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Lifecourse of a Community Survey

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Western Michigan University

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LIFECOURSE OF A COMMUNITY SURVEY

by

Craig Tollini

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 2002
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2002
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To those who helped me (particularly the members of my committee and the kind souls who were willing to be interviewed for this project) and to those who helped me without knowing it, thank you.

Craig Tollini
This paper seeks to uncover the factors that may have impacted how the officials of a medium sized, Midwestern city used the results of a survey of city residents, which had been conducted by the same university-based research center for sixteen years, in their budget and policy decision-making process. The researchers who directed the survey project and the officials who designed the survey and/or were in a position to use its results were interviewed, and various written materials related to the survey project, from memos between the city manager and the researcher to the final report the researcher provided to the officials, were analyzed. These sources of information were analyzed to determine if and how the survey was used and what factors (both those mentioned in the literature and new potential factors) might have impacted this use. This paper provides a list of the factors that appear to have either impacted or not impacted the officials' use of the survey results. Additionally, it discusses policy recommendations for the case analyzed. Although this project was designed to address gaps in the previous literature, there are gaps in this project as well, including a concern regarding the generalizability of this study's findings. Therefore, recommendations for future research are also included.
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INTRODUCTION

I have long been interested in the ways in which ordinary citizens are involved in the political process. I learned of one such way, the community survey, through my graduate assistantship. After being on the research team for two community surveys, I wondered if and how the governments of these communities used the results of these surveys to make policy and budgetary decisions and what factors impacted this use. In order to seek answers to these questions and to see how I could contribute to our understanding of this topic, I reviewed the literature.

In doing so, I came to believe that the previous research on community surveys provides an incomplete list of the factors that may impact a government’s decision to utilize (or not utilize) the results of a community survey to make policy and budgetary decisions. Almost none of the literature discusses what happens after the governmental officials receive the survey results. In other words, there is little discussion of how the officials actually go about deciding whether or not to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions and what factors impact this process. There is also no discussion of the initial contact between the officials and the researchers they hired to assist them in conducting the survey, nor of what impact this part of the process could have on the officials’ decision to use or not use the survey results. Additionally, none of the researchers who studied community surveys interviewed any governmental officials, who are the only people in a position to use the survey results. As a result, there are
reasons to believe that the literature may have failed to include other potential factors. Therefore, there appear to be "gaps" in the literature.

As a result, the literature cannot answer my questions. More importantly, research on community surveys needs to address these apparent gaps in the literature in order for us to better understand what factors impact a government's decision to utilize (or not utilize) the results of a community survey to make policy and budgetary decisions.

This research project addressed these gaps because it traced the entire "lifecourse" or "history" of a community survey and involved interviews with the governmental officials, as well as interviews with the researchers and content analyses of various archival materials, in order to determine if and how the survey results have been used and what factors might have impacted this use. As a result, it contributes to our understanding of community surveys and may help governmental officials make better use of the community surveys they sponsor. Even so, its conclusions are preliminary and may not be generalizable beyond the case that was analyzed.

Now that the inspiration for and a general description of this project have been provided, I will briefly outline the contents of this paper. The first two sections provide background information about community surveys. The first discusses the definition of "community survey" that I am using. The second presents a brief history of community surveys and a major controversy surrounding their use. The third section is a review of the factors that the researchers who have studied community surveys contend impact local governmental officials' utilization of the survey results. The research design is discussed in more detail in the fourth section, and the fifth section presents the findings of this research. These findings are synthesized and discussed further in the sixth section,
which will demonstrate which factors appear to have actually impacted the case’s officials’ use of the survey results. The seventh and final section presents a list of these potential factors, as well as a list of factors that do not appear to have impacted the officials’ use of the results, recommendations for the case’s officials and researchers, comments on the generalizability of the results, and recommendations for future research.
DEFINITION OF A COMMUNITY SURVEY

There are several definitions of a "community survey" within the social sciences. For instance, a community survey could ask citizens about their social networks, their views of their community, what provides them with a feeling of community, whether or not they support certain policies, and/or how satisfied they are with various city services. Additionally, these surveys can be conducted at various levels, from a single town or city to the entire nation. Finally, these surveys could be initiated and designed by either governmental officials or researchers, or both parties could play a part in their design.

In the following pages, however, the definition of a community survey is as follows. It is a survey that is sponsored, initiated, and at least partially designed by a community's officials and conducted and analyzed by independent researchers. It asks citizens about their opinions, priorities, and preferences regarding city services, programs, policies, and initiatives, as well as their experiences with and awareness of city services and city-sponsored activities. These surveys are conducted more than once, typically on an annual basis, in order to track trends in the citizens' responses to these questions. Ideally, the government uses the results of these surveys to assist it in setting priorities, making budgetary or policy decisions, and establishing or revising programs or policies. This definition is very similar to that provided by Webb and Hatry (1973: 7, 15-16, 22, 25-26), Hatry and Blair (1976: 129-131), and Miller and Miller (1991: 3).
THE HISTORY OF AND MAJOR DEBATE REGARDING COMMUNITY SURVEYS

Community surveys were not widely used by local governments until the 1970's (Streib, 1990: 17), even though pollsters and the federal government used surveys that asked similar questions and served similar purposes (Webb & Hatry, 1973: 9). The literature put forth reasons to explain this lack of use. First, local officials did not use community surveys because they were unaware of the useful and valuable information these surveys could provide (Webb & Hatry, 1973: 16). Additionally, the officials were not familiar with survey techniques and did not have enough resources to conduct a community survey (1973: 2, 8; Daneke & Klobus-Edwards, 1979: 421; Dillman, 1977: 30). Finally, local officials were afraid of the impact that community surveys might have on their power, as well as on the community and its citizens. More specifically, they feared these surveys would force them to take a certain action or support a certain policy, mobilize the citizens against them, and/or lead the citizens to make new demands (Daneke & Klobus-Edwards, 1979: 421; Hatry & Blair, 1976: 136-138; Streib, 1990: 18; Webb & Hatry, 1973: 8, 41). It would appear, then, that officials had reasons to not use community surveys.

By the 1970's, however, community surveys were flourishing (Streib, 1990: 17). There are several reasons put forth to explain this change. According to Brudney and England (1982: 127) and Streib (1990: 17), increased citizen demand for more services and greater responsiveness from governmental officials, increased pressure for more efficient and cost-effective governments, and an increase in the number of appointed
policy makers relative to the number of elected officials all encouraged (or forced)
officials to obtain information on citizens’ opinions. Additionally, Dillman (1977: 36)
contended that the development of telephone surveying provided an affordable
methodology for local officials, while Daneke and Klobus-Edwards (1979: 421) stated
that the existence of research firms, either private or university-affiliated, provided many
officials with accessible and relatively inexpensive experts. Thus, officials began to
perceive a need for community surveys at the same time that some of the barriers to their
use were diminishing, which appears to have led to the increased use of these surveys.

Accompanying the increased use of community surveys came a debate regarding
their worth. Brian Stipak defined much of this debate. He contended that community
surveys should not be used to make policy and budgetary decisions because their results
were not related to their complementary objective measures (1979b: 422). In other
words, Stipak argued that there is no direct relationship between an objective measure
(i.e., the number of police on patrol) and the complementary subjective measure provided
by the survey (i.e., the citizen’s satisfaction with police). As a result, an attempt to
improve a service might not increase citizens’ satisfaction with that service, which Stipak
believes demonstrated that community surveys are less than helpful tools for
policymakers. Stipak contended that these measures do not correspond because people
will rate a service even if they have no knowledge of it and will base their responses on
different standards, expectations, and/or aspects of the services (which makes comparing
He also cited one study and conducted two studies that supported his claim (1979a: 46-
All of this research led Stipak to conclude that community surveys should not be used to formulate policy.

Many of the authors who joined the debate on the worth of community surveys focused on countering Stipak's argument. While Brudney and England (1982: 129) and Percy (1986: 80) did so by citing or conducting research that demonstrated that subjective and objective indicators can be and are related, most of these authors focused on demonstrating that the subjective measures provide important, if not essential, information. Brudney and England (129), Daneke and Klobus-Edwards (1979: 422), Dillman (1977: 31), and Percy (81) all contended that local governments should collect citizen opinions in order to be responsive, accountable, and democratic. Additionally, Brudney and England (130-132) and Shin (1977: 207-210) argued that citizens' opinions provide valuable information about the quality of city services that cannot be obtained in any other way, which means that officials need to include these opinions in their decision making process. As this discussion clearly illustrates, Stipak's claim that community surveys should not be used to form policy faced substantial opposition.

It would appear that local officials have sided with this opposition because community surveys were used and continue to be used by communities across the nation. While their popularity waned in the 1980's as fiscal issues became more important (Streib, 1990: 17), between thirty and sixty communities a year were conducting surveys around 1991 (Miller & Miller, 1991: 3).
DISCUSSION OF THE FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN THE PREVIOUS LITERATURE

This section presents the factors that those who have studied community surveys contend have an impact on governmental officials' utilization of a community survey's results in making policy and budgetary decisions. These factors are presented as they would be encountered in the survey's lifecourse.

The lifecourse used in this paper is based primarily on the lifecourse constructed by the social scientists who have written about survey methodology. Although these researchers disagree to some extent about the lifecourse of a survey, they all essentially divide it into six stages: (1) designing the survey, (2) "pretesting" the survey instrument, (3) creating the final design, (4) collecting the data, (5) coding and then analyzing the data, and (6) writing the report and then providing the report (and possibly a presentation as well) to the client (Czaja & Blair, 1996: 11; Fink & Kosecoff, 1985: 25; Lavrakas, 1987: 18-19). The lifecourse of a community survey appears to have two additional stages: (1) the initial contact between the officials and the researchers and (2) the officials' decision to use the results to make policy and/or budgetary decisions. Thus, it seems logical to conclude that the lifecourse of a community survey can be divided into eight stages: (1) the initial contact between the officials and the researcher, (2) designing the survey, (3) "pretesting" the survey instrument, (4) creating the final design, (5) collecting the data, (6) coding and then analyzing the data, (7) writing the report and then providing the report (and possibly a presentation as well) to the client, and (8) the officials' decision to use or not use the survey results.
While the following discussion will present the factors mentioned in the literature as they would be encountered in the survey’s lifecourse, it will not address all of the stages listed above because the authors do not contend that a factor is encountered in every stage. In fact, all of the factors presented in the literature are encountered in stages two (designing the survey), four (creating the final design), or eight (the officials’ decision to utilize (or not utilize) the survey results). This is not surprising because all aspects of the survey, including the type of analysis to be used and the anticipated time required to complete the project, are usually designed and/or selected in the design stages. After each factor is discussed, there will be a brief summary of these factors and a discussion of the apparent “gaps” in the literature.

