

Outdoor Interests & Barriers Faced by People with Challenges to Independence or Social Isolation:

Recommendations for Decision Makers



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River Bend
NATURE CENTER

AGE FRIENDLY
minnesota

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Respondent Quotes from Surveys -

“In August 2023, I got to ride in the car with my daughter and her friend to the nature center. I saw many trees that I loved and told them the names of. We took some photos. I've always loved cottonwood trees. When the wind blows they play music when their leaves rustle. I used to lay under one when I was a child just enjoying the sound. I want to paint a picture of a cottonwood tree!! Also enjoyed all the wildflowers that were blooming. I was not able to get out and walk but just seeing all those different trees was a big deal to me.”

“My current happy place is sitting on my deck listening to cardinals, enjoying my plants, watching the squirrels play! I love being close to nature!”

Introduction

Spending time outdoors doing activities of interest keeps people healthy across their lives. Studies show a number of health benefits that nature and outdoor connections can bring. Even a few minutes outside reap countless physical and mental health benefits¹. Time outside can

- Decrease blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormones,
- Facilitate social connectedness and bonds with others and feelings of empathy,
- Increase activity level which can enhance appetite and improve sleep,
- Inspire awe and wonder and feeling connected to something greater than self,
- Improve balance and agility,
- Enhance vision,
- Stimulate vitamin D, bone growth, healing, and immune function,
- Lessen anxiety and rumination,
- Reduce pain and swelling,
- Engage senses and soothe mind,
- Boost creativity and self esteem, and
- Foster environmental awareness and stewardship.

It is important that people can access improved health and quality of life outcomes that the outdoors can provide across their entire lives. As people live longer, many barriers and challenges can add up that make nature and outdoor activities difficult or impossible.

Starting in the summer of 2023, River Bend Nature Center (RBNC) has led a community-wide initiative to survey and learn from diverse populations of older adults and some younger adults experiencing challenges to independence and/or who are socially isolated in and around Faribault, MN about how they would like to spend time outdoors, what their outdoor recreation interests are, and what barriers to participation exist for them.

The project seeks to:

- Ensure that people who have barriers to participating in traditional and broader community engagement methods can inform accessible outdoor amenities and programs that will be meaningful to them;
- Inform RBNC and the broader community of needs, interests, and barriers and how programs and amenities can be made more welcoming to impact health, social connectedness, quality of life, and inclusion of the targeted audience and people across the lifespan;
- Guide decisions and investment in immediate, short term, and long term program and amenity improvements to promote safe, inviting, appealing, and usable physical spaces and programs for all ages, abilities, and diverse groups studied; and

¹ MN Department of Health Mental Well-Being & Resilience Learning Community, “An Introduction to Nature Rx and Forest Bathing” Presentation by Sara Holger. March 28, 2023.

-
- Report back to all participants and stakeholders to inform age-friendly planning to better build a community that includes all people with opportunities to connect with nature in the way individuals choose, and to work to remove and reduce barriers so that people's outdoor activities of interest are accessible.

The Community

Faribault is a rural community in southern MN of 24,000 people unique for diversity in several areas: racial/ethnic, age (30% is age 55+, 18% is age 65+), ability, economic, and incarceration status. There has been significant growth in Latinx and East African populations with BIPOC communities now making up 32% of Faribault's population. Faribault is home to the MN State Academies for the Blind and Deaf and RBNC is located on land that was once a state regional center for people with disabilities. Today many people in Faribault are members of the Deaf and Blind communities or are former residents of the regional center. Additionally, the Minnesota Department of Corrections's largest prison is adjacent to RBNC and has a population of over 100 older adults.

Targeted Audience

This project focuses on people facing challenges to independence and/or experiencing social isolation across the community with special efforts to include partners representative of the diverse groups outlined above. Engaging communities directly ensures that assumptions are not made about interests and barriers. This project places the voices of people facing challenges to independence and/or experiencing social isolation across the community at the forefront of guiding work for current improvements and future plans to make outdoor recreation more accessible and inclusive for everyone.

We were unable to work with every community or organization we hoped to due to limited time and funding. A few important groups that we were interested in but unable to connect to the level we initially thought would be possible include: Aging Services for Communities, All Parks Alliance (mobile home advocacy), assisted living facilities, Buckham Library, faith communities, group homes, Hiawathaland Transit, Minnesota Correctional Facility - Faribault (assisted living/nursing facility serving inmates), long term care homes, Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf, restaurants/coffee shops and businesses (including ethnic), and senior apartments. If you have interest in this topic and want to be included in future efforts in this area, please contact River Bend Nature Center.

Partners & Roles

[Age Friendly Minnesota](#) (AFM) provided a grant which funded this project. AFM seeks to make our systems and communities more inclusive of and responsive to older adults. It is part of a global movement to prepare for an aging population and ensure that older people are valued and integrated into communities at a new level.

Breanna Wheeler served as Project Consultant to RBNC for this grant. She introduced the grant opportunity to RBNC and as a former Executive Director of RBNC saw the promise of engaging the community in this topic.

She researched and designed materials and the “Outdoor Interests & Barriers Survey,” coordinated with key partners, facilitated in person survey engagement sessions and methods for collecting for respondents completing the survey at home. She tabulated the data from paper surveys and analyzed and compiled the results from the surveys to develop this report that outlines key findings and recommendations.

River Bend Nature Center is a nonprofit nature center located in Faribault, MN. It specializes in education, conservation, and recreation. RBNC is the host of the project and staff served to coordinate logistics, communicate and build relationships with key partners, and will integrate learnings into community planning.

The following partner organizations had members or clients complete the survey. Methods were unique to each depending on what would best engage people and specifics of each can be found in [Appendix A: Partner Organizations and Their Participation](#).

Buckham West Senior Center

Three Rivers Community Action Center - Meals on Wheels

Healthfinders Collaborative

Somali Community Resettlement Services

Rice County Public Health - Home Care and Long Term Care - elderly and disability waiver clients

Three Links Apartments

Mill City Senior Living

New Perspectives Senior Living

Faribault Deaf Club

Other organizations were consulted to provide feedback on the survey, community engagement process, and expressed support and interest in promoting, distributing and/or incorporating results within their organizations and across the community.

