

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy >> University of Michigan

Michigan Public
Policy Survey June 2020

The initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Michigan communities and local governments

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This report presents local government leaders' views on the COVID-19 pandemic in Michigan through May of 2020, including impacts on the state and its communities, expectations for how long negative impacts would persist, evaluations of governmental coordination, and resource needs to grapple with the resulting public health and economic challenges. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the Spring 2020 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), conducted between March 30 and June 1, 2020.

>> The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is a census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. The MPPS investigates local officials' opinions and perspectives on a variety of important public policy issues. Respondents for the Spring 2020 wave of the MPPS include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,342 jurisdictions across the state.

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Key Findings

- During April and May of 2020, overwhelming majorities of Michigan's local leaders reported significant or even crisis-level impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic on the state overall (93%), and on their local schools (88%), local economic conditions (86%), their residents' welfare (70%), and their community overall (67%).
 - » In addition, large percentages of local leaders—though less than half—also reported significant or crisis-level impacts on their jurisdictions' local emergency response capabilities (43%), public health in their community (42%), the continuity of their own government's operations (40%), and their delivery of public services (37%).
 - » The state's largest jurisdictions—those with more than 30,000 residents—were the most likely to report these negative effects, including almost a third (30%) who were experiencing local crisis-level impacts on their jurisdiction overall, and 67% experiencing crisis-level local economic impacts, specifically.
- While reported impacts in the first couple months of the pandemic have been quite extensive, Michigan local leaders generally expected various COVID-19 impacts would be relatively short-lived. Relatively few expected significant negative impacts to last seven or more months when it came to their residents' welfare (31%), public health in their community (20%), or their own jurisdictions' government operations (17%).
 - » However, 45% expected significant negative impacts on their local economic conditions to last at least seven months, including 27% who predicted local economic impacts to last for more than a year.
- Assessments of the coordination between local governments and other entities is mixed, with local leaders reporting the most effective coordination has happened with their county government overall (59% say somewhat or very effective coordination), their county health department specifically (52%), and other nearby local governments (49%).
- Statewide, 39% of jurisdictions already had an emergency response plan in place or quickly adopted one in response to COVID-19 (including 94% of the state's largest jurisdictions). Almost all officials from jurisdictions who have emergency plans and have drawn from them during COVID-19 say their plans have been effective so far.
- Relatively few Michigan local jurisdictions reported getting the public health or financial resources they needed in April and May, including public health resources needed from the state government (35%) or federal government (26%), and economic support needed from the state (22%) or federal government (21%).

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Background

It is still unclear exactly when the coronavirus initially arrived in Michigan, but the state's official response began in February 2020, when Governor Gretchen Whitmer activated Michigan's State Emergency Operations Center to prepare for the spread of COVID-19 cases.¹ The first confirmed cases in the state were detected on March 10 and within a few days a state of emergency was declared and all Michigan K-12 schools were closed soon after that. On March 23, the Governor issued a statewide stay-at-home order in an attempt "to suppress the spread of COVID-19, to prevent the state's health care system from being overwhelmed, to allow time for the production of critical test kits, ventilators, and personal protective equipment, and to avoid needless deaths."²

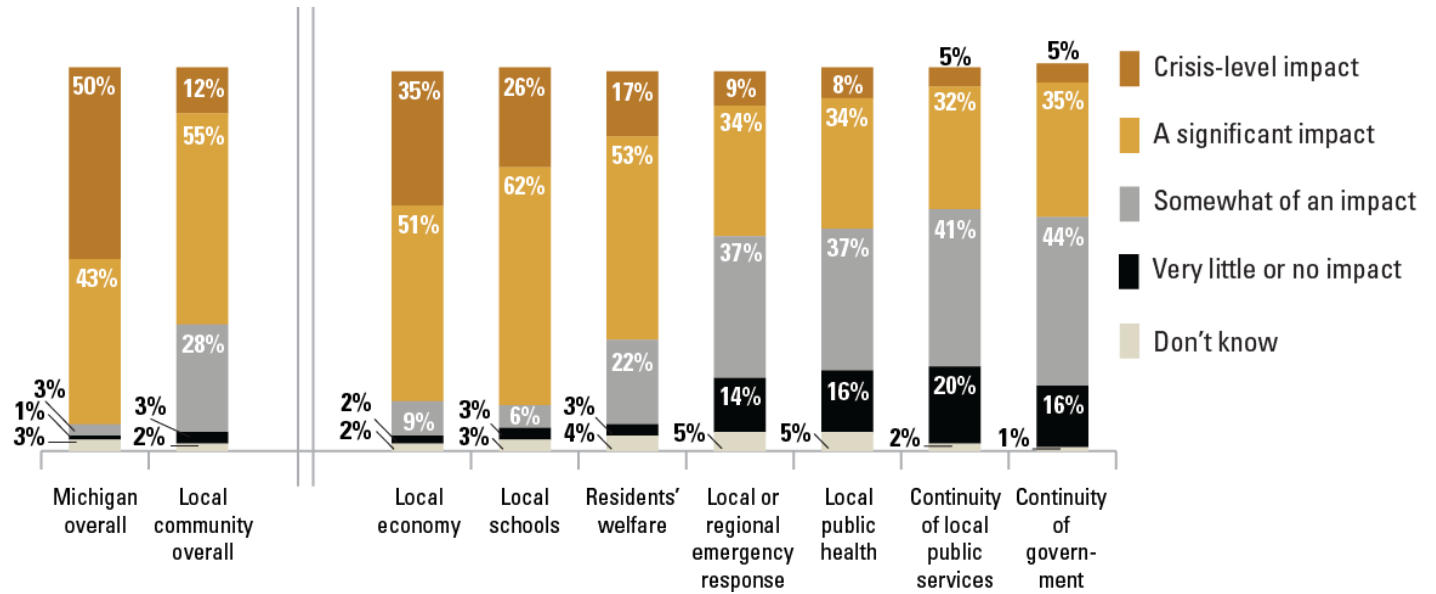
By the end of May, Michigan had suffered nearly 5,500 deaths and recorded over 57,000 confirmed cases, with Wayne County reporting the fifth-highest death toll among counties nationwide, at 2,452 as of May 30.³ Not only did Michigan suffer disproportionately from the deadly virus throughout the spring, but it has also been one of the hardest hit states economically. For example, as of early May, Michigan ranked fifth in the country in terms of total number of filings for unemployment benefits and third in the percentage of its workforce that had sought assistance.⁴

The Spring 2020 wave of the MPPS went into the field on March 30, just one week after the Governor's stay-at-home-order went into effect, and continued to survey local leaders through June 1. The survey included a range of questions to local officials about the pandemic and its effects on their community and local government.



Significant impacts of COVID-19 reported in communities statewide, most severe in largest jurisdictions

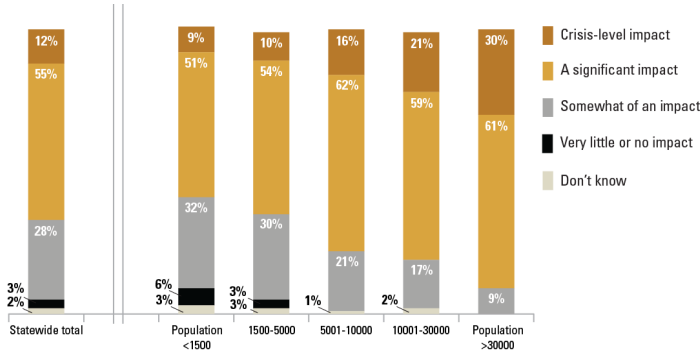
Figure 1
Local officials' assessments of a variety of possible COVID-19 impacts



To start, between the beginning of April and the end of May, the MPPS asked local leaders about a variety of potential impacts they were then experiencing, or expected to experience soon, both in their communities and for the state overall. Statewide, 93% of local leaders believed Michigan was suffering significant (43%) or crisis-level (50%) impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and 67% reported their own local communities were seeing significant (55%) or crisis-level (12%) impacts (see *Figure 1*).

