ICMA

Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

Local Government Sustainability Practices, 2015
Summary Report – March 2016

The 2015 Local Government Sustainability Practices Survey is a joint project of ICMA, the Sustainable Communities and Small Town and Rural Planning Divisions of the American Planning Association, Binghamton University, Cornell University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The survey was administered in paper format via direct mail, with an online submission option. The survey was sent to 8,562 local governments and achieved a response rate of 22.2%, with 1,899 local governments responding.

Survey Highlights

- While **47.3%** of responding jurisdictions identify environmental protection as a priority (Question 1), only **31.5%** report adoption of a sustainability plan (Q2).

- Survey results suggest that the **economic impacts** of sustainability efforts are very important to local governments.

  - Among jurisdictions that have adopted a sustainability plan, **67.6%** indicate that those plans contain goals or strategies for economic development (Q2a).

  - Potential for **fiscal savings** and potential to **attract development projects** are among the top five motivating factors for local government sustainability efforts (Q35).

- Survey results suggest a greater need for **public engagement** around sustainability

  - **58.6%** of responding jurisdictions report that public participation has had little or no impact in shaping sustainability plans and strategies (Q12).

- The five factors most commonly reported as being *"significant"* or *"very significant"* in **motivating** local governments' sustainability efforts are as follows (Q35):

  1. Potential for fiscal savings
  2. Leadership of local elected officials
  3. Federal or state funding opportunities
  4. Potential to attract development projects
  5. Concern over the environment.

- The five factors most commonly reported as being *"significant"* or *"very significant"* in **hindering** local governments' sustainability efforts are as follows (Q35):

  1. Lack of funding
  2. State or federal funding restrictions
  3. Lack of staff capacity/support
  4. Lack of information on how to proceed
 5. Lack of community/resident support.

Has your jurisdiction adopted a sustainability plan?
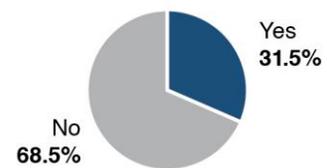
Yes 31.5%
No 68.5%

How much impact has public participation had in shaping sustainability plans and strategies in your community?

No impact 32.6%
A lot of impact 13.8%
A little impact 26.0%
Some impact 27.5%

How significant are the following factors in <u>motivating</u> sustainability efforts by your local government?

Potential for fiscal savings
Leadership of local elected officials
Federal or state funding opportunities
Potential to attract development projects
Concern over the environment

■ Very significant ■ Significant ▨ Limited significance ▨ Not significant

How significant are the following factors in <u>hindering</u> sustainability efforts by your local government?

Lack of funding
State or federal funding restrictions
Lack of staff capacity / support
Lack of information on how to proceed
Lack of community / resident support
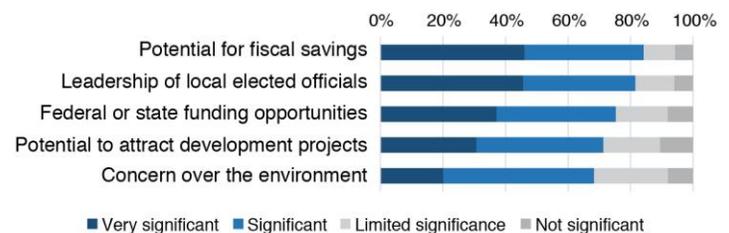
■ Very significant ■ Significant ▨ Limited significance ▨ Not significant
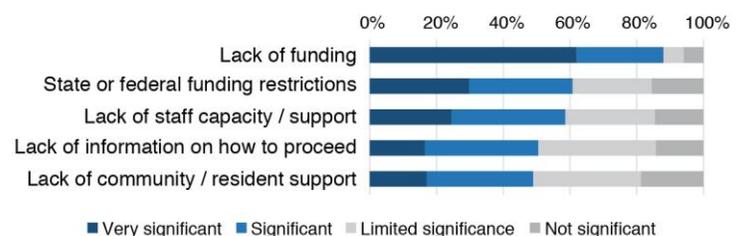
Summary of Survey Results

The summary below shows response percentages for each question. Please note that not all local governments answered each question, so the percentages are not based on all survey respondents. The number reporting (N) is provided for each question.

