



Community Research Institute

Opinions on intergovernmental collaboration in Kent County

Survey results from citizens and elected officials

Presentation to the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council
September 6, 2012

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Study sponsored by



GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

With grant funding from the Frey Foundation



KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN



URBAN METRO MAYORS AND MANAGERS

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The survey project we're discussing today was conceived and funded in cooperation with the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC); Kent County, Michigan; and the Urban Metro Mayors and Managers (UMMM).



Presenting research partner



CENTER FOR
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NEIL CARLSON, Ph.D.

DIRECTOR

Calvin College

Center for Social Research

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Today we're speaking of collaboration and partnerships across jurisdictions, and we're offering a small model of such cooperation. CRI and CSR cooperate significantly on the Believe 2 Become Initiative and enjoy other partnerships like this one. The concept for this project originally came from Calvin College, was developed, executed and partly analyzed at CRI over at GVSU, with a fresh handoff to Calvin for today's presentation. The CSR is a small research shop that specializes in serving Calvin faculty and religious and community organizations, with the occasional business or government client.

The Community Research Institute's greater scale and closeness to government clients provides indispensable leadership and infrastructure to our West Michigan research community. CRI benefits from broad community support as well as the Johnson Center's endowment. From all of us who seek to use data to understand West Michigan, our thanks to all of you who help support and network for CRI.



Research led by



JOHN RISLEY, Ph.D.
RESEARCH SPECIALIST, CRI
(Now Research and Program Officer
at Western Michigan University)

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Many thanks to John Risley for taking the lead in communicating with GVMC and the Urban Metro Mayors and Managers and in executing the two surveys we will discuss. He's now taken up a job at WMU, closer to his home and family in Kalamazoo.



Agenda

- Legacy of Dr. James “Jim” Penning
- Research design
- Methods and sampling
- Interpretive background
- Results
 - Collaboration areas
 - Collaboration and consolidation forms
- Summary
- Questions and discussion

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Today's agenda



James Penning, Ph.D. (1949-2010)



Calvin College

Professor of Political Science, 1975-2010
Director of CSR, 2008-2010

City of Grand Rapids

Board of Zoning Appeals, 1979-1981
Planning Commission, 1983-1987

City of Kentwood

Charter Review Committee, 1991-1992
Charter Commission, 1992-1995
Elected Officers' Compensation Commission,
1997-2010
Property Maintenance Task Force, 1997
Commissioner, 2002-2003

Survey concept from 2010 *Grand Rapids Press* story about the One Kent campaign

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I'd like to take a brief moment to honor Jim Penning, a beloved colleague and public servant who conceived this project and drafted survey questions after reading *Press* coverage of the One Kent campaign. Many of you may remember him from his roles in Grand Rapids and Kentwood government. He was unfailingly cheerful and patient ... except when reading the newspaper.



Research design

- Goal of non-aligned, pragmatic objectivity
- New survey questions
 - Information levels about governmental consolidation and service sharing
 - Support for sharing specific services
 - Support for levels of collaboration/consolidation
- Two complementary surveys
 - Residents via Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey (phone, fall 2011)
 - Elected officials survey (online/mail, spring 2012)

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Sample selection and results

- GGRCS, fall 2011
 - Random-digit-dialed telephone survey by Precision Research (Phoenix, AZ)
 - Quota of 500 Kent County residents
 - Oversample of African Americans and Hispanics (100 each); analysis is weighted to represent the county population
 - Sampling error +/- 4%
- Elected officials, spring 2012
 - List provided to CRI by GVMC
 - Online (148) and mail (100), 248 total
 - 118 responses (47.5% response rate)
 - Population data (no sampling error)

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Response geography

■ Residents

<u>Geography</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Weighted count</u>
Grand Rapids	194	161.9
Kentwood	31	21.8
Wyoming	48	42.5
Other city	46	48.7
Township or rural	162	178.4
Don't know, refused or no answer	19	17.8
Total	500	471.1

