INDIANA NONPROFITS
Scope and Community Dimensions

Indiana Local Government Officials and the Nonprofit Sector Report Series

Indiana Local Government Officials and 2-1-1 Service

Kirsten Grønbjerg and Hannah Martin

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Indiana Intergovernmental Issues Study

In this briefing, we assess to what extent local government officials (LGOs) are familiar with the 211 service, and how this familiarity has changed since our first briefing on 211 service in 2010 (published 2013). This is the sixth in our briefings from the *Indiana Nonprofits: Scope and Community Dimensions* project focusing on nonprofit-government relations in Indiana.[1]

The data for these briefings come from the Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (IACIR), which periodically collects information on issues affecting local governments and services to Indiana residents. We rely mainly on data from the 2014 survey, but include comparisons to the 2010 survey.[2]

What is 211?

The 211 program is a national initiative to provide information and referral services to individuals by making it possible for them to call 211

Selected highlights:

- In 2014, 626,000 Hoosiers contacted 211, reporting more than 700,000 needs and receiving nearly 1 million referrals to community resources.
- Although the service is now available in all 92 Indiana counties, only 39 percent of LGOs say they are aware of the service.
- Only 14 percent of LGOs thought the service was very useful, although close to half thought it was at least somewhat useful.
- About half (49 percent) of LGOs who were aware of the 211 service supported increasing local government funding for the services.
- These findings suggest there is an urgent need to educate LGOs about the availability and utility of the 211 services.

[1] The first five briefings explored LGOs' attitudes toward 211 service, PILOT and SILOT policies, collaboration between local government and nonprofits, LGO trust in nonprofits, and LGOs' support for PILOTs. For a listing of reports, see www.iub.edu/~nonprof/results/localgovt.php.

[2] In 2010, the IACIR surveyed nearly 1,150 local government officials (LGOs), including all mayors and county auditors, and 1-4 randomly selected members of each county board of commissioners, county council, town council, school board, and county township trustees. The response rate was 35%. In 2014, the IACIR surveyed 2,441 LGOS including all city mayors and 1-4 randomly selected member of each city council; board of commissioners, county council, town council, school board, county township trustees. The effective response rate was 26%. See www.iacir.spea.iupui.edu/publications.htm.

when they need help or seek volunteer opportunities related to health and human services. Trained Information and Referral Specialists connect callers, free of charge, with information about appropriate services available in their communities. In Indiana, the 211 program is administered by the nonprofit Indiana 211 Partnership (www.in211.org).

At the time of our first survey (2010), 211 service was available in 47 states, including Indiana, but only in 85 percent of Indiana's counties (all were included by 2012). The service is now available in part or all of the 50 states, plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico.[3] In 2014, 626,000 Hoosiers contacted 211 (67 percent via phone and 33 percent via the online database at www.in211.org), reporting more than 700,000 needs and receiving nearly 1 million referrals to community resources.[4] As Table 1 shows, more than half the contacts (56 percent) focus on various material needs, such as assistance with utilities, income support, housing, or food. A 2016 survey of 211 users found that the vast majority (95 percent) were satisfied with the help they received from 211, and 86 percent reported that their situation improved.[5]

How our analysis is organized

Given the importance of 211 service as indicated by the volume of calls, we sought to determine the extent to which LGOs are aware of 211 service as well as their opinions of it, and whether both features have changed since 2010. LGO awareness of and familiarity with the service is important because local residents may contact LGOs themselves for help with various problems. Also, in Indiana 211 service is funded by a combination of public funding and philanthropic support – hence LGOs' assessment of and support for the service is important for ensuring that this resource continues to be available.

Table 1. Indiana 211 Contacts by Needs, 2014

Needs	# of Contacts in 2014	% of Total Contacts
Utilities assistance	101,217	18.0%
Income support & assistance	81,574	14.5%
Housing	78,838	14.0%
Food & meals	53,824	9.6%
Legal, consumer & public safety	48,366	8.6%
Health care	46,777	8.3%
Information services	33,473	6.0%
Clothing, personal & household	33,159	5.9%
Mental health & addictions	19,329	3.4%
Individual, family & community support	16,120	2.9%
Transportation	13,456	2.4%
Other government/ economic services	11,599	2.1%
Education	9,624	1.7%
Employment	8,499	1.5%
Arts, culture & recreation	3,240	0.6%
Volunteers & donations	1,820	0.3%
Disaster services	1,350	0.2%

Source: Indiana 211 Partnership

We measure LGO awareness of and familiarity with 211 service by their responses to two questions that were asked in both surveys: (1) Is

[3] For more information about 211 service in Indiana, please visit www.in211.org, nationally: www.211.org or local United Way Agencies.

[4] See www.in211.org/reports/general-service/2014-community-report/.

