



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA



RURAL PULSE™ RESEARCH

Foundation Home Area – April 2016

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 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 addressed;

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

Identify emerging trends or unmet needs.

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

Twenty-six percent of home area residents surveyed feel their local economy has improved over the past year, 46 percent believe it stayed the same, and 25 percent indicate that their local economy has worsened.

Job growth and development – including maintaining and growing existing job opportunities, and attracting new businesses – are among the top priorities by 26 percent of home area residents.

Nearly half (46%) feel that living-wage job opportunities in their community are inadequate.

While 31 percent of home area residents say that their household income has increased over the past year, many households are still struggling with a decrease in wages (24%).



Optimism Continues: Most Foundation home area residents feel their community is vibrant and resilient, though not all believe that they can shape its future.

Three-quarters (76%) of home area residents feel quality of life will improve over the next five years.

When asked how optimistic they feel about their community's future, more than three in four (77%) feel positive.

Home Area residents surveyed were asked whether they feel a sense of ownership over the direction of their community and that they are able to contribute to its future. About two-thirds (64%) agree.

Collaboration: Most Foundation home area residents feel their community works together effectively across differences.

When asked whether they feel local community members work well together, more than three in four home area residents say that they feel their community works together cohesively and are able to work across differences such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and nationality.

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

Quality of Life: Most Foundation home area residents are optimistic about their community and believe there is equal access to basic services.

Close to four in five home area residents (78%) believe that their community offers equal access to essential services.

While two-thirds (67%) agree that their community provides adequate public transportation opportunities such as buses and trains, 31 percent do not feel that this is the case.

Three-quarters of home area residents surveyed 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 adequate, quality educational opportunities, most surveyed feel it is up to the government (68%) or parents (57%).



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, three in five home area residents say they are comfortable that their voice is being heard.

Nearly nine in 10 (87%) 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.

Three in five home area residents surveyed feel their community's ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse over the past five years. Four in five believe their community welcomes people of all backgrounds.

Fifty-eight percent believe local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds.

Thirty-seven percent of home area residents say that they have served in a community leadership role. While many have not yet served in a leadership role, close to two-thirds (65%) say they would consider doing so if asked.

Migration: More than one in five Minnesotans have considered relocation to a metro area.

Looking forward, 17 percent of home area residents say that they do not expect to be living in their current locale five years from now. In fact, 22 percent of rural Minnesotans 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-thirds (67%) of home area residents, compared to 43 percent of rural Minnesotans overall, say it would be to improve their quality of life. The pursuit of job opportunities is the main factor for 25 percent of home area residents, versus 46 percent of rural Minnesotans at large.

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.

Russell Herder
Strategy wins.



Executive Summary

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 those of the Blandin home area.

The Foundation chose to undertake this effort again in 2016 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 addressed;

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

Identify emerging trends or unmet needs.



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.

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 25 and March 12, reflecting a statistical reliability of +/-5.8 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

The data was weighted to reflect Home Area demographics.

Study Region





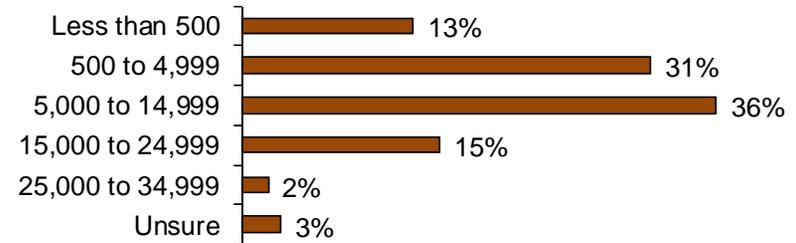
Demographics

Thirty-six percent 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 31 percent cited a population size of 500 to 4,999, followed by 15,000 to 24,999 (15%), less than 500 (13%), and 25,000 to 34,999 (2%). Three percent were unsure.

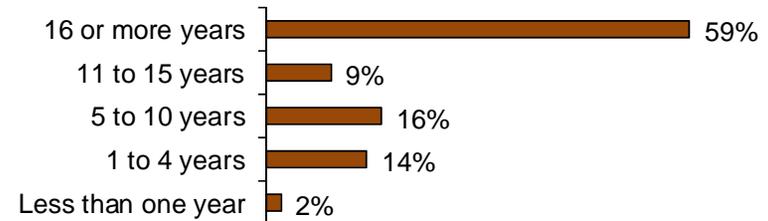
About three in five (59%) respondents in the Foundation Home Area said they have lived in their community for 16 or more years, followed by five to 10 years (16%), one to four years (14%), 11 to 15 years (9%), and less than one year (2%).

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

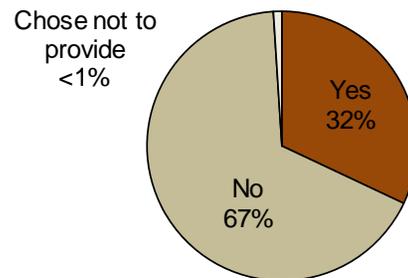
Community Population



Length of Residence



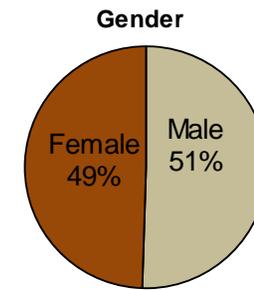
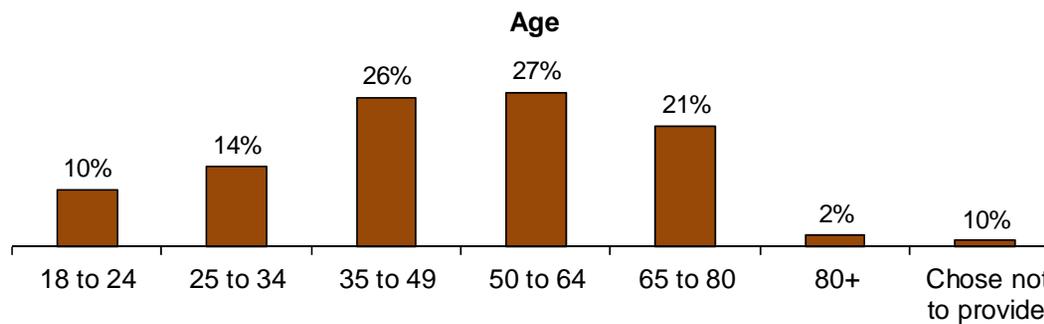
Children in Household



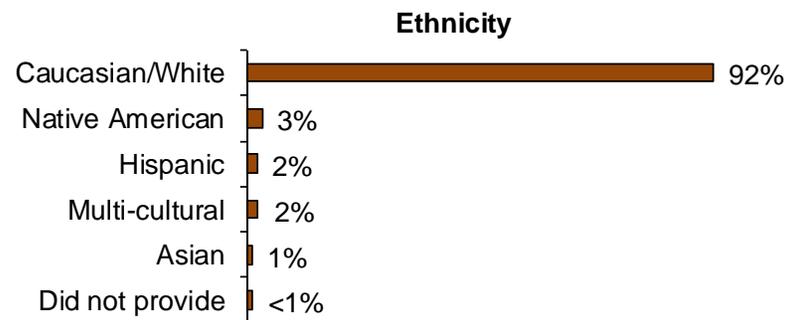


About a quarter (24%) of Foundation Home Area respondents in this study were age 18 to 34, while 53 percent were age 35 to 64 and 23 percent were age 65 or older. Ten percent chose not to provide age information.

Gender was nearly equally represented, with 51 percent women and 49 percent men.



Ninety-two percent of survey participants were Caucasian. Other ethnicities responding included Native American (3%); Hispanic or multi-cultural (2% each); and one percent said they are Asian. Less than one percent chose not to provide this information.



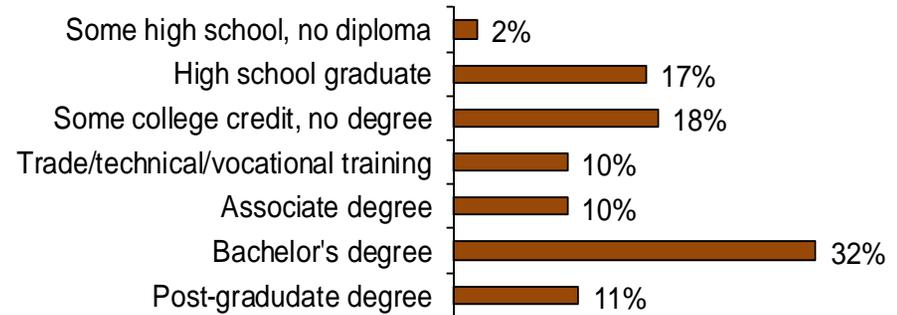


The educational experience of rural survey respondents was as follows: a bachelor's degree (32%); some college credit but no degree (18%); a high school graduate (17%); a post-graduate degree (11%); an associate degree, or trade, technical or vocational training (10% each); some high school but no diploma (2%).

