



American Planning Association
New Jersey Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

**NJ Community Based
Organization Planning
Needs Assessment**
Survey Report

2011



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Introduction

In June 2011, the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-NJ) released the ***New Jersey Community Based Organization Needs Assessment Survey***. The survey was designed with the intent of bridging the gap between community based organizations (CBO's) in New Jersey, and the states city and regional network of city planners. The goal of the survey is to better understand the types of planning support these CBO's need. This survey will support and direct the APA-NJ's newest committee, the Community Planning Assistance Committee, in its efforts to identify and mitigate the most pressing needs facing CBO's by providing volunteer planning services.

In 2010, the APA-NJ developed the Community Planning Assistance Program (CPAP). The program was designed to facilitate integration between city and regional planners and New Jersey CBO's (CBO's). CBO's are organized groups (both non profit and for profit) with the mission of assisting communities in their efforts to strengthen their vitality and foster both economic and social development. The field of city and regional planning focuses on moderating and nurturing that development, through the conduction of research and the drafting of plans to carry out community goals. It was the belief of the New Jersey chapter that CBO's play a large role in the success of neighborhoods and communities, and should therefore be seasoned in the practice of intricate planning. The CPAP will offer subsidized planning assistance to NJ CBO's that would normally not have access to these services. The goal of CPAP is to guide organizations in their efforts to enhance their development process.

The goal of the survey was to understand the planning needs of NJ CBO's. The survey was a four tiered questionnaire focused on acquiring information about each organizations background, their current activities, challenges they are facing, and the types of planning assistance they need the most.

Methodology

Survey development

The 2011 Community based Organization Planning Need assessment Survey was developed by APA-NJ staff and committee members. The survey included measures to assess CBO's awareness of planning services, their collaboration with planners and consultants in the past, and their need to work with planners in the future. The survey was designed to be completed by members of the administration of each CBO that have experience with the organizations previous development activities. The survey was reviewed and revised by members of the APA-NJ and CPAP Advisory Committee before being released to the public.

Sample of CBO's

As noted, this study was directed at all NJ based CBO's. It does not appear that any previous studies of this nature have been conducted in the State of NJ. Therefore, literature research was done using similar out of state studies as models for development. *Findings from the Family PACT Evaluation: 2008 Survey*

of CBO's and Building Partnerships: Community Voices in Planning and Developing New York City School Facilities helped to guide the survey development and implementation process.

A comprehensive list of NJ CBO's was compiled through internet research, referrals, and a partnership between the APA-NJ and the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey (HCDNNJ). While the compilation process was thorough and in depth, some eligible CBO's may have been missed in the process.

