

WHAT CITIZENS WANT

How do U.S. citizens feel about the accessibility of local government services? We're living in the midst of a boom of options for connectivity. So Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL), Government Technology's Center for Digital Government, and Rock Solid Technologies came together to conduct a survey to discover how citizens' accessibility expectations are being met by Local Government.



ROCK SOLID

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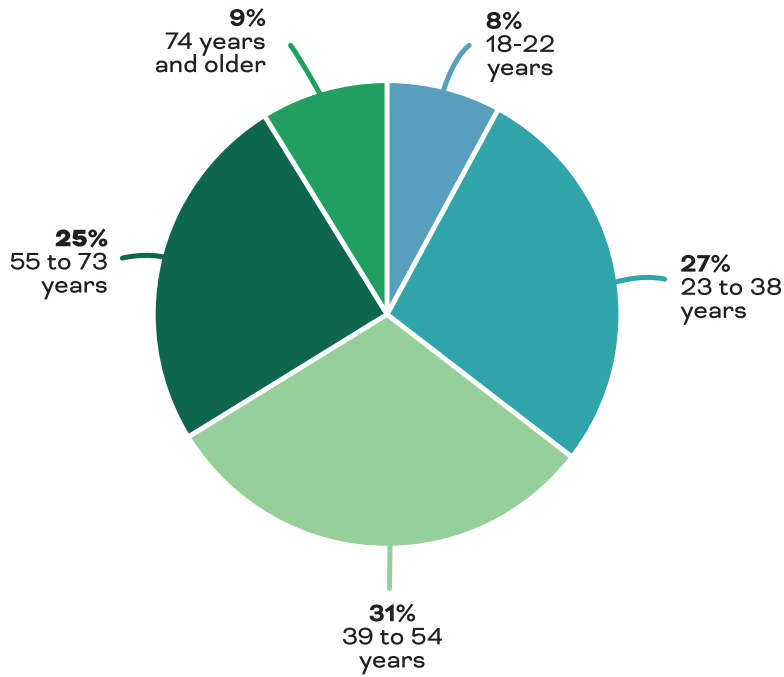
METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

This survey of 2,042 U.S. adults was conducted by Government Technology’s Center for Digital Government, Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL), and Rock Solid Technologies to understand preferences for and opinions of the accessibility of Local Government services. This research was conducted in October of 2020.

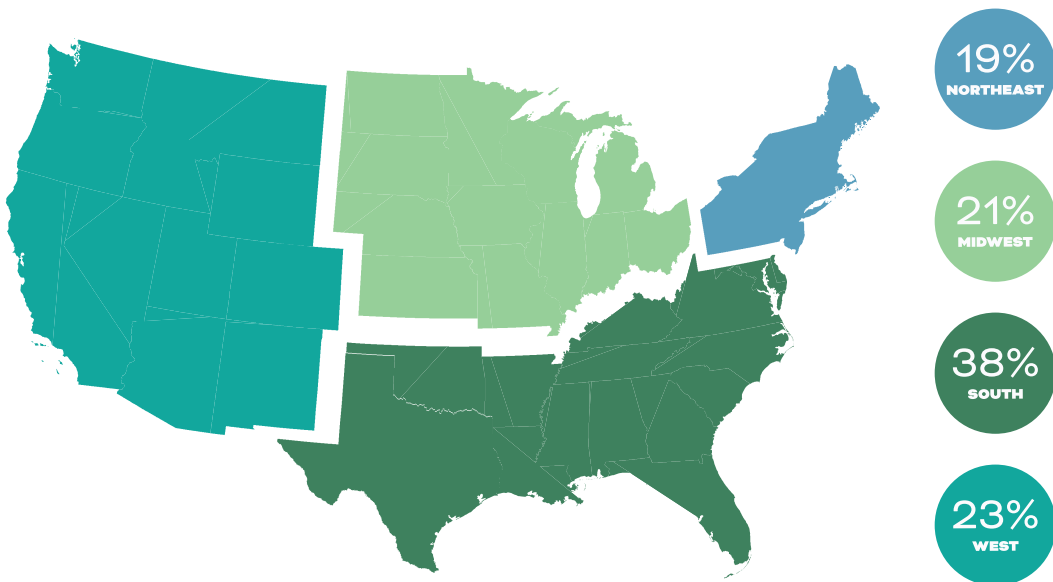
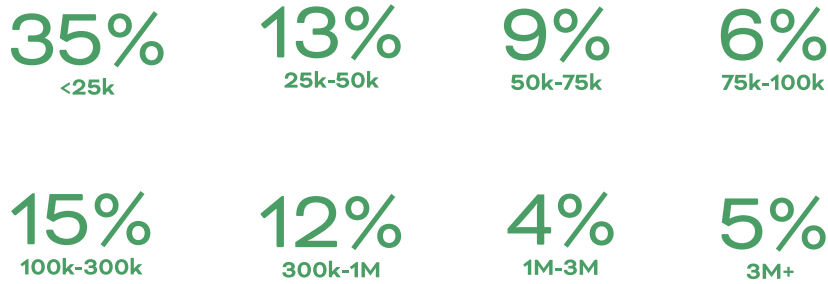
SERVICES INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  LIBRARY |  PARKS AND FACILITIES |  RECREATION PROGRAMS |
|  PLANNING AND ZONING |  POTHOLE & STREET REPAIR REQUESTS |  CITY OR COUNTY GOVERNMENT MEETINGS |
|  WATER/SEWER EMERGENCIES |  POLICE |  FIRE/EMS |
|  UTILITY BILLING |  JOB TRAINING |  PUBLIC HEALTH |
|  BUILDING PERMITS |  COURTS |  311 (SERVICE REQUEST AND INFORMATION) |