Allina Clinic - Faribault

City of Faribault Parks & Recreation

Faribault Area Senior Provider Network

Faribault Ministerial Association

Rice County SHIP

Mayo Clinic - Faribault

Methods

RBNC contacted partners of interest and met to determine fit and interest in the project. The survey draft was shared with contacts to incorporate feedback into the final copy. Surveys were distributed and completed during August and September 2023. See [Appendix A](#) for methods of distribution for each partnering organization and [Appendix B: Outdoor Interests & Barriers Survey: Cover Letter and Survey Instruments](#) for

three versions of the cover letter and survey instrument: the main version, a condensed Somali Community Resettlement Services survey, and an online version for Faribault Deaf Club.

Incentives for Participation

Partners were offered varying levels of financial incentives or programs at RBNC to compensate for their time and involvement to make the project successful. Participants who returned surveys by mail could elect to supply their contact information for a \$10 gift card to be sent to them. At in-person engagement sessions, participants were offered the \$10 gift cards as they turned in their survey. Participants were offered a choice of gift cards for local restaurants and stores.

Analysis

There were a total of 203 surveys completed. Each completed survey was labeled with an alphanumeric code (see [Appendix A](#)) and responses entered and analyzed.

Quantitative Analysis

The 58 quantitative questions were analyzed and findings subtracted any blank or other responses so percentages reflect the number of respondents who answered the question in the format provided. Questions varied in being answered between 103 times for the fewest number a question was answered to 200 times for the most number of times a question was answered.

Of the 58 questions with a quantitative response, the question most answered by 200 respondents was: “How connected do you currently feel to nature/outdoors?” This was the fourth question in the survey and the first few questions were most often answered.

The question least answered by 103 respondents was to indicate the level to which the following is a barrier to getting outside: “I am worried that I will have a bathroom accident,” followed by the other low outlier at 116 respondents: “I have other personal health or medical reasons.” Unfortunately, because of a printing error, these questions were misprinted without the full phrase on a large number of surveys and could not be used. During coding, these were either coded as blank or other and not counted. Therefore, the data may not reflect the true response to those questions if the full number of people had been able to answer them.

The most common number of times a question was answered (mode) was 171. The median number of times quantitative questions were answered was 162 (half of the questions were answered more often and half less often). And the average/mean for the number of responses to questions was 163.

As mentioned above, there are some weaknesses in the quantitative data. There were some printing errors leaving off some parts of questions in some partner organization surveys. Some participants left questions unanswered, and it was a long survey which could have increased the number of times people answered “not an issue” in the checkbox section for barriers in an attempt to complete the survey more quickly. During

in-person engagement sessions, a sense of peer pressure or competition was noted to try and finish the survey along with others when everyone was given the paper survey to complete individually.

[Appendix C: All Barriers Response Analysis - Quantitative Data](#) lists the percentages of respondents who marked various barriers affecting them “to a great extent”, “somewhat”, “to a great extent and somewhat” combined, and “not an issue”.

Questions that asked where respondents would like to participate in outdoor / nature connections and how they would like to find out about these opportunities were ‘check all that apply’ style. In those cases, the percentage of respondents who checked the value can be found in the results section below.

Qualitative Analysis

There were 53 questions in the survey that allowed respondents to write in their own comments. For these questions, it was noted that written comments often corresponded with another section of the survey such as an interest being listed in the barrier section or a barrier to participation listed in the interest section. This is likely due to human nature to reflect and write comments as they are thought of. Therefore, all comments were grouped by topic into the following categories: activities of interest, barriers, general comments, positive comments/individual solutions, negative comments, and requests/solutions. Like comments were grouped together within each category, some to correspond with existing categories listed in the survey, and the resulting analysis reflects the number of mentions.

The weakness in analyzing the comment data is the sheer amount of data and the subjectivity of the analyst to decide which comments to group with each category. Tabulating it was time consuming and subject to error when data or counts were grouped and transferred around a page.

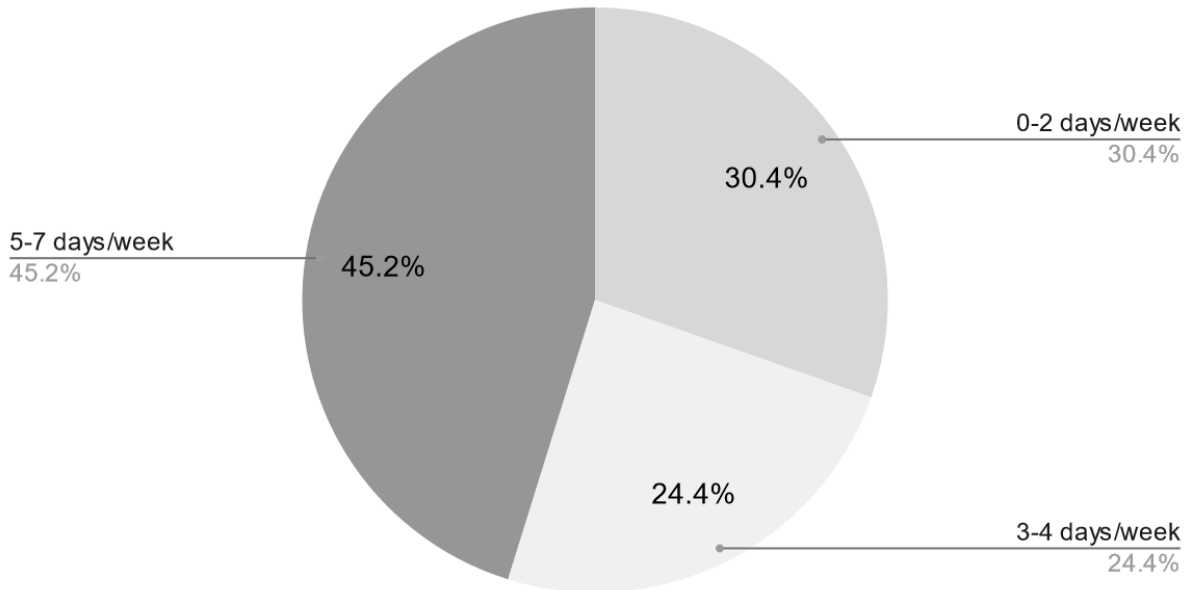
Results of data are listed in order of frequency of response and categories are grouped together to help understand and direct recommendations. Some results can be found in the results section of this report. Other results have been separated out into the following appendices:

[Appendix D: All Barriers Comments Analysis - Qualitative Data](#), [Appendix E: General, Positive, and Negative Comments Analysis](#), and [Appendix F: All Requests / Suggestions by Topic](#).

