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# DirectionFinder® Survey

## Executive Summary

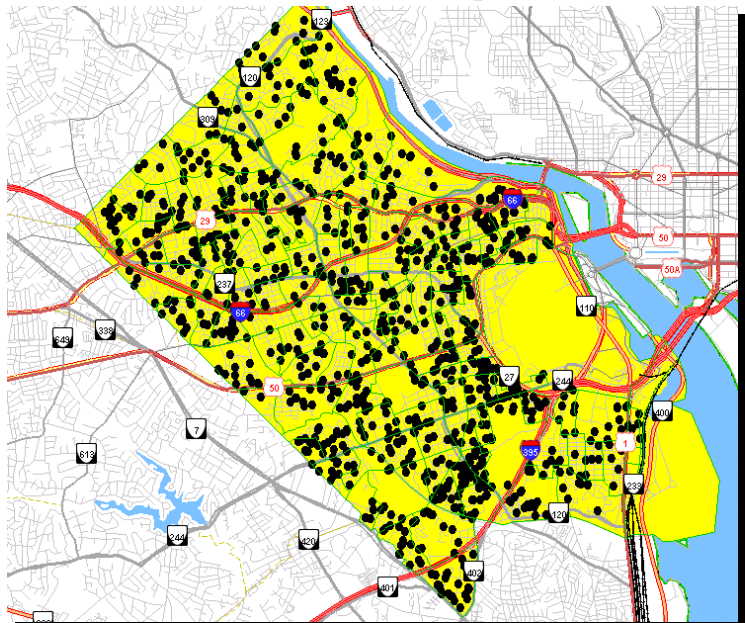
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### Purpose and Methodology

**Purpose.** ETC Institute administered a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey for Arlington County, Virginia, during the summer of 2004. The purpose of the survey was to assess citizen satisfaction with the quality of a wide range of county services, including: police, fire, public transportation, trash collection, libraries, code enforcement, street maintenance, communication, and many others.

**Methodology.** A seven-page survey was mailed to a random sample of 3,000 households in Arlington County in June 2004. Approximately seven days after the surveys were mailed, residents who received the survey were contacted by phone. Those who indicated that they had not returned the survey were given the option of completing it by phone. The survey was administered in both English and Spanish. Of the households that received a survey, 719 completed the survey by phone and 481 returned it by mail for a total of 1,200 completed surveys (40% response rate). The results for the random sample of 1,200 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 2.9%. There were no statistically significant differences in the results of the survey based on the method of administration (phone vs. mail). In order to better understand how well services are being delivered by the county, ETC Institute geocoded the home address of respondents to the survey. The map to the right shows the physical distribution of survey respondents based on the location of their home. The results for selected questions are shown by Census Block in the maps provided in Section 5 of this report.

**Distribution of Respondents to the 2004 Citizen Survey  
Based on the Location of the Respondent's Home**



The percentage of “don’t know” responses has been excluded from many of the graphs shown in this report to facilitate valid comparisons of the results from Arlington County with the results from other communities in the *DirectionFinder*® database. Since the number of “don’t know” responses often reflects the utilization and awareness of county services, the percentage of “don’t know” responses has been provided in the tabular data section of this report. When the “don’t know” responses have been excluded, the text of this report will indicate that the responses have been excluded with the phrase “*who had an opinion*”.

This report contains:

- a summary of the methodology for administering the survey and major findings
- charts showing the overall results for most questions on the survey
- benchmarking data that shows how the results for Arlington County compared to other large communities
- importance-satisfaction analysis
- maps that show the results of selected questions by Census Block
- crosstabulations that show the results for each question on the survey by ethnicity, income, type of housing, and years of residency in the County
- frequency distributions for all questions on the survey
- performance indices
- a copy of the survey instrument.

