



Implement Surveys to Initiate Change

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As a corporate fitness management company always striving to exceed our client contacts expectations, we are continuously making improvements. There are many areas to consider when deciding how and where we can make improvements. We manage facilities, staff, members, equipment, programs, events and many other areas so there's a lot to juggle but the main goal is to always improve each area. So how do you take such a broad range of responsibilities and decide what needs to be done better?

One of our answers to this "how do we do it better" question is by implementing a survey.

***Survey** (verb) - to take a general or comprehensive view of or appraise, as a situation, area of study, etc.*

Essentially, that's what we do for all of these areas; we appraise them by surveying our members and participants. The feedback we have gained from surveys has been extremely helpful in making improvements and implementing change, and below you will find more detail about how we determine when a survey is necessary, how often we should be surveying members, who we should be surveying and what to do with that information.

When is a survey necessary?

Determining when a survey is necessary should be your first question. There are many situations where a decision can be made without too much feedback or surveying. For more on how your staff might be able to gather important programming data they can use to do better, [check out this blog](#).

However, when you want to really dig deeper into a service or program with participant feedback, a survey should be considered. For example, we run our fitness center programs with certain goals in mind for a target population, and getting that specific feedback from participants helps us determine whether we've met our goals for that target audience or not.

A basic weight maintenance program for example, certainly offers a chance to survey the participants. To implement change and improvements to the program, you want to know how many members completed the program, were they able to maintain their weight, did they find the materials or classes encouraging and beneficial, was staff assistance provided, etc. This feedback straight from the source will offer a completely different perspective than what you might glean from a post-program staff brainstorming session. Also, don't discount that the end-of-program survey often provides participants with a feeling of empowerment, particularly when their feedback is used to create program improvements.

Surveys are also necessary when trying to gain an outside and anonymous perspective. There are many scenarios when members won't speak directly to staff about issues, problems, ideas or even great experiences they've had in our facilities. By conducting a survey, you'll be offering them a chance to speak their mind without any judgment and in a comfortable private setting.

How often should a survey be conducted?

This question is a little tricky to answer because the last thing you want to do is over-survey your members. One thing to keep in mind is that surveys do take time, even if it's only a few minutes. Time is limited in the corporate setting so

we want to make sure that our surveys are meaningful, straight to the point and are built to get us the information we need. You can show respect for the participants you're inviting to take the survey by adding a brief explanation ahead of the survey that outlines both what the survey is for and how long it will take them to complete it. Consider an opening statement such as:

“Thank you for taking the time to help us make improvements. Your feedback is greatly appreciated and the survey should only take a minute to complete.”

Another consideration when determining frequency for surveys is focused on what you are surveying. There are a few categories of survey and each dictates its own frequency.

The program-related survey

With many of the programs we offer to our members, we are trying to meet certain goals so this requires us to know specifics before the program and after the program. For example, if you're trying to track whether a program helped initiate a behavior change for the participants, you want to know their baseline behavior prior to beginning the program as well as their behavior at the conclusion of the program. In this example, you would need a pre-program survey and a post-program survey.

The satisfaction survey

With overall satisfaction surveys, you'll be asking for input from a larger population and generally about a larger scope of products and/or services. Typically you want feedback from all members and not just a specific participation pool like you want with program surveys. We conduct annual fitness center satisfaction surveys to see what improvements can be made to our client's facilities, what programs members are participating in, how satisfied they are with our services, and the experience they've had with our staff, what barriers they have to visiting our facility, etc. A survey like this will probably be longer than a program survey and may take two to five minutes to complete. The information we've gathered from this type of survey has become invaluable to use and we'll talk about that later on.

Who should be surveyed and how should we survey them?

When considering who should be surveyed you want to think about the questions you are asking. With a specific program survey, you only want feedback and information from the program participants. In this case, we typically survey participants after they have signed up for a program. Once we know who the participants are, then those individuals can receive a survey link via email. Now, when you are considering the surveys as mentioned above such as facility and staff surveys, you want as much feedback as possible. In this case, you'll want to send the survey out to all members so as much data can be gathered as possible.

There are many online survey options to choose from but our preference has been [Survey Monkey](#). You would think the days of paper surveys are over, but once again you need to consider your population. In most of our corporate settings, a link to the survey in an email works brilliantly. However, we have some manufacturing settings where access to a computer and/or email isn't a regular part of the day, and in this case, the more traditional method of a paper survey works better. (We put the paper responses back into our survey tool so that it's easier to crunch the numbers.) In some cases a combination of the two work well but knowing your population is important to determine what method or methods they prefer.



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What should be done with survey feedback?

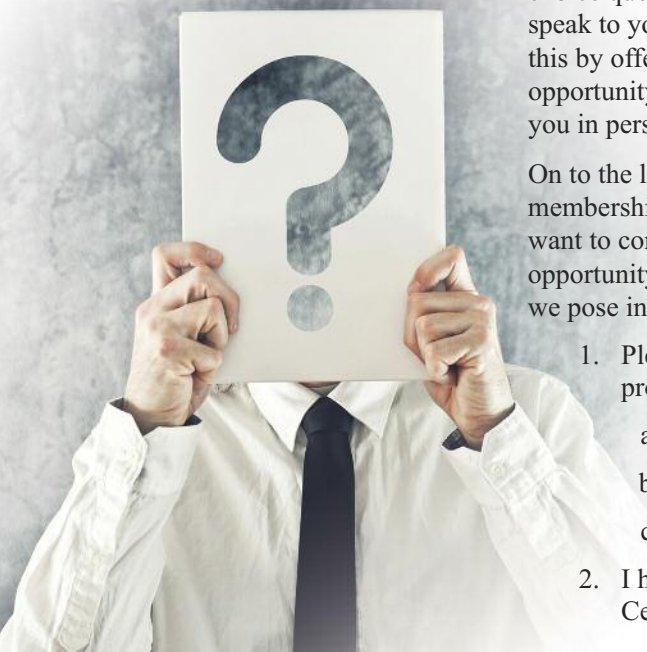
Once a survey has been conducted then the anticipation for the results ensues. It's almost like waiting for test scores. We're always eager to improve programs, see how successful participants were, read input members give about staff, what they'd like to see changed in our facilities and so on. Surveys are a direct reflection of how well you, your company, your programs and your staff are doing. The information gathered becomes invaluable and frankly, without surveying your population, this kind of information is hard to come by. Typically, people feel more comfortable answering questions anonymously rather than in direct communication, especially when you have to ask the hard questions and want the raw answers. A survey becomes your member's route for expressing their true opinions. This is what we want and this is where we can gather data to make real improvements.