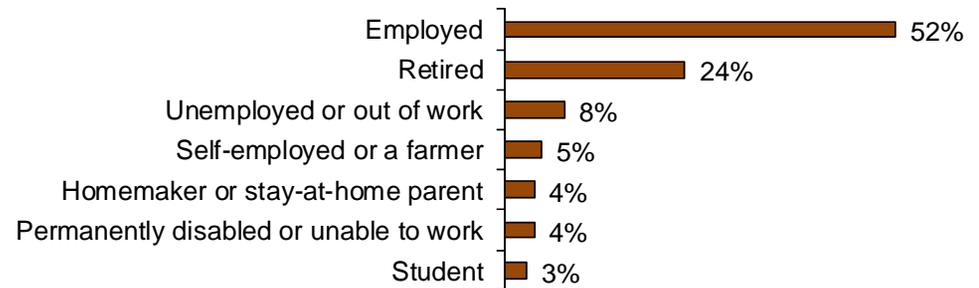
More than half (57%) said they are employed, with five percent of those citing they are either self-employed or a farmer. Of those who said they do not work, 24 percent said they are retired, followed by unemployed (8%), a homemaker or disabled/unable to work (4% each), or a student (3%).

Ten percent said they own a business of some type.

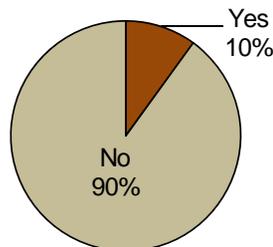
Education



Employment

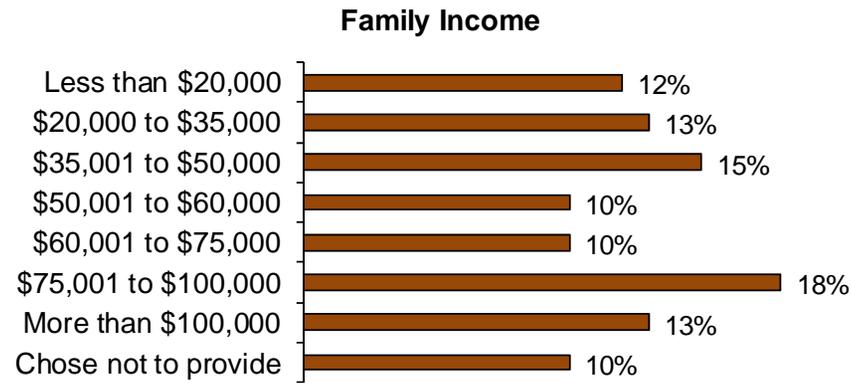


Own a Business





Eighteen percent of Foundation Home Area residents cited their family income as \$75,001 to \$100,000, followed by \$35,001 to \$50,000 (15%), \$20,000 to \$35,000 or more than \$100,000 (13% each), or less than \$20,000 (12%). Another 10 percent each said their household brings in \$50,001 to \$60,000 or \$60,001 to \$75,000. Ten percent chose not to provide income information.





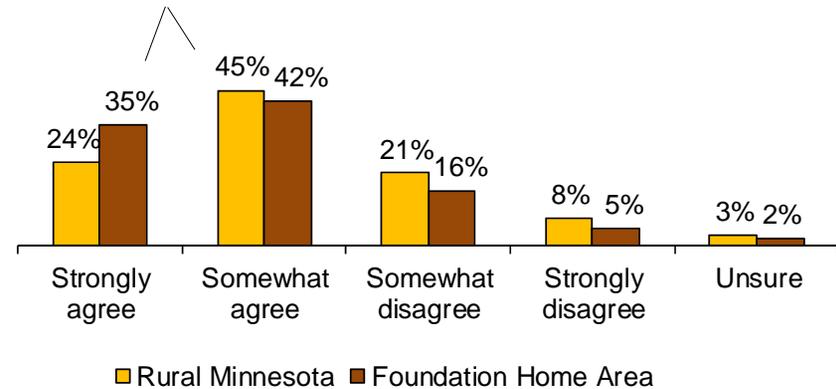
Perspective on Community

More than three in four (77%) Foundation Home Area respondents said that they believe their community is a vibrant place to live and work, which was slightly more than that of rural Minnesotans overall. Twenty-one percent did not agree.

Similarly, 77 percent believed their community is strong, resilient and able to recover from difficult situations. One in five (20%) did not agree.

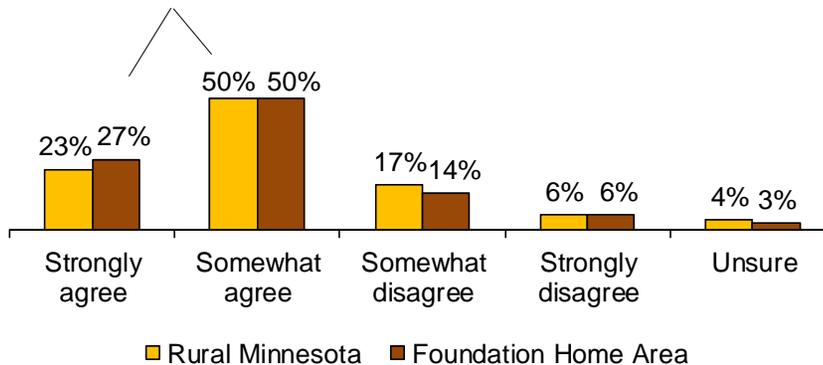
Community is a Vibrant Place to Live and Work

69% Rural vs. 77% Home Area



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

73% Rural vs. 77% Home Area



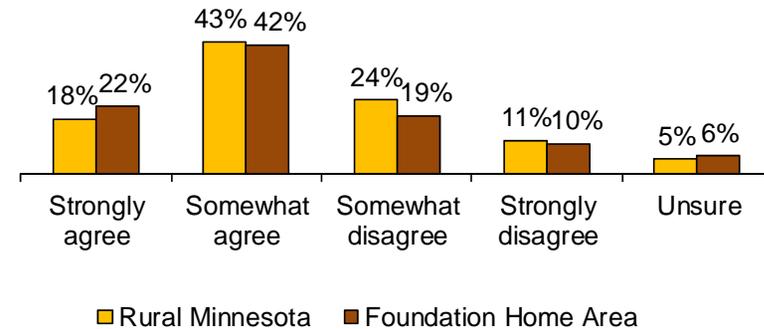


Personal Influence Surrounding Change

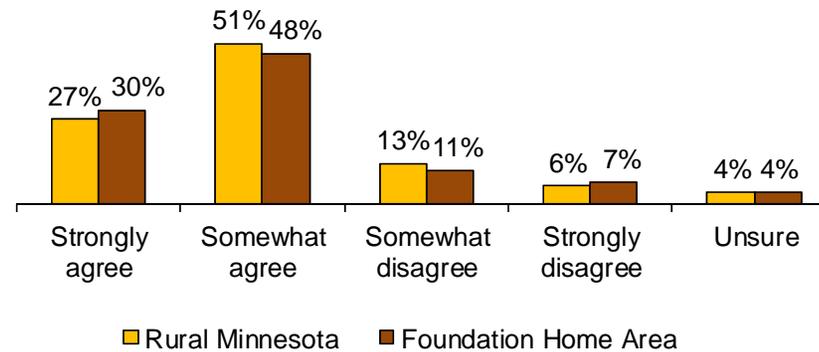
Foundation home area residents were asked whether they feel a sense of ownership over the direction of their community and whether they are able to make a contribution to its future. Just over two-thirds (64%) agreed, while 29 percent did not.

Next, they were asked whether they felt that people like themselves are able to make an impact and improve local quality of life. Seventy-eight percent said they could, with only 18 percent believing that they do not have the ability to influence change.

Feel Ownership of Community and Ability to Contribute to Its Future



Able to Make a Positive Community Impact

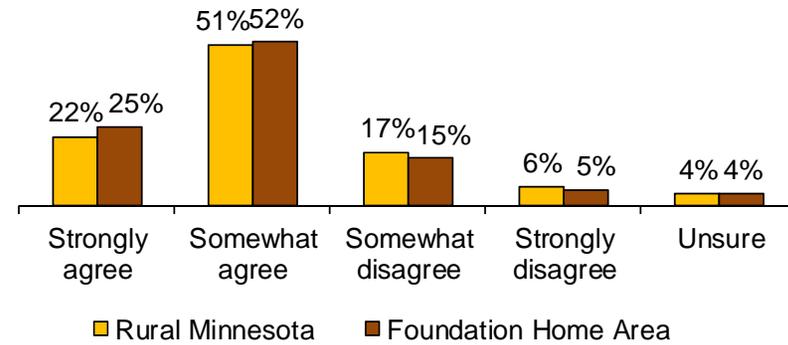




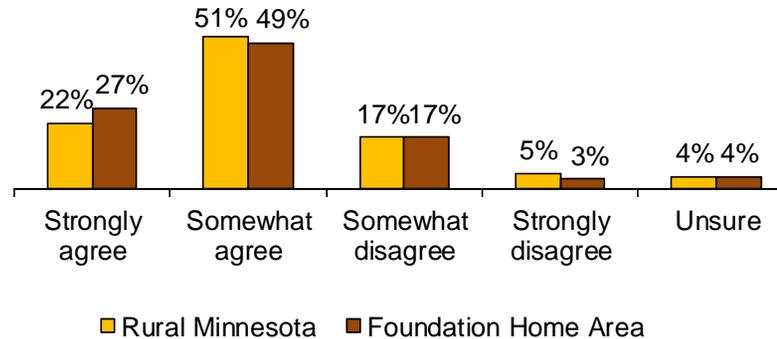
When asked whether they feel local community members work well together, results continued to skew positive. Seventy-seven percent of Foundation home area residents felt their community works together cohesively, compared to 20 percent who said that they do not.

When asked if they believe their community is able to work across differences such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or nationality, more than three in four (76%) agreed, while one in five (20%) said they did not.

