

Multnomah County Citizen Survey

Survey Results

Introduction

Evaluating the performance of government can be a very difficult and complex task. Government programs do not usually sell a product that can be measured against design or quality specifications. Further, there is no "bottom line" where profits can be determined and compared.

Nevertheless, in an age of increasing scrutiny over public expenditures and programs, it is critically important to understand how well our governments are serving citizens. Surveys are one way of gathering relevant information on citizen perceptions of government. Once a baseline has been established, changes over time can provide valuable information to decision-makers. Citizen surveys can help answer questions about program effectiveness, quality, and service level.

The results of citizen surveys must be interpreted cautiously. Questions that are not specific to the services delivered may produce responses based on other factors or may be too broad to attribute to a particular program or intervention. For example, a general question about sense of safety may prompt responses based on individual perceptions about city Police, the Sheriff's Department, the justice system, prisons, street lighting, or other factors. In this case, the general sense of safety cannot be directly tied to a particular program, department, or even to a single government entity.

In 1994, Multnomah County joined the City of Portland in their annual survey of citizen satisfaction with government services. This year, the partnership was extended to include the City of Gresham. Most County programs were not included in the survey because they target specific populations, such as low-income health services, homeless youth, and incarcerated criminals. A random sample of the general population would not include enough respondents who had used such services. Those County programs that were selected for specific survey questions, Libraries and Animal Control, are services accessible to all County residents, and were thus most amenable to a general survey.

Over the past five years, we have worked with program personnel to identify key results and other performance information that could be obtained in a survey of the County's general populations. Some questions have changed or dropped and new ones added. The original scope of the County citizen survey has narrowed considerably since 1994. Elections and Assessment & Taxation, which had survey questions in the past, were not represented this year because of changes in law that substantially decreased the control these agencies have over the design and

administration of services (Vote-by-Mail, and Measure 47). Other questions asked by Portland regarding city services and overall issues of livability and satisfaction were answered by all County residents surveyed. Responses to these questions are reported in the appendix. The main narrative portion of this report contains information relevant to specific County services, general livability, sense of safety, and satisfaction with government.

Approximately 14,200 randomly selected households in Multnomah County received a survey in September. About 5600 were returned for a response rate of 40%. The surveys were coded to distinguish responses by eleven geographic areas, but the respondents remained anonymous. For the purposes of this report, responses are reported for the cities of Portland and Gresham and collectively for the remainder of the County, including unincorporated areas and the small cities within the Multnomah County boundary.

General Government

Survey respondents were asked to rate how well they think government is doing at providing local services. Overall, public perceptions about government services have remained high, with more than 50% of respondents rating government services very good or good each year. The percentage of respondents rating government performance bad or very bad has remained under 10% since 1995. Portland residents returned a higher rating than did residents of Gresham and small cities/unincorporated areas.

How good a job do you think local government is doing at providing services?

