

# 2011 Performance Assessment

## Arrowhead Regional Development Commission

Leading • Planning • Connecting in the Minnesota counties of Aitkin • Carlton • Cook • Itasca • Koochiching • Lake • St. Louis

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## Message from the Executive Director

Members of the Minnesota Legislature:

I am pleased to write this letter prefacing the results of the 2011 Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) 2011 Agency Assessment. The nine regional development commissions established by state statute in 1969 are each required to conduct an assessment every five years. The last ARDC assessment was conducted in 2006.

ARDC staff work in four divisions: Area Agency on Aging, Metropolitan Interstate Council, Regional Planning and America's Byways Resource Center. Customers and clients who work with each of the divisions were asked for feedback. This feedback helps us improve our customer service and helps give us direction for meeting future needs in the region.

We are very proud of, and encouraged by, the results of the 2011 survey and by the response rate of nearly 52%. We learned a great deal from the results and especially appreciate the time respondents took to add written comments. Some of the written responses are included in the summary of the survey results.

As we distribute copies of the assessment to our Board and Commission members and others, we will encourage them to contact us whenever they have input. It will help us improve our services and enhance the agency's Leading, Planning, and Connecting roles in the region.

Best regards,

Pat Henderson  
Executive Director  
Arrowhead Regional Development Commission

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## Introduction

The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission is one of nine Regional Development Commissions (RDCs) in the State of Minnesota. The nine RDCs serve 63 of the 87 counties in the state.

The RDCs were established by Minnesota statute in 1969 to work with, and on behalf of, local units of government to develop plans and implement programs that address economic, social, physical and governmental concerns of each region of the state (462.393, Subd.2). ARDC's mission is to serve the people of the Arrowhead

Region by providing local units of government and citizen groups a means to work cooperatively in identifying needs, solving problems and fostering local leadership.

ARDC has been serving the seven counties (Aitkin, Cook, Lake, St. Louis, Koochiching, Itasca and Carlton) in the northeast region of the state for more than 40 years. Every five years the agency is mandated to review activities and issue a report assessing the agency's performance in fulfilling the directives of the Regional Development Act.



In the past, surveys were sent to our partners, recipients of our services, local governments, federal and state agencies, and key stakeholders throughout Minnesota. This year the agency focused on respondents within the Arrowhead region who are familiar with the services the agency offers.

## Preparing the Survey

Under the guidance of Pat Henderson, Executive Director of ARDC, the survey was developed with the assistance of staff members from the four agency divisions: *Metropolitan Interstate Council*, the *Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging*, *America's Byways Resource Center* and *Regional Planning*.

This joint effort focused on

ARDC's roles of leading, planning and connecting in our service region and what can be done to enhance each of those roles.

Each of the four divisions provided mailing lists of names of people from organizations that were recipients of services or have served in some capacity in furthering the work of the agency.

A total of 248 respondents

were sent the survey electronically or via U.S. mail. The survey questions allowed for multiple selections of answers and included an option to provide open-ended comments.