Community Works Together Effectively to Address Local Issues



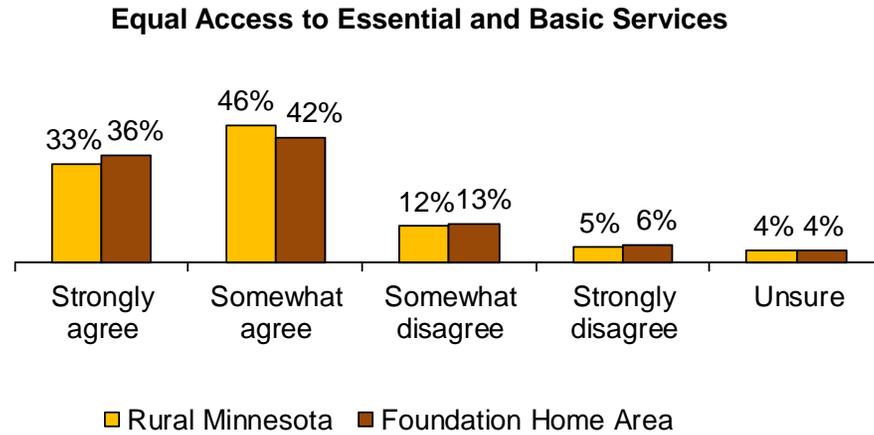
Residents Are Able to Work Across Differences (e.g., Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Nationality)





Confidence in Service Quality, Access Continues

Most Foundation Home Area residents (78%) believed that their community offers equal access to essential services.

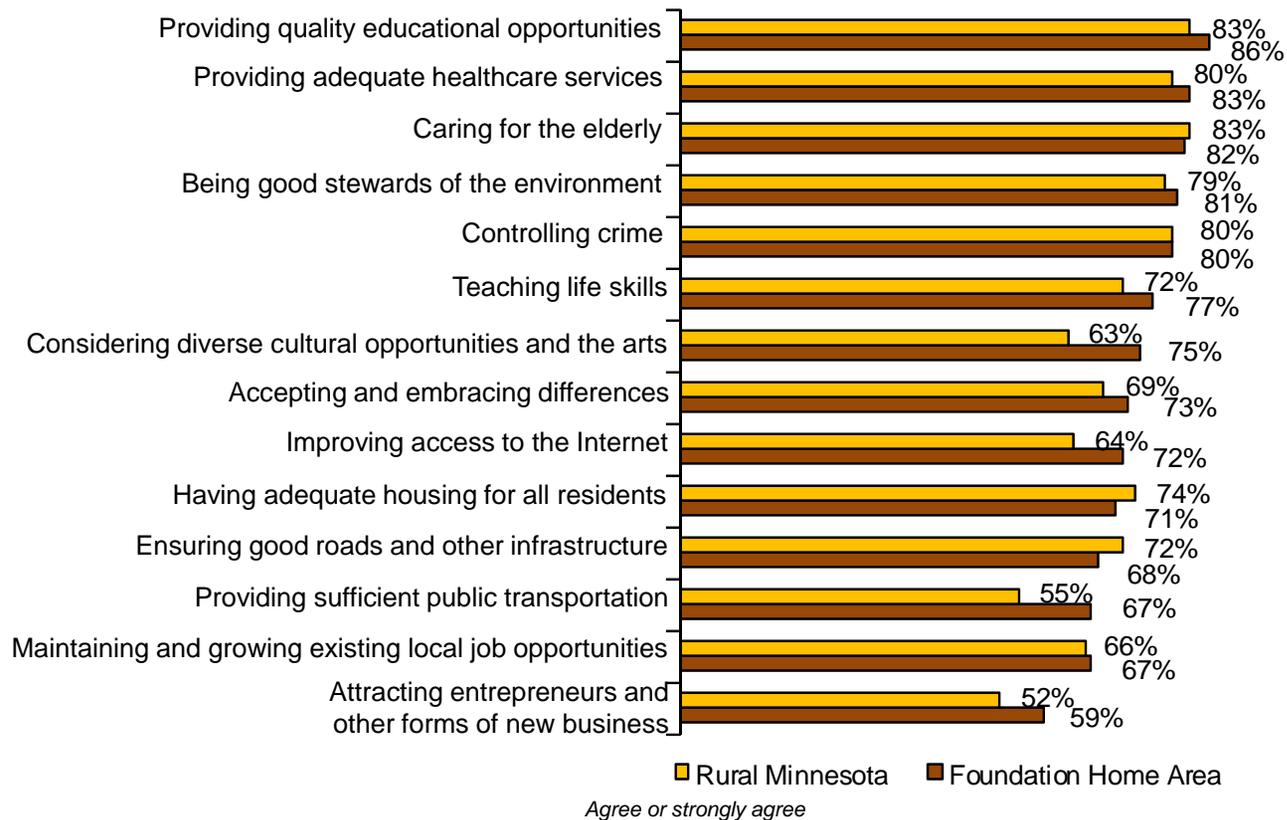




Snapshot: Community Performance

Foundation Home Area residents were asked to evaluate several critical dimensions of their area. The most highly rated were education, healthcare, caring for the elderly, environmental stewardship and crime control. They gave the lowest ratings for attracting new businesses to their community. Other issues mentioned included high taxes and unemployment, among others.

[See Appendix for full listing of other responses.]



The following shows the opinions of Foundation home area residents on the individual services in greater detail.



Controlling Crime, Caring for the Elderly and the Environment

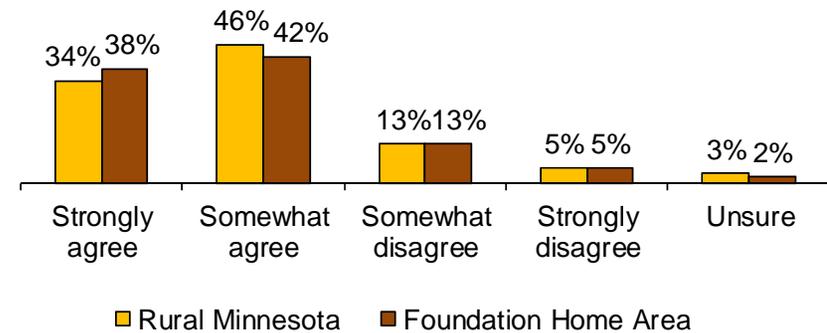
Four in five (80%) Foundation Home Area residents said that they have confidence in their community's ability to control crime.

The majority (82%) also said they have confidence in their community's ability to care for the elderly.

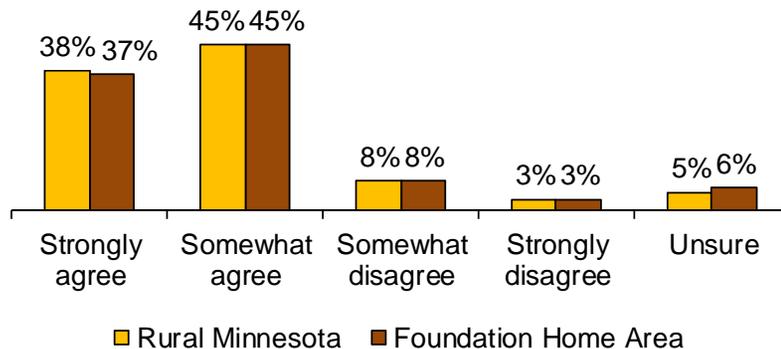
Similarly, most (81%) felt their community to be a good steward of the environment.

Rural Minnesotans at large had similar results overall.

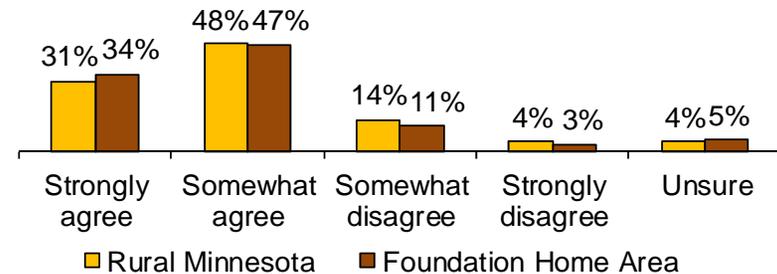
Community is Doing a Good Job Controlling Crime



Community is Doing a Good Job Caring for Elderly



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





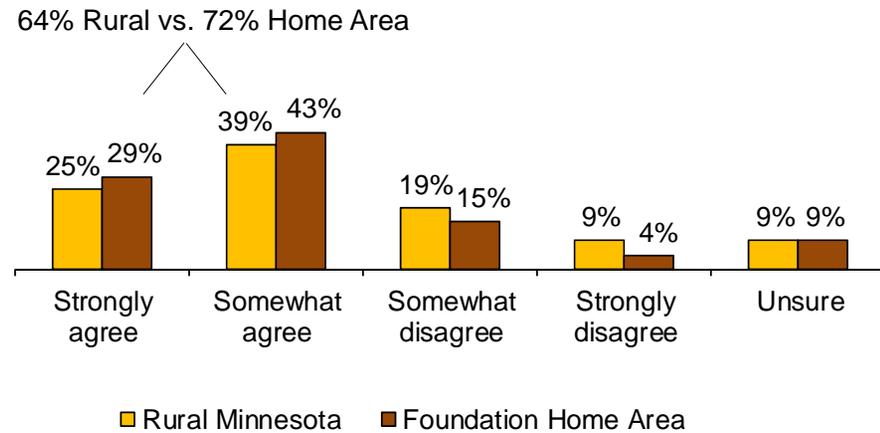
Internet Access

More than seven in 10 (72%) Foundation Home Area residents felt their community does an acceptable job at improving access to the internet, slightly higher than the opinion of rural Minnesotans overall. About one in five (19%) disagreed.

