Return migration and community assets during COVID-19: A northwest Missouri survey

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Regional
Economic &
Entrepreneurial
Development

MU Extension
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Outline

- Project Motivation and Response Overview

- COVID-19 and Where You Want to Live

- The Best Things About NWMO

- What Drives Migration Decisions in NWMO?

- What Will Influence Where Survey Respondents Move in the Next Five Years?

- How Can Maximize NWMO Strengthen the Region?

- Policy Implications

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Project Motivation and Response Overview

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Survey rationale

17 Rural Non-metro Counties

1 Urban Metro County
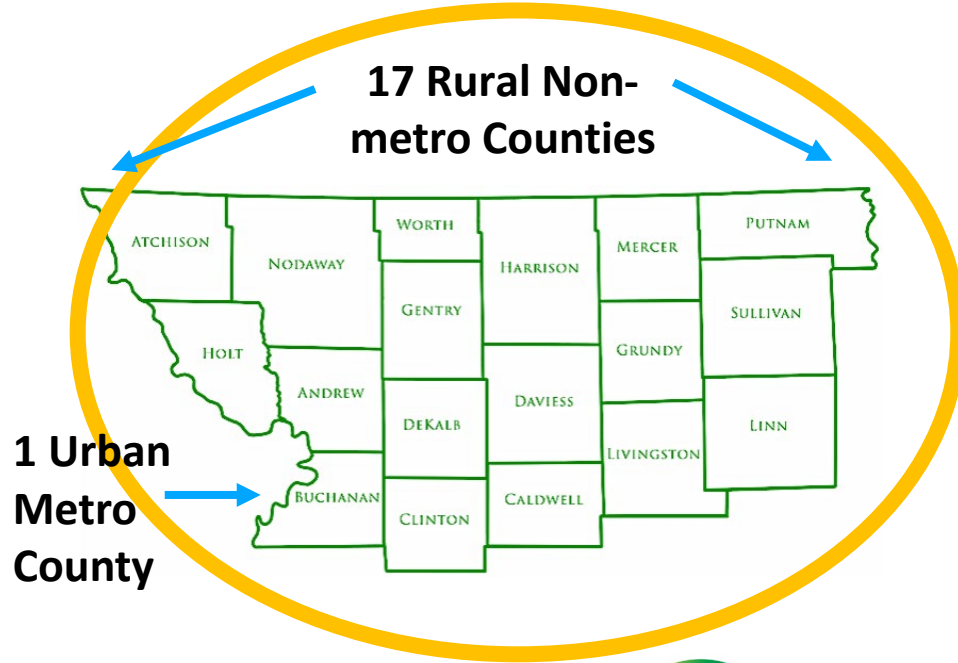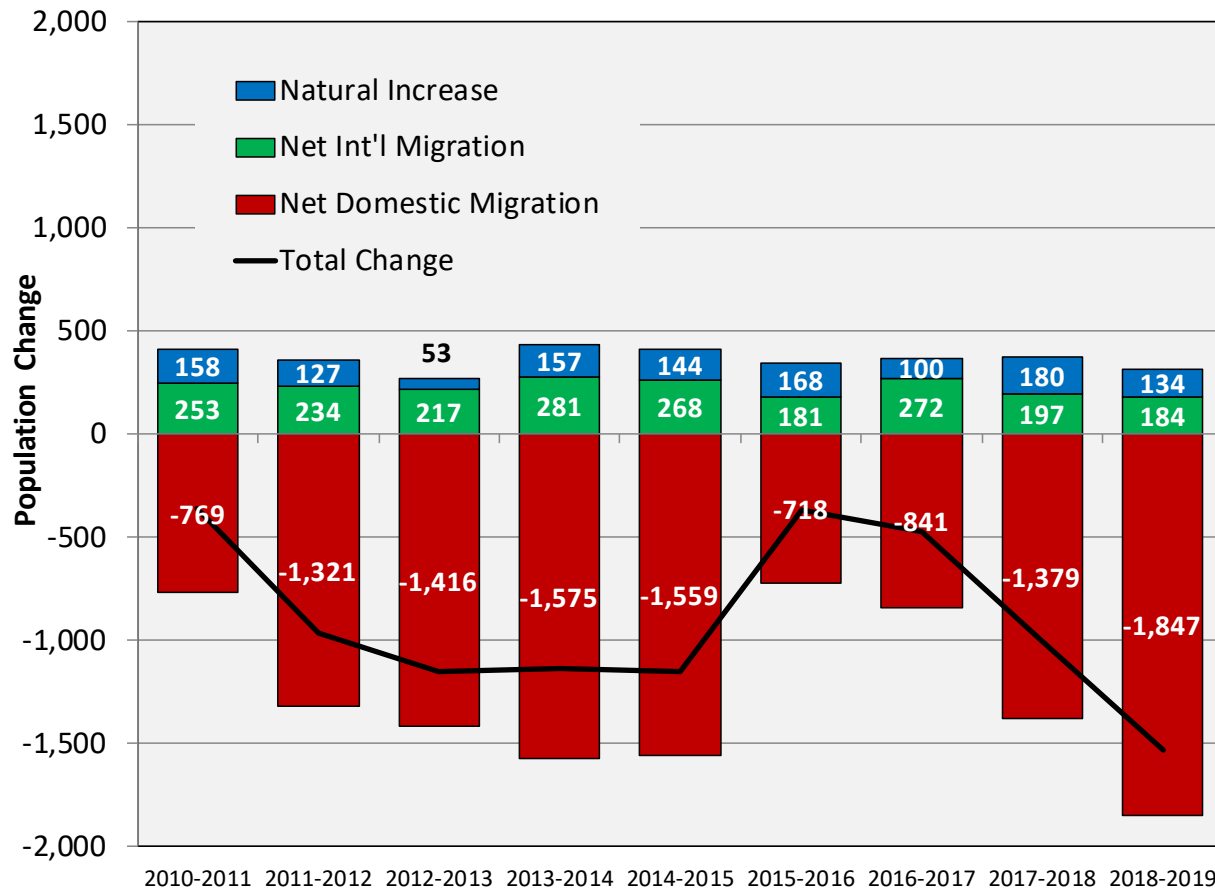
- How can leaders in Northwest Missouri stem population loss?
- Research in low amenity areas shows:
  - Return-migrants are more likely to migrate to a rural community than migrants with no roots in the region.
  - Family ties and attachment to place outweigh economic opportunities for return-migrants.
  - Return-migrants bring life experiences, new skills and new perspectives.
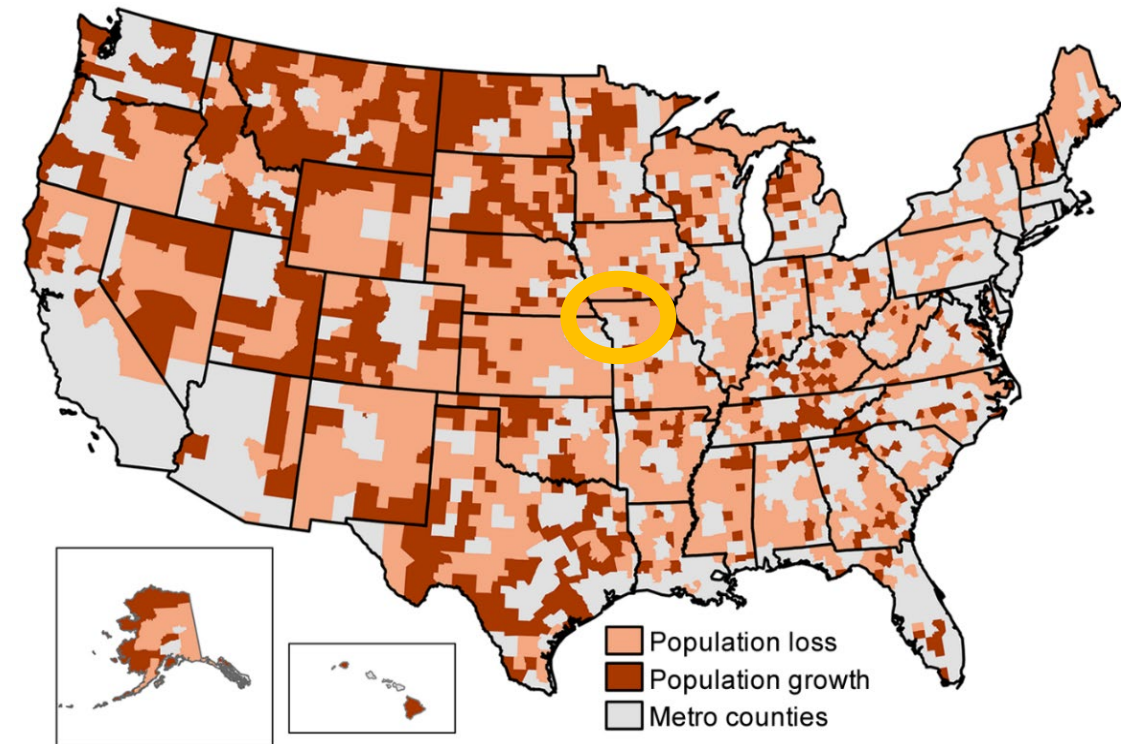
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Persistent population loss affects many rural regions
Why do people leave? Why do they stay?

Components of Population Change: Northwest Missouri

Legend:
- Natural Increase
- Net Int'l Migration
- Net Domestic Migration
- Total Change

Y-axis: Population Change (2,000 to -2,000)

Period	Natural Increase	Net Int'l Migration	Net Domestic Migration	Total Change
2010-2011	158	253	-769	-769
2011-2012	127	234	-1,321	-1,321
2012-2013	53	217	-1,416	-1,416
2013-2014	157	281	-1,575	-1,575
2014-2015	144	268	-1,559	-1,559
2015-2016	168	181	-718	-718
2016-2017	100	272	-841	-841
2017-2018	180	197	-1,379	-1,379
2018-2019	134	184	-1,847	-1,847

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, V2019

U.S. Nonmetro Population Change, 2010-17

Legend:
- Population loss
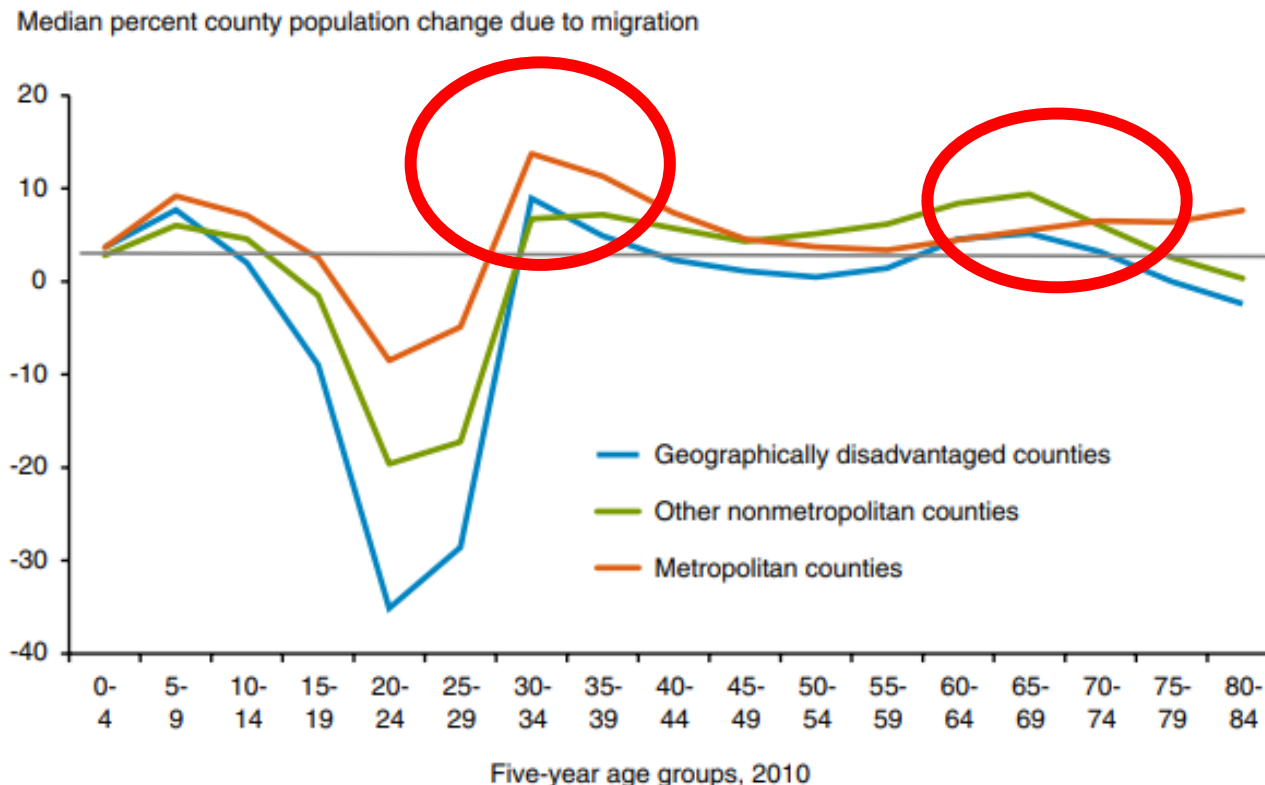- Population growth
- Metro counties

