

Larimer County Community Leaders Survey 2008

David I. Gilliland, Ph. D.

May 20, 2008

Executive Summary

The Larimer County 2008 Community Leaders Survey was conducted and analyzed March through May 2008. The primary purpose of the survey was to provide valid and reliable information to assist the Larimer County Commissioners and managers in establishing future discretionary budgets.

The general findings from the survey are:

- The most important categories of services offered are Public Safety and Health and Human Services.
- The community leaders suggest changes in the discretionary budget,
 - Budgets for Culture and Recreation, General Services, and Health and Human services should all be slightly increased.
 - The budget for Transportation should remain the same.
 - The budget for Public Safety should be decreased.
- Regarding discretionary budgets for individual services the community leaders thought that services for the disadvantaged should be increased, as well as road and bridge repair.
- Based on interpretation of the findings, I prioritize the categories as, in order, Health and Human Services, Public Safety, Transportation, General Services, and Culture and Recreation.
- The findings of the survey are similar to the findings of the Citizens Survey, suggesting that both citizens and community leaders perceive the needs of the county in a like way.¹

¹ The Larimer County Citizens Survey was conducted simultaneously with the Community Leaders Survey. Citizens were chosen from a randomly-generated list of county residents and, in total, 376 mail and online responses were received regarding county services and other related issues. The survey report will be available by the end of May at www.Larimer.org.

The Survey

Survey Objectives

The Community Leaders Survey was developed to provide an informed opinion of services offered by Larimer County. The leaders were carefully selected by county officials based on their extensive knowledge of the county and how it operates. All of the leaders are known by the county. The community leaders were asked to rate the importance of groups of services offered by the county and then to make decisions on discretionary budget allocation of the services. This survey is one of several instruments used by the Larimer County Commissioners and managers as a reference point in their decision making. The specific objectives of the survey are to:

- Provide informed opinions regarding the importance of services offered by the county.
- Provide informed opinions regarding the allocation of discretionary budgets for the county.
- Provide, for validation purposes, a reference point for the Citizen Survey.

Methodology

Ninety-seven community leaders were chosen by the Larimer County Commissioners and managers as individuals who, based on their interaction with the county, could provide informed opinions of topics that typical citizens may not be as knowledgeable of.

An online survey was developed. An online method was chosen because it was felt that the respondents would prefer to take the survey electronically. The items used in the survey were based on specific input from the county Budget Office and on the individual services found in the Citizen Survey. The items were grouped into five service categories: Culture and Recreation, General Services, Health and Human Services, Public Safety, and Transportation. See Appendix 1 for examples from the online survey and Appendix 2 for a listing of each service within its respective category.

The online survey was designed such that, after being introduced to the service categories and the individual services that comprised the categories, respondents would be asked to perform four specific exercises:

- First, the respondents were given 100 “importance points” to allocate amongst the five service categories.
- Second, to validate the first exercise, respondents were asked to rate the importance of the same five service categories on a 1 to 7 scale.

- Third, respondents were given the five categories' discretionary budgets, based on percentages, and were asked to reallocate the budget.
- Fourth, respondents were given the five categories one at a time, with the 30 individual services listed by category. They had two tasks. First, to place each individual service into one of three boxes: increase the budget of this service, leave the budget of this service the same, or decrease the budget of this service. Second, once the services were allocated to each box they were asked to rank the service by importance.

Each of the leaders was contacted by a Larimer County representative and asked to participate. Virtually all those asked agreed to take the survey. Each leader was then emailed a request, encouraging them to participate and promising confidentiality. In addition, three reminder emails were sent to those that had not responded. The survey could be completed in one sitting or it could be saved and accessed at a later date. In total, 60 leaders filled out the survey, for an excellent response rate of 62%. See Table 1 for a description of the sample.

Survey Results

The results were tabulated and analyzed. The results of each exercise is now discussed.

Allocation of 100 Importance Points. Respondents allocated 100 importance points amongst the five general categories. Three statistical groups emerged. The most important services were Public Safety and Health and Human Services. These two cannot be distinguished in importance, but are more important than the other three. The second most important services were Transportation and General Services. These two cannot be distinguished in importance, but are less important than the first group and more important than the final general service category, Culture and Recreation. See Table 2 for the results of this exercise.

Importance Scores. Respondents rated each of the five general categories on importance based on a 1 to 7 likert scale. The results were almost identical to the first exercise as, again, three statistical groups emerged. The most important services were Public Safety, Health and Human Services, and Transportation. These three cannot be distinguished in importance, but are more important than the other two. The second most important service was General Services. This is less important than the first group and more important than the final general service, Culture and Recreation. See Table 3 for the results of this test.

