Rural and Tribal Leadership Perspective

With the help of the Phyllis J Washington College of Education and Human Sciences and the Native American Center of Excellence, the SPCC sent a survey in December 2016 to 1,200 rural and tribal leaders across Montana who primarily work in K-12 education and tribal government - 40 recipients responded. This response rate is lower than with previous audiences. We suspect the following variables likely contributed: 1) The survey was distributed during the transition in UM presidential leadership and unlike previous surveys was sent directly from the committee rather than from the President and committee; and 2) Due to delays in a partner organization being able to distribute to their members, ~550 of the recipients only had 3-4 days to respond, with two of these days falling on a weekend.

Due to the relatively low response rate, we are cautious about drawing conclusions, but the data do present some basic demographic information and findings. To remain consistent with the question we asked in the one-on-one interviews and data cards, similar questions were posed in the quantitative survey to rural and tribal leaders. For example, we asked questions about current strengths and challenges for the State of Montana, what the state should focus on for the future, relationships with UM, and types of skills they are looking for in a college graduate.

Demographic Information
Table 1 provides the demographic information for the rural and tribal community survey. For example, 15% reported being Native and 78% non-Native. It is important to note that this audience is highly educated, with over 75% reporting that they had attained a master's, doctorate or professional degree, which is more than eight times higher than the Montana average (e.g. 2015 American Community Survey). Twenty-seven percent of the respondents reported living in an urban or suburban setting.

Table 1: Demographics for Tribal & Rural Communities

	Survey Respondents
Gender	
Male	33%
Female	65%
Age	
18-24	0%
25-34	3%
35-44	33%
45-54	40%
55-64	20%
65-older	4%
Work Classification	
Accommodations & Food	2.5%
Education	88%
Government	5%
Level of Education	
College Degree	23%
Graduate or Professional Degree	63%
Doctorate Degree	13%

Race or Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	78%
African American	0%
Latino/Hispanic	0%
American Indian of Alaska Native	15%
Asian or Pacific Islander	0%

Rural or Urban	
Rural	60%
Urban	17%
Suburban	10%
Tribal	13%

Since the response rate was low for this survey, we illustrate some of the results. For example, when asked, "Which of the following would you describe as *strengths* for the state of Montana," respondents were asked to pick three from a long list of options. Figure 1 demonstrates the three top strengths as natural beauty, tourism and recreation, and farming/agriculture. In fourth place was access to higher education.

Figure 1: Strengths for the State of Montana

Which of the following would you describe as strengths for the State of Montana? Please check all the strengths that apply

21st century skilled workforce	9	22.5%
Access to higher education (e.g., 2- and 4-year universities/colleges	24	60%
Agriculture, farming	29	72.5%
Amenities (e.g., restaurants, shopping	3	7.5%
Business development	3	7.5%
Educated workforce	9	22.5%
Employment opportunities	5	12.5%
Energy development	3	7.5%
Financial resources	1	2.5%
Forestry	15	37.5%
Healthcare	6	15%
Natural beauty	33	82.5%
Political climate	2	5%
Recruiting out-of-state employers and investments	0	0%
Tourism and recreation	30	75%
Transportation	0	0%
Well-paying jobs	1	2.5%
Other	2	5%

In comparison, Figure 2 presents descriptive results on what rural and tribal respondents identified as challenges for the State of Montana. The top three challenges they identified are:

well-paying jobs, employment opportunities, and financial resources (access to capital, tax incentives). Over 80% identified well-paying jobs as the greatest challenge.

Figure 2: Challenges for the State of Montana

Which of the following would you describe as challenges for the state of Montana? Please check all the challenges that apply

