

Community Perspectives on Poverty among Montana Adults

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- Results from a National Survey with an Oversample of Montana -

The Northwest Area Foundation commissioned Lake Research Partners to conduct a national survey and state oversamples to explore the public's perception of poverty in one's own community and ways in which to address the issue. Unlike many surveys that gauge opinions toward poverty in a *national* context, this survey focuses exclusively on perceptions of those struggling to make ends meet at the *community level*. The survey was conducted among 2,400 Americans age 18 and older from December 14th – 22nd, 2005. A total of 800 interviews were conducted nationally, and oversamples of 200 interviews were conducted in eight states. A total of 204 interviews were conducted among adults in Montana. The margin of error for the Montana oversample is ± 10 percentage points.

Main findings among Montanans include:

- Nine in ten Montanans (89%) say that a top or high priority for local elected officials is keeping and attracting more businesses with good paying jobs, compared to 77% of Americans nationally. Compared to the nation at large, Montana adults are more likely say creating more affordable housing is a top or high priority for local officials (70% vs. 55% nationally).
- Nearly one in three (31%) Montanans perceive a lot of people struggling to make ends meet in their community, and 28% say a lot of people are working full-time yet still struggling to get by. Forty-six percent say they know someone personally in their community who works two or more jobs and is struggling to make ends meet.
- A large majority of Montanans say a family of four living in their own community would need \$30,000 or more to make ends meet, far beyond the federal government's poverty income threshold of \$19,806. Forty-six percent say a family of four would need \$40,000 or more than that to make ends meet.
- At the same time Montanans see people struggling, the survey reveals optimism for reducing poverty locally; a majority feels the number of people struggling could be reduced. This optimism may stem in part from the perceived effectiveness of their communities: Montanans are more likely than the public at large to say their own community is always or almost always effective at dealing with problems (63% vs. 51%). Additionally, Montanans say they want to do more to help those struggling, and this sentiment is particularly prevalent among those living in towns and rural areas (91%).
- Most Montanans (87%) say it is important for local officials to work to help those struggling to make ends meet. They place more trust in their local government than the American public at large, and three-quarters feel their local elected officials are knowledgeable about the struggles people face in their community. However, a smaller proportion (55%) says their officials are working to help those struggling.