

2006 MMA Membership Survey

By Patrick O. Murphy, President of Pan Atlantic SMS Group

As part of its strategic and business planning process, the Maine Municipal Association conducts a comprehensive evaluation of member satisfaction and service needs every five years. (The last survey was conducted in 2001).

Early in 2006 the MMA selected Pan Atlantic SMS Group, a strategic market research and consulting firm based in Portland, Maine, to conduct a comprehensive survey of its members.

Working closely with MMA's Strategic and Finance Committee, Executive Committee, and staff, Pan Atlantic SMS Group developed survey instruments which were administered to elected and appointed officials in all MMA-member municipalities. The principal objectives of the 2006 membership survey were: 1) to gather data and information on the value and importance of MMA's current range of services; 2) to assess future needs of MMA members; 3) to evaluate members' level of understanding and familiarity with MMA's services and programs; and 4) to provide membership demographics.

Survey Methodology

Mail surveys were sent to 2,000 randomly selected appointed and elected municipal officials statewide from the MMA membership. Representatives from all municipalities (including 435 key appointed officials in each town or city) were included in the sampling plan. Despite the length of the survey a high response level – close to 40% overall was obtained.

Completed surveys were received from two-thirds of key appointed officials in all municipalities and from close to a third of all elected officials included in the sample. These response rates are excellent for a membership organization. We were surprised by the fact that a high percentage of respondents also took the time to write thousands of narrative comments in response to open-ended questions. These narrative comments have provided invaluable insights which complement the statistical data collected. The margin of error for the overall results of the survey is $\pm 3.3\%$ at the 95% confidence level. This represents a high level of statis-

tical validity.

Following are highlights of the data collected, information on member perceived strengths and weaknesses of the MMA and recommendations made to the organization.

Key Findings - MMA Overall Ratings

Q: Overall how valuable would you say MMA membership is to your municipality?

- A total of 96.4% of all respondents reported that MMA Membership is either "very valuable" or "somewhat valuable" to them with three out of four members reporting membership as being "very valuable."

- A high percentage of members surveyed (75.1%) reported that they "frequently" or "regularly" take advantage of the services provided by the MMA.

Q: How would you rate MMA in terms of performance, services, effectiveness as media spokesman, availability/accessibility, speed and quality of response, professional demeanor, and subject knowledge?

As can be seen from the

Overall Rating: Value of MMA Membership

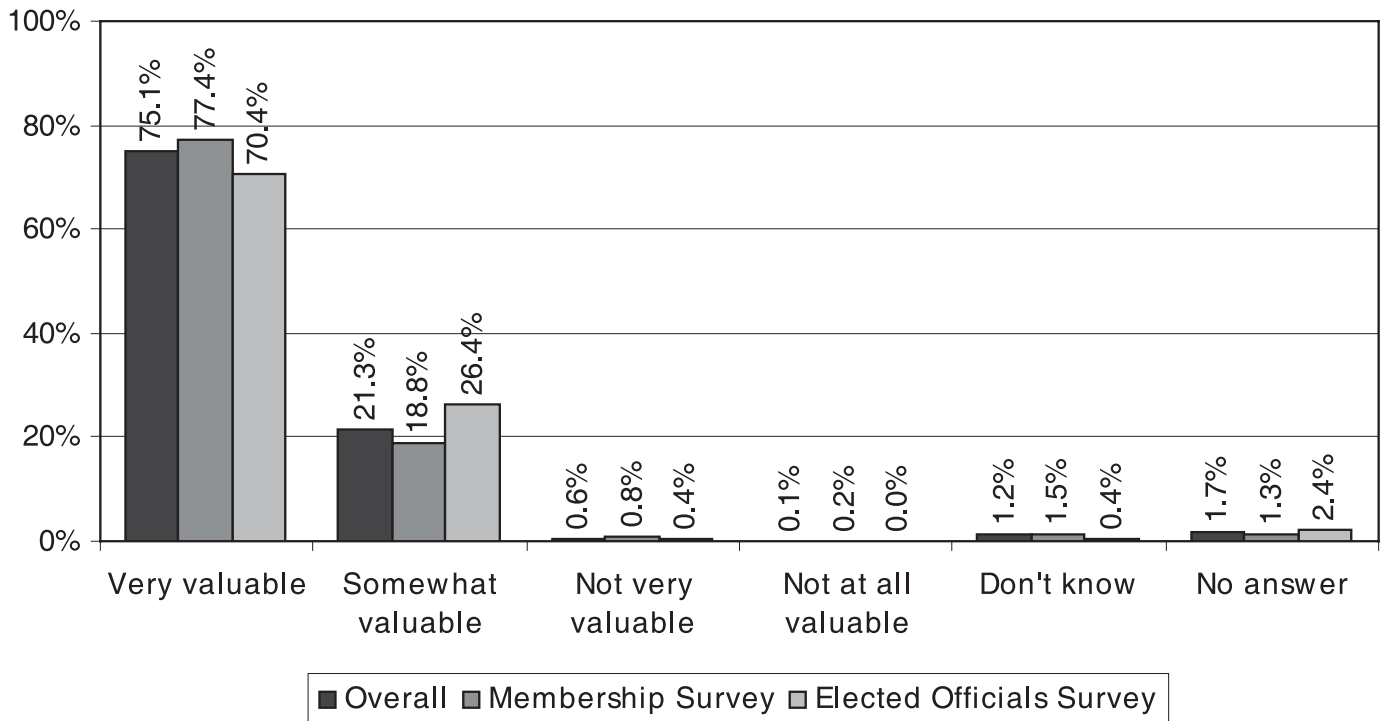


chart at the bottom of the next page, the MMA rated very well on a range of specific performance metrics.

