Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

RURAL PULSE™ RESEARCH

Leadership Program Alumni – April 2016

Russell Herder
Strategy wins.

Contents

Prepared by Russell Herder, Inc. for the Blandin Foundation

April 2016

Executive Summary

Project Objectives

The Foundation chose to undertake Rural Pulse to accomplish the following objectives:

Understand the community issues and priorities of Blandin Community Leadership Program alumni; and

Compare and contrast responses to rural resident findings at large.

Methodology

The survey was administered via e-mail to alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program.

A total of 511 surveys were completed for a statistical reliability of +/-4.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Key Findings

Economic Lens: Despite improved economy, job creation continues to be a critical concern.

Thirty-six percent of alumni surveyed feel it has improved, 42 percent believe it stayed the same, and 22 percent indicate that their local economy has worsened.

Job growth and development – including attracting new businesses and maintaining and growing existing job opportunities – are considered the top priorities by 41 percent of alumni.

Only a third (34%) feel that there are adequate living-wage job opportunities in their community, far less than the opinions of rural Minnesotans at large (47%).

While 43 percent of alumni say that their household income has increased over the past year, two in five (18%) are still struggling with a decrease in wages.

Optimism Continues: Most Leadership Program alumni feel their community is vibrant and resilient, and believe that they can shape its future.

Four in five (80%) alumni feel quality of life will improve over the next five years. More than four in five (82%) surveyed say they feel optimistic about their community's future.

More than nine in 10 (91%) say they feel a sense of ownership over the direction of their community and that they are able to contribute to its future, which is 30 percentage points higher than that of rural Minnesotans overall.

Collaboration: Many Program Leadership alumni question whether their community works together effectively across differences

When asked whether they feel local community members work well together to effectively address local issues, three in four alumni say that they feel their community works together cohesively.

When specifically asked if they feel residents are able to work across differences such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and nationality, about two-thirds (67%) agree.

Seventy-seven percent of alumni say that they believe their community is a vibrant place to live and work. Similarly, 79 percent believe their community is strong, resilient and able to recover from difficult situations.

Quality of Life: Many Leadership Program alumni are skeptical about community services being adequate and whether there is equal access to basic services.

Two-thirds (66%) of Leadership Program alumni believe that their community offers equal access to essential services.

Having adequate public transportation, such as buses and trains, is a concern to nearly half (45%) of alumni.

Housing is also a serious concern to alumni, with only 48 percent feeling there is adequate housing for community residents, showing by far more concern than rural residents overall.

Two-thirds (67%) feel their community does a good job considering diverse cultural and arts opportunities.

The majority (86%) believe their community provides quality educational opportunities. When asked who they feel is responsible for ensuring such opportunities, more than three in four (77%) Leadership Program alumni believe it is the government's obligation. Seventy-four percent also said parents are responsible for such.

Rural Voice: Are their opinions being valued?

When asked if the needs and well-being of rural Minnesota communities are as important to legislators and policymakers as those from metropolitan cities, nearly seven in 10 (68%) are of the opinion that they are not.

Nearly all (97%) alumni agree that it is important to support political candidates who address rural issues.

A Changing Landscape: Minnesota continues to diversify, but leadership is not wholly reflective of this change.

Sixty-one percent of alumni surveyed feel their community's ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse over the past five years. Thirty-seven percent feel it has stayed the same.

Despite this changing landscape, nearly two in five (39%) do not feel their community is welcoming to people of varying backgrounds and perspectives. About half (51%) of alumni feel their community accepts and embraces differences such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and nationality.

Only three in 10 (30%) alumni believe local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds.

Nearly all (97%) alumni say that they have served in a community leadership role. Of those who have not yet served, all say they would consider doing so if asked.

Migration: One in five Leadership Program alumni have considered relocation to a metro area.

Looking forward, only seven percent of Leadership Program alumni say that they do not expect to be living in their current locale five years from now. However, about one in five (21%) indicate that they have considered leaving their community for a larger city/metro area within the past two years.

Of those who have considered a move, two in five (40%) alumni say it would be to pursue job opportunities. Quality of life is the main factor for 34 percent.

BLANDIN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FINDINGS

Note: The following analysis includes Leadership Program responses with a comparison to rural Minnesota findings where significant.

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Project Goal and Objectives

Rural Pulse™ is a research study that has been commissioned by the Blandin Foundation since 1998 to gain a real-time snapshot of the concerns, perceptions and priorities of rural Minnesota residents. This initiative was last conducted in 2013 and has served to identify trends within significant, complex subject areas including the economy, education, employment and quality of life, as well as to contrast rural opinions with alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program.

The Foundation chose to undertake this effort again in 2016 to accomplish the following objectives:

Understand the community issues and priorities of Blandin Community Leadership Program alumni; and

Compare and contrast responses to rural resident findings at large.

Methodology

Independent research and communications consultant Russell Herder was retained to conduct this study. The survey instrument for Rural Pulse™ 2016 was developed in cooperation with Blandin Foundation leadership. Where possible and relevant, certain questions from past studies were repeated for comparison purposes.

- The survey was administered via e-mail to alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program between February 22 and March 3.

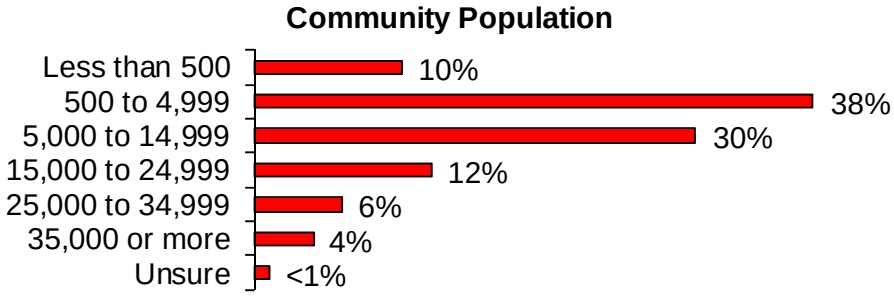
- A total of 511 surveys were completed for a statistical reliability of +/-4.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

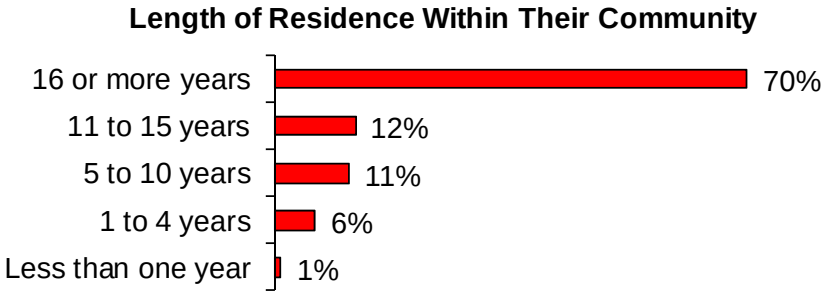
Demographics

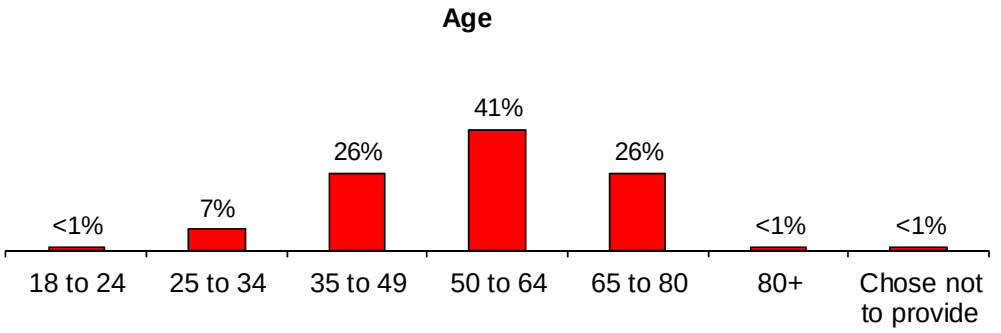
Thirty-eight percent of alumni said the community they live in, or nearest to, has a population of 500 to 4,999, followed by 5,000 to 14,999 people (30%). Another 12 percent cited a population size of 15,000 to 24,999, followed by less than 500 (10%), and 25,000 to 34,999 (6%). Four percent indicated that they live in a larger community with 35,000 or more people. Less than one percent were unsure.

Seven in 10 (70%) alumni said they have lived in their community for 16 or more years. Another 12 percent said five to 10 years, followed by 11 to 15 years (11%), one to four years (6%), and less than one year (1%).

About seven percent of alumni respondents were age 18 to 34, while 67 percent were age 35 to 64 and about 26 percent were age 65 or older. Less than one percent chose not to provide age information.







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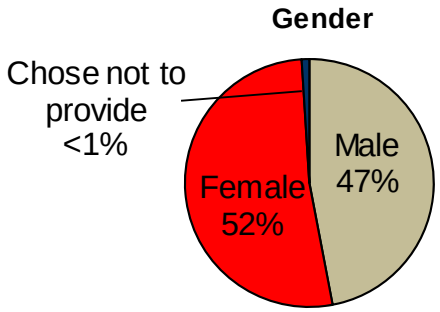
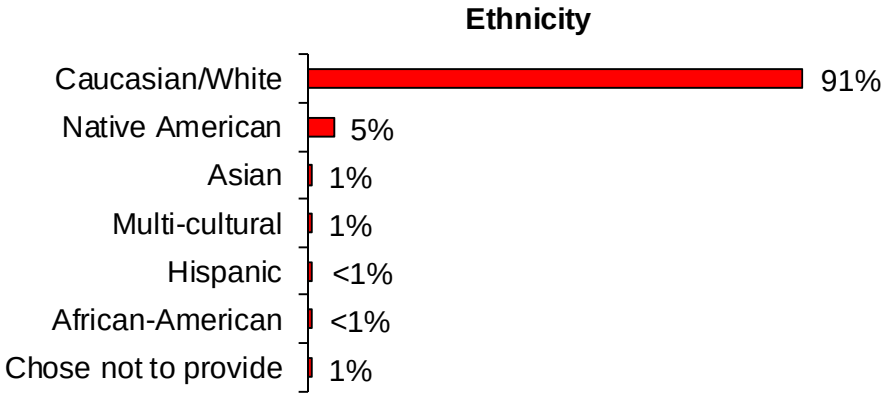
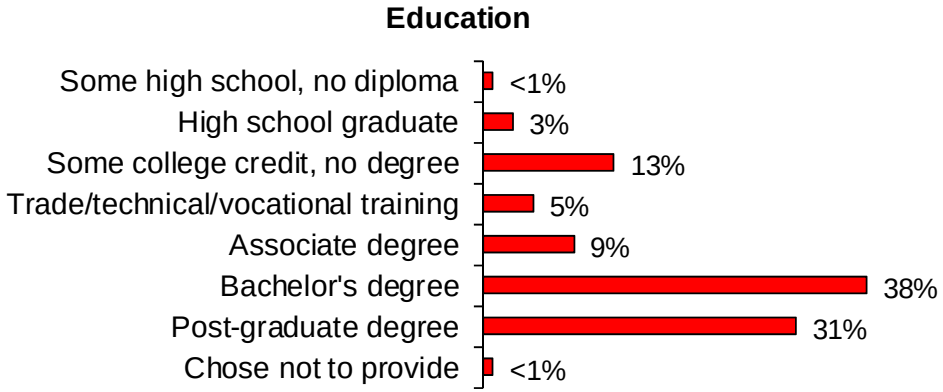
Fifty-two percent of alumni respondents were women; 47 percent were men. Less than one percent chose not to provide gender information.

About nine in 10 (91%) alumni said they are Caucasian. Other ethnicities responding included Native American (5%); Asian or multi-cultural (1% each); and Hispanic or African-American (less than 1% each). Less than one percent chose not to provide this information.





Thirty-eight percent of Leadership Program alumni said they have a Bachelor's degree; followed by a post-graduate degree (31%); some college credit, but no degree (13%); an associate degree (9%); trade, technical or vocational training (5%); a high school graduate (3%); or some high school, but no diploma (<1%). Less than one percent chose not to provide education information.

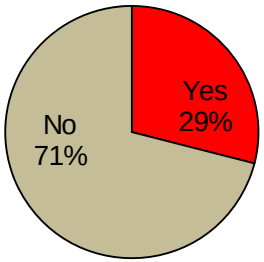


Three in four (75%) of alumni said they are employed, with 14 percent of those indicating that they are either self-employed or a farmer. For those who said they do not work, 22 percent said they are retired, two percent said that they are a homemaker, and one percent were disabled or unable to work. One percent did not provide employment information.

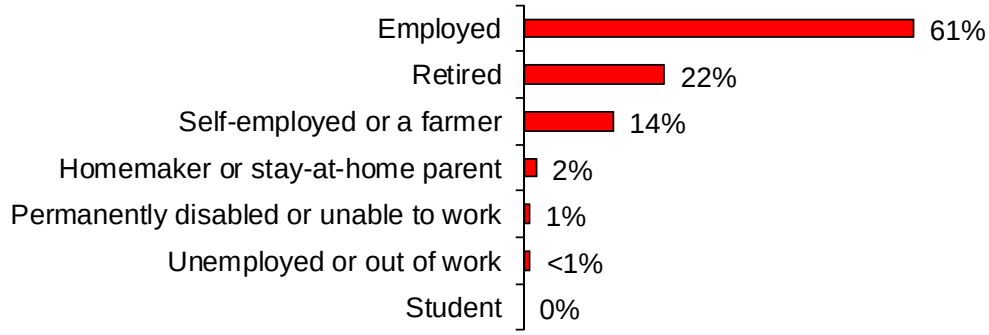
Nearly three in 10 (29%) said they own a business of some type.