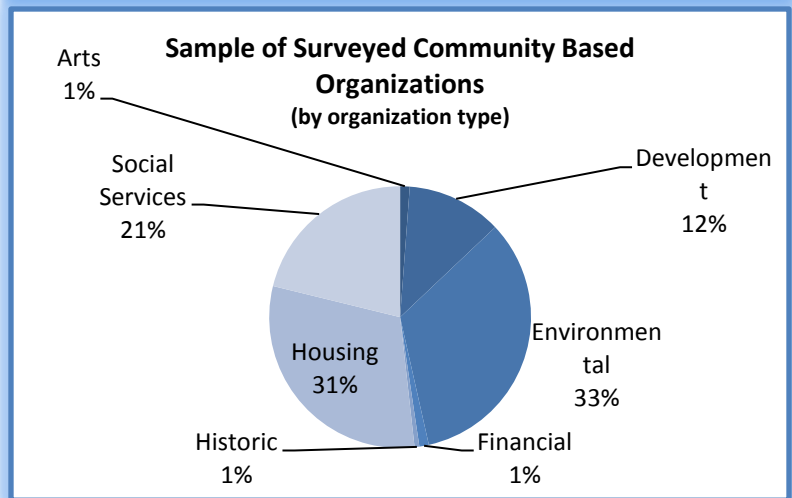
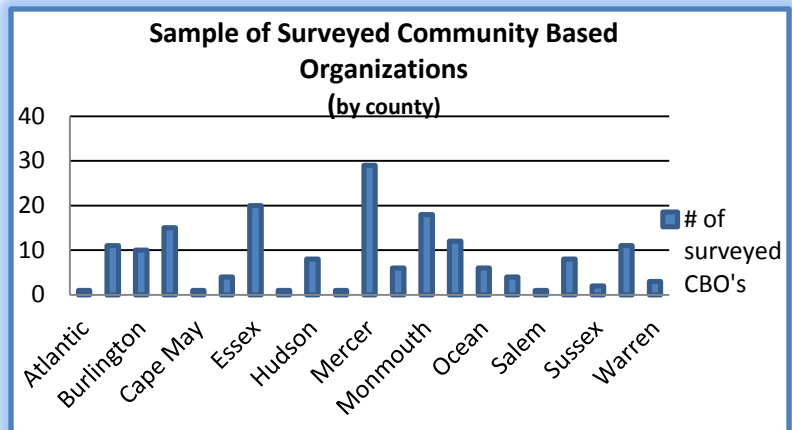
New Jersey is home to over 300 CBO's. The APA-NJ acquired contact information for 108. The 108 sample organizations that were surveyed represented all major regions of the State (North, Central, and South). The sample also included representation from various areas of focus, ranging from housing development, social services, community and economic development, environmental, financial planning, the arts and employment.

CBO's were considered to be eligible for the survey if they met the following criteria:

- They were located in and served communities within the state of NJ
- They indicated in their organizational mission statement that their goals lie within the spectrum of enhancing and fostering further development of communities.

Data Collection Procedures

The survey was administered using an online survey instrument that allowed participants to answer as many or few questions that they desired, and in the order that suited them best. The link to the survey was distributed via email using the contact list that was compiled by the APA-NJ. The survey included a cover page explaining the purpose and goals of the survey, and four follow up pages categorized by: background information, organizational activities, organizational challenges, and needed assistance. Follow up emails were sent to organizations every week for four weeks. Data collection closed precisely



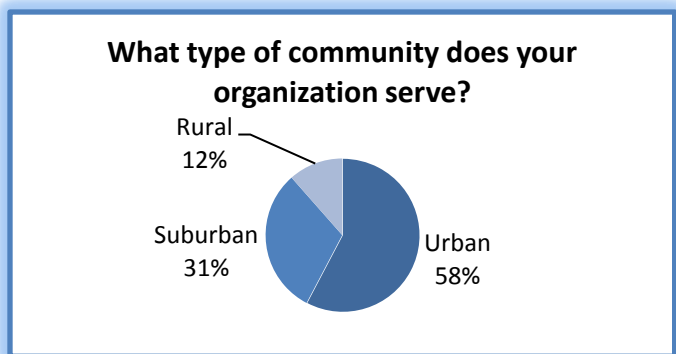
5 weeks after the original administration. In total, the APA-NJ received 32 responses, for an overall 30% response rate.

Survey Results *(for full survey results, see Appendix A)*

Description of the Respondents

Geographic Distribution

Of those that responded, there was a wide range of areas of geographic focus. 40% functioned at a regional level, while another 40% focused their activities at the county level. The remaining 20% focused their activities at the neighborhood and municipal level. 58% of the respondents considered their communities to be urban, while 31% considered theirs to be suburban and 12% to be rural.



