

PERSPECTIVES

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT SURVEY RESEARCH FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGERS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

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 \$5,600 which is a portion of the Basic Service (\$9,600) 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 Damema Mann at NRC for additional information or an invoice at any time: damema@n-r-c.com.

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

Do Ask, Do Tell

CITIZEN SURVEYS BECOME THE STANDARD IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Do you know a local government manager who believes that a scientific survey of community residents just doesn't belong in the toolbox for collecting resident opinion? These days, the educated manager learns early about the importance of periodic citizen surveys. Typically, in most performance assessment systems, resident opinion is cast as the outcome of interest since such examples as pothole repair or response time goes only so far in defining the success of street maintenance or police work. The old mantra lifted from lawyers that states "don't ask a question whose answer you don't already know" is out. It's been replaced by: "If you close your eyes, you're not safer. You just can't see."

The National Research Center (NRC) has been tracking the use of general citizen surveys in America's local governments since

1991, when it wrote the first book on citizen surveying. In 1991, citizen surveys were an afterthought for most managers. The idea of bringing into government a credible cross-section of consumer opinion that did not come from council meetings, town halls, informal teas, or knowing whispers from in-the-know friends was as foreign to public administrators as it was central to business leaders.

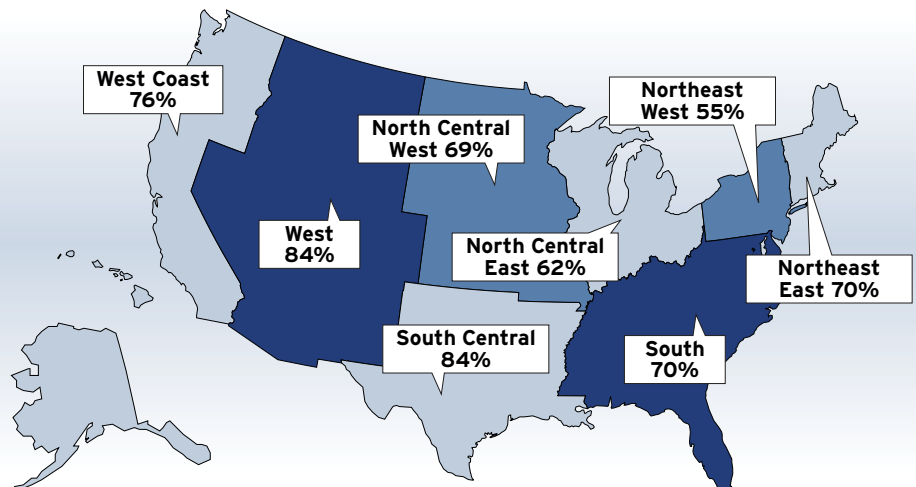
Here it is 17 years later, and managers can see—probably in their own organizations or in communities nearby—that a regularly conducted scientific survey of residents is no longer an issue that sits on the backburner.

Surveys of Surveys Say

Based on surveys of local government managers that NRC conducted in 1991, 2000, and 2007, numbers can be placed to the ascendancy of citizen surveys as basic management tools for local government administration.

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Percent of jurisdictions that conducted at least one citizen survey during the seven-year period of 2000 to 2007.



Who we are

WHO WE ARE:

Thomas I. Miller, Ph.D. is the president of NRC. 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 ICMA, 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 NCS questionnaire and protocols.

Damema Mann is the new Director for The National Citizen Survey! Damema earned her bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Vermont. She has been an integral part of The NCS team for 5 years, working on all The NCS projects during that time. She oversaw all analysis

on survey projects and has worked directly with some NCS contacts already so it will be a seamless move for her to be your direct contact. She will be able to lend her knowledge, experience and efficiency to spearheading all NCS projects moving forward. Please stop by and say hello at The NCS booth at the ICMA conference in Richmond!

Erin Caldwell, MSPH 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 working in and for local government. She has designed and conducted scores of citizen surveys, needs assessments, policy studies and program evaluations. Erin helped to develop The NCS.

