North Dakota Strategic Planning Database Website: 2011 Survey of Stakeholders

May 2011

PREFACE

This report entitled *North Dakota Strategic Planning Database Website: 2011 Survey of Stakeholders*, presents findings of a survey of key stakeholders across the state regarding the value of the pilot strategic planning database that was created with the hope of enhancing the viability of communities through cooperative ventures that nurture and promote resource sharing. Data were collected between March 16, 2011 and April 1, 2011.

The North Dakota Strategic Planning Project was initiated by the North Dakota Department of Commerce in 2006. The study was conducted by the North Dakota State Data Center (NDSDC) at North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota. This report is available on the NDSDC website: www.ndsu.edu/sdc/publications/research.htm.

Acknowledgments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The North Dakota Strategic Planning Project was initiated by the North Dakota Department of Commerce in 2006. The focus of this survey was to ask key stakeholders across the state about the value of the pilot strategic planning database that was created with the hope of enhancing the viability of communities through cooperative ventures that nurture and promote resource sharing. The survey was conducted by the North Dakota State Data Center and addresses perception of need for a database, the ability of the database to increase collaboration, the usability of the database, willingness to participate in the future, and demographic characteristics. A total of 365 surveys were emailed, and the data collection occurred between March 16, 2011 and April 1, 2011. There were 70 responses for a response rate of 19 percent.

Summary of Survey Results

Need for a Database

On average, respondents indicated that there is a *need* for a strategic planning database for communities and that an online approach to providing an interactive strategic planning database for these communities is *appropriate*.

On average, respondents indicated that community planners or decision makers will be *somewhat likely to use* an interactive planning database.

Ability of the Database to Increase Collaboration

On average, respondents indicated it is likely that a strategic planning database will increase information sharing and collaboration among communities already working together. In addition, respondents overall said that it is *somewhat likely* that a strategic planning database will lead to information sharing and collaboration among communities in general.

Usability of the Database

On average, respondents indicated that the format of the pilot version of the database is *somewhat useful*. Overall, respondents said that the main topics of community development, economic development, and emergency management are *useful* and that the subthemes under each main topic are *useful* to community planners. A number of respondents offered their comments regarding the usability of the database. A couple of the comments implied that the database should be as up-to-date as possible in order to be beneficial and that the database should be more interactive to be more useful to the communities.

Willingness to Participate in the Future

On average, respondents indicated that their communities would be *comfortable* allowing a community representative to add their information to an interactive database. However, comments from respondents included that communities may not want their community's data "out there" and concerns that other communities would not be going through an important planning process if they select items from other communities' plans.

On average, respondents indicated that it is *somewhat likely* that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database, thereby allowing the database to be self-sustaining.

Ideas for Improving the Database

Respondents shared comments and ideas about how to make the database comprehensive and how to keep it up-to-date. Several people suggested that the communities should have a representative whose job it is to update the database and that reminders should be sent out to the community representatives in charge of the updates. A number of comments focused on the difficulty of keeping the database up-to-date, because staff sizes and current workloads would not allow for this extra responsibility.

Respondents were also asked for their suggestions on how to improve or modify the database. Suggestions ranged from alphabetizing the list of communities included to conducting focus groups to clarify what would promote the participation in the maintenance and utilization of the database.

There is support overall for the website. However, the people most likely to leave comments appear to be those with strong concerns. Concerns include the scope and relevance of the information contained in the database and how to keep it comprehensive and up-to-date. There are also several comments regarding improvements that could be made to future versions of the website:

- o *"Need to identify key people who are engaged with this and ask them to continue updates. One or two persons should be responsible for each community."*

- o *"You will need to send out reminders by mail or email, at least annually, to remind community representatives to update their information."*

- o *"Alphabetize the community/area list."*

- o *"Identify specific needs of small communities and assess the ability to create a database that will effectively address such needs."*

- o *"I like the subject headings, but the database is difficult to navigate. Needs to be something that could be easily searched for specific topics."*

- o *"It would be nice to list how to contact people involved in whatever project that someone is interested [in] to get help and more information on what the projects are about."*

Demographic Characteristics

The majority of respondents (60 percent) said that their position/organization is *local government* (e.g., auditor, mayor, city council, or county commission).

Nearly two-thirds of respondents said that they represent or work for communities with *population sizes that are 500 people or larger*.

INTRODUCTION

Study Objectives

The North Dakota Strategic Planning Project was initiated by the North Dakota Department of Commerce in 2006. The focus of this survey is to ask key stakeholders across the state about the value of the pilot strategic planning database that was created with the hope of enhancing the viability of communities through cooperative ventures that nurture and promote resource sharing. The survey addresses perception of need for a database, the ability of the database to increase collaboration, the usability of the database, willingness to participate in the future, and demographic characteristics.

The study was conducted by the North Dakota State Data Center (NDSDC). This report as well as past publications relating to the Strategic Planning Project are available on the NDSDC website: www.ndsu.edu/sdc/publications/research.htm.

Methodology

The survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey. The list of key stakeholders was generated from email addresses included in a list of Chamber of Commerce, Local Planning, and Development offices found on the Marketplace of Ideas website (http://www.marketplaceofideas.org/) in March 2011. The list of email addresses focused on contacting people who would be most likely to be involved with developing and using strategic plans for communities of all sizes across the state, including city and county auditors, job development authority members, chamber of commerce members, and economic and community developers. A letter of invitation to participate in the survey was emailed to each person on the list. The letter included a temporary link to the pilot version of the Strategic Planning Database which they were asked to briefly review, along with the link to complete the survey. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. From the original list of 365 email addresses (which excludes 21 bad email addresses), there were 70 responses for a response rate of 19 percent. Data collection began March 16, 2011. Reminder emails were sent March 24 and March 30, with data collection ending April 1, 2011.

The NDSDC obtained approval from and followed the guidelines of the North Dakota State University's Human Research Protection Program for the study.

Presentation of Results

The survey results are presented in narrative and graphic form, with accompanying appendix tables, which include open-ended responses where applicable. A letter of invitation to participate in the survey that was emailed to stakeholders and the survey instrument are also provided as appendices.

Overview of the Strategic Planning Database and Website

The pilot strategic planning database was created with the hope of enhancing the viability of communities through cooperative ventures that nurture and promote resource sharing. The searchable database encompasses 78 community strategic plans that were forwarded to the North Dakota Department of Commerce in Spring 2006. These 78 plans represent 128 participating geographies (e.g., places, counties, collective entities).

Four main topics are represented in the database: community development, economic development, emergency management, and natural resources. Within each major theme, subtopics were also created in order to provide more detail. The theme of community development includes 12 subtopics: housing,

recreation, infrastructure, education, health, transportation, technology, senior services, promoting a sense of community, leadership, city promotion, and child care. Economic development includes seven subtopics: business, tourism, jobs, population, taxation, monetary concerns, and miscellaneous. Emergency Management includes five subtopics: fire, hazard mitigation, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and safety. Natural Resources includes four subtopics: water, beautification, land, and energy. The database also includes information outlined in the strategic plans such as who is involved in the strategic planning, funding sources, and methodology for collecting data from the community to assess important topics like needs and strengths.

More about the information included in the Strategic Planning Database is available in the report entitled *North Dakota Strategic Planning Profile – Findings from the North Strategic Planning Research Project* (October 2007) and can be accessed on the NDSDC website: http://www.ndsu.edu/sdc/publications/research.htm#SPprofile.

The results of a survey to gather information from communities with less than 2,500 people across North Dakota about priorities and planning activities regarding the four main strategic planning topics, as well as information about barriers, is available in a report entitled *North Dakota Strategic Planning Community Assessment: 2007 Survey Results – Findings from the North Dakota Strategic Planning Research Project* (October 2007) and can be accessed on the NDSDC website: http://www.ndsu.edu/sdc/publications/research.htm#SPassessment.

The pilot strategic planning database website was developed by the NDSDC. In the invitation to participate in the survey, we first asked the respondents to visit a temporary link to the website where they could become familiar with the website. Since the database is not public, screenshots of the website respondents were asked to review can be seen in the Appendices.