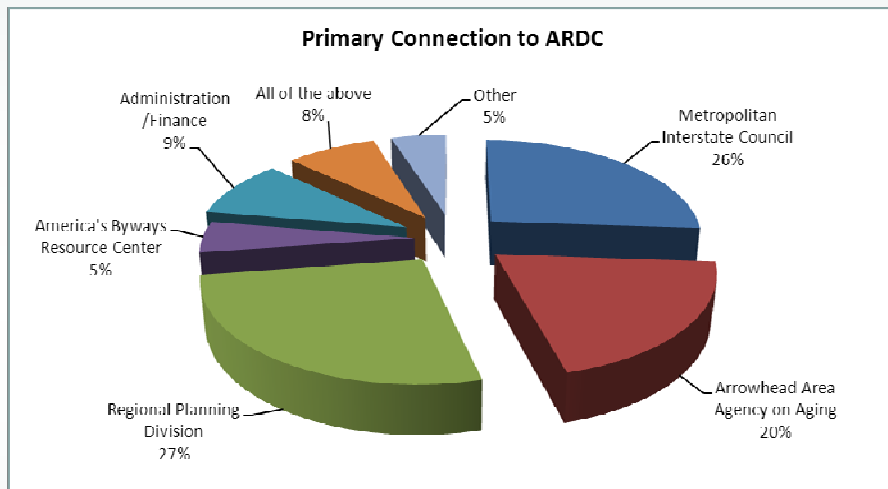
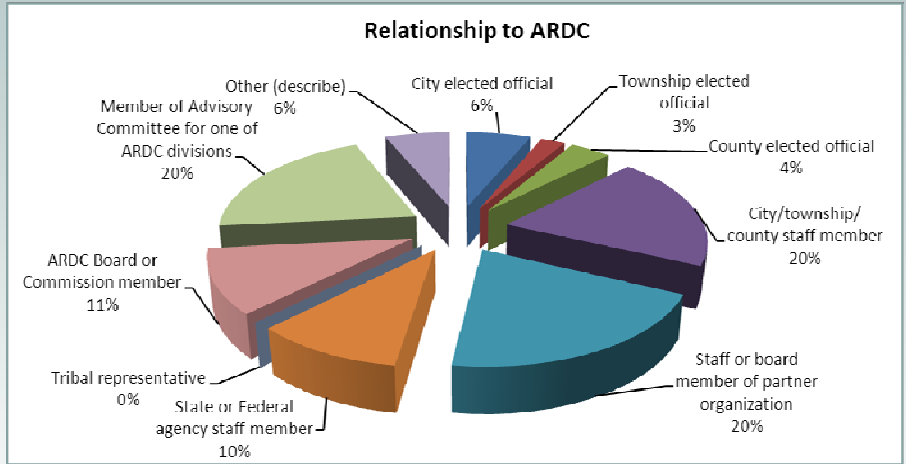
The response rate was 52% with 130 of the 248 surveys returned.

# Demographics

## Respondent Profiles

The agency serves the seven county Arrowhead region comprised of Aitkin, Cook, Lake, St. Louis, Koochiching, Itasca, and Carlton counties. This is a large geographic area with low population density. Many people serve in multiple roles within their communities and in the region which results in their using one or more services offered by ARDC.

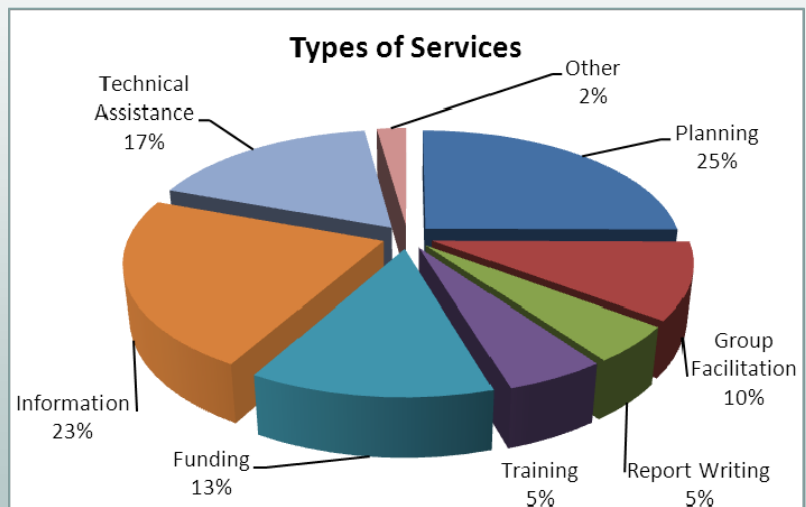
Nearly 90% of the respondents have worked with, or had some interaction with the agency, in the past five years.



## Were respondents satisfied with our services?

**Yes.** This year's results indicate 89% of the respondents were satisfied with the services they receive from ARDC as compared to 75% in 2001 and 84% in 2006. This response indicates that continuous improvement of services by the agency's dedicated staff is yielding results.

The following chart shows the agency's services accessed by survey respondents.



The following sections address the role that ARDC has had as a **leader**, a provider of **planning** services, and in **connecting** people to resources in our service area of northeast Minnesota, and as a transportation planning partner in Douglas County, Wisconsin.