## Major Findings

- **Most residents were satisfied with County services.** Ninety percent (90%) of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the quality of fire and ambulance services in Arlington County; 89% were satisfied with quality of county libraries, and 80% were satisfied with parks and recreation services in the county. When compared to other LARGE COMMUNITIES (those with populations of more than 100,000), Arlington County rated significantly above average in all areas. When compared to ALL COMMUNITIES (including those with less than 100,000 residents), Arlington County rated above average in all but two areas: (1) enforcement of codes and ordinances and (2) the overall flow of traffic on county streets.
- **Services that residents thought should receive the most increase in emphasis over the next two years.** The areas that residents thought should receive the most increase in emphasis from Arlington County over the next two years were: (1) the management of traffic flow on county streets and (2) the maintenance of county streets.

- **Residents were generally satisfied with the overall quality of life in Arlington County.** Most (86%) of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of life in Arlington County; only 3% were not satisfied; 11% gave a neutral rating.
- **Public Safety.** Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the quality of local fire protection. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall quality of police protection. Compared to other LARGE COMMUNITIES (those with populations of 100,000 or more), Arlington County rated above average in all areas of public safety that were rated. In fact, Arlington County received the highest ratings among 20 large communities in the following areas: (1) overall quality of police protection, (2) overall efforts to prevent crime, (3) enforcement of local traffic laws, (4) the overall quality of local ambulance service, and (5) the adequacy of street lighting. Residents thought the visibility of police in neighborhoods was the most important area of public safety for the County to improve over the next two years.
- **Code Enforcement.** About half (54%) of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the County's efforts to enforce the exterior maintenance of business property and 53% were satisfied with the County's efforts to enforce the exterior maintenance of residential property. Less than half of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the County's efforts to enforce noise regulations (44%) and the County's efforts to enforce construction site conditions (43%). Although Arlington County's overall rating for code enforcement was significantly better than other LARGE COMMUNITIES, Arlington County's efforts to enforce the exterior maintenance of residential and business property was about the same as other large communities. When compared to ALL COMMUNITIES (including those with less than 100,000 residents), Arlington County's code enforcement efforts rated significantly below average. Residents thought the enforcement of noise regulations and construction site conditions were the two most important areas of code enforcement for the County to improve over the next two years.
- **Utility Services.** Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the overall quality of residential trash collection services. Eighty-three percent (83%) of those surveyed were satisfied with the quality of curbside recycling services. Seventy-five percent (75%) were satisfied with yardwaste services, and 74% were satisfied with the quality of wastewater treatment services.
- **Public Works.** The areas of Public Works that were rated best included: overall satisfaction with the maintenance of county buildings (79%), adequacy of street lighting in commercial areas (78%), snow removal on major county streets (71%), and the cleanliness

of county streets and public areas (71%). When compared to other LARGE COMMUNITIES (those with populations of more than 100,000), Arlington County rated in the top 25% of all Public Works areas that were assessed on the survey. When compared to ALL COMMUNITIES (including those with less than 100,000 residents), Arlington County rated above average in all areas except (1) mowing and trimming of public areas, and (2) maintenance of neighborhood streets. Residents thought the maintenance of major streets and snow removal on neighborhood streets were the two most important areas of Public Works for the County to improve over the next two years.

- **Parks, Recreation, and Culture.** In general, residents were satisfied with parks, recreation, and culture in Arlington County. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the residents *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with walking and biking trails in the county; 82% were satisfied with the number of county parks, and 74% were satisfied with maintenance of county parks. When compared to other LARGE COMMUNITIES (those with populations of more than 100,000), Arlington County rated in the top 25% of all parks, recreation, and cultural areas that were assessed on the survey. When compared to ALL COMMUNITIES (including those with less than 100,000 residents), Arlington County rated above average in all areas except the quality of youth athletic programs. Residents were least satisfied with indoor aquatic facilities in the county. They also thought indoor aquatic facilities were the most important area of parks, recreation, and culture to improve over the next two years.
- **County Communications.** Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the quality of the County newsletter, *The Citizen*; 70% were satisfied with the availability of information about county programs and services, and 63% were satisfied with the quality of information on the county's web page. When compared to other LARGE COMMUNITIES (those with populations of more than 100,000), Arlington County rated in the top 25% of all communication areas that were assessed on the survey. When compared to ALL COMMUNITIES (including those with less than 100,000 residents), Arlington County also rated above average in all areas of communication that were assessed on the survey.
- **Library Services.** Nearly three-fourths (71%) of those surveyed indicated that they had used a county library during the past year. Of those who had used a library, 92% were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the helpfulness of library staff; eighty-nine percent (89%) were satisfied with the availability of materials, and 81% were satisfied with the adequacy of on-line (Internet) services. The Importance-Satisfaction Analysis (see Section 4) indicated that increasing the number of public access computers in libraries would be the best way to enhance overall satisfaction with library services in the county.
- **Transportation.** More than two-thirds (71%) of the residents surveyed *who had an opinion* were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the availability of bike trails and bike lanes in Arlington County; 68% were satisfied with the ease of traveling within Arlington

