

The Office of the Legislative Auditor sent the following survey instrument to chief city administrators from 854 cities in July 2011. City administrators had the option of completing a paper or online version of the survey. We received responses from 572 cities by December 1, 2011 for a response rate of 67 percent. The numbers below represent the total number of online and paper responses marked for select questions.

Office of the Legislative Auditor

SURVEY OF MINNESOTA CITIES

Consolidation of Local Governments

Your Name: _____ City and Position: _____

In this survey, we first ask about your city's use of cooperative service agreements. We consider these to be when services are provided either jointly with or on behalf of other jurisdictions through, for example: written service contracts, joint powers agreements, or informal, handshake agreements. Most of these questions ask about your cooperative agreements with cities, counties, and townships. The second part of this questionnaire pertains to the full consolidation—merging the boundaries and services—of Minnesota cities, counties, and townships.

1. During calendar year 2010, did your city participate in any cooperative service agreements with other jurisdictions? (N=571)

Number

149 No, we did not participate in any cooperative service agreements. —→ Skip to question 11 on page 4

422 Yes, we participated in at least one cooperative service agreement. (Go to the next question.)

2. Please identify the entities that your city collaborated with for your 2010 cooperative service agreements. (Check all that apply. If you had agreements with other entities—such as community action agencies—or boards that included other entities, please list these under "Other.") (N=418)

Number

330 City

288 County

232 Township

152 School District

98 State Agency

108 Other (please specify): _____

3. What was the nature of your cooperative service agreements with cities, counties, or townships during 2010? (Check all that apply.) We may contact you to learn more about your agreements. (N=417)

Number

240 We had a written service contract(s) to *provide* services.

252 We had a written service contract(s) to *receive* services.

271 We had a written mutual aid agreement(s) or automatic aid agreement(s).

200 We had a written joint powers agreement(s).

171 We had an informal, unwritten agreement(s) to provide or receive services.

114 We had a joint powers board(s) or joint agency.

41 We had a joint service district(s) for water pollution control or sewer.

32 We had a joint non-profit agency or association.

65 We provided services to other entities through a cooperative or municipal utility.

139 We participated in other cooperative authorities (such as for bulk purchasing).

13 Other (please specify): _____

4. Please estimate the total number of your 2010 cooperative service agreements that you identified in Question 3. (Please include in your estimate both written and unwritten agreements with cities, counties, and townships. In your estimate, please provide an unduplicated count of agreements. For example, a joint powers board that operated under a single joint powers agreement counts as "1". Two separate agreements with a single entity count as "2".)

Total number of cooperative service agreements: (N=378)

Mean: 10.0

Median: 6.0

5. We would like to know more about the cooperative service agreements you identified in Question 4 above. For each of the service areas below, please estimate the number of cooperative service agreements you had with cities, counties, or townships during 2010. (Check the appropriate box for each service area. If you did not have these services, or you had an agreement with the state to provide services for your city, please check the appropriate box.)

Service Area	Number of Service Agreements					We Did Not Have Any of These Services	The State Provided Services For Us
	0	1	2-5	6-20	21 or More		
(N=412)	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
General Government, Administration, and Libraries	93	100	63	14	0	24	1
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management	98	100	27	1	0	37	2
Elections and Voting	92	128	38	0	0	18	3
Attorney and Other Criminal Justice	125	86	16	2	0	30	1
Law Enforcement	43	205	68	11	0	8	0
Fire, EMS, and Rescue	12	138	143	89	3	0	0
Parks and Recreation	116	65	51	5	2	26	0
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities	84	127	58	5	0	18	0
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges	78	91	67	12	3	25	2
Economic Development	133	65	15	2	0	37	1
Health and Human Services	128	28	11	1	0	67	4
Other (please specify): _____	61	43	13	5	1	13	0

6. For each of the service areas below, with how many cities, counties, or townships did you have cooperative service agreements during 2010? (Check the appropriate box for each service area. If you did not have any of these services, or you had an agreement with the state to provide services for your city, please check the appropriate box.)

