The Office of the Legislative Auditor sent the following survey instrument to chief county administrators from 87 counties in July 2011. County administrators had the option of completing a paper or online version of the survey. We received responses from 71 of 87 counties by December 1, 2011 for a response rate of 82 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 COUNTIES

Consolidation of Local Governments

Your Name: _____ County and Position: _____

In this survey, we first ask about your county'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 county participate in any cooperative service agreements with other jurisdictions? (N=71)

Number

0 No, we did not participate in any cooperative service agreements. ⟶ Skip to question 11 on page 4

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

2. Please identify the entities that your county 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=69)

Number

62 City
67 County
38 Township
37 School District
44 State Agency
9 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=69)

Number

60 We had a written service contract(s) to *provide* services.
45 We had a written service contract(s) to *receive* services.
47 We had a written mutual aid agreement(s) or automatic aid agreement(s).
67 We had a written joint powers agreement(s).
40 We had an informal, unwritten agreement(s) to provide or receive services.
64 We had a joint powers board(s) or joint agency.
16 We had a joint service district(s) for water pollution control or sewer.
21 We had a joint non-profit agency or association.
10 We provided services to other entities through a cooperative or municipal utility.
43 We participated in other cooperative authorities (such as for bulk purchasing).
1 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 counts as "2".)*

   Total number of cooperative service agreements: (N=62) Mean: 44.2
   Median: 20.0

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 county, please check the appropriate box.)*

	Number of Service Agreements						
Service Area (N=69)	0 #	1 #	2-5 #	6-20 #	21 or More #	We Did Not Have Any of These Services #	The State Provided Services For Us #
General Government, Administration, and Libraries	2	12	31	15	3	2	0
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management	12	9	20	6	6	1	0
Attorney and Courts	11	15	24	2	0	4	2
Law Enforcement	2	6	29	23	3	1	0
Community Corrections	5	25	16	5	0	3	1
Fire, EMS, and Rescue	8	13	15	9	0	12	0
Parks and Recreation	24	6	13	2	0	7	0
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities	16	12	14	2	1	6	0
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges	3	12	22	16	6	3	0
Economic Development	13	21	11	6	1	6	0
Health and Human Services	1	10	21	19	11	0	0
Other (please specify): _____	3	8	7	1	2	2	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 county, please check the appropriate box.)*

	Number of Cities, Counties, or Townships						
Service Area (N=68)	0 #	1 #	2-5 #	6-20 #	21 or More #	We Did Not Have Any of These Services #	The State Provided Services For Us #
General Government, Administration, and Libraries	3	10	18	20	12	2	0
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management	13	1	13	12	14	1	0
Attorney and Courts	10	9	24	7	0	4	2
Law Enforcement	3	1	25	18	14	1	0
Community Corrections	5	16	17	6	3	3	1
Fire, EMS, and Rescue	9	5	13	12	7	10	0
Parks and Recreation	23	3	15	2	1	7	0
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities	15	8	13	5	4	6	0
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges	3	8	20	13	14	3	0
Economic Development	10	13	15	7	2	8	0
Health and Human Services	2	6	21	15	16	0	0
Other (please specify): _____	6	2	5	6	5	1	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.

Service Area	Number of Joint Powers Boards, Joint Agencies, or Joint Sewer Districts	
	Mean	Median
General Government, Administration, and Libraries (N=49)	3.1	2.0
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management (N=35)	2.2	1.0
Attorney and Courts (N=27)	1.0	0.0
Law Enforcement (N=50)	2.7	2.0
Community Corrections (N=33)	1.0	1.0
Fire, EMS, and Rescue (N=34)	1.4	1.0
Parks and Recreation (N=25)	0.5	0.0
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities (N=36)	1.3	1.0
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges (N=37)	3.9	1.0
Economic Development (N=34)	0.9	1.0
Health and Human Services (N=49)	4.2	2.0
Other (please specify): (N=24)	2.5	1.0

Total: (N=65) Mean: 14.9 Median: 9.0

8. In your opinion, how did your 2010 cooperative service agreements affect your county'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.)*

