

No matter what the size of your business, understanding your business, your industry and your consumers are key factors for success. However, knowing what information is needed to help you better understand each can be difficult.

These guidelines aim to make the task of setting research objectives clear and simple so that you can successfully address an issue and identify the right information to use.

Setting objectives is the most critical step in ensuring that you invest your time and/or dollars in the right venture and that the conclusions reached address the research issue. Objectives need to outline what you are trying to achieve. There are two key types of objectives that need to be considered, the Project Objective and the Research Objectives.

Project Objective

Having a clear understanding of what your business is trying to achieve is the best way to ensure success. That is, knowing what defines your business, what you want to do, how you want to do it and who are your consumers (target market).

Typically, the need for a research project will arise during times of change for your business. Issues that commonly arise include:

- a shift in the needs, attitudes or feelings of your target market
- the need for a new or improved product or service

Therefore the overarching project objective identifies the issue that your business needs to research.

What issue are you trying to address?

To help define your project objective, think about the single most important question the research must answer. Ultimately, the conclusions or recommendations reached during the project must relate back to your project objective.

Research Objectives

Firstly, the scope of the research project needs to be defined:

- What is the **background** to the issue? What circumstances have led to this research project?
- Do you have any **stakeholders**? Is there anyone you need to share the research with? Do you have to report back to anyone?
- At the end of the project **what do you want to know?**

What information is needed to address the issue?

You need to clearly articulate the problem in a few key research objectives. Research objectives need to:

- Outline the information necessary to address your project objective.
- Start with a verb (e.g. increase, decrease, improve, measure, describe, compare).
- Be easy to explain.

Note: If you find you have multiple objectives it is good to prioritise them into what you need to know and what would be nice to know, as it is often not possible (or too expensive) to achieve them all.

When scoping your research issue, other tourism specific considerations may include:

Who is most appropriate to answer the questions?

- Visitors and/or non-visitors?
- Specific visitor types and/or segments?
 - Day and/or overnight visitors?
 - Intrastate, interstate and/or international visitors?
 - Leisure, visiting friends or relatives (VFR), and/or business visitors?
 - Self-drive and/or fly in/fly out?
 - Potential visitors and/or the target market?
 - Operators and/or industry partners?

What is the geographic region that the research study needs to cover? The region may be your organisation, town, local government area, or tourism region.

When does the project need to be conducted?

- Is the information you require specific to a particular season: peak, shoulder or low? School holidays or non-school holidays? Summer or non-summer?
- Are there other factors that might impact when the project is conducted? E.g.. Is an event on which might impact results?



Analysis of information

The following questions should be considered before deciding what to analyse:

- What information do you currently record or collect? Can you use **existing business information**?
- Can you use **existing research**? Has similar research been conducted? In the tourism industry a lot of research is conducted with the aim of helping you to achieve a better understanding of your industry and your target market. Much of the research is made accessible to all, Tourism Queensland's Summary of Tourism Data Sources is a good place to find out about this information.
- Is **customised research** required to address your issue required?

Where can you source the information needed to address the issue?

The analysis is the process of collating then breaking down and reviewing the relevant information in order to gain a better understanding.

Outcomes

Results should outline what was learnt from the analysis, while conclusions should answer the research objectives. Final recommendations should address the project objective.

Do the study conclusions relate back to the research objectives?

Do the study recommendations address the business objective?



Case Study One

Martha and Sam own a small bed and breakfast outside of Toowoomba. Their rooms are themed in 1950s style décor, similarly the food and beverages that they serve are reflective of this era. Typically, their consumers are retired or semi retired couples or groups that travel to the area to experience the local festivals, food and wine. However, also enjoy their hotel as it takes them back to a past era.

Martha and Sam are ready to expand their product. They have identified a jukebox and Elvis showroom as potential new product.

They have identified their **project objective** as "Should their hotel install a jukebox and Elvis showroom?"

Project objective

Background: While many of their consumers are repeat visitors, Martha and Sam are hoping a new product will help to reinvigorate their experience as well as attract new consumers.

Stakeholders: Martha and Sam do not have any stakeholders. (Note: stakeholders could be a board or directors, managers, business partners, employees, owners, local council or local tourism organisation)

What they want to know: Will the inclusion of a jukebox and Elvis showroom have a positive impact on their business? Is it a good idea?