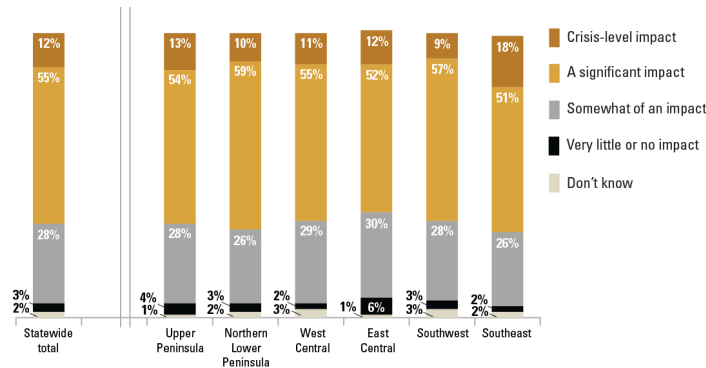
Local leaders statewide also sounded the alarm about impacts on economic conditions in their communities, with more than half (51%) reporting significant impacts and another 35% reporting crisis-level impacts. Officials also stressed impacts on their local schools (88% with significant or crisis-level impacts) and their residents' welfare including food security, mental health, job security, etc. (70%). Meanwhile, significant percentages—though less than majorities—statewide reported significant or crisis-level impacts on their jurisdictions' emergency response capabilities (43%), local public health (42%), or on government operations (40%) or public services (37%). Clearly, while many of the impacts have been common and widespread, there are still differences from place to place.

Figure 2a
Local officials' assessments of COVID-19 impact on their local community overall, by population



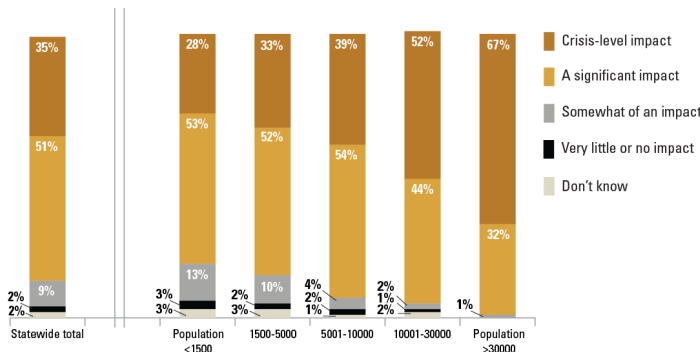
When it comes to assessments of the overall impact of COVID-19 on local communities during the spring, the severity increased with increasing jurisdiction size. Among the state's smallest jurisdictions—those with fewer than 1,500 residents—a substantial majority of local officials (60%) reported significant (51%) or crisis-level (9%) impacts (see *Figure 2a*). Meanwhile, among Michigan's largest jurisdictions—those with more than 30,000 residents—a full 91% reported significant (61%) or crisis-level impacts (30%).

Figure 2b
Local officials' assessments of COVID-19 impact on their local community overall, by region



Regionally, there was more consistency among officials' assessments of overall local impacts, with a majority in every region of the state reporting significant or crisis-level impacts (see *Figure 2b*). However, given that the Detroit metro area has suffered the greatest number of confirmed cases and COVID-19 deaths so far statewide, it is unsurprising that local leaders from jurisdictions in Southeast Michigan were the most likely to report crisis-level impacts in their communities (18%).

Figure 2c
Local officials' assessments of COVID-19 impact on their local economic conditions, by population size



Even larger differences were reported regarding the impact of COVID-19 on local economic conditions (businesses closing, unemployment, etc.), in communities of different sizes. Although almost every jurisdiction across the state has felt significant pain in the local economy, among the state's largest jurisdictions two-thirds (67%) characterized these economic impacts as crisis-level in April and May, compared with 52% of mid-sized jurisdictions, and fewer than half of smaller jurisdictions (see *Figure 2c*).

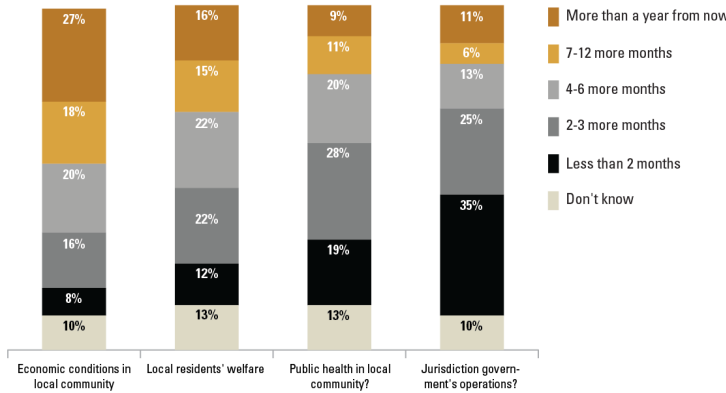
It is remarkable to find fully two-thirds of the state's largest jurisdictions reporting local economic crises. In addition, it is also worth noting that on previous MPPS surveys local leaders from some of the smallest jurisdictions have emphasized that they have no significant local business community, especially in those parts of the state dominated by forest land, and so the reported economic impacts in smaller places are also striking.

See Appendix A at the end of this report for breakdowns of officials' assessments for all types of impacts.



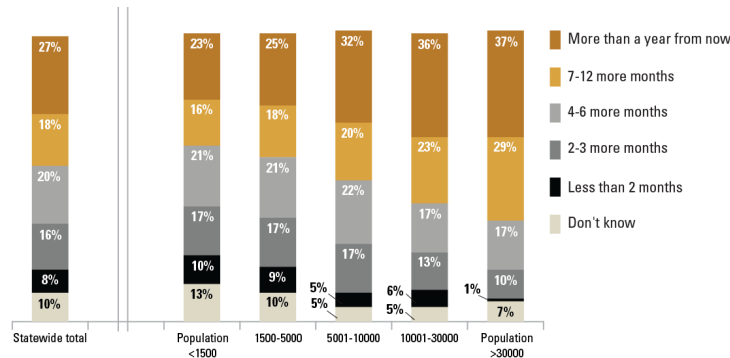
Relatively few officials statewide believe pandemic’s negative impacts will last more than a year

Figure 3
Local officials’ predictions of how long significant negative impacts from COVID-19 will persist



Although Michigan communities have been experiencing many negative impacts from the COVID-19 emergency, local leaders don't necessarily expect those effects to last a long time. The MPPS asked local leaders to estimate—based on what they knew at the time—how long *significant* negative impacts from COVID-19 will likely persist. Expectations were most pessimistic for local economic conditions, for which 45% expected significant negative impacts to last at least 6 months, and a quarter (27%) expected to last for more than a year (see *Figure 3*). However, fewer leaders expected significant negative impacts to last so long for their residents' welfare, for public health in their communities, or for their own government's operations.