Stage 2 and Stage 4: Initial Survey Design and Final Survey Design

Survey Construction

Three factors related to survey construction appear in the literature. The first of these factors is that the survey must contain questions that address specific aspects of a service, program, or policy in addition to questions that obtain general information about this service, program, or policy (Dillman, 1977: 37; Shin, 1977: 208; Streib, 1990: 18; Webb & Hatry, 1973: 25, 66). For example, a survey should not only contain questions that ask respondents how satisfied they are with various city services; it must also contain questions that ask respondents why they are satisfied or dissatisfied with these services and how often they use the services. According to these authors, asking these types of questions will increase the likelihood that the officials will use the survey results because
these questions provide them with the amount and variety of information they need to make policy and budgetary decisions.

Having the same questions in successive iterations of the survey is the second factor related to survey construction mentioned in the literature. Hatry and Blair (1976: 138), Miller and Miller (1991: 4), and Webb and Hatry (1973: 1, 66) claimed that having the same questions in the survey over time allows officials to track trends and to compare the survey results to a benchmark of sorts. As a result, the officials can see if new areas need their attention, if past areas still need their attention, and if the actions they took in the past had the impact they were intended to have. For this reason, these authors contended that the existence of similar questions over time will encourage the officials to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions.

The final factor is provided by Hatry and Blair (1976), who contended that officials will only use the survey results if the questions related to policies, programs, and services only address the aspects of these policies, programs, and services that the officials can affect (138). They justified this contention by stating that officials will not be able to use the survey’s results if they only address aspects of services, programs, or policies that the officials cannot alter.

Type of Analysis to Be Used

The literature provided one factor that is related to the type of analysis that will be used in the survey project. According to Webb and Hatry (1973: 31) and Daneke and Klobus-Edwards (1979: 424-425), the officials will be more likely to use the survey results if the analysis includes comparisons over time, comparisons between groups
defined by both geographic and demographic characteristics, and crosstabulations of the respondents' answers to various questions. They believed this is the case because they contend that these analyses will provide officials with the information they need. (More specifically, Webb and Hatry state that the officials need the crosstabulations so they can understand why respondents provided the answers that they did.)

Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers

The literature reveals that having the officials or the researchers perform certain tasks can have an impact on whether or not the officials will use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. First, the officials must be involved in designing the survey because their involvement will ensure that the questions are relevant for them, which would have an obvious impact on their decision to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions (Daneke & Klobus-Edwards, 1979: 423; Dillman, 1977: 33-35; Webb & Hatry, 1973: 30, 62, 66-67). Second, the researchers must help design the survey and conduct the data collection and analysis because their independence from the government and extensive knowledge of survey methodology bring credibility and validity to the findings, which also encourages the officials to use the survey results (Daneke & Klobus-Edwards, 1979: 423; Webb & Hatry, 1973: 4, 30, 59, 62; Wolf, 1964: 86-89). Therefore, having the officials and researchers perform certain task appears to be one of the factors impacting the officials' decision to use (or not use) the results of a community survey to make policy and budgetary decisions.
Time Required to Complete the Lifecourse

Webb and Hatry (1973) contended that the amount of time required to complete the lifecourse is a factor that impacts the officials' use of the survey results in making policy and budgetary decisions. They claimed that surveys that take more than three months to complete will not be utilized because the information they provide may come too late for the officials to use their results to make a certain policy decision (51).

Stage 8: Officials' Decision to Utilize Survey Results

Webb and Hatry (1973) presented two factors that may impact officials' utilization of the survey at this stage of the lifecourse. First, they contended that officials will be more likely to use the survey results if they plan to use them in advance (67). For instance, they could have staff members whose job responsibilities include ensuring that the results are utilized (67). Second, they believed that making the survey results fully available to the public will increase the likelihood that the officials will use the survey results because the public will view the survey as credible and support any action based on its results (29, 67).

Summary of Literature Review

As the preceding discussion illustrates, a list of factors that may have an impact on whether or not officials will utilize the results of community surveys is presented in the literature. Table 1 provides a summary of these factors. The first column in this table indicates in which stage(s) the factor appears. The second column lists the factor, which is described in the third column.
Table 1

Summary of the Factors Provided by the Literature

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage(s) of Lifecourse</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Survey Construction</td>
<td>Surveys should contain questions that obtain specific information about services, programs, and policies. Surveys should contain the same questions over time. Questions should address services, programs, and policies that the officials can affect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Type of Analysis to Be Used</td>
<td>Must compare the responses between different groups and across time, as well as conducting crosstabulations of the responses to various questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers</td>
<td>Officials should be involved in designing the survey, while researchers should check the validity of the survey, conduct the study, and analyze the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Time Required to Complete the Lifecourse</td>
<td>The lifecourse must take no more than three months to complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials’ Decision to Use or Not Use the Survey Results</td>
<td>Officials’ Intention to Use the Results</td>
<td>Officials should plan and intend to use the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials’ Decision to Use or Not Use the Survey Results</td>
<td>Officials Provide the Results to the Public</td>
<td>Officials should inform the public about the survey’s results.</td>
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This discussion also demonstrates that this list of factors may be incomplete, however. To start, none of the researchers addressed the first stage of the community
survey’s lifecourse (the initial contact between the researcher and the officials).

Similarly, only Webb and Hatry (1973) address the last stage (the officials’ decision to use (or not use) the survey results). Furthermore, their discussion is not very informative. For example, they stated that community surveys are only one source of information officials use to make decisions but neglected to disclose any of the other sources (31). Since there may be factors that impacted the officials’ decision to use (or not use) the survey results in these essentially neglected stages, the list of factors provided in the literature may not be complete. (While stages three and five through seven were also neglected, this neglect does not seem to be as problematic. This is because the literature appears to address these stages in its discussion of the design stages (stages two and four). For example, the analysis that will be used is selected in these earlier stages.) Additionally, none of the researchers included the perceptions and experiences of the officials; the factors they presented were derived from their experiences as researchers. In doing so, these researchers may have failed to account for potential factors. Therefore, there is further reason to believe that the list presented in the literature could be incomplete. As this discussion demonstrates, there appear to be “gaps” in the literature’s account of the factors that impact officials’ use of community surveys in making policy and budgetary decisions.
RESEARCH DESIGN

This research project utilized two research techniques. The first is archival research: I conducted content analyses of various written materials related to the survey. The second is interviewing: I conducted semi-structured interviews with both the researchers who directed the project over the years and the city officials who were in a position to utilize the results, namely the city manager, the city council, and department heads.

Both of these techniques were designed to obtain certain information. First, both collected information on the officials’ use of the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. Additionally, both techniques gathered information relating to the factors mentioned in the literature, including any data on the lifecourse of the survey, so that this information could be compared to what the literature contends would encourage officials to use the survey results. Both techniques also sought out new potential factors. (Two potential factors were included in the design because I came to believe that they both might be factors prior to conducting the analyses. The first was the officials’ view of the survey’s quality. This could impact the officials’ use of the survey results because they would be unlikely to use a survey they believe is of poor quality. The second was whether or not the researchers made policy suggestions in either the reports or their presentations. The officials may be more likely to use the survey if the researchers make policy suggestions, because doing so would provide the officials with a second, independent opinion.) Finally, both techniques were designed to note and track any
changes in the officials’ use of the survey and/or the factors impacting this use in order to
determine if any changes occurred and if these changes had any significant impact.

These techniques were selected for three reasons. First, they are the most direct
ways to gather the information of interest. Second, each technique could provide
information that the other does and can not. For example, the archival research could
provide information that the participants may not remember. Finally, and perhaps most
importantly given the discussion in the last section, these techniques help to “fill” the
“gaps” in the literature. After all, they enable me to address the first and last stages of the
lifecourse and to include the perceptions and opinions of the officials. For these reasons,
the two selected techniques appear to be well suited to this project.

These techniques were not perfect, however. This study has limitations due to its
design. First, only one case was analyzed. As a result, this study’s findings may not be
generalizeable to other communities. This is especially true since this study is
exploratory. Second, the design does not enable me to say with certainty that a factor
actually impacted the officials’ decision to use or not use the survey results. All that it
allows me to say is that a particular factor is correlated with the officials’ use of the
survey and that, therefore, it appears to have had an impact on that use. Third, this study
cannot indicate which factor had the greatest impact on the officials’ use of the survey
results, nor can it provide the relative impact of each factor on the officials’ decision to
use (or not use) the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. While these
limitations (as well as those mentioned later in this section) indicate that the findings of
this study should be taken with a grain of salt, this study still adds to our understanding of
community surveys because it bridges the gaps in the literature.
The remainder of this section provides more detail about each of the utilized research technique. Before doing so, however, I would like to provide some information on the specific community survey that was analyzed in this study, as well as the city in which it was conducted. The survey was administered in a medium-sized, Midwestern city that is adjacent to a larger city. This city has a council-manager form of government, in which an elected city council (one member of which is the mayor) and a manager (the city’s chief administrative officer who is appointed by the council) make policy decisions for the city. This government conducted a community survey for sixteen consecutive years. The same person has been the city manager for the entire time, and the city contracted with the same university-affiliated research center for all sixteen years.