1. Indicate which of the following are a priority in your jurisdiction. (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Environmental protection	47.3%
b. Social equity	26.1%
c. Economic development	90.5%
d. Other	13.7%

2. Has your jurisdiction adopted a sustainability plan? (N=1,859)

Yes	31.5%
No	68.5%

2a. If "yes", please indicate if the plan contains goals or strategies for any of the following. (Check all that apply.) (N=586)

1. Social equity	21.8%
2. Energy conservation	60.1%
3. Climate change	30.9%
4. Economic development	67.6%
5. Disaster mitigation	47.8%
6. Public health	37.2%
7. Community resiliency	34.3%
8. Green energy production	36.7%
9. Other	13.3%

2b. If "yes", does the sustainability plan include performance measures? (N=510)

Yes	54.3%
No	45.7%

3. Which of the following sustainability actions has your government undertaken? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Dedicated a budget line item specifically for sustainability or environmental protection	18.6%
b. Adopted a climate mitigation plan	6.4%
c. Adopted a climate adaptation plan	3.2%
d. Conducted a greenhouse gas inventory of local government operations	14.1%
e. Conducted a greenhouse gas inventory of the community	9.1%
f. Set greenhouse gas reduction targets for local government operations	10.7%
g. Set greenhouse gas reduction targets for the community	7.0%

4. Has your local government had to respond to a major disaster in the past 15 years? (N=1,862)

Yes	76.0%
No	24.0%

4a. If yes, what type? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,415)

1. Hurricane	23.7%
2. Earthquake	2.8%
3. Tornado	18.9%
4. Wildfire	10.2%
5. Flood	53.1%
6. Drought	15.3%
7. Blizzard or ice storm	50.5%
8. Toxic spill	5.6%
9. Other	9.1%

5. Do you have a hazard mitigation plan or an emergency evacuation/relocation plan? (N=1,804)

Yes   86.9%
No   13.1%

5a. If yes, does either plan specifically address issues of at-risk (low income, seniors, etc.) residents? (N=1,330)

Yes   68.6%
No   31.4%

6. Do the <u>departments in your jurisdiction</u> coordinate on the following programs or policies?

	Yes	No	No program or policy
a. Economic development (N=1,805)	85.0%	4.4%	10.6%
b. Land use planning/permitting (N=1,816)	90.6%	3.9%	5.5%
c. Environmental protection (N=1,730)	64.6%	13.4%	22.0%
d. Seeking funding and grants (N=1,798)	84.5%	7.7%	7.8%
e. Storm water management (N=1,768)	81.6%	8.4%	10.1%
f. Energy planning (N=1,667)	40.7%	25.1%	34.3%
g. Provision of affordable housing (N=1,697)	50.4%	22.0%	27.5%
h. Hazard mitigation/evacuation planning (N=1,760)	84.4%	7.0%	8.6%
i. Climate change mitigation (N=1,617)	11.5%	32.2%	56.3%
j. Climate change adaptation (N=1,602)	9.0%	33.1%	57.9%
k. Open space/farmland preservation (N=1,707)	54.7%	16.9%	28.4%

7. Do <u>localities in your region</u> coordinate on the following programs or policies?

	Yes	No	No program or policy
a. Economic development (N=1,779)	81.7%	12.6%	5.6%
b. Land use planning and permitting (N=1,750)	72.8%	21.4%	5.8%
c. Environmental protection (N=1,703)	61.0%	25.1%	14.0%
d. Seeking funding and grants (N=1,741)	67.8%	23.5%	8.7%
e. Storm water management (N=1,716)	67.9%	23.3%	8.9%
f. Provision of affordable housing (N=1,683)	52.8%	31.7%	15.6%
g. Hazard mitigation/evacuation planning (N=1,737)	79.5%	13.2%	7.3%
h. Climate change mitigation (N=1,630)	20.2%	41.7%	38.1%
i. Climate change adaptation (N=1,582)	16.2%	43.0%	40.8%
j. Open space/farmland preservation (N=1,646)	48.1%	31.9%	20.0%
k. Watershed management (N=1,693)	73.1%	16.1%	10.8%
l. Roads, public transit, and/or bike-pedestrian systems (N=1,755)	85.3%	8.9%	5.8%

8. Does your local government own any of the following municipal utilities? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Electric utility	10.6%
b. Storm water utility	32.8%
c. Gas utility	3.3%
d. Water utility	55.5%
e. District heating	0.4%
f. Wastewater utility	52.9%
g. Communications utility (e.g., cable, telephone, Internet)	2.8%

