



**RuralOrganizing.org**

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# 2022 LOCAL PROGRESS REPORTS IN OHIO: WHAT CIVIC LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

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## SUMMARY

RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund's innovative use of a drop-off/pick-up survey methodology, an approach which has been shown to reduce nonresponse bias,<sup>1</sup> takes canvassing for community perspectives to a whole new level. Blending door-knocking and community-based research techniques, this approach empowers local leaders to develop the right questions for their neighborhoods, hear from a wider range of community members than can be reached by traditional canvassing techniques, and generate local solutions that respond to local needs.

Through semi-structured interviews with four field staff, including three surveyors in supervisory roles implementing the Local Progress Reports through door knocking, RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund sought to gain insights and lessons as data collection drew to a close and experiences were fresh in mind. Our separate report details the analysis of the survey findings while this report reflects on lessons and opportunities for implementation and scaling of the Drop-Off/Pick-Up community input approach.

The need to capture a more holistic set of community perceptions, amplify the needs of ignored neighbors', and turn these community needs into a winning rural prosperity agenda drove the development of the Local Progress Report project in three Ohio Counties - Athens, Fairfield, and Licking. The approach is innovative along the dimensions of developing the project, intentionally radical community inclusion, and civic infrastructure-building.

Key findings in this experimental community needs assessment:

1. **Rural residents do not fit the stereotype of an older White cis-gender man on a tractor;** our rural respondents represented communities with a diverse mix of industries and incomes, a diversity of races/ethnicities, significant numbers of people of color, significant numbers of people in the LGBTQ+ community, and people with a wide variety of life experiences, including marginalizing life experiences such as addiction, homelessness, and incarceration.
2. **Rural concerns in our sampled communities reflect larger trends of progressive rural priorities:** decreasing daily expenses and improving rural quality of life chief among them. Indeed, we were surprised by the homogeneity of top priorities among the diverse communities sampled. These two findings combined suggest that these progressive rural values are sticky, not passing fad.

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<sup>1</sup><https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/65702>

3. **Community participation biases exist, and they influence the community priorities which rise to the top.** Our results show that home ownership continues to hold power for community participation, and that people with barriers to social inclusion - such as being a renter, having experienced homelessness - leads to distinguished community priorities. Civic leaders must account for these biases in their community inclusion work and work to ensure people who are pushed to the margins of the community are able to equitably influence the direction of their communities.
4. **Major investments are perceived to have the greatest impact in their immediate vicinity, and the people closest to them are the most likely to anticipate harm coming from them.** We saw this in our exploration of perceptions regarding the Intel microchip plant coming to Licking County. The community farthest away from the plant was most likely to indicate they would not see an impact at all. As civic leaders consider their support or dissent for major investments, they should consider the perceived effects near and far and work to acknowledge and address the concerns of people at various levels of impact.
5. **Nonvoter priorities show similarities with those who vote, but show where community needs are felt most acutely.** Similarities in priorities among those who are registered to vote and those who are not shows a consistency in the community experience for the neighborhoods surveyed. The few differences point to where the community struggles may be most acutely felt in the population, with people disconnected from the voting system needing community solutions that must come at a systemic level. For example, in our Fairfield County sample, while voters prioritize community care for veterans, nonvoters see a more specific need for homelessness supports,

## METHODS

### WHY RURALORGANIZING.ORG IS COLLECTING COMMUNITY INPUT WITH AN UNUSUAL APPROACH

There is nothing new about a community survey, but traditional approaches to gathering community input leave important gaps that mean rural people in nondominant demographic groups are less likely to be heard. We at RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund (ROEF) applied the drop-off/pick-up methodology to move past these barriers, bring in the perspectives of a more holistic group of rural residents, and simultaneously build local civic infrastructure to help progressives fight for rural prosperity.

Figure 1. Counties Where Local Progress Reports Were Conducted



- Typical canvassing comes with an extractive or persuasion agenda and too often isn't geared toward truly listening to community needs first, and then responding.
- Canvassing operations depend on voter files, which necessarily exclude community members who face barriers to voting like low literacy, those who have suffered discrimination in the voting system, folks with reasons to fear institutions, or other barriers.
- Nonresponse bias in typical surveying techniques means that the polling we see leans toward the views of vocal minorities, and categorically fails to represent the people and views that may counter these responses.

The Local Progress Reports are innovative along multiple dimensions; first, the methodology blends canvassing and

community-based research practices. The use of a co-development strategy with our partners means that not only are the *responses* hyper-local, but that local leaders have been empowered to explore the issues they know to be the most relevant to their communities. In partnership, ROEF co-developed questions with our local partners that target local issues and connect them to a national agenda.

The analysis of data relied on descriptive statistics, analyzing only the responses to the Local Progress Reports and not making generalizable inferences. While the drop off/pick up methodology of collecting surveys can be used for both a descriptive and inferential analysis, an in depth inferential analysis was out of scope of this project.

## FINDINGS

### PRIORITIES OF LOCAL PROGRESS REPORT RESPONDENTS

Across the three geographies, respondents' priorities focused heavily on reducing daily expenses, with reducing healthcare costs and reducing food and grocery costs in the top five priorities across all three geographies. Costs of housing and utilities also reached the top priorities. Other concerns among the top five were the need to address the addiction epidemic and to invest in local infrastructure. In Licking County, where our sample was the lowest income of the three geographies, cleaning up polluted areas was a top priority.<sup>2</sup>

<b>Figure 2. Top Five Community Issues Receiving “Very Important” Response in Order of Most Responses</b>		
<b>Licking County</b>	<b>Fairfield County</b>	<b>Athens County</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Food and grocery costs</b></li> <li>2. Reduce theft in my neighborhood</li> <li>3. Reduce the use and sale of illegal drugs in my neighborhood</li> <li>4. <b>Reduce healthcare and prescription costs</b></li> <li>5. Clean up polluted areas</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Food and grocery costs</b></li> <li>2. <b>Reduce healthcare and prescription costs</b></li> <li>3. Improve affordable housing options</li> <li>4. Improve veterans services</li> <li>5. Improve mental health services</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Reduce healthcare and prescription costs</b></li> <li>2. <b>Food and grocery costs</b></li> <li>3. Reduce the use and sale of illegal drugs in my neighborhood</li> <li>4. Repair local roads and bridges</li> <li>5. Reduce utility costs</li> </ol>
<small>*Items 2 and 3 in Licking County received the same number of “very important” responses and are listed as number 2 and 3 interchangeably</small>		

We applied two statistical tests, K-means clustering and classification trees, to assess if there were predictors in how folks rated the community priorities. Neither statistical test produced a reliable result, indicating that even though our sampled communities in Licking, Athens, and Fairfield Counties have a great deal of diversity, the issues of greatest concern maintained remarkable similarity.

Our analysis also included an analysis of the demographics of respondents who's top priorities did *not* float to the top of the list for the majority of respondents. We found that issues of discrimination consistently fell in the bottom half of the priority list, with at least one of the four discrimination questions filling the lowest priority spot for all three samples. However, we did find a significant difference between women and men on these questions of discrimination: women were significantly more likely to indicate that a form of discrimination was a “very important” community concern.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix for all community priority responses.

We also found a significant relationship, using a chi-square test, between those who indicated affordable housing was a top priority and those people who are renters. This validates our findings regarding renters in the demographic data: in Fairfield County we see that affordable housing is rated the third biggest priority among our respondents, and in our sample, over 40% of respondents were renters (50% of residents in the census tract are renters). Given that we have found a persisting home ownership bias in response rates, it is possible that the need for affordable housing would not have surfaced as a key issue without the specialized approach to community input undertaken in these Local Progress Reports.

These community priorities affirm what ROEF has found in our polling: that rural residents care most about reducing costs, increasing jobs and wages, and improving quality of life.

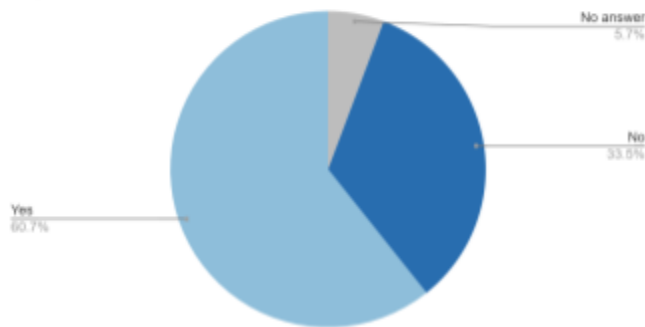
## NONVOTER PRIORITIES

Because the LPR sampling intentionally targeted people who may not participate in the voting system, it was important for us to capture how nonvoters may think differently about community priorities. Two of our local partner organizations (FTTP and NTP) asked respondents if they registered to vote, and all three groups asked if respondents choose to vote in local elections.