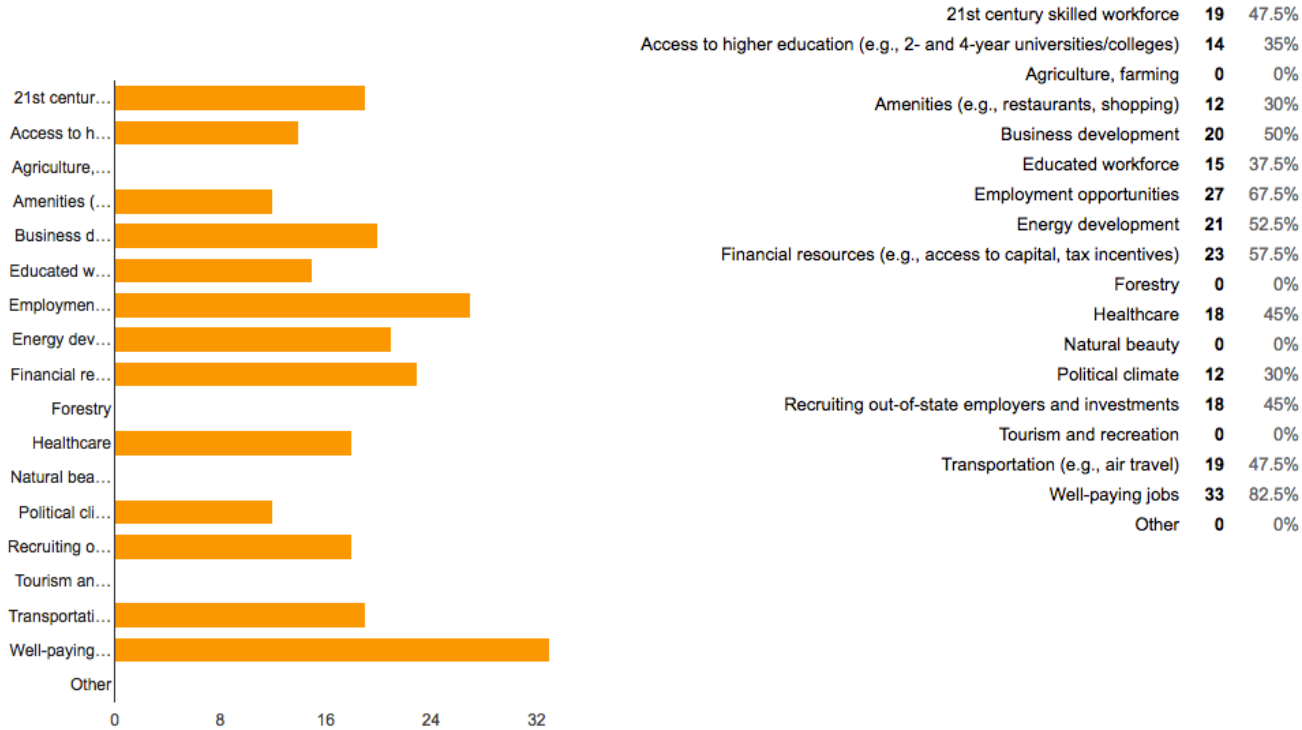| Challenge	Count	Percent
21st century skilled workforce	19	47.5%
Access to higher education (e.g., 2- and 4-year universities/colleges)	14	35%
Agriculture, farming	0	0%
Amenities (e.g., restaurants, shopping)	12	30%
Business development	20	50%
Educated workforce	15	37.5%
Employment opportunities	27	67.5%
Energy development	21	52.5%
Financial resources (e.g., access to capital, tax incentives)	23	57.5%
Forestry	0	0%
Healthcare	18	45%
Natural beauty	0	0%
Political climate	12	30%
Recruiting out-of-state employers and investments	18	45%
Tourism and recreation	0	0%
Transportation (e.g., air travel)	19	47.5%
Well-paying jobs	33	82.5%
Other	0	0%

Table 2 demonstrates what respondents believe should be the state's priorities in the next 5 to 10 years. Respondents were asked to rank a series of questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The top priority for the state from the perspective of our rural and tribal respondents, many of whom work in K-12 education, is to increase funding for K-12 schools. However, respondents would also like to see a focus on providing incentives for college graduates to remain in Montana after graduation, incubating small business, and making improvements to infrastructure.

Table 2: Priorities for the Future

Question	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Become a hub for innovation and technology	0.00%	0.00%	14.63%	46.34%	39.02%
Strengthen relationships between business sector and local/state government	0.00%	2.38%	23.81%	50.00%	23.81%
Increase financial support for Montana University System	7.14%	9.52%	19.05%	28.57%	35.71%
*Increase financial support for K-12 education	0.00%	2.38%	2.38%	14.29%	80.95%
Increase tax incentives for businesses	4.76%	4.76%	33.33%	40.48%	16.67%
Decrease tax incentives for businesses	14.29%	35.71%	42.86%	2.38%	4.76%
*Make improvements in infrastructure	0.00%	0.00%	11.90%	47.62%	40.48%
*Provide incentives for college graduates to remain in MT upon graduation	0.00%	2.38%	7.14%	35.71%	54.76%
Develop trade programs	0.00%	4.76%	23.81%	35.71%	35.71%
Focus on research and economic development	0.00%	9.52%	16.67%	47.62%	26.19%
Increase access to affordable transportation (e.g., airlines, light rail)	2.38%	2.38%	16.67%	45.24%	33.33%
Further a clean and healthy environment	7.14%	2.38%	23.81%	30.95%	35.71%
*Increase access to healthcare	2.38%	0.00%	14.29%	40.48%	42.86%
Increase access to goods and services	2.38%	2.38%	26.19%	54.76%	14.29%
Support and incubate small businesses	0.00%	0.00%	9.52%	57.14%	33.33%

To provide additional data visualization for top priorities for our tribal-rural respondents, Figures 3-6provide illustrations. Figure 3, for example, demonstrates the strong support for K-12 education.