Archival Research

The following materials were analyzed: the reports the researchers provided to the officials; the survey instruments; the memos sent by the manager’s office to either the researcher or the city council; the requests for proposals; the researchers’ proposals; the outlines of presentations the researchers made to the council; and the city’s newsletter, which is edited by the manager’s office and provided to all city residents at least three times a year. These materials were selected because they were readily available sources of information on the officials’ use of the survey and/or the factors that might have impacted this use.

The analysis for nearly all of these materials focused on seeking the information mentioned in the introduction to this section. The only exception was the analysis of the newsletters, which focused on if and how the survey was mentioned in the articles. The
headline of every article was read to see if it mentioned the survey or an issue the survey for that year addressed. The articles of those that did were read to see if and how the survey was mentioned in each article.

There was no formal coding scheme for any of these analyses. The reason for this is two-fold. First, this study is exploratory. As a result, I could not create a coding scheme because I did not know what I might encounter. Secondly, the content of interest in these materials is presented in a clear, straightforward manner. As a result, it seemed likely that multiple researchers would come to the same conclusions. For both of these reasons, a coding scheme did not seem necessary. Since no problems were encountered in coding the data, it seems that this decision was justified.

There is one major limitation to this part of the research design, however. I was unable to obtain a complete set of materials. I was able to locate all but five of the surveys and four of the reports. Furthermore, I had access to forty-six newsletters, which was nearly all of the newsletters for the eleven years that I had a survey. (I could only analyze a newsletter if I also had a copy of the survey for that year because, as mentioned above, part of my analysis of the newsletters was to identify articles whose headlines mentioned a topic that had a question in the survey for that year.) Unfortunately, however, I found only two requests for proposals, three proposals, two presentation outlines, two memos between the manager and the researchers, and two memos between the manager and the council. Furthermore, all of these materials were from the mid to late 1990's. As a result, the findings from these sources may not truly represent all sixteen years of the survey's existence. Therefore, some caution is needed in interpreting the findings of the analyses of these materials.
Interviews

I conducted thirteen interviews over a period of four weeks. Three of these interviews were with the researchers who had directed the survey projects, nine were with the current officials, and one was with a former official.

The selection of participants was a rather simple and straightforward task, particularly in regards to the researchers. Three researchers had directed the study. Two of these researchers were members of my committee, which made contacting them easy. Furthermore, they both knew the third researcher, who was employed at another university. I contacted this researcher via email after one of my committee members sent him an email.

Seventeen of the eighteen officials who were asked to participate were selected using two governmental Internet sites, which contained the names and contact information of the city council, the staff of the manager’s office, and the department heads. I sent letters to all of these officials, and I began conducting follow-up phone calls to answer questions and set up appointments approximately one week later. In doing so, I found that three officials could not participate because they were not in a position to use the results. Additionally, I was not able to reach five people, and I accidentally neglected to contact one person. Despite these problems, slightly more than half of the potential participants (nine out of seventeen) agreed to participate.

The eighteenth official who was asked to participate was a former official to whom at least four participants referred me. As with the other officials, he was sent a
letter and received a follow-up phone call approximately one week after the letter was sent.

Nearly all of the interviews were conducted face to face. (The single exception was the researcher who worked at another academic institution. He was interviewed over the phone.) Typically lasting between thirty and forty-five minutes, the interviews were conducted during regular business hours in the participants’ offices or in meeting rooms in their place of business. (There were two exceptions to this. One official was interviewed at home, while another official was interviewed in a meeting room at Western Michigan University.) Not all of the officials worked in the same type of environment. The appointed officials and department heads worked in the city's municipal buildings, while each member of the city council had another occupation and was interviewed at that place of business. Even so, each participant did have an office or meeting room in which the interview could be conducted. Although the size and layout of the offices and meeting rooms differed, I literally sat face-to-face with each participant. While all the interviews were conducted in private, they were not always isolated; phones would ring, walkie-talkies would go off, and some outside conversations could be heard, though none of the above actually interrupted the interview. A few participants had materials related to the survey on hand, to which they referred during the interview. The interviews were tape-recorded, provided the participants consented to this, though I also took extensive written notes. (Only one participant declined to be tape-recorded.)

These interviews were semi-structured. This approach was adopted because I wanted to keep the interviews open enough for exploration while ensuring that the
participants provided information on certain topics. Although the questions each participant was asked varied according to his or her experiences with and knowledge of the survey, each was asked a similar set of questions that sought the types of information mentioned in the introduction to this section (see Appendix C for the interview script). Each participant was asked about his or her involvement in the survey and perceptions of the officials’ use of the survey. While these questions were open-ended, allowing the participant to provide whatever answer he or she found most appropriate, the participants were also asked specific questions that provided information related to the factors mentioned in the literature. Furthermore, the officials were asked if there were any barriers that prevented them from using the survey results and if there were other sources of information they considered when making policy decisions. Both of these questions provided information on new potential factors. Additionally, I asked the participants how long they were involved in the survey and/or in their current position in order to get a sense of the length of “exposure” they had to the survey. Another question asked the participants to describe how they became involved in and/or aware of the survey because their answers might reveal the existence of another factor impacting the officials’ use of the survey results. Finally, they were all asked if either their role or the survey process had changed over time in order to see if such changes impacted the officials’ use of the survey.

As with the archival research, there was no formal coding scheme because of the exploratory nature of the research and the relative simplicity of the analysis. I also encountered no problems in coding or analyzing this information.
Another similarity between the archival research and the interviews is that there are some problems with the interviews that may impact the quality of the findings derived from the interviews. Social desirability bias is one potential problem. It is quite possible that the participants felt pressured to overstate either the use of the survey results or their view of its quality, particularly since most of them were politicians and part of a small, close-knit community. While I tried to overcome this by asking neutral questions, responding in the same way to all answers, and providing as much assurance of confidentiality as possible, I cannot be sure that I did indeed overcome this bias.

The quality of the information is the other concern. All of the participants were not all asked the same questions because there were a couple times when I forgot to ask a question. Additionally, I sometimes failed to ask participants to clarify an ambiguous response or to provide further explanation for a comment they made. Furthermore, one participant did not wish the interview to be tape-recorded and one interview did not record properly, so I had to rely on my notes alone for both of these interviews. The end result of all of these items is that there is missing information. As a result, the findings presented below may not accurately reflect the participants' perceptions and experiences. Since both this problem and the one mentioned above exist, some caution is needed when interpreting the findings from this section.

The small size of the sample could indicate another potential problem. After all, the views expressed by the participants might not be representative of the views of all of the officials and researchers who were involved with the survey over the sixteen years of its existence. Even so, the sample appears to be representative for two reasons. First, this sample includes all of the researchers who directed the survey, as well as a majority of
the officials who are currently in a position to use the results. Second, five of the
officials have been in their current positions and, therefore, involved with the survey for
several years. As a result, they have experience with the survey and the city and, thus,
would likely be aware of any changes over time. Therefore, the sample, while small,
appears to be representative.
FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the analyses of the archival research and the interviews. The findings of the archival research are presented first, followed by the discussion of the findings from the interviews. Each source of information (the different archival materials, the interviews with the officials, and the interviews with the researchers) are discussed in separate subsections within these larger sections. (There is one exception to this. The findings from the requests for proposals and the proposals provided by the researchers are presented together because these sources provided essentially the same information in almost identical language. This is not surprising since the proposals were written in response to the requests, which stated what the proposals must include.) These subsections are further divided, where appropriate, into discussions of the findings related the officials' use (or lack thereof) of the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions, the factors mentioned in the literature, and any new potential factors revealed in the analysis. The discussions of the factors mentioned in the literature focus on whether or not the actual survey project was designed and conducted in such a way that, according to the literature, the officials would be encouraged to use the survey results.

As mentioned earlier, each source of information is discussed separately, starting with the various archival materials. The findings from these various sources are synthesized and discussed in detail in the next section.
Reports

Factors Mentioned in the Literature

Survey Construction. Analyzing the reports revealed that the surveys contained many of the same questions over time. For example, there were series of questions asking respondents how satisfied they were with various city services and if they felt various issues were problems in the city in every survey and a series of questions asking respondents to rate the city’s efforts to perform various tasks in several surveys. Furthermore, some questions appeared in more than one survey. For instance, several surveys contained questions pertaining to proposals to have curbside recycling and to consolidate various city services with those provided by neighboring communities. One of the contentions made in the literature is that the presence of similar questions in successive iterations of the survey is one factor that encourages officials to utilize the results of community surveys.

Type of Analysis to be Used. According to the literature, officials are more likely to use survey results if the analysis provides comparisons of the responses to various questions between different years and various groups, as well as crosstabulations of the respondents’ answers to various questions. The analysis of the reports revealed that nearly all of the reports had tables that compared the responses to various questions over time. (Only the first two reports did not, and this was only because the survey had not been conducted enough times for there to be any results to be compared.) Only two
reports included crosstabulations between the respondents' answers to different questions, however. One of them compared respondents' answers to a question that asked if they were connected to the city's sewer system to their answer to another question that asked if they supported a law mandating that all residents be connected to the city's sewer system. The other compared respondents' answers to how they voted on a particular ballot issue with the reasons why they voted as they did. Finally, none of the reports compared the responses to various questions between different groups of respondents. Although the reports revealed that all three types of analysis were conducted, only the comparisons of the responses between different years were conducted regularly. Therefore, the type of analysis that was conducted may or may not have increased the likelihood that the officials would use the survey results.

**Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers.** All of the reports essentially provided the same information about the tasks performed by the officials and the researchers. According to the reports, the officials hired the researcher, who helped the manager and a special committee design the survey. After the council approved the survey, the researcher collected the data (except for the first year, when the survey was conducted through the mail and the officials handled data collection), analyzed the data, and wrote the report, which he presented to the officials. This division of labor between the officials and the researchers matches the one the literature contends will encourage the officials to use the results to make policy and budgetary decisions.
New Factors

Officials' Perception of the Survey's Quality. Analyzing the reports revealed a potential proxy variable for this factor, namely the existence of comments made in the reports regarding the survey's quality. While the officials could have a perception of the survey's quality without these comments, it seems logical to assume that the presence and tone of these comments could have an impact on the officials' view of the survey's quality and, therefore, on their use of the survey results.

