



incourage

community foundation

**South Wood County Area**

# **Community Vision Survey**

Findings from Telephone & Online Surveys

April 2012

*Prepared by:*



# Edge Research

Located in the Washington, D.C. area, Edge provides innovative research solutions for corporations and nonprofits. The firm counts as its clients many large companies, nonprofits and global NGOs, but also assists small organizations and start-ups with their unique challenges. Past and current clients include The Hartford, Time Warner Cable, Washington Post and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.



**Lisa Dropkin, *Principal***



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# Why Do This Research?

*“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.”*

*Cheshire Cat, Alice in Wonderland,  
Lewis Carroll*



This report presents findings from the largest citizen survey in the history of the south Wood County area. With help from community partners, the Foundation heard from thousands of community residents and advanced a community-wide dialogue about the future.

# Background

## Fall 2011

- Incentive Community Foundation engaged Edge Research to conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews in the Rapids area
- Discussion focused on challenges facing the community, community strengths, vision for the future, and interest in engaging with the Foundation's work

## Winter 2011-2012

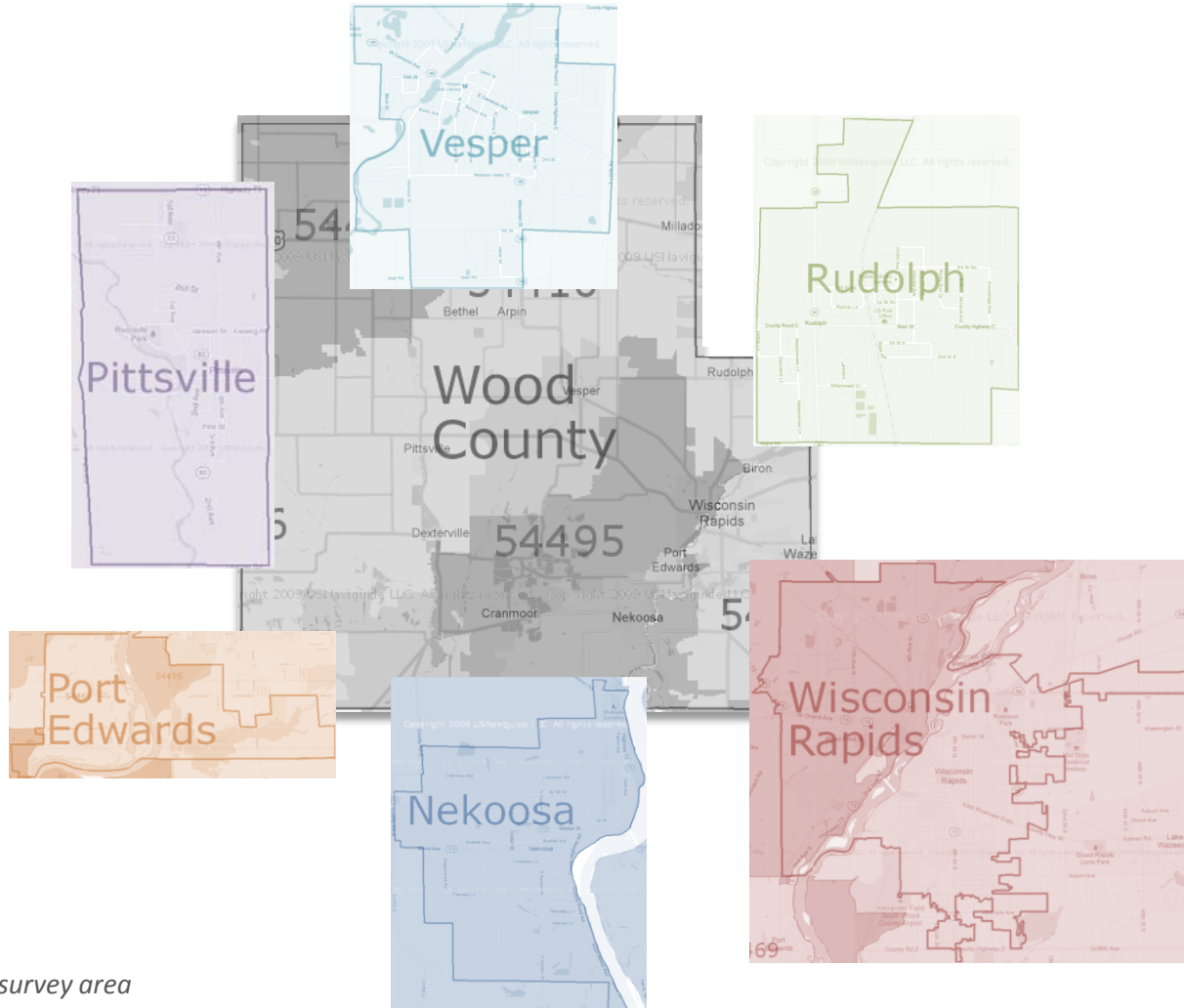
- Community survey developed and launched
- 500 random sample telephone interviews conducted, controlled for demographic and geographic representation
- 1550 online surveys completed (another 1662 residents partially completed the survey)
- Simultaneously, Incentive volunteers led community conversations with 439 residents

## Spring 2012

- Preview event to share findings with community organizations
- Community-wide event to share results and next steps

# Geographic Representation

## South Wood County Area



Zip codes/Towns included in survey area

# Survey Methodology



## Telephone Survey

- 500 interviews conducted using targeted Random Digit-Dial **telephone sample**
- Data collection controlled to reflect population distribution in the region
- Interviews conducted January 2012
- Margin of error for the sample as a whole is +/- 4.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level

## Online Survey

- Completed by 1550 residents; partial completes by another 1662. Open to anyone
- Not all respondents answered all questions
- Non-representative, self-selected sample, so margin of error does not apply
- **Throughout the report, sub-group results are taken from phone data**

| Area                                    | Phone |     | Online |      |
|---|-------|-----|--------|------|
|   | %     | #   | %      | #    |
| (distribution)                          |       |     |        |      |
| Nekoosa/Rome                            | 16%   | 82  | 4%     | 59   |
| Pittsville                              | 6%    | 28  | -      | 4    |
| Port Edwards                            | 3%    | 16  | -      | 7    |
| Vesper                                  | 3%    | 16  | 1%     | 14   |
| Wisconsin Rapids/<br>Biron/Grand Rapids | 54%   | 268 | 19%    | 300  |
| Wisconsin Rapids West                   | 15%   | 75  | 4%     | 54   |
| Rudolph                                 | 3%    | 15  | 1%     | 16   |
| Unknown                                 | N/A   | N/A | 71%    | 1096 |

# Statistical Phone Sample vs. Online Responders

- Phone survey includes more older, retired residents
- Online sample more likely to be 30-59, working and more education

|                                  | Phone | Online |  | Phone | Online |
|----------------------------------|-------|--------|--|-------|--------|
| Male                             | 50%   | 39%    | Children in home                       | 34%   | 38%    |
| Female                           | 50%   | 61%    | Full-time employment                   | 41%   | 56%    |
| 18-29                            | 9%    | 9%     | Part-time employment                   | 13%   | 12%    |
| 30-44                            | 31%   | 28%    | Not working                            | 13%   | 10%    |
| 45-59                            | 26%   | 39%    | Retired                                | 32%   | 19%    |
| 60+                              | 34%   | 25%    | Household has health care coverage     | 90%   | 89%    |
| Lived in area less than 2 years  | 2%    | 3%     | High School or less                    | 37%   | 14%    |
| Lived in area 2-5 years          | 5%    | 6%     | Vocational/post-HS; Associate's Degree | 31%   | 39%    |
| Lived in area 6-10 years         | 7%    | 8%     | College Degree                         | 19%   | 27%    |
| Lived in area 11-20 years        | 16%   | 14%    | Post-Graduate                          | 13%   | 16%    |
| Lived in area more than 20 years | 71%   | 69%    |  |       |        |

# Summary of Key Findings



## Is this a ghost town?

- Residents feel competing emotions – hopefulness tinged with skepticism.
- Uncertainty looms large, both for the community and their personal lives.
- All signs point to a community ready for change.

## Public Priorities Are Clear

- Worry about jobs and unemployment dominate the landscape. Any planning efforts need to address these issues first and foremost.
- Opportunities for young people are a key component, as part of the solution and as an indicator of the community's overall health.
- Community assets and quality of life are values to be protected – into the future.

## Leadership and Dialogue Needed

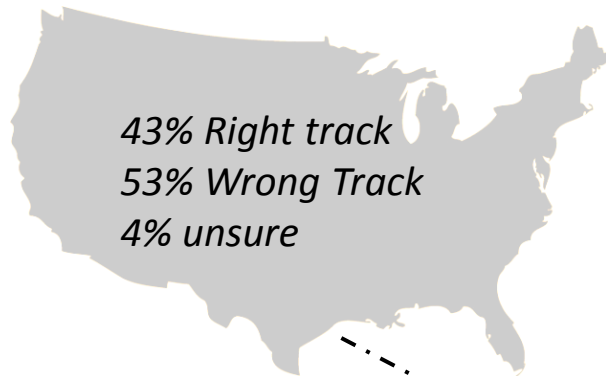
- Residents are looking for stronger leadership.
- Confidence is lacking all around, and particularly in elected officials and the business community.
- Diversity of voices are needed, and residents want to be part of the solution but can't be expected to drive the process.

## Advice for Engagement

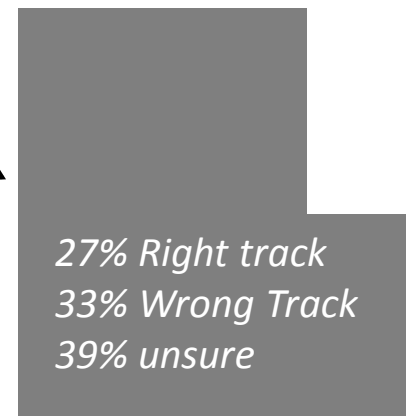
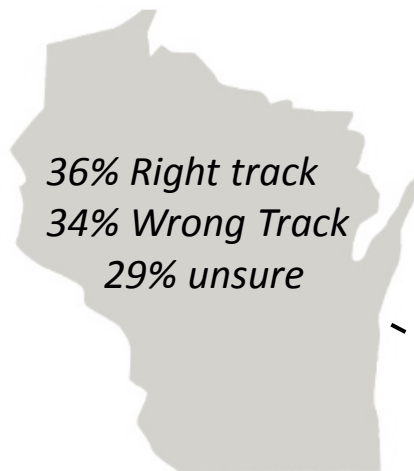
- Collective vision for the future involves a diverse economy, while protecting the way of life people appreciate today.
- Tough choices may be required to see more economic activity, without losing the small-town character of this community.
- Residents are primed for activation, but need to be inspired as well as engaged.
- Leaders may have a positive story to tell and need help spreading the word.

