

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

Local Government Survey

An Assessment of Technology and
Community/Economic Development Issues
Executive Summary

A collaborative project with the
Western Illinois Regional Council, Macomb, IL

By

Lori A. Sutton
Danielle Pataky
Catherine Swanson
Aaron Weiman
Christopher D. Merrett



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Western Illinois University
Stipes Hall 518
1 University Circle
Macomb, IL 61455-1390
309-298-2237
800-526-9943

IIRA@wiu.edu
www.IIRA.org

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Executive Summary

The goal of this statewide study is to gain a better understanding of the current status of technology used by local governments and to identify the issues affecting community/economic development in their communities. The information collected will be used to develop regional and statewide programming to assist communities in community and economic development efforts. Survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to provide input if information technology (IT) programming was developed to assist local governments. More than 70 percent (71.4%) of municipalities and 53.3 percent of counties responded positively. In addition, the same question was posed in regard to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) programming. Survey results found that 72.5 percent of municipalities and 84.6 percent of counties that perform GIS activities in-house would be willing to provide input.

Sample and Survey

A total of 1,292 cities and 102 counties were sent surveys. Completed surveys were returned by 178 municipalities and 17 counties (four surveys did not specify unit of local government). In addition, three municipal surveys were returned due to inability to deliver. This resulted in a 13.8 percent response rate for municipalities and 16.7 percent response rate for counties. Each unit of local government was sent a survey booklet to complete and return in the postage-paid business reply envelope. Only one mailing of the survey instrument occurred at the end of July 2009.

The margin of error on the municipal survey was plus or minus 6.8 percentage points. Municipal results may be applied to the population within the 6.8 percent error. For example, 29.4 of municipal survey respondents reported employing an economic development official. Taking the margin of error in consideration, if applied to all municipalities, real percent would fall somewhere between 22.6 percent and 36.2 percent. The margin of error for counties was plus or minus 21.8 percentage points due to the small number of county surveys returned. The larger the margin of error, the less confidence one should have in applying survey results to the population as a whole.

Response Rate

Survey	Number Mailed	Number Received	Number Undelivered	Response Rate	Margin of Error
Overall	1,394	199	3	14.3%	--
Municipal	1,292	178	3	13.8%	6.8%
County	102	17	0	16.7%	21.8%

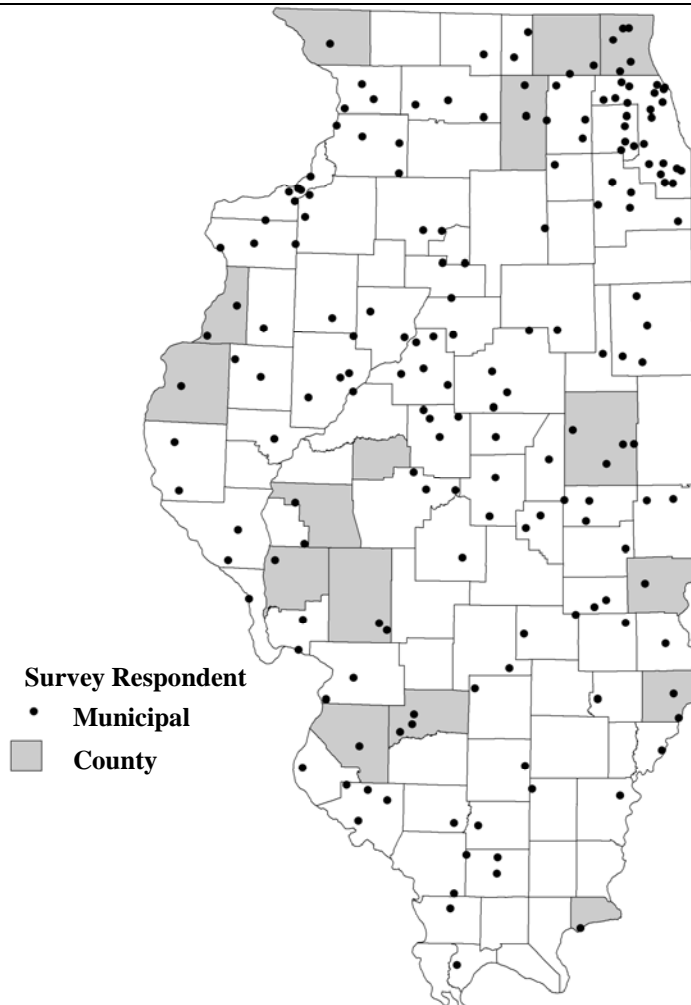
The survey instrument was divided into three sections:

- Section 1 was designed to be completed by the local administrator or his/her designee;
- Section 2 was designed to be completed by the IT professional within the unit of local government; and
- Section 3 was designed to be completed by the staff person that has Geographic Information Systems (GIS) responsibility for the unit of local government, in those cases that services were provided in-house.

In some instances, the local administrator was able to respond to all sections of this survey. In other instances, the survey was passed to other employees to complete the technical sections. Four local governments did not fill out the IT section. The GIS section was filled out by 34.8 percent of the municipalities and 88.2 percent of the counties.

Survey questions were developed from previous surveys constructed by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs and by Internet research on survey research conducted by state and research agencies in the United States.

Figure 1. Respondents to Local Government Survey



Community and Economic Development Issues

This section of the survey consisted of questions revolving around local government financial conditions, economic development, and community issues. Findings in this section include:

- The majority of the municipal survey respondents (66.5%) reside in communities with populations less than 5,000. The majority of county survey respondents (37.5%) are in counties with populations ranging from 10,000 to 24,999. Over half of the municipal respondents (55.6%) employ 20 or fewer employees, whereas half the county governments employ over 100 employees (56.3%).
- In FY2009, 52.9 percent of the municipalities stated that their revenues were stable with no impact on taxes and 53.2 percent expected the revenues to remain stable in FY2010. Only ten communities (5.8%) reported that revenues would be adequate in FY2010 and that they would need to reduce taxes and/or expand services/programs. None of the counties responding could claim adequate revenues in FY2010.
- Almost 30 percent of the communities (29.4%) and almost half of the counties (47.1%) reported that the local government employs an economic development professional. For municipal government units, 52.9 percent indicated that the position is full-time while 23.5 percent answered that it is a contractual position. The average economic development budget was \$720,678 in 49 communities, and \$360,404 in ten counties.
- There are usually other agencies in the local governments' service area that are performing economic development activities. A five-point Likert scale, with one being 'unimportant' and five being 'very important,' was used to rank the importance of different economic development groups in the area. Municipalities rated chambers of commerce (3.46 mean) and regional planning councils (3.05) as being important economic development groups. Counties rated regional planning councils (3.50) first, followed by chambers of commerce (3.23), followed by the Cooperative Extension Service (3.00).
- Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of different economic development goals on a five-point Likert scale, with one being 'unimportant' and five being 'very important.' Municipalities rated retaining current businesses and employment as being most important (4.41), followed by expansion of existing businesses of any type (4.06). County results corresponded with municipal results, with the same two goals both ranked as most important with a rating of 4.46 and 4.50, respectively.
- The majority of counties and municipalities reported that they had limited success in reaching their economic development goals, but have attracted several companies (31.3 and 46.2, respectively). Almost one in five municipalities (18.8%) felt they were moderately to

very successful in meeting their economic development goals. There were three counties that reported that they had moderate to very successful in meeting goals.

- Survey respondents were asked to rate various issues and opportunities using a five-point Likert scale, with one being ‘extremely poor’ and five being ‘excellent.’ Municipalities rated adequacy and quality of drinking water (3.83) and access to ambulance service at a reasonable cost (3.35) the highest, while counties rated adequacy and quality of drinking water (3.59) the highest. Adequacy of public transportation to get to jobs rated the poorest for both municipalities (2.07) and counties (2.29).
- Looking to the future, respondents were asked how important various issues would be in the next five to ten years, with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale with one being ‘unimportant’ and five being ‘very important.’ As noted in the previous response, adequacy and quality of drinking water rated the highest (4.24), followed by attracting more retail businesses to downtown (4.14), and preparing youth for better jobs (3.98). Counties rated availability of affordable child care (4.38) as the highest, followed by improving course offerings in schools (4.33), and the adequacy and quality of drinking water (4.31).

