



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

RURAL PULSE™ RESEARCH

Leadership Alumni Findings – March 2019

Russell Herder
Strategy wins.

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Executive Summary

Project Objectives

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

- Understand the community issues and priorities perceived by Blandin Community Leadership Program alumni; and
- Compare and contrast responses to rural resident findings at large.

Methodology

- The survey was administered via e-mail and open to all alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program.
- A total of 688 surveys were completed for a statistical reliability of +/-3.7 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Key Findings

Economic Lens: The outlook on the economy and job availability is less positive among alumni than rural Minnesotans as a whole.

- Economic development is the leading concern among the alumni population, with 16 percent identifying this issue as the most critical in their community.
- Nearly a quarter (22%) of alumni feel their community economy is somewhat worse compared to a year ago.
- While just over one-third (36%) of rural respondents feel their community does not offer an adequate number of jobs that pay household-supporting wages, over half (55%) of alumni feel this way.
- Although the percentage of alumni who feel their community offers an adequate number of jobs that pay household-supporting wages (43%) is below the overall rural population (60%), it is steadily improving over previous studies.



- Four out of 10 (40%) alumni do not feel their community successfully maintains and grows job opportunities.
- About half (51%) of alumni disagree that their community possesses an adequate workforce for businesses. This is nearly double the percentage of rural residents (27%) that feel the same.

Collaboration: Program leadership alumni recognize their community's need to improve working cohesively but are confident in their personal ability to impact change.

- More than nine in 10 (94%) alumni are confident in their ability to personally make a positive impact in their community. This is 10 percentage points higher than rural residents who feel the same.
- Roughly one-fifth (19%) of alumni do not agree that their community works together effectively across differences such as sexual orientation or race. However, there has been a steady improvement from previous studies.

Quality of Life: Alumni are not as satisfied as the rest of rural Minnesotans with their community's performance on a variety of issues.

- Eighty-six percent of alumni feel their community does a good job at controlling crime, equivalent to the percentage of rural residents who agree.
- More alumni (86%) gave their community a good rating in regard to healthcare than the overall rural population (79%).
- Housing issues are considered much more of a concern among alumni than rural Minnesotans overall. While 68 percent of rural residents feel their community is addressing this issue appropriately, less than half (45%) of alumni agree.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of rural residents rate their community positively regarding the availability of childcare, yet only 41 percent of alumni respondents feel the same.
- Sixty-one percent of alumni feel their community offers accessible public transportation for all, compared to 72 percent of rural residents at large.



- Communities are not meeting alumni expectations in a number of areas including childcare, affordable housing, workforce adequacy, economic development, mental health, jobs opportunities and opioids and drug abuse.

Rural Voice: Alumni are concerned about their representation.

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of alumni feel the needs of their rural communities are not as important to legislators and policymakers as those of the metro areas. This is considerably higher than the percentage of rural residents overall who feel the same (38%).
- Only 30 percent of alumni feel their community's needs are equally as important to elected officials as the metro area. This is down from 35 percent in 2016.

Diversity and Inclusion: Rural Minnesotans are more inclusive and confident than alumni in their community's ability to address diversity and inclusion.

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of alumni indicate they have few or no friends of a different race or culture than themselves.
- About half (51%) identify transgender people as the group experiencing the most discrimination within their community.
- Alumni are less confident in their community's ability to stand up to hatred and discrimination, with only six in 10 (60%) feeling such is the case. This is more than 20 percentage points below rural residents overall (82%).
- Less than half (48%) of alumni feel their community does a good job addressing barriers to inclusion, while seven in 10 (71%) rural Minnesotans feel this way.

Leadership: Though many alumni feel leadership positions in their community lack diversity, the majority have served in a role themselves.

- Only 38 percent of alumni respondents believe that leadership in their community is comprised of people from diverse backgrounds. This is an increase of eight percentage points from 2016 findings but still remains significantly lower than rural Minnesotans overall (54%).
- The majority (96%) of alumni have served in a leadership role within their community.



- Of the four percent of alumni who have not served in a leadership role, nearly all (93%) said they would consider doing so if asked.

Migration: Alumni are more likely to consider moving to a larger metro area than rural Minnesotans.

- Just over three-fourths (77%) of alumni indicated that they expect to live in the same community five years from now.
- One in five (21%) alumni have considered moving to a larger metro area within the past two years. This is seven percentage points higher than the rural population at large (14%).
- Of those considering a move, about four in 10 (39%) state the reason would be to improve their quality of life. This is a significant difference from rural residents, with only 22 percent identifying the same reason.

BLANDIN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FINDINGS

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



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 undertaken in 2016 and 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 effort again in 2019 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 strategy 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.

- The survey was administered via e-mail to alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program and the Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program between January 22 and February 3.
- A total of 688 surveys were completed for a statistical reliability of +/-3.7 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.



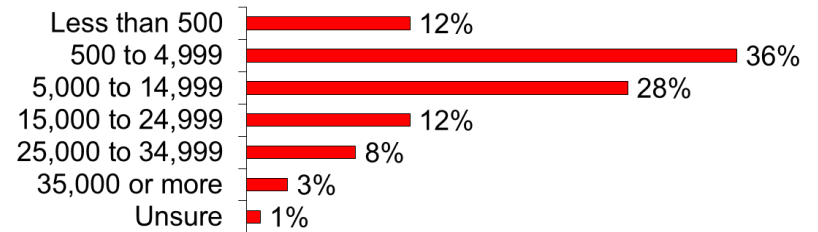
Demographics

Thirty-six 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 (28%). Another 12 percent each cited a population size of 15,000 to 24,999 or less than 500, and 25,000 to 34,999 (8%). Three percent indicated that they live in a larger community with 35,000 or more people. One percent were unsure.

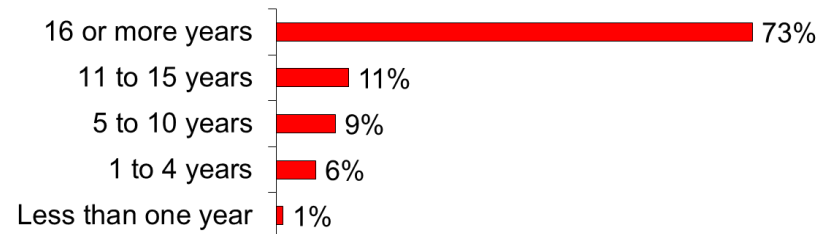
About three-quarters (73%) of alumni said they have lived in their community for 16 or more years. Another 11 percent said 11 to 15 years, followed by five to 10 years (9%), one to four years (6%), and less than one year (1%).

Five percent of alumni respondents were age 18 to 34, while 63 percent were age 35 to 64 and 32 percent were age 65 or older.

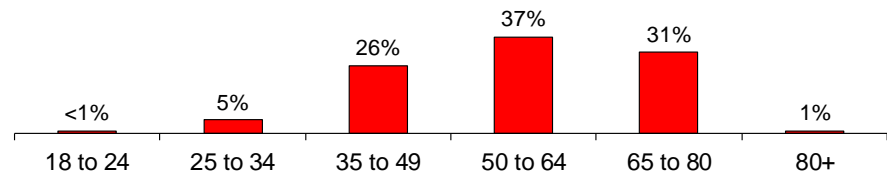
Community Population



Length of Residence Within Their Community



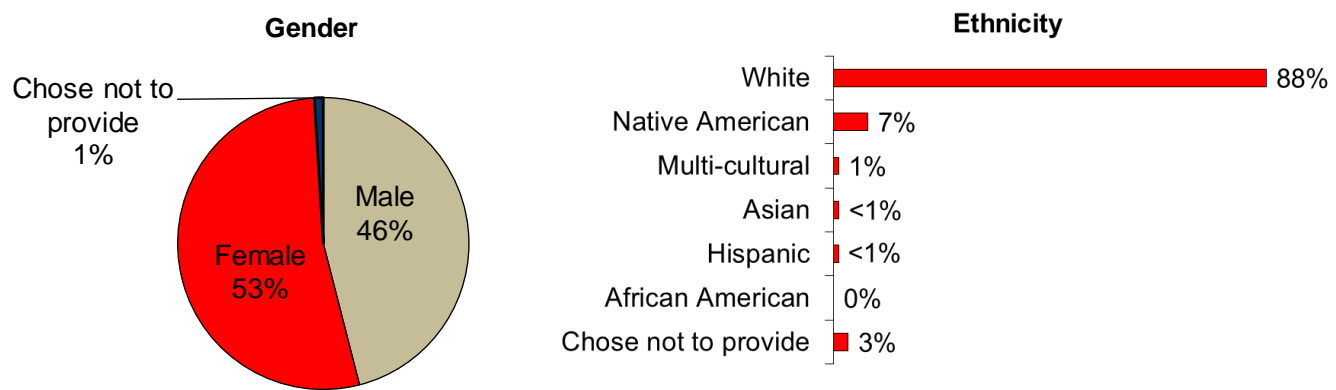
Age



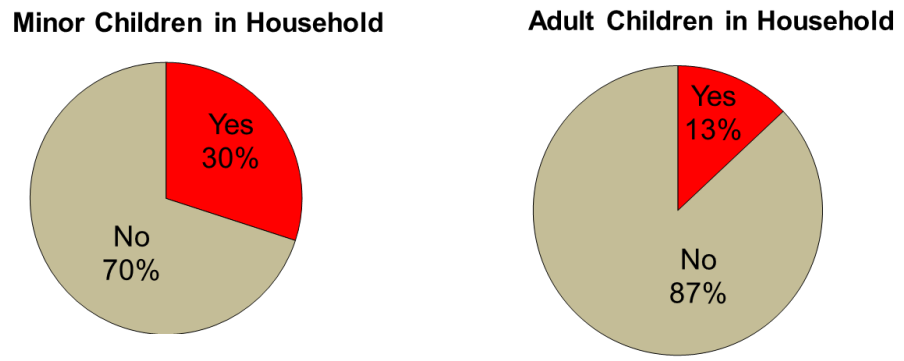


Fifty-three percent of alumni respondents were female; 46 percent were male. One percent chose not to provide gender information.