# State of the Community: Concerns

# Many Are Asking: Where Are We Headed?



*“Problems are not just in this area. In our state, in our country for that matter, people are scrambling to figure out the future.” (Interviews)*



# Sources Describe a Community Working to Correct Course

*"Hope springs eternal. I think changes are coming whether we like them or not. We will have to see how they turn out."  
(Focus Groups)*

*"There have been strides, but there is more work to do."  
(Focus Groups)*



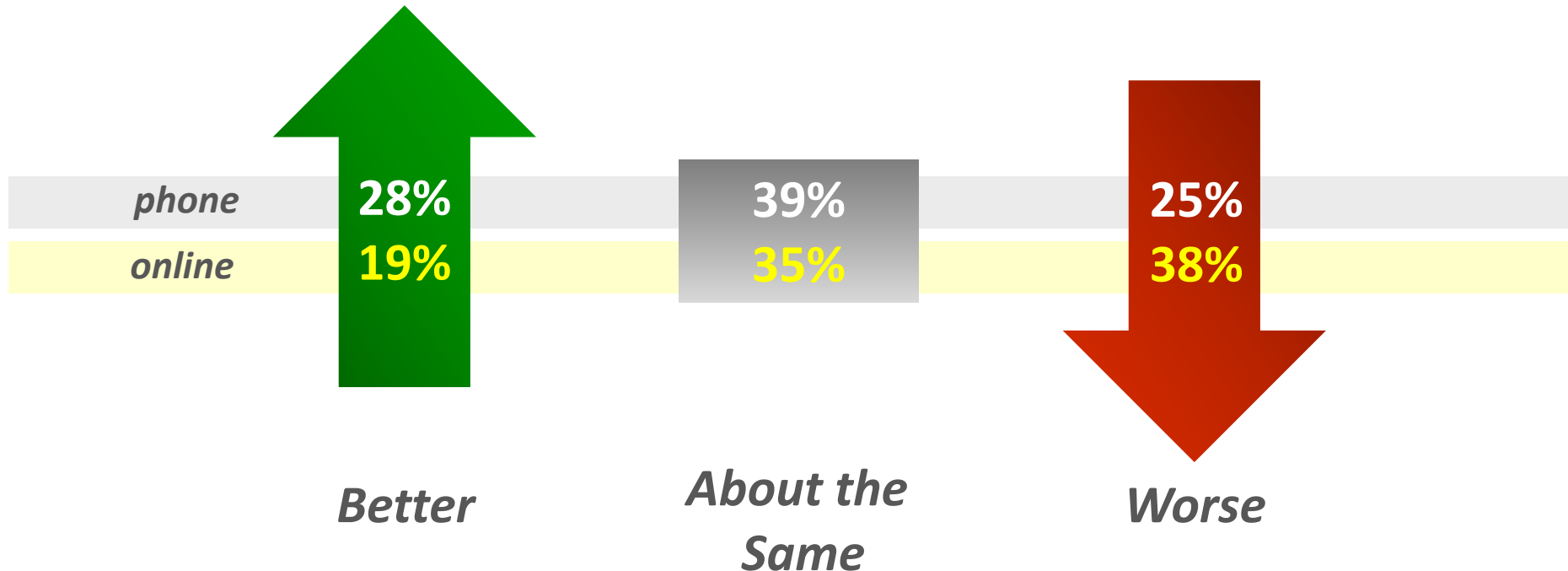
*"I definitely think we are on the right track. That is based on what I'm seeing."  
(Interviews)*

*"I would say right track. I would go between that and still to be worked out."*

*If you are not moving forward you are idling or moving backwards. We need to make sure that we don't ever become complacent about our future."  
(Interviews)*

# Looking Ahead: The Community's Future

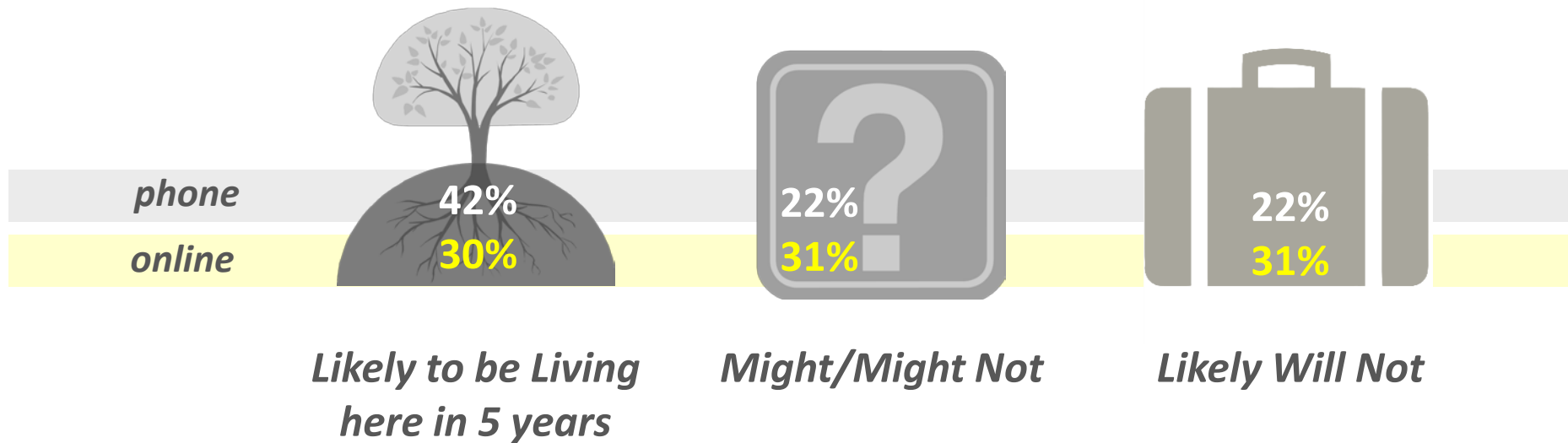
*Quality of life in south Wood County will be...*



Q. Thinking ahead to 5 years from now, do you think the quality of life in south Wood County will be better than today, about the same, or worse than today?

