

X PERSPECTIVES

Volume 2, Number 2, Fall 2004

Good Government Listens

MINE FOR GOLD, AND WIN!

Proving the Value of Citizen Surveys

Citizen surveys have been touted as a management gold mine for local government staff, because more and more, managers rely on community priorities to assist with resource allocation, service improvements, policy choices and goal setting. Over the years, public opinion, arguably administrators' most valuable natural resource, has been "uncovered" in ever more locales as managers have embraced the best technology to lay open the perspectives of a representative cross-section of their residents. Although the number of communities using citizen surveys has burgeoned, there is more excitement about "sitting on a gold mine" of useful management information, than about mining the gold. Yes, citizen surveys replace conjecture with empirical evidence about what the public thinks, but managers and elected officials often remain unprepared to use this valuable new resource effectively.

As a management tool, the citizen survey continues to enjoy great and deserved popularity, but it is no longer in a state of early development that can rest on its great potential. It is time for local government managers to show the private sector, the public and their colleagues in local government what treasures they have discovered in the citizen survey gold mine. It is time to dig in.

YOUR CHARGE

You are invited to submit a brief example that demonstrates how your jurisdiction has used citizen surveying effectively. We want strong examples that show how one survey finding motivated you to action.



Describe the action you took, and the evidence that community attitudes, knowledge, behavior or circumstances improved because of your action. That evidence can come from a repeated survey or other source(s). Many of you may already be doing this. This is a chance to let others know about your management success.

WHAT YOU'LL WIN

Winning jurisdictions in three categories (based on population size) will be featured in the next *Perspectives* and receive a free crosstabulations report (A value of \$800!) on their next iteration of The National Citizen Survey™.

SUBMISSION RULES

We want lots of examples, so we are making entry easy. No entry should exceed two pages. Complete the entry form that follows. It can be found electronically at www.ICMA.org/ncs or complete it in writing and mail it to: Citizen Survey Contest, National Research Center, 3005 30th St, Boulder, CO 80301

National Research Center, Inc. will select the best examples to be shared in the next *Perspectives*. Winners will be announced in three categories of jurisdiction size using Census 2000 counts: small (under 10,000 population); medium (10,000-49,999); large (50,000+). ♦

ENTRY FORM:

Proving the Value of Citizen Surveys

Citizen Survey defined: A general population survey in which resident opinions are sought about the overall quality of community life, quality of service delivery, resident participation in local government, public trust of local government, demographic information or policies.

BACKGROUND

Your name _____

Your direct phone _____

Your title _____

Name of jurisdiction _____

Is this a: city county town village
 parish township other

2000 Census population _____

How many citizen surveys has this jurisdiction conducted since 1990? _____

In your description of how you used one or more citizen surveys (below), in what year was the first citizen survey you mentioned conducted? _____

If you repeated the survey, in what year was the survey done in which you gathered evidence that your management action worked? _____

For the first survey (noted above):

How many people responded to the survey (what was the sample size?) _____

How was the survey conducted? phone mail
 email/Web in-person combo

Who conducted the survey?

in-house consultant (or university) combo

Please describe how one or more citizen surveys were used to identify problems that required attention in your jurisdiction and show the evidence from citizen survey results (or other sources) that your actions resulted in improved opinions.

Be sure to include how the citizen survey helped you to: 1) identify the problem; 2) describe briefly what you did to solve the problem; 3) provide evidence that you lessened the problem. Use results from the survey to show resident opinion before and after some action was taken. If some of your evidence comes from another source in addition to the citizen survey, describe that source. No appendices will be accepted. Whatever data you want to show must fit within the page limit. Please submit your description attaching a WORD document to an email to ncs@n-r-c.com. The Word document should be in 12 point font with 1 inch margins and no more than two pages. Thank you.

Be sure to emphasize the role of your citizen survey in the problem-solving process!

Perspectives is a publication of National Research Center, Inc., for past, present, and future participants in The National Citizen Survey™

The National Citizen Survey™

The NCS™ is a cost effective system for conducting comprehensive surveys of local residents and an important benchmarking tool that allows comparison among communities. The NCS™ begins with a customizable survey with core questions important to your community.

National Research Center, Inc.

NRC is one of the leading strategic planning and survey research teams in the United States, focusing on the information needs of the public sector.

The principals of NRC have authored several articles about citizen survey research methods, as well as a book on the methods of citizen surveying, *Citizen Surveys: How To Do Them, How To Use Them, What They Mean* published by the International City/County Management Association in April, 2000.

The International City/County Management Association

ICMA is the professional and educational organization representing appointed managers and administrators in local governments throughout the world.