SURVEY RESULTS

Need for a Database

- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all needed" and 5 being "very needed," respondents were asked to rate the level of need among communities for a strategic planning database (Figure 1, Appendix Table 1).**

    - On average, respondents indicated that there is a need among communities for a strategic planning database (mean=3.71); 25.8 percent said a strategic planning database is "very needed."

Figure 1. Level of need among communities for a strategic planning database
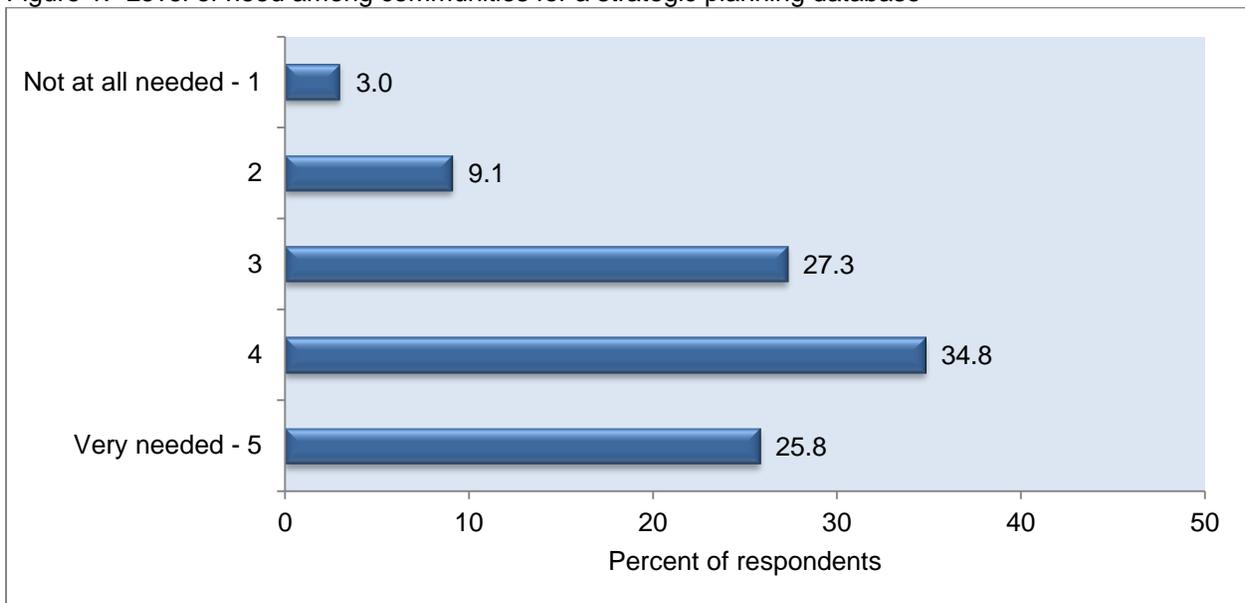
N=66; Mean=3.71

- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all likely to use" and 5 being "very likely to use," respondents were asked to rate the likelihood that community planners or decision makers will use an interactive planning database similar to the pilot version *(Figure 2, Appendix Table 2).***

  - On average, respondents indicated that community planners or decision makers will be somewhat likely to use an interactive planning database similar to the pilot version (mean=3.09).

  - Approximately one-third of respondents thought that community planners or decision makers will likely use an interactive planning database (36.2 percent); 10.1 percent said that community planners or decision makers will be "very likely to use" an interactive planning database.

Figure 2. Likelihood that community planners or decision makers will use an interactive planning database similar to the pilot version
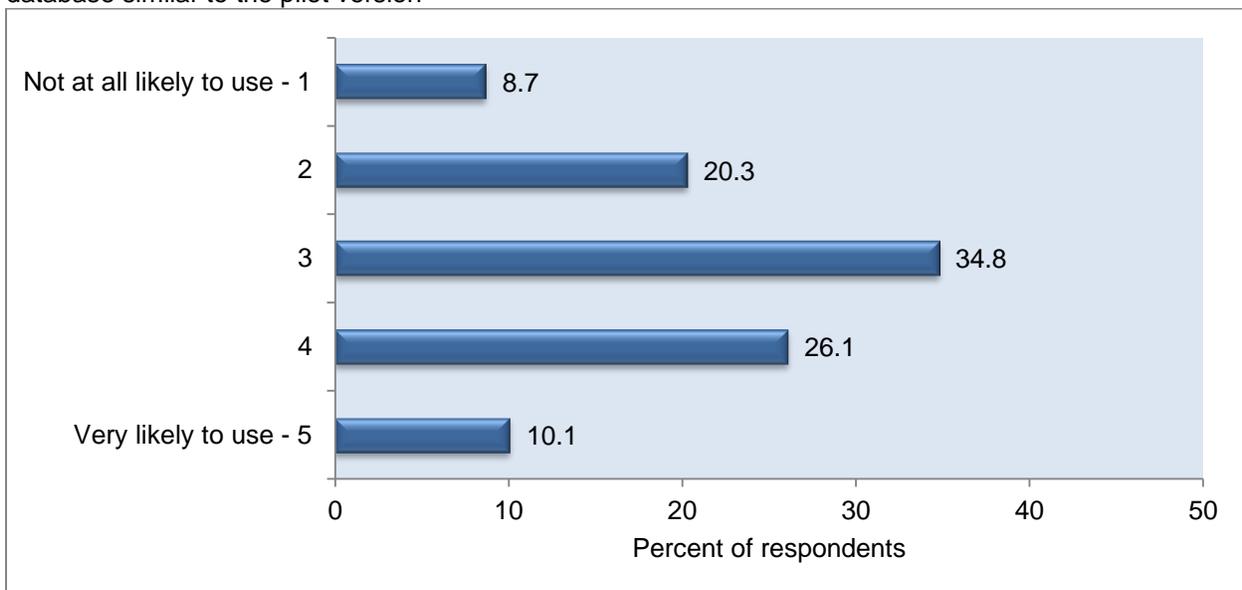
N=69; Mean=3.09

- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all appropriate" and 5 being "very appropriate," respondents were asked how appropriate an online approach to providing an interactive strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, is for smaller communities *(Figure 3, Appendix Table 3)*.**

  - On average, respondents said that an online approach to providing an interactive strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, for smaller communities is appropriate (mean=3.58); 26.1 percent said an online approach to providing an interactive strategic planning database for smaller communities is "very appropriate."

Figure 3. Appropriateness of an online approach to providing an interactive strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, for smaller communities
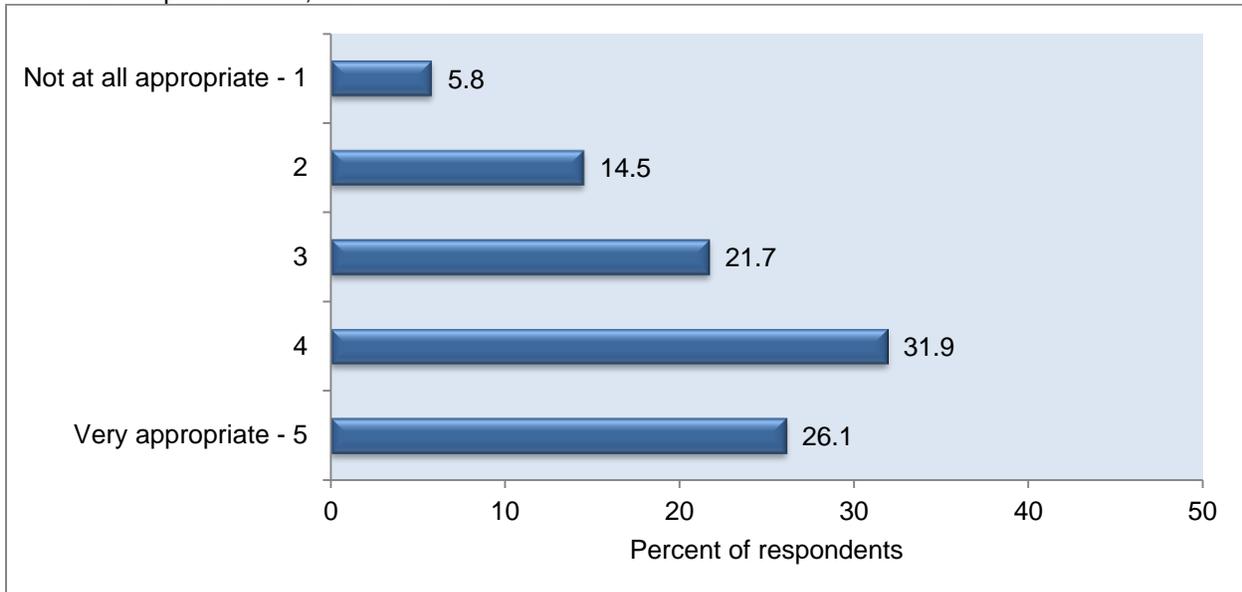
N=69; Mean=3.58

