



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

RURAL PULSE™ RESEARCH

Foundation Home Area – March 2019

Russell Herder
Strategy wins.



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*Prepared by Russell Herder for the Blandin Foundation
March 2019*



Executive Summary

Project Objectives

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

Understand the issues and priorities that Foundation home area residents see within their communities;

Determine if current community needs are being addressed and, if not, identify what should be;

Compare and contrast issue movement against past Rural Pulse studies; and

Identify emerging trends.

Methodology

To assess the Blandin Foundation's home area – defined as the Grand Rapids and Itasca County area including the communities of Blackduck, Hill City, Northome and Remer – a total of 300 telephone interviews were completed between February 15 and 25, reflecting a statistical reliability of +/-5.8 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Data was weighted to reflect home area demographics.

Key Findings

Economic Lens: While most feel the economy has remained stable, the outlook within the home area is not as positive as it is among rural Minnesotans as a whole.

More than half (56%) of home area residents reported their economy has stayed the same compared to a year ago.

Only 22 percent feel it has improved since last year.

Compared to 36 percent of the rural population, 54 percent of home area residents feel their community does not provide an adequate number of jobs that pay household supporting wages.

Four in 10 (41%) do not feel their community successfully maintains or grows job opportunities, and 45 percent feel as though their community does not support economic development.



Only 17 percent of home area residents saw a decline in their annual household income within the past year – down from 24 percent in 2016. Nearly one-third (29%) saw an increase.

Optimism Continues: Most home area residents feel they can personally impact their community but remain less optimistic about their future than other rural residents.

Sixty-nine percent of home area residents are optimistic about the future of their community, compared to 78 percent of rural residents.

Eight in 10 (81%) are confident in their ability to personally make a positive impact within their community.

Collaboration: Home area residents are largely confident in their community's ability to work together effectively.

Eighty-two percent of home area residents believe their community works together effectively when addressing local issues. This is equivalent to the total percentage of rural Minnesotans that agree with this statement.

Quality of Life: While overall responses skew positive, there are key areas in which home area residents feel quality of life could be improved.

Just over half (55%) feel their community is doing a good job in providing adequate daycare options.

Eight in 10 (83%) residents are satisfied with crime control within their community.

While three-quarters (75%) feel adequate healthcare is provided in their community, only six in 10 (62%) believe their community is doing a good job of handling the opioid and drug abuse crisis. Additionally, three out of 10 do not feel as though their community is doing well at addressing mental health issues of residents.

Sixty-three percent of those that live in the home area believe their community is providing adequate affordable housing for residents, compared to 68 percent of all rural residents.



Migration: A lack of job opportunities within the home area is the number one reason residents would consider moving.

Only five percent of home area residents do not expect to be living in the same community five years from now. However, a somewhat higher percentage (19%) have considered moving to a metro area in the past two years than the overall rural population (14 percent).

Nearly two-thirds (66%) of those who have considered a move to a metro area identified job opportunities as the reason. This is nearly double the percentage (35%) of total rural residents.

Rural Voice: Are residents being heard?

Residents of the home area are more likely than other rural Minnesotans to feel the needs of rural communities are less important to legislators and policymakers than those of the metro area. Nearly half (44%) disagree that their voice is being equally considered, compared to 38 percent of overall rural residents.

Inclusion: Diversity and inclusion gaps continue.

Fifty-eight percent of home area residents reported having few if any friends of a different race or culture. This is above the overall rural resident percentage of 52 percent.

Similar to other rural residents, the home area felt transgender people and those with drug or mental health issues were the most discriminated against.

Eight in 10 (82%) believe members of their community are able to stand up to hate and discrimination when they see it occur.



Leadership: Community members are open to accepting a leadership role if asked, but cite time limitations as an obstacle.

Slightly more than half (54%) of home area residents feel as though leadership roles within their community are held by people from diverse backgrounds. However, this is lower than the previous three studies.

Forty-four percent have not served in a leadership role within their community. They are slightly more likely to consider doing so than other rural Minnesotans.

Of those who have not served in a leadership role, more than five in 10 (54%) stated it is due to a lack of time.

FOUNDATION HOME AREA FINDINGS

Note: The following analysis reflects findings from the Blandin Foundation home area with a comparison of significant differences to rural Minnesota results at large.



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 2016. The study has served to identify trends within significant, complex subject areas including the economy, education, employment and quality of life.

The Foundation chose to undertake this study again in 2019 to accomplish the following objectives:

- Understand the issues and priorities that Foundation home area residents see within their communities;

- Determine if current needs are being addressed and, if not, identify what needs to be;

- Compare and contrast issue movement with past Rural Pulse studies; and

- Identify emerging trends or unmet needs.



Methodology

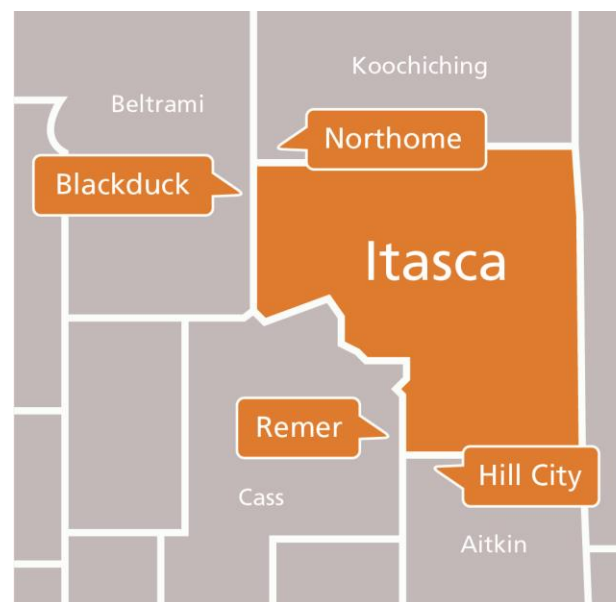
Independent research consultant Russell Herder was retained to conduct this study. The survey instrument for Rural Pulse 2019 was developed in cooperation with Blandin Foundation leadership. Where possible and relevant, certain questions from past studies were repeated for comparison purposes.

Surveys were conducted with 300 residents within the Blandin Foundation's home area – defined as the Grand Rapids and Itasca County area, including the communities of Blackduck, Hill City, Northome and Remer. In addition, the study was conducted with cultural communities throughout rural Minnesota and rural Minnesotans overall, excluding the seven county Twin Cities metro area and those in zip codes with populations of 35,000 or more. The survey was also administered to alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program.

To assess the Blandin Foundation's home area, a total of 300 telephone interviews were completed between February 15 and 25, reflecting a statistical reliability of +/-5.8 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. The data was weighted to reflect home area demographics.

Findings for the Foundation home area dimension of the study are within this report. Other study areas will be reported separately.

Home Area Study Region

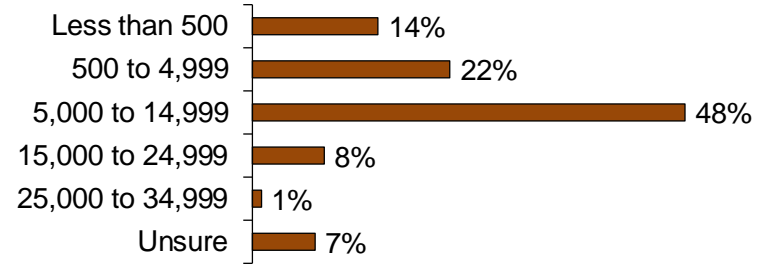




Demographics

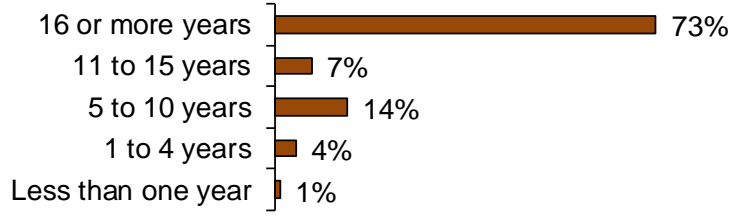
Nearly half (48%) of Foundation home area residents surveyed said the community they live in, or are nearest to, has a population of 5,000 to 14,999 people. Another 22 percent cited a population size of 500 to 4,999, followed by less than 500 (14%), 15,000 to 24,999 (8%), and 25,000 to 34,999 (1%). Seven percent were unsure.

Community Population



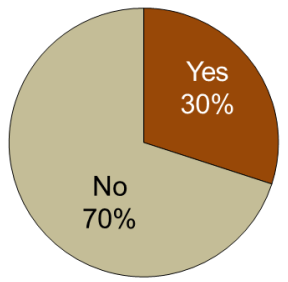
Nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents in the Foundation home area said they have lived in their community for 16 or more years, followed by five to 10 years (14%), 11 to 15 years (7%), one to four years (4%), and less than one year (1%).

Length of Residence

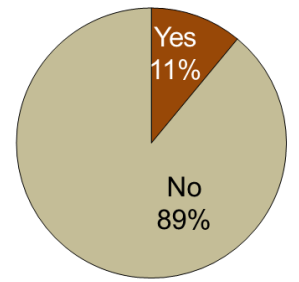


Three in 10 (30%) said that at least one child 18 years old or younger resides in their household. In addition, 11 percent cited that they currently have an adult child living in their home.

