



EPIC Award Entries – Research Tips

Research helps you define the problem/opportunity and the audience and is an essential component in developing successful communication programs, projects and initiatives. When developing the research portion of your CAPIO EPIC Award entry, here are some research tips to take into consideration.

- WHO do you want to reach?
- WHAT do you want them to do?
- WHAT messages do we want to communicate to our audience?
- WHAT were some research considerations?
 - Time/budget constraints
 - Available resources
- HOW was data collected (phone, survey, interview)?
- WHAT type of research did you use for this project?
 - Primary – Survey, focus groups, interviews, communications audit, etc.
 - Secondary – Historical research, internet research, etc.
 - Formal – Survey, content analysis, etc.
 - Informal – Phone interviews, tracking calls, observations, etc.
 - Qualitative and/or quantitative

EXAMPLES OF USING RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES IN YOUR CAPIO EPIC AWARD ENTRY

Research doesn't always mean that we are using scientific surveys to develop our communications programs and projects. Rather, research runs the gamut from formal surveys to informal call tracking. The following research methodologies highlight how you can demonstrate research in your CAPIO EPIC Award entry. With each method, there is also an example of how this it would look in a real-life situation.

Focus Groups – Focus groups consist of 8 to 12 people and are led by a moderator. The purpose of a focus group is to provide qualitative, exploratory research that helps explore feelings people have for a given product, service or idea. Focus groups can also include internal audiences.

Example of how to use focus groups in the research section of your EPIC Entry:

- Branding Category – Your county is going through its first re-branding in 60 years. Before you begin developing your brand strategy, your agency holds several focus groups throughout your county to learn more about the community's feelings, beliefs and experiences related to the county. The focus groups, along with other data collected, helps guide your agency's brand strategy.



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Surveys – Surveys can be done online, written, by phone or in-person and help you determine the knowledge or opinions of identified audiences (such as employees, customers and residents).

Examples of how to use a survey findings in the research section of your EPIC Entry:

- **Community Relations Category** – A large construction project will be commencing on a main arterial road in the heart of your city. According to your agency’s most recent resident survey, traffic delays are a top concern in your community. In addition, the survey shows that the top three ways residents in the city receive information is through your monthly newsletter, social media and at community meetings. The survey also shows that you have a large population of Spanish speaking residents in the area. Knowing that traffic is a large concern in your community and how your residents like to receive information, you are able proactively and strategically communicate early and often about the project. You are also able to translate the materials into Spanish to meet the needs of those customers.
- **Communications and Marketing Plan/Campaign Category** – Your water district is going through a strategic planning process and deploys an online survey to customers to find out where customers are getting their information from, how often they like to receive information and what kinds of information they want to receive. This survey, along with other data collected, helps guide your agency’s strategic plan.

Content Analysis - Identifying issues reported by the news media and/or social media to determine hot topics and define emerging trends that your communication efforts should address.

Example of how to use content analysis in the research section of your EPIC Entry:

- **Communications/Marketing Plan/Campaign Category** – Your agency appeared in several recent stories in the local newspaper about residents being very upset with the current uptick of theft in local neighborhoods. In addition, on Nextdoor and Facebook there were many resident complaints about packages being stolen from their doorsteps during the holidays. This analysis combined with you tracking the last two months of calls to your police station (which show a 20 percent increase in calls about theft), leads your agency to develop a new neighborhood watch outreach campaign.

Communications Audit – A communications audit assesses your agency’s internal and external communication activities in line with your goals. It can provide information on if you are effectively communicating with your audiences and how you can make your communication efforts better.



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Example of how to use a communications audit in the research section of your EPIC Entry:

- **Communications and Marketing Plan/Campaign Category** - Your city is undertaking a strategic communications planning process. As part of the process, your department is undergoing a communications audit, including a resident survey and SWOT analysis as well as reviewing your city's communication tools (social media platforms, website, media relations efforts, marketing materials and newsletters) to more effectively engage with constituents. This communications audit, along with other data collected, helps guide your agency's strategic plan.

Tracking Calls, Purchases, Hits, Actions or Placements – Tracking calls, purchases, hits, actions or placements can flag an emerging issue, can track campaign performance or measure the effects on attitudes, behaviors or perceptions.

Example of how to use tracking in the research section of your EPIC Entry:

- **Communications/Marketing Campaign Category** – Your agency tracked the last two months of calls to your police station (which show a 20 percent increase in calls about theft). In addition to this tracking, your agency analyzed social media and local news content, which finds several recent stories in the local newspaper about residents being very upset with the current uptick of theft in local neighborhoods. In addition, on Nextdoor and Facebook there were many residential complaints about packages stolen from their doorsteps during the holidays. This call tracking, along with the content analysis, leads your agency to develop a new neighborhood watch outreach campaign.

Research (Other Sources, other agencies, databases, other studies) – Oftentimes, you may not have the resources or the time to do your own research, and you can rely on research done by others. Quantitative and qualitative data is already available from other agencies and sources. For example, the state and many counties offer important demographic data. You can also use these sources to demonstrate why you are using a specific tactic. For instance, the Pew Research Center, has a survey that provides vital information on social media, including social media consumption, growth and demographics.

Example of how to use other research sources in the research section of your EPIC Entry:

- **Multi-cultural Outreach Campaign Category** – Your city is developing a multi-cultural outreach campaign for recycling. You work with the county and the council of governments in your area to obtain the most recent demographic data for your region to ensure you translate materials into the appropriate languages as well as have interpreters on hand at community outreach events in areas with large non-English speaking populations.



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- Video Production Category – You work at a county animal shelter. The shelter is hosting a “Clear the Shelter” event next weekend. The shelter has a large, engaged social media following, so you decide to primarily promote the event on social media using a short :20 second video. In addition, you choose to create a video because numerous articles and studies have shown that people are more likely to watch a video on something than just read about it; viewers retain 95 percent of a message when they watch a video compared to 10 percent when reading text; and social videos generate 1200 percent more shares than text and image content combined. In addition, you decide the video should have words on screen and not rely on a voice over because 85 percent of Facebook videos are watched without sound.