Ability of the Database to Increase Collaboration

- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all likely" and 5 being "very likely," respondents were asked to rate the likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, will LEAD TO information sharing and collaboration among communities and INCREASE information sharing and collaboration among communities already working together *(Figure 4, Appendix Tables 4 and 5)*.**

    o On average, respondents indicated it is somewhat likely that a strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, will LEAD TO information sharing and collaboration among communities (mean=3.43); 16.2 percent said it is "very likely" that a strategic planning database will LEAD TO information sharing and collaboration among communities.

    o On average, respondents indicated it is likely that a strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, will INCREASE information sharing and collaboration among communities already working together (mean=3.52); 24.2 percent said it is "very likely" that a strategic planning database will INCREASE information sharing and collaboration among communities already working together.

Figure 4. Likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, will lead to and increase information sharing and collaboration
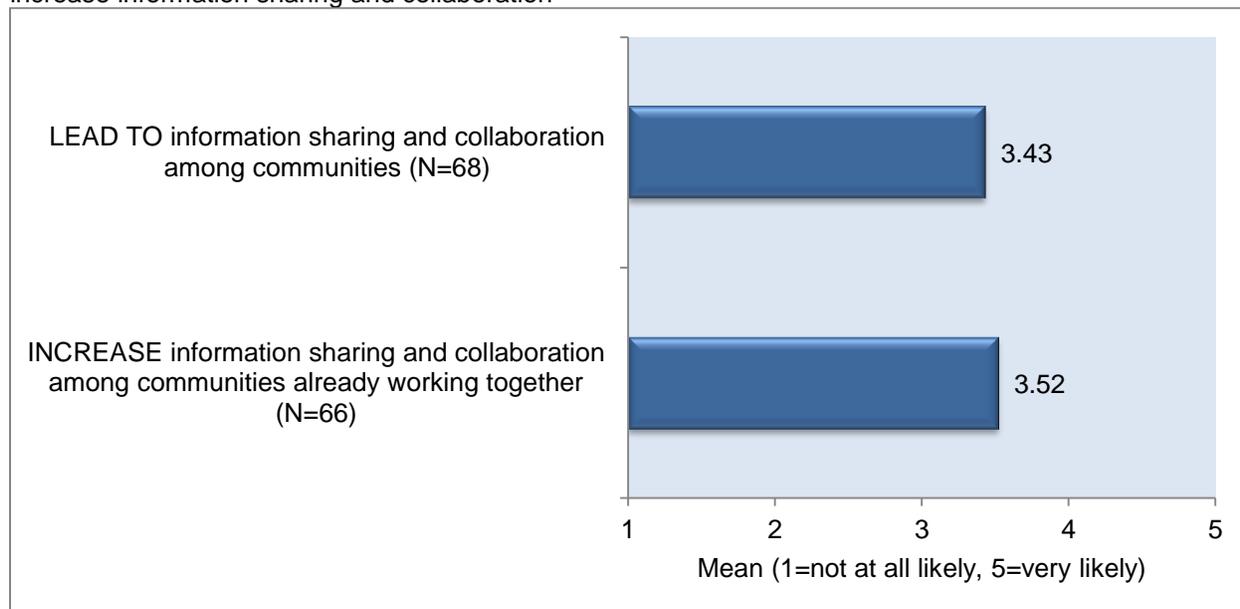
Usability of the Database

- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all useful" and 5 being "very useful," respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of the four main topics (community development, economic development, emergency management, and natural resources) addressed in the pilot version of the strategic planning database for community planners *(Figure 5, Appendix Table 6)*.**

  o On average, respondents said that the main topics of community development, economic development, and emergency management are useful. On average, economic development and community development are the most useful topics in the database for community planners (mean=3.85 and mean=3.84, respectively), followed by emergency management (mean=3.56).

  o On average, respondents indicated that the main topic of natural resources is less useful than the other three topics, but still somewhat useful (mean=3.31).

Figure 5. Usefulness of the four main topics (community development, economic development, emergency management, and natural resources) addressed in the pilot version of the strategic planning database for community planners
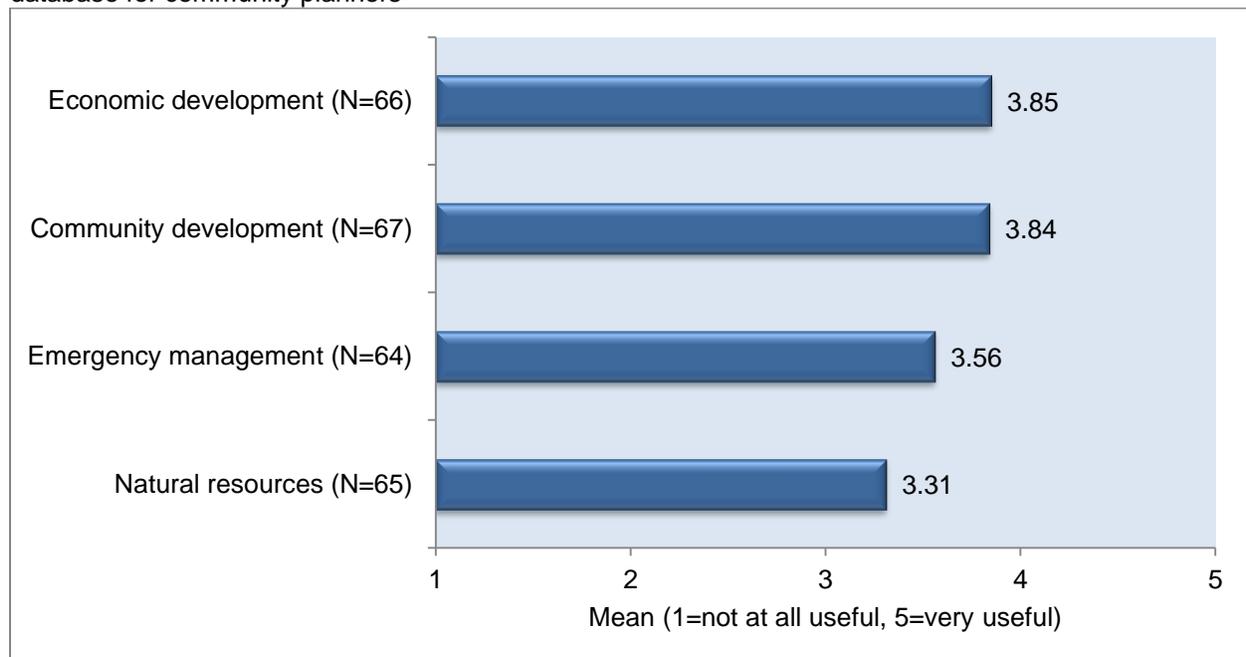
- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all useful" and 5 being "very useful," respondents were asked to rate how useful the subthemes under the main topics are to community planners as well as the format of the pilot version of the database *(Figure 6, Appendix Tables 7 and 8)*.**

    - On average, respondents indicated that subthemes under each main topic are useful to community planners (mean=3.49); 11.9 percent said the subthemes are "very useful" to community planners.

    - On average, respondents indicated that the format of the pilot version of the database is somewhat useful (mean=3.32); 9.1 percent said the format is "very useful."