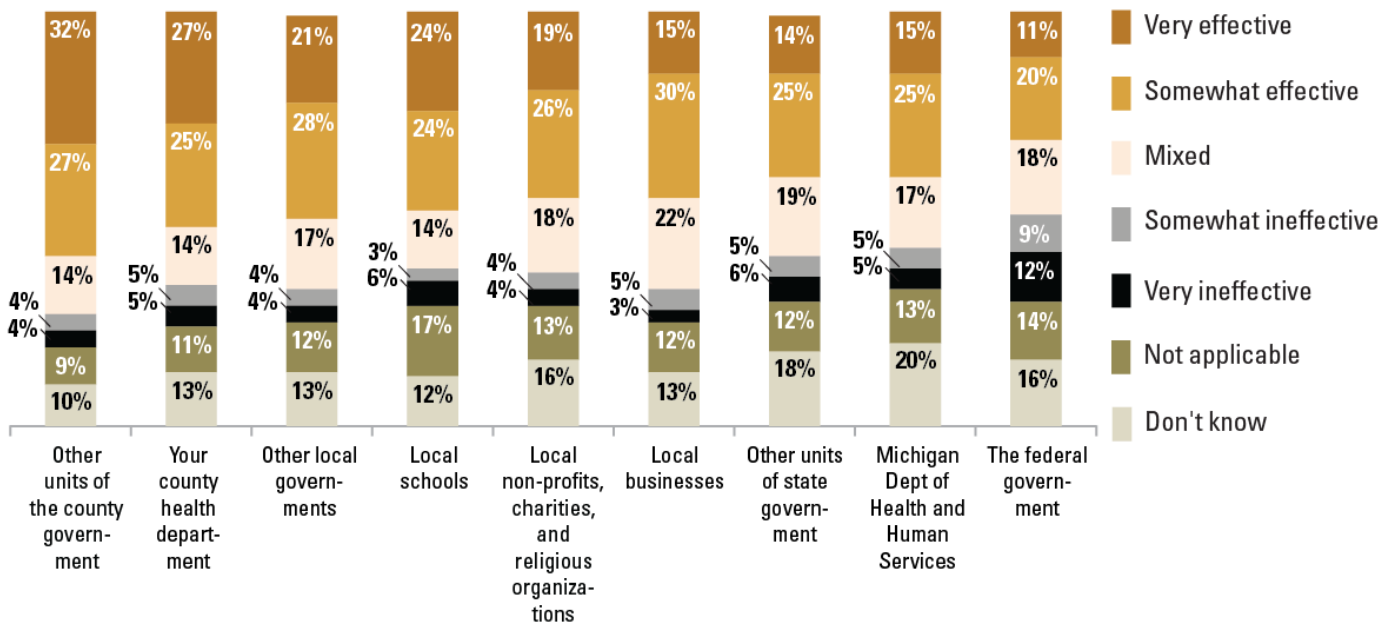
Figure 4
Local officials’ predictions of how long significant negative impacts from COVID-19 will persist on community economic conditions, by population size



Officials from larger jurisdictions tended to be more pessimistic about predictions for recovery. As shown in *Figure 4*, among those from the largest places, 37% expected significant negative impacts on their local economies would last more than a year, compared with about a quarter of local officials from the state's smaller jurisdictions (23-25%).

Coordination on COVID-19 between governments and others could be better

Figure 5
Local officials' assessments of the effectiveness so far of coordination in response to COVID-19



Looking at how effective coordination has been between government units as well as other community organizations in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, local leaders' assessments are relatively lukewarm. While few have said this coordination has been outright *ineffective*, less than half rated their government's coordination with any other organizations as *very effective*. As shown in *Figure 5*, the only entities for which a majority of local officials said coordination so far has been either somewhat or very effective are with their county government overall (59%) and their county health department specifically (52%). On the other end of the spectrum, only 31% of Michigan's local governments reported effective coordination with the federal government through April and May, while 21% said it has been outright ineffective, and 18% called it mixed at best. It is also worth noting that many local leaders said that either their jurisdictions are simply not coordinating with many of these other entities, or that they don't know how to rate that coordination.



Figure 6a
Percentage of local governments with emergency preparedness or response plans, by jurisdiction size

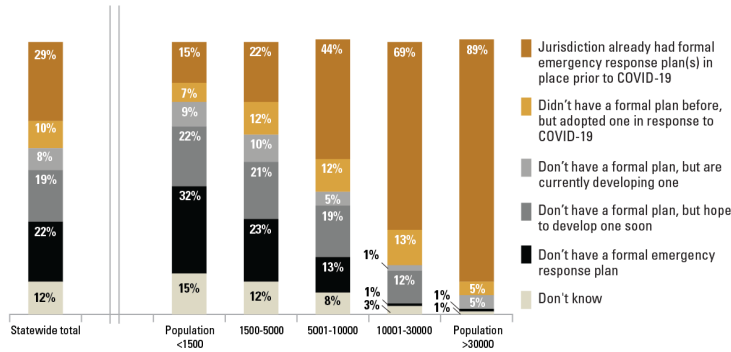


Figure 6b
Percentage of local governments with emergency preparedness or response plans, by region

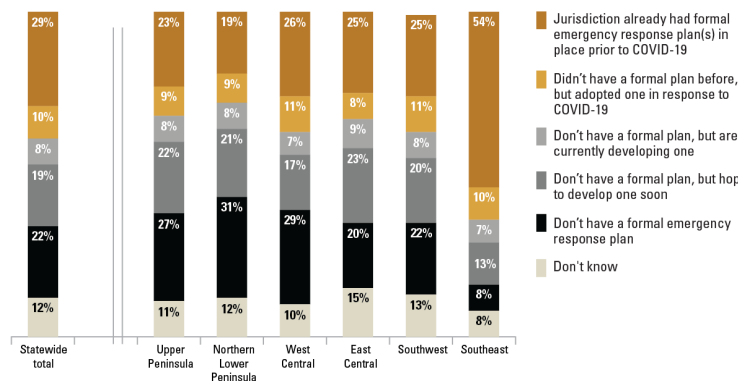
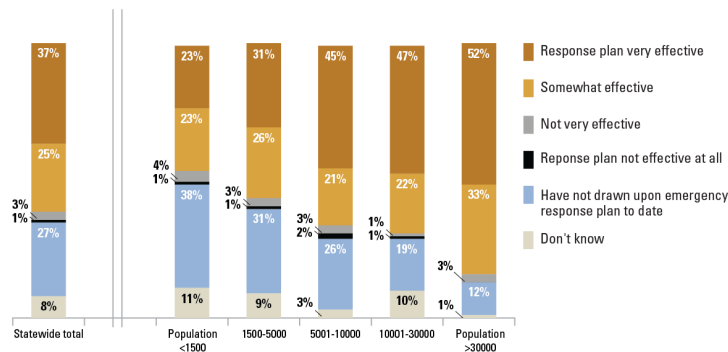


Figure 7
Local officials' assessments of the effectiveness of their emergency preparedness plans in dealing with COVID-19, among those who currently have a plan



Local Emergency Management Plans working well, for those that have them

The MPPS also asked local officials about the status of emergency preparedness or response plans in their jurisdictions, whether pre-existing or developed specifically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in *Figure 6a*, statewide, 29% of local governments reported they already had a formal emergency response plan in place before the COVID-19 pandemic, while others have developed one since the outbreak (10%) or hope to do so soon (8%). Approximately one in five local governments statewide (22%) didn't have an emergency plan for their jurisdiction, and don't expect to develop one. However, the adoption of emergency plans varies significantly by community size, with larger jurisdictions much more likely to have such plans compared with smaller places.

Looking across regions, a majority of jurisdictions (54%) in Southeast Michigan—where a significant number of Michigan's larger communities are located—already had emergency response plans in place and another 10% adopted ones in response to COVID-19 (see *Figure 6b*). Jurisdictions in the Northern Lower Peninsula are the least likely to either have such plans now or any expectation of developing them in the future.

Among jurisdictions that already had emergency plans or adopted ones in response to COVID-19, a quarter (27%) report they have not activated or drawn upon theirs so far, though this is primarily true among smaller jurisdictions (see *Figure 7*). Only 12% of Michigan's largest jurisdictions have not drawn upon their emergency response plan. Meanwhile, 64% of those who have put their emergency plans into action say they have been somewhat or very effective so far, and only a small percentage (4%) say they have been ineffective.