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

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Migration follows age specific patterns

Net migration by age, 2000-10, relative to county population, 2010

Median percent county population change due to migration

Legend:
- Geographically disadvantaged counties
- Other nonmetropolitan counties
- Metropolitan counties

Five-year age groups, 2010

Note: Geographically disadvantaged counties are geographically remote and relatively lacking in scenic amenities.
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service based on estimates from University of Wisconsin-Madison: http://www.net-migration.wisc.edu/

Northwest Missouri is considered a geographically disadvantaged region, defined as having low natural amenities relative to a national scale.

Research suggests NWMO is most likely to be successful attracting people between the ages of:
- 30-40
- 60-70

Slide from *Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Northwest Missouri: A Synthesis Review* April 27, 2020

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Purpose of the survey

- How can leaders in this low amenity, rural region focus their efforts to reduce net population loss?
  - The survey was a discovery process in work towards the goal of keeping and attracting talent to the region that feeds innovation and the entrepreneurship ecosystem necessary for building a more thriving region.
- What assets or characteristics are most valued within the region?
- Has COVID-19 created opportunities for rural communities to reattract out-migrants? Does this vary with age?

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Survey details

Primary Targets: NWMO high school alumni ages 23-47
Secondary Targets: Current and former residents with a
strong tie to the region ages 18-100+
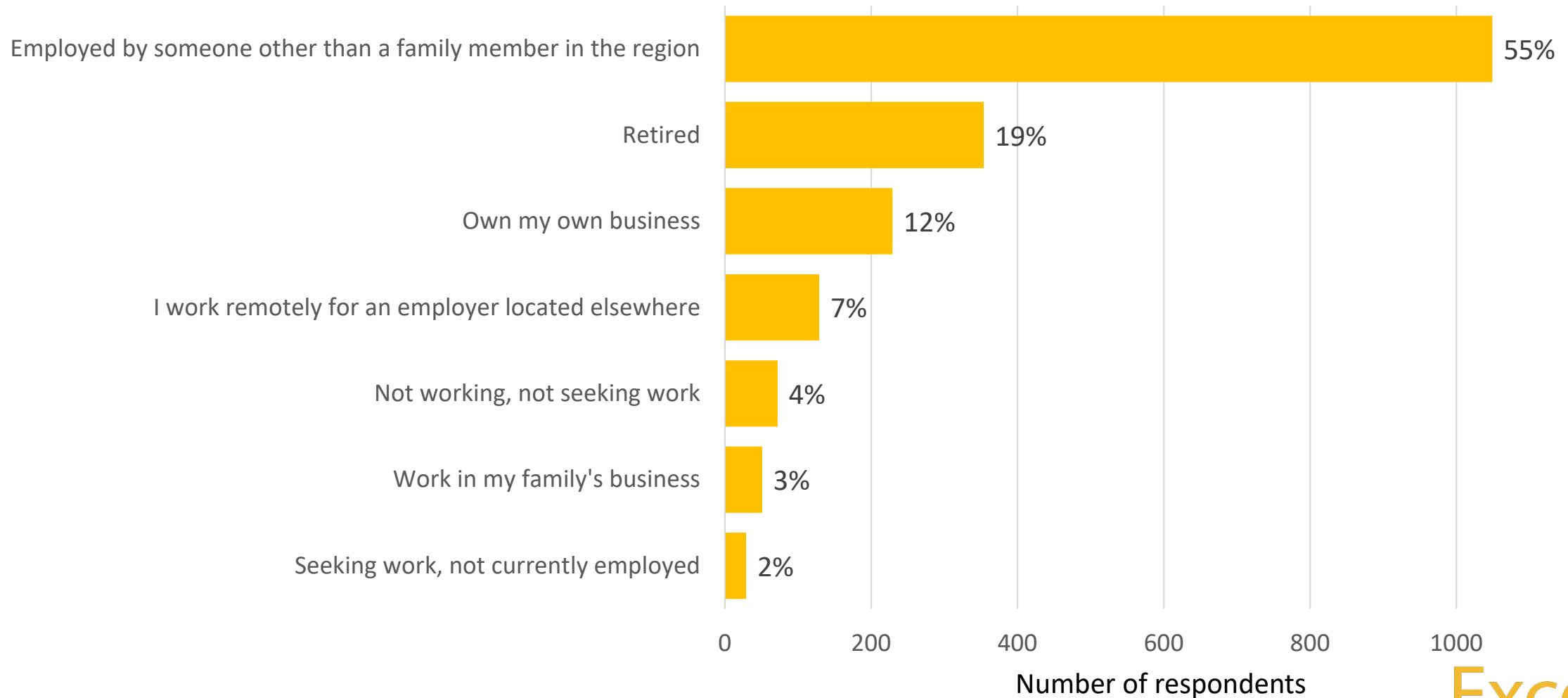Survey open: July 14-September 30, 2020
Promoted through email, Facebook, Twitter, news
releases, and interviews with volunteers in local radio,
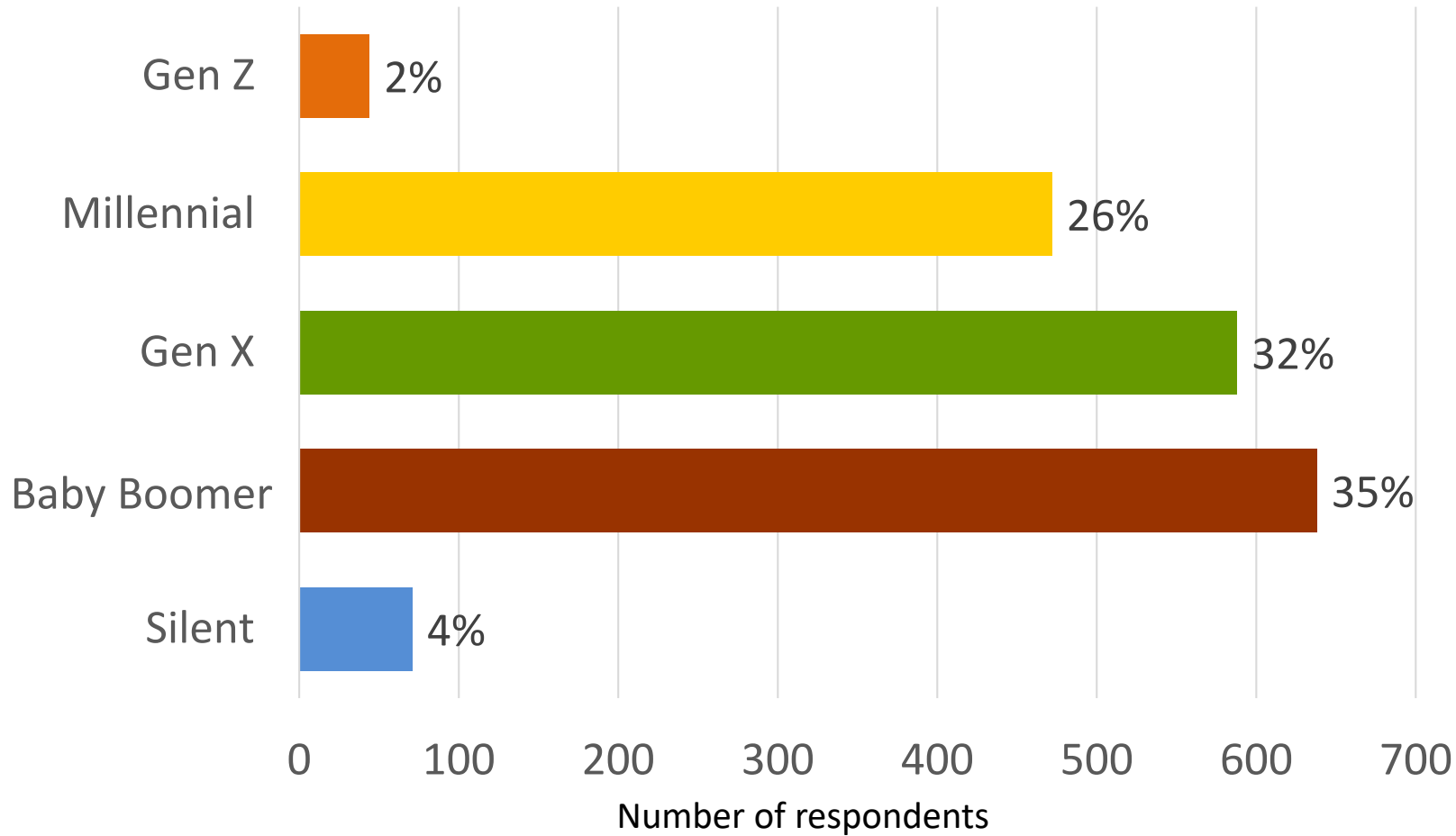television, and newspapers.

Responses

- Online only, using *Qualtrics*

- 2,182 respondents

- 1,939 complete responses

- Gender, age, geography, migration status

- Caveats: 75% of respondents were women and there were no population weights, online access bias

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A wide range of views were captured, including by employment status: 12% of respondents own a business

Employment status	Percentage
Employed by someone other than a family member in the region	55%
Retired	19%
Own my own business	12%
I work remotely for an employer located elsewhere	7%
Not working, not seeking work	4%
Work in my family's business	3%
Seeking work, not currently employed	2%

Number of respondents

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A wide variety of ages responded

Millennial and **Baby Boomer** respondents' views may be most important as they are more likely to move back.

Gen Z age 25 years and younger, Millennial age 26-40, Gen X age 41-55, Baby Boomer age 56-74, Silent age 75 years and older.