Services Provided

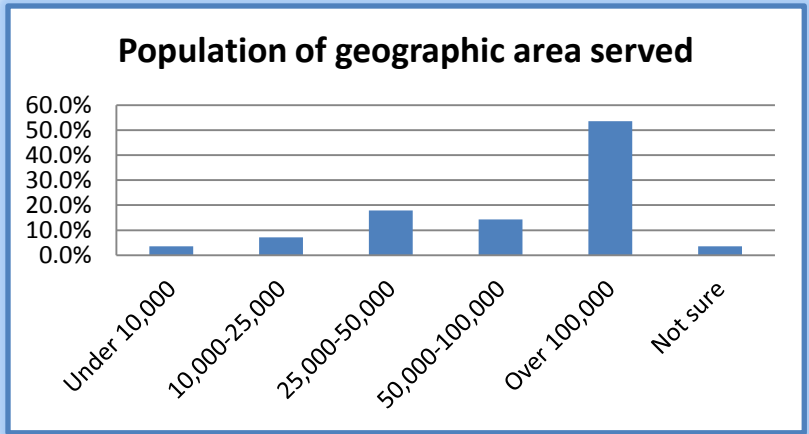
The survey asked respondents to classify their organizational activities by choosing from one or more activities on the list. The results are shown below:

How would you classify your organization and its activities? (Please check all that apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Housing Management	23%	7
Education	20%	6
Homelessness	23%	7
Social Services	23%	7
Economic development	26%	8
Child care	3%	1
Recreation	13%	4
Safety/security	0%	0
Housing Development	33%	10
Transportation	3%	1
Land Use	20%	6
Environmental	36%	11
Brownfield Development	3%	1
Other (please specify)	30%	9

The highest representation was from environmental agencies, followed by housing development, economic development, homelessness, social services, and housing management.

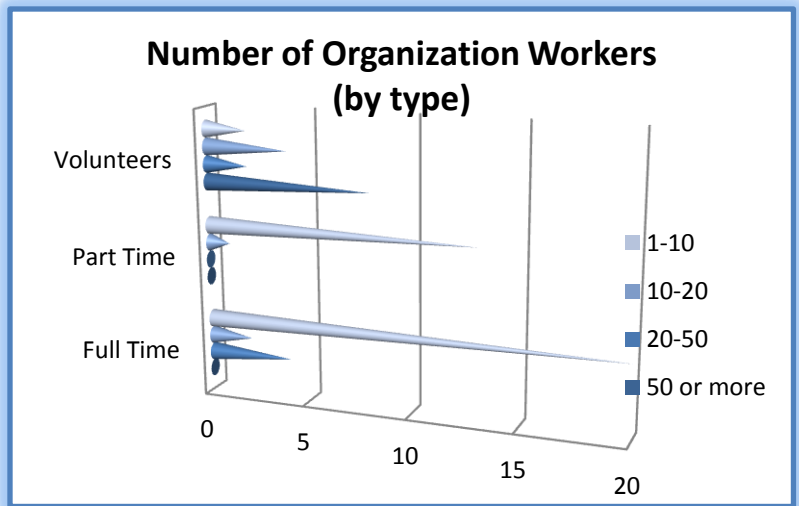
Population Served

The respondents were asked to answer several questions about the communities and populations that their services target. 53% of respondents believe that their area of geographic focus is home to 100,000 or more annual residents. 17% show a population between 25,000 and 50,000, while 14% show a population between 50,000 and 100,000. Only 4% show a population under 10,000. 75% of organizations serving 100,000 residents or more estimate that 25-50% are living at or below the State poverty level. As the populations of these areas increase, the estimated homeownership rates of residents drop significantly. Most communities indicate English to be their primary resident language.



Administration

Respondents were also asked several questions about the internal capacity of their organization. It appears as though most respondents, whether servicing 10,000 residents or over 100,000 have annual budgets that fall below the million dollar mark. Only 5 organizations indicated more than 10 staff members (both full and part time), but did however show a large dependency on volunteers. 10 organizations use 20 or more volunteers on the staff, while 8 organizations use 50 or more.



Current Activities

The sample of CBO's were asked questions regarding their current activities in order to gain an understanding of what experience they have with plan development and strategic planning.

