What Do Members Know About Demand?

An Itasca-Mantrap example of an article and member survey with notes from Co-op Innovation Network

About this example

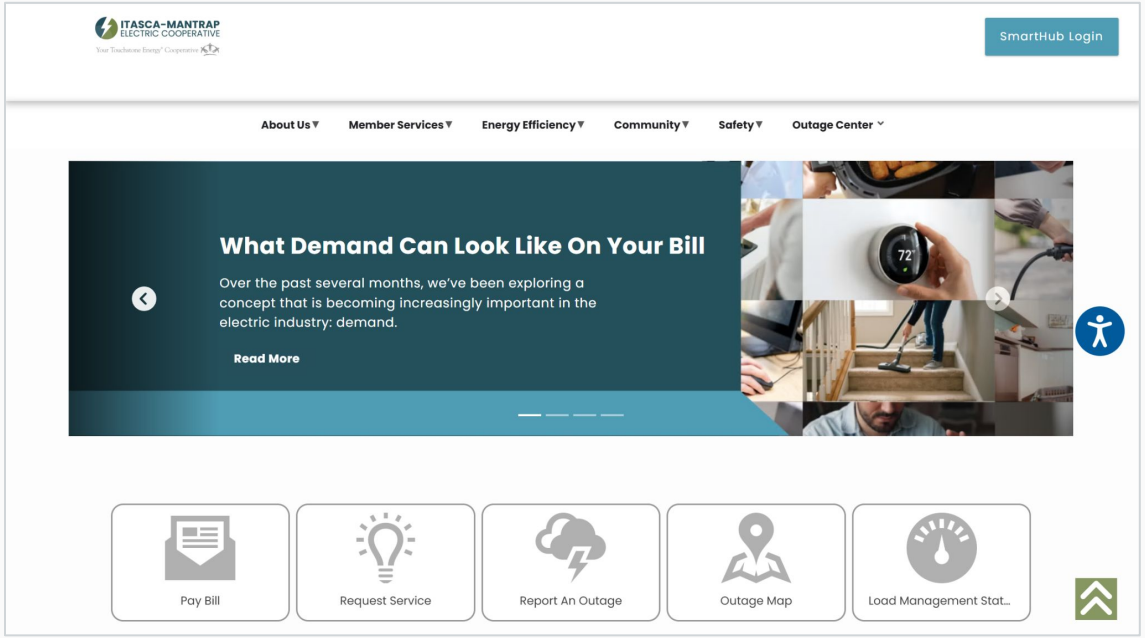
Itasca-Mantrap Electric Cooperative, based in Park Rapids, Minnesota, has made demand a focus of its member education. The co-op published a plain-language article on its website, then emailed members a short survey to learn what they understood.

This document shows the article and each page of the survey. It captures how the co-op gathered feedback rather than how it used the responses.

The Website Article

A plain-language article on demand

A homepage feature points members to the article



The homepage carousel promotes the article above everyday links like Pay Bill and Report an Outage.

The teaser repeats the article's first line, and Read More takes members to the full piece.

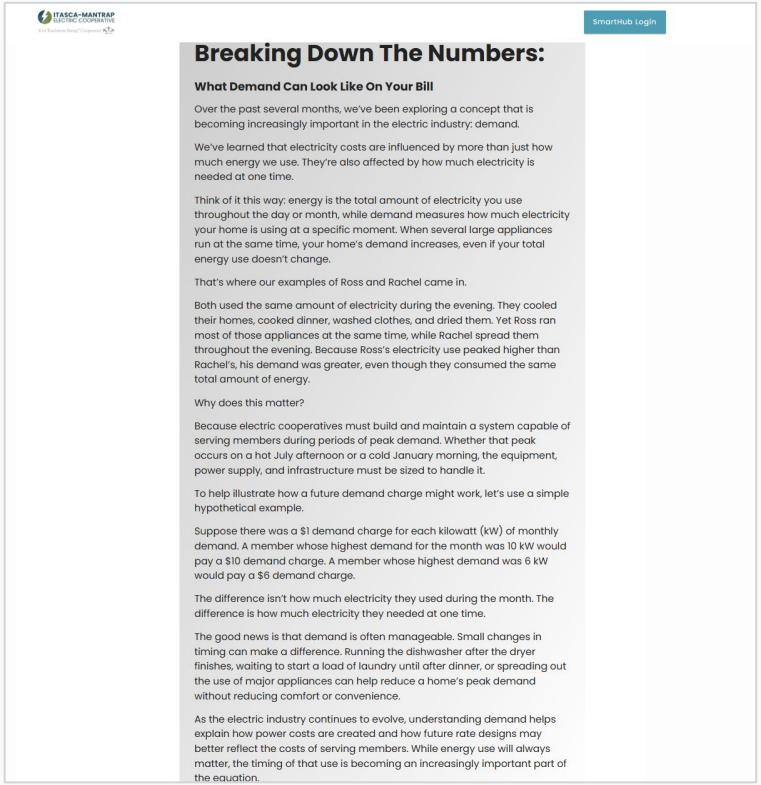
Everyday photos show where demand comes from