Results

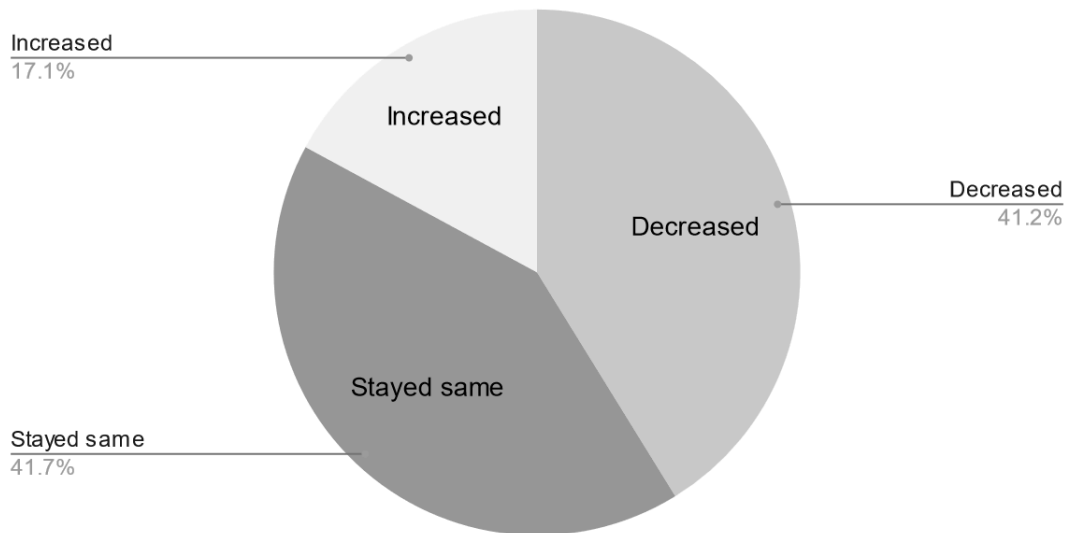
Section 1: Outdoor/nature connections and interests.

S1Q1: In the last week, how many days did you go outside and spend at least ten minutes doing an activity?



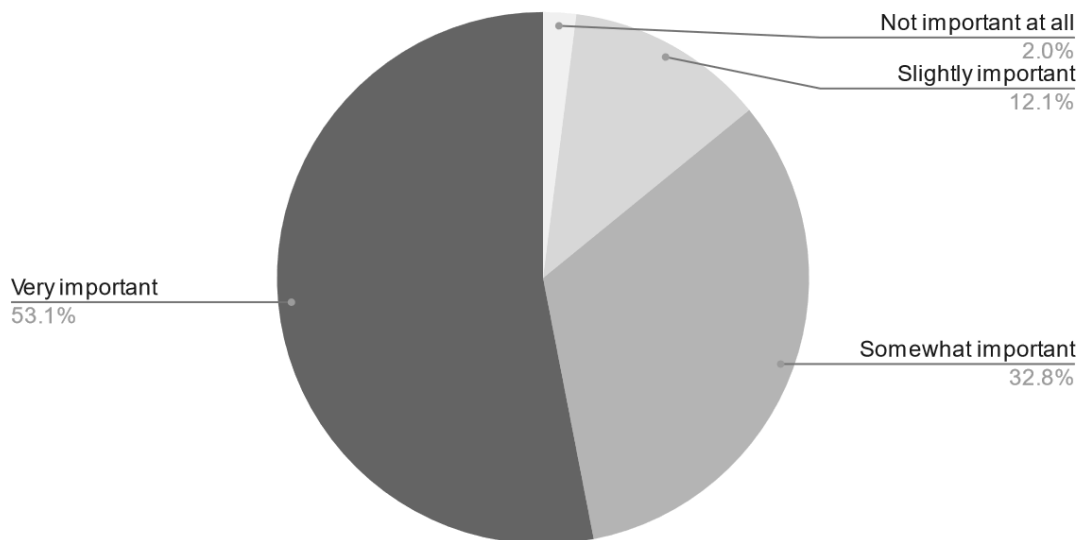
Nearly half of respondents reported spending ten minutes or more outside on 5-7 days in the prior week. About 1/3 reported spending ten minutes or more outside on 0-2 days in the prior week. In between, about 1/4 of respondents reported spending ten minutes or more outside on 3-4 days in the prior week. This is good news for the 45% that are getting outside almost every day, but for the 55% that are getting outside 0-4 days, this suggests an opportunity to understand how to improve opportunities and access.

S1Q2: When you think back five years ago, would you say the overall number of days you went outside has...



About equal percentages of respondents reported that their time spent outside in the last five years either stayed the same (42%) or decreased (41%). 17% of respondents reported an increase in time spent outside in the last five years. With 41% of people reporting a decrease, there is an opportunity to increase opportunities and access.

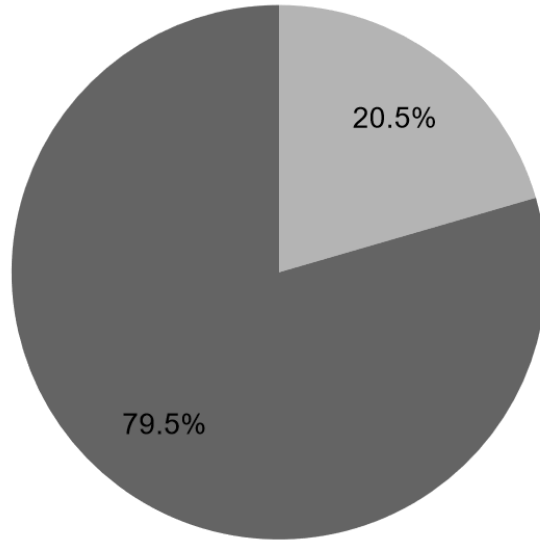
S1Q3: How important is outdoor activity as part of your life?



Outdoor activity is somewhat or very important to 86% of respondents. Outdoor activity is slightly important or not important at all to 14% of respondents. This represents a need to ensure that outdoor activities of interest are available and accessible to the population.

S1Q4: How connected do you currently feel to nature/outdoors?

● Not connected at all to not really connected ● Somewhat connected to very connected



The majority of respondents, (80%) or 4 of 5 feel somewhat or very connected to nature/outdoors with 20% or 1 of 5 feeling not really connected or not connected at all. This is an interesting finding in that it may indicate that people feel connected to nature and the outdoors even if they are not spending time outside.

S1Q5: Which of the following are ways you enjoy or would like to spend time outdoors?