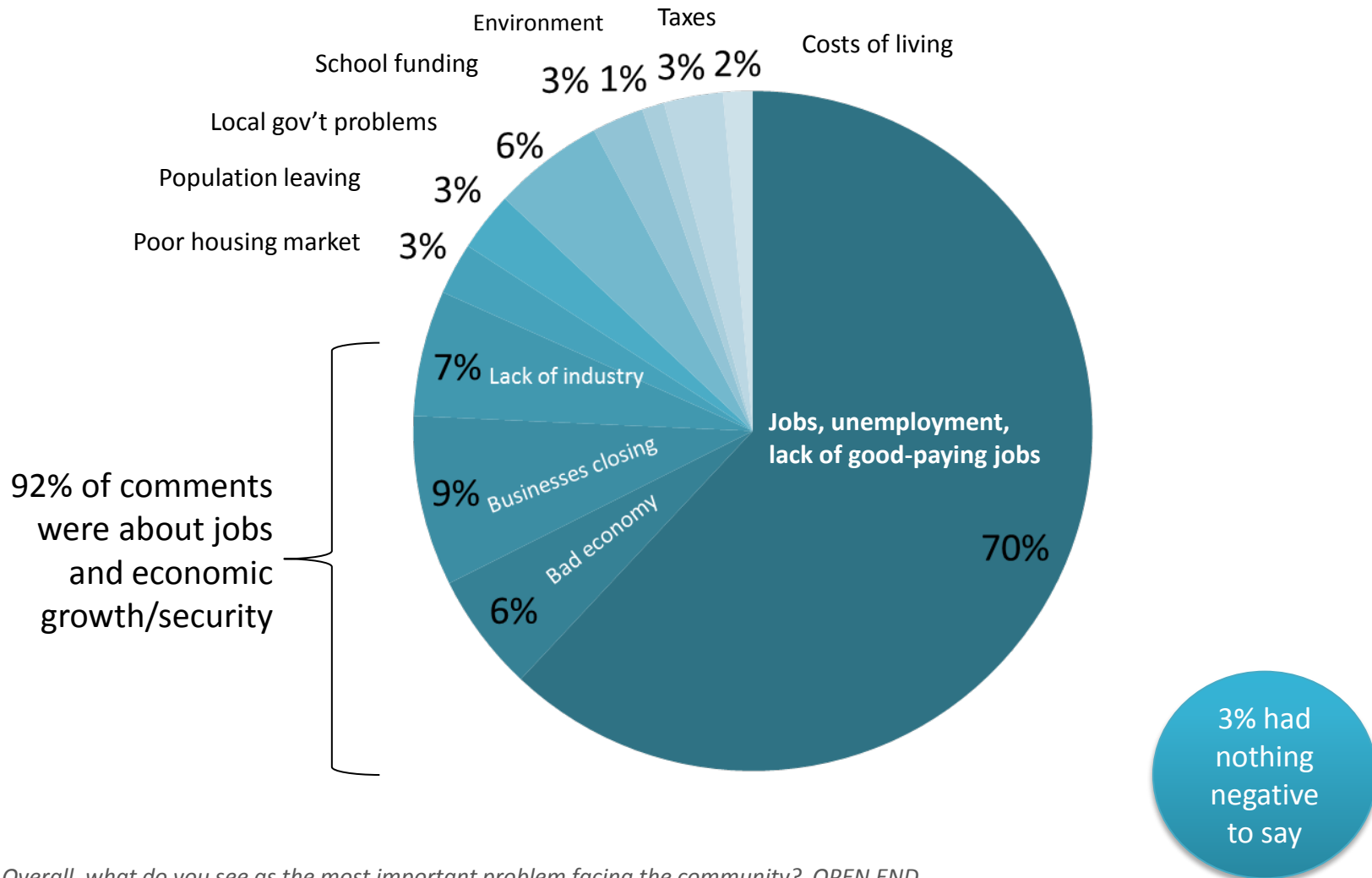
# Looking Ahead: My Personal Future

*Shall I stay or shall I go?*



Q. Still thinking ahead to 5 years from now, how likely are you to be living in the area?

# Nearly Everyone Points to the Same Big Challenge

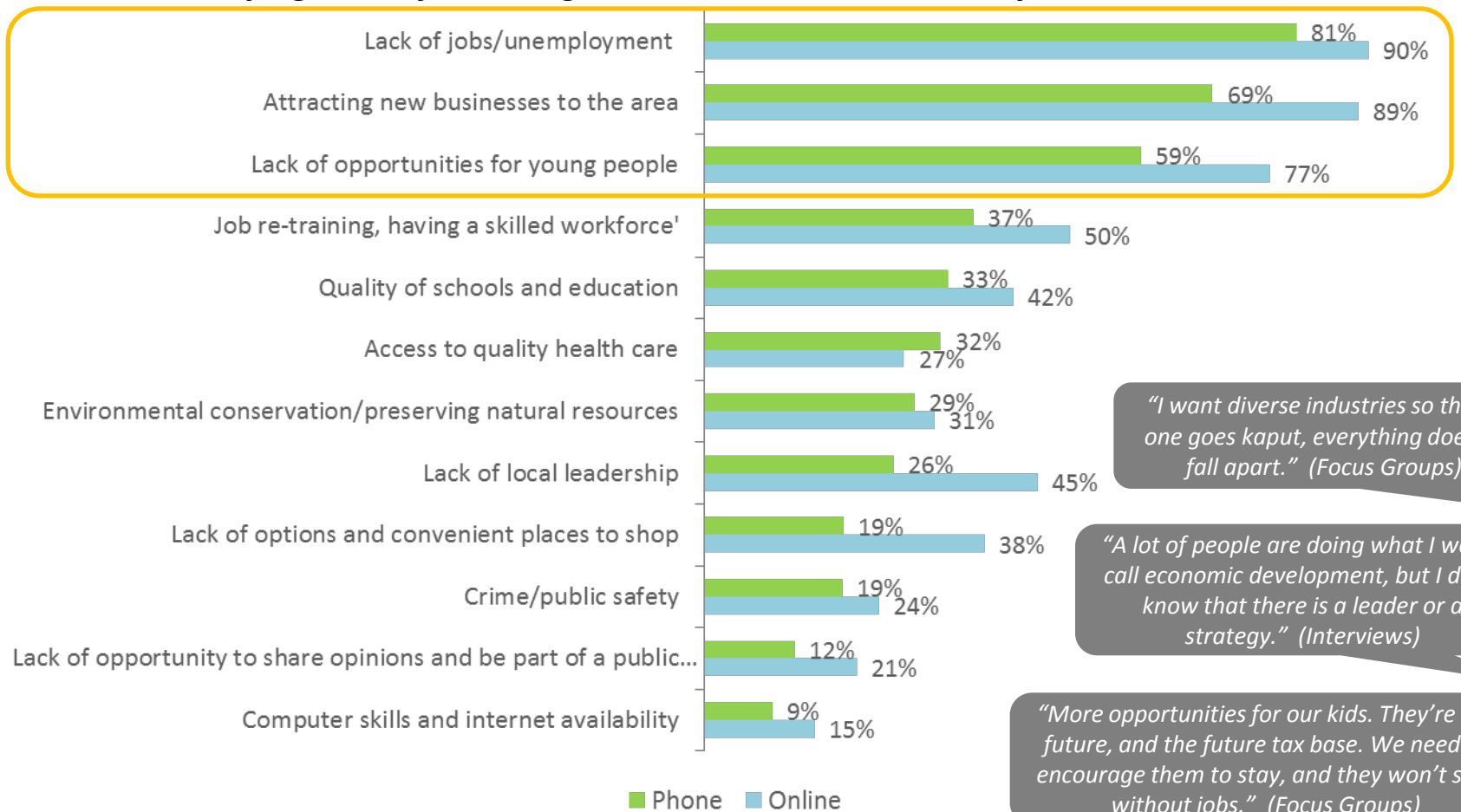


Q: Overall, what do you see as the most important problem facing the community? OPEN END

# Jobs, Economic Development and Lack of Opportunity for Young People Dominate Local Concerns

- Online respondents express more concern about almost every issue

**% saying “one of the things that concerns me most/very concerned”**



*“I want diverse industries so that if one goes kaput, everything doesn’t fall apart.” (Focus Groups)*

*“A lot of people are doing what I would call economic development, but I don’t know that there is a leader or a strategy.” (Interviews)*

*“More opportunities for our kids. They’re the future, and the future tax base. We need to encourage them to stay, and they won’t stay without jobs.” (Focus Groups)*

Q: How concerned are you personally about each of the following issues that may or may not be facing the south Wood County area?  
 One of the things that concerns you most, very concerned, somewhat, not too concerned, not concerned at all.



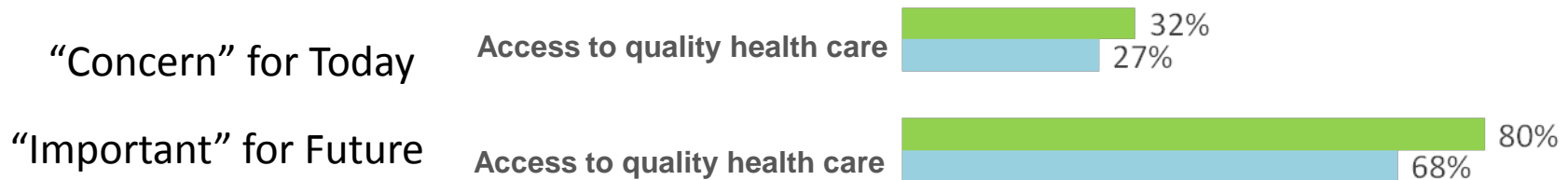
# Areas of Agreement and Disagreement – Across Generations

- All residents agree that lack of jobs and unemployment are the biggest challenges; all are less concerned about education quality
- Older residents express more concern about “lack of opportunities for young people” than young people themselves
- Younger people, more so than older generations, worry about “access to quality health care”

| Phone Survey Data                      | AGE  |       |       |     |
|--|------|-------|-------|-----|
|  | <30  | 30-44 | 45-54 | 65+ |
| % one of the most/very concerning      | <30  | 30-44 | 45-54 | 65+ |
| # respondents answering                | 46*  | 154   | 175   | 125 |
| Lack of jobs/unemployment              | 78%  | 82%   | 85%   | 74% |
| Attracting new businesses to the area  | 48%↓ | 77%   | 71%   | 64% |
| Lack of opportunities for young people | 46%↓ | 57%   | 62%   | 63% |
| Access to quality health care          | 41%↑ | 27%   | 37%   | 29% |
| Quality of schools and education       | 35%  | 34%   | 29%   | 38% |

↑↓ Statistically higher/lower compared to adjacent column.  
Small sample size, data directional.

# If Not a Pressing Concern Today, Healthcare Is Considered Vital for the Future



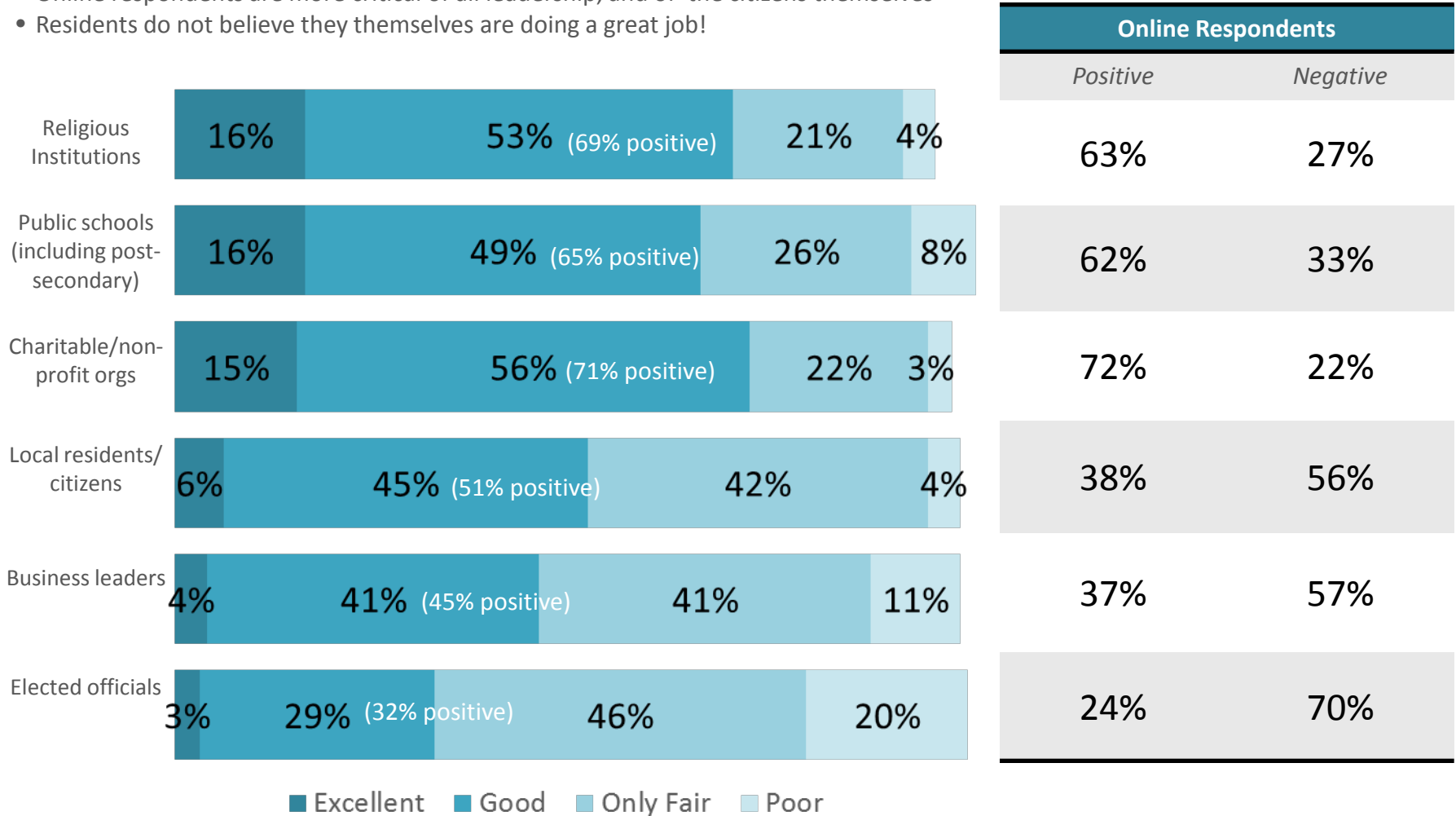
| Phone Survey Data                        | Total | <30  | Single | Unemployed |
|--|-------|------|--------|------------|
| Have Health Insurance                    | 90%   | 67%↓ | 74%↓   | 74%↓       |
| Quality of my health care coverage is... |       |      |        |            |
| Excellent                                | 39%   | 24%↓ | 27%↓   | 30%        |
| Good                                     | 43%   | 47%  | 52%    | 30%        |
| Only Fair or Poor                        | 17%   | 26%  | 16%    | 39%        |

Q: Do you and the people in your household have health insurance?