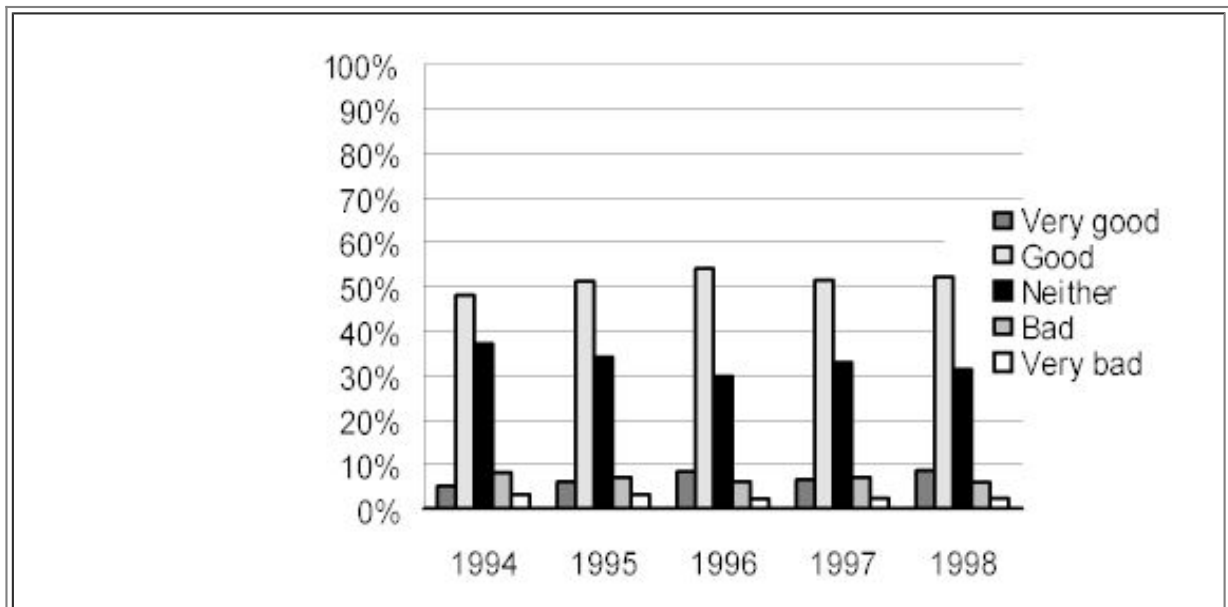
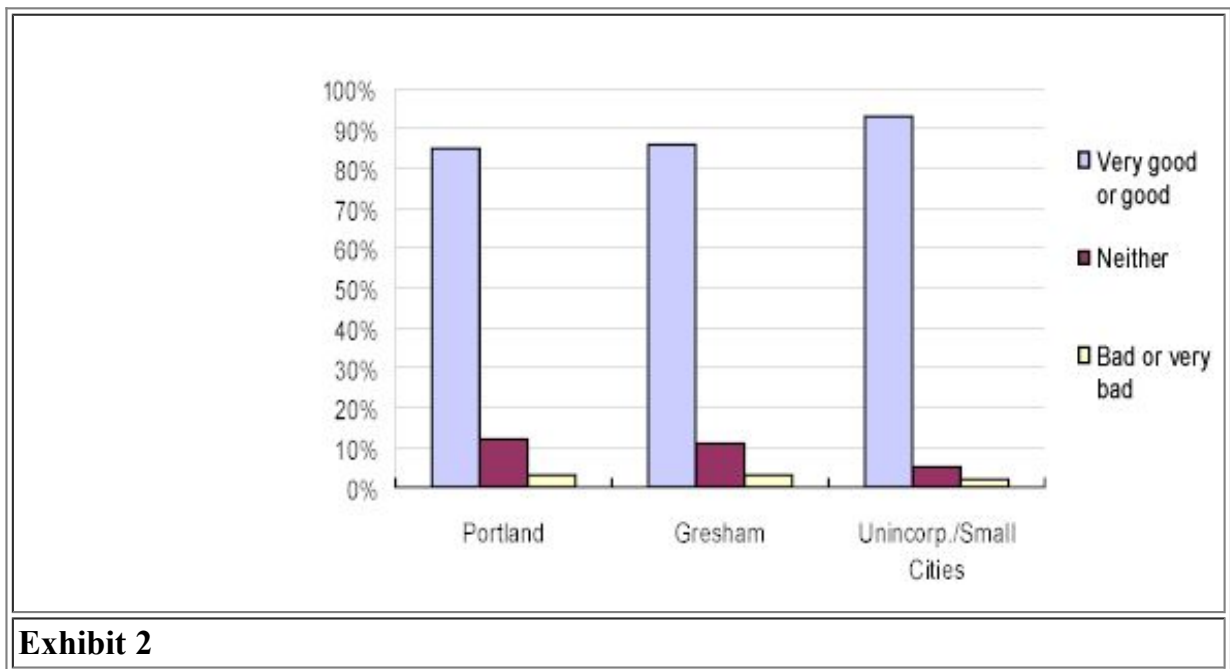


Exhibit 1

Livability

The survey also asked residents to rate the livability of their neighborhoods. Eighty-five percent of respondents rated their neighborhood livability very good or good. Those from unincorporated portions of the county or small cities had a 93% very good or good rate. For the first year, respondents were asked to rate the livability of the city as a whole (a specific city was not named). Seventy-eight percent rated city livability good or very good.

