

Needs Assessment for Wyoming County

Supported by the Wyoming Foundation

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Arts Council for Wyoming County

Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce

Town of Warsaw

Literacy West NY, Inc.

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Summary

The Wyoming Foundation is a philanthropic organization created to support activities that improve the quality of life for the people who live in Wyoming County, NY. Since 1977, the Wyoming Foundation has actively supported a wide variety of cultural, educational, and human services organizations that benefit residents. In an effort to increase participation in the Foundation and to better identify projects and programs that will positively impact the community, Council members chose to research the available data and conduct a survey of community residents to determine needs that can be addressed through informed investment. This data was collected and specific trends and themes emerged as being particularly important in this community.

A committee was formed that included members of the Wyoming Foundation Council and its partner, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. Because the health issues concerning Wyoming County were already being addressed through the Thiel Fund which conducts regular health needs assessments, the committee suggested that three additional major components of life in Wyoming County should be examined: Arts and Culture, Business, and Education. Representatives from the three areas were asked to join the committee in order to gather the maximum amount of relevant information: Jackie Hoyt, Executive Director of the Arts Council for Wyoming County; Laura Lane, President of the Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce; and Karen Six, Development Director of Literacy West NY, Inc. As a group, the committee members developed a survey that included basic demographic information along with questions related to the three target areas. The survey was administered both online and in person at many local events including the Wyoming County Fair, Warsaw Alive, and the Perry Farm Market among others. All of the input was collected and the results are discussed in this report.

The community survey was administered to 355 people from all areas of Wyoming County. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were women but a significant number of respondents chose not to answer the gender question. More than half (65%) were over age 45 and 85% had some college education or a degree. Three quarters of participants are employed. This group of people knows this county – the average number of years lived in

Wyoming County was just short of 30 – fewer than 10 were not county residents. A very large proportion of participants (79%) took the time to answer the open-ended questions, especially the last question which asked them to list the three most important issues concerning Wyoming County.

In addition to the community survey, the committee also reviewed a large group of state, regional, and local data sources. State information was taken from the New York State School Report Cards, the 2010 US Census information, and employment information from the New York State Department of Labor. Regional information was gathered from the New York Center for Rural Schools, The Self-Sufficiency Standard for New York State 2010, and the Center for Governmental Research through ACTRochester. Local county reports including Target: Tomorrow, A Plan for Wyoming County's Future, the Wyoming County Cultural Plan, and the Wyoming County retail study were also part of the research. A complete list of resources is located in the Appendix.

Through the research conducted by the committee, it became clear that a plan for community development that encompasses not only economic factors, but also other aspects that affect the quality of life of Wyoming County residents is needed. Respondents to the survey referred to the lack of a comprehensive plan for progress in respect to several different issues that concerned them. In particular, the need for a plan was connected to bringing more businesses into the county, increasing support for local products, restructuring the system to better match education to workforce skill requirements of employers, and improving health care access and availability.

As is true in most of the nation, employment and taxes were listed most frequently as the most pressing issues for this area. Business development, health care, education, cost of living, and concerns about county government were also frequently cited. It was determined by the committee that in order for the Wyoming Foundation to truly increase its community impact, the combination of interrelated areas of concern needs to be considered when making future investment decisions. The results of the research, survey, and Forum will assist the Council as it creates its own plan to perform a significant role in the future of Wyoming County and its progress through the 21st century. The Foundation encourages others to join the current members in this effort.

Background

Located in rural Western New York, Wyoming County consists of approximately 42,100 people⁹ in 16 townships and boasts a beautiful, rural environment with deep agricultural roots and no traffic hassles. Inhabitants of the many villages feel close ties to their communities and their neighbors, and the six school districts and nine libraries serve as centers for community activities. Fiercely independent and proud of their community, most Wyoming County residents choose to live and raise their families here despite the issues that concern them about the future. Of course, the ultimate topic is the economy – as is true everywhere – and the many factors that combine to form what we call the economy.

Great attention was paid by survey takers to the number of residents receiving government benefits. The facts are that Wyoming County residents receive public assistance and government subsidies at a much lower rate than the rest of the state and at the lowest rates in the region¹². As one person stated, “We learn to take care of ourselves and our neighbors.” The rate of children receiving public assistance and/or free or reduced cost lunches in schools is also very low¹, even though the rate of children living in poverty is high¹ and median income is among the lowest¹² in the region.

Intuitively people tend to link a struggling economy with increased crime rates. Crime was mentioned as a concern many times in the survey despite the fact that crime levels are actually lower than at any time during the last decade. Although juvenile delinquency has recently increased, PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) petitions are down by more than half from a high experienced in 2005¹². Many people indicated that they noticed “laziness” or lack of motivation, common sense, and work ethic among today’s youth, but the data does not support a conclusion that young people are turning to crime.

Perception and perspective play large roles in how people see their environment. During the course of this effort to collect and report the opinions of Wyoming County residents about our community, many recurring themes gained prominence. People stated that taxes and government regulation are preventing businesses and residents from succeeding. Many

respondents reported seeing once-successful businesses leaving the area and not replaced. Great sadness was displayed as parents stated that they had raised their children in this wholesome and supportive place only to watch them go to college and get jobs somewhere else. Frequently we heard that there is “nothing to do here in the middle of nowhere.” Fortunately, although there is some truth to the perceptions, there are many great things happening here and people are working very hard to maintain and improve Wyoming County.

Perhaps one of the most encouraging movements in Wyoming County is downtown revitalization. Arcade, Attica, Perry, and Warsaw have experienced a resurgence of interest and investment in community improvement and development. Through private and government grant funding, these villages have filled store fronts with new businesses, expanded beautification projects, and reinvigorated residents by making their communities better places to live. Other villages have invested in their infrastructure by upgrading outdated water and sewer systems making these communities healthier and better equipped to move forward.

Quality of life is a critical issue for everyone and an important factor when businesses consider a move into the county. Cultural experiences and the arts are important to the populace and help to make life more enjoyable for all. Large, well-attended events like the Letchworth Arts and Crafts Festival, as well as smaller events such as concerts, satellite art galleries, and artist exhibits, bring money and talent into the region and provide opportunities for residents to enjoy and share experiences. The attendance at youth art displays at schools and the Arts Council Gallery is evidence of the value the county places on the engagement of youth in artistic endeavors. Given the positive environment for the arts in Wyoming County, it is not unrealistic to consider that the arts should continue as a vehicle for bringing economic opportunity to the area.

With an unemployment rate that has doubled in the past decade¹² and the constant complaint that our children grow up and leave the area because of the lack of opportunity, the future of business and the related jobs is an important issue for Wyoming County. Lack of suitable infrastructure in terms of water, sewer, electricity, and internet accessibility is seen as a barrier to success in a 21st century economy. Jobs are shifting to government, health care, and service industries³ and away from agriculture

and manufacturing, once the mainstays of Wyoming County employment. More people are shopping online or outside the county, taking their purchasing power and tax revenues away from local economy⁵. However, there are many thriving businesses and opportunities available for new ventures as the more global economy creates markets and needs that never existed in previous generations. Wyoming County must think creatively and plan for the future to capitalize on the trends, encourage new enterprises, and bring prosperity.