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We analyze respondents by their migration status

We used survey questions to create these groups:

- Leavers: respondents who grew up in NWMO but no longer live there

- Returners: respondents who grew up in NWMO, moved away, and have since moved back

- Stayers: respondents who grew up and have always lived in NWMO

- In-Migrants: respondents who did not grow up in NWMO but currently live in the region

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Robust responses by age and migration status
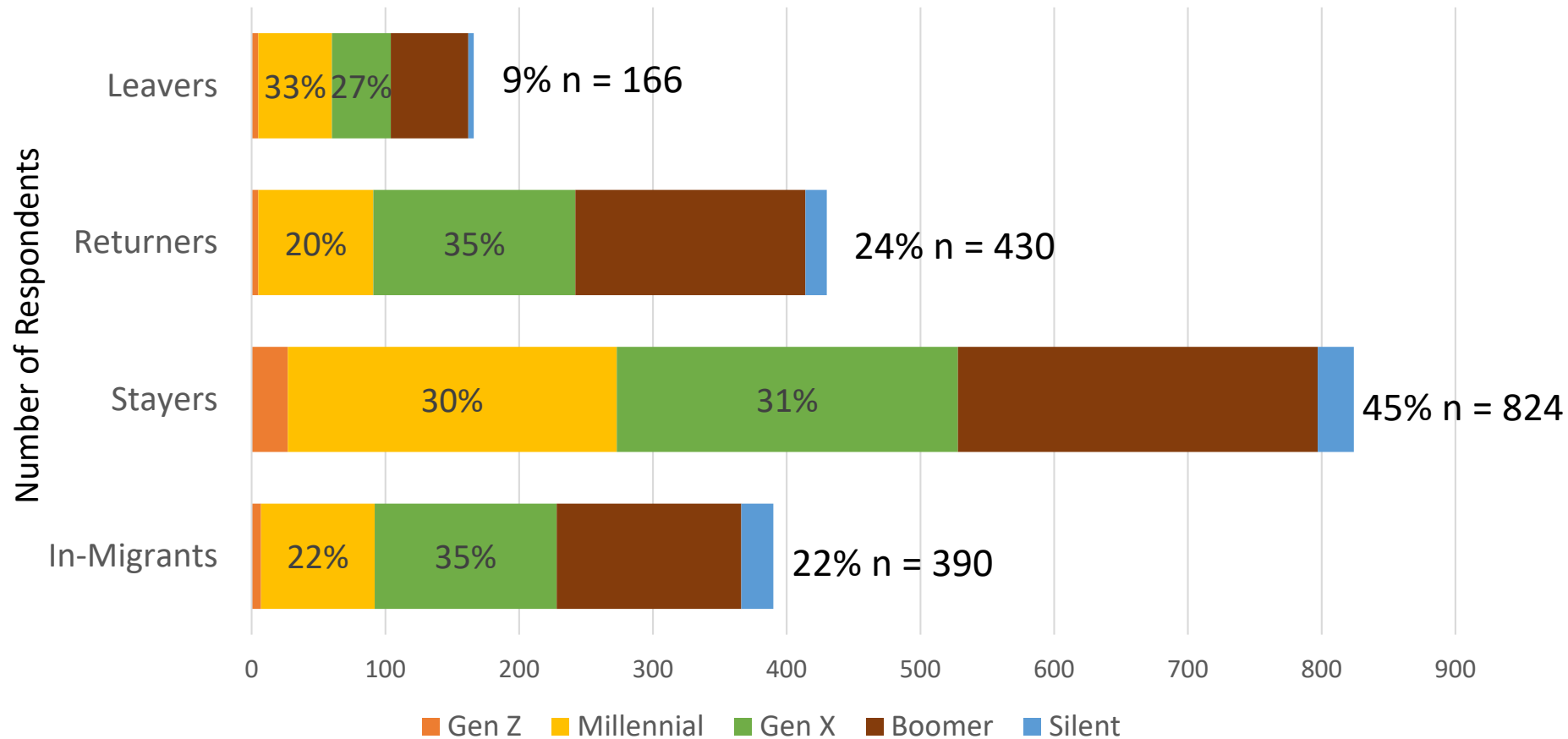
This is a very robust set of responses that allow us to have confidence in examining differences between age and migration status.

Leavers: grew up in NWMO but no longer live there; Returners: Grew up, moved away, moved back; Stayers: Grew up and have always lived in NWMO; In-Migrants: did not grow up in NWMO but currently live there.
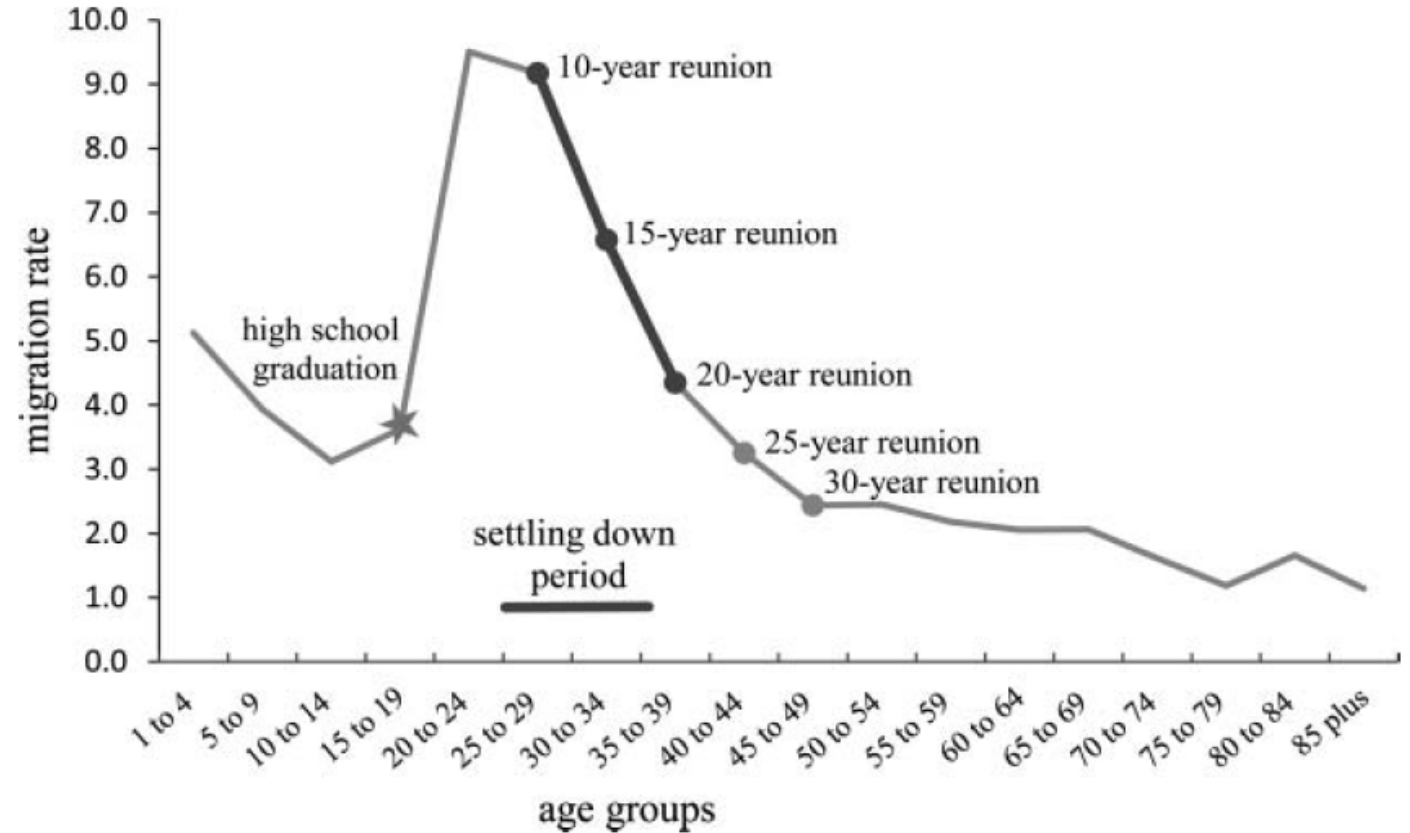
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COVID-19 and Where You Want to Live
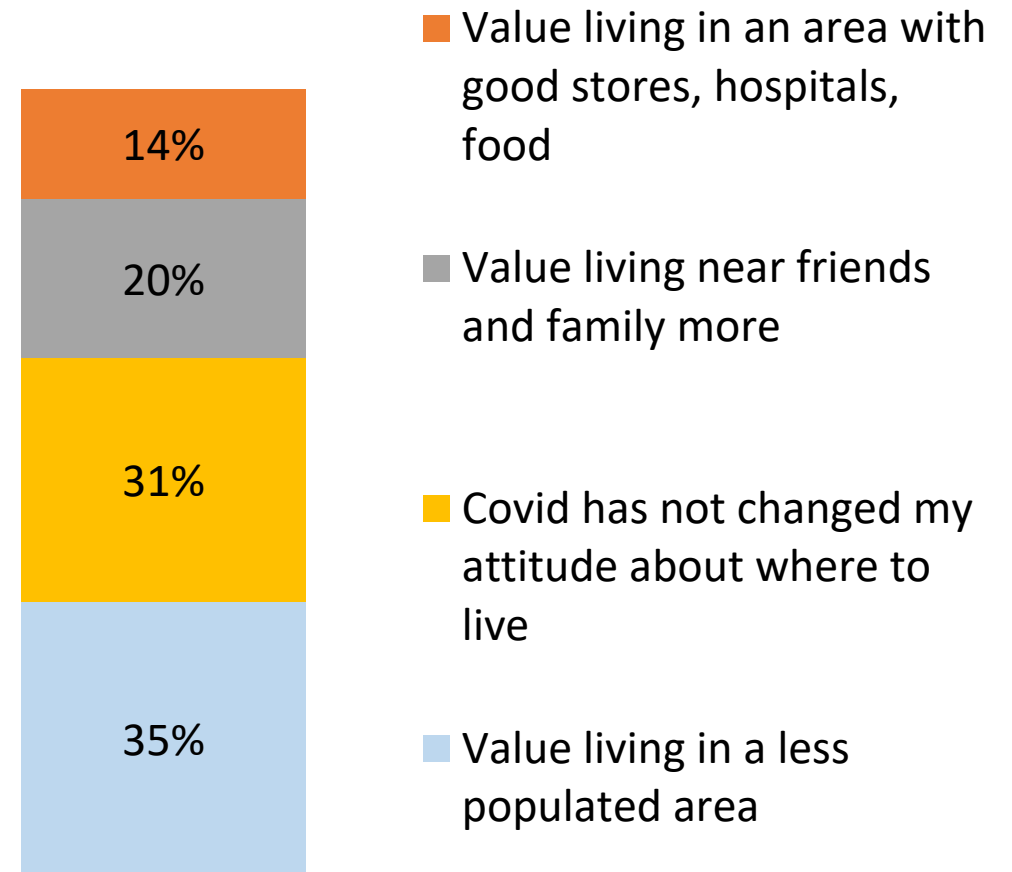
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Research Questions

- Has COVID affected perceptions about rural lifestyles?

- Has COVID created opportunities for rural communities to reattract outmigrants?

- Does this vary with age/generation?

From: Von Reichert, Cromartie & Arthun, 2013

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Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your attitude about where you want to live?