AGE



POPULATION

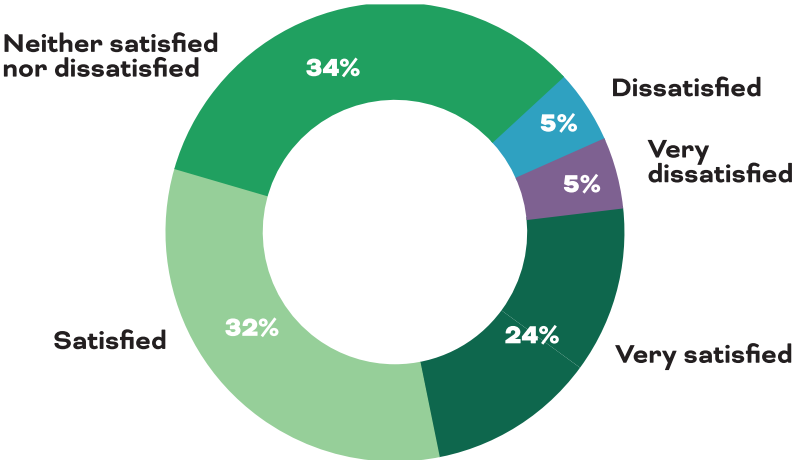


LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS ACCESSIBLE, BUT THERE'S ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Let's start with good news: **more than half of people surveyed (56%)** are satisfied with their ability to access Local Government services.

This lines up with similar research on the public's sentiment towards government. A study featured in Bloomberg CityLab revealed that most Americans feel positively about the value of local public services, even across genders, races, income groups, and locations. Pew Research Center found that 63% of people held a favorable view of their Local Government, leading over views of State and Federal Government.

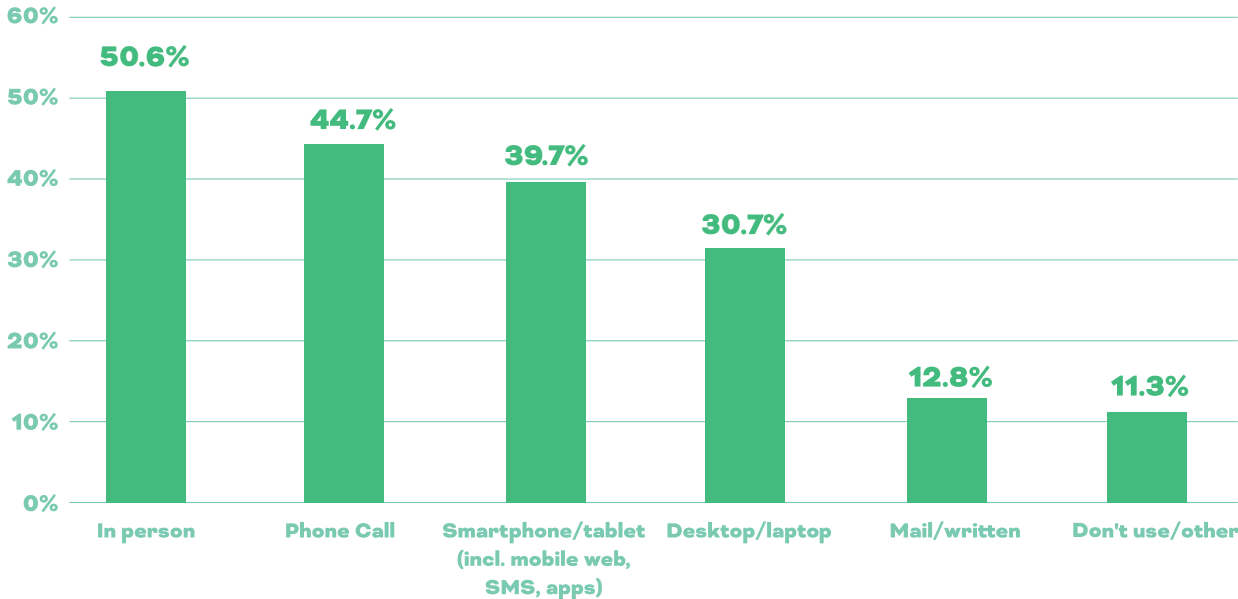
How satisfied are you with your access to local government services?



However, there are two sides to every coin. **44% of people surveyed did not feel positively about their ability to access Local Government services.** That means there's work to be done. Keep reading--we'll cover who this group is and what can be done to increase accessibility throughout this report.