The article opens with a collage of ordinary household moments including cooking, laundry, vacuuming, adjusting the thermostat.

The images tie a rate concept to things members already do every day.

Short paragraphs build the idea step by step



ITASCA-MANTRAP ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

SmartHub Login

Breaking Down The Numbers:

What Demand Can Look Like On Your Bill

Over the past several months, we've been exploring a concept that is becoming increasingly important in the electric industry: demand.

We've learned that electricity costs are influenced by more than just how much energy we use. They're also affected by how much electricity is needed at one time.

Think of it this way: energy is the total amount of electricity you use throughout the day or month, while demand measures how much electricity your home is using at a specific moment. When several large appliances run at the same time, your home's demand increases, even if your total energy use doesn't change.

That's where our examples of Ross and Rachel came in.

Both used the same amount of electricity during the evening. They cooled their homes, cooked dinner, washed clothes, and dried them. Yet Ross ran most of those appliances at the same time, while Rachel spread them throughout the evening. Because Ross's electricity use peaked higher than Rachel's, his demand was greater, even though they consumed the same total amount of energy.

Why does this matter?

Because electric cooperatives must build and maintain a system capable of serving members during periods of peak demand. Whether that peak occurs on a hot July afternoon or a cold January morning, the equipment, power supply, and infrastructure must be sized to handle it.

To help illustrate how a future demand charge might work, let's use a simple hypothetical example.

Suppose there was a $1 demand charge for each kilowatt (kW) of monthly demand. A member whose highest demand for the month was 10 kW would pay a $10 demand charge. A member whose highest demand was 6 kW would pay a $6 demand charge.

The difference isn't how much electricity they used during the month. The difference is how much electricity they needed at one time.

The good news is that demand is often manageable. Small changes in timing can make a difference. Running the dishwasher after the dryer finishes, waiting to start a load of laundry until after dinner, or spreading out the use of major appliances can help reduce a home's peak demand without reducing comfort or convenience.

As the electric industry continues to evolve, understanding demand helps explain how power costs are created and how future rate designs may better reflect the costs of serving members. While energy use will always matter, the timing of that use is becoming an increasingly important part of the equation.

The article moves from definition to example to cost: energy versus demand, a comparison of two hypothetical households, why peaks shape the system, and a $1 per kW illustration.

It closes on what members can control, which is the timing of their appliance use.

Full text of the article

Breaking Down The Numbers: What Demand Can Look Like On Your Bill

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Source: Itasca-Mantrap Electric Cooperative website

Full text of the article (continued)