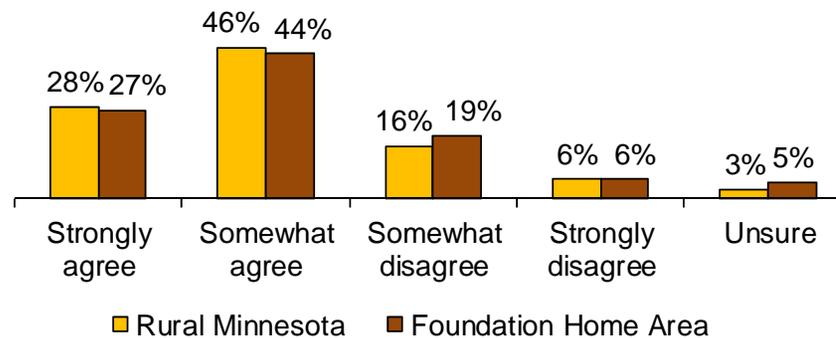
Housing

Although seven in 10 (71%) Foundation Home Area residents agreed that there is sufficient housing in their community, one in four (25%) were concerned about adequate availability. Results were similar to rural Minnesotans at large.

Community is Doing a Good Job Improving Access to the Internet



Community is Doing a Good Job Having Adequate Housing





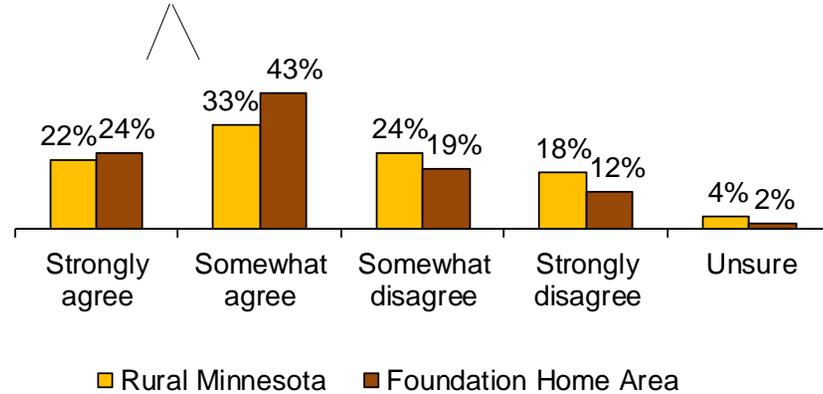
Transportation and Roads

Foundation home area residents were more likely than rural Minnesotans at large to have felt their community provides adequate public transportation. While two-thirds (67%) agreed that their community provides adequate transportation opportunities, 31 percent did not feel this is the case.

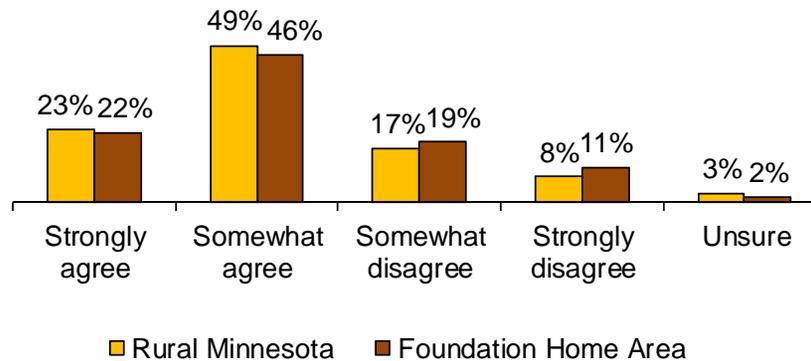
Two-thirds (68%) of home area respondents also believed their community ensures good roads and infrastructure, with three in 10 in disagreement.

Community is Doing a Good Job Providing Public Transportation

55% Rural vs. 67% Home Area



Community is Doing a Good Job Ensuring Good Roads and Infrastructure





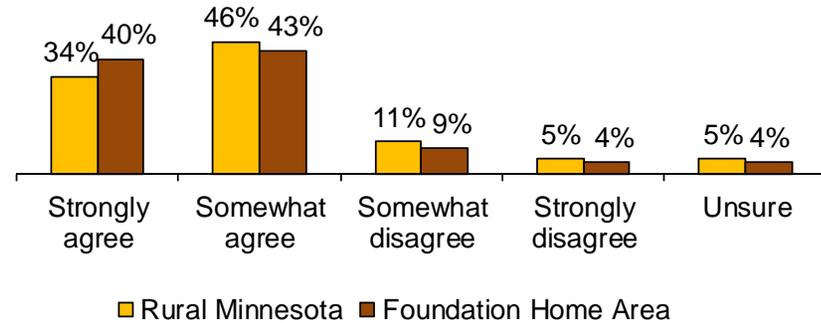
Healthcare

The majority (83%) of Foundation home area residents surveyed agreed that their community provides adequate healthcare opportunities. Only 13 percent did not feel that this is the case. Rural Minnesotans overall had similar results.

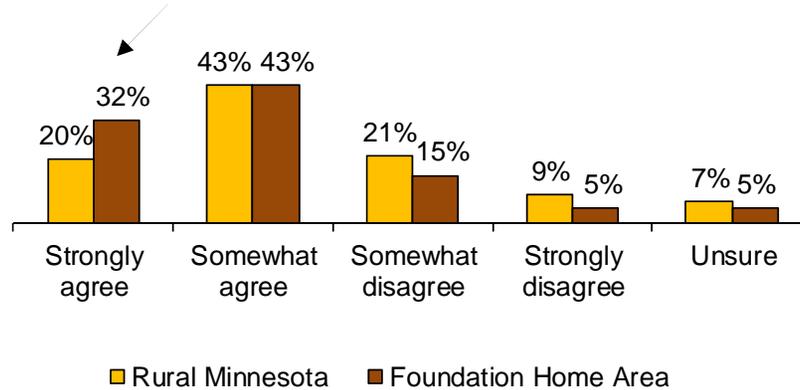
Diverse Culture and the Arts

Foundation Home Area residents were more likely than rural residents at large (75% vs. 63%) to have said that their community considers diverse cultural and arts opportunities, although it was a concern for one in five (20%).

**Community is Doing a Good Job
Providing Adequate Healthcare Services**



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



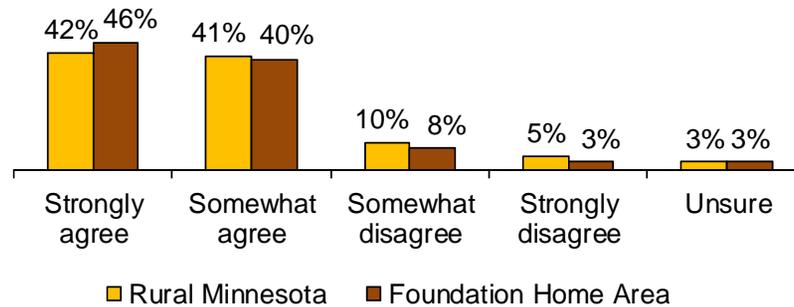


Education and Life skills

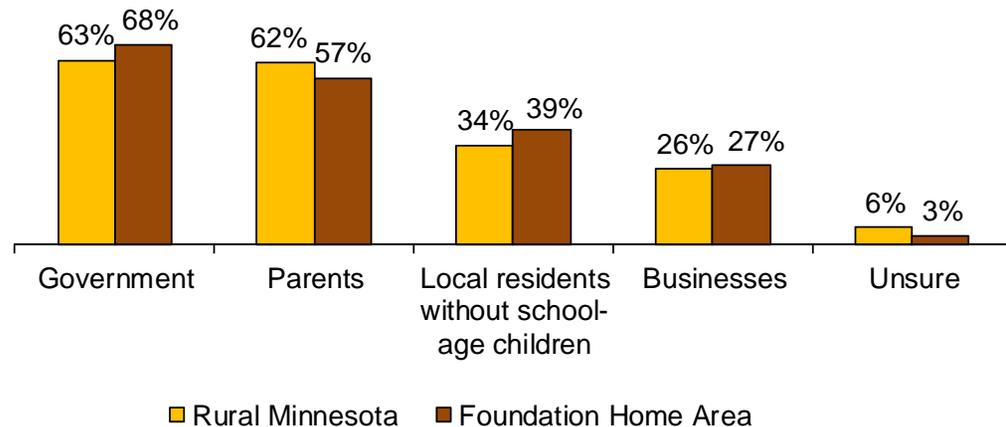
The majority (86%) of Foundation Home Area respondents believed their community provides quality educational opportunities, with 46 percent strongly agreeing and 40 percent somewhat agreeing. Eleven percent disagreed that their community provides adequate educational opportunities. Rural Minnesotans at large had similar results.

When asked who they feel is responsible for ensuring that adequate, quality educational opportunities are available in their community, two-thirds (68%) said they believe the government should be involved in such support, which was slightly higher than the opinions of rural Minnesotans overall. More than half (57%) also believed that responsibility is up to parents to provide. Thirty-nine percent of Foundation Home Area respondents felt local residents without school-age children should play a role in assisting with this effort, while 27 percent also named business owners.

Community is Doing a Good Job Providing Quality Educational Opportunities



Who's Responsible for Ensuring Quality Educational Opportunities?

