



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 11724)

Report Type: Consent Calendar

Meeting Date: 11/9/2020

Summary Title: 2020 National Community Survey

Title: Policy and Services Committee Recommends Council Accept the Proposed 2020 National Community Survey and Process

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Manager

Recommended Motion

Staff recommends that Council accept the proposed 2020 National Community Survey and process as recommended by the Policy and Services Committee at their August 11, 2020 meeting.

Background

The NCS (formerly called the National Citizen Survey) is an enterprise of Polco (who purchased [National Research Center](#), Inc., in 2019) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The survey is statistically valid and is seen as a standard in municipal government, though not every city conducts a survey annually; some conduct on a regular schedule of 2-3 years or more.

Since 2003, the City of Palo Alto has contracted to survey Palo Altans about their opinions regarding quality of life, city services, and perceptions of the environment and regional issues. The NCS has also been one way to see how Palo Alto compares to other cities who participate in this same survey. The value of the comparisons using questions on the same subjects across all jurisdictions, and the data collected, has typically been in benchmarking, for use in annual budget planning, and for Council contextual awareness of the community perception of local issues and satisfaction levels with city services and programs.

The survey process was previously overseen by the City Auditor's Office and transitioned to the City Manager's Office in 2019. Past surveys have followed a separate process through the Auditor's Office and have not come to a Council meeting for approval prior to distribution. No survey was administered in 2019 as the transition took place.

This action authorizes distribution of the survey to the community, using the National Community Survey (NCS) through their parent company, [Polco](#) (Policy Confluence, Inc.). No Council action is required to approve the contract, which is within established purchasing limits.

Discussion

The Policy and Services Committee discussed the NCS at their August 11, 2020 meeting ([Staff Report #11500](#); [Minutes](#)), noting several factors that were preferred, with the idea of improving response rates as well as remaining within the allotted budget. These ideas included shortening the survey, offering the survey only online, and perhaps moving from an annual survey to conducting a survey every 2-3 years.

The Committee's comments highlighted some specific preferences for the survey going forward, as follows. The Committee recommends:

- A statistically valid survey conducted annually;
- In 2020, a combination of paper and online (solicited via postcard) surveys to compare response rates by method, age group, gender, etc.;
- For the online portion, prevention of any duplicate responses or online activities to impair the survey's statistical validity (vendor confirms this is their standard practice);
- Keep standard questions where makes sense to maintain our ability to benchmark to other jurisdictions;
- Shorten the survey as much as possible to improve the response rate; and,
- Conduct the survey within the budget (i.e., \$27,000).

Following the discussion, the Committee moved as follows:

MOTION: Chair Cormack moved, seconded by Council Member Filseth to recommend the City Council take the following action on the 2020 National Community Survey:

1. Have the City Manager's Office inquire of the City Council for questions to be included, any questions less relevant and any questions to add;
2. Use a Hybrid Option of paper and electronic format;
3. Send out as many surveys as possible within the budget;
4. Appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to work directly with the City Manager's Office to finalize the survey questions; and,
5. Finalize the results by the end of October 2020.

During the meeting, Council member Filseth was appointed to be the Ad Hoc Committee of 1 from Policy and Services. He and the CMO reviewed the comparisons of the 2018 survey and the proposed 2020 survey to ensure that the newer version captured questions that should continue from year-to-year, as well as to address any inconsistencies or questions that might not be applicable to Palo Alto, such as a question about snow removal.

All Council members were solicited twice by the CMO directly for their feedback on the proposed draft survey. When the feedback was received, it was compiled to compare the

comments, desired additions, and deletions. Most comments were on unique items and there was very little overlap and no real conflicting comments (that is, one Council member wanting to keep a question and another wanting to delete the same question).

Once this process was completed, an updated draft was distributed to the City department directors for the same process. Comments were once again incorporated based on the number of comments per question. When a subject may have had differing opinions, and when there was a preference expressed to keep a question for a specific purpose (i.e. use in the budget document as a performance metric), the question was retained. Again, there were few if any conflicting responses.