Information Technology (IT)

This portion of the survey asked questions about IT characteristics within the unit of local government, telecommunication services, and IT needs and issues in the community. Highlights of this section include:

- Over one-quarter (29.9%) of the municipalities surveyed employ an IT administrator. As expected, larger communities are more likely to employ an IT administrator than smaller ones. Half of the counties (50.0%) had an IT administrator. For the majority of municipalities, the position is full-time (44.9%) and/or contracted (40.8%). Only 12.7 percent of municipalities and 35.7 percent of counties indicated that they have a separate IT department. Almost half (49.3%) of the municipalities spent less than \$5,000 on IT for FY2009. The corresponding county results found that 25.0 percent spent less than \$5,000 on IT.
- Counties are more likely (26.7%) to have a technology strategic plan compared to municipalities (13.8%). One in three counties (33.3%) had a technology committee, compared to 13.9 percent of municipalities.
- The most useful computer programs used, based on a three-point Likert scale (one being ‘not very useful’ and three being ‘extremely useful’), are word processing (2.73 municipalities/2.81 counties), spreadsheets (2.70 municipalities/2.75 counties), and Internet browsers (2.59

municipalities/2.64 counties). In addition, county surveys concluded that databases (2.71) and GIS (2.79) are also useful computer programs.

- Most municipalities and all counties indicated that they use broadband or leased telecommunication lines. Only 6.8 percent of municipalities indicated no Internet access while 8.0 percent have dial-up access. Satisfaction with services was indicated on a three-point Likert scale with one being 'dissatisfied' and three being 'satisfied.' Counties and municipalities rated the characteristics the same, with accessibility (no busy signals) ranking the highest (2.77 municipalities/2.83 counties). The two lowest characteristics (showing more dissatisfaction) were choice of providers (2.39 municipalities/2.33 counties) and price of service (2.85 municipalities/2.53 counties).
- Almost seventy percent of municipalities (68.3%) and 70.6 percent of county governments have a website. One-third (33.6%) of the municipalities indicated that their website has been operational for six to ten years, while another 31.0 percent stated that their website has been in use for three to five years. Only 5.3 percent of the municipalities indicated that their website has been operational for less than one year. Of the government units without websites, 21.6 percent of municipalities and 20.0 percent of counties have plans to establish a website.
- Municipalities include the following services on their website:
 1. Council agendas/minutes (49.2%),
 2. Codes/ordinances (40.7%),
 3. Online communication with individual elected and appointed officials (39.0%),
 4. Forms to download and fill out manually (33.3%), and
 5. Employment information (31.1%).

These services were also popular on county websites. Counties were also more likely to include GIS mapping/data (52.9%) and online tax payments (41.2%).

- General revenues normally fund the online services of 84.4 percent of municipalities and 100 percent of counties. Planned online services include online completion and submission of permit applications (26.0% - municipalities/35.3% - counties) and online completion and submission of business license applications/renewals (22.0% - municipalities/17.6% - counties). Counties also planned on offering GIS mapping/data on their website (17.6%).
- Respondents were asked to rate the importance of using IT to achieve or enhance community issues related to business. Municipalities ranked communication with consumers (55.9%) and regional marketing (55.5%) as very important or critical. These were followed by competitiveness (50.0%), workforce development (49.6%), and employment opportunities (49.6%).