Eighty-eight percent of alumni said they are white. Other ethnicities responding included Native American (7%); multi-cultural (1%); and Asian and Hispanic (less than 1% each). Three percent chose not to provide this information.



Three in 10 (30%) indicated that at least one child 18 years old or younger resides in their household. Thirteen percent said that they have an adult child living in their home.

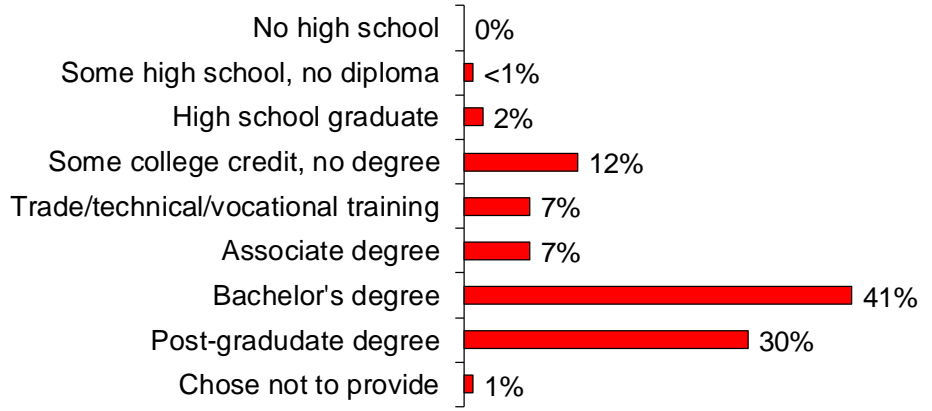




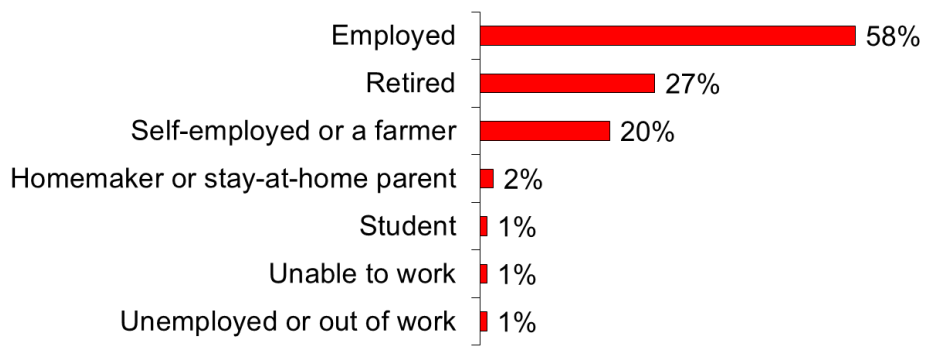
Forty-one percent (41%) of Leadership Program alumni said they have a Bachelor's degree; a post-graduate degree (30%); some college credit, but no degree (12%); and either trade, technical or vocational training or an associate's degree (7%). Two percent said the highest education they have attained is a high school diploma, and fewer than one percent said they have some high school, but no diploma. One percent chose not to provide educational information.

Nearly four in five (78%) alumni said they are employed, with 20 percent of those indicating that they are either self-employed or a farmer. For those who said they do not work, 27 percent said they are retired, two percent said that they are a homemaker, and one percent each were either a student, unable to work or unemployed.

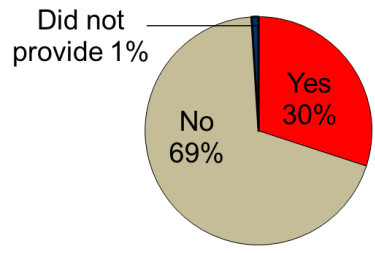
Education



Employment



Own a Business



Three in 10 (30%) said they own a business of some type.

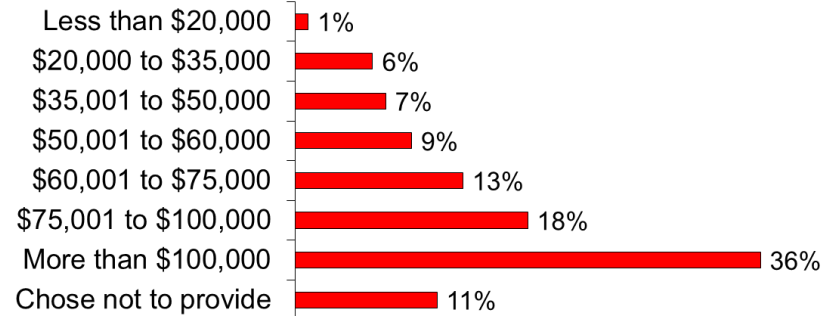


More than a third (36%) of alumni respondents indicated that their family income is more than \$100,000, followed by \$75,001 to \$100,000 (18%), \$60,001 to \$75,000 (13%), \$50,001 to \$60,000 (9%), \$35,001 to \$50,000 (7%), and \$20,000 to \$35,000 (6%). One percent said that their household brings in less than \$20,000 annually. Eleven percent did not provide income information.

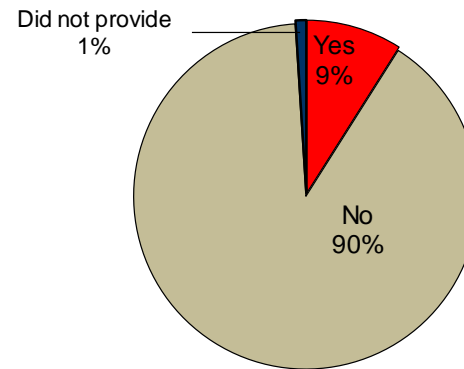
Nine percent noted that they have a disability or impairment of some type.

Responding alumni spanned decades of leadership program participation. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they had taken part in a Leadership Program most recently from 2015 to 2018. Another 22 percent said they participated from 2000 to 2009, and 20 percent said between 2010 and 2014. Eighteen percent said it was in the 1990s and another five percent in the 1980s. Seven percent could not recall.

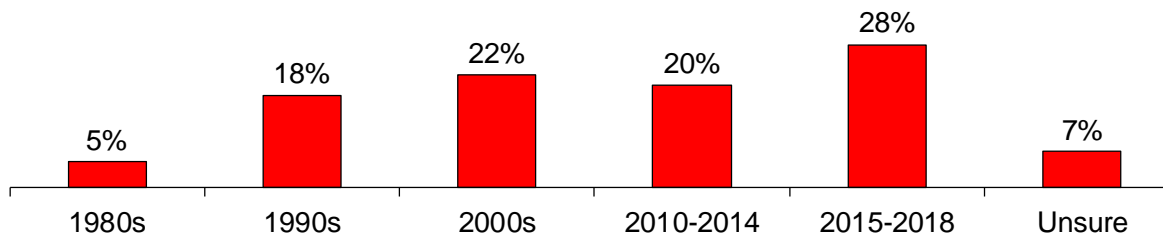
Family Income



Has a Disability or Impairment



Leadership Program Participation Year



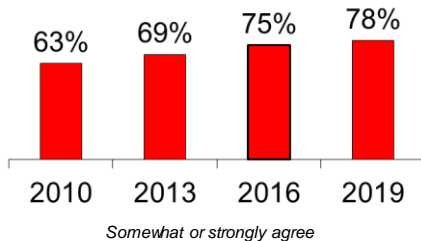


Collaboration and Contribution

Leadership Program alumni were confident about their ability to personally impact change in their community. 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 (94%) felt they could influence change, with 48 percent strongly agreeing, compared to 84 percent of rural Minnesotans overall. Only six percent of alumni disagreed.

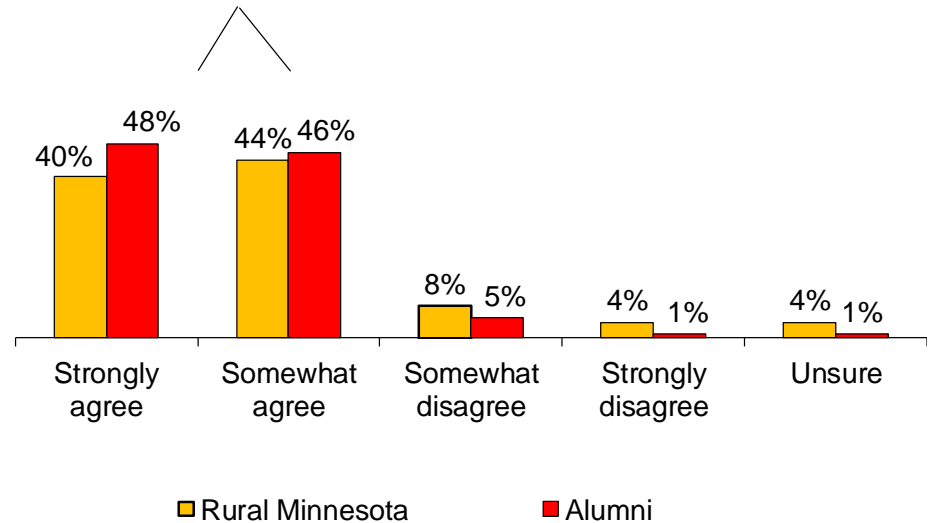
When asked whether they feel local community members work well together across differences such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, etc., confidence was not as strong. About one in five (19%) alumni said that they do not feel their community works together cohesively, compared to 13 percent of rural Minnesotans. The percent that feel it does (78%) is a slight increase from Rural Pulse 2016 findings, continuing an upward progression since 2010.

