THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

Together Rhode Island Analysis

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Rhode Island Foundation
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Faculty:
Skye Leedahl
Melanie Brasher
Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz

Student Researchers:
Travis Doumaney
Kristin Sodhi

URI Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy.

About

The Rhode Island Foundation

Founded in 1916, the Rhode Island Foundation is the state's community foundation. The mission of the Rhode Island Foundation is to be a proactive community and philanthropic leader dedicated to meeting the needs of the people of Rhode Island. The Rhode Island Foundation is the largest funder of Rhode Island's nonprofit sector. In addition, the Foundation works to achieve its goals by: evaluating community issues and making strategic grants, promoting and building effective philanthropy, stewarding permanent endowments and honoring donor intent and current needs, building the strengths and capacity of the nonprofit sector, providing leadership to and a forum for civil dialogue on important issues, and growing their endowments through disciplined and quality investments.

Together RI

The Rhode Island Foundation launched Together RI in March 2018. It was a series of 20 community events at locations throughout Rhode Island that took place between March 22nd and May 5th, 2018. The events were held at schools, community centers and other locally known places. The purpose of these events was to gather and share information about challenges, successes, and solutions within the state. Additionally, the Rhode Island Foundation wanted to hear from, and encourage dialogue between, all Rhode Islanders and hoped to encourage civic participation. The Foundation felt it was important to create a space for listening, reconnecting, and inspiring civil dialogue at a time when people are more "connected" via social media, yet more disconnected from each other personally, than ever. The events were open to the public and community members were encouraged to attend. Family-style complimentary meals were provided, and participants were encouraged to sit at a table to share their ideas and opinions about various topics, face-to-face with each other. The Rhode Island Foundation hired independent facilitators to moderate and guide the discussions. The Foundation hoped that participants would meet someone new and leave knowing that their voice was heard. Afterwards, University of Rhode Island researchers helped to synthesize the results.

The Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy

The Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy (SSIREP) at the University of Rhode Island is a campus-wide consortium that brings together strong campus units including political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, English, languages, computer science and statistics, history, gender and women's studies, nursing, pharmacy, Africana studies, environmental and natural resource economics, marine affairs, education, business, human development, engineering, communications, and labor studies. The SSIREP fosters interdisciplinary programs in scholarly research, teaching and learning, and outreach to students, faculty, business, government, and the community. In addition, SSIREP's affiliated faculty conduct program and policy evaluations for Rhode Island's government and nonprofit agencies. For more information, visit: https://web.uri.edu/ssirep/

Faculty Authors

Skye Leedahl is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Human Development & Family Studies and Political Science at the University of Rhode Island. She received a Ph.D. from the University of Kansas in 2013. Her research is focused on social integration and environments for older adults, and she teaches courses on physical environments for older adults, policy issues in health and aging, research methods, and public program evaluation. She has published in high-quality gerontology journals, and has received awards for her research, most recently from the University of Rhode Island Council for Research.

Melanie Brasher is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Sociology & Anthropology and Human Development & Family Studies at the University of Rhode Island. She received a Ph.D. in Sociology from Duke University in 2013. Her research is focused on intergenerational relations, social determinants of health, and population aging. She teaches courses on aging and life the course, family, health, and research methods. Much of her research has focused on the well-being of older adults in China, and she continues to collaborate on research with scholars at the China CDC in Beijing.

Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz is the director of the Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy and an Associate Professor at the University of Rhode Island. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2009. Her research and teaching interests are in workforce, education, and housing policy, economic inequality, and American politics. Her work has been funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Russell Sage Foundation, and her scholarly manuscripts have appeared in some of the top political science journals.

Student Authors

Travis Doumaney is an alum of The School for International Training's International Honors Program, where he studied comparative Human Rights challenges and advocacy. He is now studying Political Science and Computer Science at the University of Rhode Island.

Kristin Sodhi is a graduate student in the International Relations program at the University of Rhode Island.

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Executive Summary

In 2018 the Rhode Island Foundation held 20 community events at locations throughout the state between March 22nd and May 5th. The initiative was named "Together RI." The purpose of these events was to gather and share information about challenges, successes, and solutions within the state. Community members were invited to attend the events, where complimentary meals were provided, and participants were encouraged to sit at a table to share their ideas and opinions about the various topics. The Rhode Island Foundation helped to moderate the discussions. Nearly 1,300 people participated in the events. Participants were asked to fill out a form regarding what they discussed at their table and a survey about the event. The data analysis of the discussion form and survey results was performed by the University of Rhode Island's Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy (SSIREP) using manual and automated analysis techniques.

Together RI at a Glance:

- The youngest Together RI participant was three and a half months old, the eldest was a 92-year-old Holocaust survivor.
- Nearly 1,000 participants completed surveys asking them about their experience.
- Just under 20 percent were under 45 years old; about 35 percent were 65 or older.
- Nearly 65 percent of survey respondents were women and nearly 35 percent were men.
- More than 72 percent of survey respondents said they better understand the issues their community faces.
- Nearly 75 percent said they are now more likely to get involved in community issues.
- Of survey respondents, 60 percent rated the tone of the conversation at their table as "friendly," and 40 percent as "thoughtful."
- Ninety-nine percent of survey respondents reported meeting someone new.
- Public education, the size of the state, natural resources and open spaces, housing, public transportation, and diversity were among the topics that came up most frequently.

Survey Highlights:

- When asked about the most encouraging topics discussed, many respondents wrote in answers that were about opportunities in general or were comments about the enjoyable nature of the conversation itself, rather than naming a substantive topic such as education.
- There were interesting differences by region in the most common challenging topics discussed. The Providence and East Bay & Aquidneck regions mentioned education, while West Bay and South County mentioned government/taxes, and Northern RI mentioned community most often.
- When asked about the tone of the conversations, over 60% of respondents answered friendly, and over 40% answered thoughtful (respondents could choose more than one answer). This was similar by region, gender, race, age, and income.
- Nearly all participants met someone new, and the majority agreed that they had a better understanding of and were more likely to get involved in community issues after participating in the Together RI events.

- In terms of statewide demographics of participants, 60% were female, 78% were White, 60% were age 55 or older, and 48% were high-income earners (household income $75k or more). Much of the variation in race and income came from participants from the Providence region.
- The full survey is included in Appendix C

Discussion Form Highlights:

- Many Together Rhode Island participants noted that Rhode Island's greatest strength and what they were most proud of was related to natural resources. People thought that the coastal environment, the beauty of the state, and the focus on green energy and environmentally-friendly policies were major strengths for Rhode Island.
- For the biggest opportunity, many participants saw great potential for Rhode Island related to business and the economy. Participants believed that farms, food, restaurants, and tourism, particularly related to the ocean, were potential opportunities for Rhode Island's business and economic ventures.
- For challenges in Rhode Island, participants wrote about many different social issues that impact individuals and family including issues related to employment, drug and alcohol use, inequality, aging, and homelessness.
- Rhode Island's strong sense of community and small size came up repeatedly by Together Rhode Island participants as a strength and opportunity for the state. People found Rhode Islanders to be interconnected and willing to help one another, and they also valued how Rhode Island's small size helps to contribute to collaboration across the state and with other states.
- Together Rhode Island participants believed that the public education system and issues related to government and politics were challenges faced by Rhode Islanders. Education was also an issue that many participants were willing to spend time working to improve.
- The full discussion questions are included in Appendix C.