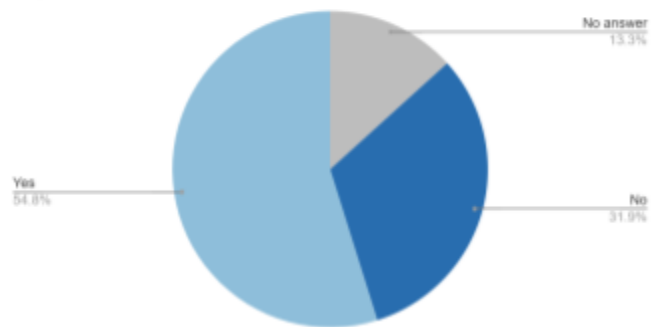
Regarding the choice to vote, around a third of respondents in the Licking and Fairfield County samples answered, “no,” while a much smaller number, 17.2%, answered “no” in Athens County. A significant portion declined to answer in the Fairfield County sample (13.3%), and an even greater number - nearly 1 in 5 respondents - declined to answer this question in Athens County.

**Figure 3. Voting Habits in Local Elections**

**Licking County Respondents' Voting Habits in Local Elections**  
Do you choose to vote in local elections?

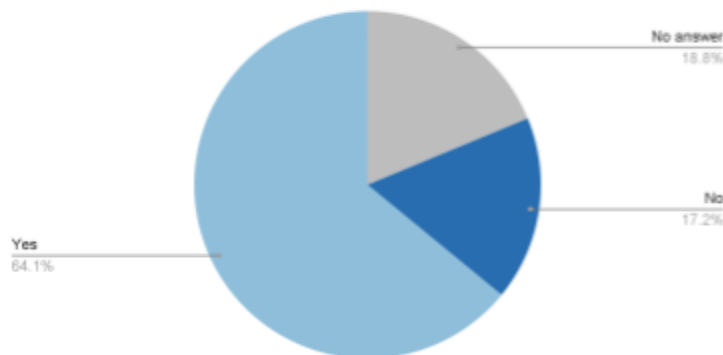


**Fairfield County Repondents' Voting Habits in Local Elections**  
Do you choose to vote in local elections?



**Athens County Respondents' Voting Habits in Local Elections**

Do you choose to vote in local elections?



For the two populations asked if they were registered to vote, we processed the 30 Likert scale questions a second time to see if the top issues were similar or divergent. In Licking County, nonvoters in our sample placed issues around the addiction crisis higher than people who report they vote, although four out of the five top community issues were the same among all sampled Licking County respondents and those who say they are not registered to vote. Food and grocery costs were number five for nonvoters, instead of number one for the group as a whole.

<b>Figure 4. Top Five Community Issues Receiving “Very Important” Response in Order of Most Responses - Voters and Nonvoters</b>			
<b>Licking County - All</b>	<b>Licking County - Nonvoters</b>	<b>Fairfield County - All</b>	<b>Fairfield County -Nonvoters</b>
1. Food and grocery costs 2. Reduce theft in my neighborhood 3. Reduce the use and sale of illegal drugs in my neighborhood 4. Reduce healthcare and prescription costs <b>5. Clean up polluted areas</b>	1. Reduce the use and sale of illegal drugs in my neighborhood 2. Reduce theft in my neighborhood 3. Reduce healthcare and prescription costs <b>4.Reduce violent crime in my neighborhood</b> 5. Food and grocery costs	1. Food and grocery costs 2. Reduce healthcare and prescription costs 3. Improve affordable housing options <b>4. Improve veterans services</b> 5. Improve mental health services	1. Food and grocery costs 2. Reduce healthcare and prescription costs 3. Improve affordable housing options <b>4.Expand homeless shelters and services</b> 5. Improve mental health services
<small>*Items 2 and 3 in Licking County received the same number of “very important” responses and are listed as number 2 and 3 interchangeably</small>			

In Fairfield County, the top five issues were identical and in identical order, except for one: number four on the list is “improve veterans services” for the Fairfield sample as a whole, while the issue in fourth place for nonvoters is “Expand homeless shelters and services.” While concern for groups with vulnerabilities is consistent, which groups need the most help differs for nonvoters in census tract 317.

The similarities in priorities among those who are registered to vote and those who are not shows a consistency in the community experience for the neighborhoods surveyed. The differences point to where the community struggles may be most acutely felt in the population, with people disconnected from the voting system needing community solutions that must come at a systemic level.

Figure 4.1 All Community Needs Responses from Licking County Nonvoters

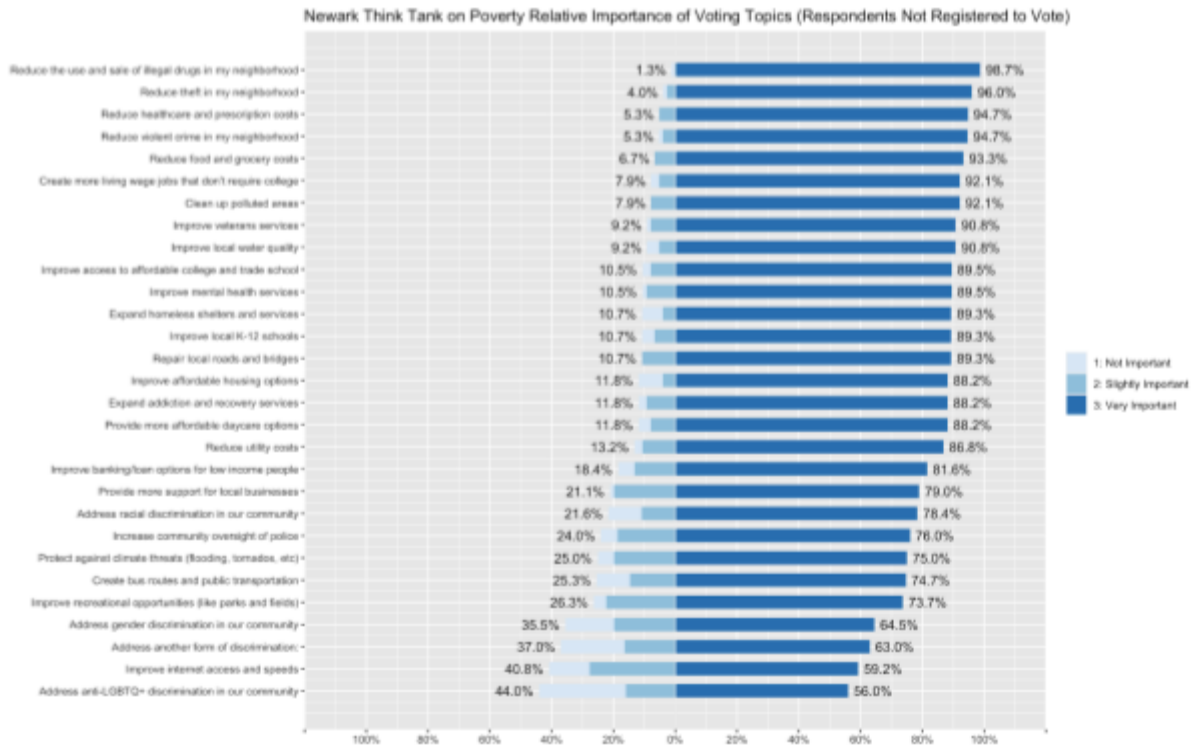
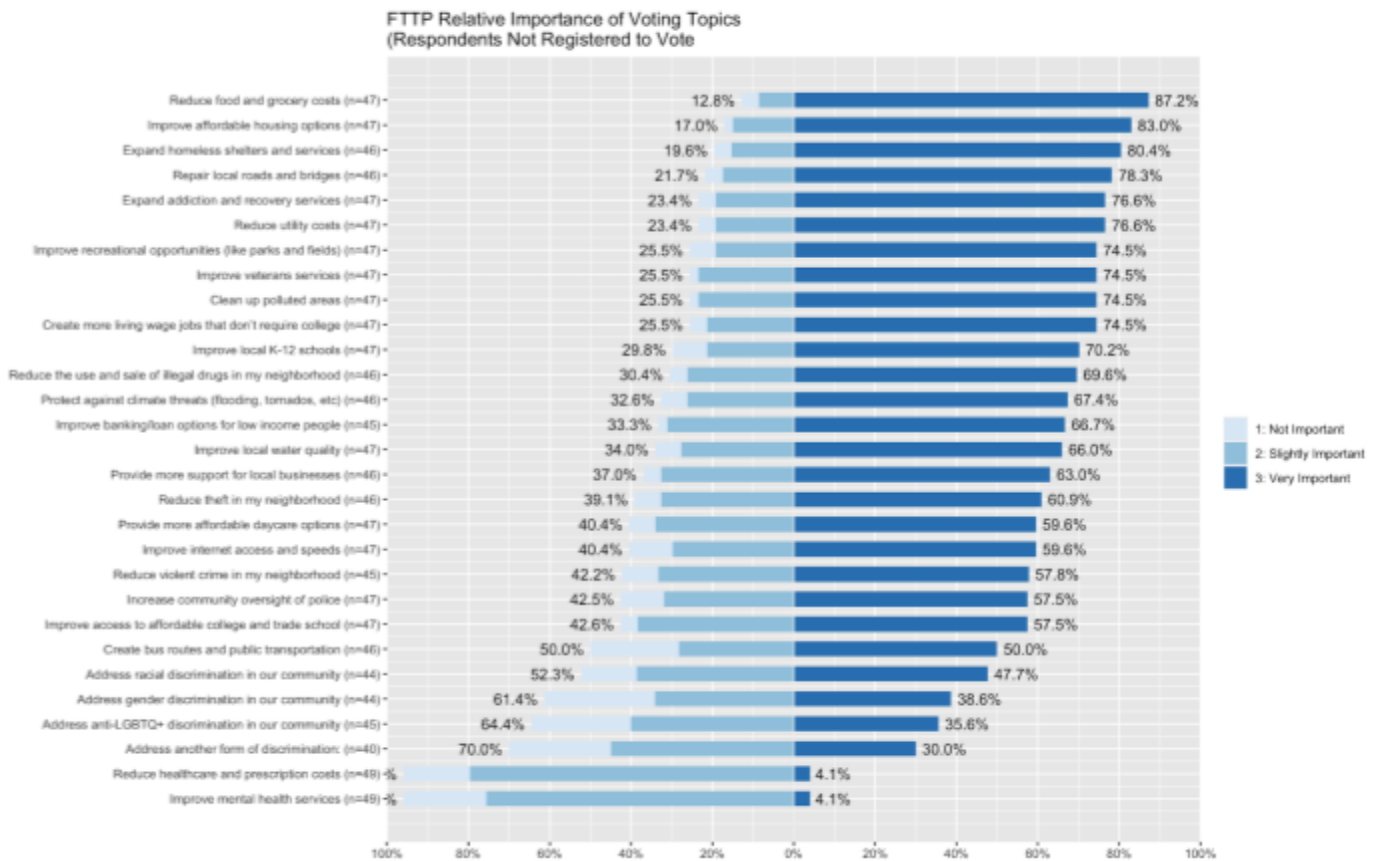


