

‘Scaling Up’

Reaching large numbers of children and young people through research for children’s rights advocacy

ADVANCING CHILDREN’S RIGHTS: CAPTURING THE LEARNING OF THE ATLANTIC PHILANTHROPIES GRANTEES IN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

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Introduction

This guide will focus on the benefits of engaging larger numbers of children and young people in research, consultations, and advocacy purposes. It will explain the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods, offering further insight into the use of quantitative methods, when appropriate, and highlighting the value it holds for child rights advocacy.

Research with Children and Young People: Depth versus Breadth

When planning a research or consultation process, there are two broad approaches that should be considered:

Qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, involve a relatively small number of people and offer scope to explore the issues at hand in detail. These methods provide *depth* of information across a *small number of respondents*.

Quantitative approaches, such as surveys, involve a large number of respondents and provide the opportunity to explore trends and prevalence in the wider population. These methods provide *breadth* by collecting the views/ experiences of *much larger numbers* of respondents than may be possible or feasible with qualitative methods.

The choice of method will be determined by the purpose of your research:

- If you want in-depth information about the lived experiences or views of a particular group of people, then *qualitative methods* are likely to be appropriate.
- If you wish to understand trends, prevalence of activities/behaviour/ attitudes in the general population or a large subset of people, then *quantitative methods* can be more appropriate.

This guide focuses on reaching large numbers of children and young people through more quantitative methods, employing surveys and online media.

Value of reaching larger numbers

One of the main advantages of reaching larger numbers is the strength it adds by enhancing the volume of evidence used to support your advocacy work. Below we have set out some common and useful methods for including large numbers of respondents in your research for children's rights advocacy. Included are some examples from Atlantic Philanthropy grantees, detailing how they reached large numbers of young people and how this benefitted their advocacy work.

How to reach larger numbers of children and young people

Surveys

These are a standard means of reaching larger numbers of young people. Surveys can be administered either in paper and pen format or online (for example, using SurveyMonkey or Google Forms). The data can be managed and analysed using a range of different programs, most popular would be excel, SPSS (a programme for the social sciences), or the basic analyses techniques offered in the online survey provider

Often surveys are designed to include several different components:

- Demographic details – this helps you understand who the respondents are by gathering information such as gender, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.
- Core questions – the main body of the survey, asking the questions you want answered. Questions can be answered in a variety of formats, such as 'yes/no', agreement scales, and open ended responses, where the respondent is free to write what they wish in response to your question. *(Something to note: be careful about including many open-ended questions, as they are more time consuming to analyse. If you find you are looking for in-depth answers from each individual, you may need qualitative methods.)*

Opinion Polls and Social Media/ Internet

Whilst surveys ask a range of questions, **opinion polls** tend to be less detailed, asking only one/two core questions. For example:

'Do you think the legal age of smoking should be increased?' Yes/No.

Opinion polls can be hosted online using the same online tools previously mentioned (Survey Monkey/ Google Forms). They require minimal set up time, but can provide strong support for campaigning/ advocacy issues.

Social media and the internet can be used to both advertise and host online surveys and opinion polls, as well as acting as research tools themselves. For example, Twitter data can be assessed to determine if issues are trending, or to establish the reach of a message via retweets etc.

Examples from the Grantees

Several of the grantees have used survey methods, opinions polls and websites to reach larger numbers of children and young people. The examples below demonstrate how these methods have been used to advocate for change.

Youth@CLC from the **Children's Law Centre** conducted a survey in 2012 with 955 Year 11 students in 13 secondary schools in Northern Ireland, the focus of which was on the use of mental health services and perceived stigma. The findings enabled Youth@CLC to make recommendations to government on how to improve service delivery. Following this research,¹ Youth@CLC received a letter from the Minister from Education setting out the steps that he and his Department would be taking to address the key recommendations in the report.

VOYPIC gathered the views and experiences of 258 children and young people (aged 8-18) through a computer assisted self-interview (CASI) survey (*Our Life in Care*, 2012). The results have informed VOYPIC's policy manifesto, which will influence the lives of young people in care from across Northern Ireland

Barnardos' IE Amplifying Voices initiative aims to 'amplify' the voices of children and young people on issues affecting their lives. This initiative has worked with a group of children aged between ages 10-13 years who were campaigning for safe play spaces. The children surveyed more than 100 people in their community, including parents, teachers and local councilors. As a result of this campaign, Dublin County Council provided funding for a games area in the community.

ISPCC uses Viewpoint (a service established to work with organisations to improve young people's participation in decision making) for their National Children's Consultations. Via these consultations, ISPCC engage directly (using surveys) with large numbers of young people around a range of issues, e.g. their consultation on the use of the internet reached 18,116 children and young people from Ireland. The results of this survey have called for immediate action to ensure children's safety whilst online.

Public Achievement's WIMPS (Where Is My Public Servant?) engaged large numbers of young people via the use of an online poll. This poll asked only one question, 'Do you think young people aged 16 years old and over should be able to vote?' The results assisted them in a campaign encouraging the government to engage with the issue of lowering the voting age in Northern Ireland.

SpunOut.ie, a youth information website created by and for young people, reaches approximately 80,000 readers each month. The content of the website is informed by the users, and to assist with this, they have conducted a number of surveys. For example, they recently conducted a survey to inform new content on LGBTQ issues.

¹ Copies of the full report are available from CLC and on their website.

Key factors for success

Deciding on your questions

Clearly identify:

- What it is you want to find out
- The parameters of the consultation/ research
- How the evidence obtained can support your advocacy agenda

Asking the best questions

Think about your audience:

- How can you best engage with them?
- Which questions should you ask?
- What is the best way to ask these questions (think about the capacity of the respondent)?

Choosing the best medium

Think about how you could best reach your intended audience:

- Which medium would be most suitable to them?
- Does your organization have the capacity to engage with the medium selected, i.e., do you require external expertise to run an effective survey or social media campaign?

Background and Context

The Atlantic Philanthropies Children and Youth Programme (Objective 2) grantees incorporated a diverse range of 19 non-governmental organisations in Ireland and Northern Ireland, working with varied groups of children and young people in a multitude of ways. What is common to all is a commitment to effecting social change for children and young people in ways that ensure their active involvement.

Research teams

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