



# Mineral County Assets and Development Needs

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## Introduction

Mineral County, organized in 1911, is located in west-central Nevada. It encompasses 3,756 square miles and is recognized as one of Nevada's 16 counties (and one independent city). Mineral County is known as a historical mining area and is home to one of the world's largest United States Army Ammunition Depots. The largest unincorporated town is Hawthorne, followed by Schurz, Walker Lake, Mina and Luning. The community of Schurz is located on the Walker River Indian Reservation.

The Nevada State Demographer estimated in 2015 the population of Mineral County was 4,539. Mineral County's population was 4,772, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. The U.S. Census Bureau reported 1,917 households (2010-2014) in Mineral County.

Mineral County communities are geographically isolated from large population centers, and are economically depressed. The countywide population has decreased over the past several years. The economic base for employment has historically been mining and the Hawthorne Army Depot. Mining has ceased; current employers are the

Hawthorne Army Depot, school district, county, other agencies and small local business. The per capita income for the past 12 months (in 2014 dollars) was \$23,222 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

The historical impacts of the Hawthorne Depot as a fully functioning Navy/Army base until 1980 led to the current diverse demographic population in Mineral County. The racial breakdown based on U.S. Census data of the county is: 70 percent Caucasian, 4.6 percent Black, 17 percent American Indian, 3.8 percent Asian, and 11.2 percent Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Education levels of the population include: 86.3 percent of the population are high school graduates or higher, and 10.8 percent of the population hold a bachelor's degree or higher. 19.6 percent of the population is under 18 years old, and 25 percent of the population is over 65 years old (US Census Bureau, 2014).

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension in Mineral County conducted a research study through a needs assessment process beginning in 2015 and ending in the spring of 2016. The quality of life needs assessment process that focused on community development was designed to help University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, county government and tribal government

identify community needs, issues and assets. Mineral County residents' participation in the needs assessment was purely voluntary.

### **Need Assessment Methods**

Focus groups sessions were held with the townships of Mina, Walker Lake and Hawthorne; and with sectors of the communities who represented junior high/high school youth, health care providers, county departments, parents in the Hawthorne school system and senior citizens. The purpose of the sessions was to identify indicators for the community development needs assessment survey questionnaire. Focus groups cannot provide reliable estimates as to what proportion of a population has a particular opinion. However, focus groups provide direction on what questions to ask in a survey questionnaire (Dillman, 1994).

These focus groups identified community assets, community development needs, youth issues and senior issues. Mineral County residents were asked to prioritize these identified needs in the survey questionnaire. Approval was given by the Walker River Indian Reservation tribal council to conduct the needs assessment with households on the reservation. The needs assessment survey questionnaire was made available in August 2015, and the last surveys were collected in February 2016. A mixed-mode data collection method was used due to Mineral County budget constraints. The use of both paper and online survey methods were combined in an effort to increase response rates and optimize community resources (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014).

The Mineral County Independent newspaper published two articles announcing the needs assessment. Paper surveys were made available at different locations in the towns of Hawthorne and Schurz. Paper surveys, with postage-paid envelopes, were sent home to all parents in the Mineral County School District. An online survey was sent out through the employment Listservs of SOC-Day & Zimmerman Company (Army Depot), the Mineral County School District and Mineral County. The online survey was also posted on local Facebook pages. Mineral County Cooperative Extension hired survey administrators to go door-to-door in Luning, Mina and Walker Lake. Extension student workers also administered the surveys to residents during the morning, afternoon and evening at the local supermarket, Safeway. Outreach to the community of Schurz occurred through the Walker River Paiute Tribe tribal departments, local food banks and the housing authority.

### **Need Assessment Results**

A total of 447 surveys were completed from the mixed-mode data collection method. Three hundred and sixty-seven participants completed paper face-to-face surveys and, 80 surveys were completed online through Survey Monkey. The response rate based on the number of estimated households in Mineral County was 23 percent. There were 1,000 paper surveys printed by Mineral County Cooperative Extension for a paper survey completion rate of 37 percent.

The survey identified community development priorities in Mineral County. These priorities were

categorized under community assets, community development needs, youth issues and senior citizen issues. This Fact Sheet reports on Mineral County community assets and community development needs.

