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The Borough of State College, Pennsylvania

Summary Report 2007



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SURVEY BACKGROUND

About The National Citizen Survey™

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS™) is a collaborative effort between National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Understanding the Results

Survey Administration

Following the mailing of a pre-survey notification postcard to a random sample of 1,200 households, surveys were mailed to the same residences approximately one week later. A reminder letter and a new survey were sent to the same households after two weeks. Of the mailed postcards, 98 were undeliverable due to vacant or “not found” addresses. Completed surveys were received from 409 residents, for a response rate of 37%. Typically, the response rates obtained on citizen surveys range from 25% to 40%.

It is customary to describe the precision of estimates made from surveys by a “level of confidence” (or margin of error). The 95 percent confidence level for this survey of 409 residents is generally no greater than plus or minus 5 percentage points around any given percent reported for the entire sample.

The results were weighted to reflect the demographic profile of all residents in the Borough of State College. (For more information on the survey methodology, see Appendix B in the Report of Results. A copy of the survey materials can be found in Appendix C of the Report of Results.)

Use of the “Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor” Response Scale

The scale on which respondents are asked to record their opinions about service and community quality is “excellent,” “good,” “fair” or “poor” (EGFP). While symmetrical scales often are the right choice in other measurement tasks, we have found that ratings of almost every local government service in almost every jurisdiction tend, on average, to be positive (that is, above the scale midpoint). Therefore, to permit finer distinctions among positively rated services, EGFP offers three options across which to spread those ratings. EGFP is more neutral because it requires no positive statement of service quality to judge (as agree-disagree scales require) and, finally, EGFP intends to measure absolute quality of service delivery or community quality (unlike satisfaction scales which ignore residents’ perceptions of quality in favor of their report on the acceptability of the level of service offered).

Putting Evaluations onto a 100-Point Scale

Although responses to many of the evaluative questions were made on a 4 point scale with 1 representing the best rating and 4 the worst, many of the results in this summary are reported on a common scale where 0 is the worst possible rating and 100 is the best possible rating. If everyone reported “excellent,” then the result would be 100 on the 100-point scale. Likewise, if all respondents gave a “poor” rating, the result would be 0 on the 100-point scale. If the average rating for quality of life was “good,” then the result would be 67 on a 100-point scale; “fair” would be 33 on the 100-point scale. The 95 percent confidence interval around an average score on the 100-point scale is no greater than plus or minus 3 points based on all respondents.

PROFILE OF STATE COLLEGE

As assessed by the survey, about 12% of State College residents have lived in the community for more than 20 years and 20% are over age 34. Another 6% are over age 64. Sixty-nine percent are currently employed; 77% rent; 23% own and 23% live in detached single family homes. Over 94% of State College residents have at least some college and 32% have annual household incomes above \$50,000. Two percent of State College residents reported that they are Spanish, Hispanic or Latino and 89% said they are White or Caucasian.

COMMUNITY LIFE

The National Citizen Survey™ contained many questions related to the life of residents in the community. Survey participants were asked to rate their overall quality of life, as well as other aspects of quality of life in State College. They also evaluated characteristics of the community, and gave their perceptions of safety in the Borough of State College. The questionnaire assessed use of the amenities of the community and involvement by respondents in the civic and economic life of State College.

Quality of Life

When asked to rate the overall quality of life in State College, 28% of respondents thought it was “excellent.” Only 2% rated overall quality of life as “poor.” State College as a place to raise children received an average rating of 68 on a 100-point scale.

Ratings of Community Characteristics

The highest rated characteristics of State College were educational opportunities, overall image/reputation, and overall appearance. When asked about potential problems in State College, the three concerns rated by the highest proportion of respondents as a “major problem” were alcohol, taxes, and drugs. The rate of population growth in State College was viewed as “too fast” by 45% of respondents, while 7% thought it was “too slow.”

Perceptions of Safety

When evaluating safety in the community, 67% of respondents felt “somewhat” or “very safe” from violent crimes in State College. In their neighborhood after dark, 76% of survey participants felt “somewhat” or “very safe.”

As assessed by the survey, 11% of households reported that at least one member had been the victim of one or more crimes in the past year. Of those who had been the victim of a crime, 50% had reported it to police.