Leadership Alumni:
Believe Residents Work Across Differences

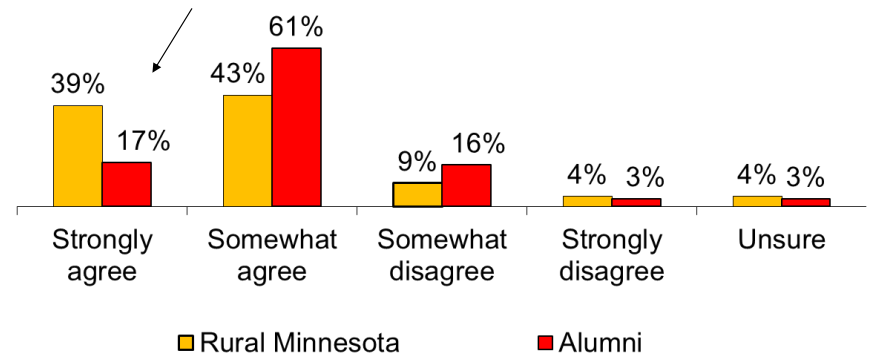


Able to Make a Positive Community Impact

84% Rural vs. 94% Alumni



Community Works Together Effectively to Address Local Issues

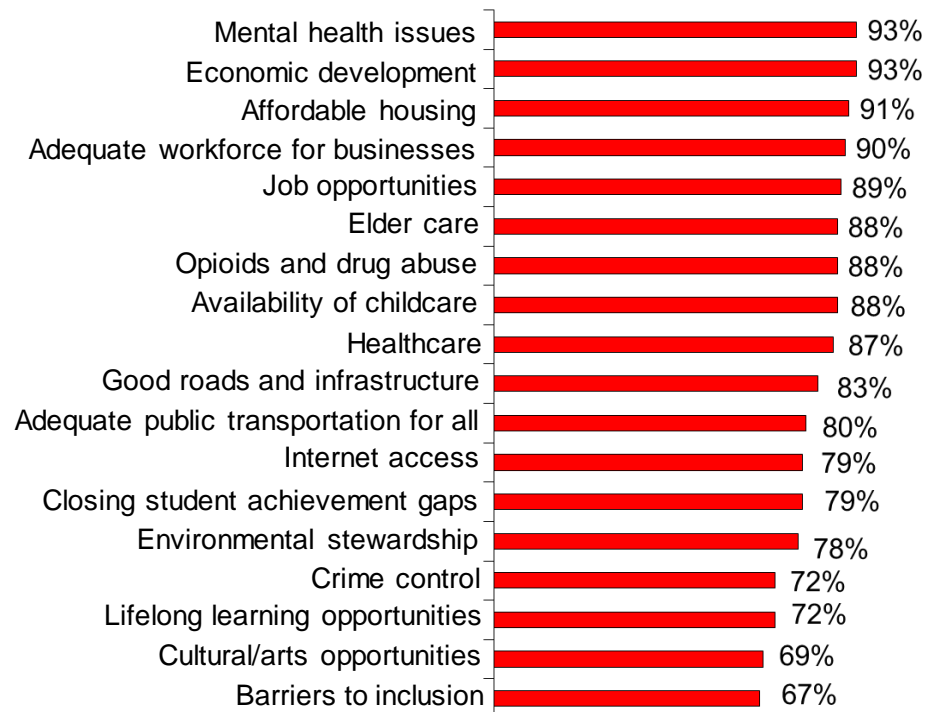




What is Important to Leadership Alumni?

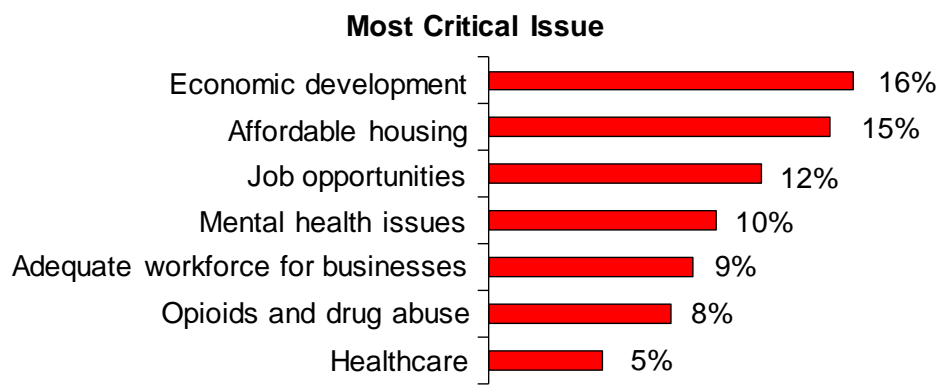
Survey respondents were given a list of community issues and asked to rate their significance or importance. The top priorities for alumni were addressing mental health and economic development (93% each); followed by affordable housing (91%); available workforce (90%); jobs opportunities (89%); and elder care, opioids and drug abuse, and childcare availability (88% each). Healthcare was also of high importance (87%). They felt of least importance were diverse cultural/arts opportunities (69%) and addressing inclusion barriers (67%). These were similar results to rural Minnesota findings at large.

Somewhat or Very Significant / Important Community Issues





When asked to choose their community's *most critical* issue, economic development was the leading concern (16%), followed closely by affordable housing (15%). The next-highest rated issue was jobs (12%), then mental health issues (10%), adequate workforce (9%), drug abuse (8%) and healthcare (5%).



Responses with less than five percent not shown

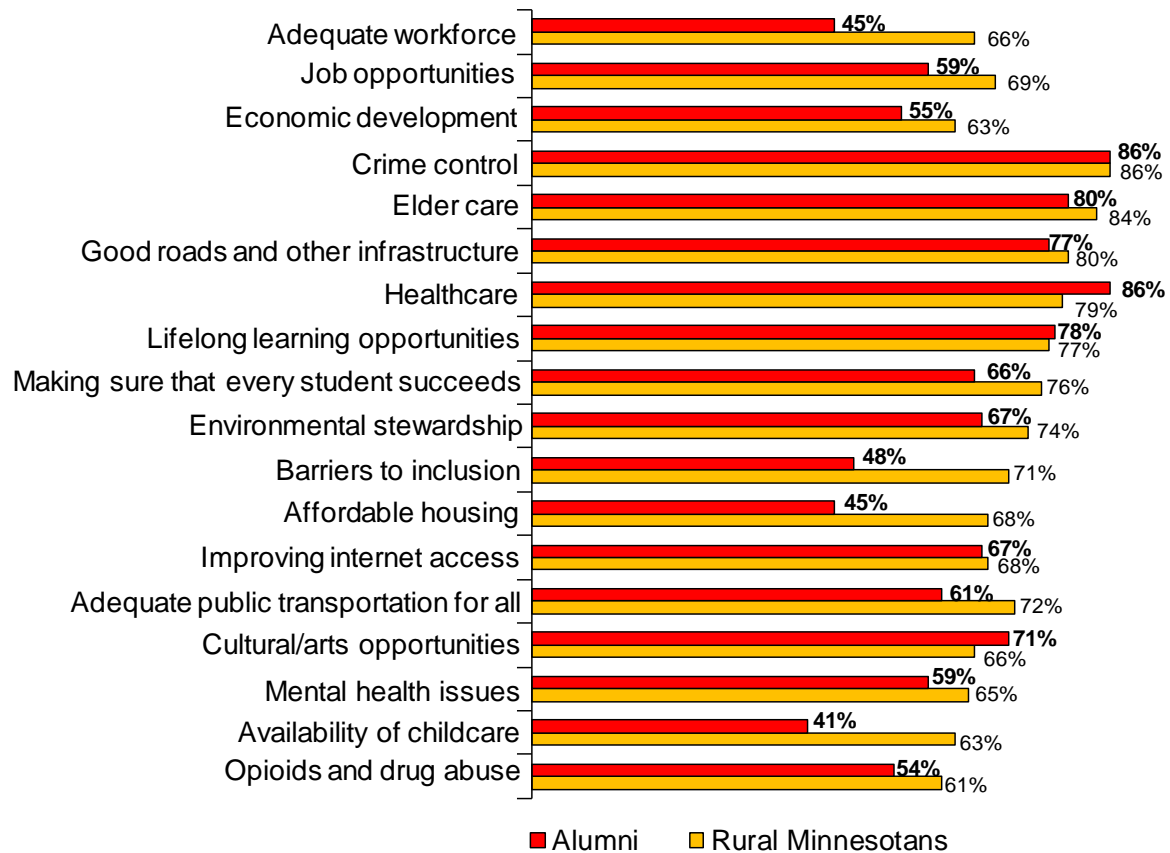


Snapshot: Community Performance

Survey participants were asked how well their community is performing regarding various community issues. Community performance received the highest ratings for controlling crime, caring for the elderly, good infrastructure, healthcare services, lifelong learning, and culture/arts opportunities. Alumni were less confident that their community is doing well addressing adequate workforce, barriers to inclusion, affordable housing, economic development, childcare availability and addressing drugs.

The following pages show the opinions of Leadership Program alumni on individual issues in greater detail.

Community is Doing a Good Job



Agree or strongly agree

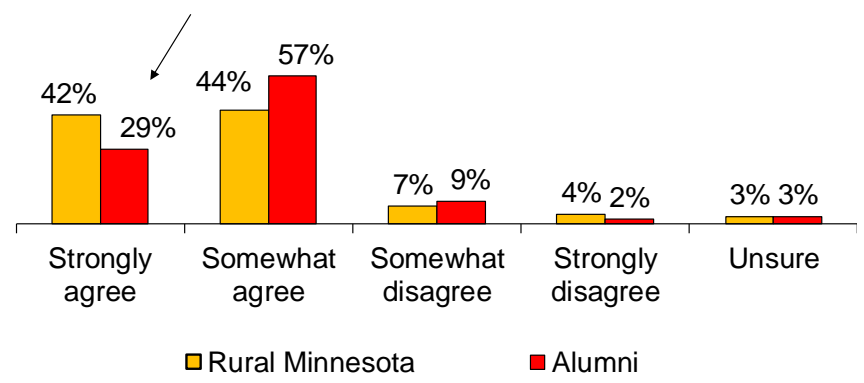


Controlling Crime, Elder Care and Childcare

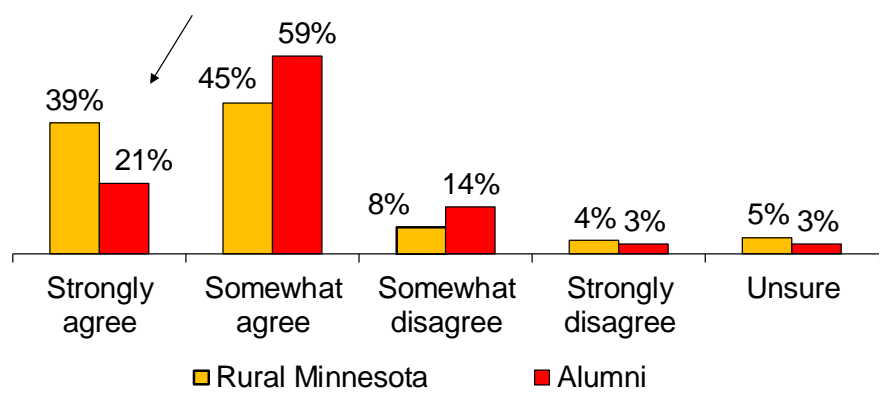
Most (86%) alumni said that they have confidence in their community's ability to control crime.