Education is a key element to the future of Wyoming County. The six school districts that serve the county's children share a good track record for educating our youth in the face of decreased funding and declining enrollment. Test scores are higher and the percentage of students earning Regents diplomas is greater than the state average; however, the dropout rate is higher and fewer Wyoming County graduates intend to enroll in college¹². Despite the complaint that children move away after high school, most parents are satisfied with the education their children receive and support their local schools, most obviously by routinely voting for school budget proposals and participating in school groups and events. Beyond high school, opportunities for further training and education are extremely limited within the county, but are widely available in other Western New York counties.

A review of the available data in the areas of Arts and Culture, Business, and Education in Wyoming County has revealed that this area has issues that require attention to ensure a prosperous future, but it also confirmed that this is a great place to live and work. There is more taking place than most residents realize, and perhaps that leads us to a need to improve the information pipeline. Using our collective strengths to minimize or eliminate our weaknesses will involve a change to an optimistic focus and resource pooling. Most importantly, it will take commitment to progress: the effort involved in developing a plan of action, the courage to make the necessary decisions, and the persistence to see it through to a positive conclusion.

To quote one long-time Wyoming County resident, "We have the green grass others look through the window to find." This committee's intent is to enhance that level of satisfaction with the community's assets, collaborate with the entire community, and use that strength to address the areas of concern.

Arts and Culture

The Arts Council for Wyoming County recently published its Cultural Plan for the county after conducting Board of Directors meetings and questionnaires, a public meeting, individual interviews and questionnaires, and a statistical analysis that reports trends and comparisons with adjacent counties¹⁰. The results show that Wyoming County has a vibrant arts community that supports the widely attended Letchworth Arts & Crafts and AppleUmpkin Festivals each year and numerous other cultural events. Local artists find welcome with Wyoming County's "vibrancy, opportunity, low cost of living and studio space, and a tightly-knit supportive community that enables artists."¹⁰ It is broadly accepted that the Arts Council and its community partners present a large variety of opportunities for Wyoming County residents to experience and appreciate artistic endeavors.

Wyoming County is very fortunate to have an active Arts Council and The Stage as well as schools, businesses, and organizations around the county that support the arts. Satellite galleries in 10 area venues provide opportunities for people to experience the work of local and visiting artists. Musical and theatrical performances are held often at The Stage, Burlingham Books, Charcoal Corral, Silver Lake Family Restaurant, the Grange Hall, and many other local public places. Wyoming County schools boast more art teachers per student than other schools in the region¹ and families and friends participate in the frequent concerts, art displays, and cultural events held in the schools.

It should be noted that the Arts Council of Wyoming County actively seeks partnerships with other community-based organizations and businesses to bring cultural activities to the residents of this county. The Hispanic Heritage Festival is planned for November 2012 by a group of local agencies including the Arts Council. A growing trend to include artists to perform for clients and customers has emerged as businesses and organizations welcome artists into their locations. Apathy about attending artistic events is mentioned by some survey respondents, but in comparison Wyoming County outpaces the adjacent counties in event attendance by enormous numbers¹⁰. Many attendees come from outside the county, economic support that should be encouraged and promoted.

The economic impact to the community of our active environment for arts and culture cannot be dismissed. Those who attend the cultural events in Wyoming County also take time to shop and eat at our local businesses. New residents and investors in our local economy consider the quality of life and availability of cultural events when choosing new locations to live and work. Satellite galleries give attendees an opportunity to learn more about our local artists and spend more time at the host sites, and many do return to see new exhibits. As people attend and participate in arts and cultural events, other businesses leverage dollars that are spent in the hosting communities from restaurants to gift shops. This trend has a positive economic impact on our county's local communities¹⁰.

As mentioned in previous sections, perceptions play a big role in the cultural status of the county. There is a perception that the only way to access high quality cultural events is to travel to the larger metropolitan areas of Rochester and Buffalo. Local artists are not perceived to be on the same level as those who routinely display or perform in the bigger venues even though many find audiences and customers from outside the county and in much broader markets. Fortunately, the perceptions are not the reality and local events and artists are excellent in their arenas. Changing those beliefs is a problem we need to solve.

The community needs survey revealed some interesting perspectives about arts and culture in Wyoming County. Funding was identified by 49% as a significant challenge, but 27% of respondents also thought that funding contributes to success. Although several items were cited as ways to improve the cultural environment, an online events calendar received the most votes and was also mentioned in the Cultural Plan as a goal for the Arts Council. More events around the county and more government funding nearly equaled the online calendar, but lack of advertising was also important. Art in schools was an often-noted area of need in the community survey. People stated that more art education is needed and increased opportunities for youth to display and experience art.

By far, the Letchworth Arts and Crafts Festival received the most attention in the community survey and was also ranked in *Sunshine Magazine* as #5 in New York State and #62 in the nation for quality arts and crafts festivals. Respondents see the festival as a very successful way to promote the arts in Wyoming County and some commented that it should be used to gain

additional support for local artists. More than 40% identified the many places to see art and attend concerts as successful events that play an essential role in the cultural success of the county.

Wyoming County may not be seen as a focal area for cultural events, but the artistic community is thriving and bringing dollars into the area. In terms of the economy as a major concern, the arts have been a driving force and can be even more so if the conditions are conducive to artists and performers and those who want to experience their work. As part of the bigger picture of economic and community development, cultural events and the promotion of them must be included in planning for the future, both as financial asset and as enhanced quality of life for those living and working here.

Business

Wyoming County has a business environment that reflects the local history and geography. Agriculture is and has been a mainstay: Wyoming County is the number one producer of milk and corn silage in the state and agricultural sales totaled more than \$150 million in 2010 (New York State Comptroller). Segments of advanced manufacturing have seen growth in recent years and entrepreneurship has increased. Many local businesses are thriving even in the recent economic downturn as they capitalize on opportunities and make new acquisitions that stimulate growth.

The county's strategic plan, *Target: Tomorrow, A Plan for Wyoming County's Future*⁶ was developed in 2001 and has helped the county progress through the last decade. Numerous business successes in the county can be linked to the plan as well as others that have been created by the constantly changing markets and the adaptability of business owners as well as support agencies. Through the work of the Wyoming County Industrial Development Agency (IDA), New York State now looks at farming operations in a similar fashion to manufacturing plants from a funding standpoint and the IDA has been successful in securing funding for local farms, resulting in the retention and creation of jobs. Cornell Cooperative Extension offers its Dairy Institute program to help train farm workers for the increasing technological demands of agricultural jobs, and the WNY Crop Management agency assists farmers in their efforts to best utilize their land. Right to Farm laws have been passed on the local and county levels; tourism is recognized as an important

economic driver for the county; obsolete buildings are being repurposed to house new and expanded businesses; and new technologies are taking hold as Wyoming County leads the way with the most on-site methane digesters in the state. Local banks are very consistent about investing with businesses and significantly supporting local communities, and the Wyoming County Business Center provides training for entrepreneurs, helping them to prosper in their new ventures.