A third (33%) of alumni respondents indicated that their family income is more than $100,000, followed by $75,001 to $100,000 (21%), $60,001 to $75,000 (14%), $35,001 to $50,000 (11%), $50,001 to $60,000 (8%) and $20,000 to $35,000 (6%). Only one percent said that their household brings in less than $20,000. Eight percent did not provide income information.

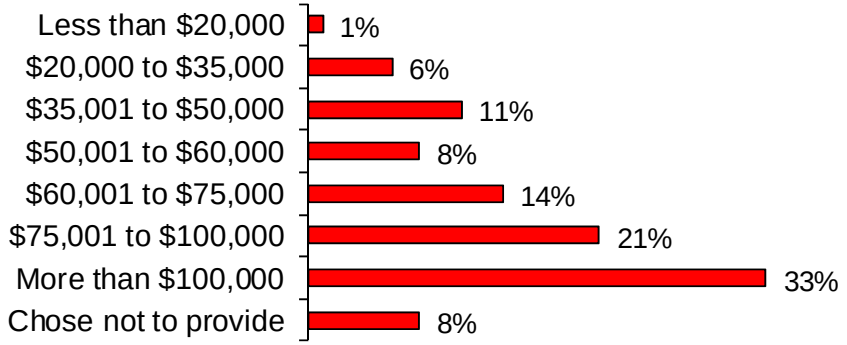
Own a Business



Employment



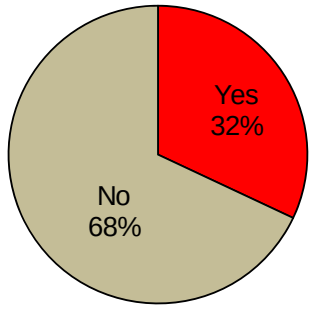
Family Income



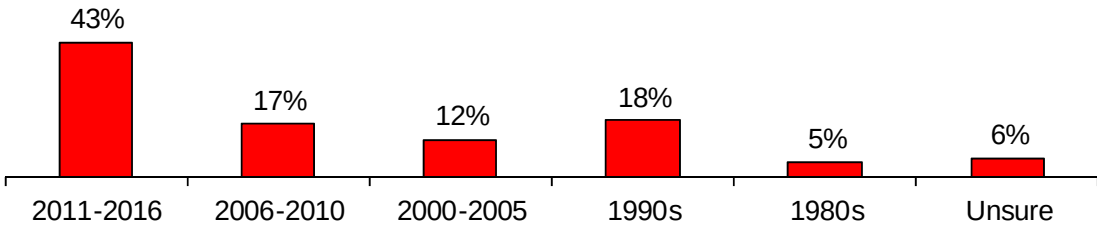
About a third (32%) indicated that at least one child 18 years old or younger resides in their household.

Responding alumni spanned more than three decades of leadership program participation. Forty-three percent indicated that they had taken part in a Leadership Program from 2011 to 2016. Another 17 percent said they participated between 2006 and 2010, while 12 percent said it was between 2000 and 2005. Eighteen percent indicated their participation was in the 1990s and five percent said it was in the 1980s. Six percent could not recall.

Children in Household



Leadership Program Participation Year



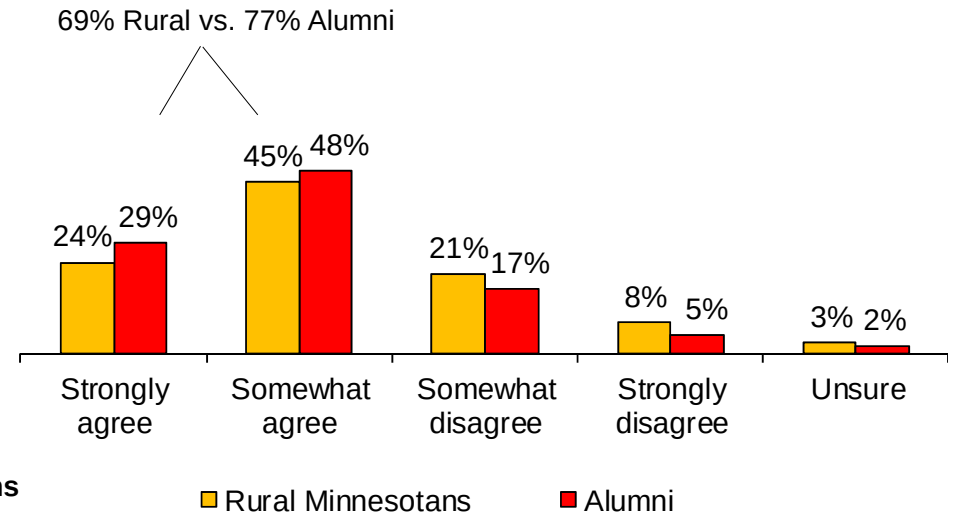
Community Perspective

More than three in four (77%) Leadership Program alumni said that they believe their community is a vibrant place to live and work, while 22 percent did not agree.

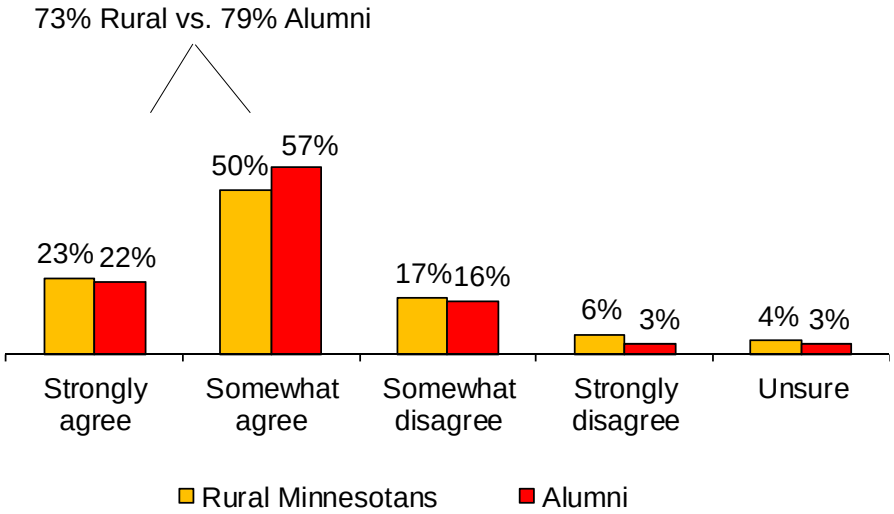
A slightly greater proportion (79%) believed that their community is strong, resilient and able to recover from difficult situations. Nineteen percent did not agree.

Alumni were more likely than rural residents overall to have felt their community is vibrant and resilient.

Community is a Vibrant Place to Live and Work



Community is Strong, Resilient and Able to Recover from Difficult Situations



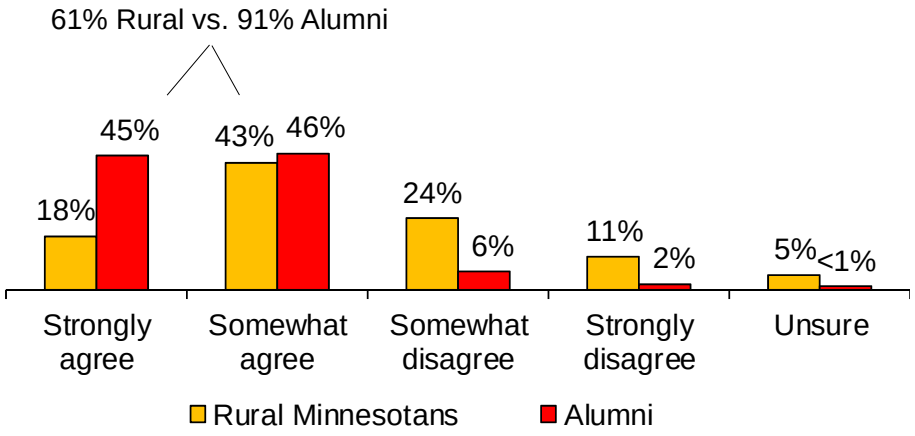
Personal Ability to Affect Change

Leadership Program alumni were highly optimistic about their ability to personally impact change in their community. Those surveyed were asked whether they feel a sense of ownership over the direction of their community and whether they are able to make a contribution to its future. About nine in 10 (91%) of alumni agreed, with 45 percent strongly agreeing. Eight percent did not agree.

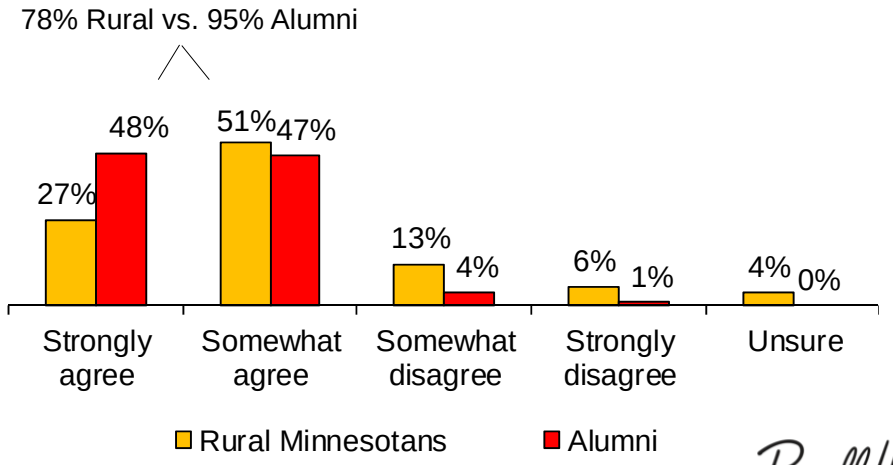
Those surveyed were asked whether they felt that people like themselves are able to make an impact and improve local quality of life. Nearly all (95%) alumni felt they could influence change, with 48 percent strongly agreeing.

Alumni were much more likely than rural residents overall to have felt they can make a positive impact and contribute to their community.

Feel Ownership of Community and Ability to Contribute to Its Future



Able to Make a Positive Community Impact



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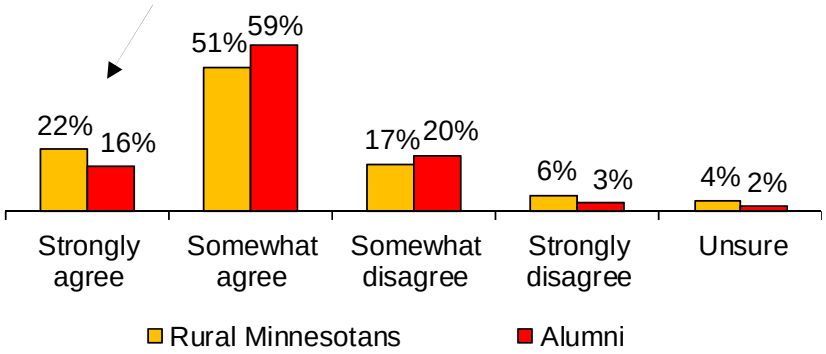
When asked whether they feel local community members work well together, however, confidence was not as strong. Nearly one in four (23%) alumni said that they do not feel their community works together cohesively, compared to 75 percent who said that they feel it does. That is a slight increase from Rural Pulse 2013 findings (up 6%), continuing an upward progression since 2010.

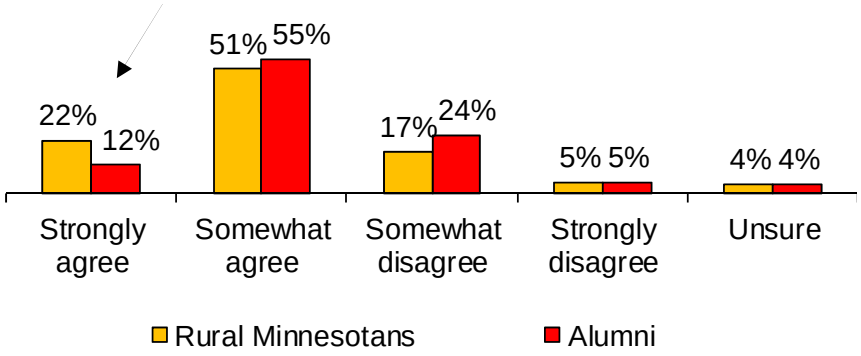
When asked if they believe their community is able to work across differences, about two-thirds (67%) agreed, while 29 percent did not believe this is the case.

Alumni were less likely than rural residents at large to have observed community cohesiveness.

