

FINAL REPORT

Needs Assessment Survey for Saint Croix County, Wisconsin

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November 2014



Introduction

In June 2014, a new Community, Natural Resources, and Economic Development (CNRED) educator was hired after nearly a one year vacancy of the post. In September 2014, a Needs Assessment survey was sent out by the Saint Croix County UW Extension office to 251 local government leaders and stakeholders to identify priority issues related to governance, economic development, and community development for Saint Croix County, Wisconsin. The purpose of the needs assessment was to build a better understanding of priority issues to inform the development of education programming for the UW Extension CNRED Educator for Saint Croix County. The survey asked about the usefulness of various educational services that the extension educator might provide. The aim was to help match useful educational services with priority issues to build an effective educational program. The survey results are presented and discussed in the following sections.

Method

The survey provided a list of issues for each category of question (economic development, community development, and governance).¹ Each respondent was asked to identify the issue as a strength or weakness, and then rank its priority. The average for each priority was used to rank the issues overall. The ranking results were further analyzed based on whether they had been identified as a strength or weakness and how those results compared to the overall assessment. This allowed for an understanding of which issues may be of particular importance to a specific area (although the particular area could not be identified).

Full results are presented in the appendix with three different graphs and a data table. The first graph lists the issues by priority ranking when considering all responses, but also includes their ranking depending on whether they were classified as a strength or weakness. This is the primary graph for understanding the priorities. For the extension services, no strength or weakness designation was requested. This initial graph is accompanied with a data table reporting the numerical averages for each category (all, strength, or weakness) and a color-coded representation of the rankings. This table illustrates how priorities changed according to whether each issue was identified as a strength or weakness. The second graph reports the number of people classifying each issue as either a strength or a weakness. The final graph reports the number of people assigning each issue either the highest or second highest priority ranking.

Response

Of the 251 surveys sent out, 41 were returned completed for a response rate of 16.3%. While lower than hoped, this falls within the typical range for a mailed needs assessment survey. Respondents were asked about the number of years they had lived in Saint Croix County and the number of years they had worked at their current organization. There were 31 responses to the years living in St. Croix County and

¹ A copy of the survey is included in the appendix.

29 responses to the years at current organization. The graphs below illustrate the distribution of responses across the different year categories. The vast majority of respondents were from township governments, and these results show that people involved in local government are long-term residents of the county. This indicates a potential opportunity to increase involvement of newer residents in local government activities.

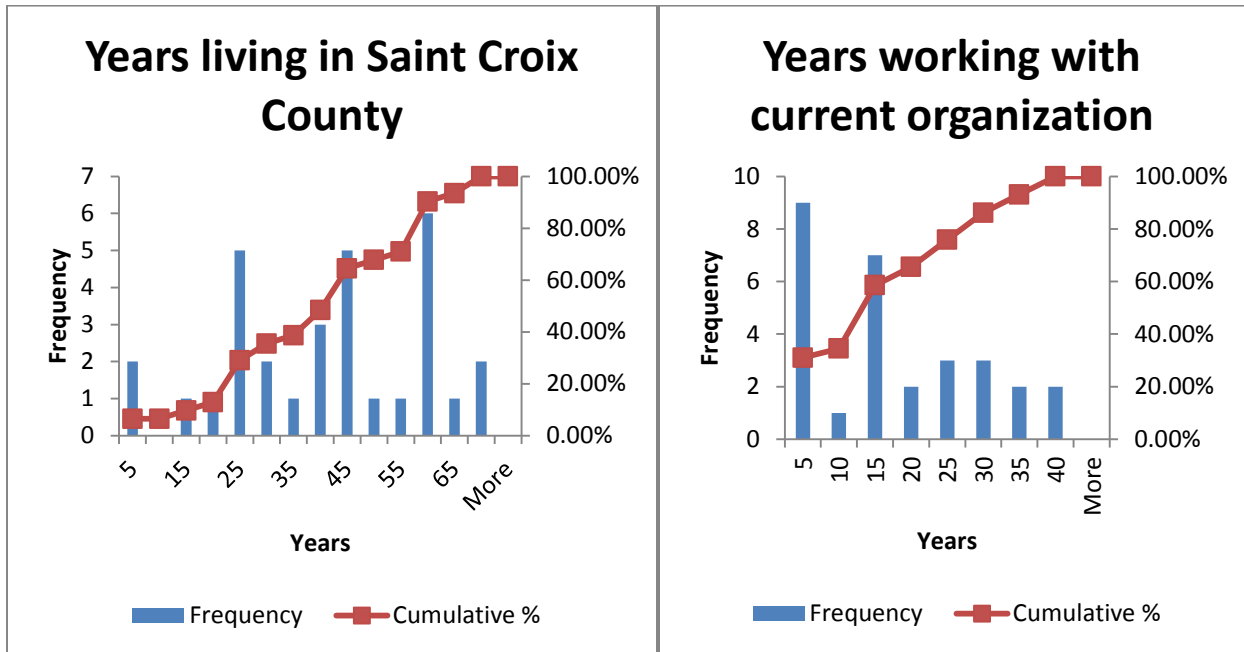


Figure 1. Year living in Saint Croix County and Years Working in Current Organization

Type of Extension Support

The survey sought to identify which types of extension support are perceived as most useful. The different subjects for potential extension education support were ordered according to the sum of votes for the two most useful categories (Table 1). Figure 2 illustrates the frequency distribution of different responses for each category. The results indicate that stakeholders view strategic planning, business and economic development, and local government education as being the most useful types of extension report. Stakeholder engagement is also a top type of support, but was the only category to receive significantly fewer responses than the other categories. It is not clear why stakeholder engagement received the lower response rate. These results give clear guidance for priority in the development of extension support. Finally, while a ranking was achieved, no single type of support was eliminated from being considered. The type of support will be dependent upon the issue being addressed.

Table 1. What type of UW Extension educational outreach would be most useful?

<i>1=Not 2=Less 3=So-So 4=Helpful 5=Very</i>	Rank
1. Strategic planning	1
2. Business and economic development	2
3. Local government education	3
4. Stakeholder engagement	4
5. Natural resource management	5
6. Community development	6
7. Leadership training	7
8. Change management	8
9. Information and data provision	9
10. Organizational development	10
11. Plan implementation	11