The results show that most organizations, whether urban, suburban, rural, big or small, have carried out some form of plan development and implementation. 96% have developed some sort of strategic plan in the past, however, 80% of those plans have been developed "in house" by administrators and volunteers. 58% have never used a professional planner, and only 4% use professional planners on a

regular basis. The majority of organizations that did use planners were serving urban areas, while 60% of organizations located in suburban areas cited never using a planner in their activities. In addition, those areas that have the least experience using planners are the areas with the highest rate of unemployment, and the lowest rate of homeownership. Included in the 58% of total organizations that have never used a planner, there are economic development agencies, housing management corporations, arts agencies, and educational institutions. 25% of the survey respondents have never used a consultant at all, and of the 75% that have, only 20% have located them through a professional organization, while 65% found them through referral.



When organizations are not using planners or consultants to construct in house plans, they are turning to volunteers. 65% of respondents use volunteers on a daily basis to achieve their goals. 84% have partnered with other organizations.

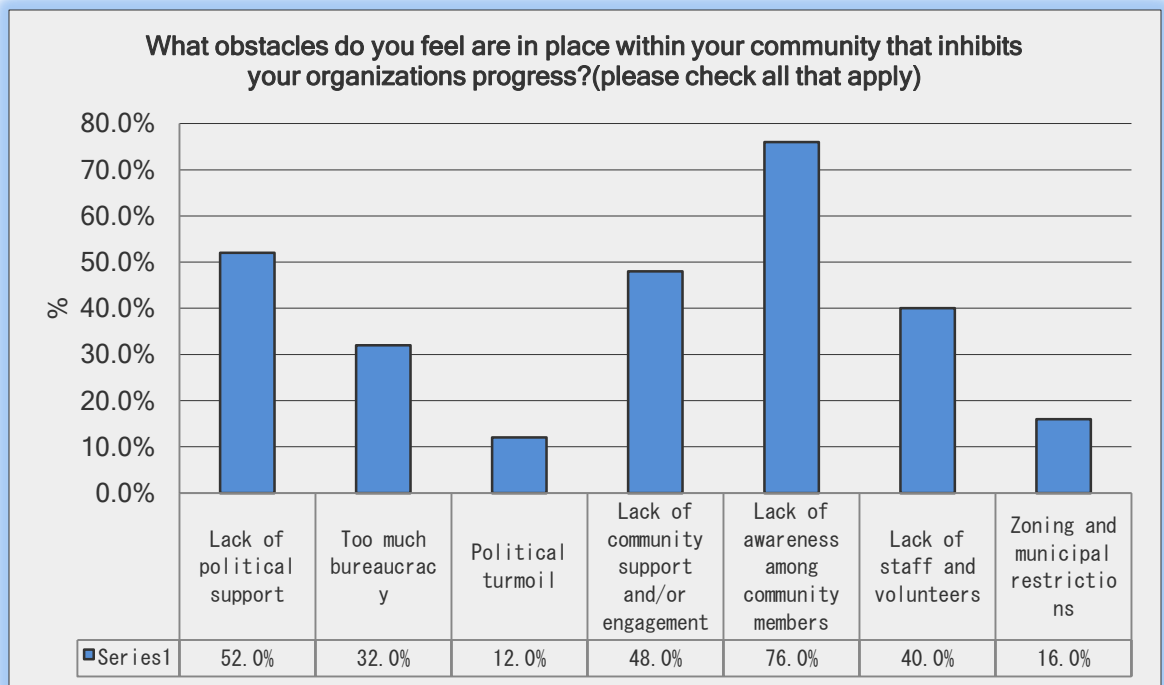
How often does your organization use each type of resource listed below?					
Answer Options	Daily	Weekly	Annually	Several times a year	Never
Planners	1	0	5	4	14
Consultants	0	7	6	8	5
Financial experts	3	1	5	9	5
Public Interest Groups	1	4	1	8	10
Volunteers	17	4	1	2	2
Internet Based Services	11	4	2	4	4
Real Estate Developers/Contractors	4	0	2	6	12
Property Managers	5	0	1	4	13

Current Challenges

The responding organizations were asked to highlight some of the specific challenges that they feel are inhibiting their progression. 65% of responding organizations are currently looking to expand their activities, and 34% are looking to expand their geographic focus.

