

Center
for Rural
Communities



ROOTS

IN CHEQUAMEGON BAY

Opportunities for Strengthening
Community Attachment



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**DULUTH SUPERIOR AREA
COMMUNITY
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Through the financial support of the Knight Foundation Fund care of the Duluth Superior Community Foundation, the Northland College Center for Rural Communities completed its first “Roots in Chequamegon Bay” report. Following the lead of important research like the Knight Foundations’ “Soul of the Community” study and Iowa State University’s Rural Development Initiative, this report examines data collected from 496 residents in rural communities across the Chequamegon Bay region of northern Wisconsin—a region known for its natural beauty and small, quaint rural towns. The following report examines how social characteristics of community relate to community attachment, giving specific attention to how different demographic groups (e.g., residents under the age of 40) perceive social qualities, and their level of community attachment.

Communities across the United States, and rural communities in particular, struggle to find ways to attract and retain residents. Community and economic development literature suggests that cultivating and promoting valuable assets and amenities is an effective approach to overcoming this challenge¹. Unique community assets and amenities help create stronger attachment to place, which in turn benefits communities by attracting and retaining residents and growing the economy². Previous studies have shown that

the assets and amenities which relate to stronger attachment to place include the aesthetic appeal of the natural environment, unique characteristics of built infrastructure (e.g., housing and downtown), indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities, arts and culture opportunities, and quality of public and private infrastructure (e.g., healthcare, education, technology)³.

In addition to these assets, research also suggests that social aspects of community relate to community attachment. For example, community members feel a stronger connection to place when they have friends and family in the community, have spaces and opportunities to interact with others (e.g., public and private spaces, community events, nightlife), are more involved with formal and informal organizations, and perceive the community as accepting and open to them⁴.

Our study reveals that the social attributes most strongly related to community attachment among residents in the Chequamegon Bay region include civic commitment, openness, trust, social ties, and civic engagement. Investment toward strengthening social ties for residents who are 40 years of age or younger and for those who are 66 and over presents a great opportunity to increase community attachment in the region, as does investment in building civic commitment and openness across all age groups. Residents across all age groups already exhibit high levels of trust and civic engagement—these attributes are the pillars of social infrastructure in the region. Communities can build on these already existing strengths to promote community and economic development and to further strengthen other aspects of community social infrastructure.

¹ Olfert, M. R., & Partridge, M. D. (2010). *Best practices in twenty first-century rural development and policy*. *Growth and Change* 41(2): 147-164.

² Knight Foundation. (2010). *Knight soul of the community 2010: why people love where they live and why it matters, a national perspective*. Gallup Inc.

³ Kruger, L. E., Selin, S. W., & Thompson, K. A.. (2014). *Amenity migration, affinity to place, serious leisure and resilience.*” In Moss, L. A.G. and Glorioso, R. S. (eds.) *Global Amenity Migration: Transforming Rural Culture, Economy, and Landscape*, Port Townsend, WA, The New Ecology Press: 31-46.

⁴ Matarrita-Cascante, D. (2014). *Sentiments and activism: community attachment and participation in changing amenity-rich communities.*” In Moss, L. A.G. & Glorioso, R. S. (eds.) *Global Amenity Migration: Transforming Rural Culture, Economy, and Landscape*, Port Townsend, WA, The New Ecology Press: 65-82

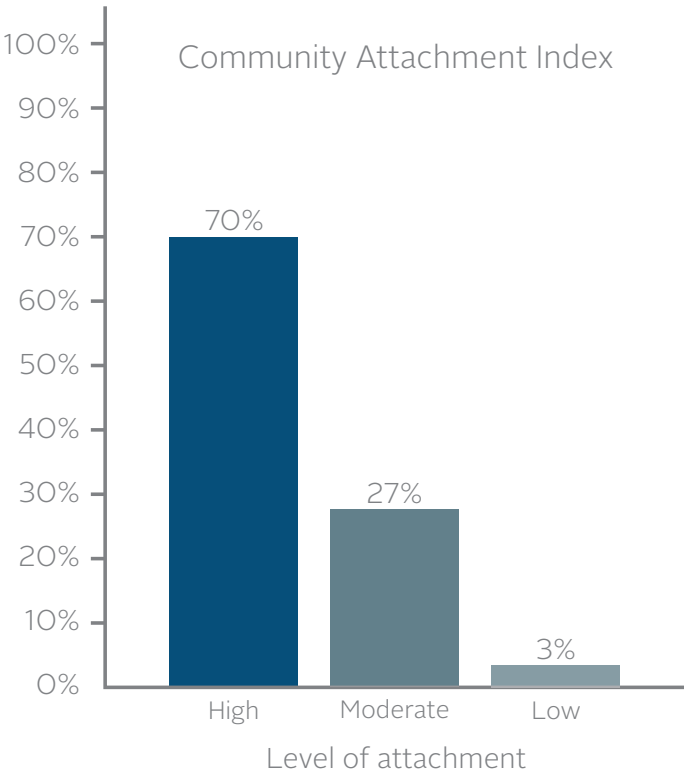
Seventy percent of respondents have a high level of attachment to their community.