[5] See https://www.in211.org/reports/general-service/2016-community-report/.

the 211 service available in your community; and (2) How familiar are you with the 211 service? We measure their assessment of the service by their responses to two other questions also asked in both surveys: (3) How useful do you think 211 service is to residents in your community; and (4) Would you support an increase in public funding in order to ensure that this service continues. Finally, we look at LGO responses to an overarching question asked only in 2014: (5) What is 211's most important contribution to your community?

For each of these dimensions, we first look at whether LGO responses appear to be significantly different in 2014 than they were in 2010 (for questions that were asked on both years). We then turn our attention to the 2014 survey to explore in greater detail what may explain LGO attitudes. In each case, we report only findings that meet statistical tests of significance. In some cases, we have had to combine adjacent response categories to obtain a more robust analysis.

We speculate that LGOs in communities with greater levels of community need will be more aware 211 service and also more supportive of the service than their counterparts. To measure community need, we look at 211 call volume per 1,000 residents[6] and LGOs' opinions on the direction their communities are heading (IACIR surveys). We also consider whether LGOs who represent more rural[7] counties will be less aware or supportive of 211 service on the argument that needs in rural counties may be more widely-dispersed and less visible to LGOs than in more urban counties. Of course, in smaller rural counties, LGOs may also be more familiar with specific needs, so the pattern may be opposite of what we hypothesize.

Finally, we consider characteristics of the LGOs available from the survey: their current position in government, the number of years they have been in this position,[8] and the number of years they have been in any position in government.[9] We predict that LGOs who have been in their current position or any government position longer will be more aware of and familiar with 211 service, find it more useful, and be more willing to support increased funding for it. Because neither LGOs' tenure in the current position nor in any position in government have a significant impact on any of the variables, we exclude these variables from further analysis in the discussion below.

Are LGOs aware of 211 service in their counties?

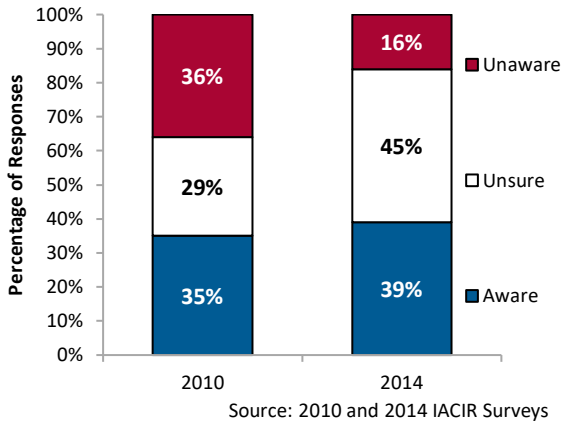
In our first briefing (using data from the 2010 IACIR survey), we concluded that information regarding the availability of 211 service is either not reaching or not registering with LGOs, since only 35 percent said they were aware of the service in their communities. In 2014, when asked that question again, only a slightly higher percent of LGOs (39 percent. Figure 1) said it was available, even though the service by then covered all Indiana counties.

However, the percentage who said they were not aware of the service dropped notably, from 36 percent to 16 percent, with a corresponding increase in the percentage who were unsure, up from 29 percent to 45 percent (Figure 1). These

[6] Using data from Indiana 211 Partnership, Inc.
[7] Using data from Stats Indiana to determine whether the largest town or city in the county has less than 10,000 residents (as do 50 percent of Indiana counties).
[8] Based on grouping into thirds the number of years each type of LGO (i.e. mayor, school board member, etc.) has been in their current position
[9] Based on grouping into thirds the number of years each type of LGO (i.e. mayor, school board member, etc.) has been in any government position

changes are significant. However, since the majority (61 percent) of LGOs still are either not aware of the service or do not pay attention to it, there is still much work to be done.

Figure 1: Are LGOs aware of 211 service? 2010 (n=266), 2014 (n=575)



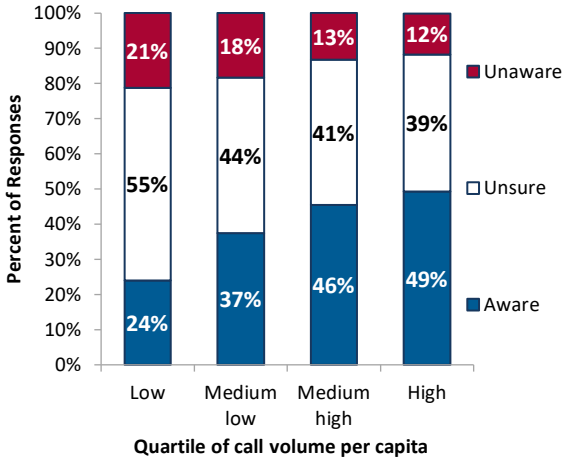
Source: 2010 and 2014 IACIR Surveys

Community need

We turn now to whether LGOs in counties with greater community need are more aware of the 211 service. Our findings are mixed. As Figure 2 shows, LGOs in counties with higher 211 call volumes do appear to be more aware of 211 service as we expected.[10] Indeed, those in counties with the highest quartile of call volume per capita are more than twice as likely to be aware of the service compared to those in counties with the lowest quartile. Those with higher call volumes are also notable less likely to say they are unsure or not aware of the service.