We'll tackle program specific surveys first and what to do with that feedback. Many smaller programs or incentives are run annually so it's pertinent to determine what's working well, what isn't and what can be changed to keep it exciting and motivational for members. A survey will also help you determine if the program is worth continuing for another go around. For example, if you've run a program for several years, participation continues to increase, goals are being met, feedback is positive then you can usually rest assured that members are enjoying the program and it's beneficial. In this case, the feedback is noted and then more creative twists and improvements can be added for the next year. [See our blog series on Maintain Not Gain](#) for more on this concept.

On the other hand, if you've been running a program for several years where participation is down, success rates are low, sign ups decrease, and/or goals aren't being met, then you should consider if the program is worth continuing. Survey feedback in this instance may help you uncover what specific elements about the program are not working. We've found it to be very beneficial in most of our surveys to leave an open ended question at the end for participants or members to leave any additional information. Again, this offers a chance for them to express their candid feedback for any ground that you didn't cover in earlier multiple choice questions. You'll also want to keep in mind that some people will want to speak to you directly or just prefer that route when offering feedback. You can do this by offering a question in the survey where participants or members have the opportunity to leave their name and contact information if they'd like to speak to you in person.

On to the larger survey's where you're collecting data from your entire membership population about a broad product/service, remember that you only want to conduct these once per year. But these types of surveys offer you the opportunity to cover many questions. Here are a few examples of the questions we pose in our annual satisfaction surveys:

1. Please rate the overall quality (equipment, amenities, locker facilities, programs/classes, etc.) of your onsite Wellness Center.
 - a. Excellent – exceeds my expectations
 - b. Acceptable – meets my expectations
 - c. Poor – is below my expectations
2. I have participated in the following activities through my onsite Wellness Center. Select all that apply.



- a. Strength training
 - b. Cardiovascular training
 - c. Lunch N Learns
 - d. Program incentives
 - e. Tobacco cessation classes
 - f. Group fitness classes
3. The NIFS staff consistently creates a welcoming environment for you.
- a. Always
 - b. Often
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never



These questions, along with the rest of our satisfaction survey provides us with about our client’s fitness center, the services we’re offering, and the performance of the staff. Historically, we’ve been able to use survey responses to improve the fitness center environment by:

- purchasing new equipment
- improving cleanliness
- adding televisions, fans, lighting, and magazines
- including towel service

In some cases, we’ve made some fairly substantial changes to the fitness center environment based on survey feedback. For example, in one of our client’s centers, we received consistent feedback about the facility layout as a response to the first question above. In this center, the set up was such that members would enter the facility, check in at the front desk, and proceed around the corner to the locker rooms and fitness center. The set up wasn’t ideal and we had many members mention in the survey that they would feel more comfortable if staff were able to directly view the fitness floor to observe when members might need help. After seeing quite a few comments like this, we decided to approach our contact in Facilities about the member’s concerns. We knew we were making a significant request because they would need to move the entire front desk including re-carpeting, adjusting electrical outlets and opening a new space on the floor for the front desk area. Facilities agreed to assist, our client contact was able to take on the cost. This large but simple improvement literally made our site better by leaps and bounds. By doing this, our staff were able to interact with members more frequently, more opportunities were opened to assist members with equipment and exercise positioning and with this move staff could also have a full view of the group exercise room.

The second question above allows us to see what services are used the most so that we can focus most on those elements which are most popular. Conversely, for the services that aren’t used as much, we have a chance to evaluate what we can do more to encourage usage. Are we promoting the service enough? What routes are we using to promote the service? Are staff members talking about these



services to current and new members? What we hope to see by evaluating our services is for numbers to shift the next year in a positive direction. Maybe one service or amenity that had low participation in one survey year will increase with the improvements that we were able to implement as shown on the following year's survey.

The last example question above is one of many we ask about how our staff are performing. These survey results specific to staff are useful during performance reviews because in many cases, we are managing our staff from afar and the feedback from these staff-centric questions offer us a glimpse as to how our staff are being perceived by members.

We know our staff play a huge role in the success of our facilities so we want to ensure that we have the right people in the right place doing the right things. Staff alone can increase usage just by welcoming all members during their visit, running successful programs, maintaining a clean facility, being knowledgeable, helpful, courteous, friendly and encouraging. Their role in the success of a facility is tremendous so gathering as much feedback from members on their daily performance is another extremely valuable piece of information and one you certainly want to include in a survey at least once per year. The feedback from members also gives us the chance to help staff make any necessary improvements to their performance and more importantly, praise them for a job well done.



As an organization, we are focused on continuous improvement and we've found surveys to be an effective tool for us. If you aren't currently using surveys to evaluate outcomes, now is a good time to start. It's an effective tool for understanding what your members need and how you can continue to serve them better. If you want to learn more about how NIFS is helping our clients operate successful fitness centers, contact Bethany Garrity [by email](#) or at 317-274-3432 x208.