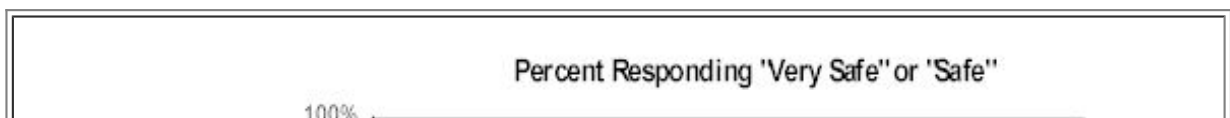
How do you rate the livability of your neighborhood?



Safety

Citizens surveyed generally reported a greater sense of safety now than they did four years ago. Overall, the percent of very safe or safe responses increased about 5 percentage points for daytime safety and 10 percentage points for nighttime safety.

How safe would you feel walking alone during the day in your neighborhood?



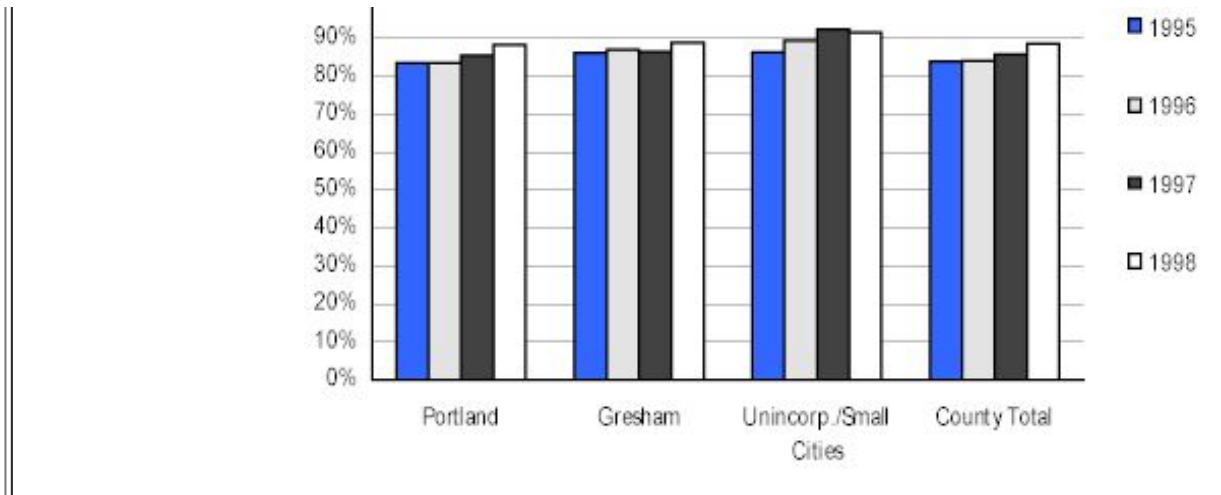


Exhibit 3

How safe would you feel walking alone at night in you neighborhood?