35% of respondents said COVID-19 has made them value living in a less populated area more than before

14%

20%

31%

35%

■ Value living in an area with good stores, hospitals, food

■ Value living near friends and family more

■ Covid has not changed my attitude about where to live

■ Value living in a less populated area

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By migrant status: Has COVID changed your attitude about where you want to live?
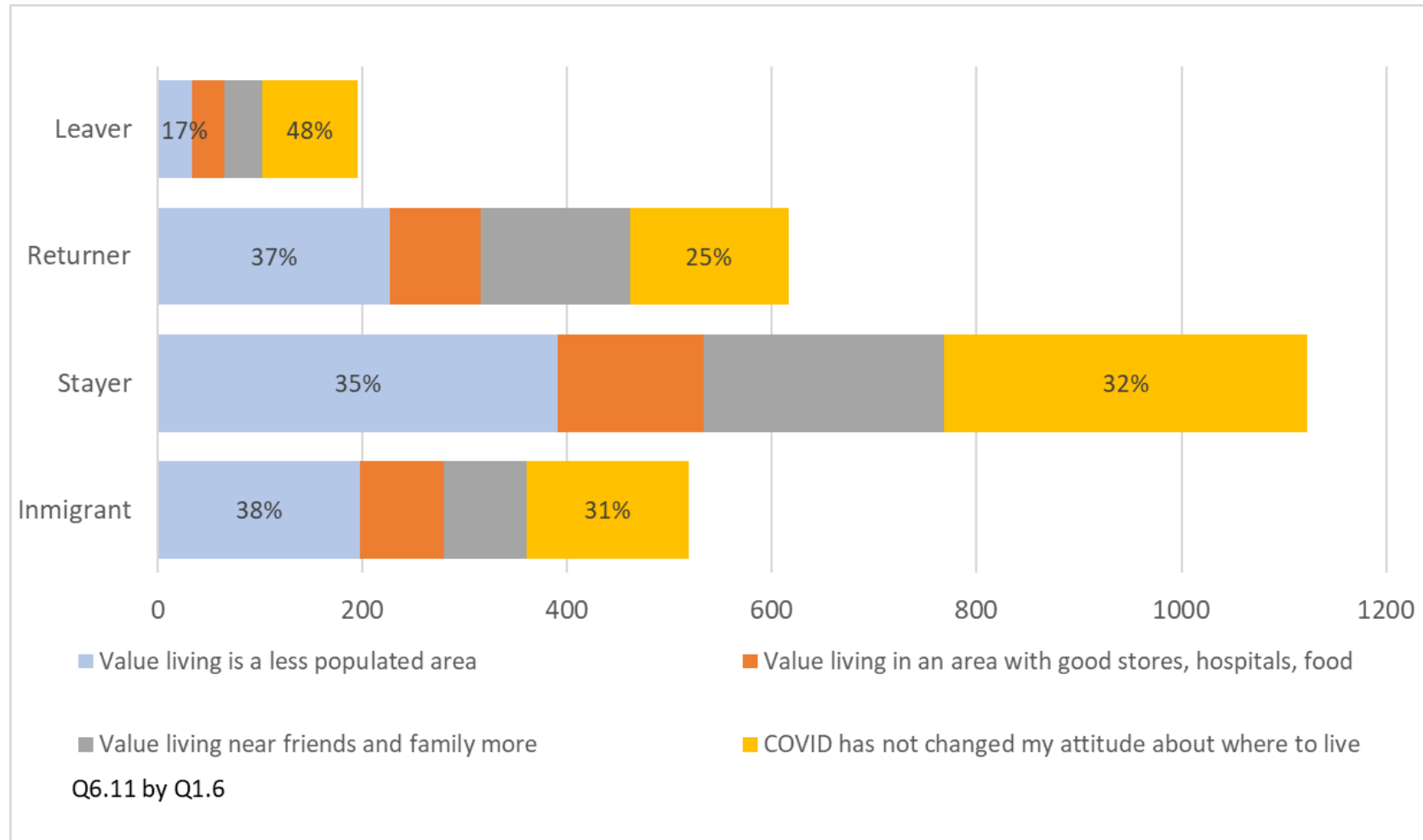
60% of respondents answered yes.

44% of all respondents said they now valued living in a less populated area more than before.

Q6.11 by Q1.6

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Regressions

- Question: Has COVID created opportunities for rural return migration?
  - Will COVID make rural return migration more attractive?
  - Do outmigrants have different attitudes about where to live after COVID?

- Dependent variable: Has COVID changed your attitude about where to live?

- Multivariate probit regressions

- Test variable: Migrant status
  - Out-migrant
  - In-migrant
  - Returner
  - Stayer

- Controlling for gender, employment status, household composition, age/generation, metro-location and survey month

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Y=Covid-No, Probit (robust std. err) Log pseudolikeli -1141.458

Variable	Coefficient	Sig
Left	0.47	***
	(0.14)	
In-migrant	-0.02	
	(0.08)	
Returner	-0.18	***
	(0.04)	
Female	-0.30	***
	(0.07)	
Own Business	-0.06	
	(0.14)	
Retired	0.02	
	(0.07)	
Commuter	-0.18	
	(0.11)	
Kids	-0.06	
	(0.11)	
Wadults	-0.06	
	(0.11)	
Gen Z	0.49	**
	(0.24)	
Millenial	0.25	*
	(0.15)	
Gen X	0.21	*
	(0.13)	
Boomer	0.10	
	(0.14)	
August	-0.03	
	(0.08)	
September	0.20	***
	(0.07)	
Metro	0.06	
	(0.05)	
Constant	-0.30	**
N=1,752		

Y=Covid-Rural, Probit (robust std. err) Log pseudolikeli -1160.17

Variable	Coefficient	Sig
Left	-0.80	***
	(0.09)	
In-migrant	0.06	
	(0.07)	
Returner	0.07	
	(0.05)	
Female	0.21	***
	(0.07)	
Own Business	0.19	*
	(0.10)	
Retired	-0.06	
	(0.12)	
Commuter	0.14	
	(0.12)	
With Kids	0.10	
	(0.06)	
With Adults	0.09	
	(0.08)	
Gen Z	-0.56	**
	(0.26)	
Millenial	-0.34	*
	(0.18)	
Gen X	-0.25	
	(0.17)	
Baby Boomer	-0.21	
	(0.14)	
August	0.00	
	(0.09)	
September	-0.13	*
	(0.07)	
Metro	-0.19	*
	(0.10)	
Constant	-0.01	**
N=1,752		

Y=Covid-Ties, Probit (robust std. err) Log pseudolikeli -978.27

Variable	Coefficient	Sig
Left	-0.28	**
	(0.13)	
In-migrant	-0.26	***
	(0.09)	
Returner	0.15	*
	(0.08)	
Female	0.19	***
	(0.07)	
Own Business	-0.20	
	(0.14)	
Retired	-0.01	
	(0.11)	
Commuter	0.08	
	(0.13)	
With Kids	-0.01	
	(0.11)	
With Adults	-0.12	
	(0.10)	
Gen Z	0.28	
	(0.33)	
Millenial	0.34	*
	(0.21)	
Gen X	0.21	
	(0.23)	
Baby Boomer	0.28	*
	(0.17)	
August	0.00	
	(0.00)	
September	0.07	
	(0.11)	
Metro	-0.08	
	(0.09)	
Constant	(0.08)	***
N=1,752		

Regression Results

- Test variables: Migrant status
  - Left (out-migrant)
  - In-migrant
  - Returner
  - Stayer (omitted condition)
- Dependent variable: Has COVID changed your attitude about where to live?
  - No (column 1)
  - Yes—value living in a less populated area (2)
  - Yes—value living closer to friends and family (3)
- Marginal effects reported on the next slide

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COVID has **not** changed my attitude about where to live

- 40% of respondents (n=766), *ceteris paribus:*
- Leavers are 18% more likely to say this than stayers
  - Leavers are less affected by COVID, and maybe are happy where they are?
- Returners are 7% less likely to say this than stayers
  - Returners are more affected by COVID, more likely to think about moving again? Broadened horizons?
- Stayers and In-migrants are no different from each other
- Younger generations are more likely to say this
  - Gen Z - 18% more likely than boomers or silent generation
  - Millennials – 9% more likely than boomers or silent generation
  - Gen X – 8 % more likely than boomers or silent generation

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COVID **has** changed my attitude about where to live: **I value living in a less populated area more**

- 44% of respondents (n=853), *ceteris paribus:*
- Leavers are 30% less likely to say this than stayers
  - Leavers left because they don't value living in rural areas?
- No difference for returners, in-migrants or stayers
- People currently located in metro areas were 7% less likely to say this than those in nonmetro areas

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COVID **has** changed my attitude about where to live: **I value living closer to family and friends more than I did before**

- 26% of respondents (n=499), *ceteris paribus:*

- Leavers were 9% less likely to say this than stayers

- In-migrants were 8% less likely to say this than stayers

- **Returners were 5% more likely to say this than stayers**
  - Due to COVID returners value friends and family more than stayers
  - Once you're left, it opens your eyes to what you left and you appreciate it?

- Millennials, boomers more likely to say this than silent generation

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Conclusions: COVID-19 and Rural Migration

- COVID has not made rural areas more attractive to natives who have left Northwest Missouri
- COVID has had less impact on younger people's perceptions about where to live
- Consistent with previous rural migration research, low amenity areas are most desirable to people with existing family ties
  - Support families, youth organizations, target leavers
  - More deliberately engage in-migrants
  - Interesting differences about who feels like they belong in the community
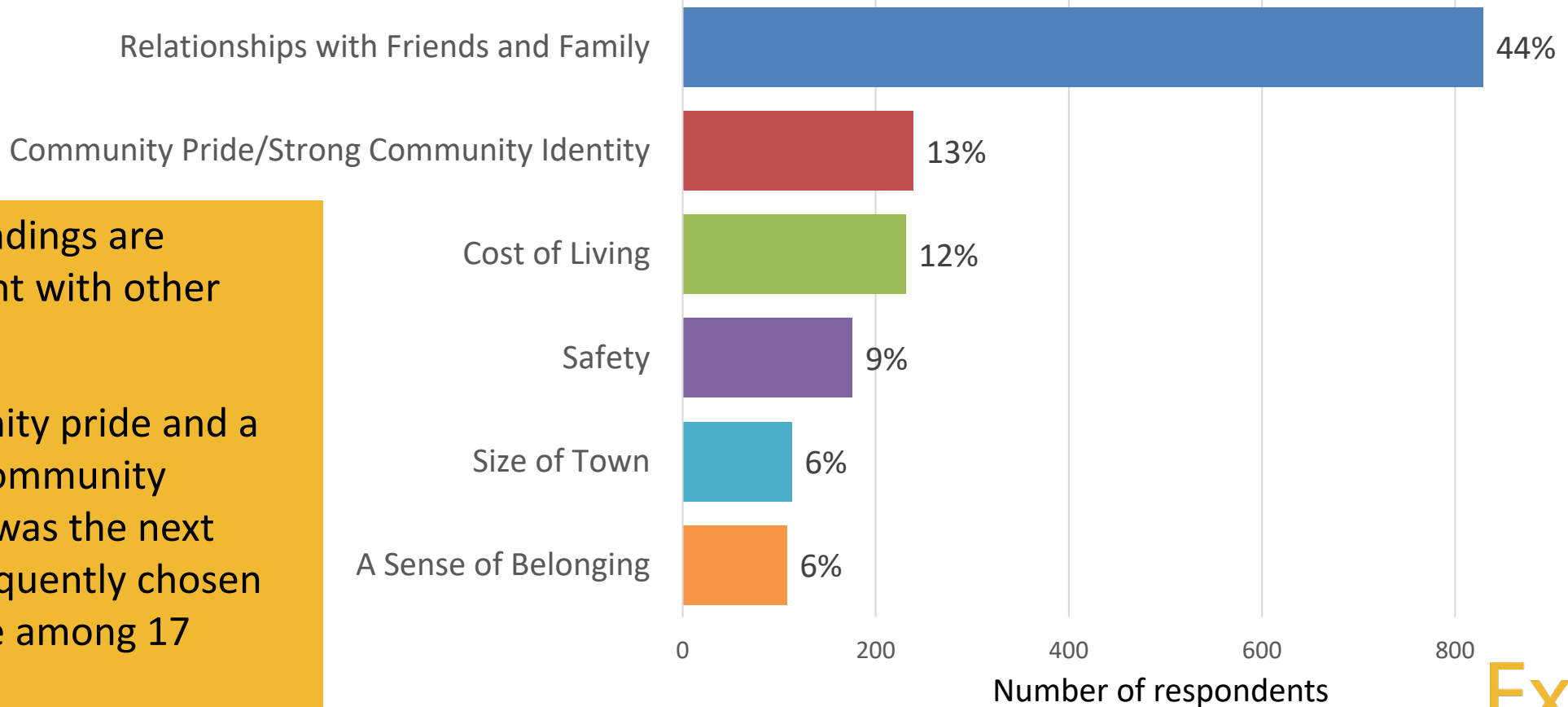- People need jobs to stay in the region (see next slide)

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The Best Things about NWMO

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Relationships with friends and family are the most valued characteristic about the region