All of the reports contained comments about the quality of the results. These included the comments about the representativeness of the sample and the impact of non-response that appeared in every report. There were also several isolated comments made in various reports in reference to a particular question or response. For instance, an earlier report warned that several "item[s were] not stated in exactly the same way in a survey..., and thus may not be directly compatible."

The presence of these types of comments within each of the reports indicates that the officials were likely to have some sense of the survey's quality. In general, these comments indicated that the sample was valid and reliable, though some of the particular results might not be. Therefore, the officials may or may not be encouraged by these comments to use the results of the survey to make policy and budgetary decisions, though it is probably safe to say that they were not encouraged to use the results of the problematic questions.

Researchers Make Policy Suggestions. Only a few of the reports included any policy suggestions. Two of the reports included statements that the presence of large
minorities was “indicative of areas where continued improvements in service delivery are desirable,” and another report claimed that the high level of non-response for a question indicated this as well. Additionally, one report stated that the results of some of the questions regarding proposed millages were “too close to call.” Since the presence of policy suggestions made by the researchers to the officials may encourage the officials to use the survey results, the essential absence of any policy suggestions in the reports may lead officials to be less likely to use the results, though they may be more likely to use the results that did receive a policy recommendation in the reports.

Results that Provide Clear Majorities. Nearly all of the policy- and initiative-related questions had a clear majority of respondents indicating support or dissent for the policy or initiative. The officials may be more likely to use the results of these questions in forming policy and budgetary decisions because they provide a clear mandate.

Majority of the Results are “Positive.” The reports revealed that there were many positive responses to the survey questions. For instance, all of the reports revealed that most respondents were satisfied with the various city services and did not think that there were many problems in the city. The officials might have been more likely to use the results of the survey because it offers such favorable information.

Surveys

Factors Mentioned in the Literature

Survey Construction. Analysis of the surveys revealed that the surveys contained few questions that asked respondents for specific information about the city’s services,
programs, and policies. For example, only a few of the questions asked respondents why they responded as they did. Furthermore, only the earlier surveys included questions that asked respondents which city service was the best or had improved the most over a period of time. According to the literature, having questions that obtain specific information about the city’s programs, policies, and services may increase the likelihood that the officials will use the results. Therefore, the officials may not be likely to use the results of many of these surveys to make policy and budgetary decisions.

The analysis of the surveys also revealed that there was a core set of questions that appeared in every survey. This set included questions that ask citizens if certain things were problems in the city and how satisfied they were with certain services. Furthermore, there were some questions related to specific policies or initiatives that appeared in more than one survey. Three illustrations of this were series of questions asking citizens about their use and opinions of the city’s recycling center, their opinions of having and having a tax for curbside recycling, and their support for consolidating various city services with those of neighboring communities. Each of these sets of questions appeared for at least a few years. Therefore, the surveys have many similar questions over time, which is one factor previous researchers contend encourage officials to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions.

For the most part, the analysis of the survey also revealed that the survey contained questions that addressed aspects of city services and programs that the government can change and affect, which is another factor identified in the literature. For example, the surveys asked questions about passing various millages and instituting
and/or revising a ban on trash and leaf burning, all of which seem to be changes and/or policies the government can implement.

Even so, some of the questions the surveys asked might be related to aspects the officials cannot change. Two examples of this type of question were those that address the flow of traffic and the growth of the city. It is possible that the city will not be able to impact either of these issues. For example, the economic growth of and traffic flow in the city may be outside of the city's control, and/or the city may not have enough resources to provide what citizens demand in regards to these areas. These questions are the exception, however, and the city may very well be able to address these areas. Therefore, the survey appears to have questions that address only the aspects of its policies, programs, and services that it can address, which may encourage the officials to use the survey results.

Memos Between the Manager and the City Council

Factors in the Literature

Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers. According to these memos, the council reviews the survey and makes recommendations on the addition, deletion, and/or alteration of the survey's questions. The council then asks the researcher to make the recommended changes, provided he approves of the format of these changes. For instance, one memo stated "several inaccuracies have been discovered" and requested "that these changes [made to correct these inaccuracies] are incorporated prior to the execution of the survey." This information indicates that the officials were involved in designing the survey and that the researchers assisted them in this task, which is actually
what the previous researchers contend will encourage the officials to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions.

Memos between the Manager and the Researcher

Factors in the Literature

Task Performed by Officials and Researchers. According to these memos, a survey committee meets and reviews the surveys. The changes it recommends are then presented to the council for its approval. As an illustration, one of these memos stated “the following adjustments were made to the survey instrument in preparation for the upcoming…survey” and then recommended “that the Council approve the [survey] instrument as amended by the Community Survey Committee.” As a result, these memos indicate that several officials were involved in designing the survey, which is consistent with what the literature contends will lead the officials to use the survey results.

Requests for Proposals and the Researchers’ Proposals

Factors in the Literature

Type of Analysis to be Used. Both the requests and the proposals indicated that the analysis will include crosstabulations of the citizen’s responses to various questions, as well as comparisons of the responses to various questions between groups and across time. According to the literature, the presence of these three types of analysis in the project will increase the likelihood that the officials will use the results of the survey to make policy and budgetary decisions.
Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers. Both the requests and the proposals the researchers wrote revealed information about the tasks performed by the officials and the researchers. The requests revealed that the lifecourse began when the city solicited the research proposals. Both the requests and the proposals stated that the officials provide a draft of the survey to the researcher, who review it to ensure that the questions meet “generally accepted interview standards” and to “determine the probability of obtaining reliable results” with the questions. The researchers “recommend wording changes for responses that can be improved” and advise the officials if their “inquiries could produce unreliable or confusing responses.” The revised draft is then presented to the council for discussion and final approval. Then the council returns the final draft of the survey to the researchers. At this point, the researchers conduct the study, analyze the data, provide a set of preliminary findings to the city (typically the question frequencies), prepare a written report for the officials, and, finally, present the results at the council’s annual goal-setting meeting.

The above discussion demonstrates that the officials were involved in designing the survey and that the researchers were charged with verifying the questions, conducting the survey, and analyzing the results. Furthermore, both the requests and the proposals included statements that the researchers were to “assist the city in its survey project.” Therefore, the division of labor that exists in this project is consistent with the one identified in the literature as that which will encourage the officials to use the results.

Time Required to Complete the Lifecourse. The proposals and the requests both reveal that the process should take about three months (usually from October to
 Officials' Intention to Use the Results. According to the literature, officials will be more likely to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions if they plan to use them in advance. The requests explicitly stated that the officials want to have the survey results prior to their annual goal- and budget-setting meeting, which indicates that they planned in advance to use the results. Additionally, the requests demanded (and the proposals stated that the researchers would provide) frequency distributions for all of the survey questions; that the responses to all open-ended questions be “transcribed, edited, and published as an appendix attached to the final report;” that the report “present[s] comparative data…using a simple, easy to understand graphic presentation;” and that the presentation “include[s] appropriate visual aides and graphic presentations necessary to provide historic and current direction of citizen input in an easily understandable comparative format.” These statements demonstrate the officials’ desire to have information they can use to make policy and budgetary decisions, which also appears to reveal their dedication to using the survey results. As a result, the officials may be more likely to use the survey results because they appear to be dedicated to using them.

New Factors

Officials’ Perception of the Survey’s Quality. In describing their expectations for the researchers in the requests for proposals, the officials provided a brief outline of the work the researchers had done for the survey for the previous year. After this
description, there was a comment that this work “is acceptable to [the city] for the
[current] survey.” This comment indicates that the officials believed the previous survey
was of high quality. Furthermore, it implies that the officials would also view any future
project that is conducted similarly as being of high quality. As a result, they may be
more likely to use the results of these surveys.

Outlines of the Presentations

Factors in the Literature

Type of Analysis to Be Used. Both of the available presentation outlines
compared the responses to various questions between different years. Only one
presentation outline contained any crosstabulations of the responses to different
questions; it compared the responses to a question that asked respondents about their
view of the city’s growth to the responses to a question about their view of the quality of
life in the city. This outline also compared the responses to a particular question between
different groups. More specifically, it compared the responses to the question that asked
respondents about the quality of life between different age groups. According to the
literature, all three types of analysis are needed in order for the officials to be encouraged
to use the survey results. Since all three types of analyses were not consistently provided
in the presentation outlines, the officials may or may not be encouraged to use the results
to make policy and budgetary decisions.
New Factors

Officials' Perceptions of the Survey's Quality. The presentation outlines provided the same proxy variable as the reports: the presence of comments regarding the validity and reliability of the data. Both of the presentation outlines clearly stated that the sample was representative of the city's population. As a result, the officials were aware of this component of the survey's quality. Since these statements indicated that the survey and its results were of high quality, the officials may have been encouraged to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions.

Researchers Make Policy Suggestions. Only one of the presentations made a policy suggestion; it stated that the officials should pay attention to some of the “sizeable minorities” that appeared in the responses to some of the questions. The essential absence of any policy suggestions on the part of the researchers may make the officials less likely to use the results to make policy and budgetary decisions.

Newsletters

As discussed in the section on the research design, the newsletters were analyzed in the following way. The headline of every article was read to see if it mentioned the survey or an issue the survey for that year addressed. Out of the 686 articles in the forty-six newsletters analyzed, only forty (5.8%) met this criteria. These articles were read to see if and how the survey was mentioned in the article.