Figure 6. Usefulness of various aspects of the pilot database
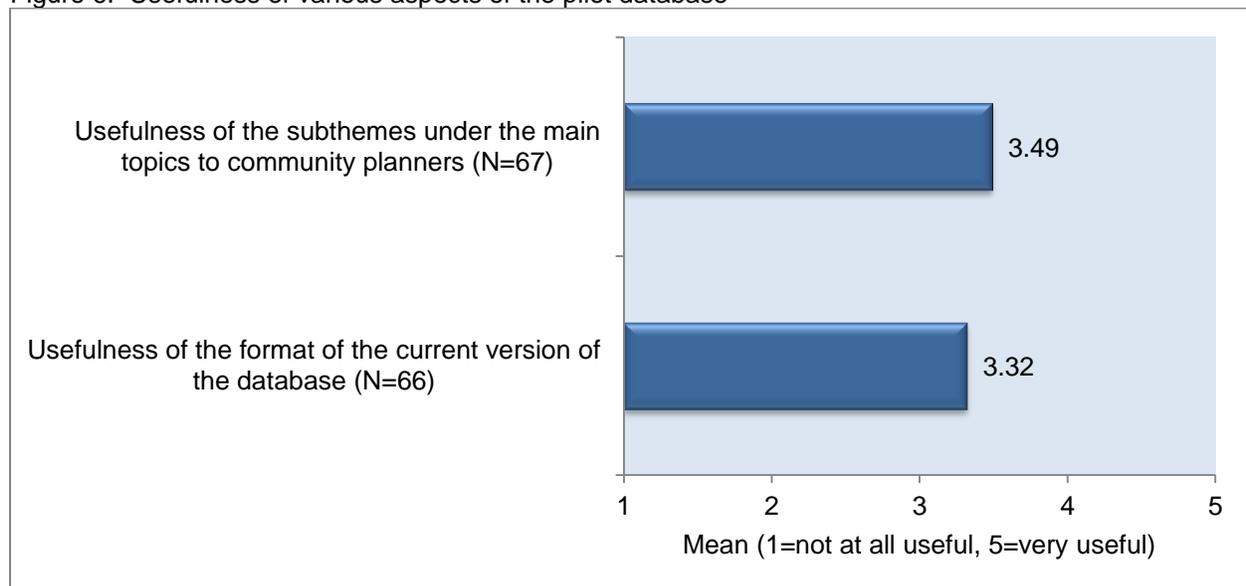
- **Respondents were asked to offer their comments regarding the usability of the database *(see Appendix Table 9 for a complete list of comments)*. Some comments are as follows:**

    - *"The idea is good, but information is not up-to-date. To be beneficial, I think the data must be as current as possible. But I like the idea behind it."*

    - *"What you have would have to be more interactive to be useful for communities."*

    - *"The most important field, the objectives, is lost in the current format. They are lumped together and, thus, difficult to read. I agree that some form of a database would be helpful to communities as they write their own strategic plans and work on specific projects, but the spreadsheet format of this database is not very user friendly. Also, I don't feel this would increase collaboration among communities already working together, as it is a way for community members to bypass their neighbors and get the information they seek without approaching individuals in the neighboring community. It could lead to collaboration if community organizers see that other communities are working on the same project and, as a result, make personal contact with individuals in the other communities. I believe in picking up the phone or sending an email; if this is truly designed as a tool for increasing collaboration, a field for a primary contact phone and/or email would be helpful and encouraged."*

Willingness to Participate in the Future

- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all comfortable" and 5 being "very comfortable," respondents were asked to rate the level of comfort communities would have when allowing a confirmed community representative to add their information to an interactive database *(Figure 7, Appendix Table 10)*.**

    o On average, respondents indicated that their communities would be comfortable allowing a community representative to add their information to an interactive database (mean=3.67); 21.9 percent said that their communities would be "very comfortable."

Figure 7. Communities' comfort level regarding adding their information to an interactive database
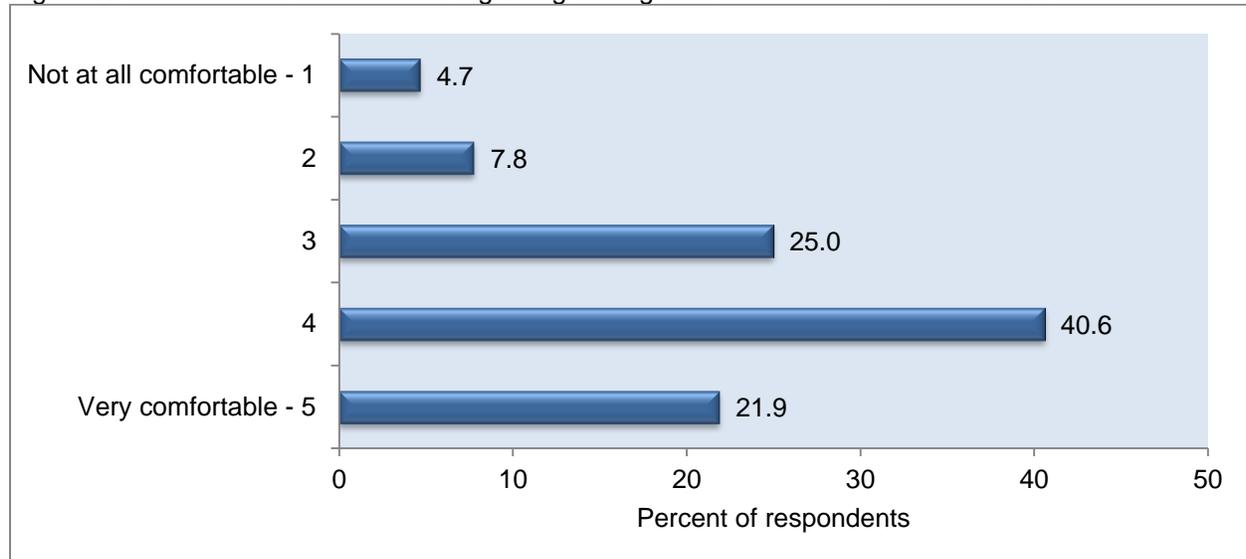
N=64; Mean=3.67

- **Respondents were asked why communities would or would not be comfortable having their information added to an interactive database *(see Appendix Table 11 for a complete list of reasons)*.**

    o Examples of reasons why communities would be comfortable:
        ▪ *"I can only speak for my own community, and we would not have an issue. We currently have our strategic plan on our website, available for anyone to access."*

        ▪ *"Sharing information and ideas is a good thing."*

    o Examples of reasons why communities would not be uncomfortable:
        ▪ *"I can only speak for my community and I know that they would not want the data out there."*

        ▪ *"If one community pays to have a plan done, and invests the time and energy into it, why would they want another community to just go grab information from their plan without going through a planning process of their own. You can't develop a plan and expect community members and leaders to be engaged in it without going through a process of their own. It's about the process just as much as it is about the resulting document."*

- **Using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all likely" and 5 being "very likely," respondents were asked to rate the likelihood that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database, thereby allowing the database to be self-sustaining** *(Figure 8, Appendix Table 12)*.

  - On average, respondents indicated that it is somewhat likely that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database, thereby allowing the database to be self-sustaining (mean=2.91). Nearly one-fourth of respondents said it is likely that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database (22.7 percent); 9.1 percent said it is "not at all likely" that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database.

