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#### Introduction

ICMA has been assessing local government practices, experiences, and policies in alternative service delivery for more than three decades. In June 2017, ICMA partnered with Cornell University to launch an update to the Alternative Service Delivery (ASD) Survey. Paper surveys were mailed to 13,777 chief administrative officers of all municipalities with a population over 2,500 and all counties across the United States. Responses were received from 2,343 local governments, yielding a response rate of 17% with a 2% margin of error.

This survey provides insights into alternative service delivery among U.S. local governments. Key topics explored include feasibility work done by local governments on private service delivery; obstacles faced in adopting private service delivery; techniques to evaluate private service delivery, as well as shared services with other jurisdictions; and how certain services are provided within communities. The term private service

Survey Population	Surveyed	Responded	Response Rate
Total	13,777	2,343	17.0%
Type of Government	Surveyed	Responded	Response Rate
Municipality	10,889	1,969	18.1%
Municipality County	10,889 2,888	1,969 374	18.1% 13.0%

Population	Surveyed	Responded	Response Rate
Over 1,000,000	42	9	21.4%
500,000 - 1,000,000	96	14	14.6%
250,000 - 499,999	165	24	14.5%
100,000 - 249,999	529	93	17.6%
50,000 - 99,999	937	148	15.8%
25,000 - 49,999	1,635	244	14.9%
10,000 - 24,999	3,148	541	17.2%
5,000 - 9,999	3,117	555	17.8%
2,500 - 4,999	4,108	715	17.4%

Geographic Division	Surveyed	Responded	Response Rate
New England	853	155	18.2%
Middle Atlantic	2,450	315	12.9%
East North Central	3,803	697	18.3%
West North Central	1,422	274	19.3%
South Atlantic	1,555	319	20.5%
East South Central	864	85	9.8%
West South Central	1,283	159	12.4%
Mountain	685	136	19.9%
Pacific	862	203	23.5%

delivery includes for-profit firms, nonprofit organizations, and private industries.

The survey results show the percentages that provided answers in response to each individual question. Not all local governments answered each question, so the percentages are not based on all survey respondents. The number reporting (n) is provided for each question.



#### **Key Findings**

### **Developing Services**

- 33.0% of local governments reported studying the feasibility of adopting private service delivery in the past five years. Local governments that studied the feasibility cited internal attempts to decrease the cost and external fiscal pressures as the main factors impacting their decision.
- Only a quarter of local governments indicate taking dedicated steps to ensure the success of private service delivery.
   But among those that have, the most common approach is to identify successful uses of private alternatives in other jurisdictions.
- Similarly, just a quarter of local governments systematically evaluate their private service delivery. Among those, the most common approaches are monitoring citizen complaints, conducting field observations and monitoring data to ensure quality, and regularly reopening bids to control costs.
- Local governments more commonly engage citizen groups with planning, designing, delivering, and assessing services than they do citizens as a whole or individual citizens.
- 20.1% of local governments said they encountered an obstacle in adopting private service delivery; opposition from local government line employees and elected officials are the most common obstacles.
- 14.3% of responding local governments brought services back in-house after previously contracting them out, most commonly due to dissatisfaction with the cost and/or quality of the privately delivered services.

#### **Financing Services**

- 53.3% of local governments reported facing medium or high fiscal stress, and just 10.2% of local governments reported facing no fiscal stress. Local governments in the western half of the United States were more likely to report high or medium fiscal stress than municipalities and local governments in the east, respectively. Counties were more likely to report medium or high fiscal stress than municipalities.
- User fees and development review fees are by far the most common alternative mechanisms for local governments to finance service delivery.
- 49.1% of responding local governments have employees covered by collective bargaining agreements.

## **Delivering Services**

- 77.3% of local governments use intergovernmental contracting to deliver services, with cost savings being the most common reason. Transit systems and health/social services, such as child welfare programs and inspection of food facilities, are frequently provided through another government or authority.
- Crime prevention/patrol and parking enforcement are the services most commonly provided by local government employees entirely, outside of support functions such as payroll and public information.
- 80% of local governments use the private sector in delivering services. Services provided mostly (50% or more) by the private sector are vehicle towing and storage, legal services, commercial and residential solid waste collection, operation of daycare facilities, recycling, and electric/gas utility operation and management.
- A majority of local governments use private sector suppliers for solid waste collection and recycling services.
- One in six local governments have volunteer firefighters.
- Services often provided by nonprofits are social services including operation of homeless shelters, museums, and cultural and arts programs.