County, and 65% were satisfied with the County's public transit system (ART). Residents were least satisfied with pedestrian safety, and they generally thought the availability of sidewalks was the most important area of transportation for the County to improve over the next two years.

- **Health and Human Services.** Almost one-fourth (23%) of those surveyed who had an opinion were dissatisfied with the availability of services for low and fixed income residents in the county. Residents generally thought this was the most important area of Health and Human Services to improve over the next two years.
- **Emergency Preparedness.** Almost one-fourth (22%) of the residents surveyed were registered for Arlington Alert. When asked about their level of agreement with the statement "My household is prepared with food, water, and other supplies for an emergency, such as a natural disaster or terror attack," 54% agreed, 27% disagreed, and 20% gave a neutral response.

### **Other Findings**

- **Perceptions of Safety in Arlington County.** 96% of those surveyed who had an opinion indicated that they feel safe (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) in their neighborhood during the day; 80% indicated that they feel safe in their neighborhood at night. Less than two-thirds (63%) of those surveyed indicated that they feel safe in county parks.
- **Customer Contact with Arlington County.** More than half (56%) of those surveyed had contacted the County with a question or complaint over the past year. Of those who contacted the County, 83% contacted the County by phone, 30% contacted the County in person, 23% sent an e-mail, and 10% wrote a letter. Of those who contacted the County, 77% were satisfied with how easy it was to contact county employees; 12% were dissatisfied, and 11% gave a neutral response. The three departments that residents were most likely to have contacted during the past year were: Solid Waste (trash/recycling), Treasurer or Commissioner of Revenue, and Planning/Code Enforcement.
- **Level of Public Involvement.** Nearly half (46%) of those surveyed thought the overall level of public involvement in Arlington County Government was "about right"; 21% thought it was "too little", 4% thought it was "too much", and 29% did not have an opinion.
- **Civic involvement.** Nearly one-third (31%) of those surveyed were involved in church or religious organizations, 29% were involved in a civic or neighborhood association, 19% were involved in a sports or recreational club/league, and 16% were involved in a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or other school organization.

- **Perceptions about “The Arlington Way.”** More than half (51%) of those surveyed were not familiar with the phrase “The Arlington Way”; 36% thought “The Arlington Way” had a positive influence on local decisions, 4% thought it had a negative influence, and 9% thought it had no influence on local decisions.
- **Best Ways to Inform Residents About County Services and Activities.** The top two ways residents preferred to receive information about Arlington County services and events were from the County Newsletter, *The Citizen* (57%) and the *Washington Post* (45%).

## Conclusions and Recommendations for Action

Arlington County rated very well, compared other communities in ETC Institute’s DirectionFinder® database. The high ratings indicate that the County has done an excellent job of prioritizing County services, based on the needs of the community. Although the County’s ratings are currently high, the results of the survey and the importance satisfaction analysis that are contained in this report (see Section 4) suggest that Arlington County should do the following to ensure that the County continues to receive high ratings in the future.

- Place a high priority on street maintenance and other capital improvements that will improve traffic flow in the community.
- Enhance code enforcement activities, especially those related to the enforcement of noise regulations and the construction site conditions.
- Develop indoor aquatic facilities.
- Increase the availability of sidewalks to enhance pedestrian safety.
- Increase the visibility of police in neighborhoods and efforts to enforce traffic laws in the community.
- Continue to improve efforts to keep the public informed about Arlington County Government activities and services.