9. Is any part of your community served by an electric cooperative? (N=1,777)

Yes   37.4%
No   62.6%

10. Does your community have a plan or program to extend Internet access to all? (N=1,815)

Yes   16.3%
No   83.7%

11. Which scenario best describes your jurisdiction's staffing on sustainability? (N=1,792)

Dedicated staffing in chief elected/appointed official's office	6.4%
Dedicated staffing across multiple departments	9.0%
No dedicated staffing, but goals recognized across departments	24.1%
Dedicated staffing within a single department	9.1%
No dedicated staffing, but a task force/committee	9.3%
No staffing, goal recognition, or task force/committee	42.2%

12. How much impact has public participation had in shaping sustainability plans and strategies in your community? (N=1,762)

A lot of impact	13.8%
Some impact	27.5%
A little impact	26.0%
No impact	32.6%

13. Please indicate how residents participate in planning strategies for sustainability? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Resident committees, commissions, and/or task forces	37.7%
b. Formal public hearings	30.6%
c. Public workshops or design charrettes	24.9%
d. Community surveys	25.4%
e. Social media (e.g., Facebook, texting, blogs)	25.0%
f. Other	4.4%

14. Which of the following energy actions has your jurisdiction taken in the last five years? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Established a fuel efficiency target for the government fleet of vehicles	13.8%
b. Increased the purchase of hybrid, plug-in hybrid, electric, or other fuel efficient vehicles	26.2%
c. Installed charging stations for electric vehicles	16.5%
d. Conducted energy audits of government buildings	63.1%
e. Established a policy to only purchase energy star equipment when available	14.2%
f. Upgraded or retrofitted government facilities to higher energy efficiency of office lighting	64.4%
g. Upgraded or retrofitted traffic signals to increase efficiency	34.9%
h. Upgraded or retrofitted streetlights or other exterior lighting to improve efficiency	45.4%
i. Upgraded or retrofitted government facilities to more energy efficient heating or air conditioning systems	49.2%
j. Upgraded or retrofitted facilities to higher efficiency pumps in the water or sewer systems	28.1%
k. Installed solar panels on a government facility	18.4%
l. Installed a geo-thermal system in a government facility	7.5%
m. Generated electricity through refuse disposal, wastewater treatment, or landfill operations	7.5%
n. Required all new government construction projects be certified green (e.g., LEED, Energy Star, etc.)	9.2%
o. Required all government renovation projects be certified green (e.g., LEED, Energy Star, etc.)	5.8%

15. Do you track the impact of conservation programs on energy usage by your government? (N=1,787)

Yes   29.2%
No   70.8%

15a. If yes, have the programs reduced energy usage in government operations? (N=536)

Yes   90.5%
No   9.5%

16. Does your government provide or support any of the following programs to the community? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Energy audits for *individual residences*	16.7%
b. Weatherization for *individual residences*	24.1%
c. Heating/air conditioning upgrades for *individual residences*	12.4%
d. Purchase of energy efficient appliances in *individual residences*	10.6%
e. Installation of solar equipment *on individual residences*	8.8%
f. Energy audits for *businesses*	11.7%
g. Weatherization for *businesses*	7.7%
h. Heating/air conditioning upgrades for *businesses*	6.7%
i. Purchase of energy efficient appliances for *businesses*	5.5%
j. Installation of solar equipment on *businesses*	7.6%

17. Please indicate if your local government has any energy conservation programs targeted to assist the following: (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Low-income residents	14.0%
b. Seniors	8.7%
c. Small businesses	4.5%
d. Non-profit organizations	2.7%
e. None	72.6%

18. Do you track the impact of conservation programs on energy usage in the community? (N=1,778)

Yes   7.9%
No   92.1%

18a. If yes, have the programs reduced energy usage in the community? (N=207)

Yes   58.9%
No   41.1%

19. Does poor air quality disproportionately impact minority or low-income areas of your community? (N=1,802)

Yes   4.1%
No   58.3%
Don't know   37.6%

20. Do you have local air pollution measures to reduce dust and/or particulate matter? (N=1,769)

Yes   19.1%
No   80.9%

21. Do you have any incentives in your <u>zoning</u> (e.g., expedited review, density bonus, tax reductions, etc.) for developers to provide community benefits (e.g., open space conservation, affordable housing, etc.)? (N=1,754)