The National Citizen Survey™ is the latest in a long series of ICMA initiatives created to further public trust and confidence in local government and improve the management of local government services.

WHO WE ARE

Thomas I Miller, Ph.D.

Tom is the president of National Research Center, Inc. He received a Ph.D. in research and evaluation methods from the University of Colorado. He has worked in state and local government since 1977. With Michelle Kobayashi, he wrote, *Citizen Surveys: How To Do Them, How To Use Them, What They Mean*, published in 2000 by the International City and County Management Association, Washington, D.C. Tom founded National Research Center, Inc. in 1994. He has designed, overseen and written results of hundreds of research and evaluation projects and presented his findings to a wide variety of audiences, both academic and lay. He has written about survey research in journals devoted to public management, including *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Planning Commissioners Journal*, *Management Science and Policy Analysis and Governing*. Believing that low-cost, quality surveys are an important part of local government management, Tom has spent years developing The National Citizen Survey™ questionnaire and protocols.

Heather Callahan Locke, M.A.

Heather is The National Citizen Survey™ Manager. Heather earned a Master's Degree in Religious Studies from the University of Colorado at Boulder, with an emphasis in Eastern religious traditions, and undergraduate degrees in Religion and French. Her experience is in research, management, coordination, customer service and teaching. Heather manages all of The NCS surveys; including working closely with interested jurisdictions and those who participate. She oversees the survey process through questionnaire customization, data collection and report writing, as well as post-report consultation on interpretation of results and next steps.



THE NCS™ STAFF

Top Row L-R: Damema Zoss, *The NCS™ Research Assistant*, Heather Callahan Locke, *The NCS™ Manager*, Thomas I. Miller, *NRC President*;

Bottom Row L-R: Erin Caldwell, *NRC Senior Research Associate*; Shannon Hayden, *NRC Senior Analyst*

Erin Caldwell, MSPH

Erin is a senior research associate at NRC. Erin has earned a Master's Degree in public health with an emphasis in research methods and statistics. Erin has over 10 years experience as a senior researcher and research manager. She has designed and conducted scores of citizen surveys, needs assessments, policy studies and program evaluations. Erin helped to develop The National Citizen Survey™ and maintains the normative database.

Shannon Hayden, B.A.

Shannon, senior analyst, earned her undergraduate degree in Sociology from The Colorado College and has experience in research, marketing and project management. Shannon has been involved in dozens of citizen surveys at NRC, managing projects and conducting data analysis. She helped develop The National Citizen Survey™ and oversaw the Beta Site testing of this project. She continues to contribute technical assistance and analysis to The NCS.

Damema Zoss, B.A.

Damema, The National Citizen Survey™ Research Assistant, joined The NCS™ team this past winter and we are happy to have her on board. She earned her undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of Vermont. Her experience and skills include marketing, management and customer service. Damema assists in all aspects of The NCS from customizing surveys to data analysis and report creation. ♦



THE NCS™ INFO CORNER

Calendar for new Classes:
November-December 2004 and
January-March 2005

We have Classes beginning at the start of each month. In order to be considered for a certain Class, we need to receive your enrollment form and check approximately two weeks prior to the start date. We will consider "late arrivals" contingent on space available in each Class. Feel free to try, we are happy to work with your schedule as much as possible!

November 2004

start: Nov 1, data collection: Jan 4-18, draft reports: March 1, completion of The NCS: March 22

** Please note that due to the winter holidays, we will delay data collection until January

December 2004

start: Nov 30, data collection: Jan 17-31, draft reports: March 21, completion of The NCS: April 4

January 2005

start: Jan 3, data collection: Feb 14-18, draft reports: April 11, completion of The NCS: May 2

February 2005

start: Jan 31, data collection: March 14-18, draft reports: May 9, completion of The NCS: May 30

March 2005

start: Feb 28, data collection: April 11-25, draft reports: June 9, completion of The NCS: June 27

Questions? We've Got Answers!

- *Citizen Surveys: How To Do Them, How To Use Them, What They Mean* addresses most questions about citizen surveying for local governments. Please contact Christine Ulrich (culrich@icma.org) for ordering information.
- If you have questions regarding such thing as sample sizes, survey types, normative comparisons or NRC's citizen survey database, please contact Heather Callahan Locke at NRC (heather@n-r-c.com). She is happy to send you documentation where applicable and answer whatever questions you have.
- To see just what The NCS™ final reports look like, visit the Web sites of some of our participants:
 - Ashland, KY www.ashlandky.org
 - Eau Claire, WI www.ci.eau-claire.wi.us
 - Homewood, IL www.homesweethomewood.com
 - Mauldin, SC www.mauldin.govoffice.com

Q: How can I interpret the changes in my jurisdiction's average ratings year by year? Do 2 points between ratings make a difference? When should I pay attention to the differences?