Community attachment is a measure of the emotional connection to place⁵. To better understand the level of community attachment in the Chequamegon Bay region, we constructed a Community Attachment index based on a set of survey questions pertaining to emotional connection to place. Our findings suggest that the majority of respondents are strongly attached to their community and the region. Close to 70 percent of respondents have a high level of attachment, while only 2.9 percent of respondents have a low level of attachment.

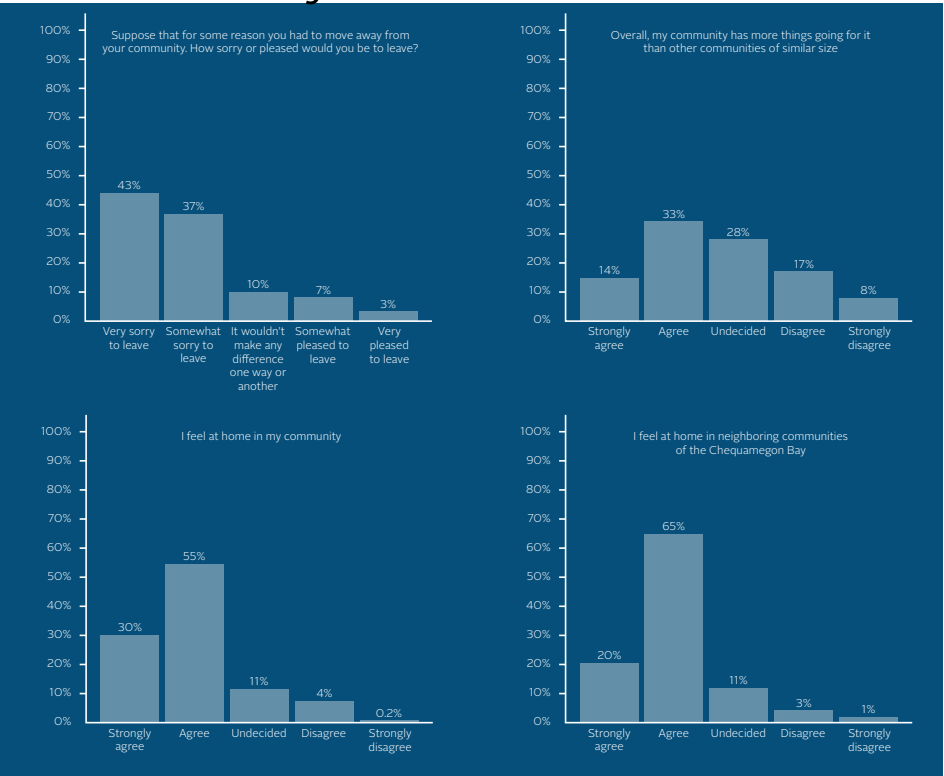
Community Attachment includes:

- Perceptions of the quality of a community in comparison to other communities
- Feeling at home in the community
- Feeling at home in the Chequamegon Bay area
- Feelings toward leaving the area

⁵ Hummon, David M. 1992. Community attachment: local sentiment and sense of place, in Altman, I. & Low, S. (eds.) Place Attachment, New York, Plenum Press: 253-278



Community Attachment Variables



Who is most attached?

By looking at the level of community attachment (a high, moderate or low score on the Community Attachment index) across groups of individuals with the same characteristics, we can discern how people of different ages, educational backgrounds and time lived in the region feel about their communities.

First, we analyzed the relationship between each characteristic and the Community Attachment index. A higher correlation indicates higher community attachment. Education level and age both have a weak positive relationship to community attachment, that is, a higher education level is related to stronger community attachment. Similarly, an older age is related to stronger community attachment. Proportion of life spent in the region does not have a significant relationship to community attachment.

Second, we examined the data by creating groups based on education level, age, education level by age, proportion of life lived in the region, and education level by proportion of life and calculating what percentage of each group has high, moderate or low attachment.

Characteristic	Correlation to attachment
Education level	.151*
Age	-.109*
Proportion of life	.078

*Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level

Education Level

A higher percentage of community members who are college-educated report a high level of community attachment than those who have an associate degree or below. Only 2 percent of college-educated residents report low attachment to their community.

Age

The level of community attachment is fairly consistent across age groups. Approximately 70 percent of people in each age group report a high level of attachment, however a larger proportion of respondents 40 years of age or younger report a low level of attachment than do members of older age groups.

Education Level and Age

When we combine age and education level, we see that the middle age and college-educated category has the largest percentage of members who report a high level of community attachment. The young and non college-educated group has the smallest percentage of members who report a high level of attachment and the largest percentage of members who report a low level of attachment.