Minor Children in Household



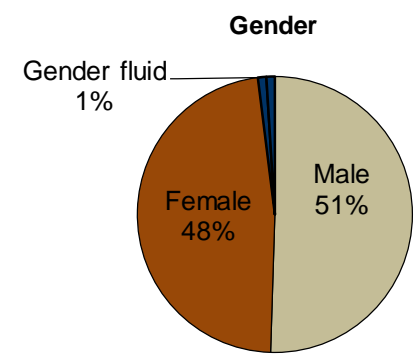
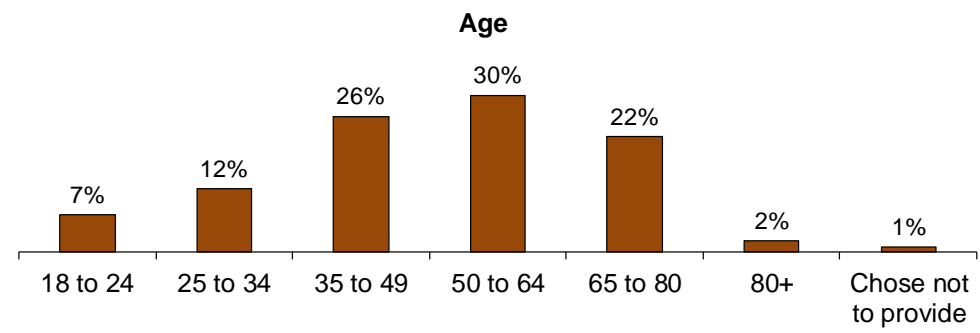
Adult Children in Household



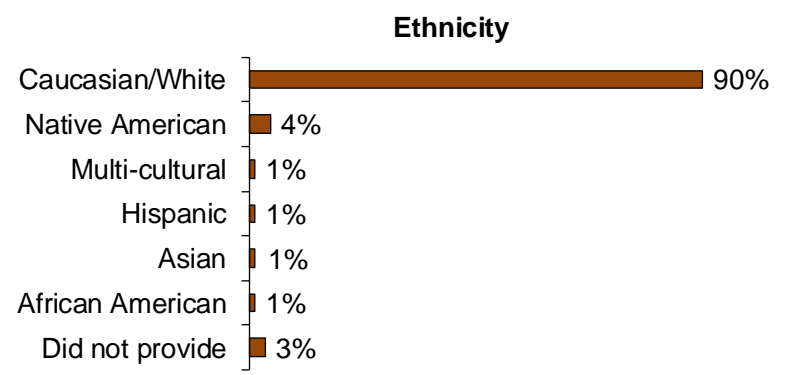


Nineteen percent of Foundation home area respondents in this study were age 18 to 34, while 56 percent were age 35 to 64 and 24 percent were age 65 or older. One percent chose not to provide age information.

Fifty-one percent of survey respondents were men, 48 percent were women and one percent are gender fluid.



Nine in 10 survey participants were Caucasian. Other ethnicities responding included Native American (4%), as well as multi-cultural, Hispanic, Asian or African American (1% each). Three percent chose not to provide this information.

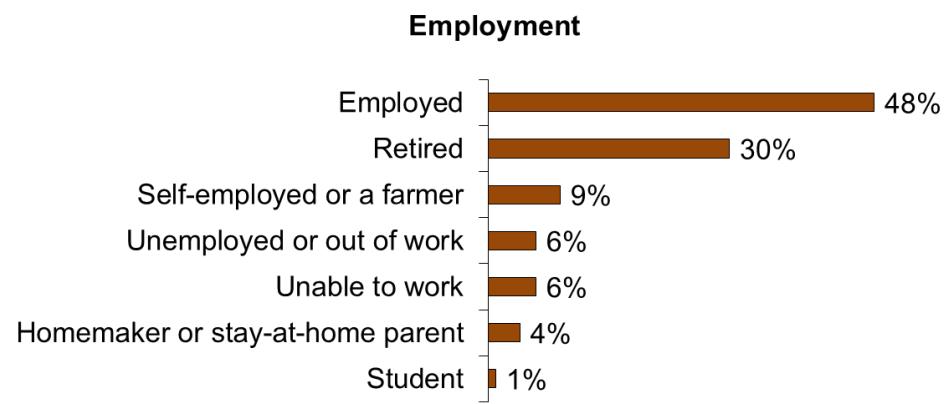
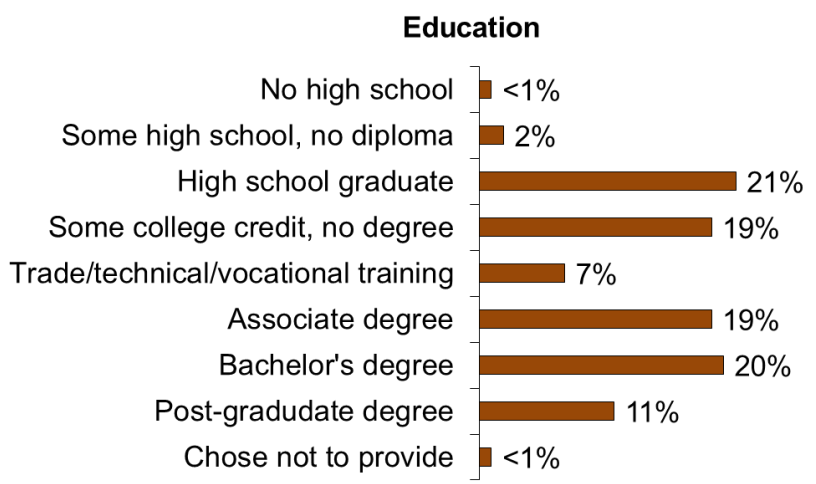
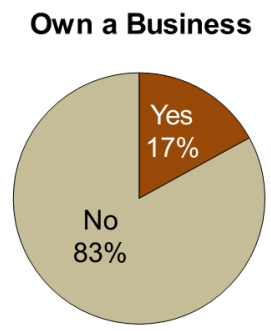




The educational experience of home area survey respondents was as follows: high school graduate (21%), a bachelor's degree (20%); some college credit but no degree or an associate's degree (19% each); a post-graduate degree (11%); or some type of trade, technical or vocational training (7%). Less than one percent chose not to provide education information.

More than half (57%) said they are employed, with nine percent of those citing they are either self-employed or a farmer. Of those who said they do not work, 30 percent were retired, followed by unemployed or unable to work (6% each), a homemaker (4%), or a student (1%).

Seventeen percent said they own a business of some type.

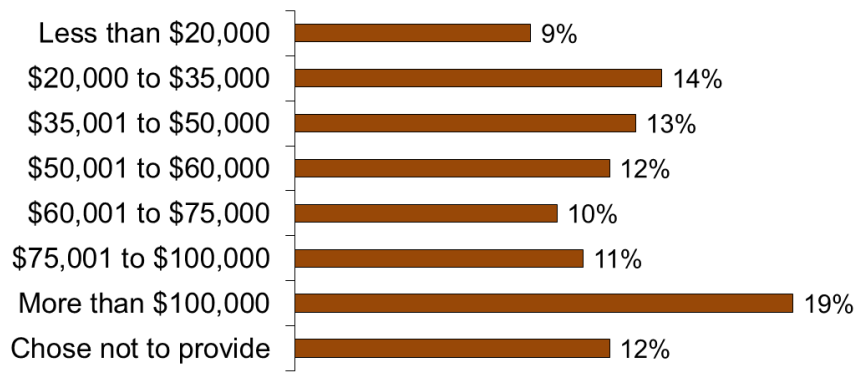




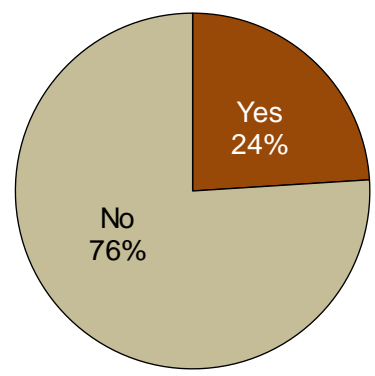
Nineteen percent of Foundation Home Area residents cited their family income as more than \$100,000. Another 21 percent said between \$60,001 and \$100,000. A quarter (25%) said their household income was between \$35,000 and \$60,000, and 23 percent said less than \$35,000. Twelve percent chose not to provide income information.

Nearly one in four (24%) survey respondents in the Foundation home area noted that they have a disability or impairment of some type.

Family Income



Has a Disability or Impairment





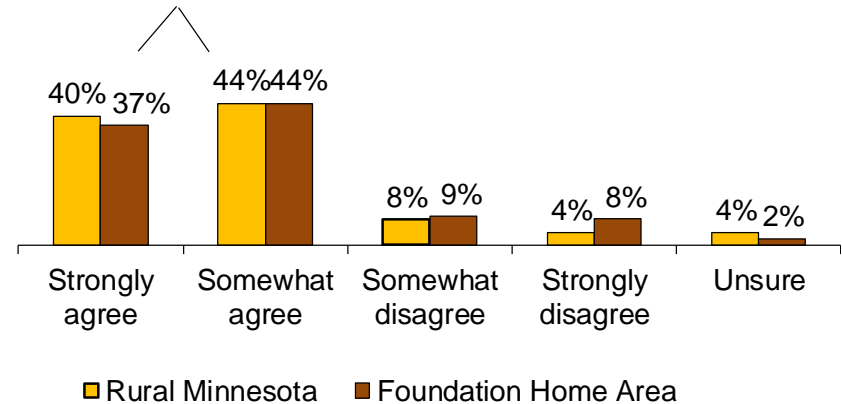
Collaboration and Contribution

Foundation home area residents were asked whether they felt that people like themselves are able to make a positive impact on their community. Four in five (81%) felt they could, with only 17 percent believing that they do not have the ability to influence change.

