

Rural Hoosiers Respond—

How are we doing? How can we do better?

Executive Summary

Citizen input is critical if policy makers are to govern well and to empower the public. Yet rural Hoosiers have never before been surveyed on how they feel about their communities. Consequently, policy makers and others are often left flying blind when it comes to rural Indiana. This report seeks to change that.

In the summer of 2005, Purdue University's Center for Regional Development and Social Research Institute interviewed 2,314 rural Hoosiers for their thoughts about their communities, the issues they face, strategies for improvement, and ways to pay for those strategies. And while answers varied some across regions and demographic characteristics, rural Hoosiers overall think their communities are doing pretty well. At the same time, however, they want them to do even better—and have definite opinions as to how that should be accomplished.

Community Satisfaction

As Figures 1, 2, and 5 show, respondents are satisfied with their communities in many ways—from general attitudes to specific conditions and services. But when asked about the future of the community, only 28 percent were content. In other words, things could be better.

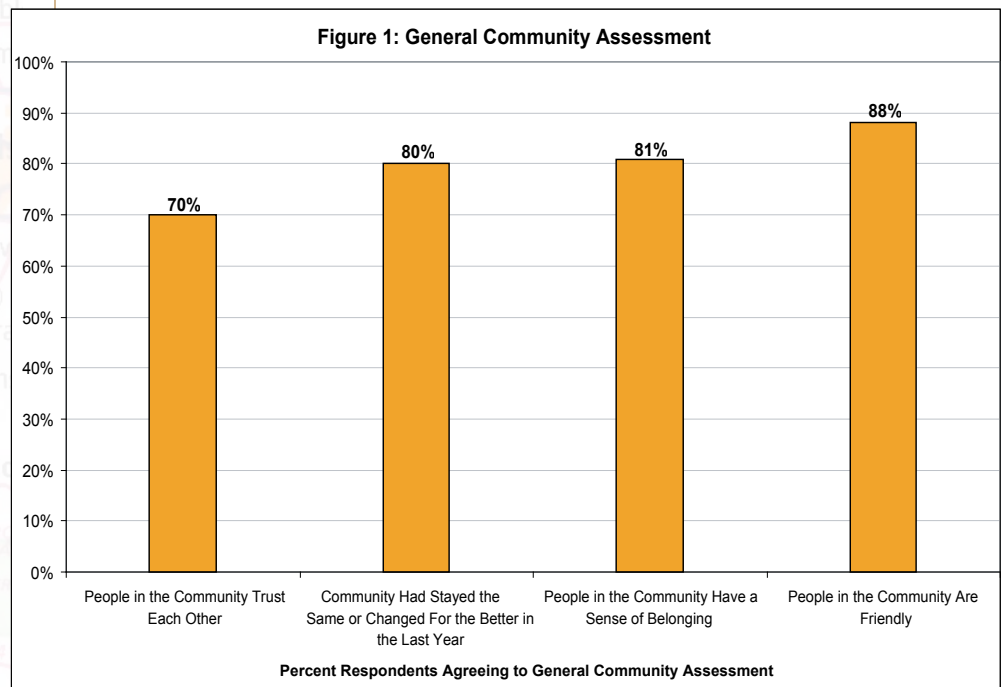




