

*The Office of the Legislative Auditor sent the following survey instrument to township clerks from 1,786 townships in July 2011. Township clerks had the option of completing a paper or online version of the survey. We received responses from 1,268 townships by December 1, 2011 for a response rate of 71 percent. The numbers below represent the total number of online and paper responses marked for select questions.*

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# Office of the Legislative Auditor

## SURVEY OF MINNESOTA TOWNSHIPS

### *Consolidation of Local Governments*

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Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Township and Position: \_\_\_\_\_

*In this survey, we first ask about your township'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 township participate in any cooperative service agreements with other jurisdictions? (N=1,257)

Number

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

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

2. Please identify the entities that your township 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=826)

Number

609 City

415 County

447 Township

34 School District

31 State Agency

90 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=822)

Number

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

65 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=782)      Mean: 3.5  
Median: 3.0

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 township, 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=813)	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
General Government and Administration	245	43	29	1	0	124	10
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management	189	147	18	1	1	112	14
Elections and Voting	143	282	55	0	0	54	11
Attorney	251	31	2	0	2	139	10
Law Enforcement	200	94	9	1	1	129	15
Fire, EMS, and Rescue	20	408	308	8	0	6	0
Parks and Recreation	218	41	2	0	1	174	3
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities	205	51	11	2	1	175	2
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges	113	251	197	12	0	50	5
Economic Development	217	29	5	0	1	183	5
Health and Human Services	212	22	6	0	1	184	10
Other (please specify): _____	90	73	13	1	0	56	3

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 these services, or you had an agreement with the state to provide services for your township, 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=819)	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
General Government and Administration	245	61	18	2	1	111	7
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management	184	167	8	2	0	103	10
Elections and Voting	138	260	77	1	1	51	9
Attorney	252	22	3	2	3	130	8
Law Enforcement	194	93	9	1	0	124	13
Fire, EMS, and Rescue	16	378	307	36	3	7	0
Parks and Recreation	217	33	6	3	0	162	4
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities	202	46	15	2	0	166	3
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges	116	240	196	8	0	49	2
Economic Development	215	22	9	1	1	173	4
Health and Human Services	209	22	5	1	1	175	4
Other (please specify): _____	90	56	14	7	0	59	3

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 and Administration (N=204)	0.1	0.0	Total: (N=411) Mean: 1.8 Median: 1.0
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management (N=210)	0.2	0.0	
Elections and Voting (N=234)	0.3	0.0	
Attorney (N=195)	0.1	0.0	
Law Enforcement (N=208)	0.1	0.0	
Fire, EMS, and Rescue (N=356)	0.9	1.0	
Parks and Recreation (N=205)	0.1	0.0	
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities (N=209)	0.2	0.0	
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges (N=238)	0.5	0.0	
Economic Development (N=208)	0.2	0.0	
Health and Human Services (N=198)	0.0	0.0	
Other (please specify): (N=182)	0.2	0.0	

8. In your opinion, how did your 2010 cooperative service agreements affect your township'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 and Administration	48	1	58	262	38	16	42	241	(N=337)
Property Records, Taxpayer, and Land Management (N=397)	85	1	84	227	49	29	71	216	(N=365)
Elections and Voting (N=474)	182	6	127	159	174	60	71	137	(N=442)
Attorney (N=349)	18	0	34	297	14	4	35	268	(N=321)
Law Enforcement (N=363)	64	1	48	250	35	8	50	233	(N=326)
Fire, EMS, and Rescue (N=717)	405	5	233	74	234	153	172	91	(N=650)
Parks and Recreation (N=351)	24	0	30	297	10	7	31	271	(N=319)
Sanitation, Sewer, and Utilities (N=370)	40	2	37	291	25	6	30	269	(N=330)
Transportation, Roads, and Bridges (N=538)	220	11	184	123	171	55	152	124	(N=502)
Economic Development (N=350)	14	0	30	306	8	5	26	283	(N=322)
Health and Human Services (N=346)	19	0	27	300	11	1	28	281	(N=321)
Other (please specify): (N=196)	30	2	34	130	28	9	27	131	(N=195)

9. Between 2005 and 2010, how did your township's use of cooperative service agreements change? (Check all that apply.) (N=788)

Number

104 Overall, we collaborated with more cities, counties, or townships.

6 Overall, we collaborated with fewer cities, counties, or townships.

516 Overall, we collaborated with the same number of cities, counties, or townships.

84 We collaborated in more service areas.

5 We collaborated in fewer service areas.

408 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 township take any actions towards fully consolidating—merging the township's boundaries and services—with a city or a township? (N=1,227)

Number

1,203 No, we did not take any actions to consolidate with a city or a township between 2005 and 2011. → Skip to question 12

24 Yes

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

- ☐ Our township is currently consolidating boundaries with a city or a township.
- ☐ Our township conducted a survey of citizens to determine interest in consolidation.
- ☐ Our township hired a consultant to study the feasibility of consolidating.
- ☐ Citizens initiated a petition for consolidation.
- ☐ Board members initiated a resolution for consolidation.
- ☐ Our township 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 township'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=1,146)	594	188	254	29	81
Our township would benefit from consolidating with another local government. (N=1,175)	11	77	165	141	781
Some counties, cities, or townships should consolidate. (N=1,168)	35	170	397	147	419
Counties, cities, or townships that don't meet at least a minimum population threshold should consider consolidation. (N=1,176)	43	190	274	177	492
Counties, cities, or townships with severely declining revenues should consider consolidation. (N=1,179)	47	245	331	186	370
Counties, cities, or townships that receive state aid should be required to consider consolidation. (N=1,179)	14	49	210	146	760
Counties, cities, or townships with a lack of expertise for mandated services should consider consolidation. (N=1,168)	21	160	302	175	510
Some counties, cities, or townships are already too large—by either population or land area—to consolidate with others. (N=1,183)	329	253	409	52	140

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=1,140)	108	178	453	401
Lack of expertise to plan for and carry out consolidating with another jurisdiction (N=1,133)	206	222	302	403
Lack of funding to evaluate the feasibility of consolidation (N=1,129)	171	176	387	395
Lack of funding for the upfront costs of consolidating (N=1,134)	145	160	419	410
Lack of statewide/regional information to help inform decisions about consolidation (N=1,125)	180	195	321	429
Differences among potential partners in how services are financed (N=1,138)	84	206	482	366
Possible increased ongoing costs (N=1,126)	62	169	543	352
Possible increased long-term debt, such as pension obligations (N=1,135)	106	116	462	451
Unwanted changes in services (N=1,128)	76	184	565	303
Geographic distances among potential partners are too great (N=1,138)	177	232	392	337
Resistance or lack of interest by elected officials (N=1,135)	125	198	511	301
Resistance or lack of interest by administrative staff (N=1,136)	134	182	348	472
Resistance or lack of interest by program staff (N=1,124)	128	155	299	542
Resistance by citizens (N=1,141)	70	134	642	295
Statutory constraints (N=1,116)	107	149	265	595
Loss of control and authority over services (N=1,141)	52	131	738	220
Loss of identity with current jurisdiction (N=1,134)	63	153	676	242
State law too easily allows for partial annexation or detachments (N=1,128)	85	116	427	500
Other (please specify): (N=251)	15	7	35	194

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=1,197)

Number

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

120 The state should be less involved.

179 The state's involvement should stay the same.

32 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 19, 2011 to:

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

Or fax to: 651/296-4712