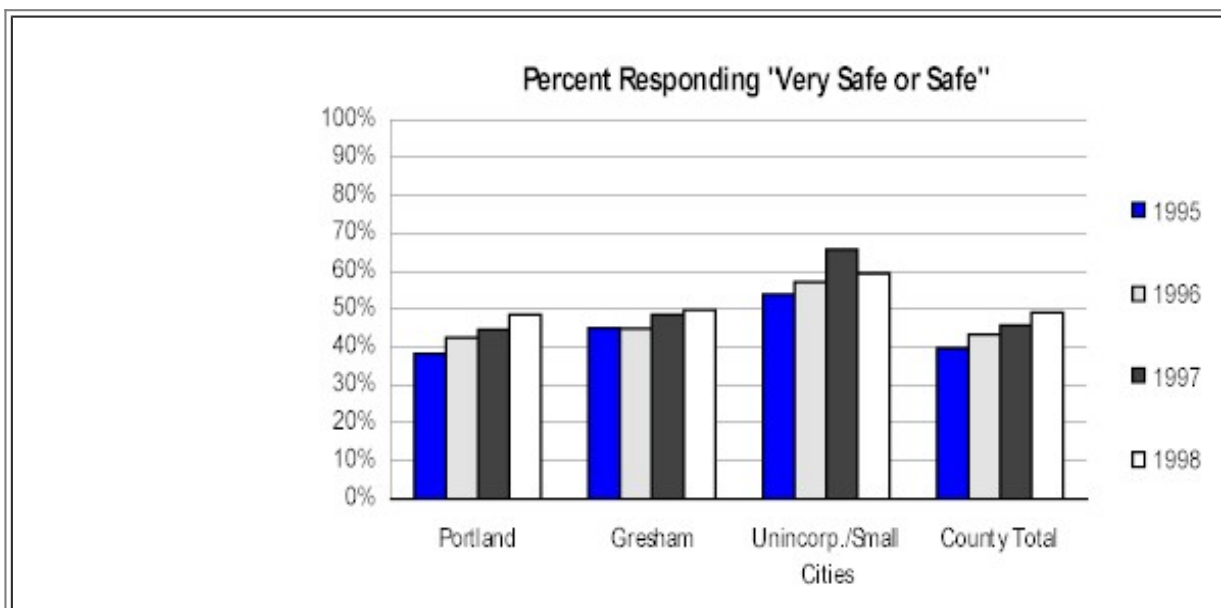


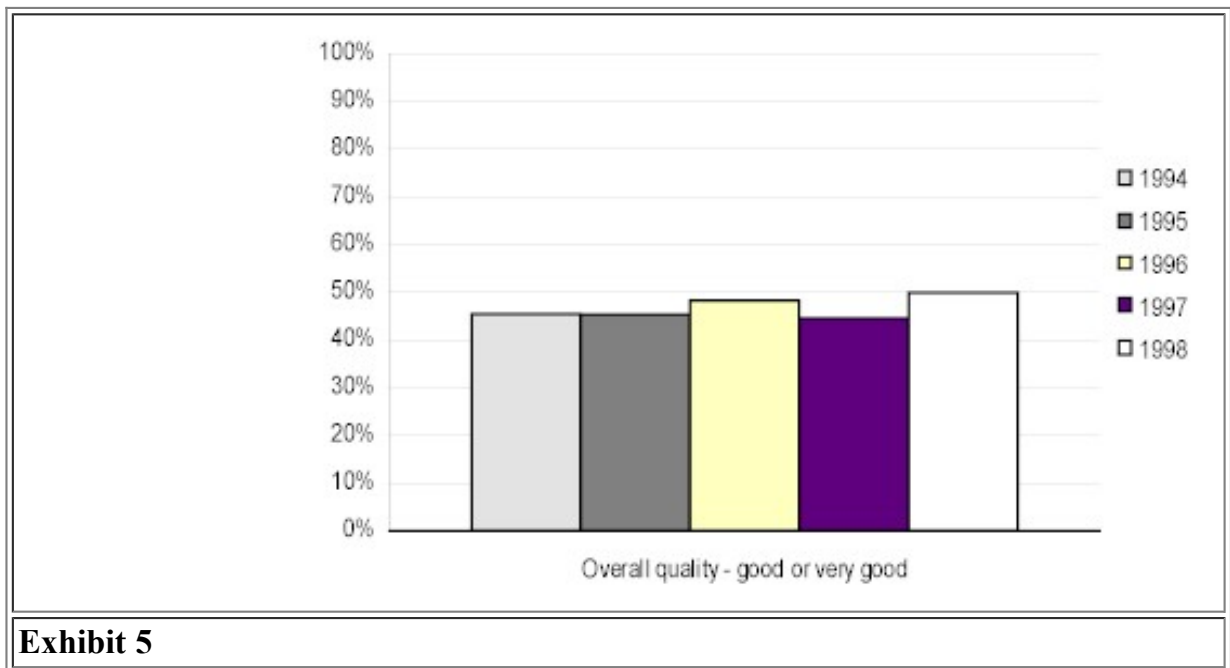
Exhibit 4

Animal Control

The Animal Control program enforces the County's animal ownership ordinances, which protect people and animals; operates an animal shelter for lost, stray or unwanted animals; administers a pet license identification system; and provides information, education and services related to responsible animal ownership. Overall

quality of the Animal Control program was perceived as higher than previous years, with 50% of those surveyed rating the program a very good or good. In 1998, 35% of respondents experienced a problem related to animals in their neighborhood. Of those who experienced a problem, 30% reported it to Animal Control and then rated the service received on this survey. Satisfaction with steps taken by Animal Control to solve a problem has declined since 1995. While valuable information, this represents a substantially smaller sample size for questions on Animal Control's performance than the general survey sample and results in a larger sampling error. Because the margin of error for this question is larger (+ or - 4 percentage points), results should be interpreted with caution. See the appendix for details about the number of respondents for each question. Also, we were unable to determine whether those who were unsatisfied with Animal Control were more likely to respond to this question. Management at Animal Control posits that lower reported satisfaction with services can be attributed to declines in the level of service they are able to provide. Budget constraints, along with increasing demands for service as the population of the County grows, have resulted in fewer hours of operation for many Animal Control services which may contribute to lower ratings.