Section 1. Together RI Survey Analysis

Section Authors:

Melanie S. Brasher, PhD

Travis Doumaney

1.1. Introduction

This report describes the individual survey data collected from the Together RI events. First, we present information on the topics of conversations, the tone of conversations, and interesting trends by region, gender, race, age, and income. We also report on whether respondents met someone new, and if they better understand, or are likely to get involved with community issues. We also describe how participants heard about the Together RI events. Last, we summarize the demographic composition of the respondents by gender, race, age, income, and region.

At the Together RI events throughout the state, individual attendees were invited to fill out an anonymous survey. Of the 1,253 attendees, 962 filled out surveys. The surveys included a variety of questions, including topics discussed, tone of the conversation, understanding of issues facing their community, and demographic information. The full survey is included in Appendix C.

1.2. Demographic Information

Table 1.1 provides demographic information for all respondents. This includes gender, race, age group, and income. There were more female than male participants. As mentioned earlier, the majority of respondents were white (78%). The most frequently reported age was 65 and over. The most common income category reported was over $100K, but 16.4% of survey-takers did not answer the income question.

Table 1.1: Demographic Information, statewide

		Entire State (N=962)			Entire State (N=962)
Gender	Female	60.81%	**Age group**	<18	1.04%
	Male	32.85%		18 - 29	4.57%
	Prefer not to respond	6.34%		30- 44	11.85%
				45 - 54	15.49%
Race	White	78.17%		55 - 64	25.47%
	Black	3.12%		65 or over	35.34%
	Asian	1.04%		Prefer not to respond	6.23%
	Hispanic/Latino	4.26%	**Income**	Less than $30K	9.43%
	Native American	0.21%		$30 - 49K	10.66%
	multiracial	2.08%		$50 - 74K	14.81%
	other	2.08%		$75 - 99K	17.28%
				Over $100K	31.43%
	Prefer not to respond	9.04%		Prefer not to respond	16.39%

Demographic information by region can be seen in table 1.2. Across regions, there were similarly more female than male participants. The Providence region had the lowest percentage of White respondents (57.53%) compared to 79% or more in the other regions. The largest non-White race reported was Hispanic/Latino, comprising 17.74% of respondents in the Providence area. For all regions the most frequent age group reported was 65 or over. This ranged from 29.48% of respondents in Providence area to 44.29% of respondents in East Bay & Aquidneck. Overall, the Providence area had younger respondents with 13.29% ages 18-29, compared with only 1.9% in East Bay & Aquidneck. The distribution of income groups was largely similar for the regions of Northern RI, East Bay & Aquidneck, and West Bay. The Providence area had the highest proportion reporting the lowest income group, 19.3% reported household incomes of less than $30k. In addition, the Providence area had the lowest proportion reporting incomes of over $100k (21.64%). South County had the highest percentage in the highest-income group, 40.57% of respondents. Across regions, 13-20 % of respondents preferred not to answer the income question.

Table 1.2: Demographic Information, by Region

		Providence area (N=186)	Northern RI (N=149)	East Bay & Aquidneck (N=219)	West Bay (N=221)	South County (N=187)
Gender	Female	60.34	57.34	66.51	66.82	63.69
	Male	37.93	39.86	30.7	31.28	34.08
	Prefer not to respond	1.72	2.8	2.79	1.9	2.23
Race	White	57.53	79.19	84.93	84.62	82.35
	Black	6.45	2.68	3.65	1.81	1.07
	Asian	1.61	2.01	0.46	0.9	0.53
	Hispanic/Latino	17.74	4.03	0.00	0.9	0.00
	Native American	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.45	0.53
	multiracial	2.69	1.34	3.2	1.36	1.6
	other	4.84	0.67	1.37	1.36	2.14
	no answer	9.14	10.07	6.39	8.6	11.76
Age group	<18	0.00	2.74	0.95	0.95	1.12
	18 - 29	13.29	2.74	1.9	3.32	3.37
	30- 44	16.76	12.33	11.43	12.32	9.55
	45 - 54	19.65	22.6	11.9	15.17	14.04
	55 - 64	18.5	24.66	28.1	29.86	30.9
	65 or over	29.48	34.25	44.29	36.02	39.33
	Prefer not to respond	2.31	0.68	1.43	2.37	1.69
Income	Less than $30K	19.3	8.15	4.85	6.86	9.14
	$30 - 49K	14.62	8.15	11.17	11.76	6.86
	$50 - 74K	19.3	15.56	12.62	15.2	12
	$75 - 99K	12.28	20.74	18.93	17.65	17.14
	Over $100K	21.64	30.37	34.95	28.92	40.57
	Prefer not to respond	12.87	17.04	17.48	19.61	14.29

Table 1.3 reports the number of people who took the survey by region and town. The percentage is the number of respondents from that town/region divided by all respondents (not all attendees). The highest percentage of respondents are from the East Bay and Aquidneck regions (22.77%), and the lowest from Northern RI (15.49%). The most respondents at a single event was for Providence, April 3 - 78 survey-takers.

Table 1.3: Surveys from attendees by region and town.

		N	% of total survey-takers
Providence area	Providence, April 3	78	8.11%
	Pawtucket/Central Falls, April 14	39	4.05%
	Providence, May 5	69	7.17%
Total		*186*	*19.33%*
Northern RI	Woonsocket, March 22	46	4.78%
	Foster/Glocester, March 29	19	1.98%
	Cumberland/Lincoln, April 24	54	5.61%
	North Providence/Smithfield, May 3	30	3.12%
Total		*149*	*15.49%*
East Bay & Aquidneck	Newport/Middletown, March 28	63	6.55%
	Barrington/Bristol/Warren, April 4	51	5.30%
	Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth, April 25	37	3.85%
	East Providence, April 26	68	7.07%
Total		*219*	*22.77%*
West Bay	Warwick, April 23	42	4.37%
	Coventry/West Warwick, April 11	24	2.49%
	Scituate/Johnston, April 12	22	2.29%
	Cranston, April 18	57	5.93%
	East Greenwich/Warwick, May 1	76	7.90%
Total		*179*	*18.61%*
South County	Westerly, March 27	35	3.64%
	Chariho, April 5	39	4.05%
	South Kingstown, April 10	66	6.86%
	Exeter/North Kingstown, April 17	47	4.89%
Total		*187*	*19.44%*

1.3. Encouraging and Challenging Topics Discussed

Participants were asked open-ended questions about the topics discussed at their tables. Question 1 asked about what was the most encouraging topic discussed and question 2 asked about what was the most challenging topic discussed. Because the participants wrote in their

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answers (open-ended question) rather than choosing from a list of options (close-ended question), we read through their answers and coded them into 11 different categories for question 1 (encouraging topic) and 16 different categories for question 2 (challenging topic).