Figure 3: State Priorities (A)

Increase financial support for K-12 education [In your opinion, what actions would you like to see as priorities for the state of Montana in the next 5 to 10 years? Please use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:]

strongly disagree	0	0%
disagree	1	2.5%
neutral	0	0%
agree	6	15%
strongly agree	33	82.5%

Figure 4 notes the importance for providing incentives for graduates to stay in Montana upon graudation.

Figure 4: State Priorities (B)

Provide incentives for college graduates to remain in MT upon graduation [In your opinion, what actions would you like to see as priorities for the state of Montana in the next 5 to 10 years? Please use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:]
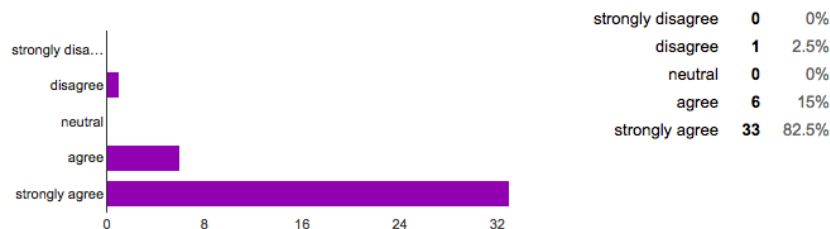
strongly disagree	0	0%
disagree	1	2.5%
neutral	3	7.5%
agree	14	35%
strongly agree	22	55%
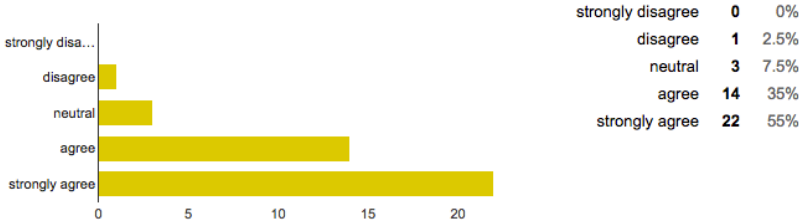
Figure 5 additionally provides support for small businesses as a priority for the future of Montana.

Figure 5: State Priorities (C)

Support and incubate small business [In your opinion, what actions would you like to see as priorities for the state of Montana in the next 5 to 10 years? Please use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:]

strongly disagree	0	0%
disagree	0	0%
neutral	4	10.3%
agree	23	59%
strongly agree	12	30.8%

Figure 6 echoees sentiments from the business community by our tribal-rural communiities to make improvements for the Montana infrastrcuture.

Figure 6: State Priorities (D)

Make improvements in infrastructure [In your opinion, what actions would you like to see as priorities for the state of Montana in the next 5 to 10 years? Please use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:]
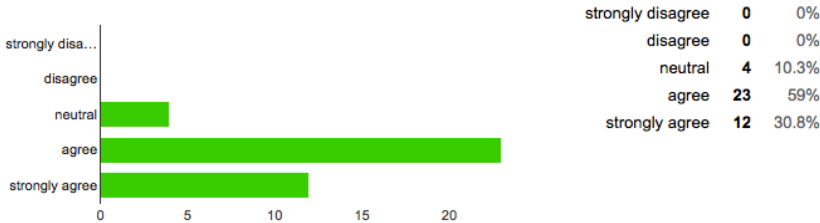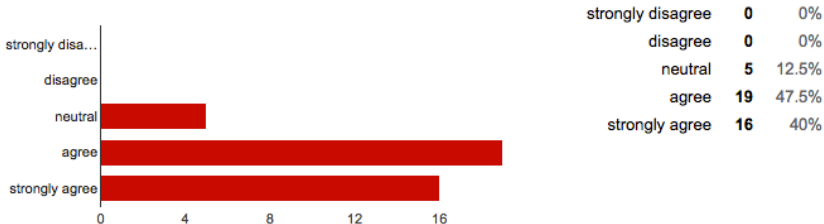
strongly disagree	0	0%
disagree	0	0%
neutral	5	12.5%
agree	19	47.5%
strongly agree	16	40%