Q. And how would you rate the quality of your health care coverage, taking into account access, coverage, number and quality of providers in the plan, out of pocket costs, etc?

# Who Is Meeting The Challenges?

- Elected officials and business leaders are least likely to be viewed as addressing the community’s challenges
- Online respondents are more critical of all leadership, and of the citizens themselves
- Residents do not believe they themselves are doing a great job!



Q: How would you rate the job that each of the following people and organizations are doing in addressing the challenges the south Wood County area community faces?

# Participants Across the Focus Groups & Interviews

## Call for Leadership & More Collaboration

### Some Sense Lack of Leadership

*"I don't see elected officials getting out there as much as they could. I know they have a huge job, but maybe they need to be hearing people's viewpoints more." (Focus Groups)*

*"A challenge in the past has been leadership's hesitancy to open the door for businesses. We hear all about the negatives, and from my perspective don't always pursue the positive. That has to change. There has to be openness." (Interviews)*

### Collaboration Is An On-Going Effort

*"I want all of the leadership to be working together and collaborating. From all levels, and being open-minded. From Rapids to Nekoosa to Port to Grand Rapids." (Focus Groups)*

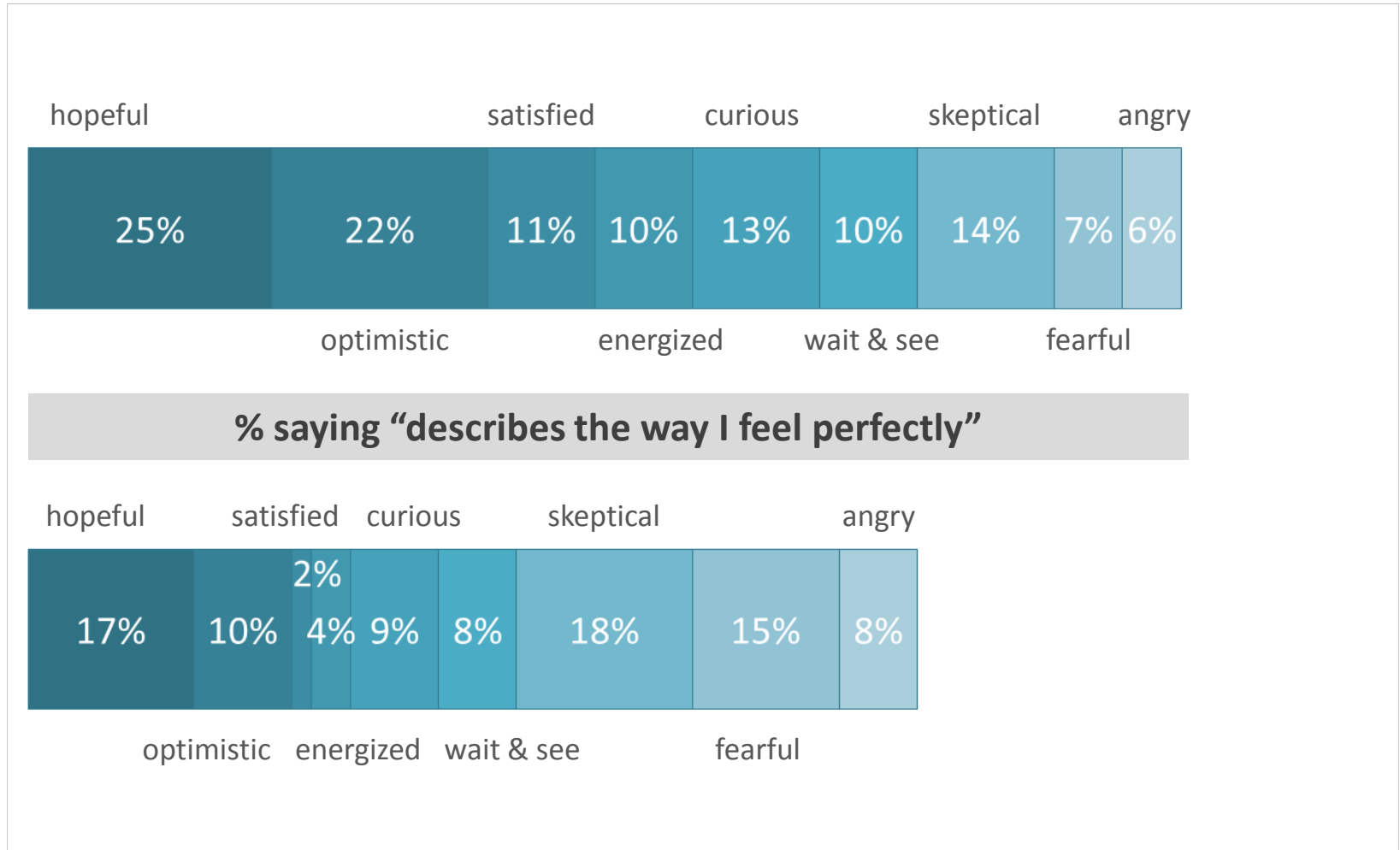
*"There's a history of political division – north and south in the county – that holds us back. It's gotten better, but is starting to percolate again." (Interviews)*

### Examples of Bright Spots

*"For example, we have a mayoral race happening and for the first time that I can recall we have three candidates that I would consider all 'younger' guys. They are stepping up to the plate and saying, 'I will take a crack at this.' That is encouraging to me." (Interviews)*

*"I think of the program at Mid-State for renewable resources. That's been doing quite well. I know a couple people that started businesses after graduation. Maybe that's the wave of the future." (Focus Groups)*

# Mixed Feelings About South Wood County



Q: How well does each of the following words describe your feelings about the way things are going in the area today?

# Residents and Leaders Say “Attitude” Is Part of Building a Brighter Future

*“Realization that things have to change, that we have to expand our horizons -- there is a willingness to do that. People don’t have their heads stuck in the past. There is a good attitude and people feel like we have a future.” (Interviews)*

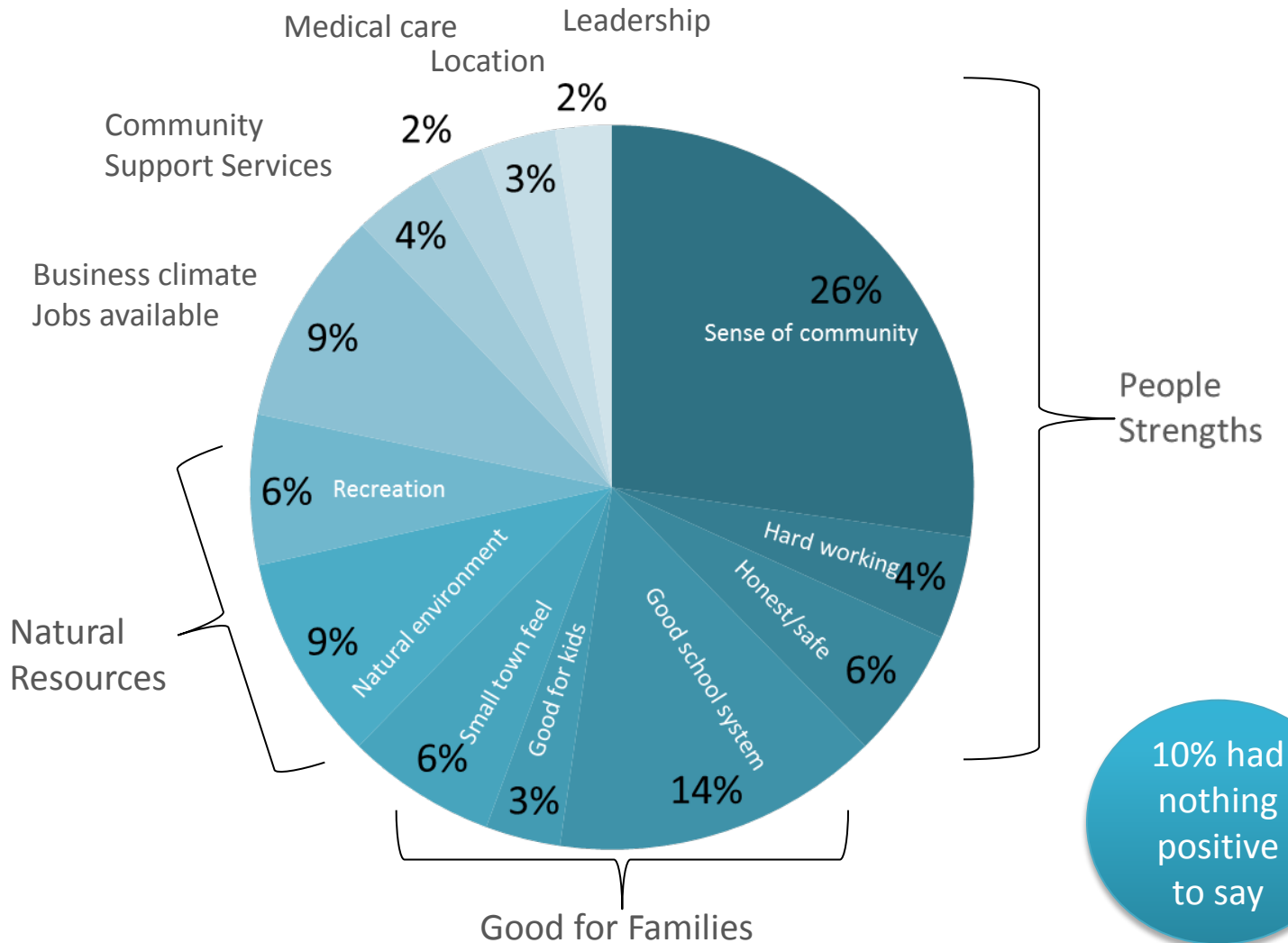
*“We need to get excited about this. We need to get other people excited about this. Just from sitting around the table tonight, I can tell everybody’s excited about what could happen in the future. (Focus Groups)*

*“We need to have a voice, and we need to fight for change. You’d be surprised how much your neighbor, or friend or somebody who doesn’t seem to be a powerful influence in town really can be influential and really can change things.” (Focus Groups)*

*“This community has really grown, not physically but mentally. It took a while. But I think the community is stronger because of that. We’ve had to learn to work together to grow the economy, grow the culture of this community” (Interviews)*

# State of the Community: Assets

# Survey Respondents Volunteered Many Strengths in South Wood County



Q: Overall, what do you see as strengths or positives for the south Wood County area? **OPEN END**



# Focus Group and Interview Participants Have Similar Points of Pride

## Quality of life...

*“There is a lot to offer in this community. It is a great place to live and raise kids. Economically and financially it is not an expensive place to live. We have a lot going for us.” (Interviews)*