These two exercises provide almost identical interpretations, thus, they validate one another. We can say with good confidence that Public Safety, Health and Human Services, and Transportation are, in the opinion of the community leaders, more important than General Services, which, in turn, is more important than Culture and Recreation. The final two exercises address how the community leaders would allocate a discretionary budget.

Discretionary Budget Allocation. In this exercise the community leaders were given the same five categories as before, but this time their discretionary budgets, based on percentages, were

provided as a reference point. They were asked to divide 100% amongst the 5 categories, based on how they believed the discretionary budget should be allocated. For this task the community leaders recommended that three of the general services categories have their budgets slightly increased: Culture and Recreation (3.8%), Health and Human Services (3.7%), and General Services (1.7%). No change in the budget was recommended for Transportation. Finally, Public Safety was recommended for a large budget decrease of 9.1%. See Table 4 for more detailed results.

Sorting Task. The final exercise involved all 30 individual services offered by the county. As mentioned above, respondents sorted the services into one of three boxes, indicating whether they wished to increase its budget, decrease its budget, or leave it unchanged. An additional ordering of the tasks within each category occurred, but we do not discuss those findings due to the small frequencies of each budget box/ranking combination. The results are indicated in Table 5. In general, the top services that the community leaders recommend for increases, with the percentage of those recommending an increase, are:

1. Maintain non-city roads and bridges (56.7%)
2. Providing alternatives to jail such as work release programs, community service, and home detention (55.5%)
3. Provide foster care, adoption, and child protection services (49.2%)
4. Providing public health services such as immunizations, tracking infectious disease, home visits, and health screenings (44.1%)
5. Helping the hard-to-employ move off of temporary assistance and into the permanent workplace (43.3%)

The services that the community leaders recommend for decreases, with the percentage of those recommending a decrease, are:

1. Providing extension education in food safety, nutrition, family economics, 4H youth development and gardening (47.5%)
2. Managing nontraditional land use programs, such as clustering homes, to encourage the preservation of open spaces (39.0%)
3. Communicating with residents about county services (35.0%)
4. Providing building inspections (28.3%)
5. Maintaining, operating, and providing events at The Ranch - Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex (25.9%)

Interpretation

Based on my interpretation of the findings, I list, in order of priority, what I believe to be the most important service groups.

1. *Health and Human Services.* First and foremost, the community leaders suggest that budget preference be given to Health and Human Services. I agree with this assessment because, 1) it was rated in the top category for both importance tasks, 2) it was awarded the second largest

budget increase, and, 3) three of the top five individual services recommended for increases came from this category. Thus, in my opinion, Health and Human Services should be the primary budget consideration.

2. *Public Safety.* At first glance there appears to be a discrepancy in the findings between the importance tasks and the budget allocation tasks. Public Safety was regarded as one of the two most important categories, yet it is recommended for a significant budget decrease. On the other hand, several services for the disadvantaged, such as children and the hard-to-employ, are determined not to be of primary importance, but are recommended for budget increases. This might be explained by considering information from the Citizens Survey. There were many cases where services were deemed to be highly important, but were performed very effectively, in fact, so effectively that some citizens suggested they were performed better than required. The community leaders might have applied this same reasoning, rating Public Safety as a highly important service, but based on its performance and the importance of other services, they recommend decreasing its budget. It appears as if the large portion of the total discretionary budget – over 50% - allocated toward public safety seemed disproportionate to its importance and performance. Further support for this reasoning is provided by the task sorting exercise, where the individual public safety services were not recommended for budget reductions. That is, once respondents viewed the individual services they were not willing to consider reduction.
3. *Transportation.* This was determined to be very important as it was in the top group in one importance exercise and in the second group for the second exercise, but wasn't granted additional budget in the budget allocation exercise. However, the respondents, when faced with the individual choices, suggested budget increases in both of the individual services: road maintenance (56.7%), and future transportation planning (35%). Further, only 15% of the respondents recommended budget reductions of the two services combined. This is strong evidence that transportation should be considered the third budget priority.
4. *General Services.* General Services were rated only moderately important in the two budget exercises and were only recommended for a small budget increase (1.7%). There were no General Services amongst the top individual services recommended for budget increases and there were two recommended for budget decreases. These seem to be performed effectively (based on the Citizen Survey) and are relatively less important than many others, thus I feel that, based on these survey results, they should be given a lesser priority.
5. *Culture and Recreation.* This, according to community leaders, is the lowest budget priority. It was statistically the lowest of the five service categories in both importance exercises. However, it should be noted that it was allocated the highest budget increase (3.8%). Thus, despite its relative priority, there is little doubt that the community leaders still value this service.