There are several obstacles that these organizations cited as standing in their way. Other organizations struggle not solely expansion, but keeping their current activities afloat.

- 76% cited a major problem in progress as being a lack of awareness of community members. In fact, 51% of respondents felt that the community had misconceptions regarding the mission and activities of CBO's in their area.
- 40% cited a lack of volunteers, while another 48% cited a lack of community support and engagement.
- 76% cited difficulty in securing funds to initiate projects. 12% cited a lack of knowledge of available resources and 56% cited a lack of staff capacity to secure those resources.
- Several organizations also expressed that there was a lack of political involvement with community based projects. While 48% of respondents felt that they had a cooperative relationship with their respective governments, 52% felt that they received less than adequate legislative support.





When asked what would help to make their organization stronger:

- 61% felt that improving their community outreach strategies would help
- 57% felt that securing more partnerships would help
- 66% felt that building internal capacity would help
- 23% felt that reassessing community needs would help
- 47% feel enhancing skills would help

What services do you feel would make your organization stronger? (please check all that apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Building internal capacity (employee training, team building, leadership training, etc)	66%	14
Enhancing skills (planning education, technological training, grant writing training, etc)	47%	10
Building Partnerships	57%	12
Advancing professional planning and physical design work (Plan development)	28%	6
Assessing community needs	23%	5
Coordinating community outreach	61%	13

Organizations were finally given an overview of what the role of city planning was in community and economic development, and asked if they felt that they would benefit from planning assistance. 30% felt that it would.

A large number of organizations that have never used planners before cited a great interest in assessing community needs (28%), building internal capacity (88%), enhancing community outreach (44%), and enhancing their own planning expertise (78%)

30% of organizations directly expressed the desire for planning assistance. 96% of organizations expressed interest in the Community Planning Assistance Program

Findings and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

- **The majority of CBO's in NJ have participated in some form of planning activities in the past, however, have not utilized the services offered by planners when doing so.** The majority of these plans were written by in house administration with little or no knowledge of the planning practice. It is clear from the survey results that there is currently a wide divide between the implementation of plans at the organization level, and the city and regional planners of NJ. More than half of the CBO's surveyed have never used a planner in their strategic planning process.
- **The organizations that have never used planners, are also the organizations that are serving the populations and communities with the most at risk population.** These are the areas that would benefit from planning assistance the most.
- **CBO's rely heavily on volunteer support and collaboration when carrying out their mission.** A large number of organizations cited a major problem in their progression as being a lack of staff capacity, and quite a few cited using less than 10 paid staff members. Almost all organizations surveyed have resorted to partnerships and collaborations when striving to reach organizational goals.
- **CBO's know what the major obstacles are in their organizations progression.** According to the study, the largest challenge seems to be coordinating community outreach and increasing community awareness and support. Just over half of all respondents also felt that there was a disconnect between CBO's and their respective governments.
- **Financial obstacles are a large concern for most CBO's.** The struggle lies in an organizations lack of capacity to raise and secure funding, as well as securing in house knowledge about how to access financial opportunities. Almost all of the respondents believe that there is an overarching lack of financial capacity to complete work.
- **CBO's would benefit from building and strengthening their internal capacity and by becoming better coordinated when developing their community outreach strategies.** Two thirds of all respondents felt that activities such as employee training, team building and leadership building would enhance productivity and overall capabilities of the organization.
- **Building partnerships and receiving planning support are valued in the community based organization circuit.** Over half of survey respondents indicated their desire to create coalitions

with other organizations in order to broaden organizational reach and strengthen ties within communities. Almost all of the organizations that responded expressed interest in learning more about receiving planning assistance from professionals.

