Membership Viability and Design Survey Template

Before you launch your membership program, you need to assess your audience members' willingness to support your work, and what they value most about it. This will help you decide whether to pursue membership, and how to design a membership program that will deliver value for them.

Below is a list of recommended questions to figure that out. Not all the questions will be relevant to your newsroom. Pick the ones that make the most sense. This is meant to be a template that you can adapt to your own specific needs. For a larger selection of questions to choose from, check out MPP's [Supporter Survey Questions Library.](#)

If this is going to your full audience, your goal should be to keep it tight – no more than 10 questions, with most of them being closed-ended questions (in other words, they should have pre-filled answer options, such as multiple choice or Likert scales).

If this survey is going to prior financial supporters or existing members, whose investment might be higher, you could include more questions or include more open-ended questions, which require more effort on the respondent's part but also give you more nuanced information.

[Find more advice on conducting audience research and synthesizing your results in the Membership Guide](#).

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To assess whether you have loyal audience members

- ❖ How long have you been reading/listening to [newsroom]?
  - ➢ Less than a year
  - ➢ One to three years
  - ➢ Three to five years
  - ➢ More than five years

- ❖ How many times a month do you estimate you visit our website/listen to our podcast/read our newsletter? (Choose the most relevant)
  - ➢ 1 to 2 times
  - ➢ 3 to 10 times
  - ➢ More than 10 times

- ❖ How many times a week do you read a newsletter we send?
  - ➢ 1 to 2 times
  - ➢ 3 to 4 times
  - ➢ 5 times or more

- ❖ Have you ever attended an event hosted by [newsroom] or participated in our journalism in any other way, such as responding to a callout?

- ❖ On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend [newsroom] to a friend? (You could also give them qualitative answer options ranging from "highly unlikely to very likely." This question is most useful as a way to categorize all the other responses. For example, you can filter so that you only see responses from people who are highly likely to recommend you to others – your superfans. These are likely to be your first members.)

To assess whether, how, and why they'll financially support you:

People are not great at answering hypothetical questions, so asking how much they would pay to support you is going to be less useful than finding out how important you are in their lives via the loyalty assessment questions above. But you can also get a picture of their likelihood to support you by asking whether and how much they already support other organizations.

- ● Do you financially support any other news organizations as a member, subscriber, or donor? Which ones?

- ● Do you financially support any other causes or charitable organizations?

- ● If yes, how much do you give monthly or annually to causes and organizations you support?

- ● What motivated you to support any of these organizations?

To learn what your potential members value about you:

For all the below questions, you could keep this open-ended, or give a few multiple-choice options with an "other" option.

- ● What do you turn to [newsroom] for?

- ● What work by [newsroom] do you value most?

- What type of work by [newsroom] do you value most? *This could be a question about forms (i.e. newsletters, podcasts, daily news stories), or about particular beats or types of coverage (i.e. investigative journalism, editorials, education coverage). MPP recommends allowing them to rank the answers.*

- How would you describe our journalism to a friend?

- What do you get from [newsroom] that you don't get from any other news organization?

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To gain insight into designing a membership program:

- Please assign a 1 - 3 value according to how important these factors are in choosing the organizations and causes that you give your time, money, and/or ideas to.
  - A sense of affiliation or belonging
  - Ability to interact with reporters
  - Feeling that my concerns are heard by the organization
  - Offering the world something that I think should exist
  - User experience, including ease of use and visual appeal
  - Makes things easier and reduces effort (i.e., not having to work around paywall to view articles)
  - Exclusive or VIP access (i.e., members-only content and access to staff)
  - Staff diversity
  - A sense of uniqueness/something I can't get anywhere else
  - Advocacy on my behalf
  - Being connected with other members or other like-minded people
  - Events/opportunities to connect in person and online
  - Interactions with like-minded organizations (i.e., member discounts at local businesses or partnerships with other organizations that share values)
  - Merchandise / physical branded goods
  - Appropriate price

You could replace the above question with "Which of the following describes why you would consider becoming a member?" while keeping the same answer options above. You can also remove those answer options that feel irrelevant to your organization and add in others that you don't see there.

- Our membership program is likely to include member-only benefits, but we're still deciding what to offer. Select the three benefits below that would be most valuable to you. *Need ideas for what to include? [MPP has a list of commonly offered benefits](.).*

- What else could improve the experience you have with [newsroom]?

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More resources:

The template above is a general one and based on a couple assumptions.

1. You already have audience members, but you don't having paying members.

2. You communicate with your audience members via email on a regular basis.