Of the 962 individuals who filled out a survey, 867 answered question 1 (encouraging topic) and 861 answered question 2 (challenging topic). Several respondents provided more than one topic, so in tables 1.5 and 1.6 the topics add up to more than 100%. For more details on how the answers were coded into topics, see Appendix B: Survey Analysis Research Methodology. The topics are slightly different for questions 1 and 2. In examining topics cross-tabulated with demographic characteristics, only the first topic mentioned per respondent is examined.

Table 1.4 : Attendance Numbers and Survey Forms Filled Out

	Attended the Event	Survey Forms Filled Out
Providence Area		
Providence 1	120	78
Providence 2	105	69
Pawtucket/Central Falls	60	39
Northern Rhode Island		
Woonsocket	78	46
Cumberland/Lincoln	65	54
North Providence/Smithfield	40	30
Foster/Glocester	22	19
East Bay & Aquidneck Island		
East Providence	77	68
Newport/Middletown	83	63
Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth	41	37
Barrington/Bristol/Warren	64	51
West Bay		
Warwick	60	42
East Greenwich/Warwick	88	76
Cranston	66	57
Scituate/Johnston	26	22
Coventry/West Warwick	29	24
South County		
Chariho	46	39
Westerly	48	35
South Kingstown	81	66
North Kingstown/Exeter	54	47
Total	1,253	962

Table 1.5: Most encouraging topics discussed, statewide

	N	%
Opportunities (general)	237	27.34%
Community	191	22.03%
Discussion	153	17.65%
Challenges (misc.)	65	7.50%
Education	59	6.81%
Location/size	59	6.81%
Natural-resources	54	6.23%
Diversity	49	5.65%
Economy	34	3.92%
Transportation	19	2.19%
Other	13	1.50%

Notes: Percents add up to more than 100 because some participants named more than one topic. Substantive topics are highlighted in blue. Only substantive topics are reported in the following pages.

As shown in table 1.5, the five most common topics were opportunities (general), community, discussion, challenges (miscellaneous), and education. The "opportunities, general" category refers to answers that were rather vague and talked about general strengths (see appendix B for details). Although the question asked about encouraging topics, several people identified challenges instead. "Discussion" refers to people who wrote about the conversation itself - more of a reflection on the event, rather than identifying a specific topic. The remainder of the report will leave out these general topics and focus on the substantive topics, which are highlighted in blue in the table.

The top five substantive topics statewide were: community, education, location/size, natural resources, and diversity. "Community" is a broad category that includes a positive sense of community, working with others, collaborating, and civic engagement. "Natural resources" includes anything having to do with the environment, the ocean, or the built environment.

1.6: Most challenging topics discussed, statewide

	N	%
Government/taxes	161	18.70%
Education	108	12.54%
Community	98	11.38%
Infrastructure/Transportation	86	9.99%
Inequality	81	9.41%
Discussion	81	9.41%
Economy	72	8.36%
Challenges (general)	62	7.20%
Services/Healthcare	59	6.85%
Affordable Housing	54	6.27%
Opportunities (general)	34	3.95%
Diversity	26	3.02%
Other	21	2.44%
Natural Resources	12	1.39%
Crime	10	1.16%
Brain Drain	7	0.81%

Notes: Percents add up to more than 100 because some participants named more than one topic. Substantive topics are highlighted in blue. Only substantive topics are reported in the following pages.

Table 1.6 shows how respondents answered the question: What do you believe was the most challenging topic discussed at your table? Highlighted in blue are the substantive categories. The top five challenging topics identified overall in the state were government/taxes, education, community, infrastructure/transportation, and inequality. In the remainder of the report, only the substantive topics are analyzed. For question 2, "community" refers to people mentioning the challenge of how to get people involved with community life or how to engage with certain age groups. This is different than its meaning for question 1 – encouraging topics.

Table 1.7: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by region

	Providence area	Northern RI	East Bay & Aquidneck	West Bay	South County
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 45.45%	Community 53.42%	Community 35.87%	Community 32.65%	Community 40.22%
	Diversity 18.18%	Education 15.07%	Size/Location 19.57%	Size/Location 17.35%	Natural Resources 14.13%
	Education 12.50%	Size/Location 12.33%	Education 14.13%	Natural Resources 12.24%	Size/Location 11.96%
	Size/Location 11.36%	Diversity 8.22%	Natural Resources 13.04%	Economy 11.22%	Education 10.87%
	Natural Resources 6.82%	Natural Resources 6.85%	Economy 7.61%	Diversity 10.20%	Diversity 9.78%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Education 19.01%	Community 31.31%	Education 23.72%	Government 25.00%	Government 29.92%
	Inequality 17.36%	Government 26.26%	Government 17.95%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 14.29%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 14.17%
	Community 10.74%	Inequality 10.10%	Community 10.26%	Community 11.31%	Community 12.60%
	Government 10.74%	Economy 8.08%	Economy 10.26%	Services/ Healthcare 11.31%	Economy 11.02%
	Affordable Housing 9.09%	Education 7.07%	Inequality 8.97%	Education 10.71%	Affordable Housing 9.45%

Notes: for ease of interpretation, the same topics are filled in with matching colors for table 3 only. Percentages are reported within region. For Q2, the government topic also includes taxes.

Table 1.7 shows the five most common substantive topics -- both encouraging and challenging-- by region. For encouraging topics, community was the topic that came up most frequently across all regions. For more information on encouraging and challenging topics discussed in specific towns, see Appendix A. Community was mentioned by 32-53 percent of respondents across regions. Each region also had "size/location" and "natural resources" as a frequently occurring topic. The remaining topics varied by region and included diversity, education, and economy.

For challenging topics identified, there was more variation. All five regions had government/taxes and community in their top five most frequently mentioned topics. For four of the five regions, education also came up frequently as a challenging topic. Inequality was the second most commonly mentioned challenging topic category for the Providence Area, and number three and number five for Northern RI and East Bay, respectively. It was not in the top five for West Bay or South County. Both respondents from West Bay and South County mentioned transportation/infrastructure as a challenging topic. Both the Providence Area and South County had affordable housing as a top five most mentioned challenging topic. Only West Bay had services/healthcare as a top five topic (#4).

It is interesting to note that community is viewed as both an encouraging and a challenging topic by participants in Together RI. For 16% of respondents, it was viewed as both an encouraging and challenging topic (i.e. they said community for both questions 1 and 2).

Next, we examine the encouraging and challenging topics mentioned by key demographics including gender, race, age, and income categories. (see table 1.1 for the demographic breakdown for the state).

