

Reimagining Faith Formation Project

Faith Formation Research Guide

Research Tasks

The **Research Guide** provides the tools for developing a deeper understanding of lives of people in your target audience(s)—their religious and spiritual needs and practices—that can form one basis of developing new initiatives. It also includes tools for observing the everyday life of people in your community, and for identifying the views of church leaders on church life and faith formation.

The Research work can include six tasks. Each of these tasks is described in this Guide.

1. Gathering demographic information about the congregation *and the surrounding community*
2. Observing the people *and patterns* in the surrounding community
3. Interviewing selected church leaders
4. Conducting *two* focus groups of people in your *target audience(s)*
5. Producing a summary report of the observations, interviews, and focus groups
6. Identifying the most important needs *and gifts* of the *target audience(s)* to be addressed by new initiatives

Part 1. Information Gathering: Demographics

Church and Surrounding Community Demographics

Please complete the following demographic information (actual numbers or best estimates).

1. Total # of church members	#
2. Total # of people attending Sunday worship on a typical weekend	#
3. Number of couples married in the past 12 months:	#
4. Number of children baptized in the past 12 months:	#
5. Number of funerals in the past 12 months:	#
6. Number of children (grades 1-8) in Christian education programs:	#
7. Number of teens (grades 9-12) in Christian education/youth ministry programs:	#
8. Number of young people confirmed in the past 12 months:	#
9. Number of people who have joined the church in the past 12 months:	#
10. Number of young adults (20s-30s) participating in faith formation programs:	#
11. Number of adults (40s+) participating in faith formation programs:	#

Racial and Ethnic Diversity of Church Members and Surrounding Community

Please provide an estimate of the % in each category.

	Church	Surrounding Community
European-Americans/White	%	
African-American	%	
Hispanic/Latino American	%	
Asian-American	%	
Ethnic Community:	%	
Ethnic Community:	%	

Age Diversity of Church Members and Surrounding Community

Please provide an estimate of the % in each category.

Children (0-10)	%
Youth (11-19)	%
Young Adults (20s-30s)	%
Adults (40s-50s)	%
Adults (60s+):	%

Part 2. Community Observation

Determining Observation Locations & Checklist

Engage the team in becoming anthropologists by observing people in the community. Develop an observation checklist (*see statements 1-5 below*) and ask team members to spend a month simply observing people at work, at school, at play, at stores, in coffee shops and restaurants, and so on. Watch for things like:

1. What are some of the most popular activities in the community?
2. Where do people gather outside of work and school—coffee shop, gym, mall, park, community center, YMCA/YWCA, and so on? What are they doing there?
3. Where do people work? Do most people work in the community or do they commute to another area? What types of jobs do people have?
4. What are the most popular or well-attended churches in the community?
5. Where are people on Sunday morning, if they are not at worship?

Develop your list of things to observe in your community that are relevant to each target audience.

Compiling Observation Notes

An “Empathy Map,” developed by the Stanford School of Design, is one tool to synthesize observations and draw out insights from the community observation. Organize findings into the following four quadrants: What are people saying, doing, thinking, and feeling? Do this activity as a team and use one *a* sheet of newsprint to compile the findings *for each quadrant*.

Empathy Map

SAY What do you hear your target group saying?	DO What actions and behaviors do you notice in your target group?
THINK What might your target group be thinking? What does this tell you about their beliefs/convictions?	FEEL What emotions might your target group be feeling?

Review the results of the “Empathy Map,” *reflect on what other insights you have gleaned from your community observation that “may” relate to your work with your target audience*, and develop a report of the major findings and insights from these observations *and your reflections*.

Part 3. Interviews of Church Leadership

Conduct 5-6 one-to-one interviews with church leaders (rector/pastor, church staff, council leaders, and other leaders *related to your target audience*) to obtain a *leadership perspective on church life and faith formation* with your target audience. Ask each interviewee for 30 minutes.

Use the following questions as a guide for developing interview questions for church leaders – adapt the questions based on the selection of your target audience(s). Every interviewer needs to ask the same questions so that comparisons can be made across the groups.

Introduction by Interviewer: *Thank you for your positive response to our invitation to be interviewed as part of our research for new faith formation initiatives. This conversation is an important element in our congregation’s desire to better serve its people and its surrounding community. I am: (name); I’m one of the task force members at: (church). I have a few questions for us to discuss; during this discussion, I will be taking a few notes so that we can more accurately recall our conversation. While this information will inform our study, no names will be attached to any of this information.*

Interview Questions

(Questions in [] are intended as follow-up questions.)

1. How would you **describe your understanding** of our target audience(s) (age group, families, whole community) in key words or phrases? What are some of the **important life issues** that our target audience is experiencing today? What are the **significant spiritual issues** that our target audience is experiencing today?
Your question(s): _____

2. Can you tell me about **how our church helps** our target audience(s) (age group, families, whole community) grow as Christians? How does the church **support, strengthen, and challenge their faith**?
Your question(s): _____

3. How would you **describe the community life** at our church? [Do you see people experiencing a life-giving spiritual community of hospitality, welcoming, love, and support?]
Your question(s): _____

4. How do you see **people experiencing worship** at our church? What words would you use to describe the worship experience? [Do they speak of it as engaging? Is worship at our church easy to **understand**? Does it seem **relevant to daily life**?]
Your question(s): _____

5. How is our church **engaged in service and mission to the community and the world**? What do you see people in our church doing to **live out our mission** and service to the community and world?
Your question(s); _____

6. How does our **church nurture the faith life of the whole family**? How does our church equip parents/grandparents to share faith and live faith practices at home?
Your question(s): _____