Ratings for Animal Control Overall Quality



Ratings for Animal Control Satisfaction with Steps Taken



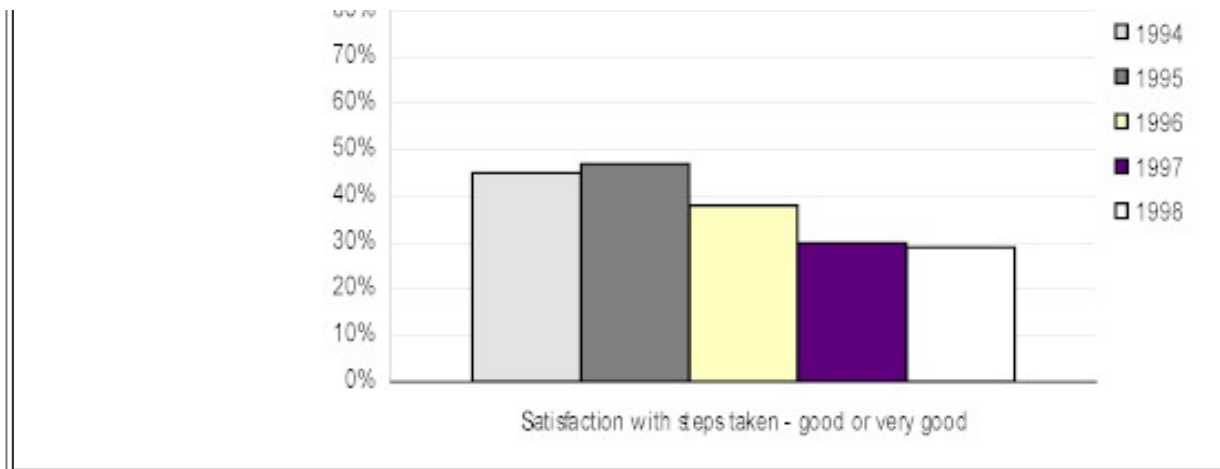
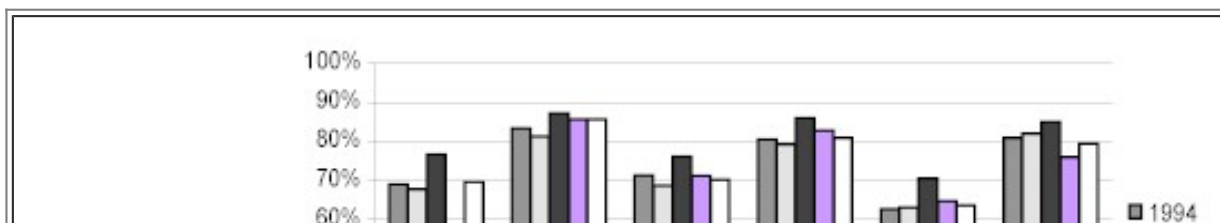


Exhibit 6

Library

The Multnomah County Library became a tax-supported free public library, open to all residents in the County, in 1903. The library lends books and other library materials at the Central Library, fourteen branch libraries, and through outreach services. Library staff also assist patrons in finding books and information; select, acquire, organize and process books and materials; provide age appropriate materials for children and young adults; and provide materials and services to those County residents not able to come to County libraries or use conventional materials. Library service levels have fluctuated in recent years. In 1996, voters approved a three-year operating levy for libraries, but the statewide passage of Measure 47 resulted in substantial reductions in the funds available. The libraries significantly reduced their hours of operation in 1997. The level of satisfaction decreased for all areas of library service in 1997, but respondents were particularly dissatisfied with the reduction in library hours. In November 1997, voters approved a new serial level to restore library hours to their pre-1997 levels and to expand library services to four new locations during the 1998-99 fiscal year. Nearly all Library branches will be renovated over the next five years, which could affect citizen satisfaction particularly at the neighborhood level.