The final version is Attachment A and is relatively unchanged from the very first proposed 2020 survey, based on the 2018 survey, in length and in subjects covered. However, this review process indicated that the Council felt it was important to continue the surveys annually, with an aim to understand the response rates of paper versus online. Going forward, the only way to increase the number of surveys distributed for the same cost would be to increase the number of online surveys.

The survey scope of services for the NCS includes all aspects of conducting the survey: all printing and mailing costs, geocoding the sample to ensure that all addresses are within the city limits of Palo Alto, ongoing consultation with staff about the survey process, sample selection, preparation and mailing of a five-page survey to at least 1,800 households, a post card mailing for solicitation to complete the survey online (3,600 households total), data entry and analysis, report of results with national benchmark comparisons, and the submission of an electronic dataset with final reports. All survey recipients will have the option to complete the survey online if they prefer. The web survey will be optimized so that respondents can also take the survey using a mobile device. To support the goal of making comparisons by respondent location, responses will be tracked by geographic areas prior to survey administration, and the vendor will provide geographic based results, as has been conducted in the past.

Timeline

The survey will be distributed as soon as possible, with results tentatively available before the City Council retreat, typically held at the beginning of February.

Resource Impact

The contract does not meet the purchasing threshold (\$85,000) to require Council approval. However, the contract with Polco will not exceed the budgeted amount approved as part of the Fiscal Year 2021 budget (\$27,000), and will extend for three years, for a not-to-exceed amount of \$81,000.

Stakeholder Engagement

Following the Policy and Services Committee meeting, CMO and the appointed ad hoc prepared a draft version for review by Council and the City department directors. Council members were

asked two times for their input and feedback, to ensure all who wished to respond were able to do so.

Once the Council review was complete, department directors engaged in the same feedback opportunity and provided their input on questions they considered important to maintain and anything that would be new to include, based on department use.

The CMO and ad hoc again reviewed the draft, commenting on any potential issues. The vendor then reviewed the draft to ensure that benchmark opportunities are still possible as well as to confirm that the overall length would fit into the paper and cost limitations. The completed draft survey is attached.

Environmental Review

This action does not constitute a project, as defined by CEQA. No environmental review is needed.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Palo Alto Community Survey DRAFT 2020-10-27



Please complete this survey if you are the adult (age 18 or older) in the household who most recently had a birthday (the year of birth does not matter). Your responses are anonymous and will be reported in group form only.

1. Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Palo Alto.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Palo Alto as a place to live	1	2	3	4	5
Your neighborhood as a place to live.....	1	2	3	4	5
Palo Alto as a place to raise children.....	1	2	3	4	5
Palo Alto as a place to work	1	2	3	4	5
Palo Alto as a place to visit	1	2	3	4	5
Palo Alto as a place to retire	1	2	3	4	5
The overall quality of life in Palo Alto.....	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Palo Alto as a whole.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Overall "built environment" of Palo Alto (including overall design, buildings, parks and transportation systems)	1	2	3	4	5
Overall feeling of safety in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Overall quality of natural environment in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	1	2	3	4	5

3. Please indicate how likely or unlikely you are to do each of the following.

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Somewhat unlikely	Very unlikely	Don't know
Recommend living in Palo Alto to someone who asks	1	2	3	4	5
Remain in Palo Alto for the next five years.....	1	2	3	4	5
Recommend Palo Alto's libraries to friends.....	1	2	3	4	5

4. Please rate the job you feel the Palo Alto community does at each of the following.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Making all residents feel welcome	1	2	3	4	5
Attracting people from diverse backgrounds	1	2	3	4	5
Valuing/respecting residents from diverse backgrounds.....	1	2	3	4	5
Taking care of vulnerable residents (elderly, disabled, homeless, etc.) ...	1	2	3	4	5

5. Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Palo Alto as a whole.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Overall quality of business and service establishments in Palo Alto.....	1	2	3	4	5
Variety of business and service establishments in Palo Alto.....	1	2	3	4	5
Vibrancy of downtown/commercial area	1	2	3	4	5
Employment opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Shopping opportunities.....	1	2	3	4	5
Cost of living in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Overall image or reputation of Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Traffic flow on major streets	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of public parking.....	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of travel by car in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of travel by public transportation in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of travel by bicycle in Palo Alto.....	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of walking in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Variety of housing options	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of affordable quality housing	1	2	3	4	5
Overall quality of new development in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of paths and walking trails	1	2	3	4	5
Fitness opportunities (including exercise classes and paths or trails, etc.) ...	1	2	3	4	5
Recreational opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of affordable quality mental health care.....	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities	1	2	3	4	5

6. Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Palo Alto as a whole.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Availability of affordable quality childcare/preschool	1	2	3	4	5
K-12 education.....	1	2	3	4	5
Adult educational opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to participate in social events and activities.....	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to participate in community matters	1	2	3	4	5
Openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds.....	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to learn about City services through social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook.....	1	2	3	4	5

7. Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.

	No	Yes
Used Palo Alto recreation centers or their services	1	2
Visited a neighborhood park or City park	1	2
Used Palo Alto public libraries or their services.....	1	2
Participated in religious or spiritual activities in Palo Alto	1	2
Attended a City-sponsored event.....	1	2
Participated in a club	1	2
Talked to or visited with your immediate neighbors.....	1	2
Done a favor for a neighbor	1	2
Used the City's website to conduct business or pay bills	1	2
Used the Utilities website to conduct business or pay bills	1	2
Contacted the City of Palo Alto (in-person, phone, email or web) for help or information	1	2
Contacted Palo Alto elected officials (in-person, phone, email or web) to express your opinion.....	1	2
Attended a local public meeting (of local elected officials like City Council or County Commissioners, advisory boards, town halls, HOA, neighborhood watch, etc.)	1	2
Watched (online or on television) a local public meeting.....	1	2
Volunteered your time to some group/activity in Palo Alto	1	2
Voted in your most recent local election	1	2
Used bus, rail, or other public transportation instead of driving.....	1	2
Carpooled with other adults or children instead of driving alone.....	1	2
Walked or biked instead of driving.....	1	2
Observed a code violation or other hazard in Palo Alto (weeds, abandoned buildings, etc.).....	1	2
Household member was a victim of a crime in Palo Alto	1	2
Reported a crime to the police in Palo Alto.....	1	2
Stocked 14 days' worth of supplies in case of a major disaster where you have no electricity, water, internet, or telephone service.....	1	2

8. Please rate the following categories of Palo Alto government performance.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
The value of services for the taxes paid to Palo Alto.....	1	2	3	4	5
The overall direction that Palo Alto is taking.....	1	2	3	4	5
The job Palo Alto government does at welcoming resident involvement .	1	2	3	4	5
Overall confidence in Palo Alto government	1	2	3	4	5
Generally acting in the best interest of the community	1	2	3	4	5
Being honest.....	1	2	3	4	5
Being open and transparent to the public	1	2	3	4	5
Informing residents about issues facing the community.....	1	2	3	4	5
Treating all residents fairly.....	1	2	3	4	5
Treating residents with respect	1	2	3	4	5

9. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
The City of Palo Alto	1	2	3	4	5
The State Government.....	1	2	3	4	5
The Federal Government	1	2	3	4	5



10. Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Palo Alto.

