

Executive Summary for Community Survey

Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority
April 27, 2016

Introduction

To understand prevailing attitudes concerning the FCCFA within the community, Werth was asked to conduct an online survey using an approved distribution list of key stakeholders. Audiences included meeting planners and convention customers; hotel and lodging general managers and owners; partners and potential partners, convention and visitors bureau managers and those in the hospitality industry; city- and county-elected officials and their staffs; and suburban mayors and city managers. The intent of the survey was to provide a baseline of opinion that will help the FCCFA improve its communications and interactions with key influencers.

The survey link was sent by email to 467 recipients on March 24; it went out again to 454 recipients on April 7. The reduction in number of recipients reflects the elimination of invalid addresses identified with the first mailing. Together, the two requests resulted in 106 responses, for a 23% participation rate.

Who Responded

• Civic leaders (mayor, city manager, county official etc.)	22.33%
• Convention and visitors bureau managers	15.53%
• Hotel and lodging general managers or owners	13.59%
• Meeting planners	10.68%
• Convention center customers	8.74%
• Other	29.13%

“Other” included:

- **Other hotel** (hotel managers, sales managers)
- **Business leaders** (including developers, architects, contractors, restaurant and bar owners, construction executives)
- **Civic and business organizations** (chamber of commerce)
- **Convention/events-related** (Experience Columbus board members, Sports Commission members, FCCFA employees, convention center employees)
- **Cultural** (artists, cultural institution leaders)

Overall Results

There was high awareness concerning the role the FCCFA plays in the community.

- Developing, building and operating convention facilities: 65% very familiar
- Developing, building and operating parking facilities: 69% very familiar
- Using countywide and citywide hotel and occupancy taxes: 72% very familiar
- Providing financial support for civic programs: 52% very familiar;
31% somewhat;
17% not familiar

Participants expressed generally favorable opinions on the job FCCFA is doing.

- Developing, building and operating convention facilities: 57% very; 37% somewhat
- Developing, building and operating parking facilities: 53% very; 34% somewhat
- Using countywide and citywide hotel and occupancy taxes: 62% very; 20% somewhat
- Providing financial support for civic programs: 48% very; 21% somewhat;
21% don't know

Negative responses were low (between 2 and 5%). Note that 8% answered "not well at all" when asked about providing financial support for civic programs, and 7% answered "not well at all" when asked about using taxes to maintain facilities.

When asked how important each FCCFA function is, with 1 most important, all functions were considered of high importance.

- Developing, building and operating convention facilities – 72% rated it a 1.
- Using taxes to develop and improve facilities – 54% rated it a 1.
- Developing, building and operating parking spaces – 45% rated it a 1.
- Operating without general tax subsidies and remaining self-sustaining – 42% rated it a 1.

Opinions about the quality of facilities were a mixed bag.

- More than half of all respondents described the Hilton as "state-of-the-art."
- More than 60% described Nationwide Arena as "above average."
- About 45% described the convention center as above average, while 34% described it as average.
- Only seven respondents described any facility as "poor."

Participants said convenience, safety and cleanliness are the best features of our convention parking facilities.

- More than 60% said parking facilities are convenient, safe and clean.
- Fewer than 40% described them as affordable.
- Fewer than half described the facilities as “easy to find.”
- Just under 40% described the facilities as “adequate.”
- Just over 10% described parking as “insufficient.”

Participants say FCCFA facilities are important to central Ohio’s economy.

The percentage of participants rating each facility as “very important” broke down as follows:

- Greater Columbus Convention Center: 92%
- Nationwide Arena: 80%
- Hilton Columbus Downtown: 71%
- Parking: 63%

An overwhelming number of participants say the FCCFA makes a big difference in contributing to the central Ohio economy.

- Makes a big difference: 86%
- Makes some difference: 11%
- Makes no difference at all: 2%

Most participants believe FCCFA has been a good steward of public funds, but there are those who disagree.

When asked how well the FCCFA has performed in this respect:

- More than two-thirds answered “very well.”
- Fewer than 5% answered “not well at all.”

Comments

The vast majority of participants praised FCCFA for its stewardship:

- “We are getting a huge return on assets and return on investment via the dollars that tourism brings back to the community economically. And as Columbus becomes a more desirable place to live, work, play, own a business and visit, the housing values go up.”
- “They have managed these funds in a way that they have not only been able to support the facilities that they oversee but have also been able to support initiatives that have helped drive the increased economic impact within our community.”

- “By operating in a self-sustainable manner without any subsidies into its operation and consistently turning a profit that allows for reinvestment back into the facilities it owns and contribution to community programs and organizations that benefit the greater community and destination as a whole.”

But there were a few dissenters:

- “Since bed tax funds the FCCFA, they should get more input from the hotel community since it is their guests that provide the funds that the FCCFA spends. All of the funds should be used to bring people to the city and not fund schools, arts or other community services.”
- “Board meetings conducted in secret. No oversight. No accountability.”
- “They are making money like any other business, then they consume public funds in millions.”
- “They have more money than any other entity and spend as they see it will enhance their empire.”

Nine of 10 participants said they have a positive opinion of the FCCFA.

- Almost 91% said they have a positive opinion of the FCCFA.
- Just over 9% said they do not.

Comments

As might be expected, most comments were positive.

- “FCCFA does a kick-ass job.”
- “The FCCFA has done an amazing job watching over public funds, selective and good practice contracting with service providers. The FCCFA provides a significant resource for the city to provide jobs and economic benefits to the businesses surrounding their facilities.”
- “We would not be where we are as a community without your efforts.”

And a few negative comments:

- “Secretive.”
- “Poor management.”
- “They should run like any other business, should not use tax money. Some hotels do not save 4% of the gross revenue after paying taxes and mortgage.”
- “It is positive, but you have ethical questions hanging over the Centerplate contract that many are following in the meeting industry. It wouldn’t even be so bad if Centerplate did a good job but their quality is terrible.”