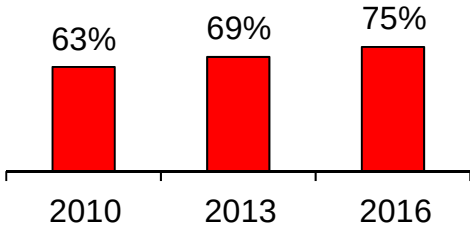
Community Works Together Effectively to Address Local Issues



Residents are Able to Work Across Differences
(e.g., Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Nationality)



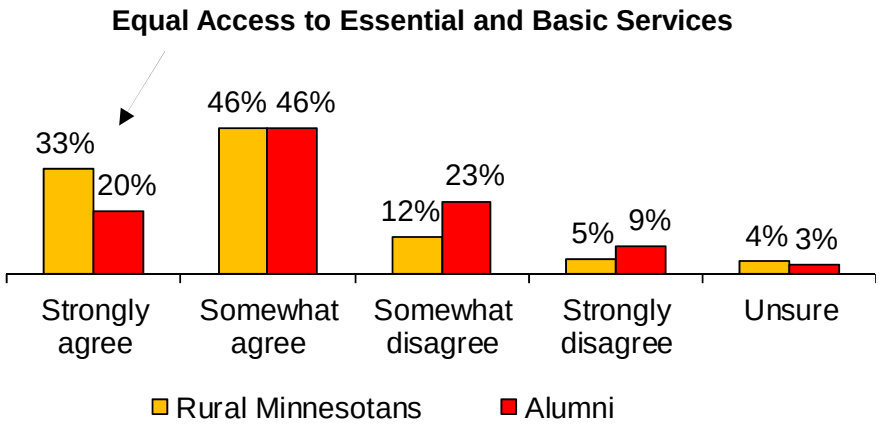
Leadership Alumni: Believe Residents Work Together Effectively



Somewhat or strongly agree

Confidence is Somewhat Lacking for Service Quality, Access

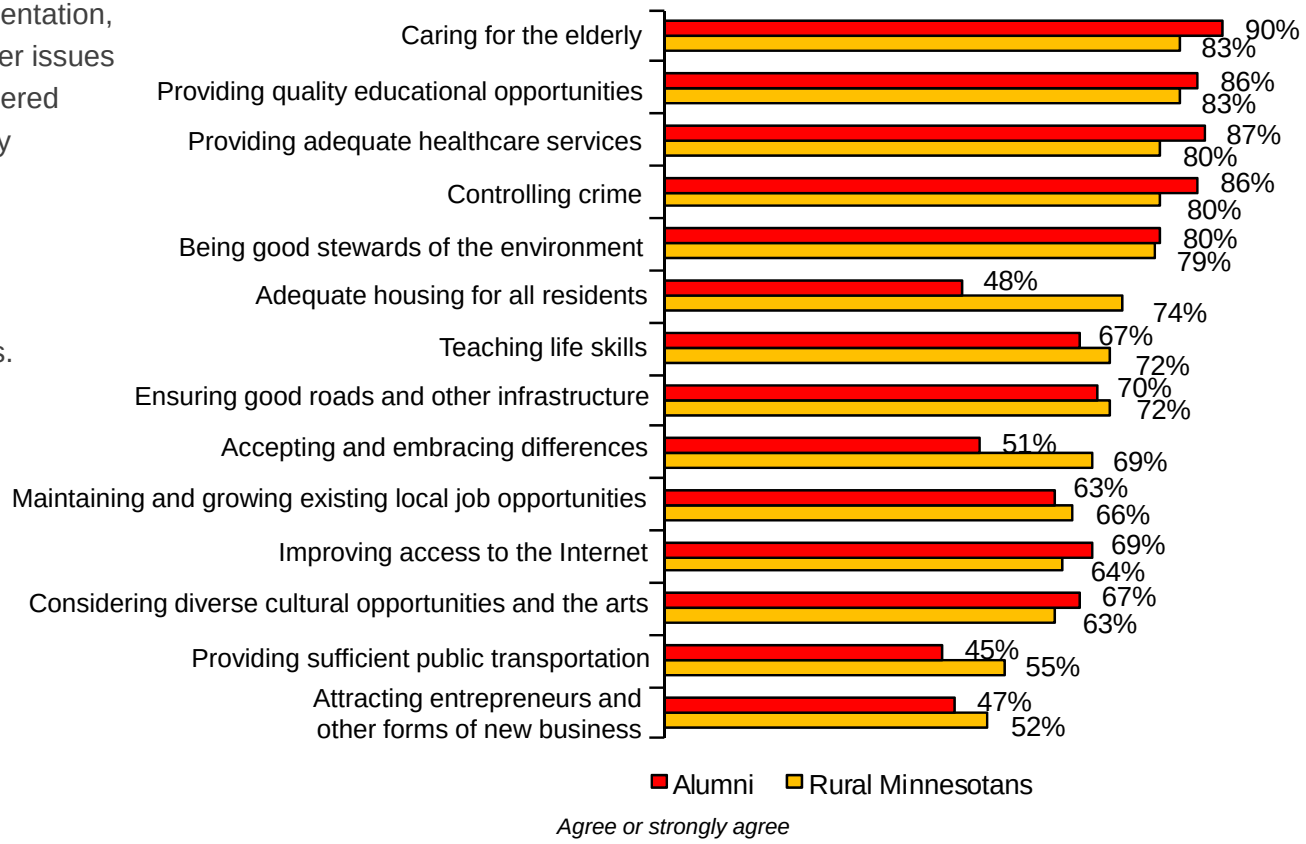
About two-thirds (66%) of alumni believed that their community offers equal access to essential services, a sentiment that was felt more strongly among rural Minnesotans overall (79%). Thirty-two percent of alumni did not agree that residents have equal access to needed community services.



Snapshot: Community Performance

Survey participants were asked to rate their agreement with how their community is handling various community issues. The most highly rated among alumni were caring for the elderly, healthcare, crime control, education and environmental stewardship. Alumni gave the lowest community ratings for attracting new businesses, sufficient public transportation, adequate housing and embracing differences such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and nationality. Other issues mentioned that were considered important to their community included local governance, social/moral issues, mental health, workforce shortage, childcare and youth opportunities, among others. *[See Appendix for full listing of responses.]*

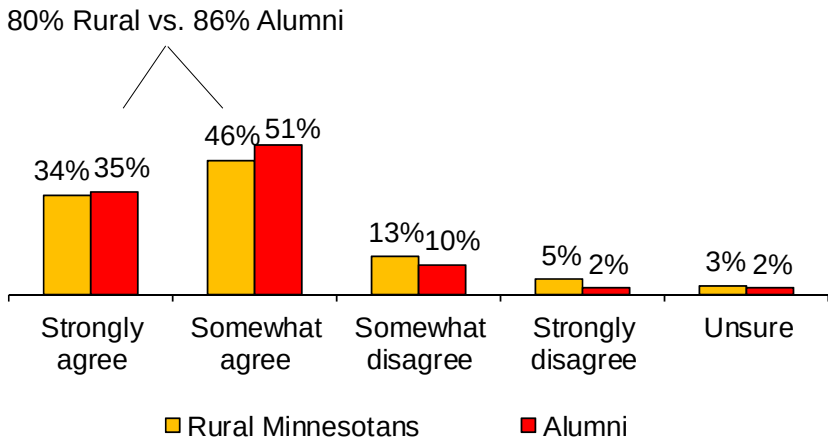
The following shows the opinions of Leadership Program alumni on the individual services in greater detail.



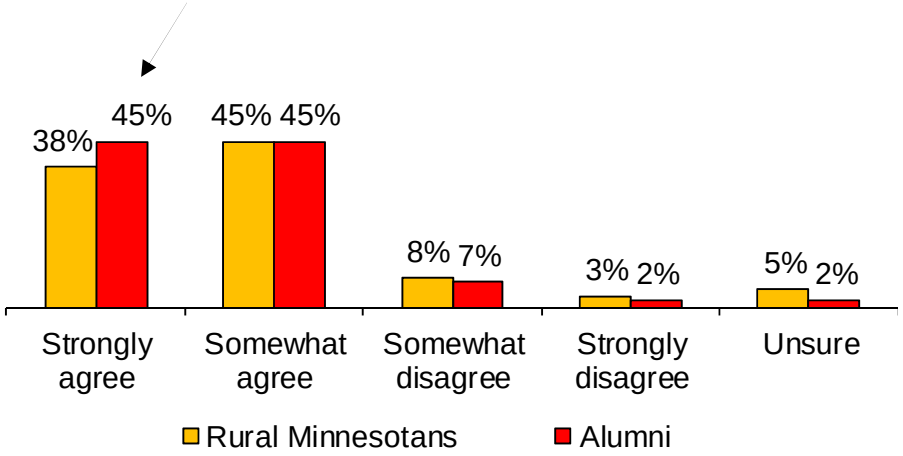
Controlling Crime, Caring for the Elderly and the Environment

Most (86%) alumni also said that they have confidence in their community's ability to control crime. Nine in 10 (90%) also had confidence in their community's ability to provide services for the elderly, and to a stronger degree than rural residents overall.

Community is Doing a Good Job Controlling Crime



Community is Doing a Good Job Caring for the Elderly



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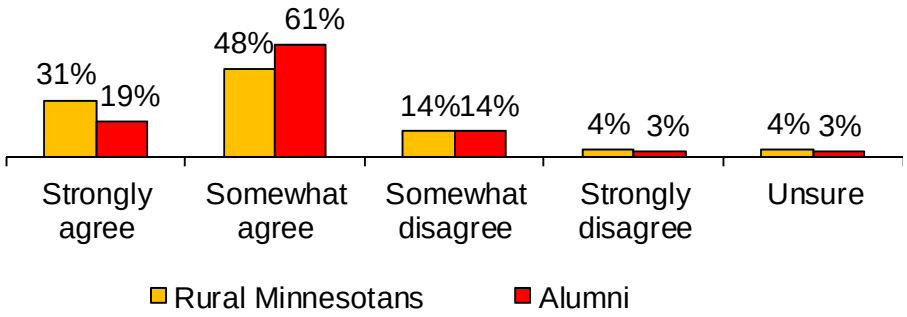
Four in five (80%) alumni believed their community to be a good steward of the environment.

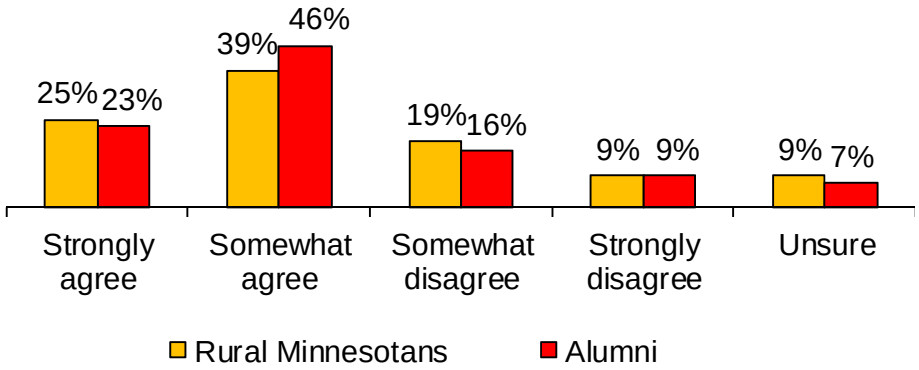
Internet Access

Nearly seven in 10 (69%) alumni felt their community does an agreeable job at improving access to the internet, with one in four (25%) disagreeing.

Community is Doing a Good Job Being Good Stewards of the Environment



Community is Doing a Good Job Improving Access to the Internet



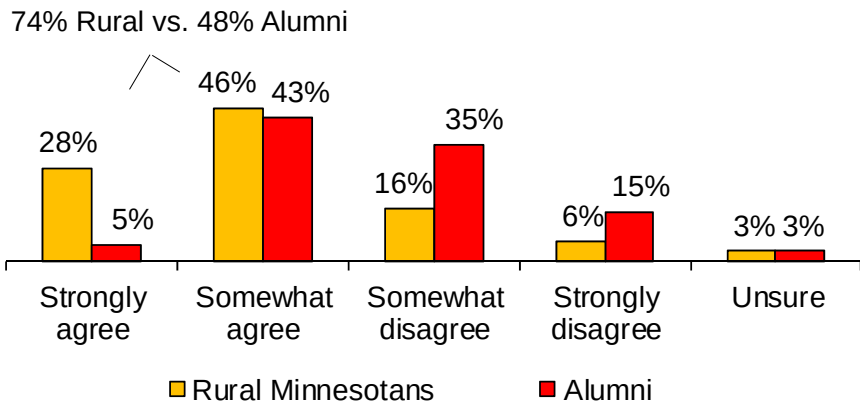
Housing and Transportation

Fewer than half (48%) of alumni believed that there is adequate availability of housing in their community, expressing markedly less confidence than rural Minnesotans overall (74%).

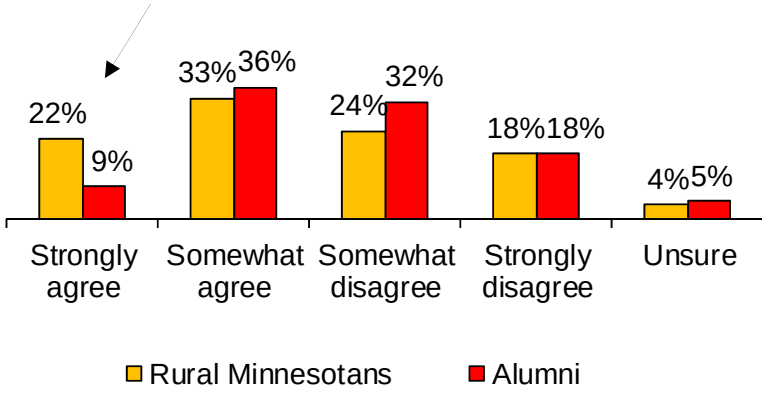
Alumni also had misgivings about the availability of public transportation. Only 45 percent felt community transportation is adequate, with half (50%) having said it is not.

Seven in 10 (70%) alumni felt their community ensures good roads and infrastructure; 28 percent did not agree. Rural Minnesotans overall felt more positive than alumni with regard to transportation and infrastructure.