The issues that concern employers in the area are much the same as others in the region and even nationally. They report problems with taxes and regulation on the state and federal levels and local infrastructure problems that inhibit business growth – all concerns often stated in the community survey. Access to capital can be a dilemma; grants are not always available and banks are more circumspect than in the past about making loans. The number of businesses in Wyoming County has increased during the past decade, particularly in the sectors of professional and business services, construction, and educational services¹², though at a lower rate than the region, state, and the nation as a whole. Available jobs decreased dramatically during the economic downturn of 2008-2009 and the numbers have not recovered appreciably¹².

Perception is a hurdle that must be overcome. Many survey respondents and general statements made in the community reflect a belief that there are no jobs and no opportunities in Wyoming County. The “brain drain” frequently mentioned (young people earning their educations outside the county and not returning to Wyoming County) appears to be more a matter of career choice than true lack of opportunities, and certainly a result of the lack of postsecondary and training facilities in the county. Areas of job growth for our area are health care and advanced manufacturing³, both of which require education beyond high school. Employers are hiring, but they need workers with specific skill sets and employees who have solid work ethics and the desire to learn.

Successful business owners are realistic by nature and adjust to meet the needs of the customer base they have. More people are shopping outside the county⁵, in person or online, but capitalizing on that knowledge can be an opportunity for the savvy entrepreneur. As the world shifts to a global economy, businesses will seek ways to meet the demands of the market. Wyoming County businesses can benefit from being centrally located in

Western New York, in the middle of several large, metropolitan areas: Rochester, Buffalo, Jamestown, and Corning. Recognizing the benefits of our location and utilizing the proximity to all parts of the entire region can work to our advantage as business owners use a broader scope through which to view potential customers.

Our survey reflected that most people see taxes and regulation, healthcare costs, and lack of an educated workforce as the biggest challenges to business in Wyoming County. Some of these factors significantly inhibit business growth. That being said, educating the workforce to meet employment needs and taking advantage of opportunities are two attainable solutions to helping to improve our business environment.

Jobs, good-paying jobs, sustainable jobs – that was the beacon call of the community survey. When asked to identify the three biggest issues concerning Wyoming County, more than half of respondents listed employment as part of the answer. It is the one thing everyone agrees upon – Wyoming County needs more employment opportunities that pay wages that can sustain an individual and his/her family and last into the future.

Another component to the future of business and the entire county is a cohesive plan for community development. Economic success depends upon a solid foundation that includes all aspects of life in the community. Businesses need skilled employees who enjoy a good quality of life, a customer base that earns self- and family-sustaining incomes, and a community environment that supports its efforts to produce. Access to capital, whether through grants or financial institutions, is also tied to an applicant's position within the big picture of a plan for the future – both for the business itself and for its community. Without a strategy for an integrated system of progress that incorporates all of the primary and ancillary elements of economic sustainability, investors will hesitate and seek communities with more comprehensive planning.

Wyoming County has made considerable economic progress and will continue to move forward into the future. As businesses work with local government, organizations, and each other to develop new initiatives and bolster successful enterprises, the entire community will benefit.

Education

The educational environment in Wyoming County reflects the rural, low population of the larger community. Six school districts serve the county: Attica, Letchworth, Perry, Pioneer, Warsaw, and Wyoming. Genesee Community College has satellite campuses in Warsaw and Arcade, and the SUNY ATTAIN Lab in Perry provides free computer education opportunities for residents. High school students and adults seeking vocational education attend the Genesee Valley Educational Partnership schools in Mt. Morris or Batavia or Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES for Pioneer students, and Cornell Cooperative Extension for Wyoming County has the Dairy Institute which provides technical instruction for dairy farm operations. Preparation for the high school equivalency exam is available through Literacy West NY and the BOCES Adult Education Department at the **Wyoming Works!** Learning Center in Warsaw. There are no 4-year colleges or universities within the county, but many colleges are located in counties adjacent to Wyoming.

It is a testament to the work ethic of the community and value placed upon our children and their education that Wyoming County schools rank above the state averages on test scores, attendance, and students earning Regents diplomas. Local school budgets are routinely passed by voters, and families are extremely supportive of children's events such as art shows, concerts, sports, and community activities. As in most rural areas, our schools are often the *de facto* community centers, the place where people connect with their neighbors and friends.

Wyoming County schools are experiencing the same difficulties seen in other rural areas: declining enrollment due to decreasing populations, increased per student costs, low graduation rates, and fewer than average graduates moving into college^{1, 2, 9, 12}. Last year, Wyoming County schools suffered the greatest per-student cuts in the state when New York State cut aid to schools². According to school officials, unfunded mandates continue to plague struggling districts as the needs of the students increase. All schools are eliminating staff and cutting programs to maintain budgets that will not violate the tax cap recently implemented in this state.

Expectations for school students have changed dramatically over the past two generations. Rigorous annual assessments of student preparation and

progress begin in Kindergarten and continue throughout high school. Research shows that children who are not adequately prepared for Kindergarten will remain behind their classmates through much of their school experience and are more likely to drop out of school prior to graduation (California Dropout Research Project). This has led to the advent of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and screenings during registration that identify areas of strength and weakness so that special needs can be addressed before regular school begins. However, in Wyoming County, we have the lowest participation rates in Universal Pre-Kindergarten and the lowest graduation rates of any other rural county in our region¹². Another serious problem is the need for remediation when our graduates enter postsecondary education programs (Alliance for Excellent Education). Although there are many factors cited as causes for the problems, what matters is that many of our children are not gaining the education needed to be successful in a workforce that requires education beyond high school.

Adult students are also facing hurdles when they attempt to prepare for self- and family-sustaining employment. Career-track training and technical programs are largely available only outside the county. Although more businesses are opening in and relocating to Wyoming County, the county resident workforce may not presently possess the necessary skills to meet the needs of current and future employers. Employers need workers with specific skill sets obtained in training that is not readily available here.

The community survey revealed concerns shared by many Wyoming County residents about the needs of our school children. Every respondent to the survey indicated that children need more activities at school, in the community, or after school in a wide variety of areas, and in particular survey takers wanted to see more activities for children that involve kids in their communities and prepare them for adult life and careers. Many contributors added financial literacy, workplace ethics, and specific career exploration and preparation to the list of responses.

Nearly half of those who responded to the survey identified community service projects as something they would like to see made available to children. More than 45% thought there should be more STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) projects for children reflecting the often-mentioned need for more technology-related instruction needed to help kids be successful in the 21st century workplace. Very closely behind

was the need for gardening and other outdoor projects for children, tying into responses to other questions which show that participants are concerned that our youth need to learn to be self-sufficient and capable of providing support for themselves and their families when they reach adulthood.

Both the community survey and a survey conducted with Wyoming County school superintendents in 2010 reflect a tremendous need for job exploration and career preparation. More than half of the respondents indicated a need for our youth to be exposed to the broad spectrum of careers available and to be provided with opportunities to learn more about career options. Hands-on career experience in the form of job shadows, training, and internships were mentioned several times particularly in the areas of agri-business, with its strong local impact, and manufacturing and trade skills. More than a third of the people responded that they or members of their families would be interested in training for entrepreneurship and health care. Whether for children or adults, career education seems to be an area that requires increased attention.