Figure 4.2 All Community Needs Responses for Fairfield County Nonvoters



## VIEWS ON THE FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN THE INTEL MICROCHIP PLANT COMING TO LICKING COUNTY

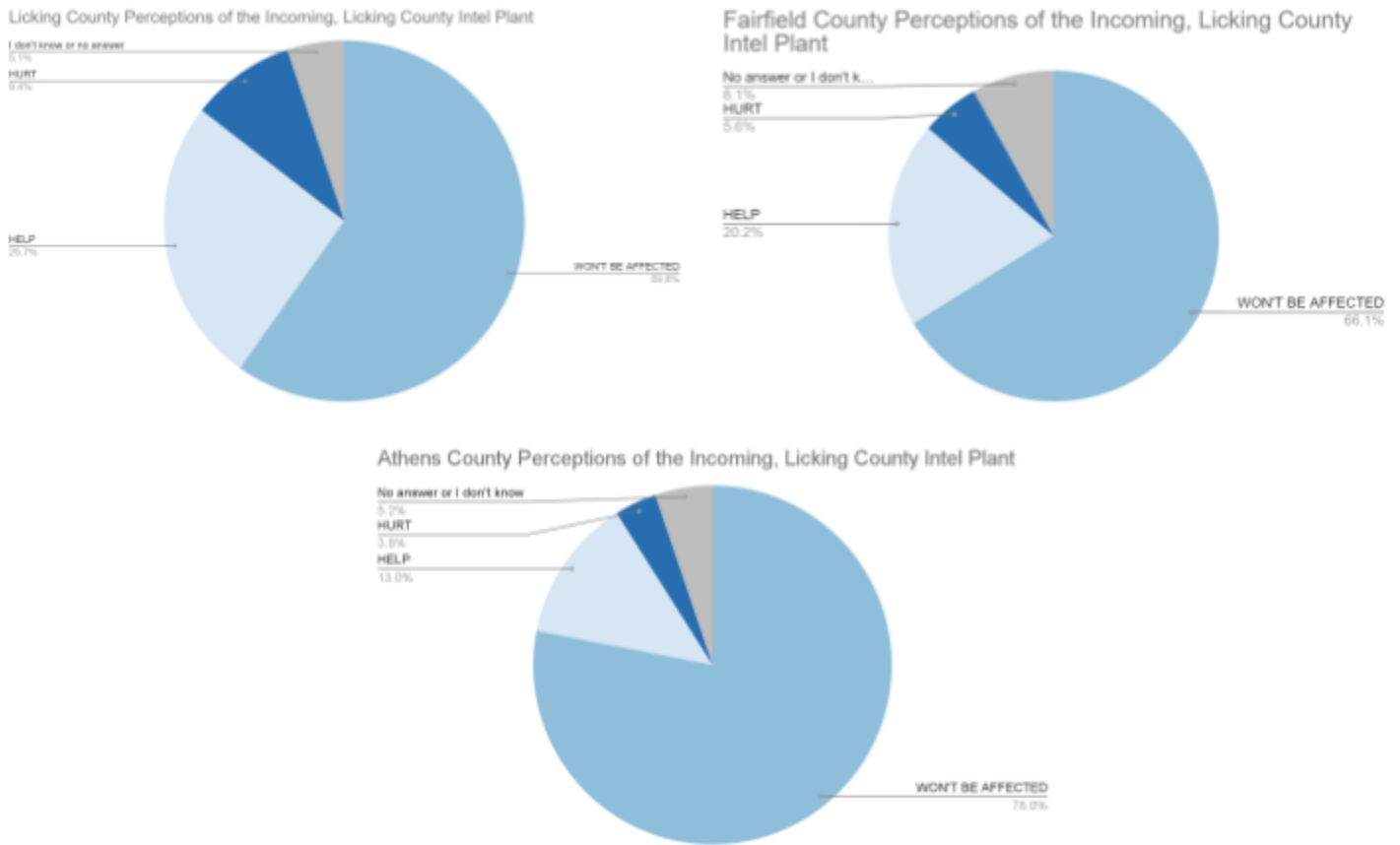
Local progress reports were collected in Licking County, the location where the Biden administration’s investments are supporting a new Intel microchip plant.<sup>3</sup> Due to the timing of community input project development, the Local Progress Reports provided an opportunity to gather community members’ perceptions of the impact this federal investment would have on their lives.

Respondents were given three answer choices:

- This new development will likely help my household
- My household likely won't be affected by this new development
- This new development will likely hurt my household

Here, we order the responses from geographically closest to the location of the plant - Licking County itself - to the location farthest from the site - Athens County.

Figure 5. Respondents' Anticipation of Help, Hurt, or Being Unaffected by the Intel Plant Coming to Licking County



The pattern from closest to farthest away from the plant's location shows that those closest are the most likely to anticipate the plant will impact their household, either positively or negatively. Moving to the right and farther away, the "won't be affected" pie slice grows to a high of 78% percent of responses in Athens County.

Of those respondents who are anticipating an impact, 27% in Licking County think the plant will hurt their households, 21% in Fairfield County think it will hurt them, and 14% in Athens County think it will hurt them. To follow the geographic trend from closest to the plant location to farthest away, those respondents who think the plant will impact them are most likely to expect harm to come from the plant if they are close to its location. The farther from the plant's location, the less likely respondents are to anticipate harm from it.

Civic leaders can learn lessons from this result: a major federal investment is perceived in particular ways depending on the community members' relation to the investment. Impacts on households and localized communities should be collected and addressed in advance of major decisions impacting them.