What is/was the <u>very best thing</u> about living and/or working in Northwest Missouri?
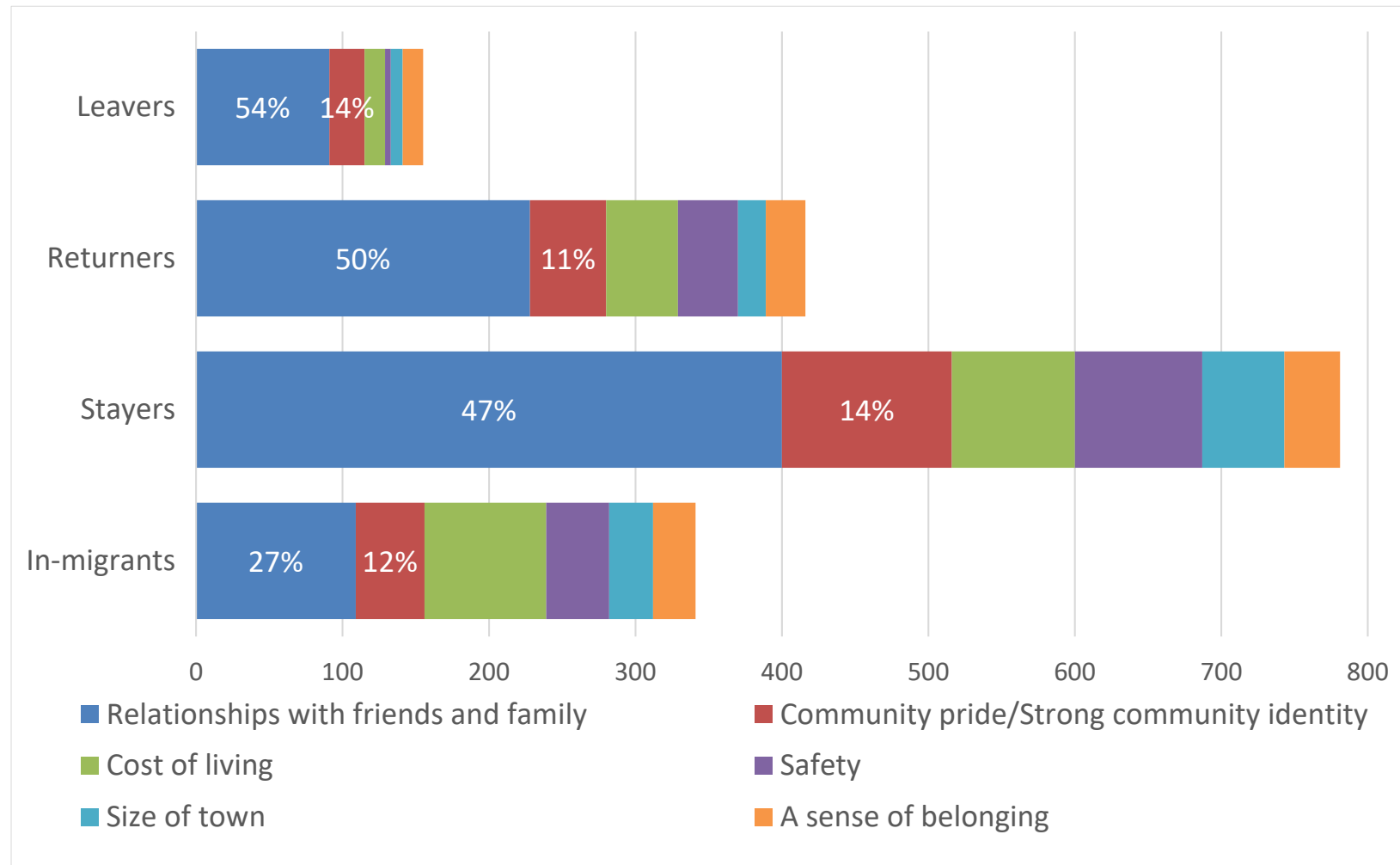
These findings are consistent with other studies.

Community pride and a strong community identity was the next most frequently chosen response among 17 options.

Characteristic	Percentage
Relationships with Friends and Family	44%
Community Pride/Strong Community Identity	13%
Cost of Living	12%
Safety	9%
Size of Town	6%
A Sense of Belonging	6%

Number of respondents

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What is/was the very best thing about living and/or working in Northwest Missouri?

Relationships with friends and family was chosen by approximately half of all **leavers, returners and stayers**.

In-migrants were more likely to say cost of living than other groups.

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What drives migration decisions in NWMO?

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People stay in NWMO to be near family and friends and so their children can grow up like they did

Which of the following reasons contributed to your decision to stay in the region?	%	Count
To be near family and friends	32%	855
Want my kids to grow up like I did	17%	468
Engagement in my community	10%	263
Support my spouse	9%	232
Always knew I wanted to stay	8%	229
Support a family business	6%	155
Wage and salary job opportunities	5%	144
Faith-based opportunities	3%	90
Educational opportunities	3%	87
Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities	3%	81
Climate and geography	2%	58
Other	1%	26
Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives and people	1%	14
Total	100%	2,702

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Returners leave for jobs and educations, they come back to be near family and friends

Which of the following reasons contributed to your decision to leave the region?	%	Count
Wage and salary job opportunities	34%	294
Educational opportunities	23%	196
Support my spouse	12%	99
Always knew I wanted to leave	7%	60
Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives and people	5%	46
To be near family and friends	3%	29
Climate and geography	3%	26
Provide a certain quality of life for my children	3%	23
Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities	2%	16
Support a family business	1%	7
Engagement in my community	1%	5
Other	7%	57
Total	100%	860

Which of the following reasons were the primary reason you moved back to the region?	%	Count
To be near family and friends	58%	297
Want my kids to grow up like I did	10%	52
Job opportunities	8%	42
Support my spouse	6%	33
Always knew I wanted to come back	5%	26
Support a family business	4%	19
Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities	3%	13
Engagement in my community	1%	3
Total	100%	511

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In-migrants are more likely to move into the region because of a personal connection

In-migrants were drawn to move into NWMO by family connections, friendships and to support their spouse.

12% of respondents mentioned they moved into the region so that their kids could grow up like they did, suggesting they originated from a similar region.

Which of the following reasons contributed to your decision to move into the region? (n=488)	%	Count
Support my spouse	24%	179
To be near family and friends	18%	133
Wage or salary job opportunities	17%	127
Other:	9%	67
Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities	5%	40
Educational opportunities	5%	39
Want my kids to grow up like I did	5%	38
Faith-based opportunities	4%	31
Climate and geography	4%	31
Support a family business	4%	29
Engagement in my community	4%	28
Always knew I wanted to come back	1%	7
Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives and people	1%	5
Total	100%	754

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Respondents who no longer live in NWMO were most likely to leave for jobs and educational opportunities

This is consistent with why returners leave as well.

People have different preferences for place, 7% of all responding leavers knew they always wanted to leave.

Which of the following reasons contributed to your decision to leave the region?	%	Count
Wage or salary job opportunities	33%	137
Educational opportunities	18%	75
Support my spouse's career	11%	48
Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives and people	10%	40
Always knew I wanted to leave	7%	30
Provide a certain quality of life for my children	6%	26
To be near family and friends	5%	19
Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities	2%	9
Climate and geography	2%	9
Faith-based opportunities	1%	4
Support a family business	0%	2
I wanted to be more engaged in community leadership	0%	1
Other:	5%	20
Total	100%	420

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What will influence where survey respondents move in the next five years?

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Nearly 1 in 4 respondents may choose to move

Returners were the least likely to say they will move

- 67% of all returners said they were somewhat or extremely unlikely to move

- 63% of all stayers said they were somewhat or extremely unlikely to move

Leavers were most likely to say they will move again.

- 42% of leavers said they were somewhat or extremely likely to move.

How likely are you to move in the next five years?

- Extremely likely, 9%
- Somewhat likely, 14%
- Unsure, 13%
- Somewhat unlikely, 17%
- Extremely unlikely, 46%

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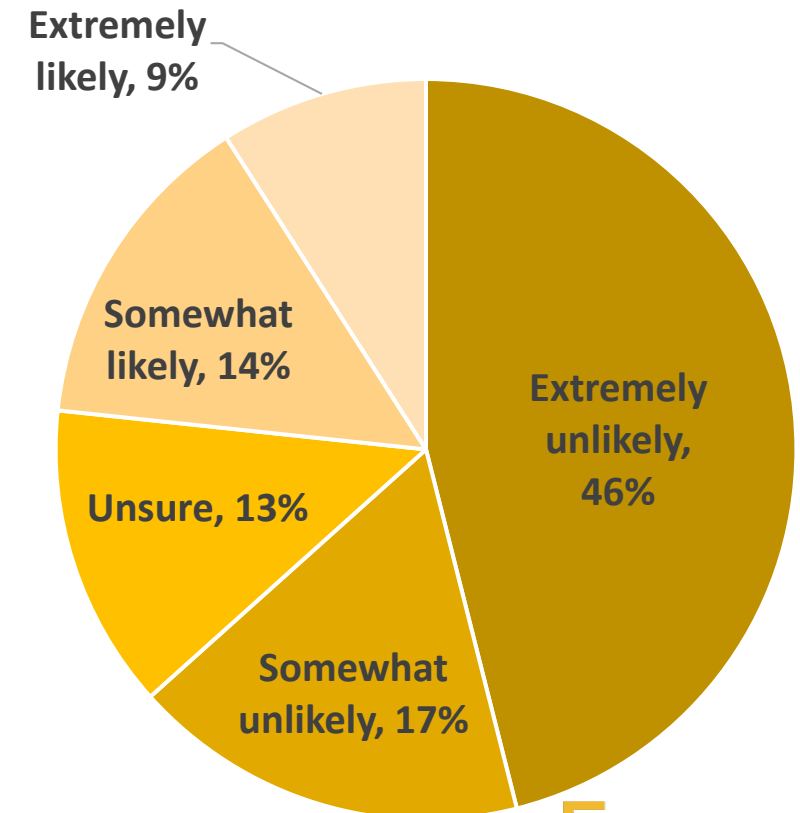
How important are each of the following factors in your decision about where you will live in the next 5 years?

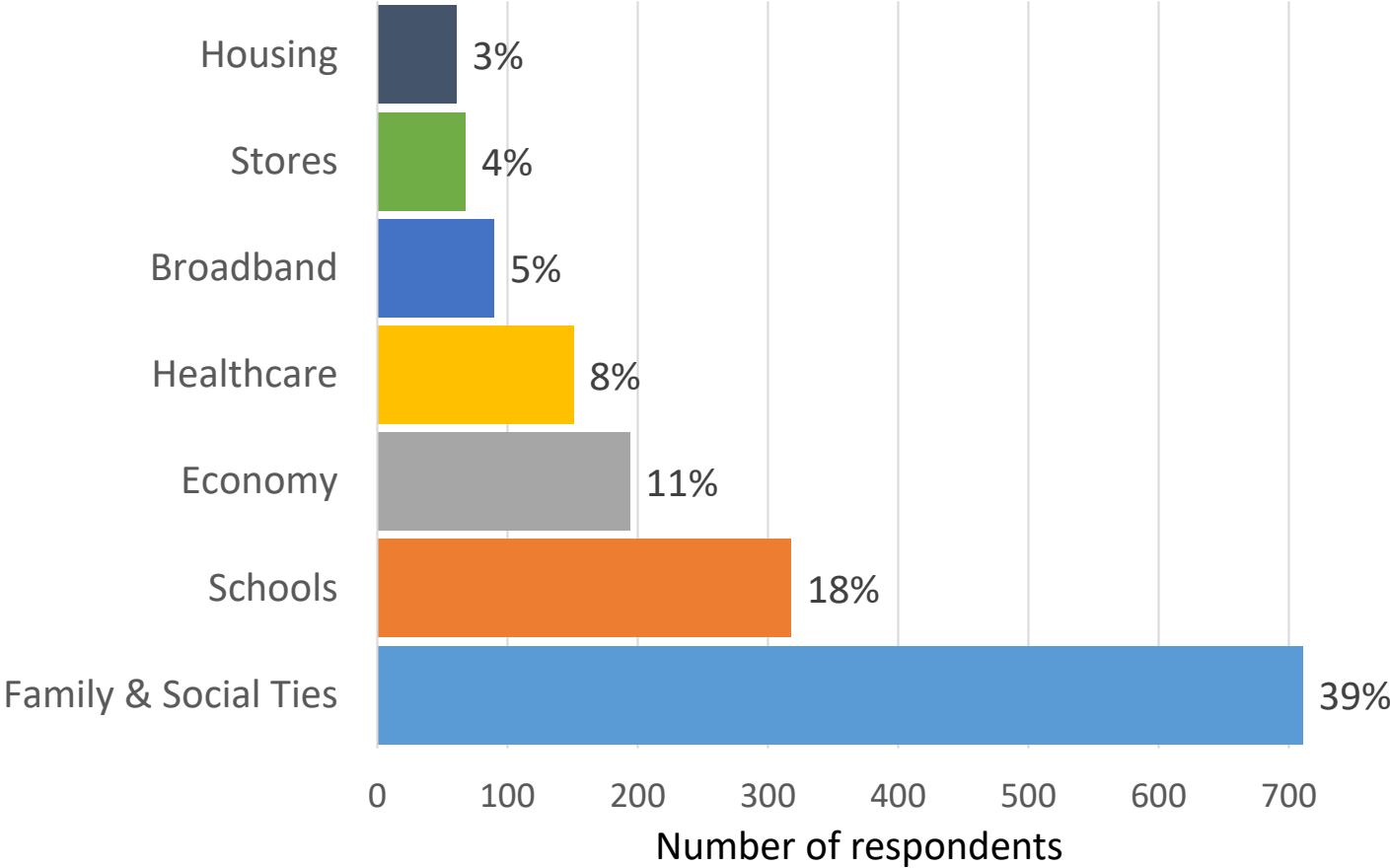Most frequently ranked as <u>very important</u> factors:

