

# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Sharon Erickson  
David Sykes

**SUBJECT: CITY SURVEY  
METHODOLOGIES**

**DATE:** February 8, 2019

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## INFORMATION

The City Auditor's Annual Services Report 2017-18 was presented at the January 8, 2019 City Council meeting. This memorandum responds to questions about the methodology of the survey data and methodologies the City employs to survey our residents.

### *City Auditor's Annual Service Report*

The City Auditor's Office contracts with the National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) to annually survey San José residents regarding their views on City services and quality of life in the City. The survey data presented in the City Auditor's Annual Services Report 2017-18 was collected and analyzed by NRC on behalf of the City Auditor's Office. The NRC survey is a collaborative effort between NRC and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). This trademark product is utilized by cities throughout the country. Using this tool, the City Auditor's Office has collected data for the past eight years, with most questions unchanged, enabling assessment of trends year over year.

For the most recent Annual Services Report survey, NRC selected its sample populations from random mailing addresses. They mailed print surveys to 3,000 random San José households, and sent postcards to an additional 1,000 random households inviting recipients to complete the survey online. Participation was encouraged with multiple mailings, self-addressed, postage-paid envelopes, and three language choices—English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Completed surveys were received from 613 residents for a total response rate of 16 percent. NRC re-weighted results, as necessary, to reflect the actual demographic composition of San José.

Residents also had an option to complete an online "opt-in" survey. Based on feedback from the City Council in prior years, the City Auditor broadened its outreach for the "opt-in" survey in 2018. The Office issued a press release and used social media to publicize the survey in multiple languages. A link to the survey was also posted on the City's website. As a result, an additional 3,075 residents completed the online "opt-in" survey. NRC has protocols in place to review the integrity of "opt-in" survey responses, such as checking for repeat IP addresses.

Upon completion of data collection of both the mail and "opt-in" surveys, NRC compared data from the two samples, and determined that the two samples could be blended. To blend the data,

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NRC weighted “opt in” survey data using a calibration technique that takes into consideration behavioral characteristics of the sample, as well as demographic data. This calibration technique reduces the differences that may occur between the mail and “opt-in” samples by using the mail results to inform the weighting scheme of the “opt-in” sample. To do this, NRC calculated an index score based on respondents' levels of engagement in the community (e.g., contact with City employees, recreation center use, frequency of volunteering). They then categorized index scores into four equal groups and used the “norms” for the categorized index scores from the random mail sample as part of the weighting scheme for the “opt-in” sample.

The precision of the 2018 survey result was estimated at 95 percent plus or minus two percentage points. Based on the success of the opt-in survey, the City Auditor’s Office plans to continue that effort and expand our outreach to ensure better representation of underrepresented groups. For more information see the Annual Services Report and technical appendices containing full survey results and methodology <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=321>.

#### *City Community Surveys and Ballot Polling*

The City Manager contracts with Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) to complete a community survey every other year on behalf of the City. These surveys measure community satisfaction with several City services and amenities, including libraries, parks, community centers, and perception of public safety. Results from a number of the survey questions are reported each year in the Adopted Operating Budget. FM3 has conducted these surveys of San José residents since 2000. The survey questions have predominantly remained the same since the inception of the community satisfaction survey. This has proven valuable for historical tracking purposes. The survey is translated into Spanish and Vietnamese, and a sample population of at least 1,000 residents is generated using a Random Digit Dial (RDD) method of surveying. Surveys are conducted over the phone in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, with an average length of not more than 25 minutes. FM3 designs and generates cross-tabulations and other statistical tables as required to conduct the analysis, and survey results are benchmarked against other municipalities and previous City survey data.

Using an RDD approach, the interviewer asks screening questions to confirm the survey respondent lives in the City, and to determine demographic data. An RDD survey of 1,000 interviews results in a margin of sampling error at the 95th percent confidence interval of plus or minus 3.2 percent. The RDD sample population used for City surveys is taken from two separate RDD samples: a traditional RDD sample (mostly landlines), and a cell phone RDD sample (mostly cell phones). FM3 determines the ratio of how the San José survey sample will be comprised (landline vs. cell phone) based on the most recent National Health Interview Survey, which includes data on the percentage of adults living in Santa Clara County whom are cell phone-only or landline-only. It should be noted that cell phone-only households are growing in prevalence, especially among younger residents and residents of color, so determining the ratio of RDD sample types is necessary to ensure residents who rely exclusively on cell phones in their households are represented.

FM3 also performs ballot measure surveys of likely voters in San José on emerging issues facing the community. FM3 develops ballot measure surveys in consultation with the City. The survey

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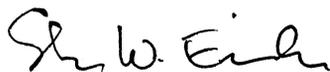
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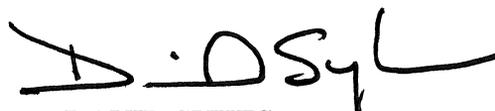
is translated into Spanish and Vietnamese, and a sample population of at least 1,000 likely voters is determined. Unlike the community surveys, which uses RDD, the sample population for ballot measure surveys is obtained from a random sample of likely voters. Likely voters are determined based on their previous election participation, pulled from the Santa Clara County's voter file. Surveys are conducted over the phone in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, with an average length of not more than 25 minutes. FM3 designs and generates cross-tabulations and other statistical tables as required to conduct the analysis, and provides the City with the data and recommendations.

Ensuring community survey samples represent our broader community is important. The City Manager's Office is currently working on an Amendment to extend the City's contract with FM3 through December 31, 2020. This Amendment will require greater flexibility and modernization of survey methods. The growing proportion of cell phone-only households and the portability of phone numbers (residents of San José can have area codes from all over the country) has made the RDD approach more expensive and time-consuming. For this reason, community surveys will now be conducted using an address-based residential survey methodology instead of RDD—allowing greater targeting in the sample.

Address-based residential surveys involve pulling a random sample of addresses in specific communities and matching those addresses with contact information (email addresses and phone numbers) available through public and commercial databases. When an email address is available, the resident is sent a City-branded email inviting them to take the survey online. If only a phone number is available, the resident is called and interviewed (similar to the current RDD approach). City-branded postcards are also mailed to addresses that have no contact information available and the residents are invited to take the survey online. The responses from each method are combined to create a sample that reflects the adult population of San José (based on US Census demographic data). Address-based surveys are more cost-effective, and include residents who are less likely to take a survey by phone.



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