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at
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AMERICAN STATE ADMINISTRATORS PROJECT 2004

Characteristics, Response Rates, and Non-Respondents Survey

The 2004 American State Administrators Project (ASAP) surveyed 100 different types of agencies across the fifty American states. A total of 3331 agency heads received the original mailing of the 8 page questionnaire. The initial mailing (in August 2004) was followed by three subsequent mailings to non-respondents, and produced usable replies from 939 agency heads for a response rate of 28%.

The names of the agency heads were obtained from the Council of State Governments Directory III: Administrative Officials, 2004. Because the Council of State Governments had reduced the number of agency heads included in the directory, ASAP staff perused governmental websites to find names and addresses for officials of agencies that had been included in the previous (1998) survey. Though this method did not yield all missing addresses, it produced a mailing list as similar as possible to the 1998 mailing list.

The questionnaire indicated that “Responses are confidential; only aggregate results will be published.” An enclosure with the survey instrument provided selected results from prior ASAP surveys (1964-1998), indicated phone and email contacts for the Auburn University Institutional Research Review Board regarding confidentiality. It also included phone and email contacts for the co-directors, Cynthia Bowling and Deil S. Wright. It also included an invitation for respondents to request summary results of the 2004 survey. These summary results were placed on the Auburn University Center for Governmental Services website in May 2006.

Following completion of the 2004 ASAP survey, follow-up phone calls were made to a 15% random sample of non-respondents during the spring of 2005. Contacts were established with 173 non-respondent agency heads or agency representatives (such as the agency heads' administrative assistant or another long-term employee). The attribute questions (age, years on state government, years in agency, years in current position, and number of agency employees. When agency heads were directly reached (N=39), four attitude questions reflecting their perceptions of relationships between the governor and legislature of their state.

We then tested statistically significant differences between the responses of the main survey respondents and those reached through follow-up phone calls. For the five attribute questions, three showed no differences between respondents and respondents: size of agency (p=.984), years in their current job (p=.929), and age of agency head (p=.255). Two characteristics did show differences –years in state government (p=.017) and years in current agency (p=.032). Respondents had been in state government and in their current agency about two years longer than non-respondents.

The telephone contacts also enabled us to query the smaller subset of the non-respondents on four attitudinal questions involving the roles of the governor and legislature in the control of the agency and the budgeting process. Here, we found no statistically significant differences between respondents and non-respondents on any of these questions: actual agency control (p=.396), preferred type of control over agency (p=.891), detailed review of agency budget (p=.943) and the greater tendency for agency budget reduction (p=.731).

Considering these nine variables, respondent and non-respondent groups sizes, the similarity of all the means of the variables and the significance levels, we conclude that the

actual respondents to the ASAP questions are representative of the universe of the 3352 administrators to whom the surveys were sent.

The coding, check coding, data entry, and other mechanics of the data gathering and processing followed closely the recommended standard survey techniques. This included internal and external advice and reviews. It is impossible to acknowledge the many advanced undergraduates, graduate assistants, faculty colleagues, and others who have made significant contributions to the surveys, analyses, papers, and publications of the ASAP project. An inventory of these papers and publications is available. Special thanks needs to be expressed to two organizations. First and foremost, sincere appreciation is accorded the Earhart Foundation of Ann Arbor, Michigan for support of the ASAP surveys across five decades. Second is Auburn University, both the Center for Governmental Services and the Department of Political Science for use of facilities, administrative assistance and for the effort they took to make the 2004 ASAP survey a success at Auburn.

[Also included is a table with individual state response rates.](#)

Cynthia Bowling and Deil S. Wright, 2006