-Ties to the area
-Health care
-Access to a hardware, grocery and other stores
-Broadband
-Quality k-12 schools
-Growing economy

Factor	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important	Total
Ties to area	9%	30%	61%	2062
Health care	6%	32%	62%	2056
Access to a hardware, grocery, and other stores	9%	37%	54%	2056
Broadband or high-speed internet	11%	34%	55%	2048
Quality of local K-12 schools	17%	21%	62%	2043
Strong or growing local economy	7%	36%	57%	2042
Easy commute	19%	40%	42%	2048
Access to fresh produce	14%	45%	40%	2048
Climate and geography	25%	57%	18%	2048
Scenic beauty (e.g., natural or architectural)	18%	56%	26%	2052
Outdoor recreation	24%	52%	24%	2053
Access to a local lawyer, accountant and other professional services	32%	49%	19%	2045
Available housing	23%	39%	38%	2039
Arts and entertainment	41%	47%	13%	2039
Access to a coffee shop/bakery	57%	32%	12%	2034
Other:	46%	20%	34%	345

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Targeted investments can help build desirable communities

Most important factor in your decision about where you will live in the next 5 years by migration status

Leavers: 19%, 19%

Returners: 47%, 15%

Stayers: 44%, 19%

In-migrants: 29%, 17%

Legend: Ties, Schools, Economy, Healthcare, Broadband, Stores, Housing
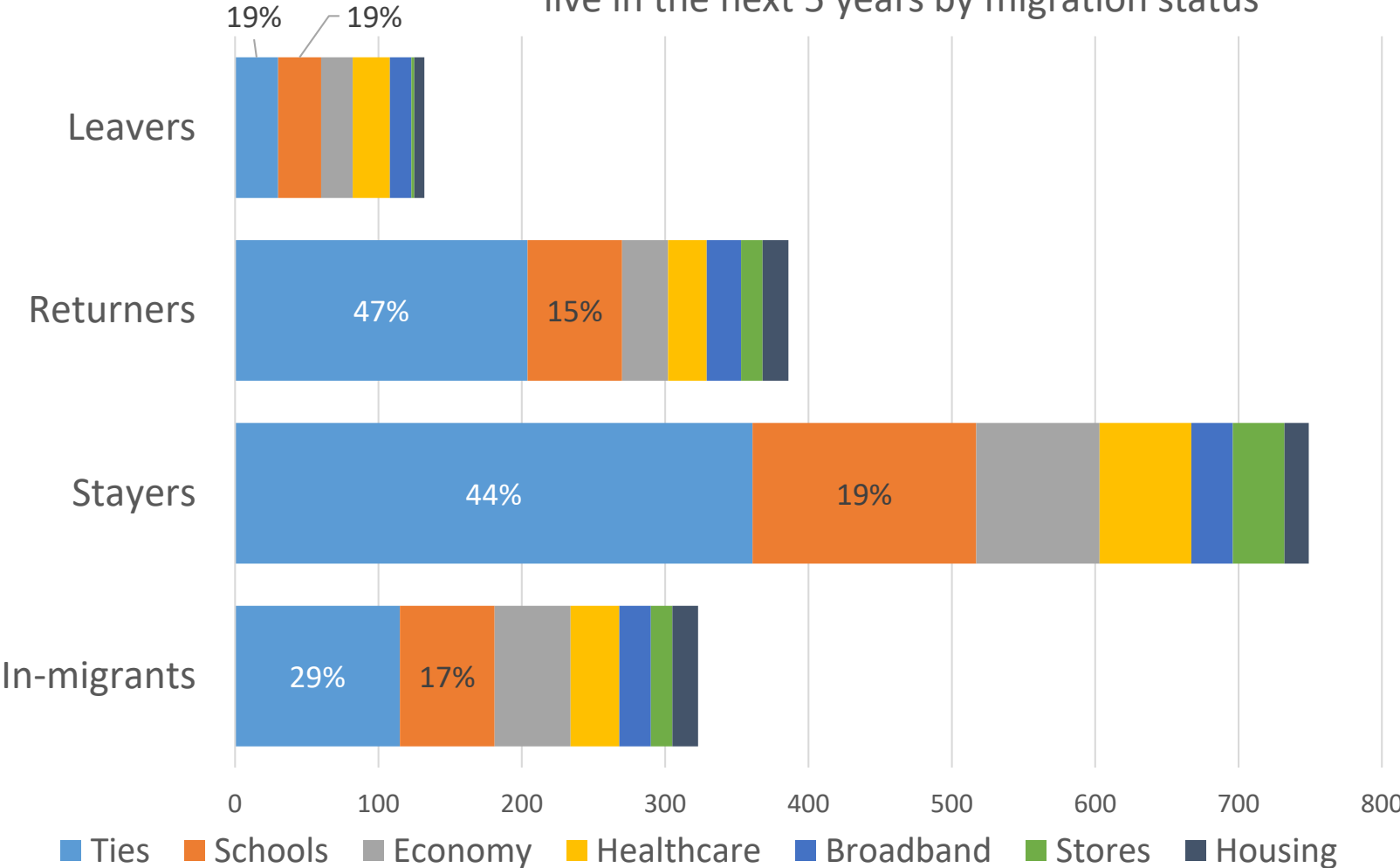
Leavers most important factor (N=161)	
Ties	19%
Schools	19%
Healthcare	16%
Economy	14%
Broadband	9%
Climate and geography	6%
Housing	4%
Arts	4%
Other	3%
Recreation	2%
Stores	1%
Commute	1%
Access to fresh produce	1%
Professional services	1%

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No matter where they currently live, people likely to move again value similar place characteristics

People who still live in the region (n = 141)

Top 5 Most Important Factors in your decision about where you will live in the next 5 years
1. Access to fresh produce
2. Coffee shops & bakeries
3. Access to professional services
4. Arts & Entertainment
5. Ties to the area

People who live outside the region (n=32)

Top 5 Most Important Factors in your decision about where you will live in the next 5 years
1. Access to fresh produce
2. Coffee shops & bakeries
3. Ties to the area
4. Access to professional services
5. Arts & Entertainment

Ties to the area were still important to both groups, but they are <u>more likely to value</u> access to fresh produce, coffee shops and bakeries. Having a local lawyer, accountant and other professional services is also important. Coordinated development efforts can address these preferences.

