

Yellowstone Basin Advisory Council
Membership &
Report of 2013 Public Scoping Activities

Appendix O:
How to Understand the Q Sort Findings



How to Understand the Q Sort Findings

The Q Sort uses ranking exercises to find common bundles of preferences (opinions) regarding a topic. Think of it this way: if we used a Q Sort to identify the characteristics that are typically associated with an attractive landscape, we would find that one bundle of characteristics includes Mountains, Evergreen Trees, and Clear Running Streams. A second bundle includes a Seashore, White Sand and Cool Breezes. We could use the statistical program of the Q Sort to find anywhere from 2-8 bundles of attractiveness.

Once statistically bundled, we look to see the extent to which individual respondents' rankings match the bundles. In doing so, we might find that there are only five bundles that resonate with most people as attractive. Each of these five bundles would then be named by selecting one characteristic that appears to define the bundle. As a result we might identify these five **archetypes**: Mountains, Seashores, Prairies, Farmsteads and Skyscrapers. Note that each archetype includes additional **defining characteristics** (e.g., Mountains includes Evergreen Trees and Clear Running Streams).

From this analysis we would report that we have found five archetypes of attractive landscapes. This means we found five statistically significant patterns in the ways that respondents view attractive landscapes. We would also report the defining characteristics of each archetype.

We would then report that there are characteristics that do not define the archetypes, but that are statistically significant as characteristics that are valued across the archetypes. For instance, we might find that Blue Skies and Colorful Sunsets are significant to all archetypes as attractive characteristics. This would mean there is **strong positive agreement** among the respondents that Blue Skies and Colorful Sunsets are important to all attractive landscapes. There might also be characteristics about which there is **strong negative agreement**. For instance, most people might agree that Dusty Air is never attractive.

Similarly, we might report that there are certain characteristics that appear as **contentious**. This means there is significant disagreement regarding the degree to which some characteristics are attractive. Thus, even though some people find Neon Signs attractive, other people have a strong aversion to Neon Signs. The statistical program identifies such characteristics. A report of such findings could precipitate further discussion of Neon Signs as a potential "deal-breaker" for a group attempting to write guidelines for defining attractive landscapes.

Lastly, we would use the Q method to reveal characteristics that might facilitate **compromise(s)**. These are characteristics about which:

- a. there is no overall strong positive or overall strong negative agreement,
- b. yet, some people feel very strongly about the characteristic, while
- c. others are indifferent.

For example, if some in the group definitely want an attractive landscape to include some Rolling Hills, and if other don't really care one way or the other about Rolling Hills, then perhaps offering to include Rolling Hills in the guidelines for defining attractive landscapes may help the group move forward.

The findings of a Q Sort are thus helpful when a group needs to recognize differing, but legitimate overall views (**archetypes**) of what seems attractive. The results further help identify three other elements:

- 1) common ground issues (**strong positive agreements and strong negative agreements**),
- 2) issues that may present problems when attempting to come to make a recommendation (**contentious issues**), and
- 3) issues that may help the group enfranchise some folks to the process of making recommendations because those people see that some of their key concerns are being addressed (**compromise issues**).

With such insights in hand, the overall group may find a variety of new ways to move forward.