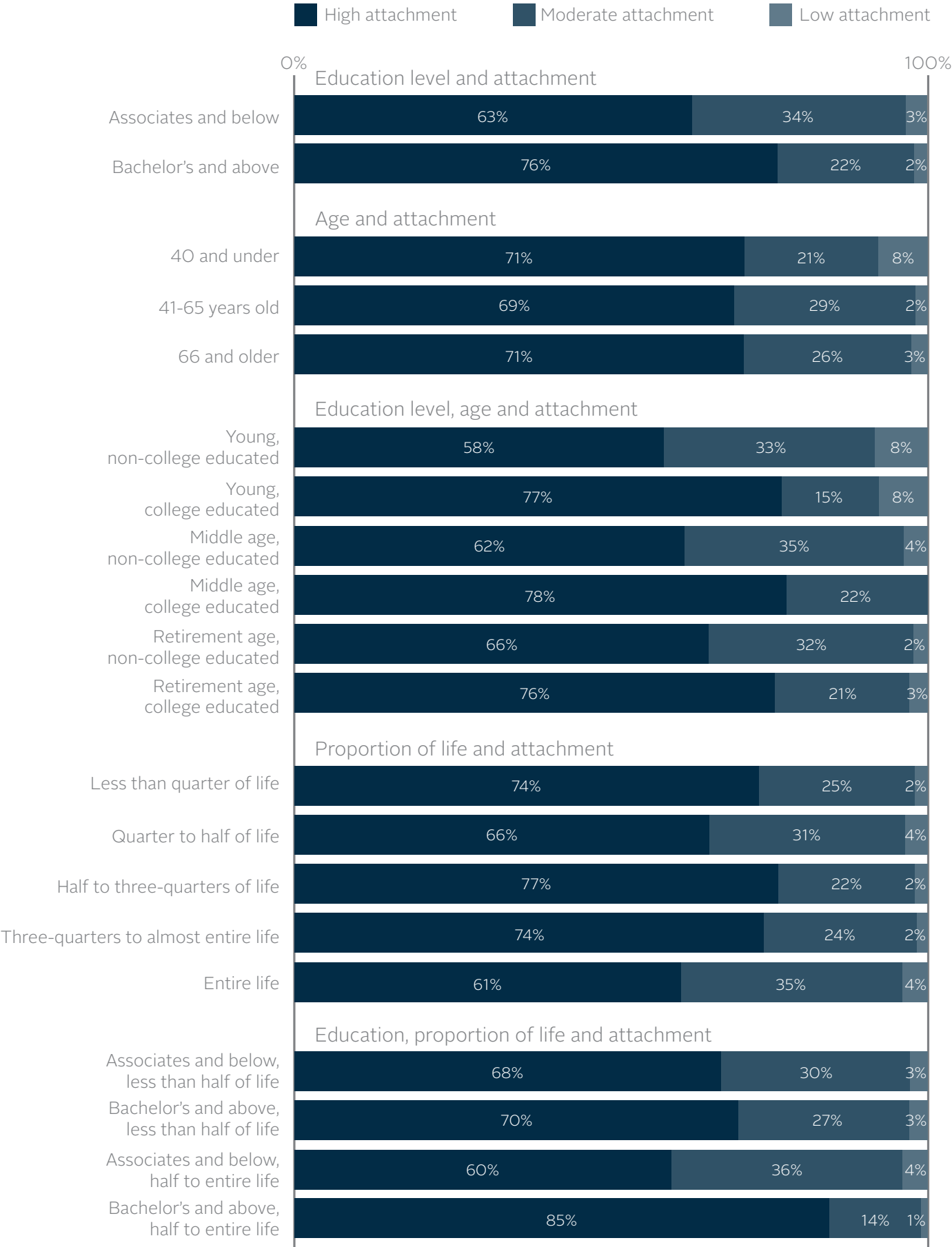
Proportion of Life Spent in the Region

Of the residents who have spent half to three-quarters of their life in the region, 76 percent report a high level of community attachment, as do 74 percent of those who have spent three-quarters to almost their entire life in the region. Interestingly, of those who have spent their entire life in the community, only 61 percent report a high level of attachment, the lowest percentage across the proportion of life groups.

Education Level and Proportion of life spent in the region

Notably, almost 85 percent of participants who have a Bachelor's degree or above and who have spent over half of their life in the community report a high level of attachment. In contrast, less than 60 percent of respondents with an associate's degree or below who have spent over half of their life in the community report a high level of attachment.

Who is most attached?



Community Social Infrastructure

In any community, interactions with other community members matter. Interactions help people get to know and trust one another, help create and strengthen local culture and identity, and provide the important social “infrastructure” to get things done. Researchers often refer to this social infrastructure as social capital⁶. Measuring and understanding local forms of social capital is important for effective community and economic development in both rural and urban areas. Just like maintaining physical infrastructure such as roads and sewers, developing, building, and maintaining social capital in a community requires investment in the form of time, effort, and money. The payoffs from proper upkeep of this often-overlooked resource include higher levels of trust, voluntarism, and community involvement. Social capital can also improve a community’s ability to respond to pressing or challenging issues, lower crime rates, and strengthen local governments. Additionally, well-maintained community social infrastructure can lead to more successful and responsible businesses and a stronger and more vibrant local economy⁷. Most importantly, it can increase community attachment. In the following section, we describe seven areas of social infrastructure and their connection to community attachment in the Chequamegon Bay region. For each social attribute, we created an index based on participants’ responses to a series of questions related to the attribute.

Community Social Infrastructure



⁶ Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, Simon and Schuster.

⁷ Flora, C. B., Flora, J. N., & Gasteyer, S. P. (2015). *Rural Communities*. Boulder, CO, Westview Press.