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Which of the following opportunities would make it easier for you to move back?
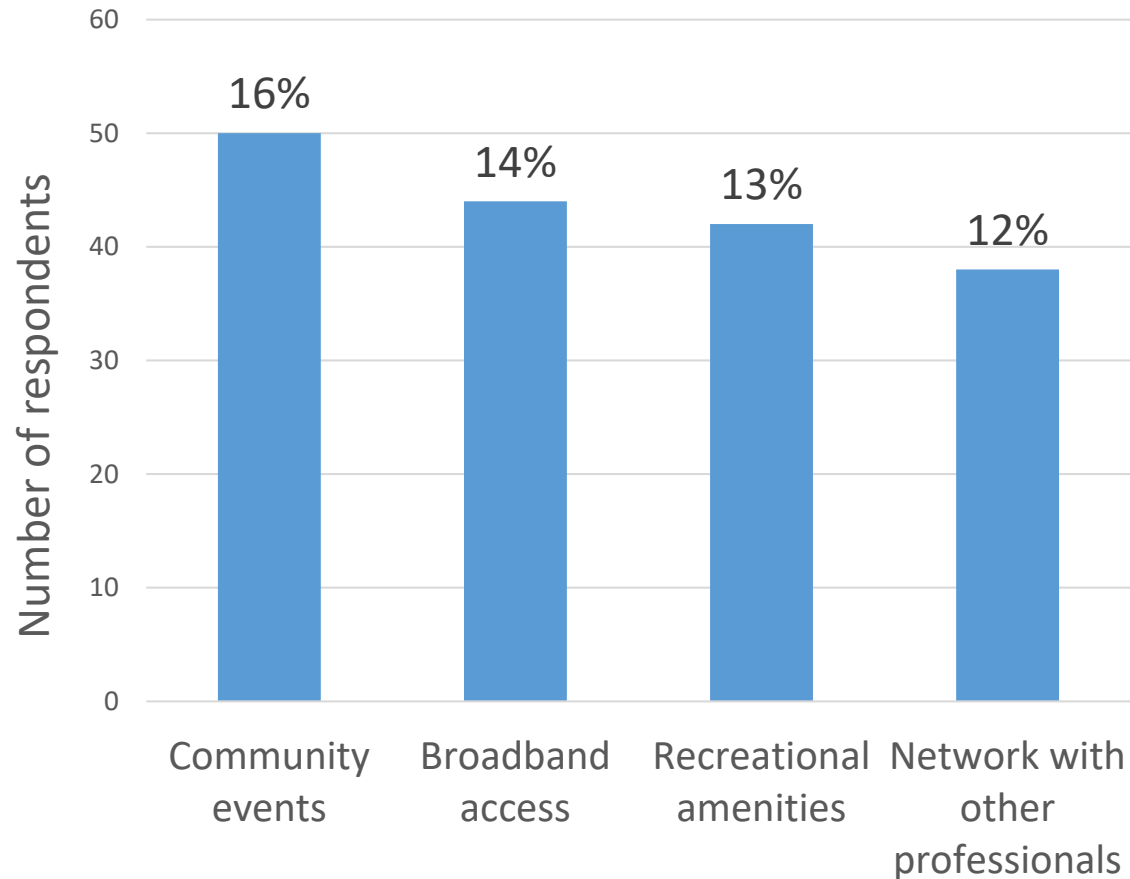
People who have left indicate more interaction personally and professionally as well as broadband and recreational amenities would make it easier for them to move back.
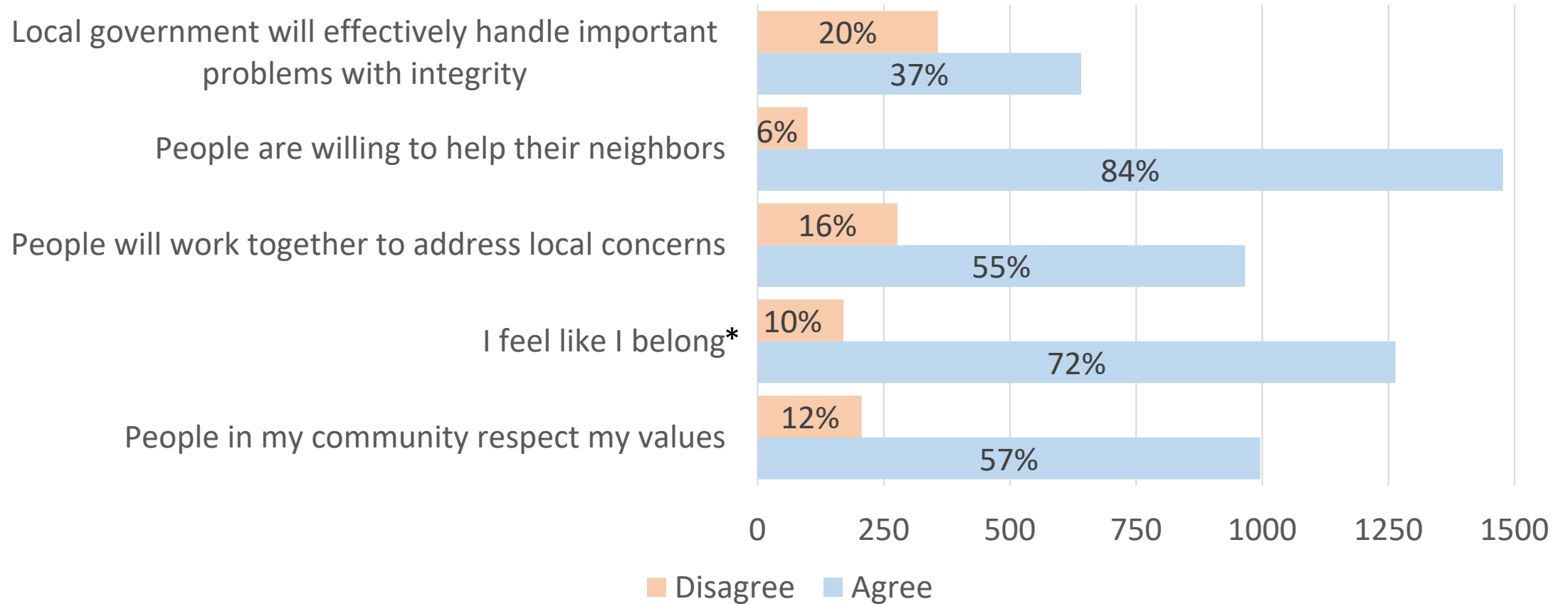
- N=179, 420 total responses.
  - 10% of all responses indicated no changes would make it easier
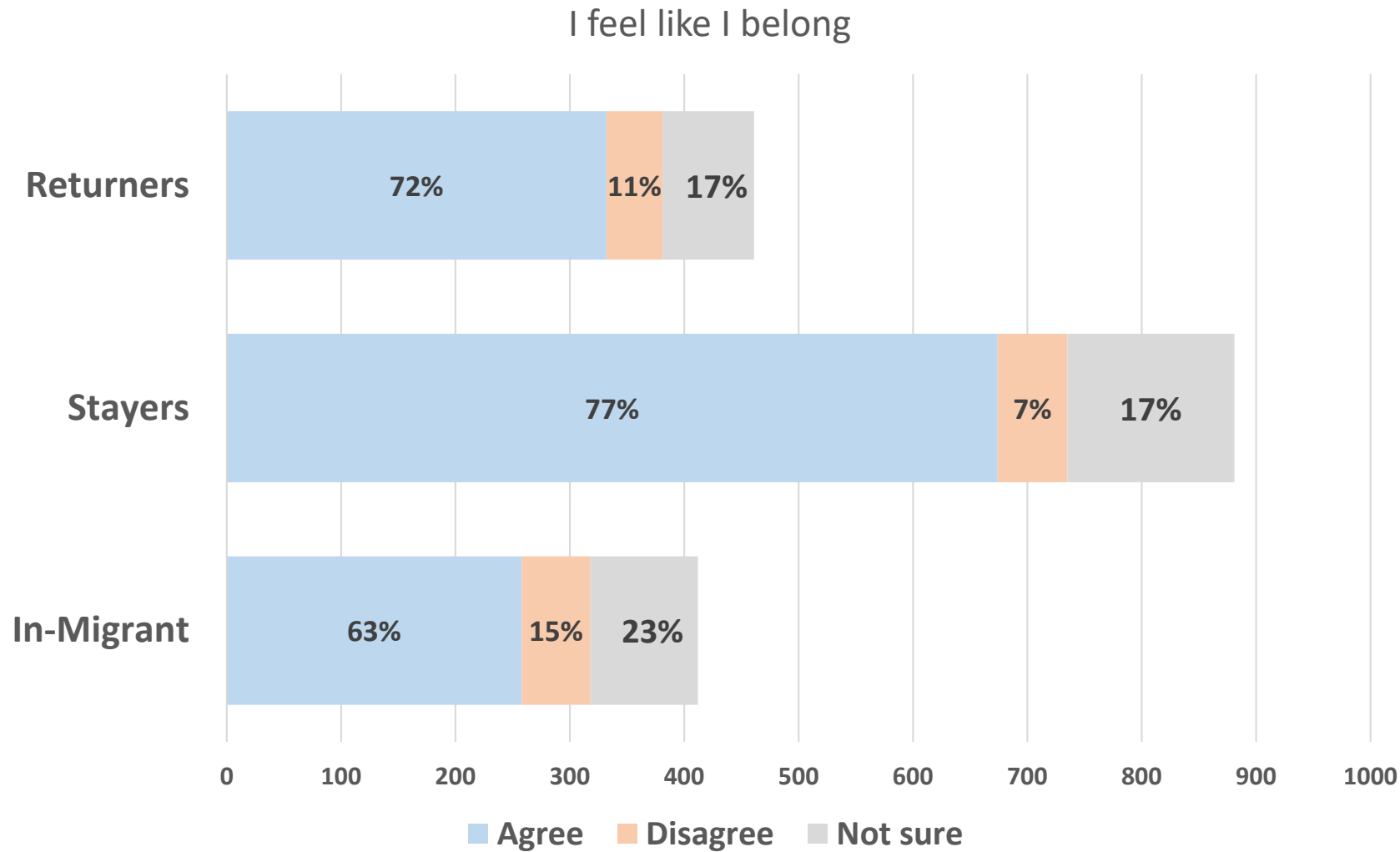
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How can Maximize NWMO strengthen the region?

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# People have a variety of perspectives on strengthening the region

*There were not strong differences among the views of stayers, returners and in-migrants except for "I feel like I belong."

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In-migrants were less likely to feel they belong

I feel like I belong

"We'd like to feel we belong, but after 17 years we still don't really feel like we're accepted and members of the community."

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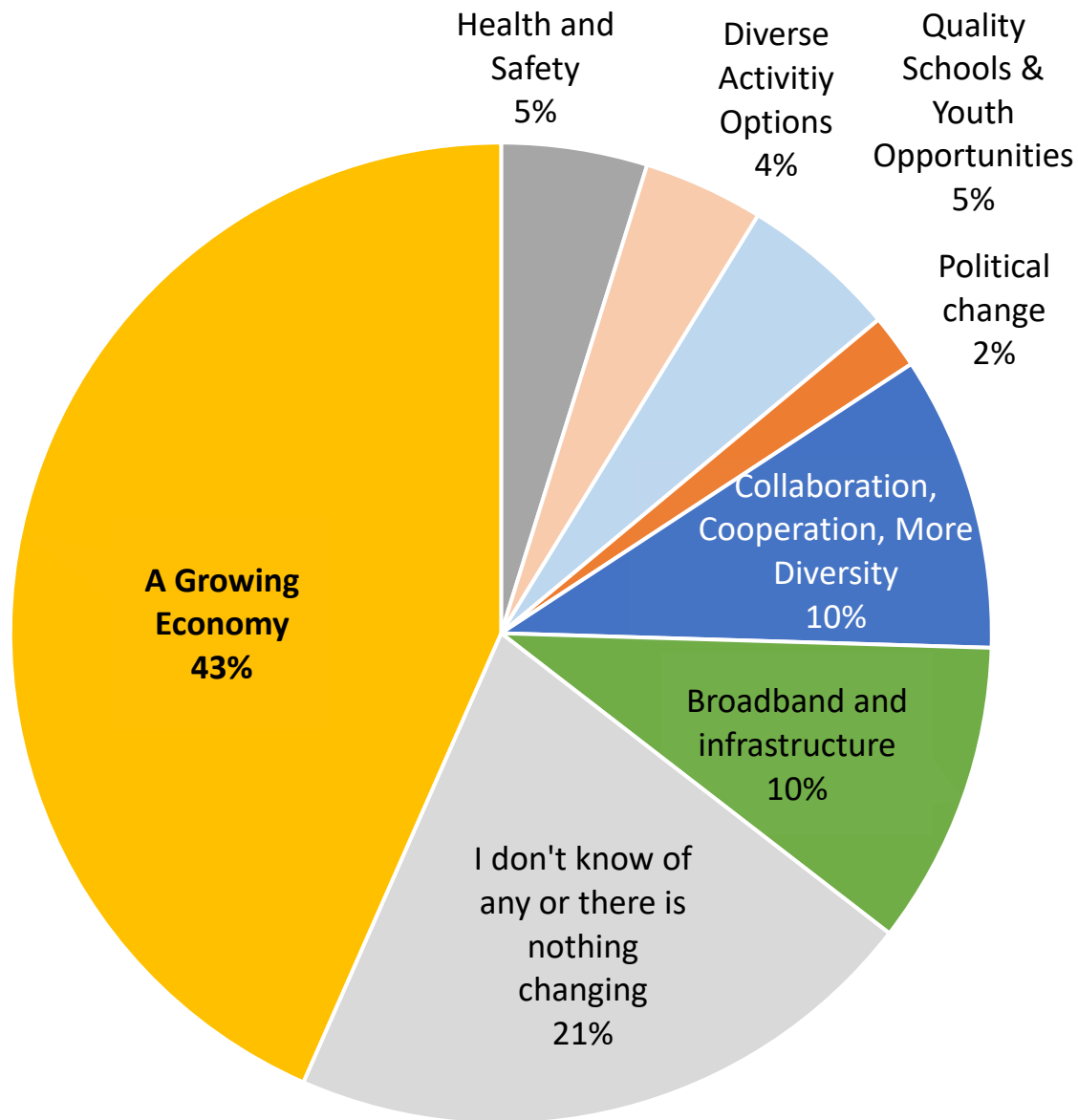
What changes are you <u>most excited</u> about for the future of Northwest Missouri?

- Respondents often wrote about their aspirations for how they want to see the region change. These individuals want to see the region's economy grow, better broadband, and more collaboration within their communities.

- The second most common response was a mixture of people who felt like the region was not changing or they were unaware of any exciting changes happening.

Pie chart: What changes are you most excited about for the future of Northwest Missouri?
- A Growing Economy 43%
- I don't know of any or there is nothing changing 21%
- Broadband and infrastructure 10%
- Collaboration, Cooperation, More Diversity 10%
- Political change 2%
- Quality Schools & Youth Opportunities 5%
- Diverse Activitiy Options 4%
- Health and Safety 5%

This was an open-ended write in response that generated 1,088 responses, these were grouped into eight categories.

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What excites you about the future of NWMO?

Growing economy

- Young adults considering business opportunities and entrepreneurial opportunities in rural areas

- Downtown revitalization

- Local employment opportunities, local recreational options, local lodging(cabins, B and B), local community center

- The growth potential - more families, more businesses, more pride in each city

- I would like to see it grow and be more accepting to new businesses. I would like to see more activities for parents and children to partake in.

