



ENGAGEWINONA

FINAL REPORT FOR:



ARPA FUNDING SURVEY

Presented August 2021



PROJECT SUMMARY

Winona County asked Engage Winona to create, promote and analyze an engagement survey for the county's American Rescue Plan Act funding allocation in summer 2021 in order to:

- Give the community an opportunity to be heard and feel engaged in the process
- Provide the county with insight into the community's needs and ideas in order to guide future planning efforts
- Provide the county an opportunity to widely and efficiently share accurate information to give the community insight into what the funding can and can't be used for

The process involved a survey, with primary distribution online and follow-ups via phone and mail to targeted stakeholders. More than 590 unique individuals filled out parts of the survey, and 420 of them fully completed the survey between July 22 and August 11.

We provided a small incentive for participation - one lucky winner received a \$100 grand prize gift card to the local business of their choice. All responses to the survey, both open-ended and ranked, are detailed throughout this report.

What's in the report

- **Demographic Profile of Participants:** Who participated, based on self-reported demographic information, and a note of comparison to 2019 census data
- **Results Part 1: Needs that emerged**
- **Results Part 2: Ideas that emerged**

Broadly, a few themes emerged. First, the survey responses reflect the unequal impact of the pandemic across communities, families, and individuals in Winona County. Some of us emerged from the pandemic facing more instability and greater needs for housing, mental health care, and community, while some of us saw little to no change. Again, this reflects what we already know about the pandemic's impact, and reinforces the need to direct assistance to those who need it most, both to address disparities related to this pandemic, and to reduce disparities for the future.

Second, respondents brought up a variety of infrastructure improvements, from broadband internet access to public transportation to road repair and maintenance. These are the things that connect us, both in-person and online, and respondents wanted to see these networks strengthened.

Finally, responses reflected a pattern of increased feelings of isolation and loss of connection to community, and Winona County residents had lots of ideas for how to address this. From shade





structures at parks to community events that celebrate small businesses to improvements to the fairgrounds, respondents suggested a variety of investments that would make it easier to meet one another and build connections. Respondents expressed a desire to see improvements to public places they have enjoyed in Winona County, including Farmers Park, bike trails, libraries, playgrounds, and centers that serve older adults.

It is our hope that this information aids the county in charting a course as we adjust to the continuing disruptions of the pandemic and find better ways to live, work, and play alongside each other.

— Marcia Ratliff, interim program manager, Engage Winona

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

We opened the survey on July 22 and kept it open until August 11. The survey was promoted and shared on social media, shared through Engage Winona’s email newsletter, highlighted in media coverage, and shared by email through community and word-of-mouth networks.

The survey received 599 unique responses, with more than 420 of them fully completing all questions. There were checks in place to prevent people from taking the survey multiple times.

About 99 percent of respondents answered questions regarding their connection to Winona County, and about 80% voluntarily answered at least one demographic question to give us a broad sense of folks’ backgrounds and experiences.

Connection to Winona County

The slight majority of respondents (60%) live in the city of Winona. This is a slightly higher proportion than the 2019 estimates from the US Census Bureau (53%). Likewise, survey respondents living in Goodview (11%) represented a slightly higher proportion than census estimates (8%). Six percent of respondents live in rural Winona County. Fewer than one-third of respondents live outside of Winona or Goodview.

Eighty percent of respondents are residents of Winona County; seven percent identify as either K-12 or college students. Forty percent are employed in Winona County and 22% own businesses in the county. Importantly, respondents may identify as more than one of these categories.

Sixty percent of respondents have lived in Winona County for at least 10 years, and nearly half more than 20 years. Approximately one-third of respondents have lived in Winona County for fewer than five years.





Age

Age distribution extended from 17 to older than 80. One-third of respondents are over age 50. Another third are between 30 and 49; the remaining third under age 30.

