



NESPMP Citizen Satisfaction Survey Results: Newport, RI

Five cities and towns in the New England States Performance Measurement Project (NESPMP) participated in their first online citizen satisfaction survey in the fall of 2009. The purpose of the survey was to determine what residents think of the services provided by their municipal government and how they view the quality of life in their town or city. The leadership of these participating towns believes that obtaining residents' views is critical to their ability to provide the best level of services while utilizing tax dollars most effectively and efficiently. The areas surveyed included public works, parks and recreation, police, fire, emergency services/rescue, public education, permitting and code enforcement, town management and administrative leadership. We hope the results of the survey will be analyzed and used to enhance the decision-making process and to indicate where there is need to improve the delivery of services and where the town is performing well.

The findings for Newport, RI, below are based on this online survey. Approximately 2,900 residents were sent postcards inviting them to participate. A total of 369 residents completed the survey for a response rate of about 12.7%.¹ Among respondents, 79% have lived in Newport for 11 or more years, about 74% were employed outside the home, 62.2% were male, 51% were between the ages of 45-64, 95% were Caucasian, and about 71% had no children under the age of 18 currently living in their household.

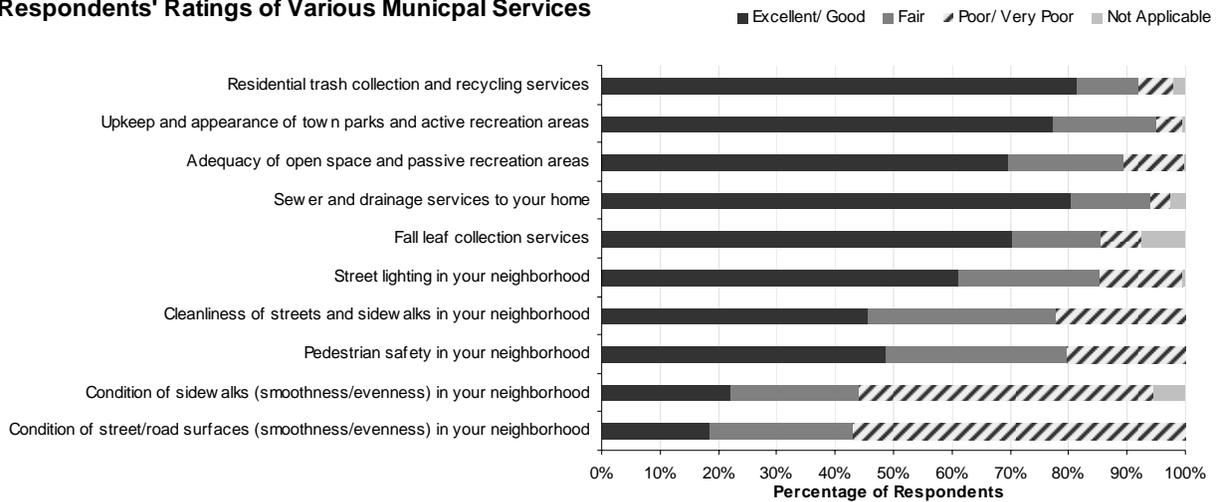
The results indicate that in several areas, the majority of respondents are satisfied with Newport as a place to live and its quality of life and with the services provided by the city. Eighty-five percent of respondents were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the overall quality of life in Newport. Respondents were less satisfied with the city's efforts to attract businesses and jobs to the area (66% were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied"). About 63% of respondents were satisfied with the overall appearance of Newport.

When respondents were asked to rate a variety of municipal services based on their own observations and experiences, high ratings went to the city's residential trash collection and recycling services, with 85% of respondents rating this service as "excellent" or "good." Seventy-seven percent of respondents rated the upkeep and appearance of city parks and recreation areas as "excellent" or "good." Lower ratings went to the condition of streets and sidewalks. About nineteen percent of respondents rated the condition of street and road surfaces

¹ However, other citizens were informed of the survey as information on how to access the survey was published in the local newspaper and on local blogs. We do not know how many respondents were those that were contacted via postcard verse those that heard about the survey through these other channels. Therefore, it is difficult to determine a true response rate for Newport.