Table 1.8: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by gender

	Male	Female
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 40.67%	Community 41.18%
	Diversity 13.33%	Size/Location 16.54%
	Education 13.33%	Natural resources 12.13%
	Size/Location 13.33%	Education 11.40%
	Economy 9.33%	Diversity 8.46%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Government/Taxes 26.11%	Government/Taxes 19.01%
	Community 19.47%	Education 15.06%
	Education 11.95%	Community 11.60%
	Inequality 9.29%	Transportation/Infrastructure 11.60%
	Services/Healthcare 7.52%	Economy 10.86%

Notes: Percentages within gender reported

For encouraging topics, men and women were similar in that their top four most common topics mentioned were community, diversity, education, and size/location (see table 1.8). By contrast, 12.13% of female respondents mentioned natural resources and 9.33% of male respondents mentioned economy. For challenging topics, the most common topic mentioned for both genders was government/taxes, followed by community and education for men, and the reverse for women (education the second most common). Other challenging topics frequently mentioned for men were inequality and services/healthcare, but transportation/infrastructure and economy for women.

Table 1.9: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by race

	Non-White	White
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community	Community
	36.73%	41.24%
	Education	Size/Location
	22.45%	16.38%
	Diversity	Natural Resources
	16.33%	11.02%
	Economy	Education
	12.24%	10.73%
	Size/Location	Diversity
	8.16%	9.60%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Government/Taxes	Government/Taxes
	21.92%	20.60%
	Education	Community
	19.18%	14.79%
	Inequality	Education
	13.70%	13.86%
	Community	Transportation/Infrastructure
	12.33%	11.42%
	Economy	Economy
	10.96%	9.36%

Notes: Percentages within racial group reported

In examining topics mentioned by race, we simplified the analysis by comparing whites and non-Whites. Seventy-eight percent of respondents identify as White. (see table 1.1 for the demographic breakdown for the state). As seen in table 1.9, the most common encouraging topics identified are similar by racial category. For challenging topics, however, inequality is one of the top five topics for non-whites (13.7% of respondents) but not frequently mentioned for white respondents. For whites, transportation and infrastructure was one of the top five challenging topics identified, for 11.42 % of respondents.

Table 1.10: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by age group

	Under age 55	55+
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 41.22%	Community 40.41%
	Size/Location 16.03%	Size/Location 14.73%
	Education 12.21%	Education 12.33%
	Diversity 10.69%	Natural Resources 10.96%
	Natural Resources 9.16%	Diversity 10.27%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Government 19.80%	Government 23.09%
	Inequality 15.35%	Community 14.55%
	Education 15.35%	Education 13.63%
	Community 13.86%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 11.55%
	Economy 9.90%	Economy 8.78%

Percentages within age group reported

In table 1.10, we broke down the most common topics identified by two age groups - above and below age 55. About 65% of respondents are age 55 or older. Topics identified are largely similar by age group for question 1 - encouraging topic. For challenging topics identified, they are largely the same except that younger people (under 55) mention inequality more often, 15.35 percent of respondents. Those over age 55, however, are more likely to highlight transportation/ infrastructure as a challenging topic (11.55 percent of respondents).

Table 1.11: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by income group

	Lower income	Middle income	Higher income
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 43.04%	Community 31.25%	Community 44.78%
	Size/Location 16.46%	Size/Location 15.63%	Size/Location 14.43%
	Education 12.66%	Education 14.06%	Education 12.94%
	Diversity 8.86%	Diversity 12.50%	Natural Resources 9.45%
	Natural Resources 8.86%	Natural Resources 10.94%	Diversity 7.96%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Education 20.34%	Government/Taxes 23.16%	Government/Taxes 23.62%
	Government/Taxes 15.25%	Community 14.74%	Community 15.86%
	Inequality 14.41%	Education 14.74%	Education 12.30%
	Economy 9.32%	Services/Healthcare 10.53%	Economy 11.00%
	Community 8.47%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 9.47%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 10.36%

Notes: We defined those making under $49k to be lower income, middle income to be $50-74k, and above $75k to be higher income. Those who did not answer the question (about 22% of respondents) are not included.

Last, we examine topics by income groups. Here we split the five original income groups into three categories. According to the US Census Bureau, median income in Rhode Island in 2016 was $58,000. Therefore, we defined those making under $49k to be lower income, middle income to be $50-74k, and above $75k to be higher income. Those who did not answer the question (about 22% of respondents) are not included in table 1.11.

The most common encouraging topics identified are very similar across income groups. For challenging topics, however, inequality is only a frequently mentioned topic for the low-income group. In addition, about ten percent of the middle-income group mentioned services/healthcare as a challenging topic.

1.4. Tone of the Conversation

The following paragraphs analyze data for survey question 3: In general, how would you describe the overall tone of the conversation? Respondents could choose from the following options: friendly, direct, serious, tense, thoughtful, and other. More than a quarter of the respondents (26.8%) chose more than one answer (see table 1.12).

For the state overall, the most common answer was friendly (61.4%) followed by thoughtful (42.7%), direct (16.7%), and serious (12.9%). A small percentage of people said "tense" (1.5% or 14 people).

Table 1.12: Tone of conversation, statewide

	%
Friendly	61.43%
Thoughtful	42.72%
Direct	16.74%
Serious	12.89%
Tense	1.46%
Other	5.41%
No response	1.77%

Notes: Percentages add up to more than 100 because 258 people (26.8%) chose more than 1 answer.

In comparing the tone of the conversation by region, the results are largely similar. The most common answer was friendly, followed by thoughtful. As many as 64.4% of people in Northern RI reported the conversation as friendly, compared to only 57.2% of people in South County. In some regions more people described the conversation as serious than direct. Very few people said the conversation was tense, but this ranged from no people in West Bay to 4.8% of people in the Providence area (see table 1.13). For more information on encouraging and challenging topics discussed in specific towns, see Appendix A.

Table 1.13: Tone of conversation, by region

	Providence area	Northern RI	East Bay & Aquidneck	West Bay	South County
Friendly	64.0%	64.4%	60.7%	61.5%	57.2%
Thoughtful	34.9%	45.0%	51.1%	42.1%	39.6%
Direct	23.7%	12.1%	16.0%	17.2%	13.9%
Serious	13.4%	13.4%	11.9%	11.3%	15.0%
Tense	4.8%	1.3%	0.9%	0.0%	0.5%
Other	6.5%	2.7%	5.0%	4.1%	8.6%

Notes: Percentages add up to more than 100 because some people chose more than 1 answer.

We also compared tone of the conversation by gender. Among women, a higher proportion reported the conversation was friendly (65%) than 57% among men (see table 1.14). Among men, 15% reported the conversation as serious, compared to 11% among women. For the other adjectives, the answers were largely the same by gender.

Table 1.14: Tone of conversation, by gender

	Female	Male
Friendly	64.79%	56.65%
Thoughtful	43.42%	41.77%
Direct	16.58%	16.77%
Serious	10.94%	15.19%
Tense	1.36%	1.58%
Other	6.32%	3.48%

Notes: Percentages add up to more than 100 because some people chose more than 1 answer.

We also examined tone of the conversation by race, but there were no significant differences to note. In comparing tone of the conversation by age (see table 1.15), we found older people were more likely to report the conversation was direct (19%) than younger people (13%). Older people were also more likely to describe the tone as serious (15% vs. 9%).

