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Research Methods for a Spatially Dispersed Membership

Abstract

This paper looks at the problem of how to research, survey and build relationships with a spatially dispersed membership. This piece is a review of the current literature pertaining to geographical research methods and how they apply to an umbrella organization such as The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA). It looks at the background theory behind surveys and how they apply to umbrella organizations. Conventional methodologies for survey delivery such as telephone and mail surveys are still relevant and useful but not complete. There is a large body of literature growing on the usefulness of electronic methods of delivery, which are very relevant with the current structure of the FOCA membership. To best reach a spatially disperse membership an organization needs to employ multiple delivery methods (both conventional and innovative) to best ensure that all members are represented. This approach can then serve as a guide for other umbrella organizations looking to communicate effectively with its members.

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Introduction

For an organization it is important to understand what their members' opinions are, so they can act accordingly with their members best interests in mind. The type of organization plays a large role in the selection of an appropriate research method for a number of reasons to be explained below. The purpose of this project is to develop a system for monitoring the needs and concerns of members belonging to a spatially dispersed membership. This will involve thoroughly examining the major methods available to organizations to achieve this level of communication with its members. These methods will be examined with respect to there usefulness for The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA). The specific research question that will be explored for the rest of the report will address how FOCA can research, survey and build relationships with its spatially dispersed membership.

Outline of FOCA

FOCA is "a non-profit, voluntary organization representing over 500 Ontario cottagers' associations plus individual and corporate members. For over 40 years, FOCA has served as an information centre and provided assistance and leadership on many crucial issues affecting cottage properties that generate half a billion dollars in property taxes, and billions of dollars in economic activity annually in Ontario" (www.foca.on.ca). FOCA's main priorities are:

1) To provide a forum for Ontario's cottagers to work together on common issues
2) To communicate FOCA's concerns and positions effectively to all cottagers
3) To achieve fair property and education tax systems for Ontario's cottagers

4) To ensure sound land-use planning policies are implemented locally and provincially
5) To promote safe recreational boating
(www.foca.on.ca).

To achieve these priorities FOCA needs a method to interact with its members to make sure they have an accurate representation of their beliefs when working on issues. FOCA's structure can be considered as an umbrella organization[1], in that they are the lead body with a number of smaller organizations below them, each of which represents individual memberships. Ontario is a large province with lakes scattered all throughout the province, FOCA's membership is one that is geographically dispersed. With this dispersion, an adequate method to communicate with its members is very important. Currently communication between individual members and FOCA is very limited. The current make-up of the FOCA membership consists of 600 lake associations, 500 additional individual members and 50 corporate members. FOCA currently has contact information[2] for up to 6 executives from each lake association. This works out to a potential 3600 executive contacts plus the individual and corporate members. The pitfall of the FOCA database is that they do not have contact information for the individual members of each lake association. This type of database makes selecting a method to survey the FOCA membership a challenge.

[1] An **umbrella organization** is an association of (often related, industry specific) institutions, who work together formally to coordinate activities or pool resources. (http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/Umbrella_organization)
[2] Phone and postal contacts as well as 30% of executives email addresses.

Methodology

For this report, the methodological approach taken was largely based on exploring the previous works of other scholars, with a small part based on primary information. The process started with a look at pieces of work on the non-profit sector and how it fits into the larger literature. This is followed by a look at relevant work on the topic of research methods from a number of disciplines including geography and marketing. In addition to the theoretical aspect of the research, some primary data was collected. To provide some examples of real-world application I interviewed a number of similar organizations to gain knowledge on their methods and implementation.

As with any research topic there are biases involved, whether they are present or hidden. The approach taken here looks at the situation/problem from the vantage point of a cottager or member of FOCA not a fully impartial stance. This approach gives me some insight into what will be practically applicable for FOCA instead of what is strictly theoretically feasible. The next aspect that should be addressed is my acceptance and optimism of technology. As you will read below, implementing a survey online, is a valid option to employ and seeing as I favor technology this unconsciously might have a bearing on why I choose a certain method of delivery over another.

Literature Review

The nonprofit sector in the North American context is one that is very important, yet has had little research done on it by geographers. To fully understand this topic, the nonprofit sector will be defined and some background information will be explored. The 2004 study *Cornerstones of Community: Highlights of the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations* by Statistics Canada is the only true comprehensive study of nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Canada. Nonprofit organizations are a very important part of life in Canada, therefore the importance of these organizations will be explored through a number of pieces of recent literature. The make-up of nonprofit organizations is one area that has been most looked at within this topic by Ferris (1998), Woods (2004), Quarter (1992), and Reed & Howe (1999). The importance of why nonprofit organizations manage there membership is a topic with limited work completed. The most relevant piece available for the purpose of this review is *Client Satisfaction: A Managers Guide* by Faye Schmidt and Teresa Strickland (1998). Once it is realized why this practice of managing a membership should be undertaken, the larger topic of how to manage the membership will start to be explored. This topical area of how to communicate with your membership is to be explored in the forthcoming sections.

Terminology Discussion

There is much debate over the correct classification for the nonprofit sector and jointly a proper definition. Thayer-Scott in Reed et al. (1999) discusses the different categories for nonprofit organizations depending on the researcher's discipline (politics, sociology etc..). The five main titles that have been brought out in research are: nonprofit sector; not-for-profit sector; voluntary, 'third', and independent (Reed et al. 1999; Salamon, 1994; Hamdad, Joyal & Van Rompaey, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2004). Hamdad et al. (2004) also explain that in some parts of the world 'civil society' could be defined as a sixth category to this sector. This inclusion is because nonprofit organizations play a large role in society, "unique in many respects from that of governments or for-profit firms" (Hamdad et al. 2004). The most recent addition to the vocabulary of this sector is the notion of 'the commons'. A term used to explain this sector, crafted by Roger Lohmann in Reed et al. (1999). Lohmann's focus was largely on the voluntary aspects of the sector and not the economics of it (Reed et al. 1999). Thayer Scott's work as cited in Reed et al. (1999) is the only attempt to define what the researchers mean by these terms and where they have arisen from. "Economists opt for nonprofit as befits their focus on the market, or for-profit as the norm" (Reed et al. 1999). Where as lawyers and accountants tend to opt for the 'not-for-profit' term, because these organizations might produce a surplus in some activities with losses in others (Reed et al. 1999). Political scientists and government officials tend to lean towards the title of 'independent' or the 'third' (Reed et al. 1999). This view follows the assumption that there are three sectors – "the private/business/commercial sector, the public/government sector, and the nonprofit/third/independent sector" (Reed et al. 1999). Lastly, sociologists Thayer-Scott explains are most likely to use the voluntary term to describe the sector because they are "more interested in the sociality, participation and association that are general in this sphere" (Reed et al. 1999, 6). The interpretation of this sector is one that depends on your background and that will be ever-evolving through further scholarly research.

