

## **Community Leadership, Engagement and Problem Solving 2010 Household Survey in Minnesota**

The following snapshot is based on surveys completed with a representative sample of Minnesotans in December 2010. Surveys were conducted on behalf of Bush Foundation to better understand residents' opinions about leaders in their communities, as well as what residents believe are the best options for solving the state's challenges. Differences by gender, age, education level, presence of children in the household, and metro (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington Counties) versus non-metro (all other counties in Minnesota) are reported when noteworthy. Changes observed since 2009 are based on a similar survey conducted in December 2009.

### *Quality of life*

In general, Minnesotans are slightly more likely to believe quality of life is getting better in their community than they are to believe quality of life is getting better in their state. Compared with one year ago, residents' ratings indicate a much more favorable outlook for both their community and their state.

- Residents with less education are more likely to believe quality of life in their community is getting better.
- Older residents are most likely to believe quality of life in their community and in the state as a whole is getting worse.

Most residents (88%) believe they can make a difference in improving the quality of life in their local community.

- Residents with children are more likely to strongly agree or agree that they can make a difference in improving quality of life in their local community.

When asked to list their top three concerns related to quality of life in Minnesota, the most commonly mentioned issues were: education (54%), government budgets (39%), the economy (37%), and health care (35%). This is a change from 2009 when the top concern was the economy (45%), followed by education (34%), public safety (20%), and social services (18%).

### **About the Bush Foundation**

Since its beginning in 1953, the Bush Foundation has invested in the vitality of communities across Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and the 23 Native nations that share the same geography. Today these communities face fundamental changes; not short-term conditions, but rather a new long-term reality that will affect the vitality of communities and the people in them for decades to come.

Adapting to this new reality will pose tough problems that are complex, challenge the status quo, will not be solved with business-as-usual approaches, and requiring change by whole communities. The Bush Foundation works in two different ways to support communities that are confronting these challenges:

1. By committing to find solutions to specific problems toward which the Foundation can make a significant contribution. The Foundation is involved in two such decade-long commitments: improving educational achievement and supporting the self-determination of Native nations.
2. By helping communities develop their capacity to solve their own tough public problems. This is accomplished through a combination of leadership development and by providing research, data, tools and opportunities to connect with others that are needed for developing innovative and sustainable solutions.

Through this work, the Bush Foundation is a catalyst for the courageous leadership necessary to create sustainable solutions to tough public problems and ensure community vitality

## *State budget challenges*

Respondents were asked if spending should be increased, left at the current level, or decreased in several specific areas of government to address their state's budget challenges. Minnesotans are most likely to favor increases in spending in the areas of K-12 education; health care for children, the elderly, poor, and disabled; long-term care for the elderly; and higher education. They are least likely to favor increases in spending for housing, property tax relief, social services, and aid to cities. Nearly half (45%) prefer to leave "across the board" spending at its current level.

- Women and men favor increased spending in different areas. Women are much more likely to favor increased spending in health care for children, the elderly, poor and disabled; long-term care for the elderly; K-12 education; and social services. Men, on the other hand, are slightly more likely to favor increased spending in property tax relief, transportation, aid to cities, and housing.
- Residents with children are more likely to favor increased spending on K-12 education, higher education, and the environment, whereas residents without children are more likely to favor increased spending on economic development, aid to cities, and transportation.
- Residents with less education are more likely than residents with more education to favor increased spending in nearly all areas, particularly for income support, housing, and aid to cities.
- Younger residents are more likely to favor increased spending in K-12 education, higher education, and health care. Older residents are more likely to favor increased spending for long-term care for the elderly, income support, and economic development.
- Residents from non-metro areas are more likely than metro area residents to favor increased spending in property tax relief, long-term care for the elderly, and income support. Metro area residents are slightly more likely to favor increased spending on transportation and K-12 education.

Respondents were also asked to select two of the items (from the same list of government services used in the previous question) that they feel are most in need of change to ensure taxpayers get the most cost effective services. Top responses include K-12 education (46%) and health care for children, the elderly, poor, and disabled (28%). It is an interesting finding that the areas in which residents feel spending should be increased are many of the same areas in which residents are most likely to feel reform is needed to ensure efficient services.