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Traffic enforcement	1	2	3	4	5
Traffic signal timing	1	2	3	4	5
Street repair.....	1	2	3	4	5
Street cleaning	1	2	3	4	5
Street tree maintenance	1	2	3	4	5
Sidewalk maintenance	1	2	3	4	5
Land use, planning, and zoning.....	1	2	3	4	5
Code enforcement (weeds, abandoned buildings, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Preservation of natural areas (open space, farmlands and greenbelts)	1	2	3	4	5
Building and planning application processing services.....	1	2	3	4	5
Affordable high-speed internet access	1	2	3	4	5
Electric utility	1	2	3	4	5
Gas utility.....	1	2	3	4	5
Utility payment options	1	2	3	4	5
Drinking water	1	2	3	4	5
Sewer services	1	2	3	4	5
Storm water management (storm drainage, dams, levees, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Refuse collection (garbage, recycling, yard waste, and e-waste).....	1	2	3	4	5
Police services.....	1	2	3	4	5
Crime prevention.....	1	2	3	4	5
Animal control	1	2	3	4	5
Ambulance or emergency medical services	1	2	3	4	5
Fire services.....	1	2	3	4	5
Fire prevention and education	1	2	3	4	5
Palo Alto open space	1	2	3	4	5
City parks.....	1	2	3	4	5
Recreation programs or classes.....	1	2	3	4	5
Recreation centers or facilities.....	1	2	3	4	5
Public library services (e.g., hold requests, storytimes, teen events, bookclubs) ...	1	2	3	4	5
Library facilities (buildings, computer equipment, accessibility)	1	2	3	4	5
Variety of library materials (books, e-books, streaming, databases, audiobooks) ..	1	2	3	4	5
Art programs and theater.....	1	2	3	4	5
City-sponsored special events	1	2	3	4	5
City website (cityofpaloalto.org).....	1	2	3	4	5
Public information services (Police/public safety).....	1	2	3	4	5
Public information services (non-Police/public safety).....	1	2	3	4	5
Overall customer service by Palo Alto employees (police, receptionists, planners, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

11. Please rate the following as they relate to Palo Alto Utilities' services:

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Reliability of utility services	1	2	3	4	5
Affordability of utility services.....	1	2	3	4	5
Community value received from the City owning and operating its own municipal utility services	1	2	3	4	5
Utilities online customer self-service features.....	1	2	3	4	5
Providing opportunities for energy and water efficiency at home or business ..	1	2	3	4	5
Working hard to keep utilities prices competitive.....	1	2	3	4	5
Value of all the services Palo Alto Utilities provides for the price you pay	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of obtaining information or performing a transaction through the City's website	1	2	3	4	5
Value of Palo Alto Utilities' customer communications.....	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of contacting Utilities department staff	1	2	3	4	5
Speed of response after contacting Utilities department staff.....	1	2	3	4	5

12. Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Palo Alto community to focus on each of the following in the coming two years.

	<u>Essential</u>	<u>Very important</u>	<u>Somewhat important</u>	<u>Not at all important</u>
Overall "built environment" of Palo Alto (including overall design, buildings, parks and transportation systems)	1	2	3	4
Overall economic health of Palo Alto.....	1	2	3	4
Overall feeling of safety in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4
Overall quality of natural environment in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Palo Alto	1	2	3	4
Overall opportunities for education, culture and the arts	1	2	3	4
Residents' connection and engagement with their community	1	2	3	4
Reducing community greenhouse gas emissions	1	2	3	4
Increasing local solar generation capacity within city boundaries	1	2	3	4
Increasing electric storage capacity within city boundaries.....	1	2	3	4
Faster notification systems (online, mobile or email) for Utilities billing issues, efficiency tips, outage information	1	2	3	4
Faster notification systems (online, mobile or email) for public safety issues	1	2	3	4

13. In a typical week, how likely are you to:

	<u>Very likely</u>	<u>Somewhat likely</u>	<u>Somewhat unlikely</u>	<u>Very unlikely</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Participate in organized group activities (such as clubs, sports teams, volunteer your time, attend church/temple).....	1	2	3	4	5
Spend quality time with local friends, family, and/or neighbors....	1	2	3	4	5

14. What mode of transportation do you use most for your typical daily needs for getting around town?

- Driving Biking Train Taxi Carpooling
 Walking Bus Free shuttle Uber/Lyft or similar rideshare service

15. If you did not have access to a car for your usual daily transportation around town, how convenient (based on time and proximity) would you consider each of the following methods of getting around?