## Lesson learned...

*“We had a challenge recruiting, and then we changed our approach. We started pursuing people who had the same beliefs and value systems that people in this area do -- a strong work ethic, good schools, low crime and low cost of living. We stopped apologizing for not having big city shopping and started pointing out the strengths. It has been really effective.” (Interviews)*

## Strong character...

*“The people are friendly, they help one another. If something happens, like when the tornado went through here, people went out and helped others clean up and get back on track. It’s not like Milwaukee, where you don’t even know your neighbors.” (Focus Groups)*

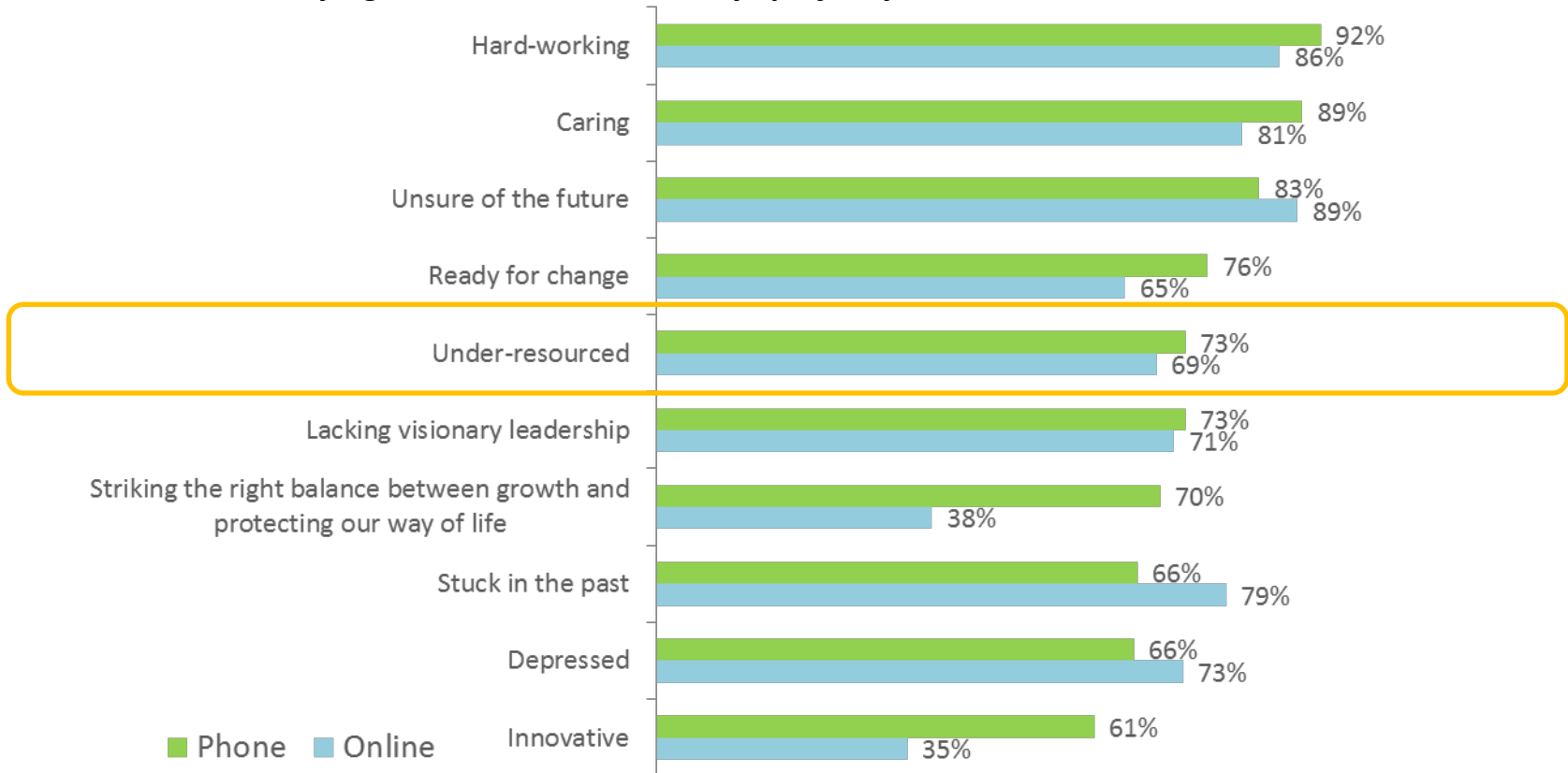
## Natural beauty...

*“I would say natural resources are something special here. I like the lakes, the trails. I’m an outdoor person, and I can run at night and feel safe.” (Focus Groups)*

# In Many Ways, This Community Is Still Defining Itself

- No question this community is hard-working and caring
- While uncertain about the future, residents feel ready for change
- But, on most areas, residents don't have a strong sense (as many people say it is "somewhat stuck in the past" as say "it is innovative")

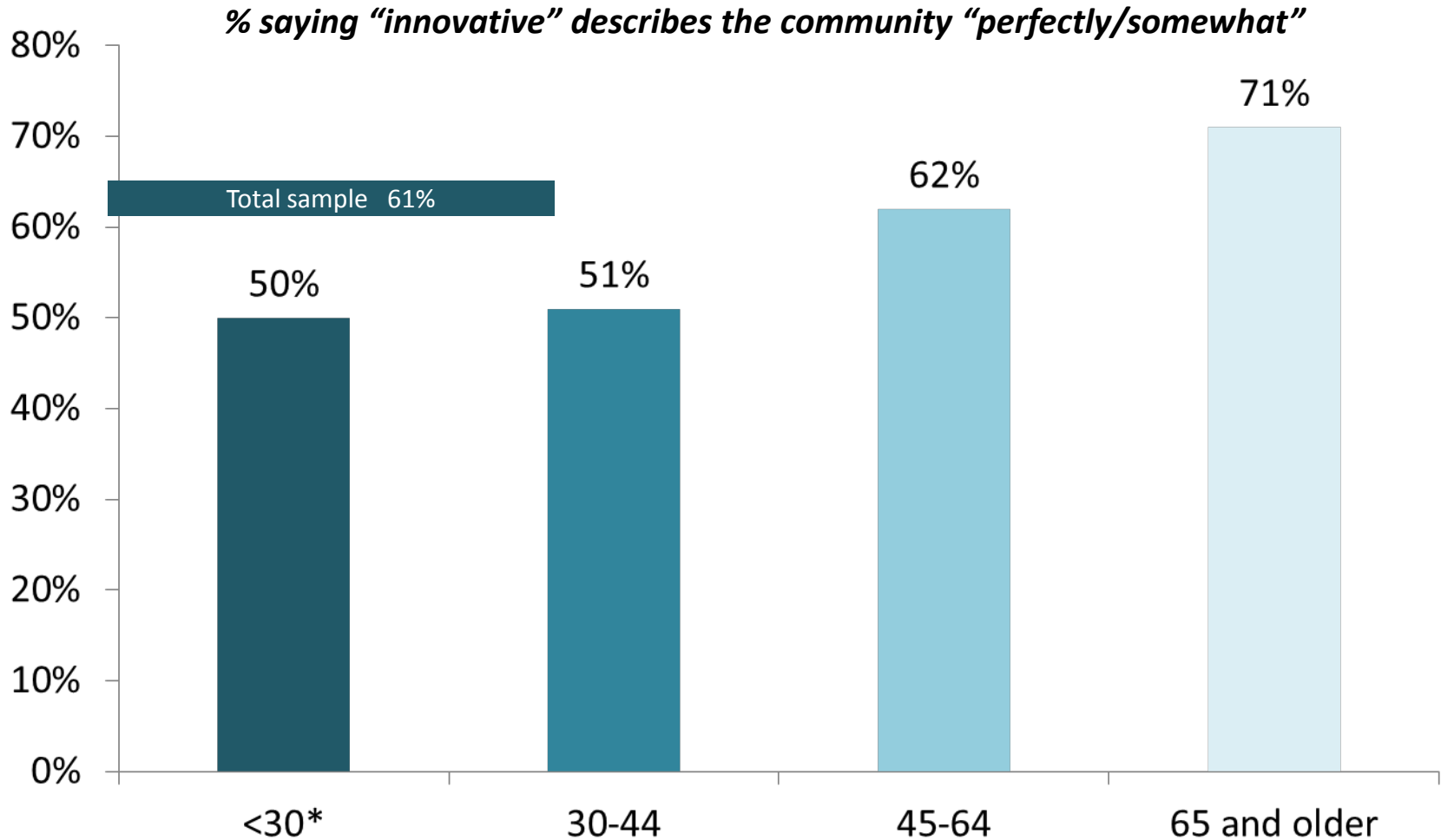
## *% saying describes the community "perfectly/somewhat"*



*Q: Next is a list of words and phrases that could describe the south Wood County area's community. How well do you think each word or phrase describes the community?*