Recommendations

- **Use the CPAP to bring CBO's and planners together in their attempts to carry out community and economic development strategies.** Developing a partnership between CBO's and planners will create strong and capable organizations that can direct positive change and progress in New Jersey communities. By offering subsidized planning services through the CPAP, organizations that have not had exposure to or could not afford sound planning services will have access to these resources
- **Create educational materials directed at assisting CBO's gain access to funding and partnership opportunities.** A central location or database where CBO's can view information regarding available funding for community based projects and in house capacity building would allow inexperienced organizations to easily obtain funding information.
- **Create an annual venue (conference or roundtable discussion) where planners and CBO's can network, create partnerships, and share resources.** The venue should be directed at providing an environment where planners, funders, and community based organizations can learn from one another, exchange success stories, compare challenges, and build strong alliances.
- **Create visibility of the planning profession within CBO's.** It is important that CBO's understand what the planning profession is, and how planners can strengthen their organizations. Explanatory marketing materials should be distributed to CBO's on a regular basis, giving them access to the knowledge that they will need to make educated planning partnership decisions.

APPENDIX A: Full Survey Response

Question 1

How would you classify your organization and its activities? (Please check all that apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Housing Management	23.3%	7
Education	20.0%	6
Homelessness	23.3%	7
Social Services	23.3%	7
Economic development	26.7%	8
Child care	3.3%	1
Recreation	13.3%	4
Safety/security	0.0%	0
Housing Development	33.3%	10
Transportation	3.3%	1
Land Use	20.0%	6
Environmental	36.7%	11
Brownfield Development	3.3%	1
Other (please specify)	30.0%	9
<i>answered question</i>		30

Question 2

Within what geographic scale does your organization function?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Regional or Statewide	40.0%	12
Neighborhood (no more than 10 city blocks)	0.0%	0
Multi-Neighborhood (two or more neighborhoods)	10.0%	3
Municipal (town, city, or Census-designated place, CDP)	10.0%	3
Multi-Municipal (two or more towns, cities, or CDP's)	10.0%	3
County	40.0%	12
<i>answered question</i>		30

Question 3

What type of community does your organization serve?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Urban	57.7%	15
Suburban	30.8%	8
Rural	11.5%	3
<i>answered question</i>		26

Question 4

Please estimate the current population of your organization's geographic focus?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 10,000	3.6%	1
10,000-25,000	7.1%	2
25,000-50,000	17.9%	5
50,000-100,000	14.3%	4
Over 100,000	53.6%	15
Not sure	3.6%	1
<i>answered question</i>		28

Question 5

Please estimate a brief overview of the population within your organization's geographic focus area.						
Answer Options	0%-10%	10%-25%	25%-50%	over 50%	Rating Average	Response Count
% living below the NJ state poverty level	5	7	6	6	2.54	24
% of homeowners	5	3	8	7	2.74	23
Unemployment rate	6	13	2	3	2.08	24
<i>answered question</i>						24

Question 6

What is/are the primary language(s) spoken in your organization's area of geographic focus?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
English	89.3%	25
Spanish	60.7%	17
Arabic	3.6%	1
French	0.0%	0
Korean	7.1%	2
Creole	7.1%	2
Other (please specify)		3
<i>answered question</i>		28

Question 7

What is your organization's annual budget?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Under \$100,000	11.1%	3
\$100,000-\$200,000	11.1%	3
\$200,000-\$500,000	18.5%	5
\$500,000-\$1,000,000	33.3%	9
Over \$1,000,000	25.9%	7
<i>answered question</i>		27

Question 8

How many employees does your organization have?

Answer Options	1-10	10-20	20-50	50 or more	Response Count
Full Time	20	2	4	0	26
Part Time	13	1	0	0	14
Volunteers	2	4	2	8	16
<i>answered question</i>					29

Question 9

How often does your organization use each type of resource listed below?						
Answer Options	Daily	Weekly	Annually	Several times a year	Never	Response Count
Planners	1	0	5	4	14	24
Consultants	0	7	6	8	5	26
Financial experts	3	1	5	9	5	23
Public Interest Groups	1	4	1	8	10	24
Volunteers	17	4	1	2	2	26
Internet Based Services	11	4	2	4	4	25
Real Estate Developers/Contractors	4	0	2	6	12	24
Property Managers	5	0	1	4	13	23
<i>answered question</i>						27