HOW DO YOUR CITIZENS WANT TO ACCESS SERVICES?

What are your preferred methods for accessing local government services?



Omnichannel is the word of the day. Three out of five respondents who use local government services (60%) selected multiple mediums as their preferred method of access. While traditional methods of in-person and phone engagement top the charts, 62% of people like to reach for a smartphone, tablet, or computer to connect with Local Government.

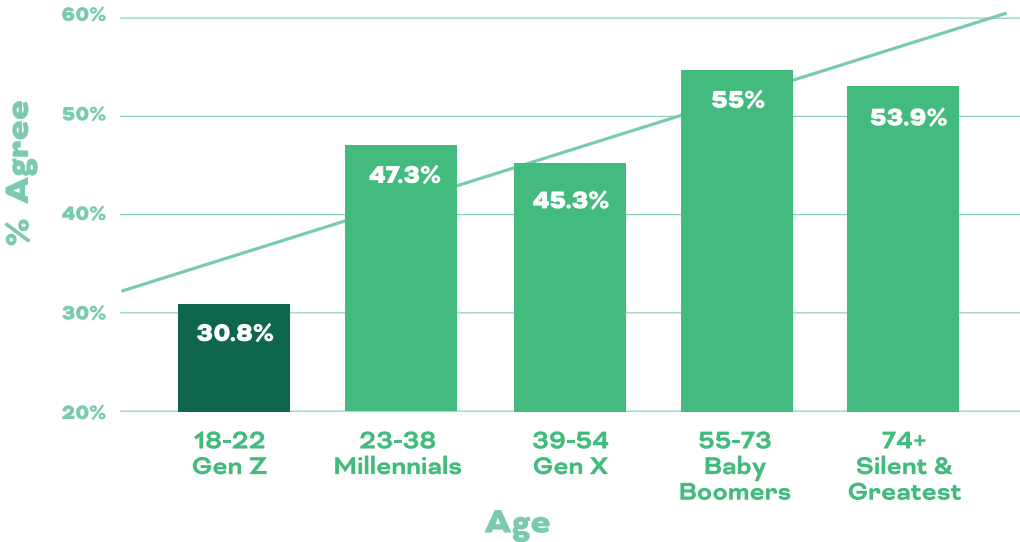
People today want to engage in multiple and varied ways. Local Government should be ready to serve.

60% of citizens use multiple mediums to access Local Government services

THE AGE EQUATION: SERVING CITIZENS UNDER 55

Here's where the first hurdles begin - why are some people dissatisfied? Segmenting by age revealed interesting insights. The younger you look, the more omnichannel preferences emerge.

**Percent of citizens who agree with the following statement:
"I can communicate with my Local Government easily"**



Over half people 55 and older, which includes Baby Boomers (ages 55-74), the Silent Generation (74-91), and the Greatest Generation (92+), agree that Local Government is easy to communicate with. That number drops below 50% for Generation X (39-54) and Millennials (23-38). For Generation Z (18-22), that number plummets to less than 1 in 3.

Local Government caters well towards Baby Boomers and Seniors. We've had more than fifty years to adjust to their preferences, after all. But younger generations are more digital-savvy, and even digital-native. This won't be a surprise to many people, but many of the challenges in Local Government access relate to this disconnect.

GENERATIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: INTERESTING FACTS

Millennials top the list for daily, weekly, and multiple monthly access, and are least likely to never access services.



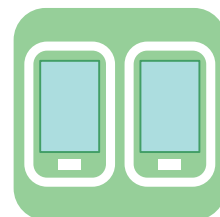
Generation Z and Millennials are over 4x as likely to access Local Government services via **text message** than Baby Boomers and older generations.



Even Baby Boomers are web-savvy. This generation is more likely than others (22% vs 12%) to use a **computer to access 311 services**.



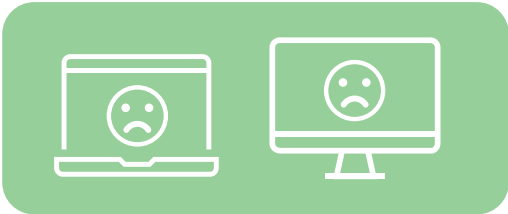
People 54 and younger are more than **2x as likely to use mobile apps for utility billing** than people 55 and older.



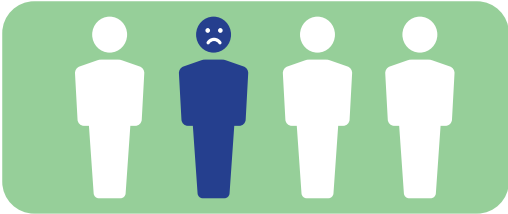
GEN Z: THE FUTURE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Gen Z is the most likely to be **very unsatisfied with access to local government**. How can we make government accessible for people of the future?

Gen Z is nearly **2x as likely** to feel that their Local Government is **not tech savvy**.