Percent rating good or very good 1994-1998



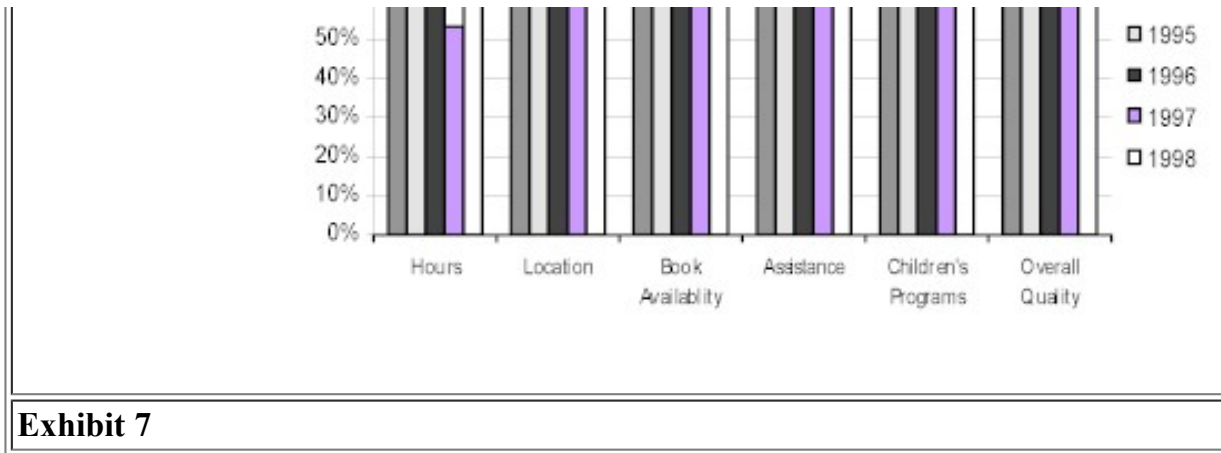


Exhibit 7

Patron satisfaction with library hours showed a marked gain for 1998, increasing from 53% to 70%. Overall satisfaction with library quality also grew, from 76% in 1997 to 79% in 1998. Other measures of satisfaction remained virtually unchanged or declined slightly, still remained above 60% on all measures.

Generally, Portland residents were more satisfied with library services and overall quality in 1998 than residents of Gresham or residents of the smaller cities and unincorporated areas. This changes a two-year trend of Gresham having higher satisfaction ratings. However, Library management notes that the lower satisfaction ratings in Gresham could be attributable to the closure of the Gresham branch for renovation at the time this survey was administered.