# **Survey Results**

Q1. Has your local government studied the feasibility of adopting private service delivery within the past five years? (n=2,327)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	33.0%
No	67.0%

Q1A. If "yes," which of the following factors spurred your local government's decision to study the feasibility of adopting private delivery alternatives within the last five years? (n=734)	Percent of Respondents
External fiscal pressures, including restrictions placed on raising taxes (e.g., Proposition 13)	48.8%
Internal attempts to decrease costs of service delivery	83.1%
State or federal mandates tied to intergovernmental financing	10.8%
Change in political climate emphasizing a decreased role for government	13.8%
Active citizens or citizen groups favoring privatization	6.7%
Unsolicited proposals presented by potential service providers	15.1%
Concerns about government liability	14.0%
Other	15.4%

Q2. Who inside your local government was involved in evaluating the feasibility of private service delivery? (Check all applicable.) (n=763)	Percent of Respondents
Manager/CAO	83.9%
Assistant manager/CAO	30.5%
Management and/or budget analysts	26.1%
Department heads	72.3%
Finance/accounting officer	46.3%
Attorney	27.1%
Procurement/ purchasing officer	13.2%
Line employees	10.9%
Elected officials	50.3%
Other	5.1%

Q3. Who outside your local government organization was involved in evaluating the feasibility of private service delivery? (Check all applicable.) (n=603)	Percent of Respondents
Potential service deliverers	60.5%
Professional consultants	41.5%
Service recipients/ consumers	11.9%
Managers/CAOs of other local governments	21.6%
Citizen advisory committees	16.6%
State agencies, leagues, or associations	6.8%
Other	6.5%

Q4. Has your local government undertaken any activities to ensure success in implementing private service delivery? (n=2,292)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	24.0%
No	76.0%



Q4a. If "yes," which of the following activities has your government undertaken to ensure success in implementing private service delivery? (Check all applicable.) (n=539)	Percent of Respondents
Identified successful uses of private alternatives in other jurisdictions	65.7%
Established a citizens' advisory committee on private alternatives	6.7%
Hired consultants to analyze feasibility of private alternatives	26.5%
Allowed government departments to compete with the private sector in the bidding process	14.1%
Developed programs to minimize the effect on displaced public employees	16.3%
Proposed implementation of private alternatives on a trial basis	23.7%
Applied private alternatives to new services	17.8%
Applied private alternatives to growing services	25.0%
Surveyed citizens	17.3%
Kept the service complaint mechanism in-house	28.0%
Provided ongoing opportunities for citizens to review contracts and implementation	8.3%
Other	6.7%

Q5. Has your local government encountered any obstacle in adopting private service delivery? (n=2,284)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	20.1%
No	79.9%

Q5A. If "yes," which of the following obstacles have been encountered? (Check all applicable.) (n=2,284)	Percent of Respondents
Opposition from citizens	35.2%
Opposition from elected officials	43.2%
Opposition from local government line employees	45.8%
Opposition from department heads	24.4%
Restrictive labor contracts/agreements	32.8%
Legal constraints	17.8%
Insufficient supply of competent private deliverers	27.8%
Lack of staff with sufficient expertise in contract management	14.3%
Lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of private alternatives	20.0%
Lack of precedent; institutional rigidities	16.5%
Problems with contract specifications	10.8%
Lack of adequate contract monitoring system	13.7%
Other	7.7%

Q6. Does your local government use any techniques to systematically evaluate its private service delivery? (n=2,292)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	24.6%
No	75.4%



Q6a. If "yes," what techniques do you use to monitor cost, quality or citizen satisfaction? (Check all applicable.) (n=562)	Percent of Respondents
Citizen Satisfaction (imputed)	79.2%
Conducting citizen surveys	30.8%
Monitoring citizen complaints	73.0%
Soliciting feedback via social media, 311/customer relationship management (CRM), or related apps	27.8%
Quality (imputed)	91.3%
Conducting field observations	68.1%
Setting deliverable dates, milestones, and other service and performance standards	56.0%
Analyzing data/records (e.g., demographic/finance data, monthly performance reports)	58.2%
Assessing penalties for non-compliance with standards	26.2%
Cost (imputed)	77.0%
Analyzing market competition or comparing to benchmark data	43.6%
Conducting regular re-bidding/RFP processes or renewal evaluations	60.3%
Other	1.2%

Q7. Within the last five years, has your local government brought back in house any services that were previously contracted out? (n=2,296)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	14.3%
No	85.7%

Q7A. If "yes," which of the following factors played a part in your decision to bring back the service(s)? (Check all applicable.) (n=329)	Percent of Respondents
Service quality was not satisfactory	54.1%
There were problems with the contract specifications	7.0%
There were problems monitoring the contract	11.9%
The cost savings were insufficient	45.9%
Local government efficiency improved	34.0%
There was strong political support to bring back the service delivery	21.0%
Lack of competitive private bidders	12.8%
Successful proposal by in-house staff	21.9%
Other	11.2%