(Answered: YES)

- 92% Driving or looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park
- 91% Just being outside (sitting, people watching, taking in the world around me)
- 86% Being outside for social interaction
- 76% Visiting a neighborhood outdoor space (park, waterway, trail)
- 70% Doing outdoor hobbies
- 68% Going to a destination further away (historical site, natural area/park, zoo, etc.)
- 65% Getting physical activity/outdoor recreation/exercise
- 49% Participating a program or class to learn something, develop skills
- 27% Participate or volunteer with an outdoor/environmental club or organization
- 26% Outdoor spiritual practice

(Answered: UNSURE & NO)

- 74% Participate or volunteer with an outdoor/environmental club or organization
- 74% Outdoor spiritual practice
- 52% Participating a program or class to learn something, develop skills
- 35% Getting physical activity/outdoor recreation/exercise
- 32% Going to a destination further away (historical site, natural area/park, zoo, etc.)
- 30% Doing outdoor hobbies
- 24% Visiting a neighborhood outdoor space (park, waterway, trail)
- 14% Being outside for social interaction
- 11% Driving or looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park
- 9% Just being outside (sitting, people watching, taking in the world around me)

(Answered: UNSURE)

- 23% Outdoor spiritual practice
- 22% Participating a program or class to learn something, develop skills
- 18% Visiting a neighborhood outdoor space (park, waterway, trail)
- 17% Participate or volunteer with an outdoor/environmental club or organization
- 8% Getting physical activity/outdoor recreation/exercise
- 8% Driving or looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park
- 7% Going to a destination further away (historical site, natural area/park, zoo, etc.)
- 7% Being outside for social interaction
- 6% Just being outside (sitting, people watching, taking in the world around me)
- 5% Doing outdoor hobbies

(Answered: NO)

- 57% Participate or volunteer with an outdoor/environmental club or organization
- 51% Outdoor spiritual practice
- 30% Participating a program or class to learn something, develop skills
- 27% Getting physical activity/outdoor recreation/exercise
- 25% Doing outdoor hobbies
- 25% Going to a destination further away (historical site, natural area/park, zoo, etc.)
- 7% Being outside for social interaction
- 6% Visiting a neighborhood outdoor space (park, waterway, trail)
- 3% Driving or looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park
- 3% Just being outside (sitting, people watching, taking in the world around me)

Mentions in Comments

172*	Going to a destination further away (historical site, natural area/park, zoo, etc.)
166	Visiting a neighborhood outdoor space (park, waterway, trail)
154	Doing outdoor hobbies
114	Getting physical activity/outdoor recreation/exercise
93	Being outside for social interaction
42	Just being outside (sitting, people watching, taking in the world around me)
23	Driving or looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park
13	Outdoor spiritual practice
12	Participate or volunteer with an outdoor/environmental club or organization
6	Participating a program or class to learn something, develop skills

*The method for determining mentions grouped places which were further away with closeby neighborhood spaces which skewed these numbers. It added the comments respondents wrote in on the preference for where they would like to participate in nature / outdoor connections. And further away is not clearly defined. Based on other comment counts and quantitative data, most respondents indicate they do not want to go too far from home.

Section 2: Barriers and Limits to outdoor/nature connections and interests.

S2Q1: When you think about the ways you like to spend time outdoors, how do the following things affect you or get in the way of your doing outdoor activities?

(Answered: TO A GREAT EXTENT)

29%	I do not / no longer drive
26%	I don't know if there is a bathroom
22%	My physical mobility is limited, my freedom to move around depends on help from others
22%	The surfaces are uneven / I'm afraid of falling
17%	Things like doors, thresholds, and stairs make it hard for me to get outside
17%	I don't know if there is a place to sit if I get tired

(Answered: SOMEWHAT)

- 51% I lack energy
- 44% One or more of my senses is impaired (vision, hearing, balance, etc.)
- 43% I don't know if there is a bathroom
- 40% I don't know if there is a place to sit if I get tired
- 39% I have pain that limits me
- 38% I don't have the information, I don't know what's available
- 38% The destination is not near me
- 37% The surfaces are uneven / I'm afraid of falling
- 33% I don't have money to participate
- 30% I am worried that I will have a bathroom accident
- 30% My physical mobility is limited, my freedom to move around depends on help from others

(Answered: TO A GREAT EXTENT AND SOMEWHAT)

- 69% I don't know if there is a bathroom
- 62% I lack energy
- 59% The surfaces are uneven / I'm afraid of falling
- 59% One or more of my senses is impaired (vision, hearing, balance, etc.)
- 57% I don't know if there is a place to sit if I get tired
- 53% I have pain that limits me
- 52% I don't have the information, I don't know what's available
- 52% The destination is not near me
- 52% My physical mobility is limited, my freedom to move around depends on help from others
- 45% Things like doors, thresholds, and stairs make it hard for me to get outside
- 44% I don't have money to participate
- 40% I do not / no longer drive

(Answered: NOT AN ISSUE)

- 85% There are not family / kid friendly spaces
- 84% I'm a caregiver and I'm unable to bring / leave my loved one
- 79% The information or program is not in my language
- 79% Other people make me feel unwelcome, unsafe, or uncomfortable
- 79% There is not a private space available
- 78% I'm limited or unable to communicate with others
- 76% I do not have access to a public transportation route
- 76% There are not outdoor spaces / parks near me that I'm interested in
- 76% I have memory problems

There were 37 barriers identified in the following categories: general, transportation, safety & accessibility, weather & nature, physical space, and health & physical ability. The full list of the percentage of respondents who selected each of these barriers is available in [Appendix C](#).

Respondents were less likely to select "To a great extent" with the highest percentage of residents indicating this for any barrier was 29% as compared with 51% as highest under somewhat and 85% as highest under "not an issue". Therefore, to a great extent and somewhat responses were grouped together above for analysis.

Mentions in Comments

55	Transportation related
54	Uneven surfaces, afraid of falling
47	Sense impairment
40	Physical mobility
34	Worry about weather, pests, animals, plants
23	Age*
23	Time
20	Pain
20	Personal health / medical reasons

See full results of mentions of barriers in comments in [Appendix D](#). A few new barrier categories were added based on the comments due to being mentioned and not fitting elsewhere. They were from highest to lowest: general age barrier (23 mentions) expressed as "I am too old" or "I can't because of my age;" needing others (17 mentions) expressed as "I need someone to help me/go with." or "I don't have anyone to help me/go with." The other barrier categories that were added based on comment frequency were wanting to stay close to home (3 mentions) and being homebound (3 mentions).

Section 3: Where and how respondents would like to participate in outdoor/nature connections.