Very encouraging are the projects and programs that are being developed and implemented to address the concerns in our educational system. Local schools are working with community-based organizations like the **Business Education Council** to increase the educational and career readiness opportunities and awareness of the importance of education for all Wyoming County residents. Perry Central School District is working with the Perry Rotary and a broad group of other community agencies to support the **Read Around Perry** project which brings the importance of literacy from birth through adulthood to the entire community. Letchworth Central School has brought the Warsaw YMCA into the school to conduct afterschool programming that encourages children to explore and learn beyond the classroom while living a healthy lifestyle. More than 75 agencies, organizations, and businesses across the county have created **Wyoming Works!**, a collaborative partnership that focuses on improving the educational and workforce skill development needs of the county. The coalition has acquired funding to support a Family Learning Center in Warsaw where people gain access to not only educational and employment services, but also connections to support systems that assist them as they seek to improve their lives. It is a successful model that has served the needs of more than 250 Wyoming County residents in the past year.

V. A Call to Action

As indicated by the available data and the survey results, there are several general themes that can be used to direct activities and investment in Wyoming County in ways that will positively impact the populace.

Employment and the economy are everyone's bottom line, and the three focus areas of arts, business and education, which this committee chose to investigate are important aspects that directly affect both. The arts can be used as an instrument for economic development; businesses bring employment, tax dollars, and assets to the community; and, education prepares people for self- and family-sustaining employment. By focusing the efforts of not only the Wyoming Foundation, but also the local government, organizations, agencies, and businesses, Wyoming County can move forward into this century with confidence and prosperity.

The Wyoming Foundation was established in 1974 by Dr. James MacCallum who intended its funds to be used to improve the quality of life in Wyoming County. With the information gathered through this process, the Council will concentrate its philanthropic mission on programs and projects that directly address the needs as defined by residents and confirmed by the research. As the only foundation that invests solely in Wyoming County, the Wyoming Foundation will target those efforts that truly lead to a positive future for the community by working toward resolving the issues that exist today.

This committee and the volunteers who helped administer surveys and collect data encourage everyone to take part in the work that needs to be done to ensure a brighter future for Wyoming County. With input from Forum attendees, specific goals will be set by the committee and the community that can be met through concerted efforts by individuals, government, organizations, agencies, and businesses. Whether through individual investments as part of the Wyoming Foundation, the development of collaborative partnerships that address goals, or the work of community groups, the goals can be met and we can make Wyoming County an even better place to live and work.

The critical element is collaboration and participation. We all need to make the success of Wyoming County a priority in our work, our community activities, and our families.

VI. Appendix – References

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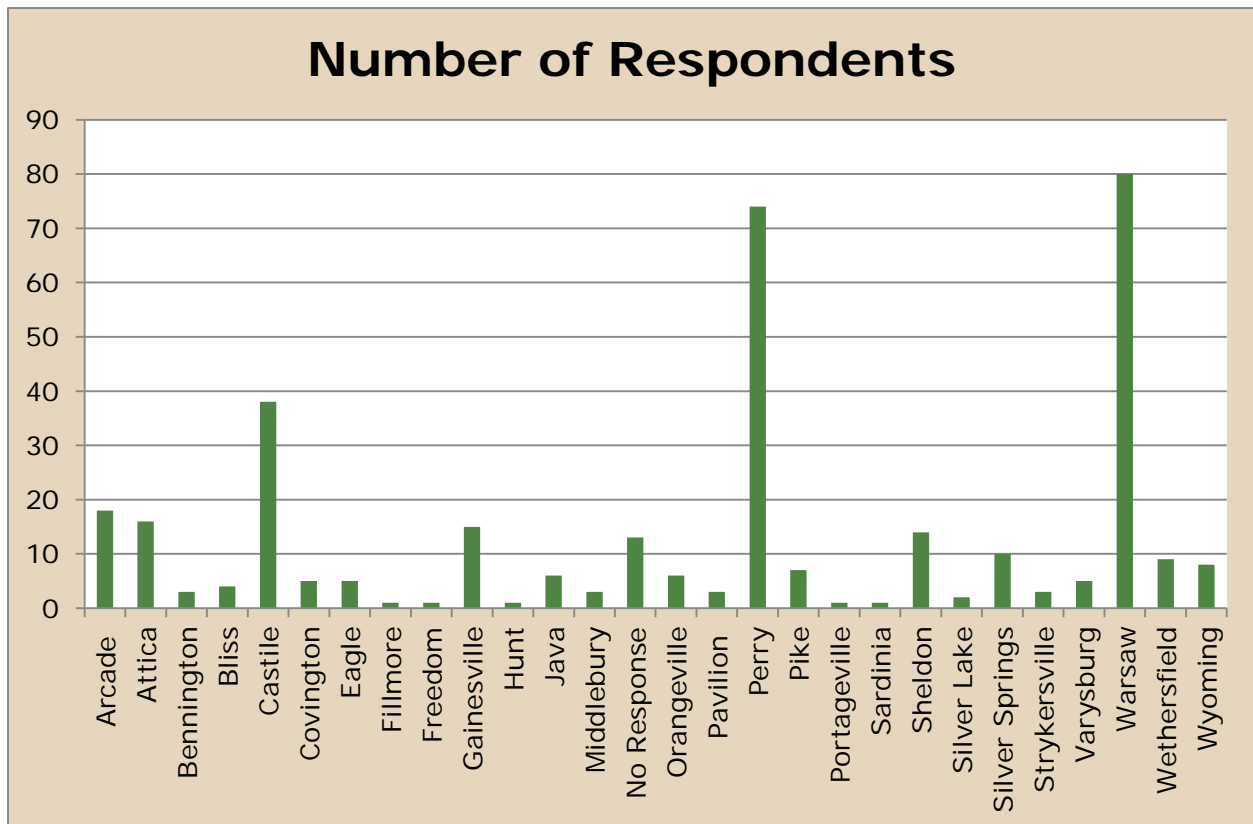
VII. Appendix - Survey Results

The Wyoming County Needs Assessment Survey was administered between May and August, 2012, online and at various locations and events to those who live and work in the county.

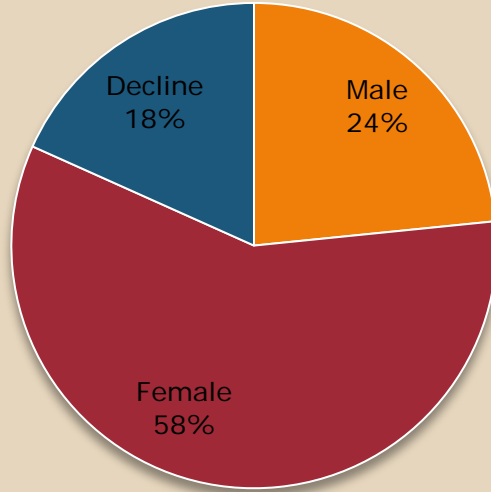
355 people agreed to participate in the survey.