■ Elected officials' residences

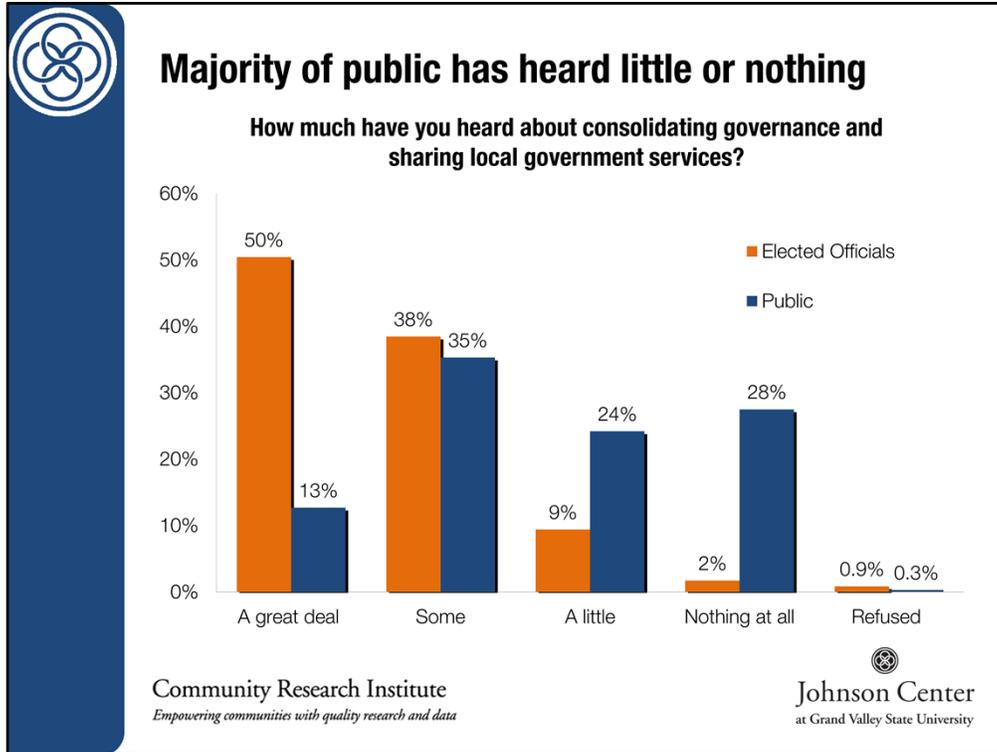
<u>Geography</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Center cities	28
Outlying cities	11
Charter townships	21
Townships	47
Other or no answer	11
Total	118