Table 1: Description of Community Leaders Sample

<i>Line of Work</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Sample</i>
Government or elected official	39.7
Not-for-profit organization	29.3
Private sector	27.6
School district	3.4

<i>Location</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Sample</i>
Fort Collins	58.3
Loveland	16.7
Estes Park	8.3
Wellington	5.0
Other in county	11.7

Table 2: Allocation of 100 Service Points

<i>Group</i>	<i>Service Category</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Highest importance*	Public Safety	24.5
	Health and Human Services	22.0
Moderate importance	Transportation	20.1
	General Services	18.7
Lowest Importance	Culture and Recreation	14.7

*Statistical groupings based on comparing confidence intervals at 90% confidence: $\mu = \bar{x} \pm z s_x$

Table 3: Importance Scores

<i>Group</i>	<i>Service Category</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Highest importance*	Public Safety	6.3**
	Health and Human Services	6.0
	Transportation	5.8
Moderate importance	General Services	5.2
Lowest Importance	Culture and Recreation	4.6

*Statistical groupings based on comparing confidence intervals at 90% confidence: $\mu - x \leq z s_x$

**based on a scale of 1 = Not at all important; 7 = Extremely important

Table 4: Discretionary Budget Allocation

<i>Service Category</i>	<i>Actual (%)</i>	<i>Reallocated (%)</i>	<i>Change (%)</i>
Culture and Recreation	1.0	4.8	+3.8
General Services	10.0	11.7	+1.7
Health and Human Services	16.0	19.7	+3.7
Public Safety	52.0	42.9	-9.1
Transportation	21.0	21.0	no change

Table 5: Budget Change Sorting Task

<i>Culture and Recreation</i>	<i>Incr. (%)</i>	<i>Stay the same (%)</i>	<i>Decr. (%)</i>
Maintaining, operating, and providing events at The Ranch - Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex-Group	12.1	62.1	25.9
Maintaining parks and open lands such as Horsetooth Reservoir and The Devil's Backbone	40.7	44.1	15.3
<i>General Services</i>	<i>Incr. (%)</i>	<i>Stay the same (%)</i>	<i>Decr. (%)</i>
Determining property taxes and keeping records of property tax bills and payments	3.3	91.7	5.0
Determining property market values for tax purposes and providing an appeals process-Group	13.8	79.3	16.9
Communicating with residents about county services	18.3	46.7	35.0
Issuing vehicle registrations, titles, and license plates	20.7	72.4	6.9
Managing nontraditional land use programs, such as clustering homes, to encourage the preservation of open spaces	27.1	33.9	39.0
Providing land use planning and zoning enforcement	29.3	53.4	17.2
Recording and maintaining official records such as real estate deeds and marriage licenses	5.0	80.0	15.0
Registering voters and conducting elections	18.6	64.4	16.9
<i>Health and Human Services</i>	<i>Incr. (%)</i>	<i>Stay the same (%)</i>	<i>Decr. (%)</i>
Conducting restaurant inspections and other services related to food safety and water quality	30.0	61.7	8.0
Establishing and enforcing child support orders	28.1	66.7	5.3
Helping the hard-to-employ move off of temporary assistance and into the permanent workplace	43.3	43.3	13.3

<i>Health and Human Services (cont.)</i>	<i>Incr. (%)</i>	<i>Stay the same (%)</i>	<i>Decr. (%)</i>
Providing employment and training for all employers and job seekers, including economically disadvantaged youth and those that traditionally have a difficult time finding jobs	25.4	57.6	16.9
Providing extension education in food safety, nutrition, family economics, 4H youth development and gardening	6.8	45.8	47.5
Providing foster care, adoption, and other child protection services	49.2	45.8	5.1
Providing information and services to senior citizens, such as home delivered meals and energy assistance	12.0	69.0	19.0
Providing long term care and medical and financial assistance to those in need	28.8	59.3	11.9
Providing public health services such as immunizations, tracking infectious disease, home visits, and health screenings	44.1	49.2	5.1
Providing residential and non-residential treatment for mental health and substance abuse problems	28.3	58.3	13.3
Providing support services to military veterans	16.9	55.9	27.1

<i>Public Safety</i>	<i>Incr. (%)</i>	<i>Stay the same (%)</i>	<i>Decr. (%)</i>
Providing alternatives to jail such as work release programs, community service, and home detention	55.5	41.7	3.3
Operating the jail for all of Larimer County (including the cities in the County)	40.7	45.8	13.6
Providing a temporary place for juveniles in conflict with law enforcement or in conflict with their families	33.9	61.0	5.1
Prosecuting criminal cases	30.5	66.1	3.4
Providing medical investigation of all deaths not resulting from natural causes	13.6	61.0	25.4
Providing protection and rescue from wildfires and forest fires	13.6	61.0	25.4
Responding to non-city public safety problems and enforcing laws	16.7	66.7	16.7

<i>Public Safety (cont.)</i>	<i>Incr. (%)</i>	<i>Stay the same (%)</i>	<i>Decr. (%)</i>
Providing building inspections	1.7	70.0	28.3
<hr/>			
<i>Transportation</i>	<i>Incr. (%)</i>	<i>Stay the same (%)</i>	<i>Decr. (%)</i>
Coordinating and planning the current and future transportation needs of the County	35.0	51.7	13.3
Maintaining non-city roads and bridges	56.7	41.7	1.7

Appendix 1: Examples from the Online Survey

Introductory page

Qualtrics

As a Larimer County Community Leader, we thank you for helping out with our budgeting process. At Larimer County we conduct community scans to ensure that we are considering all budget requirements and possibilities. This is particularly important as funds continue to become more restrictive.

