

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In the late fall and winter of 2004, the Center for Survey Research at the University of Virginia conducted a telephone survey of 843 residents of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, on behalf of Spotsylvania County's Board of Supervisors and administrative staff.

The purposes of the survey were to determine residents' opinions about quality of life in Spotsylvania County, to determine which strategic planning goals are considered to be of higher budgetary priority, to determine residents' level of satisfaction with a number of services the County provides, and to measure citizen opinion about the way in which the County is managing growth and transportation issues.

This report summarizes the results of the survey. Chapter 1 includes a summary of methodology and a demographic profile of the sample of residents who responded to the survey. Chapter 2 concerns citizen opinion about the quality of life in Spotsylvania County, rated on a 10-point scale. County goals are ranked by perceived budgetary priority in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 provides the satisfaction ratings for a number of County services, including growth and development as well as public transportation items. Satisfaction with County employees and offices are detailed in Chapter 5. Citizens' views of government, schools and taxes are discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 explores the commuting experiences of Spotsylvania residents and is followed by a concluding summary in Chapter 8.

The complete survey questionnaire is found in Appendix A of this report. Appendix B provides details of survey and sampling methodology and Appendix C provides a table of the responses for all substantive and demographic questions. Appendix D provides a ranked list of all satisfaction items in the survey. Finally, Appendix E (bound separately) is a list of respondents' comments and answers to open-ended questions.

Summary of Method

The questionnaire was developed in conjunction with key members of the Spotsylvania County administrative staff. Based on a topical outline

developed by County staff, CSR generated an initial questionnaire draft, which was then edited by Spotsylvania staff. Members of the County's Board of Supervisors contributed to and approved the final version of the questionnaire.

Telephone calls were made from the CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) laboratory at the Center for Survey Research. A pretest was conducted November 11th to November 14th, 2004, resulting in 30 completed interviews.

CSR used Random Digit Dialing (RDD) to contact County residents. The survey calling was conducted from December 1st, 2004 through January 7th, 2005 and resulted in 843 usable interviews (of which 813 were fully complete), with a response rate of 25 percent and a margin of error of ± 3.4 percent.

Subgroup Differences

Data analysis for this survey included breaking down the responses for all opinion items by demographic subgroups, in order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between them. Statistically significant differences are those that probably did not result merely from sampling variability, but instead reflect real differences within the County's adult population.¹ The demographic variables listed below were those used in our subgroup analysis.

- *Age:* Five categories were used to compare age groups: 18 to 25, 26 to 37, 38 to 49, 50 to 64, and over 64.
- *Children in the household:* We compared the responses of householders with children under 18 with those that do not have children living at home. Furthermore, responses were compared based on whether the children are less than 5 years of age, 5 to 12 years of age, and 13 to 17 years of age.
- *Education Level:* Persons with less than high school, high school, some college, college de-

¹ Throughout this report, only those differences that reach statistical significance to the degree of $p < .05$ will be discussed. Occasionally, non-substantive, yet statistically significant, differences have not been mentioned. Details on all demographic differences are available from the University of Virginia Center for Survey Research upon request.

gree, professional, and Ph.D. degrees were compared.

- *Employment Status:* We compared those working full-time with those working part-time, retired, homemakers, students, and those looking for work.
- *Gender:* Women were compared with men.
- *Homeownership:* Homeowners were compared with renters.
- *Income:* Five categories of self-reported annual household incomes were compared: less than \$35,000, \$35,000 to \$50,000, \$50,000 to \$75,000, \$75,000 to \$100,000, and more than \$100,000.
- *Length of Commute:* Those respondents who work outside of Spotsylvania County were asked how long their average one-way commute is. Those with commuting times of less than 15 minutes, 16 to 30 minutes, 31 to 45 minutes, 46 to 60 minutes, and more than 60 minutes, were compared.
- *Length of Residence:* Newcomers to Spotsylvania County were compared with those who had lived in the County for longer periods or all their lives. Respondents were divided into seven categories: those who had lived in Spotsylvania County for less than one year, for one to two years, three to five years, six to ten years, eleven to nineteen years, twenty years or more, or all their lives.
- *Marital Status:* Those that are married were compared to those that are separated, divorced, widowed, or never married.
- *Race/ethnicity:* Self-identified racial groups were compared. For purposes of analyses, respondents were divided into four racial categories: Caucasian, African-American, Asian, and "Other."
- *School Attendance:* Those who had not attended Spotsylvania County schools were compared with those that had attended themselves, have a family member who had attended, and those that have a family member that currently attends.
- *School Type:* Those respondents with children under 18 were asked what type of school their children attend. Those that attend public schools were compared with those who attend private schools and those who are involved with some other type of schooling (including home-schooling).
- *Type of Home:* Those living in single-family homes, duplexes, apartments, townhouses, mobile homes or trailers, and other kinds of structures were compared.

In addition to these variables, results were broken down by the seven voting districts of Spotsylvania County: Battlefield, Berkeley, Chancellor, Courtland, Lee Hill, Livingston, and Salem. Respondents were asked to identify their own voting district or voting precinct. If they did not know it, they were then asked to identify where in the County they lived, either by the name of their neighborhood or subdivision or the nearest intersection to their homes. The voting districts were then determined by County administrative staff.

