Key Findings From Survey and Focus Group Research

320-572

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates - FM3
Public Opinion Research & Strategy

SANTA MONICA • OAKLAND • MADISON • MEXICO CITY
Survey Methodology

• Data Collection: 500 telephone interviews and five focus groups among residents. One focus group with local business leaders.

• Field Dates: September-November, 2013

• Survey Margin of Error: +/-4.4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

• Focus Group Methodological Considerations: While participants were selected to be diverse and representative, focus group research cannot be considered to represent those of the broader population with statistical precision.
Sonoma County
Quality of Life
Residents express remarkably high levels of satisfaction with the overall quality of life in the County.

How would you rate Sonoma County as a place to live: is it an excellent place to live, a good place to live, just average, poor, or an extremely poor place to live?

- Excellent: 56%
- Good: 33%
- Average: 10%
- Poor: 2%
- Extremely poor: 0%
- Just average/DK/NA: 8%

Focus Group Participant:
I chose [this area] because of its natural beauty, the spirit of the people. Here in Sonoma County people are actually actually friendly.
In the focus groups, Latino residents expressed greater concern that lower income areas and residents of color don’t necessarily enjoy the same quality of life as others.

**LATINO RESIDENT:**
Everyone has opportunity because there’s no law against you, like changing your school for your kids in any Sonoma County school, but who really has the resources to get their kid out of a bad neighborhood to the better school if they don’t have a car, because they don’t have money...

**LATINO RESIDENT:**
I feel like it depends on where you are raised, you have less opportunities...I feel like most of the Hispanics don’t make enough money to live in a better place and that takes them away from their dream.

**LATINO RESIDENT:**
People look down on a farmer or a janitor and stuff like that, so [we need] more understanding that you need those people in your community to work together, to function together.
Among survey respondents, road maintenance, jobs, and crime emerge as the most serious local issues.

(Open Ended; First Choice; 3% and Above Responses Only)

- Road/Street maintenance: 15%
- Jobs/Keeping businesses: 11%
- Crime, in general: 10%
- Economic development: 6%
- Public safety/Perceptions of safety: 5%
- Homelessness: 4%
- Business growth/Expansion: 3%
- Environmental degradation: 3%
- Housing costs: 3%
- Don't know: 13%
- Other: 27%

9. In your own words, what do you think is the most serious issue facing the residents of Sonoma County that County government should do something about? And what would be the next two most serious issues?
Perceptions of Sonoma County Government
Three quarters of residents say they are satisfied with the quality of County services.

Thinking about the overall quality of the services provided by Sonoma County government, would you say that you are..?

- Very satisfied: 16%
- Somewhat satisfied: 62%
- Somewhat dissatisfied: 16%
- Very dissatisfied: 5%
- Don't know/NA: 2%

Total Satisfied: 77%
Total Dissatisfied: 21%
Business leaders expressed a desire to engage on a higher level with County government.

- Business leaders agreed that the County is accessible and responsive when the business community seeks engagement.
- Nearly all, however, expressed an interest in having the County reach out more proactively to inform business leaders of important issues facing the county.
- They also expressed an interest in having the County proactively engage the community on how to make business growth and development easier.

BUSINESS LEADER: If you want to talk to, or have a presentation, or have some interest in something for your individual group, you can make a phone call and within a month you will have a presentation.
Business leaders also highlighted several areas in which they would like to work with the County to improve the local business climate.

- Participants identified the permitting process and regulatory environment as significant challenges to attracting and retaining business.
- Several felt the County didn’t have a detailed understanding of their industry.
- Many also desired a better balance between protecting the environment and supporting business growth. Didn’t believe these two priorities as necessarily had to be in conflict.

BUSINESS LEADER: The impact of the wine and tourism industry on the economy is significant, but I think not well understood, particularly in terms of county leaders and county offices overall.
Perceptions of Sonoma County Employees
Close to seven in ten residents have a favorable opinion of county employees.

In general, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of County employees?

- Very favorable: 24%
- Somewhat favorable: 45%
- Somewhat unfavorable: 10%
- Very unfavorable: 6%
- Don't know/NA: 15%

Total Favorable: 69%
Total Unfavorable: 16%
All of the actions that might be undertaken to improve perceptions were viewed favorably.

I would like to read you a list of potential actions that might be undertaken by the County. For each one, please tell if that action would cause you to have a much more favorable, somewhat more favorable, somewhat less favorable or much less favorable opinion of County employees.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instituting measures that increase accountability for job performance</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing efforts to engage residents and include them in decision making</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancing customer service</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enacting pension reform that reduces the cost to taxpayers</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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</table>
Of those who have had contact with Sonoma County employees, majorities express satisfaction with their experiences.

Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the ___________ by the Sonoma County employee or employees with whom you had contact?

- Courtesy shown to you: 83% Very Sat., 16% Dissat.
- Timeliness of the response: 79% Very Sat., 19% Dissat.
- Competence displayed in handling your issue: 77% Very Sat., 21% Dissat.
Perceptions of County Services
Broad consensus exists that public safety services are among the County’s most important functions. 