Table 1.15: Tone of conversation, by age group

	Under 55	55 +
Friendly	62.15%	61.03%
Thoughtful	39.75%	44.96%
Direct	12.93%	19.32%
Serious	8.83%	14.53%
Tense	2.21%	0.85%
Other	5.05%	5.13%

Notes: Percentages add up to more than 100 because some people chose more than 1 answer.

In comparing tone by income, we found that 21% of lower income people reported the tone was direct, compared to 15% of higher income groups (see table 1.16). In addition, among lower income groups, a higher percentage (3.9%) reported the conversation being tense. This corresponds with the higher percentage of people who responded that the conversation was tense in the Providence area (see table 1.13 above.) This is because the Providence area has a higher percentage of individuals reporting lower income (see table 1.2).

Table 1.16: Tone of conversation, by income group

	Lower income	Middle income	Higher income
Friendly	65.92%	65.15%	59.68%
Thoughtful	42.46%	35.61%	45.16%
Direct	21.23%	14.39%	15.44%
Serious	13.97%	11.36%	11.06%
Tense	3.91%	0.76%	0.69%
Other	4.47%	2.27%	5.76%

Notes: We defined those making under $49k to be lower income, middle income to be $50-74k, and above $75k to be higher income. Those who did not answer the question (about 22% of respondents) are not included. Percentages add up to more than 100 because some people chose more than 1 answer.

1.5. Community Engagement

The survey also contained a question asking, "Did you meet someone new at your table?" The vast majority of respondents, both statewide, and by region, said "yes" (see table 1.17 & 1.18).

Table 1.17: Met someone new, statewide

Yes	97.82%
No	1.14%
No response	1.04%

Table 1.18: Met someone new, by Region

	Providence area	Northern RI	East Bay & Aquidneck	West Bay	South County
Yes	99.46%	95.27%	99.54%	100%	98.92%
No	0.54%	4.73%	0.46%	0%	1.08%

Together RI participants were also asked about their understanding of issues (Q6) and likelihood of getting involved with conversations or activities pertaining to community issues (Q7) after participating in the day's conversations. As seen in table 1.19, regarding understanding of issues, 72% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, 22% were neutral, and less than 4% disagreed (35 individuals). Responses were largely similar by region (table 1.20).

Table 1.19: Understanding of issues facing my community, Statewide

Strongly agree	22.87%
Agree	49.58%
Neither agree nor disagree	21.52%
Disagree	3.22%
Strongly disagree	0.42%
No response	2.39%

Table 1.20: Understanding of issues facing my community, by region

	Providence Area	Northern RI	East Bay & Aquidneck	West Bay	South County
Strongly agree	26.88%	26.17%	18.72%	24.89%	18.72%
Agree	45.70%	49.66%	52.51%	45.25%	55.08%
Neither agree nor disagree	21.51%	20.13%	23.74%	22.17%	19.25%
Disagree	2.15%	2.68%	3.20%	3.62%	4.28%
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.67%	0.00%	0.90%	0.53%
No response	3.76%	0.67%	1.83%	3.17%	2.14%

Tables 1.21 and 1.22 show the level of agreement with the statement: As a result of today's conversations, I am more likely to get involved with conversations and/or activities related to community issues. Once again, overall agreement is high, and there is not much variation by region.

Table 1.21: More likely to get involved with community issues, statewide

Strongly agree	29.94%
Agree	45.01%
Neither agree nor disagree	17.26%
Disagree	1.66%
Strongly disagree	0.42%
No response	5.72%

Table 1.22: More likely to get involved with community issues, by region

	Providence area	Northern RI	East Bay & Aquidneck	West Bay	South County
Strongly agree	37.10%	36.91%	25.11%	30.77%	21.93%
Agree	40.32%	38.26%	49.32%	46.15%	48.66%
Neither agree nor disagree	13.44%	19.46%	16.89%	18.10%	18.72%
Disagree	0.54%	1.34%	2.74%	0.90%	2.67%
Strongly disagree	0.54%	0.00%	0.00%	0.90%	0.53%
No response	8.06%	4.03%	5.94%	3.17%	7.49%

1.6. How Participants Heard About the Event

Participants were asked how they heard about the event, choosing from a list of options. As seen in table 1.23, the percentages add up to more than 100 because some respondents chose more than one answer. The most common answer was News Media or Advertisement. For those that chose "community group or nonprofit organization," they were also asked to write in the specific organization. Similarly, for choosing "other" respondents were asked to write a specific answer. Table 1.24 shows the list of community groups and nonprofit organizations mentioned, for those that found out about the event through a community group. Table 1.25 provides a partial list of "other" responses. This included people who identified that they heard about the event through the RI Foundation, but not through RIF Facebook or Twitter page, but rather email or newsletter. Some people did not choose answer 1 - news story or advertisement- but instead chose "other" in order to name a specific newspaper.

Table 1.23: How respondent heard about Together RI, Statewide

News Media or Advertisement	29.31%
Rhode Island Foundation's Facebook or Twitter page	24.01%
Someone told me about it	24.22%
From a community group or nonprofit organization	15.38%
Other social media	12.37%
Other	4.47%
No response	4.89%

Notes: Percentages add up to more than 100 because some respondents chose more than one answer.

Table 1.24: Community groups and nonprofit organizations named, Statewide

A Community Together (S.K. And Narr.)	Engages East Greenwich	Providence Chamber of Commerce
AARP	Foster Parrots, ltd.	Providence Global Shapers
ACT	Garden Club- Friends of Green Hill Pond	RI Commodores
Age Friendly RI (Barrington)	Glocester, RI Facebook group	RI Foundation
Alliance for Better Long Term Care	Green Party	RI Public Radio
Aquidneck Community Table	Johnnycake Center	RICH
Beat the Streets Providence	Land Trust	Rights + Resources RI
Beechwood Center	Leadership RI	Scituate Health Alliance
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council	LEAN RI/Brown MPA program	Smith Hill Partners Initiative
C3center/NWBRV	Library	Sojourner House: Democratic Women's Caucus
CAN- Cranston Action Network	LISC	South Kingstown Huddle
Cape Verdean Community Development	Motif	State of the State
Chamber of Commerce	neighborhood newsletter	The Commodores Meeting
Common Fence Improvement Association	North Kingstown Senior Center	The Journey to Hope, Health, and Healing
Community Action Partnership of Providence (CAPP)	NPFF	Thundermist
Democracy @ Work Providence	NSRI.org	uPro
Diremail	NWBRV	Wavemaker Fellowship
Domestic Violence Resource Center of South County	One Cranston	Welcome House
Edward King House	PITI	Working Cities Newport
Emmanuel Church, Newport	Progreso Latino	WURI Radio
Enagic		

Table 1.25: Other responses named (partial list)
·   Department of Corrections
·   Email
·   Communication from RI foundation – email, newsletter, eblast.
·   Internet search
·   Hope and Change for Haiti
·   Neil Steinberg on "State of the State"
·   New England Tech
·   Town email
·   TV
·   Work
·   Local newspapers: Valley Breeze, Warwick Beacon, Westerly Sun.