## WHO RESPONDED, AND WHY IT MATTERS

Our partner organizations are based in three counties of Ohio, one officially within the Appalachian region and two bordering it. In Licking County, ROEF partnered with the Newark Think Tank on Poverty (NTTP); in Fairfield County we partnered with the Fairfield County Think Tank on Poverty (FTTP), and in Athens County we partnered with Indivisible Appalachian Ohio (IAO). These three groups selected census tracts for sampling households based on their own knowledge of the locations where people live who have been excluded from community input. This is an important innovation in the way respondents were identified; relying on multiple types of knowledge to reach communities that are passed over by traditional methods requires that practitioners set their own biases aside in favor of what local experts know. In reporting the results of the community input survey, the demographics of who responded is an important finding in itself, as the groups intended to reach community members who have been omitted from public input and community development processes.

**Census Tracts Selected**  
 Tract 7590 and 7525 in Licking County  
 Tract 317 in Fairfield County  
 Tracts 9726 and 9735 in Athens County

After our partner organizations in each of these communities selected the census tracts of interest based on their experiential knowledge, we compared the demographics of the tracts to the county at large.

### Comparison of Census Tracts Sampled to their County At Large<sup>4</sup>

#### Indivisible Appalachian Ohio (IAO) in Athens County

This group decided to sample households in two census tracts: numbers 9726 and 9735.

**Figure 6. Athens County Demographics Compared to Demographics of Two Census Tracts Used for Sampling**

	Athens County	Tract 9726	Tract 9735
Median Household Income	\$42,414	\$35,697	\$47,321
Race/Ethnicity			
- White Alone	86.6%	95%	88.3%
- BIPOC	13.4%	5%	11.7%
Home Ownership			
- Own	58.9%	73.5%	70.5%
- Rent	41.1%	26.5%	29.5%

In Athens County, IAO selected two quite different census tracts. Tract 9726 has a median income much lower than the county median, is a strong majority White-only area, with nearly three quarters of residents owning their homes. By contrast, tract 9735 has a median income nearly 10% **above** the county median, has a much higher proportion of people with BIPOC identities than the other census tract (although still lower than the county as a whole), and has a similarly high rate of home ownership, over 11 percentage points higher than the county as a whole. The tracts sampled represent very different cross sections of the county, with neither tract reflecting the demographics of the county.

<sup>4</sup> Data sourced from the 2020 US census at <https://data.census.gov/>.

Fairfield County Think Tank on Poverty

Only one census tract was selected by FTTP: tract number 317.

**Figure 7. Fairfield County Demographics Compared to Demographics of Census Tract Used for Sampling**

	Fairfield County	Tract 317
Median Household Income	\$70,906	\$38,791
Race/Ethnicity		
- White Alone	82.2%	87.6%
- BIPOC	17.8%	12.4%
Home Ownership		
- Own	73.8%	50.4%
- Rent	26.2%	49.6%

The FTTP census tract used to sample from has significant differences from the county of Fairfield. While there are over 5% fewer people with BIPOC identities in the census tract than in the county as a whole, the census tract’s median household income is nearly half of the median income for the county, and while nearly three quarters of people in the county live in a home they own, only half of the people in census tract 317 do.

Newark Think Tank on Poverty

In Licking County, our local partner randomly sampled one census tract from which to sample households - tract 7590 - and selected a subset of a second tract - 7525 - that was within Newark city limits. Figure 8 shows some demographic information about these two census tracts.

**Figure 8. Licking County Demographics Compared to Demographics of Census Tract Used for Sampling**

	Licking County	Tract 7590	Tract 7525 (partially sampled)
Median Household Income	\$67,736	\$22,616	\$28,010
Race/Ethnicity			
- White Alone	85.7%	85%	88%
- BIPOC	14.3%	15%	12%
Home Ownership			
- Own	76.2%	32.3%	32.2%
- Rent	23.8%	67.7%	67.8%

The first tract, 7590, shows striking differences from the county in which it is located. While the race/ethnicity makeup of the tract is nearly identical to that of the county at large, the median household income is only *one-third* of

the median household income of the county. Tract 7525's median income is also about one-third of the county median, while the population is more dominated by those who are White.

Similarly, while most people in the county own their homes (over 76%), only 32.3% (Tract 7590) and 32.2% (Tract 7525) of people in the selected census tracts do.

As a cohort, our three local partner organizations largely selected census tracts in which they were far more likely to find households with dramatically lower incomes than the county as a whole and for NTTTP and FTTP, where home ownership was dramatically lower. Indivisible Appalachian Ohio's sampling followed a different pattern of diversity among their selected tracts. While one tract does match the trend of the other two geographies with dramatically lower incomes and having a more homogeneously White population, even the lower income census tract in Athens County (9726) held quite high levels of home ownership.

We see that in these three rural Ohio communities, the paradigm of a rural community being only White, racially/ethnically, is deeply flawed. We see that at the census tract level, communities in rural Ohio are differing substantially from the county where they are located, and that the summary of information at the county level can profoundly defy the experience of a community within it. This comparison of selected census tracts to the counties verified a hypothesis: that local experiential knowledge is both an essential tool and a shortcut in doing effective community input gathering for those who wish to ensure those who face adversity and instability in their communities are able to have their voices heard.

## **Who Was Included in the Samples**

Once tracts were selected, walk sheets for surveyors were created by randomly selecting from a list of all households in the census tract, except in Licking County census tract 7525, where households were randomized only within the boundaries of the city of Newark. By coupling the organization-based census tract selection based on local expertise and randomization of the households within them, our Local Progress Reports blended crucial local knowledge and good surveying practices.

Just as we triangulated census tracts to the county to understand what the local expertise was telling us about the communities which needed to be reached, we compared our sample to the demographics of the census tracts and to the respective counties to vet the effectiveness of our sampling. Because of the particular census tract selection, we anticipated our sample to hold a greater proportion of people facing community marginalization than in the county as a whole, but we anticipated our samples roughly representing the census tracts, given that we randomly sampled households within each tract. Our results found that

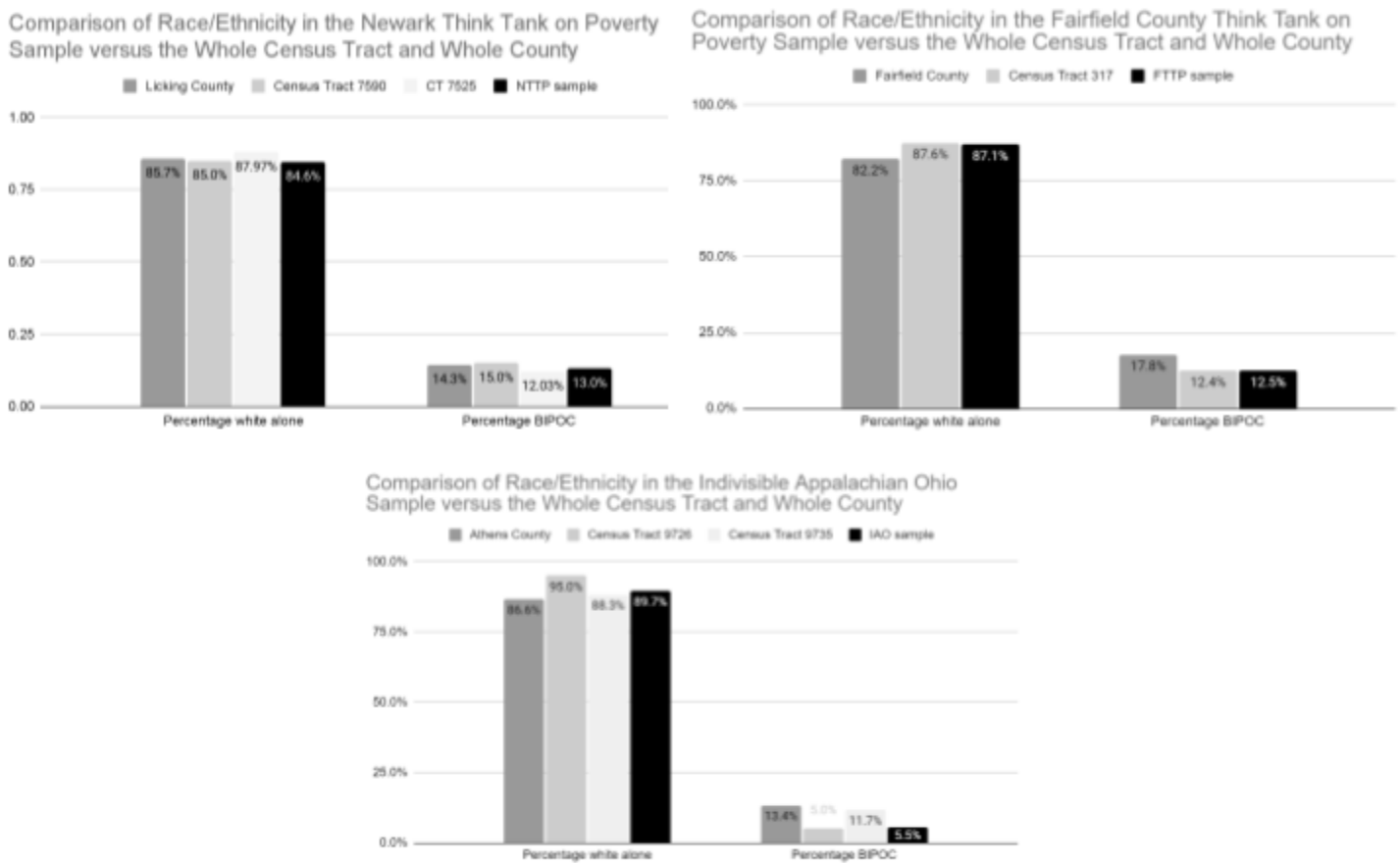
- By race/ethnicity, our samples tended to over-represent people who identify as White Alone. However, between 2.4% and 5.2% of respondents declined to share race/ethnicity information, and it is possible that this group of respondents would account for the under-representation of people with BIPOC identities.
- By home ownership, most census tracts held dramatically fewer homeowners and more renters. Still, our samples did not fully represent the proportion of renters in any of the census tracts sampled. Homeownership bias prevailed even through this surveying technique. Between 7% and 10% of respondents in the three samples gave a response other than "rent" or "own." Many said "neither," and this information is corroborated by the high rates of respondents reporting they or a loved one has experienced a marginalizing experience like homelessness, addiction, and/or incarceration. (See below for more information on this question).