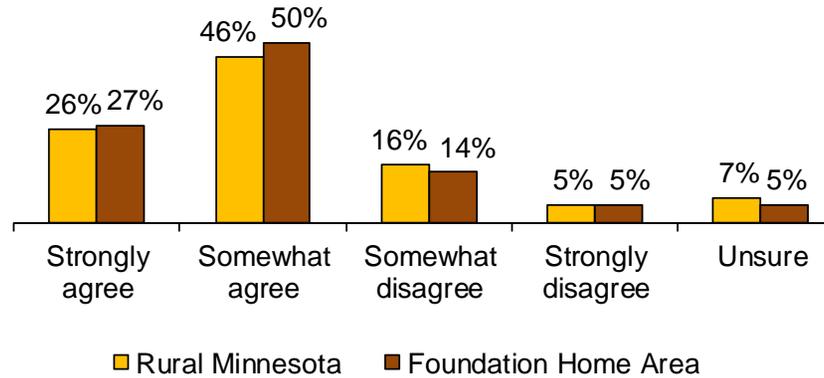


Multiple responses allowed



More than three in four (77%) of Foundation Home Area respondents believed their community is doing a sufficient job teaching life skills to residents, with 27 percent strongly agreeing and half (50%) somewhat agreeing. Nineteen percent disagreed that their community teaches adequate life skills.

Community is Doing a Good Job Teaching life Skills



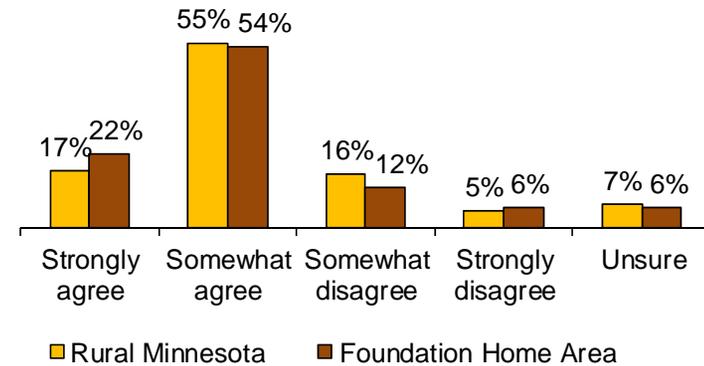


Optimism Surrounds Quality of Life

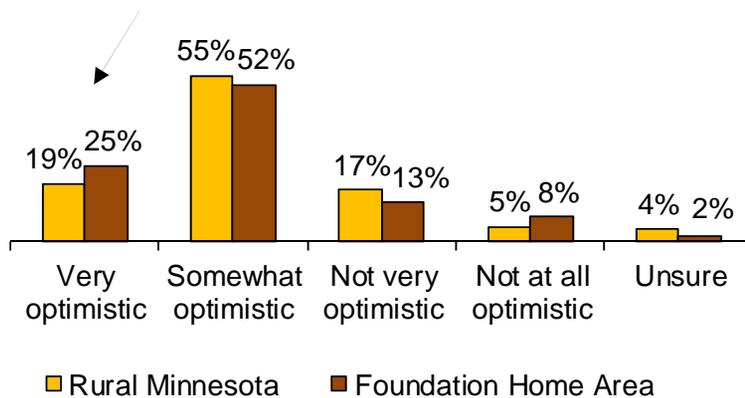
Foundation Home Area residents were queried about their community's quality of life. About three in four (76%) felt quality of life would improve over the next five years, while 18 percent predicted that it would not. This represents a continued positive upswing since 2010 Rural Pulse findings.

When asked how optimistic they feel about their community's future, 77 percent of Foundation Home Area respondents felt positive, with 25 percent strongly agreeing and 52 percent somewhat agreeing. While 19 percent disagreed that their community teaches adequate life skills, 21 percent did not share that sentiment.

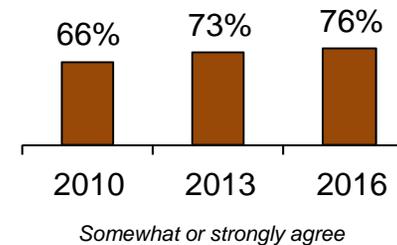
Quality of Life Will Improve Over Next Five Years



Optimistic About Future of Their Community



Home Area Residents: Believe Quality of Life Will Improve Over Next Five Years





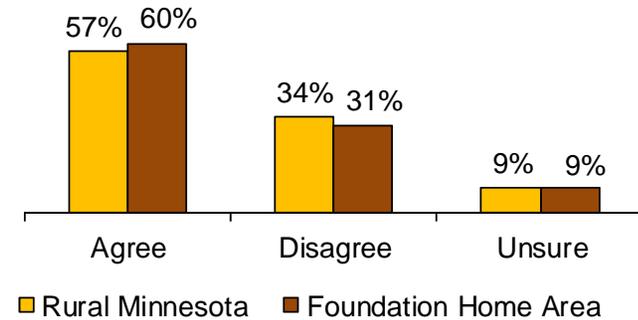
Rural Voice

Foundation Home Area residents expressed concern about the priority placed upon their public policy 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, 31 percent were of the opinion that they are not. Three in five (60%) were comfortable that their voice is being heard.

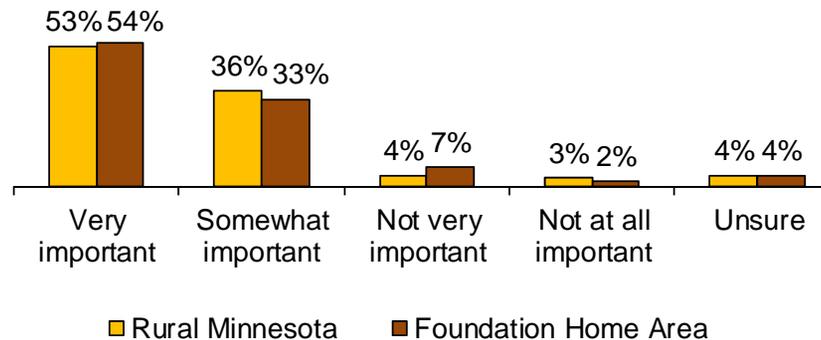
Eighty-seven percent of Foundation Home Area respondents said it is important to support political candidates who actively address rural issues.

These findings were similar to those of 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



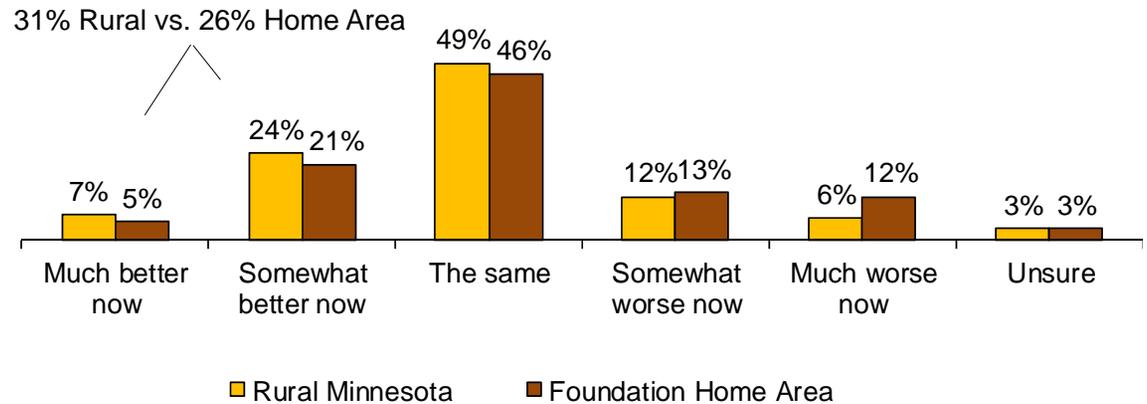


Economic Concerns Persist, But Show Slight Progression

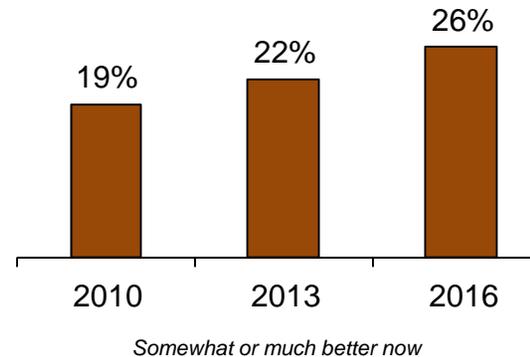
Survey participants were asked to gauge the condition of their community's economy now as compared to a year ago. Twenty-six percent of Foundation Home Area respondents said that they felt it had improved. Forty-six percent believed it stayed the same and 25 percent indicated that their local economy had worsened over the last year.

Rural Minnesotans overall were slightly more positive about a recent upswing in the economy. Belief that the economic condition had improved has been on a slight incline since Rural Pulse 2010 results.

