

City of Cartersville, GA

Reporting citizen survey results

For the city of Cartersville, conducting a biennial citywide survey is an essential way to gauge citizens' satisfaction with what they are getting for their tax dollars.

The city of Cartersville has a long history of conducting citizen surveys. Prior to enrolling with the National Citizen Survey™ (NCS) in 2003, the city used other survey services to gain citizen feedback. Although results from

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previous surveys were helpful, the results did not permit the level of analysis that the city desired. Wanting to ask citizens customized questions and develop reliable trend data, the city of Cartersville began to research other survey instruments. The city ultimately chose NCS because of its customization options, ability to track trends, and affiliation with ICMA.

Other NCS features that appealed to Cartersville included

- Customized survey form
- Customized cover letter accompanying survey form
- Three mailings each to 1,200 randomly selected households
- Data coding and cleaning
- Comparisons of results with weighted population norms
- Executive summary and statistical analysis of survey results
- Access to technical assistance.

The NCS also offers at additional cost larger mailings, Spanish-language surveys, open-ended questions, Web-based surveys, and presentation of results to elected officials (and others).

It's all about your audience

After receiving the survey results from the NCS, Cartersville staff began to brainstorm ways in which to report the results. Wanting to balance the competing demands of sharing the results as much as possible with keeping the report as easily digestible as possible, staff decided to report a portion of the survey results at the end of each council meeting. Survey results are also reported in the city's newsletter and published on the city's Web site.

In the report of survey results at Cartersville's city council meetings, the city manager, Sam Grove, spends approximately 10 minutes explaining the results from one section of the survey. A question-and-answer session follows.

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Case Profile

Population:

20,568

Square miles:

28

Median household income:

\$41,162

Form of government:

Council-manager



For additional information about the practices described in this case study, please contact Elaine Edwards, assistant to city manager, at eedwards@cityofcartersville.org.

and reach a wide audience. Councilmembers themselves have said that they find the presentations very useful and informative. Moreover, councilmembers frequently refer to results from the presentations when discussing key policy issues.

Reporting in action

An example of how to use results from citizen surveys to inform local government decisions can be seen in the city of Cartersville's process for implementing transportation impact fees.

In 2003, Cartersville took advantage of the NCS option to add customized questions to its survey, and it asked residents whether they would support the introduction of transportation impact fees. Survey results showed that only 49 percent of residents either strongly supported or somewhat supported the use of transportation impact fees to fund road improvements. Based on these results, the city decided not to implement the fees at that time.

In its 2005 NCS survey, the city included the transportation impact fee question again. This time, 75 percent of respondents indicated that they either strongly supported or somewhat supported the fees. The results were reported at a city council meeting, informing the council and the public that the majority of residents supported the introduction of transportation impact fees—and the council voted to implement the fees.

Cartersville has also used the NCS to guide policy on such issues as support for a sales tax-funded civic center and the establishment of a stormwater utility. Going forward, the city plans to use customized survey questions to guide decisions on greenspace management, tree ordinances, and redevelopment districts.