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## Economy: Too Early to Write Requiem for “Ole Norm.”

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Is the news so old that it’s become boring, or just so bad that it remains depressing? Yes, the economy stinks. Yes, local governments continue to suffer, and yes, many find themselves on a downward slope that is steeper even than the slide facing businesses. But do we have to continue to wallow in this mud hole—now that the thrill of the spill is gone?

Even as cuts are made and we pledge allegiance to the “new normal,” a funeral for the “old normal”—let’s call him “Ole Norm”—is premature. Ole Norm needs to be exhumed and dressed for the party. Back when resources to provide all the services that residents expect were simply insufficient rather than totally absent, high principles of governance described the working doctrine of local government managers across the country. Those principles of strong local government have not diminished during this fiscal crisis, and basic actions that support those principles remain badges of the best local government administrators.

## How to Sign Up for The National Citizen Survey™

Enrolling in The NCS is easy. 1) You can get all the details including an enrollment form and a comprehensive calendar by visiting [icma.org/ncs](http://icma.org/ncs). 2) Send your completed enrollment form to National Research Center, Inc along with a check for \$5,900, which is a portion of the Basic Service fee (\$9,900). Your check initiates The NCS process. 3) The NCS staff will contact you upon receipt of your enrollment form and initial payment. You will be sent a customized timeline and a Worksheet Packet to guide you through the steps to customize your survey, write policy questions, and choose add-on options where needed.

For more information send us an email at [ncs@icma.org](mailto:ncs@icma.org) or call us at 202-289-ICMA. If you have specific questions about the survey or invoices, contact [damema@n-r-c.com](mailto:damea@n-r-c.com) or call 303-444-7863 x118.

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**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 relevant to your

Ole Norm's good government aimed squarely at top quality service delivery, long range planning, regional cooperation, transparent financing, unbiased distribution of resources, and strong partnership with residents. It's true that the number of staff and dollars that can be devoted to these important activities has diminished, but the unstated contract with residents remains that local government is closer and more responsive to residents than any other level of government. Our research bears this out. Across hundreds of jurisdictions and within the results of each locale, results from The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) demonstrate that residents think vastly more of the services provided to them by their local government than they do of services provided by state and federal government.

Nothing helps keep the core principles of good government alive more than a strong connection between local government and the residents it serves. Knowing what residents think about the community, services, and key policies keeps the jurisdiction on track with planning, finance, and equitable resource allocation. Moreover, regular monitoring of resident opinion will tone service delivery to match resident expectations.

## Mail Surveys Capture Elusive Cell Phone Users

Get used to those goofy ring tones? More and more Americans are switching to cell phones, causing all sorts of grief, not only for moviegoers and conference conveners—but also for survey research firms that carry the financial weight of call centers. The magnitude of the switch and the consequences to survey research are growing so fast that many survey research firms emphasizing phone contact cannot keep up.

Social scientists at National Research Center, Inc.'s (NRC) research laboratory regularly test new survey methods, question wording, data analysis, and report writing. Recently, we included questions about cell phone use among respondents to surveys by mail in six jurisdictions where we administered The National Citizen Survey™. We wanted to test our hypothesis that The NCS, conducted by mail, was reaching residents who typically would be missed by telephone surveys that did not include cell phones.

Here's what we found: Most people have cell phones (88 percent of respondents on average, across our six locales), and only about half of all mail respondents to The NCS considered their land line to be their primary line. The rest considered their cell or the combination of cell and land lines to be

community. It comes to you from the National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and ICMA.

### **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 for Local Government: A Comprehensive Guide to Making Them Matter* published by the International City/County Management Association in 2009.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the NCS team.

their primary line. Results were similar in each city in states as diverse as Florida, Arizona, Oregon, South Dakota, and Idaho. Most surprising was that, on average, **40 percent of respondents by mail to The NCS did not have any land line.**

There are other reasons that jurisdictions aren't keen on including cell phones in general citizen surveys. In addition to the havoc that telephone portability creates for jurisdiction-level surveys (because any phone number can be attached to any household anywhere in America so we don't know until we connect if a cell phone user lives in the jurisdiction of interest), cell phones can be dangerous to call because a respondent could be driving. Also, cell phones are more expensive to call because FCC law requires that cell phone numbers be dialed manually, and cell phone users often require some compensation for the minutes taken to complete the survey. This means that accurate representations of a community only are possible with the right mail techniques or careful inclusion of (more expensive) cell phone numbers.

Our research helps to demonstrate that mail surveys are the best way to reach residents who are no longer interested or able to respond by land lines.

## The NCS™: Quality Marches On

National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) survey research professionals regularly review—and engage clients in the review—of The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) instrument to identify questions, analyses, and reports that merit enhancement. Recently updated features include:

- An expanded explanation of the Key Driver Analysis (KDA)—boosting clients' ability to apply survey results in decision making
- More benchmark comparisons—now five levels of comparisons instead of three (much above, above, similar, below, much below)
- Additional employee rating information with optional questions related to contact with police and fire employees
- New phone use questions to help prove the efficacy of your choice to use a mail survey
- Additional questions and reporting related to media use, public trust and more.