Race/Ethnicity

The majority of respondents (85%) identify as White; 5% Black, African-American, or African; 3% American Indian, Native American, Indigenous; 1-2% Hispanic or Latino, 1-2% multiple races.

Gender

The gender distribution of survey respondents does not match the census estimates; approximately two-thirds of respondents identified as female and five percent identified as neither male nor female.

Income

The most common income category (34%) for respondents is between \$25,000 and \$50,000; this is slightly higher than the census estimates (23%). One-third of respondents (29%) have incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000; census estimates 35%.

Educational Attainment

One-third of respondents have completed no more than some college, another third have a two- or four-year degree, and the remaining third have completed a graduate degree. Survey respondents are more educated than census estimates of educational attainment (10% of the population has graduate degrees, 34% have two- or four-year degrees).

Family

Slightly more than half of the survey respondents (55%) do not have children living at home. Twenty-three percent have one child, 13% have 2 children, and 8% have 3 or more children living at home.

Employment

More than half (57%) of respondents are employed full-time and another 14% are employed part-time.

Note: The 2019 American Community Survey data collected by the US Census Bureau are used as the reference for our demographic data. These are sample data, not decennial census data, which are not yet available for 2020.





RESULTS PART 1: NEEDS

The first part of the survey was designed to measure needs related to the pandemic by asking folks how their lives have changed since March 2020. Over 98% of respondents answered the items below.

The responses in this section reflect the unequal impact of the pandemic in communities around the state and nation. Some impacts were more concentrated among older respondents, such as social isolation and connections to extended family. Other impacts, such as food and financial security, were not widespread across the respondent pool, but were more pronounced, and more variable, among respondents with incomes under \$50,000.

The largest percentage of respondents said they were “a little worse” or “much worse” in these four aspects: Social isolation: 56%; Connections to community: 53%; Mental health: 48%; and Connections to friends: 48%.

Areas with the smallest reported impacts were Food security (14% a little worse or much worse); Housing access (15%); and Health care access (17%). Responses differ by income and age, sometimes greatly, and are explored in greater detail in the section below.

Consider your life before the pandemic (pre-March 2020) and your life now. How has your life changed in the area below?

Physical Health

Most commonly, respondents reported their physical health being “a little worse” (35%) or “no change” (33%) between now and before the pandemic. There is, however, some difference by age and income. Younger adults (ages 18-39) were more likely than older adults to report better physical health; approximately 22% of respondents in this age group reported each “much better” and “a little better.” Older adults were more likely to report “no change” in physical health.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
33%	10%	16%	35%	6%

Mental Health

Like physical health, most respondents reported either “a little worse” (35%) or “no change” (35%) in their mental health since the start of the pandemic. Results differed by age. Younger





adults (ages 18-24) were equally likely to report a decline (40%) and an improvement (38%) in mental health. Nearly half (44%) of respondents between 30 and 69 reported their mental health to be “a little worse.”

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
35%	6%	12%	35%	13%

Financial Security

Nearly half (41%) of respondents reported “no change” in their financial security. Nearly equal numbers of respondents reported their financial security to be “a little better” (20%) and “a little worse” (25%). Older adults (ages 50+) were more likely than younger adults to report “no change.” Respondents earning less than \$50,000 reported a decline in financial security more often than those with higher incomes.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
41%	5%	20%	25%	9%

Food Security/Access to Healthy Food

The majority of respondents (69%) reported “no change” in their food security. Slightly more (17%) respondents reported an improvement than a decline (14%) in food security. Among young adults (ages 18-29), nearly half (45%) reported an improvement in food security (with 18% reporting a decline). Those respondents earning less than \$50,000 reported an improvement in food security more often than those with higher incomes.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
69%	5%	12%	9%	5%

Connections to Immediate Family

Nearly half of the respondents (43%) reported “no change” in their connections to immediate family since the start of the pandemic. The “no change” response was more common among those over age 50. The age group that saw the most improvement was those under age 30. The income group that saw the most decline was those with incomes below \$50,000.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
43%	7%	17%	26%	7%