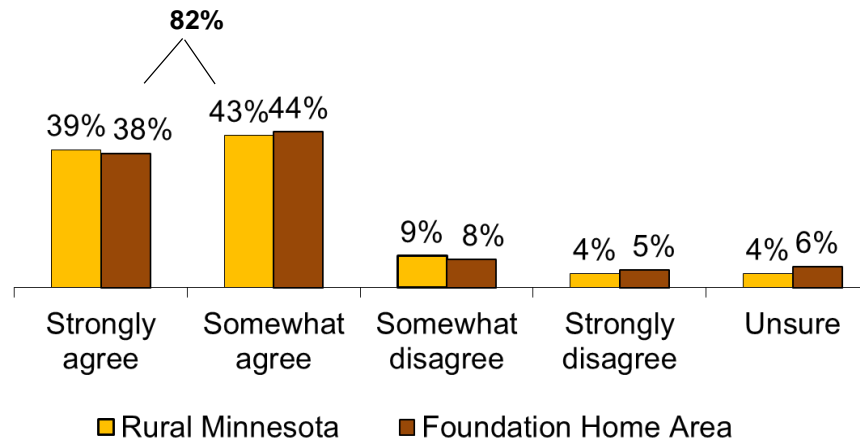
When asked whether they feel local community members work well together across differences such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or nationality to address local issues, results were just as positive. Eighty-two percent of Foundation home area residents felt their community works together cohesively, compared to 13 percent who said that they do not.

Able to Make a Positive Community Impact

84% Rural vs. 81% Home Area



Community Works Together Effectively to Address Local Issues

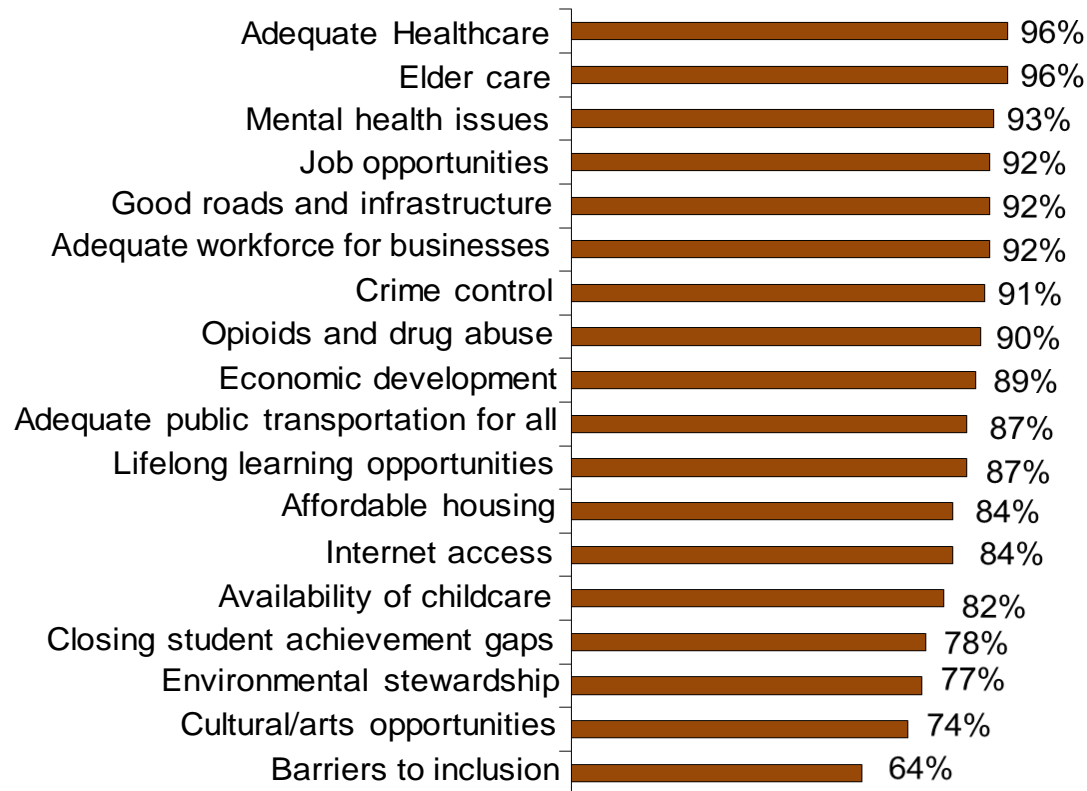




What is Important to Home Area Residents?

Survey respondents were given a list of community issues and asked to rate their significance or importance. The home area placed high significance on many issues such as healthcare opportunities and caring for the elderly (96% each); mental health issues, including suicide (93%); job opportunities, good infrastructure and having an adequate workforce for businesses (92%); controlling crime (91%); opioids and drug abuse (90%); and economic development (89%). These were similar results to rural Minnesota findings at large, although to a higher degree of significance for home area residents.

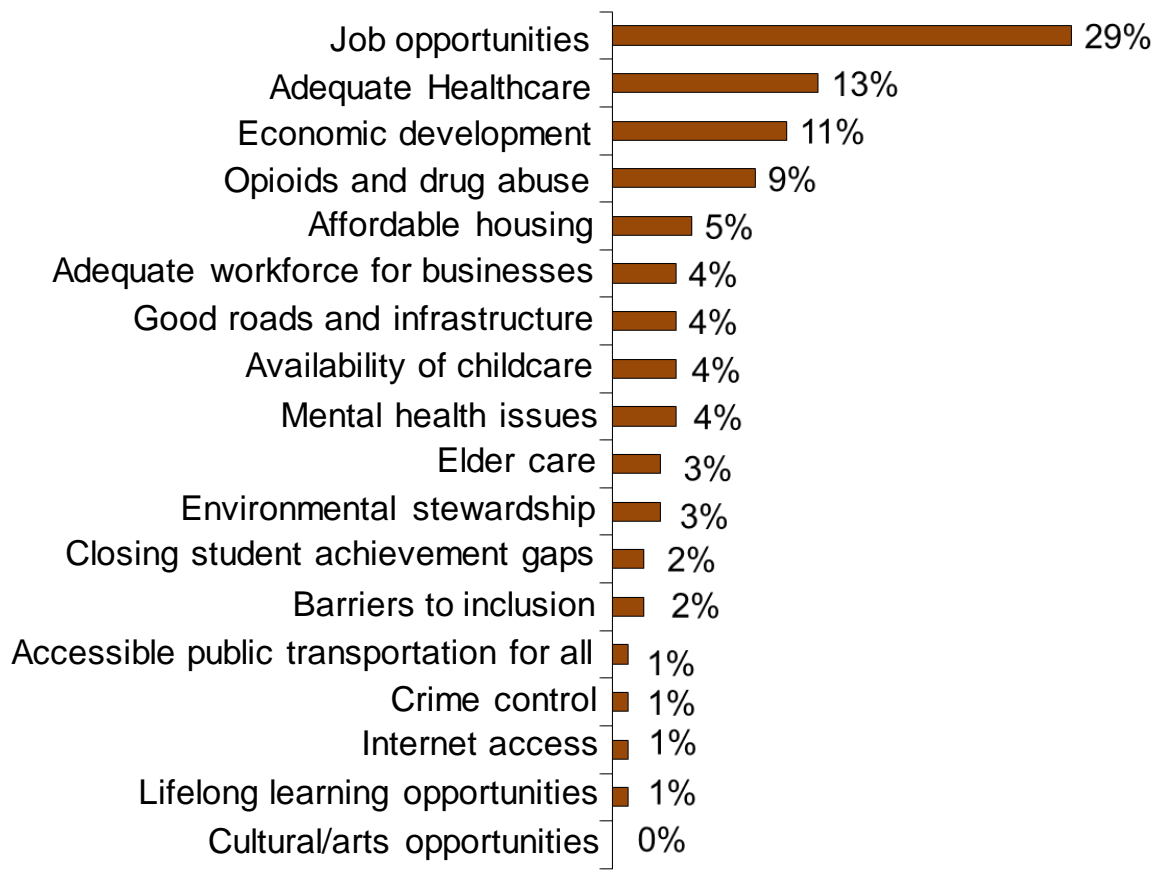
Somewhat or Very Significant Community Issues





When asked to choose the most critical issue facing their community, local job opportunities (29%) was by far the leading concern – twice that of overall rural Minnesotans surveyed (15%). The second-highest rated issue was healthcare (13%), followed by economic development (11%), drug abuse (9%), and affordable housing (5%). Having a sufficient workforce for local businesses, good infrastructure, availability of childcare and mental health issues followed (4% each).