S3Q1: I am interested in participating in outdoor connections at the following:

- 51% Nature Center
- 50% My own backyard or shared space
- 48% Other parks or places to walk / sit outside
- 45% State parks or other state lands/waters
- 45% Homes of friends, family, or neighbors
- 44% Senior center / community center
- 43% Community events
- 39% Community education
- 35% Coffee shop / restaurant / local business
- 33% Faith community
- 33% On my own / unstructured
- 30% Library
- 21% At my health care provider / clinic
- 18% Area agency on aging programs
- 14% Online programs

The list above shows where respondents expressed interest in participating in outdoor connection activities. A variety of places were of interest with the lowest interest expressed in online programs. See below for other comment mentions of places people mentioned being interested in visiting.

Places that received specific mentions include: River Bend Nature Center (23), outside at home or in neighborhood (21), Healthfinders Collaborative (8), Alexander Park (7), Carleton Arboretum (5), Central Park (4), Minnesota Landscape Arboretum (4), state parks (4), Nerstrand Big Woods State Park (3), Northfield (3), community events (2), Friendship House (2), parks in Northfield (2), St. Dominic's Church - Northfield (2), and school (2).

Single mentions include: Anytime Fitness, Buckham Memorial Library, Buckham West Senior Center, Cannon River Wilderness Area, Christian Women's group at The River Church, community center, Itasca State Park, Kenyon, local WMAs, Medford, Minneopa State Park, Nerstrand, Northfield Public Library, Oddfellows Park-Northfield, Owatonna, Rice and Steele Counties, Sakatah State Park, sports events, Teepee Tonka Park, Truman Park at Woodridge Apartments - Northfield, Wabasha, and Waseca.

S3Q3: If someone wanted to give you information about outdoor/nature connection opportunities, what are the best ways to reach you?

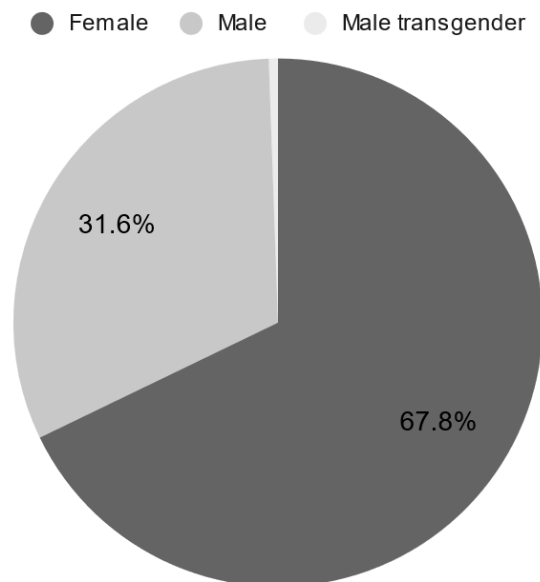
- 74% Printed publications / brochures
- 44% Text messages
- 41% Email
- 40% Signs or flyers in public places
- 28% Social media
- 24% On site programs and classes
- 24% Website
- 20% Voicemail

The majority of respondents report being best reached by printed publications/brochures. See above for other ways reported. Other comments and mentions for ways people expressed being best able to be reached include: by phone (7), in the newspaper (3), email of a family member (3), come and tell me / in person (2).

Single mentions included: by text, through sign ups, in the mail, signs at organizations and restaurants that people frequent, in bus route houses, notices where I live, Target, in Spanish, no computer, and no phone.

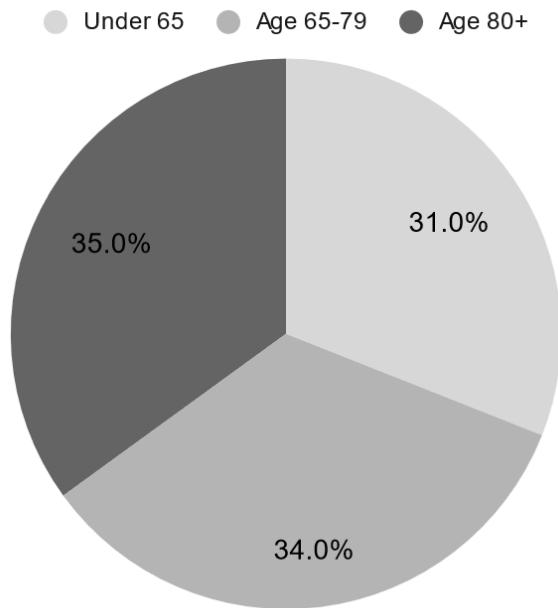
Section 4: Demographic Questions

S4Q1: What is your gender identity?



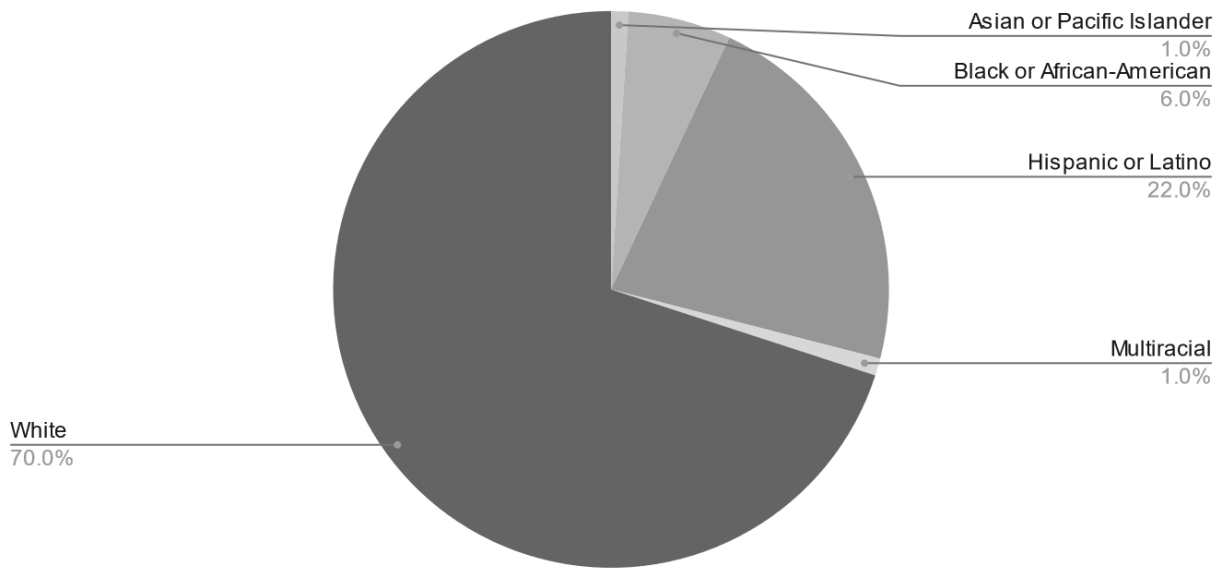
The majority of respondents were female (68%) and 32% were male. One respondent identified as transgender male.