Connections to Extended Family

Equal numbers of respondents reported “no change” and “a little worse” regarding their connection to extended family since the start of the pandemic. Older adults (ages 50+) were more likely to report connections to extended family was “a little worse” than younger adults. Lower income respondents were more likely than others to report connections to extended family was “a little better” and were more likely than others to report these connections were “much worse.” Results are displayed on the next page.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
35%	5%	11%	33%	16%

Connections to Friends

Almost half of the respondents (48%) reported a decline in connections to friends since the start of the pandemic. This decline was most pronounced for those over age 30. In fact, for those aged 18-24, 46% reported an improvement in connections to friends. There is more variation in responses for lower income respondents (below \$50,000).

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
30%	4%	17%	40%	8%

Connections to Community

Half of respondents (53%) reported a decline in connection to the community over the past 18 months. This is slightly more pronounced as age increases. Almost half of 18-24-year-old respondents reported an improvement in connections to the community.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
28%	6%	13%	37%	16%

Access to Safe and Affordable Housing

Most respondents saw “no change” in their access to safe and affordable housing. This was most pronounced among those over age 30. Respondents under age 30 were more likely to see an improvement in access to housing. Respondents reporting incomes of below \$50,000 reported the most variation in housing access change. For those above \$50,000, more than 78% reported





“no change”; for those below \$50,000, 32% reported a decline and 20% reported an improvement.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
74%	4%	8%	11%	4%

Access to Health Care

Seventy percent of respondents reported “no change” in their access to health care. This was a clearer pattern among those over age 30. Between 15 and 23% of those under age 30 reported their access to health care was “much worse.” Results are displayed on the next page.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
71%	4%	8%	10%	7%

Social Isolation

More than half of respondents reported a worsening of social isolation during the pandemic. Only 12% reported an improvement in social isolation. The severity of social isolation increased with age.

No Change	Much Better	A Little Better	A Little Worse	Much Worse
32%	6%	6%	42%	14%





RESULTS PART 2: IDEAS THAT EMERGED

The second part of the survey involved three open-ended questions designed to encourage respondents to think about **what would meet their own needs, what would meet the needs of the community, and what one thing would have the largest positive impact** in the community.

Responses to all three open-ended questions reflected a pattern of desires and ideas for what could be done with the funding. Five general response themes emerged: community spaces/activities/social infrastructure, physical infrastructure, housing, mental health care, and supporting small and local businesses.

First, consider your own individual/family needs. What could Winona County do with this money to improve your life right now?

In response to the question “What could Winona County do with this money to improve your life right now?” 449 respondents provided comments. Of these, 102 were not substantial comments, for example, “yes”, “no”, and “not sure.” A few dozen respondents commented about using the money for lowering taxes, providing refunds, reducing the cost of utilities, or issuing direct cash assistance, and a few comments encouraged using the money for promotion of vaccines and masking.

The remaining comments fell into five main categories: Community activities/social infrastructure (31% of substantive responses), Physical infrastructure (14%), Mental health care access (14%), Small business assistance (9%), and Housing (6%).

Now, consider the needs of the Winona County community. What could Winona County do with this money to improve the lives of our neighbors right now?

This question asked respondents to think more broadly about Winona County as a whole. This question received 421 individual comments. Of these, 37 were not substantial comments, for example “yes” or “not sure.” A handful of comments suggested increasing access to childcare and older adult support.

For the remaining responses, the top five response categories were similar to those in Question 1. The largest category was Community activities/social infrastructure (including youth, outdoor, library) with 20% of substantive responses; then Physical infrastructure (including internet,





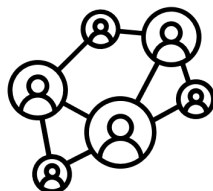
roads, transportation, trails) with 18% of responses; Housing with 18% of responses; Mental health care with 15% of responses, and Small/local business assistance with 7% of responses.