Figure 8. Likelihood that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database

N=66; Mean=2.91

North Dakota Strategic Planning Database Website: 2011 Survey of Stakeholders
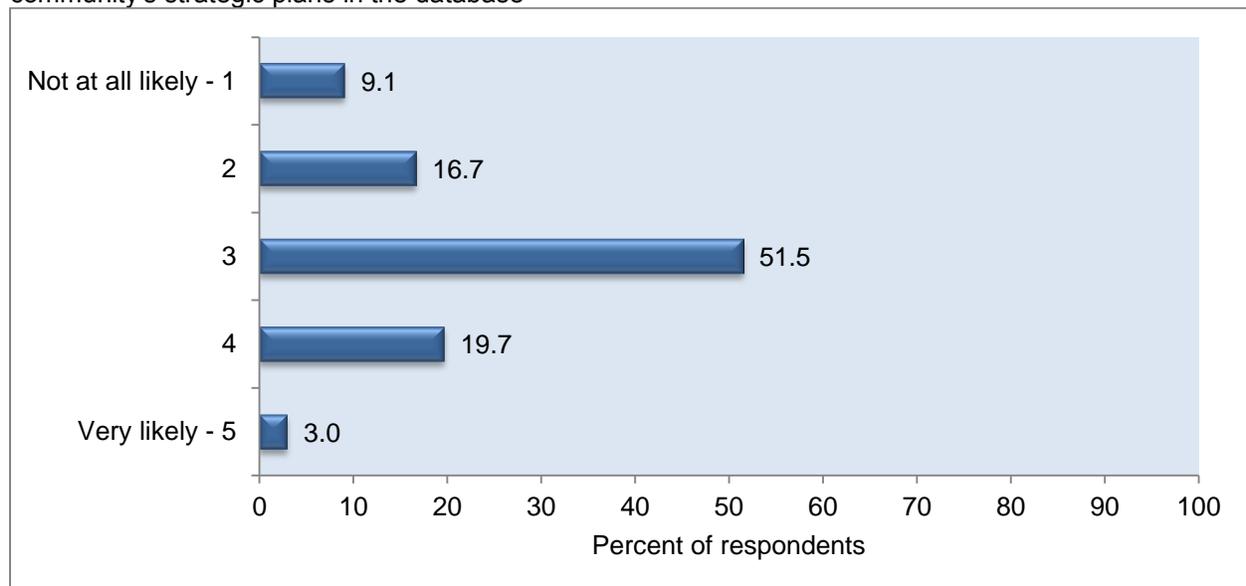
Ideas for Improving the Database

- **Respondents were asked for their comments and ideas about making the database comprehensive and keeping it up-to-date** *(see Appendix Table 13 for a complete list of comments).*

    o Examples of constructive comments and ideas about making the database comprehensive and keeping it up-to-date:
        - *"Need to identify key people who are engaged with this and ask them to continue updates. One or two persons should be responsible for each community."*

        - *"You will need to send out reminders by mail or email, at least annually, to remind community representatives to update their information."*

        - *"I would like to understand the ultimate [goal that] this could accomplish. Would this help create involvement in such programs?"*

    o Examples of concerns about making the database comprehensive and keeping it up-to-date
        - *"Communities will not take the time to enter their plan information into this database. They don't have time to do that. The format doesn't offer enough to make it worth keeping up."*

        - *"I think community planners/reps have better things to do than paperwork. Updating and managing data takes away from the time that could be better used to actually make things happen. Sorry, I don't have any particular ideas about keeping the database up-to-date."*

        - *"Some small communities don't have enough staff to follow-up with updates. They might want to, but don't have the time or staff. Could be a problem."*

- **Respondents were asked for their suggestions to improve or modify the database** *(see Appendix Table 14 for a complete list of suggestions).* **Some suggestions are as follows:**

    o Examples of suggestions to improve or modify the database:
        - *"Alphabetize the community/area list."*

        - *"Identify specific needs of small communities and assess the ability to create a database that will effectively address such needs. If specific needs by a significant subset of small communities can be met via a database, use a focus group to more clearly define the characteristics of the database that will promote participation in maintenance and utilization."*

        - *"Need specific information about what works, what the community did to solve a problem, etc. Include a space for them to offer potential solutions (i.e., we handled a housing problem and it's working)."*

- *"I like the subject headings, but the database is difficult to navigate. Needs to be something that could be easily searched for specific topics."*

- *"It would be nice to list how to contact people involved in whatever project that someone is interested [in] to get help and more information on what the projects are about."*

o Other suggestions for a website or database:
- *"It would be better to offer a website that has up-to-date links to each plan on the community's website. This format is just not very helpful. It's too limiting, and the scope of it is so narrow. It offers no information as to the context of the overall plan and the implementation measures that were identified. Some plans don't even have goals and objectives - granted, they should, but some don't, or the format can vary from one community to another. You risk making community planning into a cookie cutter exercise, almost suggesting that a community can go borrow or copy goals and objectives from another community without any information as to how effective that community's plan has been."*

Demographic Characteristics

- **Respondents were asked how they would characterize their position/organization as it relates to their community, development activities, and/or strategic planning *(Figure 9, Appendix Table 15).***

    o The majority of respondents said that their position/organization is local government (e.g., auditor, mayor, city council, or county commission) (60.0 percent). Equal proportions of respondents indicated that their position/organization is community development and economic development (31.4 percent each).

    o Fewer than 1 in 10 respondents said that their position/organization is related to state, regional, or federal entities (7.1 percent).

    o Other positions/organizations that respondents indicated include: banker, business leader, land use planning, and private consultant (11.4 percent). See Appendix Table 15 for a complete list of other positions/organizations.

Figure 9. Respondents' position/organization as it relates to their community, development activities, and/or strategic planning
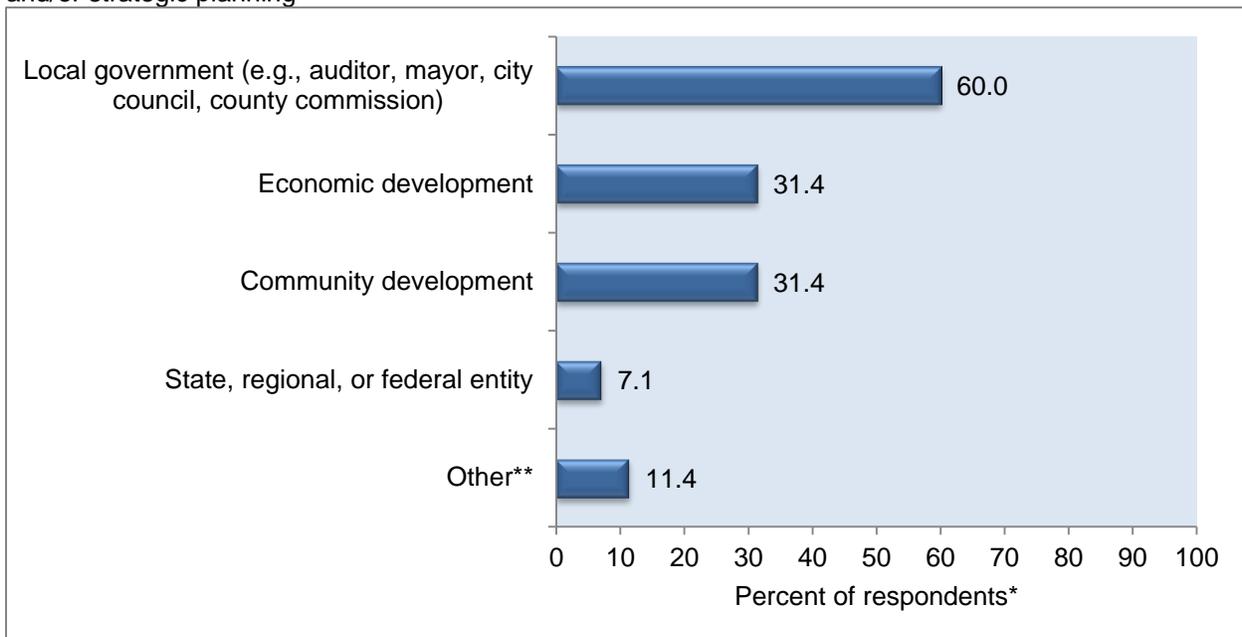
N=70
*Percentages do not equal 100.0 due to multiple responses.
**See Appendix Table 15 for a list of "other" positions/organizations.

- **Respondents were asked the population size of the community they represent or with which they primarily work ("community" may be a city, a county, or collection of geographies) *(Figure 10, Appendix Table 16)*.**

    o One-fourth of respondents indicated that the population size of communities they represent or with which they primarily work is less than 500 people (24.2 percent). Similar proportions of respondents said that they represent or work for population sizes of 500 to 2,499 people and 2,500 people or more (33.3 percent and 30.3 percent, respectively).

    o Respondents who indicated an "other" community size (12.1 percent) typically specified a much larger size than 2,500 people (e.g., 125,000) or indicated they work with a variety of communities. See Appendix Table 16 for a complete list of other population sizes.