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



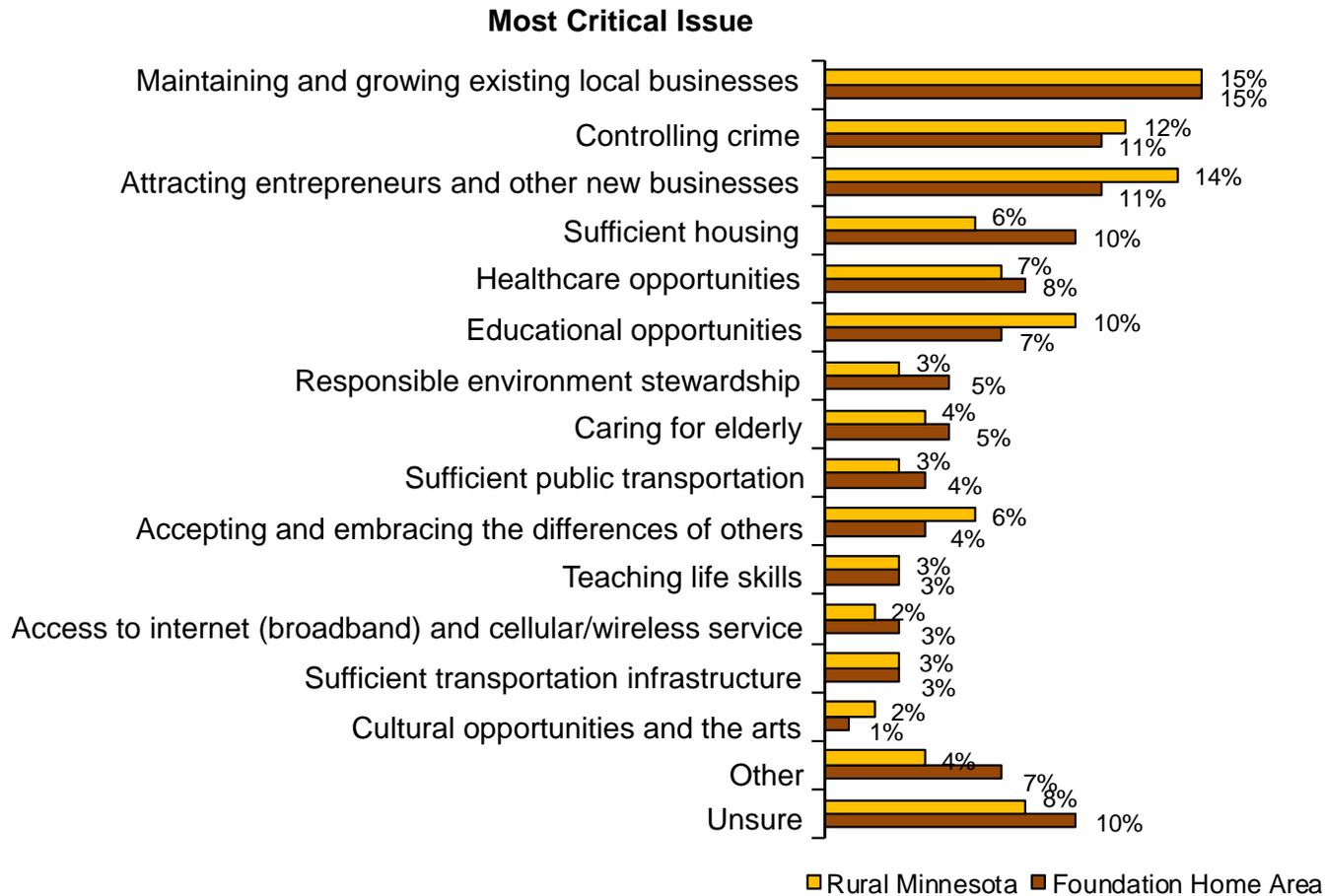
Home Area Residents:
Community's Economy Has Improved
Compared to A Year Ago





Critical Issues for Foundation Home Area

Maintaining and growing existing businesses was considered to be the top priority for Foundation home area residents (15%), followed by crime control and attracting new businesses (11% each). Rural Minnesotans at large had similar results.



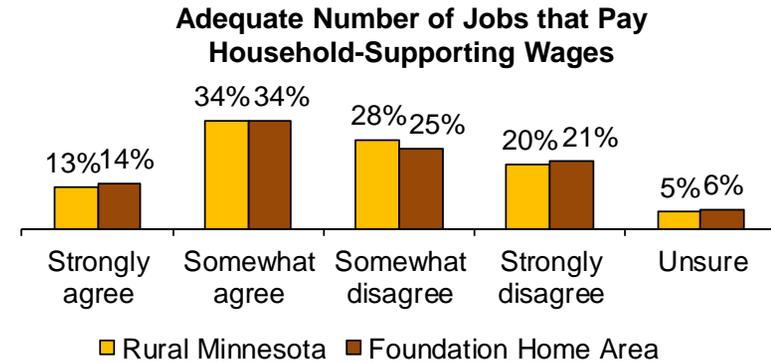
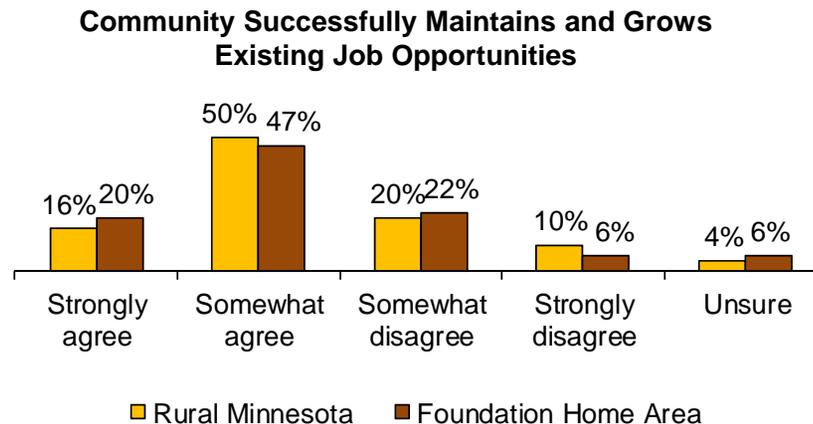
Note: Issue options provided in 2016 varied from previous years.



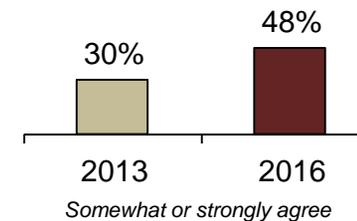
Job Concerns Diminish, But Still High

Although agreement that there are adequate jobs paying household-supporting wages increased an impressive 18 percentage points since Rural Pulse 2013, there is still a lack of confidence in the job market. Nearly half (46%) of Foundation Home Area residents felt that there are not adequate living-wage job opportunities in their community, nearly identical results to that of Rural Minnesotans overall. Forty-eight percent felt their community provides sufficient living-wage jobs.

Although to a lesser degree, nearly one in three (28%) said they feel that their area lacks the ability to maintain and grow existing job opportunities. About two-thirds (67%) felt job sustainment is good.



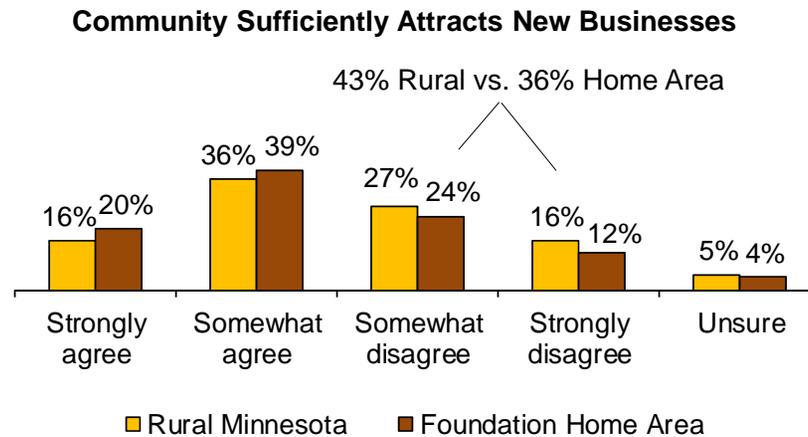
Home Area Residents: Believe There Are Adequate Jobs that Pay Household-Supporting Wages





While many Foundation Home Area respondents believed that their community does a good job of maintaining and growing employment opportunities, they were more skeptical about attracting new industry to the area (67% vs. 59%).

More than a third (36%) believed that their community does not do enough to draw new businesses to their area. Fifty-nine percent felt comfortable with their community's ability to attract new industry, which was slightly higher than the opinions of rural Minnesotans overall (52%).



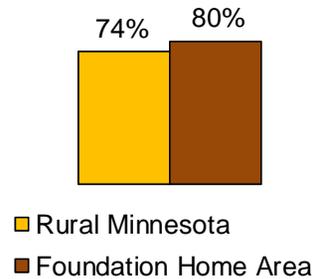


Job Growth Resources

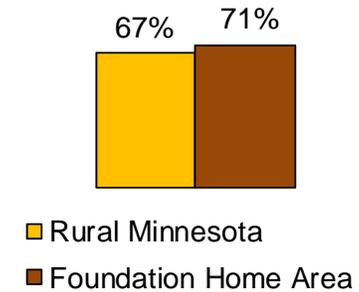
Four in five (80%) Foundation Home Area residents said they feel improved internet could assist in promoting local economic vitality. About seven in 10 (71%) felt that their community effectively collaborates to grow the local job base. These findings were slightly more positive than those of rural Minnesotans overall.

Although about three in four (74%) Foundation Home Area residents said they are aware of local resources to assist residents in finding jobs, 35 percent said they are unaware of resources available to help entrepreneurs start new businesses. Rural Minnesotans at large were slightly less likely to have shown awareness of job growth resources (65% vs. 59%).