Finally, consider what one thing Winona County could do with this money to make the largest positive impact on our community. What is that one thing?

This question sought ideas for what would make the largest positive impact on the community. The question received 430 comments. Of these, 30 were not substantial comments. For the remaining 400, responses fell into the following five categories.

The largest category was Infrastructure (including internet, roads, transportation, trails), with 16% of substantive responses to this question. After that, respondents mentioned Community activities/social infrastructure (including youth, outdoor, library) in 14% of responses. Mental health care and support received 12% of responses, Education and child care 11%, and Housing 10%.

There were some comments that did not fit into the categories below. A sampling of comments are provided below, and the full set of public data, cleaned to remove any personal or identifying data, is available as part of the public release of this report.



Community Activities and Social Infrastructure

By far, the largest number of individual comments (237 total. Q1: 107 individual references, 31% of all substantive responses. Q2: 75 individual references, 20%. Q3: 55 individual references, 14%) referenced a desire for community-based engagement opportunities and investment in public spaces. Specific comments included mentions of more community outdoor activities and gathering spaces, youth-focused activities, expanded resources for public libraries and Friendship Center, and opportunities for community discussions and information sharing.

Respondents frequently commented that community programming would benefit themselves/their family. Respondents noted that, in part, these activities would help in addressing the isolation and loneliness created during the pandemic. Some respondents noted specifically that programming should happen at the neighborhood level, as well as making activities physically accessible, free or inexpensive, and welcoming for all persons.

“Community outreach and programs to bring people together in meaningful ways.” — Winona resident





“Develop a few more family oriented, community building programs.” — Saint Charles resident

“Invest in community and family infrastructure and activities in Lewiston.” — Lewiston resident

Structured activities for youth and teens were noted by many respondents. Some comments included specific reference to programs aimed at helping students adjust to in-person schooling and for tutoring and mentoring to address the pandemic- and race-related achievement gaps. Others comments mentioned extra-curricular programming, including the arts. A few commented specifically about opportunities for teens.

“Make more opportunities for teenage kids. They need a place to hang out that’s fun and exciting.” — Winona resident

“Assistance to the public schools to boost music and activities that is inclusive of all students.” — Goodview resident

Respondents frequently noted a desire for communal outdoor space and improved playground spaces. Comments included references to bike paths, safer streets, better lighting, and more shaded areas around playgrounds.

“Invest in parks and family friendly spaces/activities.” — Winona resident

“Investments in communal spaces that appeal to many different generations of residents would encourage foot traffic to local destinations, as well as facilitate conversations amongst diverse groups of people.” — Winona resident

“Invest in enhancing outdoor spaces and recreation opportunities.” — Rural Winona County resident

Specific references were made to providing funds to improve or expand the existing services for the public libraries in Winona and Saint Charles and services for older adults, including the Friendship Center in Winona.

“Keep investing in shared resources such as the Winona Public Library.” — Winona resident

“Allocate more funding toward older adult services.” — Winona resident

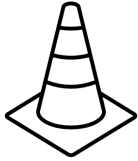
A final area of common note was community conversations. Some respondents noted specific topics, while most recommended simply that efforts should be made to facilitate conversation.





“Forums for conversation and information gathering” — Winona resident

“Provide opportunities for community members to discuss the significant division that have been created due to COVID and politic unrest. Individuals should be trained to facilitate these conversations successfully.” — rural Winona County resident



Physical Infrastructure

The next largest number of individual comments (183 total. Q1: 47 individual references, 14% of all substantive responses. Q2: 71 individual references, 18%. Q3: 65 individual references, 16%) were about improvements in the physical infrastructure within Winona County.

Comments about physical infrastructure included many specific references to improved internet access and road maintenance.

Access to reliable and affordable internet access, particularly in the more rural parts of the county, was mentioned repeatedly. Several respondents noted the importance of this service for both students and workers.