Performance Ratings of Specific Service Areas

As can be seen from the chart at the top of the next page, very high levels of satisfaction were recorded for each of the MMA's service areas.

- Within each service area MMA members also rated most individual service offerings very well.

Other Key Findings

- In the communications arena the *Maine Townsman* (92.3%), the Municipal Directory (83.0%), and the MMA website (80.5%) were all highly rated in terms of quality and

value by members.

- Respondents were almost evenly split on the issue of changing the *Maine Townsman* to a quarterly publication (41.2%) versus those who prefer to keep it as a monthly publication (48.6%).

- More than half of respondents (54.5%) feel that the MMA should increase the level of electronic communications by producing a weekly electronic newsletter.

- Approximately nine in ten respondents (88.4%) indicated that it would be "very" or "somewhat valuable" if the MMA were to sponsor annual meetings in various parts of the state thus providing them with the opportunity to learn more about MMA services and programs.

- While approximately half

of those responding said that they favor continuing to hold the MMA Annual Convention in Augusta, two in ten do not, and three in ten are undecided on this issue.

- Reported attendance at the Convention is down considerably since 2001 (24.5% reported attending in the 2006 survey versus 45% in 2001). The principal reason cited for not attending (54.1%) is inability to do so due to workload.

- Approximately equal numbers of respondents said that they would prefer that Advocacy Surveys be offered online and in paper format.

- MMA's Legal Services Department rated very highly and a high percentage of respondents (72.2%) reported that they use the MMA website or

Category	Excellent / Good
Advocacy	76.2%
Communications and Educational Services	75.9%
Health Trust Services (N=483)	84.1%*
Legal Services	86.0%
Personnel and Labor Relations Services (N=439)	80.4%*
Risk Management Services (N=625)	87.0%*

* Indicates the ratings provided by those who were familiar enough with this service to do so.

other materials to research questions before making a direct inquiry to the department.

- A high percentage of those using the MMA's Health Trust Services rate it very well. Among users of these services, a high percentage also reported that it is important that the Health Trust provides consumer healthcare information

to municipal employees.

- As with the MMA's Health Trust Services, a high percentage of those who use the organization's Risk Management Services (RMS) rated them very well. However, a significant percentage of members reported that they do not use these services.

- In terms of new services

which members feel the organization should provide, the following were noted:

- Budgeting / Financial management seminars
- IT technical assistance
- Training workshops on land use and environmental laws
- Long-term care insurance and health savings accounts

All Respondents	Excellent / Very good
Overall performance in representing its members	85.8%
Services it provides to its members	89.8%
Effectiveness as a statewide media spokesman for Maine local government	75.8%
Availability / accessibility	87.4%
Speed and quality of response	82.1%
Professional demeanor	90.9%
Knowledge of subject matter	91.4%

MMA's Key Strengths and Weaknesses

• In an unaided question, to which 58% of all respondents provided an answer, the MMA's principal strengths were cited as:

— Knowledgeable, accurate, professional and courteous staff

— The organization's role in providing statewide representation and communications for its members

— The availability and quick response time provided by staff to members on issues

— The organization's legal, lobbying, legislative, publications and educational / training services

• While only 32% of respondents provided an answer to this question, the principal cited weaknesses of the MMA were:

— Distance issues with respect to members attending trainings / workshops (in Augusta)

— Lack of focus with regard to the organization's representation of membership demographic groups (e.g. urban vs. rural etc.)

— The need for more / better communications on MMA services

— Slow response time or lack of response to inquiries

Recommendations

Arising from analysis of the data and information gathered, Pan Atlantic SMS Group made a series of recommendations to the MMA. Key recommendations include:

• MMA should conduct more regional trainings, workshops and meetings so as to provide better geographic coverage and communications to its membership.

• MMA needs to conduct a more in-depth review of its Annual Convention to deal with issues of attendance, location, scheduling and programming for both elected and appointed officials.

• MMA should consider offering a place on its website where municipal officials can share opinions on legislative issues online.

• MMA needs to increase awareness of and the importance of member participation in Advocacy Surveys and Action Alerts. Additionally, the MMA should encourage members to respond to Action Alerts by contacting their legislators.

• While an increasing percentage of members would like to receive MMA publications and other materials online, the MMA should continue to service the needs of the many smaller community members who still conduct the majority of their business offline, via printed materials. However, some economies can be achieved with those members who would prefer online formats. The MMA should also offer members a weekly electronic newsletter.

• MMA should promote greater awareness of its Health Trust and Risk Management Services, especially to officials from smaller and more rural

communities.

• MMA should offer training seminars on 1) budgeting / financial matters and 2) information technology / data management.

• MMA should consider providing 1) long-term care insurance and 2) health savings account services to members.

Conclusion

The results of the 2006 MMA Membership Survey reflect a high degree of satisfaction with the organization and its services. The results of the survey also provide guidelines on areas where refinements are recommended so that the MMA continues to provide the highest quality level of services to the broadest spectrum of appointed and elected municipal officials in its member municipalities.

We at Pan Atlantic SMS Group want to take this opportunity to thank all of the MMA staff and Executive Committee who provided us with invaluable assistance and direction in the course of conducting this project. We also want to thank all of the organization's members for making the considerable time commitment to respond to the survey.

Pan Atlantic SMS Group is a strategic market research and consulting firm which has been servicing the needs of Maine public and private sector clients for the past 21 years. We can be contacted by phone at (207) 871-8622 or via our website www.panatlanticsmsgroup.com.