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For More Information, contact:

William SaintAmour, 877-888-0209

wsaintamour@cobaltcommunityresearch.org

Housing Costs and Local Spending Top Concerns Among State of Washington's Citizens

Communities Can Measure "Bang for the Buck" with Citizen Survey to Improve Low Satisfaction

LANSING, Mich. (July 14, 2009) – Washington State citizens rate management of local governments and economic health as driving concerns.

When asked specifically about local government, citizens were most dissatisfied with how local governments communicate and spend tax dollars. Economic scores were undercut by housing affordability and jobs.

Other community improvement opportunities include public schools and community events – suggesting these are the areas where Washington citizens generally want local government to invest the most.

Overall, the 2009 State of Washington Baseline Study of the [Cobalt Citizen Satisfaction Survey \(CCSS\)](#) posted a 61 on a 100-point scale. Citizen satisfaction with Washington's local communities is statistically even with the national score of 58.

The survey is part of a nonprofit program by Cobalt Community Research. Cobalt is an emerging leader in measuring local government satisfaction. The program 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 and a shrinking tax base make it tough for communities to fully support important local initiatives. It's a real challenge."

The Cobalt Citizen Satisfaction Survey measures 15 community characteristics and local government services. Washington citizens are most satisfied with Library (77), Utility Services (78) and Fire Department (77). Areas for improvement: Economic Health (46) and Local Government Management (55).

Under Local Government Management, citizens were dissatisfied with how they believe their tax dollars are being spent (46) and communication with the public (54). Economic Health was undercut by housing affordability (43) and quality of jobs (46).

Satisfaction is a key performance measure for local leaders. The study reveals a practical relationship between citizens' satisfaction and community well-being. Satisfaction drives behaviors such as remaining in the community, recommending it to others, volunteering, supporting the current administration, and encouraging business startups.

“Building citizen satisfaction builds support for local leaders, builds commitment to and investment in the community, and builds a better position for growth,” said William SaintAmour, executive director of Cobalt Community Research. “Tracking and acting on satisfaction data is vital to effective community management.”

The study is part of the Cobalt program helping individual communities optimize limited resources by measuring the effect community components have on satisfaction and quality of life. It delivers a high-quality, affordable benchmark that local governments can use annually for budget and planning.

“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 tell 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.”

“Cobalt gives local officials credible, fact-driven feedback to support quality decision-making,” said SaintAmour. “Such citizen-based data support local governments’ efforts to engage citizens in the strategic planning and budgeting process. It promotes accountability citizens are calling for. While this study is a helpful statewide benchmark, individual communities can improve only if they 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, Barclay’s Bank, DIRECTV, Home Shopping Network, Toys ‘R Us, UPS, NASA, and Yahoo!

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