- By income, we found that respondents were profoundly uncomfortable sharing household earnings, as between 23% and 25% of respondents in each sample refused to share this information. While firm conclusions we can draw related to income are limited due to the strong nonresponse bias, we can see in the data that the proportion of respondents who reported extremely low incomes was high, but still much lower than the census tracts sampled in every case. While our surveyors did not capture a disproportionate number of high income earners, middle income earners were likely over-represented.

The following descriptive analyses consider only the responses we received in the Local Progress Reports and do not include sample weighting which was outside the scope of this project. Nonresponse limitations could be addressed by sample weighting in future projects to leverage the data for inferential analyses.

### Race/Ethnicity

**Figure 9. Race/Ethnicity Comparisons for All Three Cohort Members' Samples**



Indivisible Appalachian Ohio, Athens County, Ohio	Fairfield County Think Tank on Poverty, Fairfield County, Ohio	Newark Think Tank on Poverty, Licking County, Ohio
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Athens County, 89.7% of respondents were White Alone. This is higher than the population of one of the the census tract sampled -</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Fairfield County, 87.1% of respondents were White Alone. This is very similar to the population of the census tract sampled (87.6%) but</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Licking County, 84.6% of respondents were White Alone. This is very similar to the population of the census tracts sampled (85% and</li> </ul>

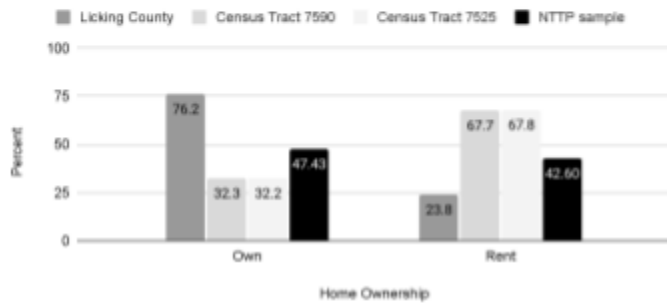
<p>tract 9735 includes 88.3% of people who identify this way, but the IAO sample had a lower percentage of respondents identifying as White Alone than the second tract sampled - in tract 9726 95% of people say they are White Alone. Athens County as a whole includes 86.6% of people identifying this way, lower than the IAO sample.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Athens County, only 5.5% of respondents identified themselves as BIPOC, while the county as a whole includes 13.4% of people with these identities. One census tract sampled (9726) has a very similar proportion of people with BIPOC identities as the sample (5%), but the other sampled census tract (9735) includes over twice as many people with BIPOC identities as the IAO Sample.</li> <li>• The IAO sample closely resembles the census tract with fewer people identifying with BIPOC identity (tract 9726). The IAO sample likely underrepresented people with BIPOC identities in tract 9735 and the county of Athens as a whole.</li> <li>• 4.9% of the sample declined to share race/ethnicity information.</li> </ul>	<p>notably higher than Fairfield County as a whole (82.2%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Fairfield County, only 12.5% of respondents identified themselves as BIPOC, while the county as a whole includes 17.8% of people with these identities. The census tract has a very similar proportion of people with BIPOC identities as the sample (12.4%).</li> <li>• 5.2% of the sample declined to share race/ethnicity information. Based on those who did share this information, race/ethnicity in the survey sample fairly accurately represented the race/ethnicity of the census tract sampled, but included a larger proportion of people who identify as White Alone than Fairfield County as a whole.</li> </ul>	<p>88%) and Licking County as a whole (85.7%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In our Licking County sample, only 13% of respondents identified themselves as BIPOC, while the county as a whole includes 14.3% of people with these identities, and one of the two census tracts has an even higher proportion (15%). BIPOC respondents may have been underrepresented in the NTTTP sample.</li> <li>• 2.4% of the sample declined to share race/ethnicity information.</li> </ul>
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Home Ownership

Figure 10. Home Ownership Comparisons for All Three Cohort Members' Samples

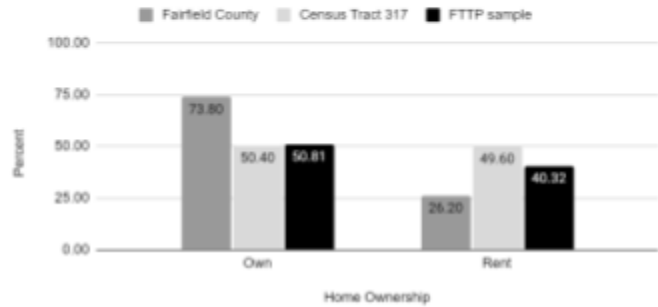
Home Ownership in Licking County versus Newark Think Tank Sample

\*9.97% of respondents answered "both," "neither," or "declined"



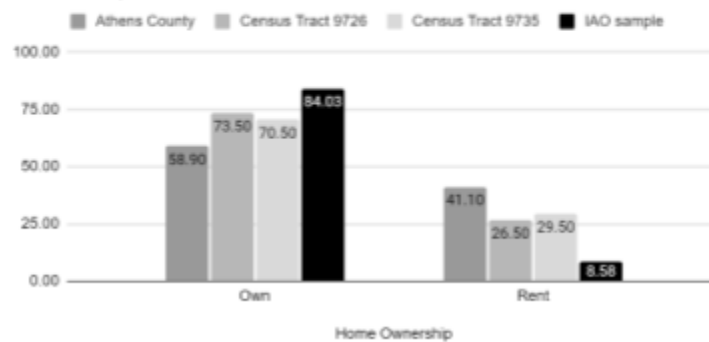
Home Ownership in Fairfield County versus Fairfield County Think Tank Sample

\*8.87% of respondents answered "both," "neither," or "declined"



Home Ownership in Athens County and Two Census Tracts versus Indivisible Appalachian Ohio Sample

\*7.39% of respondents answered "both," "neither," or "declined"



Indivisible Appalachian Ohio, Athens County, Ohio	Fairfield County Think Tank on Poverty, Fairfield County, Ohio	Newark Think Tank on Poverty, Licking County, Ohio
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The IAO sample skewed strongly toward homeowners, with over 84% of respondents reporting how ownership. This was more than either of the two sampled census tracts (70.5% and 73.5% homeowners) and far above homeownership in the county (58.9%).</li> <li>Over 7% of respondents either declined to answer the question, or said they neither owned nor rented. This finding is related to a later question we explore related to people who have experienced homelessness or other socially marginalizing experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FTTP's sample had a strong proportion of both renters (40.3% and owners (50.8%). This did not, however, match the tract nor the county.</li> <li>At the tract level, rentership and ownership is nearly 50/50. With 8.9% of respondents declining to answer this question, it is possible that the weighting of FTTP's sample toward owners may be due to nonresponse to this question.</li> <li>At the county level, ownership is much higher (73.8%).</li> <li>The FTTP census tract selection and sampling seems to have effectively reached a stronger portion of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The NTTP sample was the closest to equal representation of homeowners and renters, at 47.4% and 42.6%, respectively.</li> <li>This sample did NOT reflect home ownership in the tract it was pulled from, where over two-thirds of residents are renters.</li> <li>This sample also did not represent the county of Licking writ large, where three-quarters of residents are homeowners.</li> <li>In the NTTP sample, nearly 10% of respondents declined to answer this question, indicating there may be</li> </ul>

