

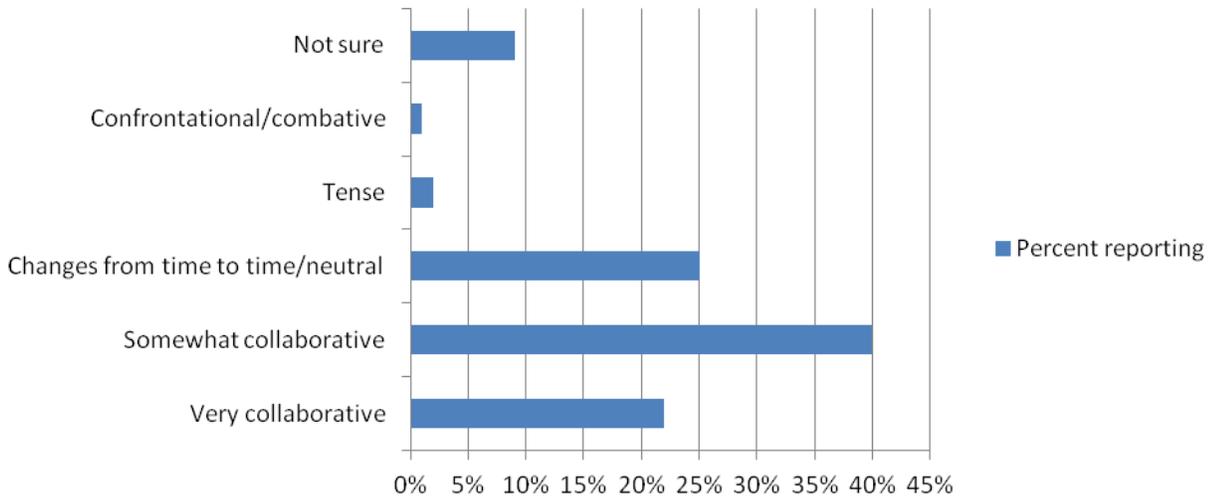
## **Results of ICMA Survey Show Most “Occupy Movement” Protests Have Been Manageable at the Local Level**

- 87 local governments report an “Occupy Movement” in their community.
- Close to 60% describe the relationship with the protestors as “very” or “somewhat collaborative.”
- The political attitude of local elected leadership is overwhelmingly described as “neutral” toward the protestors.
- The concern reported by the highest number of local governments is related to destruction of public property.

On November 3, 2011, ICMA conducted an electronic survey of 4,100 local government managers to learn the extent of the “Occupy Movement” and find out how their local governments are managing the protests. So far, 376 local governments have responded. The survey, created at the request of ICMA members, collected quantitative data and asked respondents to share their recommendations and experiences.

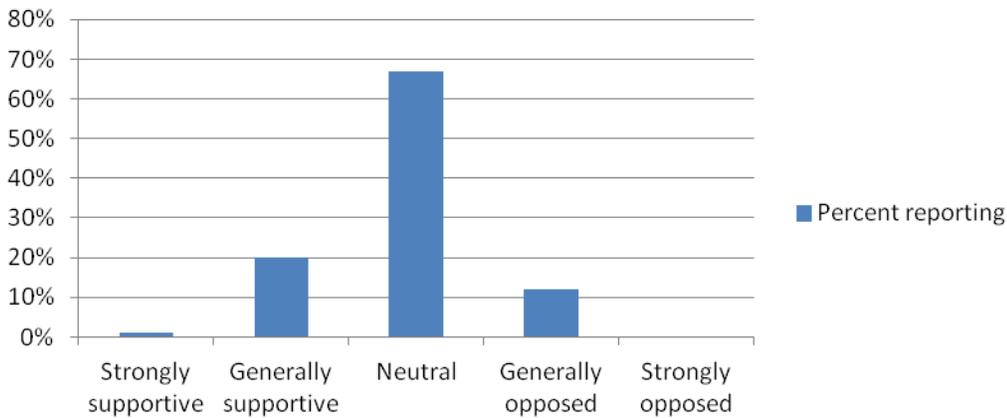
Comments from participants in the survey addressed issues related to overall management of the protests and, specifically, the use of law enforcement personnel. Almost all respondents indicate that they have been successful in keeping disruption, public safety issues, and public health issues to a minimum while protecting the protestors’ right to free speech. Managers are seeking to balance their approach between the need to enforce laws and public access to parks with the rights of protestors. Among the obvious recommendations were to “use patience and common sense” and “keep the governing body informed.”

### Relationship between the local government and the protesters



One of the reasons that the relationship may be collaborative is the attitude of local leaders toward the protesters. While some locally elected officials are supportive and others oppose the objectives of the protesters, most local elected officials are described as being neutral.