S4Q2: In which age group are you?



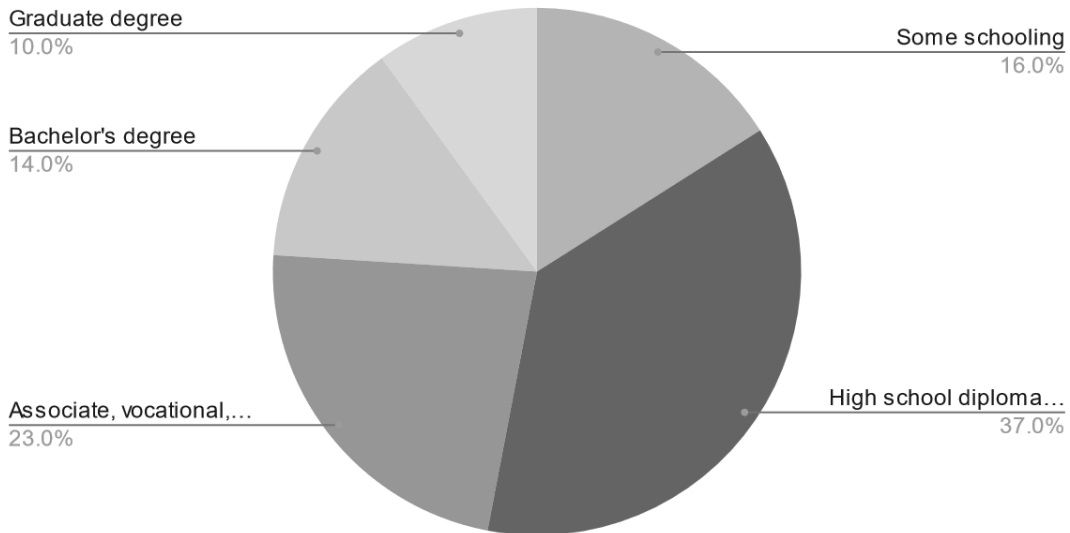
The survey respondents had a good diversity of ages participating with 31% under age 65, 34% of respondents reporting their age as age 65-79, and 35% of respondents reporting their age at 80 or better.

S4Q3: How do you describe your race and/or ethnicity?



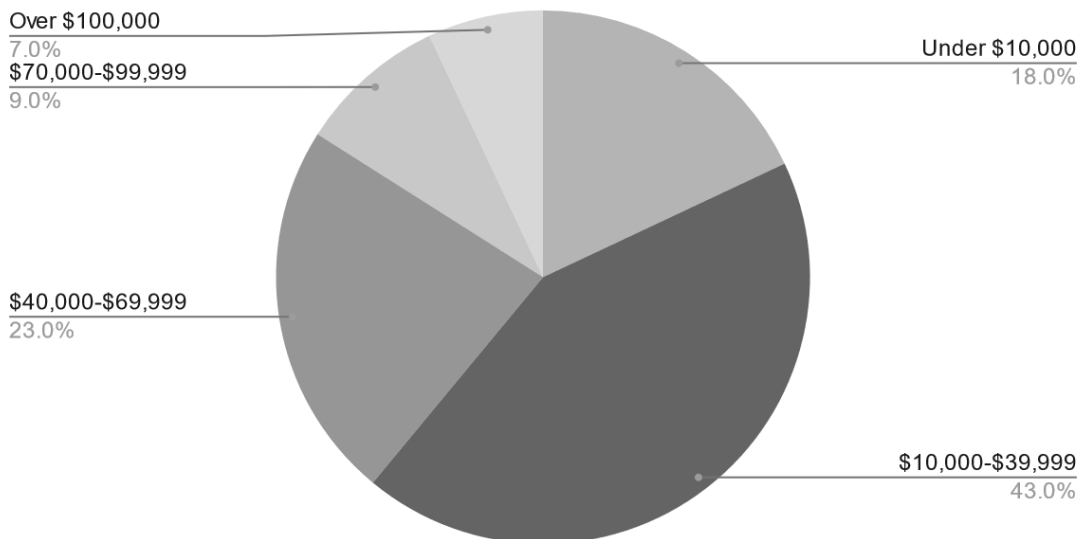
The survey respondents represented a varied racial and ethnic diversity which reflects the general makeup of the community. 70% of respondents reported as white, 22% as Hispanic/Latino, 6% as Black or African-American, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% Multiracial.

S4Q4: What is the highest level of education you have completed?



There was a variety of educational levels represented by respondents. 37% reported having a high school diploma or GED, 23% reported having an associate or vocational degree, 16% reported some schooling, 14% a Bachelor's degree, and 10% a Graduate degree.

S4Q5: Please indicate your total household income before taxes last year.



A variety of household income levels were reflected by respondents. 43% reported incomes of \$10,000-\$39,999; 23% reported incomes of \$40,000-\$69,999; 18% reported incomes of under \$10,000, 9% reported incomes of \$70,000-\$99,999, and 7% reported incomes of \$100,000+.

General Comments, Positive Comments / Individual Solutions, and Negative Comments

A number of general comments were found during the analysis of qualitative data. The most common general comment was “thank you for asking / doing this survey” (5).

Positive comments and individual solutions were grouped together with the most mentioned being: “I can ask, learn, and find out” (5), “I would love to, like to do these activities” (4), and “I take the bus”(4).

Negative comments centered around the activities being “not possible, not able to do, enjoyed in past but now limited” (20), “limited in kinds of activity (7), “no longer applies/doesn’t apply” (5), and “can no longer do” (4).

All general, positive, and negative comments can be found in [Appendix E](#).

Requests / Suggestions by Category

The areas respondents commented on that were requests of things needed or suggestions were in alignment with the barriers identified in the survey results. The top comment categories by number of mentions were related to:

- 32 Surfaces, fall related, seating
- 27 Need for bathrooms, water
- 27 Accessibility / inclusion
- 20 Transportation

The majority of comments under the “surfaces, fall related, seating” heading included: need more benches / a place to sit with shade every so often, more seating to stop and rest, benches and chairs for frail elders, paved surfaces, walking trails, path development, concrete or blacktop for smooth surfaces, easy to walk, level surface, good terrain for walking.