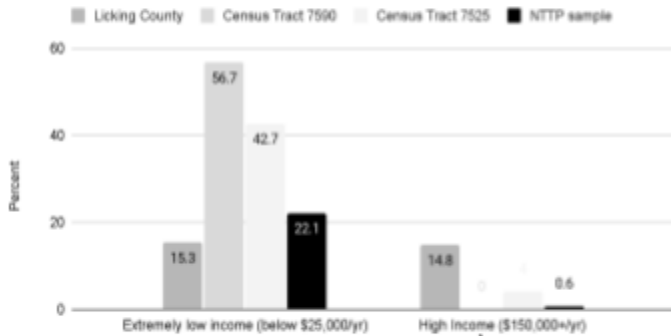
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The IAO sample did not reflect the high levels of rentership in the county and in the census tracts sampled, and may have failed to effectively bring in perspectives from groups who lack power in the community due to lack of home ownership.</li> </ul>	<p>renters, a group of residents who may lack power in community development due to lack of home ownership.</p>	<p>more to the story about home ownership in census tract 7590 than this survey was able to uncover.</p>
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**Income Extremes**

**Figure 11. Comparisons of Income Extremes for All Three Cohort Members' Samples**

**Comparison of Income Extremes in Licking County versus Sampled Census Tract and Newark Think Tank on Poverty Sample**

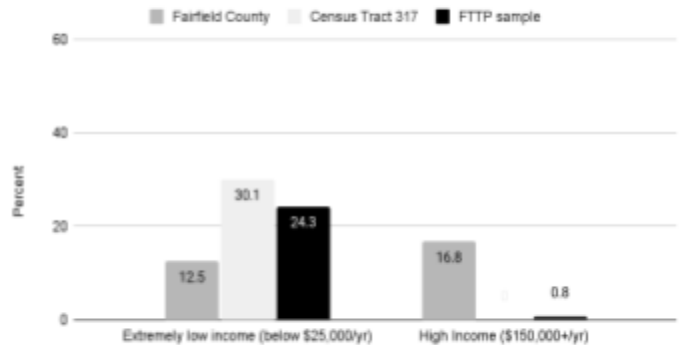
\*24.8% of respondents declined to disclose income



\* Census data reports 0% of households in census tract 7590 with incomes over \$150,000, and a margin of error of 2.3%

**Comparison of Income Extremes in Fairfield County versus Sampled Census Tract FCTTP Sample**

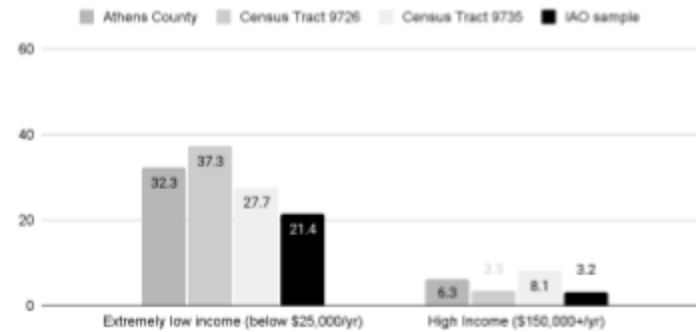
\*23.9% of respondents declined to disclose income



\* Census data reports 0% of households in census tract 317 with incomes over \$150,000, and a margin of error of 2.4%

**Comparison of Income Extremes in Athens County versus Sampled Census Tract and Indivisible Appalachian Ohio Sample**

\*23.2% of respondents declined to disclose income



<p>Indivisible Appalachian Ohio, Athens County, Ohio</p>	<p>Fairfield County Think Tank on Poverty, Fairfield County, Ohio</p>	<p>Newark Think Tank on Poverty, Licking County, Ohio</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One of the census tracts selected for sampling (9735) had a higher median income than the county. This selection likely would not have reached people who face</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The sampled census tract has a median income about half that of the county. To target lower-income residents, this was a well-selected tract.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The sampled tracts in Licking County have a median income strikingly at about one-third that of the median income of the county as a whole. For targeting low-income respondents,</li> </ul>

marginalization from community decision-making based on income, but may face it based on other factors; we do see that this census tract includes over 11% of people with BIPOC identities.

- Athens County's other sampled tract (9726) has a median income substantially below the county median.
- 23% of people in the IAO sample chose not to share income, so conclusions we can draw from this sample **are limited**.
- IAO's sample included the greatest percentage of high income households at 3.2% of respondents.
- The Athens County census tracts are the only ones sampled in this project with estimates of any households earning over \$150,000 per year. For tract 9735, this was over 8% of households.
- The two Athens County census tracts straddle the county percentage for extremely low incomes, but the IAO sample collected responses from a substantially smaller proportion of extremely low income households - only 21.4% of responses were in this group, compared to 27.7% and 37.3% of the two tracts' households having extremely low incomes.
- IAO's sample did not reflect the incomes of the census tracts sampled; however, IAO did collect input from far more low income respondents than high income respondents.

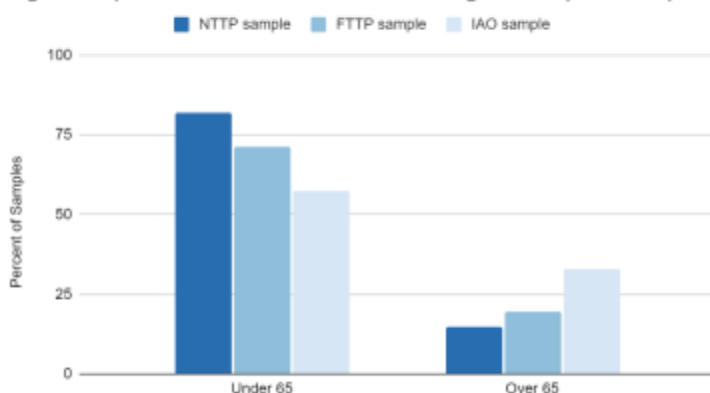
- 24% of the FTTP sample declined to disclose income, so conclusions we can draw from this sample **are limited**.
- In the FTTP sample, 24.3% of households had extremely low incomes. This is twice as high as Fairfield County, but still lower than the 30.1% in the census tract sampled.
- FTTP only collected responses from households with high incomes 0.8% of the time.
- With nearly 17% of Fairfield County households having high incomes, FTTP did a good job collecting input from more low-income households and more closely matching their sampled census tract.

these were well-selected tracts.

- 25% of NTTP respondents declined to share their income, so conclusions we can draw from this sample **are limited**.
- Census tract 7590 and 7525 in Licking County hold strong majorities of households with extremely low incomes - 56.7% and 42.7%. In comparison, only 22% of the NTTP sample captured extremely low-income households.
- The NTTP sample only captured a small portion of high income households (0.6%) which tracks with the census data for this census tract, where the estimates do not include any households with high incomes (but these estimates do include a 2.3% margin of error)
- The NTTP sample has done a good job avoiding over-representation of high income households, but failed to fairly represent extremely low income ones.

## Age

Figure 12.  
Age Comparison Across Three Local Progress Report Samples



Age information collected was not directly comparable to census data, but did reveal interesting insights when compared among the three samples.

The samples include very different age cohorts, with NTTP having a dramatically younger majority of the sample - 82% under age 65 - than did IAO have for theirs, with only 57.5% under age 65. The younger the sample of respondents, the more likely they were to share their age too: in Licking County where the



strong majority of respondents were under 65, 4.8% of respondents refused to share their age. The middle group in Fairfield had a nonresponse rate of 8.5% to the age question, paired with 71% of answerers under age 65. But in Athens County where nearly a third (32.9%) of respondents were over age 65, 9.6% of respondents chose not to share their ages.

The NTTTP surveyors reached far more young people than the other two groups, especially surveyors in Athens County.