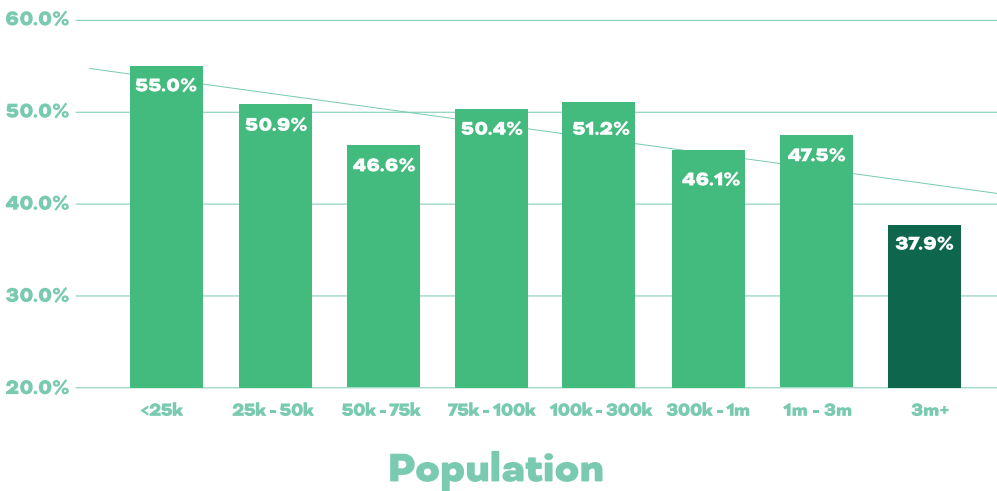


1 in 4 Gen Z'ers does not feel that they can communicate with their Local Government in the way they'd prefer.



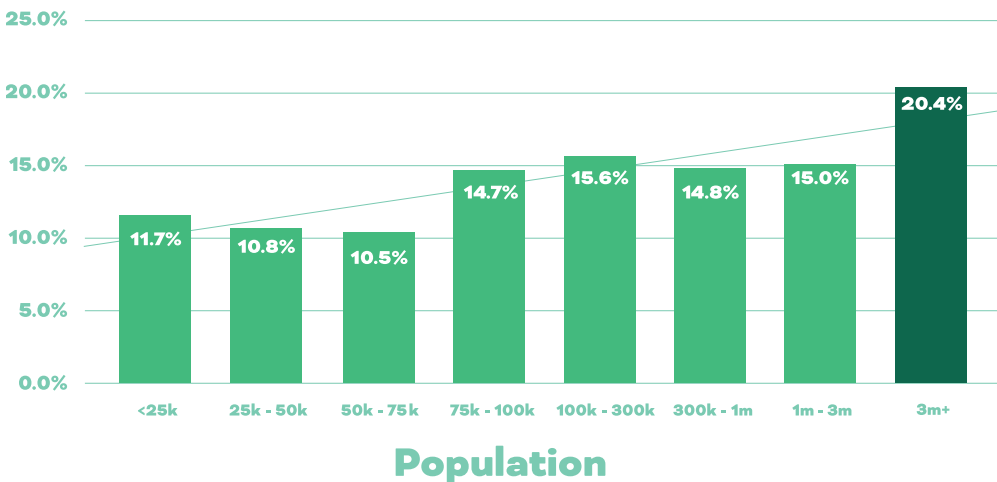
POPULATION: AVOIDING IN-PERSON IN BIG CITIES

As population increases, accessing Local Government services in person is less and less likely to be the preferred method. Only **38%** of people in cities larger than 3 million like to access services in person, versus 55% of people in cities under 25,000. More people accessing similar services means longer wait times, which is more likely to occur in areas with larger populations.



% of respondents who prefer in-person access to Local Government services

So what do residents of large cities prefer instead? **Text messages**. This method sees sharp growth dependent upon population. While SMS is a preferred method of just over 10% of people in towns with fewer than 75,000, **over 20%** of residents in cities over 3 million prefer a text.