Figure 8
Percentage of local leaders who say their jurisdictions did or did not get the needed resources to address COVID-19

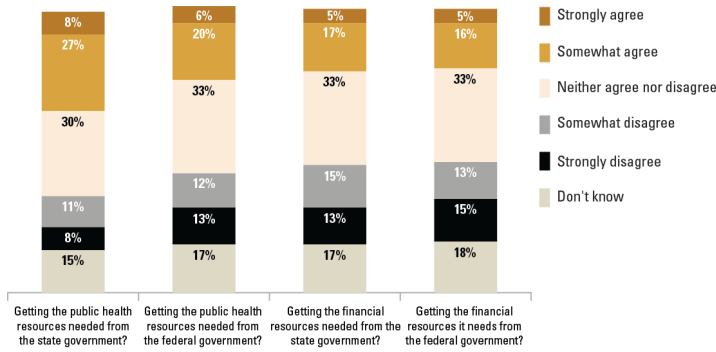
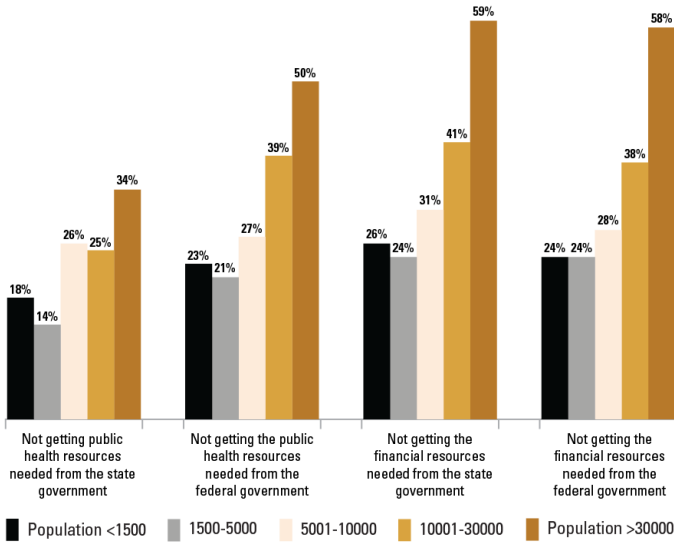


Figure 9
Percentage of local leaders who say that their jurisdictions did not get needed resources to address the COVID-19 crisis, by population size



Relatively few jurisdictions got the public health or financial resources they needed in pandemic’s first two months

When asked during April and May whether jurisdictions were getting the resources they needed to address the COVID-19 crisis, only 35% statewide said they had received the public health resources needed from the state government, while 30% were neutral and 19% said explicitly they had not gotten what was needed (see *Figure 8*). Approximately 15% were unsure whether they had received the public health resources they needed from the State of Michigan. Only one-quarter (26%) had gotten the public health resources they needed from the federal government, while a similar percentage say they had not (25%).

And when it comes to financial resources needed from either the state or federal government, again relatively few said their jurisdictions had received what they needed in April and May. Note again, though, the high percentages of “don’t knows” which may indicate to some extent that local leaders were still seeking a complete understanding of what they might need to combat the challenges presented by the pandemic.

Officials from the state’s largest local governments were the most likely to say that they had not received sufficient public health or economic support from the state and federal governments. As shown in *Figure 9*, nearly 60% of officials from jurisdictions with over 30,000 residents report that they had not received sufficient economic resources from the state government (59%) or federal government (58%), and another 50% had not gotten the public health resources they need so far from the federal level. A third of these largest jurisdictions had not received the public health resources they needed from the State so far.



Local leaders seek clearer communication, help with medical and financial burdens

The Spring 2020 MPPS asked local leaders two open-ended questions about their jurisdictions' experiences with COVID-19. In the first question, the MPPS asked local leaders to describe any additional resources or information (from the state government, federal government, or other entities) that would help their jurisdiction address the COVID-19 crisis. Approximately 580 local leaders provided comments, with the majority of the comments gathered during April, when the crisis was first spreading in Michigan. Local officials' responses to this question include frequent focus on the need for better communication and coordination with state and federal agencies, help needed with medical resources (such as public health supplies, tests, PPE, hospitals, health care workers, disparities in different locations), and financial support needed for local governments, including continued State revenue sharing. Below are some examples in their own words:

Voices Across Michigan

Quotes from local leaders about additional resources or information (from the state government, federal government, or other entities) that would help their jurisdictions address the COVID-19 crisis

"We need to be sure there is equitable distribution of PPE and needed medical supplies. [Also] if funds are diverted from revenue sources that support local governments, a secondary plan needs to be in place to not create gaping holes in general fund budgets. Our local health departments are doing amazing jobs to continue to respond, ... but this is on an unsustainable trajectory. Health departments need more human and financial resources to support them through this crisis."

"Everyone just did their budgets for the 2020-2021 year and based revenue sharing on last year's numbers. It would be good to get a projection from the state as soon as possible on what we should expect those numbers to be based on the current economic impact."

"Our fire department is operating under unusual circumstances, requiring extensive use of PPE, setting up isolation rooms, etc. We are keeping track of the extra costs associated with these changes and we hope that the federal or state government would help to offset these unbudgeted expenses."

"Our township has received NO help from any of these resources except emails."

"We will lose between 25% and 75% of our small businesses. Suspend the Headlee Amendment to give cities income lost in the 2008 Recession. Our income goes down in bad times but doesn't go up in good times."

"State mandated that water services be restored. This was very expensive for our city, but the State only covered a fraction of the cost. If going to mandate something, then the State should pay for it. We are in a rural county and the COVID cases have been very minimal. Don't do a 'one size fits all' policy across the state. We can safely operate in some areas of the state. Don't shut down the whole state."

"We need more clear rules so we know what to follow, and we also need the state to make sure all local governments are on the same page. Our biggest challenges have been that some local governments and officials are not enforcing the Executive Orders and that creates a lot of strife for communities that do follow the rules."

"Our County was in financial duress prior to the crisis. This has made it much worse as the revenues have declined and the expenses have remained steady. The State is looking at reducing revenue sharing and there is no guarantee that we will be receiving any funds to offset additional costs."

"We have gotten very little in the way of PPE... for example, the May 2020 election. The Bureau of Elections promised PPE to jurisdictions with a May election. We have been preparing for this election throughout the entire crisis with NO PPE. We cannot get it because there is none to purchase locally (or even online) and the state will not give us any so we are left with nothing."

In the second open-ended question, officials were asked if their jurisdictions needed temporary modifications to how they were operating during this period of crisis, and to identify any particular new authorities or powers the state of Michigan should allow so local jurisdictions could respond with more flexibility. Again, most of these were submitted in April, as the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19 in Michigan were just starting to be felt. More than 800 local leaders provided specific responses to this question, and their comments frequently referenced issues such as: challenges responding to FOIA requests, the need to ease rules around paying bills, the difficulties of providing required Public Notice or closed captioning for video recordings of meetings, the need to ease deadlines for certain reporting to the state (for example, Equalization to the State Tax Commission), and challenges from the April deadline for filing affidavits/petition signatures for the November Elections.

Voices Across Michigan

Quotes from local leaders about new authorities or powers they need the state of Michigan to provide

“Continue to allow for virtual public meetings and virtual/web-based posting of public notices. Provide technology grants or assistance to local jurisdictions who do not have in-house IT management capabilities (ex. a state managed video conference resource or website that small, local jurisdictions can use to maintain OMA compliance). Remove the state debt limit requirements for local jurisdictions so that local units can secure large scale, long term loan assistance. Suspend or amend Headlee and Proposal A or consider direct increases to revenue sharing to local units to avoid crisis level reduction in public services (i.e. fire, police, public works). Do more to control price gouging by actually acting as a single source provider of essential equipment and supplies for all units - instead of just setting up a “procurement site” where all us locals do is get spammed by people trying to sell N95 masks for 200x the regular price.”

“Allowing a certain amount or percentage of public funds to be used to assist citizens in need (specifically those that qualify as seniors or low-income). It has been a source of frustration that we aren’t able to provide diapers and formulas for parents or basic groceries for seniors.”

“The State Tax Commission has not extended its deadline for Equalization which is making various reports due from the municipalities [difficult], these reports require staff to travel and go to work even with the Stay-at-Home Order.”