# Perceptions of Innovation

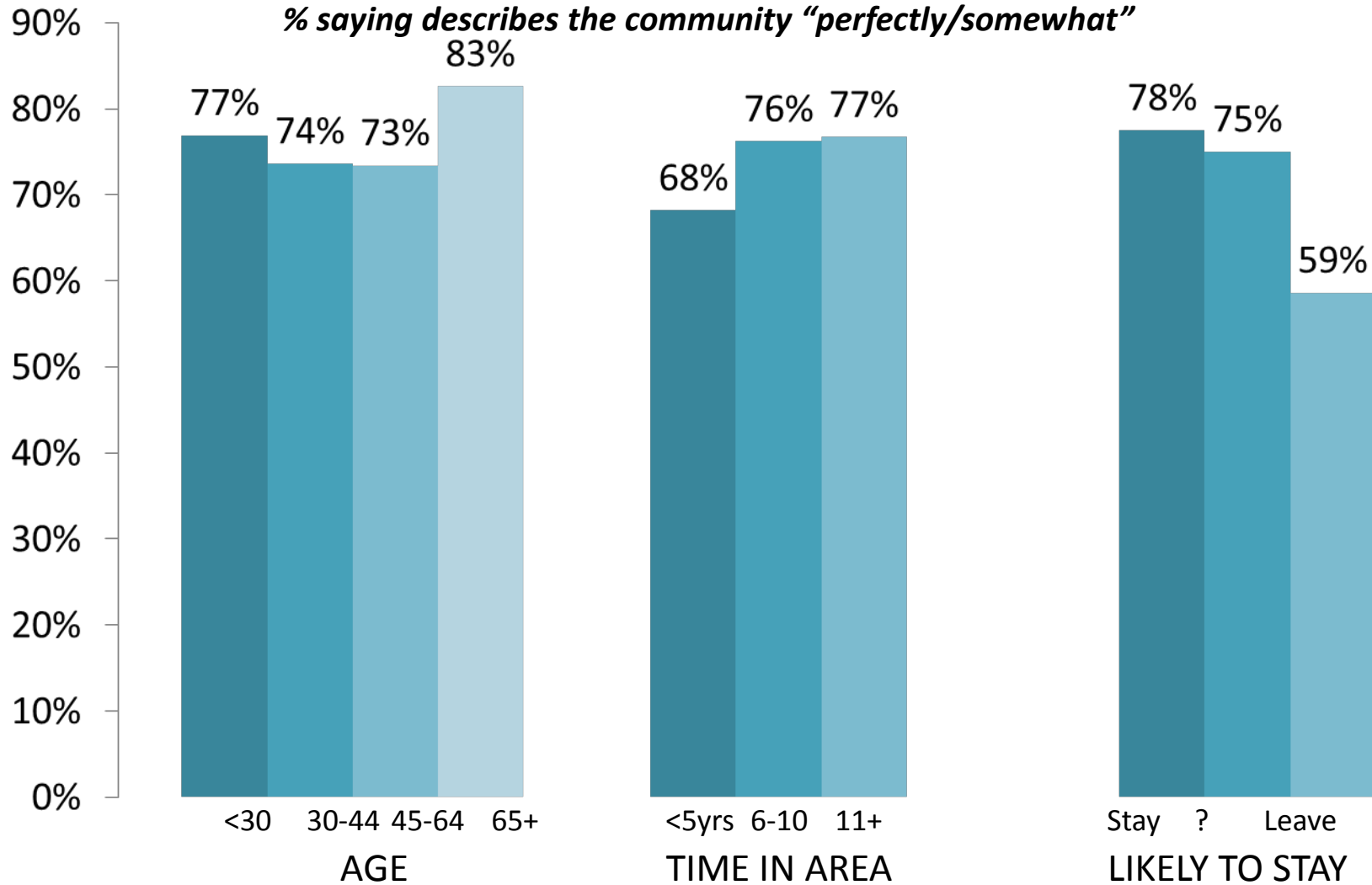
- Younger residents are much less likely to see the community as innovating



- *Indicates small sample size (<50) data should be considered directional*
- *Data from phone survey*

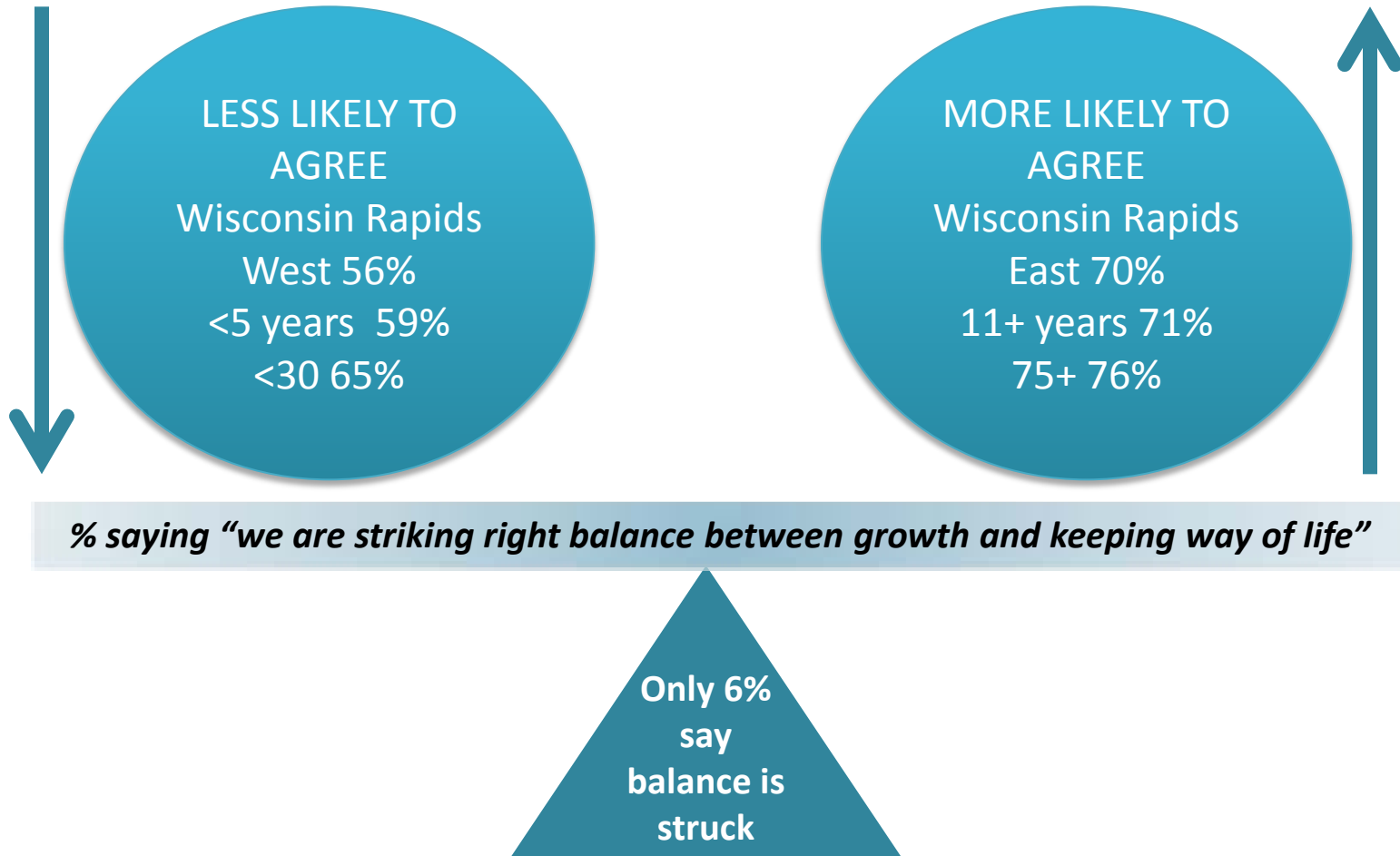
# Enthusiasm for Change Cuts Across Demographics

- All age groups, but especially older residents say this community is ready for a change
- Believing in readiness for change correlates with intent to stay in the area



# Future of the Community: Vision

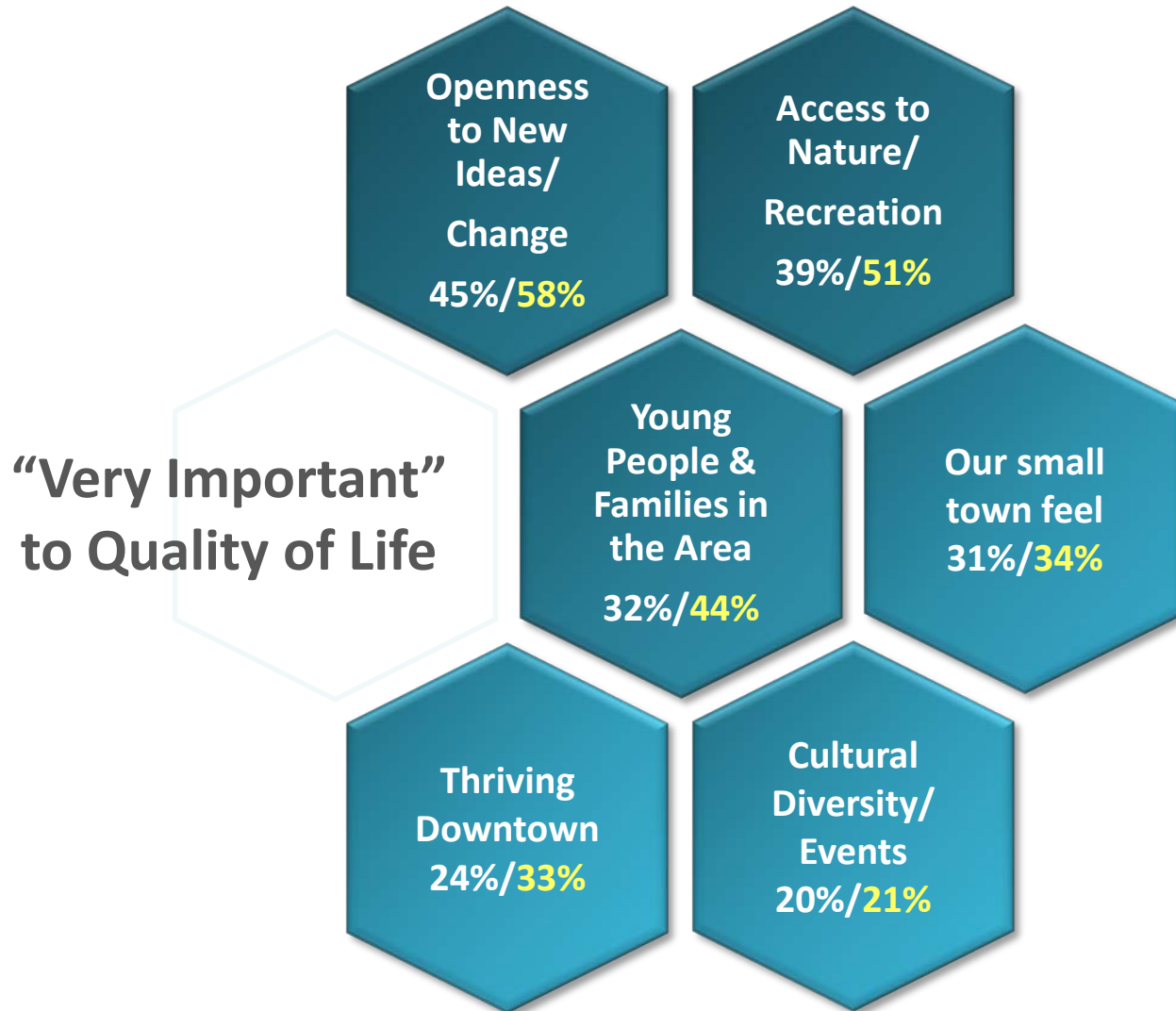
# Striking the Right Balance Now?



Q: Next is a list of words and phrases that could describe the south Wood County area's community. How well do you think each word or phrase describes the community?