- Providing 911 emergency response services: 50% Extremely Important, 46% Very Important, 6% Not Too Important, 4% No Opinion
- Providing fire protection services: 47% Extremely Important, 46% Very Important, 6% Not Too Important
- Protecting clean water sources: 37% Extremely Important, 49% Very Important, 10% Not Too Important
- Bringing jobs to Sonoma County: 42% Extremely Important, 39% Very Important, 15% Not Too Important
- Providing public safety services: 37% Extremely Important, 44% Very Important, 15% Not Too Important
- Providing services to seniors, veterans, residents with disabilities or chronic, debilitating health conditions: 36% Extremely Important, 44% Very Important, 16% Not Too Important
- Paving and repairing streets and roads: 37% Extremely Important, 40% Very Important, 20% Not Too Important

14. Let me ask you about some specific services provided by Sonoma County government. Please tell me how important each service is to making Sonoma County a good place to live: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important. ^ Not Part of Split Sample.
Residents express the highest levels of satisfaction with fire protection services and waste management.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing fire protection services</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing reliable waste management systems</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing 911 emergency response services</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting tourism</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing public libraries</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting clean water sources</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting natural areas</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Satisfied:
- Providing fire protection services: 88%
- Providing reliable waste management systems: 82%
- Providing 911 emergency response services: 79%
- Promoting tourism: 77%
- Providing public libraries: 75%
- Protecting clean water sources: 73%
- Protecting natural areas: 73%

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15. I am going to read you the same list of services provided by Sonoma County government. Please tell me how satisfied you are with the job Sonoma County government is doing in providing that service: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. ^ Not Part of Split Sample.
Residents place a high priority on jobs and road maintenance, but less than half are satisfied with the County’s performance in these areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Ext./Very Important Priority</th>
<th>Total Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing 911 emergency response services</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing fire protection services</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting clean water sources</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing jobs to Sonoma County</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing public safety services</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing services for seniors, veterans, residents with disabilities or chronic debilitating health conditions</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paving and repairing streets and roads</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions of Strategic Goals and Priorities
Residents broadly approve of the County’s performance in key areas tied to the County’s strategic priorities.

I am going to read you a list of these goals. Please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of the job County government is doing in meeting that particular goal.

Fostering a safe, healthy, and caring community that meets the basic needs of all residents

- Total Approve: 73%
- Total Disapprove: 23%

Balancing local economic growth with the needs of local farmers and the natural environment

- Total Approve: 68%
- Total Disapprove: 25%

Fostering an engaged, informed and civic-minded community through better access to and participation in County government and enhancing community based partnerships

- Total Approve: 62%
- Total Disapprove: 27%

Investing in the future through infrastructure, sustainability of local resources and prevention focused strategies

- Total Approve: 58%
- Total Disapprove: 30%
Participants felt that the County should place an especially high priority on protecting open space and creating a strong economy.

*(Participants Asked to Select Top Four Priorities)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Outcomes</th>
<th>Times Chosen Among Top 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protecting and maintaining parks, public lands and open space</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting a strong, diverse and sustainable economy that supports job retention and job growth</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the overall health of the community, beginning with the healthy development of children</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in policies and interventions that reduce poverty and increase equal opportunity for quality education and good health</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximizing the use of renewable energy, promoting water conservation and reducing green-house gas production</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring that local resources, such as timber, aggregate resources, energy and water, are sustainably managed</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attitudes Toward Potential Revenue Measures
**Ballot Language Tested**

**Sonoma County Fix-It First Transportation Act.**

To fix potholes, maintain and repair local streets and roads; and finish highway 101 widening, shall Sonoma County establish a ¼ cent sales tax with annual independent audits, citizens’ oversight and all funds remaining local to improve Sonoma County roads?

**Sonoma County Park and Water Quality Improvement Measure.**

To keep parks open; increase public access to parks; protect natural areas; protect drinking water sources; create and improve parks, trails and bikeways; restore wetlands, preserve fish and wildlife habitat, and improve flood control and water quality in rivers, lakes and streams, shall Sonoma County establish a ¼ cent sales tax with annual independent audits, citizens’ oversight and all funds remaining local to improve Sonoma County parks and water quality?
More than 2/3rds of voters support a transportation finance measure; support for a parks measure is somewhat lower.

Transportation Finance

- Definitely yes: 39%
- Probably yes: 24%
- Undecided, lean yes: 5%
- Undecided, lean no: 1%
- Probably no: 8%
- Definitely no: 21%
- Undecided: 1%

Parks and Water Quality

- Definitely yes: 37%
- Probably yes: 23%
- Undecided, lean yes: 3%
- Undecided, lean no: 2%
- Probably no: 9%
- Definitely no: 23%
- Undecided: 3%

10/11. If the election were held today, would you vote yes in favor of it or no against it?
Reaching Residents with Information About County Government
Residents are most likely to get their news about Sonoma County government from the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* or other local newspapers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Occas.</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>DK/NA</th>
<th>Total Freq./Occas.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Santa Rosa Press Democrat</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local newspapers</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio news</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook or other social networking websites</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The County’s official website</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A community website, blog or e-mail newsgroup</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td></td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sonoma County Gazette</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A County e-newsletter</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For more information, contact:

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