Q8 . Does your local government involve individual citizens, groups of citizens, and/ or citizens as a whole (i.e., the entire community) in any of the following ways? (Check all applicable.) (n=1,231)

	Groups of Citizens	Citizens as a Whole	Individual Citizens	Any Citizen Involvement	n
In planning services (i.e., decisions on service policies and funding)	52.4%	40.3%	36.9%	84.2%	1,037
In designing services (i.e., decisions on how services will be arranged or organized)	49.3%	38.4%	36.4%	55.2%	679
In delivering services (i.e., using citizens' labor/ expertise to help deliver services)	46.2%	42.6%	34.3%	49.6%	610
In assessing services (i.e., seeking citizens' online ratings or other reviews of services)	57.2%	39.9%	32.3%	63.4%	780



Q9. If your local government uses intergovernmental contracting, please check the reasons that motivate your government to enter into intergovernmental contracts: (Check all applicable.) (n=1,606)	Percent of Respondents
To strengthen collaborative intergovernmental relations	54.7%
To promote regional service integration	43.5%
To avoid shedding services	8.9%
To promote higher quality/ more effective service delivery	53.2%
To achieve economies of scale	62.9%
To access technical expertise	32.2%
To save money	78.3%
There is a lack of private providers	7.7%
Participation in a regional council of governments or metropolitan planning organization	35.1%

Q10. If your local government has faced any obstacles to contracting with other local governments, districts, or authorities, please identify them below: (Check all applicable.) (n=1,083)	Percent of Respondents
Concern about loss of community control	59.5%
Lack of common vision, shared mission	38.7%
Liability concerns	22.1%
Lack of trust	33.9%
Internal opposition from elected officials	33.2%
Opposition from citizens	20.9%
Internal opposition from employees	23.1%
Different employment arrangements/ union contracts	21.3%
Concern about difficulty in monitoring intergovernmental agreements	15.3%
Need to create new accountability structures	11.5%
Incompatible funding streams, data systems, planning horizons	11.4%
No neighboring government willing to enter into an agreement	11.8%

Q11. Does your local government finance service delivery through any of the following mechanisms? (Check all applicable.) $(n=1,510)$	Percent of Respondents
User fees	81.6%
Payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTS)	28.2%
Tax increment financing	27.4%
Tax base sharing	7.1%
Public private partnership (P3) financing for infrastructure	10.9%
Sale of government assets	15.5%
Private home owner associations (HOA)	5.9%
Business improvement districts	12.2%
Taxes dedicated to specific services (e.g., transit or children's services)	24.0%
Hotel occupancy taxes	34.4%
Development review fees	41.5%
Mortgage or property transfer fees	12.2%
Local impact fees or developer exactions	29.0%
Social impact bonds	0.3%



Q12. What is the level of fiscal stress faced by your government? (n=2,206)	Percent of Respondents
None	10.2%
Low	33.5%
Medium	42.3%
High	13.9%
Q13. Which measures has your government implemented to address its fiscal needs? (Check all applicable.) (n=1,837)	Percent of Respondents
Reduce staff	45.5%
Reduce personnel benefits	30.5%
Reduce services	22.9%
Eliminate services	11.8%
Increase taxes	43.3%
Increase existing user fees	54.9%
Adopt new fees	36.0%
Reduce fund balance	39.7%
Defer maintenance expenditures	43.8%
Defer capital projects	58.7%
Q14. Are any of your employees covered by collective bargaining agreements? (n=2,250)	Percent of Respondents



49.1%

50.9%

Yes

No

Q15. Please check the boxes that best describe service delivery in your jurisdiction. (n=2,204)