Service Area	Overall Service Quality				Overall Service Costs				
	Improved Quality #	Reduced Quality #	Did Not Affect Quality #	Do Not Know/Not Applicable #	Decreased Costs #	Increased Costs #	Did Not Affect Costs #	Do Not Know/Not Applicable #	
General Government, Administration, and Libraries (N=64)	43	1	10	10	34	6	10	9	(N=59)
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management (N=51)	34	0	4	13	29	1	4	13	(N=47)
Attorney and Courts (N=55)	24	0	9	22	20	1	6	23	(N=50)
Law Enforcement (N=63)	49	0	9	5	34	2	15	7	(N=58)
Community Corrections (N=53)	33	0	7	13	32	1	4	13	(N=50)
Fire, EMS, and Rescue (N=52)	28	0	4	20	15	2	11	21	(N=49)
Parks and Recreation (N=47)	18	0	3	26	12	1	4	25	(N=42)
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities (N=51)	24	1	7	19	18	3	5	21	(N=47)
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges (N=61)	41	0	12	8	35	5	9	8	(N=57)
Economic Development (N=55)	29	1	8	17	23	2	5	21	(N=51)
Health and Human Services (N=64)	55	0	5	4	45	2	6	4	(N=57)
Other (please specify): (N=21)	12	0	2	7	9	1	3	10	(N=23)

9. Between 2005 and 2010, how did your county's use of cooperative service agreements change? *(Check all that apply.)* (N=69)

Number

- 55 Overall, we collaborated with more cities, counties, or townships.
- 1 Overall, we collaborated with fewer cities, counties, or townships.
- 15 Overall, we collaborated with the same number of cities, counties, or townships.
- 47 We collaborated in more service areas.
- 0 We collaborated in fewer service areas.
- 12 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 county take any actions towards fully consolidating—merging the county's boundaries and services—with another county? (N=69)

Number	
69	No, we did not take any actions to consolidate with another county between 2005 and 2011. → Skip to question 12
0	Yes

→11a. If yes, what actions to fully consolidate with another county have occurred in your county between 2005 and 2011?

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

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=69)	27	24	10	8	0
Our county would benefit from consolidating with another local government. (N=68)	4	17	9	22	16
Some counties, cities, or townships should consolidate. (N=69)	21	26	15	4	3
Counties, cities, or townships that don't meet at least a minimum population threshold should consider consolidation. (N=69)	11	23	19	6	10
Counties, cities, or townships with severely declining revenues should consider consolidation. (N=69)	13	27	16	7	6
Counties, cities, or townships that receive state aid should be required to consider consolidation. (N=69)	2	4	13	14	36
Counties, cities, or townships with a lack of expertise for mandated services should consider consolidation. (N=69)	10	26	17	6	10
Some counties, cities, or townships are already too large—by either population or land area—to consolidate with others. (N=69)	14	29	21	4	1

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.)*

Issue	Issue is Not an Obstacle Number	Issue is a Slight Obstacle Number	Issue is a Significant Obstacle Number	Not Applicable/ Don't Know Number
Inability to agree with potential partners on purpose and goals of consolidation (N=68)	4	23	36	5
Lack of expertise to plan for and carry out consolidating with another jurisdiction (N=69)	12	29	23	5
Lack of funding to evaluate the feasibility of consolidation (N=69)	9	24	30	6
Lack of funding for the upfront costs of consolidating (N=69)	8	23	31	7
Lack of statewide/regional information to help inform decisions about consolidation (N=69)	9	22	28	10
Differences among potential partners in how services are financed (N=68)	0	25	40	3
Possible increased ongoing costs (N=69)	5	28	29	7
Possible increased long-term debt, such as pension obligations (N=69)	9	25	27	8
Unwanted changes in services (N=69)	5	26	32	6
Geographic distances among potential partners are too great (N=69)	9	27	31	2
Resistance or lack of interest by elected officials (N=69)	2	18	43	6
Resistance or lack of interest by administrative staff (N=68)	7	38	18	5
Resistance or lack of interest by program staff (N=69)	2	33	28	6
Resistance by citizens (N=69)	2	15	44	8
Statutory constraints (N=69)	4	27	24	14
Loss of control and authority over services (N=69)	2	16	48	3
Loss of identity with current jurisdiction (N=69)	3	17	45	4
State law too easily allows for partial annexation or detachments (N=69)	13	9	5	42
Other (please specify): (N=10) _____	0	1	1	8

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=67)

Number	
28	The state should not be involved in determining local government boundaries or consolidating local governments.
9	The state should be less involved.
15	The state's involvement should stay the same.
15	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