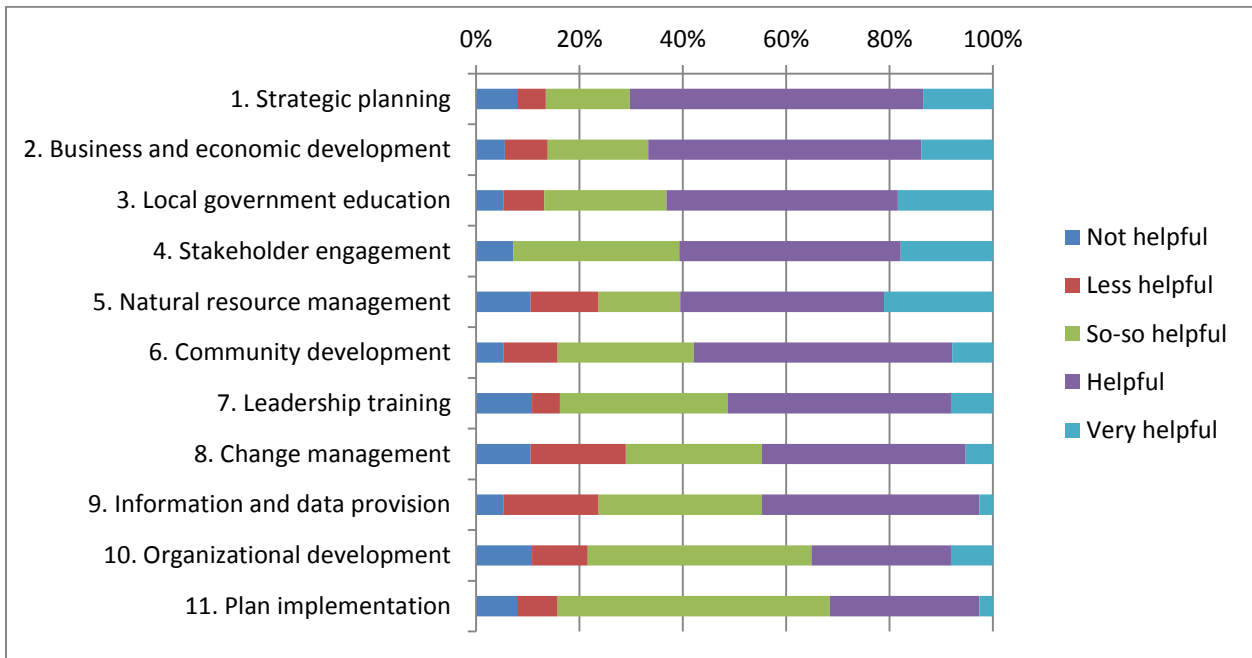


Figure 2. Distribution of Responses for Type of Extension Support

These responses help to identify the general areas of support, the other sections of the survey were designed to identify the specific issues that need to be addressed in the county. Cross referencing the identified priorities with the ranked extension services will help shape extension education programming opportunities.

Governance Issues

The section on Governance issues was designed to identify the key issues surrounding local governance and to determine whether they were viewed as a strength or a weakness. No distinction was made about whether the strength or weakness applied to the county as a whole or a specific locality. Figure 3 presents the priority rankings for governance issues in Saint Croix County based on average ranking scores for both strength and weakness with each issue also reporting the separate ranking based on whether the respondent classified each issue as a strength or a weakness. Issues with greater disparity in those classifying a strength or weakness indicate a likely need to identify specific locations, while issues with similar reporting numbers for strength and weakness can be interpreted as county wide issues.

Issues that received the highest overall priority rankings include: leadership skills, budgeting and financial management, intergovernmental cooperation, and decision-making procedures. This corresponds well to the finding that local government education is viewed as a useful type of service provided by extension. Public trust in and support for local government was ranked second highest in priority driven by those who viewed it as a weakness. Alternatively, “people with adequate leadership skills” was driven largely by people who viewed it as a strength of the county. **This indicates a need for leadership skills in reaching out and building trust among the public.** Both strategic planning and engagement of residents in planning issues were ranked relatively low compared to extension services for strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. This indicates that **strategic planning and engagement of residents in planning issues are more likely localized issues rather than county-wide issues.** Interestingly, organizational development is ranked near the bottom despite it being identified highly in the visioning session for the CNRED position.

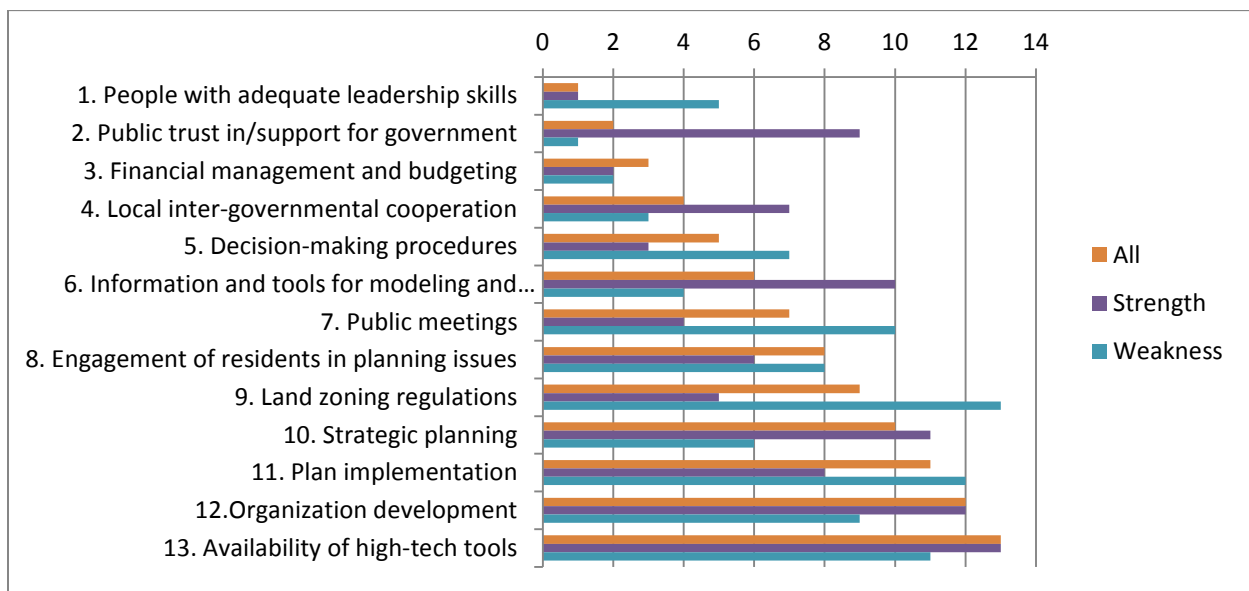


Figure 3. Priority Rankings for Governance Issues

Economic Development Issues

The economic development issues section sought to identify priority issues related to potential support for entrepreneurs and small business and economic development activities for the county and its municipalities.

As shown in Figure 4, the top three priority issues for economic development were 1) business retention; 2) small business and entrepreneurial support; and, 3) business attraction and expansion. It is interesting that all three of these issues were driven by those who saw them as weaknesses for the county. In fact, economic development issues had the greatest divisions among those seeing things as strength or weakness (compared to governance or community development issues), which indicates divisions in how economic development is viewed within the county.

Workforce quality and availability was ranked right in the middle, almost equally by those seeing it as a strength or weakness. Some sources report area businesses viewing workforce availability as a major constraint to developing business in the county or region. On the other end, those seeing tech industry support and tourism sector support as strengths for the county ranked them highly, while those who saw them as weaknesses ranked them very lowly. This division in support is especially wide for tourism sector support.