Service Area	Number of Cities, Counties, or Townships					We Did Not Have Any of These Services	The State Provided Services For Us
	0	1	2-5	6-20	21 or More		
(N=408)	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
General Government, Administration, and Libraries	101	89	53	20	6	20	2
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management	92	115	14	2	0	35	4
Elections and Voting	93	116	41	3	1	17	2
Attorney and Other Criminal Justice	132	82	16	5	1	27	4
Law Enforcement	39	179	75	23	3	8	2
Fire, EMS, and Rescue	11	84	165	116	4	1	0
Parks and Recreation	123	65	44	8	0	24	1
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities	94	108	66	6	2	15	1
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges	85	81	74	10	1	20	5
Economic Development	138	57	13	10	2	27	3
Health and Human Services	136	23	11	2	0	65	5
Other (please specify): _____	68	27	18	5	2	14	0

7. If you had any joint powers boards, joint agencies, or joint sewer districts in place during 2010, please indicate below the number of boards, agencies, or districts for each service area.

<u>Service Area</u>	Number of Joint Powers Boards, Joint Agencies, or <u>Joint Sewer Districts</u>		Total: (N=273) Mean: 3.9 Median: 2.0
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	
General Government, Administration, and Libraries (N=144)	1.0	1.0	
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management (N=110)	0.4	0.0	
Elections and Voting (N=113)	0.5	0.0	
Attorney and Other Criminal Justice (N=109)	0.3	0.0	
Law Enforcement (N=154)	0.9	1.0	
Fire, EMS, and Rescue (N=192)	1.6	1.0	
Parks and Recreation (N=125)	0.6	0.0	
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities (N=149)	0.7	1.0	
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges (N=121)	0.5	0.0	
Economic Development (N=119)	0.4	0.0	
Health and Human Services (N=104)	0.2	0.0	
Other (please specify): (N=90)	0.4	0.0	

8. In your opinion, how did your 2010 cooperative service agreements affect your city's overall service quality and overall costs? (Check one box per service area for service quality. Check one box per service area for service costs.)

<u>Service Area</u>	<u>Overall Service Quality</u>				<u>Overall Service Costs</u>				
	<u>Improved Quality</u>	<u>Reduced Quality</u>	<u>Did Not Affect Quality</u>	<u>Do Not Know/Not Applicable</u>	<u>Decreased Costs</u>	<u>Increased Costs</u>	<u>Did Not Affect Costs</u>	<u>Do Not Know/Not Applicable</u>	
General Government, Administration, and Libraries (N=285)	117	4	57	107	99	11	55	98	(N=263)
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management (N=258)	67	2	64	125	57	10	54	115	(N=236)
Elections and Voting (N=276)	99	0	73	104	84	12	57	97	(N=250)
Attorney and Other Criminal Justice (N=259)	63	2	50	144	55	6	41	137	(N=239)
Law Enforcement (N=325)	180	9	90	46	142	30	79	48	(N=299)
Fire, EMS, and Rescue (N=375)	237	2	114	22	165	53	106	26	(N=350)
Parks and Recreation (N=264)	97	1	37	129	78	16	33	118	(N=245)
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities (N=298)	116	0	73	109	82	22	58	112	(N=274)
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges (N=265)	108	5	57	95	83	18	52	94	(N=247)
Economic Development (N=246)	54	2	4	150	33	8	44	146	(N=231)
Health and Human Services (N=235)	30	1	22	182	15	6	18	178	(N=217)
Other (please specify): (N=149)	36	1	24	88	26	4	25	79	(N=134)

9. Between 2005 and 2010, how did your city's use of cooperative service agreements change? (Check all that apply.) (N=407)

Number

163 Overall, we collaborated with more cities, counties, or townships.
5 Overall, we collaborated with fewer cities, counties, or townships.
192 Overall, we collaborated with the same number of cities, counties, or townships.

137 We collaborated in more service areas.
4 We collaborated in fewer service areas.
115 We collaborated in the same number of service areas.

10. In your opinion, what are the primary benefits and/or drawbacks of cooperative service agreements, and why?

Questions 11-16 below pertain to the full consolidation—merging the boundaries and services—of cities, counties, and townships in Minnesota. For purposes of this survey, the term consolidation includes the complete annexation of an entire township.

11. Between 2005 and 2011, did your city take any actions towards fully consolidating—merging the city's boundaries and services—with another city or a township? (N=547)

Number

530 No, we did not take any actions to consolidate with another city or a township between 2005 and 2011. —→ Skip to question 12

17 Yes

→ 11a. If yes, what actions to fully consolidate with another city or a township have occurred in your city between 2005 and 2011? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Our city is currently consolidating boundaries with another city or a township.
- ☐ Our city conducted a survey of citizens to determine interest in consolidation.
- ☐ Our city hired a consultant to study the feasibility of consolidating.
- ☐ Citizens initiated a petition for consolidation.
- ☐ Council members initiated a resolution for consolidation.
- ☐ Our city held a referendum to consider a consolidation question.
- ☐ Other (please explain):

We did not report responses to this question due to the small number of respondents that described their city's consolidation actions.