On the other hand, we thought that LGOs who have a very pessimistic opinion on the direction of their community would be more aware of 211 service because their community is likely to face significant needs. However, we find some evidence that the opposite (Figure 3)[11] may hold: those with the most pessimistic view of the direction their community is going in are notably less likely to be aware of the service than LGOs with less pessimistic views (25 percent vs. 39 percent). They are also almost three times as likely to say that the service is not available at all than their counterparts (44 percent vs. 15 percent). These findings should be interpreted with caution, however, since relatively few LGOs hold very pessimistic views.

Figure 2: Are LGOs aware of 211 service? by call volume, 2014 (n=582)



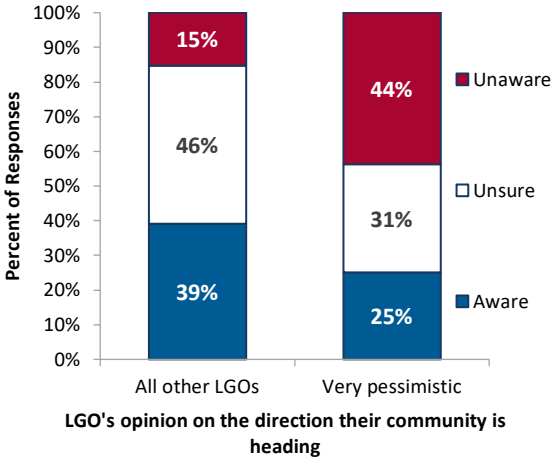
Source: 2014 IACIR Survey; Indiana 2011 Partnership.

We also thought that LGOs in more urban counties would be more aware of the service than their rural counterparts, because the needs would be greater or more visible. In fact, that appears to be the case. LGOs in counties where the largest town or city is 10,000 residents or more are more likely to be aware of the 211 service than those in rural counties with only towns of fewer than 10,000 residents (44 percent vs. 33 percent) (Figure 4).

[10] "Low" indicates less than 16 calls to 211 per 1,000 residents. "Medium low" indicates between 16 and 26 calls per 1,000 people. "Medium high" indicates between 26 and 37 calls per 1,000 people. "High" indicates more than 37 calls per 1,000 people.

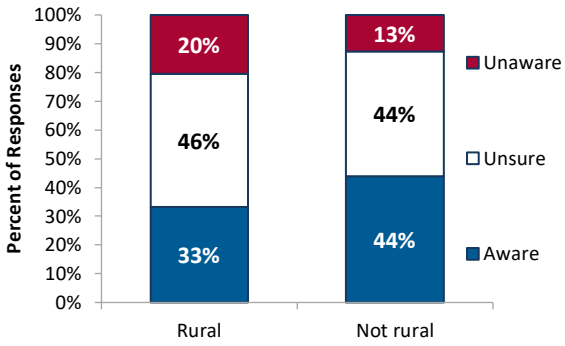
[11] "All other LGOs" includes those with very optimistic, mildly optimistic, neither optimistic nor pessimistic, and mildly pessimistic views on the direction their community is heading.

Figure 3: Are LGOs aware of 211 service? by community direction, 2014 (n=567)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

Figure 4: Are LGOs aware of 211 service? by rural, (n=582)

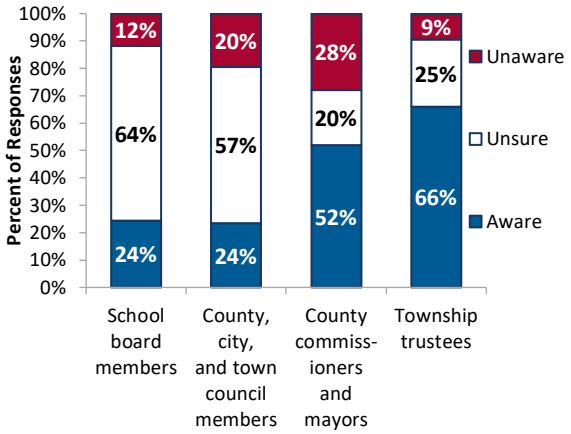


Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

LGO positions

We expect LGOs holding particular types of government positions to find 211 service more relevant, since community residents may contact them with requests for help. This is particularly the case for township trustees, who administer township relief in Indiana, but it may also hold for those in positions of leadership in local government, such as mayors or county commissioners. We find evidence in support of this argument: awareness of 211 service is in fact highest for township trustees, followed by county commissioners or mayors. County, city, and town council members and school board members are notably less aware (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Are LGOs aware of 211 service? by position (n=582)