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1 Short notes that were under the same heading (e.g., "Briefs," "Senior Center News") and any solitary graph, table, or picture caption were counted as a single article.
Officials' Use of the Survey Results

The analysis of the newsletter articles indicated that the officials did not use the survey results. Only two articles discussed how the survey was used in designing the budget, while six other articles described how the survey results specifically led to various road improvements. Although these articles demonstrated that the results were used to make policy and budgetary decisions, they were the only ones that did. Therefore, it seems that the officials have not used the results of the survey. This perception is aided by the fact that twenty-five articles had headlines that pertained to an issue the survey addressed that year, but did not mention the survey. Thus, it seems that the officials did not use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. Even so, the newsletters may only provide proxy information about the officials' use of the survey results because the officials may have used the survey results but neglected to communicate this use to the public.

Factors in the Literature

Officials Provide the Results to the Public. One of the contentions made in the literature is that making the results of the survey public will encourage the officials to use the results. Five articles, each from a different year, presented the results of the survey. This means that the results were not reported to the public every year. As a result, it is unclear whether or not the officials would have been encouraged to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions.
Officials’ Use of the Survey Results

All of the researchers provided statements about the officials’ use of the survey results. Since these statements are based on the researchers’ perceptions, they serve as proxies for the officials’ actual use of the survey.

All of the researchers stated that the officials used the results. As one researcher stated, “I think they’ve been used. There’s no question in my mind about that.” More specifically, all of them stated that the officials, in the words of one researcher,

used the perceptions of what were problems in the city as areas where they might try to direct more resources in the budgeting. They also look at the success of different programs. If programs were viewed as highly successful, they would be more likely to divert more resources to evidence of success.

One example of this type of use that all three researchers put forth was the officials’ attempts to improve the flow of traffic in the city. As one researcher put it:

[A]t one point, roads were a real critical issue... Every year for two or three years, the city was getting beaten up about the roads... They made the decision to invest a significant portion of city resources in fixing, widening, cleaning up [a particular road], and I think that was in direct response to being beat up year after year after year for three or four years running on the survey.

One of the researchers stated that the results were used in another way as well. He contended that “the department heads in particular have used the results over the years... as a way of justifying the budget requests that they had formulated.”

While all of the researchers provided specific examples of the officials using the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions, two of the researchers claimed that the surveys did not and were not designed to provide guidance for making specific policy and budgetary decisions. One of these researchers went on to say that the officials
relied on the “enlightenment function” of the survey. Essentially, this means that the officials used the results to “provide the context within which decisions are made and in which planning is made” instead of to “actually make a specific decision.” According to these comments, then, the survey results were used more to create the officials’ general plan for the city. At the same time, however, all of the researchers provided examples of the officials using the survey results to make specific policy and budgetary decisions.

Factors in the Literature

Survey Construction. All of the researchers mentioned that the survey contained many of the same questions over time. As one put it, “I think there was remarkable consistency in the... survey across time... [T]here certainly was a strong core of items that were the same...” According to the literature, the presence of the same questions in successive iterations of the survey will encourage the officials to use the results.

Type of Analysis to be Used. All of the researchers said they compared the results of various questions over time, though the first researcher said he did not do so until the survey had been conducted enough times for there to be a meaningful comparison. Only one remembered doing any crosstabulations, however, and none of the researchers said they compared the results of various questions between different groups. Since the previous researchers contend that all three types of analyses are needed to increase the likelihood that the officials will use the results, the officials may or may not have been likely to have used the survey results.
Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers. All of the researchers essentially stated that the officials and the researchers performed certain tasks for every year the survey was conducted. To put it simply, the officials initiated the project, by asking the researcher to help in the first year and by asking the researcher to submit a proposal in later years, and designed the survey. The researchers checked the formatting of the questions (which took more time and effort in the initial years), conducted the study, analyzed the data, wrote the report, and presented the findings to the officials. Thus, the officials and the researchers performed the tasks identified in the literature as those that will increase the likelihood that the officials will use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions.

Time Required to Complete the Lifecourse. One of the researchers stated that the process took five months to complete, while another claimed it typically took two to two and one-half months. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if the lifecourse was completed in the timeframe the literature contends will encourage the officials to use the survey results, which is three months. Even so, none of the researchers indicated that the officials received the results after the deadline for a major policy or budgetary decision. Therefore, it would seem that the timeframe, whatever it was, was of acceptable length for the officials to use the survey results.

Officials’ Intention to Use the Results. Two researchers stated that the officials planned to use the results.

[The city manager’s] perception from the beginning was that the community survey would be a way of informing the city council and the department heads regarding the opinions of the residents of the community and that, therefore, that governing group would be able to take into account those results in their annual budgeting process.
[The city council was] very explicit in wanting to connect the results to their budget process...I know that one of the issues that was often part of the discussion with the city was their need to have the results by a certain date so that it could be built into their budget planning process, and...I do remember some cases where there was an extra push to get things completed so that we would, in fact, meet this deadline...It was sort of almost a model of survey results mattering.

Therefore, it definitely appears that the officials were dedicated to using the results of the survey to make policy and budgetary decisions, which is one of the factors put forth in the literature that supposedly encourages the officials to use the survey results.

**Officials Provide the Results to the Public.** One researcher stated the city did... 

...a pretty good job of presenting the survey results to the community. They used...the newsletter [the city] put out, where they would typically provide, each year, some summary of some of the key findings of the survey.

At the same time, another researcher stated the officials never revealed the results of the survey to the public. Thus, the officials may or may not have communicated the results to the public, which the previous researchers contend they should do. Furthermore, the information the researchers provided on this topic serves as a proxy for the officials’ actual communication with the citizens, which the newsletter provides.

**New Factors**

**Officials’ Perception of the Survey’s Quality.** The interviews with the researchers provided the same proxy variable as the reports and the presentation outlines: the presence of comments regarding the validity and reliability of the data. Two of the researchers said they made comments about the quality of the survey in their presentations. One of them said he “stressed the limitations of the data” so that the officials “don’t take it to have more reliability than it probably should.” The other said he would often have to discuss sampling and the representativeness of the sample with
the officials. As a result, the officials could have a good idea of the survey’s quality, or lack thereof, and this could affect their use of the results.

Researchers Make Policy Suggestions. Two of the researchers said they had not made any policy suggestions. One of them went on to say that:

I tend to avoid that kind of language because this is a very experienced client in this sense. They are very active in the design and have a lot of experience in the use of this information.

On the other hand, the other researcher recalled making some policy suggestions to the officials. More specifically:

[T]here were a couple of budget questions that came up at various points, and the survey was “would you be willing to pay x mils for something?” and, in some of those cases, I know I told them that, because of the confidence intervals, this is too close to call…[Additionally,] I will often frame things in a context, especially in a community survey like that. I’ll talk about the “urban” context and say things like, “like many cities of similar size and age, these kinds of things are happening and these are important issues that need to be dealt with.”

While this researcher did make some policy suggestions, he did not appear to make numerous suggestions. Additionally, he stated that he most likely only made comments like these in the first years that he directed the project. Furthermore, he stated that these suggestions were not particularly strong. Therefore, this researcher does not appear to have provided many policy suggestions to the officials.

It would appear, then, that the researchers did not really provide any policy suggestions to the officials. Since there were so few suggestions, the officials may not have used the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. They may, however, have been more likely to use the few questions that did receive a policy suggestion.

Majority of Results are “Positive.” All of the researchers said that many of the results were positive. As one of them put it, “Across the board, the number of positive
comments far outweighs the negative.” Two of the researchers explicitly linked these positive comments to the officials’ use of the survey. In the words of one:

If there are problems, people will tell them...[but they] tend to be kind of “nibbling around the edges...[I]ts not as if there’s fundamental problems or people are really angry about something...[T]hat makes it a fairly pleasant experience there and that is part [of] why the reaction of the council and the city managers tends to be pretty good.

Thus, the ratio of “positive” to “negative” responses could impact the officials’ decision to use (or not use) the results of the survey to make policy and budgetary decisions. After all, officials may very well be less likely to utilize the survey results if they indicate that the city provides poor services and/or that the city is plagued by problems, particularly the first few times a survey project is carried out.

With the Officials

**Officials’ Use of the Survey Results**

All of the officials stated that they (or the other officials) used the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions or, as one put it, to plan “their next year’s activities.” In fact, two of the officials claimed that the officials used the survey results so much that, in the words of one,

I can’t immediately think of [a time] when there was enough interest to do something and we couldn’t fully address it or at least address it sufficiently for the time.

All of the officials provided specific examples of their use of the survey results to make these decisions. The examples provided by three officials, which are representative of those provided by the other officials, are provided below.

We had overwhelming response to wanting [leaf and trash collection]...The city council, based on those results, were able to increase the cost of taxes to cover that.
People have also said, "We need more hiking trails. We need walking trails.", so we've continued to put an emphasis on this...[The results have] really helped us and supported us in terms of where we are with [the tax appeal]...The continued upgrading, expansion of infrastructure, particularly the main thoroughfares...[The] commercial parks [and the] office park...are all responses to "we need more economic development."

The fire fighters particularly have been saying they need more fire fighters for the growing population and the number of commercial enterprises they have to cover, but the response from the citizens said on the survey they felt that they were adequately provided for. So, then the management takes that...to make the deduction that the fire fighters do not need more fire fighters.

In addition to using the results to create or revise specific initiatives, four of the officials also indicated that they use the results in another way. In the words of one:

Typically, what we see is a percentage of satisfaction with [the services provided by the department] and we can compare that to the study done the year before and in the past, and if we see this satisfaction level going in a different direction than what we hope it would be going, that certainly would point out some things to us.

These officials provided examples of this type of use. The examples provided by two of them are presented below.

One example I can think of...one of the city projects yearly is our leaf collection process. I think two years ago, when the survey came back, there was some criticism and some slippage from an aspect of the satisfaction level with the way we provided that service. So, there were some adjustments that were made in the preceding years and then some evaluation and measurement of now how was the public reaction to the way we provided this service.

