



Blandin Foundation™  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

## Rural communities say they are resilient, but the economy is still tough

*Blandin Foundation survey raises voices of rural Minnesotans*

GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. (Sept. 12, 2016)--Is economic recovery being felt by rural Minnesota's communities? According to Blandin Foundation's 2016 Rural Pulse survey, released today, yes.

Sort of. And by some.

Commissioned since 1998 by the Grand Rapids-based foundation, Rural Pulse™ provides a snapshot every few years of how rural Minnesotans perceive their communities and the issues they consider of greatest importance. Blandin Foundation surveyed 1,144 rural Minnesotans last spring, with a parallel survey of 500 urban residents. Results are at the [www.ruralpulse.org](http://www.ruralpulse.org) website.

### **It's *still* the economy**

Top of mind for rural Minnesotans was the economy. Rural Pulse shows that nearly one-third (31%) felt their local economy had improved over the past year, a nine-point upswing from 2013 study findings and 13 points higher than in 2010. Half said it stayed the same over the past year (49%), and 18 percent said it was worse.

Nearly half (48%) of rural residents felt that living-wage job opportunities in their community are *inadequate*. In a parallel study of urban residents, Rural Pulse found that only 27 percent of residents felt living-wage opportunities were *inadequate*.

One-third of rural residents said their household income has increased over the past year at the same time that 22 percent say it actually has decreased—similar to 2013 and only slightly improved over 2010.

### **Differences that make a difference**

Who is feeling it most? Rural residents ages 25 to 34 and those whose annual household income is greater than \$100,000 were *most* likely to feel the economy has improved (41% say it has).

Central Minnesota shows the greatest sense of improvement, with 37 percent of residents believing that the economy had improved (up 17 points since 2013).

Meanwhile, those with the lowest incomes (\$35,000 or less) and those ages 50 and older were *least* likely to believe that the economy has improved. Only 19 percent of Minnesota's Northeast region believed they have seen improvement.

Populations of color, especially African Americans, felt better about the state of the economy. Most (55%) of African Americans living in rural Minnesota who were surveyed said that their local economy had improved, with more than one-third of rural residents who are Asian, Hispanic and Native American saying it had improved.

### **Work to do**

"Rural places are rich with possibility—abundant natural resources, optimistic and committed leaders, quality of life," said Dr. Kathleen Annette, president and CEO for Blandin Foundation. "Nearly half of our state's population lives in rural places, and Rural Pulse results remind us that economic recovery is not yet reaching all Minnesotans. We must press on if we want to be a state that is resilient, healthy and vibrant."

Nationally, rural jobs are expanding at less than half the rate of metro job creation, according to Sept. 6 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures. While the number of jobs in the country's rural counties increased by 4.8 percent between July 2015 and July 2016, job growth in metropolitan counties was 13.3 percent, reports the Bureau.

According to recent statistics from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), the state's economy is growing. In July 2016 alone, 11,300 jobs were added in Minnesota. Most (84%) of these gains, however, were in the Twin Cities.

"While economic experiences may be different right now between our state's urban and rural places, we share the belief that we must come together in support of *all* communities—including rural places."

Rural Pulse found that nine in 10 urban and rural residents alike believe that it is important to support political candidates who address rural issues.

### **Other Rural Pulse highlights**

- Seventy-three percent of rural residents—and 83 percent of urban residents—believed their community is strong, resilient and able to recover from difficult situations.

- About three-quarters (73%) of rural residents said that they feel their community works together cohesively and are able to work across differences such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and nationality. Millennials ages 18 to 24, those with incomes of \$35,000 or less and non-business owners were the *least likely* to agree.
- Looking forward, 17 percent of rural Minnesotans—and 21 percent of urban area residents—said that they do not expect to be living in their current locale five years from now.
- More than half (53%) of rural residents—and two-thirds of those in urban areas—felt their community’s ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse over the past five years.
- Only 71 percent of rural residents—and 84 percent of urban residents—said that they feel their community is welcoming to people of all backgrounds, an 11-point decrease from 2013 rural findings. Those of color who live in rural Minnesota had similar response to those who are Caucasian.
- Women and those ages 18 to 24 were least likely to agree that people from different backgrounds fill leadership roles within their community. More than four in 10 (44%) rural residents *disagreed* that their community fills leadership roles with people from diverse backgrounds (compared to 24% *disagreement* among urban residents).
- Among the 7,000 rural Minnesotans who have received training through Blandin Foundation’s community leadership programs, two-thirds (67%) *disagreed* that people from diverse backgrounds fill leadership roles in their community.
- Three in four (74%) rural Minnesotans believed that improved Internet access could make a positive impact on local economic vitality, yet only 64 percent felt their community does a good job of improving access.

Rural Pulse results, including special reports by topic and by region, are available at [www.ruralpulse.org](http://www.ruralpulse.org).

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Note to editor: a variety of infographics and charts are available for media use at [www.ruralpulse.org](http://www.ruralpulse.org).

*Blandin Foundation stands with rural Minnesota communities as they imagine and claim ambitious, vibrant futures. Based in Grand Rapids, Minn., it is one of only a handful of foundations in the U.S. focused exclusively on rural communities and the largest rural-based private foundation in Minnesota. Information on grant-making, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives is available at [www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org). On Twitter at <http://twitter.com/BlandinFound> and Facebook at [www.facebook.com/BlandinFoundation](http://www.facebook.com/BlandinFoundation). The foundation's blog is: <http://outposts.blandinfoundation.org>.*

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