“Open Meetings act and public notices are the biggest. We need to be able to cancel meetings at any time or reschedule them. Otherwise have all been able to work from home and it has made everything pretty easy.”

“While we have a County Emergency Preparedness Plan and have utilized it to gain PPE for Police and Fire, and keep up on stats regarding confirmed cases, there have several issues that came up that were not covered in the plan, and required special emergency provisions created by state lawmakers and enacted through adopting local resolutions; namely modifications necessary to conduct public meetings electronically-via emergency amendments to the OMA, and the ability for the Executive Administrator to make emergency decisions on behalf of the Board of Trustees in order to respond the Governor’s Executive Orders, announced mid-day, or emergency purchases for first responders that could not have been anticipated. These types of emergency provisions need to be codified in state policy to allow local governments to function as necessary to meet urgent needs as they occur in emergency situations, to prevent the risk of punitive damages for violating, normal protocols.”

“1. Suspend FOIA inquiry, we are not trying to deny access but the restrictions make it difficult to answer Freedom Of Information Act questions... if we are working remotely or have to lay off staff we would likely find ourselves in violation on FOIA requests. Note many of our FOIA are real estate inquiries: does a home have water, sewer, code violations pending, or ‘provide me with the minutes of a meeting’ that are publicly posted. 2. Delay filing deadlines on budget or audit issues. 3. Allow us to hold meetings and publish the minutes or a video to be reviewed without penalty as we currently need to transcribe.”



Voices Across Michigan (continued)

Quotes from local leaders about new authorities or powers they need the state of Michigan to provide

“The State should work with the Federal Government to develop an exception to the HIPPA and allow the health department to disclose to municipal utilities those homes which are under quarantine for either a potential or confirmed COVID-19 case.”

“The requirement that closed captioning be provided for these virtual meetings is a huge hurdle for us. We have never had a request for this service in the past in regards to our open meetings and these services are not readily available in this area- That is the only problem we are having with the OMA flexibilities.”

“1. There are gaps in services that only became perceivable during the crisis. Indigent Homeless people lost basic sanitation and bathroom access. Seniors living independently may have someone checking on them, or they may not, and they are the most at risk population. Private Affordable Housing large units somewhat arbitrarily made decisions to protect their residents and isolated them more by closing common spaces, denying Food Gatherers access for instance. 2. Government: OMA is an obvious need to be adapted. Obviously this is not a best case option, but technology can give access to meetings, allow for virtual meetings, etc. This rule needs to be updated to include technology solutions for short term needs. Schedules for taxes, tax appeals, planning, permits and other city services all have impacts on the daily lives of our residents and that is likely an ongoing issue of adapting them in an unknown situation. 3. The ability to control late fees for renters out of work would be a huge help. 4. Police and Fire are both at high risk and should too many of them become infected with Covid 19, we could have a crisis of essential services on our hands. Is there potential back up?”

“OMA - allow flexibility in holding meeting electronically. A State of Michigan video conferencing system, thru state servers, that allows the public to watch any public meetings and allow any public meeting to broadcast their meetings. FOIA - suspend FOIA or automatically extend FOIA requests during a declared emergency. Revenue sharing - upon request, allow communities to receive funds from future revenue sharing payments. Each State regulatory agency should assign a staff person to act as a direct contact for local agencies. Such as, EGLE shall have a staff person assigned to 10 water treatment facilities with direct communications to answer questions and provide information. The State should fund, not reimburse with grants, for local service mandates during an emergency. Public Employee Unions should be prohibited from demanding extra pay, compensation, etc. during an emergency. Non-essential employees should be required to use leave time (not subject to bargaining), so essential employees cannot demand “compensation” for time worked and others didn’t. Work requirements during an emergency are not subject to grievances or suspended.”

“Our difficulty revolves around union contracts and limitations imposed. These will be addressed next round of negotiations.”

“Assure that there is internet infrastructure in place in extremely rural areas, such as the Upper Peninsula.”

“The ability to pay the reoccurring and customary bills to vendors such as utilities and contracted road maintenance without the need to hold a public meeting. We are not technologically adept to facilitate EO 2020-15 relative to holding virtual meetings.”

“The open meeting act needs to be suspended, or we need cable internet so we can do a live meeting online with our community. [The cable company] won’t bring their service to our area as of right now. Satellite internet does not work in our area very well.”

Reactions to the COVID-19 crisis evolving week-to-week

The MPPS typically has a long field period, with the Spring 2020 wave collecting responses from Michigan local officials for nine weeks (opening March 30 and closing June 1). This largely coincided with the initial progression of COVID-19 cases in the state and allows analysis of simultaneous changes in local leaders' perceptions of the pandemic and its impacts. It is important, though, to note that nearly 40% of responses came within the first two weeks of the field period, and participation dropped significantly in the final weeks of the survey, as it normally does. This resulted in small numbers of respondents to the MPPS in the final weeks. This resulted in small number of respondents to the MPPS in the final weeks, which could raise concerns about the representativeness of those responses. However, initial analysis shows this may not be a significant concern.⁵

In the first week of the survey (the first week of April), a majority (51%) of local leaders predicted that significant negative economic impacts of COVID-19 on their local community would not last longer than 6 months (see *Figure 10*). Subsequently, concerns about the longevity of the economic downturn increased, and by the end of May only 31% of local officials were predicting that the most severe economic effects would be done within six months, while almost two-thirds (62%) expected them to persist longer than that.

Concerns about not receiving sufficient financial resources also increased over the course of the MPPS field period. During the first week in April, about a quarter (23-24%) of local leaders said that their governments were not receiving the financial resources they needed from the state and federal governments (see *Figure 11*). Over the subsequent weeks this concern increased, to the point where a majority statewide said by the week of May 18th that they were not receiving sufficient financial help from the state, and 48% said the same about the federal government.

Figure 10
Local officials' predictions of how long significant negative local economic impacts from COVID-19 will persist, by week of survey response

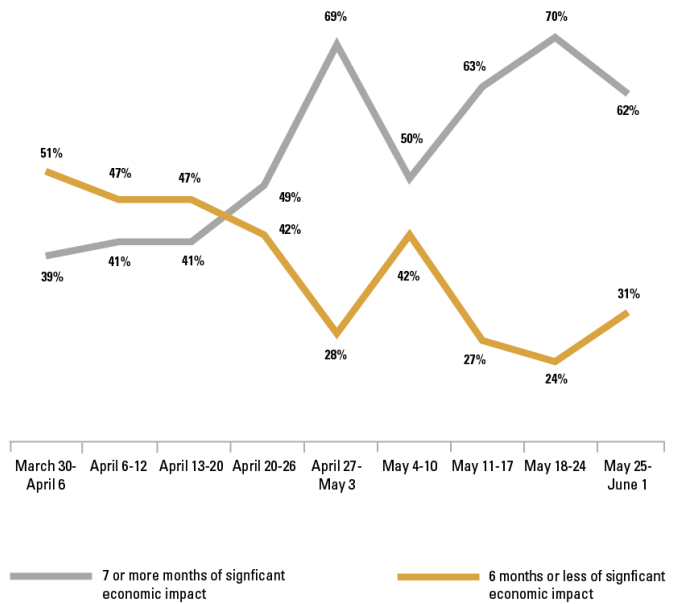
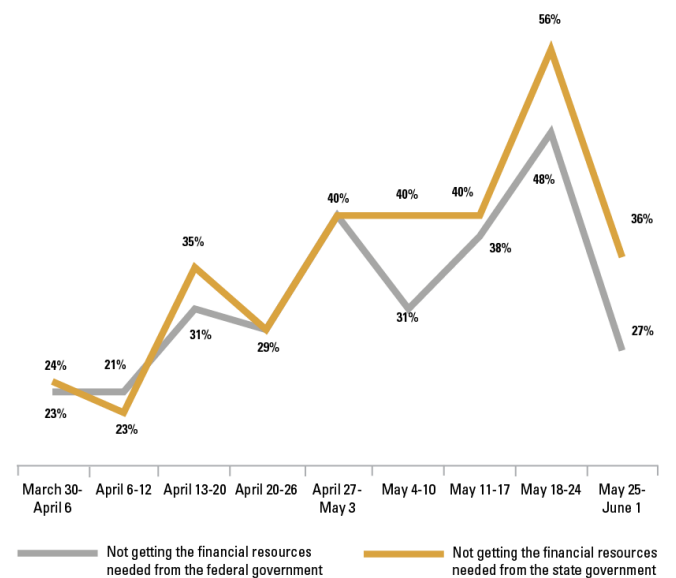