Breaking Down The Numbers: What Demand Can Look Like On Your Bill

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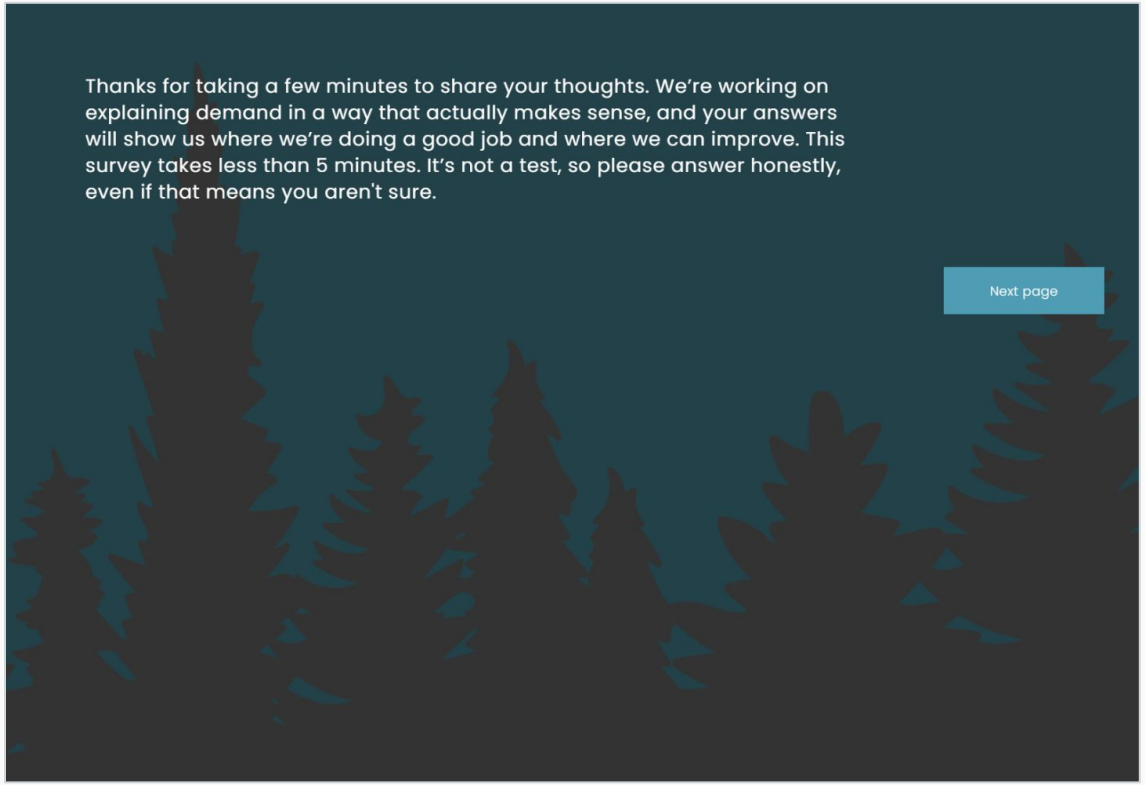
As the electric industry continues to evolve, understanding demand helps explain how power costs are created and how future rate designs may better reflect the costs of serving members. While energy use will always matter, the timing of that use is becoming an increasingly important part of the equation.