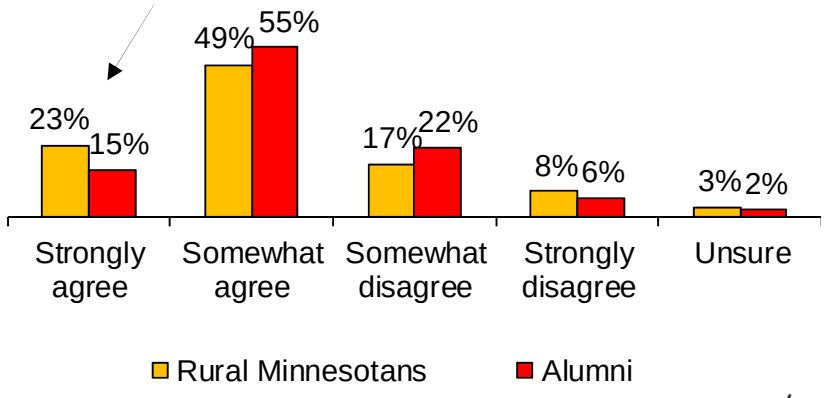
Community is Doing a Good Job Providing Adequate Housing for Residents



Community is Doing a Good Job Providing Public Transportation



Community is Doing a Good Job Ensuring Good Roads and Infrastructure



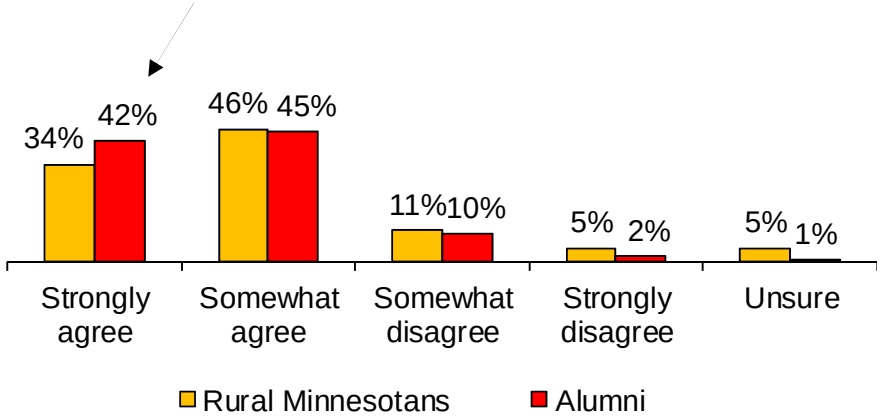
Healthcare

While most (87%) alumni felt that their community provides adequate healthcare services, alumni agreed to a somewhat higher degree than rural Minnesotans at large. Twelve percent did not feel that this is the case.

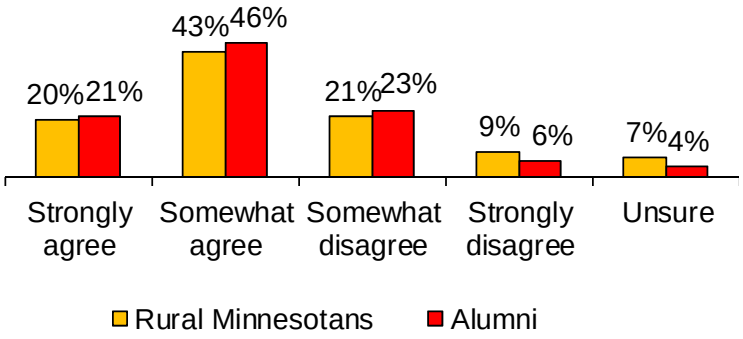
Diverse Culture and the Arts

About two-thirds (67%) of alumni said that the consideration of diverse cultural and arts opportunities in their community is good, although it was a concern for 29% of alumni. These were similar findings compared to Rural Pulse 2013.

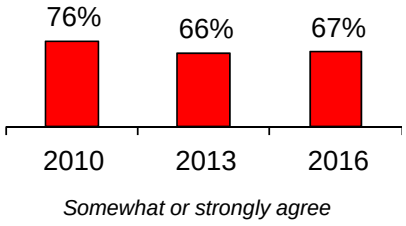
Community is Doing a Good Job Providing Adequate Healthcare Services



Community is Doing a Good Job Considering Diverse Cultural Opportunities and the Arts



Leadership Alumni
Community is Doing a Good Job
Considering Cultural Opportunities and the Arts



Somewhat or strongly agree

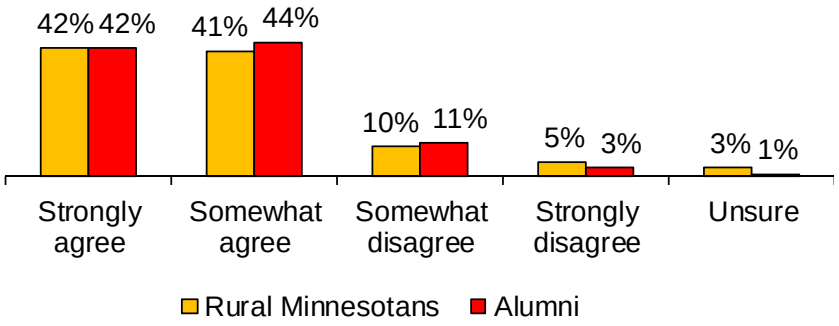
Russell Herder Strategy wins.

Education and Life Skills

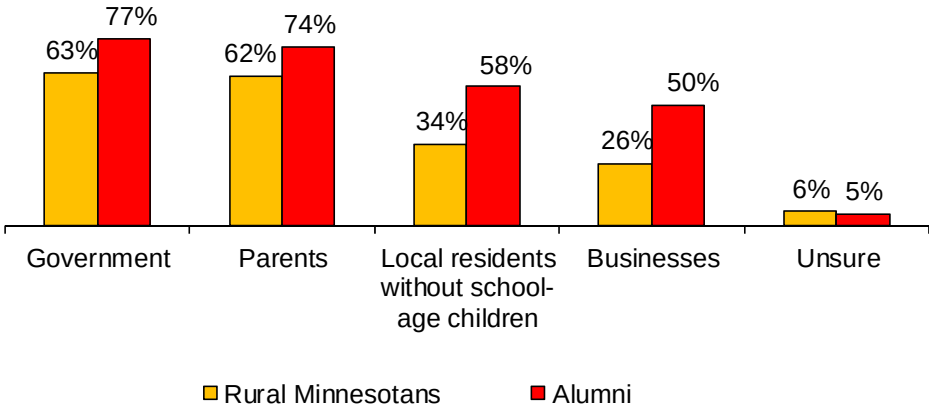
The majority (86%) of alumni respondents believed their community provides quality educational opportunities, with 42 percent strongly agreeing and 44 percent somewhat agreeing. Fourteen percent disagreed that their community provides such.

When asked who they feel is responsible for ensuring that adequate, quality educational opportunities are available in their community, alumni were more likely than rural residents at large to place responsibility on the *entire* community's shoulders. Seventy-seven percent believed the government should be involved in such support and 74 percent said it is up to parents. Fifty-eight percent of alumni felt local residents without school-age children should play a role, and half (50%) also felt business owners should assist with this effort.

Community is Doing a Good Job Providing Quality Educational Opportunities



Who's Responsible for Ensuring Quality Educational Opportunities?

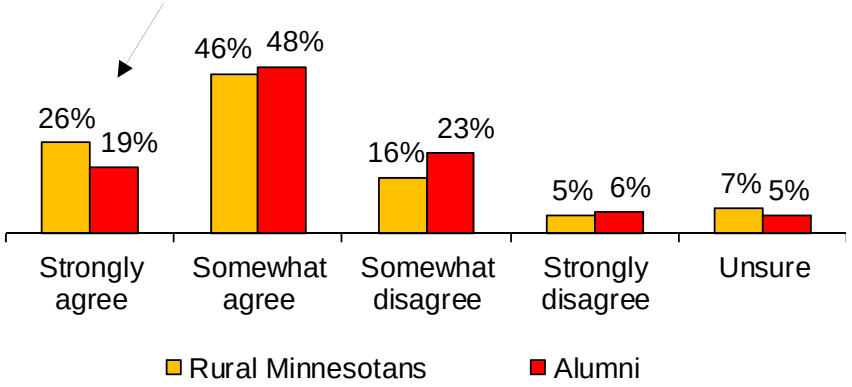


Multiple responses allowed

Russell Herder Strategy wins.

Two-thirds (67%) of alumni respondents believed their community does a good job teaching life skills to residents. Twenty-nine percent disagreed that their community provides such adequately.

Community is Doing a Good Job Teaching life Skills

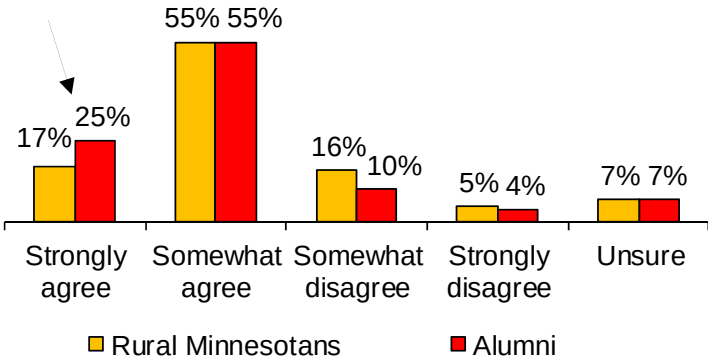


Optimism Exists About Quality of Life

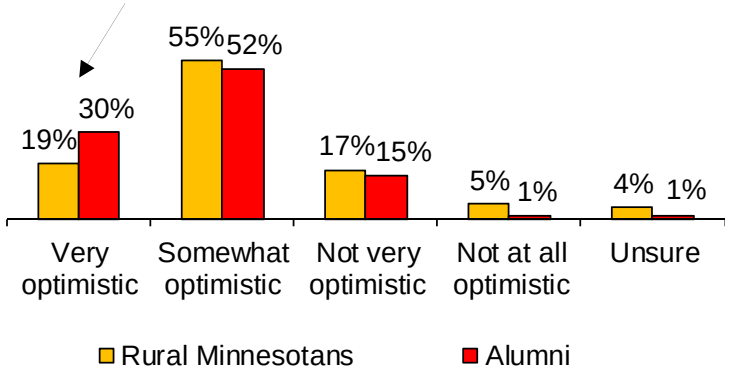
Survey participants were also queried about their community's quality of life. Four in five (80%) alumni felt quality of life would improve over the next five years, showing slightly higher confidence compared to rural residents at large (72%). Fourteen percent of alumni were not confident about improved quality of life in the future.

When asked how optimistic they feel about their community's future, 82 percent of alumni felt positively, while 16 percent did not share that sentiment. Rural Minnesotans overall expressed somewhat higher cynicism (22%) than Leadership Program alumni.

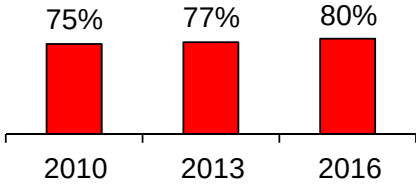
Quality of Life Will Improve Over Next Five Years



Optimistic About Future of Their Community

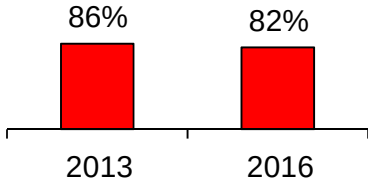


Leadership Alumni:



Somewhat or strongly agree

Leadership Alumni



Somewhat or very optimistic

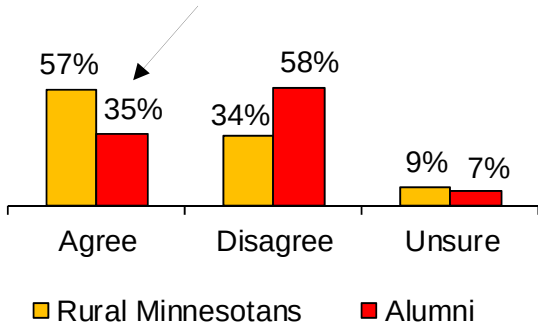
Russell Herder
Strategy wins.

Rural Voice

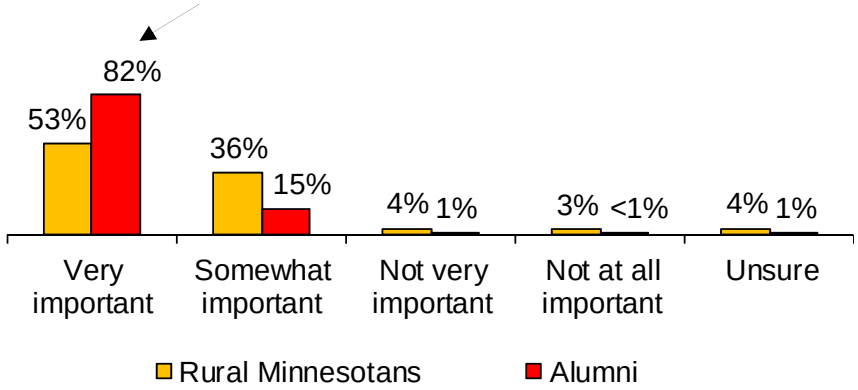
Leadership Program alumni expressed significant concern about the priority placed upon the interests of rural Minnesotans. When asked if the needs and well-being of rural Minnesota communities are as important to legislators and policymakers as those of metropolitan cities, nearly three in five (58%) were of the opinion that they are not, compared to 34 percent of rural residents at large. Thirty-five percent of alumni were comfortable that the rural voice is being heard, although seven percent were unsure.

Nearly all (97%) alumni said it is important to support political candidates who actively address rural issues, and to a much strongly degree than rural Minnesotans overall.