In general, all economic development issues were classified significantly more often as a strength than as a weakness – except for job creation and opportunities. This is related to the second highest ranked useful extension service for business and economic development. It will be useful to consider citizen surveys and comprehensive plans to ensure proper alignment with the interests of the county and its localities.

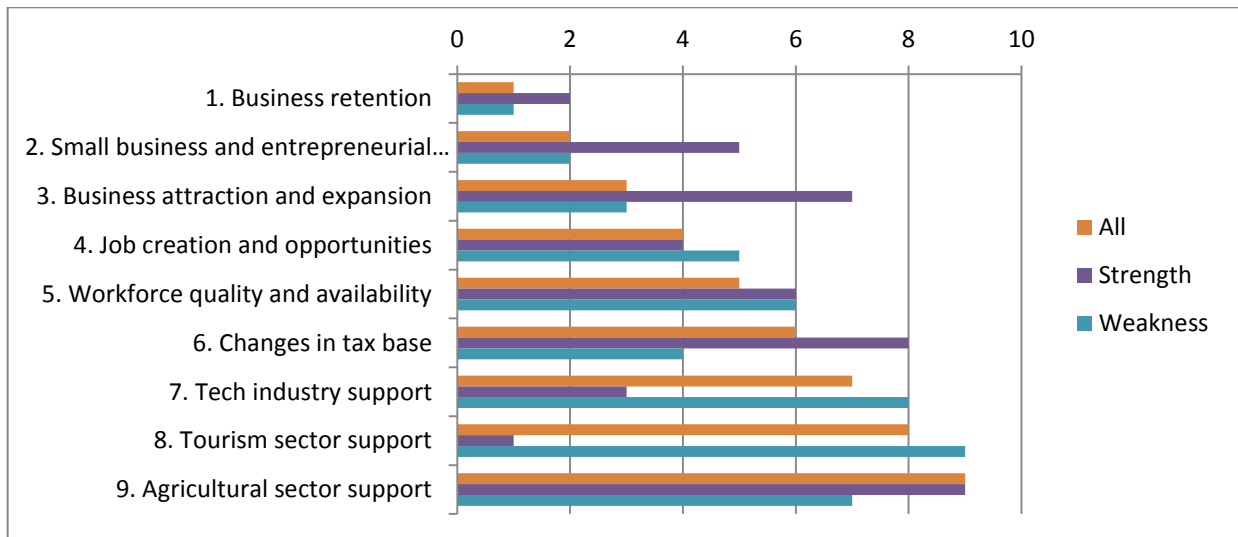


Figure 4. Priority Rankings for Economic Development Issues

Community Development Issues

Figure 5 shows, the highest ranked community development issues are related to infrastructure, especially roads, communication and broadband, and school. Education and skills development and Schools were ranked 4th and 5th highest priority, which were driven strongly by those who saw education and skills as a strength while those who viewed Education and Skills development and Schools as a weakness ranked them near the lowest priority (although the vast majority of respondents rated it as a strength). However, only a relative few respondents answered that Education and Skills Development and Schools were a weakness.

Communication and broadband had a divided ranking with those who saw it as a weakness ranking it much higher than those who saw it as a strength. This is indicative that it is a localized issue, which is in fact consistent with findings from personal interviews.

Environmental impacts from growth was ranked high over all, but driven largely by people who saw it as a weakness. This result occurred even though respondents were nearly evenly divided over whether it was a strength or a weakness.

Other issues whose priority rankings were divided by strength-weakness classifications included cost of living, unemployment, urban-rural perspectives, and economic inequality.

It is not possible for the Community, Natural Resource, and Economic Development Educator to address issues directly, but rather to focus on assisting governments and local entities in responding through planning and management activities. This corresponds closely with the finding from the Governance Issues analysis. Such support may be in the form of research and information development, strategic planning activities, strengthening of government procedures and organization, or understanding the impacts from the issues.