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The Member Survey

A short emailed survey to learn what members understood

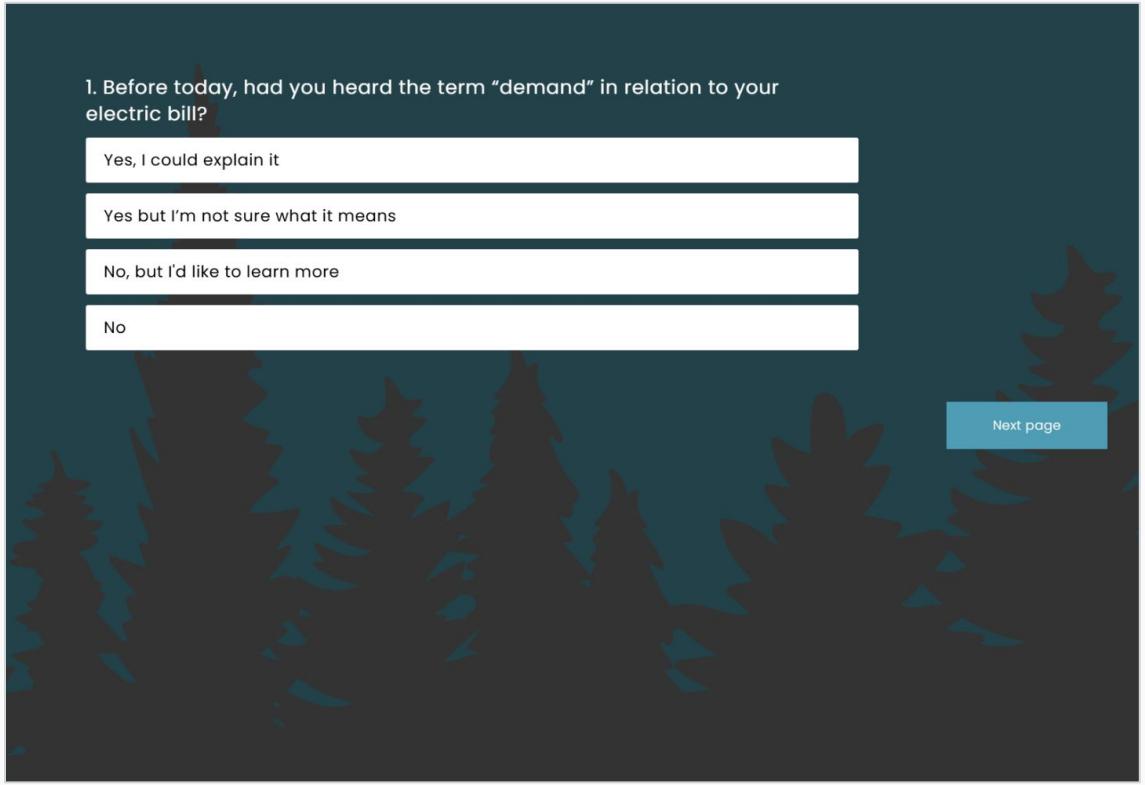
The survey invites honest answers



The introduction sets expectations such as it will take less than five minutes and this is not a test.

Telling members it's fine to be unsure makes them more likely to admit confusion, which is exactly what the co-op needs to know.

Question 1 separates awareness from understanding



The choices distinguish members who have heard the term from those who could explain it.

"No, but I'd like to learn more" also works as a gauge of interest.

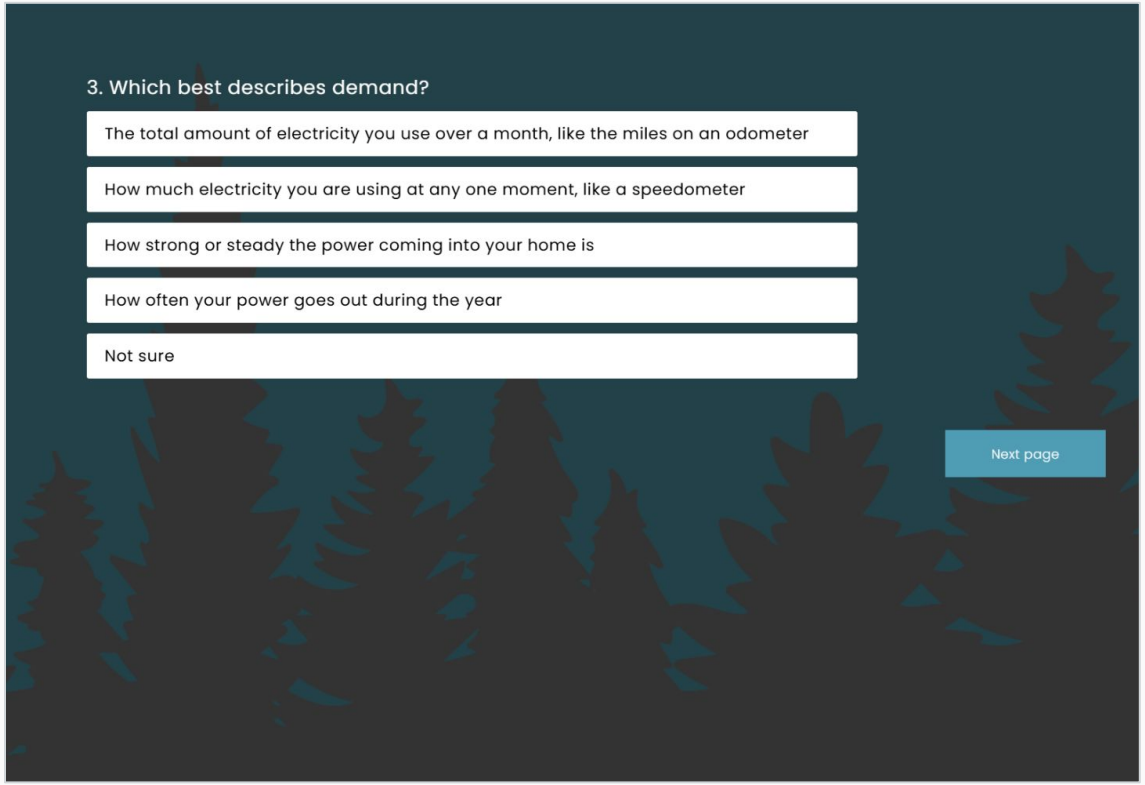
Question 2 asks where members heard about demand



Listing every channel, plus "Neighbor or Employee," shows which efforts members noticed.