Shannon Hayden, M.A., senior analyst, earned her undergraduate degree in Sociology from The Colorado College and a master's degree in Educational Psychology (emphasis on research and evaluation methodology) from the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center. Shannon has been involved in dozens of citizen surveys at NRC, working as a project manager and on all aspects of the projects, including survey instrument development, overseeing data collection and analyzing and reporting the data. She helped develop The National Citizen Survey and oversaw

the Beta Site testing of this project. Her background includes a number of years in marketing. She continues to contribute technical assistance and analysis to The NCS.

Lee Tyson, B.A., analyst, has a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and English from the University of Connecticut. Lee has assisted NRC principals on projects with myriad topics including parks and recreation, older adult needs assessments, transportation, policy studies and code enforcement. Lee has worked extensively with The NCS staff in developing reports and normative comparisons.

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 survey research and performance measurement 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.

ICMA advances professional local government worldwide. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advancing professional management of local government. ICMA (International City/County Management Association) provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to nearly 9,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world.

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trators. NRC's most recent survey conducted on the Web with hundreds of managers in United States' jurisdictions with populations of at least 1,000 found that more than half of all localities with populations of more than 25,000 had conducted a citizen survey in the past 24 months.

In the 16 years since NRC's first estimate of the prevalence of citizen surveys, there has been almost a seven-fold increase in the number of surveys conducted each year by local governments. As context, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has increased by only about half that much since 1991.

NRC defines citizen surveys this way: "A general citizen survey is a scientifically conducted survey administered to a sample or to all residents. At a minimum, it asks

questions about the quality of community life and the quality of services." And where were surveys conducted most in 2007? The south central and western sections of the U.S. have especially embraced resident surveys, while the northeast and northwest lag behind.

In most parts of the U.S., the vast majority of managers are making sure that good government includes periodic evaluations from residents about the quality of community life and service delivery as well as civic engagement and policy preferences. Citizen surveys have been transformed from occasional exercises to valued references that are invoked in the course of every regular assessment of local government performance and in other everyday operations that benefit from understanding public preferences. ■

NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY ADDS NEW BENCHMARKS

In addition to hundreds of service quality evaluations in the National Citizen Survey™ (NCS) database of citizen survey results from across the U.S., it is adding comparisons for important non-evaluative survey items. Comparisons for these resident activities help managers to understand how engaged their residents are compared to other jurisdictions and to determine if programs are needed or are showing success for getting residents more involved.

Perspectives on growth in population, retail, and jobs vary widely among jurisdictions, and these benchmark data let managers know if the seeming cry for reduced (or increased) growth at home is unusually strong or relatively muted. This context is a key to determining the priority of programs to meet resident expectations. The new list of benchmarks shown in the box includes survey questions on participation in a variety of community amenities, growth, and crime reporting. Contact Damema Mann for more information at damema@n-r-c.com. ■

- Population growth
- Retail growth
- Job growth
- Recommend living in [community name] to someone who asks
- Remain in [community name] for the next five years
- Victim of crime
- Crimes reported
- Visit with neighbors/neighborliness
- Contact with [community name] staff members
- Impact of the economy on family income in the next six months
- Used [community name] public libraries or their services
- Used [community name] recreation centers
- Participated in a recreation program or activity
- Visited a neighborhood park or [specific name of] park
- Ridden a local bus within [community name]
- Attended a meeting of local elected officials or other local public meeting
- Watched a meeting of local elected officials or other local public meeting on cable television
- Read [community name's] Newsletter
- Visited the [name of page or document]] on [community's name] Web site (at xx.com)
- Recycled used paper, cans, or bottles from your home
- Volunteered your time to a group or activity in [community name]
- Participated in religious or spiritual activities in [community name]
- Participated in a club or civic group in [community name]
- Provided help to a friend or neighbor
- Used the Internet for anything
- Used the Internet to conduct business with [community name]
- Purchased an item over the Internet

Q&A

Q: Some citizen surveys evaluate service delivery on different scales. One scale that is often used is “excellent, good, fair, poor” while others use “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied.” Which is better?