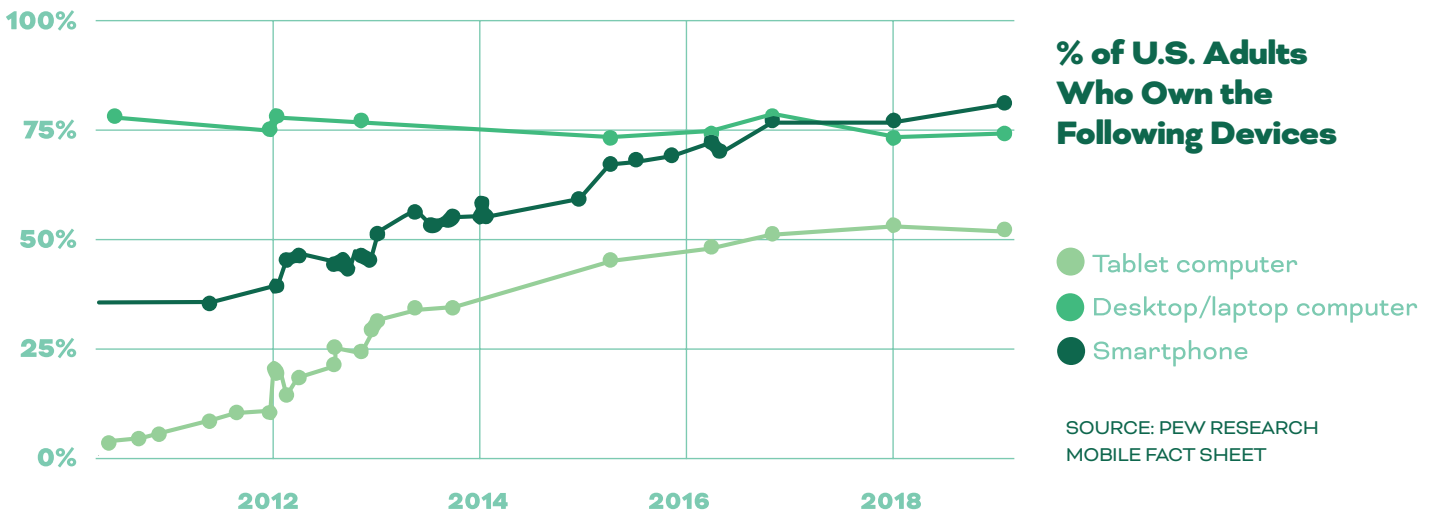


% of respondents who prefer text message (SMS) access to Local Government services

DIGITAL ACCESS PREFERENCES

What services do people want to access most on their computers or smartphones? All of them! There is significant interest across a range of services in digital and mobile accessibility. For most services, over half of citizens across all demographics are interested in both digital and mobile access.

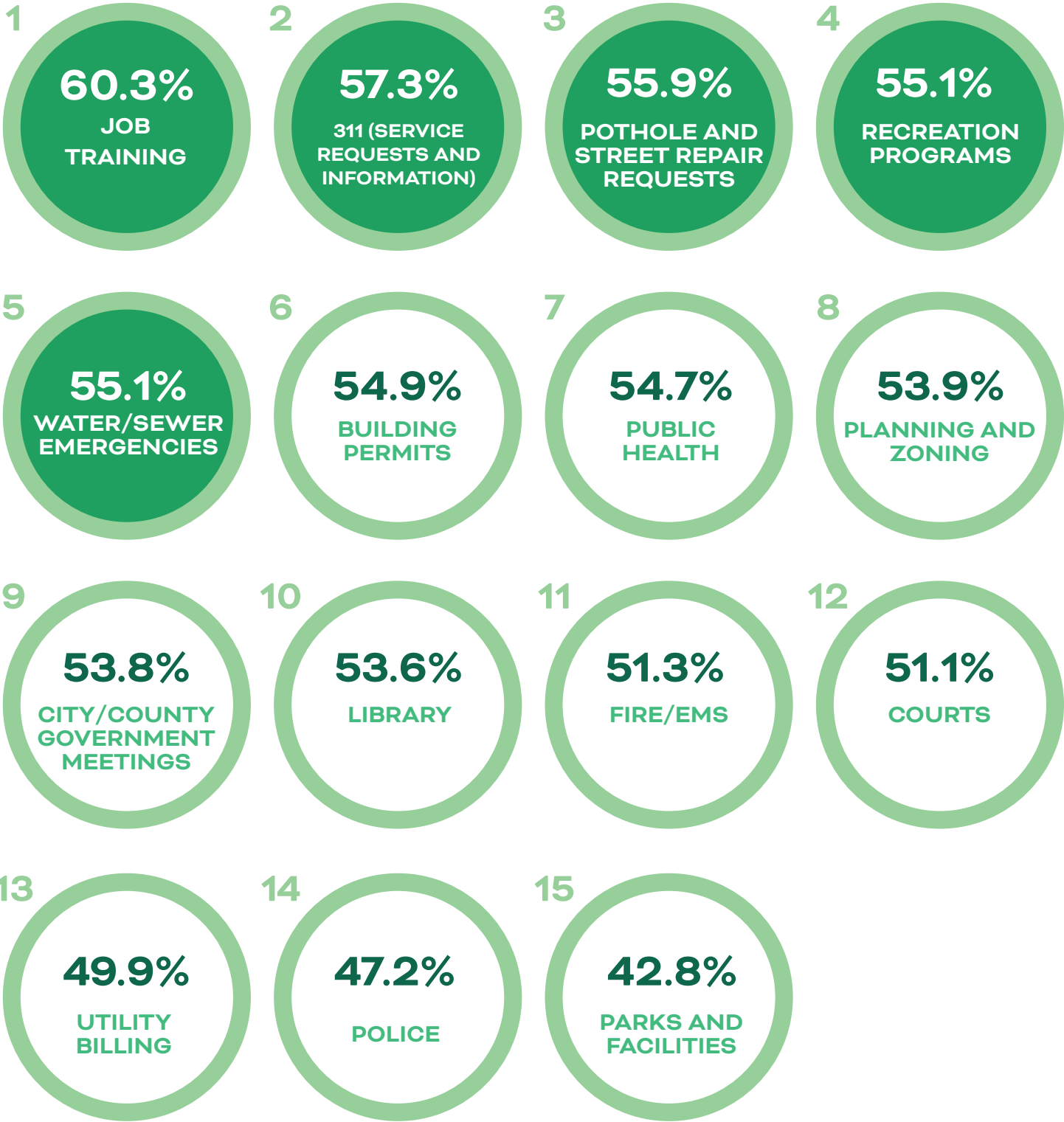
This is reflective of greater trends in device ownership. According to Pew Research, nine out of ten U.S. adults use the internet. To access the web, 81% own a smartphone, 74% own a desktop or laptop, and 52% own a tablet.