When asked to what degree they can accept certain consequences of increasing the cost-effectiveness of government services, Minnesotans were most likely to be able to accept doing more for themselves (59%) and getting used to a new way of doing things (51%). They are least willing to accept less regulation and inspection (23%) and loss of government jobs (27%).

- Men are more likely than women to accept loss of government jobs and less regulation and inspection as consequences of increased cost-effectiveness of government services. Men are also slightly more likely to accept loss of convenience, such as longer travel or waiting times. Women are slightly more likely to accept a new way of doing things.
- Residents without children are more likely to accept loss of government jobs, less regulation and inspection, and less convenience. Residents with children are more likely to accept doing more for themselves.

- Residents with higher education are willing to accept more consequences than residents with lower education, particularly change in location, less convenience, getting used to a new way of doing things, and a loss of government jobs.
- Younger residents are more likely to accept a new way of doing things as well as doing more for themselves. Middle-aged residents are more able to accept a change in location. Older adults are more willing to accept a loss of government jobs.
- Metro area residents are more likely than non-metro area residents to accept loss of government jobs and less convenience. Non-metro area residents are more likely to accept less regulation and inspection.

Respondents were asked to select from a list of pre-determined options how they feel about their state's budget challenges. Over two-thirds (68%) of Minnesotans believe their state's budget challenges have reached a crisis and will require difficult decisions to solve. This compares to 61 percent of residents who gave this answer in 2009.

- Residents without children, those with higher education, older adults, and non-metro area residents are more likely to give this response.

A smaller proportion of residents (14%) believe the state budget challenges are real but can be solved easily. In 2009, a comparable proportion of residents gave this answer (13%).

- Residents with less education are more likely to give this response.

Few residents believe the state budget challenges are exaggerated for political reasons (7%). Even fewer are unaware of any challenges (6%) or believe the challenges are irrelevant to them (3%). The responses from 2009 are similar.

- Women are slightly more likely to believe challenges are exaggerated for political reasons. Men, those with less education, and younger residents are more likely to report being unaware of challenges.
- Residents with children and older adults are more likely to believe the challenges are irrelevant to them.
- Metro area residents are more likely to give all of these responses.

Respondents were also informed that increasing taxes is one possible option under consideration in order to resolve their state's budget challenges. They were then asked if they would be willing to pay higher taxes under a number of different circumstances. A majority of Minnesotans agree or strongly agree they would be willing to pay higher taxes, especially for certain types of taxes only (66%), if the overall tax structure is fair (61%), and if it's clear they would get more for their money (58%). Over one-third (35%) would not support raising taxes under any circumstances.

- Women are more likely to pay higher taxes in nearly all circumstances, except men are more likely to be willing to pay higher taxes for certain types of taxes only. A similar proportion of men and women expressed they would not support raising taxes under any circumstances, however.
- Residents with children are more likely to be willing to pay higher taxes if the overall tax structure is fair, if taxes are dedicated to certain services, and in order to avoid cuts in vital services. Residents without children are slightly less supportive of raising taxes under any circumstances.

- Residents with more education are more willing to pay higher taxes in all circumstances. Residents with less education are far more likely to report they would not support raising taxes under any circumstances.
- Younger residents are more likely to support higher taxes particularly if they would get more for their money and for certain types of taxes only. Older residents are more likely to report they would not support raising taxes under any circumstances.
- Metro area residents are more likely to pay higher taxes if they get more for their money, if the overall tax structure is fair, and to avoid cuts to vital services. Non-metro area residents are more likely to be willing to pay higher taxes if taxes are dedicated to certain services.

### *Community problem-solving*

Most Minnesotans feel to some degree that people in their community work together and take action to solve problems, and include input from all segments of the community. Their answers are comparable to results from 2009.

- Men and women are equally as likely to believe people work together on community problems, but women are more likely to report that action is taken and decision-making includes input from all segments of the community.
- Metro area residents and those without children are less likely to agree the community takes action to solve problems.
- Residents with higher education are less likely to believe input from all segments of the community is included in decision-making.