Figure 11
Percentage of jurisdictions reporting they were not getting needed financial resources to address the COVID-19 crisis, by week of survey response





As noted earlier, local leaders were lukewarm in their assessments of coordination between their own jurisdiction and other governments (as well as community organizations like schools, non-profits, and the business community), for responding to the pandemic. Unfortunately, these evaluations generally did not improve over the course of the first two months the pandemic in Michigan (see *Figure 12*). Previous MPPS reports have highlighted local leaders' lack of trust in the state and federal governments,⁶ and significant friction in state-local government relations in Michigan.⁷ The current challenges of coordination might be seen in part as a legacy of these ongoing problems.

Each year the MPPS also asks local leaders a series of questions about their local governments' fiscal health and budgeting, including a summary item that looks at whether jurisdictions are *better able* or *less able* to meet their financial needs now compared to the previous year. Between the end of March to the end of May, the percentage of Michigan local governments that said they were *less able* this year to meet their needs compared to last year more than doubled. During the first week of the Spring 2020 MPPS, 29% of local leaders reported their jurisdiction was somewhat (23%) or *significantly* (6%) less able to meet their fiscal needs compared to last year (see *Figure 13*). This was already a 12 percentage point increase over the 17% who said "less able" on the Spring 2019 MPPS, compared with their fiscal abilities the previous year.⁸ And by the end of the current 2020 survey field period, the last week of May, well over half (61%) of local jurisdictions were reporting that they are now less able to meet their fiscal needs, including 13% saying they are significantly less able.

Figure 12
Percentage of jurisdictions reporting somewhat or very effective coordination in response to COVID-19, by week of survey response

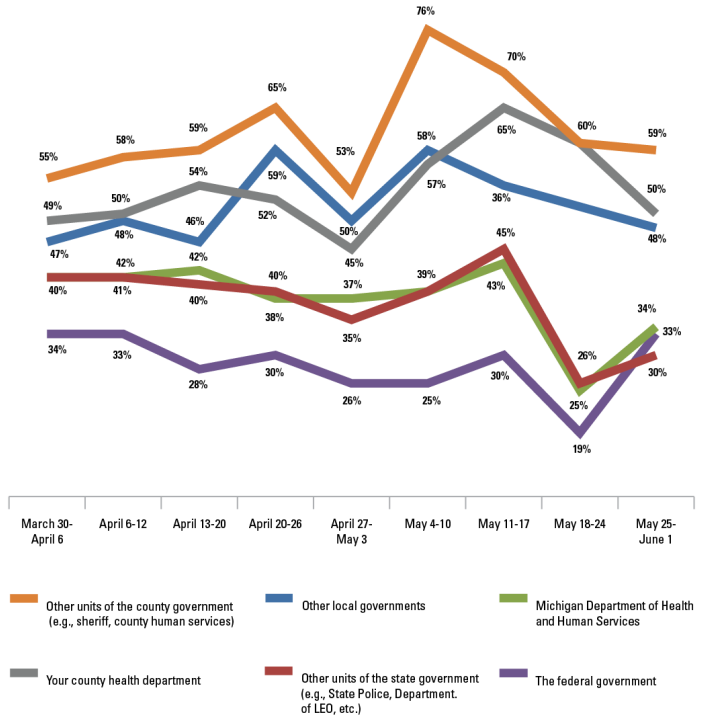
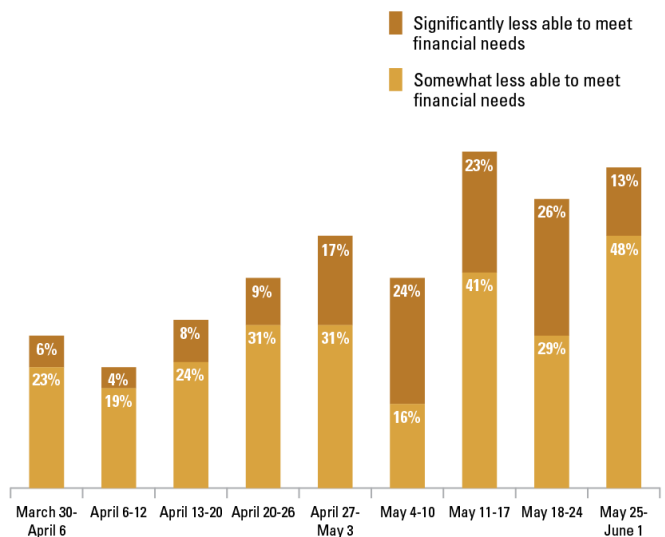


Figure 13
Percentage of jurisdictions reporting they are better or less able to meet their fiscal needs in current year compared to previous year, by week of survey response



Conclusion

With the dramatic arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the months of April and May 2020 in Michigan were unprecedented in many ways. During those first two months of the crisis, local leaders reported many significant and crisis-level impacts from the pandemic on their communities, in particular on their local schools (88%), economic conditions in their communities (86%), and their residents' welfare including food security, mental health, job security, etc. (70%), and on their communities overall (67%).

Of particular note for those working in the public sector, local leaders' assessments regarding the effectiveness of coordination this spring between their governments and other entities were less than enthusiastic, and showed little improvement over the first two months of the crisis. While few believe coordination was outright ineffective, only the coordination between their jurisdiction and their county health departments or other county agencies received positive assessments from the majority of local officials statewide.

One positive note is that local emergency preparedness plans have been reportedly working well, among the 39% of jurisdictions statewide who had a pre-existing plan or developed one in response to the COVID-19 crisis. However, a majority of Michigan local jurisdictions still don't have their own emergency plan.

Meanwhile, a concerning—if not surprising—finding is that, relatively few local governments got resources from the state or federal government that they needed in April and May to respond to the crisis, whether to address fiscal or public health needs.

Finally, although most local leaders did not necessarily think most significant negative impacts of COVID-19 would last very long, many of their assessments grew more pessimistic as time went on over the weeks of the MPPS field period, particularly in regard to economic conditions. And particularly worrisome is the sharp increase in the percentage of jurisdictions that already report declining fiscal health, a stubborn issue in Michigan that the MPPS has reported on many times already over the last decade.