A: With resident opinion, it is better to ask directly the kind of performance that has been observed. Residents are reasonable judges of service quality, whatever their own expectations or demographics. When you ask a resident to rate the quality of a service, there is implicit understanding that you are asking the citizen to serve as a judge of your work. Not telling you how he feels but what he thinks.

After all, measures of government performance require an estimate of achievement, not a read of the emotional state of the resident. Of course, it is understood that even judges are influenced by their own life circumstances and the environment in which judgments are made. But asking about quality is a more straightforward request than asking about satisfaction, with-

out needing to be mediated by an assessment of the resident’s state of equanimity. (“I don’t want to know how you are. I want to know what you think about how we are.”)

NRC research shows that ratings of quality are not interchangeable with ratings of satisfaction. In one jurisdiction with more than 400 respondents to a citizen survey, residents were asked to rate several services using the “excellent,” “good,” “fair,” and “poor” scale in the early part of the survey and “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied” toward the end of the survey. Residents did not give the same ratings to each. Overall, ratings were almost always higher on the satisfaction scale than the quality scale, even after controlling for differences in scale symmetry and number of response options.

So, ask about quality on an “excellent,” “good,” “fair,” and “poor” scale or use “very good” to “very bad” options, 1 to 10, or high to low, but make it about clients’ perceptions of your quality not about their satisfaction. ■

The NCS Info Corner

Here is a calendar for new classes scheduled September through December 2008 and January 2009.

NCS offers classes or groups of participants beginning at the start of each month. In order to be considered for a certain class, NCS needs to receive an enrollment form and payment check approximately two weeks prior to the start date. It will consider late arrivals contingent on space available in each class. It is happy to work with an individual’s schedule as much as possible.

Class	Enrollment Deadline	Data Collection	Draft Reports	Completion
Sep 2008	Sep 1	Oct 13- Nov 17	Dec 8	Dec 22
Oct	Sep 29	Nov 10- Dec 17	Jan 5, 2009	Jan 19, 2009
Nov**	Oct 27	Jan 5, 2009- Feb 9	Mar 2	Mar 16
Dec	Dec 1	Jan 12- Feb 16	Mar 9	Mar 23
Jan 2009	Jan 5	Feb 16- Mar 23	Apr 13	Apr 27

**Due to winter holidays, November’s surveys are mailed in early January rather than in mid December.

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/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 post-card and two mailings of the survey instrument
- A margin of error (95 percent confidence interval) of no more than +/- 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 including cross-tabulations, in-person presentation, larger survey sample, translation into different languages, etc.
- Debriefing call

ENROLLMENT FORM

Last Name		First Name	
Title		Organization	
Mailing Address		City (abbreviate if necessary)	State Zip
Phone		Fax	
Email Address			

To order, send this completed form with payment to:

The National Citizen Survey™ • National Research Center • Attn: Heather Locke
3005 30th St. • Boulder, CO 80301

PRICING

Product	Price	Description
Basic	\$9,600	Includes creation of survey instrument and materials, printing and mailing to 1,200 households, data analysis and creation of a report of results, report of normative comparisons, and summary report.
Spanish	\$1,450	Includes Spanish paragraph on cover letters asking those who wish to complete the survey in Spanish to contact the jurisdiction and request a Spanish copy of the survey. Jurisdiction will be mailed envelopes-outbound and return-and surveys to mail out to those individuals
3,000 out	\$6,600	Mailing is of 3,000 instead of 1,200.
Custom norms	\$1,100	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	\$1,500	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	\$1,750	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	\$900	Crosstabs of questions 1-16 by 4 demographic variables on survey to be provided under separate cover from report.
Geographic crosstabs	\$1,100	Crosstabs of questions 1-16 by geographic variable to be provided under separate cover from report.
Phone data collection	\$6,000	400 completed interviews
On-site Presentation	\$2,650	Presentation of results to council or department heads. Cost includes travel expenses.



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