Broadband and Infrastructure

- Increasing ability to telecommute might allow us to keep talented individuals in the community

- Maintain & Upgrading Road & Bridges in Northwest Missouri

- The additional sidewalks are nice. And the new shops and restaurants are great too.

Collaboration, Cooperation, More Diversity

- I think the younger generations are stepping up and we may see more progressive communities

- New leadership means new opportunities for our town

- Attracting new people with new ideas to our communities

- Seeing communities around the area start to show they care about their appearance and friendlier attitudes towards more people. It seems like some communities are starting to understand that same people can't run things the same way forever or they'll just keep pushing new residents and younger people away.

- Residents of the region embracing similar and like projects and visions. Pride and togetherness

Exceed

Selected write-in responses from the 1,088 provided.

What changes <u>worry you the most</u> about the future of Northwest Missouri?
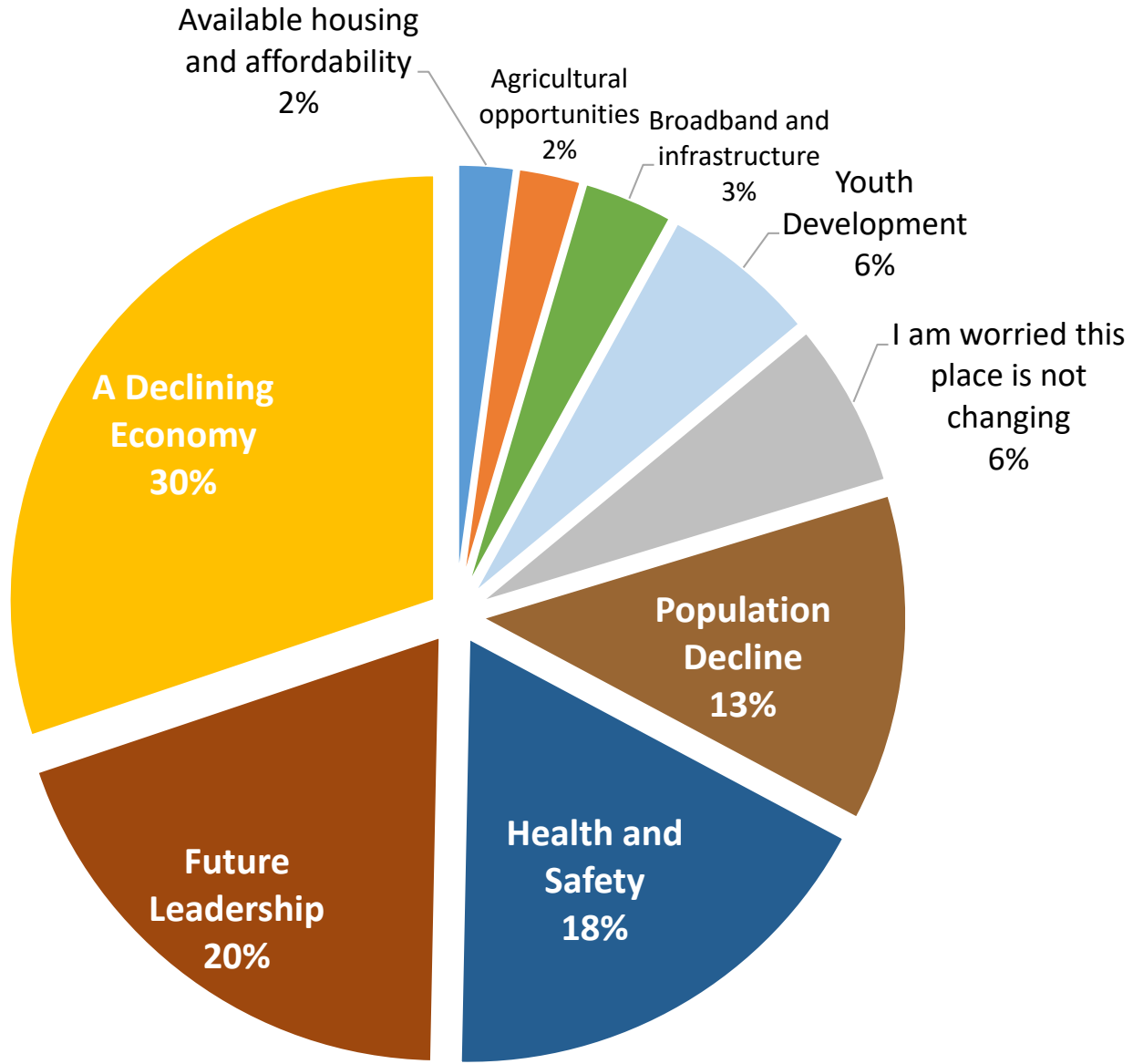
- Respondents were mostly worried about the future of the NWMO economy, and they were concerned about national and local political strife and leadership changes.

- The quality of local health care resources, COVID recovery, crime rates and population decline were the next most commonly voiced concerns.

Pie chart categories:
- Available housing and affordability 2%
- Agricultural opportunities 2%
- Broadband and infrastructure 3%
- Youth Development 6%
- I am worried this place is not changing 6%
- A Declining Economy 30%
- Future Leadership 20%
- Health and Safety 18%
- Population Decline 13%

This was an open-ended write in response that generated 1,236 responses, these were grouped into nine categories.

Exceed

What concerns you about the future of NWMO?

A declining economy

- Lack of well paying jobs, poverty, not enough jobs for professionals

- Closing of multiple long-term businesses and more restrictive business hours for community center and stores

- Businesses inability to find qualified workers

- Business closures

Declining health and safety

- Broad concern about the availability of health care providers
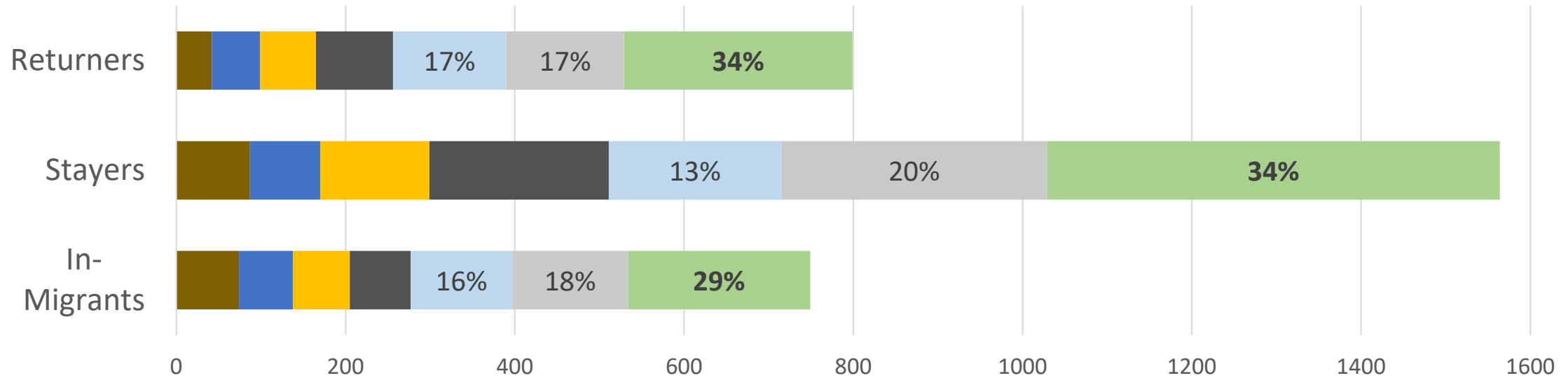
Youth Development

- Lack of school funding

- Quality of local schools

- Less and less for our children to do. If not involved in sports then nothing much available.

Selected write-in responses from the 1,236 provided.

Exceed

Policy Implications

Exceed

Regional
Economic &
Entrepreneurial
Development

What efforts would you support in your community? →#1, support new businesses (*jobs*)

Returners
- 17%
- 17%
- **34%**

Stayers
- 13%
- 20%
- **34%**

In-Migrants
- 16%
- 18%
- **29%**

(x-axis: 0, 200, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1200, 1400, 1600)

- ■ Involve new residents in groups and committees
- ■ Champion efforts of people trying new things
- ■ Support regional events
- ■ Build/maintain recreational gathering places
- ■ Include a wider range of people and perspectives in local decision making
- ■ Build stronger youth organizations
- ■ **Support new businesses**

Exceed

COVID and Migration: Carefully targeted return migration efforts are warranted

- Family and friends are important—maintain those ties and capitalize on them in recruitment

- Towns and cities in NWMO may be most attractive to potential in-migrants valuing living in a less populated area due to COVID (i.e., not too rural—is there a coffee shop, bakery and grocer?)

- Early retirees might be targeted, their migration perceptions were more impacted by COVID-19
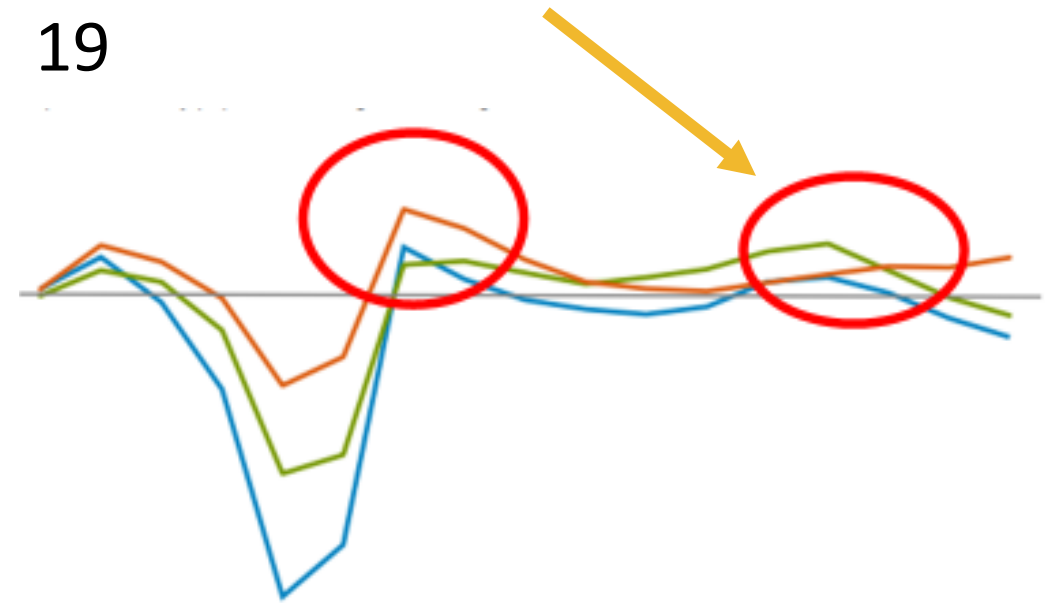
Exceed

Where can Maximize NWMO focus efforts to promote the region in ways that retain and attract residents?

Actively reach-out to newcomers (in-migrants)

- Nominate newcomers to serve on boards and in other leadership roles
- Let them get their footing for a year and then watch them contribute

Engage the business community in developing solutions

- Engage with a range of businesses, work across sectors when possible
- Collaborate with other organizations

Foster job-creating businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities

Be inclusive and foster new leaders

Exceed

Where can Maximize NWMO focus efforts to promote the region in ways that retain and attract residents?

Areas like NWMO are most desirable to potential in-migrants with existing family ties to the area

- Support families and youth organizations
- More deliberately engage in-migrants and potential return-migrants

Think about what it means to be not just *family friendly* but supportive of families

- Engage young families in the region and talk about their needs and preferences. Prioritize reviving public spaces that are family friendly and invest in youth organizations.

Exceed

Where can Maximize NWMO focus efforts to promote the region in ways that retain and attract residents?

Schools as leaders in supporting families

- School districts can engage new families before the start of the year and host schoolwide social events that help new families meet others. Encourage transfer students to join student organizations, discuss options with parents. Be inclusive.

- Develop ways to communicate with alumni after their five year high school graduation – talk about new events, community spaces, business openings, etc.

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Thank You

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