



Winston-Salem

Office of
Performance &
Accountability

P.O. Box 2511
Winston-Salem, NC 27102
CityLink 311 (336.727.8000)
Fax 336.727.2878
www.cityofws.org

Memorandum

TO: Lee Garrity, City Manager
FROM: Scott Tesh, Performance and Accountability Director
DATE: 7/25/2017
SUBJECT: Citizen Survey
CC: Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The most recent Winston-Salem Citizen Satisfaction Survey was completed in the Fall of 2011. This was the fourth time since 2005 residents had been formally surveyed regarding their experiences and opinions related to City services. Telephone surveys were conducted in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The 2011 survey was carried out as a part of the National Citizen Survey (NCS) by a third party vendor. Citizens were contacted and surveyed through the US mail. A supplemental web survey was also conducted in December 2011.

The NCS is a uniform survey tool that questions residents about their satisfaction with city services in eight categories: Community Quality, Community Design, Public Safety, Recreation and Wellness, Civic Engagement, Environmental Sustainability, Community Inclusiveness, and Public Trust. The NCS is administered through the mail, with an option to complete online. Survey results for the City were compared with national averages and results gathered from similarly-sized southern regional jurisdictions for benchmarking purposes. All prior survey response pools, regardless of method, have been statistically representative of the whole of the City population.

In June 2017, the Mayor and City Council adopted a FY 2017-18 budget that included \$38,750 in funding to conduct a statistically significant citizen survey, similar to the previous surveys. Engaging residents in such a way would provide valuable feedback on the perceived effectiveness of City services, as well as meaningful benchmarking data with selected peer groups.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

There are four common methods of data collection leveraged by survey research firms. Responses are typically solicited through mailed surveys, internet-based surveys, telephone surveys, face-to-face interviews, or a combination of these instruments. Considerations related to cost effectiveness, quality of response, the rate of response, and timing of the study can have a significant impact on the efficacy of the data collected and value to city management. A challenging response rate is acknowledged to be from 50-60% in certain data collection methods mentioned above with actual response rate for municipal citizen surveys often being significantly less than 50%. Further, considerations must be made to ensure that the data collected in prior studies is accurately comparable to current results.

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Call 311 or 336-727-8000
citylink@cityofws.org

City Council: Mayor Allen Joines; Vivian H. Burke, Mayor Pro Tempore, Northeast Ward; Denise D. Adams, North Ward; Dan Besse, Southwest Ward; Robert C. Clark, West Ward; John C. Larson, South Ward; Jeff MacIntosh, Northwest Ward; Derwin L. Montgomery, East Ward; James Taylor, Jr., Southeast Ward; City Manager: Lee D. Garrity

At one time, telephone surveys were the most utilized method of data collection. However, the recent technological trends increasing wireless-only households and standard caller identification have reduced the effectiveness of the telephone method. The Pew Research Center reports that average response rates for telephone surveys have fallen in recent years and several research methods studies have shown a diminishing difference in response rates between telephone and mail surveys. While firms have begun to alter their selection and collection methods to account for this trend, telephone communication is no longer the preferred method.

Mail surveys have a lower response rate than the face-to-face method but are a lower cost option. Mailed surveys average a 35-40% response rate nationally. This option also has the longest window required for administration. Address-based surveys allow for geocoding and provide a more complete sampling frame than telephone surveys.

Face-to-face surveys have the highest response rate, along with the highest associated costs. As such, they are typically reserved for complex or confusing studies that require trained interviewers or areas where telephone and mail studies are not appropriate. Internet only based methods (web and social media) are the quickest to administer and least expensive option but face several significant limitations related to sampling, accuracy, and response rates and are not recommended to be used in a standalone setting.

The University of North Carolina School of Government maintains a Citizen Survey webpage as a research reference for cities and counties in North Carolina. A review of the most recent surveys completed by 13 of the largest cities and counties in North Carolina (jurisdictions shown below) showed the mail survey method as the primary choice. Nine of the thirteen surveys used mail as the primary method with seven of those nine including either a phone or web-based component. The remaining four jurisdictions chose the telephone as the primary survey method. None of the jurisdictions used face-to-face interviews.

Cities

Asheville, NC
 Cary, NC
 Chapel Hill, NC
 Charlotte, NC
 Durham, NC
 Fayetteville, NC
 Greensboro, NC
 Wilmington, NC

Counties

Chatham County, NC
 Durham County, NC
 Mecklenburg County, NC
 New Hanover County, NC
 Wake County, NC

RECOMMENDATION

There are two immediate goals to be accomplished with the completion of the citizen satisfaction survey. First, the survey should capture citizen satisfaction levels with selected areas of current service delivery. Second, results should provide management with selected benchmarking performance measures to compare to prior City results and with selected peer groups.

Staff recommends:

1. Advertising a RFP for professional delivery
2. Using a mail delivery method to include:
 - a. Post cards alerting recipients to selection and that they should expect to see a survey in the mail soon.
 - b. Mail surveys with cover letters explaining the reason for the survey.
3. Including add alternates to increase response rates:
 - a. Incentives upon completion – shown to increase response rates by 19% on average. Typically, incentives have been some form of gift card.
 - b. Limited/targeted telephone follow-up or additional survey
 - c. Web-based option – with mobile support for phone and tablet devices

The recommendations above provide for a statistically significant survey instrument. In addition to this feedback, staff recommends further engagement during the budget process to include a more simplified survey targeted to certain community groups and identified stakeholders, as well as posting the simplified survey online. Staff from the Office of Performance and Accountability and the Budget and Evaluation Office would work with Marketing and Communications to create an effective social media marketing strategy for the survey. Other similarly-sized jurisdictions have received feedback from these strategies with greater response rates than a citizen survey; however, one must use caution that this feedback may contain self-selection bias. This more limited survey would act as a complement to the citizen survey, providing feedback from additional users.

With the endorsement of the Finance Committee, staff will move forward with issuing a RFP in the month of August. Doing so would provide meaningful information to inform the FY 2018-19 budget process and additional discussions regarding strategic priorities. A follow-up information item will come back to City Council after a vendor is selected and the full scope of work is solidified. A draft schedule is shown below:

August – RFP issued

September – Vendor selection and scoping

October/November – Survey preparation

December – Survey conducted

January – Survey analysis, draft report, and feedback

February – Final report submitted to City

March – Presentation to City Council