Figure 2: Satisfaction with Community Services

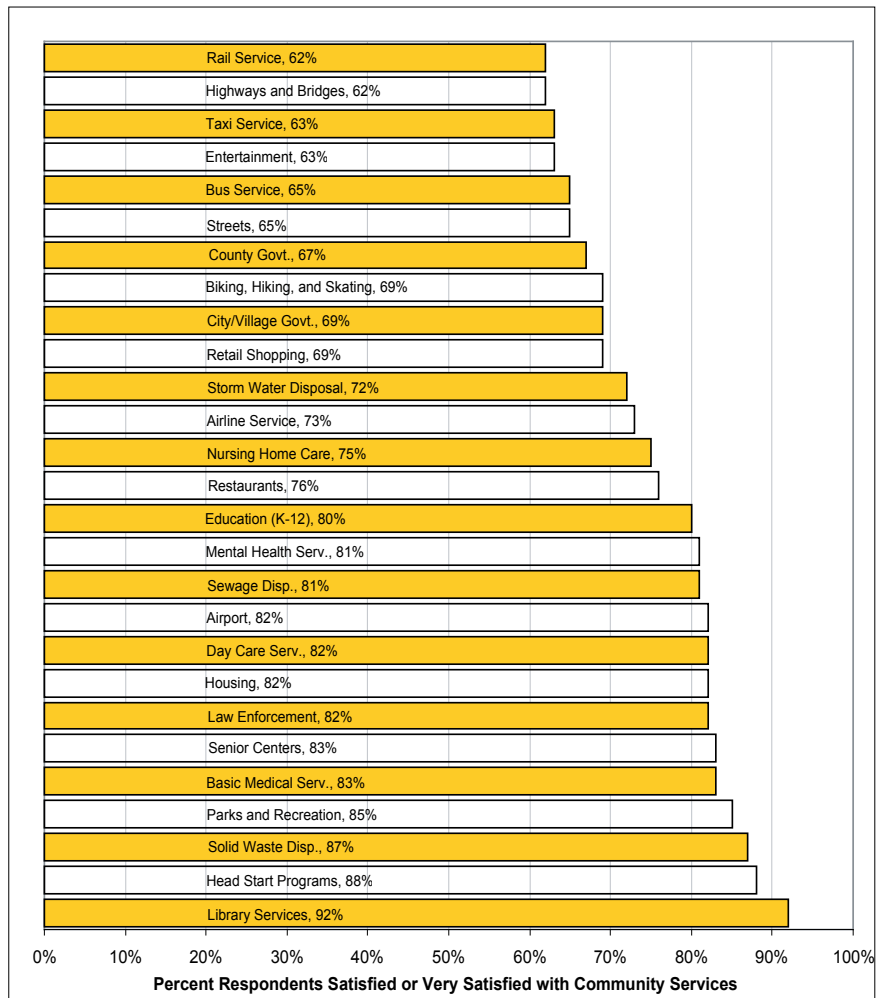


Figure 5: Satisfaction with Community Leadership and Environment

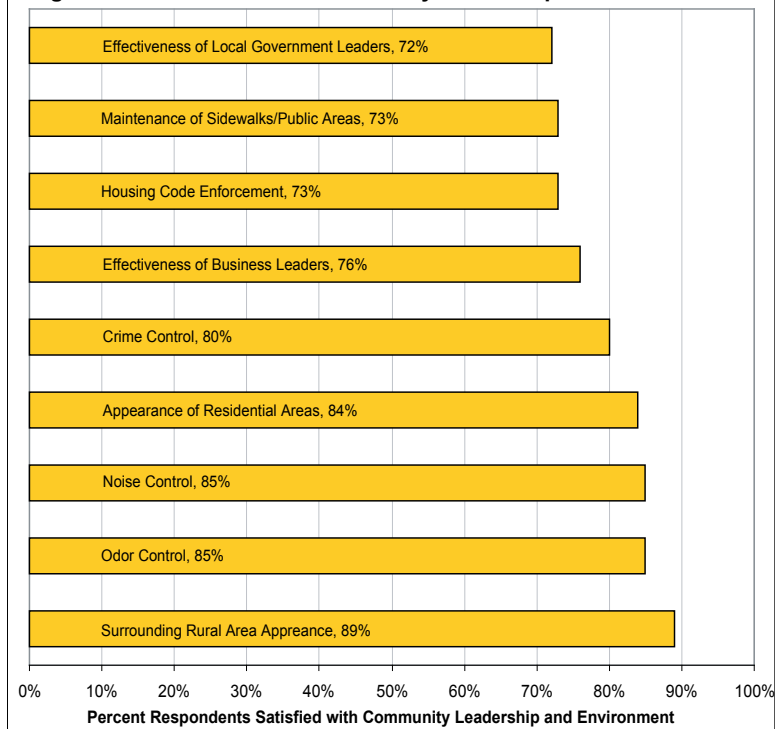
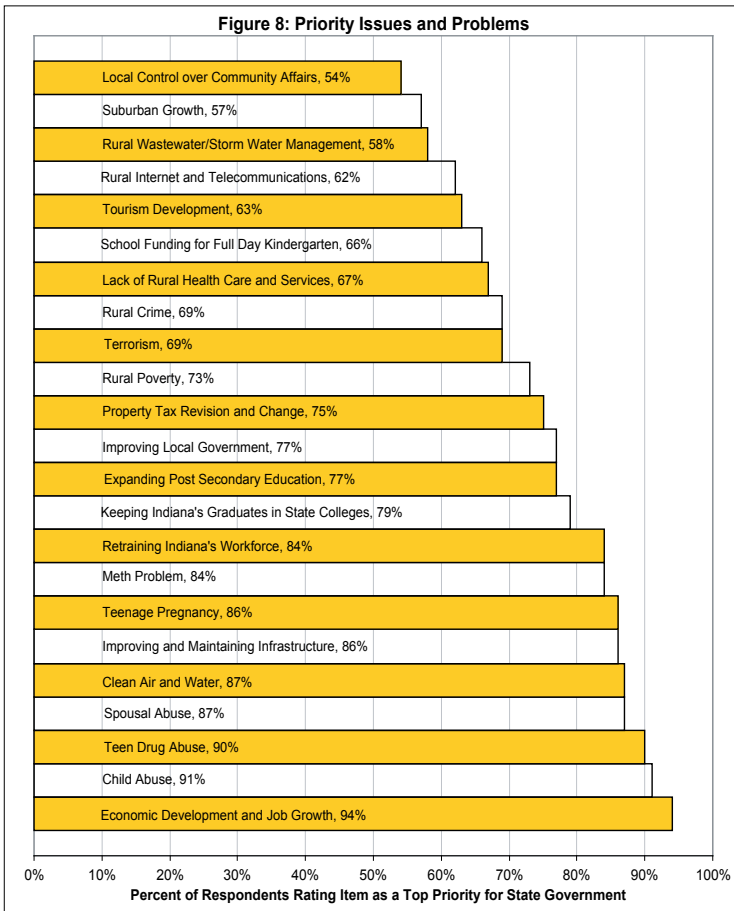


Figure 8: Priority Issues and Problems



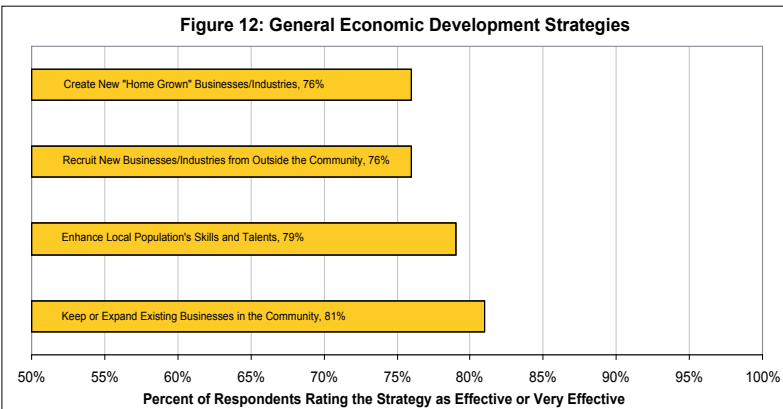
Priority Issues and Problems

Rural Hoosiers do face a rather long list of significant challenges—with 23 issues/problems deemed a top priority by 50 percent or more of respondents (Figure 8). Not surprisingly, economic development topped the list at 94 percent. Sadly, abuse in one form or another took the next three spots.