The results that you get from the survey, especially where people indicate major concern, and I would say [traffic flow is one] of the biggest negatives that come out year after year on the survey, although, [for one road], the negative is a lot less than it used to. Well, why is that? Because of improvements that we've made on [that road] in recent years...Street sweeping, I guess, is another area...There was a time where, two or three years ago, we got what we felt was a negative response on the quality of street sweeping. So, we've pretty well doubled that in the past couple of years and, now, the results on street sweeping are pretty good.

The officials differed on whether or not they believed the results were used to create the budget. While three officials claimed the survey is used to, in the words of one, "develop the budget" and as "a document that's part of the budgeting process," another states that "in a city that's established like [this city], the budget's pretty well set."

Finally, two officials stated they could not use the results as much as they would have liked. The reason for this will be described in the next section.
Factors in the Literature

Survey Construction. One of the factors identified in the literature is that the survey must contain questions that obtain specific information about the city's services, programs, and policies. Two of the officials stated that the survey questions did not provide them with enough specific information. As one put it:

We do what we can with the information we get...[but] what we're getting is just a general community perception of "What do you think of [this department]?"...That doesn't really give me a great deal of information from an aspect of what caused that change [or what type of experience the respondent had with my department].

It is not surprising, then, that these officials stated they could not use the results to the extent they would have preferred.

The officials also provided comments that related to the presence of similar questions in successive iterations of the survey. Six officials mentioned that the survey contained similar questions over the years. In the words of one, “The questions that would relate to this department have been consistent over time.” Furthermore, three of the officials stated that the officials who revised the survey each year tried to maintain the questions. This was done because, in the words of one of these officials, changing the questions would mean the officials would have to:

start from scratch...You’d need, I would think, a good three to five years of the survey in its new format...to really have a good picture. Because of the consistent nature in which we’ve provided the survey, you’ve got this track record; you’re able to kind of graph things out... I know that major changes in a survey can skew the number in such a way that it may very well not be very useful until you’ve done something similar to that for three to five years.

Since the presence of similar questions in successive iterations of the survey is another factor put forth in the literature, the officials would appear to be more likely to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions.
Finally, the officials made comments regarding whether or not the survey contained questions related to aspects of the city's services, programs, and policies that the officials could affect, which is the third factor related to survey construction mentioned in the literature. One official stated that:

I pick on traffic because it's a given... [J]ust with the volume of traffic we have out here people are going to say "Yeah, it's a problem" because it is perceived to be a problem.

Furthermore, two of the officials, when asked if there were any barriers that might prevent them from acting in accordance with the survey results, mentioned financial restraints. As one put it,

Money, of course, is always a limiting factor in any activity. I mean, you could show a high negative response on a particular item but end up not doing it because of financial limitations.

Both of these comments indicated that the survey may contain questions that address services, policies, and/or programs that the officials cannot change or affect. According to claims made in the literature, the officials may be less likely to use the results of these questions to make policy and budgetary decisions.

Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers. According to the literature, the officials will be more likely to use the results of the surveys if they are involved in designing the survey and if the researchers conduct the survey and analyze the results. The interviews with the officials revealed that, in the words of one:

The process... was the internal administrative staff working with [the Center] to put the thing together, and then the council committee each year kind of reviewed everything and made any recommendations for additions or subtractions to the survey to the full council, and then the full council pretty much approved it... Usually, the timing of the thing was that it was provided to us just prior to our... major retreat... that revolved around the beginning of the budget process for the council. The staff had access to it just prior to that... Usually at the... meeting, we had somebody come from [the Center] to present the thing and go over the executive summary and the high points. And also the staff did their version of the same thing.
Additionally, one official stated that the city sent out a request for a proposal from various research firms, and another said that “the administration is the one that...after the approval from the council...hired [the center] to do the survey.” Another said that the researchers make sure that the questions “meet the basic survey standards” and collect and analyze the data. Thus, it would seem that the division of labor that existed in this project exactly matches that suggested in the literature.

Even so, one official claimed that department heads will make recommendations “on a question or two [they would] like to see included, but that doesn’t mean it is always included.” Furthermore, three of the officials stated that they wished they were more involved in designing the survey. One of these officials suggested that those who design the survey “ask the city council if they have any questions they’d like to have in the design.” Therefore, it would seem as if the tasks performed by the officials could be altered in a way that is consistent with the suggestions made in the literature, namely by involving more officials in the design of the survey, that might increase the use of the survey results.

**Time Required to Complete the Lifecourse.** One official stated that the project typically took three months from start to finish. Since the timeframe the previous researchers of community surveys claim will increase the likelihood of officials deciding to use the survey results is three months, the officials would appear to be likely to use the results of this survey project. This contention is supported by the fact that none of the officials indicated that they received the survey results after a policy or budgetary decision had been made.
Officials' Intention to Use the Results. All of the officials indicated that the survey was very important to them and to their decision making process. In the words of one official:

As representatives of the citizens of [the city], we need to have an instrument or...some sort of barometer to see how the public feels about the actions that we’ve taken and whether they support or don’t support what we’re doing...[W]e want to truly represent [the citizens] and try to do what they would want us to do, as opposed to what we perceive. And, of course, to perceive it, we need this sort of tool. So, it was a very, very helpful instrument for us to be able to decide if the citizens were satisfied with the course of action we’ve taken so far.

In making statements of this type, it would appear that the officials planned to use the results of the survey, which is one of the factors mentioned in the literature.

Officials Provide the Results to the Public. Five officials mentioned that the city provides the results of the survey to the public. As one put it:

They always print the results of the survey in the [newsletter]...The citizens of [the city] get a result of the survey to tell what are the problem areas that people respond to.

These officials also indicated that the results appear in other media sources, and one official noted that this information is “a matter of public record; it can be requested by members of the public.” According to the literature, communicating the results of the survey to the public will increase the likelihood that the officials will use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. Even so, the information provided by these interviews is only a proxy of the officials’ actual communication with the public, which is provided by the newsletters.

New Factors

Officials’ Perception of the Survey’s Quality. All of the officials provided statements about their view of the survey’s quality. Furthermore, all of these comments
indicated that the respondents felt the survey was of high quality. Some of the officials provided the reasons why they felt this way, three of which are presented below.

And it’s been very reliable... We think its pretty credible.

The questions...were pretty well tested and were receiving the response that we were looking for. They weren’t ambiguous or whatever.

I know the [Center] was really quite good at trying to give an accurate crossection of the people, and I can recall that, in recent years, there have been some...surveying procedural changes done to assure that we weren’t going to get sixty some percent women and thirty some percent men, or something like that...

Even so, the officials did have some concerns about the quality of the survey.

Four mentioned a desire for a larger sample. The comment of one official captures this concern:

I would...like to see it a little bit bigger sample because of the negative comments that you hear at council real often, especially when this thing is made public. If you could, in some way, involve more people in the process, it may not give you any better statistical results, but it gives you a little bit better PR, you know, in engaging more of the public in participation so they can get their comments in...If you’ve never been involved in the thing, then you are not so confident in it...I’ve heard it enough to know that we’re not getting enough people involved.

Similarly, one of the officials was concerned that the researchers could maintain a valid response rate “given the number of telephone interviewers and telephone solicitors that there are right now.” Four of the officials also believed that some of the questions were slanted in order to, as one put it, support “the management’s intent and direction and [corroborate] the work he’s already doing.” Finally, and on a similar note, one official was suspicious of the high rating the library received over the years because, as he put it, “Who wants to admit that they don’t read books?”

Although some of the officials raised these concerns, all of the officials stated they believed the survey was of high quality. Therefore, they might be encouraged to use its results to make policy and budgetary decisions, though a few of them might have decided not to use the questions they believed were slanted.
Researchers Make Policy Suggestions. All of the officials stated that the
researchers did not provide any policy suggestions. One official went on to say that
doing so was “really not a charge that was given to [the researcher],” while two officials
stated that it would be inappropriate for the researcher to have made any suggestions
because, as one put it, “[the researcher’s] role is not to make recommendations but to
validate the survey’s validity.” Since the researcher makes no suggestions, the officials
may be less likely to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions,
though the above quotation indicates this perception may be inaccurate.

Information Obtained from Other Sources. The officials were asked if there were
other sources of information they considered when making policy and budgetary
decisions, and six responded that there were. In addition to emails and other
“opportunities that citizens have to respond to you” and “your own personal opinions and
thoughts,” the officials also mentioned the following:

A great deal of the factors we use are research and recommendations provided to us by the
administration, the manager’s office and the different department heads. The department heads
are able to make a recommendation and have certain different types of data to support their
recommendation. Furthermore, we have had some minisurveys done by the [Center] that focus in
on a smaller segment...a more focused questionnaire. So, oftentimes, when we’re just not sure,
we contact the [Center] and have them, then, provide us with further information...Experts are
another one. We have had different experts that we’ve hired for different matters...Typically, we
will try to get close to that conclusion before the survey is applied, and then we’ll look at the
survey and see if it is consistent with the conclusion that we’ve drawn. I mean, we kind of use it
as a check and balance to confirm our research one way or the other.

I go to various neighborhood associations, I talk to people, people come to our council meetings.
They give their opinions...We also read newspapers. There’s letters to the editor...The more
information we have, the better position we are in to make any decision.

The officials’ use of these other sources of information when making policy and
budgetary decisions may be a factor that impacts their use of the survey results. After all,
they may be less likely to use the survey results if one or more of these alternative sources provided information that contradicts the results of the survey.

**Large Proportion of the Respondents Provide a Certain Response.** When asked if there were any barriers that might prevent him from using the survey results, one official said:

I’d like to see at least seventy percent support for something. I want much more than a simple majority. I want to see a high level of support because you’re always going to lose, that number will erode as soon as it becomes a tax increase issue...

This could be another factor impacting the officials’ use of the survey results, though it may only be a factor for this official.
DISCUSSION

This section will synthesize and discuss the findings presented in the previous section. The information the analyses of the archival research and the interviews revealed about the officials' use of the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions are presented first. The discussion will then go through each of the factors presented in the literature and the new potential factors revealed by the analyses. This discussion will determine whether or not these factors may have had an impact on the official's use of the survey.