- Municipalities were asked to rate their community's level of IT usage to other communities. Half the municipalities (50.4%) rated their IT usage as average or above average. County respondents rated their IT usage level as average or above average (53.3%). Lack of funding for IT improvements was the most common hindrance to IT enhancement/improvements for the community (53.1% - municipalities/71.4% - counties).
- Most municipalities (37.9%) indicated that 51 to 75 percent of their residents have Internet access in their home. Only one in six communities (16.6%) indicated that less than 25 percent of their residents have Internet access at home. Public Internet access is available at 88.0 percent of libraries and 64.7 percent of schools. One in five communities (20.3%) have cyber-cafes and almost one in ten (8.3%) have community technology centers. Other areas noted by respondents include train stations, senior centers, restaurants, civic center, village hall, and hotels.
- Respondents were asked for their perceptions on the current and future levels of IT to the various sectors in the community. Municipalities rated IT as very important or critical to the education section most often (89.1%) currently. More than 90 percent (90.4%) reported that they expected it to be very important or critical to education in the future. Information technology was also seen as very important or critical to the large business section (81.1% - current/89.9% - future).
- One in five municipalities (19.4%) indicated that their community currently has a site, industrial park, or building/incubator that is equipped with telecommunications infrastructure suitable for new high-tech business to move into.
- More than two-fifths (42.4%) of municipalities and 88.2 percent of counties indicated that they utilize GIS. The tendency to use GIS increases with size. Most of the local government GIS activities are performed in-house and contracted (38.0% - municipalities/50% - counties). Of the municipalities not using GIS, 39.5 percent are interested in incorporating GIS activities into their operations. This also includes one of the two counties that do not currently use GIS.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

The last section of the survey focused on GIS. Only units of local government that use GIS in-house completely or partially were instructed to fill out this section of the survey. As noted earlier, 34.8 percent of municipalities and 88.2 percent of the counties surveyed completed this section. Percentages listed in this section are based only on the units of local government that participate in GIS activities. GIS questions in this section revolve around installation, data,

software/equipment, and usage. An imagery subsection was added at the request of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). Results include:

- As noted in the IT section, 42.4 percent of municipalities and 88.2 percent of counties use GIS. Forty percent (40.3%) of municipalities have been using GIS for less than three years. Results showed that counties are more likely (78.6%) to have been using GIS four years or more. GIS is used daily by 63.5 percent of municipalities and 92.9 percent of counties.
- GIS was initially set up by an internal budget for municipalities (73.6%). Approximately one-quarter of the municipalities (28.3%) indicated that there was a partnership/interagency agreement between other units of local government. County respondents indicated that they utilized recorder's fee from deeds (66.7%) the most for initial set ups, followed by internal budgets (53.3%) and state grants (40.0%). After initial funding, internal budgets have been used by the majority of municipalities (77.4%) to upgrade software and cover personnel expenses. County results show that recorder's fees (100%) and internal budgets (33.3%) have been used for continued funding of GIS activities.
- Over three-quarters (77.4%) of municipalities and 85.7 percent of counties have staff that have been formally trained to use GIS. The training met the majority of their needs (86.8% - municipalities/100% - counties). The two most commonly used GIS software for communities is ArcGIS (67.3%) and Arc View (40.4%). Counties also used the same software the majority of the time (71.4% and 42.9%). Over half of the municipalities (51.1%) and 64.3 percent of counties indicated using multiple GIS software applications.
- Most units of local government built the GIS data in-house via GPS collection, digitizing, scanning, rubber sheeting, etc. (86.4% - municipalities/76.9% - counties). Purchased proprietary data was utilized by 31.8 percent of municipalities and 46.2 percent of counties. Most municipalities (68.0%) share data with communities in their immediate county or with private engineering firms (32.0%). Approximately two-fifth (40%) or more of the counties were willing to collaborate/share data with the different entities listed on the survey [communities in their immediate county (76.9%), state agencies (69.2%), community colleges and universities (46.2%), communities outside the county (38.5%), and federal agencies (38.5%)]. Only 24.0 percent of municipalities and 15.4 percent of counties do not collaborate or share data.
- Most communities use GIS for decision-making (74.5%), map production (74.5%), data collection/creation (68.6%), and visualization (68.6%). Municipalities have intentions of using GIS for monitoring (35.3%) and modeling (33.3%).
- Only 26.4 percent of municipalities and 42.9 percent of counties provide GIS data online for their residents and businesses. Around 14.3 percent of municipalities and 33.3 percent of counties charge a fee for the data.

- In response to the questions submitted by IDOT, 70.4 percent of municipalities and 69.2 percent of counties were interested in partnering with the state for a 2010 statewide aerial imagery acquisition. Only 10.2 percent of municipalities and 28.6 percent of counties indicated having funding available for the spring 2010 imagery collection.

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