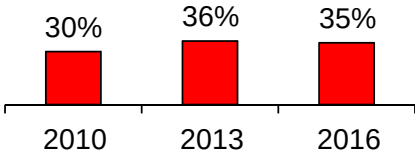
Needs of Rural Communities are as Important to Legislators, Policymakers as Metropolitan Areas



Importance of Supporting Political Candidates Who Address Rural Issues



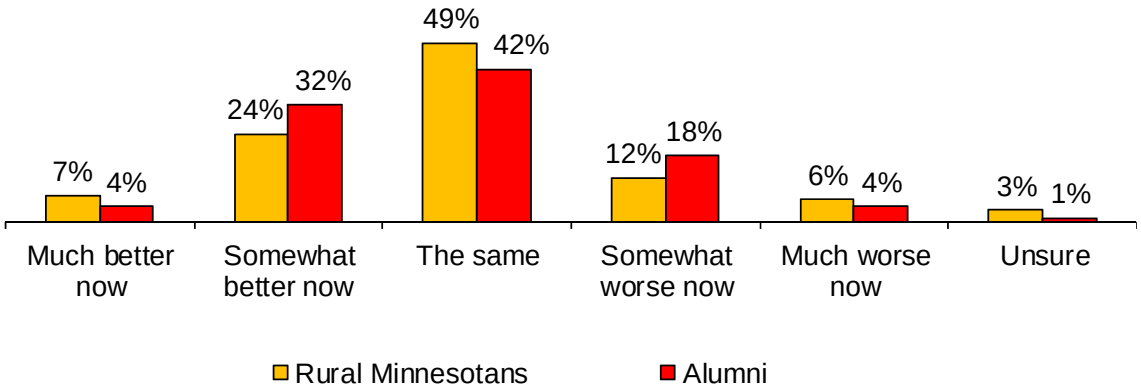
Leadership Alumni: Agree That Needs of Rural Communities are as Important to Legislators, Policymakers



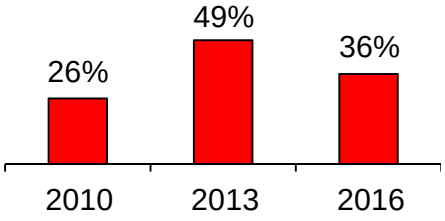
Economic Concerns Continue

Survey participants were asked to gauge the condition of their community's economy now as compared to a year ago. Thirty-six percent of alumni felt that their local economy has improved, which is a downswing from Rural Pulse 2013 alumni results. Forty-two percent believed that the economy has remained level, while 22 percent indicated that their local economy had worsened over the last year, twice as many as 2013 study findings.

Condition of Community's Economy Right Now, Compared to a Year Ago



Leadership Alumni:
Condition of Community's Economy Has Improved Compared to a Year Ago

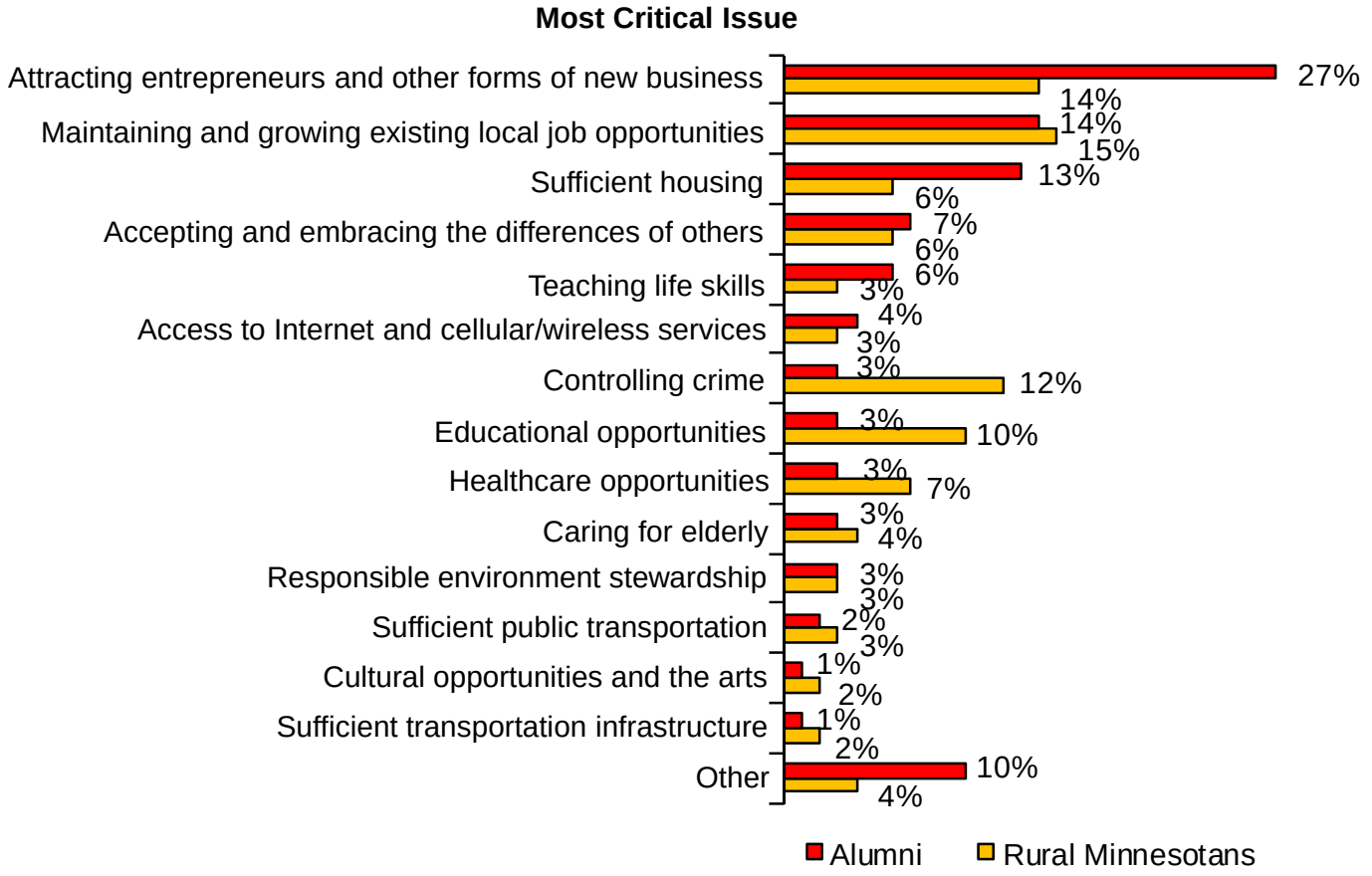


Somewhat or much better now

Russell Herder
Strategy wins.

Critical Community Issues

Job growth is a significant theme for Leadership Program alumni, as well as with rural Minnesotans at large. By far the most critical issue that alumni felt must be addressed was attracting new businesses to their community (27%). Hand in hand with job development, the second most critical issue was said to be maintaining and growing existing job opportunities (14%). Sufficient housing was a close third (13%). Alumni were less likely than rural residents overall to have said the most critical issue to address is controlling crime, education or healthcare.



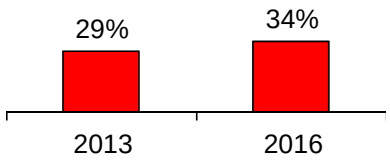
Note: Issue options provided in 2016 varied from previous years.

Jobs Continue to be an Overwhelming Concern

Although agreement that there are adequate jobs paying household-supporting wages slightly increased since Rural Pulse™ 2013 (29% vs. 34%), there is still a lack of confidence in the job market. Sixty-four percent of alumni felt that there are not adequate living-wage job opportunities in their community, a higher dissatisfaction than indicated by rural residents overall (48%). Only a third (34%) of alumni felt there are sufficient living-wage jobs in their community, compared to 47 percent of rural Minnesotans at large.

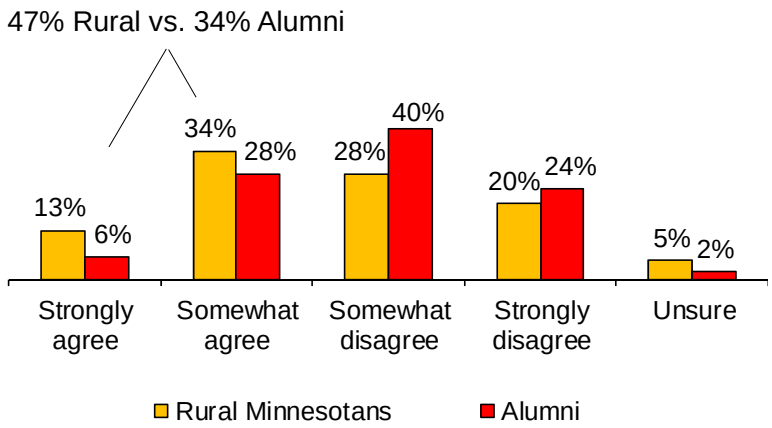
Along with the concern over adequate job opportunities, about half (51%) of alumni believed that their community does not do enough to attract new entrepreneurs and businesses. Forty-seven percent felt positive about their community's ability to attract new industry, compared to 52 percent of rural residents overall.

Leadership Alumni:
Adequate Number of Jobs that Pay Household-Supporting Wages

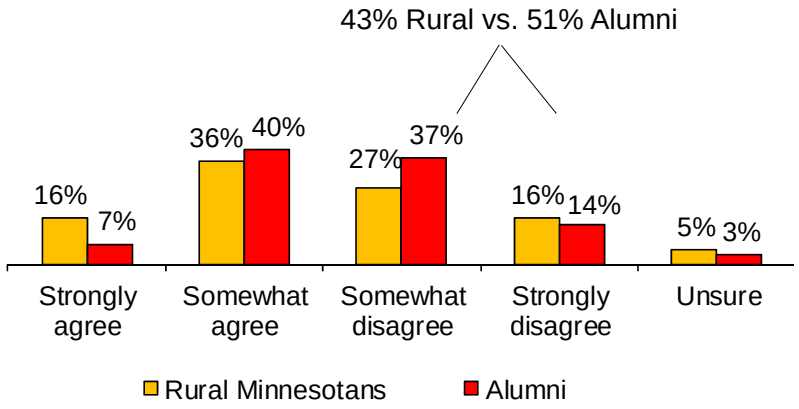


Somewhat or strongly agree

Adequate Number of Jobs that Pay Household-Supporting Wages

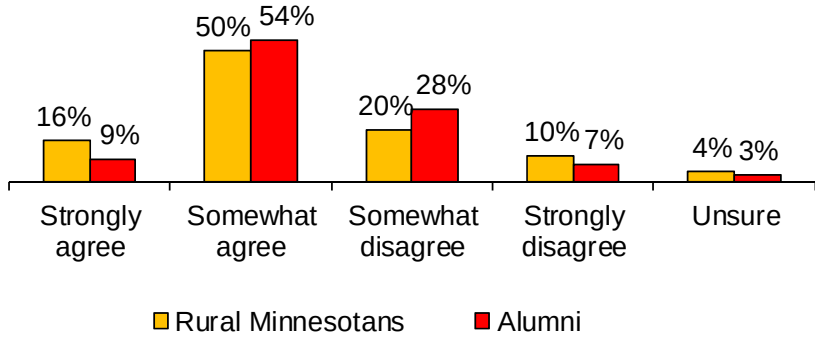


Community Sufficiently Attracts New Businesses



In addition, thirty-five percent said they feel their community lacks the ability to maintain and grow existing job opportunities, although many alumni believed that their community does a better job of maintaining and growing existing jobs than it does attracting new industry (63% vs. 47%).

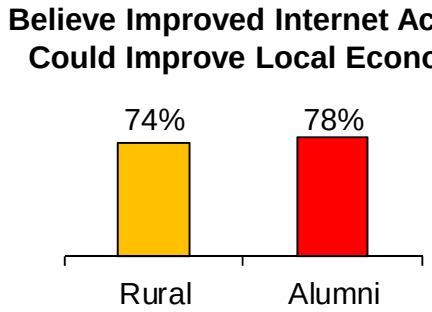
Community Successfully Maintains and Grows Job Opportunities

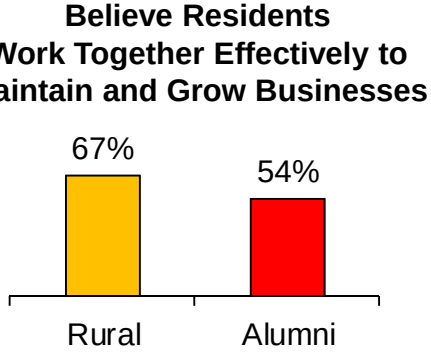


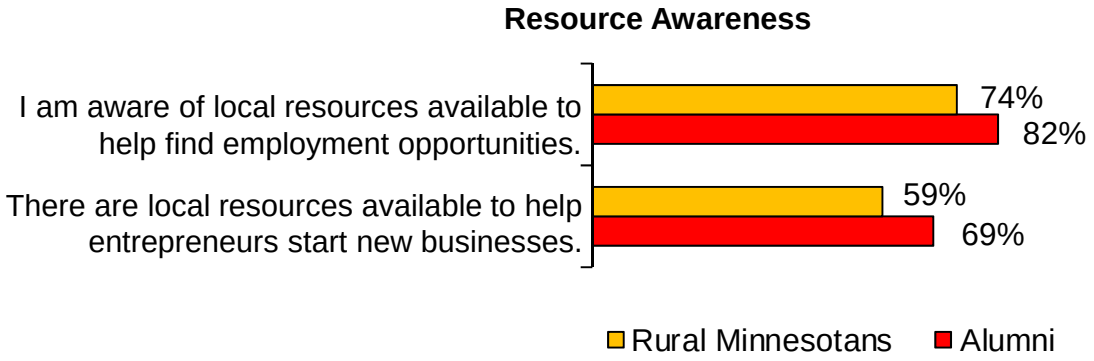
Job Growth Resources

Seventy-eight percent of Leadership Program alumni and 74 percent of rural residents overall said they feel improved internet could assist in promoting local economic vitality, although much skepticism exists whether their community is able to work together to address job growth. Just over half (54%) of alumni agreed that their community effectively collaborates to grow the local business base, while two-thirds (67%) of rural residents at large said that collaboration exists.

