Opinions on intergovernmental collaboration in Kent County

Survey results from citizens and elected officials

Presentation to the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council
September 6, 2012
Community Research Institute

Johnson Center for Philanthropy
at Grand Valley State University

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Phone: 616-331-7585
Study sponsored by

**GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL**
With grant funding from the Frey Foundation

**KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

**URBAN METRO MAYORS AND MANAGERS**
Presenting research partner

Center for Social Research
A Center of Calvin College

Neil Carlson, Ph.D.
Director
Calvin College
Center for Social Research
Research led by

JOHN RISLEY, Ph.D.
RESEARCH SPECIALIST, CRI
(Now Research and Program Officer at Western Michigan University)
Agenda

- Legacy of Dr. James “Jim” Penning
- Research design
- Methods and sampling
- Interpretive background
- Results
  - Collaboration areas
  - Collaboration and consolidation forms
- Summary
- Questions and discussion
James Penning, Ph.D. (1949-2010)

**Calvin College**
- Professor of Political Science, 1975-2010
- Director of CSR, 2008-2010

**City of Grand Rapids**
- Board of Zoning Appeals, 1979-1981
- Planning Commission, 1983-1987

**City of Kentwood**
- Elected Officers’ Compensation Commission, 1997-2010
- Property Maintenance Task Force, 1997
- Commissioner, 2002-2003

**Survey concept from 2010 Grand Rapids Press story about the One Kent campaign**
Research design

- Goal of non-aligned, pragmatic objectivity
- New survey questions
  - Information levels about governmental consolidation and service sharing
  - Support for sharing specific services
  - Support for levels of collaboration/consolidation
- Two complementary surveys
  - Residents via Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey (phone, fall 2011)
  - Elected officials survey (online/mail, spring 2012)
Sample selection and results

- GGRCS, fall 2011
  - Random-digit-dialed telephone survey by Precision Research (Phoenix, AZ)
  - Quota of 500 Kent County residents
  - Oversample of African Americans and Hispanics (100 each); analysis is weighted to represent the county population
  - Sampling error +/- 4%
- Elected officials, spring 2012
  - List provided to CRI by GVCMC
  - Online (148) and mail (100), 248 total
  - 118 responses (47.5% response rate)
  - Population data (no sampling error)
Response geography

Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Weighted count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>161.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentwood</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other city</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township or rural</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>178.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know, refused or no answer</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>471.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elected officials’ residences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center cities</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlying cities</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter townships</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townships</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other or no answer</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Majority of public has heard little or nothing

How much have you heard about consolidating governance and sharing local government services?

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Residents mostly neutral, supportive

In general, what is your opinion of efforts to share local government services in Kent County?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Elected Officials</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Support</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Oppose</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Information moves public toward officials

In general, what is your opinion of efforts to share local government services in Kent County?

- Strongly Support: 12% Elected Officials, 10% Informed Public, 10% Uninformed Public
- Support: 39% Elected Officials, 33% Informed Public, 25% Uninformed Public
- Neutral: 46% Elected Officials, 18% Informed Public, 25% Uninformed Public
- Oppose: 19% Elected Officials, 2% Informed Public, 3% Uninformed Public
- Strongly Oppose: 12% Elected Officials, 1% Informed Public, 7% Uninformed Public
- Don't Know: 7% Elected Officials, 9% Informed Public, 1% Uninformed Public
- Refused: 1% Elected Officials, 1% Informed Public, 1% Uninformed Public
Geographic variation

Margins of error are large—not for strong conclusions!

- Among officials,
  - “Center city” officials are most supportive (70% support, just 7% opposition).
  - Non-charter township officials are most opposed (45% support, 40% oppose).

- Among residents,
  - “Other city” respondents are most supportive (50% support, 9% oppose)
  - GR: 39% support, 14% oppose
  - Opposition is also greatest in townships (34% support, 25% oppose).
Supportive residents put money first; supportive officials name effectiveness

What is the main reason you [strongly] support these efforts?

