

# Community Needs Assessment Results



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**Released:** July 2016

## Introduction

The City of Duluth Community Planning Division created and distributed a Community Needs Assessment to identify the major concerns of community members regarding the ability to meet basic needs, find and/or keep affordable, suitable housing, and maintain economic self-sufficiency. A focus group of community advocates, especially those who work with communities of color in Duluth, helped staff develop the survey and strategies to make the survey available to as many community members as possible. Community members were asked to identify barriers to achieving the above goals and to share which problems they or their families personally have been struggling with. This survey was made available online, on the City of Duluth's website, and was also distributed at events around the City and at several different nonprofit service agencies. City staff also collected verbal input from community members at a Community Needs Hearing at the Harrison Community Center. The results of the Community Needs Assessment will help the Community Development Committee identify the funding priorities for the 2017 Community Development Program.



## Demographics

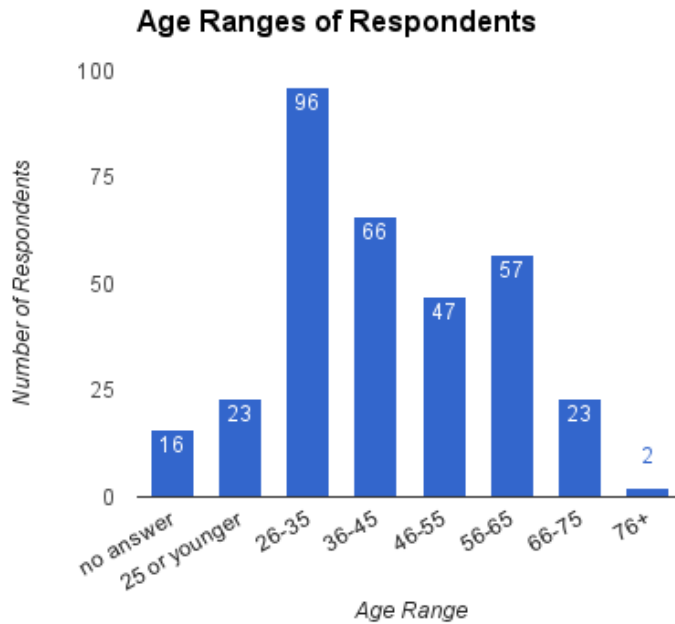
The Community Needs Assessment had a total of 330 respondents. Demographic questions help us understand who we are hearing from and who we are not hearing from. These questions can also help us find if there are specific segments of the population who have important unique needs that might normally be overlooked because they are a small share of the whole population. The sample size of 330 is adequate to draw conclusions about the opinions of Duluth's entire population of just over 86,000 people.

### Home of Respondents

We asked respondents to share their zip codes. Just over one third (34%) of respondents live in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) priority neighborhoods of Morgan Park, Lincoln Park, Central & East Hillside. Almost two thirds (57%) live in other Duluth neighborhoods, and 9% do not live in Duluth or did not provide a zip code.

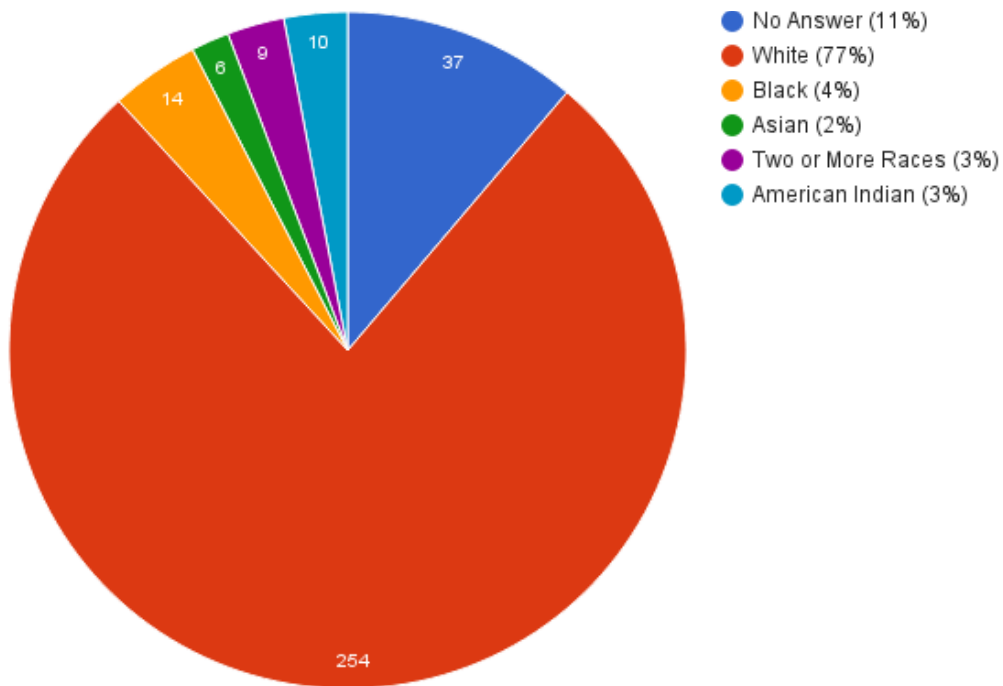
### Age of Respondents

Almost half (49%) of respondents are between the ages of 26 and 45. Respondents between 26 and 35 years old have the largest single share at 29% of respondents.