Officials' Use of the Survey Results

The interviews with the officials provided the most direct information on the officials' use (or lack thereof) of the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. All of the officials contended that they (or other officials) used the survey results as a general guideline for setting priorities and goals and to make specific policy and budgetary decisions. All of them also provided specific examples of how the survey results were used to create and revise various services, policies, programs, and initiatives. Furthermore, four of the officials contended that any change in the rating or ranking of a program or service led to alterations in that program or service. Finally, three officials explicitly stated that the budget resulted from the survey, while another claimed that it did not. While all of the interviews indicated that the officials used the results, as the
above discussion demonstrates, two officials contended they used the survey results less than they would have liked.

The interviews with the researchers, while providing a proxy of the officials’ use of the survey results, corroborated much of what the officials said in their interviews. The researchers stated that the officials used the results to create their general goals and objectives and/or to make specific changes, as well as to address any changes in the ratings or rankings of services or programs.

While the newsletters provided information on the officials’ use of the survey results, it would appear that they are not a truly appropriate source of information for this variable. Almost none of the articles in the newsletters indicated that the officials used the results to make policy and budgetary decisions. Unless both the officials and the researchers were lying or gravely mistaken about the officials’ use of the survey results, the newsletters appear to understate the use that actually occurred. Therefore, the newsletters do not appear to truly offer information on the use of the survey. They do, however, serve as an excellent source of information regarding the officials’ communication of the survey results to the public.

Factors Mentioned in the Literature

Survey Construction

Survey Contains Questions that Obtain Specific Information

The analysis of the surveys indicated that they contained very few questions that obtain more specific information about the city’s services, programs, or policies.
According the literature, the officials should therefore not be likely to use the survey results. While two officials contended they could not use the survey results as much as they would have preferred for this reason, all of the other officials did not mention encountering this problem when using the survey results. Therefore, the lack of this type of questions in the survey may have only been a minor factor for these two officials.

**Surveys Contain the Same Questions Over Time**

Comments made by all of the researchers and six of the officials, statements made in the reports, and the analysis of the survey instruments all revealed that the survey contained many of the same questions in all of its iterations. Additionally, the interviews with the researchers and four of the officials indicated that one of the officials’ primary uses of the survey results was to react to any changes in the ratings and rankings of the city’s services and programs. Finally, three officials said the survey instrument should not be radically altered so the officials can continue to monitor the survey results for any changes. Therefore, the existence of similar questions in the surveys throughout the years appears to be a factor that might have impacted the officials’ use of the survey results.

**Questions Address What Officials Can Affect**

The analyses of the surveys and the interviews with three of the officials indicated that the surveys might contain a few questions that address aspects of the city’s services, policies, and programs that the officials may not be able to affect, such as economic development and the flow of traffic. Even so, the interviews with both the researchers
and the officials and six of the articles in the newsletter indicated that the officials have initiated and/or revised these services, policies, and/or programs. One example of this would be road improvements. Therefore, the survey appears to contain questions that relate to aspects of the city's services, policies, and programs that the officials can affect, which the literature contends makes the officials more likely to use the survey results. Since the officials appear to have used these survey results, having questions that address services, policies, and programs the officials can affect appears to be a factor.

**Type of Analysis to be Used**

The analyses of the reports, the presentation outlines, and the interviews with the researchers all revealed that the researchers essentially only provided the officials with comparisons of the results to various questions across time. Both the requests for proposals and the researchers' proposals claimed that the researchers would provide crosstabulations of the respondents' answers to various questions and comparisons of their responses to various questions over time and between different groups, but these claims did not materialize. (Additionally, the lack of any crosstabulations may be the direct result of the dearth of questions that obtain detailed information about the city's services, policies, and programs, as discussed above.) As a result, the literature would contend that the officials would be less likely to use the survey results.

The results have been used, however. Therefore, having all three types of analysis may not be a factor that impacts the officials' decision to use the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. At the same time, however, having the comparisons over time appears to have been a factor, particular in light of the previous
discussion. Furthermore, having all three types of analysis could possibly make the officials more likely to use the results.

**Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers**

With the exception of the newsletter articles and the surveys, all of the sources that were analyzed presented information on the lifecourse of the survey, which provided information on the tasks performed by the officials and the researchers. Furthermore, all of these sources essentially described the same division of labor and indicated that neither the lifecourse nor the tasks performed by the officials or the researchers changed significantly over the sixteen years the survey was conducted.

According to the various sources analyzed, the lifecourse of the survey, which reveals the tasks performed by the officials and the researcher, is as follows. The officials solicited a proposal, which the researcher supplied. The officials then selected the researcher who would conduct the study. The manager and other officials, specifically the survey committee, created and reviewed a draft of the survey. They then provided this draft to the city council and, after obtaining the council’s approval, to the researchers, who reviewed it to ensure that it met the basic standards of survey research. The researchers then returned the survey to the council, who reviewed and approved it a second time. The researchers then setup the study, obtained the sample, hired and trained the interviewers, conducted the pretest and then the actual study, transferred the data to the database, cleaned and analyzed the data, wrote and delivered the report, and presented the findings to the officials. As this point, the officials reviewed the results and decided if and how to use the results.
Since the literature contends that the officials will be more likely to use the survey results if they are involved in designing the survey and if the researchers conduct the study and analyze the results, the above paragraph indicates that the officials and the researchers performed the tasks the literature contends will encourage the officials to use the survey results. Furthermore, three officials said they wished to be more involved in designing the survey. This could indicate that involving more officials in the design, which is a task the literature contends they should be involved in, might increase the officials' use of the results. As a result, the tasks performed by the officials and the researchers would appear to be a factor.

Time Required to Complete the Lifecourse

The analyses of an interview with one official, one interview with a researcher, the proposal requests, and the proposals all indicated that the project was (or should have been) completed within the timeframe suggested by the literature, although one researcher indicated that the timeframe of the lifecourse was longer. Furthermore, neither the officials nor the researchers indicated that the officials ever received any of the survey results after the deadline for a policy or budgetary decision. Therefore, the time required to complete the lifecourse may have been a factor that impacted the officials' use of the survey results.

Officials' Intention to Use the Results

The requests for proposals, the researchers' proposals, the interviews with two of the researchers, and the interviews with the officials all indicated that the officials
planned to use the results of the survey. As a result, this may very well be a factor that impacted their use of the results.

Officials Provide the Results to the Public

The information the various sources provided on this topic is mixed. While five of the officials and one of the researchers contended that the officials communicated the results of the survey to the public, one of the researchers makes the opposite claim. More importantly, the analysis of the newsletters, which are the most objective and direct sources of information on this topic, revealed that the officials did not publish the results every year. The discussion on the officials' use of the survey indicates that the officials appear to have used the results of the survey continuously. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if this is a factor.

Potential Factors Revealed in the Analysis

Officials' Perception of the Survey's Quality

The analysis of the officials' comments about their view of the survey's quality provided the most direct measure of this potential factor. Although a few of the officials had some concerns with the quality of the study, they all stated they felt it was of high quality. The other sources that provided information on the officials' view of the survey's quality (the reports, the presentation outlines, and the interviews will all three officials) corroborated these findings; all of them indicated that the project was of high quality in general, though some particular survey items might be problematic. Therefore, one might expect the officials to use the survey results for the most part, ignoring the
problematic questions. Since none of the interviews provided any examples of these problematic survey results being used, this appears to be what occurred. Therefore, the officials’ view of the survey’s quality appears to be a factor.

Researchers Make Policy Suggestions

The analyses of the reports, the presentation outlines, and all of the interviews with the researchers and the officials all demonstrated that the researchers essentially did not provide any policy suggestions for the officials. While the lack of these suggestions could lead the officials to be less likely to use the survey results, the officials did use them, as revealed above. Furthermore, one of the officials said he did not expect the researchers to provide policy suggestions, and two other officials stated that they felt doing so would be inappropriate. Therefore, the presence or absence of policy suggestions does not appear to be a factor.

Results Provide Clear Majorities

The reports revealed that many of the responses to the questions regarding policy and initiative issues have clear majorities of respondents either “for” or “against” the issue, which could lead the officials to use the results. Since the interviews with the officials and researchers indicated that the officials have used the results in this way, the presence of these majorities would appear to be a factor.
Majority of Results are “Positive”

All of the researchers stated that the majority of the responses to the survey are “positive.” In other words, the results indicate that the citizens are satisfied with the services the city provides, do not believe that there are many areas of concern in the city, and support previous actions the city has taken. Furthermore two of the researchers contended that the existence of these positive results was one reason the officials used the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions. Therefore, having a large proportion of positive results may be a factor that impacts officials’ use of the results of community surveys.

Information Obtained from Other Sources

The interviews with six officials revealed that they considered other sources of information when making budgetary and policy decisions. These sources include: information obtained from other forms of contact with citizens; the officials’ opinions and experiences; and research sponsored and/or conducted by the manager, department heads, and outside experts. Therefore, the officials may not always use the survey results. After all, they might be unlikely to do so if another source of information provided contrary information. Since six officials provided examples of this, the existence of other sources of information appears to be a factor, at least for these officials.
Large Proportion of the Respondents Provide a Certain Response

One official stated he only used the survey results if a very large proportion of the respondents provided a certain response. For example, he would only support a policy initiative if seventy percent or more of the respondents indicated that they supported it. As a result, this could be another factor, though only this official mentioned it.
CONCLUSION

This section lists the factors that may or may not have impacted the officials’ use of the survey results. It also provides recommendations for the researchers and officials involved in the project. It ends with a discussion of the generalizability of the results and recommendations for future research.