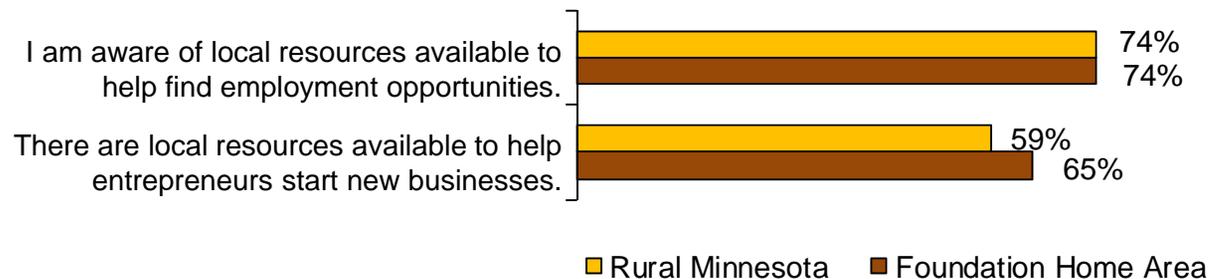
Believe Improved Internet Access Could Help Improve Local Economic Vitality



Believe Residents Work Together Effectively to Maintain and Grow Businesses



Resource Awareness



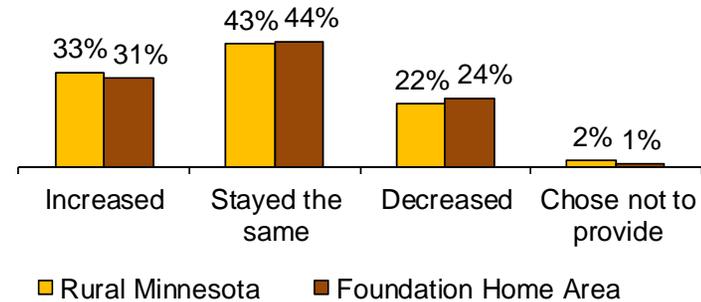


Impact of the Economy on Households

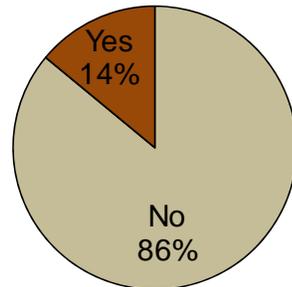
While about three in 10 (31%) Foundation Home Area residents said that their household income has increased over the past year, many households are still struggling with a decrease in wages (24%). Forty-four percent said their household income had not changed in the past 12 months.

More specifically, 14 percent said that someone in their home has lost a job within the past year, nearly identical results to rural Minnesotans overall.

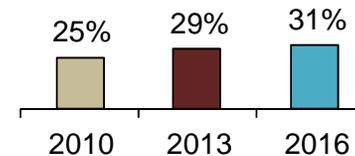
In the Past Year, Has Your Household Income Increased, Decreased or Stayed the Same?



Someone in Household Lost a Job In the Past Year



Home Area Residents: Household Income Has Increased



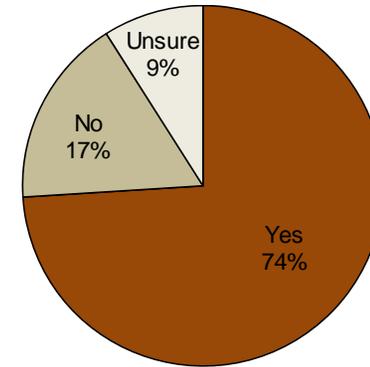


Migration

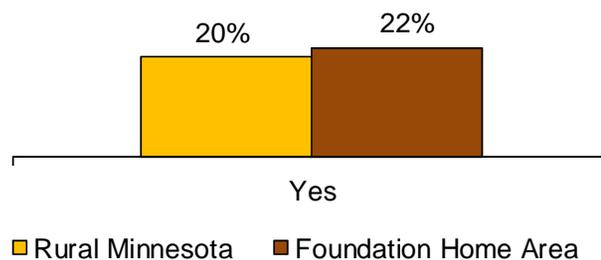
Looking forward, 17 percent of Foundation Home Area residents said that they do not expect to be living in their current locale five years from now and another nine percent were undecided.

Twenty-two percent of Foundation Home Area 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, about two-thirds (67%) said it would be for improved quality of life. Another one in four (25%) said the reason would be to pursue job opportunities, followed by educational opportunities (4%). Rural Minnesotans at large showed opposite migration priorities. Other responses included being closer to family.

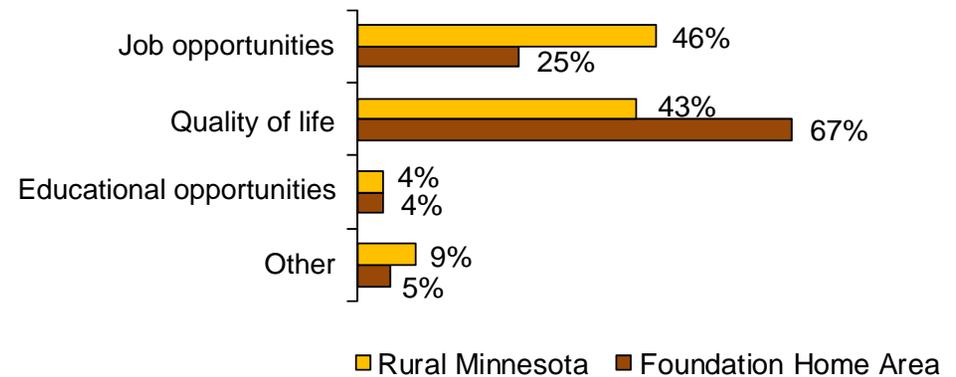
Expect to Live in Community Five Years From Now



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



Main Reason for Considering a Move



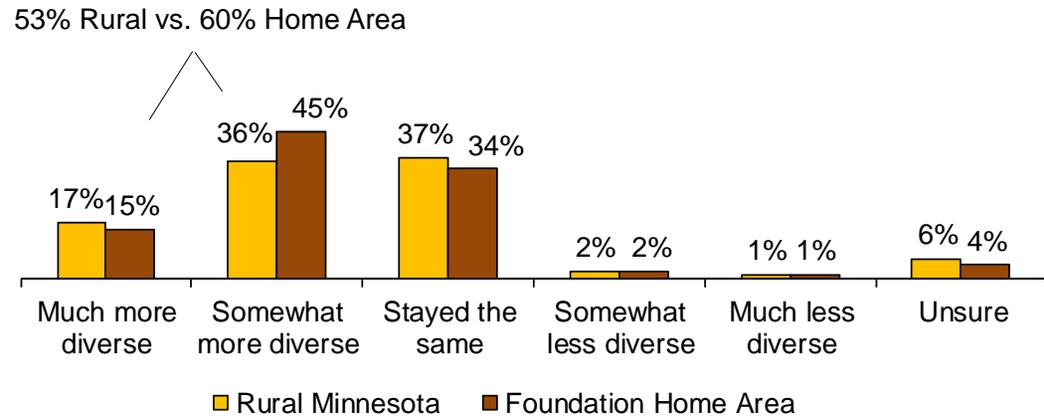


A Changing Landscape

Foundation Home Area residents were slightly more likely than rural residents overall (60% Foundation Home Area, 53% overall) to feel their community's ethnic or racial makeup has become more diverse over the past five years. A third (34%) felt it has stayed the same.

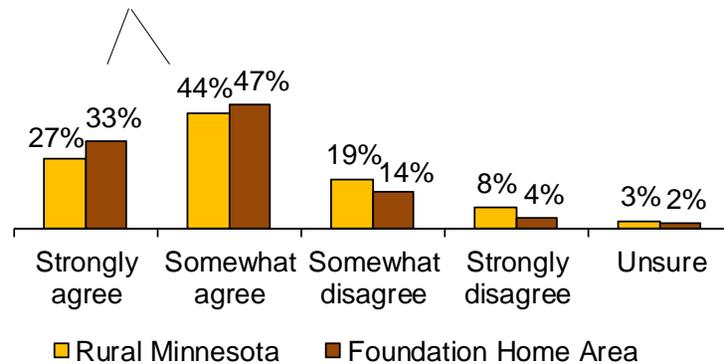
Though there is some belief that diversity is increasing in the Foundation Home Area, 18 percent did not feel their community is welcoming to people of varying backgrounds and perspectives. Four in five (80%), however, said that they feel their community is inviting, which was a slightly higher number than that of rural residents overall (71%).

Change in Community's Cultural Composition Over Past Five Years



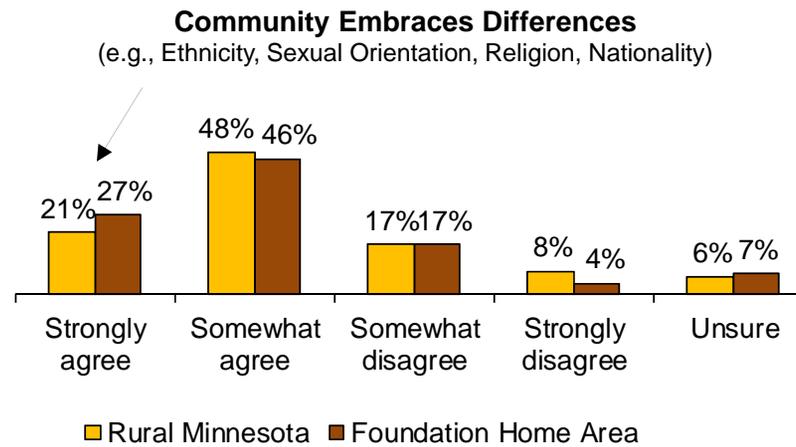
Community is a Welcoming Place for People of All Backgrounds and Perspectives

71% Rural vs. 80% Home Area





Similarly, when asked if they feel their community does a good job accepting and embracing differences, such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or nationality, 73 percent of Foundation home area residents surveyed felt it does, compared to 69 percent of rural residents at large. About one in five (21%) felt their local community does not embrace differences sufficiently.