Although the majority (82%) of alumni said that they are aware of local resources to assist residents in finding jobs, only about seven in 10 (69%) said they are aware of resources available to help entrepreneurs start new businesses. An even fewer number of rural residents overall indicated that they are aware of aid for starting new businesses (59%).







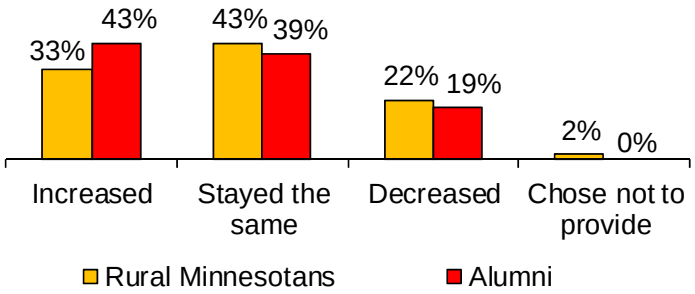
Russell Herder
Strategy wins.

Impact of the Economy on Families

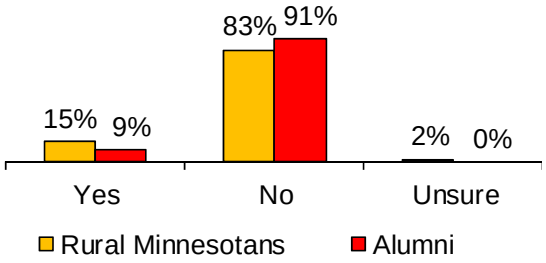
More than two in five (43%) Leadership Program alumni said that their household income has increased over the past year, a slight increase from 2013 findings, and 10 percentage points higher than rural residents overall. Many households, however, are still struggling with a decrease in wages (19%). Thirty-nine percent said their household income had not changed in the past 12 months.

More specifically, nine percent of alumni said that someone in their household has lost a job within the past year.

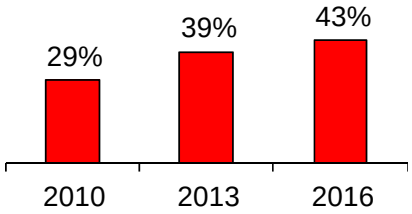
In the Past Year, Has Your Household Income Increased, Decreased or Stayed the Same?



Someone in Household Lost a Job In the Past Year



Leadership Alumni: Household Income has Increased Over Past Year



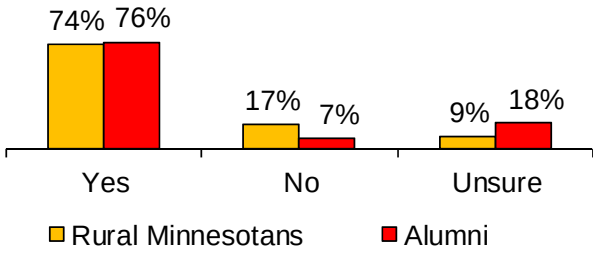
Russell Herder Strategy wins.

Migration

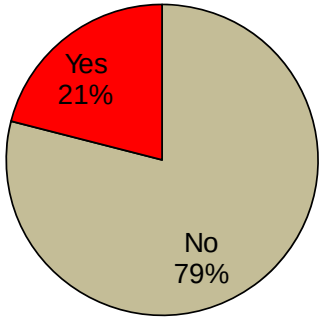
When asked if they expect to live in their current community five years from now, about three-quarters (76%) of alumni indicated that they will probably remain where they are, although 18 percent were undecided about future migration. Rural residents at large were more likely than Leadership Program alumni to have said they don't expect to remain in their locale (17% vs. 7%).

About one in five (21%) alumni respondents indicated that they have considered leaving their community for a larger city/metro area within the past two years. Of those who have considered a move, 40 percent said it would be to pursue job opportunities. Quality of life was cited as the main factor for 34 percent of alumni responding, followed by educational opportunities (5%). These results were similar to 2013 findings. Other responses included being closer to family and lower taxes, among others. *[See Appendix for complete listing of responses.]*

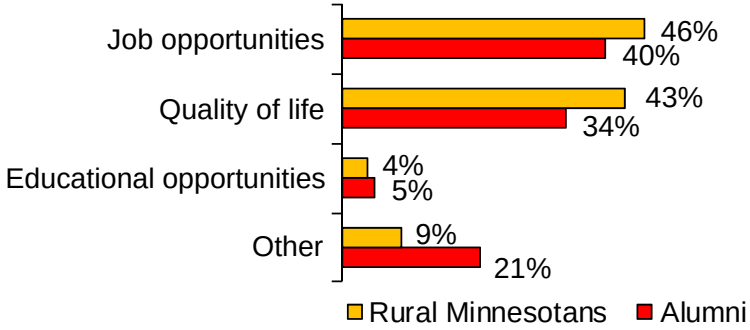
Expect to Live in Community Five Years From Now



**Within the Past Two Years,
Have Considered Moving to a Larger City or Metropolitan Area**



Main Reason for Considering a Move



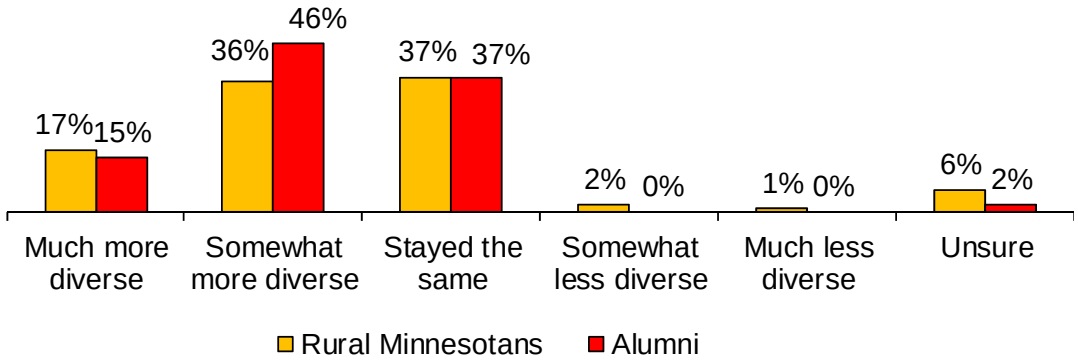
Those who have considered moving to a larger city or metropolitan area within past two years

A Changing Landscape

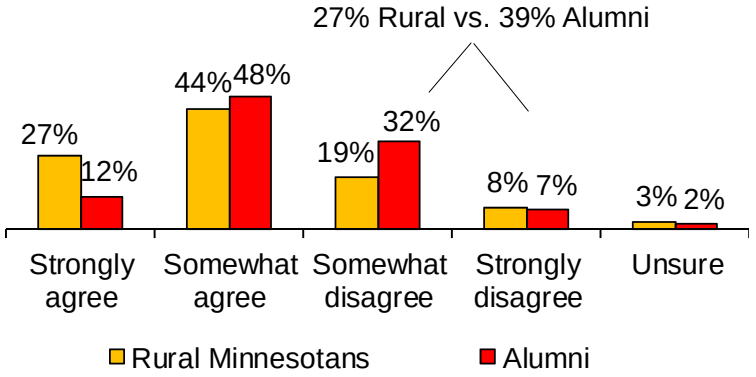
Alumni were slightly more likely than rural residents overall (61% alumni, 53% overall) to feel their community's ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse over the past five years. Thirty-seven percent felt it has stayed the same.

Though there is some belief that diversity is increasing in rural Minnesota, 39 percent of Leadership Program alumni did not feel their community is welcoming to people of varying backgrounds and perspectives. Three in five (60%) said that they feel their community is inviting, although that was felt more strongly among rural residents overall (71%).

Community's Cultural Composition Over Past Five Years

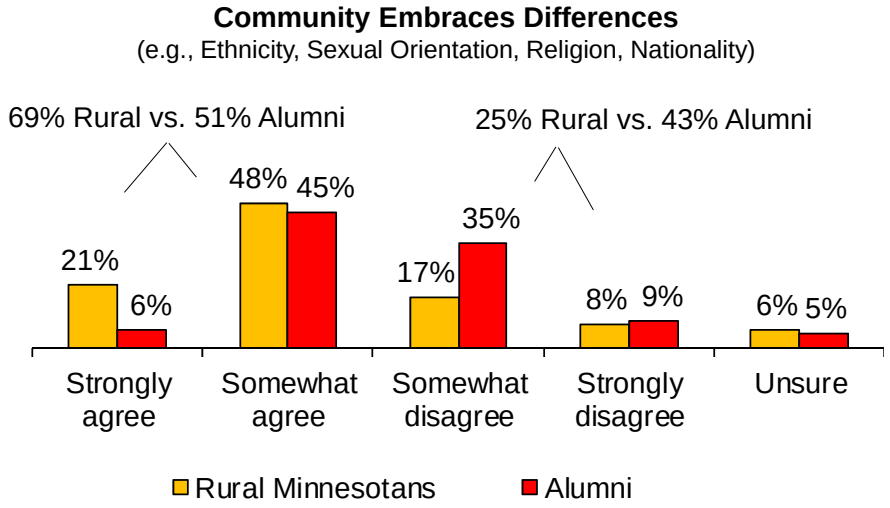


Community is a Welcoming Place for People of All Backgrounds and Perspectives



Russell Herder Strategy wins.

Along the same lines, when asked if they feel their community does a good job accepting and embracing differences, such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or nationality, 44 percent of alumni felt it does not, compared to 25 percent of rural residents at large. About half (51%) of Leadership Program alumni felt their local community embraces differences sufficiently.

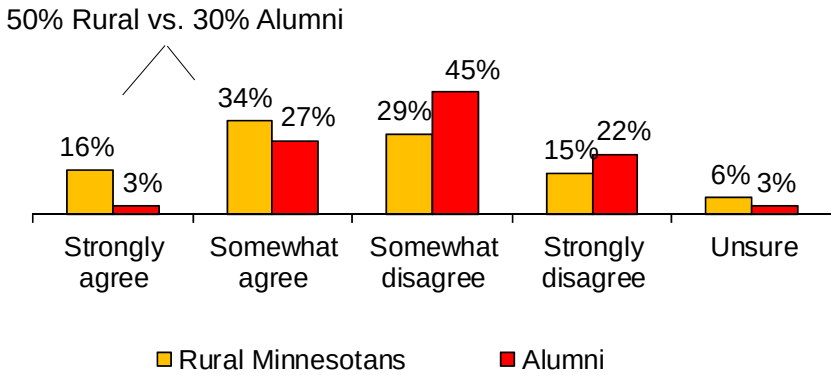


Leadership Composition

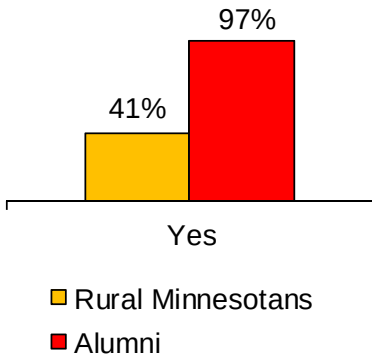
Only three in 10 (30%) Leadership Program alumni said that they feel local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds, which was much lower than that of rural Minnesotans overall (50%) and 10 percentage points lower than Rural Pulse 2013 findings. Two-thirds (67%) of alumni felt that inclusiveness in leadership roles is lacking.

Interestingly, while many alumni said that they believe that leadership in their community is not inclusive, nearly all (97%) said that they have served in a leadership role, more than double the percentage of rural residents overall (41%).

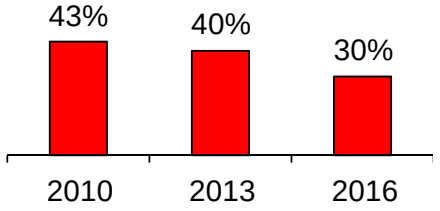
People From Diverse Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within Community



Have Served in a Community Leadership Role



Leadership Alumni: People From Diverse Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within Community



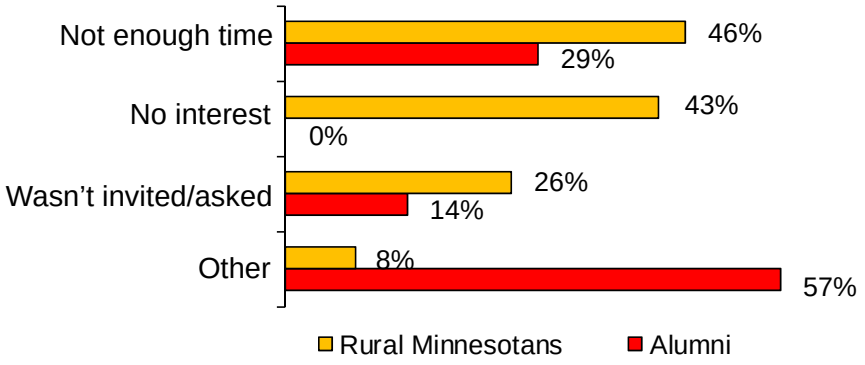
Somewhat or strongly agree

Russell Herder
Strategy wins.