	<u>Very convenient</u>	<u>Somewhat convenient</u>	<u>Somewhat inconvenient</u>	<u>Very inconvenient</u>
Walking	1	2	3	4
Biking	1	2	3	4
Bus.....	1	2	3	4
Train.....	1	2	3	4
Free shuttle.....	1	2	3	4
Taxi.....	1	2	3	4
Uber/Lyft or similar rideshare service	1	2	3	4
Carpooling	1	2	3	4

16. If you plan to purchase a new car within the next two years, what is the likelihood of it being:

	<u>Very likely</u>	<u>Somewhat likely</u>	<u>Somewhat unlikely</u>	<u>Very unlikely</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Gas.....	1	2	3	4	5
Diesel	1	2	3	4	5
Natural gas	1	2	3	4	5
Hybrid.....	1	2	3	4	5
Plug-in hybrid.....	1	2	3	4	5
Electric.....	1	2	3	4	5
Fuel cell	1	2	3	4	5

17. As a resident of Palo Alto, what one change could the City make that would make you happier?

18. As a resident of Palo Alto, what one thing do you believe the City does well and would want to maintain?



Our last questions are about you and your household.

Again, all of your responses to this survey are completely anonymous and will be reported in group form only.

D1. What impact, if any, do you think the economy will have on your family income in the next 6 months? Do you think the impact will be:

- Very positive
- Somewhat positive
- Neutral
- Somewhat negative
- Very negative

D2. What is your employment status?

- Working full time for pay
- Working part time for pay
- Unemployed, looking for paid work
- Unemployed, not looking for paid work
- Fully retired
- College student, unemployed

D3. Do you work inside the boundaries of Palo Alto?

- Yes, outside the home
- Yes, from home
- No

D4. How many years have you lived in Palo Alto?

- Less than 2 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

D5. Which best describes the building you live in?

- One family house detached from any other houses
- Building with two or more homes (duplex, townhome, apartment or condominium)
- Mobile home
- Other

D6. Do you rent or own your home?

- Rent
- Own

D7. About how much is your monthly housing cost for the place you live (including rent, mortgage payment, property tax, property insurance and homeowners' association (HOA) fees)?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Less than \$500 | <input type="radio"/> \$5,500 to \$5,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$500 to \$999 | <input type="radio"/> \$6,000 to \$6,499 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$1,000 to \$1,499 | <input type="radio"/> \$6,500 to \$6,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$1,500 to \$1,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$7,000 to \$7,499 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$2,000 to \$2,499 | <input type="radio"/> \$7,500 to \$7,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$2,499 to \$2,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$8,000 to \$8,499 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$3,000 to \$3,499 | <input type="radio"/> \$8,500 to \$8,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$3,500 to \$3,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$9,000 to \$9,499 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$4,000 to \$4,499 | <input type="radio"/> \$9,500 to \$9,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$4,500 to \$4,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$10,000 or more |
| <input type="radio"/> \$5,000 to \$5,499 | |

D8. Do any children 17 or under live in your household?

- No
- Yes

D9. Are you or any other members of your household aged 65 or older?

- No
- Yes

D10. How much do you anticipate your household's total income before taxes will be for the current year? (Please include in your total income money from all sources for all persons living in your household.)

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,000
- \$150,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 to \$249,999
- \$250,000 to \$299,999
- \$300,000 to \$349,999
- \$350,000 to \$399,999
- \$400,000 to \$449,999
- \$450,000 to \$499,999
- \$500,000 or more

D11. Are you Spanish, Hispanic or Latino?

- No, not Spanish, Hispanic or Latino
- Yes, I consider myself to be Spanish, Hispanic or Latino

D12. What is your race? (Mark one or more races to indicate what race you consider yourself to be.)

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian, Asian Indian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- White
- Other

D13. In which category is your age?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> 18-24 years | <input type="radio"/> 55-64 years |
| <input type="radio"/> 25-34 years | <input type="radio"/> 65-74 years |
| <input type="radio"/> 35-44 years | <input type="radio"/> 75 years or older |
| <input type="radio"/> 45-54 years | |

D14. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Identify in another way

Thank you!

Please return the completed survey in the postage-paid envelope to:
National Research Center, Inc., PO Box 549, Belle Mead, NJ 08502