Appendix A

Local officials' current assessments of COVID-19 impacts, by jurisdiction size and region

		Overall	Population <1500	Population 1500-5000	Population 5001-10000	Population 10001-30000	Population >30000
... public health in your community	Very little or no impact	16%	20%	19%	6%	7%	1%
	Somewhat of an impact	37%	38%	38%	41%	34%	24%
	A significant impact	34%	31%	31%	40%	43%	55%
	Crisis-level impact	8%	5%	7%	9%	13%	19%
	Don't know	5%	6%	5%	3%	3%	1%
... schools in your community	Very little or no impact	3%	5%	4%	1%	1%	0%
	Somewhat of an impact	6%	7%	6%	5%	9%	3%
	A significant impact	62%	64%	64%	54%	55%	57%
	Crisis-level impact	26%	21%	24%	38%	34%	37%
	Don't know	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%
... economic conditions in your community (businesses closing, unemployment, etc.)	Very little or no impact	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%	0%
	Somewhat of an impact	9%	13%	10%	4%	2%	1%
	A significant impact	51%	53%	52%	54%	44%	32%
	Crisis-level impact	35%	28%	33%	39%	52%	67%
	Don't know	2%	3%	3%	1%	2%	0%
... your residents' welfare (food security, mental health, job security, etc.)	Very little or no impact	3%	4%	3%	2%	0%	0%
	Somewhat of an impact	22%	26%	21%	19%	27%	7%
	A significant impact	53%	51%	57%	54%	44%	58%
	Crisis-level impact	17%	15%	15%	21%	26%	35%
	Don't know	4%	4%	4%	5%	3%	0%
... local or regional emergency response capability (police/sheriff, EMS, hospitals, etc.)	Very little or no impact	14%	16%	15%	11%	9%	4%
	Somewhat of an impact	37%	38%	36%	44%	35%	30%
	A significant impact	34%	30%	36%	31%	38%	49%
	Crisis-level impact	9%	8%	9%	11%	15%	16%
	Don't know	5%	8%	5%	2%	2%	1%

		Overall	Population <1500	Population 1500-5000	Population 5001-10000	Population 10001-30000	Population >30000
... continuity of your jurisdiction's public services	Very little or no impact	20%	26%	21%	20%	5%	7%
	Somewhat of an impact	41%	46%	40%	36%	40%	23%
	A significant impact	32%	23%	33%	37%	46%	62%
	Crisis-level impact	5%	3%	4%	7%	9%	9%
	Don't know	2%	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%
... continuity of your jurisdiction government's operations	Very little or no impact	16%	19%	17%	16%	4%	6%
	Somewhat of an impact	44%	48%	43%	37%	42%	33%
	A significant impact	35%	28%	36%	44%	46%	51%
	Crisis-level impact	5%	4%	4%	3%	8%	10%
	Don't know	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
... overall impact on your community	Very little or no impact	3%	6%	3%	0%	0%	0%
	Somewhat of an impact	28%	32%	30%	21%	17%	9%
	A significant impact	55%	51%	54%	62%	59%	61%
	Crisis-level impact	12%	9%	10%	16%	21%	30%
	Don't know	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	0%
... overall impact on Michigan	Very little or no impact	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
	Somewhat of an impact	3%	3%	4%	4%	1%	0%
	A significant impact	43%	42%	45%	38%	48%	32%
	Crisis-level impact	50%	50%	47%	56%	48%	68%
	Don't know	3%	4%	4%	3%	3%	0%



		Total	Upper Peninsula	Northern Lower Peninsula	West Central Lower Peninsula	East Central Lower Peninsula	Southwest Lower Peninsula	Southeast Lower Peninsula
... public health in your community	Very little or no impact	16%	18%	16%	19%	20%	15%	8%
	Somewhat of an impact	37%	36%	35%	35%	38%	40%	38%
	A significant impact	34%	35%	35%	36%	32%	30%	38%
	Crisis-level impact	8%	9%	8%	3%	7%	7%	12%
	Don't know	5%	2%	6%	6%	2%	7%	4%
... schools in your community	Very little or no impact	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	2%	3%
	Somewhat of an impact	6%	2%	4%	8%	7%	9%	5%
	A significant impact	62%	72%	62%	58%	67%	61%	58%
	Crisis-level impact	26%	21%	27%	27%	22%	25%	30%
	Don't know	3%	1%	3%	4%	0%	4%	4%
... economic conditions in your community (businesses closing, unemployment, etc.)	Very little or no impact	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	2%
	Somewhat of an impact	9%	8%	6%	11%	12%	10%	8%
	A significant impact	51%	59%	49%	49%	51%	52%	48%
	Crisis-level impact	35%	31%	40%	36%	33%	31%	39%
	Don't know	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	4%	2%
... your residents' welfare (food security, mental health, job security, etc.)	Very little or no impact	3%	5%	2%	2%	4%	4%	2%
	Somewhat of an impact	22%	23%	22%	23%	23%	21%	23%
	A significant impact	53%	54%	53%	54%	55%	54%	51%
	Crisis-level impact	17%	15%	20%	16%	16%	15%	21%
	Don't know	4%	3%	3%	5%	2%	6%	3%
... local or regional emergency response capability (police/sheriff, EMS, hospitals, etc.)	Very little or no impact	14%	15%	13%	12%	17%	15%	12%
	Somewhat of an impact	37%	35%	38%	38%	35%	41%	35%
	A significant impact	34%	34%	32%	33%	38%	29%	38%
	Crisis-level impact	9%	10%	10%	10%	7%	8%	12%
	Don't know	5%	6%	7%	6%	3%	7%	3%

		Total	Upper Peninsula	Northern Lower Peninsula	West Central Lower Peninsula	East Central Lower Peninsula	Southwest Lower Peninsula	Southeast Lower Peninsula
... continuity of your jurisdiction's public services	Very little or no impact	20%	20%	16%	21%	25%	22%	17%
	Somewhat of an impact	41%	46%	49%	43%	37%	37%	37%
	A significant impact	32%	30%	30%	30%	33%	34%	37%
	Crisis-level impact	5%	3%	2%	5%	4%	4%	9%
	Don't know	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%	1%
... continuity of your jurisdiction government's operations	Very little or no impact	16%	13%	15%	18%	22%	13%	12%
	Somewhat of an impact	44%	52%	47%	41%	40%	45%	42%
	A significant impact	35%	31%	32%	36%	35%	38%	38%
	Crisis-level impact	5%	3%	3%	5%	3%	4%	8%
	Don't know	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
... overall impact on your community	Very little or no impact	3%	4%	3%	2%	6%	3%	2%
	Somewhat of an impact	28%	28%	26%	29%	30%	28%	26%
	A significant impact	55%	54%	59%	55%	52%	57%	51%
	Crisis-level impact	12%	13%	10%	11%	12%	9%	18%
	Don't know	2%	1%	2%	3%	1%	3%	2%
... overall impact on Michigan	Very little or no impact	1%	2%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
	Somewhat of an impact	3%	4%	2%	3%	5%	5%	3%
	A significant impact	43%	38%	40%	44%	45%	45%	43%
	Crisis-level impact	50%	54%	53%	48%	49%	48%	50%
	Don't know	3%	4%	4%	5%	1%	2%	4%



Notes

1. Bouffard, K. (2020, Feb 28). Whitmer activates emergency center, prepares ‘for the worst’ on coronavirus. *The Detroit News*. Retrieved from <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2020/02/28/whitmer-activates-emergency-center-sets-plan-coronavirus/4895831002/>
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4. Soergel, A. (2020, May 1). Pennsylvania, Michigan Among Hardest Hit by Unemployment Amid Coronavirus. *US News and World Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2020-05-01/pennsylvania-michigan-among-states-hardest-hit-by-unemployment-spikes-amid-coronavirus>
5. Methodological note: Analyzing small numbers of survey responses typically decreases statistical confidence in the reliability of findings (i.e., small differences in answers can yield large swings in percentages when sample is small). However, preliminary analysis of this wave’s data on the COVID-19 battery shows there are relatively consistent levels of weekly response rate among jurisdictions of different sizes and regions over the course of field period and this might increase confidence in the following over-time analyses. Nonetheless, there may be other factors that encouraged local officials to respond earlier or later, such as whether jurisdictions were simply too busy dealing with the pandemic early in the field period to participate in the survey at that time.
6. Ivacko, T., Horner, D., & Crawford, M.Q. (2013). Trust in government among Michigan’s local leaders and citizens. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://closup.umich.edu/files/mpps-spring-2013-trust-in-government.pdf>
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8. Horner, D., & Ivacko, T. (2019). Mixed signals continue for Michigan local governments’ fiscal health, while future outlooks worsen. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://closup.umich.edu/files/mpps-fiscal-health-2019.pdf>
9. Gallup Organization. (2018). 2017 Democratic States Exceed Republican States by Four in 2018. Washington, D.C.: Gallup Organization. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/247025/democratic-states-exceed-republican-states-four-2018.aspx>

Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is an ongoing survey program, interviewing the leaders of Michigan’s 1,856 units of general purpose local government. Surveys are conducted each spring (and prior to 2018, were also conducted each fall). The program has covered a wide range of policy topics, and includes longitudinal tracking data on “core” fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and designed to build-up a multi-year time-series.