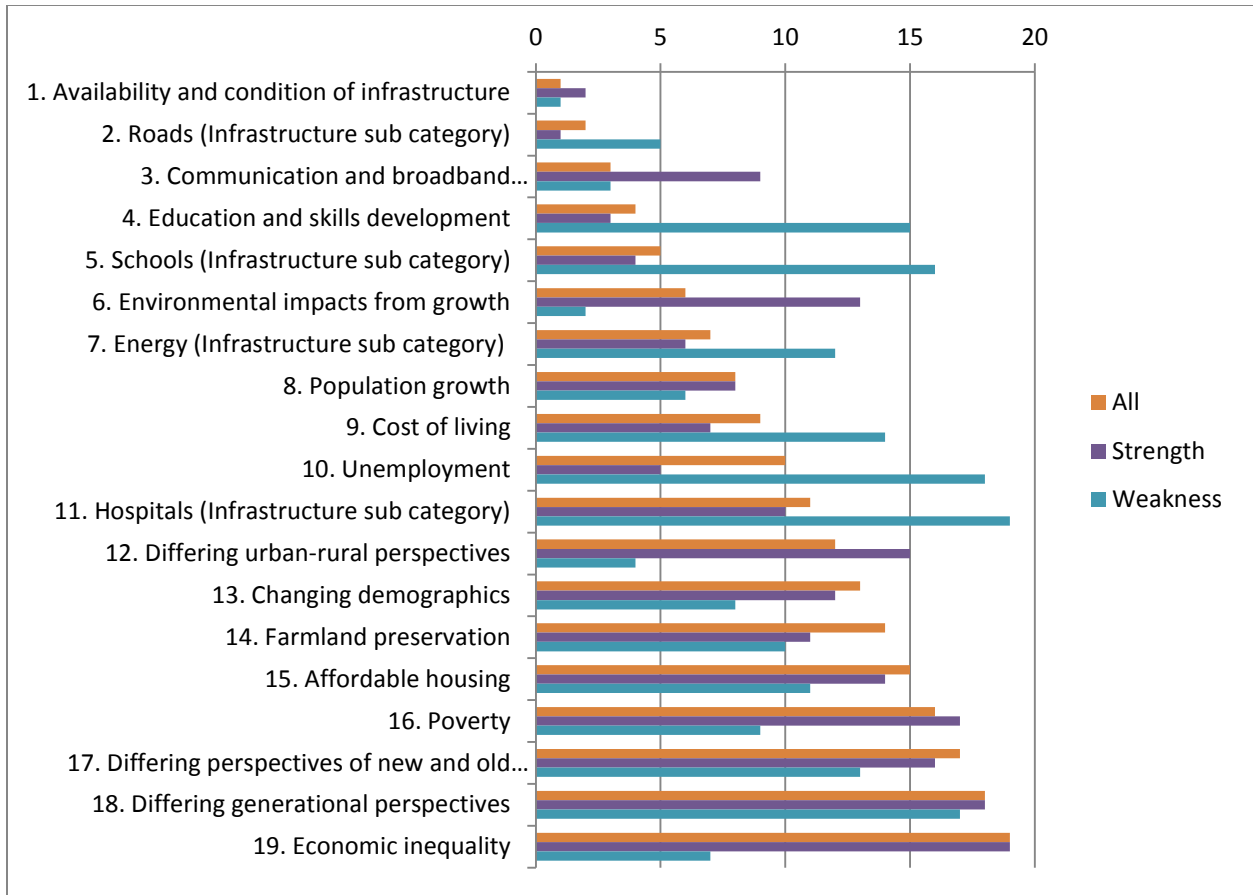


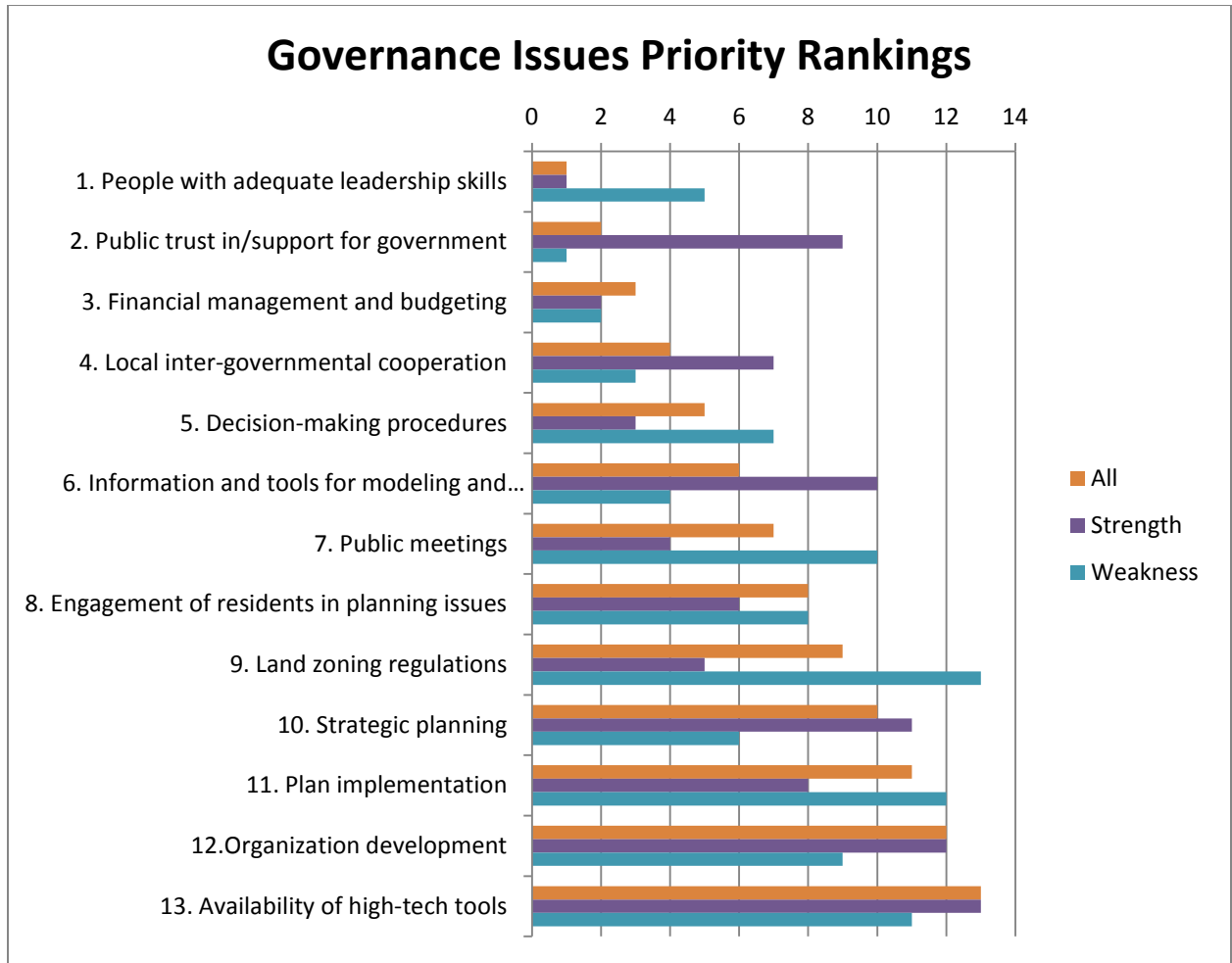
Figure 5. Priority Rankings for Community Development Issues

Conclusion

The survey results indicated clear areas for types of extension support as well as specific issues to be addressed for economic development, community development, and governance. It is also clear that there are differences in opinion about the priority for different issues within the county. This is particularly true with economic development. Such divisions are likely to become more prominent as revised comprehensive planning proceeds, especially in consideration of impacts from the new River Crossing project.

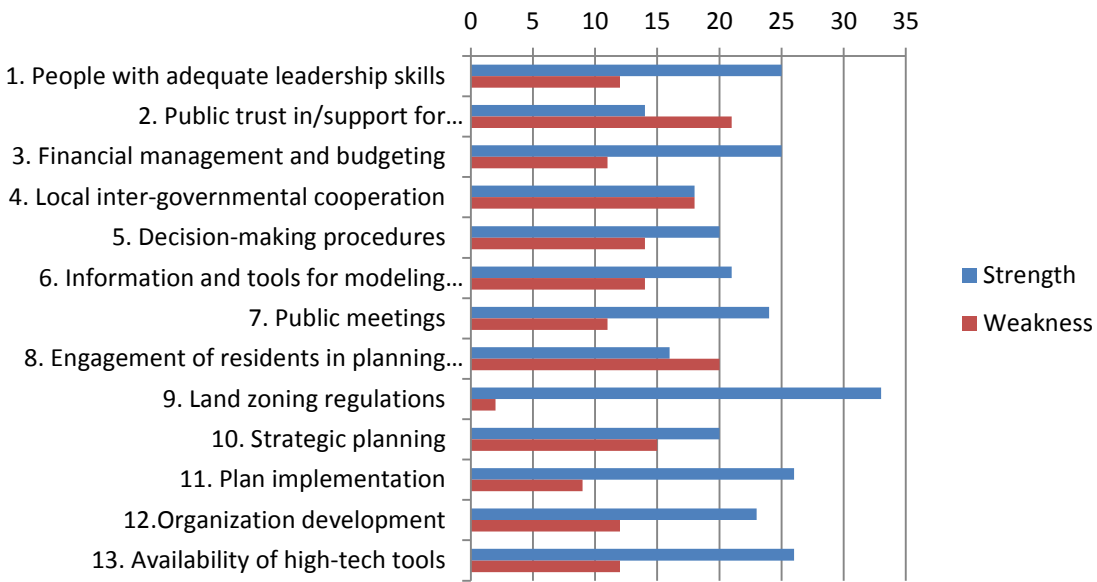
The next steps include continued personal interviews conducted within the county, but with a more specific focus. Such feedback is very important for helping to shape formal educational programs. In addition to continued information gathering, future programming will also be directed by perceived urgency, realized demand for education services, and potential for impact.