Nonprofit Sector Overview

For the purposes of this review the term nonprofit sector or organization will be used. The definition for this term is one that is fairly general and agreed upon by scholars (Woods, 2004; Ferris, 1998; Statistics Canada, 2004; Hamdad et al. 2004; Young, 1983). One of the early and most well known attempts at defining this area was by Hansmann. He stated as quoted in Young (1983, 11) "that an organization is nonprofit if it prohibited by law from distributing surplus revenues (that is, receipts less expenditures, or profits) to individuals (owners)." From this early look at nonprofit organizations many authors have taken this definition and helped it evolve throughout the years. Ferris (1998) took Hansmann's look on nonprofits one step forward, and explained it in reference to the larger economic structure of society (the stock market) when he stated that,

> Nonprofit Organizations (NPO's) exist as public, non-stock entities. When revenue exceeds expense the difference must be reinvested in the organization for growth or improvements consistent with the NPO's mission: income cannot be disbursed to members of the organization. (Ferris 1998, 11)

To further explain what Ferris stated; he and others believed that nonprofit organizations could generate financial surpluses, but these had to be retained or spent on activities that were consistent with the organizations mission (Ferris, 1998; Woods, 2004; Quarter, 1992; Reed et al. 1999). Both Statistics Canada

(2004) and Hamdad et al. (2004) take this one step further and define a number of general criteria to consider an organization one in the nonprofit sector.

--non-governmental (i.e., are institutionally separate from governments)
--non-profit distributing (i.e., do not return any profits generated to their owners or directors)
--self-governing (i.e., are independent and able to regulate their own activities)
--voluntary (i.e., benefit to some degree from voluntary contributions of time or money)
--formally incorporated or registered under specific legislation with provincial, territorial or federal governments

(Statistics Canada 2004, 7).

Overall the definition of the nonprofit sector is one that is general and up for interpretation to some degree. Nonprofit organizations makeup a large part of the Canadian economy and are very beneficial and influential in Canadians lives. In 2003 there were an estimated 161,000 nonprofit and voluntary organizations operating within Canada with revenues totaling $112 billion (Statistics Canada, 2004). In addition Hamdad et al. (2004) explain the non profit sector in terms of it's relevance to the GDP in the country. The GDP of nonprofit organizations was estimated at $61.8 billion in 1999, which accounts for approximately 6.8% of the total economy (Hamdad et al. 2004, 15).

Importance of Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations as explored above play a large role in the Canadian economy, but what other aspects make these organizations important to Canadians? Quarter (1992) explained that nonprofit organizations have a paradoxical social role. He believe that this is true because “they draw people together in organizations based upon their common interests, but they also draw people apart, in that self-interest builds walls between organizations with unrelated activities" (Quarter 1992, 64). The first part of Quarter's discussion is one that is discussed in detail by other authors (Hamdad et al. 2004; Statistics Canada 2004; Salamon 1994). Statistics Canada (2004) believe that nonprofit organizations are vehicles for Canadians "to come together to build community, address collective needs and work for the benefit of the public" (Statistics Canada 2004, 9). These organizations are tools for Canadians' collective action and engagement in civic life. There is also an understanding that nonprofit organizations are a way to get people engaged in topics that concern them. Salamon (1994) takes this discussion one step further and explains that nonprofit organizations are "ideally suited to fill the resulting gap" (Salamon 1994, 110) that is left by government and for-profit organizations. Salamon (1994) continues to explain that this is the case because nonprofit organizations are small scale, have great flexibility and have the capacity to engage grass-root energies. This discussion of the importance of nonprofit organizations is one that you can speculate on, but little scholarly research has been completed on. Thayer-Scott in Reed et al. (1999) summarizes the roles and functions of nonprofit organizations best in explaining the main three; provision of services, advocacy, and mediation. The provision of services deals with the role of the organizations in giving services (food, shelter, healthcare etc..) to their clients. Advocacy Thayer-Scott explains is defined in its broadest sense when looking at nonprofit organizations. This may consist of "direct advocacy to improve the economic or social conditions of a particular disadvantaged group" (i.e. cottagers) (Reed et al. 1999, 50). The work of James Ferris explores this topic of advocacy within nonprofit organizations as well in saying that they are "vehicles for reacting to government choices" (Ferris 1998, 141). Finally Thayer-Scott explains that mediation as the third role of nonprofit organizations involves associations and/or individuals coming together in neighborhoods or across geographical boundaries to work on a common issue to come to a consensus (Reed et al. 1999). These roles and functions are a large part of why nonprofit organizations are so important to Canadians. Yet still this topic needs to be addressed in greater detail, and the study *Cornerstones of Community: Highlights of the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations* by Statistics Canada in 2004 identifies a few key research questions to consider.

> How do nonprofit and voluntary organizations contribute to the quality of life in Canadian communities? What needs do they address? What is the collective impact of having a vibrant collection of organizations within communities? Are there regional differences?
>
> What role do organizations play in encouraging citizen engagement, developing social capital and promoting the development of social capital? What role do they play in a healthy democracy?
>
> What role do nonprofit and voluntary organizations play in the delivery of human and social services, and what would be the consequences of a decline in their capacity to deliver such services?

(Statistics Canada 2004, 55)

Through this further research a better understanding of the full importance of nonprofit organizations, as well as the internal organizational structures within these organizations will be achieved.

There has been little work on the make-up of nonprofit organizations, yet there is a general understanding that nonprofit organizations can have a membership of individuals and/or other organizations/associations. In the 2004 study *Cornerstones of Community: Highlights of the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations* (Statistics Canada 2004) it was found that 76% of all nonprofit and voluntary organizations have people as members, where as 13% of organizations have other organizations/associations as members (Statistics Canada 2004, 15). A significant number of people and organizations make up the nonprofit sector in Canada. Nonprofit organizations in Canada report having a total membership of 139 million people and 4 million organizations/federations/associations (Statistics Canada 2004, 15). This data suggests that Canadians tend to be members of more than one nonprofit or voluntary organization. With the large number of individuals and organizations being members of nonprofit organizations it is crucial that the membership of these organizations is managed to ensure the nonprofit organization succeeds in fulfilling its mission.

Importance of Managing Memberships

The importance for nonprofit organizations to manage there membership is a topic that has little research done on it specifically. Yet, if you look at literature in the economics or management fields you see that this topic has been addressed to a small degree. There is one main study done by the Canadian Centre for Management Development written by Faye Schmidt and Teresa Strickland (1998) which provides an excellent overview of this topic. When you have a membership of 'x' number of people and a mission to fulfill, you need to ensure that your membership is happy with the way you are fulfilling the mission of your organization. This is the case, because your organization depends on individuals and/or associations to be a part of your membership to acquire funds to try and fulfill that mission. The first stage to effective management is sound decision making (Schmidt & Strickland 1998). Decisions can only be as accurate and reliable as the data which it is based upon. Therefore nonprofit organizations should have a full account of there membership to properly make sound decisions towards fulfilling there mission. Organizations within the larger economic structures as well as nonprofit organizations "depend on feedback from their members in order to make effective decisions about the services they provide (Schmidt et al. 1998). Therefore by surveying members to assess their service expectations and satisfaction levels, organizations will obtain the data needed to make informed decisions (Schmidt et al. 1998). When managing a nonprofit organizations membership it is important to be proactive and preventive. When you have information about your members views you can then better understand your members perspective and make decisions accordingly, instead of what the board of directors feels is what the members what (Schmidt et al. 1998). Another main reason that managing a nonprofit organizations membership is important is to ensure that the board of directors is not creating a "service gap" (Schmidt et al. 1998, 9). Schmidt et al. (1998) explains a service gap as the area between what your client expects and what they receive from the organizations services. In other terms it deals with the balance of expectations and perception of service. If you have high expectations and lower perception of service you will have a service gap which needs to be addressed by the organization. Through managing the membership by getting the members feedback you can obtain this information to minimize these service gaps (Schmidt et al. 1998). One argument that is discussed in the literature by Schmidt et al. (1998) is the fact of cost. Nonprofit organizations have a limited budget, and therefore need to be selective in where there resources are spent. Schmidt et al. (1998) provide a quotation in their work that explains the battle that nonprofit organizations go through in deciding to what extent to manage there membership. "Can we afford to survey our clients? Can we afford not to?" (Schmidt et al. 1998, 4) Managing a membership can be a costly venture, but not doing it can be even more damaging. Schmidt et al. (1998) believe that "for every dollar *not* spent in preventing typical services errors or problems, organizations can expect to spend at least 10 times – and as much as 100 times – more, fixing things after an error occurs" (Schmidt et al. 1998, 4). This point shows the magnitude of not managing a nonprofit organizations membership effectively.