In the Spring 2020 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via the internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (including county administrators and board chairs; city mayors and managers; village presidents, clerks, and managers; and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Spring 2020 wave was conducted from March 30 – June 1, 2020. A total of 1,342 jurisdictions in the Spring 2020 wave returned valid surveys (59 counties, 216 cities, 163 villages, and 904 townships), resulting in a 72% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.41%. The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or below, unless otherwise specified. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. Quantitative data are weighted to account for non-response. “Voices Across Michigan” verbatim responses, when included, may have been edited for clarity and brevity. Contact CLOSUP staff for more information.

Detailed tables of the data analyzed in this report broken down three ways—by jurisdiction type (county, city, township, or village); by population size of the respondent’s community, and by the region of the respondent’s jurisdiction—are available online at the MPPS homepage: <http://closup.umich.edu/mpps.php>.

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.



Previous MPPS reports

- Energy policies and environmental leadership among Michigan's local governments (January 2020)
- Mixed signals continue for Michigan local governments' fiscal health, while future outlooks worsen (December 2019)
- Michigan local officials' views on the next recession: timing, concerns, and actions taken (October 2019)
- Michigan local government preparations and concerns regarding the 2020 U.S. Census (September 2019)
- New Governor, new evaluations of the direction Michigan is headed among local leaders (August 2019)
- Positive working relationships reported among Michigan's local elected officials (June 2019)
- Community poverty and the struggle to make ends meet in Michigan, according to local government leaders (March 2019)
- The state of community civic discourse, according to Michigan's local government leaders (December 2018)
- Despite sustained economic growth, Michigan local government fiscal health still lags (November 2018)
- Michigan local government leaders' views on medical and recreational marijuana (September 2018)
- Rising confidence in Michigan's direction among local leaders, but partisan differences remain (July 2018)
- Michigan local government officials weigh in on housing shortages and related issues (June 2018)
- Approaches to land use planning and zoning among Michigan's local governments (May 2018)
- Workforce issues and challenges for Michigan's local governments (January 2018)
- Local leaders' views on elections in Michigan: accuracy, problems, and reform options (November 2017)
- Michigan local government officials report complex mix of improvement and decline in fiscal health, but with overall trend moving slowly upward (October 2017)
- Michigan local leaders want their citizens to play a larger role in policymaking, but report declining engagement (August 2017)
- Michigan local leaders' views on state preemption and how to share policy authority (June 2017)
- Improving communication, building trust are seen as keys to fixing relationships between local jurisdictions and the State government (May 2017)
- Local leaders more likely to support than oppose Michigan's Emergency Manager law, but strongly favor reforms (February 2017)
- Local government leaders' views on drinking water and water supply infrastructure in Michigan communities (November 2016)
- Michigan local leaders say property tax appeals are common, disagree with 'dark stores' assessing (October 2016)
- Local officials say Michigan's system of funding local government is broken, and seek State action to fix it (September 2016)
- Michigan local governments report first declines in fiscal health trend since 2010 (August 2016)
- Michigan local leaders' doubts continue regarding the state's direction (July 2016)
- Hospital access primary emergency medical concern among many Michigan local officials (July 2016)
- Firefighting services in Michigan: challenges and approaches among local governments (June 2016)
- Most local officials are satisfied with law enforcement services, but almost half from largest jurisdictions say their funding is insufficient (April 2016)
- Local leaders say police-community relations are good throughout Michigan, but those in large cities are concerned about potential civil unrest over police use-of-force (February 2016)
- Report: Responding to budget surplus vs. deficit: the preferences of Michigan's local leaders and citizens (December 2015)
- Michigan's local leaders concerned about retiree health care costs and their governments' ability to meet future obligations (October 2015)
- Fiscal health rated relatively good for most jurisdictions, but improvement slows and decline continues for many (September 2015)
- Confidence in Michigan's direction declines among state's local leaders (August 2015)
- Michigan local government leaders' views on private roads (July 2015)
- Few Michigan jurisdictions have adopted Complete Streets policies, though many see potential benefits (June 2015)
- Michigan local leaders have positive views on relationships with county road agencies, despite some concerns (May 2015)
- Michigan local government leaders say transit services are important, but lack of funding discourages their development (April 2015)

Michigan local leaders see need for state and local ethics reform (March 2015)

Local leaders say Michigan road funding needs major increase, but lack consensus on options that would raise the most revenue (February 2015)

Michigan local government leaders' views on employee pay and benefits (January 2015)

Despite increasingly formal financial management, relatively few Michigan local governments have adopted recommended policies (December 2014)

Most Michigan local officials are satisfied with their privatized services, but few seek to expand further (November 2014)

Michigan local governments finally pass fiscal health tipping point overall, but one in four still report decline (October 2014)

Beyond the coast, a tenuous relationship between Michigan local governments and the Great Lakes (September 2014)

Confidence in Michigan's direction holds steady among state's local leaders (August 2014)

Wind power as a community issue in Michigan (July 2014)

Fracking as a community issue in Michigan (June 2014)

The impact of tax-exempt properties on Michigan local governments (March 2014)

Michigan's local leaders generally support Detroit bankruptcy filing despite some concerns (February 2014)

Michigan local governments increasingly pursue placemaking for economic development (January 2014)

Views on right-to-work legislation among Michigan's local government leaders (December 2013)

Michigan local governments continue seeking, and receiving, union concessions (October 2013)

Michigan local government fiscal health continues gradual improvement, but smallest jurisdictions lagging (September 2013)

Local leaders evaluate state policymaker performance and whether Michigan is on the right track (August 2013)

Trust in government among Michigan's local leaders and citizens (July 2013)

Citizen engagement in the view of Michigan's local government leaders (May 2013)

Beyond trust in government: government trust in citizens? (March 2013)

Local leaders support reforming Michigan's system of funding local government (January 2013)

Local leaders support eliminating Michigan's Personal Property Tax if funds are replaced, but distrust state follow-through (November 2012)

Michigan's local leaders satisfied with union negotiations (October 2012)

Michigan's local leaders are divided over the state's emergency manager law (September 2012)

Fiscal stress continues for hundreds of Michigan jurisdictions, but conditions trend in positive direction overall (September 2012)

Michigan's local leaders more positive about Governor Snyder's performance, more optimistic about the state's direction (July 2012)

Data-driven decision-making in Michigan local government (June 2012)

State funding incentives increase local collaboration, but also raise concerns (March 2012)

Local officials react to state policy innovation tying revenue sharing to dashboards and incentive funding (January 2012)

MPPS finds fiscal health continues to decline across the state, though some negative trends eased in 2011 (October 2011)

Public sector unions in Michigan: their presence and impact according to local government leaders (August 2011)

Despite increased approval of state government performance, Michigan's local leaders are concerned about the state's direction (August 2011)

Local government and environmental leadership: views of Michigan's local leaders (July 2011)

Local leaders are mostly positive about intergovernmental cooperation and look to expand efforts (March 2011)

Local government leaders say most employees are not overpaid, though some benefits may be too generous (February 2011)

Local government leaders say economic gardening can help grow their economies (November 2010)

Local governments struggle to cope with fiscal, service, and staffing pressures (August 2010)

Michigan local governments actively promote U.S. Census participation (August 2010)

Fiscal stimulus package mostly ineffective for local economies (May 2010)



Fall 2009 key findings report: educational, economic, and workforce development issues at the local level (April 2010)

Local government officials give low marks to the performance of state officials and report low trust in Lansing (March 2010)

Local government fiscal and economic development issues (October 2009)

All MPPS reports are available online at: <http://closup.umich.edu/mpps.php>

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The **Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP)**, housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

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