

October 14, 2019

Additional Writings
City Council Meeting
October 15, 2019
Item No. 3

Dear Calistoga City Council -

Thank you for conducting a Community survey. The Draft is a very good first step, but there are easy modifications to make it even stronger, more comprehensive and useful.

As some of you know, my professional career was in research based strategic consulting. I also studied quantitative methods at U.C. Berkeley. As someone with extensive academic and professional experience in public opinion research, I would like to offer the City a few professional suggestions to improve the Draft survey instrument. I will not be able to attend the Council Meeting, so wanted to convey my recommendations in writing. These recommendations are meant to strengthen the Draft survey, making it more effective and yielding more useful data.

General Survey Methodology and Design Recommended Changes

1. Surveys should move from general to specific, to minimize biasing the more general questions.
 - a. *Q.15 should be moved to after Q.8, to avoid bias from questions 9-13.*
2. Respondents are often sensitive to demographic questions and therefore demographic questions are normally asked at the end of a survey.
 - a. *Move demographic questions 1-7 to the end of the survey. (Note: there are other demographic type questions you might want to move to the end as well.)*
3. Use four-point response scales whenever possible on close-ended questions. Four-point response scales provide a better range of responses and a deeper analysis of the data. Most studies show three-point response scales are less useful and are biased, yielding disproportionately high and hard to analyze response rates for the mid-point response. For example, a "satisfactory" response on three-point scale in the Draft survey will include both respondents who lean towards "very good" and those who lean towards "poor". By comparison, a four-point scale provides the full array of attitudes and allows for a much deeper analysis, including a line between those whose attitudes are excellent/good versus fair/poor.
 - a. *Use Four-point scales (as they were in original draft survey and are in Q.8-11) throughout survey's closed-ended questions. These four-point scales were in the original Draft.*

Recommended New Questions - the following are some standard community survey questions that are currently not in the survey but are highly recommended to get a comprehensive assessment of Calistogans' opinions.

- 1. Job Approvals** – Community surveys such as this usually include a battery of “job approval” questions. If the Council is interested in understanding the public’s real view, it is recommended the following battery be included.

Suggested Language: *Overall, would you say you approve or disapprove of the job each of the following is doing and is that strongly or somewhat approve or disapprove:*

- a. The City Council
- b. The City Manager
- c. The City Staff in General
- d. The Department of Planning
- e. The Department of Public Works
- f. The Fire Department
- g. The Police Department
- h. The Recreation Department
- i. The Planning Commission
- j. Other Departments to Add???

Most good organizations want an objective assessment of the job they are doing. Less common, but as an alternative scale, the job approval can be rated on four-point responses: excellent, good, fair or poor.

Placement: *This battery should be early in survey, after right Q. 8 and before the open-ended number one problem (Q.15 currently).*

- 2. Issue Importance Comparison** –The Draft survey is silent on some significant issues frequently discussed by Calistogans. I recommend a battery of issue importance questions after the broader, open-ended number one issue facing Calistoga question (Q.15). This is a standard research methodology and gives comparative data across the various issues. Q.15 will give issue saliency but you need relative importance as well. This battery will also help put the more specific questions in context for a better analysis.

Suggested language: *Below is a list of issues facing Calistoga. How serious an issue is each for you – extremely serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, not at all serious. (A 10-point scale could be used as well for a more precise comparison).*

List of issues:

- a. Growth
 - b. Affordable housing
 - c. Speeding on city streets
 - d. Business retention
 - e. Activities for Seniors
 - f. Water rates
 - g. Recreational activities
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- h. Condition of city streets
- i. Bike lanes in town
- j. Off street parking
- k. Public transportation
- l. Additional Issues to Add???

If the Council wants a true read on respondents' relative concern about a series of issues, they should list the full set of issues and then compare data.

Placement: Ideally these would come right after the open-ended number one problem (Q.15 currently).

- 3. Growth Trade-off question.** Given the saliency of growth issues in small communities, this type of question is traditionally included in a community survey.

Suggested language: Would you say there currently is 1) too much growth; 2) about the right amount of growth; or 3) too little growth in Calistoga?

Placement: This question should follow right after the issue battery above.

Recommended Wording Changes to Existing Draft Questions – the following are recommended changes to help clarify and strengthen existing questions:

1. **Q. 12** – this is two separate questions as written. Are you asking about responsiveness or courteousness? For example, someone can be courteous but not responsive.
2. **Q.17** – the response categories need to strike “I don’t believe in climate change” as it is not a response to the Q.17. A second question could be added about whether respondents believe in climate change or not.
3. **Q.18** – as written, the results will be hard to interpret as respondents could believe the new revenue could be spent on multiple choices.
4. **Q.21** – as written is vague and unanswerable. Respondents may favor bike lanes over on-street parking in certain areas of town and the opposite in other areas.
5. **Q.26** – as written is vague and could not be interpreted. Housing costs are a Statewide issue and respondents' views will vary based on what type of housing is being asked about in Calistoga.
6. **Q.27** – as written is unclear. What is meant by “else”? Is it in reference to business issues? If so, should state, if not it is very vague.

Survey Logistics/Execution Issues/Recommendations

1. How are survey responders going to be managed to ensure only intended respondents take the survey and that they take it only once? Is Survey Monkey being used, as it has many safeguards built-in?
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- *Clarify safeguards for proper respondents taking survey and taking it only once.*
2. Transparency in Reporting Full Results – surveys like this are only credible with the community if the full results are made public. Also, if respondents take time to fill out a survey, they expect to see the full results.
- *Release complete results and analysis to the public, when completed.*

As a research professional, I offer these suggestions to improve the Draft survey instrument and provide the City with a fuller and more powerful set of data. I am happy to discuss with the Staff or any of the Council members as well.

Thank you,

Paul Holm

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