Public Works/ Transportation	Number reporting (n)	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/ For Profit	Non-profit	Franchises/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
1. Residential solid waste collection	1,127	27.2%	5.1%	6.4%	56.7%	0.5%	10.6%	0.3%	0.1%
2. Commercial solid waste collection	856	19.3%	6.3%	7.5%	61.9%	0.5%	11.9%	0.1%	0.1%
3. Recycling	1,209	22.0%	11.8%	12.2%	51.9%	3.0%	9.3%	0.7%	1.7%
4. Solid waste disposal	1,063	25.3%	9.2%	18.4%	47.4%	0.7%	7.6%	0.4%	0.0%
5. Street repair	1,603	40.4%	46.8%	10.1%	33.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%
6. Street/parking lot cleaning	1,283	68.4%	15.4%	5.2%	18.6%	0.1%	0.5%	0.0%	0.1%
7. Snow plowing / sanding	1,331	77.2%	15.9%	6.5%	10.4%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%
8. Traffic sign/signal installation/maintenance	1,408	49.6%	28.4%	21.7%	19.8%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
9. Parking meter maintenance and collection	251	59.0%	17.5%	13.1%	17.1%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%
10. Street tree trimming & planting	1,375	44.6%	39.6%	6.6%	34.7%	0.9%	0.2%	0.1%	2.5%
11. Maintenance/administration of cemeteries	774	57.9%	17.7%	7.1%	19.5%	6.2%	0.3%	0.5%	5.7%
12. Inspection/code enforcement	1,444	72.2%	16.6%	8.7%	13.0%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
13. Operation of parking lots & garages	447	64.7%	15.4%	7.8%	21.5%	1.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%
14. Operation/maintenance of bus transit system	450	16.9%	10.2%	56.4%	14.9%	9.6%	0.9%	1.8%	0.2%
15. Operation/maintenance of paratransit system	394	16.2%	8.6%	54.6%	17.5%	12.9%	1.0%	1.5%	0.5%
16. Operation of airports	425	37.9%	14.8%	39.1%	13.6%	0.7%	1.4%	0.9%	2.6%
17. Water distribution	1,123	64.3%	11.8%	22.1%	9.0%	0.5%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
18. Water treatment	1,042	58.8%	10.3%	28.6%	8.7%	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%
19. Sewage collection and treatment	1,164	54.1%	16.8%	35.4%	7.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
20. Disposal of hazardous materials	713	17.0%	18.8%	42.5%	32.4%	2.7%	2.2%	0.3%	1.0%

Public Utilities	Number reporting (n)	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/ For Profit	Non-profit	Franchises/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
21. Electric/gas utility operation and management	538	25.5%	4.5%	19.3%	50.9%	1.5%	6.5%	0.2%	0.0%
22. Utility meter reading & billing	984	63.8%	8.8%	12.1%	21.2%	0.7%	1.1%	0.1%	0.0%



Public Safety	Number reporting (n)	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/ For Profit	Non-profit	Franchises/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
23. Crime prevention/patrol	1,475	81.2%	6.7%	15.1%	0.5%	0.6%	0.1%	0.2%	1.4%
24. Public safety dispatch	1,328	47.4%	8.2%	48.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
25. Fire suppression	1,335	56.2%	7.8%	23.5%	0.9%	4.2%	0.1%	0.7%	16.6%
26. Emergency medical care	1,187	37.8%	15.7%	29.5%	16.6%	8.4%	0.4%	0.7%	7.8%
27. Emergency medical transport/ambulance	1,147	33.1%	8.3%	31.5%	22.2%	8.7%	1.1%	1.0%	6.5%
28. Parking enforcement	937	80.0%	6.0%	11.8%	4.1%	0.4%	0.3%	0.0%	0.7%
29. Vehicle towing and storage	815	10.6%	7.4%	9.0%	75.5%	0.9%	2.1%	0.1%	0.1%
30. Prisons/jails	913	34.9%	8.2%	59.9%	3.7%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%

Health, Food, and Social Services	Number reporting (n)	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/ For Profit	Non-profit	Franchises/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
31. Sanitary inspection	764	30.2%	7.5%	59.6%	5.8%	0.8%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
32. Insect/rodent control	588	21.6%	10.4%	48.0%	26.7%	1.5%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%
33. Animal control	1,190	49.7%	11.8%	31.9%	7.5%	7.1%	0.3%	0.4%	0.8%
34. Operation of animal shelters	840	26.8%	6.2%	40.4%	8.7%	23.5%	0.5%	1.1%	5.2%
35. Operation of daycare facilities	405	8.9%	4.4%	25.4%	61.0%	22.2%	0.5%	0.5%	0.2%
36. Child welfare programs	527	14.8%	10.6%	67.7%	9.7%	15.6%	0.8%	1.9%	1.3%
37. Programs for the elderly	870	26.8%	25.2%	41.0%	11.3%	26.1%	1.0%	2.4%	7.9%
38. Elder nutrition programs (e.g., Meals on Wheels)	770	14.9%	15.3%	42.7%	10.0%	34.5%	1.3%	2.5%	10.1%
39. Programs to address hunger	452	8.6%	12.4%	44.7%	11.1%	39.6%	1.5%	2.9%	10.2%
40. In-home safety improvements for seniors	399	10.8%	16.0%	45.9%	15.5%	33.3%	1.0%	2.0%	6.0%
41. Home health care/visiting nurse	404	10.9%	6.4%	41.8%	34.7%	28.0%	1.0%	1.7%	1.7%
42. Operation/management of hospitals	410	3.7%	2.2%	34.6%	47.1%	30.2%	1.2%	0.0%	0.7%
43. Inspection of food preparation facilities	645	23.4%	4.7%	65.7%	7.4%	3.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
44. Addiction treatment programs	497	5.2%	9.3%	55.3%	30.8%	37.2%	1.4%	1.0%	2.0%
45. Mental health programs and facilities	544	5.3%	11.9%	56.6%	28.3%	36.4%	1.3%	1.8%	2.6%
46. Operation of homeless shelters	441	1.8%	6.3%	46.7%	15.4%	50.3%	2.0%	2.9%	6.3%