Surveying Membership

To further explain the importance of nonprofit organizations to manage there membership the literature explains some benefits of surveying your membership to get the relevant data/information explained above. Schmidt et al. (1998) in there work explain a number of benefits that organizations will see from surveying the satisfaction of clients. These benefits somewhat summarize the points explained earlier. First, by surveying your membership you can "identify opportunities for service improvements" (Schmidt 1998, 6), which can then be used to effectively to change your practices accordingly. Next, within some nonprofit organizations you have a board of directors which sets the mission of the organization and makes decisions on what action to take, yet these decisions might not actually be what the membership wants. Therefore through surveying the membership you can "identify what clients want as opposed to what organizations think they want" (Schmidt 1998, 6). Another important reason for an organization to communicate with it's memberships is so that they can "allocate resources more effectively to meet client priorities by targeting high service priorities and reducing or eliminating services that clients do not value, (where appropriate)" (Schmidt 1998, 6). Next, by the organization communicating with its membership you get an accurate understanding of what they want the organization to accomplish and what they feel it is doing an adequate job at. Therefore a nonprofit organization can "evaluate the achievement of the organization's mandate and even substantiate amendments to the mandate" (Schmidt 1998, 6). Lastly, if you have an excellent account of your memberships demands compared to your mission you can "develop proactive responses to emerging client demands, reducing crises and stress for staff and clients" (Schmidt 1998, 6). Overall, the importance of a nonprofit organization to manage its membership is high as explained by Schmidt et al. (1998), but still more work needs to be done by scholars with respect to the direct importance to nonprofit organizations.

Methods for Nonprofit Organizations

With nonprofit organizations realizing that managing there membership is important, you need to look a literature pertaining to the methods that need to be employed by these organizations. This area is one that has a large base of research completed on it, and exploring the full extent of that is above the scope of this review, yet a brief overview will be looked at to start exploring the various methods possible for these organizations. Within this topic there is a wide array of topics that can be explored, therefore for the purposes of this review only the specific methods will be explored and not how to undertake or construct the methods. The main methods that can be employed by nonprofit organizations include questionnaires or surveys, interviews, and focus groups (Flowerdew & Martin 1997; Hay 2000). Each organization will have to select the proper method based on there specific situation (membership size, resources available, and information required). This topical area will be explored in depth in the next sections.

To conclude, the research that has been undertaken on this topic within the Canadian context is very limited, yet provides a base to undertake personal research. You have seen a discussion of the debate of the classification and definition of nonprofit organizations by Reed et al. 1999, Salamon 1994, Hamdad et al. 2004, and Statistics Canada 2004. In addition to this the overall nonprofit sector was explored to give a look at background data on the importance of the topical area. Through exploring the importance of nonprofit organizations, literature revealed that the membership that makes up these organizations is an importance aspect. Therefore the importance of managing these memberships was looked at in recent literature by Schmidt et al. (1998). This larger topic of nonprofit organizations in Canada is one that has just recently become a focus of researchers and will only flourish with more scholars doing research in this area.

Part 1 – Data Collection Method

Surveys

"Survey research is a very old research technique" (Babbie 2001, 238) with it's beginnings in the Old Testament to its current state with public opinion polls (Babbie, 1999), census surveys (which feed government policy) (Hoggart, 2002) and a "mode of observation in the social sciences" (Babbie & Benaquisto 2002, 240). Surveys can be defined as "a gathering of a sample of data or opinions considered to be representative of a whole" (www.dictionary.com). Therefore it is an adequate look at a problem without talking to every individual affected. "Surveys are suited to uncomplicated 'factual' data gathering, where the chances of uneven reaction should be lessened" (Hoggart, Lees & Davies 2002, 175). McNamara explains how surveys are excellent when we need to "quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non threatening way" (McNamara 1999, 1). Everyone of us at some point in our life has filled out a survey or two and therefore has some level of knowledge on their creation and implementation. This section will simply expand on that knowledge, with a theoretical approach. There are a number of ways to deliver a survey, each which has their benefits and drawbacks. Survey implementation is largely subjective, with each organization and topic possibly warranting a different approach. Hoggart et al. (2002, 175) explains that there are four types of surveys; personal or intercept survey, mail or postal survey, telephone survey and an online survey."

Personal or Intercept Survey

This approach to survey delivery is one that involves face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the respondent (Hoggart et al. 2002). The personal survey is one that "usually takes place in a relatively comfortable setting, such as the respondent's home" (Hoggart et al 2002, 175). With this method the interviewer reads/asks the questions and the respondent typically gives a verbal response. This approach gives the survey a personal touch with the ability to use an unstructured approach. With an unstructured approach, the interviewer can probe deeper into responses, and ask different questions based on the responses. In other words, the questions are not set in stone. On the other hand this approach is "a lot of leg work" (Hoggart et al.2002, 176). The interviewer needs to contact appropriate persons, set up interviews, and travel to the specified location. Intercept Surveys are similar to that of the personal survey in that they are implemented face-to-face also. This method involves the interviewer approaching people in a public space to complete the survey. Most of us have encountered this type of approach while in a shopping mall or on the street (Hoggart 2002).

Because of the spatially dispersed nature of the FOCA membership personal surveys are not an applicable method. The intercept method is an approach that could be considered by FOCA at its general meeting and at any trade shows it attends[3]. This would involve a FOCA representative stopping a predetermined amount and or type of person and administering the survey if they fit the requirements.

Trade Show Intercept Advantages

This approach is a very quick and efficient way of collecting data. No travel during survey administering is required, which makes it very cost-effective. Also, the interviewer can “show, explain and probe” (Punj 2003, 3) while asking questions. This leads to a more in-depth look at certain areas if desired. In addition, Babbie (2001, 258) believes that “the presence of an interviewer generally decreases the number of ‘don’t knows’ and ‘no answers’.” With this approach being done face to face it is an excellent way to receive responses quickly to questions that arise, because there is no waiting for people to respond. High response rates can be expected with this delivery method. Babbie (2001, 258) explains that “a properly designed and executed interview survey ought to achieve a completion rate of 80-85 percent.” He goes on to state that “respondents seem more reluctant to turn down an interviewer standing on their doorstep than to throw away a mailed questionnaire” (Babbie 2001, 258). The same feeling goes for a interviewer at a trade show. People I feel will be willing to give their views on certain issues when they are at the trade show. They have put the time and effort into coming to the show, to learn and experience, so a few minutes getting there voice heard will happen. A good interviewer can make a huge difference in the validity of the responses and the success of the survey.