### Race of Respondents

Of the 330 respondents, 293 provided information about their race. The shares of respondents of color are similar to the shares they hold in Duluth's total population. With such a small sample size, we are unable to analyze if there are any concerns specific to any single racial group.



## Economic Self-Sufficiency of Respondents



Source: Jacob Norlund CC BY 2.0

Respondents were asked if their households are economically self-sufficient. Self-sufficient households can afford all of their basic needs (including food, clothing, health care, transportation, child care, and housing) using only household members' employment incomes. About 30% of respondents reported their households are not self-sufficient and about 66% of respondents reported their households are self-sufficient. The other 4% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

## Experience of Respondents

Respondents were asked to identify if they had trouble meeting basic needs, finding and keeping affordable housing, and accessing medical care in the past year. Many respondents chose multiple answers. About 26% of respondents had difficulty meeting basic needs in the past year, 21% of respondents had difficulty accessing medical care in the past year, and 27% of respondents had difficulty finding and/or keeping suitable, affordable housing. About 32% of respondents, experienced just one of these issues in the past year, 13% of respondents experienced two of these issues in the past year, and 7% of respondents experienced all three of these issues in the past year. Not surprisingly, respondents who had experienced any of these issues tended to rate problems facing the community as more severe than respondents who had not experienced any of these issues in the past year.

## Survey Results

### Economic Self-Sufficiency

About 36% of respondents identified achieving self-sufficiency as a moderate problem and 42% identified it as a serious problem.

The top three reasons respondents said it was difficult to achieve self-sufficiency are low wages (15% of respondents), lack of employment (13%), and a high cost of living (11%). Respondents who identified these three barriers were concerned with many Duluth area jobs that do not offer living wages and workers who do not have enough education or training to get living wage jobs.

*"It is hard to transition off of assistance when you begin to make more money. There should be some sort of bridges program that helps people. It is hard to go from having food stamps and daycare help to nothing at all. If there was a year in between where we could wean people off I think more people would give up their assistance."*



## Basic Needs

About 33% of respondents identified meeting basic needs as a moderate problem and 48% identified it as a serious problem.



The top three reasons respondents said it was difficult to meet basic needs are a lack of suitable, affordable housing (22% of respondents), a lack of food (15%), for example neighborhoods that are food deserts, and a lack of transportation options (13%). Respondents who identified a lack of affordable housing options as a barrier were concerned with there not being enough variety in the size (number of bedrooms) of housing, not being able to find housing in a desirable location, and a lack of accessible housing for people with disabilities.

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*“Young people that grow up experiencing homelessness learn to live in crisis, to live with a survival mentality. This is hard on our economy and our future community. With families living in crisis, it is harder to hold jobs, build relationships, and give back.”*

## Affordable Housing

Respondents identified affordable housing as the most serious issue of the three they were asked about in this survey. More than half (61%) of respondents said affordable housing is a serious problem in Duluth. Another 23% of respondents identified affordable housing as a moderate problem.

The top three reasons respondents said it was difficult to finding and keeping suitable, affordable housing are that rents are too high (36% of respondents), there are not enough places to live (15%), and too many of the existing housing options are low quality (14%). Many respondents cited personal experiences with difficulty finding rental housing, regardless of their incomes. Respondents said available units are rented very quickly and it takes too long to find housing, increasing people's need and willingness to accept unsuitable housing.



*“Most of our new housing is being built to attract people who earn a good wage. Investors want to maximize their return. Not much attention is being paid to providing decent affordable housing for lower income, working people. Housing for lower income people is not only not adequate but a large percentage of the available housing stock for them is aging and not much upkeep/rehab is being done to those units.”*

### **Barriers**

Survey respondents were asked an open ended questions about the barriers they see in Duluth to meeting basic needs, finding and keeping affordable housing, and achieving self-sufficiency. This question was similar to the three questions about each of these issues, but allowed respondents to identify the most pressing issues in the community. The top three barriers respondents identified are the high price of housing (24% of respondents), low wage jobs (18%), and a lack of employment opportunities (15%).



Other notable barriers that were mentioned over and over again for different questions, but were not in the top three responses for any one question include:

- Racism
- Lack of community and social supports
- Access to child care - not enough options and/or unaffordable
- Lack of opportunity for people with criminal records

Source: Duluth LISC

*“People who are living at or below poverty are so busy surviving that there isn't the time or energy to ‘improve’ their situation by looking for a better job or getting more education which is also expensive.”*