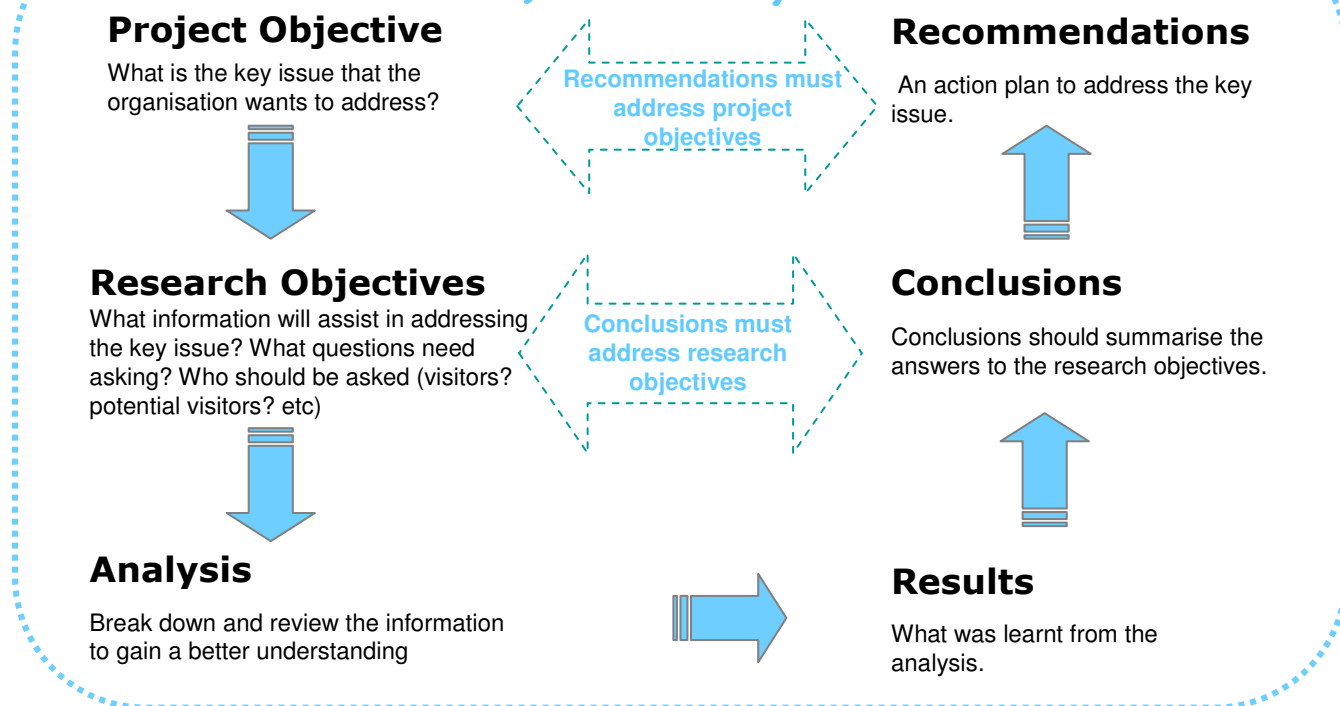
Research objective: "To explore how appealing the inclusion of a jukebox and Elvis showroom would be to their target market"

Existing business information: Martha and Sam are able to extract a detailed profile of their consumers over the past 12 months from their business records. They ask each guest a few details about themselves on arrival such as their age, if they are married, postcode and email address.

Existing research: They were unable to locate relevant existing research.

Customised research: Martha and Sam are going to conduct research with previous consumers. They have previous guests' email addresses and are going to email them a short survey asking questions aligned to the research objectives.

Setting research objectives



Case Study Two

William and Bertha manage a caravan and camping ground on the Sunshine Coast. Facilities at their camping ground include pool, spa, BBQs, playground, trampoline, kayaking and games room. Typically, their consumers are young couples and families that travel to the area for a beach holiday experience as well as to enjoy the facilities on offer at the caravan and camping ground.

William and Bertha have been looking at implementing new facilities to help give them a competitive edge. They have flagged an internet hub as a potential addition.

Their **project objective** is "Should they add an internet hub to their caravan and camping ground?"

Background: Previous research they have conducted indicated that their customers tend to choose them because of their location as well as the facilities they have on offer.

Stakeholders: William and Bertha need to get changes to their business approved by the owners, therefore will need to report the findings of this research project back to them. (Note: It is often beneficial to involve stakeholders in the project from the beginning. Their buy-in to the study and its objectives can help ensure that actions will follow on from the research).

What they want to know: Will the inclusion of an internet hub have a positive impact on their business?

Research objectives "To explore if their target market think it is important to have access to internet facilities while they are on holidays" and "To explore if their target market expect their caravan/camping ground to provide internet facilities"

Existing business information: William and Bertha are able to extract a detailed profile of their consumers as they collect details through their online booking system such as postcode and who they are travelling with.

Existing research: They were able to find a study on the expectations of consumers that take caravan and camping holidays in Southern NSW. While this study was not able to answer their objectives it gave them great insights and encouraged them to pursue their idea further.

Customised research: William and Bertha have decided to conduct customised research. As their customers check out over the next month, they will be asked a few questions aligned to their research objectives.