Appendix: Governance Issues Graphs



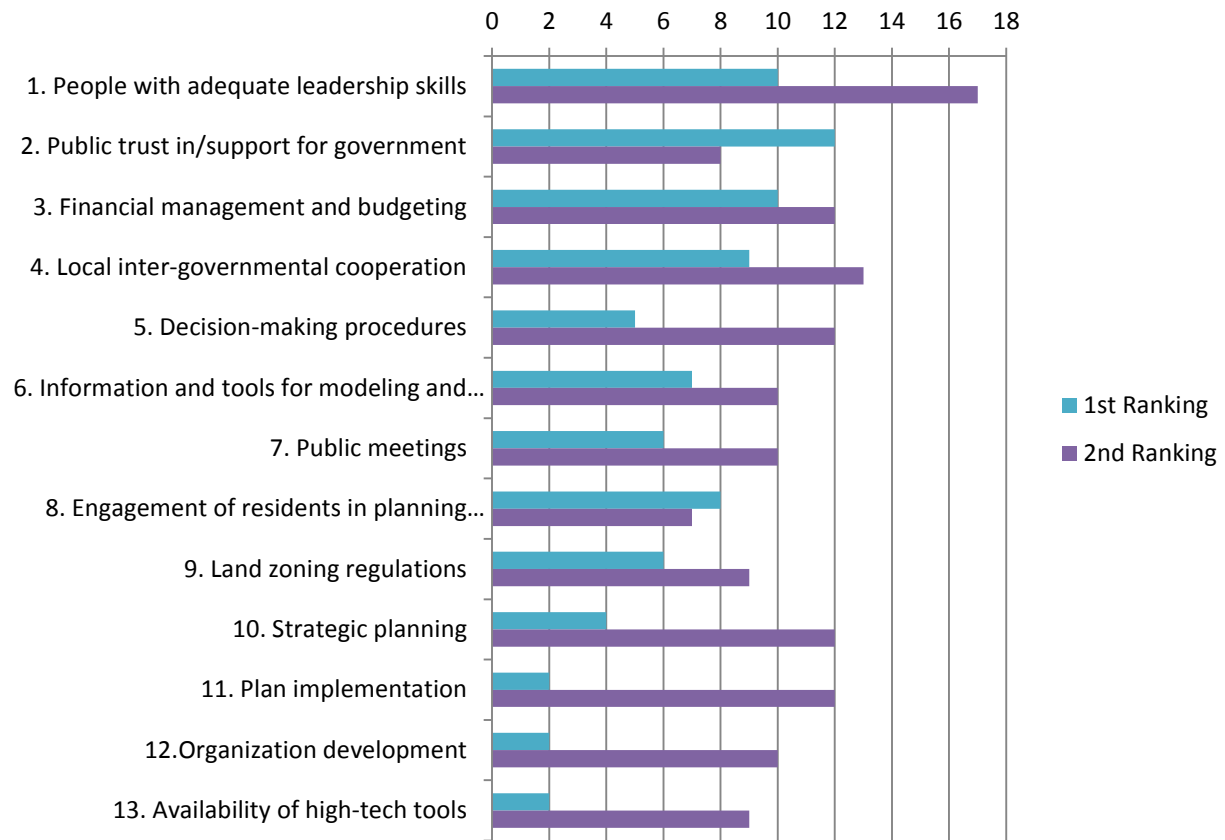
Governance	Average score			Rank		
	Strength	Weakness	All	Strength	Weakness	All
1. People with adequate leadership skills	3.84	3.67	3.78	1	5	1
2. Public trust in/support for government	3.29	4.05	3.74	9	1	2
3. Financial management and budgeting	3.56	3.91	3.67	2	2	3
4. Local inter-governmental cooperation	3.39	3.89	3.64	7	3	4
5. Decision-making procedures	3.55	3.57	3.56	3	7	5
6. Information and tools for modeling and managing growth	3.24	3.79	3.46	10	4	6
7. Public meetings	3.50	3.27	3.43	4	10	7
8. Engagement of residents in planning issues	3.44	3.40	3.42	6	8	8
9. Land zoning regulations	3.48	2.00	3.40	5	13	9
10. Strategic planning	3.00	3.60	3.26	11	6	10
11. Plan implementation	3.35	2.78	3.20	8	12	11
12. Organization development	3.00	3.33	3.11	12	9	12
13. Availability of high-tech tools	2.92	3.25	3.03	13	11	13