Four in five (80%) also were positive about their community's ability to provide services for the elderly, but to a lesser degree than rural residents overall. This was a 10 percentage point decrease from Rural Pulse 2016 findings. Only two in five (41%) alumni believe their community offers sufficient childcare options, compared to 63 percent of rural residents at large.

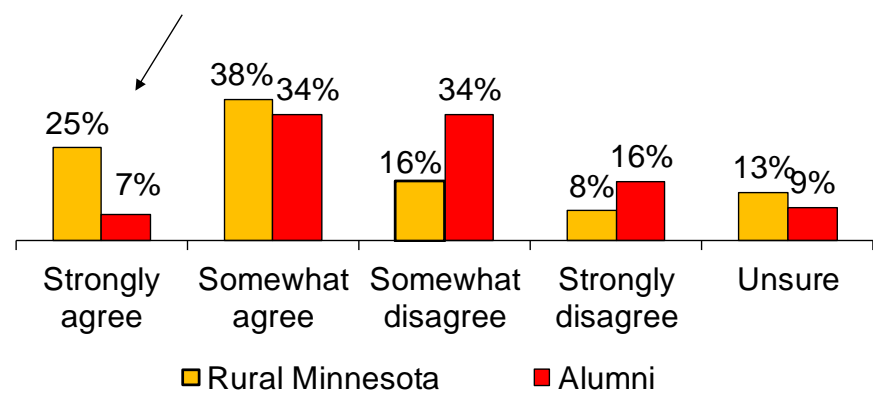
Community is Controlling Crime



Community is Caring for Elderly



Community Has Childcare Availability



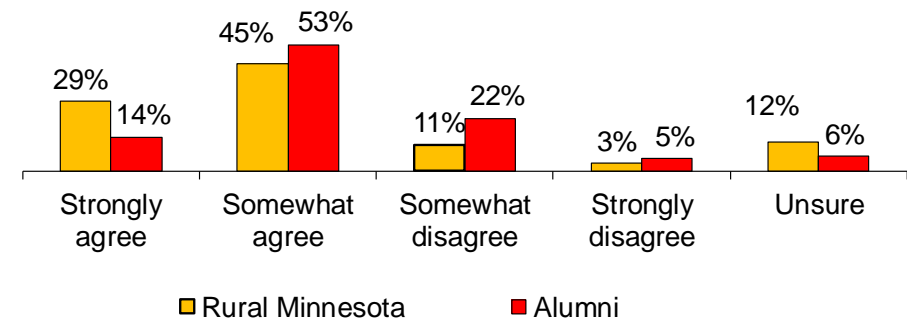


Two-thirds (67%) of alumni believe their community to be a good steward of the environment, another decrease from 2016 study findings by 13 percentage points. Again, they did not feel as strongly about environmental stewardship as rural Minnesotans at large.

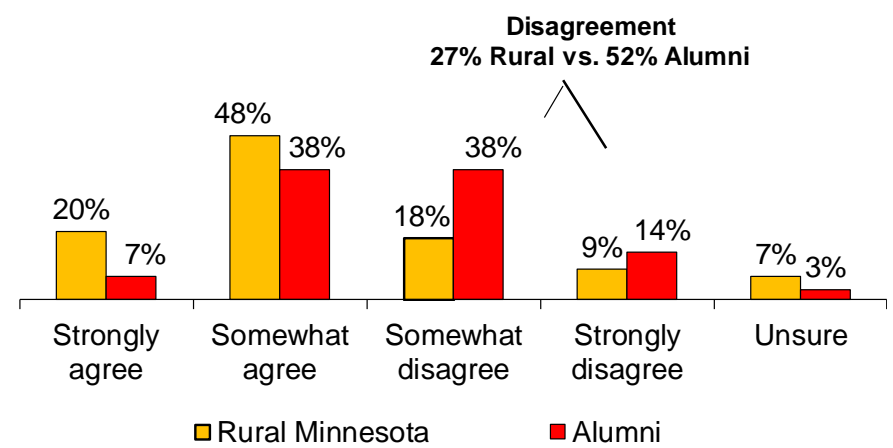
Housing

More than half (52%) of alumni are not confident that there is adequate affordable housing within their community – nearly twice that of rural Minnesotans overall. While 45 percent of alumni feel affordable housing is available, only seven percent strongly agreed this is the case.

Community is a Good Steward of the Environment



Community Provides Affordable Housing for Residents



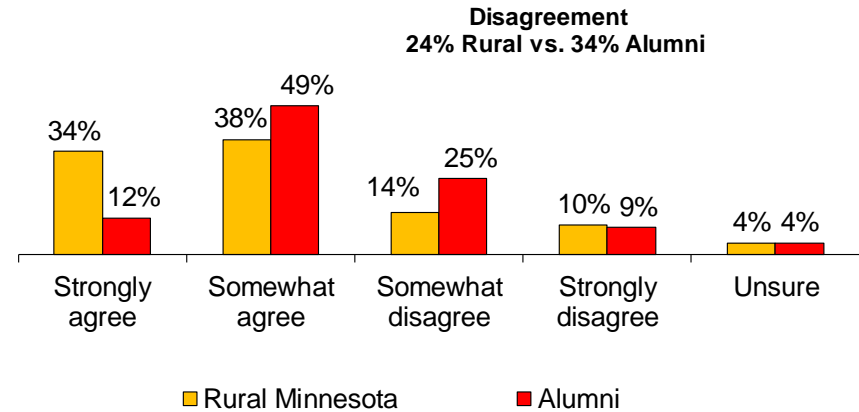


Transportation and Infrastructure

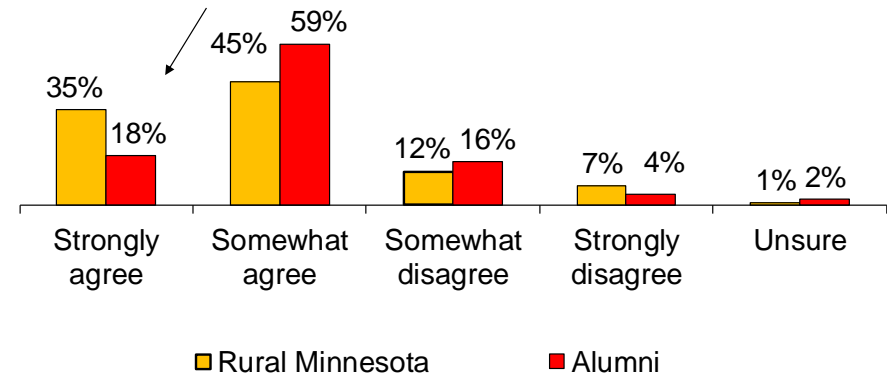
Six in 10 (61%) alumni felt their community provides adequate public transportation for all, including the disabled – a 16 percent increase compared to Rural Pulse 2016 findings – although the sentiment wasn't felt as strongly as it was among rural residents overall. A third (34%) had misgivings about the availability of public transportation. Four percent were unsure.

Seventy-seven percent of alumni feel their community ensures good roads and infrastructure – a seven percent uptick from 2016 study findings. However, this is to a less significant degree than rural Minnesota respondents overall. One in five (20%) do not agree that local infrastructure is sufficient.

Community Provides Public Transportation for All



Community Ensures Good Roads and Infrastructure





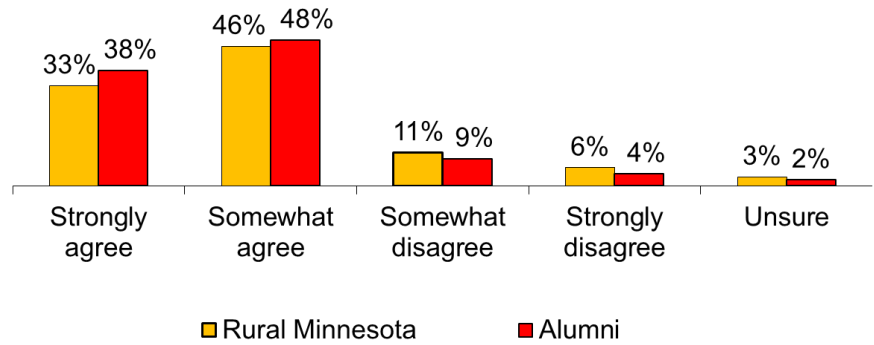
Healthcare

Most (86%) alumni feel that their community provides adequate healthcare services; 13 percent did not feel that this is the case.

