

Setting Priorities Using Paired Couplets

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There's nothing easy about setting priorities. When involving an advisory group, sometimes it gets more difficult. Ask a group of people to select between priorities, and guess what? About one-half of the group selects priority A, and the remaining one-half are head cheerleaders for priority B.

But sometimes, that's not really what's happening. Often people don't want to disagree with an opinion leader in the group. Some people are not as willing to share ideas in a group. But, is there a better way than involving people?

The key is to involve them in the right way. One way is a simple ranking. Give your participants the choices, and ask them to rank them 1-4, with one being the highest priority. Then add up the scores; the lowest score is the top priority.

Another way is to use paired couplets. This is a way to measure the feelings of the whole group, particularly when there are more than four choices.

After conducting the survey, calculate the results. Consider asking participants to do their own calculation. Be careful!

Have an example ready so that participants will not make a miscalculation. This system can be very confusing when you are talking about getting a score of "1" and the item that scored "1st place" (had the highest score).

After the calculations, make plans with the group about which topics were selected as priorities.

This is a great technique! You see, if plans change during the year, you have numerical data to help you make a decision.

Example Using Paired Couplets

For this example, I have completed the questionnaire so that you can see an example of scoring.

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program provides education in food planning, preparation and nutrition to low-income and limited resource individuals and families in Example County.

EFNEP provides education and training in many locations in our county. But, we have lost funding for two EFNEP positions, and it's time to set some priorities. Where can we reach the most families who are the most in need?

Here are the places where we currently conduct EFNEP:

- A. Example Harvest Food Bank
- B. Example County Health Department
- C. Small Community Health Clinic
- D. Small Community School
- E. Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School

For each of the following, please mark the one location where EFNEP will reach the most people who are most in need:

A. Example Harvest Food Bank.....OR
 B. Example County Health Department

A. Example Harvest Food Bank.....OR
 C. Small Community Health Clinic

A. Example Harvest Food Bank.....OR
 D. Small Community School

A. Example Harvest Food Bank.....OR
 E. Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School

B. Example County Health Department.....OR
 A. Example Harvest Food Bank

__B.Example County Health Department.....OR
 __C. Small Community Health Clinic

__B.Example County Health Department.....OR
 __D.Small Community School

__B. Example County Health Department.....OR
 __E.Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School

__C. Small Community Health Clinic.....OR
 __A. Example Harvest Food Bank

__C. Small Community Health Clinic.....OR
 __B.Example County Health Department

__C.Small Community Health Clinic.....OR
 __D.Small Community School

__C. Small Community Health Clinic.....OR
 __E.Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School

__D.Small Community School.....OR
 __A. Example Harvest Food Bank

__D.Small Community School.....OR
 __B.Example County Health Department

__D. Small Community School.....OR
 __C. Small Community Health Clinic

__D.Small Community School.....OR
 __E.Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School

__E.Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School.....OR
 __A.Example Harvest Food Bank

__E.Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School.....OR
 __B. Example County Health Department

✓__E. Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School.....OR
__C. Small Community Health Clinic

✓__E. Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School.....OR
__D. Small Community School

Now count the number of marks beside each item and put the totals in these blanks:

- 3__A. Example Harvest Food Bank
- 6__B. Example County Health Department
- 2__C. Small Community Health Clinic
- 1__D. Small Community School
- 8__E. Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at High School

In the example, the respondent identified the Class for Expectant Teen Mothers at the High School as the top priority for EFNEP in Example County. The second highest priority was the Example County Health Department.