### The LGBTQ+ Community

Our Local Progress Reports asked about gender and sexuality identities in the LGBTQ+ rainbow. This data is notoriously difficult to collect and report accurately due to the safety concerns for the individuals with these identities. Still, our Ohio partners aimed to acknowledge the diversity of people in their communities and invited participants to share if they, themselves, or a member of their household identified themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or another gender or sexuality nonconforming identity. Two of our groups' results (those for NTTTP and FTTP) show over 10% of respondent households included someone in the LGBTQ+ community, and the third group, IAO, had responses showing over 6% of respondent households included someone in this community.

In Athens and Fairfield Counties, nearly 10% of respondents declined to answer this question, showing that many in the community are not interested in discussing this question. Still, a significant part of rural residents are a part of this community, further challenging the stereotype of rural communities as only filled with White, cis-gender, heterosexual residents.

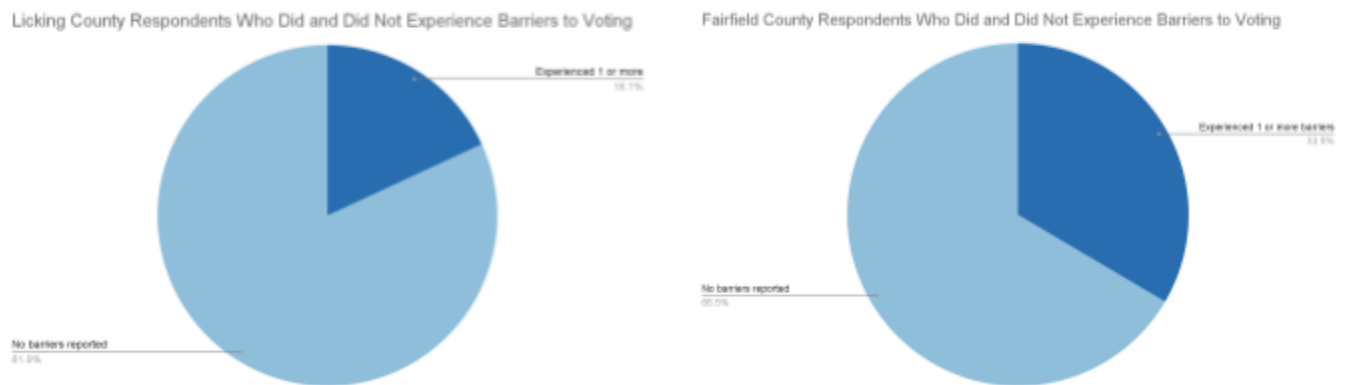
### Marginalizing Experiences

The Local Progress Report surveyors collected information on the question, "**Have you or anyone in your household experienced homelessness, incarceration, and/or addiction?**" Responses to this question have been summarized as "socially marginalizing experiences."

A remarkable number of respondents have had these types of experiences. In our Licking County sample, over **half** of respondents said they or a household member had had one of these experiences. While the Fairfield sample's percentage was lower at 32% saying yes, this number showing nearly a third of respondents have faced an extremely marginalizing experience is astounding. In Athens County, our sample included a smaller number, 17.1%, of respondents who had faced such an experience or had their household member done so.

These marginalizing experiences structurally push individuals out of collective community decisions, like voting. Indeed, we see in a later question regarding barriers to voting that over a quarter of all our respondents said they had faced some barrier to voting, like discrimination while trying to register or at a polling location itself, not being able to take time off work, or lack of transportation. Even more specifically, over 2% of respondents across the Licking and Fairfield samples (IAO surveys did not include the question regarding barriers to voting) said they believed they could not vote due to a felony conviction, when people convicted of felonies in Ohio have their voting rights restored upon release from incarceration.

Figure 13. Licking & Fairfield Respondents Who Faced Barriers to Voting



The data regarding marginalizing experiences does not distinguish between the three particular experiences of facing addiction, experiencing incarceration, or having experienced homelessness. Still, we can see that a notable portion of respondents had indicated they neither rent nor own a home (2.8% in the Athens County sample, 3.6% in the Fairfield County sample, and a sizable 8.2% in the Licking County sample).

The respondents in our three geographic samples illustrated that rural residents are not monolithic - they hold many racial/ethnic identities. Our sample also showed gender and sexuality diversity in these three communities. These Local Progress Reports show that issues of incarceration, addiction, and houselessness are prevalent in these three communities, and these experiences are impacting folks' ability to have a say in what happens at the community level. Folks who gave input were not rich, even if our sampling did not quite represent the extent of the low-income nature of the areas. Our results show a continuing bias for folks who own their homes to be more empowered than renters to have their voices included in community decisions.

## DISCUSSION

### EXPECTATIONS AND SURPRISES

While ROEF truly approached the Local Progress Reports with curiosity and an absence of expected outcomes, we naturally developed ideas about the possible outcomes. In some ways, the community input matched these ideas, while there were also a few surprises. How the results met our expectations:

- **Decreasing daily expenses and improving rural quality of life rose to the top of community priorities, no matter how you slice the results.** This finding resonates with ROEF polling which shows rural residents care most about decreasing daily expenditures, increasing jobs and wages, and improving rural quality of life.
- **A large portion of our sample has experienced barriers to voting.** Since our local partners were targeting areas where their lived experience told them residents were disengaged from public life, we expected to find that our respondents were facing barriers to participating in public life. To further confirm the importance of our LPR approach, these respondents would be unlikely to be reached by a voter canvass or survey.
- **Caring infrastructure is a high priority among a diversity of respondent groups.** As we looked at a variety of subgroups of respondents, caring for others in the community continuously emerged in the top five priorities. Since we know that caring for one another is a dominant progressive rural value borne out by our previous polling, we were not surprised to see these priorities surface.

- **Targeting respondents with social vulnerabilities led to related priorities.** For example, a chi-square test and a Cramér's V both indicated a significant relationship between respondents who rent their home and a higher priority for affordable housing as a community need. This finding was driven by renters who overwhelmingly rated affordable housing as "very important." We suspected that community priorities would show up in distinct ways for respondents who face barriers to social inclusion, and our renter/homeowner results show that to be true. Collecting these perspectives in community assessments is thus all the more important for addressing true community needs.

The surprises:

- **Respondents in two of the sample groups identified constant moving of polling locations to be a barrier to voting.** This was a distinct barrier to voting that was not one of the listed options, indicating a pattern in the region that we had not anticipated.
- **Across our three geographies sampled, top issues were remarkably similar.** With the census tracts selected in the three geographies being so distinct geographically and demographically, we anticipated some clear distinction in the community priorities. Further, these communities hold other distinguishing characteristics; for example, Athens, Ohio is home to Ohio University, making the primary industry, demographics, and culture of the community distinct from the other two sampled communities. Athens is also within the designated Appalachia region, whereas Fairfield and Licking Counties do not. Licking County has been receiving a great deal of press in 2022 as it will be home to the Intel microchip plant, a major federal investment in the area. Each of these distinguishing factors led us to anticipate distinctions in what communities saw as their greatest needs, and yet we saw great similarities instead.

We tested these similarities using multiple statistical tests, including a K-means cluster analysis and a classification tree analysis. Both methods led to unreliable results in clustering responses based on any guiding element, whether that be the location of the respondents, race/ethnicity, or responses to any of the individual questions in the survey. It is possible that a larger sample, or one with a different sampling technique, may have produced more distinct clusters.

- While no demographic dimension nor any particular question guided groupings within the data, we *did* find significant relationships among a few demographic variables and responses. **Gender was the dimension by which the most reliable differences emerged.** While we did not anticipate a gender split in community concerns, women indicated a high priority around addressing discrimination (there were four separate community priority options relating to differing types of discrimination).

## CONCLUSION & FUTURE WORK

The Local Progress Reports found several notable findings with implications for civic leaders and progressives committed to fighting for rural communities:

1. **Rural residents do not fit the stereotype of an older White cis-gender man on a tractor;** our rural respondents represented communities with a diverse mix of industries and incomes, a diversity of races/ethnicities, significant numbers of people of color, significant numbers of people in the LGBTQ+ community, and people with a wide variety of life experiences, including marginalizing life experiences such as addiction, homelessness, and incarceration.
2. **Rural concerns in our sampled communities continue to reflect larger trends of progressive rural priorities:** decreasing daily expenses and improving rural quality of life chief among them. Indeed, we were surprised by the homogeneity of top priorities among the diverse communities sampled. These two findings combined suggest that these progressive rural values are sticky, not passing fad.