Of the few alumni who have not served as a leader, 46 percent said that the main reason was lack of time. Fourteen percent said they have never been invited to participate as a leader. Others cited different reasons, such as being new to the area. *(See Appendix for complete listing of responses.)*

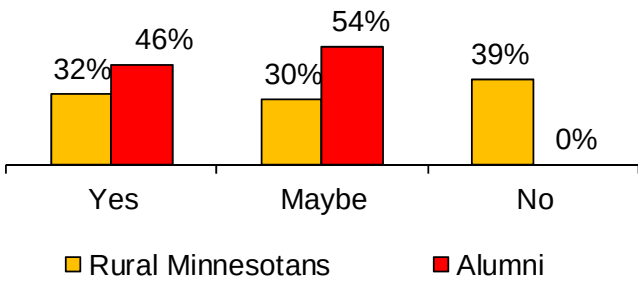
Forty-six percent of those indicated that they would definitely be interested in being invited to serve, and another 54 percent said they might consider doing so. Leadership Program alumni were much more likely than rural residents overall to have an interest in such (100% alumni, 62% overall).

Why Haven't Served in a Leadership Role



Multiple responses allowed

Would You Consider Serving If Asked?

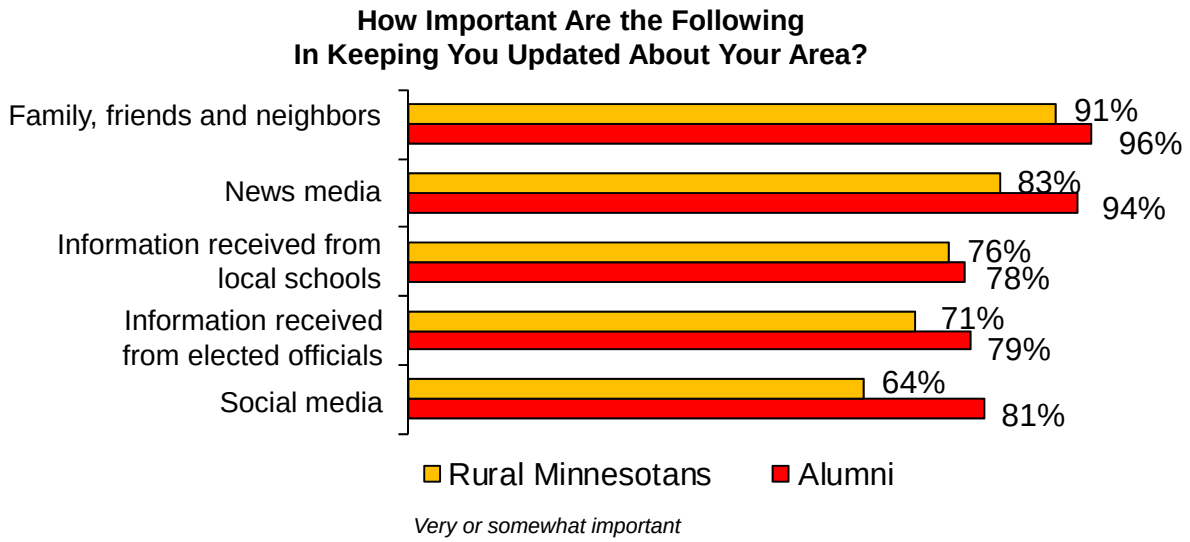


Multiple responses allowed

Russell Herder
Strategy wins.

Information Source Preferences

When asked about preferred information sources, alumni said that they rely heavily on family, friends and neighbors (96%) and the news media (94%) to keep them updated about their local area. Other preferred information sources included social media (81%), elected officials (79%) and local schools (78%). Other sources cited included Chambers of Commerce, churches, and civic and nonprofit organizations, among others. *[See Appendix for complete listing of other responses.]*



APPENDIX

Blandin Foundation: Alumni Verbatim Responses

28. Other than those I just mentioned, are there other issues that you feel your community is not addressing?

- Accepting young people in their 20s and 30s as full-fledged adults who can contribute to the community.
- Accessibility for those that have mobility issues, such as those in wheelchairs. Our police station isn't even handicap accessible!
- Activities for young adults and livable wages for unskilled residents.
- Additional mental health services would always be helpful.
- Affordable healthcare.
- Aging leaders with too few younger leaders to step in; the tensions between political and personal beliefs and larger societal good is a huge struggle for elected officials and more polarized factions of their supporters.
- Aging senior population, specifically housing and transportation.
- Alcoholism and drug addiction.
- All sectors of the community need to come together on a regular basis to address the overall community health issues. This includes those in both formal and informal leadership roles.
- Available, affordable daycare is a big concern right now. Our community has begun to have conversations on this issue, but hasn't made any actions beyond conversation to move towards solving the problem.
- Because of the thriving real estate market, our community has too much concentration on multi-family housing complexes, which oftentimes will become congested and be in tougher areas of the city. The actually zoning and planning appears to be too aggressive in building properties, rather than the right property mix.
- Being a welcoming place to all, not just a chosen few.
- Breaking out of the "boys' club" mindset and welcoming new people from the outside.
- Building bridges to the Native American community (a lengthy quest); urban green space, parks and playgrounds; and local food integration and infrastructure.
- Buildings available for rent to new businesses. Many retail buildings are used for storage rather than rental or for sale.
- Capturing manufacturing and business-related employment that would draw families with children into the community.
- Celebrating those businesses that have maintained or had growth, and/or provided jobs and/or services.
- Childcare.
- City government: there are a few rogue individuals who need to go through BCLP training. They are destroying the fabric of our community. We try to be a voice of reason and calm. I am hopeful, but not too optimistic. Education: our school board sent teacher contracts to a mediator without even negotiating. It sends a bad message to potential developers about the health of our community as it relates to investing in education and our youth.

- Cleaning up the vacant storefronts. Press owners that live out of the area.
- Climate change readiness, contraction of government to live within “their” means, sustainable funding for the local school district.
- Close-mindedness: I moved to the northern region to escape caring about the concerns in the cities, so only interested in the “good life” for themselves. Very ego-eccentric and set in their sheltered belief system they have created. Community health and supporting programming for less fortunate is not on their radar.
- Community and statewide addressing the shortage of available workers for today’s jobs that employers have available.
- Community has begun addressing labor shortage; there are more jobs than people to fill them.
- Community hasn’t improved in the last decade in addressing race and class divides. The overwhelming number of people in leadership position (government, healthcare, business, schools, nonprofit organizations, civic organizations, law enforcement, courts, etc.) are white, male, heterosexual and over 50 with deep roots in the community.
- Community partnerships.
- Competition among businesses.
- Conserving water for the future and prioritizing green space.
- Creating leaders in ethnic community. Creating a culture of well-being for all.
- Cuts in area education.
- Daycare accessibility and affordability.
- Daycare center and sufficient, affordable, livable housing.
- Dental care to lower economic members of the community.
- Development of youth in volunteerism. Upgrading of single family homes to ADA standards, yet keeping them reasonable to buy or rent. Supporting local athletes in college sports instead of giving free rides to minorities for out-of-the-area. Reducing parking requirements on new construction to a reasonable amount. There is lots of wasted space in the big box parking lots. Bringing in new businesses that don’t need to be in tax-free zones or have everything given to them, and no gain on the tax base. Not replenishing the trees that have been butchered for businesses that came and left in short periods of time requiring *all* new housing to meet ADA standards, and the lots be big enough for two to three vehicles to parked *on the lot* and *off the roads* so plowing can be done more efficiently. Require apartment housing to have two elevators – one for service only to move folks in and out without blocking the main entrances, tying up the resident elevators and having to unload in handicapped parking, as there is no other option. A second elevator would be handy for emergencies as well.
- Diversity and equal opportunity.
- Divisiveness.
- Drawing an interest from qualified persons to hold local political offices.
- Drug abuse!
- Drug and alcohol abuse, and the cost to education, business and family life.
- Drug use.
- Drug use and aftercare options for those in recovery. Battered women’s shelter.
- Drug use has skyrocketed in this small community. It’s the “elephant” in the corner, so to speak. If police and other agencies are on the case, they are taking their time about it.
- Drugs.
- Drugs, vandalism, gambling addiction.
- Economic development and workforce retention are the biggest issues.
- Educational testing needs related to federal and state mandates.

- Emergency medical ambulance and fire.
- Entertainment: movie theater and eating places like Applebee's, Texas Roadhouse, TGI Fridays, etc. are very few.
- Fine arts auditorium. Walkability to stores. Uniting as a community.
- Flexible work schedules for families with young children, for hourly and professional-level career individuals.
- GLBT bullying and suicide prevention.
- Global climate change and proactively addressing the effects into the future. Making reproductive healthcare readily accessible to all women/girls, men/boys.
- Good community leaders are not cultivated, but they are run down.
- Governmental leadership: lack of a vision by the elected leaders of the community. Not willing to put aside past grievances and look at working together to build a better community.
- Healthy youth activities. Promoting healthy lifestyles (farmers' market, fitness classes, fitness center, etc.).
- Hermantown is so close to Duluth that a lot of the issues are a part of the larger community. The major problem seems to be that Hermantown has become too expensive for the majority of people to buy a house and live there.
- High-speed internet, including fiber optic capabilities.
- Homelessness.
- Housing in all price ranges. Attracting business. Cleaning up blighted properties.
- How to transition from small river town industrial to tourism destination.
- I am seeing a growing trend of what I would call reverse discrimination. Those from a Christian background are not granted the same opportunities as those that are of another religion, race or gender.
- I believe we are drawing in people who taking more from the community than they are contributing.
- I don't think there is enough diversification in the types of jobs/careers available in the Grand Rapids area. I also feel there is a major divide between socioeconomic classes.
- I feel it has been difficult for the Hibbing/Chisholm area to bring in and sustain efforts for new businesses, compared to the surrounding communities such as Grand Rapids and Virginia.
- I feel like we have a community that doesn't know how to welcome or act around those of a different culture. I also think that everyone should have the same opportunity to get a job or be on a board, regardless of their culture, and it should be a priority.
- I feel that our community needs to look into providing opportunities for the youth of this community. We need to try and find ways sports and other extracurricular activities can be accessible to them.
- I listed somewhat disagree about minority representation because we have had a hard time getting Latino and Somalian residents to step forward into leadership roles. I feel this is progressing better now. We recently have a Latina and a Somalian male running for the Willmar School Board. Excellent.
- I think we are very much missing the link between working collaboratively with our area small communities. I feel like we are more against each other, in our own silos of pride as communities. In reality, the smaller communities around Redwood are bedroom communities and we work in Redwood Falls. Both sides have work to do. Now that my kids are through high school, I think it has to do with our school systems and each of our communities disliking the opposing area schools because of rivalries and competition. We really are all the same type of people; we just don't see it in the short-term with kids.

We would be so much stronger if we could think of our area as 17,000-strong, instead of 900- or 5,000-strong.

- I am a bit surprised you have not even listed “finding an adequate workforce” as an issue. I feel it is the number one issue for all of rural Minnesota.
- Inclusion. The majority of vocal supporters being overshadowed by vocal minority on large community policy decisions.
- Income disparity between full-time working residents and the retired, high-income summer/retiree residents. It makes it difficult to support year-round business.
- Infrastructure and economic development.
- Jobs.
- Lack of affordable, quality childcare. The tax climate in Minnesota, and perhaps locally, prohibits further business growth and development.
- Leadership at the political and organizational levels.
- Leadership harmony. Leadership skills are poor.
- Local government is not working well together and does not communicate well with community members.
- Maintaining housing stock. Rental housing stock – homes not well-maintained.
- Mental health awareness and reduction of stigma.
- Mental health, family structure, adverse childhood experiences, trauma coping skills.
- Minnesota and clean water are known nationally. The water quality in southern Minnesota is unfit to use for recreation many days of the year. The water in northern Minnesota is still not compromised. Soon the water resource will be valued like never before. A prudent community, rich in clean water like ours, should protect and enhance it at all costs to provide future economic viability.
- Missed information about municipal electric money owed young adult parties, and drinking in general.
- My main concern with my community is engagement. I feel there are leaders and groups to drive improvements, but we need an engaged community to take advantage of it. I grew up in this community, so I have witnessed the change, although I am unsure if the change is a cultural shift or due to a reduction in population.
- Need a community center, public swimming beach and extensions of Heartland Trail. Poverty elimination. Wealth disparity between city and townships.
- Need ATV trails. Need current snowmobile trail to expand around whole town and must get trails to local businesses. Must be able to spend money at local gas, restaurants and hotels. Need to make Hermantown a destination stop, not just a place to pass by.
- Need for land to expand economically.
- Need to address the homeless situation among our school students at all levels.
- Need to embrace small businesses with available services to assist them in staying viable. Must continually be community oriented to save and nurture what we have.
- New housing study needed.
- Our community relies so heavily on tourism, that if those dollars aren’t rolling into town, the town suffers. The big box stores in nearby Brainerd hurt local mom and pop shops. There is a huge push in the general area to shop local.
- We are more of a bedroom community with sub-standard rental housing in an aging community. We have seniors starting to return home.
- Our “new” Voyage Forward, a county group, has addressed many issues. Just last night we had a call to action with our community. We have worked for 17 months with 95 members to address such issues. Last night about 165 people attended the two-hour affair. It was great and affirming that we do have a following. Now it is up to the citizens,

countywide, to join and help with their future. At this point, I'm not sure how the sign up went, but many people were asking questions. I think our committee has covered many areas and at this time I can't think of anything not being address. With the new collaboration of interested people, it is exciting and people now know that they can come forward and address issues and help. Last year we sent out a survey to every household in the county and the survey was well-received. That certainly helped with issues, and we also hired a group that visited our county twice to assess our needs, which gave us a vision of what we can expect or not to expect. We are building from their suggestions. Our future is uncertain, but certainly we believe in our future!