[3] An excellent example would be both the Spring and Fall Cottage Life Shows.

Trade Show Intercept Drawbacks

Yet on the other hand, this method also poses some problems. Your implementation can only occur at times when trade shows occur. This is not always when key issues arise. Therefore, more general knowledge and opinion questions can be asked. As well, with the trade show environment you have the possibility for distractions (Punj 2003). There are a large amount of people in one location walking from booth to booth talking with representatives which can become a noticeable distraction. Also people at the show might be in a hurry to see all the exhibitors and therefore not want to participate or, rush through the questions. Being in this state puts respondents in the wrong state of mind, so their responses maybe off. Having the interviewer there to assist with questions is nice, but can also be a drawback. “There is the opportunity for interviewer bias when using this approach” (Punj 2003, 3). The interviewer/interviewee interaction can affect the responses given. With this method you are not going to get an accurate representation of the total membership. Your answers will be from persons who live near the trade show and have cottages within a couple of hours typically. Using the Cottage Life show as an example, seeing as it is held each year at the International Center in Mississauga, the people attending this event will be from the GTA or slightly beyond that. This will exclude the members of the population that are further away from the GTA area. To combat this if, FOCA attends trade shows across the province then a more accurate representation of the membership can be obtained. When looking at other similar organizations across the country, none of them employed this method to survey members. Trade shows are typically used as a one way avenue with the organization giving information to the member and other individuals, and not so much of a dialogue.

Usefulness for FOCA

This is a method that has a number of benefits for certain applications, yet FOCA's needs do not fit in with this at the current time. Seeing as FOCA's membership is dispersed across the province of Ontario and the trade show that FOCA currently attends are in the southern and central region of the province, you will not be getting a truly representative response. In any case, this approach is one that should be considered if the frequency of information is yearly or every 6 months on a localized scale. For example, if there are issues on a regional basis, this could be an approach that could be explored. In addition, if a test-study is done, the representation of all cottagers across the province at these trade shows might emerge which would make this method a cost-effective approach. Therefore, overall this method of survey delivery is one that should be avoided with the current structure of the membership.

Mail or Postal Survey

This type of delivery method involves the organization/individual preparing a questionnaire and mailing it out to the predetermined amount of people.[4] Edwards (2002, 1183) believes that this method is "the only viable option when collecting information from large, geographically dispersed populations." This is a claim that I believe is too bold to make but has some validity. I would argue

[4] Specific Sample Sizes will be explored in Section 2.

that it is a very relevant method, which could be chosen in the right situation, but is not the only 'viable option' when looking at spatially dispersed populations.

The mail or postal survey method involves the respondent self-administering the questionnaire, instead of having an interviewer present. This can have its advantages and its drawbacks. Mail surveys tend to be a relatively expensive way of acquiring information. With this you create the same questionnaire and send it out to the specified number of respondents[5]. This questionnaire is usually preceded by a letter informing participants of the study being completed and that the questionnaire will be coming in the mail in the coming days/weeks. In addition, with the questionnaire, a postage paid envelope is enclosed to ensure that respondents do not have to pay to respond to the questionnaire. As well, follow up questionnaires are typically sent to non-respondents once or twice to try and spark interest and increase the response rate.[6] Therefore, the costs associated with this method involve questionnaire creation, postage and analysis once data is acquired. These costs tend to be small individually, but add up in the end. The matter of questionnaire creation and analysis will be dealt with in later sections.

Postage Considerations

Postage of mail surveys is the one cost that is constant in questionnaire/survey work. Babbie et al. (2002) discusses two postage options that are currently available being first class postage and bulk rate. Within

[5] This number of surveys sent out is much larger than the sample size required compensating for non responses.
[6] Typically response rates for mail surveys are lower than other methods to be discussed in this report. Yet there are a number of strategies to increase response rates which will be explored below.

Canada, the two options that are available are regular letter postage and business reply mail. With the regular postage option, you mail out the questionnaire, and enclose an envelope with a regular postage stamp on it. With this method, you are being charged whether or not the person that receives the survey responds. Babbie et al. (2002, 256) states that “some researchers feel that the use of postage stamps communicates more ‘humanness’ and sincerity than bulk rate and business-reply permits.” The regular postage approach currently costs $0.50 per envelope in Canada (Canada Post, 2005). The other approach available is the business reply method. Canada Post sees business reply mail as an excellent way to request information, build databases, and research the marketplace. With the business reply approach, you are only charged postage if the questionnaire is returned. For a survey to be mailed out, it would cost FOCA “a $525.00 annual fee for each Business Reply Mail address used” (Canada Post, 2005). In addition, each survey returned would be charged a postage fee based its weight. For example an envelope under 50 grams, you would be charged $0.64 (Canada Post, 2005). As you see this method costs more per envelope but you are only charged for surveys which are returned. Therefore a survey with a high return rate might be better suited to individual postage stamps. Yet, on the other hand, using the business reply method, you are not penalized for a low response rate. As well, it can be argued that this approach to postage is a much more professional way. A good understanding of your memberships willingness to respond to a survey would be helpful in the selection of the appropriate method.

Self-administered Survey Attributes

With self-administering the questionnaire you eliminate the need to employ an interviewer which is saving on costs for travel, and the time spent administering the questionnaire. Also, by eliminating the interviewer you are also eliminating the associated biases (Punj 2003). People complete the survey in the privacy of their own home which influences the responses on some types of questions. If the question involves a sensitive subject, or topic not having to respond to someone in person will tend to open the respondent up. Being in an environment that makes you most comfortable is most likely to lend to the most relevant responses. This also lends itself nicely to certain topical areas. With the respondent answering the questions in the privacy of there own home, more sensitive information can be acquired because the respondent is anonymous and feels that way (Punj 2003). For example if I was asked a question that involved something that was seen as socially wrong, but I felt it had some merit, I would be more likely to express my true opinions about the question with a self-administered approach, versus a face-to-face interview. In addition, some people work better while working at their own pace, at their own convenience. Therefore the questionnaire is sent out and the respondent “can complete the questionnaire when convenient” (Punj 2003, 2). Also with being in your own environment you can “look up certain information and work at your own pace” (Punj 2003, 2). I find that I tend to feel rushed if I am asked the question by an interviewer versus completing questions at my own leisure. Not having the rushed feeling, the self-administered approach lends itself to longer responses from respondents (Trochim 2002). With this approach visual mechanisms can be employed to get the respondents reaction of a certain situation. Keeping everything previously mentioned in mind, the survey must be carefully designed in that it needs to be kept short in length to ensure that the respondents interest is still their at the last question. The benefits of this method are great for certain applications and FOCA's needs are perfect at the current time for this approach, yet not perfect.