Yes   38.5%
No   61.5%

22. Do your regulations require, allow, or incentivize the following in any part of your jurisdiction. (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

	Require	Allow	Incentivize	Not applicable
a. Higher density development near public transit nodes	3.3%	21.0%	6.8%	55.6%
b. Higher density development in areas with existing infrastructure	3.7%	32.4%	7.6%	41.9%
c. Accessory dwelling units, such as granny flats, basement units, etc.	0.5%	33.7%	1.1%	46.3%
d. Mixed use development	5.6%	54.4%	8.0%	23.2%
e. Sidewalks in new developments	46.7%	20.5%	2.1%	21.2%
f. Clustered (conservation) subdivision design	4.8%	40.7%	5.3%	35.2%
g. Low-impact design/green infrastructure (e.g., bioswales, rain gardens, etc.)	10.4%	35.9%	6.6%	34.4%
h. Sustainable or green residential or commercial building standards	5.1%	33.6%	5.9%	39.1%

23. If you have sustainable building policies, have they resulted in more green buildings? (N=1,762)

Yes   11.9%
No   11.7%
No policy   76.4%

24. Do you levy developer impact fees on any projects in your jurisdiction to pay for community benefits? (N=1,779)

Yes   36.2%
No   63.8%

25. Which of the following actions has your government taken to reduce or manage water usage? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Reuse of grey or reclaimed water in government buildings, public parks, or public facilities	14.4%
b. Provide for the reuse of grey water or reclaimed water on the landscaping of private homes or businesses	9.6%
c. Use water price structure to encourage water conservation	26.9%
d. Other incentives for water conservation behaviors by city, residents, and businesses	18.0%
e. Protect low-income households from water service shut off	8.1%
a. Reuse of grey or reclaimed water in government buildings, public parks, or public facilities	14.4%

26. Do you track the impact of water conservation programs on water usage? (N=1,778)

Yes   21.7%
No   78.3%

26a. If yes, have the programs reduced water usage in the community? (N=472)

Yes   72.0%
No   28.0%

27. Do you track quality-of-life indicators, such as education, cultural, diversity, and social well-being? (N=1,775)

Yes   26.9%
No   73.1%

28. Which of the following programs does your local government provide? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Financial support/incentives for affordable housing	30.2%
b. Supportive housing for people with disabilities	14.9%
c. Funding for early child care and education	15.9%
d. Housing options in community for homeless persons	11.8%
e. Housing options for elderly	19.5%
f. After school programs for children	27.8%

29. Does your government provide direct support (e.g., land, water, or other services) to community gardens? (N=1,813)

Yes 36.4%
No 63.6%

30. Has your government added or adopted any of the following in the past five years? (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Expanded public transit	25.2%
b. Widened sidewalks	36.3%
c. Walking or biking trails	63.5%
d. Car sharing program	4.4%
e. Charging stations for electric vehicles	16.4%
f. Expanded dedicated bike lanes on streets	32.1%
g. Bike sharing program	5.4%
h. Public transportation programs to assist low-income residents	21.5%

31. Please indicate which actions your government has taken to reduce or manage waste. (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

a. Implemented an internal recycling program in your local government	65.8%
b. Require minimum of 30% post-consumer recycled content for office paper use in government	11.5%
c. Community-wide, curbside recycling collection program for homes	57.1%
d. Community-wide, curbside recycling collection program for commercial properties	25.3%
e. Recycling of household hazardous waste	51.7%
f. Recycling of household electronic equipment (e-waste)	55.3%
g. Community-wide collection of yard waste material for composting	45.9%
h. Community-wide collection of food waste for composting	7.4%
i. Pay-As-You-Throw program with charges based on the amount of waste discarded	9.5%
j. Restrictions or bans on the use of plastic grocery bags	4.6%

32. Do you track the impact of recycling programs on recycling rates? (N=1,811)

Yes 44.7%
No 55.3%

32a. If yes, have the programs increased recycling? (N=819)