Figure 10. Population size of the community that respondents represent or with which they primarily work ("community" may be a city, a county, or collection of geographies)
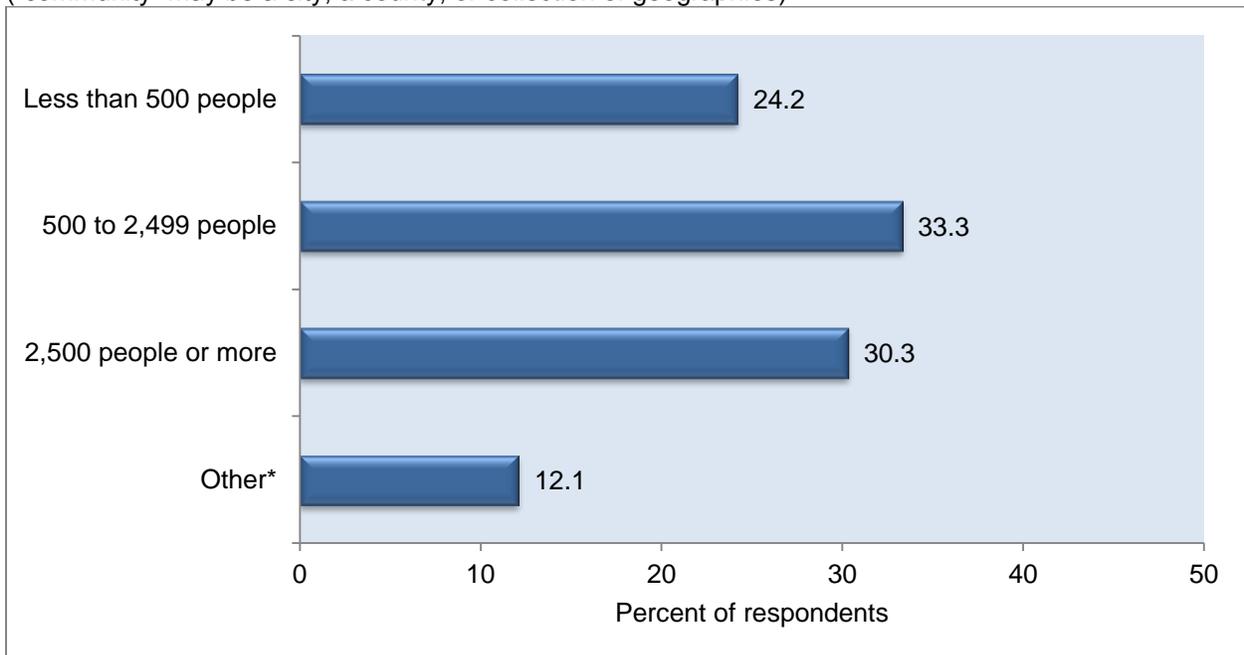
N=66
*See Appendix Table 16 for a list of "other" community population sizes that respondents represent or with which they primarily work.

North Dakota Strategic Planning Database Website: 2011 Survey of Stakeholders

APPENDICES

Website Screenshots

North Dakota Strategic Planning Database

HOME : VIEW DATA : HELP : CONTACT US

View Data

View data **specific to a county and/or places within that county** by clicking on the map below:
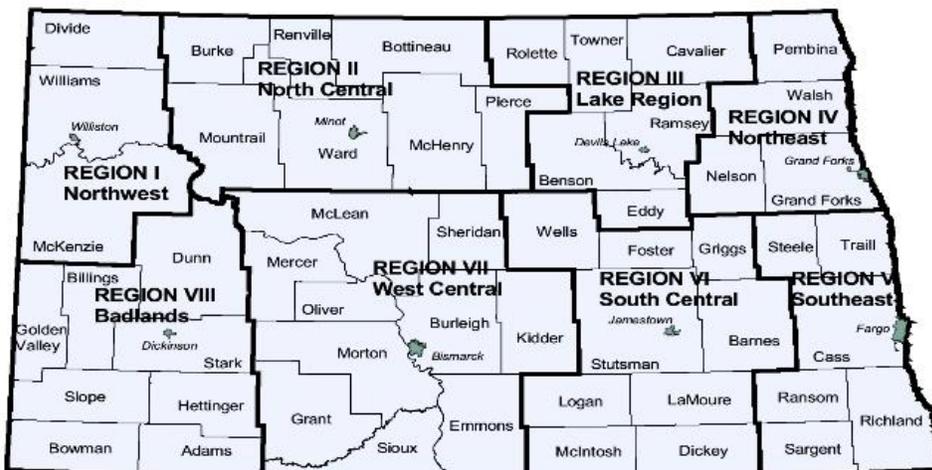
- OR -

View data **specific to a theme.**

- ○ Community Development
- ○ Economic Development
- ○ Emergency Management
- ○ Natural Resources

- OR -

View Plan Details

Check the checkbox below and click on the Get Plan Information button to view details for all the plans. (This will open in a new page.)

□ Get Plan Information

Get Plan Information

View data **specific to a theme.**

○ Community Development
◉ Economic Development

The following information is available about Economic Development. Choose the items you are interested in viewing.

Since we have more data than we can show on a page, you need to select a particular Theme Type to view data then click on the Get Data button.

☑ Select All

☑ Funding Source
☑ Data Collection Method
☑ Plan Number
☑ Plan Name
Theme Type*

| Jobs ▾ |
| Select |
| Business |
| **Jobs** |
| Miscellaneous |
| Monetary Concerns |
| Population |
| Taxation |
| Tourism |

☑ G
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Ge

* Required Field

○ Emergency Management
○ Natural Resources

We have the following data available in **Economic Development** for theme type **Jobs**

Plan Number	County Name	Area Name	Funding Sources		Data Collection Methods		planName	goal	objective
			Source 1	Source 2	Method 1	Method 2			
31	Adams County	Hettinger	~		~		Hettinger Strategic Plan: December 1998	provide new jobs opportunities (with above minimum pay)	attract manufacturing business
3	Barnes County	Barnes County	~		Survey	Community Meetings	Barnes County 2001 Strategic Plan	develop primary sector quality jobs	pursue angel and venture capital needed for new companies (such as IT); secure funding for soft costs (professional staff, marketing); allocate more funding for primary sector, service, retail, and tourism businesses
76	Barnes County	Wimbledon	ND Forest Service	US Forest Service	Survey	Community meetings	Wimbledon Community and Surrounding Area Action Plan 2004	develop new jobs	create new jobs in the 20 mile radius communities, work with city, township, and county governments to provide zoning for the new businesses and jobs

Appendix Tables

Appendix Table 1. Level of need among communities for a strategic planning database

| Question | Mean | Percent of respondents | | | | | Total |
| | | Level of need (1=not at all needed, 5=very needed) | | | | | |
		1	2	3	4	5	
What is the level of need among communities for a strategic planning database?	3.71	3.0	9.1	27.3	34.8	25.8	100.0

N=66

Appendix Table 2. Likelihood that community planners or decision makers will use an interactive planning database, similar to the pilot version

| Question | Mean | Percent of respondents | | | | | Total |
| | | Likelihood of use (1=not at all likely to use, 5=very likely to use) | | | | | |
		1	2	3	4	5	
What is the likelihood that community planners or decision makers will use an interactive planning database, similar to this version?	3.09	8.7	20.3	34.8	26.1	10.1	100.0

N=69

Appendix Table 3. Appropriateness of an online approach, similar to the pilot version, to providing an interactive strategic planning database for smaller communities

| Question | Mean | Percent of respondents | | | | | Total |
| | | Level of appropriateness (1=not at all appropriate, 5=very appropriate) | | | | | |
		1	2	3	4	5	
Is an online approach to providing an interactive strategic planning database, similar to this version, appropriate for smaller communities?	3.58	5.8	14.5	21.7	31.9	26.1	100.0

N=69

Appendix Table 4. Likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, will LEAD TO information sharing and collaboration among communities

Question	Mean	Percent of respondents					
		Likelihood (1=not at all likely, 5=very likely)					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
What is the likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to this version, will LEAD TO information sharing and collaboration among communities?	3.43	8.8	8.8	29.4	36.8	16.2	100.0

N=68

Appendix Table 5. Likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to the pilot version, will INCREASE information sharing and collaboration among communities already working together