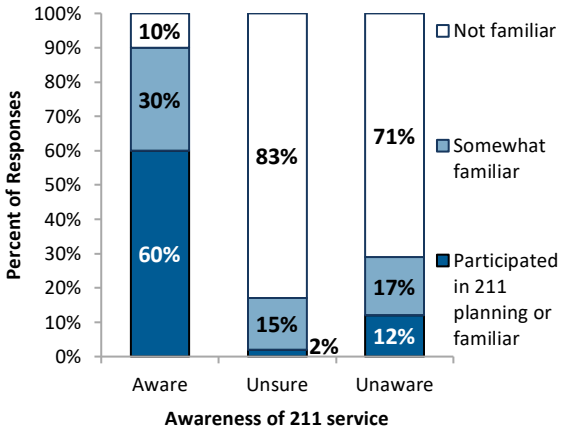


Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

How familiar are LGOs with 211 service in their counties?

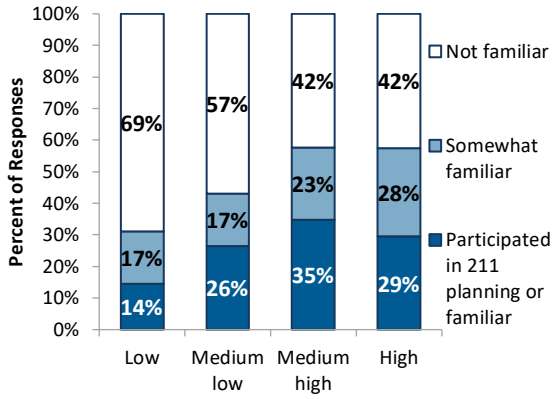
To explore awareness of 211 service in more detail, we look at a second question from the survey, which asked LGOs to report their familiarity with the service. Possible responses to this question ranged from having participated in planning the service locally (most familiar) to being familiar, somewhat familiar, and not familiar. In our first briefing, we found – as expected – that LGOs who were aware that 211 service was available in their communities also indicated that they were more familiar with the details of the service. In 2014, this pattern was not significantly different. As Figure 6 shows, 60 percent of those aware of the service in their community said they had participated in planning the service or were familiar with it, compared to those who were not aware of the service (12 percent) or uncertain as to whether it was available (2 percent).

Figure 6: How familar are LGOs with 211 service? by awareness, 2014 (n=575)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

Figure 7: How familiar are LGOs with 211 service? by call volume, 2014 (n=579)



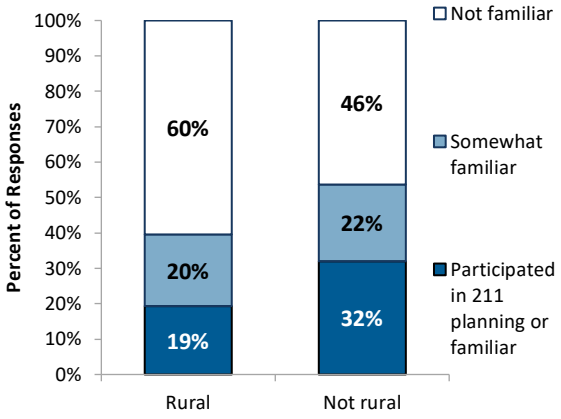
Source: 2014 IACIR Survey; Indiana 2011 Partnership

Community need

Using the more detailed responses about familiarity with (rather than just overall awareness of) 211 service, we find that LGOs in counties with above average 211 call volumes are more familiar with 211 service (last two columns in Figure 7) than the next lower quartile. Those in the lowest quartile of call volume are clearly least familiar: only 15 percent have participated in planning efforts or generally understand how the service operates compared to 30 percent in the highest quartile. Similarly, more than two-thirds (69 percent) of those in the lowest quartile describe themselves as not familiar with the service, compared to about two-fifths (43 percent) in counties with the highest call volume. However, LGOs' opinions on the direction of their communities does not have a significant impact on their familiarity with 211 service.

As was the case with overall awareness, LGOs from more urban counties (largest town has more than 10,000 residents) are more familiar with the service: about a third (32 percent) have been involved in planning the service or generally understands how it operates, compared to less than one-fifth (19 percent) of LGOs from more rural communities (Figure 8).