“Assure affordable access to rural broadband for residents and businesses ... It was difficult to conduct business from home during the pandemic ... the pandemic really magnified the issues we’ve struggled with for many years.” — Rural Winona County resident

“Invest in extending broadband to rural and extended city areas.” — Winona resident

“Wifi is one of my biggest expenses.” — Winona resident

Multiple respondents noted roads as an area for improvement. Most of these comments were simple, such as: “fix roads.” Others specifically noted fixing rural roads or gravel roads. A few others mentioned maintaining roads in the winter months.

“Fix roads and bridges.” — Minnesota City resident

“Fix all of our roads not just main haigh ways but gravel roads too.” — Winona resident





Mental Health

A few dozen responses to each question commented about increasing access to mental health resources (140 total. Q1: 35 individual references, 10% of all substantive responses. Q2: 57 individual references, 15%. Q3: 48 individual references, 12%).

Some, but not all, of these comments mentioned specifically how the pandemic impacted their own and others' mental health. Others pointed to a persistent difficulty finding care. A few comments also recommended "trauma-informed" providers.

"Increase community support and awareness for mental health." — Minnesota City resident

"Dedicate more funding for mental health supports, like direct support staff for kids and families with diagnoses. Also, more mental health practitioners and cost deferment for more people to be able to utilize mental health services." — Winona resident

"Open and Fund a free clinic that offers non-coercive mental health support and drug and addiction services." — Wilson Township resident

Housing



Respondents mentioned housing in 133 total comments across the three questions, and mentioned housing more often when referring to what would benefit the community, not necessarily themselves. The total number of housing-related comments was 21 in Question 1 (6% of substantive responses), 71 in Question 2 (18%), and 41 in Question 3 (10%).

These comments focused on adding low-income housing, expanding Section 8 availability, providing assistance with home repair, and housing options for those without a permanent residence.

"Housing needs for families. It's very difficult to find housing if you're not a college student." — Winona resident

"I see that there is a lot of low income housing needed. helping lower the cost of rent/ help landlords with section 8 housing would be beneficial." — Winona resident

"Make sure everyone has adequate housing." — Saint Charles resident





“Invest in creative solutions to create more affordable housing for low income individuals.” — rural Winona County resident

“Lower rent housing options/emergency and transitional housing.” — Winona resident



Small and Local Business Assistance

A few dozen respondents for each question commented about assisting small and local businesses which were impacted by the pandemic. Small business assistance came up in 89 total comments, 30 in Question 1 (9% of substantive comments), 25 in Question 2 (7%), and 34 in Question 3 (9%).

Some respondents noted that small business assistance could also provide community engagement opportunities in both the city of Winona and surrounding towns.

“Assist family-owned businesses financially affected by delayed supplies and increased pricing.” — Winona business owner, mixed race, age 30-39

“I believe the WHOLE grant should go to families / businesses that did every thing in there power to stay open, and help keep employees with jobs during the pandemic like myself. Business owners couldn't jump on the unemployment line wasn't an option, unless you wanted to close your business for good.” — Winona business owner, White, age 50-59

“Create incentives for small businesses to open in Winona County; work with the Cities to create ordinances/policies that prevent having vacant storefronts in downtown areas (e.g., building are ill kept, only have renters upstairs, or storage, but little to no businesses).” — Winona business owner, White, age 30-39

“Work with local small businesses in the smaller Winona county communities most impacted by the pandemic by helping to host/plan an event that would help to bring people out in a safe manner. Also work with those same small communities (think Lewiston, Altura, Rollingstone) to help the small local business and families with costs that have gone up in regards to food/fuel and access to healthy food options or activities.” — Stockton resident, male, age 40-49

“Help out those small, family owned businesses that are not corporate ones that are struggling so we can keep them in our area. These businesses add the personalized touch and bring their love of the community to us all.” — Saint Charles resident, female, age 40-49