Areas of Concern for the Self-Administered Approach

As with any research method, there are aspects that you need to keep in mind to ensure a smooth execution. The most important aspect of mail questionnaires which I feel is jeopardizing there success is the increase amount of junk mail arriving daily. This makes it very easy for potential respondents to dispose of surveys without completing them. In addition to the ease of disposal is people's willingness to respond due to usefulness of responses. Hoggart et al. (2001, 176) believe that the postal survey is

> coming under threat from the amount of junk mail people receive, which has a tendency to cool people's willingness to respond (especially if completion of commercial questionnaires results in unsolicited follow-up calls from sales personnel).

Having contact with the people that you will be sending out the questionnaire will help you in this respect. With FOCA having a common goal with its members, I believe if they understand that this form of communication could be coming from FOCA, they will be aware and watch out for it in most cases. Having the survey completed by the respondent on their own has its drawbacks. The survey must be properly designed to ensure that it is easy to follow, understand, and return because their will be no one there to assist them. If a respondent doesn't understand a question they are likely to not respond to that question or answer it with the understanding they have of the question. In other words further clarification of questions is unavailable in an easily accessible form (Punj 2003). This approach can lead to responses that are invalid, and not useful to your data, but are very hard to detect. Response rates with this approach are one of the main drawbacks, which will be discussed in the next section. Therefore, making the questionnaire easy to return will increase the likelihood of a response. Mail surveys are very structured in that the questions are set in stone and cannot be modified in the middle of data collection. There is no room for you to probe and/or get clarification on responses other that sending out another survey which increases costs and time. The last drawback and most relevant is that you have no idea which individual in the household completed the survey. This creates an unknown element in your data that you need to keep in mind. A well completed survey is one that is thought through in great detail, being aware of the benefits and drawbacks of the method.

Response Rate Considerations

The response rate for mail questionnaires is one of the reasons that I feel this method is a bad idea for FOCA at this time. Currently mail response rates are between 2-35% depending on the application (DSS Research[2] 2005). The low end of the scale being credit card offers, and the high end of the scale being surveys dealing with socially relevant issues (DSS Research[2] 2005). The high end of the scale is typically studies geared towards specific samples/populations.

This low percentage is an area of concern but there are ways to increase the amount of responses. Some form of communication before the questionnaire is sent out, will get potential respondents interest peaked. This will ensure that they keep an eye out for the questionnaire in the mail. For FOCA, this could consist of contacting lake association executives by phone, or postal letter. In addition to making people aware that the questionnaire is coming, you need to ensure that they feel it is important. Therefore, "using a cover letter signed by the highest ranking executive as possible" (GuideStar Communications 2003) will help immensely. This gives the survey the professional touch and appearance that it needs to be successful. The content of this cover letter is just as important as a cover letter for your resume. It needs to discuss the purpose of the survey, as well as how the information will be used. In addition to describing the contents you need to assure the respondent of their value to the survey and that confidentiality and anonymity are assured (GuideStar Communications 2003). After the questionnaire has been sent out, your job is not done. Response rates can still be increased when the survey has already been sent out. Following up with some form of communication to the participant a week later to remind them about the survey can increase response rates as well. In this reminder it is also wise to include another copy of the survey. The last option you have to increase your response rates is to include incentives. Monetary incentives seem to be the most popular approach to take. In addition to not getting a lot of responses, you will find that the time it takes to get a response is much longer then any other traditional approach.

Usefulness for FOCA

As mentioned, FOCA's current database, has limited contact information for the total membership. With postal contact information for the executives (up to 6) for each of the 600 lake associations as well as 500 individual members and 50 corporate members, this approach is limited. No contact information is available for the rest of the membership, which excludes them with this approach. This approach would work by sampling the executives of the current lake associations. This works out to be a maximum of 3600 potential executives plus the additional individual and corporate members. A couple of drawbacks of this method should be discussed. First off, postal surveys typically have low response rates, yet if the executives of the associations know that this is the method that interaction between FOCA and them will occur on issues, they will be more willing to look for these items in the mail and respond to them. Therefore communication with FOCA and the lake association executives will be important. Next, is the issue of getting an accurate representation of the total membership and anonymity. With each lake association being a different size in terms of amount of members there is the question of weighting. For example, should a lake association with 4000 members have the same say as an association with 100 members? This is an area which needs to be addressed by the staff at FOCA during the design and analysis stages. Executives on certain issues may want to be left anonymous in their responses. This is fine and is part of the survey process, yet you will then have no record of where responses are coming from. This meaning that you could only get responses from a certain area. There are ways to minimize this such as number coding each of the surveys to know where they are being sent, so therefore you will know which regions you have gotten responses. There are ethical issues behind this which should be researched further. Yet overall, this method with the current information available about the membership is an excellent delivery mechanism which should be considered.

Telephone Survey

The telephone approach to the survey is one in which questionnaire questions are asked by an interviewer or group of interviewers to respondents over the phone. This method has “become the most popular survey method in the United States in recent years (Singleton, Straits & McAllister 1988, 247). This trend has continued, with Leeuw and Hox (2004, 464) echoing this by stating that “telephone surveys have become more and more popular in the last thirty years, reaching their zenith in the 1990s.” Typically this approach has been used by cold-calling respondents using random sampling techniques (Thomas & Purdon 1994). Seeing as FOCA has a database of it’s executives that could be potentially surveyed the issues involved with cold-calling methods will not be discussed in any detail. Yet, for general knowledge they include the problem of unlisted phone numbers and the increased use in cell phones. In any case, with the current database that FOCA has this approach still has its benefits as well as its drawbacks. It can be used for a number of applications and as a first look; it is an option FOCA could employ.

Benefits of Phone Surveys

The obvious first benefit of delivering a survey over the telephone is the speed at which it can be completed. This approach is one that is very quick and efficient. There is no waiting for people to return surveys by mail, or traveling to respondents households. In addition, Aaker & Day (1980, 132) explain that their "are more hours of the day that are productive – especially the evening hours." This means that surveying can be completed for more hours of the day, which will shorten the length of data acquisition time. Also, with this expanded productive time, interviewers can call non-respondents back at different times of the day which can reduce long distances costs and avoids excluding the working individual from the survey. This makes it very attractive for FOCA, when they need a response to particular issues in a timely fashion. Speed is a very important advantage, yet not the only one. The costs involved with this method also are attractive. Phone surveys are typically cheaper then personal interviews and similar to that of a postal survey. The costs associated with this method involve the cost of calls, and the interviewer(s) time.

The use of this method is also attractive to populations/memberships which are spatially dispersed such as FOCA's. It allows information to be obtained from respondents while at a central location. This centralized location has its benefits as well. Because interviewers will be located together, issues that arise can be dealt with at that time by the individual in charge instead of simply making due until a decision is made (Thomas et al. 1994). This time when completing surveys while an interviewer is unsure of something makes that data useless. Just as with the trade show intercept approach, the interviewer and respondent can develop a rapport[7] which will make the respondent feel more comfortable, and potentially open up while responding to questions. This personal contact can greatly increase the quality of responses, but it also needs to be expressed that it can also work to your disadvantage if not undertaken properly. Again, just like the trade show intercept approach, this method allows the interviewer to ask for clarification on respondents and to ask additional questions to get a more in-depth look. As well as asking clarification on questions, the interviewer can ask more sensitive topics if desired because the respondents don't have to look you in the eye when responding (Babbie et al. 2002). As you can see this approach is a viable option for a spatially dispersed membership, but it does come with its drawbacks which need to be addressed.

