

# Survey Background

## Survey Purpose

The City of Minneapolis contracted with National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) to conduct a citywide resident survey. The Minneapolis Resident Survey serves as a consumer report card for Minneapolis by providing residents the opportunity to rate the quality of life in the city, as well as the community's amenities, service delivery and their satisfaction with local government. The survey also permits residents to provide feedback to government on what is working well and what is not, and to communicate their priorities for community planning and resource allocation.

The focus on the quality of service delivery and the importance of services helps council, staff and the public to set priorities for decisions and lays the groundwork for tracking community opinions about the core responsibilities of Minneapolis City government, helping to assure maximum service quality over time.

This type of survey gets at the key services that local government controls to create a quality community. It is akin to private sector customer surveys that are used regularly by many corporations to monitor where there are weaknesses in product or service delivery before customers defect to competition or before other problems from dissatisfied customers arise.

This is the fourth iteration of the Minneapolis Resident Survey since the baseline study conducted in 2001. This is the second iteration conducted by NRC.

## Methods

Interviewing Service of America, a company specializing in telephone survey services which conducted the interviewing under direction of NRC staff, purchased a random digit dial sample (RDD) where part of the sample was geocoded using reverse directory look-up to help determine in which Community Planning District potential respondents lived. Phone numbers of Minneapolis residents were randomly selected for interviewing. Phone calls were made from May 19, 2008 to July 11, 2008. A majority of the interviews was completed during the evening hours, although calls were made on the weekend and during weekdays also. All phone numbers were dialed at least eight times before replacing with another number, with at least one of the attempts on either a weekend or weekday evening.

Once interviews were completed using the RDD list, respondent address information were geocoded to determine in which of 11 community planning districts a respondent resided. Community planning districts were chosen as the geographic unit of analysis below the City level. The districts were the geographic unit selected for prior surveys. Datasets are available for a wide variety of demographics based upon the community planning districts. To complete the minimum number of responses for each community (96), a set of numbers was pre-coded for location and called to fill the quota for each community planning district. An additional quota system based on racial groups was used to ensure that a representative number of these populations participated in the survey. Telephone numbers associated with cellular phone lines were not included in the sample.

Interviewers who spoke Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Hmong, Lao and Oromo were available for this survey; 22 surveys were conducted in Spanish, two in Hmong and three in Somali. While interviewers were available to conduct the survey in Vietnamese, Lao and Oromo, no interviews were completed in these languages. The overall response rate was 23%.

# Understanding the Results

## “Don’t Know” Responses and Rounding

On many of the questions in the survey, respondents could answer “don’t know.” The proportion of respondents giving this reply is shown in the full set of responses included in *Appendix III: Complete Set of Frequencies*. However, these responses have been removed from the analyses presented in the body of the report. In other words, the tables and graphs display the responses from respondents who had an opinion about a specific item. This approach to presenting data is used in order to allow the most “fair” comparison across items.

Though a somewhat small percentage of respondents offer “don’t know” for most items, inevitably some items have a larger “don’t know” percentage. Comparing responses to a set of items on the same scale can be misleading when the “don’t know” responses have been left in. If two items have disparate “don’t know” percentages (2% vs. 15%, for example), any apparent similarities or differences across the remaining response options may disappear once the “don’t know” responses are removed.

Resident survey reports prior to 2005 for the City of Minneapolis have included “don’t know” responses in the report bodies. In this report, comparisons to previous data omit the “don’t know” responses.

For some questions, respondents were permitted to select multiple responses. When the total exceeds 100% in a table for a multiple response question, it is because some respondents are counted in multiple categories. When a table for a question that only permitted a single response does not total to exactly 100%, it is due to the customary practice of rounding percentages to the nearest whole number.

## “Resident” and “Respondent”

As the results of the survey are intended to reflect the City of Minneapolis population as a whole, the terms “resident” and “respondent” are used interchangeably throughout this report.

## Confidence Intervals

It is customary to describe the precision of estimates made from surveys by a “level of confidence” (or margin of error). The 95 percent confidence level for the survey is generally no greater than plus or minus three percentage points around any given percent reported for the entire sample (1,258 completed interviews). For each community planning district from the survey, the margin of error rises to as much as plus or minus 10% for a sample size of 96 (in smallest) to plus or minus 9% for 115 completed surveys (in largest). (For comparisons made across community planning districts, the margin of error is equivalent to that for the smallest group.) Where estimates are given for subgroups, they are less precise. Generally the 95% confidence interval is plus or minus five percentage points for samples of about 400 to 10 percentage points for samples as small as 100.

## Comparing Survey Results

Certain kinds of services tend to be thought better of by residents in many communities across the country. For example, public safety services tend to be received better than transportation services by residents of most American communities. Where possible, the better comparison is not from one service to another in Minneapolis, but from Minneapolis services to services like them provided by other jurisdictions. This way we can better understand if “good” is good enough for Minneapolis service evaluations.

## Comparison of Results Over Time

Because this survey was the fourth iteration of the resident survey, the 2008 results are presented along with past ratings when available. Differences that surfaced may or may not be meaningful, as wording changes between survey versions may account, at least in part, for any shift in ratings.