Table 1.26 shows how respondents heard about the event by region. The most common response for four of the five regions (except the Providence area) was News Media or Advertisement. For Providence, the most frequent response was Rhode Island Foundation's Facebook or Twitter page. More than a quarter of respondents in East Bay & Aquidneck and South County shared that they heard about the event through word of mouth (someone told me about it).

Table 1.26: How respondent heard about Together RI, by Region

	Providence area	Northern RI	East Bay & Aquidneck	West Bay	South County
News Media or Advertisement	17.20%	36.24%	28.77%	35.29%	29.41%
Rhode Island Foundation's Facebook or Twitter page	29.57%	20.81%	21.46%	27.60%	19.79%
Someone told me about it	24.19%	21.48%	26.94%	20.81%	27.27%
From a community group or nonprofit organization	18.28%	11.41%	16.44%	10.86%	19.79%
Other social media	16.67%	8.72%	15.53%	8.14%	12.30%
Other	4.30%	7.38%	4.57%	3.17%	3.74%

Notes: Percentages add up to more than 100 because some respondents chose more than one answer.

Section 2. Together RI Discussion Analysis

Section Authors:

Skye N. Leedahl, PhD

Kristin Sodhi

Travis Doumaney

2.1. Summary of Findings

Participants were asked to provide open-ended, written responses to six questions related to the discussions had at their tables. The six questions included:

1. In your opinion, what is Rhode Island's biggest strength?
2. In your opinion, what is the biggest opportunity we have as a state?
3. What are the challenges facing you, or your community, that impact your daily life?
4. What about, or in, Rhode Island makes you proud?
5. What do you think contributes the most to a positive sense of community in Rhode Island?
6. Is there something that was discussed at your table that you would spend personal time working to improve, or promote, on behalf of your community OR on behalf of our state?

In total, we received 451 discussion question forms with at least one of the questions answered out of 1,253 participants. In examining each question, 427 forms had question one answered, 399 forms had question two answered, 400 forms had question three answered, 224 had question four answered, 175 had question five answered, and 147 had question six answered. Participants were encouraged by Rhode Island Foundation staff to at least respond to questions 1-3 (the first page) if they were short on-time. This helps to explain why questions 1-3 have more responses than the other questions. Table 2.1 includes attendance numbers and numbers of discussion forms filled out by community event.

2.2 Major Categories Summary

Summary of Response Topics
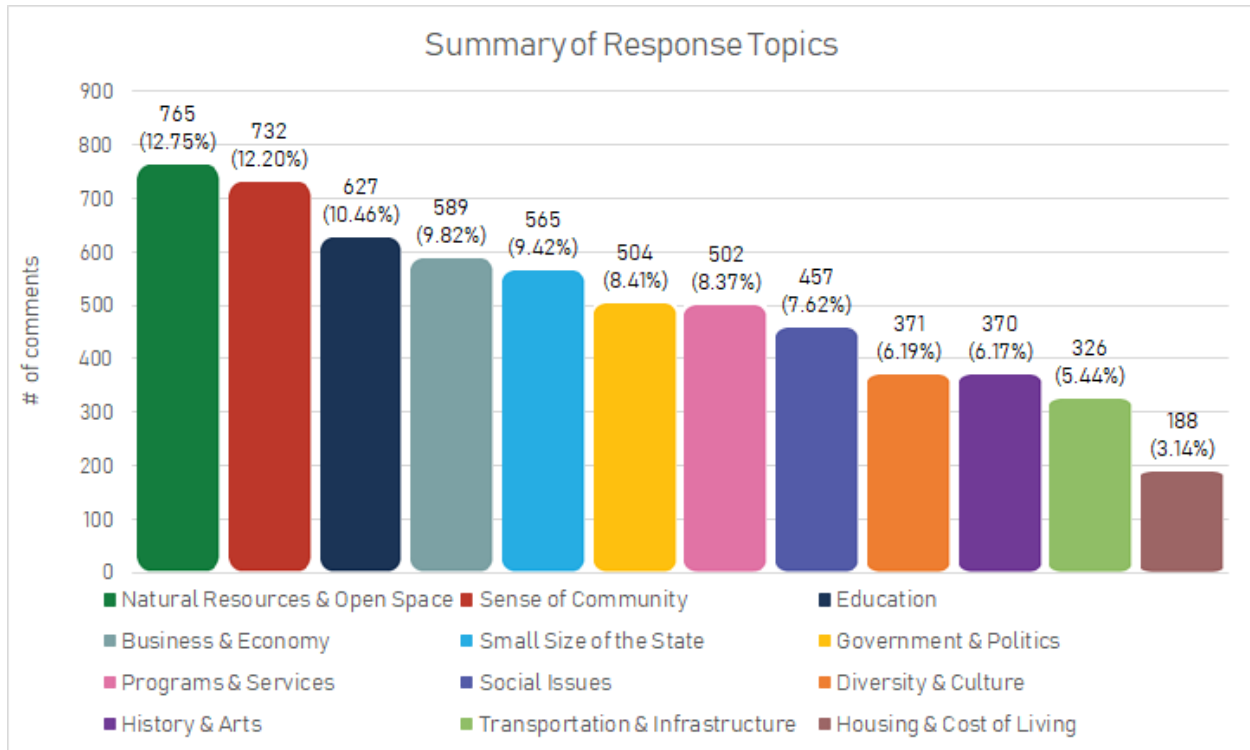
Each category includes the comments and opinions from Together RI participants, and the categories for the responses varied greatly depending on which of the six questions were being asked. As shown above, 12.8% of the responses overall fell into the *Natural Resources & Open Space* category, while about 3.1% of responses were within the *Housing & Cost of Living* category. The next section describes each major category identified in the analysis (in order based on frequency of responses). One important note to make regarding qualitative research like this is that all categories, even those with fewer responses, include important information worth considering. These categories are used to help organize information and show breadth and depth of information discussed. The word cloud for each category includes the 75 most common words used by participants when responding to the discussion questions overall.

Natural Resources & Open Space

Across all questions, people who attended the Together RI events discussed Rhode Island's *Natural Resources & Open Space* most frequently. This category included any responses regarding water, public land, energy, and parks. Items coded in the *Natural Resources & Open Resources* category included: ocean, beaches, water, natural beauty, fishing/aquaculture, wind energy, green energy, recycling, waste, sustainability, recreational opportunities, parks, bike paths, sidewalks, walkability, use of vacant buildings and land, and weather/climate. Most of the codes in this category came in response to the question about Rhode Island's strengths.

Sense of Community

Many responses across the six questions were coded in the category *Sense of Community*. This category included any comments about community-building and social cohesiveness. Items coded in this category included: people coming together, people watching out for one another, civic engagement, inclusivity, people helping others feel welcome, respect across people, empathy for others, understanding across groups, working collaboratively, closeness, provincial thinking, or communication. This category also included more negative comments related to a

lack of community-building and social exclusion, including a lack of people coming together, not knowing neighbors, polarization of community, social isolation, or loss of personal connection. Many of the codes in this category came from individuals responding to the question about Rhode Island strengths, though the responses were rather spread out among all questions.