11b. Please briefly describe the outcomes of the efforts to consolidate described in question 11a:

Your responses to the following questions will be maintained as not-public information following the release of our report. Our report will include summary or aggregate information but will not identify individuals or their responses.

12. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the full consolidation of cities, counties, and townships in Minnesota. (Check one box for each statement.)

Statement	Strongly Agree Number	Somewhat Agree Number	Neither Agree nor Disagree Number	Somewhat Disagree Number	Strongly Disagree Number
Our cooperative service agreements are a better approach than consolidation for streamlining services and/or reducing costs. (N=531)	169	159	163	24	16
Our city would benefit from consolidating with another local government. (N=533)	33	101	147	89	163
Some counties, cities, or townships should consolidate. (N=524)	101	196	145	36	46
Counties, cities, or townships that don't meet at least a minimum population threshold should consider consolidation. (N=534)	74	136	158	82	81
Counties, cities, or townships with severely declining revenues should consider consolidation. (N=532)	70	217	149	54	42
Counties, cities, or townships that receive state aid should be required to consider consolidation. (N=537)	21	57	136	105	218
Counties, cities, or townships with a lack of expertise for mandated services should consider consolidation. (N=530)	50	174	157	78	71
Some counties, cities, or townships are already too large—by either population or land area—to consolidate with others. (N=536)	106	157	190	54	29

13. Please indicate the extent to which the following issues are obstacles to consolidation of cities, counties, and townships in your area. (Check one box for each issue.)

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Issue is Not an Obstacle Number</u>	<u>Issue is a Slight Obstacle Number</u>	<u>Issue is a Significant Obstacle Number</u>	<u>Do Not Know/ Not Applicable Number</u>
Inability to agree with potential partners on purpose and goals of consolidation (N=531)	40	137	210	144
Lack of expertise to plan for and carry out consolidating with another jurisdiction (N=530)	96	170	141	123
Lack of funding to evaluate the feasibility of consolidation (N=528)	51	128	242	107
Lack of funding for the upfront costs of consolidating (N=530)	42	119	251	118
Lack of statewide/regional information to help inform decisions about consolidation (N=528)	88	144	147	149
Differences among potential partners in how services are financed (N=531)	36	157	219	119
Possible increased ongoing costs (N=525)	38	158	210	119
Possible increased long-term debt, such as pension obligations (N=529)	64	136	179	150
Unwanted changes in services (N=530)	37	167	227	99
Geographic distances among potential partners are too great (N=530)	108	144	175	103
Resistance or lack of interest by elected officials (N=528)	38	125	250	115
Resistance or lack of interest by administrative staff (N=528)	90	173	126	139
Resistance or lack of interest by program staff (N=528)	89	144	116	179
Resistance by citizens (N=533)	31	107	276	119
Statutory constraints (N=526)	61	150	87	228
Loss of control and authority over services (N=530)	26	120	291	93
Loss of identity with current jurisdiction (N=527)	39	99	297	92
State law too easily allows for partial annexation or detachments (N=528)	111	98	54	265
Other (please specify): (N=118)	6	4	21	87

14. To what extent should the state—either the Legislature or a state agency—be involved in the consolidation of cities, counties, and townships? (N=519)

Number

272 The state should not be involved in determining local government boundaries or consolidating local governments.

58 The state should be less involved.

108 The state's involvement should stay the same.

81 The state should be more involved.

Please explain your answer. In what ways should the state be involved in consolidating cities, counties, and townships?



15. What other actions or resources would facilitate more consolidation of Minnesota's local governments? *(Please be specific. For example, describe the nature of any incentives, expertise, or other changes that would be needed to ensure more successful consolidations.)*

16. Please use the space below to provide any additional comments you may have. *(You may attach additional sheets of paper if you need more space, although this may require additional postage.)*

Thank you for completing this survey!

Please return the completed survey in the postage-paid envelope by August 5, 2011 to:

Office of the Legislative Auditor
658 Cedar Street, Room 140
St. Paul, MN 55155

Or fax to: 651/296-4712