Addressing Those Issues and Problems

Asked for their opinion of four general economic development strategies, the majority of respondents rated each one as effective or very effective (Figure 12). Respondents were also asked about a seven-point strategy for agricultural development. The overall strategy was well-supported, with six of the seven items receiving majority support (Figure 13). When it comes to specific community development approaches, the results were quite different. Only 6 of 19 strategies got a 50 percent or more rate of approval (Figure 14). There was limited support for strategies more likely to attract outsiders or that were perceived to create environmental risks, e.g., prisons, casinos, confined hog operations, and landfills.

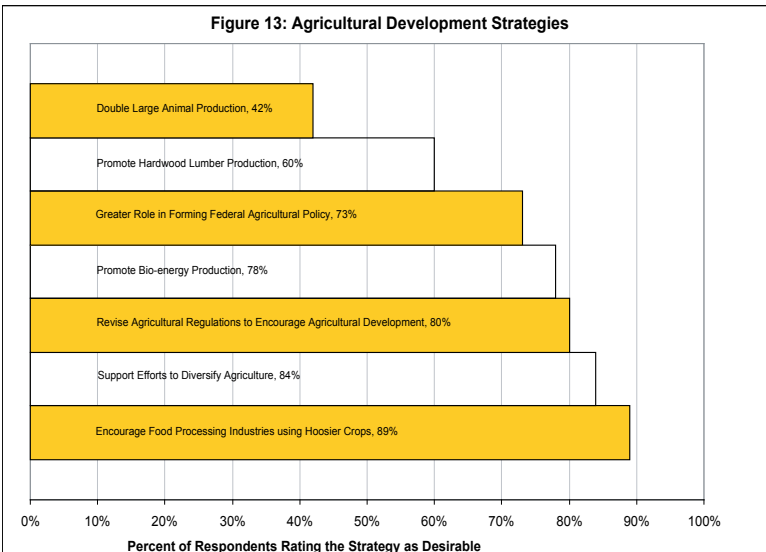
Figure 12: General Economic Development Strategies