Education

  Education was also a common response across the six questions. The Education category included any responses related to the educational system in general, schools (public or private), higher education, school safety, training individuals or employees, or school buildings. Most of the codes in this category came from individuals responding to the questions about Rhode Island's biggest opportunity, challenges encountered, and biggest strength.

Government & Politics

  Issues related to *Government & Politics* were another frequent category for responses among Together RI participants. This category included any responses pertaining to governmental issues, elected officials, and policy changes. Items coded in this category included any responses related to: federal, state, or community governments, state house, governor, elected officials, voting, political participation, taxes, legislation, political leaders, funding (or lack of) within the state, school districts, government corruption, consolidation of communities or school districts, and various policies. A large majority of the responses in this category came in response to the question about challenges faced by participants and their communities.

Business & the Economy

    The Business & the Economy category was identified in order to bring together codes related to business and economic growth in the state, and this category often included specific comments about various industries, suggested growth opportunities, or companies or organizations that bring jobs and economic growth to Rhode Island. Responses coded in this category included: business, small business, economic growth, jobs, tourism, food and restaurant industry, marine industry, information about Providence and Newport (due to those towns being economic powerhouses for the state), or the airport. Most responses in this category were made in answering the question about the biggest opportunity in Rhode Island, though there were also many responses to the question about the state's biggest strength.

Small Size of the State

    The *Small Size of the State* was written as a response to the six questions by many participants. Items coded in this category included any response regarding how small Rhode Island is compared to other states and how this provides for collaboration opportunities, the leveraging of resources, more accessible communities, and increased potential for change and innovation. This category also included responses pertaining to Rhode Island's geography and its location compared to other states and metropolitan areas. By and large, most responses in this category were written when answering the question about Rhode Island's biggest strength.

Programs & Services

In answering the questions, many comments were made about various *Program & Services* within Rhode Island. This category included any responses related to all private or public programs, organizations, or services available to Rhode Islanders. Items included: public or private programs, nonprofit organizations, churches and synagogues, community activities and events, or any kind of service including healthcare, mental health, daycare services, and newspaper and media. Most responses in this category were made when answering the question about challenges faced by people and their communities followed by the question about opportunities for the state.

Social Issues

Many different *Social Issues* were brought up by Together RI participants. This category was quite broad in that it included any type of social problem or concern that participants mentioned that affect themselves and their communities. Items coded in this category included: bullying, opioid epidemic, violence and crime, racism, sexism, drugs and alcohol, issues pertain to the disability community, the aging of the population and related concerns, unemployment or the lack of jobs, income disparities, homelessness, population loss or trying to retain young people, and childcare. The large majority responses in the *Social Issues* category came in response to the question about challenges encountered by Rhode Islanders.

Diversity & Culture

Many Together RI participants wrote about *Diversity & Culture* when responding to the questions. This category included any response pertaining to racial and ethnic groups in Rhode Island as well as cultural opportunities and the uniqueness of the Rhode Island population. Items were coded in this category such as: cultural diversity, racial/ethnic diversity, immigrants, indigenous community, cultural opportunities, quirkiness of the people, and different languages. Most of the responses in the category were made when answering the question about Rhode Island's biggest strength.

History & Arts

A number of the respondents wrote answers to the questions that included information about *History & Arts.* This category emerged after identifying how many participants wrote about the history of the state as well as appreciation for the arts opportunities. Items in this category included comments about: the history of the state, religious freedom, independence, status as one of the 13 colonies, the arts community, the creative community, theatre opportunities, or music options. Most responses that fell into this category were made in responding to the question about Rhode Island's biggest strength followed by the question about what in Rhode Island makes people proud.

Transportation & Infrastructure

Multiple participants referred to Rhode Island's *Transportation & Infrastructure* when responding to the six questions. This category included any response about the public transportation system, roadways, traffic, or physical and organization structures and facilities within Rhode Island. Codes in this category included: public transportation, roads, traffic, potholes, trains, infrastructure, and bridges. The large majority of responses in this category were in response to the question about challenges encountered in Rhode Island.

Housing & Cost of Living

The final category that participants mentioned many times was related to *Housing & Cost of Living* in Rhode Island, and the category was rather straightforward in that mostly issues of housing and cost of living were included. Items coded in this category included issues of: affordable housing, cost of rent, cost of living, housing prices, real estate, public housing, senior housing, gentrification, and intergenerational communities. The vast majority of responses related to *Housing & Cost of Living* came when participants were responding to the question about challenges encountered by Rhode Islanders.

Table 2.1: Attendance Numbers and Discussion Question Forms Filled Out

	Attended the Event	Discussion Question Forms Filled Out[1]
Providence Area		
Providence 1	120	46
Providence 2	105	43
Pawtucket/Central Falls	60	26
Northern Rhode Island		
Woonsocket	78	26
Cumberland/Lincoln	65	26
North Providence/Smithfield	40	13
Foster/Glocester	22	4
East Bay & Aquidneck Island		
East Providence	77	36
Newport/Middletown	83	30
Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth	41	19
Barrington/Bristol/Warren	64	15
West Bay		
Warwick	60	17
East Greenwich/Warwick	88	16
Cranston	66	39
Scituate/Johnston	26	7
Coventry/West Warwick	29	7
South County		
Chariho	46	17
Westerly	48	13
South Kingstown	81	33
North Kingstown/Exeter	54	18
Total	1,253	451

[1] Some forms were filled out by one attendee, while other forms were filled out by a note taker who aggregated comments from their table on one sheet.

Overall, we identified comments from Together RI event participants to the six questions in twelve areas (listed in order of the frequency mentioned across the six questions. See Appendix B for descriptions of these twelve areas):

1. Natural Resources & Open Space
2. Sense of Community
3. Education
4. Government & Politics
5. Business & Economy
6. Small Size of the State
7. Programs & Services
8. Social Issues
9. Diversity & Culture
10. History & Arts
11. Transportation & Infrastructure
12. Housing & Cost of Living

For question one (biggest strength in Rhode Island), the most frequent response categories included: *Natural Resources & Open Space, Small Size of the State, Sense of Community, Diversity & Culture, History & Arts,* and *Business & the Economy*. Many Together RI participants believed that the coastal environment was the biggest strength in Rhode Island, while others wrote about the beauty of the state and the potential for and use of green energy and environmentally-friendly policies. Other attendees found that the small size of the state was a major strength in that Rhode Island is unique and manageable and provides opportunities for collaboration and for testing new ideas and initiatives.

For question two (biggest opportunity in Rhode Island), the most frequent categories included: *Business & the Economy, Education, Natural Resources & Open Space, Sense of Community,* and *Small Size of the State*. Many participants saw great opportunity for the food and restaurant industry in Rhode Island, including the expansion of local farming and fishing industries. People identified that the ocean could be better utilized for tourism, education, and food opportunities. The improvement of educational systems and ensuring that students who graduate from higher education institutions in the state remain in Rhode Island were also mentioned as opportunities for Rhode Island.