Finally, selected results for all Minneapolis residents were compared to results from subgroups of the population (community planning district and sociodemographics) in Minneapolis and are presented *Appendix II: Crosstabulations of Select Survey Questions*.

### Normative Database

National comparisons and comparisons to select cities<sup>4</sup> also have been included in the report when available (jurisdictions to which Minneapolis was compared can be found in *Appendix V: Jurisdictions Included in the Database*). NRC has been leading the strategic use of surveys for local governments since 1991, when the principals of the company wrote the first edition of what became the classic text on resident surveying. In *Resident surveys: how to do them, how to use them, what they mean*, published by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), we not only articulated the principles for quality survey methods, we pioneered both the idea of benchmark data for citizen opinion and the method for gathering benchmark data. We called it, “In Search of Standards,” and argued for norms. “What has been missing from a local government’s analysis of its survey results is the context that school administrators can supply when they tell parents how an 80 percent score on the social studies test compares to test results from other school systems...”

NRC’s database of comparative resident opinion is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in resident surveys from approximately 500 jurisdictions whose residents evaluated local government services. Conducted with typically no fewer than 400 residents in each jurisdiction, opinions are intended to represent over 30 million Americans. NRC has innovated a method for quantitatively integrating the results of surveys that we have conducted with those that others have conducted. We have described our integration methods thoroughly in *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* and in our first book on conducting and using resident surveys. Scholars who specialize in the analysis of resident surveys regularly have relied on our work (e.g., Kelly, J. & Swindell, D. (2002). Service quality variation across urban space: First steps towards a model of citizen satisfaction, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 24, 271-288.; Van Ryzin, G., Muzzio, D., Immerwahr, S., Gulick, L. & Martinez, E. (2004). Drivers and consequences of citizen satisfaction: An application of the American Customer Satisfaction Index Model to New York City, *Public Administration Review*, 64, 331-341). The method described in those publications is refined regularly and statistically tested on a growing number of resident surveys in our proprietary databases.

NRC’s work on calculating national norms for resident opinions about service delivery and quality of life won the Samuel C. May award for research excellence from the Western Governmental Research Association.

### The Role of Comparisons

Normative comparisons are used for benchmarking. Jurisdictions use the comparative information to help interpret their own resident survey results, to create or revise community plans, to evaluate the success of policy or budget decisions, to measure local government performance. We don’t know what is small or large without comparing. Taking the pulse of the community has little meaning without knowing what pulse rate is too high and what is too low. When surveys of service satisfaction turn up “good” citizen evaluations, we need to know how others rate their services to understand if “good” is good enough. Furthermore, in the absence of national or peer community comparisons, a jurisdiction is left with comparing its fire protection rating to its street maintenance rating. That comparison is unfair. Streets always lose to fire. We need to ask more important and harder questions. We need to know how residents’ ratings of fire service compare to opinions about fire service in other communities.

A Police Department that provides the fastest and most efficient service – one that closes most of its cases, solves most of its crimes and keeps the crime rate low – still has a problem to fix if the residents in the county it intends to protect believe services are not very good compared to ratings given by residents in other counties to their own objectively “worse” departments.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Arbor, MI; Austin, TX; Boulder, CO; Charlotte, NC; Denver (City and County), CO; Durham, NC; Oklahoma City, OK; Phoenix, AZ; Portland, OR; San Francisco, CA

The normative data can help that Police Department – or any City department – to understand how well citizens think it is doing. Without the comparative data, it would be like bowling in a tournament without knowing what the other teams are scoring. We recommend that citizen opinion be used in conjunction with other sources of data about budget, personnel and politics to help managers know how to respond to comparative results.

Jurisdictions in the normative database are distributed geographically across the country and range from small to large in population size. Comparisons may be made to subsets of jurisdictions (within a given region or population category such as jurisdictions in the Minnesota region). Most commonly comparisons are made to all jurisdictions. In this report, comparisons were made to all jurisdictions in the database except counties (unless the county was also a city). Despite the differences in jurisdiction characteristics, all are in the business of providing local government services to residents. Though individual jurisdiction circumstances, resources and practices vary, the objective in every community is to provide services that are so timely, tailored and effective that residents conclude the services are of the highest quality. High ratings in any jurisdiction, like SAT scores in any teen household, bring pride and a sense of accomplishment.

### **Comparison of Minneapolis to the Normative Database**

In this report, comparisons are made both to the entire database (“National Database”) and a portion of the database (“Select Cities”)<sup>5</sup>, featuring communities identified by Minneapolis, when available. Normative comparisons have been provided when similar questions on the Minneapolis survey are included in NRC’s database and there are at least five jurisdictions in which the question was asked, though most questions are compared to more than five other jurisdictions across the country. Where comparisons are available, Minneapolis results are noted as being “above” the norm, “below” the norm or “similar to” the norm. This evaluation of “above,” “below” or “similar to” comes from a statistical comparison of Minneapolis’s rating to the average rating from all the comparison jurisdictions where a similar question was asked. Differences of three or more points on a 100-point scale between Minneapolis’s ratings and the average based on the appropriate comparisons from the database are considered “statistically significant,” and thus are marked as “above” or “below” the average. When differences between Minneapolis’s ratings and the national average or select cities average are less than two points, they are marked as “similar to” the average.

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