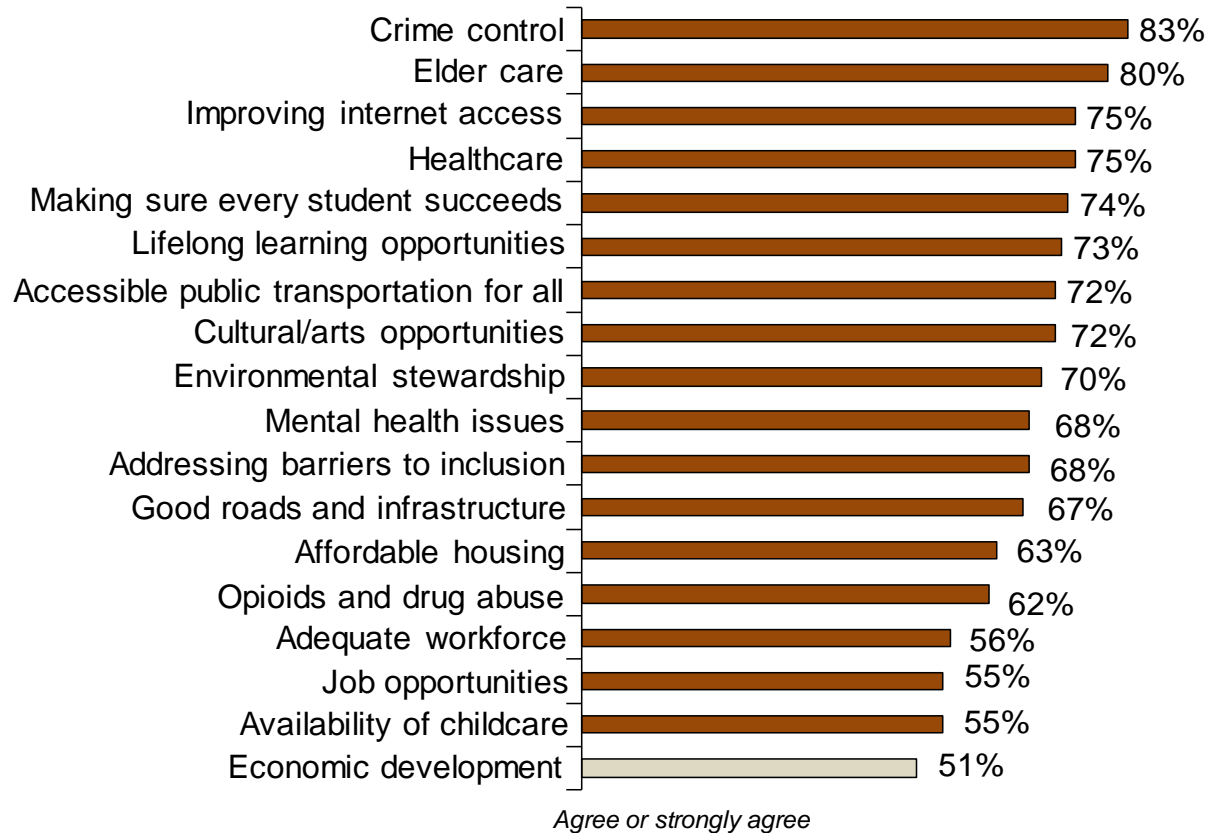
Most Critical to Your Community





Snapshot: Community Performance

Foundation home area residents were asked to gauge community performance in key areas. The highest percentage agreed the community was doing well with crime control, elder care, internet access, healthcare, education including lifelong learning and making sure every student succeeds, public transportation, and cultural/arts opportunities. They were less in agreement that the community is addressing the following well: drugs, adequate workforce, job opportunities, availability of childcare and economic development.



The following pages show the opinions of Foundation home area residents on these issues in greater detail.



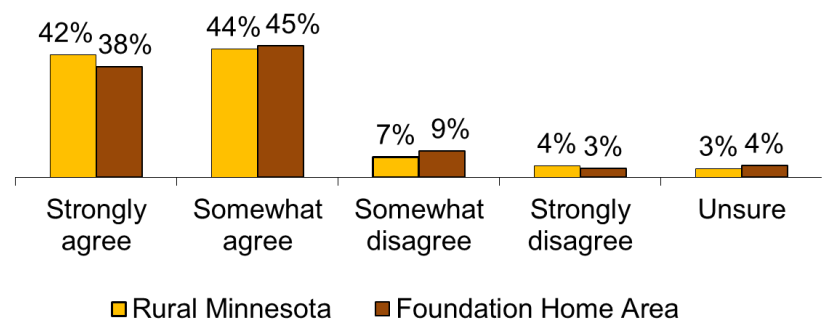
Controlling Crime, Elder Care and the Environment

More than four in five (83%) Foundation home area residents have confidence in their community's ability to control crime.

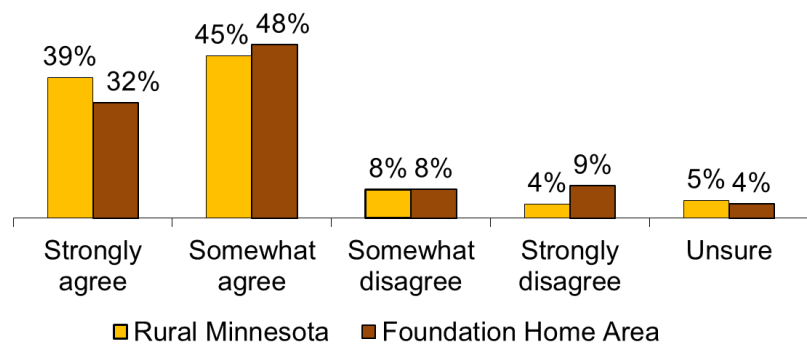
Eighty percent also said they believe their community provides adequate care for the elderly. Fifty-five percent feel their community provides available childcare, compared to 63 percent of rural residents at large. One in three (29%) do not agree, and 16 percent are unsure.

Rural Minnesotans at large had similar results overall.

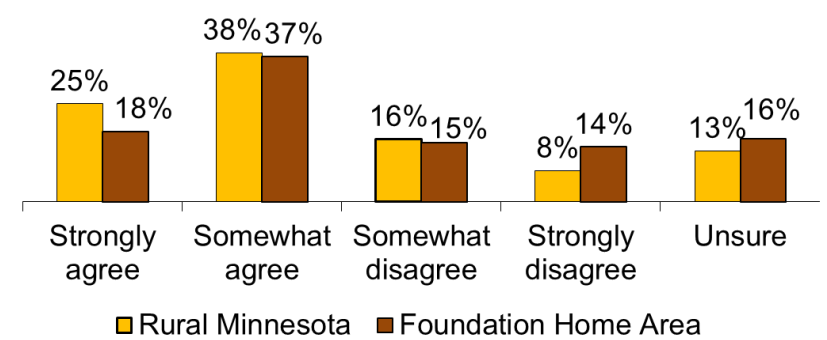
Community is Doing a Good Job Controlling Crime



Community is Doing a Good Job Caring for Elderly



Community Provides Childcare Availability





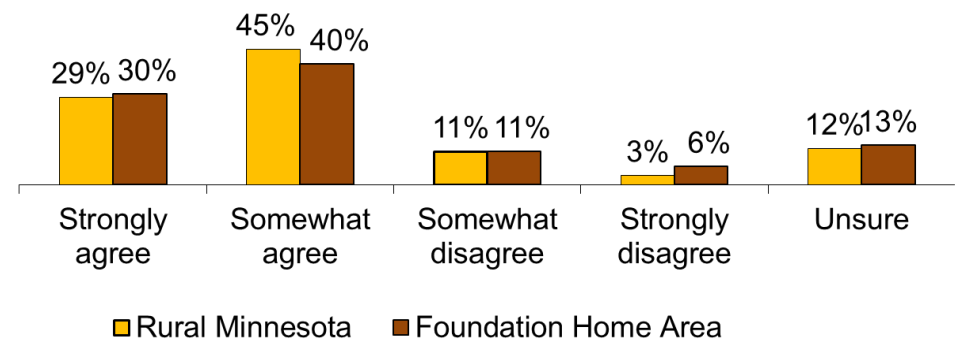
Seven in 10 (70%) feel their community is a good steward of the environment.

Rural Minnesotans at large had similar results.

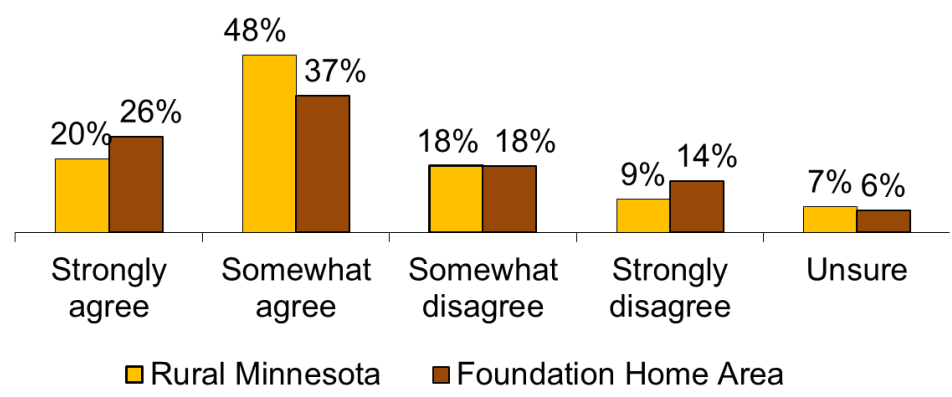
Housing

While 63 percent of Foundation home area residents agree that there is sufficient affordable housing in their community, one in three (32%) do not feel that is the case.

Community is a Good Environmental Steward



Community Provides Affordable Housing for All



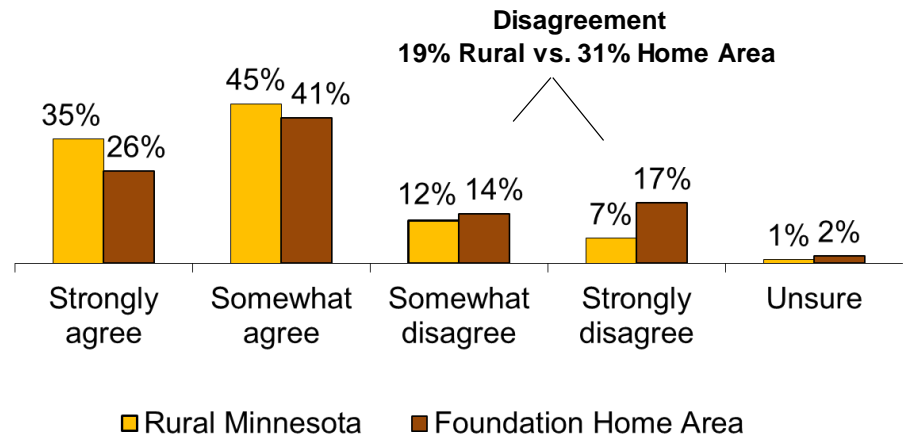


Transportation and Infrastructure

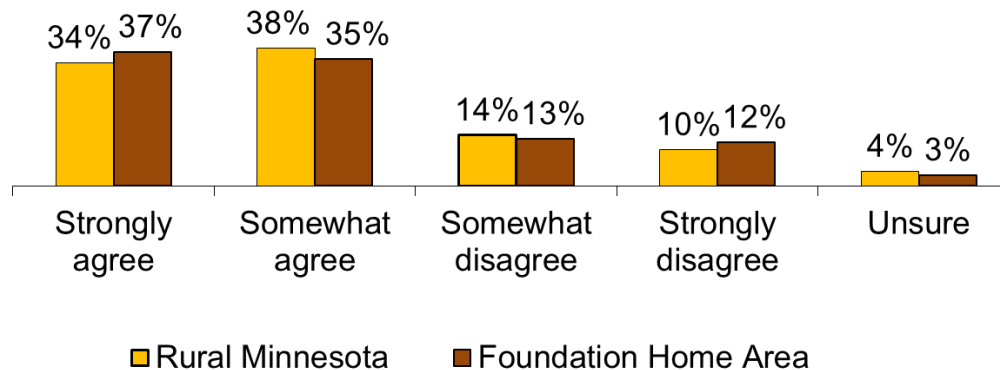
Three in 10 (31%) Foundation home area residents disagree that their community ensures good infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, etc. Two-thirds (67%) feel local infrastructure is provided.

