

In December 2020, the Center surveyed 5,409 elected municipal officials to gather some basic information on municipal official attitudes about the COVID-19 vaccines, and Pennsylvania state government response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was conducted via email, with addresses provided by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services. A total of 1,009 officials answered the survey, for a response rate of 18 percent.

Four Key Findings:

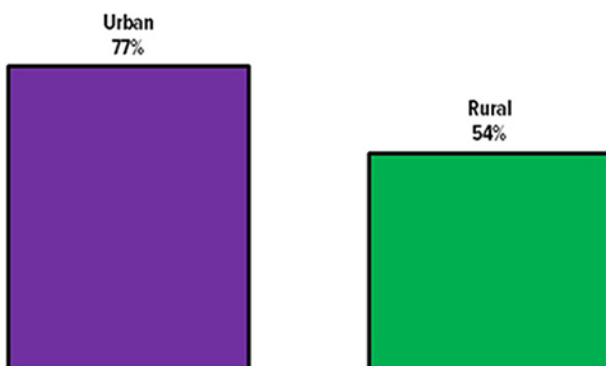
1. Two-thirds (66 percent) of respondents said they would probably get the COVID-19 vaccine. However, a sizeable percentage of rural respondents said they would not get vaccinated.
2. Forty-seven percent of respondents were dissatisfied with state government's response to the pandemic, 34 percent were satisfied, and 19 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction was especially strong among rural municipal officials.
3. Municipal officials gave Pennsylvania state government high marks for assisting health care providers during the pandemic, but low marks for assisting employers and businesses, and schools.
4. Most rural municipal officials met in-person at the latest regularly scheduled municipal meeting. Most urban officials met virtually.

Views on Vaccination

Two-thirds (66 percent) of municipal officials said they would definitely or probably get the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available. Thirty-four percent said they would probably not get the vaccine or were unsure. While the majority of respondents intended to get the vaccine, there were some differences.

- **Rural/Urban Differences:** 77 percent of urban officials intended to get vaccinated compared to 54 percent of rural officials.
- **Gender Differences:** 68 percent of male officials intended to get vaccinated compared to 61 percent of female officials.
- **Age Differences:** 72 percent of officials age 55 and older intended to get vaccinated compared to 52 percent of officials under age 55.

Percent of Urban and Rural Municipal Officials Who Said They Would Definitely or Probably Get Vaccinated



- **Population Differences:** Officials representing less populated municipalities were less likely to get vaccinated compared to those representing more populated municipalities. For example, 57 percent of officials in municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents intended to be vaccinated compared to 81 percent in municipalities with 5,000 or more residents.

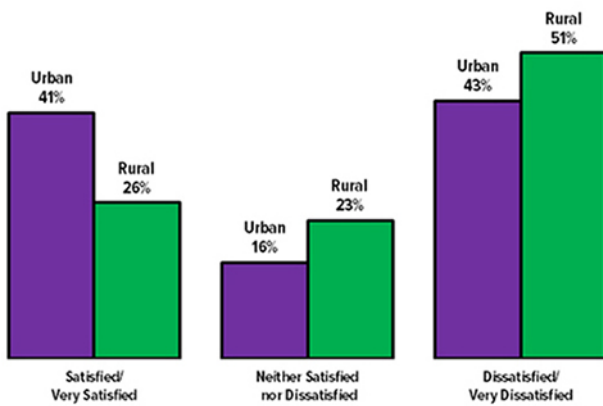
Satisfaction with State Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Forty-seven percent of survey respondents said they were dissatisfied with state government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirty-four percent said they were satisfied, and 19 percent said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

To better understand officials' dissatisfaction with state government's response, the Center excluded the middle group—those who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with state government's response—and focused on those who were dissatisfied. Here's what we found:

- **Geographic:** 66 percent of rural officials were dissatisfied with state government's response compared to 50 percent of urban officials. A higher percentage of officials in western Pennsylvania were dissatisfied (61 percent) compared to those in eastern Pennsylvania (56 percent).
- **Demographic:** 65 percent of officials who were under 55 years old were dissatisfied compared to 54 percent of officials who were 55 years old and older. In addition, a higher percentage of male officials (61 percent) were dissatisfied compared to female officials (49

Levels of Satisfaction with State Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Urban and Rural Municipal Officials



percent). Sixty-one percent of officials in municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents were dissatisfied, compared to 50 percent of officials in municipalities with 5,000 or more residents.