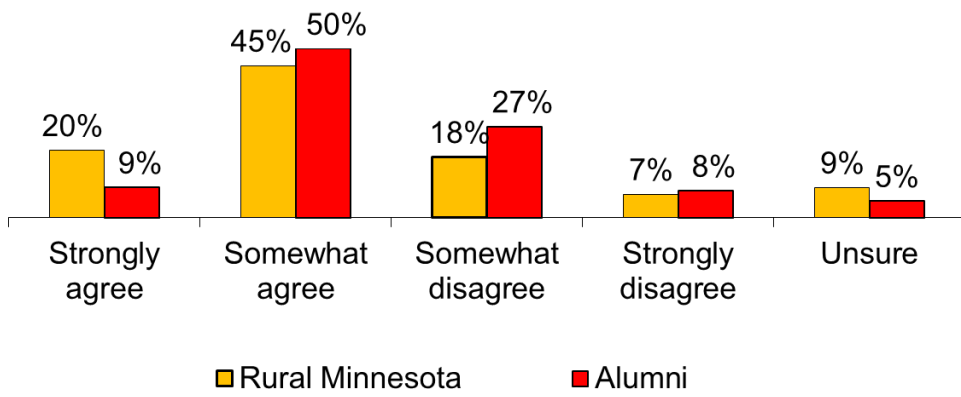
Mental Health

Thirty-five percent of alumni compared to 25 percent of rural residents felt their community could do more to address mental health issues. Fifty-nine percent feel mental health is being adequately addressed in their area. Five percent are unsure.

Community Provides Adequate Healthcare Services



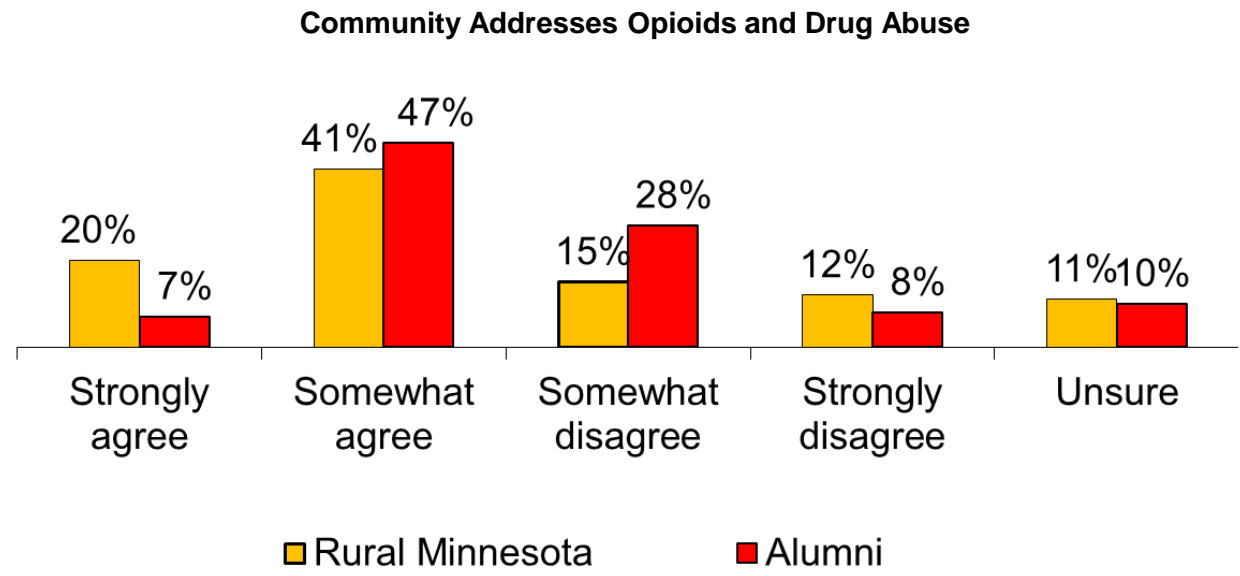
Community Addresses Mental Health Issues





Drug Abuse

When asked if they feel their community is doing well addressing opioid and drug abuse; 36 percent of alumni respondents disagreed, slightly higher than rural resident findings overall. Fifty-four percent gave their community a passing grade, although to a lesser degree than among rural Minnesotans at large.



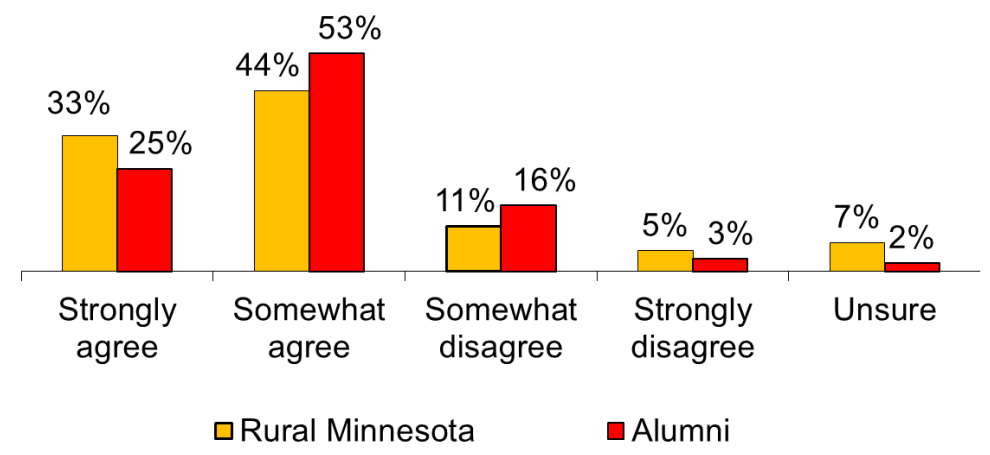


Education

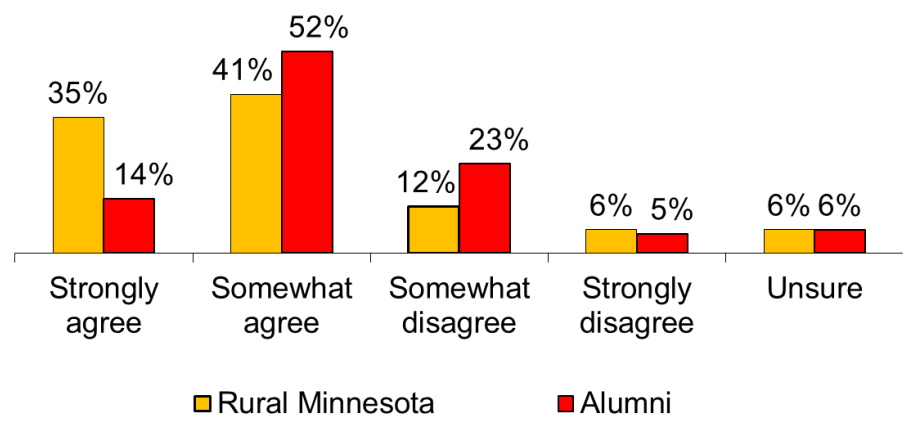
The majority (78%) of alumni respondents believe their community provides adequate lifelong learning opportunities, with 25 percent strongly agreeing and 53 percent somewhat agreeing. Nineteen percent disagree that their community provides such.

When asked if they believe their local area does a good job making sure that every student succeeds, they were not quite as positive. Only 14 percent strongly agreed and 52 percent somewhat agreed. Twenty-eight percent feel their community needs to do a better job with overall student success.

Community Provides Lifelong Learning Opportunities



Community Makes Sure Every Student Succeeds

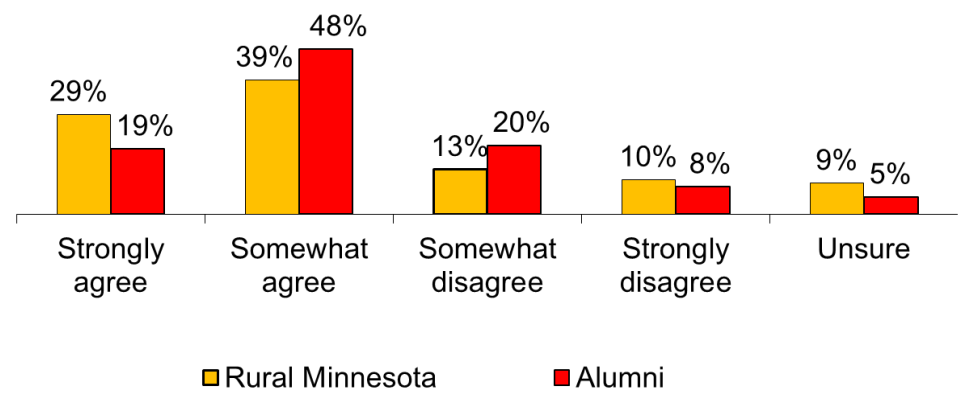




Internet Access

About two-thirds (67%) of alumni feel their community has improved access to the internet. Twenty-eight percent disagreed and five percent were unsure.

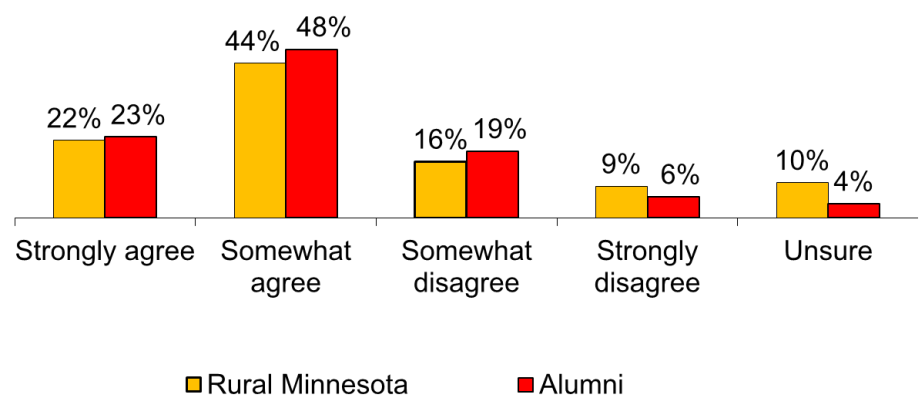
Community is Improving Access to the Internet



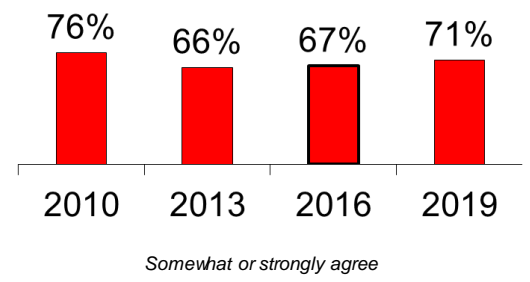
Diverse Culture and the Arts

Seven in 10 (71%) alumni said that providing cultural and arts opportunities in their community is a strength, a slight increase from Rural Pulse 2016 findings. It was a concern for one in four (25%).