Tips if commissioning a research consultancy to conduct customised research

These kinds of studies are usually a partnership between your business, your stakeholders (if applicable) and a research consultancy. No-one will understand your local region and industry better than you and a research consultancy will welcome your input. Be prepared to commit time and effort to ensure robust results. At a minimum, **you should consider:**

- Communicating all relevant background information - to your stakeholders and/or the research consultancy. This may include information about your region, your local tourism industry, tourism trends, what your business is trying to achieve (business strategies) and any previous research results.
- Outlining your expectations of the study (the project objective) with the consultancy. Perhaps ask yourself the following questions: *At the end of this project what do I want to walk away with? At the final presentation what do I want it to tell me?* The answers to these questions are a good way of expressing what your expectations are. Your expectations should also include more functional aspects such as when the study needs to be completed by, anticipated budget and reporting needs.
- Sharing any applicable local knowledge, local contacts, resources etc.
- Setting and prioritising your research objectives.
- Investing time to review research materials throughout the study, including questionnaires, reports and presentations.

Taking the time to involve your stakeholders (if relevant) in the study can be beneficial. That is not to say all stakeholders need to be intricately involved in the day-to-day conduct of the study but their *buy-in* to the study and its objectives can help ensure that expectations of the study are met and that actions will follow on from the research. The type of involvement of stakeholders will vary, particularly depending on the number of stakeholders you have. Briefing them on what it is you are doing and why is a good benchmark.

When reviewing or discussing materials from the research consultancy (e.g. questionnaires, reports, presentations) it is important to check that the conclusions relate back to your research objectives and that the recommendations relate back to your project objective.

Qualitative versus Quantitative research

There are two main types of market research - Quantitative research and Qualitative research:

Quantitative research aims to measure or count how many people do or say something. Quantitative research is appropriate when you want to answer questions that require precise numbers like:

- How many?
- How much?
- When?
- Where?
- By whom?

Quantitative data collection usually involves conducting surveys among a selected group of people. This group, or sample, statistically represents the target population so that results can be generalised to predict attitudes and/or behaviours of the whole target population.

Qualitative research is used to explore an issue or to find out more about it. It provides in-depth information on people's attitudes and reasons why they think or behave as they do. Qualitative research typically involves a series of group discussions or individual in-depth interviews, or both. It is often used to identify issues to be addressed in quantitative research. Due to its exploratory and diagnostic nature, qualitative research results should never be generalised, sample sizes are not robust enough to be statistically representative of a whole target population.



Research reports and presentations

The beginning of the study is the time to consider how you will want the research findings to be delivered back to you. Consider the following:

- If you have multiple stakeholders (e.g. your Board and operators), will you need separate presentations for each stakeholder group?
- Would a one page summary of the findings in a format that can be distributed to your stakeholders be useful (a research agency will probably do this at little or no extra cost)?
- Always consider a workshop in addition to the presentation. This is not a presentation of the study findings but a chance to consider the implications of the findings with key stakeholders the outcome being an action plan. A workshop is a great way to ensure that the study findings make a tangible difference. Generally research consultancies will be able to run a workshop for you.

If considering commissioning a survey, research costs are driven by a few factors:

- The harder the people you want to survey are to find, the higher the cost of the survey. For example, if you randomly sample the Australian population the cost of finding someone who has visited Roma in the last three years is very high. For that reason conducting the survey in Roma itself will usually be the most cost effective approach.
- The more people you want to talk to (the larger the survey sample) the larger the cost. A key driver of the sample size you need is the number of sub-groups you wish to talk to/survey. For example, if you are a tourism region that is made up of three Local Government Areas (LGA) you may wish to present results for each LGA separately as well as for the region as a whole. This will mean that you need a larger sample size, say, 200 surveys from each region, and therefore the cost will be higher.
- Most research agencies will deliver a report in one of two formats:
 - PowerPoint: A presentation style report. This is useful if you need to present results in other forums you have the slides already done. Most research agencies report in this format.
 - Microsoft Word: A written report. It is likely to have more detail than the PowerPoint report and therefore tends to cost more than a PowerPoint style report. There will also be an additional cost if you need a presentation as well.
- Visitor expenditure data and economic value. Collecting visitor expenditure data is relatively complicated. If your study requires this you should consult Tourism Queensland to ensure that the questions/methodology align with recommended methods for your industry. Measuring the economic value of tourism is very complicated and not surprisingly very expensive. Again, if you need to do this you should consult Tourism Queensland for advice.

References:

Project Smart: 21 Ways to Excel at Project Management

<http://www.projects smart.com/>

Small Business Development Corporation, Western Australia

<http://www.smallbusiness.wa.gov.au/step-2-set-your-research-objectives/>

eHow: How to Write Business Objectives

http://www.ehow.com/how_4719172_write-business-objectives.html#ixzz1212TNA1c

