

# Nantucket Data Platform

## BIG DATA FOR A SMALL ISLAND

### Data Platform Survey Probes Quality of Life

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The Nantucket Data Platform recently completed a six-month survey that asked a group of more than 400 year-round and summer residents a series of questions that boiled down to: What is the quality of life on Nantucket?

What the survey finds is that in general year-rounders come to Nantucket because of family and friends already here, or a job brought them, while seasonal residents come because of an appreciation for the island's natural or scenic beauty.

Both groups, however, indicated they avoid driving downtown because of traffic and limited parking.

Answers like these can help town officials make decisions on issues like parking, Data Platform founder and CEO Alan Worden said. "We've done a survey on affordable housing, and with affordable housing, we want to know preferences, like would people rather own or rent their house or apartment," Worden said.

"For quality of island life, we were trying to figure out what keeps people on Nantucket and what makes them want to move. We're trying to design a program that is representative of a group of customers, whether they're members of your organization or not."

It's part of an initiative called the Community Survey Panel, what Worden called a statistically reliable program that can be used by both governmental and non-governmental organizations for future surveys ranging from quality of life, to perceptions of nursing care at Our Island Home, or reasons why people go to the Nantucket Whaling Museum.

"Every organization on the island should use it if they want reliable opinions from islanders," Worden said.

He admitted, however, that a survey is not the only way organizations could or should be obtaining information.

Having a survey on quality of life on Nantucket does not mean the town should stop seeking additional information or hear feedback on various issues during public hearings at committee meetings or at Town Meeting, he said.

“It’s not a replacement for open meetings, it’s a supplement to them,” Worden said. “With Town Meeting, only a minority of voices are heard, unfortunately, so if you really want to understand what the community thinks about something, this works not as a substitute, but as a supplement.”

The quality of life survey is the group’s second survey, following a survey on affordable housing released in May.

This one was funded by ReMain Nantucket. Approximately 400 island residents were surveyed. Their responses were broken out by gender, household income and whether the respondent lives on-island year-round. The results were then extrapolated to represent the island’s population, and weighted by subgroup representatively, even if more responses were received from one group over another. Worden hopes to bring the survey to other municipalities and organizations around the country that can pay for the service. He’s currently talking to groups in Santa Fe, N.M., Palm Beach, Fla. and Hartford, Conn.

“We don’t make money on Nantucket, it’s an at-cost tool,” Worden said. “Nantucket benefits from being our laboratory, and hopefully it’s profitable in other communities when we take the surveys off Nantucket.”

Organizations can use the results from this type of survey to make decisions beyond any anecdotal information they receive on their own, he added.

Worden pointed to an example he said the Data Platform is currently working on with the Nantucket Public Schools, which is being funded through a Nantucket Cottage Hospital grant program called Healthy Nantucket 2020. The question is whether parents support the school’s pre-kindergarten programs, and if they should be expanded.

“The school could be committed to pre-K, but it might not know what parents want out of pre-K, and in the absence of a reliable survey, it’s only (superintendent Michael Cozort’s) guess,” Worden said. “Would you rather have a conversation with six parents or hear from 400 in a survey? If you get a big enough sample of parents and it’s constructed well, it’s as if you’re talking to everyone you wanted to talk to.”

“We now have a tool that community leaders can use, and help further along their thinking,” he added. “I hope this is a tool they can use, and that homemade surveys conducted by amateurs are no longer a tool they use to guide decision-making.”