Community Provides Cultural Opportunities and the Arts



Leadership Alumni: Believe Community Provides Cultural Opportunities and the Arts





Overall, Blandin Community Leadership Program alumni feel that their communities are not meeting expectations in several key areas, most notably: availability of childcare, affordable housing, adequate workforce, economic development, mental health, job opportunities and the drug crisis.

Importance Vs. Satisfaction

	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Difference
Availability of childcare	3.5	2.3	-1.2
Affordable housing for all	3.5	2.4	-1.1
Adequate workforce	3.5	2.4	-1.1
Economic development	3.5	2.6	-.9
Mental health issues	3.5	2.6	-.9
Job opportunities	3.4	2.6	-.8
Addressing opioids and drug abuse	3.4	2.6	-.8
Accessible public transportation for all	3.2	2.7	-.5
Closing student achievement gaps	3.2	2.8	-.4
Internet access	3.2	2.8	-.4

■ Significantly Below Expectations

■ Below Expectations

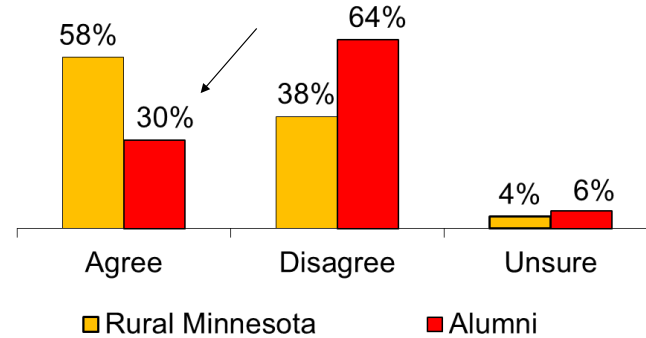
4 = High, 1 = Low



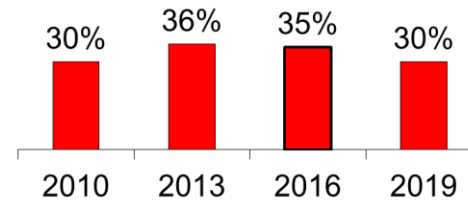
Rural Voice

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, 64 percent were of the opinion that they are not. Only three in 10 (30%) alumni were confident that rural voice is being heard, while six percent were unsure. Rural Minnesotans overall were nearly twice as likely to feel that political leadership hears their needs.

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



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

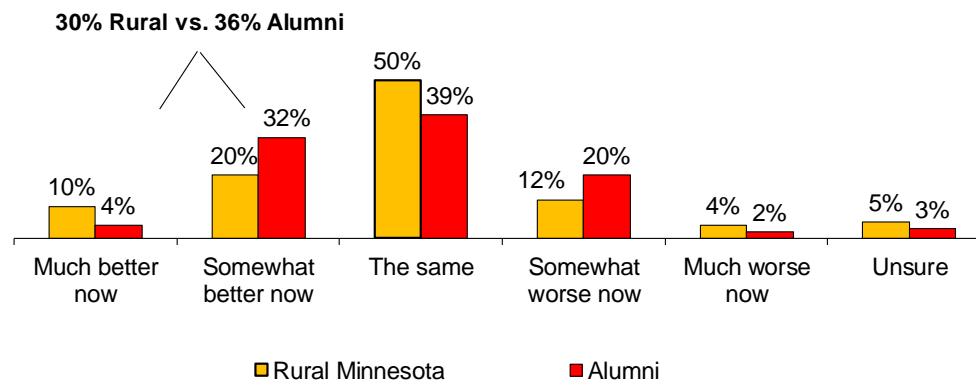




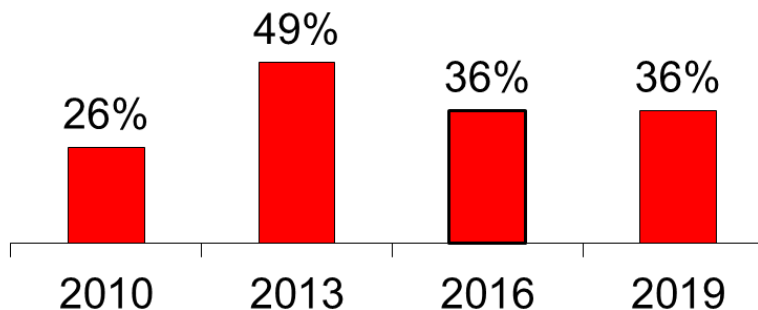
Economic Concerns Remain

Survey participants were asked to gauge the condition of their community's economy now compared to a year ago. Thirty-six percent of alumni feel that their local economy has improved, identical to Rural Pulse 2016 results, and better than rural Minnesotans' sentiments overall. Four in 10 (39%) believed that the economy has remained level, while 22 percent indicated that their local economy has worsened over the last year. Three percent were unsure.

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



Leadership Alumni:
Condition of Community's Economy Now, Compared to a Year Ago



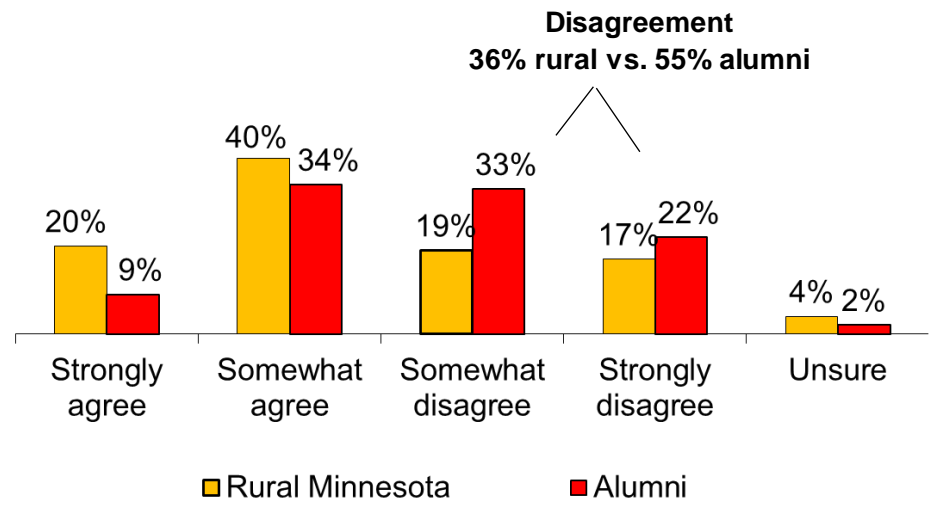


Jobs Continue to be an Overwhelming Concern

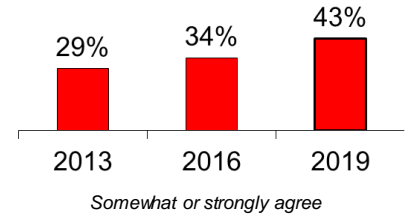
Although agreement that there are adequate jobs paying household-supporting wages increased since Rural Pulse™ 2016 (43% vs. 34%), there is still a lack of confidence in the job market. More than half (55%) of alumni felt that there are not adequate living-wage job opportunities in their community, a much higher dissatisfaction than indicated by rural residents overall (36%).

Along with concern over adequate living-wage job opportunities, two in five (40%) alumni felt their local area is not maintaining and growing existing job opportunities, compared to 27 percent of rural residents at large. About six in 10 (59%) alumni – and 69 percent of rural residents overall – are satisfied with job growth.

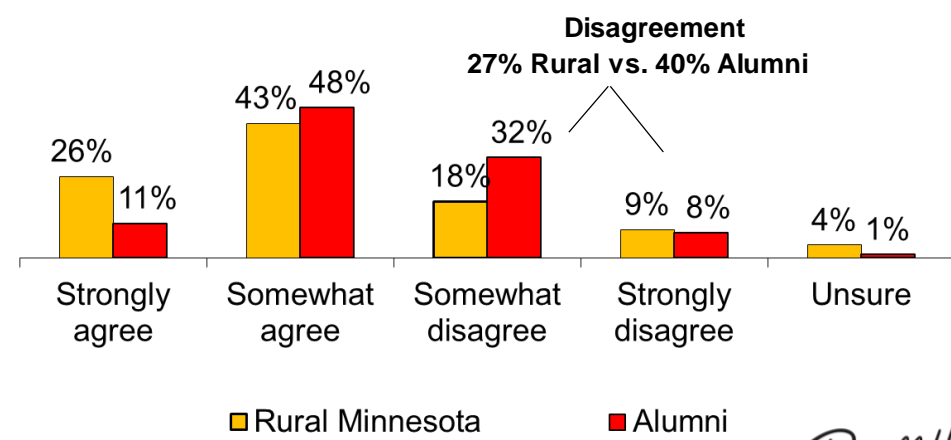
Adequate Number of Jobs that Pay Household-Supporting Wages