Civic Commitment

The belief that other community members are invested in making the community a better place for all enriches social infrastructure. We developed a civic commitment index as a measure of respondents’ perceptions of how invested their fellow community members are in the area. Responses are grouped into negative, undecided or positive perceptions of civic commitment. About one-third of respondents hold a positive perception of civic commitment in their community, while almost 50 percent are undecided.

Civic Commitment includes perceptions of:

- Other community members’ willingness to invest in working together to make the community a good place to live
- Rejection of “every person for themselves” as a description of their community
- Other community members’ concern for the welfare of local people
- Disagreement with the statement that disadvantaged groups rarely get involved in community projects

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement refers to a community member’s perception of others’ willingness to volunteer assistance when it’s needed to support the community as a whole, such as assisting in recovery from natural disasters or providing donations to help those in need. Responses are grouped into negative, undecided or positive perceptions of civic engagement. The vast majority of respondents (74.4 percent) are positive in their perception of civic engagement in their community.

Civic engagement includes perceptions of community willingness to offer assistance in:

- Natural disasters
- Clean-up efforts
- Delivering food for the elderly
- Donations to the locally owned business
- Donations for those in need
- Changing consumption in response to fuel shortages

Cohesiveness

When community members feel their community is cohesive and has few divisions based on educational, racial, political, or wealth differences, they will be more likely to develop formal and informal social ties with other community members—especially those who are different from themselves in some way. The cohesiveness index is a composite measure of participants’ perceptions of the lack of division within the community. Responses are grouped into negative, undecided or positive perceptions of cohesiveness. Close to 40 percent of respondents hold a positive perception of the level of cohesiveness in their community. However, a slight majority of respondents are undecided.

Cohesiveness includes perceptions of what divides a community in informal social situations, including differences in:

- Education
- Race and ethnicity
- Age
- Sex
- Length of residence
- Social standing
- Wealth
- Religion
- Group membership
- Family name
- Political affiliation

Community Involvement

Communities that have high levels of participation in formal organizations thrive in many ways. In particular, participation in community organizations has a strong relationship to community attachment, suggesting one way to increase attachment to place may be to provide and encourage opportunities for people to be involved in the community. The community involvement index is a combined measure of participants’ level of involvement in several organizations and groups.

Close to 70 percent of respondents report low to no involvement in their community. Although this finding is worrisome, it is aligned with other research showing a decline in community involvement over the last 30 years across many regions. Still, approximately 30 percent of respondents do fall into the moderate and high involvement categories.

Community Involvement includes participation in a community improvement project and involvement in:

- Service and fraternal organizations
- Recreational groups
- Political and civic groups
- Job-related organizations
- Church or other religious groups

Openness

Openness (i.e., how welcoming a community is to different types of people) in a community is important because it sends a positive and inviting message that there are opportunities for everyone to be involved in community affairs. We developed an openness index as a measure of respondents’ perceptions of how open or closed their community is. Responses are grouped into open, undecided or closed. Nearly an equal percentage of respondents view Chequamegon Bay communities as open (21.5 percent) and closed (21.9 percent). A majority (56.6 percent) of respondents are undecided.

Openness includes:

- A belief that the ability to get ahead in the community is not tied to knowing the right people
- Confidence that local people can have an impact on community decisions
- Agreement that residents are receptive to new residents taking leadership positions
- A feeling that others are willing to express opinions publicly

Safety

When community members feel safe, they tend to be connected to their community socially, emotionally, and economically. Using variables that capture a participant’s feeling of safety, we created a safety index with responses grouped into feeling safe, undecided, and unsafe. Close to 40 percent of respondents perceive their community to be safe compared to only 5.7 percent who feel their community is unsafe.

Safety includes:

- Likelihood that other community members will report crimes
- Keeping doors unlocked
- Feeling safe in different places
- Feeling safe at night

Social Ties

Close connections with other community members and positive perceptions of overall community connectedness both foster social capital. We use a social ties index to measure these connections. Responses are categorized as low, moderate and strong social ties. Only about 25 percent of respondents report strong social ties in their community.

Social Ties include:

- Perceptions of a tightly knit community
- Perceptions of a tightly knit neighborhood
- Proportion of close friends who live in town

Trust

Trust is important in any relationship. When there is distrust, it is difficult to work together toward a common goal. When distrust fractures the social fabric of a community, reaching shared goals is nearly impossible. The trust index is comprised of variables that gauge the level of trust respondents have for other community members. Responses are grouped into low, moderate and high levels of trust. A majority of respondents (67 percent) report an overall high level of trust for members of the community, and only 1.2 percent report low levels of trust.

Trust includes trust in different groups:

- Neighbors
- Local store workers
- Teens
- New residents
- Police
- Public officials





Community attachment
is most closely linked to
civic commitment, trust in
different groups,
and openness.

Connecting Community Attachment and Social Infrastructure

Identifying which social infrastructure indices are most closely linked with community attachment provides insight into how communities might further strengthen attachment. To do this, we analyzed the relationship between each social attribute index and the community attachment index. A higher correlation indicates a stronger relationship. Civic commitment, trust, and openness are the three indices with the strongest links to community attachment. Investing in activities, programs and infrastructure to strengthen these areas of social infrastructure could bolster levels of attachment to communities across the region.