"Haven't seen anything" gives the co-op an honest baseline.

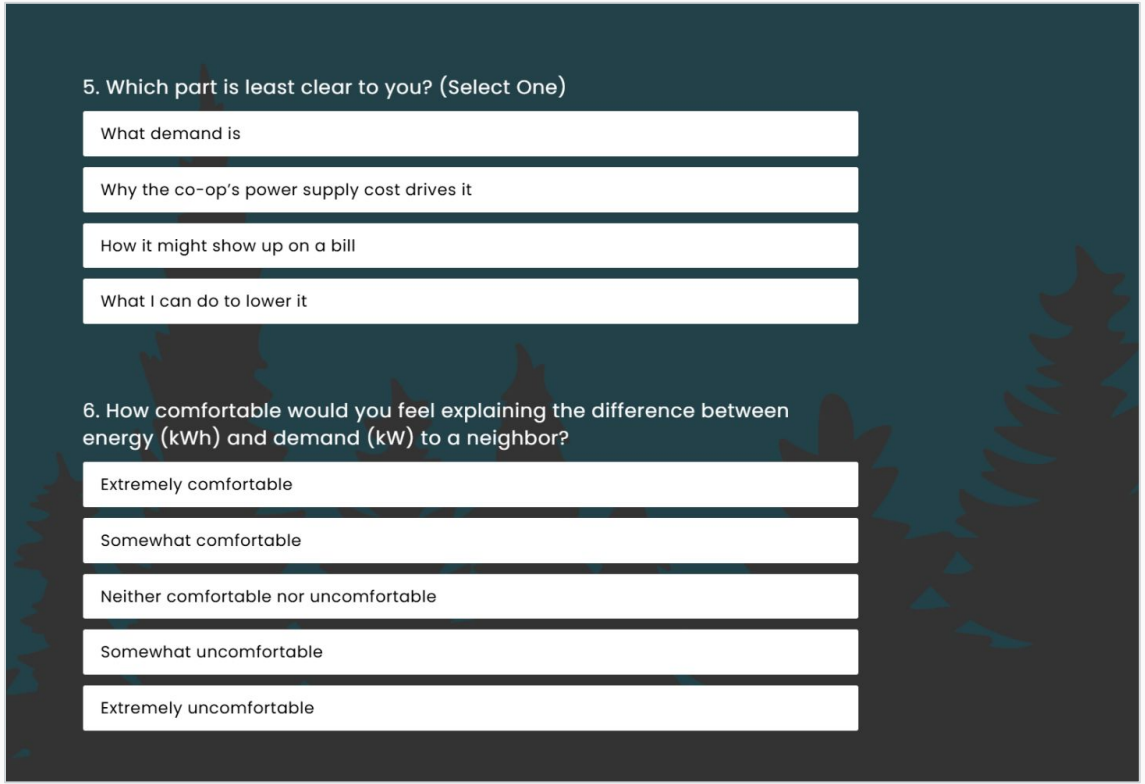
Question 3 tests the concept with analogies



The odometer and speedometer choices give members a familiar way to tell energy from demand.

Plausible wrong answers, like power quality or outage frequency, reveal common misconceptions.