A:

The National Citizen Survey™ reports for jurisdictions that have completed the survey at least twice display average ratings from consecutive years in graphs and tables. It is natural for small variations to occur in these ratings from year to year simply due to random fluctuations that occur with the selection of different respondents. However, some ratings will be different because perspectives of residents really have changed. When your sample sizes are about 400, differences of 4 points are more likely to reflect real changes in residents' opinions from year to year. With samples of about 1,000, differences of only 2 points are more likely to reflect real changes in residents' opinions from year to year.

How reliable the average differences are from year to year is only one way to think of the importance of differences. Some declines of 4 points, while reflecting genuine change of opinion, may be too small to mount a campaign to change jurisdiction policies or programs. Nevertheless, such a decline should trigger at least the raising of a pole from which a red flag may fly if the trend continues into a third year. On the other hand, if the jurisdiction has made a change in policy that is mirrored in improved resident opinion, there is no harm in making cautious statements about policy success and tracking opinion to see if the success holds.

HOW TO SIGN UP FOR THE NCS™:

If you have an introductory packet from ICMA, you can fill out the enrollment form and send it to National Research Center, Inc; please include a check for \$4,100 which is half of the Basic Service (\$8,200) at that time. Your check initiates The NCS process. You will be added to the next available Class of participants, unless you specify a different Class. NRC will send a packet of information** containing several FAQ sheets, background information on The NCS, your timeline and a Worksheet Packet. The Worksheet Packet will guide you through the steps to customize your survey, write policy questions, and choose add-on options where needed.

If you do not have the introductory packet from ICMA, you can use the enrollment form on the back of this newsletter.

You can also contact Heather Callahan Locke at NRC for additional information or an invoice at any time: heather@n-r-c.com.

**We are happy to get materials to you even faster by sending electronic (PDF) copies of all files if you prefer. Just let us know!



3005 30th Street
Boulder, CO 80301

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Boulder, CO
Permit No. 94

WHAT YOU GET WITH THE NCS™

Basic Service Includes....

- Copy of *Citizen Surveys: How To Do Them, How To Use Them, What They Mean*, by Miller and Kobayashi, published in 2000 by the International City and County Management Association, Washington, D.C.
- Customized survey form and mailing envelopes with jurisdiction name, logo, and local contact
- Choice of services to be surveyed
- Addition of three optional questions
- Three mailings to 1,200 randomly selected households: pre-survey postcard and two mailings of the survey instrument
- A margin of error (95 percent confidence interval) of approximately +/- 5 percentage points around any given percent
- Data input and cleaning
- Statistical analysis of survey results
- Written report illustrated with tables and graphs summarizing the survey results
- Comparative norms for service evaluations
- Certificate of survey authenticity
- Technical assistance by phone and email
- Add-on options for further reports and customization
- Debriefing call

PRODUCT	PRICE	DESCRIPTION
Basic	\$8,200	
Spanish	\$1,400	Includes Spanish paragraph on cover letters asking those who wish to complete the survey in Spanish to contact the jurisdiction and request Spanish copy of survey. Jurisdiction will be mailed envelopes – outbound and return – and surveys to mail out to those individuals.
3,000 out	\$6,000	Mailing is of 3,000 instead of 1,200.
Custom norms	\$1,000	Through worksheet options, jurisdiction selects criteria for set of custom norms. Custom norms will be provided alongside national norms in report tables. Graphs will include either custom or national norms but not both.
One open end	\$1,250	Includes one open-ended question added to survey. Responses will be categorized and reported in a table under separate cover, accompanied by a complete list of verbatim responses.
Compare prior (non-NCS) results	\$1,700	Tables include comparisons to previous years' service evaluation ratings in jurisdiction – up to three previous years.
Compare to prior NCS results	\$0	Comparisons included in report of results.
Demographic crosstabs	\$800	Crosstabs of questions 1-15 by 4 demographic variables on survey to be provided under separate cover from report.
Geographic crosstabs	\$800	Crosstabs of questions 1-15 by geographic variable to be provided under separate cover from report.
Phone data collection	\$6,000	400 completed interviews.
On-site Presentation	\$2,300	Presentation of results to Council or department heads. Cost includes travel expenses.

The NCS™ Enrollment Form Print legibly (use blue or black ink only.)

NAME: _____

TITLE: _____ ORGANIZATION: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____ FAX: _____

EMAIL: _____

To order, send this completed form with payment to:
The National Citizen Survey™ • National Research Center Inc. • Attn: Heather Callahan Locke • 3005 30th Street • Boulder, CO 80301