Social index	Correlation to attachment
Civic commitment	.588
Trust	.559
Openness	.555
Safety	.506
Social ties	.464
Civic engagement	.380
Cohesiveness	.353
Community involvement	.233

All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level

Civic Commitment

A majority of residents who have a positive view of civic commitment also have a high level of community attachment. Surprisingly, over half of those who have a negative take on civic commitment still display a moderate level of attachment, while only 12 percent report a low level of attachment.

Trust

Amongst community members who score high on the trust index, 82 percent also have a high level of attachment to their community. The opposite is also true—83 percent of residents who have a low level of trust in other community members also have low attachment to their community.

Openness

No respondents who perceive their community to be open and welcoming of others display a low level of attachment, while the same is true for respondents who are undecided with less than one percent reporting a low level of attachment. However, only a little over one third of respondents who view the community as closed have a high level of attachment.

Safety

Of the residents in the region who feel safe leaving their doors unlocked or walking alone at night, among other safety-related behaviors and perceptions, 87 percent report a high level of community attachment. However, 50 percent of residents report a moderate level of attachment despite feeling unsafe in certain situations in their community.

Social Ties

Almost no residents who have moderate to strong social ties in their community report a low level of attachment. In fact, 88 percent of those with strong social ties and 71 percent of those with moderate social ties have a high level of

attachment to place. Notably, over half of community members with few social ties display only moderate or low attachment to place.

Civic Engagement

Over half of community members in each category, whether they have a positive, undecided, or negative perception of civic engagement, report a high level of attachment. Notably, approximately 79 percent of those who hold a positive perception of civic engagement also have a high level of community attachment.

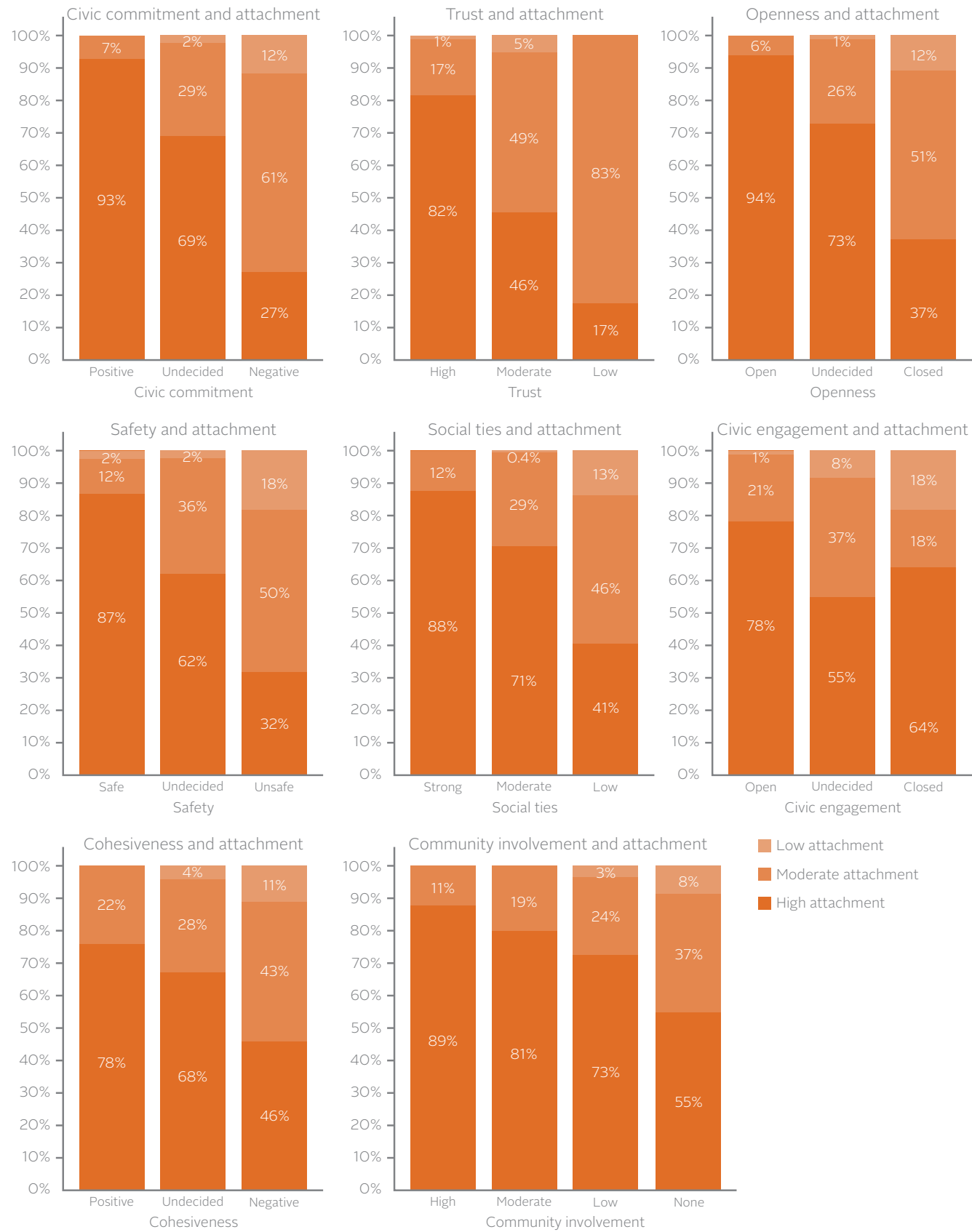
Cohesiveness

The group of residents who tend to think that differences do not divide their community and who, in turn, have a positive outlook on community cohesiveness has the largest percentage of people with a high level of attachment. In contrast, of those who have a negative outlook on community cohesiveness, 11 percent report low community attachment, and 43 percent report only a moderate level of attachment.