### Attitude of majority of elected officials toward the Occupy Movement



The most consistent recommendations from local managers were about communication and include these verbatim suggestions:

- Communication is vital to deter misunderstanding;
- Keep the lines of the communication open with the organizers, city government, and the community;
- Talk to the protestors regularly; treat them fairly and with respect.

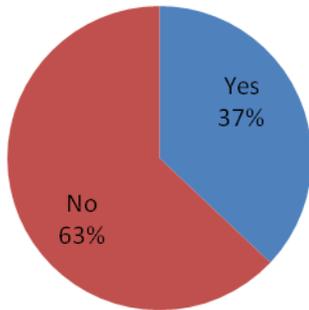
To facilitate communication, some managers recommend a single point for all communication and having all segments of staff (not just police) involved to address the range of issues. Nonetheless, for half of the local governments, law enforcement is the primary point of contact with the protestors. There were multiple recommendations to meet early on with protestors and try to work out an agreement that meets their needs as well as those of the local government and affected community.

Managers recommended setting clear expectations and establishing at the outset ground rules for legal protest conduct and for enforcement of the rules. One manager recommended issuing a permit with provisions that the Occupy Movement can agree to, and then holding protestors to those provisions in as collaborative a way as possible. Another manager recommended avoiding short-term thinking because agreeing to something for expediency's sake can be hard to un-do later.

With regard to enforcement, there were multiple recommendations to not overreact and to avoid confrontation. Suggestions included looking for opportunities to accommodate the protestors' requests and maintaining a command center near the protest site to enable communication, monitoring, and the ability to address issues as they arise.

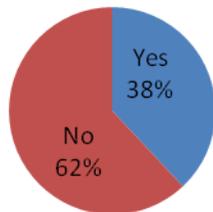
While enforcement may be necessary, the recommendation is to "move demonstrators along if disobeying rules, but don't arrest unless the situation gets out of control." Managers were reminded that some protestors will want to be arrested in order to create a news story. Accordingly, the recommendations were to "have patience and do not act in an aggressive manner without a well planned response"; "minimize police presence as long as things are orderly, damage isn't being done, and no one is breaking any significant rules"; and "give plenty of notices before any summons are issued."

### Is a permit required?



The tent encampments are of special concern, both from the perspective of the health and safety of the protestors as well as possible damage to public property. Some recommended that an encampment be stopped “the minute it starts” because the negative media coverage is coming from efforts to remove camps once they are already established. Many public parks close at a specified time and enforcement was recommended. One city, however, noted that they have enforced the no-tent provision, but as an accommodation, have allowed nine protestors to stay overnight without penalty. Only 11% of respondents report “evicting” protestors.

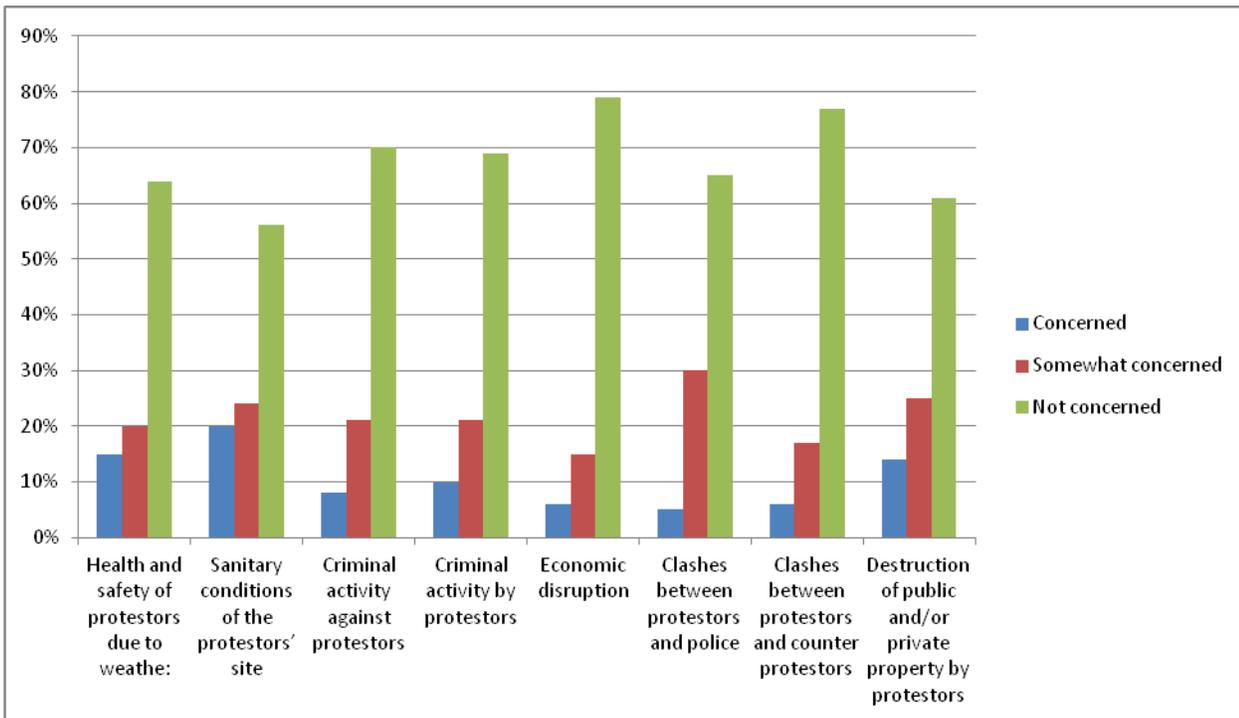
### Overnight encampments are taking place