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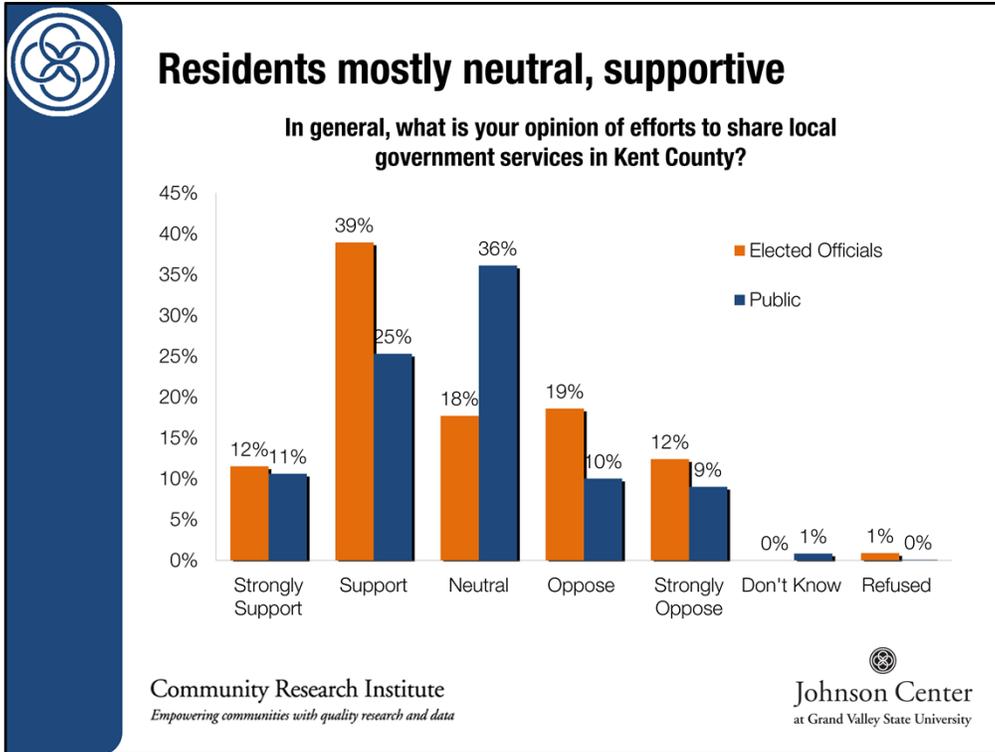
Just to highlight the geographic distribution of the respondents, we've grouped the respondent's governments into categories in each survey. For reasons that should be obvious, the data on residents is dominated by Grand Rapids residents, while the data on officials is dominated by township officials. Resident data is weighted for representativeness, but we have not endeavored to weight the officials' responses, except to be wary and report briefly on internal variation among the officials.

We recognize that the officials surveyed are not equally influential and that the positions of a few individual leaders from specific jurisdictions can be decisive. We are taking officials here as a sort of especially informed population of citizens, rather than as a formally constituted body of decision makers.

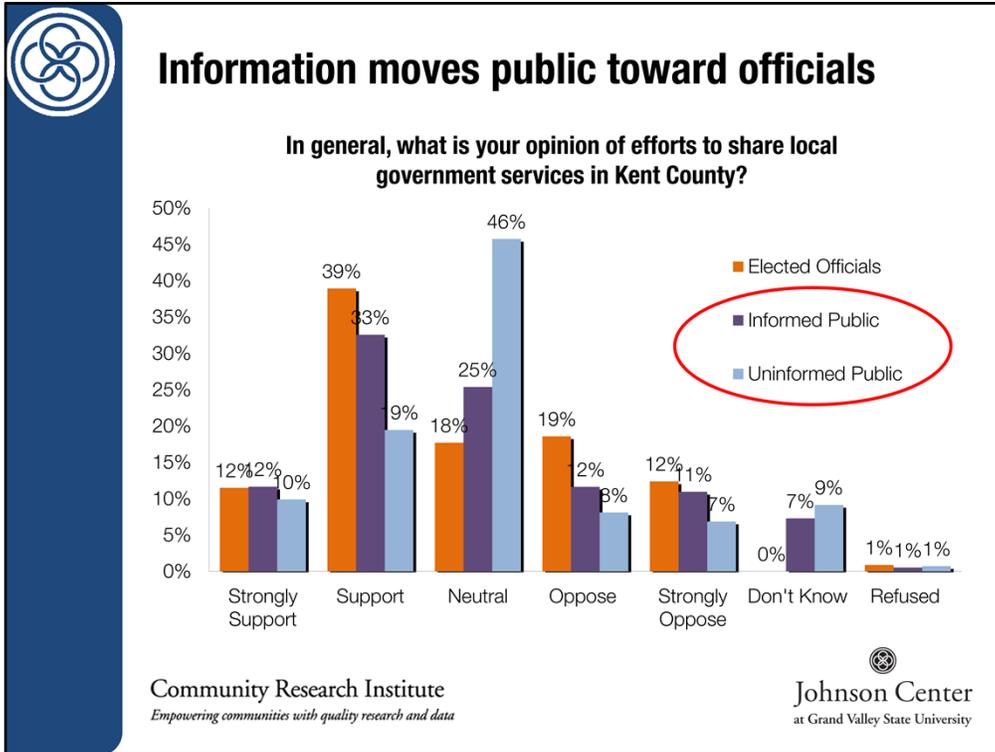


Both residents and elected officials were asked, “How much have you heard about consolidating governance and sharing local government services?” Officials were four times more likely than residents to report hearing “a great deal” (50% vs. 13%); 88% of officials had heard “some” or “a great deal,” compared to just 48% of residents; leaving a majority of residents (52%) who had heard “a little” or “nothing at all.”