Community assets are positive features that explain why one chooses to live in a particular community. Mineral County survey respondents identified the top six community assets as: open space, access to wildlife and outdoor recreation, high desert, access to local parks, and Mt. Grant, one of the most prominent peaks in Nevada at an elevation of 11,285 feet. The lowest community assets identified were availability of clothing and shoe stores, good restaurants, grocery stores and repair services. Also, there was a concern about the appearance and cleanliness of the community. Table 1 reports all priorities for Mineral County community assets.

The highest priority community development needs were to create more local jobs, recruit manufacturing jobs, improve local access to higher education, improve quality of education to grades K-12, and help small business grow. The lowest priority of community development needs is mail delivery services (street delivery), organization/communication between Mineral County departments, Mineral County support of small business as economic development, communication network created on programs and services offered in Mineral County, and develop workforce development programs. Table 2 reports priorities for Mineral County community development needs.

**Table 1. Mineral County community assets.**

PRIORITY	COMMUNITY ASSETS	MEAN
1	Open space	4.27
2	Access to wildlife (hunting, viewing, photos, etc.)	4.04
3	Access to outdoor recreation	4.03
4	High desert	3.98
5	Access to local parks	3.91
6	Mt. Grant	3.83
7	Personal and family safety	3.78
8	Access to senior center	3.76
9	Access to library services	3.73
10	Fire department services	3.49
11	Access to Consolidated Agencies of Human Services (CAHS).	3.37
12	Army depot employment	3.32
13	Police department services	3.17
14	Computer and internet access	3.08
15	Walker Lake	3.05
16	Access to hospital and medical clinics	2.97
17	Mining	2.94
18	Available housing	2.83
19	Organized activities for youth	2.66
20	Access to drug/alcohol counseling services	2.41
21	Organized activities for adults	2.32
22	Access to psychological counseling services	2.31
23	Price of goods and services	2.28
24	Appearance and cleanliness of community	2.19
25	Availability of repair services	2.10
26	Availability of grocery stores	2.08
27	Availability of good restaurants	1.95
28	Availability of clothing and shoe stores	1.52

Note: 1 = Poor; 5= Excellent

**Table 2. Mineral County community development needs.**

PRIORITY	COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS	MEAN
1	Create more local jobs	4.48
2	Recruit manufacturing jobs	4.37
3	Improve local access to higher education	4.36
4	Improve quality of education grades K -12	4.35
5	Help small business grow	4.27
6	Recruit high-tech jobs	4.27
7	Create prescription drug abuse prevention programs	4.26
8	Build upon what is already in Mineral County	4.22
9	Main street revitalization	4.22
10	Create more tourism events	4.18
11	Community cleanup programs	4.18
12	Create illegal drug abuse prevention programs	4.17
13	Benefits for workers (health, retirement, etc.)	4.12
14	Wages for workers	4.10
15	Develop workforce development programs	4.07
16	Create communication network on programs and services offered in Mineral County	4.00
17	Mineral County support of small business as economic development	3.97
18	Organization and communication among Mineral County departments	3.77
19	Mail delivery services (street delivery)	3.32

Note: 1 = Doesn't need; 5 = Definitely needs

## Discussion and Conclusions

Community asset priorities had a wide range of means, 1.52 to 4.27 on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. The community development priorities showed moderate variations on the Likert-type scale (1=doesn't need; 5= definitely needs). The lowest priority had a ranked mean of 3.32 and was for mail service delivery. Priorities 1-16 had ranked means of 4.00 and above, which is within the need category.

The priorities identified under community assets and community development needs provide Mineral County leaders with key information. This information can be used in allocating budgets, creating new or changing programs, applying for grant programs, or identifying issues to be addressed. Results of the assessment, combined with additional community data, are being used by community leaders in decision-making.

There has been speculation that the 1,917 households stated in the U.S. Census may not be a correct reflection of the community, since the population has steadily decreased since the 2010 U.S. Census. This would directly affect the response rate of the survey. Since U.S. Census data is the only data to compare to, it was also important that the completion rate of the paper survey be included. In addition, a completion rate for the online survey could not be calculated because it was sent over social media sites, and connections were not available.

A technical report of the entire Mineral County Community Development Needs Assessment can be obtained at the University Center for Economic Development (UCED 2016/17-05) website at

<https://www.unr.edu/Documents/business/uced/technical-reports/mineral/Final-Needs%20Assessment%20Booklet%208-4-2016.pdf>

## Bibliography

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