7. How can our church help our target audience(s) to **continue growing as a Christian**? Be specific. Name some of the things you would like to see our church offer this target audience?
Your question(s): _____

Compiling and Analyzing Interview Results

Use the following process to find the key themes that have emerged from the interviews (The goal is to “make as much sense as you can” out of what you have heard):

1. Compile the responses for each question from all of the interviews.
 - *Enter all your notes from the interviews into a computer file.* Then collate all of the responses from the separate interviews into one document, question-by-question.
 - *Print the collated responses to each question on separate newsprint sheets. Place the newsprint sheets on the wall.*
2. *As a team review the responses to each question.*
 - If you find responses to a question that are *identical in language or similar in content*, give these identical or similar items the same number beginning with #1.
 - Continue to do this for all related items. *Some items will not relate to any other items...let them stand alone.*
3. *Next place blank sheets of newsprint on the wall.* Name *and write* in one phrase or sentence the *core* content of each of the most frequently mentioned responses. These are themes.
4. Develop a summary report for each question that focuses on the top priority themes but also includes all the items. For some questions this may only be 4 or 5 themes; for other questions there may be as 8 or 10 themes.
5. *Finally, summarize these themes in a single narrative report organized around the questions and themes with the clustered responses as descriptive information filling out the themes.*

Part 4. Focus Groups with Target Audience

Audiences

An excellent way to gather information about people in the *congregation and* community is through focus groups. Organize two focus groups of eight to twelve people from among the target audience. Select a diversity of people in each focus group, reflecting ethnic/cultural diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and spiritual and religious diversity (from the actively engaged to the “churchless” thus some of the members of the focus groups may be from the congregation and some from the community).

Meet for about one hour in different locations and times. Remember that people who are not involved in church may be hesitant to come to a meeting at church. Have two people lead each focus group – one to record (on a computer or tablet is preferable) and one to ask the questions. The recorder can also ask follow-up questions as appropriate.

Introduction by Focus Group Leaders: *Thank you for your positive response to our invitation to be in this focus group discussion. This discussion is an important element in our congregation’s desire to better serve its people and its surrounding community. I am: (name); I’m one of the task force members at: (church). I have a few questions for us to discuss; during this discussion, we will be taking a few notes so that we can more accurately recall our conversation. While this information will inform our study, no names will be attached to any of this discussion.*

Use the following questions as a guide for developing your focus group interviews – adapt the number and character of the questions based on the selection of your target audience(s). Each focus group needs to ask the same questions so that comparisons can be made across the two groups. Keep the group moving through the questions; don’t get “stuck” on any one question. The goal is to surface lots of information from group members, not to conduct a group discussion of the questions.

Focus Group Questions

(Questions in [] are intended as follow-up questions.)

1. How would you **describe** our target audience (age group, families, whole community) in key words or phrases? What are some of the important life issues that our target audience is experiencing today?

Your question(s): _____

2. What are the **significant spiritual issues** that our target audience (age group, families, whole community) is experiencing today?

Your question(s): _____

3. What is most important to you about **being a Christian (or an Episcopalian) today?**

Your question(s): _____

4. How do you **live your Christian faith**? Name some of the ways you **put your faith into practice**.
Your question(s): _____

5. Can you tell me about **how our church helps** you [and your family when appropriate] grow as Christians? How does the church support, strengthen, and challenge your faith? [What practices and/or experiences are of importance to you and your faith?]
Your question(s): _____

6. How would you **describe the community life at our church**? [Do you see people experiencing a life-giving spiritual community of hospitality, welcoming, love, and support?]
Your question(s): _____

7. How do you see **people experiencing worship** at our church? What words would you use to describe the worship experience? [Do they speak of it as engaging? Is worship at our church easy to understand? Does it seem relevant to daily life?]
Your question(s): _____

8. How is our **church engaged in service to the community** and the world? What is our target audience doing to live out our mission and service to the community and world?
Your question(s): _____

9. For parents: How does our church nurture the **faith life of the whole family**? How does our church equip parents/grandparents to share faith and live faith practices at home?
Your question(s): _____

10. How can our church help you to **continue growing as a Christian**? Be specific. Name some of the things you would like to see our church offer for your age group?
Your question(s): _____

Compiling and Analyzing Focus Group Results

Use the following process to find the key themes that have emerged from the focus groups: (The goal is to “make as much sense as you can” out of what you have heard):

1. Compile the responses for each question from both of the focus groups.
 - *Enter all your notes from the each of the focus groups into a computer file, thus collating all of the responses into one document for each focus group, question-by-question.*

- *Print the collated responses to each question on separate newsprint sheets. Place the newsprint sheets on the wall. (Do this and the following processes for each of the two focus groups).*
2. *As a team review the responses to each question.*
 - *If you find responses to a question that are identical in language or similar in content, give these identical or similar items the same number beginning with #1.*
 - *Continue to do this for all related items. Some items will not relate to any other items...let them stand alone.*
 3. *Next place blank sheets of newsprint on the wall. Name and write in one phrase or sentence the core content of each of the most frequently mentioned responses. These are themes.*
 4. *Develop a summary report for each question that focuses on the top priority themes but also includes all the items. For some questions this may only be 4 or 5 themes; for other questions there may be as 8 or 10 themes.*
 5. *Next, compare the themes and items from each of the focus groups with each other. Look for commonalities and differences.*
 6. *Finally, summarize these themes, referencing commonalities and differences in a single narrative report organized around the questions and themes with the clustered responses as descriptive information filling out the themes. Bring this final report along to the August 29, 2015 workshop.*