Residents’ reported exposure to information increases as age, income and civic engagement increase, but education, geography and ethnicity are not significant predictors when the others are controlled. Elected officials’ reported information exposure did not differ by geography, the only demographic variable available for that group.



We asked, “In general, what is your opinion of efforts to share local government services in Kent County?” Residents’ and officials’ positions were similar, with 51% of officials and 36% of residents expressing support and 31% of officials and 19% of residents expressing opposition. Over a third of residents (36%) and about a sixth of officials (18%) reported a “neutral” position.



Here we group our first question's responses into residents who had heard "a great deal" or "some" about government consolidation and sharing services into an "informed public" category and the remaining 52% into an "uninformed public" category, then apply the subgrouping to the last chart. While the differences are not statistically significant, it's immediately apparent that the "informed public" has a distribution of responses more similar to those of public officials, with fewer neutral responses, greater support and greater opposition.

Among the 68 residents who reported hearing "a great deal," 45% were supportive and 34% were opposed, with just 19% "neutral." 21% (14 respondents) were "strongly opposed." The 68 self-reported highly informed respondents is too few to analyze with any statistical power, but the pattern is suggestive of a small (3% of respondents) but vehement constituency in opposition.



Geographic variation

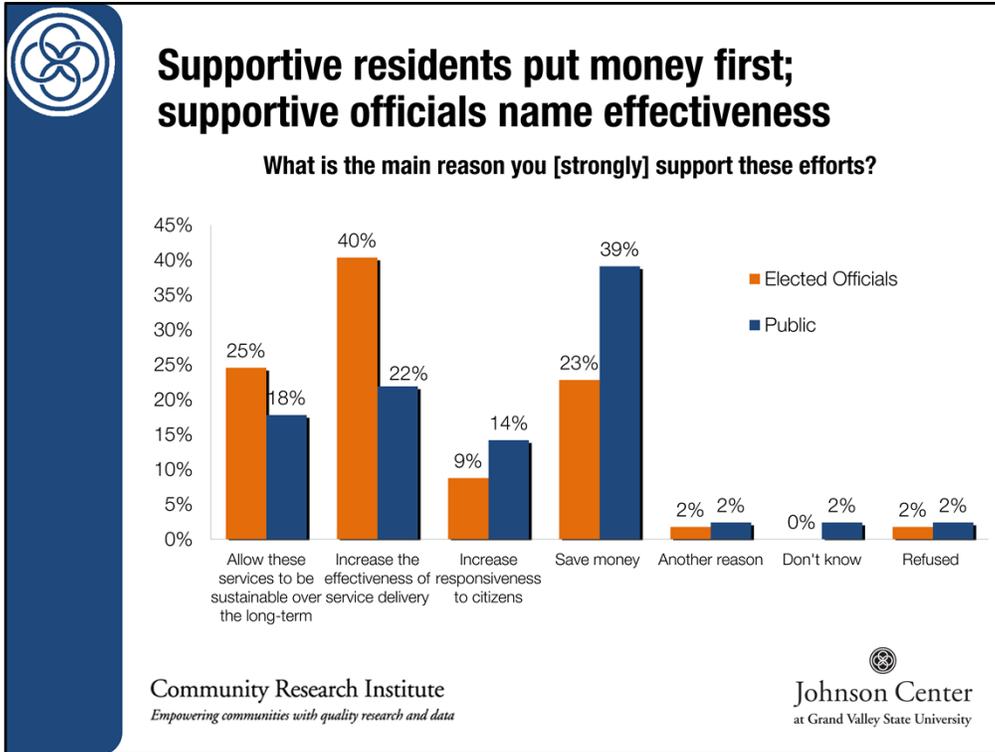
Margins of error are large—not for strong conclusions!