3. **Community participation biases exist, and they influence the community priorities which rise to the top.** Our results show that home ownership continues to hold power for community participation, and that people with barriers to social inclusion - such as being a renter, having experienced homelessness - leads to distinguished community priorities. Civic leaders must account for these biases in their community inclusion work and work to ensure people who are pushed to the margins of the community are able to equitably influence the direction of their communities.
4. **Major investments are perceived to have the greatest impact in their immediate vicinity, and the people closest to them are the most likely to anticipate harm coming from them.** We saw this in our exploration of perceptions regarding the Intel microchip plant coming to Licking County. The community farthest away was most likely to indicate they would not see an impact at all. As civic leaders consider their support or dissent for major investments, they should consider the perceived effects near and far and work to acknowledge and address the concerns of people at various levels of impact.

While the ROEF Local Progress Reports have produced actionable findings for advocates ready to support these communities and other communities similar to them, important next steps should follow this work. First, this drop-off/pick-up methodology, which has been shown to reduce nonresponse bias<sup>5</sup>, should be scaled to additional settings as a major contender for community input methods in a variety of communities. Second, civic leaders engaging community input should iterate on the notions of co-creation of geographic sampling and survey questionnaires to meaningfully and deeply incorporate local expertise into the community input process. Third, policy and research institutions should invest in further exploring (and experimenting with) the combination of these participatory approaches and relational surveying techniques in a variety of settings and at a variety of scales to build the evidence base for better methods of strong community inclusion in public processes.

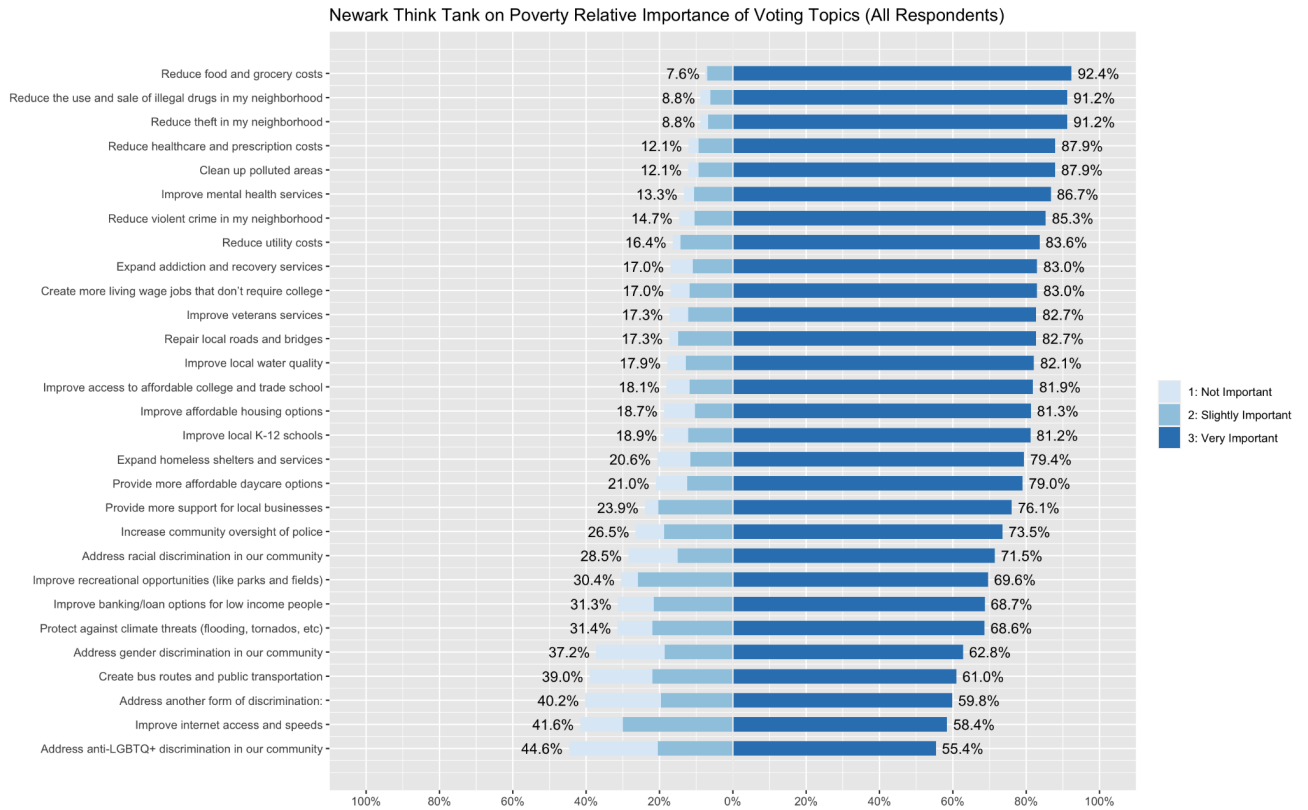
For the Fairfield, Athens, and Licking communities who participated in the ROEF Local Progress Reports, the next steps are at your fingertips to deliver these results to your elected officials and assert your rights as Ohioans to collaboratively rebuild the community you need for you and your neighbors to thrive.

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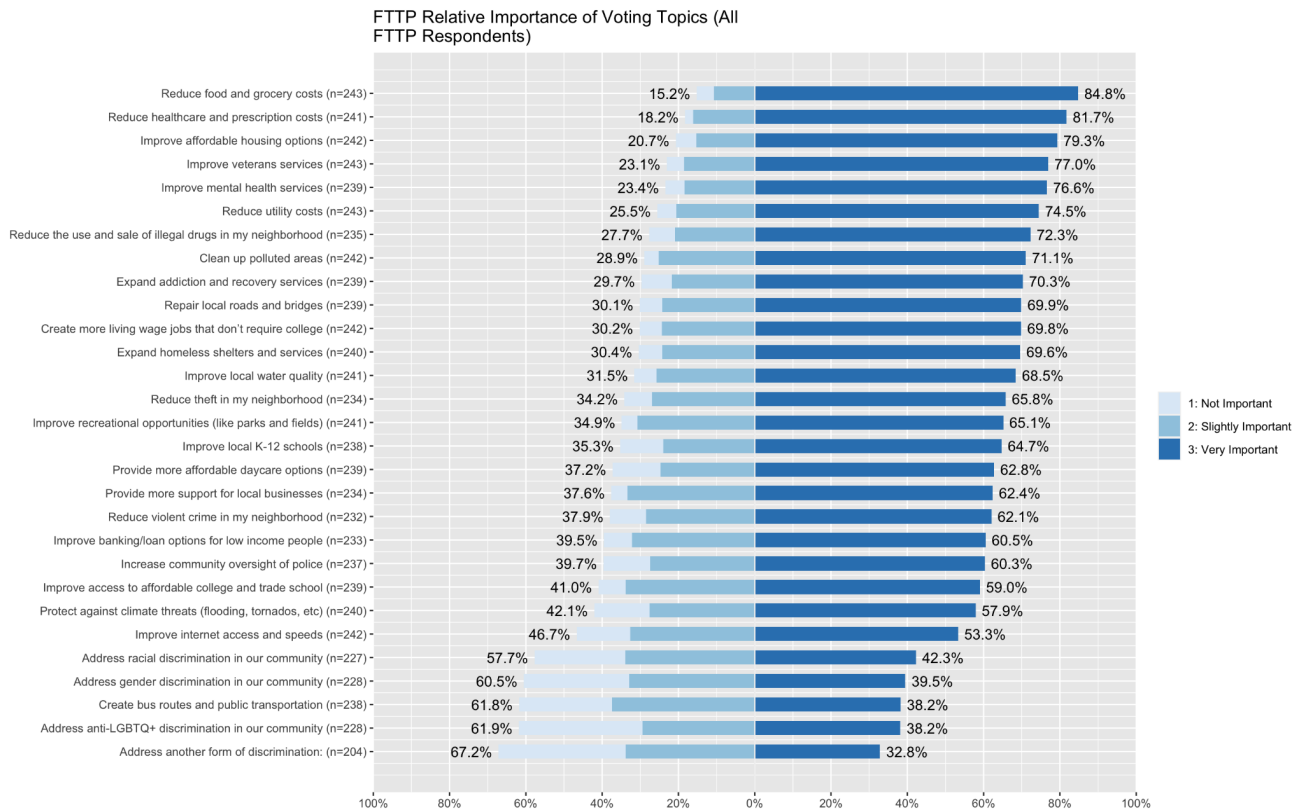
<sup>5</sup> <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/65702>

# APPENDIX

## 1. Licking County (NTTP) Likert scale responses



## 2. Fairfield County (FTTP) Likert scale responses



### 3. Athens County (IAO) Likert scale responses