Question	Mean	Percent of respondents					
		Likelihood (1=not at all likely, 5=very likely)					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
What is the likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to this version, will INCREASE information sharing and collaboration among communities already working together?	3.52	10.6	10.6	19.7	34.8	24.2	99.9

N=66

Appendix Table 6. Usefulness of the four main topics (community development, economic development, emergency management, and natural resources) addressed in the pilot version of a strategic planning database for community planners

To what degree are the four main topics addressed in this version of a strategic planning database useful for community planners?	Mean	Percent of respondents					
		Usefulness (1=not at all useful, 5=very useful)					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Economic development (N=66)	3.85	1.5	13.6	18.2	31.8	34.8	100.0
Community development (N=67)	3.84	1.5	13.4	20.9	28.4	35.8	100.0
Emergency management (N=64)	3.56	1.6	20.3	21.9	32.8	23.4	100.0
Natural resources (N=65)	3.31	4.6	23.1	27.7	26.2	18.5	100.0

Appendix Table 7. Usefulness of the subthemes under each main topic to community planners

Question	Mean	Percent of respondents					
		Usefulness (1=not at all useful, 5=very useful)					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
To what degree are the subthemes under each main topic useful to community planners?	3.49	4.5	10.4	28.4	44.8	11.9	100.0

N=67

Appendix Table 8. Usefulness of the format of the pilot version of the database

Question	Mean	Percent of respondents					Total
		Usefulness (1=not at all useful, 5=very useful)					
		1	2	3	4	5	
To what degree is the format of this version of the database useful?	3.32	4.5	15.2	33.3	37.9	9.1	100.0

N=66

Appendix Table 9. Respondents' comments regarding the usability of the database

Comments
Don't understand if there will be keyword search capabilities - that would be useful.
Goals are not specific or measurable and have no timeline.
I would like to see a different type of format that would show more structured topics for the various plans. For example - all housing plans under housing; all community centers listed with their ideas under one topic. Something like that so when a community is looking for resources on a particular subject it is easier to find than having to look through all the plans.
If data [are] current, this would be a helpful tool.
In my capacity as a community business leader, I am not sure that I would utilize this information. Maybe elected officials or economic or emergency management officials would have more use for it. I am not certain the cost of obtaining the data is worth it, but that is only as it relates to my role as a business leader.
Information seems too generic. When reading the information I was not sure how this data was gathered and how much was missed.
It would be helpful if the communities/areas were listed alphabetically so that we can find the communities we are looking for without having to scroll through the whole list.
The chief value of the database in its present form is to identify communities with strategic plans covering given topic areas; the data provided in the database is too limited to serve any other purpose.
The data base is out of date - the time between information being gathered & getting results to communities is too slow to provide any meaningful assistance to the communities.
The format of the data and the searchability is not very useable. Too compartmentalized. Very limited. No information provided about the age of the plans. Anyone who knows anything about preparing strategic plans knows that the goals and objectives are just a small part of the overall effort.
The idea is good, but the information is not up to date. To be beneficial, I think the data must be as current as possible. But I like the idea behind it.
The information is too dated to be of current value. Things are changing rapidly and "academia" continues to operate in the past.
The most important field, the objectives, is lost in the current format. They are lumped together and, thus, difficult to read. I agree that some form of a database would be helpful to communities as they write their own strategic plans and work on specific projects, but the spreadsheet format of this database is not very user friendly. Also, I don't feel this would increase collaboration among communities already working together, as it is a way for community members to bypass their neighbors and get the information they seek without approaching individuals in the neighboring community. It could lead to collaboration if community organizers see that other communities are working on the same project and, as a result, make personal contact with individuals in the other communities. I believe in picking up the phone or sending an email; if this is truly designed as a tool for increasing collaboration, a field for a primary contact phone and/or email would be helpful and encouraged.
What you have would have to be more interactive to be useful for communities.

N=14

Appendix Table 10. Communities' comfort level regarding adding their information to an interactive database

Question	Mean	Percent of respondents					
		Level of comfort (1=not at all comfortable, 5=very comfortable)					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
If an interactive option was made available to confirmed community representatives, how comfortable would communities be having their information added to such a database?	3.67	4.7	7.8	25.0	40.6	21.9	100.0

N=64

Appendix Table 11. Respondents' reasons why communities would or would not be comfortable having their information added to an interactive database

Reasons why communities would or would not be comfortable
Reasons why comfortable
I can only speak for my own community, and we would not have an issue. We currently have our strategic plan on our website, available for anyone to access.
Sharing information and ideas is a good thing.
They might not be comfortable, but if they are using taxpayers' dollars to fund it, it falls under public information - it should be ok.
Reasons why not comfortable
Bully-buddy competition from neighboring towns and counties. A plan shows the community's weaknesses as well as strengths. A very small community with many strengths cannot compete when their enemies know their weaknesses! The concept of communities "partnering" or "supporting" each other for a common goal is not one I've seen succeeding in ND. There is always one clear winner, and at least one "bastard child" community in the dynamic.
Communities do not have the time to complete survey after survey when it takes so long for the data to be gathered, analyzed and provided back to communities.
I can only speak for my community and I know that they would not want the data out there.
If one community pays to have a plan done, and invests the time and energy into it, why would they want another community to just go grab information from their plan without going through a planning process of their own. You can't develop a plan and expect community members and leaders to be engaged in it without going through a process of their own. It's about the process just as much as it is about the resulting document.

N=7

Appendix Table 12. Likelihood that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database

Question	Mean	Percent of respondents					
		Likelihood (1=not at all likely, 5=very likely)					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
What is the likelihood that community planners/ representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database, thereby allowing the database to be self-sustaining?	2.91	9.1	16.7	51.5	19.7	3.0	100.0

N=66

Appendix Table 13. Respondents' comments and ideas about making the database comprehensive and keeping it up-to-date

Comments and ideas
Constructive comments and ideas
I would like to understand the ultimate [goal that] this could accomplish. Would this help create involvement in such programs?
It would have to be delegated to someone to make this work.
Need to identify key people who are engaged with this and ask them to continue updates. One or two persons should be responsible for each community.
Periodic update reminders would need to be sent out to whoever has an account.
Semiannual update electronically if that's possible. Need names of communities participating so they can talk to one another.
You will need to send out reminders by mail or email, at least annually, to remind community representatives to update their information.
Concerns about the database
Communities will not take the time to enter their plan information into this database. They don't have time to do that. The format doesn't offer enough to make it worth keeping up.
I think community planners/reps have better things to do than paperwork. Updating and managing data takes away from the time that could be better used to actually make things happen. Sorry, I don't have any particular ideas about keeping the database up-to-date.
Just based on our staff size and workload, we would have difficulty keeping this up.
One more task for already over-tasked individuals to manage.
Some small communities don't have enough staff to follow-up with updates. They might want to, but [don't] have the time or staff. Could be a problem.
Things are happening so fast there is not enough time to be completing surveys when their work is demanding all their time.
Time to do so (and remembering to do so) may be a challenge.
Unless there are "paid" community planners/representatives with strong community leaders prompting them, it is yet another database that cannot be maintained or sustained.
While the intention of being self-sustaining is admirable, the quality of data will be too inconsistent to provide a useful tool. Additionally, small communities tend to have limited staff capabilities and time, both of which may reduce the likelihood of developing and maintaining a truly comprehensive database. Finally, the limited usefulness of the database in its present form is likely to limit the level of participation - who wants to put effort into something no one is going to use?
Who is responsible for keeping the information up to date? In oil country there are not enough hours in the day to fill out surveys while trying to meet the immediate needs of the community.