- Among officials,
 - “Center city” officials are most supportive (**70%** support, just 7% opposition).
 - Non-charter township officials are most opposed (45% support, **40%** oppose).
- Among residents,
 - “Other city” respondents are most supportive (**50%** support, 9% oppose)
 - GR: 39% support, 14% oppose
 - Opposition is also greatest in townships (34% support, **25%** oppose).

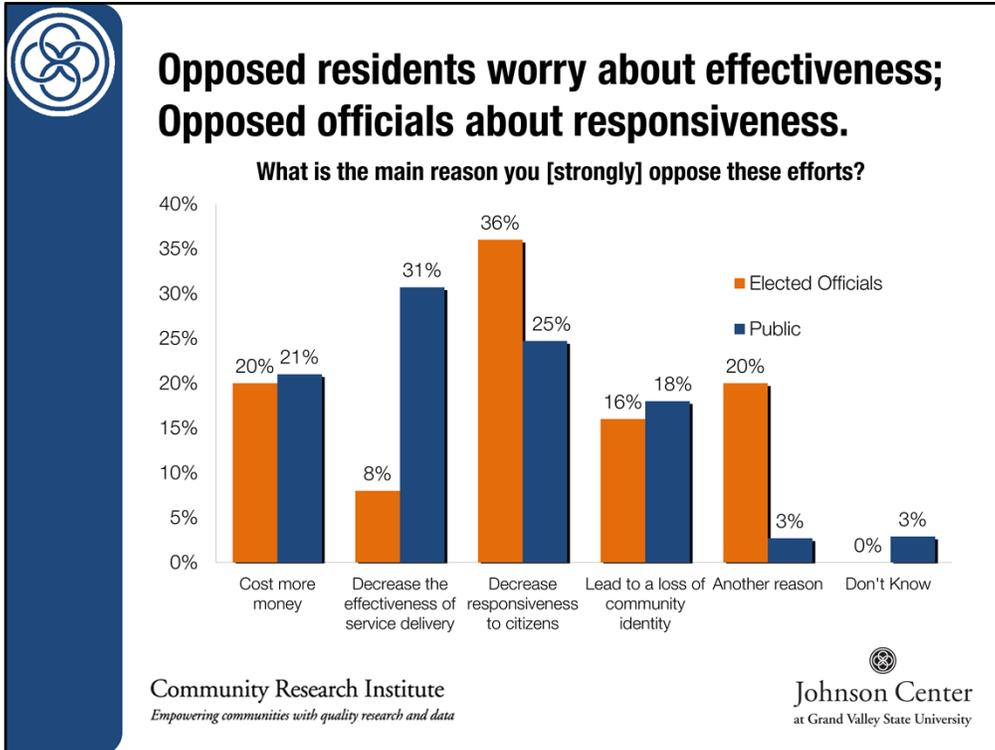
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Under construction: a visual would be preferable.



For the respondents who said they were supportive of sharing services (48% of officials and 36% of residents), we asked, “What is the main reason you support [or strongly support] these efforts?” Elected officials were more likely than residents to mention service effectiveness (40% vs. 22%) and sustainability (25% vs. 18%), while the public was more likely to mention saving money (23% vs. 39%) and responsiveness to citizens (9% vs. 14%). No difference between informed and uninformed citizens was observed.



For respondents who said they were opposed to sharing services (30% of officials and 19% of residents), we asked, “What is the main reason you oppose [or strongly oppose] these efforts?” Opposed elected officials had the largest single group, with 36% citing decreased responsiveness to citizens as their #1 concern. Citizens were most likely to cite decreased effectiveness (31%), which was officials’ least likely response (8%). Similar proportions of both groups cited cost and community identity.