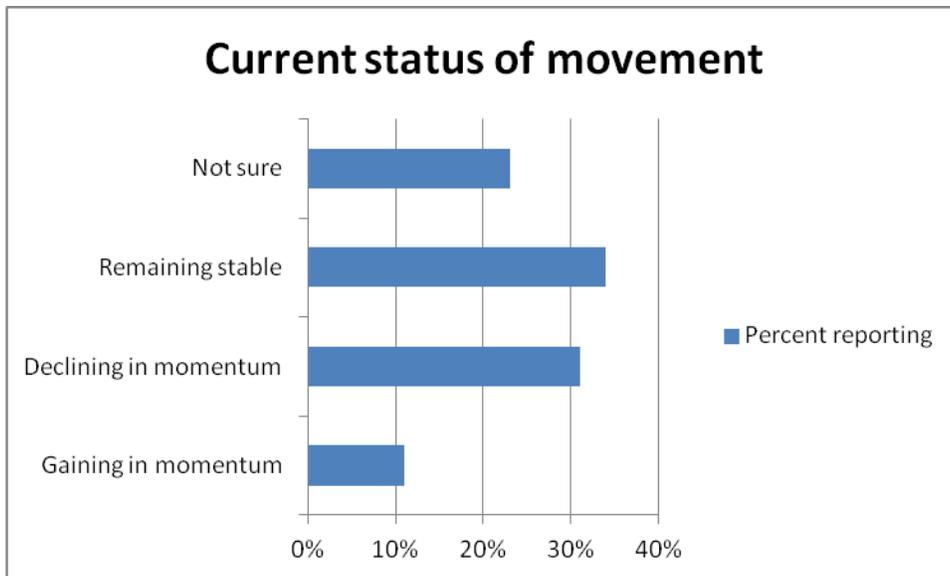
Overall, most local governments are comfortable with the way they are managing the protest movement. A frustration is the ambiguous and diverse motives of the protestors and lack of a clear way to negotiate a resolution. In some cities the protest movement has no clear and consistent leadership with whom to identify and resolve issues.



Looking forward, concerns identified by local government managers vary widely, ranging from health and safety of the protestors to the potential for property damage by the protestors. What emerges clearly from the survey is that the dynamics of the protest will vary from one community to another.



The big questions that remain are how long will the protests last and is there an end-game. Once again, the perceptions at the local level vary. In some communities, the protests have been small and are declining, while protests appear to be on the rise in other communities. This much uncertainty about where the movement is headed requires local government managers to have a variety of contingency plans.



**In their own words**

These stories reflect the thoughtful and professional approaches of managers whose cities have an Occupy Movement.

Rick Cole, city manager of Ventura, California, describes that city’s approach. “We have permitted two weekend events, one at a downtown park and two weeks later at a satellite parking lot near city hall. We insisted on a cut-off time for each, and the group agreed and respected both deadlines. By being flexible in permitting time-limited events, we gained cooperation in respecting those time limits. About 350 came during the day the first weekend, with perhaps 35 staying overnight. The second weekend was probably 50 during the day and 20 overnight. There are no further announced plans. The protestors have praised the cooperation of the city and police.”

As Eric Norenberg, city manager of Oberlin, Ohio, explains it “In our community, we have had a long-running peace protest every Saturday on a prominent corner that does not block commercial establishments. This location has had very little impact on commerce or others. I would suggest working with "Occupy" organizers early on to find a visible location that will have little or no impact on others. Civic activism is part of our community’s DNA, so if anyone wanted to organize a longer, larger

scale "Occupy" protest, I would expect the city would find a way to safely and inexpensively support it. And... I expect we will get cooperation from the protestors to avoid conflict and damage. “

### [About ICMA](#)

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government worldwide. Our mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advancing professional management to create sustainable communities that improve lives worldwide. ICMA provides member support; publications; data and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to nearly 9,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of individuals living in thousands of communities, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.