

# St. Louis County, Minnesota

*Resident Survey*

## Report of Results

2013



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

### Background

Understanding the needs of residents is important to St. Louis County government, so it has conducted a regular, periodic survey of residents' opinions. This report includes St. Louis County's results from 2013 compared to those from 2011 and 2007 where possible. In 2013, St. Louis County was joined by Scott County, Washington County, Dakota County and Olmsted County, working together with NRC, to develop a survey instrument with a set of shared questions, as well as questions unique to each County.

The St. Louis County Resident Survey was administered by mail to 2,100 randomly selected households in February 2013 and was distributed equally among the seven County Commissioner Districts. Of the approximately 1,975 households that received a survey in the mail, 732 surveys were completed providing a response rate of 37%.

Because St. Louis County has administered a resident survey before, a number of comparisons could be made between 2013 responses and those from 2011 and 2007. Generally, comparisons between surveys are made through the conversion of ratings to a 100-point scale. St. Louis County also elected to have its results compared to those of other counties around the nation, comparisons made possible through NRC's national benchmark database. This database contains resident perspectives gathered in citizen surveys from approximately 500 jurisdictions, including cities and counties.

### Key Findings

*Many aspects of quality of life remained the same or improved from 2011 to 2013.*

- Residents' ratings of the overall quality of life in St. Louis County increased from 62 points on the 100-point scale in 2011 to 66 in 2013, but remained below the national county average.
- Of the community characteristics assessed on the survey, respondents gave the highest ratings to recreational opportunities (67), St. Louis County as a place to live (67), and St. Louis County as a place to raise children (66). Employment opportunities received the lowest rating (32 on a 100-point scale), although this rating increased from 2011 (25). Ratings of recreational opportunities also improved from 2011 to 2013 (63 versus 67, respectively).
- When responses were compared to other counties across the nation, results were mixed: recreational opportunities was rated much above the national average, while most other characteristics were rated similar to (such as the county as a place to live and raise children) or below (such as the overall image or reputation of the County) the national average.
- As in 2011, when asked to rate how important 17 factors were to their quality of life in the county, the availability of quality healthcare was considered most important to residents' quality of life in St. Louis County in 2013 (76 points on the 100-point scale where zero equals "not at all important" and 100 equals "essential").

*St. Louis County residents felt safe from most types of crime but feared unsafe drivers.*

- In 2013, residents felt safest from violent crime (68 points on the 100-point scale, or "somewhat safe") and property crime (63 points, or just below "somewhat safe"). Respondents felt the least safe from intoxicated or impaired drivers (45 points, or between "somewhat" safe and "somewhat" unsafe) and distracted drivers (35 points). This was a similar pattern when compared to safety ratings in 2011.

- Ratings of safety from violent crime and property crime were similar to the average for other counties around the country.
- Fewer respondents in 2013 than in 2011 reported feeling safe from illegal drug activity and from distracted drivers.
- Public safety was viewed as the fourth most important factor, out of 17, in residents' quality of life in St. Louis County.

*Residents voiced concerns about jobs, opportunities for youth, and substance abuse in St. Louis County.*

- Respondents were asked to rate how much of a problem seven different potential issues were in the County. In 2013, opportunities for young people (78 points) and jobs (78 points) were seen as the most problematic for St. Louis County, ratings between a “moderate” and “major” problem.
- As mirrored in residents ratings of safety from various types of crime, crime was viewed as the least problematic, with a rating of 58 points on the 100-point scale (or between a “minor” and “moderate” problem).
- When asked to identify the most serious issue facing St. Louis County, one-quarter of respondents cited jobs, similar to 2011. As previously mentioned, jobs also was among the top two biggest potential problems in St. Louis County. About 15% also mentioned taxes and issues related to the budget and government spending as the most serious issue currently facing the County.
- Regarding potential health issues, residents voiced the most concern about illegal drug use, overweight adults and underage alcohol use, with each rated as at least a “moderate” concern.

*Perceptions of St. Louis County government performance were lower compared to other counties and have slightly decreased over time.*

- Seven in 10 residents “somewhat” or “strongly” approved of the job St. Louis County government was doing.
- Respondents' ratings of St. Louis County government performance ranged from 30 (managing tax dollars) to 43 (informing residents) points on the 100-point scale, or between about “fair” and “good.” These types of government performance items tend to get lower ratings than ratings for specific services.
- Opinions on the job St. Louis County government does at informing residents, listening to citizens, managing tax dollars, and the value of services for the County taxes paid were below the national county benchmarks.
- Less favorable ratings were given in 2013 than in 2011 to the job the County does at informing residents and supporting the quality of life in St. Louis County (43 in 2013 versus 48 in 2011 and 41 versus 45, respectively).
- Respondents who had contacted a County employee in the year prior to the survey gave average ratings at or just below “good” on the 100-point scale to the employee's knowledge, courtesy, responsiveness and their overall impression of the employee. Although these ratings remained stable over time, all but one (employee knowledge) were below the national average.

*When evaluating County services, residents awarded the highest marks to law enforcement services.*

- In 2013, the highest rated services out of the 21 services asked about on the survey were 911 dispatch (72) and sheriff patrol (65), which were about “good” on the 100-point scale and similar

to ratings given in 2011. Services to youth and the assessment process/ property tax system received the lowest ratings, at or just above “fair.”

- Sheriff patrol, snow and ice removal, and maintenance of County roads were similar to the national average and land use services were rated much above. Most of the other services were rated below the benchmark.
- Quality ratings of most services remained stable over time. However, ratings of snow and ice removal on County roads and disaster preparedness and response were higher in 2013 than in 2011. Records and vital statistics and access to information on County website were given lower ratings in 2013 than in 2011.
- Four in 10 residents supported a property tax increase to maintain County services (a decrease in the level of support in 2011), and about half supported an increase for improving plowing on County roads.

*As in previous years, residents primarily used print sources to get information about St. Louis County government in 2013.*

- Respondents relied on daily newspapers (85% indicated using as a “minor” or “major” source) as a primary source of information about St. Louis County government; many also used weekly community newspapers (73%) and other county residents (81%).
- When asked what method they would use to contact St. Louis County government, one-third of residents indicated that they would call a staff person and one-quarter would send an email. Few (12%) preferred to use social media.
- One-third of respondents said they would like to learn more about County services via direct mail, while 22% preferred to do so via the County website.
- The County service that residents most frequently mentioned wanting more information about was the assessment process and property tax system, with 4 in 10 requesting more information.