- Our community could make it easier for new businesses to move to and/or start up in the community. Such as facilitating land purchases; offering gap financing; have a go-to supportive group to turn to for help with new business growth that includes business people, as well as other professional people.
- Our community does not recognize the need for lower-income housing in order to maintain an adequate work force for the industries in town.
- Our community does not understand embracing or appreciating diversity. Most people think that if they have, hire or include a "token," of non-white, then they are diverse. People that are "not from here" are still not appreciated, regardless of color.
- Our community may welcome others with different nationalities or ethnicity to leadership positions, but it's still more of a mono-culture, not very diverse community.
- Our programs and services in Itasca County support people who are not working instead of programs that exist as incentives and support for the working poor. It is an honor to have high-quality support services in our community, but we are now recruiting a specific population to Itasca County because our programs encourage them not to have a job. If they work at all, they will not qualify for assistance. We are not supporting business owners/employers with the way our current programs run their policies and criteria.
- Our teens and young adults really don't have any outlets for entertainment or gathering places. It would be nice to have a youth rec center, bowling alley, etc. available. A lot of our social events are geared toward our older population.
- Overcrowding in schools, affordable housing and educating the public on the changing face of America.
- Perception about immigration and refugees from other countries are splitting our town, even with none taking place as of now. It mostly to do with our older population.
- Poverty.
- Poverty issues. Not only financial, but social, religious and economic. Homelessness of our youth.
- Providing after-school opportunities for youth in need.
- Quality housing for renters, low-income housing for some, as well as housing that is affordable.
- Racism.
- Racism against Native Americans. Difficult to make a business successful in Cloquet. Poor mental health crisis services like psychiatry, etc.
- Rising property taxes that we don't see benefits from. Taxes going to "white elephant" wants, not needs.
- Safe, affordable and decent rental housing opportunities.
- School district board is weak and school administrative leadership is dictatorial. This has created a quiet disappointment for many leaders I have spoken with in Bemidji.
- See Albert Bartlett articles: Reflections on Sustainability Population, Growth and the Environment, Forgotten Fundamentals of the Energy Crisis.

- Shopping local. Maintaining a cohesive, positive attitude toward *all* economic and social groupings.
- Spiritual health.
- The community is as fractured and toxic as I have ever seen it. I would be interested in talking about healing and more positive aspects of our community. There is a pall over Cloquet/Fond du Lac that needs to be addressed. Racism in either direction shouldn't be tolerated by the complacency of your Foundation. We have serious issues here that need attention. Just an observation from someone who walks in two worlds and sees the positive that can be, not the backwards thinking and division that racial intolerance brings out in this community as it is.
- The emotional and psychological impact of long-term assistance programs in many families. While the individuals/families must qualify, it seems there is little oversight in the assistance programs, and limited availability of tools and manpower to "change the norm." This seems to result in low self-esteem by our residents and casts a depressed state over our little town. We see it in the state of our housing, yard maintenance, crime levels, education levels/dropout rates and overall quality of life.
- The Iron Range is not a welcoming place for educated, professional, independent women and/or minorities. It continues to promote a "white boys only" environment that doesn't respect or foster leadership opportunities, or economic growth for women and minorities. Too much cronyism. If you don't support or participated in the "good 'ole boys" cronyism, you are discredited and set up to fail. It's very sad. Business, city and state government agencies promote that they have recruited women on their teams; however, they carefully select people that will support, go along with and/or agree with their cronyism. In my opinion, it's destroying the area's possibilities. They lack creative solutions and ideas.
- The lack of transparency in our city government.
- The need for something more productive than a bar. The need for something the laid-off workers can do and get involved in that's interesting to them. Overpriced real estate for where we are.
- The Owatonna community continues to work in silos. There is a strong lack of alignment around collective civic leadership and community resources necessary to identify and address desires for its future.
- The political fighting is not helpful to our community *at all*. We need to attract more younger candidates to run for offices, and support collaboration.
- The rampant drug use and abuse in our young people.
- There are jobs advertised each week in the newspaper, and there are also many people of working age who are idle. We seem to need some avenue to coordinate the two so that potential workers can be matched/trained for available jobs.
- There is a need for heathy social activities for adults. There are a lot of lonely, isolated, depressed adults.
- Too many jobs centered in tourism, which do not pay living wages.
- Too many people are living in poverty and there are few opportunities for them to get out of poverty.
- Total ignorance of Positive Historic Tourism Opportunities.
- Trouble in our school system with the superintendent. Things are in the process of being resolved, but it has made for much division as data privacy will not let the truth be told at present.
- Universal access.
- Unresolved grief.

- Urban/rural divide. Not just the Cities versus northern Minnesota, but towns versus rural in our own backyard. Opportunities are different and expectations of services seem different.
- Very high tax rates as compared to North Dakota. The tax burden is too high for businesses to survive and/or thrive in Minnesota. Too many regulations/requirements by the state that do not allow local economies to thrive.
- Very rural. We seem to be totally forgotten and ignored.
- Vision for the community? We're not asking where we'd like to be in five, 10 or 30 years.
- We are not addressing the thriving good 'ole boy network and the disastrous decisions being made by them (Bob Anderson eliminating EDA).
- We are not addressing/teaching strong parenting skills or working towards building strong marriages so children never become "at risk."
- We are protecting existing businesses and not welcoming new business that might compete. We seem to have forgotten about free enterprise.
- We could do a better job getting young adults involved in community and civic life and with decision-making.
- We have a group of wealthy right-wingers who are trying to push creationism on the rest of us. They are throwing their money at a Christian school that is dividing our community. The misinformation and liberties they are trying to take against our excellent public school system is very harmful.
- We have made some progress in getting beyond "the good ole boys" network. A few new and younger candidates and committee members are on board.
- We have no adequate lower-cost housing available for very poor people. Some 25 families, usually one parent with one, two or three children, are here and homeless, looking for housing, but we do not have any to offer in Mankato. There is only one shelter and it is only for men, and only for wintertime. We need to also allow for an area for people to camp outside. No one is allowed to have camping in or around Mankato, such as veterans and homeless people. This is a great need in this regional hub.
- We have no school and no bank, which is very hard on the seniors with no bank. The Senior Citizens Center is struggling with many of the seniors going to assisted living in Worthington and have a hard time meeting expenses.
- We need housing for our underpaid workers.
- We need stronger internet. The rural areas are not being covered, and this is a huge issue.
- We need to come to terms with the treaty rights to harvest, the extra costs relative to the reservation that aren't reimbursed and the amount of untaxed parcels (state parks, wildlife management areas, trust land, etc.), and the impact all of this has on the area. I've been here for 22 years and it seems like people are losing hope. Mille Lacs County is one of the poorest in the state with the third-highest taxes.
- We need to continue the growth of new businesses and recreational growth around our community and youth programs.
- We need to encourage more openness and understanding to the differences in our community.
- We see children at our church each week for the children's meal who are not taken care of as well as we would like to see.
- We struggle with maintaining a strong retail presence.
- We will have road construction on our main intersection of town and I am concerned about businesses surviving.
- Widening gap between the "haves" and the "have nots."

- Winona is struggling with having a large enough workforce.
- Women's leadership opportunities are marginal.
- Workforce, housing, aging, volunteer and business leader/owner retirement.
- Working to address daycare shortage.
- Worthington is very diverse, and we need to figure out a way to get that diversity to help step forward to build, grow and enhance our quality of life
- Year-round sustainable economic growth and job opportunities.
- Youth activities.

29. Which *one* issue would you say is the most critical to your community?

- Living-wage jobs – 11
- Alcohol and drug use – 5
- Workforce shortage – 4
- Land for expansion – 2
- Adequate food and housing for children who are in need.
- After-school opportunities for youth in need.
- All of the ones listed.
- I can't pick just one; they layer.
- Christian school issue.
- Competing priorities, lack of alignment, no roadmap to help the community get to where it wishes itself to be within the next 10 years.
- Cyclical poverty.
- Daycare shortage.
- Emergency preparedness.
- Employment.
- Good, quality restaurants.
- Having enough childcare.
- Home ownership, not renting.
- Involvement from all different people.
- Keeping children in school, graduating students that are competent and have life skills (people skills, managing money, etc.).
- Nearly all of the ones listed.
- Not enough single family homes being developed; too many multifamily projects occurring.
- Political leadership and vision.
- Population and environment.
- Poverty and the sub-culture of youth who do not embrace the educational opportunities available.
- Provide a tax/regulation structure that will allow business to survive and/or grow.
- Recovering from recent fire.
- Urban/rural divide.
- Sensationalism letters to editor.
- Some of these are married to each other, so I can't just pick one. An example is housing and transportation. It does no good to build new housing if there is not access to transportation.
- Sufficient housing a close second.
- Understanding community capital wealth.

35. Why have you not served in a leadership role in your area?

- Application for employment was denied; the candidate was chosen by nepotism.
- Applied for a couple of positions, but was not accepted. I need to serve on something of which I have an interest.
- I haven't had the opportunity.
- I work in a different community.
- New to community still.
- Newer to this rural community. Cautious of my commitments after years of nonprofit career.
- Recently relocated to this community.
- There are people who run, and have always run, the city.

42. Are there any other ways to keep you updated about your area?

- Chamber of Commerce – 17
- Churches/church groups – 11
- Civic organizations (rotary, arts council) – 3
- Law enforcement – 3
- Nonprofits – 3
- Social gatherings/groups – 3
- Public library – 2
- Chamber of Commerce website and e-newsletter
- 50-plus group and the Traverse/Grant Counties Senior Citizen Coordinator, Deb Rapp
- Ag Extension Service update meetings
- Business leaders in this community
- Televised council meetings
- Chamber of commerce updates
- Development Corporation of Austin, Vision 20/20
- Chisago Lakes Area Community Foundation
- City council minutes and commissioners minutes, county minutes; updated websites from local, regional and state tourism associations; arts councils; and historic preservation organizations
- Local organizations
- City government staff
- Community education programs, school district releases
- Computer access
- Coworkers
- While considered "old" media, I believe both northern community radio/KAXE and the Herald-Review do a great job of soliciting input from local residents to share with the community as a whole
- Dakota Wicohan
- Destination Lake City, Lake City Tourism Bureau
- Dialog Session Minutes, Blandin Leadership group breakfasts
- Elected officials from the state level; because of the extremely polarized political climate, most of their input is slanted.

- Email updates from economic development organizations or the Chamber of Commerce about what's new/happening in the business community would be helpful to those of us working in government or nonprofit.
- Employer groups are important, although they typically take a passive role. They could play a key role, especially with showing their own sense of authentic civic stewardship.
- Environmental groups
- Grassroots community groups
- Hospital, health and human services
- In the last five years, the community has a new church and a new school, next is to work together to continue as a group with some basic goals for the future through communication.
- Information from organizations that we support or have membership in (e.g., League of Women Voters, Minnesota Land Trust, Nature Conservancy, Planned Parenthood)
- Information obtained through community involvement, such as service clubs
- Involvement in networking through local organizations such as Greater Mankato Growth
- Leadership groups, service clubs, personal connections
- Leadership of the largest employers in the community
- Local city and county reports, in news and on websites
- Local contacts are the most important
- Local nonprofits such as YMCA, churches, social service organizations
- Local organizations
- Local service groups
- Local snowmobile club and ATV club
- Networking
- Networking amongst nonprofits, businesses
- Newsletters
- Nonprofits like Northern Community Radio, MacRostie Arts Center, Itasca YMCA, Bridges Mentoring, Reif Arts, Itasca Water Legacy Partnership. Also local government organizations; townships, county.
- Nonprofit and civic organizations like the college and community education
- NRCS; USDA; U of M EXT Service; local growers; DOE (sustainable energy), etc.
- Other business owners and leaders
- Nobles County Integration Collaborative or community education
- partners in other organizations, learning from others, sharing information
- Personal contacts
- Resilience.org, book by Ted Koppel, Lights Out
- Rotary Club programs
- School board, community coordinators
- Service clubs and economic development authorities
- Service organizations
- Local businesses
- Serving on civic groups
- SMIF, SHIP
- State and national news for comparisons
- State government and nonprofit groups that conduct research and provide planning data
- Statewide reports from industry leaders/organizations
- DNR, Cuyuna Lakes Mountain Bike Crew, economic development agencies
- Trade groups like AMFA, IREA, IMA, etc.

- Training provided by the Blandin Foundation
- University Extension, WCI Fergus Falls, MN DNR, MN DOT
- Vision 2040
- Warroad Young Professionals
- We have a fairly new group called Destination Lake City that is a wonderful collaboration of elected officials, community leaders, business owners, service groups and the tourism board. It is a wonderful networking tool and has had significant impact on the way the city is moving.
- Websites
- Work colleagues

46. What would you say was the main reason you have considered moving to a larger city or metropolitan?

- Family – 11
- Lower taxes – 2
- Personal
- Mixture of reasons, including above and others
- Expanded opportunities for work, social, living
- Greater opportunities all the way around – jobs, education, arts, culture, businesses, entertainment
- Climate
- Tired of Iron Range cronyism
- Closer to work
- Small-town politics
- Opportunities for our children

53. How would you describe your ethnic and cultural background?

Listing of Multi-cultural:

- White and Native American – 4
- Native American, Hispanic, White
- Indian/French/Scottish
- French Canadian and Native American