Figure 8: How familiar are LGOs with 211 service? by rural vs not rural, 2014 (n=579)



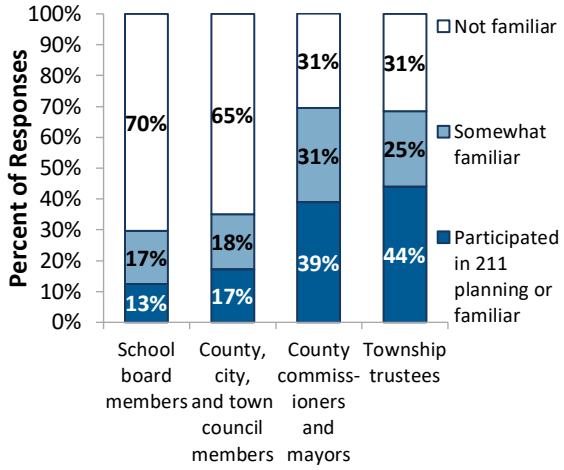
Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

LGO positions

As was the case with awareness of 211 service, familiarity with the service also varies by the LGO's position in government. Township trustees and mayors and county commissioners are most familiar with the service, with about two-fifths (respectively 44 and 39 percent) reporting the highest level of familiarity (Figure 9). By contrast, only 17 percent of county, city, and town council members and 13 percent of school board members report a similar level of familiarity. And two-thirds or more of the latter

(respectively 65 and 70 percent) say they are not familiar with the service, compared to less than half as many (31 percent) of township trustees or mayors and county commissioners.

Figure 9: How familiar are LGOs with 211 service? by position (n=579)



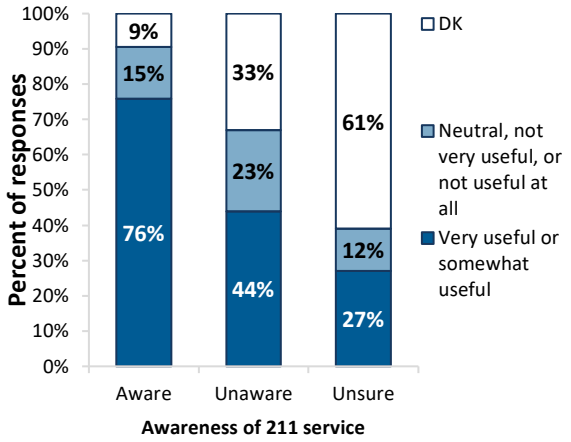
Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

What do LGOs think about the usefulness of 211 service?

Both surveys asked LGOs to assess the usefulness of the 211 service to residents in their local community, with response categories ranging from very useful to not at all useful. The response categories for the two surveys differed slightly, but the 2014 assessment is not significantly different from that in 2010. In 2014 almost half (49 percent) of LGOs described the 211 service to be at least somewhat useful (including 14 percent who said it was very useful).

Not surprisingly, whether LGOs find the services useful varies by how aware they are of the services. As Figure 10 shows, in 2014 over three quarters (76 percent) of LGOs who were aware of 211 service described it to be at least somewhat useful. However, lack of awareness is clearly a persistent problem—almost one third (33 percent) of LGOs who were unaware of the 211 service and over one half (61 percent) of LGOs who were unsure of whether their counties have the service said they did not know how useful it is.

Figure 10: What do LGOs think about the usefulness of 211 service? 2014 (n=574)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

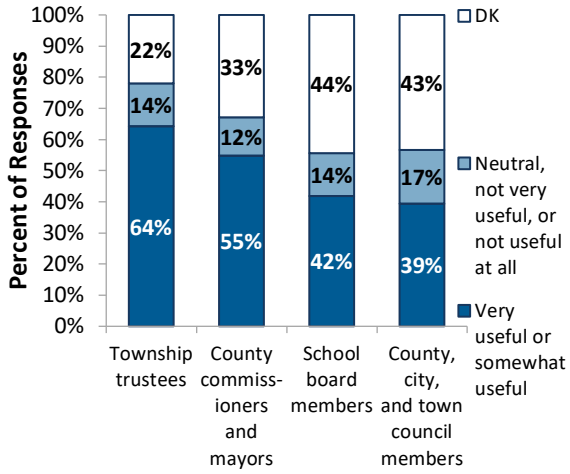
Community need

We thought that LGOs from communities with greater levels of need would be more likely to find 211 service to be useful. However, none of the measures of need we examined – call volume per capita, whether LGOs were pessimistic about the future direction of their community, or whether the LGO represented a more urban county – were significantly related to how useful LGOs find 211 service.

LGO positions

As was the case with awareness of and familiarity with 211 service, opinions on the usefulness of the service varies by the LGO's position in government. Township trustees find it most useful, and county, city, and town council members find it least useful (Figure 11).