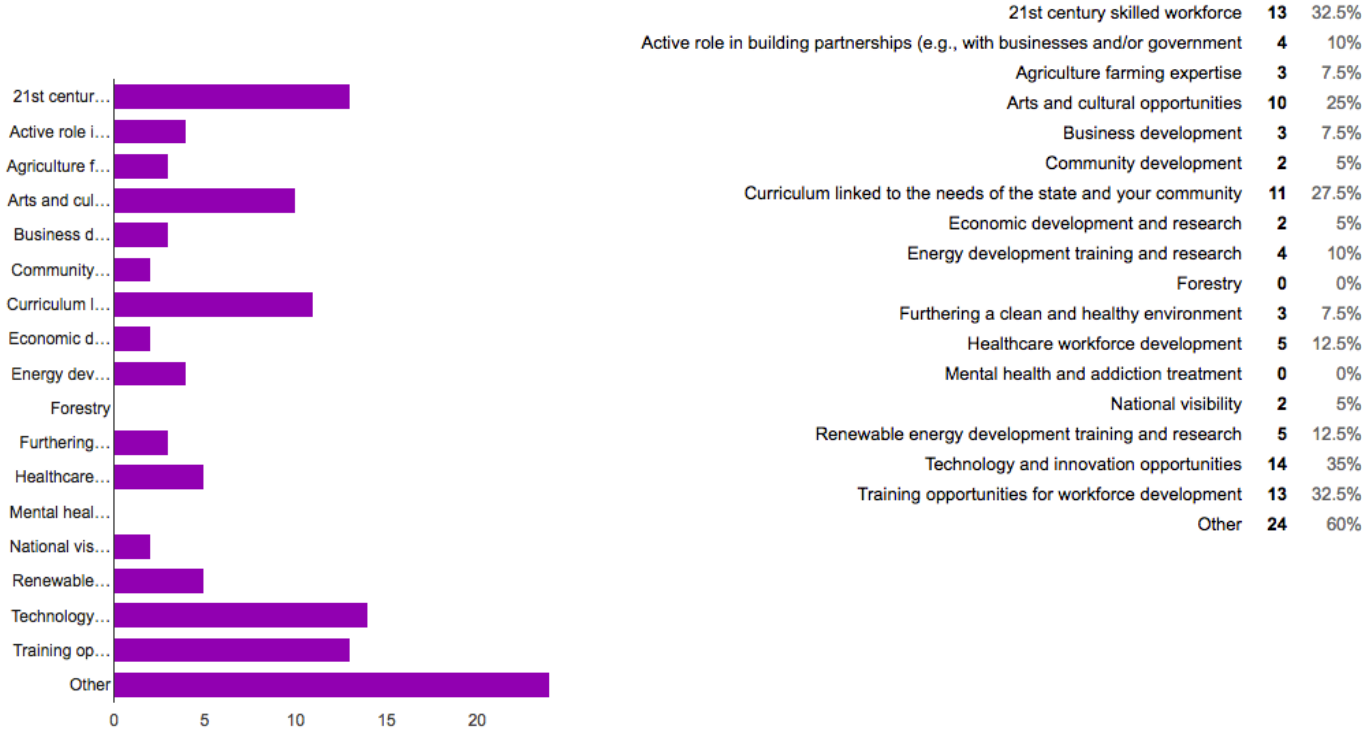*Future Priorities*
In addition to what respondents reported as their preferences for the future of the state, rural and tribal leaders provided important input about UM. In particular, the Figure 7 illustrates the most important services respondents believe UM should provide for the region and state: training opportunities for an educated workforce, a 21st century skilled workforce, technology and

innovation opportunities, curriculum linked to state and community needs, and arts and cultural opportunities.

Figure 7: Services UM Should Provide

From the list below, what do you think are the most important services the University of Montana should provide for the region or state?

Service	Count	Percent
21st century skilled workforce	13	32.5%
Active role in building partnerships (e.g., with businesses and/or government	4	10%
Agriculture farming expertise	3	7.5%
Arts and cultural opportunities	10	25%
Business development	3	7.5%
Community development	2	5%
Curriculum linked to the needs of the state and your community	11	27.5%
Economic development and research	2	5%
Energy development training and research	4	10%
Forestry	0	0%
Furthering a clean and healthy environment	3	7.5%
Healthcare workforce development	5	12.5%
Mental health and addiction treatment	0	0%
National visibility	2	5%
Renewable energy development training and research	5	12.5%
Technology and innovation opportunities	14	35%
Training opportunities for workforce development	13	32.5%
Other	24	60%

Rural and tribal resondents also want UM to provide college students with important skills and comptenencies . These items, as listed in Figure 8, clearly suggest that UM students should have strong skills in written and oral communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork.

Figure 8: Skills and Compentencies for College Graduates

From the list below, what are the most important skills and competencies you are looking for from a college graduate?

Skill	Count	Percent
Civic engagement	3	7.5%
Computational skills	2	5%
Critical thinking	18	45%
Entrepreneurial skills	1	2.5%
Ethical reasoning	11	27.5%
Foreign language proficiency	0	0%
Information skills	0	0%
Inquiry and analysis	11	27.5%
Intercultural competence	2	5%
Networking capability	2	5%
Problem solving	24	60%
Quantitative expertise	1	2.5%
Social media and marketing expertise	0	0%
Teamwork	16	40%
Written and oral communication	29	72.5%
Other	0	0%