A quarter (25%) of home area respondents feel there is inadequate public transportation for residents in their community, including those with disabilities. Seventy-two percent feel that there are sufficient transportation opportunities locally.

Community Ensures Good Roads and Infrastructure



Community Provides Public Transportation for All

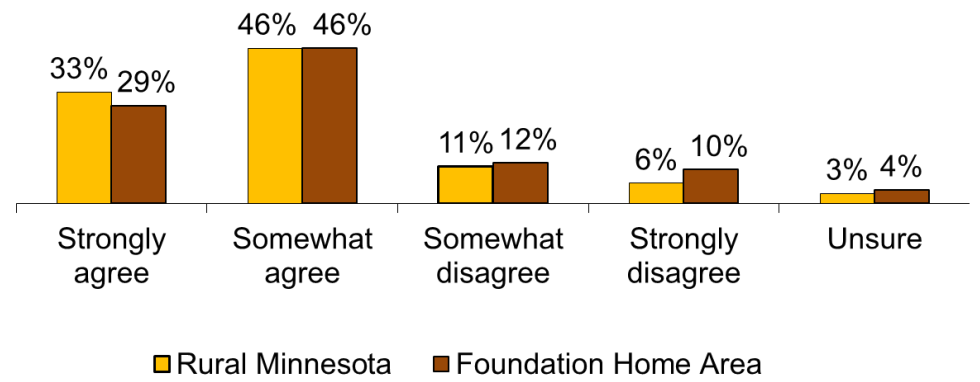




Healthcare

Three in four (75%) Foundation home area residents surveyed agree that their community provides adequate healthcare opportunities. Twenty-two percent do not agree – up nine percentage points from 2016 survey findings. Rural Minnesotans overall had comparable results.

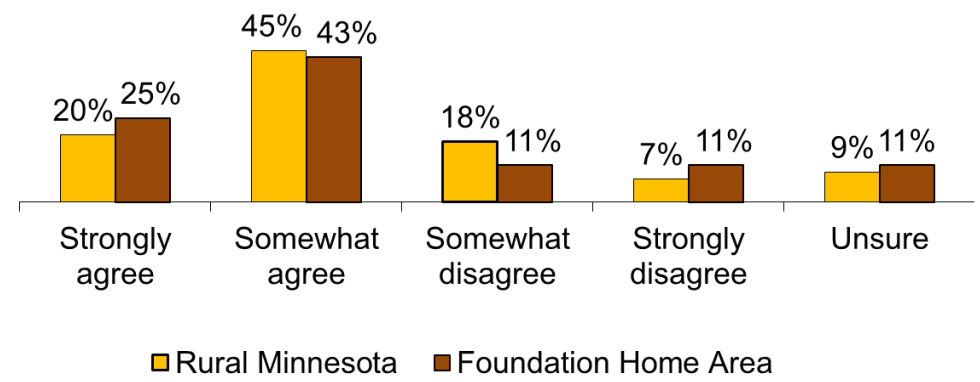
Community Provides Adequate Healthcare Services



Mental Health

Mental health issues, including suicide prevention, is a concern for 22 percent of Foundation Home Area residents, although 68 percent feel mental health is being adequately addressed in their area.

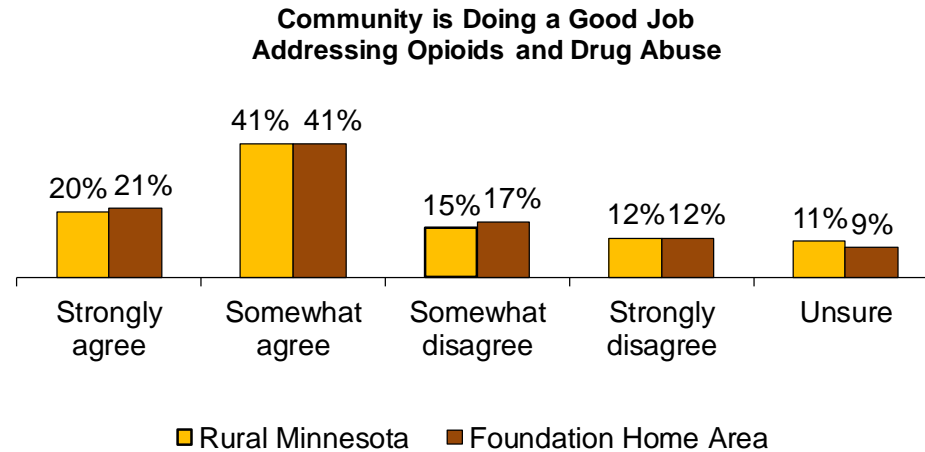
Community Addresses Mental Health Issues





Drug Abuse

When asked if they feel their community is doing well with addressing opioid and drug abuse; 29 percent of home area respondents said no. Sixty-two percent gave their community a passing grade. Rural Minnesotans at large had nearly identical results.





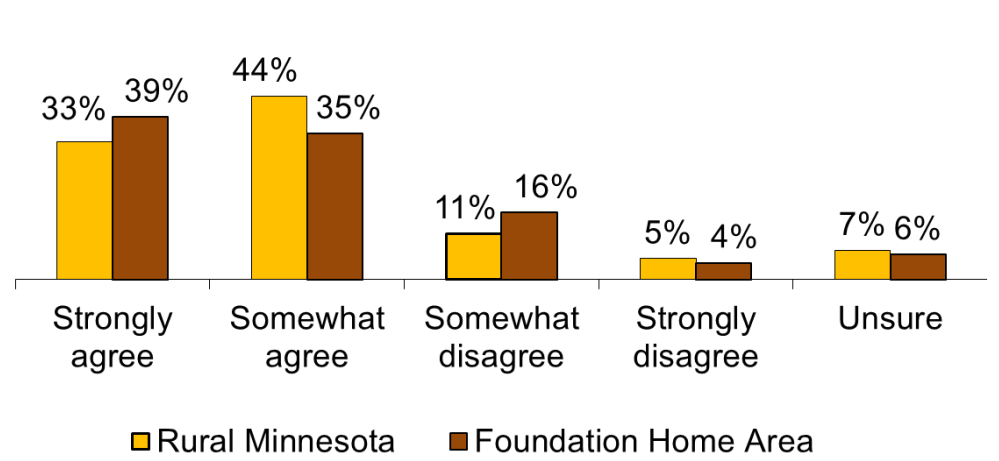
Education

Three in four (74%) Foundation home area respondents felt their community provides lifelong learning opportunities, with 39 percent strongly agreeing and 35 percent somewhat agreeing. Twenty percent disagreed.

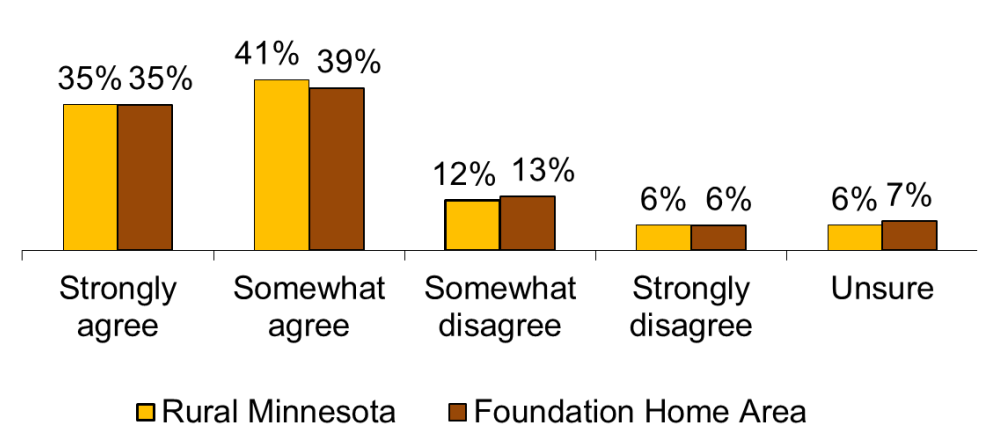
When asked if they feel their community does an adequate job making sure that every student succeeds, again, 74 percent felt this was true. Some 19 percent disagreed.

Rural Minnesotans at large had similar results.