## LEADING • PLANNING • CONNECTING

### Leading

#### Is the agency seen as leader?

Nearly 70% of the respondents said they had experienced ARDC as a leader in the agency's many diverse services. Staff led efforts in regional and local planning, transportation issues, senior services and economic development. America's Byways Resource Center staff have been leaders in assisting local citizens who are interested in developing their scenic byways throughout the United States, as well as in Minnesota.

#### Can we enhance our role as a leader?

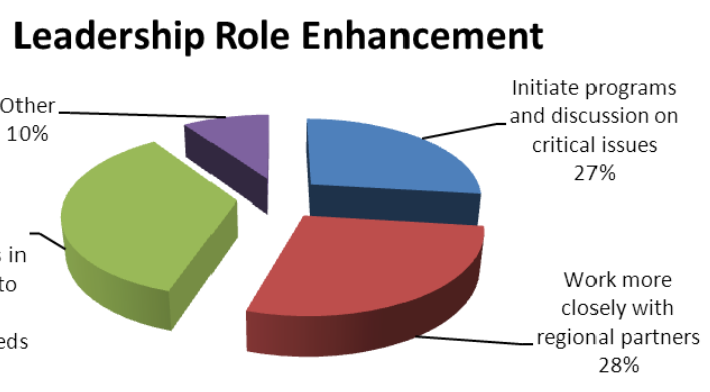
The survey suggested three areas to focus on expanding in the future. Respondents indicated they would like to see ARDC staff increase interaction with communities to determine community needs. Respondents also recommended that agency staff take a more defined leadership role in initiating programs, discussing critical issues in the region and in working with agency partners.

#### Suggestions

ARDC needs to "identify issues of regional importance like parks and recreation that are being planned and funded by each locality that might be provided and funded on a regional basis so that the duplication of service provided can be avoided."

"Planning is only half the battle. ARDC is good at completing extensive studies, but these studies are not widely publicized/distributed, nor is there an accompanying action plan with clear strategies or objectives for putting the study to productive use in improving the region."

ARDC should make "more proactive efforts to work with partners on critical issues, more integration of [the] ARDC skill set into ongoing efforts where participation from ARDC could be beneficial."



# Planning

Staff in the four ARDC divisions provide planning assistance on projects and programs throughout the region and nationwide. However, not all survey respondents had used ARDC's planning services. Only 62% had directly experienced the agency's planning expertise. Of that group, 86% expressed satisfaction with the performance of the agency planning staff. Respondents also provided written feedback when asked how the agency could enhance the planning role. About half of the written responses are included here.

"The ARDC has an excellent staff. They are dedicated employees to their divisions."

"Add value by bringing the ideas and take on a leadership role to act on the ideas. Pursuing planning grants would be one example; use staff and resources to lead and generate the applications."

"Meet with local jurisdictions on a regular basis to check-in or explain what is available or happening in the region."

"Offer services to others in Duluth and St. Louis County who appear to be overloaded and in need of help. ARDC seems to be somewhat invisible in the Duluth area issues other than the MIC."

"If you are working with Community A, let communities B-Z know process and outcomes. It may spur initiatives, collaboration or thinking. It doesn't have to be in a newsletter—that takes time and money and is outdated by the time it comes. A one page summary by email "ongoing efforts at ARDC" would be enlightening."

"Some services such as HTAC's<sup>1</sup> work has been satisfactory. Some things like work with the North Shore Management Board have been less than satisfactory. It is sometimes difficult to see the value added by ARDC in these efforts. Developing a reputation for very high-quality products or outputs would help enhance ARDC's role. Sometimes it seems that ARDC provides staff support but little comes of it."

"Continue to make communities aware of this service."

"We need ARDC to add value by both bringing the ideas and taking on the leadership role to act on the ideas. Pursuing planning grants would be one example. Please use your staff and resources to lead and generate the applications."

"Comprehensive plans should include short-term goals that communities can achieve. Also, identify the leadership group that will accomplish these goals. Comprehensive plans should also incorporate energy efficiency into them."<sup>2</sup>

"Get workers into the outlying regions of the counties it [ARDC] serves."

