Township Officials’ Views on State-Local Government Relations

Presented at the
2017 Michigan Townships Association Annual Educational Conference
April 11, 2017
Overview of MPPS survey program

Findings on township officials’ views on state and local government relations (from Fall 2016 Wave of the MPPS), including

- particular factors that township officials say affect state-local relations
- preferred areas of shared and separate authority
- how often township officials contact and are contacted by state officials
- the importance of communication to improved relations
The Michigan Public Policy Survey

- **Census survey** – all 1,856 counties, cities, villages, and townships
- **Respondents** – chief elected and appointed officials
- **Administered** – online and via hardcopy
- **Timing** – Spring and Fall each year
- **Topics** – wide range, such as fiscal health, budget priorities, roads, public safety, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, service privatization, employee policies, labor unions, environmental sustainability, Great Lakes, citizen engagement, much more.
MPPS is not a typical opinion poll

- 70+% response rates

- **Transparency**
  -- Questionnaires online
  -- Pre-run data tables online
  -- Sharing of (anonymized) datasets with other researchers

- Expert advisors on questionnaire content

- **Research partnership with Michigan local government associations**
  -- MAC, MML, & MTA

- Borrowing from other proven sources such as NLC and ICMA
What does the MPPS aim to do?

• **Improve understanding** of local government to help improve policymaking and quality of life

• **Inform local leaders** about peers across the state: challenges and responses

• **Inform state policymakers** and other stakeholders with data about local level challenges and responses not available from any other source

• **Build a longitudinal data archive** to allow tracking of fundamental changes (such as the economic transition, aging population, etc.)

• Foster **academic research and teaching** on local government issues
How many townships responded to the Fall 2016 MPPS?

852 townships total (69% of all statewide)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Population Size</th>
<th>By Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>305 townships &lt;1500</td>
<td>98 in the Upper Peninsula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>380 townships 1500-5000</td>
<td>168 in the Northern LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86 townships 5001-10,000</td>
<td>163 in the Central West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59 townships 10,001-30,000</td>
<td>158 in the Central East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 townships &gt;30,000</td>
<td>130 in the Southwest</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>135 in the Southeast</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Townships’ mixed relationships with the State

How would you describe the overall relationship between the State government and your township?

- Excellent: 5%
- Good: 41%
- Fair: 35%
- Poor: 12%
- Don’t know: 7%
Townships’ mixed relationships with the State

How would you describe the overall relationship between the State government and other local jurisdictions?

With your township:
- Excellent: 7%
- Good: 12%
- Fair: 35%
- Poor: 41%
- Don’t know: 5%

With other local jurisdictions:
- Excellent: 9%
- Good: 17%
- Fair: 27%
- Poor: 40%
- Don’t know: 7%
Townships’ mixed relationships with the State

How would you describe the overall relationship between the State government and your township?

Overall:

By Population Size:
Townships’ mixed relationships with the State

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Overall:
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- Good: 12%
- Fair: 35%
- Poor: 7%
- Don't know: 5%

By Region:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Peninsula</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Lower Peninsula</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>39%</td>
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<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
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<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>34%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factors that affect township-state relations

Thinking about the **relationship** between the State government and local jurisdictions, overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan state government officials value input from local government officials.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State is taking too much decision-making authority away from local governments.</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State’s decision-making is transparent.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State holds local government officials to a higher standard than it holds itself to.</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State unfairly treats some jurisdictions better than others.</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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Factors that affect township-state relations

To what extent, if any, would you say the following factors have had a **positive or negative impact** on the relationship between the State and local governments in Michigan?

- **The State’s system of funding local government**
  - Positive impact: 19%
  - Negative impact: 47%

- **Term limits for state officials**
  - Positive impact: 26%
  - Negative impact: 33%

- **Behavior of state officials (professionalism, ethics, etc.)**
  - Positive impact: 27%
  - Negative impact: 28%

- **Communication between state and local officials**
  - Positive impact: 32%
  - Negative impact: 14%

- **Behavior of local officials (professionalism, ethics, etc.)**
  - Positive impact: 45%
  - Negative impact: 12%
Factors that affect township-state relations

How much of the time do you think Michigan’s state officials trust local governments to do what is right?

How much of the time do you think you can trust the state government in Lansing to do what is right?

State trusts local govts

- Nearly always: 4%
- Most of the time: 4%
- Some of the time: 15%
- Seldom: 39%
- Almost never: 10%
- Don’t know: 4%

Townships trust State

- Nearly always: 1%
- Most of the time: 18%
- Some of the time: 4%
- Seldom: 54%
- Almost never: 1%
- Don’t know: 21%
How should authority over policy be divided?

Some people think that certain policy issues should be managed at the state level rather than the local level for a variety of reasons (for example, efficiency or consistency across jurisdictions). Others think local home rule is more important. In each of the following broad policy areas, how do you generally think authority should be divided between the state and local levels of government?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Mostly state, some local</th>
<th>Mostly local, some state</th>
<th>Completely local authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-discrimination policies (e.g., LGBTQ, equal opportunity)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social issues (e.g., public welfare, homelessness, gun policies)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business issues (e.g., minimum wage, plastic bags, puppy mills, Uber, Airbnb)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and natural resources (e.g., water, solid waste, agriculture, forestry)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How local governments conduct business (e.g., open meetings, public notices)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local finance and tax policy</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use and planning (e.g., zoning, permitting)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Township officials think outreach is important

To what extent do you agree or disagree that local officials should try to influence state policy issues affecting local governments?