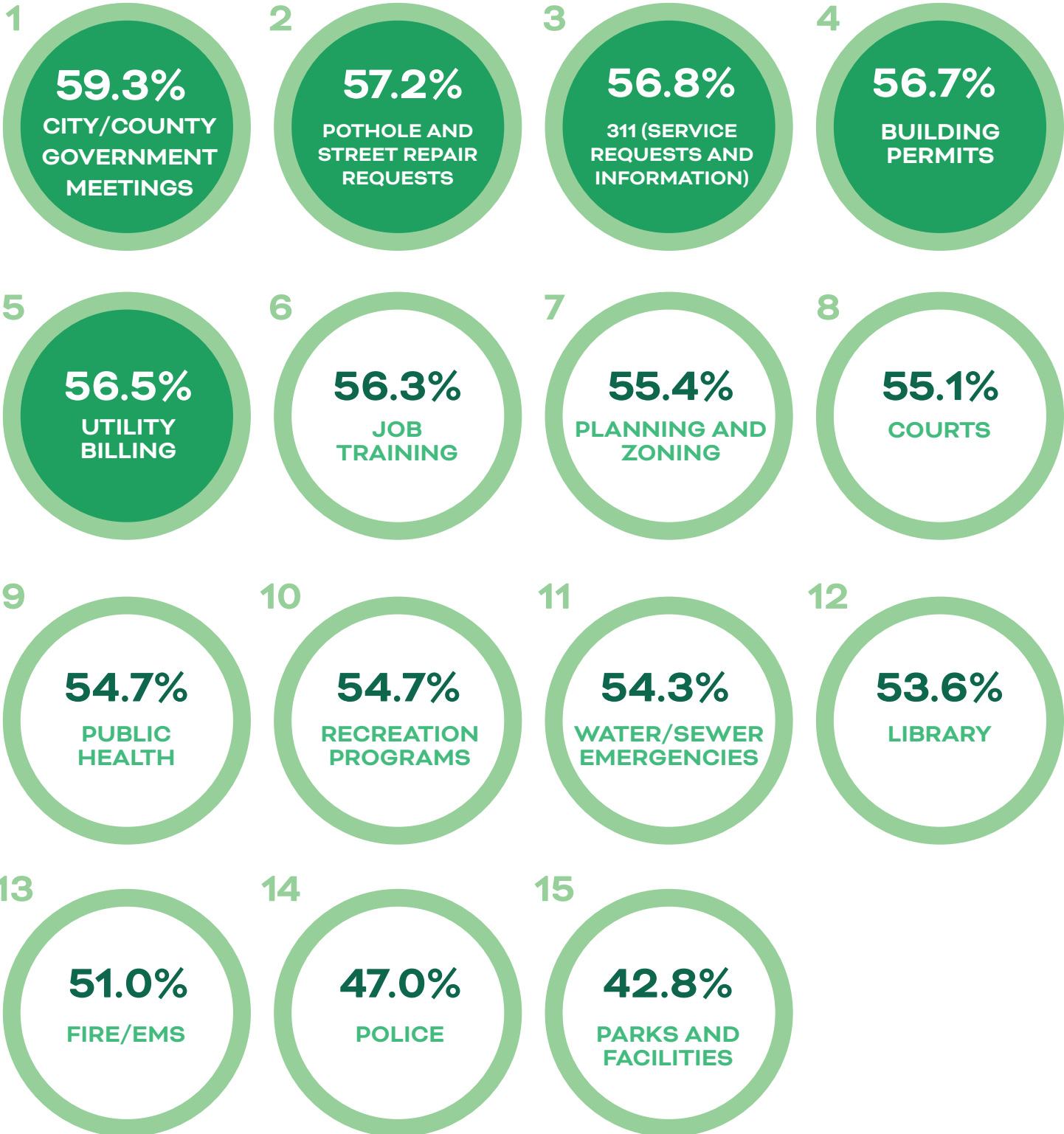
While computer ownership has remained relatively flat since 2010, smartphone and tablet ownership have grown. Though it does appear that tablet ownership may be plateauing, smartphones still appear to trend upward. Also notable is that approximately one in five Americans are “smartphone only” internet users.

Internet device ownership is prevalent, which is in line with the high interest in accessing Local Government services via smartphone, tablet, desktop, or laptop.

SERVICES BY INTEREST IN ACCESS VIA SMARTPHONE OR TABLET



SERVICES BY INTEREST IN ACCESS VIA DESKTOP OR LAPTOP



WHAT SERVICES SHOULD YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT PRIORITIZE?