Governance Issues - Responses Indicating Strength or Weakness

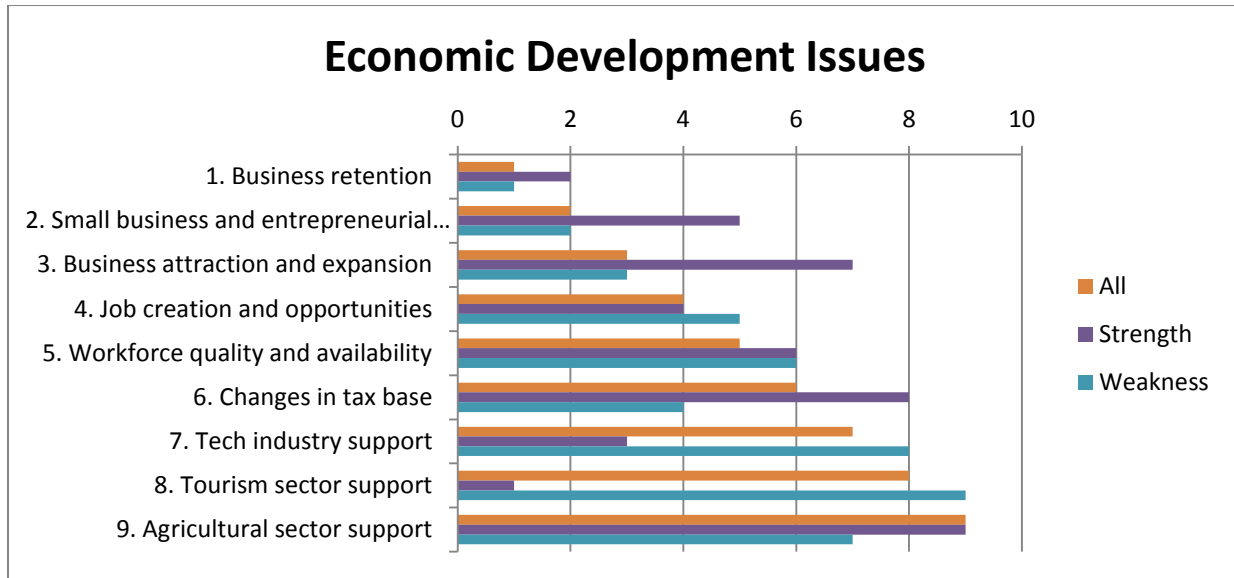


Governance

Number Indicating 1st or 2nd Priority Ranking

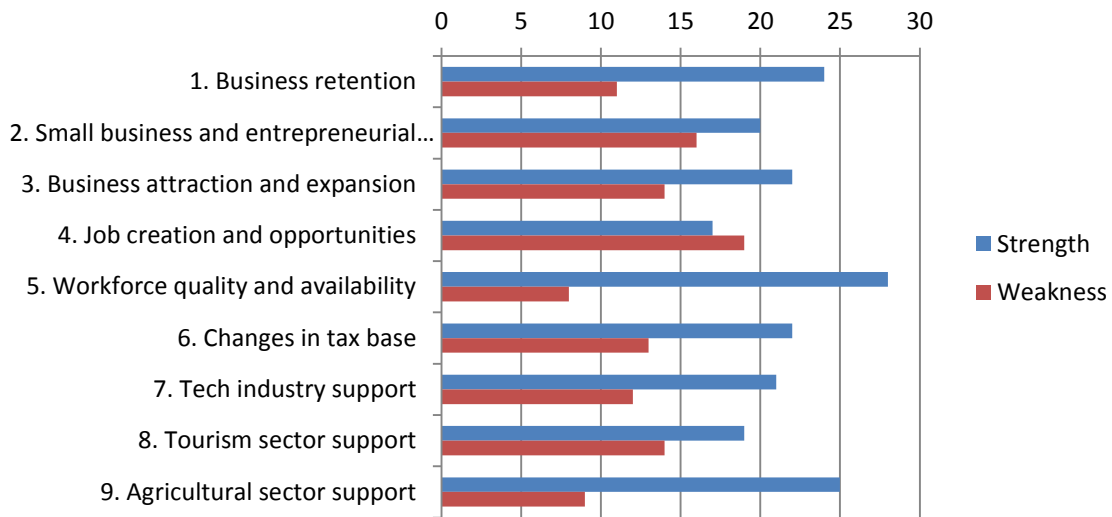


Appendix: Economic Development Issues Graphs

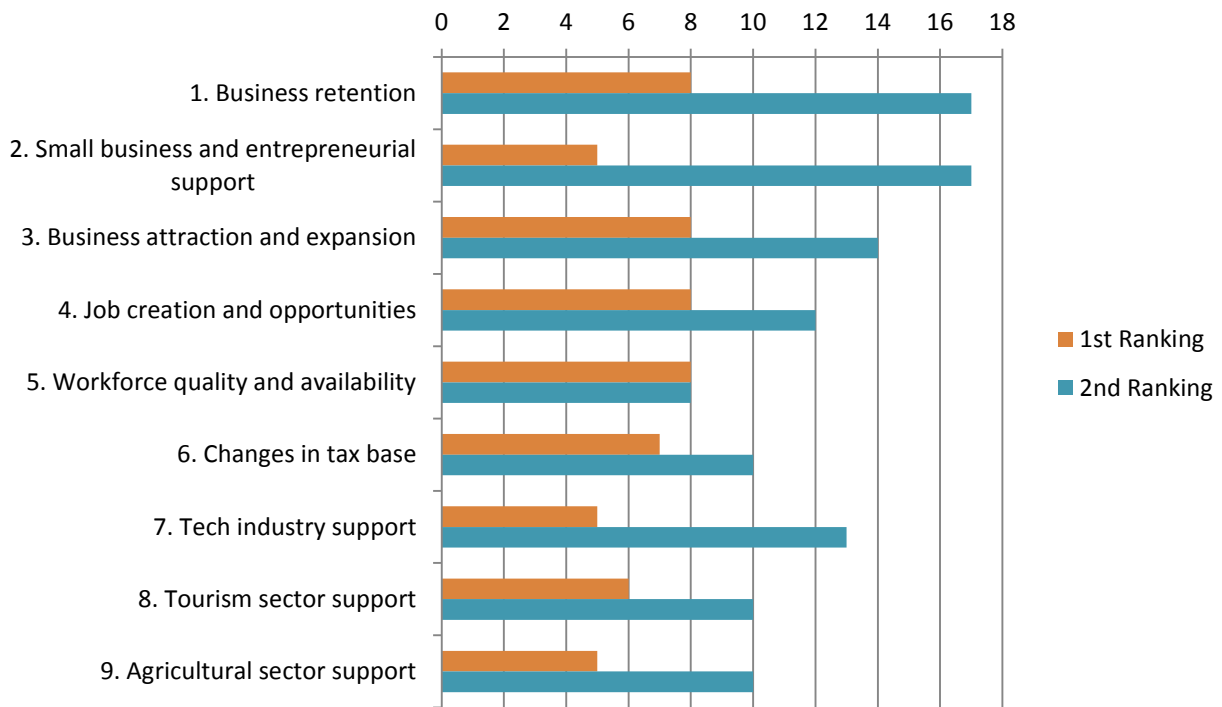


Economic Development	Average score			Rank		
	Strength	Weakness	All	Strength	Weakness	All
1. Business retention	3.58	4.09	3.74	2	1	1
2. Small business and entrepreneurial support	3.50	3.94	3.69	5	2	2
3. Business attraction and expansion	3.45	3.71	3.56	7	3	3
4. Job creation and opportunities	3.53	3.53	3.53	4	5	4
5. Workforce quality and availability	3.46	3.50	3.47	6	6	5
6. Changes in tax base	3.32	3.62	3.43	8	4	6
7. Tech industry support	3.57	3.17	3.42	3	8	7
8. Tourism sector support	3.63	3.00	3.36	1	9	8
9. Agricultural sector support	3.20	3.22	3.21	9	7	9