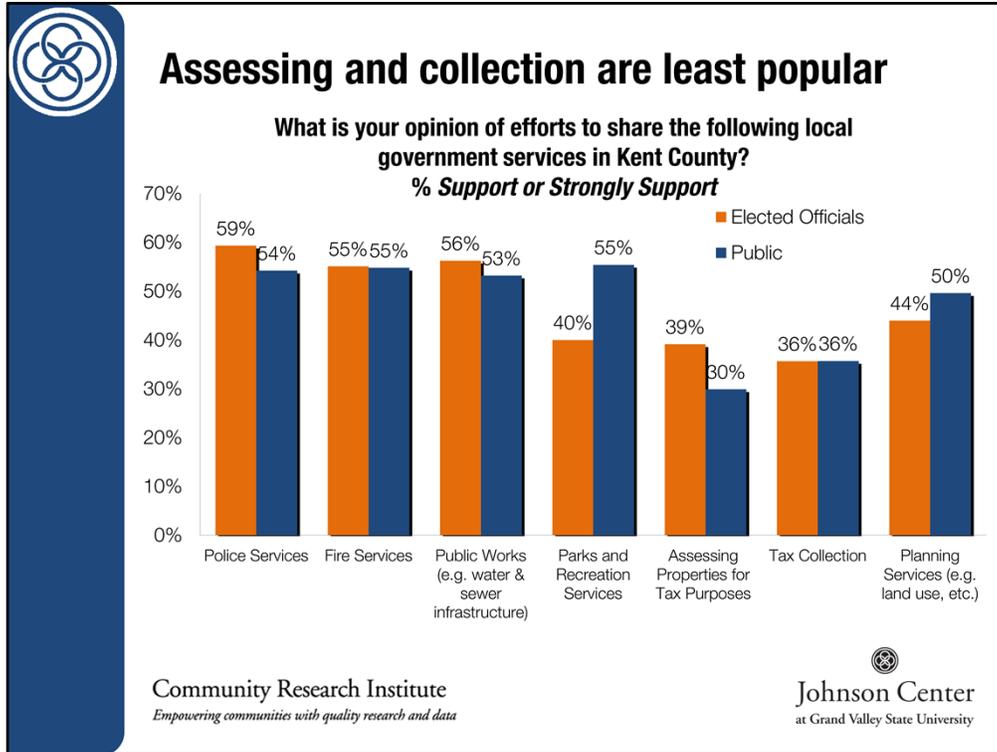
Political opportunity?

Very tentative observations from survey data:

- Citizens want to save money, worry about effectiveness, responsiveness.
- Elected officials worry about responsiveness and cost, but see clear gains and few risks to effectiveness of services.
- Formula for a breakthrough?
Focus on making and communicating effectiveness gains while holding steady or improving costs and responsiveness.