Overall:

- Strongly Agree: 53%
- Somewhat Agree: 36%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 8%
- Somewhat Disagree: 2%
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
- Don't know: 2%

By Population Size:

- <1,500: Strongly Agree 47%, Somewhat Agree 37%, Neither Agree nor Disagree 11%, Somewhat Disagree 7%, Strongly Disagree 2%, Don't know 2%
- 1,500-5,000: Strongly Agree 54%, Somewhat Agree 34%, Neither Agree nor Disagree 6%, Somewhat Disagree 1%, Strongly Disagree 4%, Don't know 1%
- 5,001-10,000: Strongly Agree 58%, Somewhat Agree 34%, Neither Agree nor Disagree 6%, Somewhat Disagree 1%, Strongly Disagree 4%, Don't know 1%
- 10,001-30,000: Strongly Agree 69%, Somewhat Agree 26%, Neither Agree nor Disagree 4%, Somewhat Disagree 4%, Strongly Disagree 1%
- >30,000: Strongly Agree 64%, Somewhat Agree 32%, Neither Agree nor Disagree 4%, Somewhat Disagree 4%, Strongly Disagree 2%, Don't know 2%
To what extent do you agree or disagree that state officials should frequently reach out to local officials to get feedback on pending policy changes?

Overall:

- Strongly Agree: 25%
- Somewhat Agree: 72%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 2%
- Somewhat Disagree: 1%
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
- Don't know: 1%

By Population Size:

- <1,500 population:
  - Strongly Agree: 69%
  - Somewhat Agree: 26%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 4%
  - Somewhat Disagree: 1%
  - Strongly Disagree: 3%
  - Don't know: 3%

- 1,500-5,000 population:
  - Strongly Agree: 70%
  - Somewhat Agree: 28%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 3%
  - Somewhat Disagree: 19%
  - Strongly Disagree: 12%
  - Don't know: 4%

- 5,001-10,000 population:
  - Strongly Agree: 78%
  - Somewhat Agree: 19%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 3%
  - Somewhat Disagree: 12%
  - Strongly Disagree: 4%
  - Don't know: 4%

- 10,001-30,000 population:
  - Strongly Agree: 88%
  - Somewhat Agree: 12%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 3%
  - Somewhat Disagree: 4%
  - Strongly Disagree: 3%
  - Don't know: 4%

- >30,000 population:
  - Strongly Agree: 92%
  - Somewhat Agree: 8%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 4%
  - Somewhat Disagree: 4%
  - Strongly Disagree: 3%
  - Don't know: 3%
Most townships reach out at least once a year

Thinking about communication between state and local officials specifically regarding State actions affecting your township, in a typical 12-month period, how often do you or a representative of your township contact state officials?

Overall:

- 52% At least once a month
- 34% A few times a year
- 11% Rarely or never
- 3% Don't know

By Population Size:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Size</th>
<th>At least once a month</th>
<th>At least once a month</th>
<th>Rarely or never</th>
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<td>15%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500-5,000</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Southeast</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But is the State doing enough?

Thinking about communication between state and local officials specifically regarding State actions affecting your township, in a typical 12-month period, how often does a state official contact your township?

Overall:

- At least once a month: 5%
- A few times a year: 29%
- Rarely or never: 63%
- Don’t know: 4%

By Population Size:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1,500</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500-5,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
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Overall:
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- A few times a year: 5%
- Rarely or never: 63%
- Don't know: 4%

By Region:
- Upper Peninsula: At least once a month - 22%, A few times a year - 72%, Rarely or never - 3%
- Northern Lower Peninsula: At least once a month - 4%, A few times a year - 73%, Rarely or never - 3%
- West Central: At least once a month - 5%, A few times a year - 60%, Rarely or never - 3%
- East Central: At least once a month - 69%, A few times a year - 4%, Rarely or never - 5%
- Southwest: At least once a month - 3%, A few times a year - 53%, Rarely or never - 38%
- Southeast: At least once a month - 12%, A few times a year - 44%, Rarely or never - 34%
- Don't know: Upper Peninsula - 3%, Northern Lower Peninsula - 4%, West Central - 5%, East Central - 3%, Southwest - 2%, Southeast - 4%
Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

What do you think the State could do to improve the relationship between the State and local governments?

over 1,000 descriptive comments from more than 700 local leaders

What do you think local governments could do to improve the relationship between the State and local governments?

almost 800 comments from 645 local leaders
Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

Suggestions for actions the State could take to improve state-local relations = 49% focus on communication

- the State needs to listen to locals’ problems and generally improve communication
- the State should get input from local governments before changing laws
- State officials should visit local jurisdictions and be more forthcoming with information
Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

Suggestions for what local governments themselves could do to improve relations = 64% communication

- educate state officials on local needs
- contact state officials more consistently to open dialogue and engage them with more quality dialogue
- attend or set up meetings with state officials for a greater quantity of dialogue
- stay educated on current policy and state government efforts
Township Officials’ Views on State-Local Relations

Summary

• Township officials’ overall assessments of their governments’ relationships with the state government are mixed, with 46% rating their overall relationship with the State government as excellent or good, but 47% saying it is only fair or poor.

• A majority of township leaders believe that:
  • the State is taking too much authority away from locals
  • the State holds locals to a higher standard than it holds itself
  • the State plays favorites, treating some local jurisdictions better than others

• 63% of township officials report that their jurisdictions contact the State on issues that affect their townships a few times each year or more, while only 34% say that the State communicates with their township about salient local issues each year.

• Most say communication is the most important way to improve state-local relations.
The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

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