Our Community Leaders' opinions are particularly useful to us given 1) your knowledge of the community, and, 2) your status as an "outside observer" of the County.

In this survey we will ask you to make some choices about the relative importance of County services and how budgets should be allocated. We realize that you don't have enough information to make perfect choices, just do the best you can.

The instructions should be self-explanatory. Should you have questions, feel free to contact our survey designer at 491-5224, or at dave.gilliland@colostate.edu.

First importance exercise

Consider the five service categories and reward points to each based only on its relative importance. This exercise has nothing to do with budgets or efficiencies, only the importance of the services. The importance points must total to 100. For instance, if all five services are of equal importance you would give each service 20 points.

Culture and Recreation	<input type="text" value="0"/>
General Services	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Health and Human Services	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Public Safety	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Transportation	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Total	<input type="text" value="0"/>

Second importance exercise

Again, consider the five service categories. How important are the categories? This exercise has nothing to do with budgets or efficiencies, only the importance of each service. For each, click on the button that best represents your opinion.

	Not at all Important	2	3	Average Importance	5	6	Extremely Important
Culture and Recreation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health and Human Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Budget allocation exercise

Please make sure that the discretionary budget totals to 100%.

Culture and Recreation (1%)	<input type="text" value="0"/> %
General Services (10%)	<input type="text" value="0"/> %
Health and Human Services (16%)	<input type="text" value="0"/> %
Public Safety (52%)	<input type="text" value="0"/> %
Transportation (21%)	<input type="text" value="0"/> %
Total	<input type="text" value="0"/> %

Example of sorting task

General Services

Drag each of the General Services into the appropriate box.

Then rank the services within each box from most to least important.

Items	The budget for this service should be increased
Determining property market values for tax purposes and providing an appeals process	Collecting property taxes and keeping records of property tax bills and payments 1
Managing nontraditional land use programs, such as clustering homes, to encourage the preservation of open spaces	Communicating with residents about county services 2
Registering voters and conducting elections	The budget for this service should remain the same
	Issuing vehicle registrations, titles, and license plates 1
	Providing land use planning and zoning enforcement 2
	The budget for this service should be decreased
	Recording and maintaining official records such as real estate deeds and marriage licenses 1

Appendix 2: List of Service Categories and Their Individual Services

Culture and Recreation

Maintaining, operating, and providing events at The Ranch - Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex

Maintaining parks and open lands such as Horsetooth Reservoir and The Devil's Backbone

General Services

Determining property taxes and keeping records of property tax bills and payments

Determining property market values for tax purposes and providing an appeals process

Communicating with residents about county services

Issuing vehicle registrations, titles, and license plates

Managing nontraditional land use programs, such as clustering homes, to encourage the preservation of open spaces

Providing land use planning and zoning enforcement

Recording and maintaining official records such as real estate deeds and marriage licenses

Registering voters and conducting elections

Health and Human Services

Conducting restaurant inspections and other services related to food safety and water quality

Establishing and enforcing child support orders

Helping the hard-to-employ move off of temporary assistance and into the permanent workplace

Providing employment and training for all employers and job seekers, including economically disadvantaged youth and those that traditionally have a difficult time finding jobs

Providing extension education in food safety, nutrition, family economics, 4H youth development and gardening

Health and Human Services (cont.)

Providing foster care, adoption, and other child protection services

Providing information and services to senior citizens, such as home delivered meals and energy assistance

Providing long term care and medical and financial assistance to those in need

Providing public health services such as immunizations, tracking infectious disease, home visits, and health screenings

Providing residential and non-residential treatment for mental health and substance abuse problems

Providing support services to military veterans

Public Safety

Providing alternatives to jail such as work release programs, community service, and home detention

Operating the jail for all of Larimer County (including the cities in the County)

Providing a temporary place for juveniles in conflict with law enforcement or in conflict with their families

Prosecuting criminal cases

Providing medical investigation of all deaths not resulting from natural causes

Providing protection and rescue from wildfires and forest fires

Responding to non-city public safety problems and enforcing laws

Providing building inspections

Transportation

Coordinating and planning the current and future transportation needs of the county

Maintaining non-city roads and bridges