Community Provides Lifelong Learning Opportunities



Community Makes Sure Every Student Succeeds





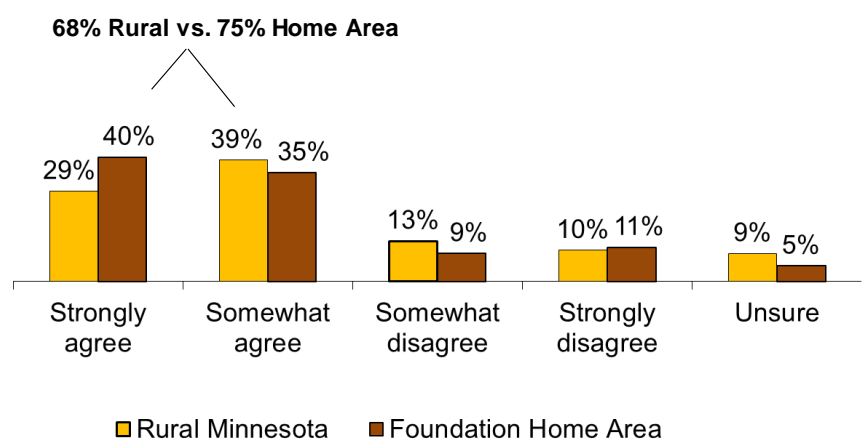
Internet Access

Three-quarters (75%) of Foundation home area residents feel their community is doing an acceptable job at improving access to the internet, slightly higher than the opinion of rural Minnesotans overall (68%). One in five (20%) disagreed.

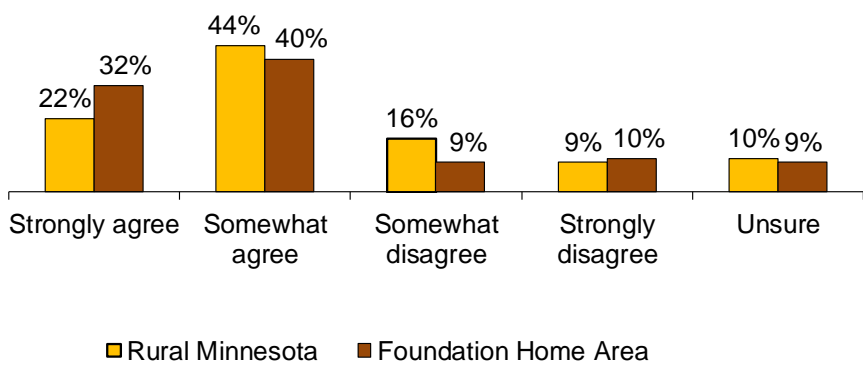
Diverse Culture and the Arts

Foundation home area residents were slightly more likely than rural residents at large (72% vs. 66%) to have said that their community provides diverse cultural and arts opportunities, although it was a concern for one in five (19%).

Community Improves Access to the Internet



Community Provides Cultural Opportunities and the Arts





Overall, respondents felt home area communities are not meeting expectations in several key areas, most significantly, jobs, workforce availability, economic development, mental health, drugs, infrastructure, childcare availability, adequate healthcare and affordable housing.

Importance Vs. Satisfaction

	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Difference
Job opportunities	3.6	2.6	-1.0
Adequate workforce	3.6	2.6	-1.0
Economic development	3.5	2.5	-1.0
Mental health issues	3.7	2.9	-.8
Addressing opioids and drug abuse	3.6	2.8	-.8
Roads and infrastructure	3.5	2.7	-.8
Availability of childcare	3.5	2.7	-.8
Adequate healthcare services	3.7	3.0	-.7
Affordable housing for all	3.4	2.8	-.6
Elder care	3.7	3.1	-.5
Accessible public transportation for all	3.5	3.0	-.5

Significantly Below Expectations

Somewhat Below Expectations

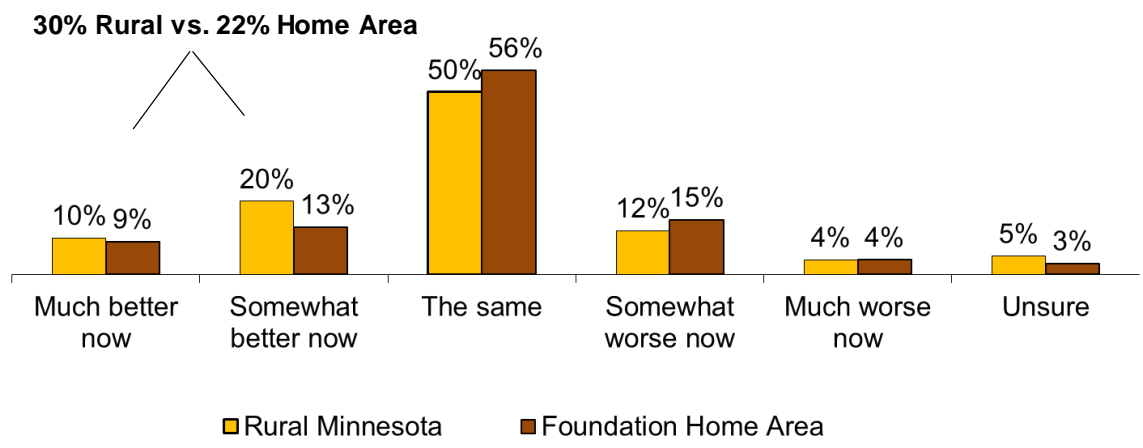
4 = High, 1 = Low



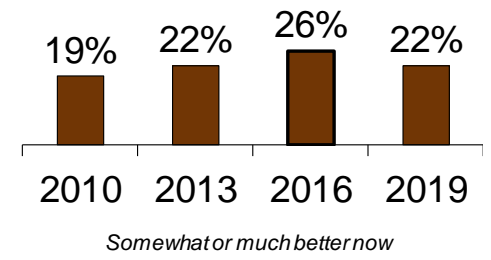
Economic Concerns Linger

Survey participants were asked to gauge the condition of their community's economy now as compared to a year ago. Twenty-two percent of Foundation home area respondents said that they felt it had improved – eight percentage points lower than rural Minnesotans overall. Fifty-six percent believed it stayed the same. While 19 percent of home area respondents indicated that their local economy had worsened over the last year.

Condition of Community's Economy Compared to a Year Ago



Home Area Residents:
Believe Community's Economy
Has Improved
Compared to A Year Ago

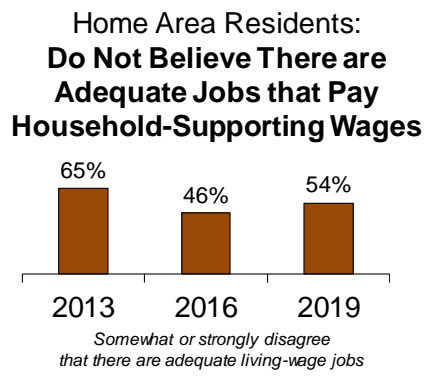




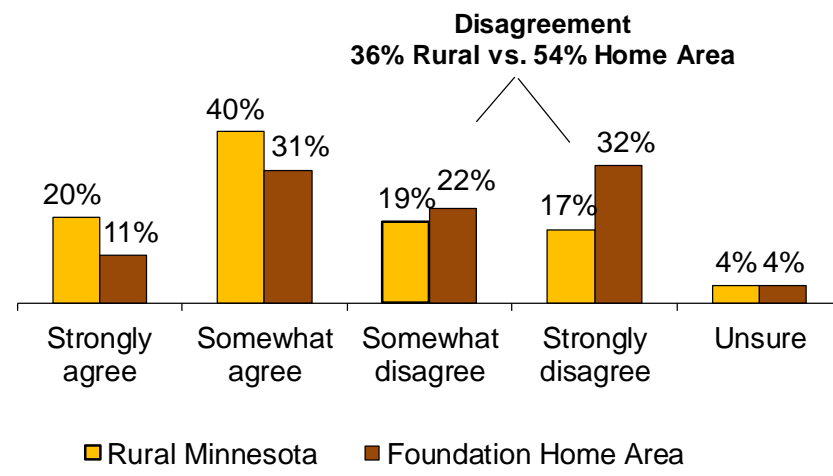
Job Concerns Increasing Again

There is still a significant lack of confidence in the job market, according to Foundation home area respondents. More than half (54%) feel there are not a sufficient number of living-wage jobs in their community – an eight percentage point increase compared to Rural Pulse 2016 findings and 18 percent higher discontentment than rural Minnesotans overall. Forty-two percent feel their community provides sufficient living-wage jobs, compared to 60 percent of rural respondents at large.

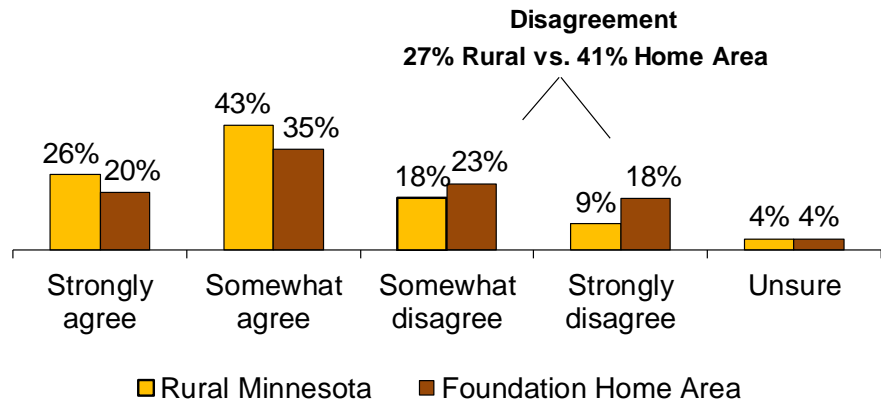
Although to a lesser degree, 41 percent said they feel that their area is not maintaining and growing job opportunities, again, higher than overall rural Minnesotans. Fifty-five percent of home area residents feel job opportunities are good.