Phone Survey Drawbacks

With the spatially dispersed nature of FOCA's membership this approach is an excellent one, but the costs can start to climb. Each interview being between 5-15 minutes, with 3600[8] possible respondents can add up very quickly with the cost of long distance charges. There is the solution of buying long distance minutes in bulk form from the provider, which will reduce costs slightly. Another point to be aware of is people's willingness to respond to questions over the phone. Leeuw et al (2004, 264) explain that with "the growing number of unsolicited calls (e.g., tell-sell, telemarketing, polls) may lessen the willingness to cooperate." People are starting to get more and more annoyed by the amount of

[7] Rapport is "the development of a positive, empathetic relationship with participants" (Hoggart 2001, 311).
[8] Amount of potential lake association executives within the FOCA membership

telephone calls that they are receiving, and therefore will be more inclined to not respond to your survey. It has been outlined that a response rate of approximately 17% for this type of survey is typical (WebSurveyor 2004). Also with this method, it is much easier for respondents to end the survey when ever they feel like it because they do not have the interviewer standing in front of them. Therefore as Babbie et al (2002, 263) the ease at which people can hang up is another shortcoming of telephone surveys." In addition to this, people today are leading very busy lives, with work, family, friends etc, so their time is very precious to them. With the invention of call-display mechanisms people can now choose whether to answer the call if it is an unknown number. This is an area which FOCA needs to address to ensure a good participation rate. I suggest that if possible phone numbers used for this are registered under the FOCA name so that they will be identified on call display mechanisms. Just using myself as an example, if there is a number with an unknown name attached to it that calls I will not pick up the phone, yet if there is a name attached to that phone number I will majority of the time field the call. The name attached to the number gives the call a more personal touch I feel. The other aspect with this is that phone surveys to some people feel like an intrusion into their home. For FOCA, this will be minimized by making the membership aware that this is the survey delivery mechanism to be used (if selected). An important drawback of this method is that the survey needs to be short and simple, yet at the same time be able to probe for further information. Aaker et al. (1980, 134) explain that "most telephone interviews are kept as short as five to ten minutes, because of the belief that a bored or hurried respondent would be likely to hang up the phone." Therefore, no long answers are feasible. In addition to the shortness of surveys with this method, you also eliminate the use of visual aids (Punj 2003). With this method as well, the interviewer does not have the ability to develop a rapport with the respondent. The absence of a physical presence and eye contact is a key component of creating a rapport which is lost over the phone (Brown 1980). Therefore, the drawbacks for this method are general in nature. This is because the drawbacks will differ based, on the time required for the survey, the types of questions asked and the resources available.

Usefulness to FOCA

As explained briefly in the previous section, this is an approach to delivering a survey which can be very beneficial to spatially dispersed populations such as the FOCA membership. Yet, the types and amount of questions that can be asked are more limited with this approach. The speed of this approach is one that I think will be of great importance to FOCA due to the nature of the issues that FOCA deals with. Therefore, because the current database that FOCA employs has telephone contact information for the executives of the 600 lake associations apart of FOCA this approach would be a very relevant one to employ for quick and simple surveys. Issues that involve more complex responses and understanding should be surveyed in another fashion.

Online Surveys

This is the newest and most innovative approach to survey delivery that is available to researchers to day. Sillis & Song (2002, 22) make it clear that “the rapid expansion of internet users has given Web-based surveys the potential to become a powerful tool in survey research.” As well Best & Krueger (1999) see email as having enormous potential as a medium for data collection. This enormous potential will only grow as more and more Canadians connect to the internet. Currently, “approximately 50 per cent of households are now connected in some way to the internet” (Statistics Canada 2000 as cited in Mallett 2001). Just as when the telephone was introduced and accepted, the internet is having a large impact on the ways information is transferred. This is not saying that it is widely accepted as the new traditional way to survey. Simonetta (2002) believes that there are some fatal flaws in electronic surveys as usually conducted, which leads her to deem this method as “not yet a reliable research tool” (Simonetta 2002, 1).

Online surveys come in two primary methods as Simonetta (2002) explains. The first option is “posting them on the WWW[9] where they can be filled out and sent back to the researcher” (Simonetta 2002, 1). This approach involves setting up a website to locate the survey, and respondents going to that site at there own convenience to complete the survey. The next method involves creating the question set and “emailing them to individuals to fill out and email back to the researcher” (Simonetta 2002, 1). Now both of these approaches can be used to complement each other. How this is typically done is by emailing or

[9] WWW refers to World Wide Web

postal mailing potential respondents a link to the survey which is posted on a website. With this approach respondents are informed of the survey without having to search around to locate it. As explained this new approach has its optimists and its skeptics.

Online Survey Advantages

Perkins (2004) outlines five main advantages with this approach which are;

> (1) the sampling instrument is available 24-7 at a location convenient to the respondent;
> (2) less time required for delivery of the instrument to participants, the administrator's receipt of responses, data entry, and analysis and feedback;
> (3) the Web-based instrument allows inclusion of text, images, and sound;
> (4) direct and accurate electronic transmission (coding and analysis) of quantitative and qualitative data; and
> (5) potential for customized feedback, including survey results, supplied directly to the respondent, and based on response content.
> (Perkins 2004, 123)

Looking at the time advantages of this approach, as mentioned by Perkins, the survey is available 24-7, which is excellent if you are researching across time-zones. In addition to the theoretical benefits this method can be “considered the least expensive research methodology” (DSS Research 2005). Simonetta (2002) discusses the fact that online survey methods tend to be “one tenth of the cost of a typical telephone survey” (Simonetta 2002, 1). Costs attached to this method are largely linked to the software needed to design, implement, receive and analyze the survey. Simonetta (2002) believes that a survey can be put on the web for the simple cost of the software which is approximately $300. In addition there is also the cost of staff to create, monitor, and analyze the survey. This can be done by one staff member due to the ease of online technology. The last cost is associated with the actual website. With FOCA having a website currently, this cost is not directly associated with the survey. Using the email approach, this website cost is eliminated. Another advantage, just like mail surveys is that human bias is eliminated because the interviewer-respondent relationship is not there. Also, the “typical” cottager is in the higher income bracket, with greater need to use the web and computers. It has been shown that online surveys can “access high-income, high-tech, professionals, who are normally difficult to identify and reach via other methodologies” (DSS Research 2005). Yet, currently I feel this will not be a completely representative sample of the total membership. On the lake association executive level, for which FOCA has contact information, I see a more representative sample being possible.

Response Rate Considerations

In terms of the responses received, the online survey approach is the best method with a response rate typically of 34% (WebSurveyor 2004). Even though this response rate is the best out of the traditional methods, there are still ways to increase your response. Jensen (2004) outlines a number of strategies which should be considered to get the best response rate possible out of your online survey. The strategies that affect FOCA’s online surveying involve keeping the invitation short. If people are going to fill out the survey they most likely do not want to read long instructions. Therefore put the necessary information (purpose, value of response, length, and privacy statement), and limit filler. Next, if you are emailing the survey to them, it is good practice to send a reminder email with the survey link a few days later. As displayed above, the use of graphics is available with this method, but to ensure the maximum amount of people will respond, these need to be used strategically. Therefore the graphics should complement not detract from the survey. With a properly outlined and implemented survey, the online approach seems to yield the best response rate as well as the most representative sample of current lake association executives.

