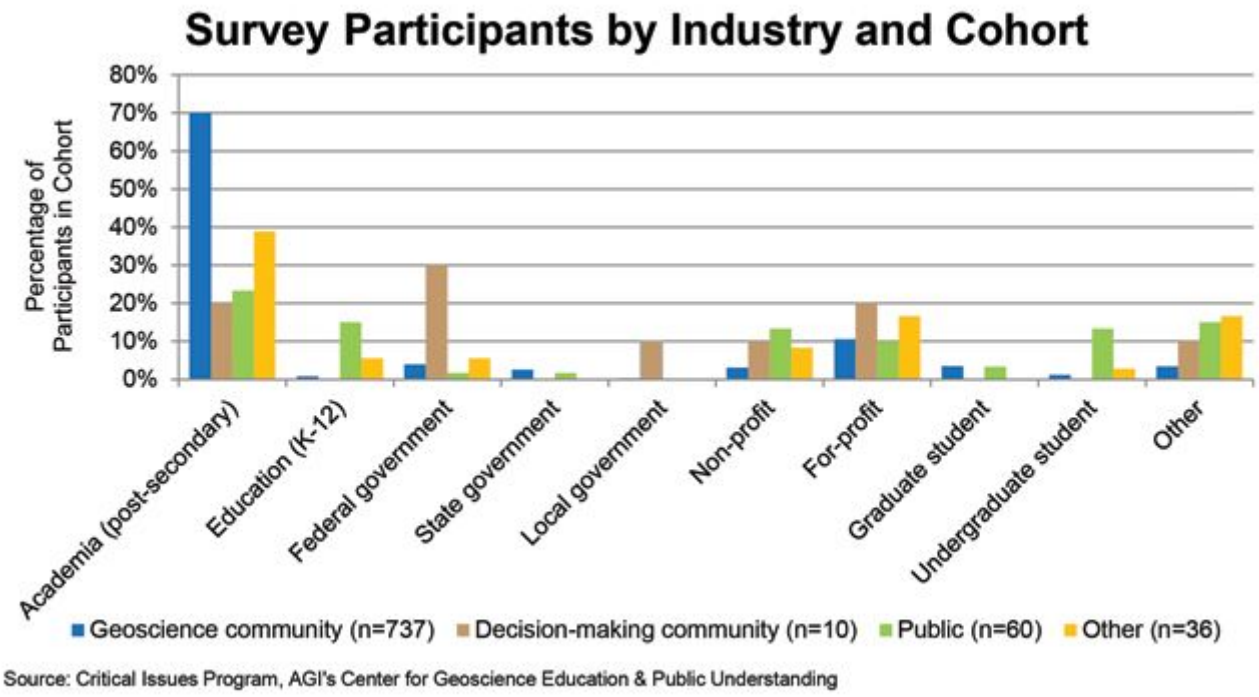
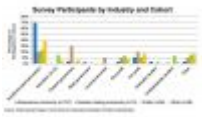
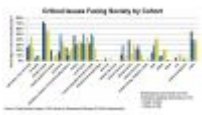
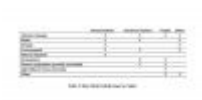
Defining Critical Issues Survey: Final Survey Results



- 
- 
- 
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Defining Critical Issues Survey-FinalResults.pdf

The Critical Issues Program launched its “Defining Critical Issues” survey on November 5, 2013. Emails were sent to 11,400

geoscientists and 83 decision makers at national, state and local level decision making organizations and think tanks. The survey was also disseminated via social media channels.

The preliminary results of the survey were released at the end of November 2013 with the goal to garner additional input from the decision-making community and general public, the non-academic sectors of the geoscience community, and individuals in the age groups between 18 and 44 years of age. However, only an additional 130 useable responses were received in December, primarily from geoscientists in the post-secondary academic sector. Thus, we were unable to substantially gain more in-depth insights into the decision-making community and public cohorts. A total of 890 usable responses were received.

The aim of the web-based survey was to understand how the decision-making community, geoscience community, and the public define the term “critical issue,” as well as which critical issues were of top concern to each community. The survey was deliberately short, broad, and unstructured in order to capture a wide range of responses. This report provides the final analysis of the survey responses received through December 31, 2013, the closing date of the survey.

The survey was advertised widely in the geoscience community with more limited distribution in the decision-making community and general public. As a result, the geoscience community was the cohort with the highest percentage of survey participants (83%), while the public and decision-making community had a much smaller representation (7% and 1%, respectively). Across cohorts, survey participants were predominantly from the post-secondary academic sector. Additionally, over two-thirds of the survey participants were 45 years of age or older and nearly one-quarter of participants were between 18 and 44 years old.

Climate change ranked in the five most frequently mentioned issues by all cohorts. The other most frequently mentioned critical issues by cohort were water and environment (geoscientists, decision makers, “other”), economics and human population growth & health (decision makers, public), energy (geoscientists, “other”), “other” issues (public, “other”), natural hazards (geoscientists), and agriculture, food, and soils (public). The highest priority issue for all cohorts was climate change, followed water (geoscientists, “other”), human population growth & health (public), energy (decision makers); and then human population growth (geoscientists, decision makers, “other”) and water (public).

Based on the suggestions by all survey participants, we refined the Critical Issues program’s definition of the term “critical issues” to read as follows:

Critical issues are natural and human-influenced Earth processes that require immediate attention in order to mitigate significant, adverse, wide-ranging impacts in both the short and long term on people and their way of life, living organisms, and/or Earth’s resources and ecosystems.

This research was supported by AGI's Center for Geoscience & Society.

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