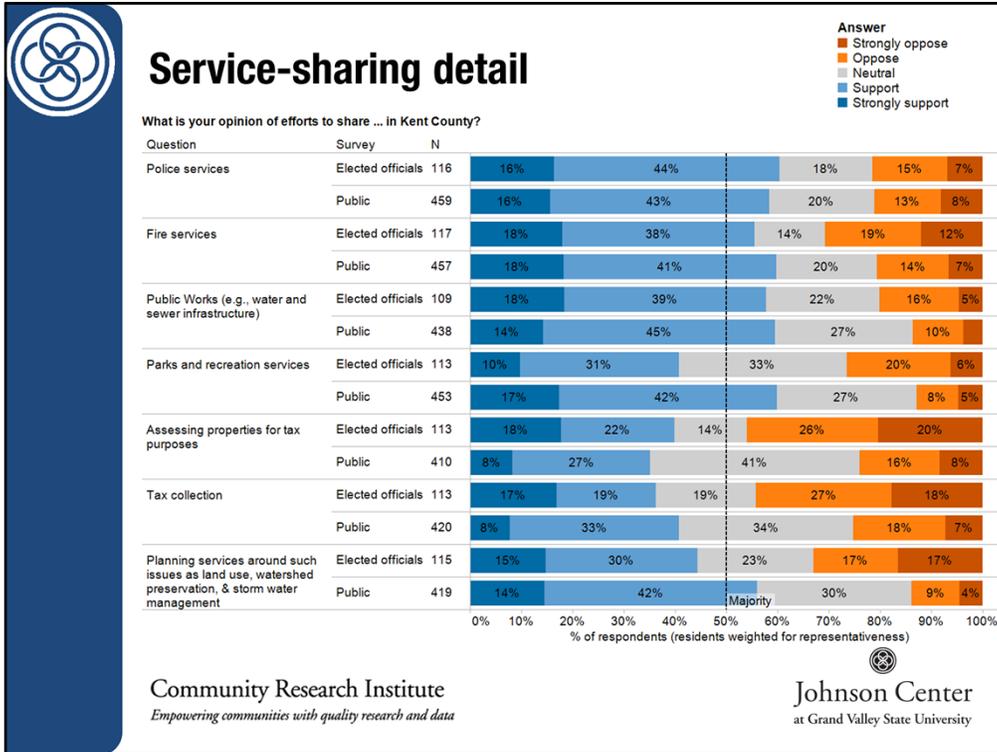
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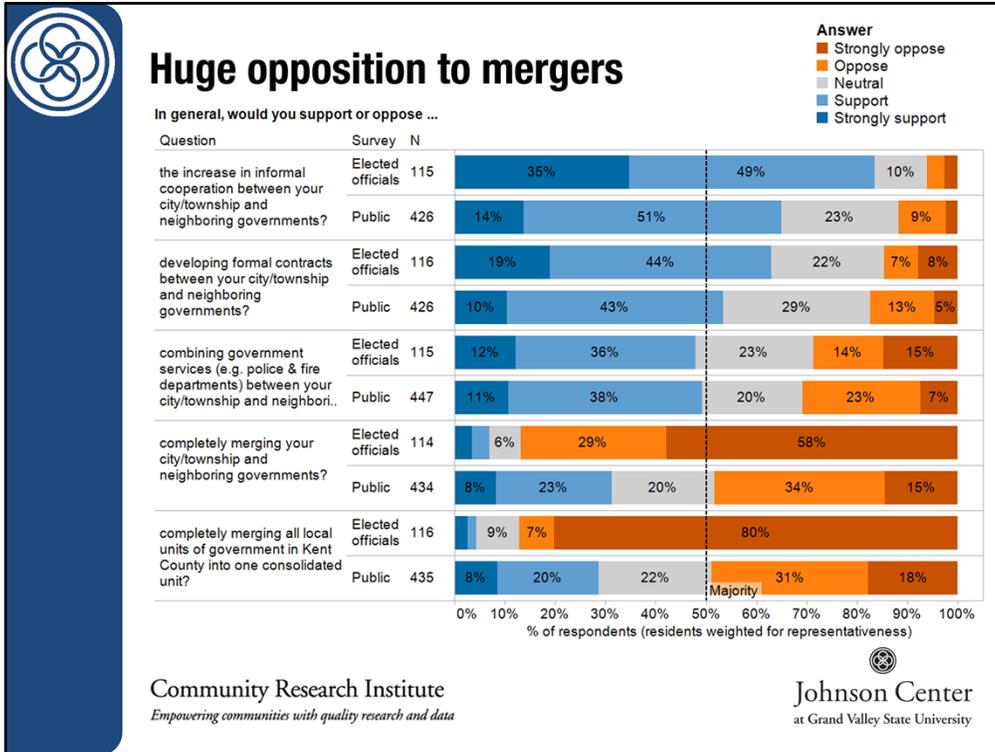


We asked for opinions about sharing specific services: police, fire, “public works (e.g. water & sewer infrastructure),” parks and recreation, assessing property tax, tax collection, and “Planning Services around such issues as land use, watershed preservation, and storm water management.” There were generally large majorities in favor of sharing police, fire and public works from both groups (at least 53% support). The groups split on parks and recreation (officials were less supportive [40%] and citizens more so [55%]) and on planning services (officials 44% and residents 50%).

