

Are you a 2-percenter?

The mission of the Nipomo Community Services District is to provide its customers with reliable, quality, and cost-effective services now and in the future.

Nipomo CSD recently completed a customer satisfaction survey and found 54% of its customers believe the rate setting process is not satisfactory. 78% of these same customers rated the District's overall performance as favorable. The cost of service can be a difficult hurdle to overcome when trying to satisfy consumers. The District's rates are built on the predominant principle of charging only what it costs to provide the service. There is no other option.

The survey was not scientific. Statisticians would discount the information altogether because only 2% of the total pool of customers responded. Of the District's 4,300 water customers, only 87 people took time to answer the 25 question survey. So what can be learned from this small sample?

If we understand the limits of the information that was made available by the 2% that did respond, we can build a profile of this subgroup's sentiments. You as the reader can compare your sentiments against the sentiments of the profiled customers and judge for yourself the value of the data.

Based on the survey's six categories, the profile of the 2-percenter is:

- 1) Concerned with area water supply but satisfied with the District's efforts for securing a reliable source of water;
- 2) Concerned that the cost of service is unreasonable and believe that the District sets rates unfairly;
- 3) Accepting of the water quality at their home;
- 4) Conserved more water this year than in past years and would like to see an end to development and the creation of drought rates for high water users;
- 5) Confident that the District can provide services following an emergency and feels well-informed on District activities;
- 6) Prefer to receive communications from the District via email and direct mail rather than bill stuffers, social media, and other forms of mass communication.

How do your perceptions compare with this snapshot of respondents? If you're interested in reviewing the questions and the responses, the information can be found on the District's website at ncsd.ca.gov.

It may not come close to statistical accuracy, but the survey results do provide some insight. Customers dislike paying for one option. They want to believe a service provider has their best interest in mind. In a competitive world, if that service provider forgets who's paying the bill, the customer can go somewhere else for services. There is the perception that the District charges what it wants without regard to the customer, so the District has work to do to change that perception.

As stewards of the water and wastewater systems, we all have a role. Board Members, staff, and customers need to be aware of and engaged in the success of these valued enterprises. Collectively, we cannot fail. Understanding what drives the cost of services is crucial to building trust. Improving and maintaining the unseen infrastructure the community relies on guarantees we leave a lasting legacy for our children so they too can rely on these services.

Until next time...