Adequate Number of Jobs that Pay Household-Supporting Wages



Community Successfully Maintains and Grows Job Opportunities



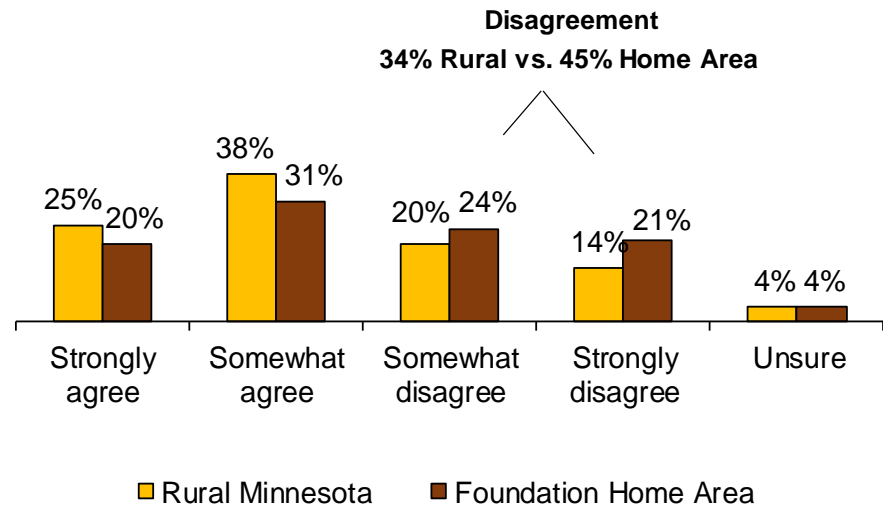


Foundation home area respondents were also more skeptical than rural residents at large with regard to local economic development (45% home area, 34% rural overall). About half (51%) feel their community does a sufficient job supporting entrepreneurs and drawing new businesses to their area.

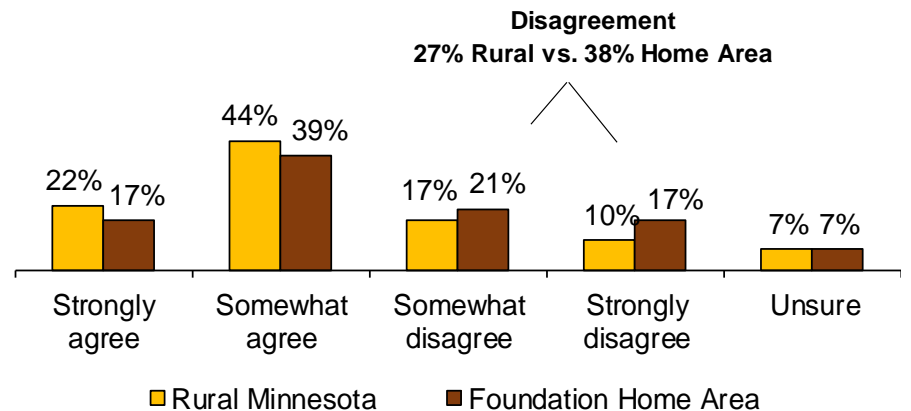
When asked if they believe their community possesses a sufficient workforce for local businesses, 38 percent of home area respondents – and 27 percent of rural Minnesotans overall – disagreed. Fifty-six percent feel their community’s labor pool is adequate.

Business owners were more likely than non-business owners to disagree that their community has an adequate workforce (44% vs. 36% disagreement, respectively).

Community Promotes Economic Development



Community Possesses an Adequate Workforce for Businesses

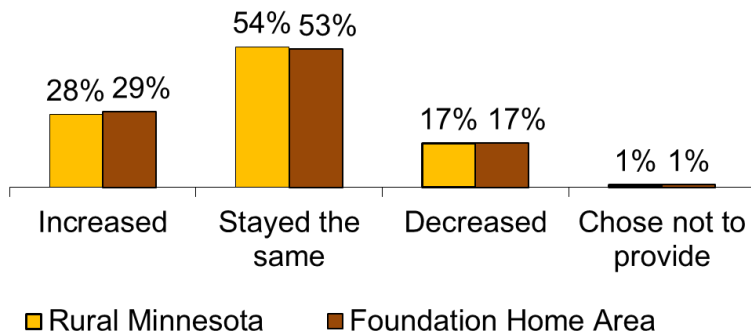




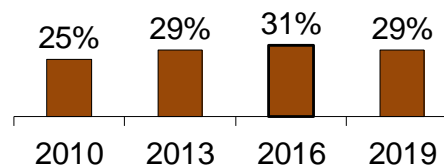
Impact of the Economy

Three in 10 (29%) Foundation home area residents said that their household income has increased over the past year. Seventeen percent of home area households have struggled with a decrease in wages over the last 12 months, this is fewer than those who experienced a decrease in 2016. More than half (53%) cited that wages have remained constant.

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



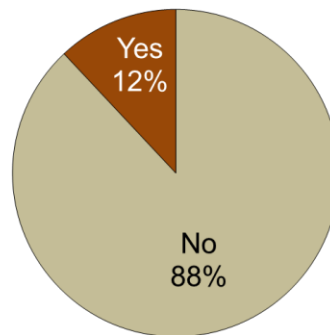
Home Area Residents: In the Past Year, Household Income Has Increased



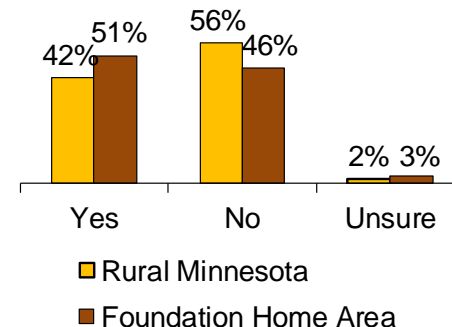
More specifically, 12 percent said that someone in their home has lost a job within the past year, slightly higher than rural Minnesotans overall (10%).

When asked if they had ever experienced poverty in their life, about half (51%) of Foundation home area residents – and 42 percent of rural Minnesotans overall – said they have or are currently.

Someone in Household Lost a Job In the Past Year



Have They Ever Experienced Poverty?



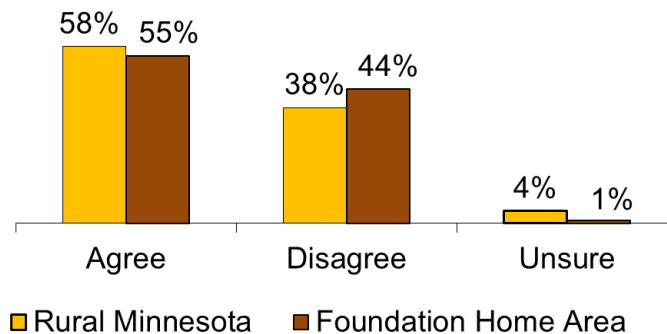


Rural Voice

Foundation home area residents expressed continued concern – and to an even greater degree than in 2016 – about the priority placed upon their interests. When asked if the needs and well-being of rural Minnesota communities are as important to legislators and policymakers as those of metropolitan cities, 44 percent were of the opinion that they are not (compared to 31% in 2016). Fifty-five percent were comfortable that their voice is being heard.

Rural Minnesotans overall expressed concern to a slightly lesser degree.

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



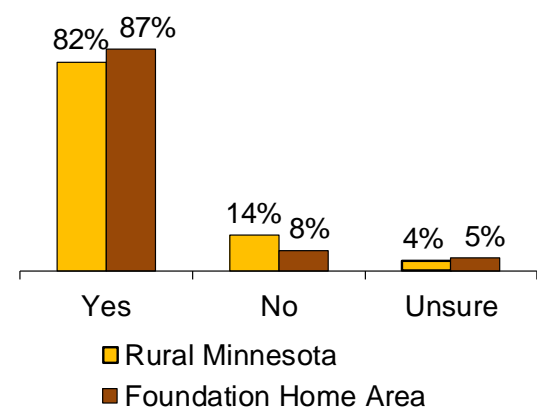


Migration

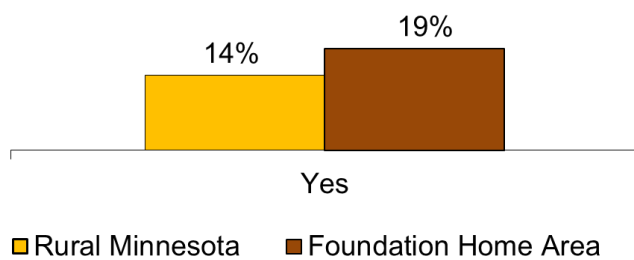
Looking forward, only eight percent of Foundation home area residents said that they do not expect to be living in their current locale five years from now and another five percent were undecided.

Nineteen percent of Foundation home area respondents indicated that they have considered leaving their community within the past two years for a larger city/metro area. Of those who have considered a move, about two-thirds (65%) – nearly double that of rural Minnesotans overall – said it would be to pursue job opportunities. Another 21 percent said a move would be for improved quality of life. Other responses included being closer to family, among other comments. (See Appendix for full listing of other responses.)