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



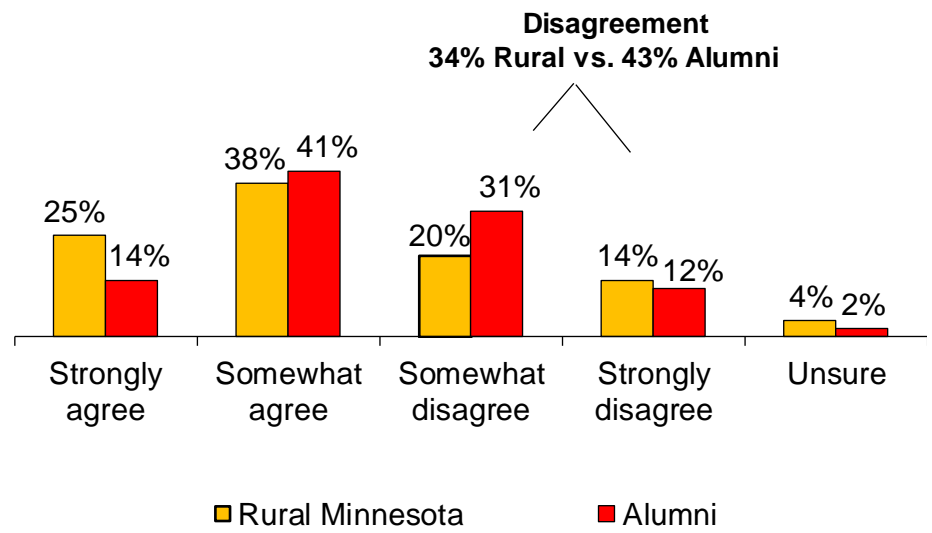
Community Successfully Maintains and Grows Job Opportunities



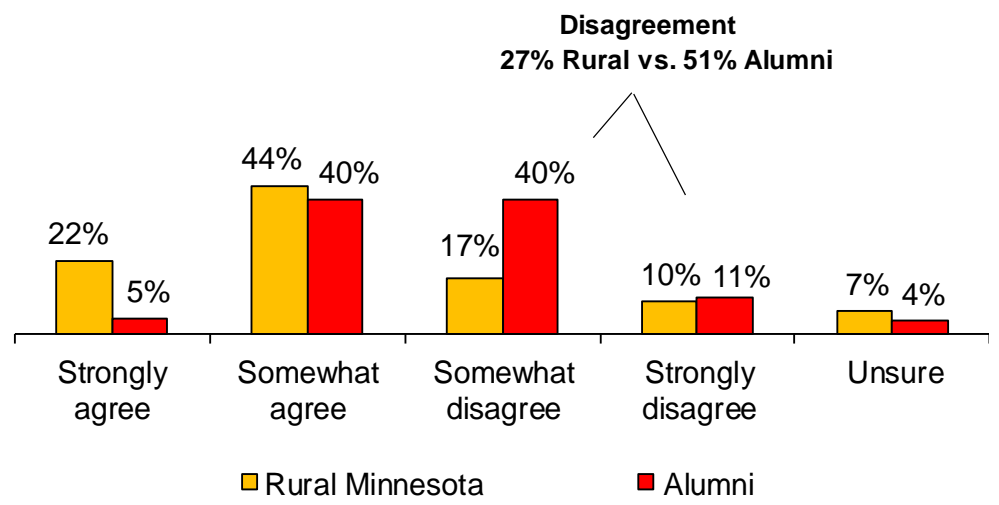


In addition, 43 percent of alumni – and 34 percent of rural Minnesotans at large – said they feel their community does not sufficiently provide economic development opportunities in support of entrepreneurs and new businesses. More than half (55%) of alumni feel local economic development initiatives are adequate, compared to 63 percent of rural Minnesotans overall.

When asked if they feel their community possesses a sufficient workforce for businesses, about half (51%) of alumni disagreed, showing much higher concern than that of rural residents at large (27%). Forty-five percent of alumni – and 66 percent of rural respondents overall – felt their local labor force is adequate.



Community Possesses an Adequate Workforce for Businesses

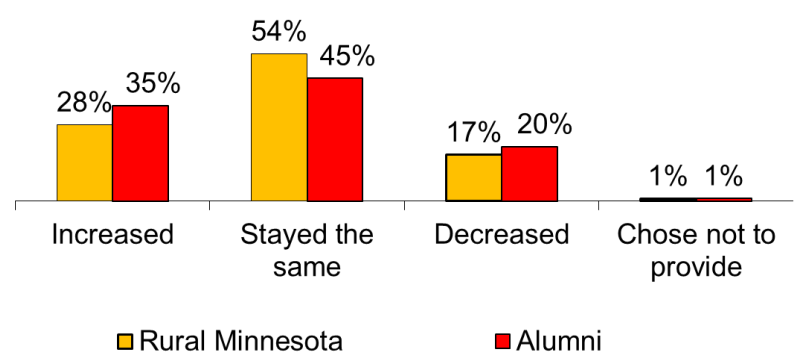




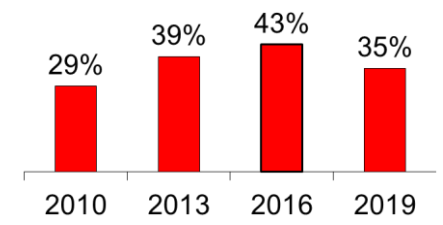
Impact of the Economy

Thirty-five percent of Leadership Program alumni said that their household income has increased over the past year, an eight percentage point decrease from 2016 findings, though seven points higher than rural residents overall. Many alumni households, however, are still struggling with a decrease in wages (20%). Forty-five percent said their household income has not changed in the past 12 months.

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

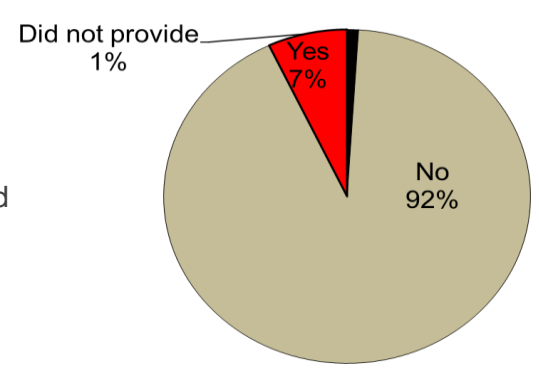


Leadership Alumni: Household Income has Increased Over Past Year



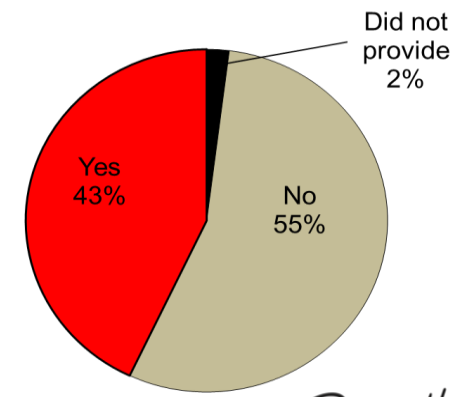
Seven percent of alumni said that someone in their household has lost a job within the past year, however.

Someone in Household Lost a Job In the Past Year



When asked if they had ever experienced poverty, 43 percent of alumni, similar to rural respondents overall, said they have at least at some point in their life.

Have They Ever Experienced Poverty?



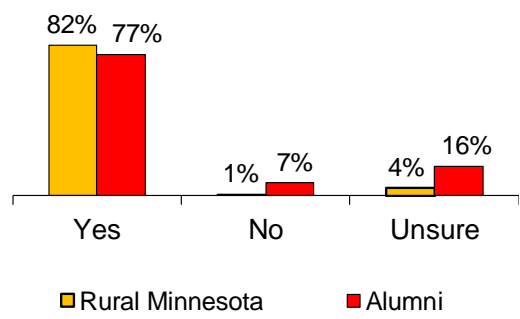


Migration

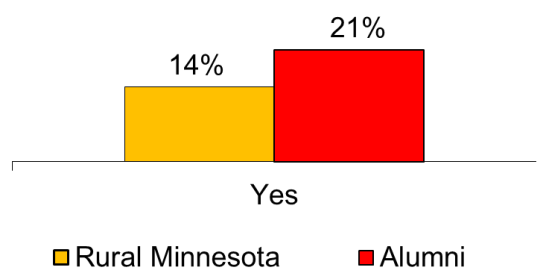
When asked if they expect to live in their current community five years from now, more than three-quarters (77%) of alumni indicated that they will probably remain where they are, although 16 percent were undecided about future migration.

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, higher than rural Minnesotans overall. Of those who have considered a move, 39 percent said it would be to improve their quality of life. The search for better job opportunities was cited as the main factor for 33 percent of alumni responding, followed by educational opportunities (2%). Other responses included being closer to family, among others. [See Appendix for complete listing of responses.]

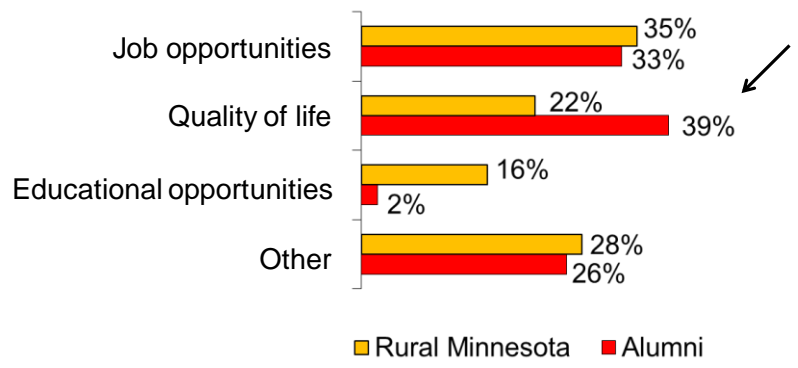
Expect to Live in Community Five Years From Now



