

Dakota County, Minnesota Residential Survey: Report of Results (May 2006)

Executive Summary

Background

- Understanding the needs of residents is important to Dakota County government. A periodic survey of residents' opinions has been conducted several times over the past 20 years. In 2006, Dakota County chose to collaborate on this survey project with neighboring Scott and Washington Counties. Scott and Dakota Counties collaborated during the 2004 Residential Survey administration, with Washington County joining for the first time during the 2006 administration. The three counties worked together with National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) to develop a survey instrument with a set of shared questions, as well as questions unique to each County. This executive summary includes Dakota County's results.

Methods

- The Dakota County Residential Survey was administered by phone to a representative sample of 700 residents from March 1 to March 23, 2006. A total of 100 surveys were completed in each of seven County Commissioner Districts. The response rate was 15%.
- The margin of error is no greater than plus or minus 3.7 percentage points around any given percent, based on the entire sample (700 completed interviews).
- When possible, comparisons between survey years are made through the conversion of ratings to a 100-point scale.

Findings

Quality of Life

- Dakota County residents rated their overall quality of life in the county. Thirty-seven percent of respondents gave the overall quality of life a rating of "excellent," and 55% rated it as "good." Dakota County's overall quality of life was higher than ratings given by other counties in the normative data set.
- As in 2004 and 2001, over one-quarter of respondents reported that their location was the one thing they liked most about living in Dakota County in 2006.
- Respondents rated a set of community characteristics giving the highest ratings to "access to parks" (average rating of 75 on the 100-point scale) and "access to trails" (69 out of 100).

Issues Impacting the Community

- The most serious issue facing the County, as perceived by respondents, was growth and development (26% of respondents), followed by taxes (14%), schools (11%), and traffic congestion (8%). This is similar to results from 2004.
- About one-third of respondents felt that illegal drug use, underage drinking, obesity, the health and support for the elderly and disabled, and youth tobacco were major health concerns.

Quality of Service Delivery

- In 2006, 90% of county residents reported "somewhat" or "strongly" approving of the job the Dakota County Board is doing, compared to 94% in 2004.
- As in 2004, County libraries were rated the highest (78 on the 100-point scale) among services delivered by the County. Libraries were followed by County parks and recreation (74 out of 100), the trail and bikeway system (70 out of 100), and Sheriff services (70 out of 100).
- The lowest rated services were public transportation/transit services (47 out of 100), and services to low-income residents (51 out of 100). While these were the lowest rated services, each was considered above the norm when compared to counties in the normative data set.
- Of the 11 services that were compared to the national norm for counties, nine of the services were rated above the norm and two of the services were similar to the norm.

- Most residents “somewhat” or “strongly” agreed with statement, “the services that the County provides improve the quality of life in my neighborhood.”

Public Trust

- Survey respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with several statements about the Dakota County government. About 80% of respondents “somewhat” or “strongly” agreed that they understood how County services affected them, that they receive good value for the Dakota County taxes they pay, and that Dakota County does a good job of managing tax dollars.
- Compared to counties across the nation, Dakota County was above the norm for their citizens feeling they receive good value for County taxes they pay and that their County government listens to them.

Contacting County Government

- As in 2004, about 50% of respondents had visited or telephoned a County government office within the previous 12 months, and most of those making contact with the County government (80%) rated their overall impression of Dakota County as “excellent” or “good.” This rating was higher than average ratings from other counties.

Public Information

- Respondents cited television news broadcasts, daily newspapers, and weekly community newspapers most often as “major” sources of information about Dakota County. The Internet increased from 27% of respondents naming it a “major” source of information in 2004 to 37% in 2006.

Parks and Recreation

- Most respondents thought that natural resource preservation and recreation, activity-based recreation, and socially-oriented recreation were “essential” or “very important” park activities, and about 90% felt that Dakota County parks provided for these activities “very” or “somewhat” well.

Policy Questions

- County residents were asked whether they would support or oppose increasing their property tax to maintain services at current levels. Only 46% percent of respondents said they would “somewhat” or “strongly support” a property tax increase compared to 55% in 2004 and 54% in 2001.
- Respondents supported improving current levels of service to decrease congestion, even if it results in increased taxes. They also supported maintaining current levels of transportation service, even if taxes increase or reductions occur in other County programs. They supported these options more strongly than they supported funding transportation projects at current levels.
- Eighty-seven percent of respondents “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed that getting services to infants and toddlers at risk should be a priority for Dakota County.

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