Percent rating good or very good by area

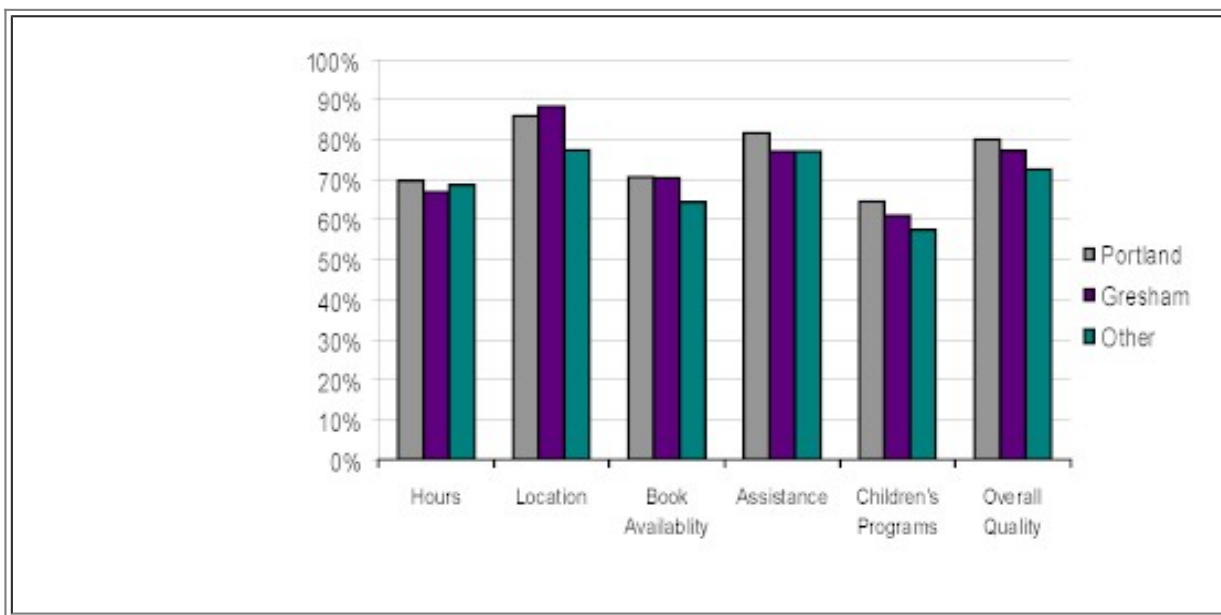


Exhibit 8

While residents are satisfied with library quality and the services provided, many visit only infrequently. In 1998, 55% reported that they had not visited the Central Library in the past year and 45% had not visited their neighborhood branch, an increase of 6 percentage points. About 7% of residents frequently visited the Central or Trans-Central Library (12 or more times) and 14% frequently visited their neighborhood branch.

Frequency of visits to Central Library 1994-1998

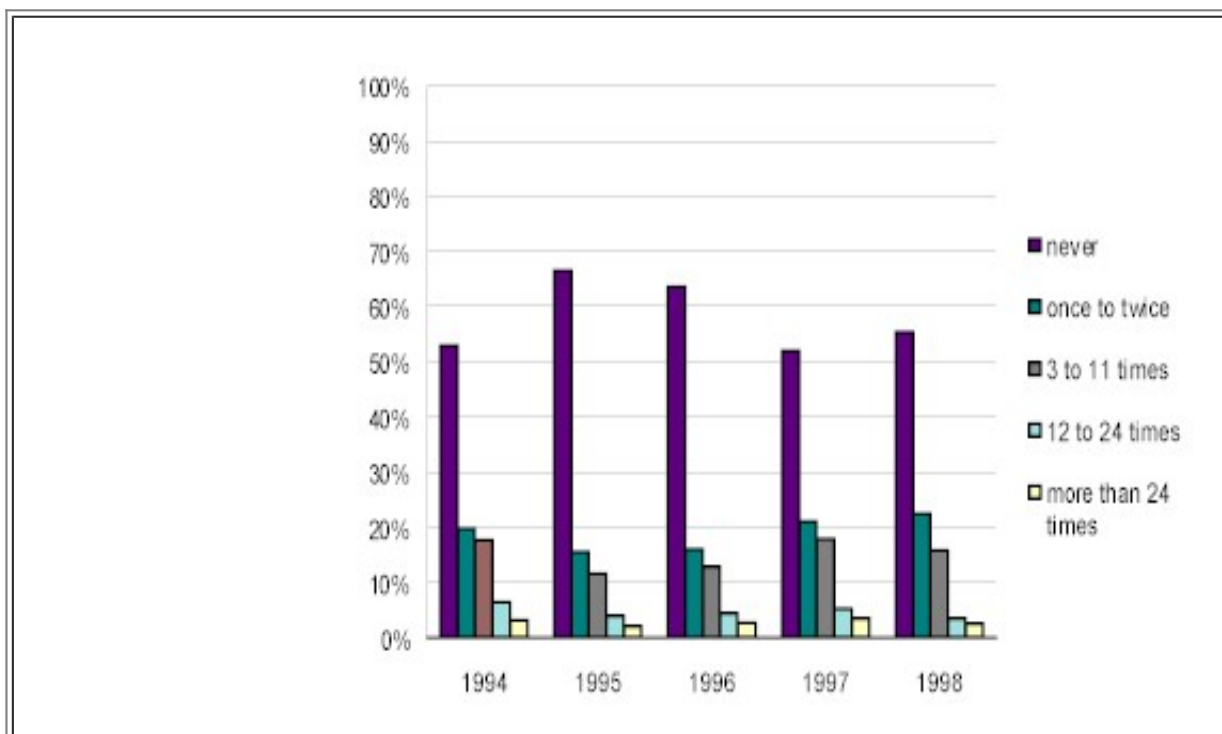
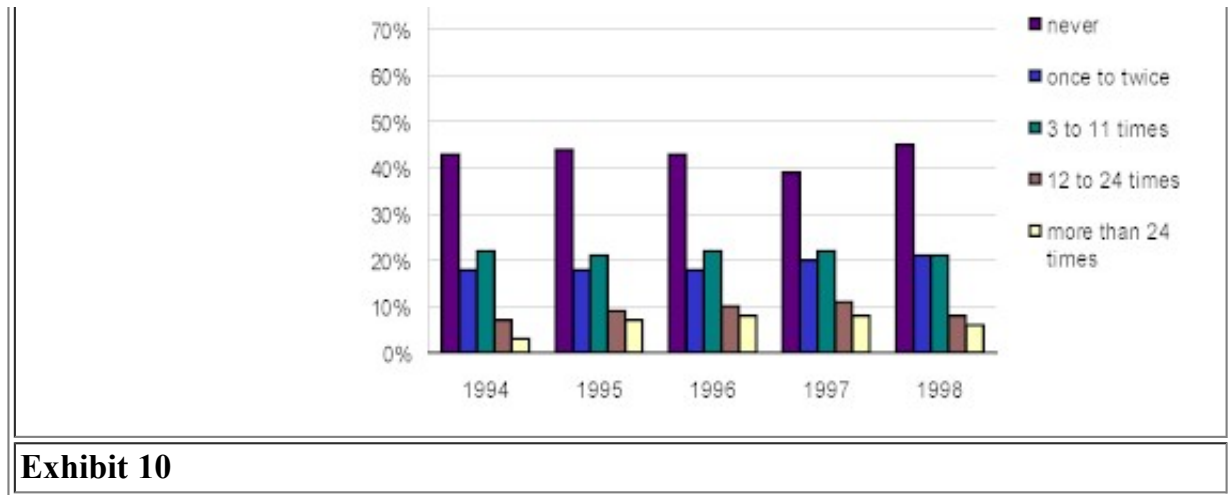