Question 10

Has your organization ever developed a strategic plan, a yearly work plan, or a specific project plan to help it meet its goals?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	96.2%	25
No	3.8%	1
Unsure	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		26

Question 11

If answered "yes" to Question 11, who developed these plans for you? (Please check all that apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Staff	80.0%	20
Volunteers	60.0%	15
Consultants	48.0%	12
Funders	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		5
<i>answered question</i>		25

Question 12

If your organization has ever hired consultants to assist in strategic planning, how did you select them?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Professional association	20.0%	4
Internet search	5.0%	1
Referral	65.0%	13
Community program	5.0%	1
Never hired a consultant	25.0%	5
Other (please specify)		5
<i>answered question</i>		20

Question 13

Has your organization ever partnered with other NJ CBO's?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	84.6%	22
No	15.4%	4
Unsure	0.0%	0
Please describe:		13
<i>answered question</i>		26

Question 14

What future goals and initiatives is your organization in the process of developing or adopting?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Expanding our geographic focus	34.6%	9
Adopting new activities	50.0%	13
Expanding our existing activities	65.4%	17
Not applicable	11.5%	3
Please elaborate below:		8
<i>answered question</i>		26

Question 15

What obstacles do you feel are in place within your community that inhibits your organizations progress?(please check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Lack of political support	52.0%	13
Too much bureaucracy	32.0%	8
Political turmoil	12.0%	3
Lack of community support and/or engagement	48.0%	12
Lack of awareness among community members	76.0%	19
Lack of staff and volunteers	40.0%	10
Zoning and municipal restrictions	16.0%	4
Other (please specify)		6
<i>answered question</i>		25

Question 16

What financial obstacles do you feel are in place in your organization and community? (Please check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Difficulty in securing funds	76.9%	20
Not enough relevant funding for organizational projects	73.1%	19
Cost overruns on projects	3.8%	1
Lack of capacity for fundraising activities	42.3%	11
Other (please specify)		1
<i>answered question</i>		26

Question 17

Are there any misconceptions that you feel the community has about your organization?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	51.9%	14
No	25.9%	7
Unsure	22.2%	6
If "yes", please elaborate below:		14
<i>answered question</i>		27

Question 18

How would you describe your organizations relationship with your municipal government?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Cooperative/Supportive	48.0%	12
Neutral	52.0%	13
Friction/Unsupportive	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		25

Question 19

What obstacles do you feel are in place within your organization that inhibit progress towards your goals? (please check all that apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Lack of financial capacity to complete work efficiently	75.0%	18
Lack of staff capacity	58.3%	14
Lack of coordination/communication among departments	4.2%	1
Lack of partnership opportunities	8.3%	2
Lack of leadership	8.3%	2
Lack of knowledge about what resources are available	12.5%	3
Lack of advanced technology	33.3%	8
Lack of planning or long term vision	12.5%	3
Other (please specify)		1
<i>answered question</i>		24

Question 20

Do you feel that the goals of your organization adequately address the needs of the communities it is servicing?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	91.7%	22
No	4.2%	1
Unsure	4.2%	1
If no, please elaborate below:		3
<i>answered question</i>		24

Question 21

What services do you feel would make your organization stronger? (please check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Building internal capacity (employee training, team building, leadership training, etc)	66.7%	14
Enhancing skills (planning education, technological training, grant writing training, etc)	47.6%	10
Bulding Partnerships	57.1%	12
Advancing professional planning and physical design work (Plan development)	28.6%	6
Assessing community needs	23.8%	5
Coordinating community outreach	61.9%	13
Other (please specify)		2

Question 22

Would your organization be interested in receiving professional planning support from the American Planning Association in addressing any of the concerns you highlighted in this survey?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	30.4%	7
No	13.0%	3
Maybe	56.5%	13
<i>answered question</i>		23