

Soliciting Resident Input

One of the three basic tenets upon which the Agency's SSP is built, is that decisions surrounding services are based, in part, on resident input. Management is expected to re-evaluate their service programs and solicit resident input at least once every three years.

Resident needs and interests should be the basis for developing a service plan. This resident input allows program administrators to adjust services to the changing needs and interests of residents and make improvements to the site's supportive services program over time.

Management may solicit resident input through a variety of formats. The format selected should take advantage of the unique circumstances of each property. Sites may choose to facilitate focus or discussion groups, distribute a written survey, or conduct individual needs assessments. Regardless of the method selected, all residents should have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Decisions that impact what services are available, how they are accessed, and any associated costs to residents should not be made without resident input.

To help determine what method should be used to solicit resident input at any particular site, answer the following questions:

- What surveys and data collection methods have been used in the past?
- Which methods worked best?
- What is the best way to gain information from your residents?

Resident Input Methods

Self-Administered Written Questionnaire	Although these may be the easiest to distribute, care must be taken to make sure the questionnaire is easy to read and understand, and that the resident sees the value in completing the survey. Refer to sample resident surveys and cover letters. Alternative methods should be used for residents with sight-impairments or for those who are unable to read or write.
Personal Interviews	Interviews work best at sites with few residents. A personal interview may result both in a higher response rate and in the collection of more information. The interviewer may probe for clarification or more in-depth responses while following a standard set of questions.
Discussion or Focus Group	Residents may be separated into groups, such as by floor of residence, and led in a group discussion utilizing questions similar to those in the personal interview. The facilitator must assure that all residents have the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Though a 100% completion rate may not be achievable, it is reasonable to expect that more than half of the residents will participate in the resident survey if they recognize the benefits of doing so. Incentives may be offered to encourage participation, but at the very least, a comprehensive marketing effort with follow-up will increase participation.

The following conditions should be met to assure that residents have input into site services:

- Resident input should be considered in the design and format of the resident survey to assure that pertinent issues are covered.
- All residents must have an opportunity to participate in the survey process.
- A response rate below 50% should be evaluated to determine whether another means of surveying the population should be used.
- An attempt to ascertain the service needs of residents must be completed every three years.
- The findings from the resident survey should be made available to residents to demonstrate the results of their support for the project and encourage future participation.

A summary of findings from the resident survey becomes the foundation on which the site's plan of services is based.

Sample resident services questionnaires and cover letters are available under the Sample Documents and Forms Section.

Surveys and Evaluations

Getting feedback from residents is an important component of the Service Coordinators job. Written surveys and small group meetings provide opportunities to evaluate programs that you have, to gauge interest in new programs, and to generate new ideas or approaches. Administering a survey helps identify strengths and needs of residents, and therefore is a valuable planning tool. Written, mailed surveys are useful because they can be anonymous and don't consume as much staff time as individual interviews do. However, the return rate for surveys that are simply mailed out is usually quite low. To increase the return rate, you can provide an incentive, such as sending a two-part numbered ticket with the survey. When residents return the survey, they include one part of the numbered ticket. All returned tickets are put into a raffle drawing. Be sure that surveys are available in the significant languages spoken in your development, as well as alternate formats for people with visual disabilities.

The best results, however, come from one-on-one interviews with residents. Residents should be assured that the information they provide the interviewer will be kept confidential; that the goal is to summarize all answers in order to evaluate current programs and plan new ones. However, residents should also be reassured that if they bring up a particular issue with which they want assistance, the Service Coordinator will

follow up with them directly. If you are conducting interviews, you may need to hire an interpreter in order to provide access to someone who signs or whose primary language isn't English. A caveat to remember when doing a survey is *not to ask residents if they want something that you do not have the capacity or funding to deliver* – unless you make it very clear that the reason for the survey is to gauge interest for the purpose of building the capacity and finding the funding.

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