Community Involvement

A large percentage of residents who are highly or moderately involved in local groups and organizations and who participate in local projects report a high level of community attachment. However, over half of the people who are not involved in their communities still report a high level of attachment and 37 percent report a moderate level of attachment.

Connecting Community Attachment and Social Infrastructure



Opportunities

In order to identify opportunities for investment in social infrastructure that have the potential to affect community attachment in the Chequamegon Bay region, we analyzed the strength of the relationship between each social infrastructure index and the community attachment index by age group. An opportunity for investment exists when a social infrastructure index has a high correlation with community attachment for a particular age group but a low social index score as measured by the mean or median score for that age group. For example, social ties have a strong link to community attachment for residents who are 40 years of age or younger and for those who are 66 and over, but these groups currently

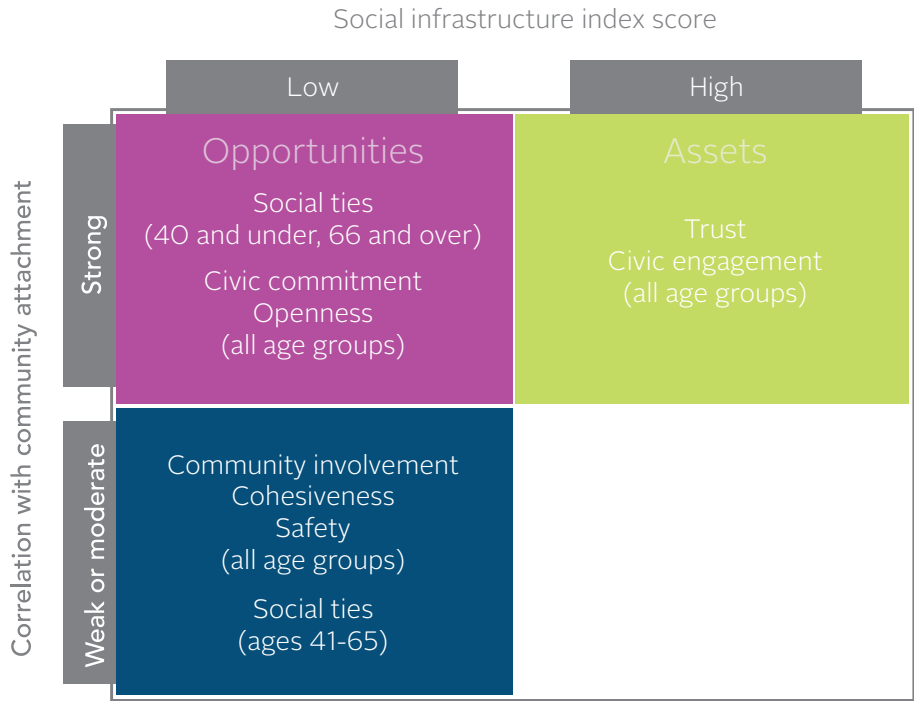
score low on the social ties index. Therefore, developing strategies and initiatives to strengthen social ties in the region is one way to invest in social infrastructure to potentially improve community attachment. As noted, strengthening community attachment helps attract and retain residents which in turn helps spur community and economic growth.

All age groups scored low on the community involvement, cohesiveness and safety indices. Similarly, these same social indices have a weak to moderate link to community attachment. Therefore, while investing in these areas of social infrastructure is important for community development, priority should be given to efforts that aim to improve other areas such as social ties and increase civic commitment.

Assets

Community assets are identified when a social infrastructure index has a high correlation with community attachment for a particular age group and the social index score for that age group is also high. Current levels of trust and civic engagement in the region are high across all age groups, and these indices are strongly correlated with community attachment. Therefore, trust and civic engagement are highly developed assets across the region that can be built upon. Initiatives that further strengthen these attributes have the potential to increase community attachment, and building on these assets can in turn promote community and economic development and strengthen other social attributes.

Opportunities



In this study, participants were asked to complete a survey via mail that evaluated how they feel about living in their community and the Chequamegon Bay region. The survey was sent to randomly selected households (n=1,761) across the region including the city of Ashland, city of Washburn, town of Washburn, Barksdale, Bayview, city of Bayfield, town of Bayfield, La Pointe, Russell, and Red Cliff. A total of 496 surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of 28.2 percent. This survey is meant to provide a baseline assessment of social capital measures for communities in the Chequamegon Bay region and to capture quality of life measures important for community and economic development.