N=16

Appendix Table 14. Respondents' suggestions to improve or modify the database

Suggestions
Suggestions to improve or modify the database
Alphabetize the community/area list.
Define strategic plan. Evaluate how many communities recognize a need for a strategic plan. Identify specific needs of small communities and assess the ability to create a database that will effectively address such needs. If specific needs by a significant subset of small communities can be met via a database, use a focus group to more clearly define the characteristics of the database that will promote participation in maintenance and utilization.
Get [it] accurate. Cover as many communities per region as possible in all the categories.
Heavy on the public side. Need more private side input. Given the size of the communities being under 2,500, community development and public services will be the focus. Primary sector economic development leads in other communities that are 3,000-5,000 population and over. Need specific information about what works, what the community did to solve a problem, etc. Include a space for them to offer potential solutions (i.e., we handled a housing problem and it's working).
I like the subject headings, but the database is difficult to navigate. Needs to be something that could be easily searched for specific topics.
Information needs to be current.
It would be nice to list how to contact people involved in whatever project that someone is interested [in] to get help and more information on what the projects are about.
Would like a clearer understanding of what level of government is involved and why.
Other suggestions for a website or database
I have offered my suggestions throughout the survey. As the sponsoring agency, you should expect that several communities will embrace, use, and update this database regularly; others will use the information occasionally and never provide or update their own information; and some will never access it or update it.
It would be better to offer a website that has up-to-date links to each plan on the community's website. This format is just not very helpful. It's too limiting, and the scope of it is so narrow. It offers no information as to the context of the overall plan and the implementation measures that were identified. Some plans don't even have goals and objectives - granted, they should, but some don't, or the format can vary from one community to another. You risk making community planning into a cookie cutter exercise, almost suggesting that a community can go borrow or copy goals and objectives from another community without any information as to how effective that community's plan has been.
None at this time.
The database is vague and basically refers to programs that most communities are already aware of and using.

N=12

Appendix Table 15. Respondents' position/organization as it relates to their community, development activities, and/or strategic planning

Position/organization	Percent of respondents*
Local government (e.g., auditor, mayor, city council, county commission)	60.0
Economic development	31.4
Community development	31.4
State, regional, or federal entity	7.1
Other:	11.4
Banker	
Business leader	
Community economic developer	
Consulting planner	
EMS – EMT–B	
Job Development Authority	
Land use planning	
Private consultant	

N=70
*Percentages do not equal 100.0 due to multiple responses.

Appendix Table 16. Population size of the community that respondents represent or with which they primarily work ("community" may be a city, a county, or a collection of geographies)

Community population size	Percent of respondents
Less than 500 people	24.2
500 to 2,499 people	33.3
2,500 people or more	30.3
Other:	12.1
7,000	
98,000 MSA	
105,000	
125,000	
County 66,000	
Ranging from less than 100 to more than 75,000 people	
Seven county area of north central North Dakota	
Work with a variety of communities as a planning consultant	
Total	99.9

N=66

Cover Letter

To: [Email]
From: ramona.danielson@ndsu.edu
Subject: ND Strategic Planning Database -- please complete a brief survey

North Dakota State Data Center
North Dakota State University
PO Box 6050, Dept. 8000
Fargo, North Dakota 58108-6050
Phone: 701-231-7980
Fax: 701-231-9730

March 16, 2011

Dear Community Key Leader:

I am contacting you on behalf of the North Dakota Strategic Planning Project. We are conducting a research study to assess the value of a pilot strategic planning database that has been created with the hope of enhancing the viability of communities through cooperative ventures that nurture and promote resource sharing. This searchable database encompasses 78 community strategic plans that were forwarded to the North Dakota Department of Commerce in Spring 2006.

Four main topics are represented in the database: community development, economic development, emergency management, and natural resources. Within each major theme, subtopics were also created in order to provide more detail. For example, the theme of community development includes subtopics such as housing, recreation, and infrastructure. The database also includes information outlined in the strategic plans such as who is involved in the strategic planning, funding sources, and methodology for collecting data from the community to assess important topics like needs and strengths.

We are interested in assessing the value of such a database. Therefore, we are inviting you to participate in our research study by first becoming familiar with the database, and then by completing a very short online survey. The survey is voluntary and visiting the database website and answering the survey questions will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You may skip any question you do not want to answer. The information you provide will be combined with responses from planners in other communities and will help us understand the need and usability of the database, the likelihood the database will increase collaboration among communities, and the likelihood of sustainability of the database in the future. Your identity will be kept confidential. In order to be included in the analysis, it is important that you complete the survey by March, 31, 2011.

If you have questions about the study, you may call or email me directly at 701-231-8621 (richard.rathge@ndsu.edu) or contact our survey administrator at 701-231-9496 (ramona.danielson@ndsu.edu). For questions about the rights of human research participants or to report a problem with this study, you may call the North Dakota State University Human Research Protection Program at 701-231-8908.

First, please use the following temporary link (housed on the NDSU website) to familiarize yourself with the North Dakota Strategic Planning Database. Keep in mind that your community may not yet be included in this database, or that your may have an updated strategic plan that is not reflected in the database. However, we are asking you to examine the value of the overall idea as a resource to your community.

http://ateotia.cc.ndsu.nodak.edu/StrategicPlanning/index.php

Then, please follow this link to Survey Monkey to complete the very short survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

Thank you very much for your help in this research study.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Rathge, Director
North Dakota State Data Center
North Dakota State University

Please note: This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address, so it will not work for you to forward this message. If you would like to suggest the name of a different person to complete this survey, please send the person's name, title, and email address to Ramona at ramona.danielson@ndsu.edu.

+++
If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx

Strategic Planning Database Survey

Thank you for being willing to help us with this study!

First, if you haven't already, please spend a couple of minutes familiarizing yourself with the North Dakota Strategic Planning Database (currently housed on the NDSU website). Keep in mind that your community may not yet be included in this database, or that your community or organization may have an updated strategic plan that is not reflected in the database. However, we are asking you to examine the value of the idea of the database as a resource for your community. [Copy and paste the following temporary link into a web browser to view the database: http://ateotia.cc.ndsu.nodak.edu/StrategicPlanning/index.php]

Then, click "Next" to begin the survey:

To begin, we'd like your perceptions of the need among communities for such a database (using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very").

1. What is the level of need among communities for a strategic planning database?

> 6

2. What is the likelihood that community planners or decision makers will use an interactive planning database, similar to this version?

> 6

3. Is an online approach to providing an interactive strategic planning database, similar to this version, appropriate for smaller communities?

> 6

Next, we'd like your perceptions of the ability of the database to increase collaboration among communities (using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very").

4. What is the likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to this version, will LEAD TO information sharing and collaboration among communities?

> 6

5. What is the likelihood that a strategic planning database, similar to this version, will INCREASE information sharing and collaboration among communities already working together?

> 6

After briefly viewing the database, please tell us your perceptions of the usability of database (using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very").

6. To what degree are the four main topics (i.e., community development, economic development, emergency management, and natural resources) addressed in this version of a strategic planning database useful for community planners?

	(1) Not at all useful	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) Very useful	Prefer not to answer
Community development	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Economic development	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Emergency management	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Natural resources	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

7. To what degree are the subthemes under each main topic useful to community planners?

8. To what degree is the format of this version of the database useful?

9. Please offer any comments you have about the usability of the database.

Finally, we'd like your perceptions of the future of the database (using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very").

10. If an interactive option was made available to confirmed community representatives (e.g., who applied for an account), how comfortable would communities be having their information added to such a database?

11. If you feel they would not be comfortable, why not?

12. What is the likelihood that community planners/representatives will regularly add or update their community's strategic plans in the database, thereby allowing the database to be self-sustaining?

13. Please offer any comments/ideas you have about making the database comprehensive and keeping it up-to-date.

5
6

14. What suggestions do you have to improve or modify the database?

5
6

Just a few final questions to help us better understand the information you provide us.

15. How would you characterize your position/organization as it relates to your community, development activities, and/or strategic planning? (Choose all that apply)

- ⊖ Local government (e..g, auditor, mayor, city council, county commission)

- ⊖ State, regional, or federal entity

- ⊖ Economic development

- ⊖ Community development

- ⊖ Other (please specify)

16. What is the population size of the community you represent or with which you primarily work ("community" may be a city, a county, or a collection of geographies)?

- ⌒ Less than 500 people

- ⌒ 501 to 2,499 people

- ⌒ 2,500 people or more

- ⌒ Other (please specify)

Thank you for assisting us in this important research study. Please click "Done" to exit the survey.

(If you are not redirected to the North Dakota State Data Center website after clicking "Done," please check to see if there is an error message regarding one of your responses.)