The majority of comments under the “need for bathrooms, water” heading included: want to know that bathrooms are closeby if needed, extra large bathrooms, more bathrooms, with water access to clean, proper elder-accessible bathrooms, and port a potties being closer together.

There was a grouping of comments under the “accessibility/inclusion” heading that included: closeby activities, activities in local neighborhoods so more accessible, where I don’t have to drive, I can’t go far.

The majority of comments under the “transportation” heading included: transportation, offer transportation, be able to go without expense and having to schedule it, all ages, more stops.

All of the comments grouped and analyzed by request / suggestion topic can be found in [Appendix F](#).

Summary of Findings

1. The findings suggest an opportunity to better provide outdoor activities of interest and reduce barriers to participation.
 - a. Outdoor activity is somewhat or very important to 86% of respondents. This reinforces the need to ensure that outdoor activities of interest are available and accessible to people as they age and experience challenges to independence and less social connection.
 - b. There were 30% of respondents who reported getting outside for at least ten minutes 0-2 times in the previous week. The survey was administered in the summer/early fall season which is usually most hospitable for outdoor activity and represents a gap between what people find important and their behavior and suggests that some barriers are at play.
 - c. With 41% of people reporting a decrease in their outdoor activity in the past five years (three of those years being COVID-19 pandemic years when the general population increased outdoor time), the results again show an opportunity to provide continued outdoor amenities and programs and ensure they remain accessible and of interest as people age.
 - d. An interesting finding was that 4 of 5 respondents felt somewhat or very connected to nature/outdoors even when their behavior of spending time outside and compared with time spent outdoors in previous week, this indicates that people may feel connected to nature and outdoors even if they are not spending time (or very much time) outside.
2. Higher levels of interest were expressed in spur of the moment activities that could be done independently and take place in easily accessible places to respondents. Lower levels of interest were shown in activities that were structured or led by others such as classes.
 - a. 92% indicated interest in driving or looking at scenery on scenic roads or in a park, 91% for just being outside, 86% for being outside for social interaction, and 76% for visiting a neighborhood outdoor space.
 - b. About 3/4 of respondents indicated they were unsure or not interested in participating in a volunteer or environmental group (74%) and outdoor spiritual activity (74%), about 1/2 are unsure or not interested in participating in a class to learn something or develop skills (52%). Based on this information, these areas which typically receive a lot of focus by program coordinators should not be invested in as much.
 - c. The majority of comment mentions were about interest in destinations both close to home and further away (see note above), doing outdoor hobbies, physical activity, and being outside for social interaction.
 - d. Crossover between quantitative and qualitative data exists with visiting neighborhood outdoor spaces and being outside for social interaction.
3. Barriers most often faced include (combined “to a great extent” and “somewhat” responses: not knowing if there is a bathroom (69%), lacking energy (62%), surfaces are uneven / fear of falling (59%), sensory impairment (59%), not knowing if there is a place to sit if tired (57%), pain (53%), not having information or knowing what available (52%), destination not near (52%), and limited physical

mobility/depending on others (52%). Underlined barriers also had top numbers of mentions in comments. The top commented topic was transportation related barriers.

4. A variety of places to take part in outdoor connection activities were listed. The top three responses identified were: nature center (51%), my own backyard or shared space (50%), and other parks or places to walk / sit outside (48%). The place of least interest was online programs (14%).
5. The majority of respondents reported that the best way to be reached was through printed publications or brochures (74%). There was a gap before the next three ways reported of text messages (44%), email (41%) and signs or flyers in public places (40%).
6. Requests most often made through comments were need for smooth surfaces and seating for walking (32 mentions), need for bathrooms and water access (27 mentions), a variety of accessibility and inclusion needs (27 mentions) many centering around need for activities closeby, and offering transportation (20 mentions).

Recommendations

Given the findings of this survey, here are some recommendations for decision makers. For all of the recommendations, to be successful a key centralizing theme is to make any new and existing changes or improvements easy for anyone to do and be sure people know about it.

Planning

1. Include outdoor/ nature connection interests and barriers expressed by people who are experiencing challenges to independence and who have less social connections in community plans. They value time outside and may not be able to take part in traditional community engagement to give their input about their needs. With a growing number of people living longer, more people will be less independent and have fewer social connections, so it is important to include their needs and interests into plans and encourage their participation.
2. Shift thinking from traditional, destination-based and program-related focuses to include dispersed opportunities throughout the community occurring in the places where people are and close to where they live.
3. Simplify accessibility for people to do the things they most want to do: just be outside, view scenery, and have social interaction.
4. Incorporate ways for people to do their outdoor hobbies and get physical activity throughout the community.
5. Map out how people can easily get to the activities, offer transportation.

Physical Infrastructure / Amenities

6. Improve surfaces. Audit and make plans to improve surfaces and then make sure people know where the best places are that suit their needs that they can access and use.
7. Highlight and be clear about the location of bathrooms. Ensure there are enough bathrooms and that there is water availability. Ensure these amenities are accessible to all.
8. Highlight where benches and seating areas are. Ensure there are enough places to sit that are protected from the sun and/or wind.

Amenity / Activity / Program Adaptations

9. Ensure adaptations for people who have low vision or are blind, people who are hard of hearing or are deaf, and people with limited physical mobility and problems with balance.
10. Offer help for people such as transportation to/from programs or destinations, assistance with mobility/getting around, or guide them on walks.
11. Provide activities that require lower activity levels that take into account lower energy levels and physical tolerance / pain issues.
12. Implement bus stops at nature based locations and/or scenery bus tours.

Communication

13. Develop a communications strategy to encourage people to add more time outdoors and educate on existing and new opportunities so that all people can experience the physical and mental health benefits of nature / outdoor connections.
14. Invest in accessible opportunities and amenities across the community for people to spend time outside and ensure that they know about them and are encouraged to use them.

Appendices

Appendix A: Partnering Organizations and Their Participation

Buckham West

Buckham West constituents completed 48 surveys (24% of the total surveys completed).

There were two ways that Buckham West was involved. In the first way, staff members identified Buckham West members who had at one time been active participants at the senior center but who had decreased activity level or stopped participating and sent surveys to 109 people. 28 participants (26% response rate) completed these at home and returned them by mail. The second way people were engaged was through a visit by RBNC representatives at a congregate dining when a popular noon meal was served and engaged with 20 people before and after the meal to complete surveys.

Alphanumeric codes: BW01-BW48

Three Rivers Community Action - Meals on Wheels

Three Rivers Community Action Center - Meals on Wheels constituents completed 30 surveys (30% response rate, 15% of the total surveys completed).