Interpreting Subgroup Differences

We have taken pains here to avoid speculative interpretations about why, for example, men as a group should differ significantly from women, or homeowners from those who rent, or persons with college degrees from those without college degrees, in their satisfaction levels with respect to given items. A variety of circumstances can cause two groups to differ in the levels of satisfaction they express with a given service, program, or process. People are "satisfied" when the level of service they receive (or perceive to be available to them) meets their expectations. Therefore, satisfaction depends both on what people receive and what they think they ought to receive. When Group A expresses a higher level of satisfaction than Group B, it can mean one or more of the following:

Actual differences in service levels. People in Group A may actually be receiving a different level of service than those in Group B. This can happen because the service is site-specific, and the people in Group A are located closer to the service site(s) than are those in Group B. The given service also may be targeted specifically toward members of Group A for reasons of age, income, eligibility, need, etc. Older residents may be more

satisfied than younger people with services to senior citizens, for instance, because they are the targeted recipients of those services. In several cases we are able to control for these factors by asking screening questions about the eligibility or familiarity of the respondent. In other instances, of course, it is impractical to determine eligibility or proximity to a service through the use of survey questions directed at County residents as a whole.

Differences in expectations. People in Group B may report lower satisfaction because they expect more service than do those in Group A. Expectations about service differ for many reasons. Often, people form expectations about what government services should be from past experience. Group B, then, may include people who experienced a higher level of service in some other community, leading to dissatisfaction with the service level available where they live now. Conversely, members of group A may be highly satisfied now because they used to live somewhere with poorer provision of the service in question. When service levels in a community increase over time, satisfaction of long-term residents may be higher than the satisfaction of newcomers because their expectations are based on the lower service levels to which they became accustomed in the past.

Differences in perceptions of costs versus benefits. Group B also may be less satisfied than Group A because they perceive the costs of the service differently, or think that the government is doing "too much" as a general matter. For example, higher income residents may feel that welfare programs impose a tax burden upon them while not bringing them direct benefit. Political viewpoints differ among citizens to begin with: some expect their governments to provide many services, whereas others desire lower service levels. These differences can be especially important in people's judgments about human services provided by government. Thus, some residents may base their satisfaction level on an informal cost-benefit analysis involving both perceptions of service quality and considerations of service or cost efficiency.

We hope, nonetheless, that the subgroup analyses provided will give both County decision-makers and the public a better sense of how different residents perceive County services, and will suggest possible avenues to improvement in service levels.

Demographic Profile of the Sample

An early task in the analysis of any survey data is comparing the demographics of the sample with the demographics of the population being studied. When there are discrepancies, it is wise to "weight" the data in order to compensate for the differences. The weighting procedure results in very small differences in the results, but increases their accuracy. The current data were weighted based on gender, homeownership, and race. (See Appendix B for a complete description of the weighting procedures.)

Almost 7 percent (6.9%) of our sample has lived in Spotsylvania County all their lives. Slightly less than 10 percent (9.2%) are new to Spotsylvania, living in the County for less than a year. Approximately the same amount (9.6%) have lived in Spotsylvania County for one to two years, 16.4 percent have lived in the County three to five years, 18 percent have lived there 6 to 10 years, and 19.9 percent have lived there eleven to nineteen years. Finally, 20 percent of respondents reported living in the County for twenty years or more, but not all their lives.

Slightly less than half (45%) of our respondents reported having children under 18 living in their households.

Approximately seven percent (7.1%) of respondents were in the youngest age category of 18 to 25 years old, 19.3 percent were aged 26 to 37, 31.9 percent 38 to 49, 27.2 percent were between 50 and 64 years of age, and 14.6 percent were 65 and older.

Fifty-nine percent of respondents were working full-time, whereas 7.7 percent were working part-time and 1.9 percent were looking for work. Nearly 20 percent (18.4%) were retired, 7.7 percent were homemakers, and 1.5 percent were students. Almost 70 percent (67.8%) were married, 11 percent were separated or divorced, 8.6 percent widowed, and 12.7 percent had never been married.

In our weighted sample, 82.5 percent reported owning their own home, 15.9 percent rent, and 1.6 percent have some other type of living arrangement. Almost 85 percent (84.5%) live in a single-family home, 5 percent live in an apartment, 6.5 percent live in a condominium or townhouse, 2.2

percent live in a mobile home or trailer, and 1.8 percent have some other type of dwelling.

The education level reported reflected Spotsylvania’s highly educated populace. A total of 7.7 percent reported that they had not finished high school, whereas 22.5 percent were high school graduates. Almost 30 percent (29.8%) of our respondents reported having at least some college education or a two-year degree. Slightly less than a quarter (23.1%) had a four-year degree, and 17 percent had completed some graduate work, a masters or professional degree, or an advanced graduate degree. The median level of education was some college.

In terms of household income, 16 percent reported incomes of less than \$35,000. Approximately 16.5 percent of our sample reported income between \$35,000 and \$50,000, 24 percent of households had incomes in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range, 21.2 percent reported a household income of \$75,000 to \$100,000 and 22.2 percent reported incomes over \$100,000.

Approximately 3 percent (2.9%) of our respondents reported that they considered themselves to be Hispanic. Of our respondents in our weighted sample who reported race, 84.7 percent were Caucasian, 12.3 percent were African-American, and one percent were Asian. Fewer than one percent each reported being American Indian or Pacific Islander, and 1.1 percent gave their race as something else. Almost 4 percent (3.8%) of the total refused to answer the question. Of our respondents, 52 percent are female and 48 percent are male.

The respondents in our sample were relatively evenly distributed across the seven Spotsylvania voting districts, with the exception of the Livingston district. Seventeen percent of our respondents were from the Chancellor district, 15.7 percent were from Lee Hill, 15.5 percent were from Berkeley, 14.7 percent were from Battlefield, 14.4 percent were from Salem, 14.1 percent were from Courtland, and 8.6 percent were from Livingston. Details of the sample breakdown by voting district are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Respondent Distribution by Voting Districts

