



Maine Municipal Association

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To: Key Municipal Officials

From: Steve Gove, Executive Director, Maine Municipal Association

Date: February 9, 2016

Re: 2015 Local Government Finance Survey

Attached to this memo is the Local Government Finance Survey we send out every year in conjunction with the U.S. Census. This year's survey is focused on FY 2015 municipal revenue and expenditure data.

In recent years this survey has experienced a drop-off in participation. When the participation rate drops below a certain level, either across the board or for clusters of municipalities within certain population levels, the value of the information generated by the survey is considerably diminished. I am hoping with this memo to rekindle your willingness to respond to this fiscal survey by describing five different ways the information it generates is used. From our perspective, the ready availability of the information in the MMA Fiscal Survey benefits Maine's towns and cities by providing accurate information regarding municipal government to Maine's lawmakers, general public, press, academics and the entire municipal community.

- **One-of-a-kind resource.** To our knowledge, there is no other resource that gathers all the data necessary to answer such questions as: "How much does the management and disposal of solid waste cost Maine's property taxpayers?" or "What were the financial impacts on Maine's towns and cities associated with the major recession of 2008?" or "Are there per-capita differences in the costs of animal control services between large urban and small rural municipalities?" Without some source of dependable, aggregated information about the revenue municipalities collect from all sources, as well as all expenditures they make according to common program centers, even the most fundamental questions about governmental services in Maine cannot be answered.
- **Trending.** Assuming a sufficient level of participation, the annual reports generated by this fiscal survey can accurately spot trends over time in municipal revenue collection and spending priorities. Several years ago, a professor at the University of Maine used the data in MMA's Fiscal Survey to begin tracking the impacts of the Legislature's deep cuts in the municipal revenue sharing program on local government programs.

- **Public relations.** With the information available in the MMA Fiscal Survey, a routine inquiry by a newspaper or television reporter can be answered with information that gives the story added dimensions and helps the public better understand the breadth and depth of services provided by local government.
- **Legislative advocacy.** Lawmakers, also, are sometimes not well informed about the array of services provided at the municipal level (often at the demand of the State Legislature) and how the cost of providing those services burdens the state's property taxpayers. The MMA Fiscal Survey is a tool that can quickly end a legislative claim that the municipalities are not doing enough or that some mandated function really doesn't cost anything to implement.
- **Municipal-to-Municipal information sharing.** There is great value in learning how your revenue collections and program expenditures compare with other similarly situated municipalities across the state. When the survey response is robust, the information sharing possibilities expand exponentially.

For all these reasons and more, we sincerely hope you will consider completing the enclosed 2015 Local Government Finance Survey.

This survey is requesting data for the 2014/2015 budget year, which in most "calendar year" municipalities is the budget year that ended on December 31, 2014 and in "fiscal year" municipalities is the budget year that ended June 30, 2015. If you believe some other employee (e.g., finance director, treasurer, etc.) or volunteer (e.g., budget committee member, etc.) in your community is better suited to complete the survey, please forward this survey to that person.

Please review the attached instructions carefully and return your completed survey in the postage paid envelope by **Monday, March 21, 2016.** Surveys can also be faxed (624-0129) or emailed (kdufour@memun.org) to Kate Dufour. Copies of these documents, as well as an Excel version of the survey, are posted on MMA's website.

The Census Bureau and MMA are dedicated to making this survey a reliable source of municipal revenue and spending data. This goal is possible only with your assistance. Again, please take the time to complete the survey and return it in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your time and assistance. If you have any questions please contact Kate Dufour at 1-800-452-8786 or at the email address provided above.