Data from phone survey

# Vision: What Makes Quality of Life?

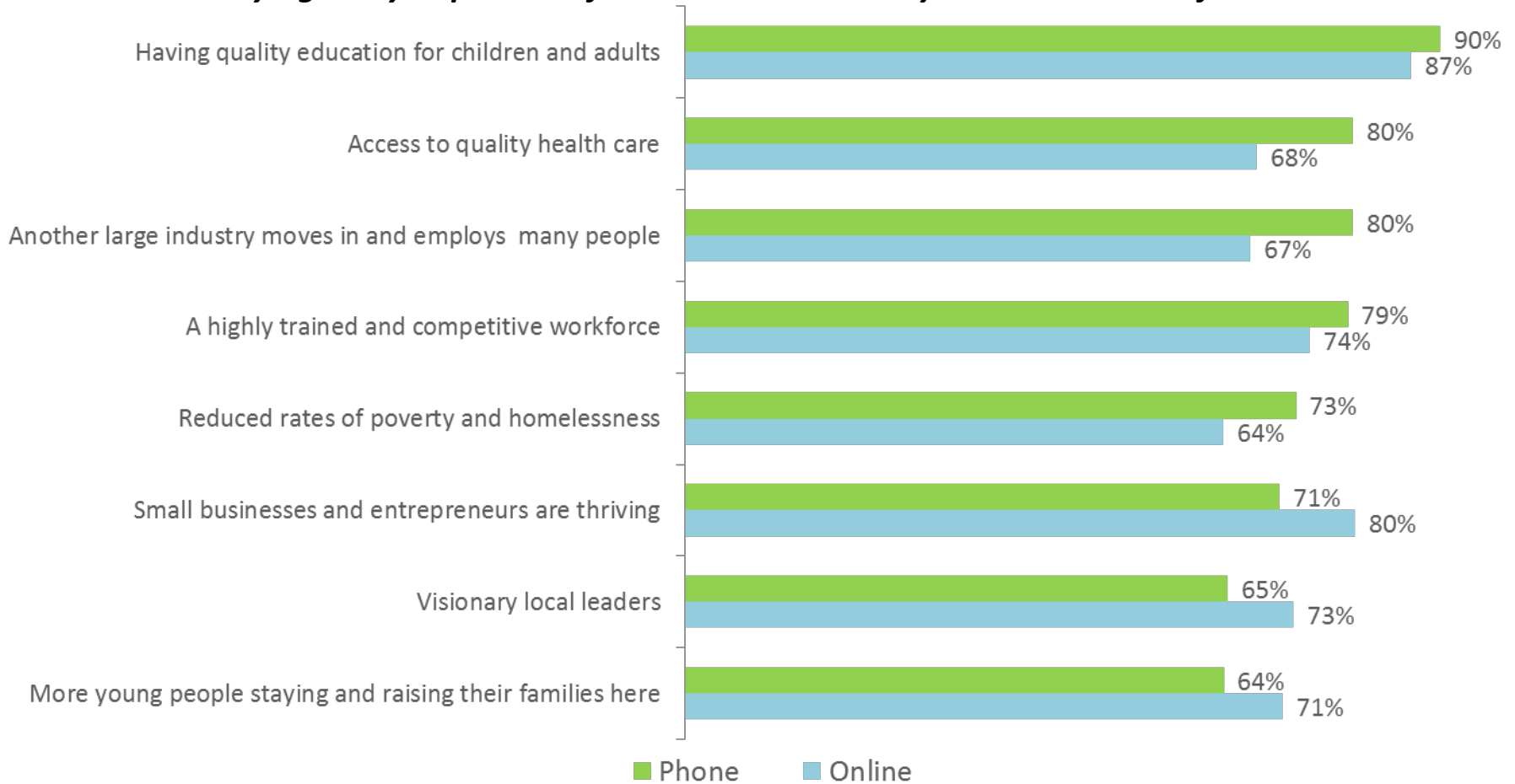


Q: How important is each of the following to your personal quality of life? Very important, somewhat important, not too important, not at all important.  
YELLOW=ONLINE

# Top Tier Priorities Emerge

- Education, quality health care and jobs are the cornerstone wishes for the future
- An economy that includes thriving small business, visionary leadership and more young people making roots also top the list

## **% saying “very important” for South Wood County to achieve in the future**



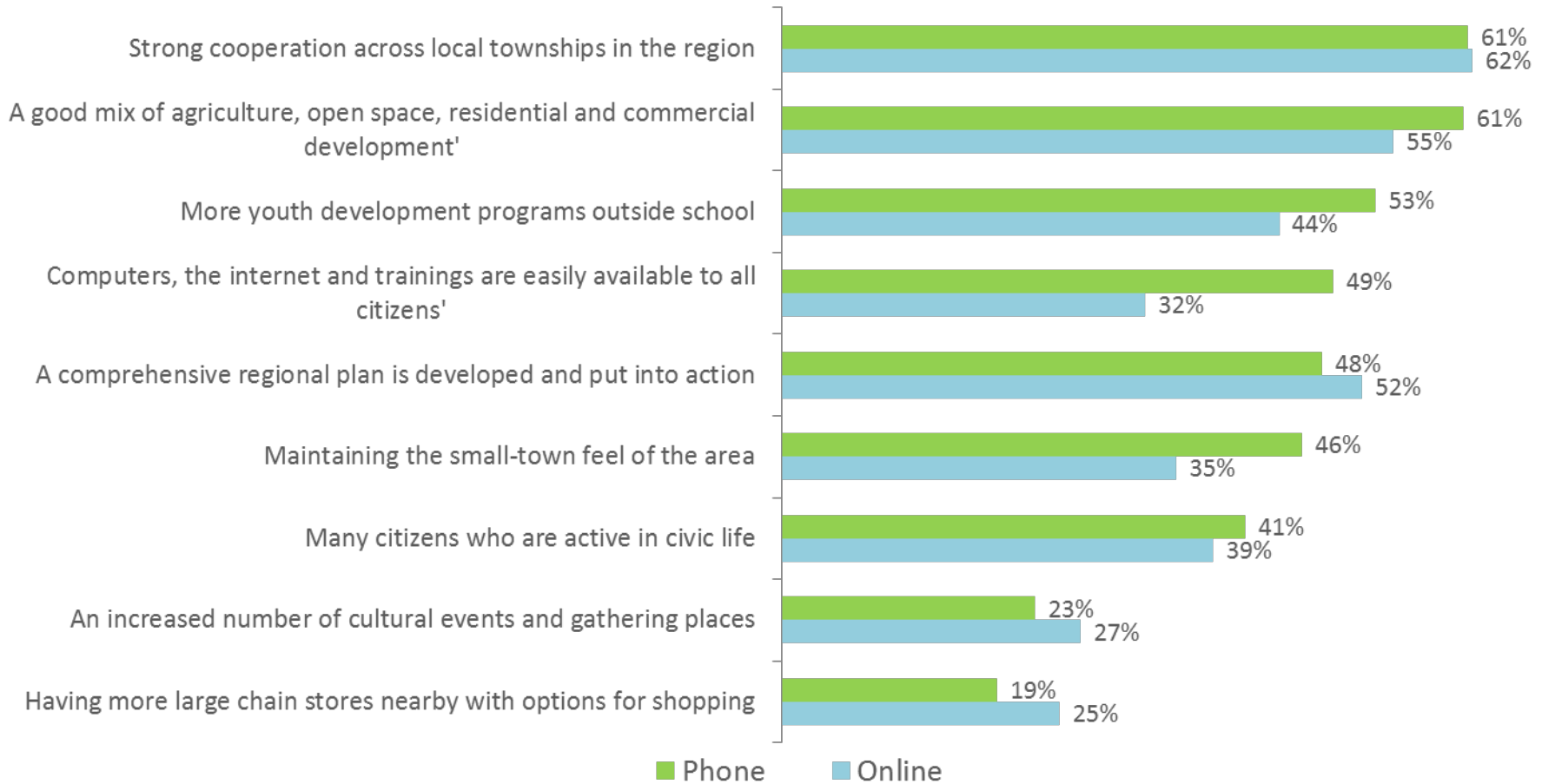
*Q: Next is a list of words and phrases that could describe the south Wood County area's community. How well do you think each word or phrase describes the community?*



# Second Tier Priorities

- More regional cooperation and a balanced mix of development top the list of secondary priorities

## **% saying “very important” for South Wood County to achieve in the future**

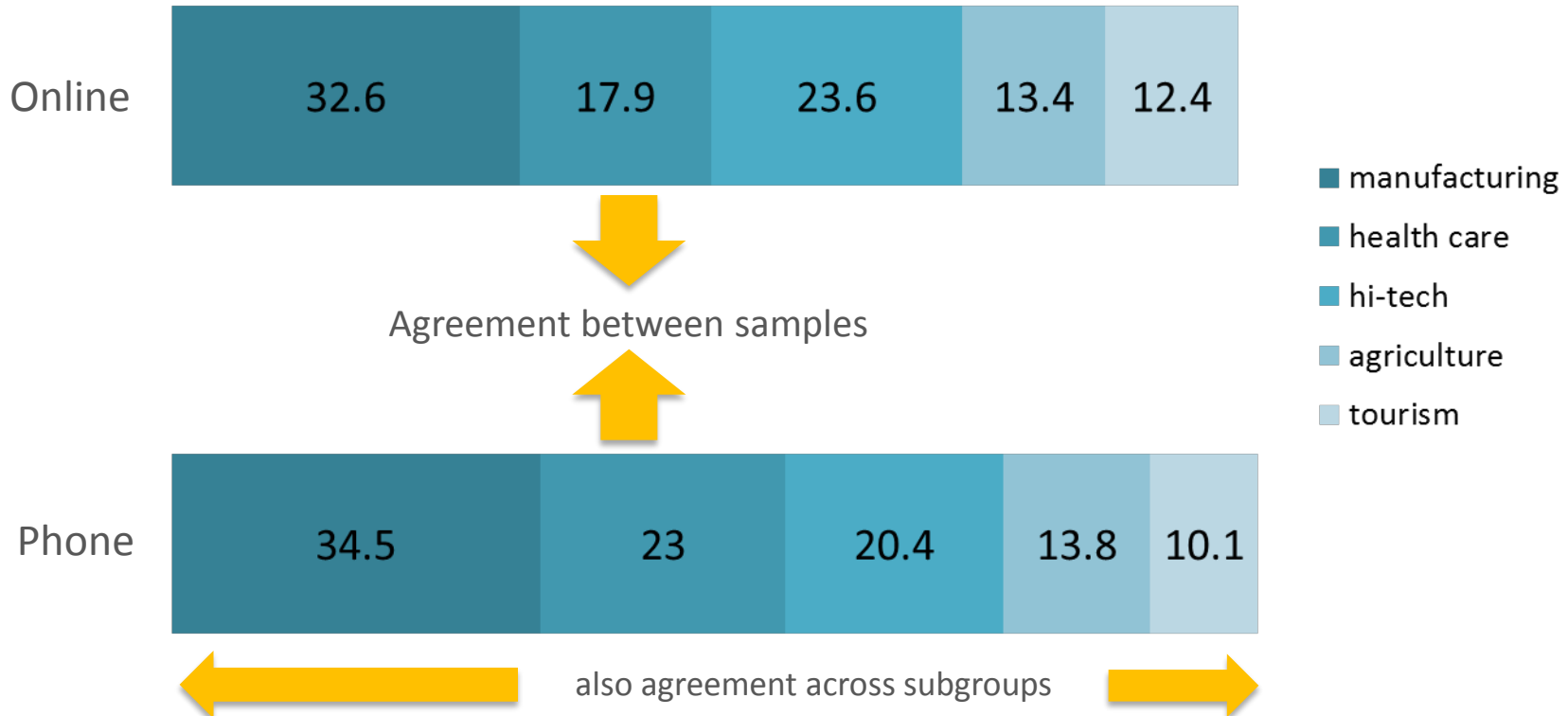


*Q: Next is a list of words and phrases that could describe the south Wood County area’s community. How well do you think each word or phrase describes the community?*