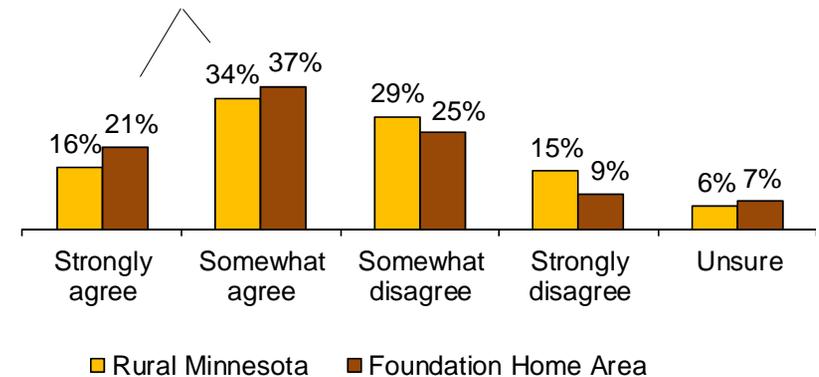
Leadership Distribution

Close to three in five (58%) Foundation Home Area residents said that they feel local community leadership is comprised of people from different backgrounds, which was slightly higher than that of rural Minnesotans overall (50%). It was a seven percentage point decline from Rural Pulse 2013 findings, however. Thirty-four percent of Foundation Home Area residents and 43 percent of rural Minnesotans at large felt that inclusiveness in leadership roles is lacking.

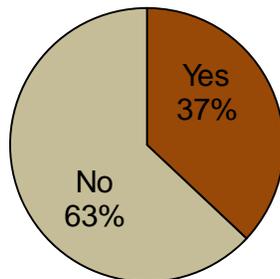
Interestingly, while many Foundation Home Area residents said that they believe that leadership in their community is inclusive, 63 percent said that they have not served in a leadership role, whether it be youth sports, city government or with a local nonprofit organization in the past. That is a significant 18 percentage point drop from Rural Pulse 2013 findings.

People From Diverse Backgrounds Fill Leadership Roles Within Community

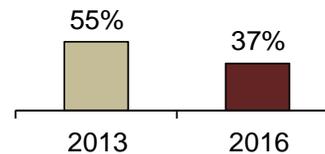
50% Rural vs. 58% Home Area



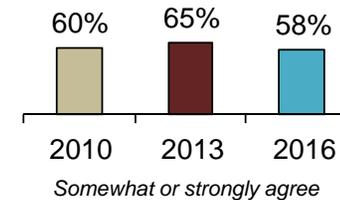
Have Served in a Community Leadership Role



Home Area Residents: Have Served in a Community Leadership Role



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

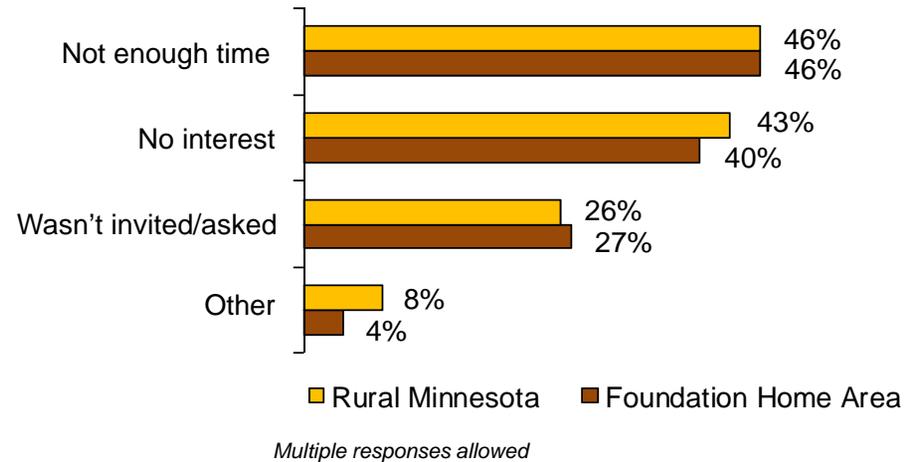




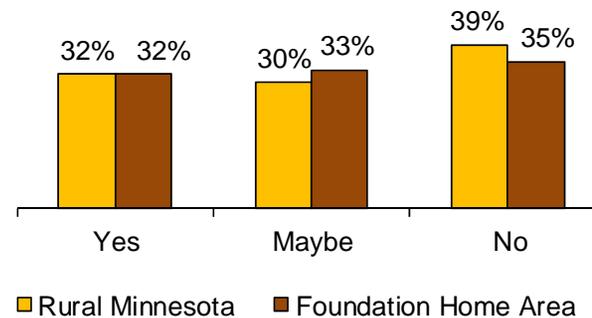
Nearly half (46%) of local residents who had not served as a leader said that the main reason was lack of time. Two in five (40%) said they would have no interest in serving in a leadership capacity. More than one in four (27%) said they have never been invited to participate as a leader. Another four percent cited other reasons, such as there not being enough local opportunities, 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. About a third (32%) indicated that they would be interested in being invited to serve, and another third (33%) said they might consider doing so. Thirty-five percent said they have no interest in such.

Why Haven't Served in a Leadership Role



Would You Consider Serving If Asked?

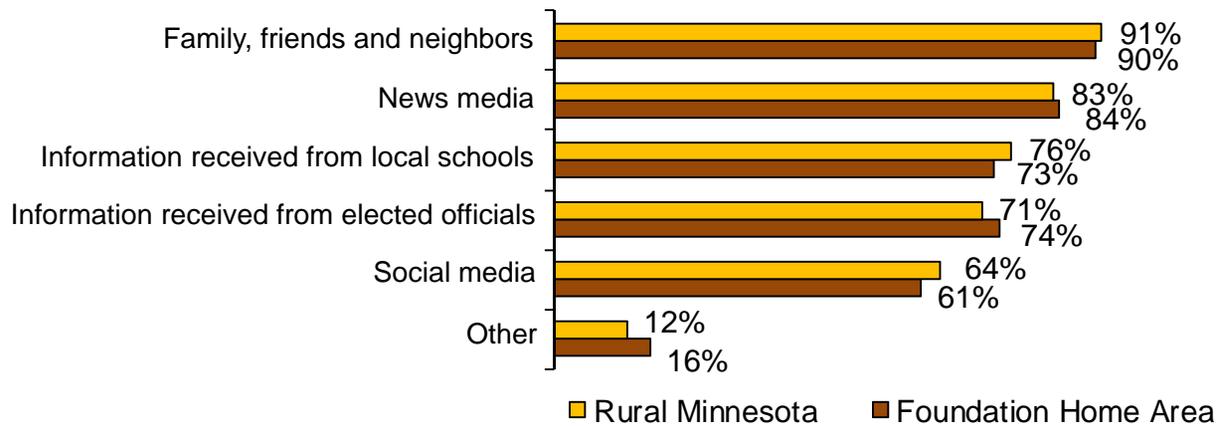




Information Source Preferences

When asked about preferred information sources, Foundation Home Area residents said that they rely heavily on family, friends and neighbors (90%), as well as the news media (84%) to keep them updated about their local area. Other top information sources included information received from local schools (73%) and information received from elected officials (74%). About three in five (61%) said social media would be an important source for community information. Additional sources cited included churches, community centers, local events and employers, among others. [See Appendix for full listing of other responses.]

**How Important Are the Following
In Keeping You Updated About Your Area?**



Very or somewhat important

APPENDIX



Blandin Foundation: Foundation Home Area Verbatim Responses

28. Other than those I just mentioned, are there other issues that you feel your community is not addressing?
- All issues
 - Affordable taxes
 - Air pollution
 - Better employment wages
 - The county doesn't help people like they should when they need help – county and state programs
 - Diversity of opportunities for jobs
 - Don't think about legal citizens, only illegal citizens
 - Drugs
 - It's rural
 - Labeling of GMOs
 - Learning about nutrition
 - More opportunity for anyone to come in
 - No jobs, taxes are low and roads are not good
 - Property taxes
 - Rehabilitation center for addicts
 - Spending money without community support
 - Taxes are too high
 - Unemployment
29. Which *one* issue would you say is the most critical to your community?
- Jobs – 5
 - Good jobs
 - Better employment wages
 - Better roads and highways, and dealing better with crimes
 - Cannot choose one
 - Diversification of industry
 - Diversity
 - Drugs
 - Homeless shelters
 - Local spending
 - Mental illness and addiction
 - Politicians
 - Somalians
 - Unemployment

35. Why haven't you served in a leadership role in your area?

- No reason – 3
- Not enough opportunities – 2
- All travel
- In a wheelchair
- Never thought about it
- Retired
- Too much negativity
- In an unorganized area

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

- Churches – 4
- Community centers – 3
- Community events/meetings – 3
- Local businesses – 3
- Workplace – 3
- Library – 2
- Internet – 2
- Mail – 2
- Parks and recreation – 2
- Anything that brings the community together
- Assisted-living home
- Blogs
- Emergency services
- Flyers
- Library
- Local bars
- Local museums, theatres and other cultural institutions
- Local organizations
- Safety officers
- Social services
- Specialized media
- Volunteer opportunities
- Watch the groups
- YMCA, gathering place for people in town

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

- Family – 2
- All of the above

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

Listing of Multi-cultural:

- White and Mexican – 2
- Mixed – 2