- Willingness to Get Vaccinated:** 40 percent of officials who said they would probably get vaccinated were dissatisfied with state government’s response to the pandemic. Eighty-eight percent of officials who said they would probably not get vaccinated or were unsure were dissatisfied with state government’s response.

Effectiveness of Pennsylvania’s Response to Assist Various Entities

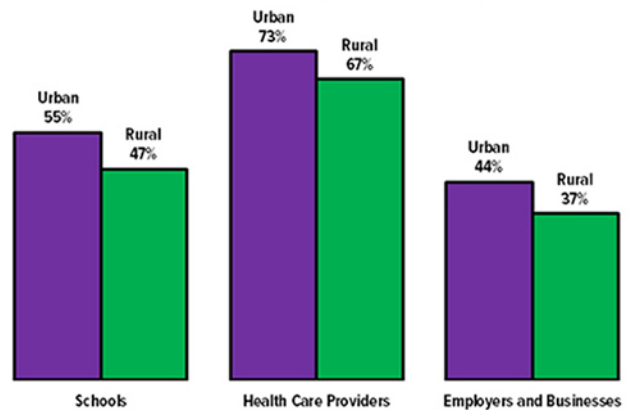
Officials were asked how effective Pennsylvania’s response was in assisting employers and businesses, health care providers, and schools. Municipal officials generally gave high marks to Pennsylvania’s response to health care providers and low marks to the state’s response to employers and schools.

- Health Care Providers:** 70 percent of officials said Pennsylvania’s response in assisting health care providers was either effective or very effective, and 30 percent said it was ineffective. This response pattern was consistent across gender, age, and rural/urban location. The one exception was among those who planned/did not plan to get vaccinated. Seventy-seven percent of officials who intended to get vaccinated rated Pennsylvania’s response in assisting health care providers as effective. In comparison, 56 percent of officials who were unlikely or unsure of vaccination rated Pennsylvania’s response as effective.
- Employers and Businesses:** 40 percent of respondents said Pennsylvania’s response in assisting employers and businesses was effective, and 60 percent said it was ineffective. This pattern was consistent across gender, age, and rural/urban location. The one exception was among those who planned/did not plan to get vaccinated. Forty-seven percent of officials who were likely to get vaccinated rated Pennsylvania’s response to assist employers and businesses as effective, and 26

percent of officials who were unlikely or unsure rated Pennsylvania’s response as effective.

- Education:** 51 percent of officials said Pennsylvania’s response in assisting educational entities was effective, and 49 percent said it was ineffective. This pattern was consistent across gender, age, and rural/urban location. The only exception: the likelihood of getting/not getting vaccinated. Fifty-seven percent of officials who would get vaccinated rated Pennsylvania’s response to schools as effective. In comparison, 38 percent of officials who were unlikely or unsure of vaccination rated Pennsylvania’s response as effective.

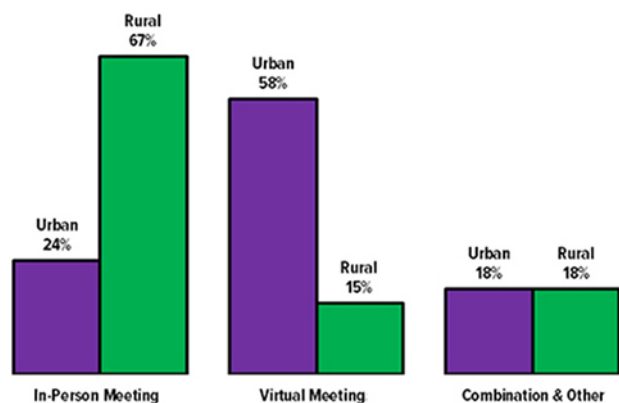
Percent of Urban and Rural Municipal Officials Who Said Pennsylvania’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic was Effective/Very Effective In Regard to the Following Entities:



Municipal Meetings During the Pandemic

- Most Municipal Meetings Were In-Person:** 45 percent of municipal officials said the latest regularly scheduled meeting was in-person. Thirty-seven percent met virtually, and the remaining 18 percent met through a combination of in-person and virtual, or some other method. When comparing rural and urban locations, there were some striking differences. Only 15 percent of rural officials met virtually compared to 58 percent of urban officials. In addition, 67 percent of rural officials said they met in-person, compared to 24 percent of urban officials.

Format of Most Recently Attended Municipal Meeting for Rural and Urban Municipal Officials



Methods

The Center obtained the list of municipal officials from the Governor’s Center for Local Government Services (GCLGS). This list contained names and mailing addresses for 12,776 elected or appointed municipal officials from every city, borough, town, and township in Pennsylvania. Within this list, 5,409 officials had listed a unique email address.

Officials with email addresses came from 1,704 municipalities, or 66 percent of Pennsylvania’s 2,560 municipal governments. The survey sample did not include officials from 856 municipalities (33 percent).

The survey was emailed to the 5,409 officials on December 14, 2020. Two follow-up reminders were sent to non-respondents. By December 21, 2020, 1,009 officials had completed the survey, or 18 percent. The margin of error among officials with email addresses was +/-2.8.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania surveyed municipal officials for two reasons. First, municipal officials are the elected representatives of their municipality. The views of these officials are likely to reflect those of the residents they represent. Second, the list of officials represented a sample of convenience.

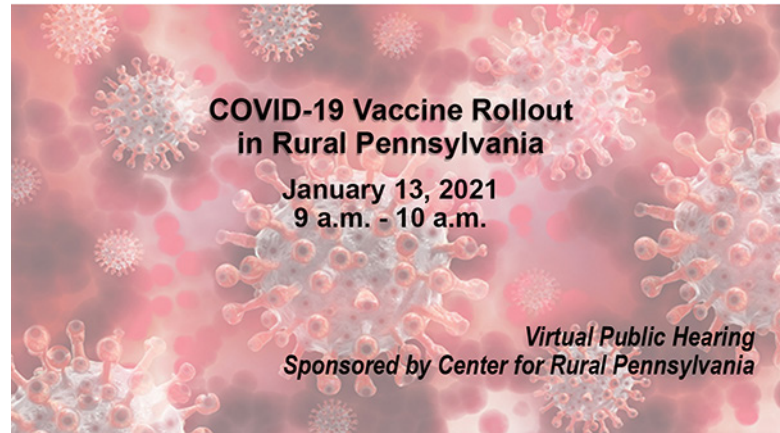
Among those who responded to the survey, the Center matched the responses with additional information from the GCLGS on gender. The Center was also able to code each respondent’s municipality as rural or urban according to the Center’s definition, as follows: a municipality is rural when the population density within the municipality is less than the statewide average density of 284 people per square mile, or the total population is less than 2,500, unless more than 50 percent of the population lives in an urbanized area as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. All other municipalities are considered urban.

In addition to the municipal survey, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors held a virtual public hearing on January 13 on the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines in rural Pennsylvania.

Hearing panelists were Pennsylvania Department of Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine, Dr. George Garrow, Chief Medical Officer of Primary Health Network, Mr. Steven Johnson, President of UPMC Susquehanna, and Dr. Cary Funk, Director of Science and Society Research at Pew Research Center.

The overarching message of the panelists was the need to build trust around the safety and necessity of COVID-19 vaccines, and communicating how, where, and when residents can get vaccines.

[Click here](#) for the agenda, testimony and recording of the public hearing.



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Center for Rural Pennsylvania
625 Forster St., Room 902
Harrisburg, PA 17120
Phone: (717) 787-9555
www.rural.pa.gov
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