Figure 11: What do LGOs think about the usefulness of 211 service? by position (n=577)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

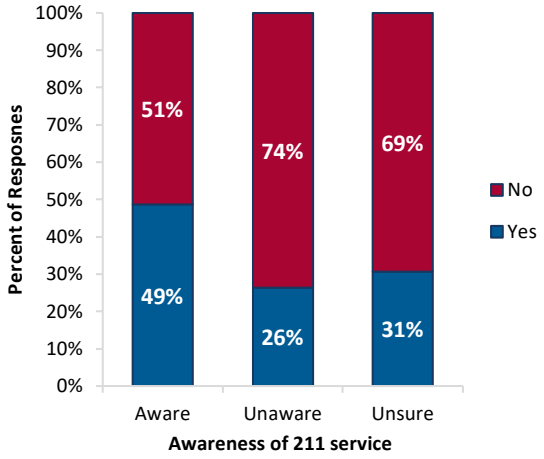
Are LGOs willing to increase 211 funding?

In our first briefing (using data from the 2010 IACIR survey), we found that LGOs who were aware of 211 service were notably more likely to support increasing local government funding for the service than were those who were unaware or unsure whether their counties had the service. In 2014, this pattern was not significantly different. As figure 12 shows, almost half (49 percent) of LGOs who were aware of 211 service supported increasing funding for it, compared to just over a quarter (26 percent) of those who were unware of the service and almost a third (31 percent) of those who were unsure whether their counties had the service. These findings suggest that increasing awareness of 211 service among LGOs may result in greater willingness to support local government funding for the service.

Community need

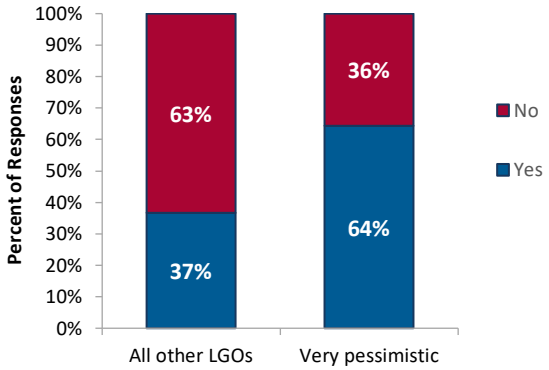
The 211 call volume in an LGO's community does not have a significant impact on their willingness to increase 211 funding, nor does whether the county is rural or not. However, views about the direction of the local community do appear to make a difference. Almost two thirds (64 percent) of LGOs who have the most pessimistic opinion on the direction of their community are willing to increase 211 funding (Figure 13) compared to just over one third (37 percent) of those with less pessimistic or optimistic views.

Figure 12: Are LGOs willing to increase 211 funding? by awareness of 2-1-1, 2014 (n=321)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

Figure 13: Are LGOs willing to increase 211 funding? by community direction, 2014 (n=317)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

LGO positions

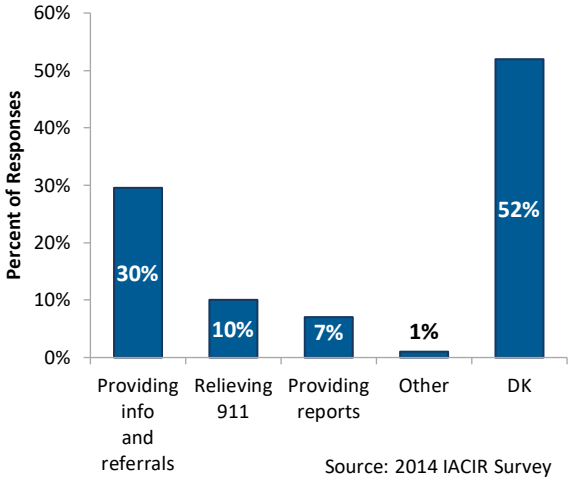
Although the type of position LGOs hold is related to how aware of and familiar with 211 service LGOs are and how useful they consider it to be, position is not related to their willingness to support increased funding.

What do LGOs think is 211's most important contribution?

IACIR's 2014 survey included a new question that was not asked in 2010: What is 211's most important (or valued) contribution to your community? Respondents were given five options: (1) providing 24/7 access to human service information and referrals to government, community and faith-based services; (2) relieving 911 for non-emergency needs; (3) providing reports about local residents' needs, resources available and gaps in services; (4) other; and (5) I don't know. Figure 14 shows the percentages of these responses.

The majority (52 percent) of LGOs said they did not know what is 211's most important contribution, confirming our previous findings that many LGOs are not aware of or familiar with the service. Another 30 percent selected the basic information and referral purpose of the service as its most important contribution – providing information about and referrals to needed human services 24/7. Only a tenth of LGOs identified the more administrative purposes of the service as its most important contribution: relieving stress on 9-1-1 service by absorbing non-emergency calls (10 percent) and supporting community planning by making it possible to identify gaps in services or changes in community need (7 percent). The rest (1 percent) mentioned a variety of other benefits, such as transport van services.