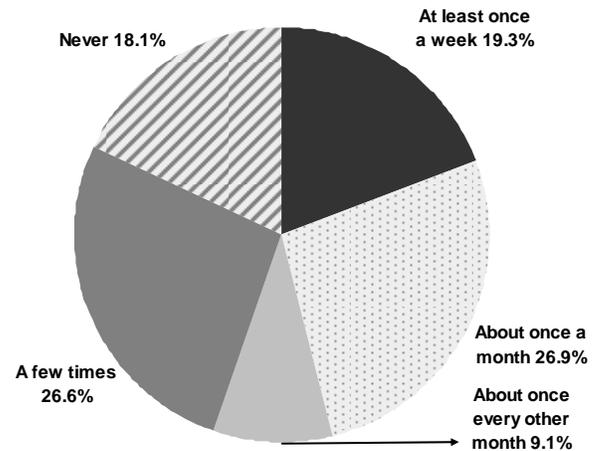
as “excellent” or “good,” while another 24.6% rated them as “fair” and the remaining 57% said “poor” or “very poor.” Twenty-two percent of respondents gave an “excellent” or “good” rating to their neighborhood sidewalks, 22% said “fair,” and 50% said “poor” or “very poor.” Seventy-three percent of respondents said they “strongly agree” or “agree” that major roads/arteries are passable during or shortly after a winter storm event, while about 56% agreed that residential streets were passable the day after a winter storm event.

Respondents' Ratings of Various Municipal Services



Eighty-two percent of respondents have utilized the public library during the past year, and gave high satisfaction ratings to a number of services or features of the public library, especially library facilities. One-hundred percent of respondents with an opinion were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the accessibility to services and facilities, while 99.6% were satisfied with the cleanliness and maintenance of facilities. There was a bit less satisfaction with the variety of programs offered, where 93.5% of respondents were “satisfied” or “very satisfied,” and with the quality of young adult programs and services offered (92.9%).

During the past 12 months, approximately how often have you or other members of your household used the Public Library facilities and/or online services?



About 43% of respondents or someone in their household had received assistance from the Police Department over the past year, and of these respondents, 79.3% were satisfied with the Police Department’s response time, 75% were satisfied with the professionalism of staff, and 76.4% were satisfied with the quality of service provided.

About 28% of respondents or someone in their household had received assistance from the Fire Department over the past year, of which 22% received fire suppression services (72% received emergency medical services and 30% answered “other”).² Of respondents who had contact with the Fire Department in the past year, 96.6% were satisfied with the department’s response time, the professionalism of staff, and with the quality of service provided. Of the 24% of respondents who called 911 in the past year for emergency services, 92.3% were satisfied with the assistance received from the person who took their 911 call.

Almost half of respondents (48.8%) currently, or at some point, have or had children attend the public schools. The highest ratings were given to the student-teacher ratio, or class size (76% of respondents with an opinion were “very satisfied” or “satisfied”), and with other activities, including athletics (73% satisfied) and other extracurricular activities (74.4% satisfied). Much lower ratings were given to the quality of curriculum (57.3% of respondents with an opinion were “very satisfied” or “satisfied”) and with the administration at the district level (54.5% satisfied).

About 21% of respondents had applied for a building permit or had been a part of the permit process in the town during the past year. Of these respondents, 75% were satisfied with the ease of obtaining information and materials during the process; 79% agreed that town staff was knowledgeable about the overall process; and 82% of respondents with an opinion were satisfied with the inspection process.

The majority of respondents were dissatisfied with the leadership in Newport. About 68% of respondents with an opinion were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the leadership of elected officials in the city, while about 53% of respondents with an opinion were “very dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied” with the leadership of appointed officials. Respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with various town offices and departments that they have been in contact with over the past year. High ratings of users were given to Emergency Medical Services – Rescue (90.7% satisfied), the Fire Department (88.4% satisfied), and Recreational Department and Services (79.5% satisfied). Lower ratings were given to Economic Development (37.3% satisfied), Information Technology/ services (42% satisfied), and to the City Manager/ Administration office (44.7% satisfied).

Residents were generally satisfied with services but dissatisfied with elected officials and administrative leadership. This dichotomy seems to require further probing.

² Respondents could check more than one option, so values may add up to more than 100%.