Parks and Recreation	Number reporting (n)	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/ For Profit	Non-profit	Franchises/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
47. Operation of recreation facilities	1,405	71.5%	18.4%	12.3%	5.8%	5.9%	1.5%	0.4%	7.1%
48. Parks landscaping/maintenance	1,476	70.7%	20.2%	7.2%	15.2%	2.3%	0.1%	0.3%	4.4%
49. Operation of convention centers and auditoriums	452	47.6%	10.8%	25.0%	19.5%	8.6%	1.5%	1.1%	1.5%
50. Before/after school programs or summer camps	816	44.6%	18.6%	25.0%	11.5%	21.3%	1.5%	0.7%	6.5%
51. Youth recreation programs	1,060	49.0%	22.4%	17.2%	9.2%	19.7%	1.9%	0.9%	11.7%
52. Senior recreation programs	917	45.0%	21.0%	21.7%	9.4%	20.8%	1.4%	1.3%	10.7%
53. Operation of cultural and arts programs	676	24.7%	28.0%	19.1%	15.2%	41.0%	0.9%	3.6%	15.7%
54. Operation of libraries	971	41.8%	7.5%	43.3%	2.5%	10.4%	0.2%	1.2%	5.7%
55. Operation of museums	572	17.5%	10.0%	25.2%	7.0%	47.6%	0.3%	4.2%	15.9%

Community Development	Number reporting (n)	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/For Profit	Non-profit	Franchises/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
56. Economic development	1,289	44.5%	32.7%	27.7%	8.5%	18.6%	0.1%	1.7%	4.0%
57. Comprehensive land use planning	1,404	66.9%	20.9%	13.7%	11.8%	1.3%	0.1%	0.1%	4.6%
58. Land use review and permitting	1,426	72.5%	17.4%	10.3%	10.0%	1.0%	0.1%	0.1%	3.4%
59. Affordable housing	718	23.7%	25.6%	48.1%	18.0%	26.5%	0.4%	2.9%	1.8%
60. Workforce development/job training programs	576	10.8%	20.7%	60.1%	11.5%	30.4%	0.3%	1.7%	1.6%
61. Youth employment programs	505	17.0%	18.0%	53.5%	12.1%	30.3%	0.6%	1.0%	1.8%



Support Functions	Number reporting (n)	Your employees entirely	Your employees in part	Another government or authority	Private sector/For Profit	Non-profit	Franchises/ concessions	Subsidies	Volunteers
62. Facility maintenance	1,512	64.7%	30.7%	1.6%	25.5%	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%	0.7%
63. Building security	1,122	68.4%	17.5%	2.9%	21.2%	0.4%	0.3%	0.0%	0.1%
64. Fleet management/vehicle maintenance	1,454	56.5%	33.9%	3.2%	31.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
65. Payroll	1,604	86.5%	8.2%	0.8%	9.9%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
66. Tax bill processing	1,249	53.9%	13.9%	32.1%	8.8%	0.7%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
67. Tax assessing	1,154	41.7%	9.1%	44.5%	10.8%	1.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
68. Information technology services	1,337	39.7%	25.1%	8.1%	45.8%	1.4%	0.7%	0.2%	0.0%
69. Collection of delinquent taxes	1,176	40.0%	16.8%	40.0%	16.2%	0.9%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
70. Title records/plat map maintenance	997	38.9%	15.2%	47.0%	10.8%	0.7%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
71. Legal services	1,201	26.5%	16.0%	5.9%	62.2%	2.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%
72. Personnel services	1,281	81.7%	13.6%	3.1%	11.6%	1.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
73. Public relations/public information	1,279	83.7%	13.0%	2.5%	7.1%	0.9%	0.1%	0.0%	0.6%
74. Centralized customer service system (i.e., 311 system)	383	47.5%	10.7%	33.9%	9.1%	8.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