The average number of years respondents lived in the county was 29.52 and ranged from 0 to 75 (or "too many" as one person stated).

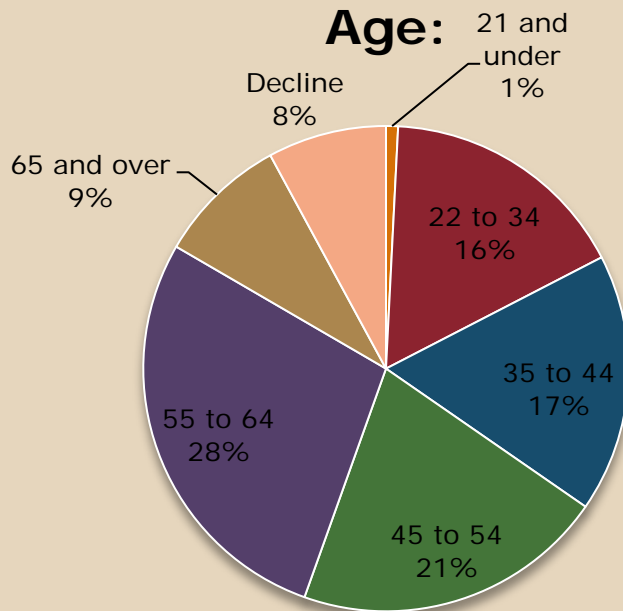
Every township in the county was represented.



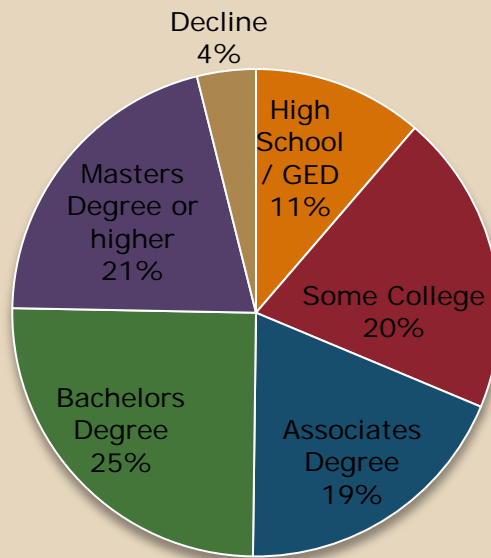
Gender:



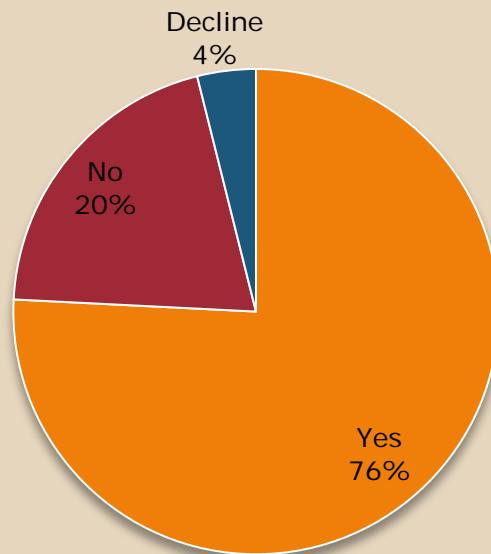
Age:



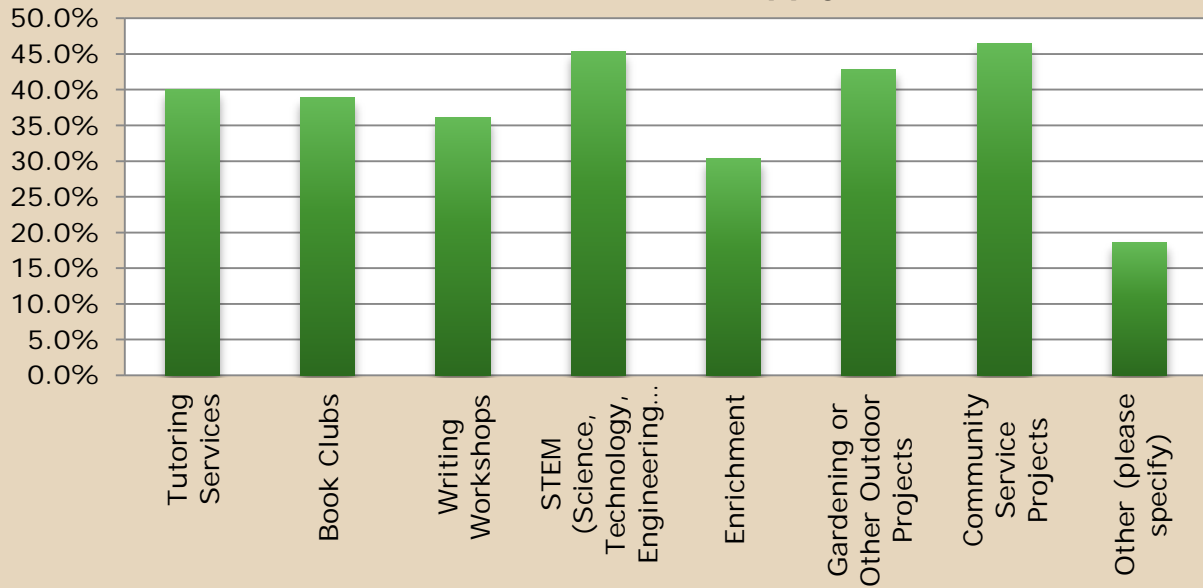
Please indicate your highest level of education.



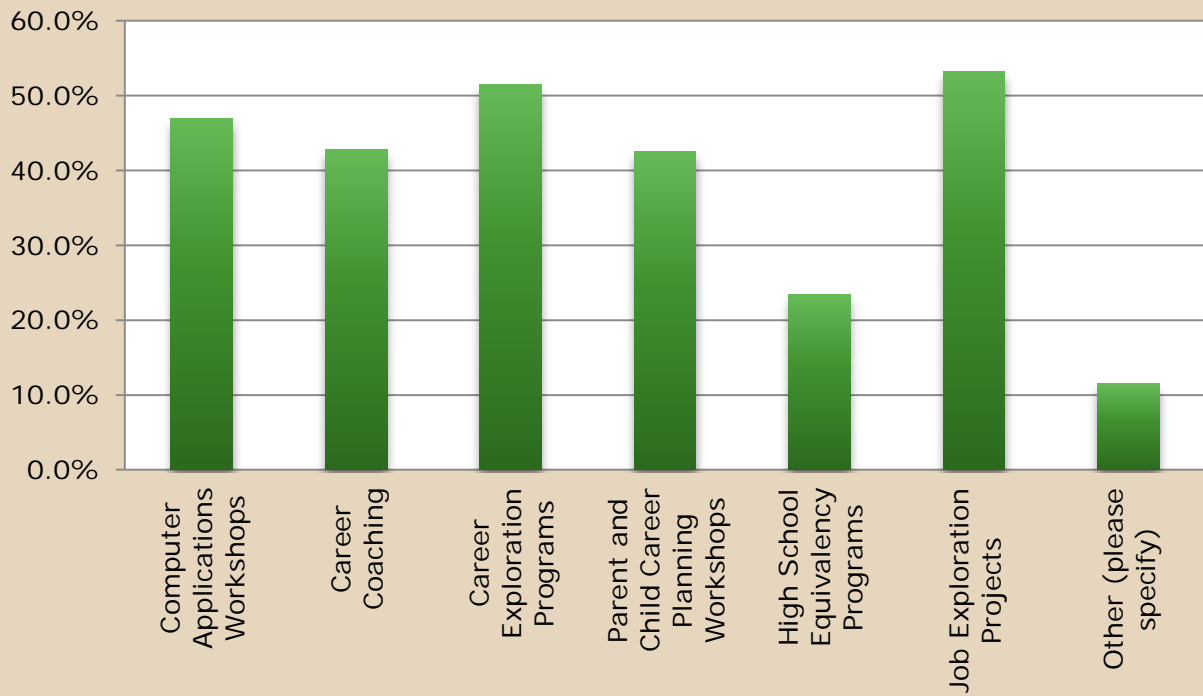
Are you currently employed?



