



# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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**Fact Sheet-05-13**

## ***Community Needs and Quality of Life in Lyon County: Results of a Community Situational Analysis***

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### **Introduction**

Lyon County is located in northwestern Nevada. It is 2,204 square miles in area with a population estimated at 40,000 (2002). Traditionally, rural communities have been perceived as alternative residential havens that provide personal space and privacy, low crime, helpful and caring neighbors and pastoral scenery. However, disappearing open space and rising real estate prices are becoming commonplace in rural communities, including those within Lyon County, Nevada. In addition, issues that have traditionally faced rural communities continue to be of concern. These include unemployment, inadequate access to higher education, inadequate access to health care, poor quality public education, issues involving at-risk youth and in general, a lack of amenities typically associated with a high quality of life.

In July 2003, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension conducted a Community Situational Analysis in Lyon County. The purpose of the assessment was to identify community needs that Cooperative Extension might possibly address through education and/or research efforts.

### ***Conducting the Analysis***

Respondents were asked a series of 21 questions to assess perceived community needs that reflect quality of life in Lyon County. These questions were developed using components provided by conceptual frameworks from rural sociology, rural

economic development and community development literature (Christensen and Robinson, 1988; Theodori, 2001; Williams and Bloomquist, 1997).

A panel of survey and subject experts with University of California Cooperative Extension and University of Nevada Cooperative Extension reviewed earlier drafts of the questionnaire. Modifications to the questionnaire were made based upon their recommendations. The purpose of the reviews was to identify missing items that measure community needs and to check for word clarity, comprehension of survey questions and overall appearance of the questionnaire.

Participants were asked to rate quality of life "needs" in their community. Each question used a five-point equal weighted Likert-type scale, 1 equaled "doesn't need" and 5 equaled "definitely needs." Each question included an option for respondents to indicate "Don't Know" in the choice set.

Survey participants comprised a household sample of 400 voters randomly selected from the 2003 list of registered voters in Lyon County. Each randomly selected registered voter received in the mail a booklet-type questionnaire with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. A cover letter was included that explained the purpose of the survey, ensured confidentiality and thanked them for their input. The data collection protocol did not require "tracking" respondents and so received exemption from the University of Nevada, Reno Office of Human Research Protection.

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## Results of the Analysis

Of the total 400 survey recipients, 169 returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a 42 percent response rate. An estimate of reliability of the 21 items was calculated and found to be high ( $r = .94$ ) (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). This high score for instrument reliability indicates that these questions served as consistent indicators for the items measured.

Descriptive statistics were calculated and provide a ranking of community needs that reflect perceived quality of life in Lyon County. Ranked mean scores for each item are shown in Table 1.

Survey results indicate that of the 21 items provided in the survey, respondents rated none as “definitely needs.” However, respondents rated 7 of the 21 items as “needs,” however. These included: Involve citizens in planning community growth (4.43); Create more local jobs (4.40); Create long-term economic development strategy (4.32); Help small businesses to grow (4.20); Improve local access to higher education (4.15); Recruit high-tech jobs to area (4.03); Improve quality of grades K-12 education (4.01).

Of the remaining 14 needs, respondents rated 13 items “moderate needs.” Of these, the top 4 included: Plan residential growth (3.97); Enforce current land-use zone ordinances (3.95); Improve roads (3.94); Encourage overall growth in local economy (3.93). Comparatively, the item respondents rated lowest, “slight needs,” was “continue growth in gaming industry.” No survey item was rated “doesn’t need.”

### Conclusions and Implications for Extension Program Development

The postal mail survey conducted by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension helped to identify several important community needs that reflect perceived quality of life in Lyon County. Seven items were identified as “needs” in Lyon County. These included “involving citizens in planning community growth” and “creating a long-term economic development strategy.”

These results emphasize a desire for citizen involvement in Lyon County’s growth management and planning processes. Since rapid population growth is relatively new to Lyon County, elected county officials are in the early stages of assertive management and planning efforts. They are

working with respective county departments to tackle tough issues related to rapid growth, including expanding basic amenities such as highways and sewage facilities. Interestingly, other items that respondents rated as “needs” included attention to local job creation, helping small businesses to grow and recruiting high-tech jobs to the area. These needs compliment additional identified needs, including improving access to higher education and improving quality of education for grades K through 12. The results of this Community Situational Assessment suggest a short-term direction for Extension programming that addresses identified community needs to enhance quality of life in Lyon County. An Extension program, for example, that further investigates how citizens perceive they should be involved in planning community growth and how more local jobs could be created would be a likely starting point. This may be accomplished through additional random postal mail surveys, with perhaps follow-up face-to-face interviews. The data collected must be analyzed, reported, reviewed and distributed. Extension programs have a long history of conducting applied and localized research to collect information to help local citizens with pressing issues. Informed citizens are then better prepared to work together to make group decisions about matters affecting their quality of community life. The published results of this applied research are likely to benefit elected county officials and departments who are in need of precise information about public expectations for strategically planning continued growth in order to achieve a high quality of life for all Lyon County citizens.

### References

- Carmines, E.G. & R.A. Zeller. 1979. *Reliability and validity assessment*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Christenson, J.A., Fendley, K. & J. Robinson, Jr. 1989. Community development. In J. A. Christenson and J. W. Robinson, Jr. (eds.) *Community development in perspective*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press.
- Theodori, G.L. 2001. Examining the effects of community satisfaction and attachment on individual well-being. *Rural Sociology* 66 (4): 618-628.
- Williams, D. D. & L.E. Bloomquist. 1997. Gaining a community perspective: A community case study utilizing multiple theoretical approaches. *Journal of the Community Development Society* 28 (2): 277-302.

**Table 1. Ranked Mean Scores for Respondents' Ratings of Community Needs in Lyon County, Nevada**

<b>Community Needs</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Ranked Mean</b>
Should involve citizens in planning community growth	160	4.43
Create more local jobs	162	4.40
Create long-term economic development strategy	157	4.32
Help small businesses to grow	163	4.20
Improve local access to higher education	144	4.15
Recruit high-tech jobs to area	158	4.03
Improve quality of K through 12 education	133	4.01
Plan residential growth	161	3.97
Enforce current land-use zone ordinances	146	3.95
Improve roads	166	3.94
Encourage overall growth in local economy	163	3.93
Create and improve public transportation	162	3.85
Recruit superstore, such as Wal-Mart, to area	167	3.84
Recruit manufacturing jobs to area	161	3.77
Conserve natural and historic resources	152	3.60
Expand agriculture industry	157	3.50
Create bike paths along streets and highways	161	3.35
Plan tourism to occur only in specific areas	142	3.25
Promote tourism industry	155	3.24
Create hiking, jogging and horse trails	158	3.18
Continue growth in gaming industry	159	2.64

Numeric Color Code: 1 = doesn't need; 2 = slightly needs; 3 = moderately needs; 4 = needs; 5 = definitely needs