Community Participation

Participation in the civic, social and economic life of State College during the past year was assessed on the survey. Among those completing the questionnaire, 59% reported volunteering in the past year.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Several aspects of the government of the Borough of State College were evaluated by residents completing The National Citizen Survey™. They were asked how much trust they placed in their local government, and what they felt about the services they receive from the Borough of State College. Those who had any contact with a Borough of State College employee in the past year gave their impressions of the most recent encounter.

Public Trust

When asked to evaluate whether they were pleased with the overall direction taken by the Borough of State College was rated as 59 on a 100-point scale.

Service Provided by State College

The overall quality of services provided by the Borough of State College was rated as 63 on a 100-point scale.

The Borough of State College Employees

Impressions of the Borough of State College employees were assessed on the questionnaire. Those who had been in contact with a Borough of State College employee in the past year (45%) rated their overall impression as 64 on a 100-point scale.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Seven additional questions were asked by the Borough of State College as listed below. The results for these questions are also available in the Report of Results.

Question 16a: Policy Question 1

The Borough has limited budget dollars. Borough Council wants your input in setting long-term budget priorities. Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following items is to you:

	Essential	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Total
<i>Continuing the current level of services for the following:</i>					
Street tree program	14%	28%	44%	14%	100%
Number of CATA bus routes	30%	38%	26%	5%	100%
Library hours and programs	18%	36%	36%	9%	100%
Promotion of alternative transportation (e.g., bus, biking or walking)	30%	31%	30%	8%	100%
Borough Web site (www.statecollegepa.us)	9%	23%	48%	19%	100%
<i>Expanding the current level of services for the following:</i>					
Nuisance ordinance enforcement	13%	23%	47%	17%	100%
Number of police officers	14%	30%	42%	14%	100%
Code enforcement at rental housing	24%	31%	35%	10%	100%
Number of surveillance cameras downtown	9%	20%	34%	37%	100%
Funding affordable housing programs in State College	35%	35%	22%	8%	100%
Expanding the Borough WiFi network	15%	23%	41%	22%	100%

Note: "don't know" responses have been removed.

Question 16b: Policy Question 2

The Borough is exploring options to help maintain the economic viability of State College. Some options are described below. Please indicate to what degree you would support or oppose each of the following options:

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Total
Efforts by the Borough to maintain State College's status as a rental hub area	45%	46%	7%	2%	100%
Active support by the Borough for expansion of existing business in State College	37%	49%	12%	2%	100%
Efforts by the Borough to attract more visitors to the State College area	31%	47%	16%	5%	100%
Active support of downtown State College as a shopping and employment center	43%	48%	8%	1%	100%
Financial assistance for expansion of affordable housing in State College	54%	33%	9%	5%	100%
Financial assistance to help first time home buyers in the Borough	52%	35%	9%	5%	100%
Incentives to encourage new non-retail commercial development in the Borough	29%	52%	14%	6%	100%

Note: "don't know" responses have been removed.

Question 16c: Policy Question 3

The Borough may consider increasing the real estate tax rate by one mill to provide funds for each of the following activities. One mill would generate approximately \$485,000 and represents an additional \$62 in tax for a home with a market value of \$200,000. Please indicate to what degree you would support or oppose a one mill tax increase for each of the following options:

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Total
Financial assistance to first time home buyers	38%	38%	13%	11%	100%
Financial assistance to develop workforce housing (housing for a family of four with \$49,000-70,000 in annual income)	36%	41%	13%	10%	100%
Expand CATA's fare free area to include the entire Borough	46%	32%	13%	8%	100%
Purchase additional parkland in the Centre Region	31%	41%	16%	12%	100%

Note: "don't know" responses have been removed.

Question 16d: Policy Question 4

	No	Yes	Total
Do you have access to the Internet at home?	7%	93%	100%

Question 16e: Policy Question 5

	Broadband (DSL/Cable)	Dial-up	Total
What type of internet access do you have?	94%	6%	100%

Question 16f: Policy Question 6

Which of the following services or activities would you use on the Internet if available? Check all that apply	Percent of Respondents
Pay a parking ticket	88%
Report a nuisance or unsafe condition in my neighborhood	68%
Buy a monthly parking pass for a Borough parking garage or a cash key to use in parking meters downtown	64%
Report a crime that has occurred in my neighborhood	59%
Pay my refuse bill	45%
Pay Borough and School District taxes (a small processing fee would be charged)	37%
Apply for zoning/building permits	29%
Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one category.	

Question 16g: Policy Question 7

	No	Yes	Total
Are you currently enrolled as a student at Penn State?	49%	51%	100%