Neither survey revealed a majority in favor of sharing property assessment or tax collection, with officials more in favor than residents (39% vs. 30% and 36% vs. 36%, respectively).



A view of the top part of the first page of the handout you received; if you'd like to discuss the specifics, we can do so later. I don't see any jaw-droppers here, except perhaps that elected officials' weak support for tax assessment and collection sharing is accompanied by strong opposition (46% and 45% opposed, respectively) rather than neutrality.



This is the same as the bottom part of the handout you received. Both residents and elected officials express majority support for informal cooperation (84% of officials and 65% of residents) and formal contracts (63% and 53%) and near-majority support for combining services (48% and 49%).

Mergers, whether with neighbors or countywide, are widely opposed, especially by elected officials. Just 8 officials expressed support for merging with neighboring governments, and just 5 expressed support for a countywide merger; 87% oppose both options, with fully 80% strongly opposing the countywide merger option. Near-majorities of residents were also opposed to each (49% in each case).



Few patterns to report in resident data

Statistical models don't offer much insight

- Older residents are significantly more likely to oppose sharing police and fire and combining services “such as police and fire.”
- More educated respondents are more likely to oppose sharing planning services—but why?
- Geography, race and income are not consistent predictors.
- More civically engaged residents also lend much more support to sharing police and fire and ... to merging all governments in the county! Hmm.

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(Civic engagement is measured here by combining 12 items from the regular GGRCS survey (questions 2-5) into a scale, including religious attendance, theater- and concert-going, getting together with friends, museum visits, and several forms of political activism, including contacting officials, the media, joining a protest, signing a petition, community problem-related volunteering, charitable organization volunteering, and membership in associations.)



Summary of key findings

- The majority of the public feels relatively uninformed about governmental cooperation.
- Elected officials' distribution of general support and opposition reflects the informed public's.
- Opposed residents are most concerned about service effectiveness, but elected officials are quite sanguine about it.
- Majorities of officials and residents oppose shared tax assessment and collection.
- There is majority or near-majority support for informal, contractual and service combinations.
- There is weak support and majority or near-majority opposition to government mergers, both with neighbors and county-wide.

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2013 Deliberative Poll on this topic

- Creation of Stanford's James Fishkin.
- Tested method combines representativeness of polling with deep deliberation.
- Informative, useful results for leaders and media.
- CSR and Calvin's Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics (Dr. Kevin den Dulk, Director) plan to pursue it.
- Very positive initial discussions with CRI, GVMC and Fishkin's Center for Deliberative Democracy.
- Will begin seeking broad formal co-sponsors this fall.

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[If time permits:] With the encouragement of a recent faculty-alumni reading group, CSR and the Paul B. Henry Institute at Calvin are planning to engage with CRI, GVMC and a variety of community partners to sponsor a Deliberative Poll™ on the topic of intergovernmental cooperation and consolidation in 2013. Pioneered by Stanford scholar James Fishkin, deliberative polls are a method of combining the representativeness of polling and elections with the deliberative learning and consensus-building of the jury room or focus group. A representative random sample of participants take a pre-event survey, then are invited to a 2-day event including comfortable hotel accommodations, food and some relaxation time. Participants read a carefully framed “issue book” on the topic, discuss and prioritize issues, then draw on presentations and discussion with expert stakeholder informants from multiple perspectives. At the end of the session, a public statement is crafted and the survey is taken again. The result is a tool which decisionmakers and media can use to communicate to the general public how their peers have responded to careful consideration of an issue. Fishkin's extensive research shows that citizens make informed judgments that can be surprising and valuable to leaders seeking to break political logjams. If you are interested in considering this idea, please contact Neil Carlson, neil.carlson@calvin.edu or 616 526-6420. Thank you!



THANK YOU
Questions and discussion

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