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Grading North Carolina's Local Governments: Satisfaction Dips with Economy and Local Spending Decisions

Ann Arbor, Mich. (June 23, 2009) – Current frustrations with the economy and local budget decisions reduce community satisfaction, but local officials lift scores in other areas, according to a new study.

The 2009 North Carolina Baseline Study of the [Cobalt Citizen Satisfaction Survey \(CCSS\)](#) posted a 58 on a 100-point scale. Citizen satisfaction with North Carolina's local communities matches the national score of 58. Community scores for all states studied lag below other economic sectors measured by the ACSI.

The Cobalt Citizen Satisfaction Survey measures 15 community characteristics and local government services. North Carolina citizens are most satisfied with Library (76), Utility Services (76) and Fire Department (78). Least satisfied areas include: Economic Health (46), Local Government Management (53), and Managing Diversity (51).

Under Local Government Management, citizens were particularly dissatisfied with how they believe their tax dollars are being spent (44) and communication with the public (52). The lowest scoring component for Economic Health was quality of jobs (40). The lowest scoring component for Diversity was efforts to support ethnic group interaction (45).

The nonprofit survey program is emerging as a leader in measuring local government satisfaction and performance. It employs the scientific methodology of the University of Michigan's American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

“The national economy gets the headlines, but local economies are feeling it and it shows,” said Xavier Quenaudon, vice president with CFI Group and head of analysis for the study. “In many communities, rising unemployment, depreciating home values, and a shrinking tax base make it tough for communities to fully support important local initiatives, and staffing is tight to support programs. It's a real challenge for leadership.”

The North Carolina study reveals a clear relationship between citizens' satisfaction and support for the community. There is a practical link with remaining in the community, recommending it to others, volunteering, and encouraging business startups.

“Building higher citizen satisfaction means stronger support for local leaders, greater commitment to and investment in the community, and a stronger position for growth,” said William SaintAmour, executive director of the nonprofit Cobalt Community Research. “Tracking and acting on community satisfaction is vital to effective community leadership.”

The Cobalt Citizen Satisfaction Survey program helps individual communities optimize limited resources by measuring the effect each community component has on citizen satisfaction and quality of life. It delivers a high-quality, affordable benchmark that local governments can use annually to plug into budget and planning efforts.

“Not all priorities are created equal, so it is important to identify where communities will get their biggest bang for the taxpayer buck,” said Quenaudon. “Citizens are essentially telling us that community leadership is falling short in economic health, spending decisions, and communication. Improvement is easier said than done. Knowing where to put your resources is a start.”

“The Cobalt Citizen Satisfaction Survey provides local officials with credible, fact-driven feedback that supports quality decision-making,” said SaintAmour. “Such citizen-based data support local governments’ efforts to engage citizens in the strategic planning and budgeting process. It also promotes accountability citizens are calling for. While this study is a statewide benchmark, communities can improve only if individual communities participate.”

The free report is available for download at www.cobaltcommunityresearch.org/CCSS or at www.cfigroup.com.

About Cobalt Community Research

Cobalt Community Research (www.cobaltcommunityresearch.org) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization with a mission to provide research and educational tools that help local governments and other nonprofit organizations thrive as changes emerge in the economic, demographic and social landscape. Cobalt is located in Lansing, MI.

About CFI Group

CFI Group (www.cfigroup.com) turns “voice of the customer” survey data into customer satisfaction improvement strategies. Inventors of the University of Michigan’s American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), CFI Group is able to apply this technology to identify product and service improvements that will maximize ROI. For over twenty years, CFI Group has applied ACSI best practices worldwide to help clients drive customer loyalty, recommendations, and firm value. CFI Group’s clients include the American Cancer Society, Arrow Electronics, AT&T South, Best Buy, British Telecom, Barclays Bank, DIRECTV, Home Shopping Network, TOYS R US, UPS, NASA, and Yahoo!

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