Survey Construction

One of the primary goals of the project is to work in partnership with local stakeholders to conduct a community survey of residents to understand the “social infrastructure” of communities across the Chequamegon Bay region. The survey includes questions about community relationships, civic involvement and participation, and quality of services and facilities. Roughly half

of all questions for each community were written in conjunction with or supported by representatives from area business, religious, tribal, and civic leaders. The other half of the survey questions came from Iowa State University’s ongoing Rural Development Initiative project of 99 Iowa communities led by Dr. Terry Besser. This report only focuses on the parts of the survey that were shared by all or by a majority of respondents and includes the following parts:

- (1) Participant attitudes about their community,
- (2) Participant community involvement,
- (3) Participant attitudes towards their community’s connection to the region and state,
- (4) Participants perceptions of living in their community, and
- (5) Participant demographic information.

Sampling Frame and Strategy

Households across the region were randomly selected from property ownership records in Ashland and Bayfield Counties. We sent surveys following the modified Dillman

method in which respondents are contacted prior to receiving the surveys and sent a reminder to complete the survey after receiving it.

Data Analysis

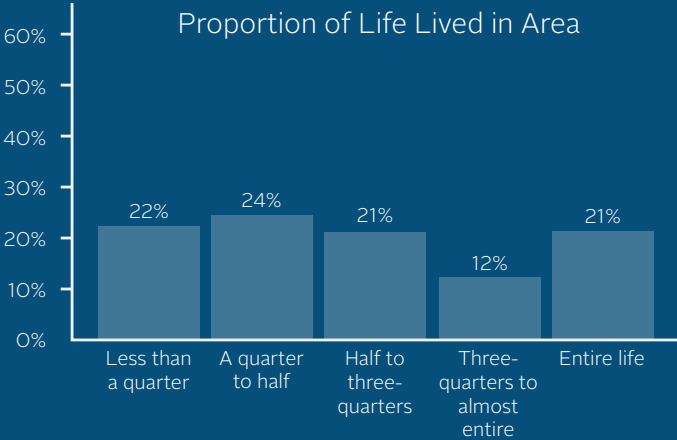
The report presents descriptive statistics on select survey variables, including demographics and community attachment. All indices were constructed by producing a mean score of index variables for every respondent. For example, each respondent received a mean score for community attachment by summing their responses for the variables “feel sorry or pleased to leave,” “community has more things going than other communities of similar size,” “feel at home in community,” and “feel at home in other communities in Chequamegon Bay” and dividing that number by the total (i.e., 4), or a minimum (i.e., at least 3), number of variables. All indices were evaluated for reliability using an Alpha coefficient, which captures whether or not a group of indicators is a consistent measure of the underlying concept, such as community attachment. Finally, we used cross tabulations and correlations to explore the relationships between demographic characteristics, social attribute indices, and the community attachment index.

Table 5 Final Sample by Community

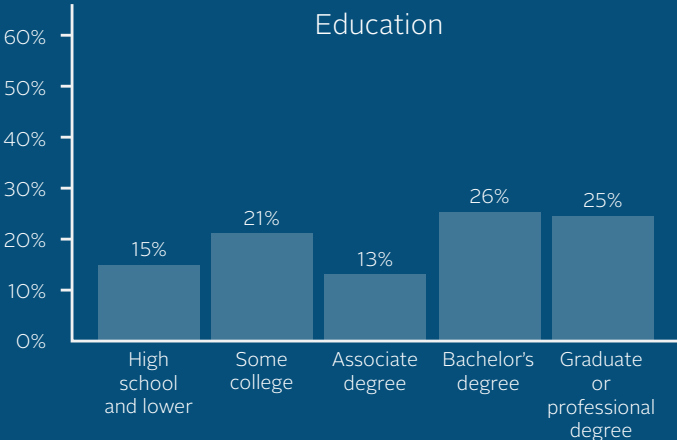
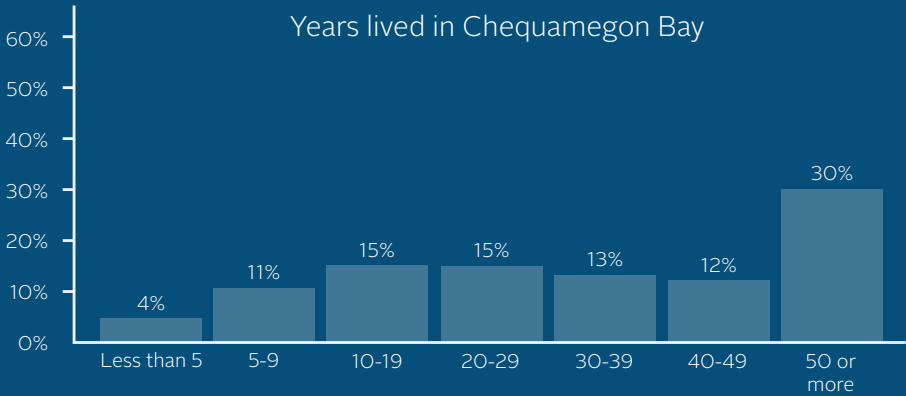
	Ashland	Barksdale	Washburn (City)	Washburn (Town)	Bayview	Bayfield (City)	Bayfield (Town)	Russell	La Pointe	Red Cliff	TOTAL
Total sent	680	50	300	50	50	150	100	70	400	275	2125
Non-deliverable	53	0	24	2	1	14	8	12	233	17	364
Total delivered	627	50	276	48	49	136	92	58	167	258	1761
Total completed	186	13	78	11	17	46	24	17	48	56	496
Response rate	29.7%	26.0%	28.3%	22.9%	34.7%	33.8%	26.1%	29.3%	28.7%	21.7%	28.2%

*The sampling frame used for La Pointe did not provide second addresses. As a result, many of the La Pointe properties that did not have a permanent mail receptacle did not receive the initial survey. The final sample for La Pointe, however, is made up of approximately 52 percent of respondents who consider themselves to be a resident of La Pointe and the remaining 48 percent who see themselves as a resident of another community. Additionally, only 34 percent of respondents identify themselves as year round residents and the remaining 66 percent of respondents identified as a seasonal resident.