Surveys were sent to about 90 people receiving Meals on Wheels in Faribault with a monthly donation letter from Three Rivers Community Action. The surveys were mailed back to the Zumbrota office and brought to Faribault where they were picked up for tabulation. Three Rivers staff reviewed which participants had not

responded and a second survey went out with the meal to participants who had not completed it the first time which were returned back to the Faribault office.

Alphanumeric codes: TR01-TR30

Healthfinders Collaborative

Healthfinders Collaborative constituents completed 26 surveys (13% of the total surveys completed).

Healthfinders Collaborative translated the survey into Spanish and Somali. Their community health workers completed surveys one to one with participants in Faribault and Northfield over the course of a couple of weeks. Only surveys in Spanish and English were returned. Some surveys had responses in Spanish which were translated using Google Translate during analysis.

Alphanumeric codes: HC01-HC26

Somali Community Resettlement Services

Somali Community Resettlement Services constituents completed 23 surveys (11% of the total surveys completed).

An engagement session was held at SCRS with RBNC representatives where bilingual SCRS staff completed surveys one to one with constituents of SCRS. The survey instrument was adapted to make it shorter in length and the English version was verbally translated to Somali or Spanish by an SCRS staff and responses written in English. The shortened survey responses were tabulated along with their corresponding sections during analysis. See Appendix B for the SCRS survey version.

Alphanumeric codes: SC01-SC23

Rice County Public Health

Rice County Public Health clients completed 22 surveys (11% of the total surveys completed).

Rice County Public Health staff brought surveys to 60 clients in their homes (37% response rate) in Rice County who receive home care and waived services. Participants were mostly aged 65+ with some younger people with disabilities. The clients completed the surveys and returned them by mail.

Alphanumeric codes: RC01-RC22

Three Links Apartments

Three Links Apartments constituents completed 22 surveys (11% of the total surveys completed).

An in person engagement session was held with RBNC representatives where participants completed the survey in person. A few surveys were held for interested people who could not make it to the session to fill out and were picked up later.

Alphanumeric codes: TL01-TL22

Mill City Senior Living

Mill City Senior Living constituents completed 20 surveys (10% of the total surveys completed).

An in person engagement session was held with RBNC representatives where participants completed the survey in person. A few surveys were held for interested people who could not make it to the session to fill out and were picked up later.

Alphanumeric codes: MC01-MC20

New Perspectives Senior Living

New Perspectives Senior Living constituents completed 7 surveys (3% of the total surveys completed).

An in person engagement session was held with RBNC representatives where participants completed the survey in person. A few surveys were held for interested people who could not make it to the session to fill out.

Alphanumeric codes: NP01-NP07

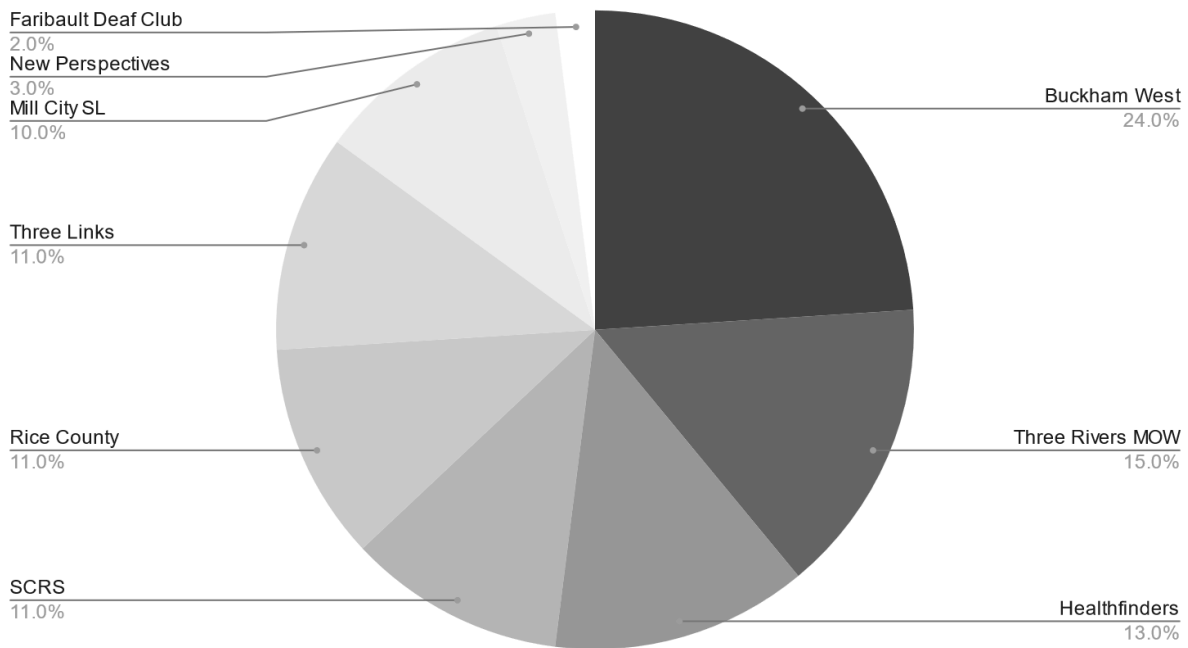
Faribault Deaf Club

Faribault Deaf Club constituents completed 5 surveys (2% of the total surveys completed).

The Faribault Deaf Club members were provided with an online survey delivered by the leader of the FDC to complete. There were very slight differences in the survey and responses were tabulated with the rest of the responses as a whole during analysis. See Appendix B for the FDC survey version.

Alphanumeric codes: FD001-FD005

Percent of Total Surveys Completed by Organization



Appendix B: Outdoor Interests & Barriers Survey: Cover Letter and Survey Instruments

The majority of respondents received a packet that included this [Cover Letter](#) and [Outdoor Interests & Barriers Survey](#).

Here is the Spanish version of the [Cover Letter and Outdoor Interests & Barriers Survey](#) translated by Healthfinders Collaborative.

Here is the [condensed version](#) used during the Somali Community Resettlement Services engagement session.

The Faribault Deaf Club version that was online is available upon request. It was nearly identical to the main version.

[Appendix C: All Barriers Response Analysis - Quantitative Data](#)

[Appendix D: All Barriers Comments Analysis - Qualitative Data](#)

[Appendix E: General, Positive, and Negative Comments Analysis](#)

[Appendix F: All Requests / Suggestions by Topic](#)