# Desired Economic Mix

- Residents want to maintain a manufacturing base in the local economy

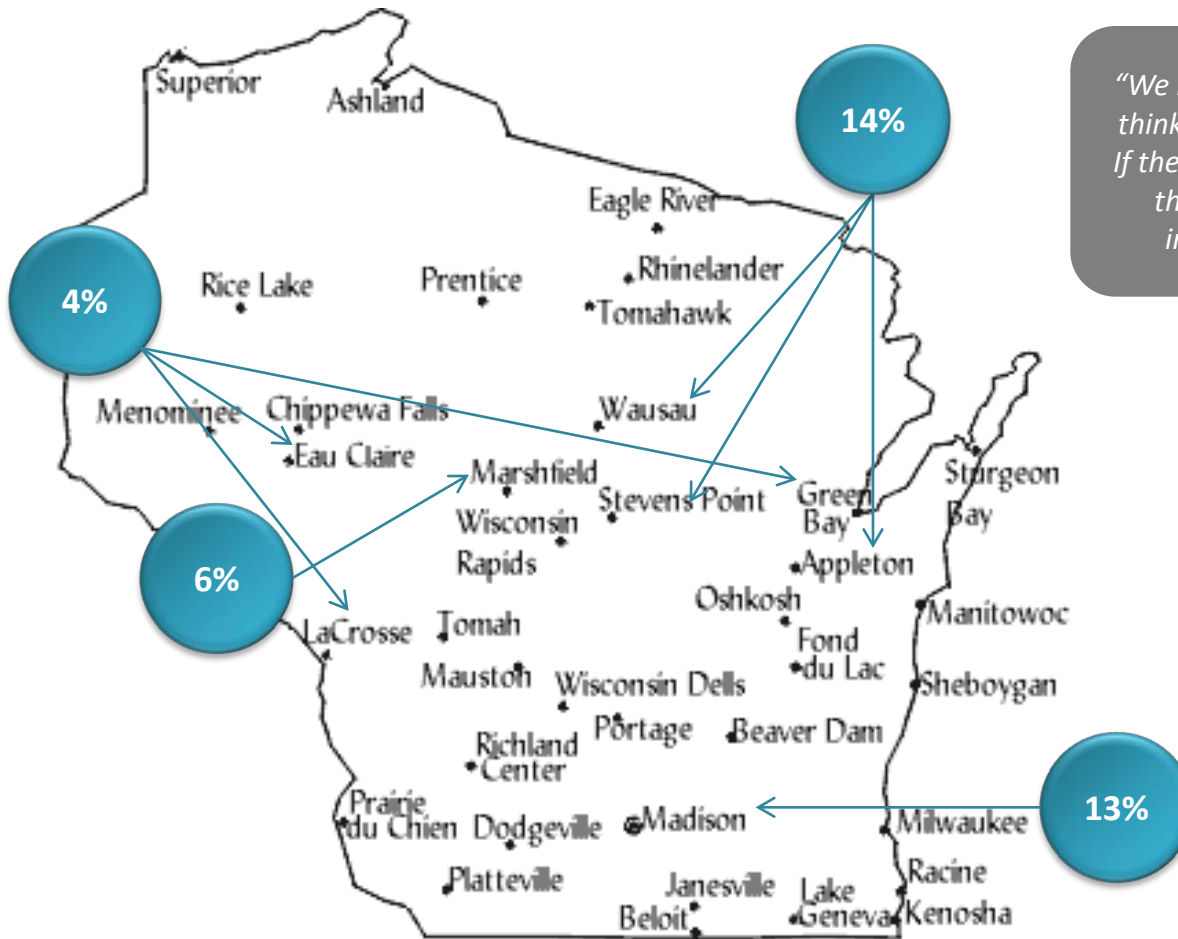
Points assigned out of 100 total to each category



Q. Here is a list of different types of economic growth and jobs. Please assign points to each based on how attractive bringing that type of economic growth and development to the area is to you. You will have 100 points to use. You may assign as many or as few points as you like to each item, but you cannot use more than 100 points.

# Who Is Getting it Right?

- Just a handful of cities are mentioned as models by respondents
- Most (42%) could not think of any



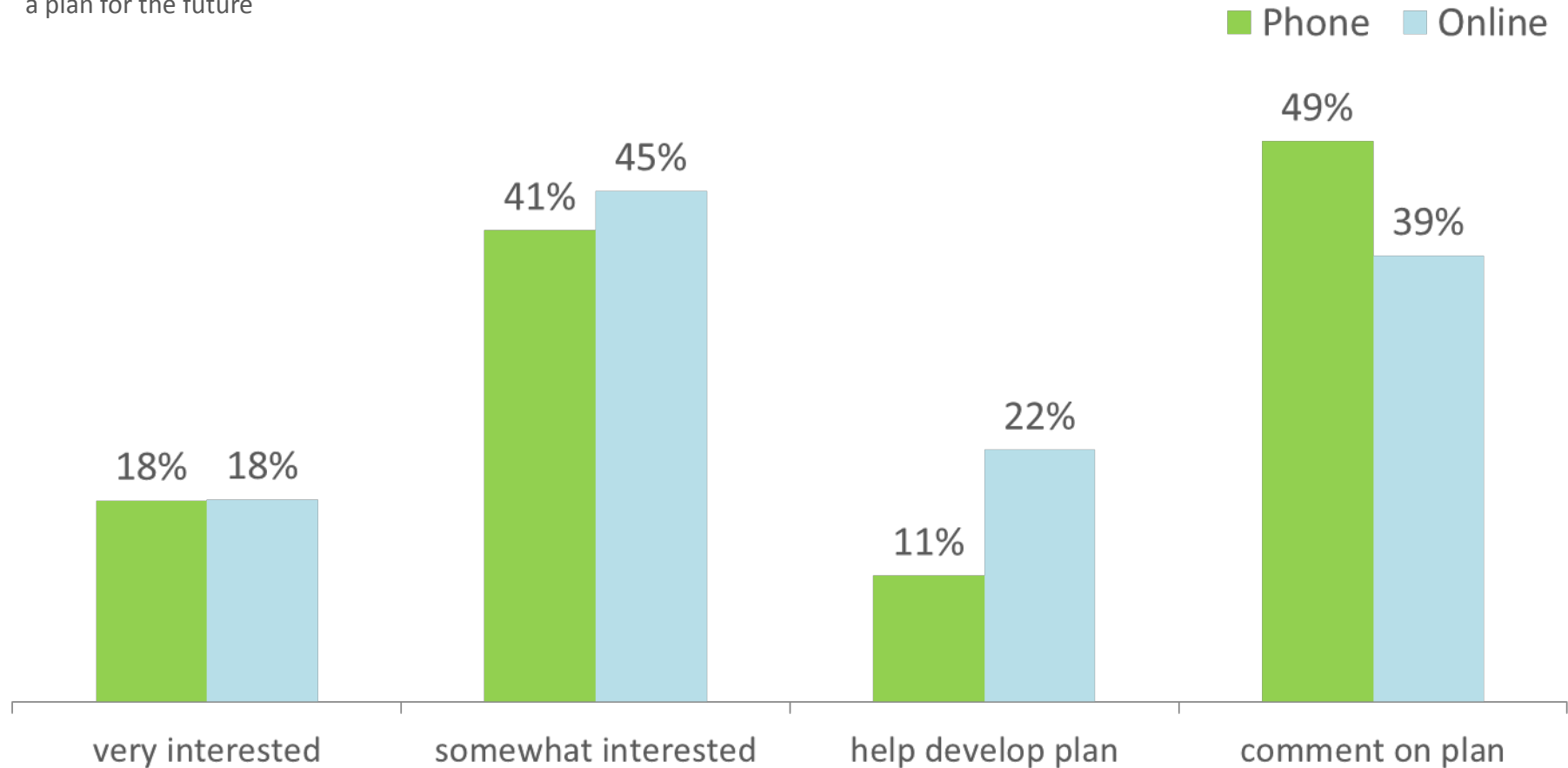
*"We live in Port Edwards. From what I've seen, I think a problem holding Rapids back is mindset. If the mindset is changed then figuring out other things that need to change in terms of the infrastructure can happen." (Interviews)*

*"Look at the Rome area. Look at Plover and Steven's Point. They are so much more forward-thinking. It's amazing to me." (Focus Groups)*

Q. Thinking ahead to how you would like the south Wood County area to be in the future, are there any towns or cities you can name in Wisconsin that have the qualities you would like to see here?

# Who Called The Meeting? You Did!

- More than half of survey respondents are interested in participating in a community meeting
- While most want to comment on plans developed by community leaders, a significant number are willing to help develop a plan for the future



Q: How interested are you in participating in a community meeting -- where you and people like you are asked to share your concerns and discuss ideas for the community?

Q: Which of the following comes closest to your view about working toward a brighter future for the south Wood County area?

# Dialogue Requires a Variety of Voices

*"It's the average Joe, the people that live here now, that need to have a voice. People saying, 'I can do something in this community,' that is where we'll find opportunities." (Focus Groups)*

*"There are young people emerging as community leaders. They understand what they like and what the community needs to attract other young people. They have the ability to do something about it. We have to support them." (Interviews)*

*"There has been an increased amount of dialogue. Community groups are coming together, and sitting down and talking. Is it enough? I suppose it is never enough. That kind of thing starts from the top, with the mayor's office and other leaders." (Interviews)*

# Themes for Discussion



## Strengthen the Economy

- Identified as biggest challenge
- Connect to issues of growth, development, workforce readiness



## Create Opportunity for Young Adults and Families

- Attracting and retaining youth is a widespread concern



## Openness to New Ideas and Change

- Openness was identified as top indicator of quality of life
- 76% are ready for change – but their skepticism will need to be overcome



## Nature and Recreation

- Also a very important indicator of quality of life
- Residents want growth that includes preservation of open space

# Notes

*For additional information, please contact:*

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