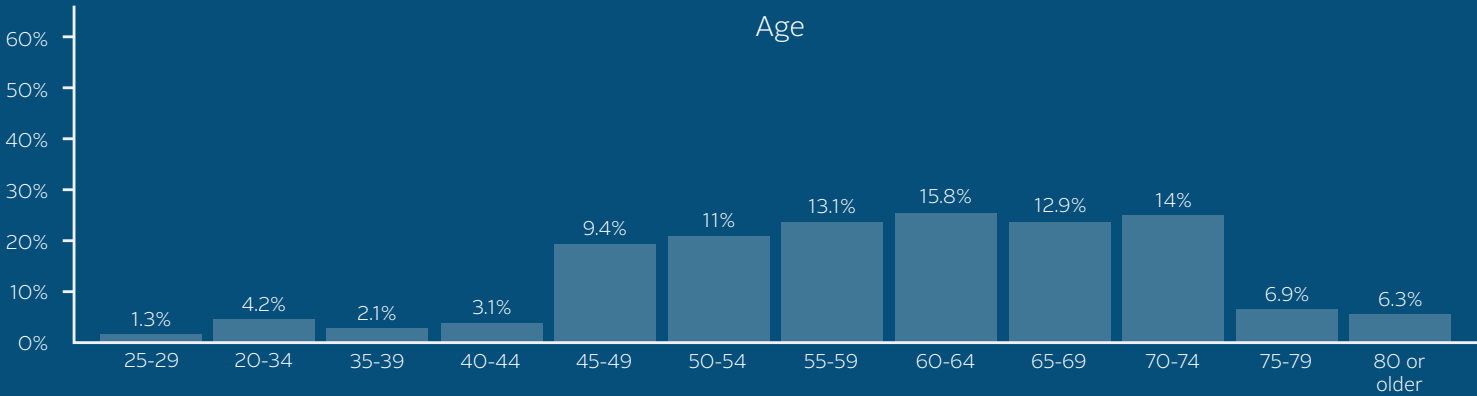
A Snapshot of Participants



Sex	Percentage
Male	55%
Female	45%
Race	Percentage
White/Caucasian	83.6%
Native American	13.9%
Multi-racial	1.5%
Hispanic or Latino(a)	0.6%
Asian American	0.4%



Employment	Percentage
Employed or self-employed full-time	41.0%
Employed or self-employed part-time	14.9%
Retired	39.3%
Elect not to work outside home	2.1%
Unemployed	2.8%
Region employed	Percentage
Chequamegon Bay Area	81.3%
Outside Bay Area	18.7%



Participants have lived in the region for, on average, 34.5 years, with 4.1 percent living in the region for less than 5 years, 10.7 percent between 5 and 9 years, 15.3 percent between 10 and 19 years, 15.1 percent between 20 and 29 years, 13 percent between 30 and 39 years, 12.2 percent between 40 and 49 years, and 29.7 percent more than 50 years.

The average age of participants is 60.5 years, ranging from 25 to 92 years old. Just over one fifth of participants have lived in the area their entire life. A slight majority of respondents (54.6 percent) state that they have lived in the area all or most of their life.

Fifty-five percent of respondents identify themselves as female, while the remaining 45 percent identify as male. Most (83.6 percent) respondents self-identify as white or caucasian, followed by 13.9 percent as Native American or American indian, 1.5 percent as multi-racial (most commonly Native American and white), 0.6 percent as hispanic or latino, and 0.4 percent as asian American.

Education levels of respondents vary with 15.5 percent holding a high school diploma or equivalent or less, 20.6 percent attending some college (no degree), 12.6 percent having earned an associate degree, 26.1 percent having a bachelor's degree, and 25.1 percent who hold a graduate or professional degree.

Not quite half of the respondents (41 percent) are employed or self-employed on a full-time basis. The other respondents are retired (39.3 percent), employed on a part-time basis (14.9 percent), elect not to work outside of their home (2.1 percent), or are unemployed (2.8 percent). For those respondents who are employed or self-employed on a full- or part-time basis, a majority (81.3 percent) work in the Chequamegon Bay area. The remaining 18.7 percent work outside of the area.



Center for Rural Communities NORTHLAND COLLEGE

The Northland College Center for Rural Communities applies research based solutions to social and economic challenges, partners with community members to build on local knowledge, and promotes the long-term health and vitality of rural communities in the north woods region. For more information, visit us at [**northland.edu/crc**](http://northland.edu/crc)

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