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



Main Reason for Considering a Move



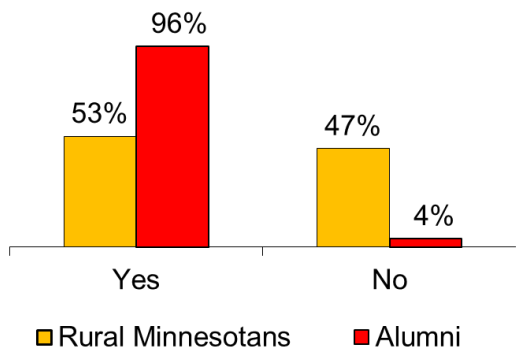


Leadership

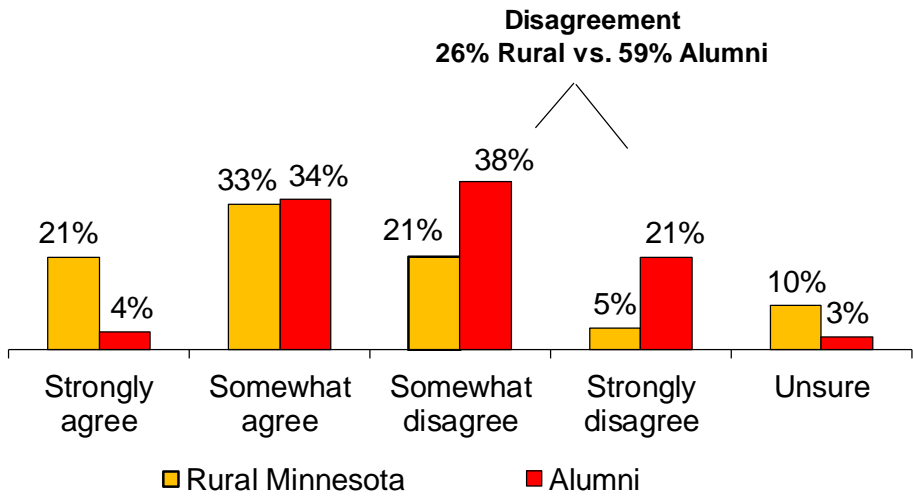
Only 38 percent of Leadership Program alumni said that they feel local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds. While that is an eight percentage point upswing from Rural Pulse 2016 findings, this was much lower than that of rural Minnesotans overall (54%). Fifty-nine percent of alumni felt inclusivity in leadership roles is lacking.

Nearly all (96%) said that they have served in a leadership role, significantly higher than rural residents overall (53%).

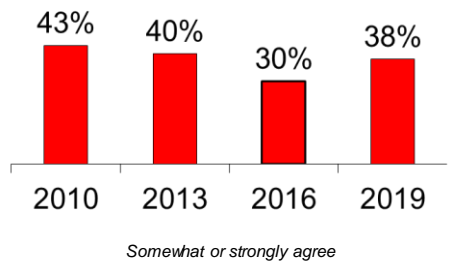
Have Served in a Community Leadership Role



People From Diverse Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within Community



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

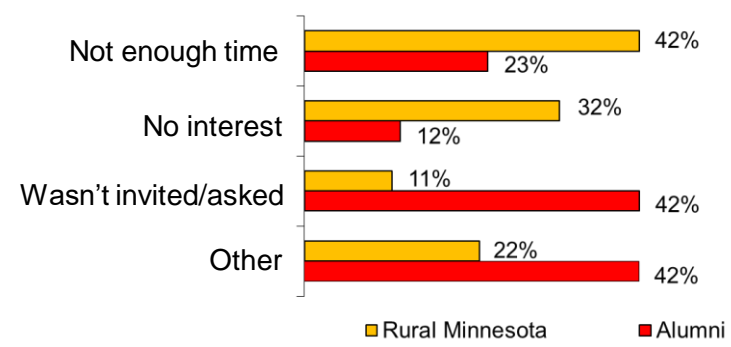




Of the very few alumni who have not served as a leader, the main reason cited was that they have never been invited to do so. The second reason was lack of time. Other reasons mentioned include being new to the area. (See Appendix for complete listing of responses.)

The vast majority (93%) of those who have not served said they would consider doing so if asked (39% yes, 54% maybe), clearly showing more interest in such than rural Minnesotans overall. Only eight percent said they would not contemplate serving in leadership.

Why Haven't Served in a Leadership Role

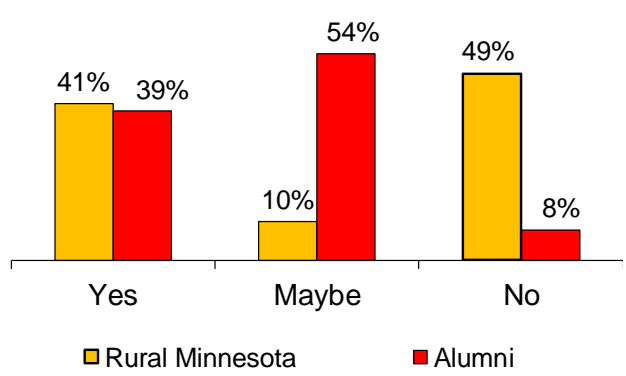


Multiple responses allowed

N = 11

Other responses included being new to the area or not being accepted

Would You Consider Serving If Asked?



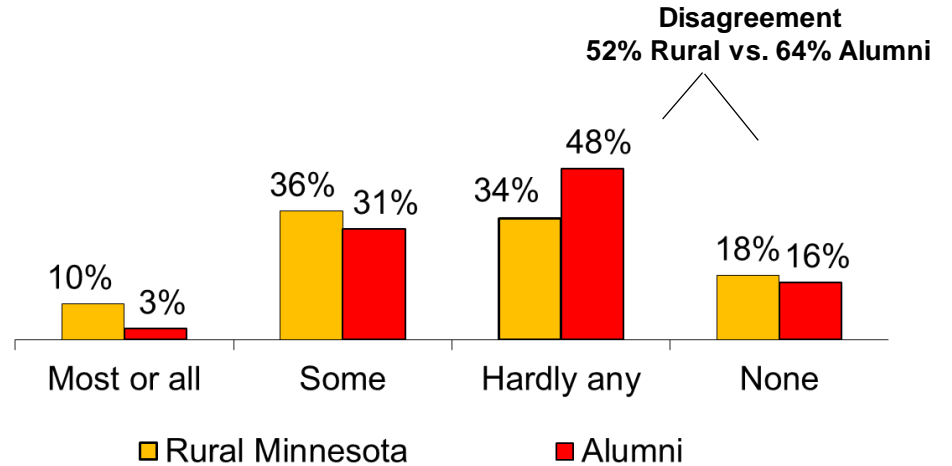


Inclusion

Alumni were less apt than rural residents overall to have said their friendship circles are inclusive. Sixty-four percent of alumni – and 52 percent of rural Minnesotans overall – said they have few if any close friends of a different race or culture, if any. A third (34%) said they have at least some good friends of an inclusive nature.

Alumni believed that there are groups who experience discrimination. When asked who in their community most experiences bias, discrimination or harassment, most alumni felt transgender individuals (51%), followed by those with drug or mental health issues and African Americans (48% each); and recent immigrants and gays/lesbians (45% each).

Have Close Friends of a Different Race or Culture



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

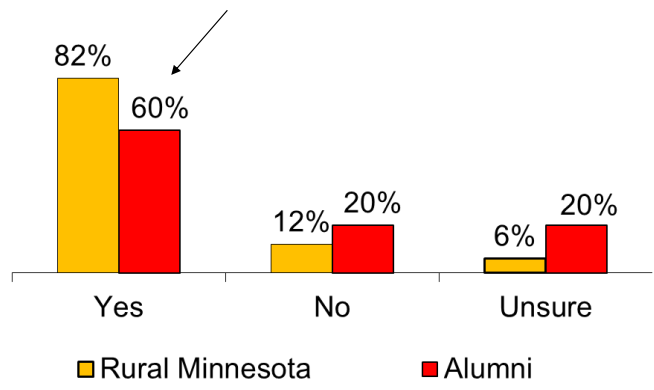
Alumni

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



Only six in 10 (60%) alumni felt that people in their community are able to stand up to hatred and discrimination when they see it occur, compared to 82 percent of rural Minnesotans overall. One in five (20%) did not feel this way. It is evident that some alumni are unclear about the issue, as 20 percent are reportedly unsure whether individuals in their community could, or would, take a stand against discrimination when presented with such a situation.

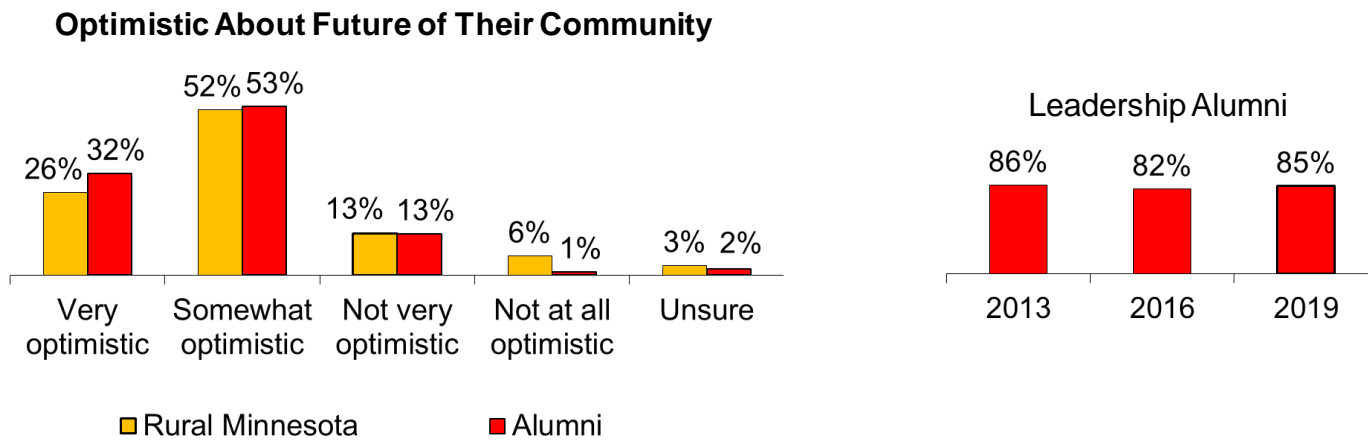
Believe People in Community are Able to Stand Up to Hatred and Discrimination When They See It Occur





Optimism Exists About Community's Future

When asked how optimistic they feel about their community's future, 85 percent of alumni felt positively, while 14 percent did not share that sentiment. Rural Minnesotans overall expressed somewhat less optimism (19%) than Leadership Program alumni.



APPENDIX

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