"It simply isn't enough to draft a study and put it on a shelf somewhere. These studies need to be publicized and put into action for tangible results. For this to be possible, the studies need to be relevant and cutting-edge. This means you need to involve all of the people currently engaged in work related to the subject matter.... These are tools. A hammer is only a valuable tool when it is used to complete a project of demonstrated value."

"To remain focused on the mission [of ARDC] to assist with planning. Facilitate the delivery of state and federally funded initiatives. To educate local governments and non-profits about the services available to them. To serve as a conduit to promote public-private partnerships for the public good."

"Maintain quality staff who are active in local communities. It is important to assure that staff is knowledgeable about community life, trends and opportunities. I would suggest getting as many staff as possible through the Blandin Foundation's leadership program."

<sup>1</sup>Harbor Technical Advisory Committee (HTAC) has staffing support provided by the Metropolitan Interstate Council.

<sup>2</sup>The City of Ely has added an energy addendum to their Comprehensive Plan; ARDC assisted in its development.

# Connecting

Making connections—person to person, agency to agency, community leaders/citizens to resources—can be challenging, especially given that the Arrowhead region covers approximately 18,000 square miles, is largely rural and has a low population density.

About two-thirds of the survey respondents experienced ARDC as a connector and they report 90% satisfaction with the agency’s efforts in this area.

## How does the agency serve as a connector with what results?

ARDC scores highest in connecting customers and clients to information and technical resources. The agency does an acceptable job in connecting people to financial resources, but needs improvement in connecting customers to human resources.

## Comments offered by respondents

*“Dispense more information about ARDC’s ability to assist in seeking funds.”*

*“ARDC does a good job with the National Scenic Byways program and Mn/DOT Enhancement funds. There are many local agencies that are connecting communities to financial / technical resources for community / economic development. Too much duplication in this area.”*

*“Build expertise in critical areas.”*

*“Host workshops to get the word out on what services you provide.”*

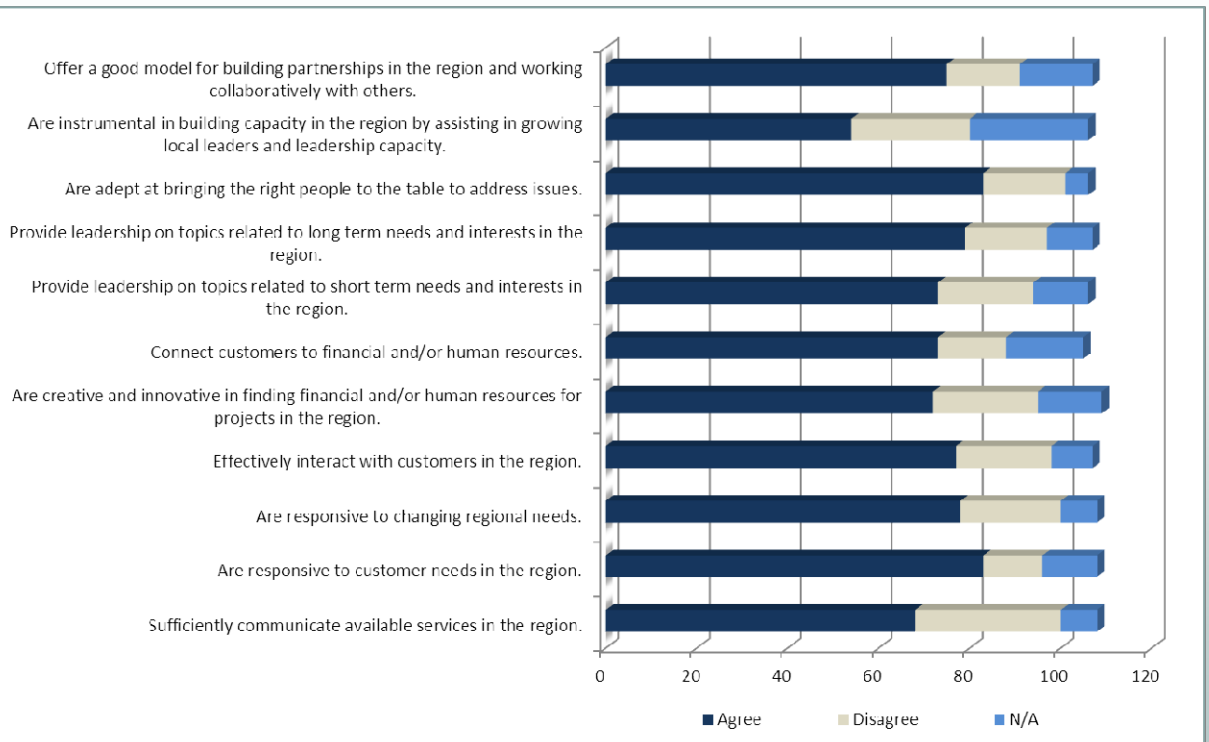
*“It is impossible to be everything to everybody. However, in all of the categories (financial, information, technical, human resources), it is possible to have staff who are trained in each sector in order to be able to assist area communities in these various elements of governmental activity.”*