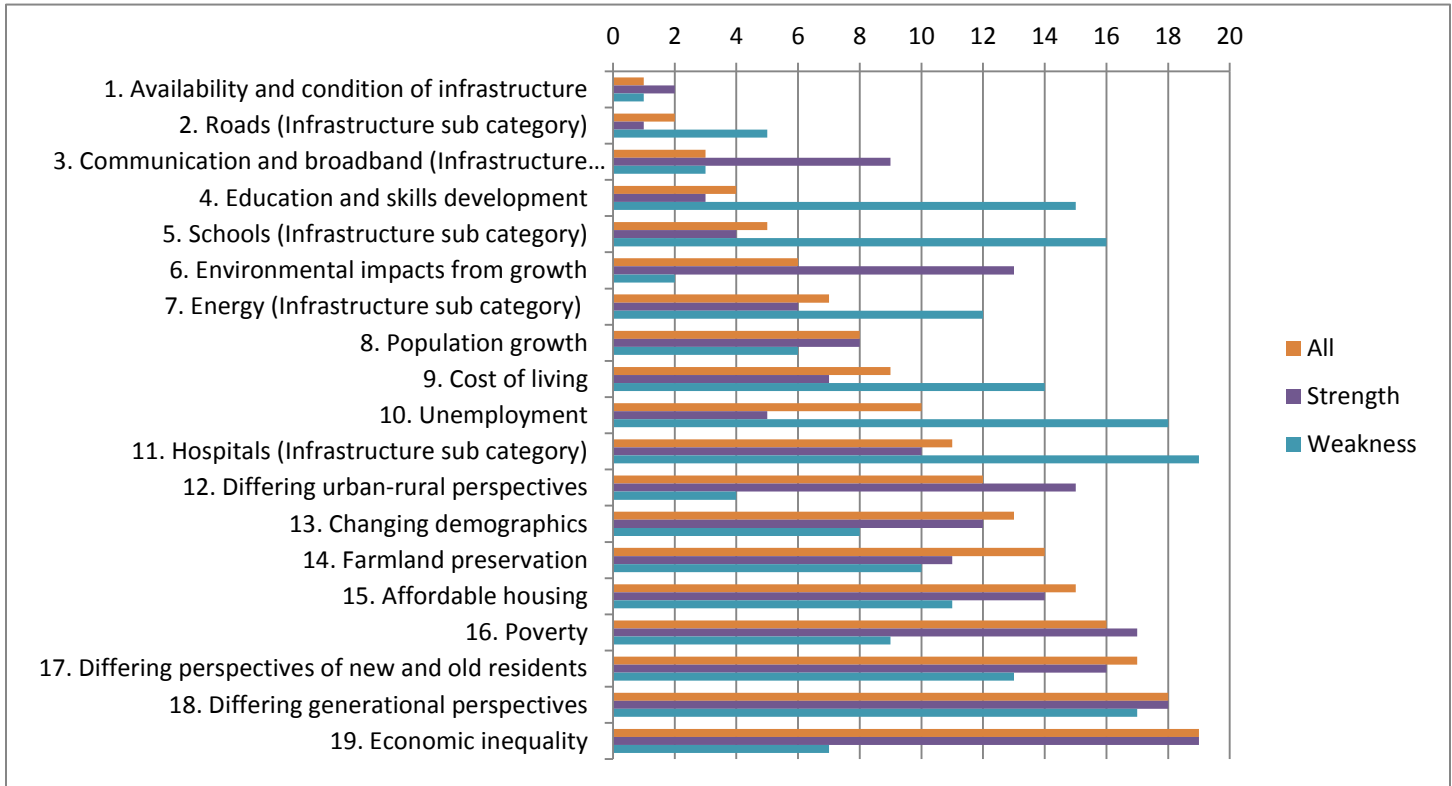
Economic Development Issues - Responses Indicating Strength or Weakness