There is a lot of opportunity to improve Local Government customer service by increasing accessibility. Between the boom of the internet and smartphones, the changing preferences of younger citizens, and the desire to engage, digital accessibility is a must. But with budgetary and time limitations, tackling everything at once is just not possible. What should you prioritize?

Based on the results of this survey, we created a matrix to determine which services will have the most impact on communities through digital accessibility. By ranking services from highest to lowest in:

1. Total usage,
2. Interest in smartphone or tablet access by anyone who accesses the service,
3. Interest in desktop or laptop access by anyone who accesses the service,
4. Interest in smartphone or tablet access among citizens who access specific services most frequently (at least once every three months),
5. Interest in desktop or laptop access among citizens who access specific services most frequently (at least once every three months),
6. Greatest dissatisfaction with specific services,
7. Greatest dissatisfaction with specific services among citizens who access those services most frequently (at least once every three months).

HERE ARE THE TOP FIVE SERVICES TO PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBILITY:

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Pothole and street repair requests | 2. 311 (service requests and information) | 3. City or county government meetings | 4. Building permits | 5. Recreation programs |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|

FULL RANKING OF SERVICES TO PRIORITIZE

| RANK | TOTAL SCORE BY SUM OF RANKS (EX. RANK 1 = 1 POINT) ACROSS ALL CATEGORIES | SCORE |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1 | Pothole and street repair requests | 33 |
| 2 | 311 (service requests and information) | 37 |
| 3 | City/county government meetings | 39 |
| 4 | Building permits | 41 |
| 5 | Recreation programs | 50 |
| 6 | Job training | 52 |
| 7 | Water/sewer emergencies | 58 |
| 8 | Planning and zoning | 59 |
| 8 | Library | 59 |
| 10 | Public health | 61 |
| 11 | Utility Billing | 62 |
| 11 | Courts | 62 |
| 13 | Police | 65 |
| 14 | Fire/EMS | 72 |
| 15 | Parks and facilities | 90 |

ANALYSIS: INPUT DATA FOR RANKING OF SERVICES TO PRIORITIZE

| RANK | PERCENT OF PEOPLE WHO USE EACH SERVICE | | PERCENT OF PEOPLE INTERESTED IN FOR SMARTPHONE OR TABLET ACCESS SERVICES THEY USE | | PERCENT OF PEOPLE INTERESTED IN DESKTOP OR LAPTOP ACCESS FOR SERVICES THEY USE | |
|------|--|-------|---|-------|--|-------|
| 1 | Parks and facilities | 80.2% | Job training | 60.3% | City/county government meetings | 59.3% |
| 2 | Library | 70.4% | 311 | 57.3% | Pothole and street repair requests | 57.2% |
| 3 | Utility billing | 64.7% | Pothole and street repair requests | 55.9% | 311 | 56.8% |
| 4 | Recreation programs | 47.1% | Recreation programs | 55.1% | Building permits | 56.7% |
| 5 | Police | 40.6% | Water/sewer emergencies | 55.1% | Utility billing | 56.5% |
| 6 | Public health | 40.0% | Building permits | 54.9% | Job training | 56.3% |
| 7 | Pothole and street repair requests | 32.3% | Public health | 54.7% | Planning and zoning | 55.4% |
| 8 | Fire/EMS | 32.0% | Planning and zoning | 53.9% | Courts | 55.1% |
| 9 | City/county government meetings | 31.9% | City/county government meetings | 53.8% | Public Health | 54.7% |
| 10 | Water/sewer emergencies | 31.8% | Library | 53.6% | Recreation programs | 54.7% |
| 11 | 311 | 31.6% | Fire/EMS | 51.3% | Water/sewer emergencies | 54.3% |
| 12 | Building permits | 28.4% | Courts | 51.1% | Library | 53.6% |
| 13 | Courts | 27.9% | Utility billing | 49.9% | Fire/EMS | 51.0% |
| 14 | Job training | 26.8% | Police | 47.2% | Police | 47.0% |
| 15 | Planning and zoning | 25.1% | Parks and facilities | 42.8% | Parks and facilities | 42.8% |