Areas for Concern in Online Research

The areas of concern that FOCA needs to be aware of with this approach are limited, yet still very important to the success of this method. As with telephone surveys you do not know who is replying to the survey if it is placed on the website. Using the email approach limits this problem. Also unless proper mechanisms are put in place, Best et al. (1999) explain that people may try and respond to the survey more than once. Even though 50 percent of Canadian households have access to the internet, this is not enough to consider an accurate representation of the population. It would be beneficial for FOCA to determine the use of the internet by its members[10] to see if a large enough sample of them has access to this medium. Today's internet users are typically young white, well educated males with busy schedules and short attention spans, therefore using long surveys are more difficult. Next, with any of the above approaches using incentives tends to increase the amount of respondents. This is an excellent idea for online surveys as well, yet their currently is not an accepted form of electronic cash (DSS Research 2005). This means that currently incentives need to be mailed out to respondents. The outlined

[10] If surveying the larger membership is a route that FOCA is going to take in the future.

concerns above are ones that need to be kept in mind while creating a survey, yet there are some implementation concerns as well. With online surveys there is the threat of the system crashing in which all received responses will be lost. This system crash can be caused from a number of sources such as viruses, email server overload, and letter bombs[11]. Therefore, a good back-up system will be required.

Usefulness for FOCA

"Despite some definite problems, online research has many more advantages than disadvantages," (DSS Research 2005) especially when dealing with a known population. This makes this approach a very important one for FOCA to consider. The current database that FOCA has only includes 30% of email addresses for lake association executives. Therefore at the current time the email survey option is one that is not feasible. On the other hand, with FOCA's well-established website, distributing a survey through it would be an excellent option. If no other communication was made with members about the survey being on the website, response rates I feel would be low. In addition to this approach being an excellent way to survey the membership, it is also an excellent way to expand the database, to get contact information for a greater number of its membership. The specific use of online survey techniques will be explored in the recommendations section of the report.

[11] Letter bombs are is a type of computer program which grows in the surveyors' mail server, causing the system to crash. "This prevents any legitimate surveys from getting through until the letter bomb is removed and the system is restarted" (www.dssresearch.com).

Section 2 -- Sampling Considerations

No matter which survey approach is chosen, the results will be a waste of time if the proper sample of your population is not achieved. This will ensure that you get significant data about your membership which can be then used to make the appropriate decisions. Within this section I will look at the specific size of the sample required to make sure that your results are significant. Specific sampling techniques and strategies are important aspects that should be addressed but are specific to the approach chosen, and therefore should be looked at in detail before completing the survey, yet is beyond the scope of this report.

Sample Size

There are a number of ways of looking at how many people you need to survey to get an accurate representation of your data. In addition you need to look at how you are going to analyze the data to ensure that your sample is large enough for statistical analysis. Brown (1980, 195) puts it best when he explains that there is never a sample large enough to ensure the decision maker is not being mislead. “Sampling never yields certainty. It yields degrees of confidence and measures of reliability” (Brown 1980, 195). The size of the sample required therefore rests on a number of factors, with the main one being the level of precision needed from the results. As a general rule of thumb there are three ways to determine what sample size you will need to use for your survey. The staff at PearsonNCS.com believes that the first way is to “imitate what has been done by others or just doing what you’ve always done” (Pearson NCS 2005). This approach is by far the easiest, yet not the most reliable. For FOCA there has been no other surveying done to this point, so looking at other organizations would be an option. This data is very hard to obtain from similar organizations within Canada; yet one organization that did disclose specific information does do bi-annual surveying of approximately 1000 members (Unidentified Respondent 2005). This sample is taken from a membership of approximately 80,000. The next approach to selecting a sample size is explained as "picking what is convenient or what you can afford" (Pearson NCS 2005). This approach is an option if you just want a quick and dirty survey completed to give you some indication of members' views. This by no means is the best way, but an option if funds are an issue. For FOCA with its limited budget, I feel that the cheapest method will have to be employed (online) and therefore this will help in hopefully obtaining the required sample size to get a representation of the membership. The third and final main way of determining your sample size required is "by considering the level of accuracy that you feel is required for the issues you are investigating" (Pearson NCS 2005). This approach is the best and most reliable approach to employ. This ensures that you data is statistically significant, and gives you solid data to work with. This third approach is the method I propose that FOCA use when selecting the appropriate sample size. With using this approach there are three areas for consideration as explained by Israel (1992). The three areas are the level of precision, confidence level, and degree of variability (Israel 1992).

Level of Precision[12]

The level of precision is

> the range in which the true value of the population is estimated to be. This range is often expressed in percentage points, (e.g., ±5 percent), in the same way that results for political campaign polls are reported by the media. (Israel 1992, 1).

This means that for example if I was to do a survey of the acceptance of motorized boats on Lake X with a level of precision of 5% and got a result that 70% of people approve of them then I could conclude that between 65 and 75% of respondents approve motorized boats on Lake X. The level of precision can be set to what ever percentage you feel appropriate, yet typical tables have values of 3, 5, 7 and 10%. Anymore then 10% I feel is not really getting a good look at what respondents feel.

Confidence Level

This measurement tells you how sure you can be that the data you collect will be accurate. "It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the confidence interval" (Creative Research Systems 2003). The typical confidence levels are 90, 95 and 99%, with "most researchers use the 95% confidence level" (Creative Research Systems 2003). Using this confidence level gives you a comfortable level of risk. By selecting a 99% confidence, you are reducing the risk that your data will not be valid, yet this increases the sample size. Israel (1992, 1) explains that "this means that, if a 95% confidence level is selected, 95 out of 100 samples will have the true population value within the range of

[12] Sometimes referred as Sampling Error, or Confidence Interval

precision" specified in the previous section. Having confidence that your data is accurate is very important but not the final criteria.

Degree of Variability

This measure looks at the similarity or difference in the membership. "Heterogeneity refers to the degree of dissimilarity (and conversely, homogeneity to the degree of similarity)" (Singleton et al. 1988, 158) within a population/membership. Israel (1992, 1) explains that the more heterogeneous a population, the larger the sample size required to obtain a given level of precision." This means that if your population greatly differs on an issue, you will need a greater sample size to accurately get a true representative sample of their opinion. An example of a heterogeneous membership would be one that is split 50-50 on their views with respect to a certain issue. This level of similarity is also a good measurement on its own for FOCA to determine how its membership feels. Certain issues will lead to different levels of variability and therefore you always need to be aware of its implications on the overall sample size.