Economic Development Number voting 1st or 2nd Priority Ranking

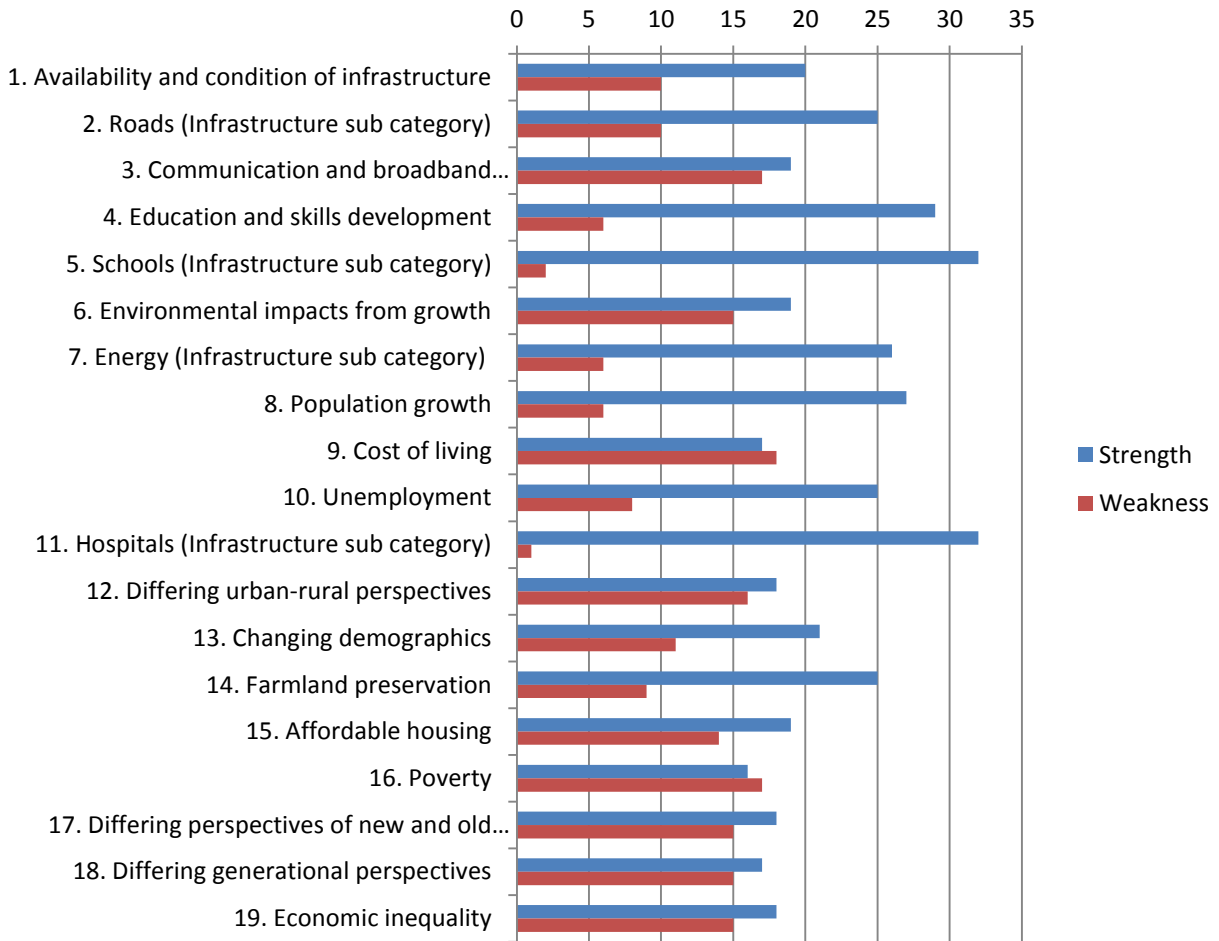


Appendix: Community Development Issues Graphs

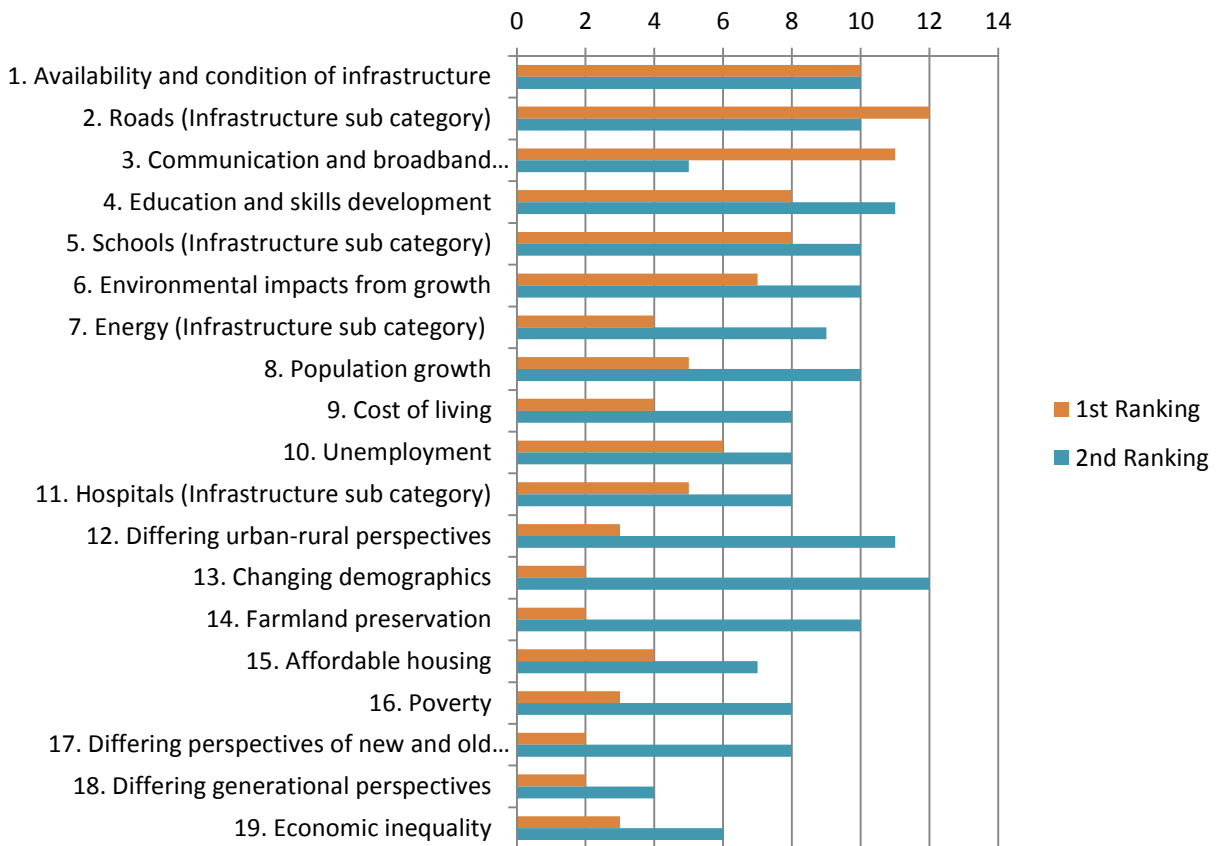


Community Development	Average score			Rank		
	Strength	Weakness	All	Strength	Weakness	All
1. Availability and condition of infrastructure	3.80	4.30	3.97	2	1	1
2. Roads (Infrastructure sub category)	3.96	3.50	3.83	1	5	2
3. Communication and broadband (Infrastructure sub category)	3.16	3.94	3.53	9	3	3
4. Education and skills development	3.52	3.00	3.43	3	15	4
5. Schools (Infrastructure sub category)	3.41	3.00	3.38	4	16	5
6. Environmental impacts from growth	2.84	4.00	3.35	13	2	6
7. Energy (Infrastructure sub category)	3.31	3.17	3.28	6	12	7
8. Population growth	3.22	3.33	3.24	8	6	8
9. Cost of living	3.24	3.06	3.14	7	14	9
10. Unemployment	3.40	2.25	3.12	5	18	10
11. Hospitals (Infrastructure sub category)	3.16	2.00	3.12	10	19	11
12. Differing urban-rural perspectives	2.72	3.56	3.12	15	4	12
13. Changing demographics	2.90	3.27	3.03	12	8	13
14. Farmland preservation	2.92	3.22	3.00	11	10	14
15. Affordable housing	2.74	3.21	2.94	14	11	15
16. Poverty	2.56	3.24	2.91	17	9	16
17. Differing perspectives of new and old residents	2.72	3.13	2.91	16	13	17
18. Differing generational perspectives	2.53	3.00	2.75	18	17	18
19. Economic inequality	2.22	3.33	2.73	19	7	19

Community Development Issues - Responses Indicating Strength or Weakness



Community Development Number Voting 1st and 2nd Priority



Appendix: Survey Form

3-Minute Survey on Community and Economic Development Issues in Saint Croix County

We are looking for public input to identify the key assets, issues, challenges and opportunities facing St Croix County and its communities. This assessment will provide a better understanding of these issues from the perspective of elected officials, government agencies, and other organizations involved in the economic and community development in the county. The results will be made available and will help shape a relevant, effective and efficient Community and Economic Development program for Saint Croix County's UW-Extension Office.

Directions: Mark each issue as either a strength or a weakness and then check the priority each issue should receive either to be improved (if a weakness) or promoted (if a strength).

1. Governance

	Write S or W for strength or weakness	Priority of Issue				
		Low 1	2	3	4	High 5
Land Zoning regulations						
Financial management and budgeting						
People with adequate leadership skills						
Engagement of residents in planning issues						
Strategic Planning						
Plan implementation						
Local inter-governmental cooperation						
Decision-making procedures						
Availability of high-tech tools						
Public meetings						
Information and tools for modeling and managing growth						
Organizational development						
Public trust in/support for government						

2. Economic Development

	Write S or W for strength or weakness	Priority of Issue				
		Low 1	2	3	4	High 5
Workforce quality and availability						
Job creation and opportunities						
Small business and entrepreneurial support						
Changes in tax base						
Business attraction and expansion						
Business retention						
Tech industry support						
Agricultural sector support						
Tourism sector support						

3. Community Development

	Write S or W for strength or weakness	Priority of challenge				
		Low 1	2	3	4	High 5
Population growth						
Changing demographics						
Farmland preservation						
Cost of living						
Poverty						
Economic inequality						
Unemployment						
Education and skills development						
Availability and condition of infrastructure						
<i>Roads</i>						
<i>Energy</i>						
<i>Communication and broadband</i>						
<i>Schools</i>						
<i>Hospitals</i>						
Affordable housing						
Differing urban-rural perspectives						
Differing perspectives of new and old residents						
Differing generational perspectives						
Environmental Impacts from growth						

4. What type of UW Extension educational outreach would be most useful?

	Not needed	Less helpful	So-so helpful	Helpful	Very helpful
Leadership training					
Business and economic development					
Strategic planning					
Community development					
Local government education					
Change management					
Plan implementation					
Information and data provision					
Organizational development					
Natural resource management					
Stakeholder engagement					
Other (Please fill in):					

5. Additional comments:

1. How long have you lived in Saint Croix County?
2. How long have you worked at your current organization?
3. What is your administrative level of responsibility?
 - a. Town, Village, City
 - b. County
 - c. State
 - d. Regional
 - e. Not applicable

THANK YOU!!

If you would like a copy of this report please provide an email address or check the St Croix County UW Extension website. Email addresses will NOT be recorded with above answers.

Email (optional): _____

Please return the completed survey using the enclosed stamped envelope or send to:

UW Extension Office
1960 8th Avenue, Suite 140
Baldwin, WI 54002