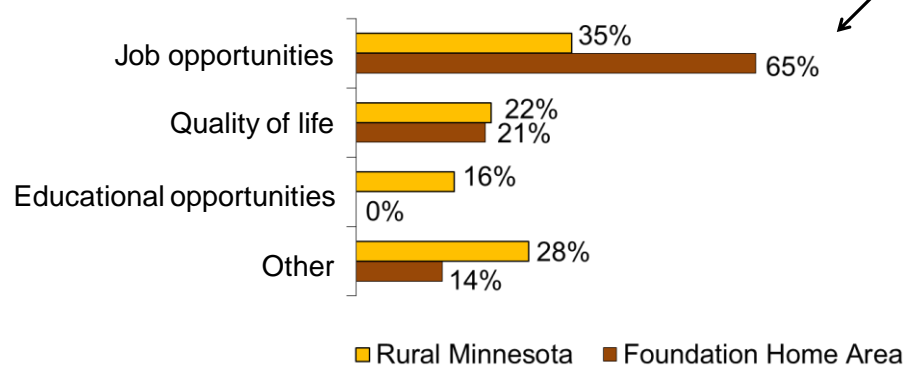
Expect to Live in Same Community Five Years From Now



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



Main Reason for Considering a Move



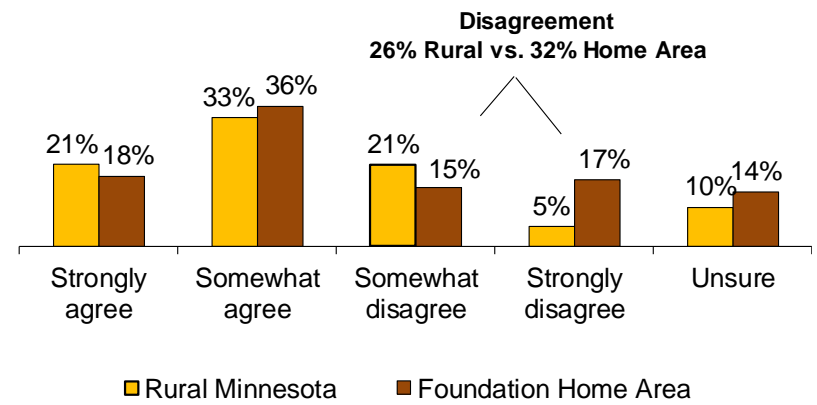


Leadership Involvement

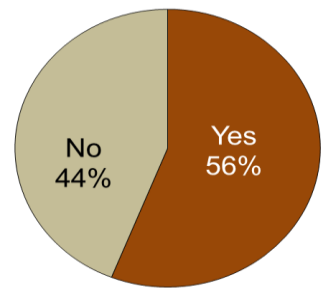
More than half (54%) of Foundation home area residents said that they feel local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds, a slight decline from Rural Pulse 2016 findings. Thirty-two percent of Foundation home area residents – and 26 percent of rural Minnesotans at large – felt that inclusivity in leadership roles is lacking. Fourteen percent were unsure.

Forty-four percent said that they have not served in a leadership role, whether it be youth sports, city government or with a local nonprofit organization in the past. That is a significant 19 percentage point upswing from Rural Pulse 2016 findings.

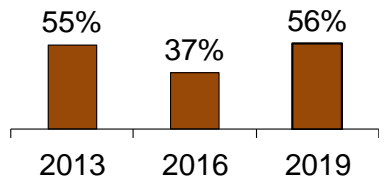
People From Diverse Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within Community



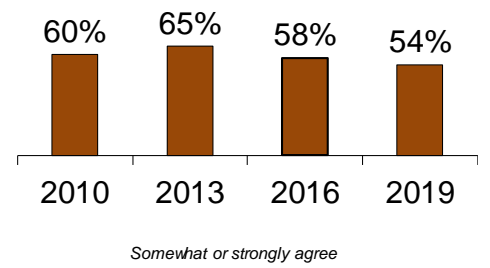
Have Served in a Community Leadership Role



Home Area Residents: Have Served in a Leadership Role



Home Area Residents: Believe People From Diverse Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within Community

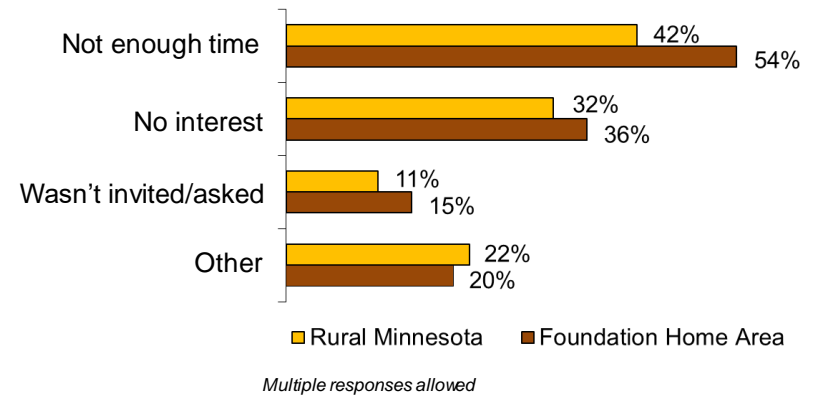




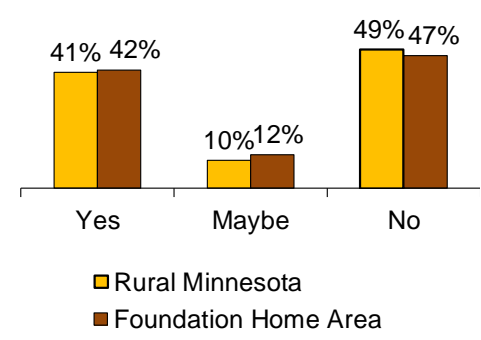
More than half (54%) of Foundation home area residents who have not served as a leader said that the main reason is lack of time, a higher margin than rural residents overall. Thirty-six percent said they would have no interest in serving in a leadership capacity. Fifteen percent said they have never been invited to participate as a leader. Another 20 percent cited other reasons, such as being new to the area or not being chosen after applying for a leadership commitment, among others. *(See Appendix for full listing of responses.)*

Although many had not served in a leadership role within their community to date, there was interest in doing so. Forty-two percent indicated that they would be interested in being invited to serve – 10 percent more than in 2016 study findings – and another 12 percent said they might consider doing so. Forty-seven percent said they have no interest in such.

Why Haven't Served in a Leadership Role



Would You Consider Serving If Asked?



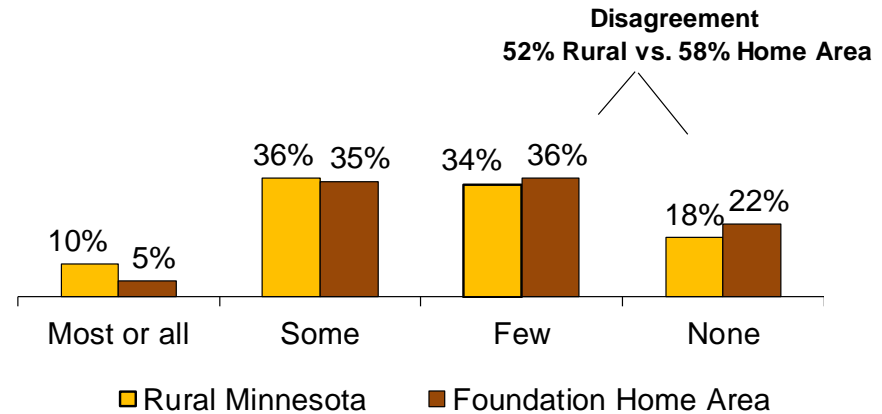


Inclusion

Foundation home area residents were slightly more likely than rural residents overall (58% Foundation home area, 52% overall) to have said that they have few, if any, close friends who are of a different race or culture than themselves. Four in 10 said they have at least some close friends with a different background than their own.

When asked which groups they most believe experience bias, discrimination or harassment in their community, residents of the Foundation home area most felt transgender individuals (39%) were treated unfairly, followed by those with drug or mental health issues (37%); African Americans (35%); Native Americans (34%); recent immigrants and gays/lesbians (32% each).

Have Close Friends of a Different Race or Culture Than Themselves



Groups Most Believed to Experience Bias, Discrimination or Harassment Within Their Community

Multiple Responses Allowed

Rural Minnesota

1. Those with drug or mental health issues
2. Transgender people
3. Recent immigrants
4. Gays and lesbians
5. African Americans

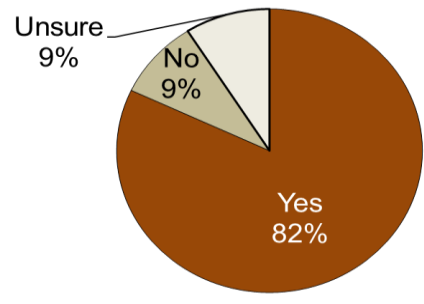
Foundation Home Area

1. Transgender people
2. Those with drug or mental health issues
3. African Americans
4. Native Americans/American Indians
5. (tie) Recent immigrants
Gays and lesbians



More than four in five (82%) feel that people in their community are able to stand up to hatred and discrimination when they see it occur. Nine percent disagree and another nine percent are unsure.

Believe People in Community are Able to Stand Up to Hatred and Discrimination When They See It Occur

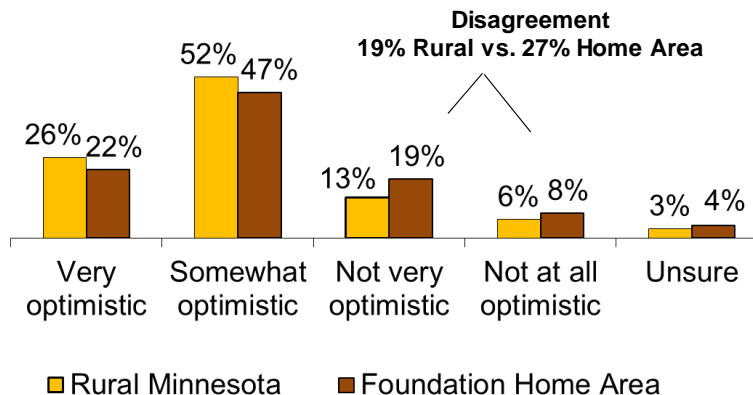




Optimism Prevails, But Could Improve

Rural Minnesotans were queried about how optimistic they feel in regard to the future of their community. More than a quarter (27%) of Foundation home area residents did not feel assured – eight percentage points less optimistic than rural respondents throughout the state. Sixty-nine percent of Foundation home area residents – compared to 78% of rural respondents at large – felt positively, with 22 percent strongly agreeing and 47 percent somewhat agreeing. Four percent were unsure.

Optimism About Future of Their Community



APPENDIX

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