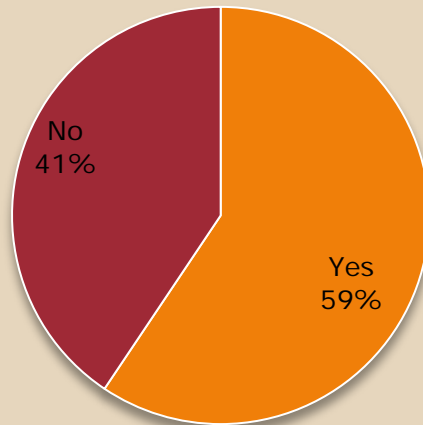
**What educational programs would you like to see made available for your children at school, in the community or after school?
(Please check all that apply)**



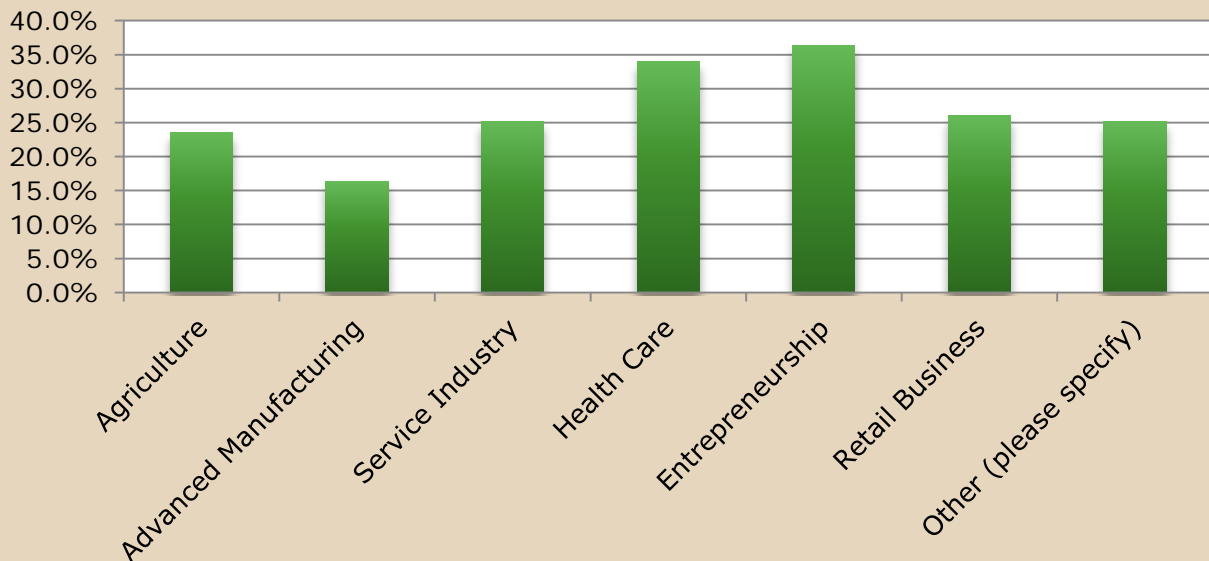
**What kind of educational and career planning programs do you think we need in Wyoming County?
(Please check all that apply)**



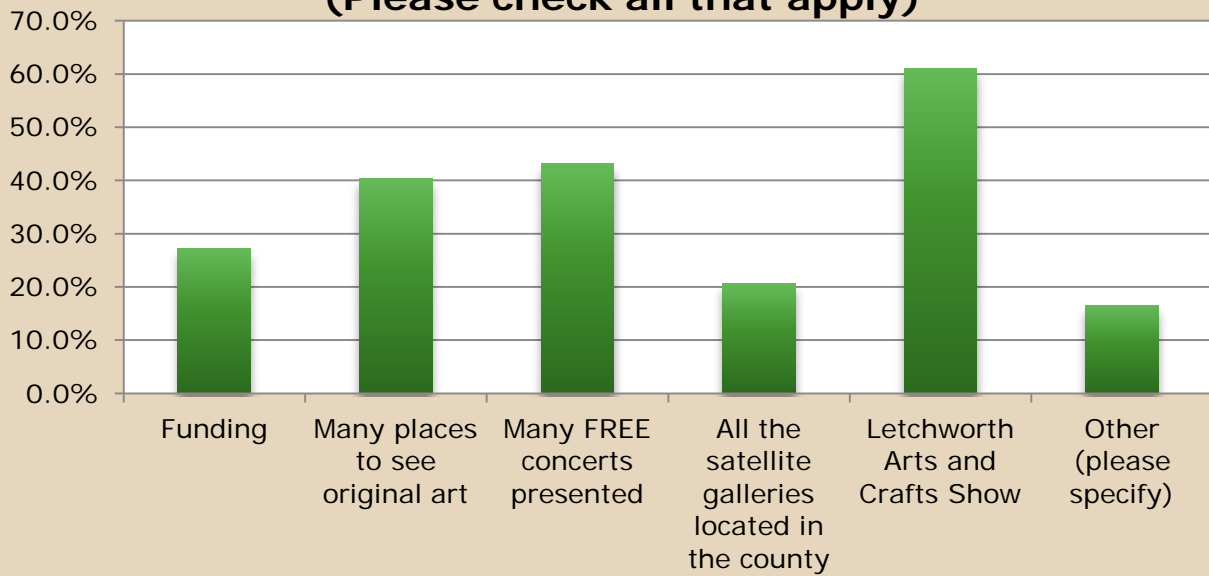
Would you or someone in your family use training opportunities that lead to employment in local businesses?