The previous section reveals that there appear to be several factors that may have impacted the officials’ use of the survey results to make policy and budgetary decisions in the case studied. Table 2 provides a summary of these factors. The first column in this table indicates in which stage(s) the factor appears. The second column lists the factor, which is further explained in the third column.
Table 2

Summary of the Factors that Impacted the Officials’ Use of the Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage(s) of Lifecourse</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Survey Construction</td>
<td>Surveys should contain the same questions over time. Questions should address services, programs, and policies that the officials can affect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Type of Analysis to Be Used</td>
<td>Must compare the responses across time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Tasks Performed by Officials and Researchers</td>
<td>Officials should be involved in designing the survey, while researchers should check the validity of the survey, conduct the study, and analyze the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Survey and Creating the Final Design</td>
<td>Time Required to Complete the Lifecourse</td>
<td>The lifecourse must take no more than three months and/or the officials must receive the results prior to a policy or budgetary decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials’ Decision to Use or Not Use the Survey Results</td>
<td>Officials’ Intention to Use the Results</td>
<td>Officials should plan and intend to use the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials’ Decision to Use or Not Use the Survey Results</td>
<td>Types of Results</td>
<td>Officials are more likely to use results that provide clear/large majorities. Officials are more likely to use the results when the majority are “positive.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since the factors that may have impacted the officials’ use of the survey results are now known, three recommendations can be made to the researchers and officials who are involved in the survey project studied in this paper. First, the officials already involved in designing the survey may want to consider including more officials in the design. Although all of the officials stated they used the results, three wished they could be more involved in the process. Furthermore, two other officials contended they could not use the survey results as much as they would have liked because the questions did not provide them with enough specific information about the city’s various services and programs. As a result, including more officials in the survey’s design, which the literature would support, might increase the relevance of the survey’s questions and, therefore, the officials’ use of the survey results.

Second, the researchers and the officials who design the survey need to ensure that the survey only includes questions that ask citizens about policies, programs, services, or initiatives that the officials have the resources to implement or change. While the findings indicate that the surveys’ questions already appear to do this, doing so would address the concern raised by two officials that financial restraints prevented the
officials from using some of the results to make policy and budgetary decisions. Furthermore, it would ensure that all of the questions addressing policies, programs, services, and initiatives only address aspects of those things that officials can change, which is a factor that appears to impact the officials’ use of the survey results.

Finally, the researchers may want to address the officials’ concerns about the quality of the survey and its results. Doing so might increase their already high use of the survey.

In addition to indicating which factors may have impacted the officials’ use of the survey results, the previous section indicates that three of the factors mentioned in the literature do not appear to have had an impact on the officials’ use of the results in this particular case. Although the literature contends that the survey must contain questions that obtain specific information about the city’s services, programs, and policies, the officials’ use of the survey despite the lack of these questions indicates that this is not a factor. Whether or not the officials publicize the results of the survey also does not appear to be a factor because the officials appear to have used the results regardless of whether or not the results had been publicized that year. Finally, the contention made in the literature that the analysis needs to include crosstabulations between the respondents’ answers to different questions and comparisons of the responses to different questions over time and between various groups does not seem to be a factor because the officials used the results even though only comparisons over time were provided.

The previous section also indicates that one of the potential new factors, whether or not the researchers make any policy suggestions to the officials, does not appear to be a factor. While it seems logical to believe that the presence of policy suggestions might
make the officials more likely to use the results, the findings illustrate that the officials made great use of the survey results despite the fact that the researchers provided essentially no suggestions. Furthermore, three officials indicated they did not want or expect these suggestions. As a result, the presence of policy suggestions does not appear to be a factor.

By revealing new factors and indicating that some of the factors mentioned in the literature do not appear to be factors for this case, this study would appear to have added to our knowledge of community surveys. Therefore, its attempt to "fill the gaps" in the literature appears to have been successful.

The true value of this research, of course, is whether or not its conclusions can be generalized to other communities. At this point it time, it is difficult to say if the results are generalizable, especially since this study is preliminary and exploratory. Future research is needed to see if the conclusions presented here apply to other cases.

Furthermore, future research could be designed to bridge the gaps in this project. Two of these gaps, namely this study’s inability to provide causal arguments and to determine the relative impact of each factor on the officials’ decision to use or not use the survey results, were mentioned in the section on the research design. Additionally, this study did not allow the participants to verify its findings, which would have increased the validity of these findings. Furthermore, this study did not systematically investigate the officials’ budgetary and policy decision making processes. Future research should address these gaps in order to further increase our understanding of the factors that impact officials’ use of the results of community surveys.
Finally, any future research on this topic could explore the factors listed above in more detail. More specifically, it could seek any potentially contradictory effects of these factors. For example, the presence of large majorities appears to be a factor, but, at the same time, officials may also "use" results that do not have any majorities by taking no action. This study does not address these potential issues, so they would make a good topic for future research.
Appendix A

Protocol Clearance From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Date: February 15, 2002

To: David Hartmann, Principal Investigator
    Craig Tollini, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 02-02-13

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Lifecourse of a Community Survey" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 15, 2003
Appendix B

Informed Consent Document
Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology
Principal Investigator: Dr. David Hartmann
Student Investigator: Craig Tollini

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled “Lifecourse of a Community Survey.” This research is intended to discover how the Portage Community Survey came to be, if and how its results have been used to form policy, and what factors may have led to this result. This project is Craig Tollini’s thesis project.

You will be asked to participate in a one one-hour private interview with Craig Tollini. You will be asked to meet Craig Tollini for these sessions at either your office or a place that is more convenient and comfortable for you. This session will be tape-recorded, provided you consent. The session will involve answering a short series of questions addressing the topics mentioned above.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to you except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way you may benefit from this activity is having the chance to think more about and reflect on the Portage Community Survey, which may improve the quality of the survey and increase its utility.

All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means that your name will not appear in any report or publication that uses the information you provide. Furthermore, your name and any other identifying information, such as the time you were involved with the survey or your position, will not be included in the final report. All of the information you provide will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the KSCR.

You may refuse to participate at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. You may also refuse to have the interview tape-recorded.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you may contact either Craig Tollini at (616)387-3600 or Dr. David Hartmann at (616)387-3594. You may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (616)387-8293 or the vice president for research at 387-8298 with any concerns that you have.
This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not have a stamped date and signature.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that you agree to participate.

_________________________________________ Date
Signature
Consent obtained by: _______________________
  initials of researcher _______________________
  Date

Your signature below indicates that you give consent to have the one-hour session tape recorded.

_________________________________________ Date
Signature
Consent obtained by: _______________________
  initials of researcher _______________________
  Date
Appendix C

Interview Scripts
Current and former KCSR directors:

- Please describe your involvement in the Portage Community Survey, starting at the beginning.
  
  o If needed:
    - How did you come to be involved in the survey?
    - As far as you know, what did the city want from the survey?
    - To what extent were you involved in planning the survey (i.e., choosing and designing the questions, format, and analysis)?
    - How long did the process take?
    - How did you report the results? To whom did you present the results and in which format (i.e., written report, presentation, or both)? Which results did you include in your report? How did you present the results, and which results did you present? If you encountered any issues or problems while conducting the survey that you believed might detract from the validity or generalizability of the survey, did you mention these issues/problems to the client (either in person or in the report)?
    - Were there any changes in the survey (either during the process or from preceding years)? Why do you believe these changes occurred?
    - Did your involvement in the survey change over time?
  
  o I will allow the respondents to be as specific as they can in regards to time.
- What is your perception of how Portage’s officials received the survey results?
  
  o If needed:
    - Were they happy with the results?
    - Did they feel that the views expressed could be reasonably addressed?
    - Did the results agree or disagree with their opinions?
- Do you think the survey provided information that could be used to make policy? Why?
- Do you think the results have been used? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

City Contact: Assistant Manager and others.

- Please describe your involvement in the Portage Community Survey, starting at the beginning.
  
  o If needed:
    - How did you come to be involved in the survey?
    - As far as you know, what did the city want from the survey?
    - To what extent were you involved in planning the survey (i.e., choosing and designing the questions, format, and analysis)?
    - How long did the process take?
• Did you report the results to anyone else? If so, how did you report the results? To whom did you present the results and in which format (i.e., written report, presentation, or both)? Which results did you include in your report? How did you present the results, and which results did you present? If you encountered any issues or problems while conducting the survey that you believed might detract from the validity or generalizability of the survey, did you mention these issues/problems to the client (either in person or in the report)?
• Did you have the results reported to you? If so, how were they presented and what was presented? Were any problems with the survey brought to your attention?
• Were there any changes in the survey (either during the process or from preceding years)? Why do you believe these changes occurred?
• Did your involvement in the survey change over time?
  o I will allow the respondents to be as specific as they can in regards to time.
• What is your perception of how the officials received the survey results?
  o If needed:
    • Were they happy with the results? Why?
    • Did they feel that the views expressed could be reasonably addressed? Why?
    • Did the results jive agree or disagree with their opinions? Why?
• What is your view of the survey’s quality?
• Do you think the survey provided information that could be used to make policy? Why?
• Do you think the results have been used? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

City Officials who Receive the Survey Results and are in a Position to Utilize Them:
Mayor, council members, development directors, department heads.
• Please describe your involvement in the Portage Community Survey, starting at the beginning.
  o If needed:
    • Were you involved directly in the survey? If so, how (i.e., extent involved in planning the survey)?
    • How long did the process take?
    • Did you have the results reported to you? If so, how were they presented and what was presented? Were any problems with the survey brought to your attention? Were any problems with the survey brought to your attention?
    • Did you report the results to others, including the public? If so, how and why?
    • Were there any changes in the survey (either during the process or from preceding years)? Why do you believe these changes occurred?
    • Did your involvement in the survey change (over time)?
• I will allow the respondents to be as specific as they can in regards to time.
• What is your view of the survey’s quality? Were any problems/issues with the survey brought to your attention (either in person or in the report)?
• Did the survey provide you with useful information? OR did it give have questions that applied to your needs? If so, why and please provide examples.
• Did the results agree or disagree with your own position? With what you thought could be achieved?
• Do you think the survey provided information that could be used to make policy? Why?
• Do you think the results have been used? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Stipak, B. (1979b). Are there sensible ways to analyze and use subjective indicators of urban service quality? Social Indicators Research, 6, 421-438.