Sample Size Examples

For the current members that FOCA has the ability to survey at the present time (lake association executives) works out to be a maximum of 3600 individuals[13]. Refer to Table 1 for a general understanding of the required sample size needed with a confidence level of 95%. For a more specific look at

[13] This is calculated by multiplying the current amount of lake associataions (600) with the potential amount of executives that FOCA had contact information for (6). 600 lake associations x 6 executives per association=3600

the required sample size, there are a number of calculators on the WWW[14], in which you can play with your level of precision and confidence level to determine your sample size. With this approach you can pick a sample size which adequately fills your requirements for validity of results and cost constraints. As a preliminary attempt to determine the needed sample size for FOCA if they are measuring the lake association executives I will use the calculator provided by Pearson NCS. If assuming a population of 3600 individuals, with a level of precision at +/- 5% you get a sample of between 253 and 560 people. At a 90% confidence you get a required sample of 253 respondents. Next at a 95% confidence level, you need 347 respondents, and lastly at a 99% confidence level you need 560 respondents. This gives you a brief look at how increasing just your level of confidence can increase the amount of respondents required. One point to keep in mind is that your sample size refers to the amount of responses you receive and not the amount of surveys you distribute. In addition you need to be aware of the type on analysis to be completed with the data. If you are to spilt the sample into male and female respondents, then you are going to need to increase your sample size accordingly.[15] I suggest that you use Table 1, and the calculators mentioned to calculate your exact sample size required, when you determine the specific numbers for your variables.

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[14] Pearson NCS is a data collection company which deals with this topic in great detail. They have a calculator on there website which is a very helpful tool. http://www.pearsonncs.com/research/sample-calc.htm
As well the Creative Research Systems website has both a sample size and confidence level calculator which is very useful. http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm

[15] For example if your population of executives is 50-50 male and female, you will need to get responses from 347 individuals from both groups to have a representative sample, not simply 347 total. This sample size will increase again if you want to segregate the data further.

Table 1.

Table 1. Sample size for ±3%, ±5%, ±7% and ±10% Precision Levels Where Confidence Level is 95% and P=.5.				
Size of	Sample Size (n) for Precision (e) of:			
Population	±3%	±5%	±7%	±10%
500	a	222	145	83
600	a	240	152	86
700	a	255	158	88
800	a	267	163	89
900	a	277	166	90
1,000	a	286	169	91
2,000	714	333	185	95
3,000	811	353	191	97
4,000	870	364	194	98
5,000	909	370	196	98
6,000	938	375	197	98
7,000	959	378	198	99
8,000	976	381	199	99
9,000	989	383	200	99
10,000	1,000	385	200	99
15,000	1,034	390	201	99
20,000	1,053	392	204	100
25,000	1,064	394	204	100
50,000	1,087	397	204	100
100,000	1,099	398	204	100
>100,000	1,111	400	204	100
a = Assumption of normal population is poor (Yamane, 1967). The entire population should be sampled.				

(Israel 1992)

Recommendations

From my current understanding of FOCA, I believe that before they select a research method to employ, they should take a good look at who their members are. What I mean by this, is that each approach is geared towards a different demographic and without a true understanding of the membership it is difficult to select a specific approach. Most specifically the online approach is one that is geared towards young, high educated males, which I believe is starting to become the typical cottager. As well, I feel that FOCA should outline some specific goals, on what they want to achieve by employing a survey technique. This will influence the type of questions to be asked which will in turn affect the approach and visa versa. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages as outlined in Section 1, yet without full knowledge of the types of questions and issues to be asked it is difficult to arrive at a single answer. I encourage FOCA to use this report as a guide to the advantages and disadvantages of each approach and ensure that the survey type that they devise will fit in with the method of delivery that they choose.

At the current time, with the make-up of FOCA's database having limited contact information, surveying the lake association executives as the only feasible option at this time. The approach to accomplish this would involve using the current FOCA website as a location to post the survey. By using the website as the delivery mechanism FOCA would be using the most cost-effective method, while acquiring data in a timely fashion. With the majority of lake association executives being well-educated males, I would make the assumption that internet access is very high within this group of individuals. Now simply posting it on the website is not an adequate method, because I don't believe that executive members frequent the website. FOCA needs to inform potential respondents that the survey is available on the website. This would be best accomplished by mailing out the survey, with a copy of the website address attached. With this approach, respondents can fill out the survey either online, or on the paper copy. This makes it most convenient for the respondent. I propose using this approach as some what of a pilot study before it is expanded to the whole FOCA membership. Once surveys are received you will be able to determine the preferred method of the lake association executives, and expand this approach to the larger membership. I assume that a combination of the mail and web-survey approach will yield your best results both in the short and long terms. This combination approach is endorsed by Sills et al. 2002, where they believe that a joint approach of online methods with either mail or phone will yield the most favorable results. As a practical example of this approach being used you can look at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). CFIB is a "lobbying organization representing 100,000 exclusively small and medium-sized business owners across Canada" (Mallet, 2001, 1). Currently CFIB's approach uses "electronic surveys and paper surveys in tandem. Members have the choice of responding to identical questionnaires either by mail or through the CFIB website" (Mallett, 2001, 1). Through this approach a sample of approximately 10% of the total membership responds to the survey (Mallett, 2001). This amount of respondents is more than enough to conclude that you have an accurate representation of your membership. Therefore I feel employing this joint approach you will get an accurate representation of your lake association executives at the current time, and your total membership if expanded at a later date. One concern that I feel needs to be addressed with only surveying the lake association executives is that you are unsure how well they represent their members. You have no way of knowing whether or not the executive discussed the issues/questions in the survey with his/her membership or not.

As a future project, I feel that expanding your current database to include contact information for all members of FOCA is a necessary step forward in the future.[16] As a preliminary look at a possible way to expand this database, I propose that FOCA informs the lake association executives of a website link that members can go to if they would like to be a part of future surveys. Members that want to be a part of future surveys can go to the website, and fill out information about themselves and complete a survey as well. You could also allow people to call FOCA's office and leave addresses if they do not have internet access. This process is one that will need to be completed year after year as database expansion is a slow process. The database will slowly grow year after year, with more and more people becoming interested, and therefore eventually being able to survey FOCA's total membership base.

[16] By this I mean all cottagers that are members of their respective lake associations which are members of FOCA

Conclusion

Spatially dispersed memberships require data collection methods which are unique to their situation. Traditional methods have worked in the past, but new innovative approaches are becoming more and more recognized. The online survey approach is one when use in conjunction with other traditional research methods which can be a very effective way of surveying members. This approach still does have its skeptics, but with more and more research being completed using the online approach, I see this method becoming a commonly used one. This report shows that being innovative with your approach is your best option. Every organization has a membership which has a slightly different make-up. Therefore, be creative and employ multiple approaches which will work best for your membership.

This report is important because it will give other non-profit organizations a guide to look at to select an appropriate method to survey their membership. For an organization, interacting with its membership is always going to be a necessary component and by having this look at possible survey methods available they can take this and choose the one which best suits their needs. I have learned through the researching for this problem, that research methods is a topic that is not as straight forward as I first believed. There is not a framework that you can follow, when you come across a problem such as this. Innovation, creativity and knowledge are all important in selecting an appropriate method.

As explained in the recommendations section I believe that expanding the current database that FOCA has will be a very valuable investment. Therefore, research should be completed on what would be the best strategy to complete this task. As well, I believe that some further research should be completed on the demographics of the cottager. A true idea of the demographics of the cottaging population would be helpful in all stages of the surveying process. The next possible research extension could be for FOCA to research how to create a survey after they have selected their delivery mechanism. This should include a pilot study, to work out all the bugs in the process. Lastly, an in-depth look at analysis literature is needed to ensure that once the data is collected, the appropriate methods are used to analyze the results.

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