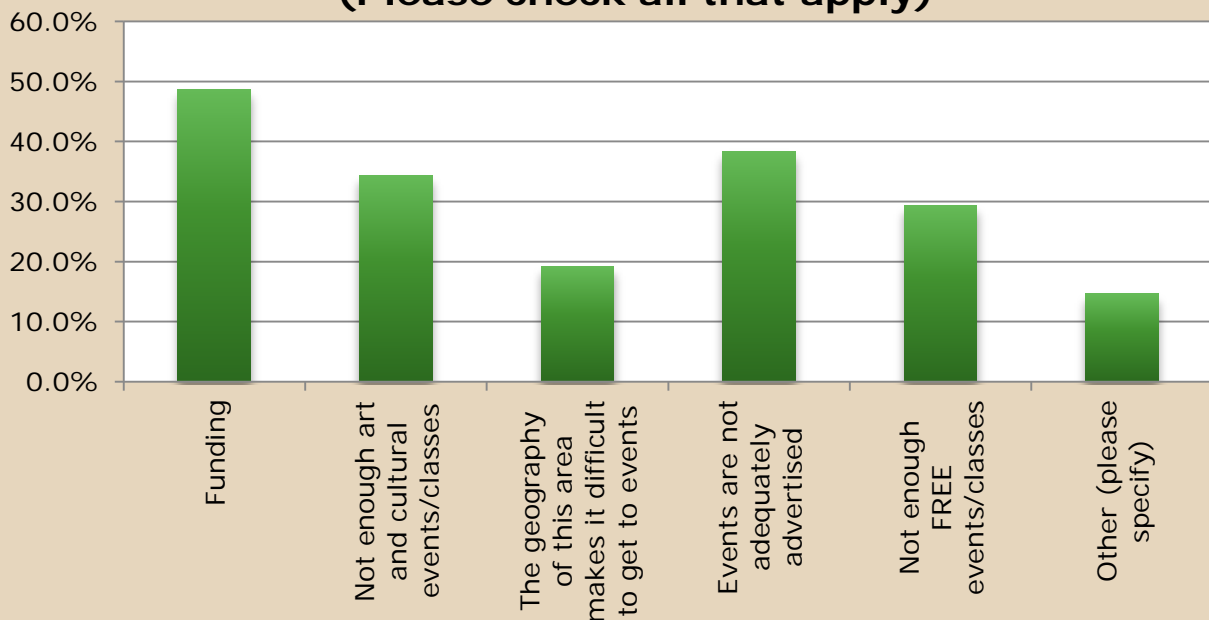
If you answered yes to question #8, which areas of employment would you be most interested in? (Please check all that apply)



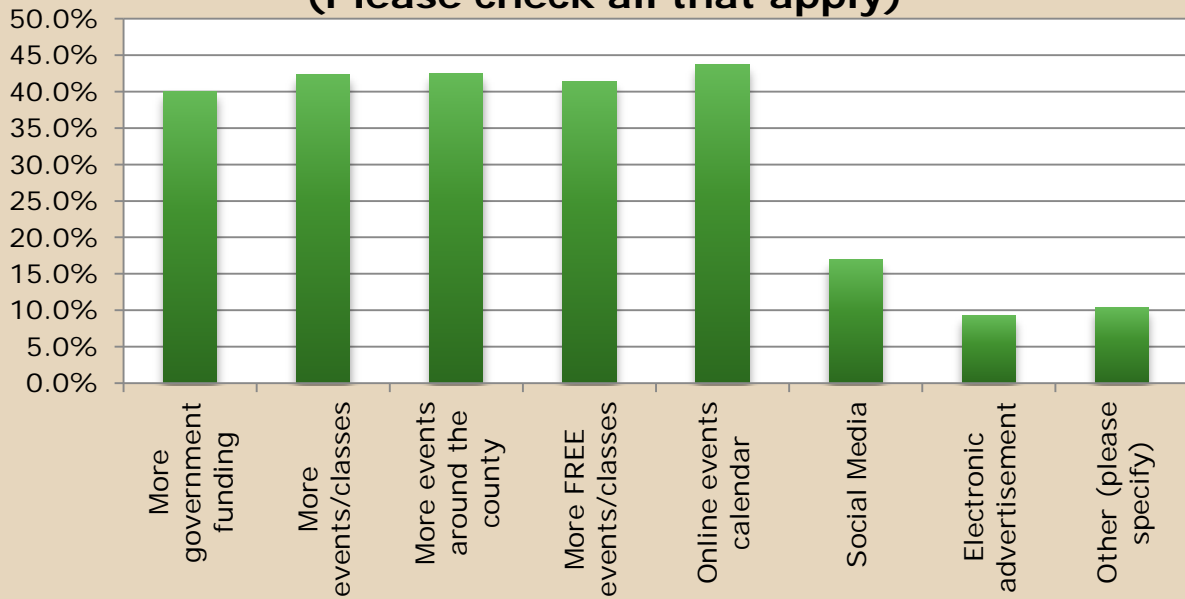
**What do you feel contributes to the success of arts and culture in Wyoming County?
(Please check all that apply)**



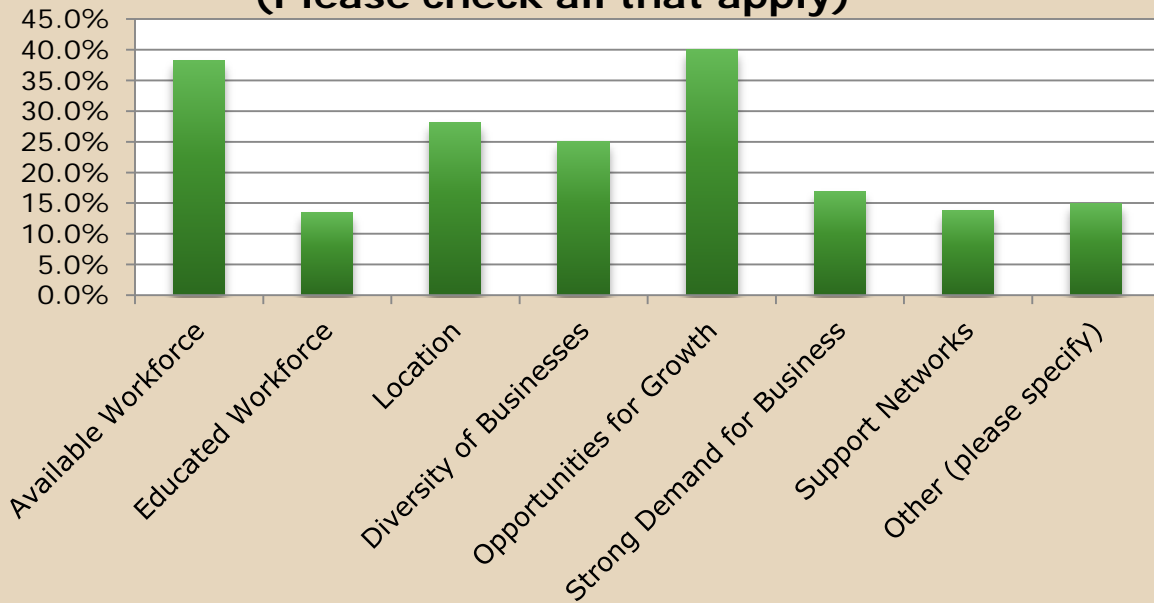
**What do you see as challenges facing arts and culture in Wyoming County?
(Please check all that apply)**



