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New Record for County Forums – 766 Take Budget Survey

*Respondents show sharp division on short-term versus long-term cuts
Majority view combination of government efficiencies, lower labor costs and
Increasing revenues as best fix for budget shortfall*

SEATTLE - King County's nationally recognized [Countywide Community Forums](#) (CCF) released today the survey results from the Round 6 of forums on the King County budget shortfall. Results showed a sharp division from respondents on whether King County should make permanent long-term cuts or temporary short-term cuts to the budget. As best options to fix the 2011 budget deficit, a majority chose increasing program efficiencies and staff productivity followed by lower labor costs and increasing tax revenues.

Results also showed a small majority of respondents favored providing a safety net of services to people most affected by the economic crisis over limiting the tax impact on all county residents to help them cope with the economic crisis. Support for preserving the county safety net grew with the respondent's age.

Round 6 marked a new record for CCF with 766 people taking the survey online or participating in one of 23 forums hosted throughout King County by volunteers between Sept. 11 and Oct. 23, 2010. Unlike random sample polls, the CCF survey and forums are open to any interested person living or working in King County and are not a scientific sampling of county residents.

The CCF Opinionnaire® survey for Round 6 was the result of a comprehensive process involving King County Councilmembers, county agency heads, community leaders, and King County residents with final approval by the King County Auditor.

Titled "Government Priorities in Challenging Economic Times," the survey questions focused on the 2011 budget shortfall and how best to deal with the current deficit and structural budget gap through efforts involving government efficiencies, prioritizing spending, and adding revenue sources, as well as looking at labor costs and/or program cuts.

As part of CCF's new public engagement effort, the organization launched a Partners program for other nonprofits, businesses, and organizations that focus on community building and civic involvement. The CCF Partners for Round 6 included The CityClub of Seattle, Real Change, Seattle Greendrinks, the Family Support Network, and Dick's Drive-In Restaurants.

Here are the CCF Opinionnaire® survey highlights:

Respondents were closely divided on whether King County should make "permanent, long-term cuts because the current level of services are unsustainable" (41 percent), versus "finding short-term temporary reductions until the economy recovers" (40 percent).



As the most effective single option for King County to deal with the budget shortfall, a plurality of respondents (27 percent) chose increasing efficiency/productivity, followed by cutting labor costs (23 percent), and increasing revenues (22 percent). Only 7 percent chose “making program/service cuts” as the most effective single option.

A majority of respondents (62 percent) thought program efficiencies and/or increasing productivity are likely to fix the 2011 budget deficit. A wider majority (64 percent) agreed that those same efficiencies will fix the long term budget gap. A slight majority (53 percent) thought employee salary and/or benefit cuts are likely to fix the 2011 budget. Similarly, a slight majority (52 percent) viewed specific service cuts as a likely fix. Fifty percent thought that an increase in tax revenues would fix the long-term budget gap. Across the board cuts was the least favored fix with 42 percent of respondents choosing it as a 2011 budget fix and only 34 percent seeing it as a solution for the long-term structural budget gap.

When it came to labor costs, a plurality of respondents (35 percent) thought reducing cost-of-living adjustments, or COLAs, is the most acceptable strategy other than laying-off employees. This was followed by reducing healthcare benefits (18 percent), reducing wages and imposing a hiring freeze (both at 11 percent), and increasing furloughs (10 percent). A strong majority of respondents (64 percent) say that more of the collective bargaining units should agree to forgo their COLAs.

If cuts are necessary in various law and criminal justice department to preserve existing county programs for crime prevention and crime victim counseling and treatment, opposition to cuts in the Sheriff’s Office staff was highest with 38 percent of respondents opposed versus 31 percent supporting cuts. Cuts to the Court staff was supported by 40 percent versus 20 percent opposed, and 38 percent supported cutting staff in the Prosecutor’s Office versus 20 percent opposed to cuts.

The largest majority of respondents (68 percent) think that, *even as it is considering program cuts, King County should invest in further performance management and budget reporting systems that deliver more efficiency, transparency and accountability so that decision-makers and constituents can be better informed.*

Forty-two percent agree that *we need to rethink our budget and make deep, permanent, long-term cuts because the current level of services is unsustainable* while 39 percent think that *we must find short-term temporary reductions to the budget until the economy recovers, so we don't lose the investments we have already made in programs and people.*

Fifty-one percent agree that King County *must provide a safety net of human and other services to those most affected by the economic crisis* while 33 percent would rather have King County *limit the tax impact on all county residents to help them cope with the economic crisis.* When broken down by age group, the majority (53 percent) of those respondents over 30 wanted to provide a safety net over limiting the tax impact, versus a plurality (49 percent) of respondents under 30. Support of preserving the safety net grew with age.

In contrast to other CCF rounds, 44 percent of respondents were under the age of 30. Also in contrast, a majority of respondents, 54 percent, were from Seattle with the remainder (46 percent) from the 35 cities and unincorporated King County.



Sixty-three percent feel better informed about King County after participating in a forum, and 58 percent said their participation will have a positive influence on their involvement in other local decision-making actions.

To obtain the King County Auditor's report and survey demographic information, click here.
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/operations/auditor/communityforums/topics.aspx>

Over 2,000 people have registered to serve as a *Citizen Councilor* since the program began in 2007. In 2009, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2.org) recognized CCF as an innovative project designed to encourage civic engagement.

To register as a *Citizen Councilor*, and access opportunities to engage, go to CommunityForums.org. Call (206) 296-1633, toll-free (800) 369-2584 or email: CommunityForums@KingCounty.gov

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