- **Allow these services to be sustainable over the long-term**
  - Elected Officials: 25%
  - Public: 18%

- **Increase the effectiveness of service delivery**
  - Elected Officials: 40%
  - Public: 22%

- **Increase responsiveness to citizens**
  - Elected Officials: 9%
  - Public: 14%

- **Save money**
  - Elected Officials: 23%
  - Public: 39%

- **Another reason**
  - Elected Officials: 2%
  - Public: 2%

- **Don’t know**
  - Elected Officials: 0%
  - Public: 2%

- **Refused**
  - Elected Officials: 2%
  - Public: 2%
Opposed residents worry about effectiveness; Opposed officials about responsiveness.

What is the main reason you [strongly] oppose these efforts?

- Cost more money: 20% (Residents), 21% (Officials)
- Decrease the effectiveness of service delivery: 8% (Residents), 31% (Officials)
- Decrease responsiveness to citizens: 36% (Residents), 25% (Officials)
- Lead to a loss of community identity: 16% (Residents), 18% (Officials)
- Another reason: 20% (Residents), 3% (Officials)
- Don't Know: 0% (Residents), 3% (Officials)
Political opportunity?

Very tentative observations from survey data:

- Citizens want to save money, worry about effectiveness, responsiveness.
- Elected officials worry about responsiveness and cost, but see clear gains and few risks to effectiveness of services.
- Formula for a breakthrough? Focus on making and communicating effectiveness gains while holding steady or improving costs and responsiveness.
Assessing and collection are least popular

What is your opinion of efforts to share the following local government services in Kent County? % Support or Strongly Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Elected Officials</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Services</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Services</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works (e.g. water &amp; sewer</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infrastructure)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Recreation Services</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Properties for Tax Purposes</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Collection</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Services (e.g. land use, etc.)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Service-sharing detail

**What is your opinion of efforts to share ... in Kent County?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of respondents (residents weighted for representativeness)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elected officials</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>459</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police services</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire services</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works (e.g., water and sewer infrastructure)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and recreation services</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing properties for tax purposes</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax collection</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning services around such issues as land use, watershed preservation, &amp; storm water management</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Huge opposition to mergers

In general, would you support or oppose ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the increase in informal cooperation between your city/township and</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neighboring governments?</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing formal contracts between your city/township and neighboring</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>governments?</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combining government services (e.g. police &amp; fire departments) between</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your city/township and neighboring governments.</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completely merging your city/township and neighboring governments?</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completely merging all local units of government in Kent County into one</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consolidated unit?</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of respondents (residents weighted for representativeness)

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Few patterns to report in resident data

Statistical models don’t offer much insight

- Older residents are significantly more likely to oppose sharing police and fire and combining services “such as police and fire.”
- More educated respondents are more likely to oppose sharing planning services—but why?
- Geography, race and income are not consistent predictors.
- More civically engaged residents also lend much more support to sharing police and fire and … to merging all governments in the county! Hmm.
Summary of key findings

- The majority of the public feels relatively uninformed about governmental cooperation.
- Elected officials’ distribution of general support and opposition reflects the informed public’s.
- Opposed residents are most concerned about service effectiveness, but elected officials are quite sanguine about it.
- Majorities of officials and residents oppose shared tax assessment and collection.
- There is majority or near-majority support for informal, contractual and service combinations.
- There is weak support and majority or near-majority opposition to government mergers, both with neighbors and county-wide.
2013 Deliberative Poll on this topic

- Creation of Stanford’s James Fishkin.
- Tested method combines representativeness of polling with deep deliberation.
- Informative, useful results for leaders and media.
- CSR and Calvin’s Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics (Dr. Kevin den Dulk, Director) plan to pursue it.
- Very positive initial discussions with CRI, GVMC and Fishkin’s Center for Deliberative Democracy.
- Will begin seeking broad formal co-sponsors this fall.
THANK YOU
Questions and discussion