*“Provide follow-up on projects.”*

## Staff

### Connections

This graph indicates how respondents feel regarding ARDC staff’s ability to interact with clients, partners and citizens.

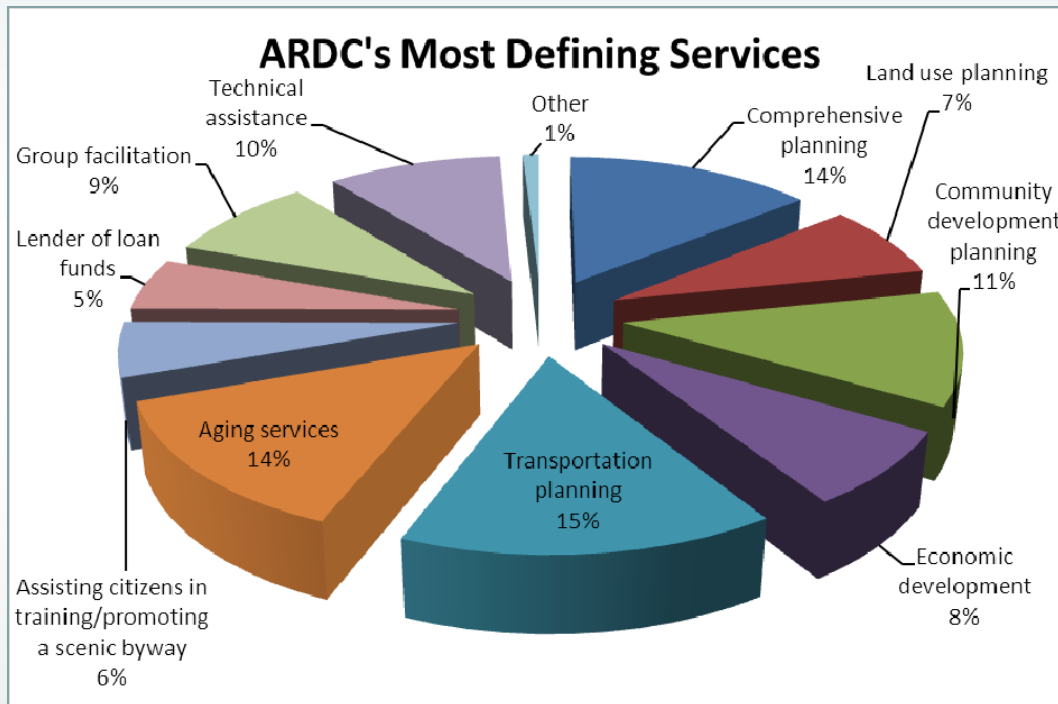


## Our Services

As the designated planning organization for the north-east region of Minnesota and as a partner in providing transportation planning in Douglas County, Wisconsin, ARDC provides a wide range of services.

Throughout the survey, respondents emphasized the need to increase marketing of the agency's services. They expressed an interest in learning more about the wide range of services offered by the agency.

The survey's last question asked respondents to identify the services they felt best identified ARDC. Their responses indicate the diversity of the agency's services, as shown in the following chart.



The mission of ARDC is to serve the people of the Arrowhead Region by providing local units of government and citizens groups a means to work cooperatively in identifying needs, solving problems and fostering local leadership.



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