your agency cares about the rider experience and wants to do all it can to improve where necessary.

Despite the importance and potential benefits of conducting these surveys, most transit agencies are only doing so on a relatively infrequent basis, if at all. This is likely due to the fact that:



Conducting feedback surveys is a costly process, whether done in-house or through an external consultant.



Staff at smaller transit agencies rarely have the time to dedicate to the process.



Once the data is collected, smaller agencies often do not have the capacity to analyze and apply these findings in a meaningful way.

In addition, if a smaller agency does happen to have the resources to conduct a feedback survey and analyze the results, there are often issues with the quality of data collected that undermine the entire effort, including the quality of the questions and sampling errors. ***On the reverse side of this page is a worksheet*** designed to help your agency think through its goals of gathering customer feedback, as well as strategies that can help with addressing some of the most common survey issues to ensure the data collected is useful for implementing improvements.

COMMON SURVEY ISSUES:



The sample is not representative of actual rider base.



The right questions are not being asked, or questions are unclear.



Recency bias is affecting riders' views of the overall services.



Response rates are often very low.

THINKING THROUGH YOUR SURVEY GOALS & STRATEGIES

What survey issue(s) is your agency facing?

- Lack of responses
- Unrepresentative sample
- Recency bias/single-event complaints
- Results not useful for decision-making
- Never conducted a survey before

Why do you want to conduct a ridership survey?

Have you conducted ridership surveys previously? What went well/didn't go well?

Who responds to the surveys? Why do you think you aren't reaching a broader audience?

What feedback have you previously received? Was it actionable? Why or why not?

Strategies for improving survey outcomes:



Unrepresentative sample? Mix up your methods! Many riders may not have access or know how to use technology to fill out online surveys. Have **on-board surveys** available and **in-person engagement sessions** at varying times of day so as to not cater only to standard work schedules.



Survey responses aren't useful for decision-making? Ensure that you are asking the **right questions** and in the right format. For example, providing multiple choice or ranked questions can lend itself to identifying issues that are affecting many as opposed to one-off issues.



Receiving a lot of complaints about one event? Don't wait till something goes wrong to collect feedback from customers. Get in the habit of conducting surveys on a **regular basis** to **continually gather feedback**, even when it seems like everything is going well.



Low engagement rates? Emphasize **the potential benefits** of providing feedback and **create incentives** where possible. Point to ways that rider feedback has previously helped your agency improve its service.