Yes 84.9%
No 15.1%

33. In developing sustainability strategies, how important are each of the following as sources of information?

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
a. Federal government (N=1,709)	19.6%	35.2%	29.9%	15.3%
b. State government (N=1,725)	28.3%	40.4%	23.4%	7.9%
c. Local, regional, or national environmental groups (N=1,716)	30.8%	40.6%	21.2%	7.4%
d. Appointed resident commissions or advisory boards (N=1,667)	22.3%	38.2%	24.2%	15.3%
e. Examples of other municipalities (N=1,703)	30.7%	47.4%	17.3%	4.6%
f. National or state local government organizations (e.g., ICMA) (N=1,699)	14.7%	44.7%	30.8%	9.9%
g. Regional governmental organizations (e.g., Council of Governments) (N=1,690)	18.9%	43.7%	26.0%	11.4%
h. Articles in professional magazines and websites (N=1,662)	9.0%	34.8%	42.4%	13.8%
i. Other (N=178)	23.0%	14.6%	15.2%	47.2%

34. Please indicate the sources of funding for each kind of sustainability policy or program. (Check all that apply.) (N=1,899)

	Local govt	State/fed govt	Utility	Private grant	Other	No program
a. Reduction of energy use in govt. operations	33.7%	19.1%	18.4%	2.8%	1.4%	38.8%
b. Reduction of community energy use	11.6%	8.5%	19.1%	1.8%	1.2%	55.6%
c. Increase in renewable energy in govt. operations	19.1%	14.0%	10.0%	1.7%	1.5%	54.3%
d. Housing affordability	23.7%	33.2%	1.0%	4.3%	3.7%	42.5%

35. How significant are the following factors in <u>motivating sustainability</u> efforts by your local government?

	Very significant	Significant	Limited significance	Not significant
a. Federal or state policies (N=1,626)	22.7%	40.0%	25.6%	11.7%
b. Federal or state funding opportunities (N=1,634)	37.2%	38.1%	16.6%	8.1%
c. Leadership of regional/state officials (N=1,628)	17.6%	41.5%	30.5%	10.4%
d. Leadership of local elected officials (N=1,643)	45.8%	35.8%	12.4%	6.0%
e. Potential for fiscal savings (N=1,643)	46.0%	38.2%	10.0%	5.7%
f. Potential to attract development projects (N=1,632)	30.7%	40.6%	18.2%	10.5%
g. Concern over the environment (N=1,640)	20.1%	48.2%	23.6%	8.0%
h. Desire to promote social equity (N=1,628)	8.1%	30.7%	41.6%	19.6%
i. Pressure from residents (N=1,629)	14.2%	37.4%	33.2%	15.1%
j. Pressure from advocacy groups (N=1,622)	5.8%	25.3%	48.5%	20.4%
k. Pressure from business/industry (N=1,618)	9.5%	32.4%	39.0%	19.2%
l. Desire/expertise of municipal staff (N=1,620)	14.9%	46.9%	28.0%	10.3%
m. Threat of lawsuits (N=1,590)	6.0%	18.6%	33.8%	41.6%
n. Other (N=118)	9.3%	7.6%	16.1%	66.9%

36. How significant are the following factors in <u>hindering sustainability</u> efforts by your local government?

	Very significant	Significant	Limited significance	Not significant
a. State or federal government policies (N=1,589)	20.5%	25.8%	32.2%	21.6%
b. State or federal funding restrictions (N=1,598)	29.8%	31.0%	23.7%	15.5%
c. Opposition of elected officials (N=1,594)	23.4%	25.3%	28.7%	22.6%
d. Lack of funding (N=1,633)	61.8%	26.1%	6.1%	5.9%
e. Lack of information on how to proceed (N=1,595)	16.5%	34.0%	35.2%	14.2%
f. Opposition of business/industry (N=1,591)	9.4%	26.4%	37.7%	26.5%
g. Lack of qualified private contractors (N=1,586)	7.2%	19.8%	43.3%	29.8%
h. Lack of staff capacity/support (N=1,612)	24.6%	34.1%	26.9%	14.5%
i. Lack of community/resident support (N=1,595)	17.1%	31.9%	32.2%	18.7%
j. Challenges coordinating across agencies (N=1,594)	9.2%	27.3%	42.7%	20.8%
k. Challenges coordinating across jurisdictions (N=1,587)	9.6%	28.6%	40.4%	21.4%
l. Threat of lawsuits (N=1,554)	5.8%	10.9%	34.1%	49.2%
m. Other (N=114)	8.8%	7.9%	14.9%	68.4%

For questions, contact ICMA Survey Research at surveyresearch@icma.org.