### *Courageous leadership*

Bush Foundation's description of courageous leadership is as follows:

***Courageous leaders don't shy away from conflict when they are trying to solve tough problems. Courageous leaders harness energy from differing points of view and rally community members to work together to find solutions. Courageous leadership can come from anybody in your community, not just those in charge.***

Respondents were read this description and asked about the courageous leadership in their community. When asked if their community has the courageous leadership needed to solve tough problems, about two-fifths (39%) of residents said that is a lot like their community and over half (54%) said it is a little like their community.

- Women, residents without children, residents with lower education, older adults, and non-metro area residents are most likely to strongly endorse this statement about their community.

Nearly three-fifths (58%) of residents feel their community is either strong or very strong when it comes to courageous leaders in their community, compared with 42 percent in 2009.

- Women, residents with children, those with lower education, and non-metro residents are more likely to feel their community is strong or very strong in terms courageous leadership.

Finally, over two-thirds (68%) of residents have seen between one and four courageous leaders in their community in the past year. Nearly one-fifth (18%) have seen five or more. Fourteen percent of residents have not seen any courageous leaders. Overall, residents report slightly more courageous

leaders in their community than in 2009, when 19 percent of residents reported no courageous leaders.

- Women are more likely than men to have seen at least one courageous leader in their community in the past year.

### *Trust in leadership*

Minnesota residents have the most trust in the leadership of law enforcement, colleges and universities, and charitable organizations. They are least trusting of the leadership of labor unions, the media, and state government. When compared with the average U.S. adult (using a Harris Poll conducted in 2010), Minnesotans are far more trusting of leaders from all types of institutions, with the exception of small businesses (and we are not sure how Minnesotans compare to the average U.S. adult on the other areas that the Harris Poll did not include). However, it is important to note that the Harris Poll used different question wording (“confidence” in leaders, instead of “trust” in leaders), as well as slightly different wording on some of the items, so caution should be used when interpreting these results.

- Women, residents with children, residents with higher education, and younger residents have more trust in the leadership compared with other residents overall.
- Non-metro area residents have similar levels of trust in leadership compared to metro-area residents, except in areas of health care and labor unions.

### *Advice for elected officials*

When asked what one piece of advice they would give to elected officials in their state as they work on these and other issues of importance to their state, by far the most common suggestions provided by the residents of Minnesota fall under the following themes:

- Fiscal responsibility, a balanced budget, and don’t waste money (18%)
- Listen to your constituents, represent the people that elected you, remember who you work for (16%)
- Political parties need to work together and quit fighting, don’t blindly follow party lines, and be open-minded (15%)
- Use common sense and do what’s best for the people, make tough decisions, and don’t pander to lobbyists (10%)

### *Status of overall goal in 2009*

Bush Foundation’s goal is that 75 percent of Minnesota residents will believe their community is effective at solving problems and improving their quality of life by 2018 (along with North Dakota and South Dakota residents, which make up the Foundation’s service area).

When asked if their community is effective at solving problems and improving their quality of life, over half (52%) of Minnesotans say this is a lot like their community. This is a considerable increase from 2009, when 39 percent of Minnesotans said this is a lot like their community. Residents with children and residents with lower education are more likely to endorse this statement as a lot like their community.

### *Methods and respondent demographics*

Households were randomly selected to participate in this survey using address-based sampling. Adults were chosen at random from these households using the “most recent birthday” method. Post-stratification weighting based on age and gender (from the 2010 U.S. Census) was used to ensure representativeness of the data. The sampling error is less than +/- 5 percent.

#### **Respondent characteristics**

Female	50%
Male	50%

Average household size	2.7 people
Percent with children	43%

Working full-time	55%
Working part-time	13%
Unemployed	7%
Retired	19%
Disabled - unable to work	3%
Stay at home parent	4%

High school diploma or less	27%
Some college/AA degree	31%
Bachelor's degree or more	42%

18-34	34%
35-49	23%
50-64	24%
65 and older	19%