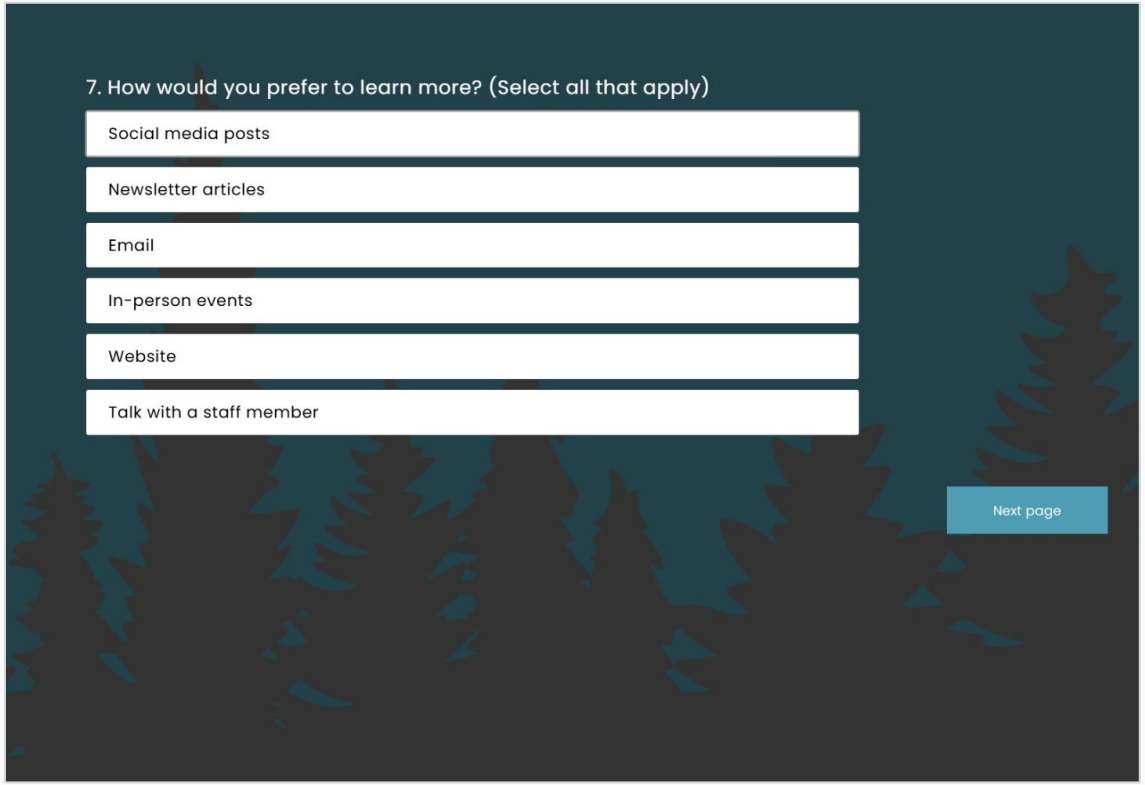
Questions 5 and 6 find the gaps



Question 5 pinpoints which piece needs more work: the concept, the cost driver, the bill, or what members can do.

Question 6 sets a practical bar for understanding: could you explain it to a neighbor?

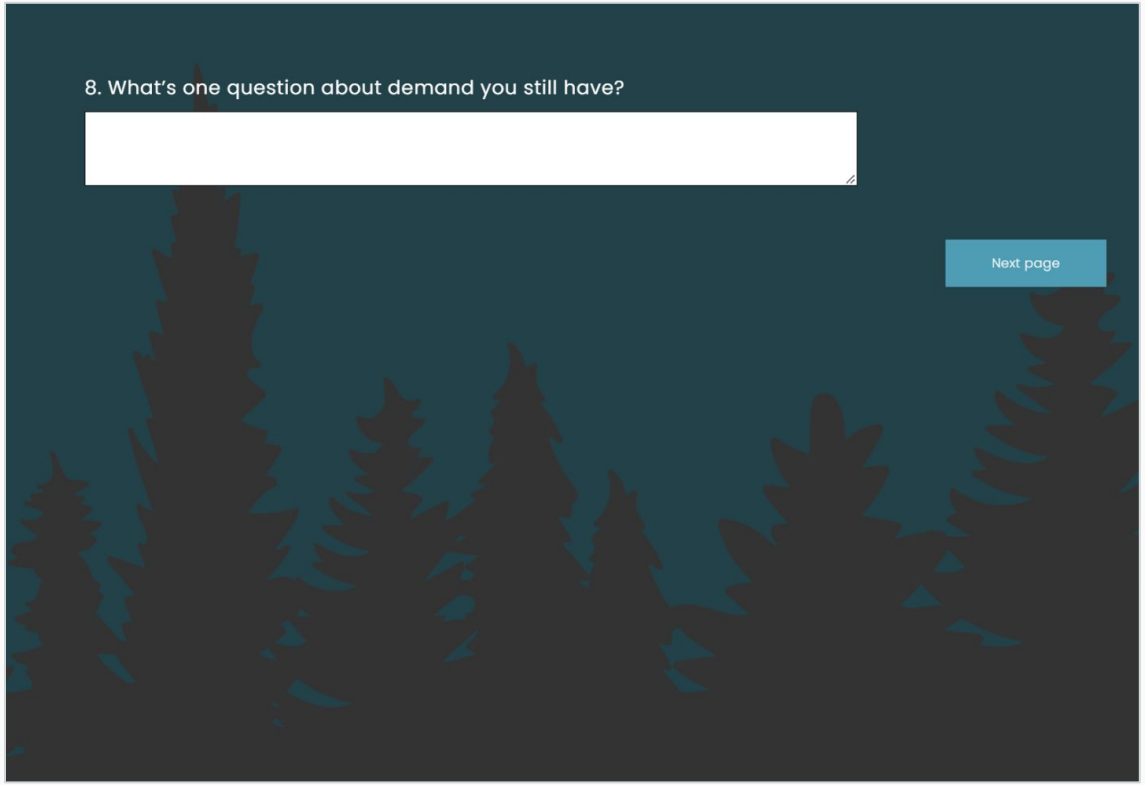
Question 7 asks how members want to learn



