



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Bringing the University to You

Fact Sheet-04-50

Mineral County Needs Assessment: Community Needs and Issues

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Introduction

Mineral County, created in 1911, is located in West-Central Nevada encompassing some 3,756 square miles. The terrain in the county is unique in that it is mostly mountainous, with canyons and large arid plateaus rising upward from the Walker Lake Basin. While Hawthorne is the county seat, other small outlying communities include Schurz, Walker Lake, Luning and Mina.

The 2000 US Census Bureau reported that the population of Mineral County in the 2000 Census was 5,071. The 2002 population of Mineral County, according to the Nevada State Demographer, had dropped to 4,695. The largest unincorporated town is Hawthorne and has an estimated population of 2,995, over half the county population.

Known for its mineral deposits of gold, silver, copper, tungsten, iron, coal, borax, lead and gemstone rocks, the county suffers from the Nevada boom bust economy. The history of the county not only includes such historical mining areas as Aurora, Candelaria and Bellevue, and is known as the worlds largest United States Ammunition Depot and “America’s Patriotic Home.”

The results of the comprehensive survey instrument required that Mineral County’s need assessment be reported in multiple fact sheets. This

fact sheet reports on community needs and issues. The other fact sheets resulting from the needs assessment report on youth development and community demographics.

Needs Assessment

A formal needs assessment was completed by the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Northeast Central Area to identify Cooperative Extension programming needs for Mineral County. A needs assessment was completed using a survey instrument which solicited opinions, ideas and perceptions from Mineral County residents identifying community concerns.

The survey instrument integrated 27 sets of questions identifying community involvement, needs, issues, quality of life, youth issues, and demographic characteristics. The results were first compiled by the University Center for Economic Development in order to facilitate the qualifications needed for the Mineral County Extension Educator position. The Extension Educator, once hired, analyzed the data compiled from the survey instrument and gathered additional data through public meetings, newspapers, recorded minutes of meetings and other sources.

Methodology

Due to the fact that Mineral County had never had a Cooperative Extension office, a comprehensive needs assessment had never been completed. The Northeast Central Area director from the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension attended several community meetings and met with community leaders to collect information and community priorities for a formal survey instrument. A focus group session was also held at Mineral County High School.

The survey instrument randomly sampled 540 households located in Mineral County. There were 207 households that responded for a total of 440 individuals including 88 children.

Community Needs

Respondents were asked to prioritize 33 possible community needs of the county. Respondents were asked to give each possible need in the survey instrument a rating (1 through 4). The rating of “1” equaled high importance and a rating of “4” equaled not important.

Table 1. Top five community needs identified in Mineral County.

| Top Five Community Needs Identified | Percentage of 207 Households Responding |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Maintain High Water Quality | 97% |
| 2. Efficient Local Government | 92% |
| 3. Affordable Medical Care | 96% |
| 4. Effective Fire/Police Service | 95% |
| 5. Health Insurance | 94% |

Table 2. Least important community needs identified in Mineral County.

| Community Needs Least Important | Percentage of 207 Households Responding |
|--|---|
| 1. Create hiking, jogging and horse trails. | 92% |
| 2. Create county manager position | 87% |
| 3. Create bike paths along streets and highways | 92% |
| 4. Create community support of agriculture | 93% |
| 5. Create and improve public transportation system | 90% |

The data obtained from the 207 respondents’ households was calculated and an average value was given to each of the community needs identified. Community needs were ranked once an average value was calculated. Refer to Table 1 for the top five community needs identified. Refer to Table 2 for the least important community needs identified.

Community Issues

Mineral County respondents were also asked to prioritize community issues. The survey instrument listed 31 possible community issues. Respondents were asked to give each possible issue in the survey instrument a rating (1 through 4). The rating of “1” equaled high importance and a rating of “4” equaled not important.

The data obtained from the 207 respondents’ households was calculated and an average value was given to each of the community issues identified. Community issues were ranked once an average value was calculated. Refer to Table 3 for the top five community issues identified. Refer to Table 4 for the least important community issues identified.

Table 3. Top five community issues identified in Mineral County.

| Top Five Community Issues Identified | Percentage of 207 Households Responding |
|--|---|
| 1. Unsightly properties | 97% |
| 2. Inadequate preparation of youth for the work world. | 96% |
| 3. Overpriced goods and services | 97% |
| 4. Unemployment | 97% |
| 5. Maintaining quality schools. | 94% |

Table 4. Least important community Issues identified in Mineral County.

| Community Issues Least Important | Percentage of 207 Households Responding |
|--|---|
| 1. Lack of affordable housing | 93% |
| 2. Families in the community who do not speak English. | 92% |
| 3. Children in school who are learning English | 90% |
| 4. Fear of crime. | 98% |
| 5. Adult suicide/depression. | 93% |

Quality of Life

In order to assess the quality of life in Mineral County, respondents were asked questions about their community. The majority of respondents (65%) strongly agreed to agree that people have pride in their community. The majority of respondents (64%), however, disagreed to strongly disagreed that the future of their community looked bright. In fact, 56% of respondents believed that their community will become less desirable in the next five years.

Economic growth was desirable among the majority of respondents (88%). Respondents (83%) also believed that increased growth in the county would improve their quality of life while 67% of respondents believed that strict limits on growth and development would do more harm than good.

Cooperative Extension Program Interests

To assess the program interest for Cooperative Extension, respondents were given topics currently offered by cooperative extension as well as topics identified in community meetings. The top four interests of respondents overall for attending a workshop were Walker Lake issues, landscaping, making a difference in the community, and grant writing. The topics of least interest were farm management, livestock science, irrigation technology and new crops.

Respondents also identified topics for printed material. The top four interests for printed material were Walker Lake issues, Vegetables

gardening, trees/shrubs and water quality. Of least interest, were farm/ranch management, farm management, livestock science and new parent information.

Conclusions

Surveys are scientific tools used in research that gather accurate and useful information which are used to identify characteristics, behaviors or opinions of particular populations. It is important to remember that sample surveys present close estimates, not absolutes, and are one of many tools that are used to make assessments of a sample population.

Mineral County respondents of 207 households identified community needs and issues and also assessed their quality of life. The community needs and issues identified were significant to Mineral County and assist in setting priorities for Cooperative Extension programming. The major programming areas identified through this needs assessment were community development, youth development and natural resources surrounding water quality and Walker Lake issues.

The results of the survey provided a strong foundation for developing programs to meet the needs of the communities in Mineral County. The data can also be used to further explore and target additional areas of interest.

References

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