Figure 14: What do LGOs think is 211's most important contribution? 2014 (n=557)

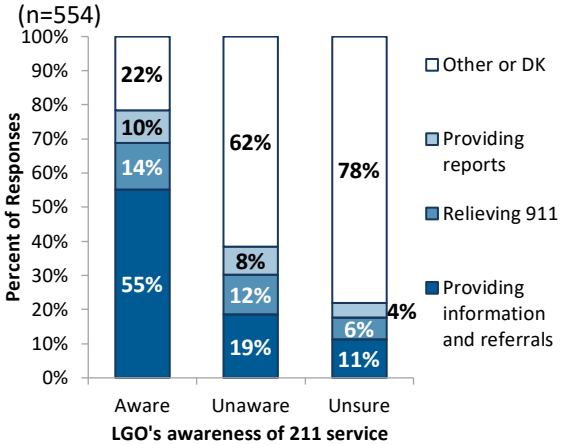


Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

Awareness of and familiarity with the 211 service

Although the majority of LGOs said they did not know what 211's most important contribution is, more than half (55 percent) of those who were aware said that providing 24/7 access to human service information and referrals to government, community, and faith-based services was most important (Figure 15), compared to only 19 percent of those who were not aware of the service and 11 percent of those that were not sure if they knew about the service.

Figure 15: What do LGOs think is 211's most important contribution? by awareness, 2014 (n=554)

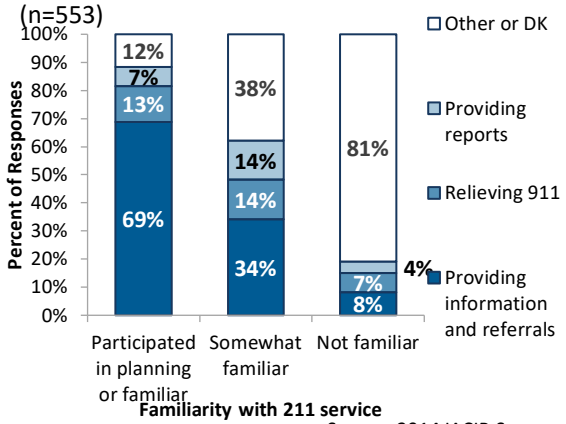


Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

A similar pattern holds when we consider LGOs' familiarity with 211 service. As Figure 16 shows, those most familiar with the service are more than twice as likely to identify information and referral as the service's most important contribution, compared to those who identified themselves as only somewhat familiar (69 vs. 34 percent). The two groups are about equally likely to identify relieving 911 services (13 and 14 percent respectively). Although those with less familiarity are somewhat more likely to identify community planning as the most important contribution (14 vs. 7 percent) they are much more likely to say they don't know what is the most important contributions (38 vs. 12 percent). Not surprisingly, the vast majority (81 percent) of those who said they were not familiar with the 211 service said didn't know what its most important contribution is.

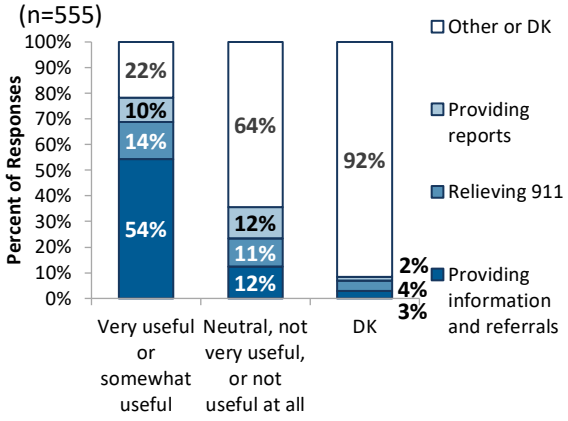
Similarly, LGOs who view the 211 service as most useful are over four times as likely to identify the service's information and referral purpose as its most important contributions than those who hold neutral or negative views of the usefulness of the service (Figure 17).

Figure 16: What do LGOs think is 211's most important contribution? by familiarity, 2014 (n=553)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

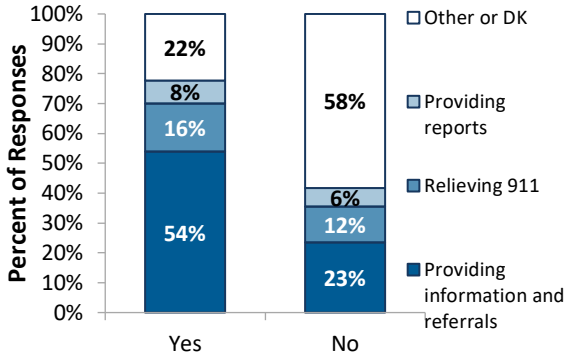
Figure 17: What do LGOs think is 211's most important contribution? by usefulness, 2014 (n=555)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

Figure 18 shows that LGOs who support increased funding for the service are more than twice as likely to identify information and referral as the most important contribution of the service (54 vs. 23 percent) compared to those who do not support increased funding. Notably, the majority of the latter (58 percent) are not able to identify the most important contribution of the service.[12]

