

Introduction to The National Citizen Survey™

What is The National Citizen Survey™?

A citizen survey is a general survey of resident attitude about local quality of life, quality of service delivery, resident activity and resident demography. Many include questions of local policy significance.

A citizen survey provides the vehicle through which the voices of those who are the typical recipients of government services are joined with those who usually chart the direction of government. The typical resident is no expert, lobbyist, or leader. The typical resident has less time on her hands, may be less robust or outgoing than “the usual suspects” who attend the budget hearings and town meetings.

A citizen survey offers to elected officials and administrators the perspectives on service delivery and community quality that cannot be deduced from records of complaints, comments at public hearings or whispers at community picnics.

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) will allow your jurisdiction to conduct a survey of residents and compare the results to those found across America.

The NCS addresses the following areas: quality of life, quality of community characteristics, speed of growth, potential problems affecting the community, safety, service delivery, public trust, local policy questions (if desired by the community) and local demographic characteristics.

Blue Ribbon Panel

A collection of experts agreed to review The NCS™. They considered a number of elements including content, wording, order, length, and layout. Our panelists include:

James Cavanaugh, *Financial Business Analyst*, Pennsylvania Bureau of Correctional Industries

James Fountain, *Assistant Director of Research*, Governmental Accounting Standards Board

Tom Guterbock, *Director*, Center for Survey Research, University of Virginia

Michael Lawson, *Director*, ICMA Center for Performance Management

Derek Okubo, *Director*, National Headquarters and Community Services, National Civic League

David Swindell, Ph.D., *Director*, Master of Public Administration Program, Department of Political Science, Clemson University

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What are national norms?

NRC's database includes the results from citizen surveys conducted in over 400 jurisdictions in the United States. These are public opinion polls answered by more than 250,000 residents around the country. We have recorded, analyzed and stored responses to over 6,000 survey questions dealing with resident perceptions about the quality of community life and public trust and residents' report of their use of public facilities. Respondents to these surveys are intended to represent over 40 million Americans.

This comparative information can help you interpret the citizen survey results. We don't know what is small or tall without comparing. Taking the pulse of the community has little meaning without knowing what pulse rate is too high and what is too low. So many surveys of service satisfaction turn up at least "good" citizen evaluations that 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 our residents' ratings of fire service compare to opinions about fire service in other communities.

Who is NRC?

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. Our principals have worked more than 20 years with government leaders on issues in critical areas such as customer satisfaction, transportation, land use, personnel, special needs human services, law enforcement, libraries, parks, recreation, water use and conservation, recycling, health care and more. In addition, we have worked with clients on needs assessments in health care and human services as well as training and writing about human service outcomes and more.

The principles of NRC have authored several articles about citizen survey research methods, social science and health care outcomes in journals and books devoted to public management and health care as well as authoring 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 and County Management Association in April, 2000.

Who is ICMA?

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) is the professional and educational organization representing appointed managers and administrators in local governments throughout the world.

ICMA, from its inception in 1914, has continued to serve a number of essential functions for professional local government management executives. In so doing, the association

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has improved the quality of local government in which its members serve. As the number of local governments adopting the council-manager form of government has grown, so has the ICMA membership, in terms of both numbers and professional knowledge and skills.

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