Exhibit 9

Frequency of visits to Branch Library 1994-1998





In 1995 and 1996, the percentage of households visiting the Central Library in its transitional quarters, Trans-Central Library, was significantly lower than in 1994. By 1997, the frequency of visits to the Central or Trans-Central Library had returned to 1994 levels, but decreased again in 1998. The percentage of households visiting neighborhood libraries remained about the same from 1994 to 1996, increased in 1997, then declined again in 1998. Thirty-one percent of residents contacted the library by phone between 1 and 11 times over the course of the year, and 4% contacted the library 12 or more times. Computer contact with the library stayed the same between 1997 and 1998 at 13%, but increased steadily from 6% of households in 1994 to 13% in 1997.

Appendix

Methodology In September 1998, the citizen survey was mailed to approximately 14,200 randomly selected addresses from seven Portland neighborhood areas, three Gresham neighborhoods and the remaining areas of the County. The survey included a letter from the City of Portland Auditor, the Multnomah County Auditor, and the Mayor of the City of Gresham explaining the purpose of the survey and how to complete it. A reminder card was mailed four weeks later. We asked respondents to remove the address page of the survey so that returned surveys would be anonymous. However, the survey form included information to identify the respondent's area of residence.

Approximately 5,600 County households returned surveys, for a response rate of 40%. This sample size represents a sampling error (at 95% confidence level) of no more than +1.5% for Countywide and Portland results. For Gresham and the rest of the County separately, the sampling error is generally less than +5%.

We compared demographic information of respondents to census data to see if our sample was representative of the County population. A comparison showed the

respondents were somewhat more educated and older than the entire population, and that minorities were under-represented. However, analysis in prior years showed that adjustments to give more weight to the less educated and younger respondents would make very little, if any, difference in the results. We could not determine the impact of the low minority response on our results.

The number of surveys in our sample was not always proportional to the number of households in the areas sampled, especially for the areas outside Portland. We weighted the results of the Countywide questions to adjust for the differences, which had a very minimal effect on overall results.

The 1998 survey questions and results from respondents follow. A percentage is given for the responses to each question for the County as a whole and separately for Portland, Gresham and the remainder of the County. In addition, County total percentages from the last three years are included. "Don't know" and blank responses are not included in the percentages. Due to rounding, percentages may not add to 100%. The weighted number of respondents is provided for those County-specific questions and sub-questions that had a substantially lower response rate.