Figure 18: What do LGOs think 211's most important contribution is in their community? by support for increased 211 funding (n=309)



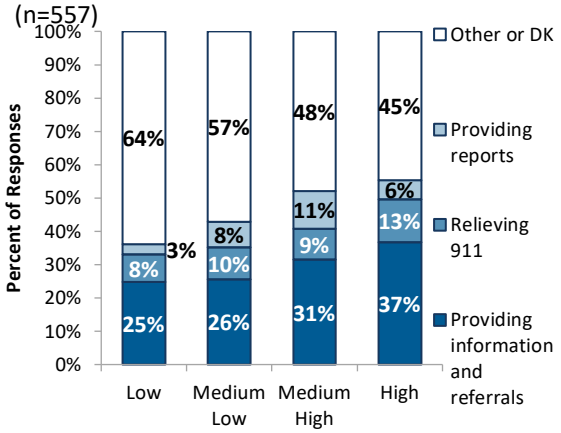
Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

[12] However, when we treat the "other" and "DK" responses as missing, LGOs' support for increased funding no longer has a significant relationship to the service's most important contribution.

Community need

We thought LGOs in communities with higher levels of community need would be more aware of the contributions of the service. There is some evidence for this argument, but only for 211 call volume. About 59 percent of LGOs in communities with the highest level of 211 call volume per capita identified a primary contribution of the 211 service, compared36 percent of those in communities with the lowest call volume (Figure 19). LGOs in communities with the highest call volume were also significantly more likely to identify relieving 911 from non-emergency calls as the primary contribution than their counterparts. For those who identify any primary contribution, the most prevalent response is information and referral.[13]

Figure 19: What do LGOs think is 211's most important contribution? by call volume, 2014 (n=557)



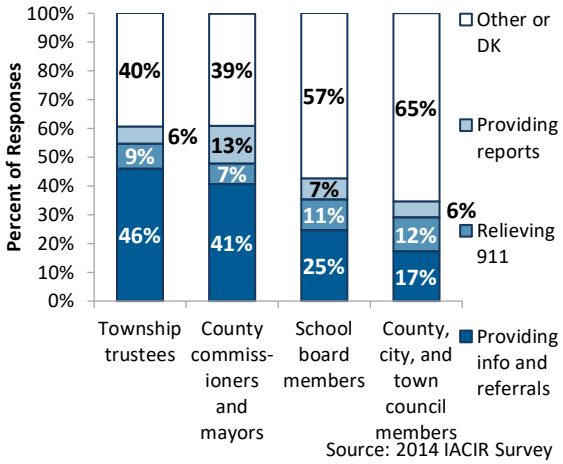
Source: 2014 IACIR Survey; Indiana 2011 Partnership

However, LGOs' opinions on the direction that their communities are heading, or whether LGOs' counties are rural, are related to what they think 211's most important contribution is.

LGO positions

Assessment of 211's most important contribution varies by the LGO's position in government. Township trustees are more than twice as likely to identify information and referral as the most important contribution of the service (46 vs. 17 percent) compared to county, city, and town council members. Notably, the majority of the latter (65 percent) are not able to identify the most important contribution of the service (Figure 20).

Figure 20: What do LGOs think is 2-1-1's most important contribution? by position (n=557)



Source: 2014 IACIR Survey

Conclusions and Policy Implications

211 service is very beneficial to many Indiana residents. In 2016, 86 percent of callers who contacted the programs to which they were referred by 211 operators reported an improvement in their situation, and 95 percent were satisfied with the help they received.[14] Vulnerable populations, such as veterans and the elderly, are especially in need of this service. Between 2012 and 2016, veterans' calls to 211 more than doubled, and calls from seniors are increasing, reflecting the overall growth in older

[13] When we run an analysis treating "other" and "DK" responses as missing, call volume no longer has a significant impact on what LGOs identify as the most important contribution.

[14] Indiana 211 Partnership, Inc. 2016 Community Report.

Hoosiers.[15] [16] In addition, the Indiana 211 Partnership is collaborating with the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration to screen callers for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.[17]

While some LGOs are aware of and support the 211 service, many do not know that the service in fact is available in their communities, much less how the service benefits their constituents. These findings suggest there is an urgent need to educate LGOs about the availability and utility of the service. In particular, 211 awareness campaigns need to target LGOs in counties with low 211 call volumes per capita, LGOs who are very pessimistic about the direction their community is heading, LGOs in rural counties, and LGOs who serve as county council members, city council members, town council members, and school board members.

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[15] Indiana 211 Partnership, Inc. 2016 Community Report. 211 Connects Hoosier Veterans to Much Needed Help.

[16] Indiana 211 Partnership, Inc. Connecting Seniors.

[17] Indiana 211 Partnership, Inc. SNAP Interim Report.