Options range from social media and email to in-person events and a conversation with staff.

The answers can guide where the co-op focuses its next round of education.

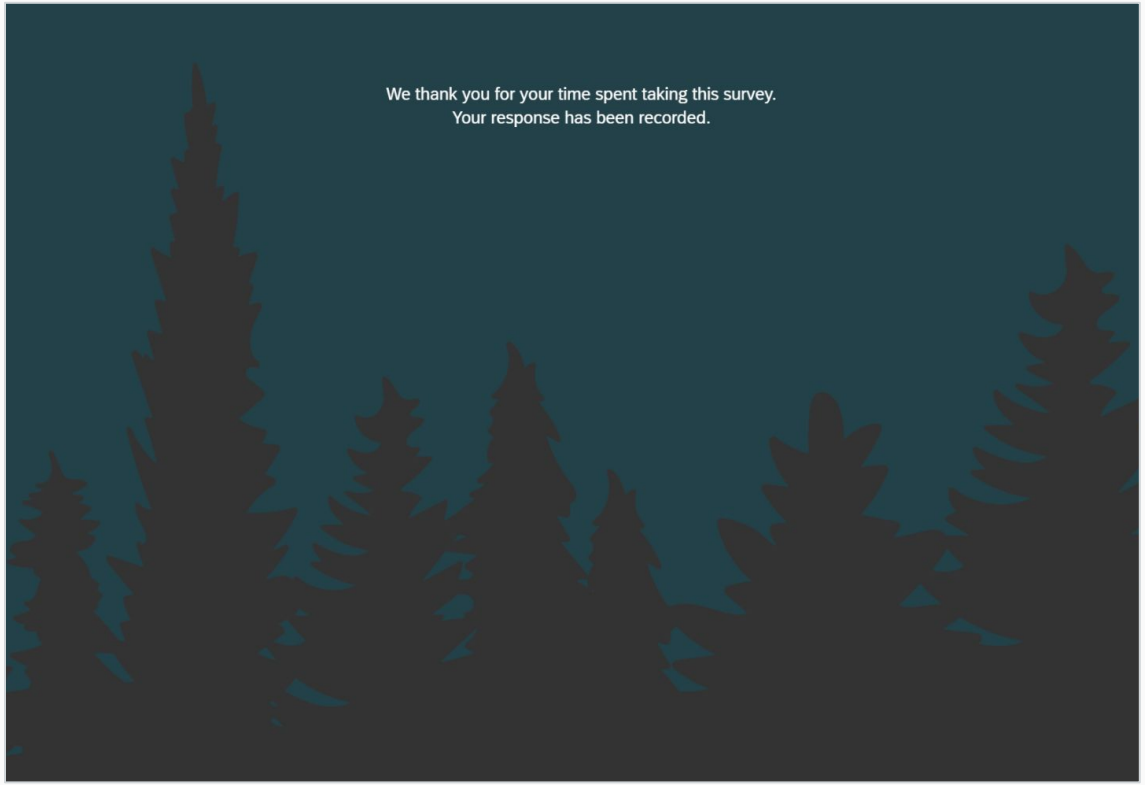
Question 8 collects open questions



A single text box captures the questions members still have.

Those questions can feed future articles, FAQs, and talking points for staff.

A brief thank-you closes the survey



The final page confirms the response was recorded and thanks members for their time.