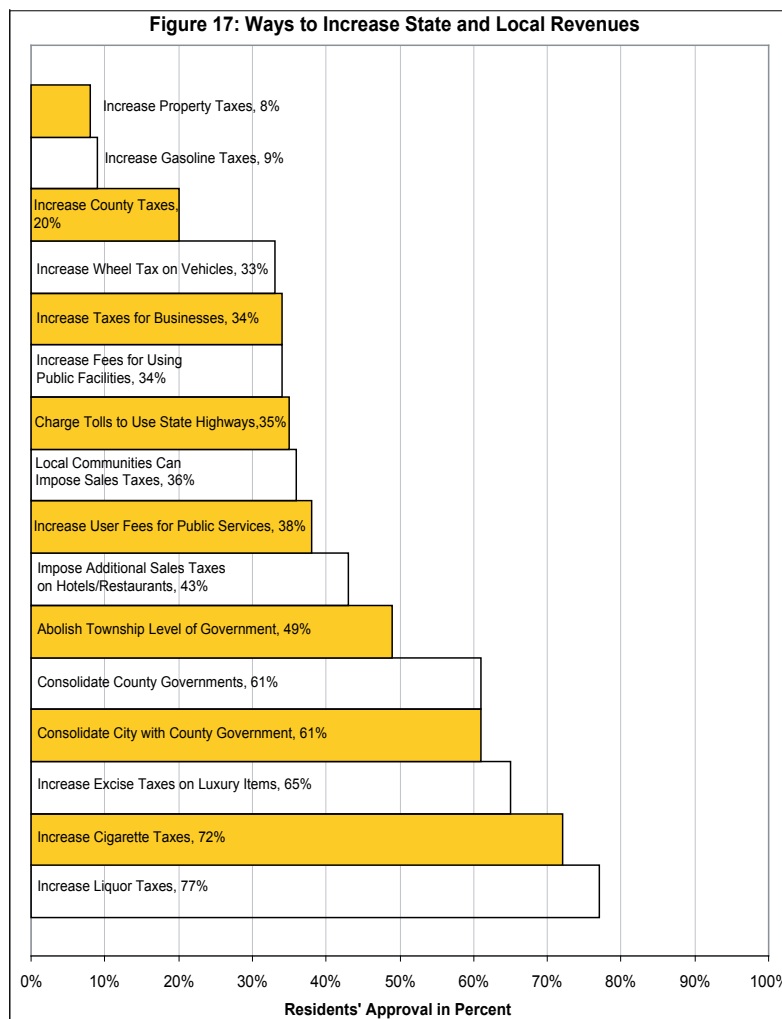
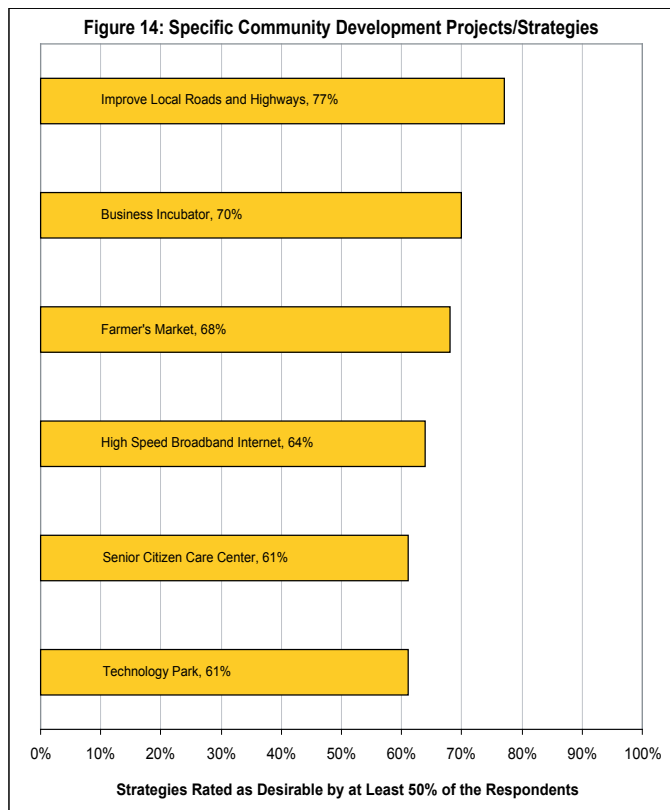
Connection to RISE 2020

While the rural poll is independent of the RISE 2020 Rural Indiana Strategy for Excellence, the two are complementary. RISE 2020 represents a big picture view, or a strategic framework, built upon a united rural voice and containing seven pillars: regional frameworks; civic leadership and engagement; asset-based community development; innovation and entrepreneurship; diversity, access, and inclusiveness; youth engagement; and wealth creation and retention.

Figure 13: Agricultural Development Strategies



If applied wisely and creatively, these pillars can be used to address most if not all of the priority issues and problems identified by poll respondents. Similarly, many of the development strategies fall under one or more of the pillars. Indeed, the pillars were intended to be flexible enough to allow for just that. For example, asset-based community development could address a large share of the priority issues and problems. Likewise, nearly every development strategy could be cast in such a way as to develop a community's existing assets. Innovation and entrepreneurship also encompasses many of the development strategies.



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Paying for It All

When it comes to raising governmental revenue (to pay for development efforts, among other things), residents were less than enthusiastic about the options. At the local level, respondents favored strategies that put the bite on someone else (Figure 17). At the state level, large majorities favored “sin” taxes, while simple majorities supported consolidating governments.

Conclusion

Rural Hoosiers have now spoken. And while the survey shows that they are satisfied overall with their communities, they want them to be better. Furthermore, they have identified which issues and problems they see as priorities, and have stated their preferences on ways to address those priorities. This information—combined with the RISE 2020 framework—and a commitment from local leaders, government, non-profits, and others can help create a bright future for rural Indiana. This will be of benefit to all Hoosiers.

The Indiana Rural Poll is part of a larger rural development project that was funded by the Indiana Rural Development Council and the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

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