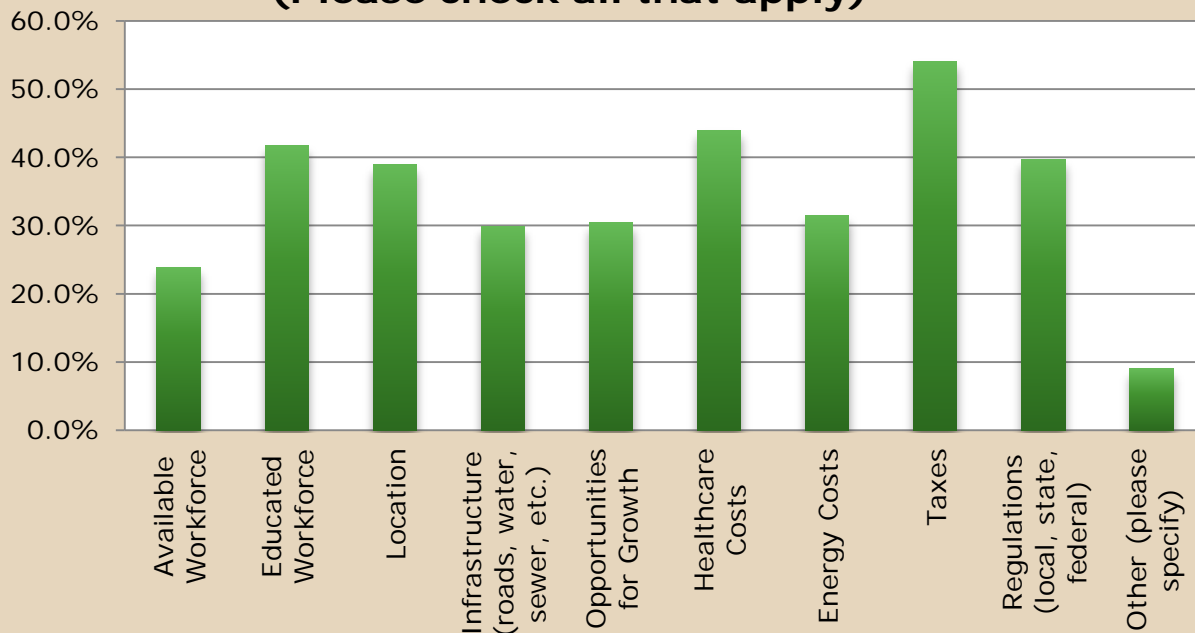
What could help make arts and culture better in Wyoming County? (Please check all that apply)

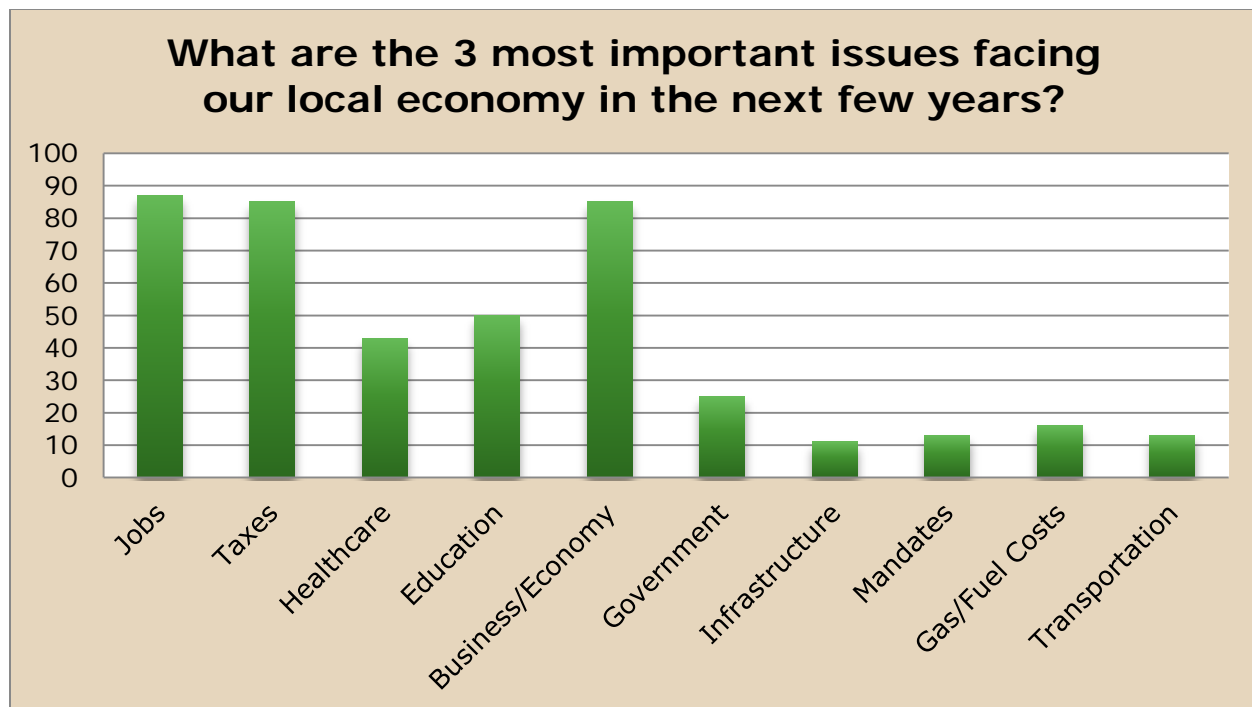


**What do you feel are positive assets for the business community in Wyoming County?
(Please check all that apply)**



**What do you see as challenges to doing business in Wyoming County?
(Please check all that apply)**





The responses of 280 survey takers are summarized in the following categories:

- Jobs: the lack of jobs, lack of jobs that pay self- and family-sustaining wages, unprepared workforce.
- Taxes: high local, state, and federal taxes, and those that increase the cost of living.
- Business: lack of local support for businesses, big businesses pushing out small companies, need for increased manufacturing plants, need to bring good paying jobs to the area.
- Cost of living: high cost of gas, food, taxes, energy, and housing.
- Health care: accessibility to specialty care and health insurance and overall costs.
- State and federal mandates, regulation, and funding: almost one quarter of respondents mentioned government mandates and regulations as a detriment to success as well as the lack of funding in needed areas.
- Education: Schools losing funding and support, dropout rates, preparation for workforce and college, school spending not appropriate.
- Infrastructure: inadequate water, sewer, roads, electricity, and broadband internet access.
- Local government: Many respondents noted concerns about barriers within the structure as a hindrance to progress.
- Brain drain: residents moving out of Wyoming County to find better opportunities elsewhere.
- Perceptions and attitudes: apathy, lack of work ethic and common sense, negativity toward Wyoming County, need for family responsibility and values, strong desire to reduce dependence on government benefits, need to promote our tremendous community assets, 'not-in-my-backyard' mentality.
- Transportation, lack of child care, lack of housing, and the need for more options for the elderly in an aging population were also frequently mentioned.