WHAT CITIZENS WANT

| RANK | PERCENT OF FREQUENT USERS (AT LEAST ONCE EVERY THREE MONTHS) WHO ARE INTERESTED IN SMARTPHONE OR TABLET ACCESS | | PERCENT OF FREQUENT USERS (AT LEAST ONCE EVERY THREE MONTHS) WHO ARE INTERESTED IN DESKTOP OR LAPTOP ACCESS | | PERCENT OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DISSATISFIED WITH INDIVIDUAL SERVICES THEY USE | | PERCENT OF FREQUENT USERS (AT LEAST ONCE EVERY THREE MONTHS) WHO ARE DISSATISFIED WITH INDIVIDUAL SERVICES THEY USE | |
|------|--|-------|---|-------|--|--------------------|---|-------|
| 1 | Job training | 61.1% | City/county government meetings | 61.2% | Courts | 21.3% | Courts | 19.1% |
| 2 | Recreation programs | 59.8% | 311 | 60.0% | Building permits | 17.7% ¹ | Pothole and street repair requests | 8.5% |
| 3 | 311 | 59.7% | Recreation programs | 58.6% | Planning and zoning | 17.2% ¹ | Planning and zoning | 3.9% |
| 4 | Building permits | 58.1% | Utility billing | 57.1% | Police | 15.8% ¹ | City/county government meetings | 3.5% |
| 5 | Pothole and street repair | 56.4% | Pothole and street repair | 57.0% | City/county government meetings | 15.7% ¹ | Building permits | 3.3% |
| 6 | Public health | 56.2% | Library | 56.1% | Water/sewer emergencies | 15.3% | Water/sewer emergencies | 12.0% |
| 7 | Library | 56.1% | Water/sewer emergencies | 55.9% | Fire/EMS | 15.0% | Police | 11.7% |
| 8 | Police | 54.4% | Building permits | 55.8% | 311 | 14.3% | 311 | 10.9% |
| 9 | Fire/EMS | 52.6% | Planning and zoning | 55.6% | Pothole and street repair requests | 14.0% | Job training | 10.1% |
| 10 | City/county government meetings | 50.9% | Job training | 53.8% | Public health | 11.2% | Library | 9.0% |
| 11 | Utility billing | 50.5% | Fire/EMS | 53.2% | Job training | 11.1% | Public health | 8.7% |
| 12 | Courts | 49.8% | Public health | 53.2% | Library | 10.8% ⁸ | Utility billing | .0% |
| 13 | Water/sewer emergencies | 48.5% | Police | 52.0% | Recreation programs | 9.4% | Fire/EMS | 7.6% |
| 14 | Planning and zoning | 48.1% | Parks and facilities | 47.5% | Utility billing | 8.4% | Recreation programs | 7.0% |
| 15 | Parks and facilities | 47.5% | Courts | 46.7% | Parks and facilities | 7.4% | Parks and facilities | 6.5% |

DEEP DIVE: TOP 5 SERVICES

Pothole and street repair requests

Taking the top spot in this analysis are pothole and street repair requests. Though it rests in the middle of the pack for overall usage, there is very high interest among all users to be able to access this Local Government service on digital devices. Also notable is the high rate of dissatisfaction among those who notice the need for repairs most frequently.

The transactional nature of pothole and street repair requests lends itself well to digital access. Instead of taking time to visit a public works office or wait on hold, citizens could report issues with just a few inputs via website, app, or even text message. Ease of use and time saved make this service an attractive prospect for digital access.

311 (service requests and information)

By name, 311 is tied to a phone call. According to Governing.com, nearly 300 cities and counties in the U.S. have a 311 system in place. But the people in these communities have spoken, and they are ready for an upgrade to digital 311 access.

Across every device and usage category, 311 stayed in the top three of the most wanted services for smartphone, tablet, desktop, and laptop access. When compared to the above pothole and street repair requests category, 311 services saw similar placements but with fewer frequent users dissatisfied with their access. If your community has or is considering 311, modernizing this service will satisfy significant amounts of users and be a worthwhile endeavor.

City or County government meetings

Local Governments around the country made a frantic switch to online public meetings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. But perhaps this transition was a long time coming. Government meetings are the #1 most desired service type for accessibility on computers by both frequent and infrequent attendees. And right now, community members are dissatisfied with their ability to access these meetings.

If you haven't already, ensure that meetings involving community input are accessible via the web.

Building permits

Though building permits are not used by a large number of people, dissatisfaction with this service is quite high. For the general population, dissatisfaction with the accessibility of building permits falls behind only that of Courts. Perhaps the process is confusing or difficult for infrequent users.

Interest in both mobile and web access to building permits is relatively high, in the top half of rankings across all categories. Interestingly, frequent users, likely in construction, contracting, or property management, are more interested in smartphone and tablet access while the general population leans towards desktop and laptops. As you consider improving accessibility of your Local Government's permitting process, keep these differing use cases in mind.

Recreation programs

Widely-used and widely-loved, recreation programs are a great area for an accessibility upgrade. Smartphone and tablet access are especially high on survey respondents' wishlists.

How could recreation programs be digitized for mobile access? From booking a room at the recreation center to registering a child for youth soccer, always-on smartphones and tablets can make accessing beloved recreation programs easy to do at any time of day. Plus, not having to take information or process registrations over the phone can save time for your staff.

MEETING YOUR CITY'S NEEDS

When determining which services to prioritize, you should consider the needs of your community first. Analyzing the makeup of your population, citizens' feedback, and current infrastructure may reveal a clear starting point.

CONCLUSION

People have more devices than ever before, and Local Government needs to keep up. But traditional methods of accessing Local Government services aren't going to disappear. Though younger generations are more interested in digital access, in-person visits and phone calls are here to stay.

Different people have different preferences, and the number of options has increased. The more omnichannel your agencies can be, the better you can meet the needs of not just older citizens, but younger generations as well. Prioritize omnichannel service delivery to match the needs of your citizens.

CONNECT WITH US

We hope you enjoyed this report! If you have any questions, feedback, or just want to keep the conversation going, get in touch with us.

ENGAGING LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS

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APPENDIX

Percentage of respondents who use each Local Government service

