

Methodology

Qualitative information was collected by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia and the Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment Committee over a nine-month period in 2004. Overall, more than 3,700 Chattahoochee Valley Region residents participated in the CACIA project via one of the following information-gathering means:

Town Hall Meetings

Meetings were held from 7-9pm (with the exception of the May 18 meeting in Muscogee County, which was held from 4-6pm) and were advertised by the Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment Committee in a variety of ways. After listening to a brief presentation on the CACIA project, participants were asked to respond to a series of four questions. First, participants were asked to write their own responses to the questions on color coded pieces of paper. These individual responses were collected and analyzed but are not part of this Data CD. Next, participants discussed their responses in small groups, and they utilized a wireless network to display group responses to each question to the entire meeting. Responses were discussed by the entire group and the facilitators before beginning the next question. The questions asked were:

1. What are the County's greatest strengths?
2. What are the County's greatest challenges?
3. Are there any gaps in services?
4. Are there any overlaps or duplication in services?

Summary notes from each of the town hall meetings may be found under the CACIA Town Hall Meetings folder on this Data CD. The dates, approximate number of participants and locations of the town hall meetings are as follows:

- Chattahoochee County
 - August 31, 2004; approximately 50 participants; Chattahoochee County Community Center
- Harris County
 - July 27, 2004; approximately 45 participants; Harris County High School
- Marion County
 - August 17, 2004; approximately 75 participants; Marion County Schools
- Muscogee County
 - May 18, 2004; approximately 50 participants; CB&T downtown
 - June 1, 2004; approximately 70 participants; Shirley Winston Community Center
 - June 15, 2004; approximately 55 participants; Baker Middle School
 - June 29, 2004; approximately 50 participants; Columbus Northside
- Russell County

- September 14, 2004; approximately 25 participants; Community Center
- Stewart County
 - September 09, 2004; approximately 30 participants; Stewart County Elementary School
- Talbot County
 - August 03, 2004; approximately 65 participants; Talbot County Schools
- Taylor County
 - September 28, 2004; approximately 65 participants; Taylor County High School

E-Surveys

E-surveys were distributed as a way of reaching more individual respondents and to enable the Committee to respond to people who wanted to participate in ways other than a town hall meeting. A sample e-survey is located under the “E-Survey” folder on the Data CD. Individual responses are not provided to protect the identities of those who responded.

Personal Interviews

Personal interviews provided the opportunity to obtain detailed information, direct quotations and follow-up information. Notes and N-6 summaries are not provided on the Data CD to protect the identities of the interviewees.

Qualitative information was then analyzed using a qualitative research software application called “N-6”, which helps to reduce the impact of researcher bias through a process which requires coding and categorizing every sentence of text from these sources. Faculty and staff from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government’s Research and Policy division, who did not participate in the collection of the data, read and coded all transcripts, providing a means to determine those topics that were truly the most significant to participants.

Point-in-Time Homeless Count and Survey

The Community Assets and Critical Issues Assessment Steering Committee partnered with the Columbus Area Homeless Network and the Muscogee County School District to assess homelessness within the CACIA Region. A homeless point-in-time count was conducted on the evening of January 25, 2005 in Muscogee County, Georgia and in Phenix City, Alabama. Also on this evening, surveys were with 165 homeless individuals within local shelters. In addition, surveys were conducted with sheriff’s offices and Department of Family and Children’s Services Coordinators in the remaining counties to collect information relating to the status of homelessness within the less metropolitan areas of the CACIA Region.

High School Youth Survey

All county school districts in the CACIA Region were offered an opportunity to allow high school government classes to participate in the community needs assessment. Approximately 1,000 high school government students in schools in Muscogee, Chattahoochee and Talbot Counties participated in the assessment process through classroom discussions of their respective county's relative strengths and weaknesses. Data was presented to the Carl Vinson Institute of Government in paper format. While most responses were cumulative, a few were individual; therefore, specific responses of students are not presented in this Data CD beyond the quotes and ideas cited in the Report.

Random Digital Dial Telephone Survey

The public opinion survey instrument was designed and pre-tested by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, and the telephone interviews were conducted by Braun Research Incorporated from their Memphis, Tennessee, phone banks. The survey sample consisted of eight independently drawn county-level random samples. The sample sizes (quotas) were determined to assure a reasonable level of confidence for generalizing results to the county level (see Table 1). Although 1,913 interviews were actually conducted in the 8-count region, the effective sample size for data reported about the region as a whole was 488, and the sampling error for a sample of this size is +/- 4 percent.¹ The sampling error represents the greatest degree which we would expect any reported percentage of our sample to differ from the true population percentage. In other words, if we say that 50 percent of the population holds opinion A, we can be very confident that somewhere between 46 and 54 percent of the population in the region actually hold opinion A.²

¹ The effective sample size for the region was calculated by determining what the sample size for the region would have been if each county was sampled proportionately to its size in the region. Because 61.5 percent of the region's population lives in Muscogee County, the 300 interviews conducted in that county should make up 61.5 percent of the total sample. Consequently, because we over sampled in each of the remaining 7 counties in order to have a sufficient sample size to analyze opinion in those counties, we weighted the responses downward to their proportional share of the region's population.

² The confidence level we employ is 95 percent. Thus, we expect that 95 percent of the time, a sample drawn at random will reflect the true population within the sampling error.

Table 1. Sample Size, Population Size and Sampling Error for the Public Opinion Telephone Survey

County	Sampling Error	Sample Size	Population
Chattahoochee, GA	6%	230	10,656
Harris, GA	6%	230	17,630
Marion, GA	6%	230	5,119
Muscogee, GA	6%	300	136,289
Russell, AL	6%	232	36,562
Stewart, GA	6%	230	3,945
Talbot, GA	6%	230	4,928
Taylor, GA	6%	231	6,446

In order to reduce any bias in respondent selection, households were chosen using Random Digit Dialing (RDD) methods, whereby known phone blocks are randomly chosen within valid exchanges and the final two digits of the phone numbers are randomly generated. The use of RDD results in reaching both listed and unlisted numbers, and allows respondents to remain entirely anonymous to the interviewer.

Once a household was selected, individuals 18 years of age or older were selected by choosing the one with the most recent birthday. In the event that an imbalance in gender representation began to occur, interviews were in switched to a selection method that asks to speak with the youngest male or oldest female in the household.

The final dataset was weighted on two criteria: (1) to adjust for probability of selection due to differing household sizes, and (2) to adjust differences between the sample and the population in race, age, and gender for each county. Additionally, all data reported about the region were weighted to adjust for disproportionate sampling techniques instituted for county-level analysis.

Because people who live in households with only one or two adults and/or with more than one active phone line—excluding phone lines dedicated to computer modems or fax machines—have a higher probability of being selected than do individuals who have many adults in the household but only one phone line, some individuals are more likely to be included in telephone surveys of this sort than are others. To adjust for this, we calculated the probability of selection for each respondent based on the ratio of eligible respondents (individuals over 17 years old) to active phone lines. Those individuals who had a low probability of being selected were given greater weight.

Also, because typically men, African-Americans, and young adults are more difficult to reach than are women, whites, and older adults, survey samples often overrepresented the latter group. To adjust for this, we weighted the responses of

underrepresented groups proportionately to their representation in the population based on the most current Census figures.

Extensive efforts were taken to reduce known sources of survey error through the instrument design, sample selection, and interviewing processes. In addition, all data presented from the public opinion survey have been weighted to help adjust for bias in respondent selection. The consequent data is our best representation of public attitudes throughout the region.