For question three (challenges facing you & your community), the top categories included: *Social Issues, Government & Politics, Transportation & Infrastructure, Programs & Services,* and *Education*. Many participants were concerned with unemployment and a lack of job opportunities for Rhode Islanders. Drug and alcohol abuse, including the opioid epidemic, were also mentioned as challenges. Many people wrote about how issues of inequality are challenging for many Rhode Islanders. Finally, helping the older adult population and those with disabilities who have limited income were mentioned.

The most frequent categories for question four (what makes you proud) were *Natural Resources & Open Space, History & Arts, Sense of Community, Diversity & Culture,* and *Business & the Economy*. Participants at the Together RI events were especially proud of the natural beauty of the state, including the landscapes, the oceans, the parks, and the weather. People were also proud of Rhode Island's history related to religious freedom and independence.

The top categories for question five (what contributes to positive sense of community) included *Sense of Community, Programs & Services, Small Size of the State, Diversity & Culture,* and *History & Art*s. People believed that Rhode Island has a strong sense of community and valued the interconnectedness of the state. Participants also wrote about the people in Rhode Island being supportive, open, and inclusive with a willingness to work together. Individuals also found that various Rhode Island community events and organizations contributed to a positive sense of community.

For question six (something people are willing to work on), the top categories included: *Education, Natural Resources & Open Space, Sense of Community, Social Issues,* and *Government & Politics*. Working to improve the educational system was discussed as the most common issue people were already working on or willing to work on within their communities. Participants were also interested in helping to improve water quality at local beaches.

The most frequently discussed major categories varied greatly based on the city where the event was held. For example, at the first Providence event, participants discussed *Sense of Community & Education* most frequently, whereas the second Providence event seemed to focus on *Social Issues* and *Programs & Services*. At the Newport/Middletown event, the topics varied greatly, with people writing frequently about discussions regarding *Natural Resources & Open Space*, *Education*, *Sense of Community*, *Small Size of the State*, and *Business & the Economy*. As a last example, the Warwick event mostly discussed *Natural Resources & Open Space*, though *Education* and *Sense of Community* were also common topics.

2.3. Rhode Island's Biggest Strength
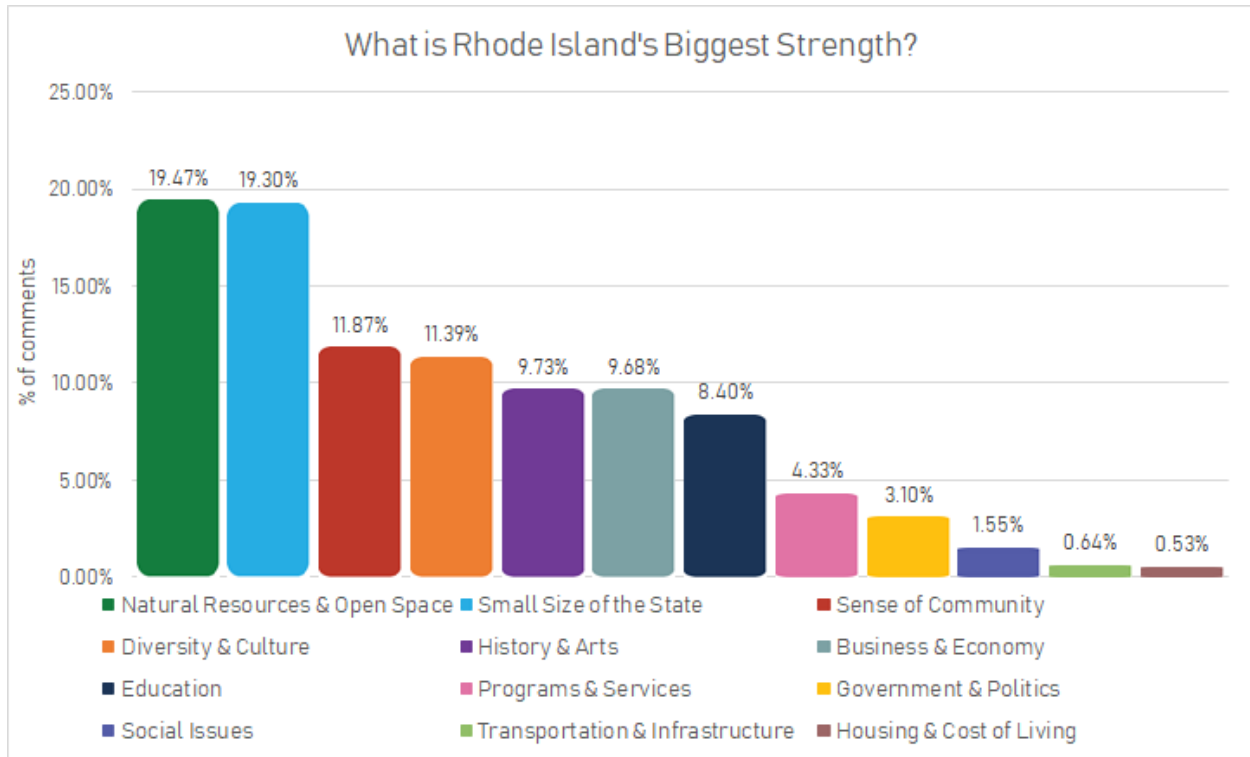
#1: Natural Resources & Open Space

In responding to the question about Rhode Island's biggest strength, the most common response participants provided was in regards to Rhode Island's *Natural Resources & Open Space*. Overwhelmingly, participants identified Rhode Island's coastal environment (beaches, ocean, water, bays, etc.) as a key strength of the state. One attendee felt that that Rhode Island's "oceans are a big strength, but they need protection from offshore drilling." Another responded, "being a coastal state. That, to me, is the biggest draw." Another felt that the coastline granted a lot of opportunity to the state.

Several attendees discussed the overall beauty of the state. The diverse landscape, natural environment, and beauty were common answers to this question. One attendee stated that Rhode Island benefited from the "natural benefits of environmental diversity and beauty."

Rhode Island's potential for and use of green energy and environmentally friendly policies were mentioned by several participants. Rhode Island is the first state to have a commercial offshore wind farm and a fair number of participants recognized this. One respondent stated that Rhode Island is a "leader in offshore wind power" While others stated that Rhode Island has the "potential for environmental leadership" and has a "sense of conservation." Additionally, Rhode Island's use of recycling and other forms of clean energy (wind, & potential for geothermal or wave/ocean power) were cited as strengths.

It was common for participants to mention industries and infrastructure related to Rhode Island's

environment as a major strength. Several participants mentioned Rhode Island's fishing and aquaculture industries as a strength. Recreational opportunities were frequently cited as an asset in Rhode Island. Discussions included mentions of the "bike paths, hiking trails, cliff walks, boating, etc." available. One participant stated Rhode Island's Bike paths were in the "top 10." The "walkability" and ease of access to Rhode Island's waterways and beaches were also highlighted by respondents.

Related to the geography of the state, several attendees mentioned Rhode Island's size and location as a strength. Participants cited "location and proximity to NYC, Boston, Canada." One attendee stated that Rhode Island's location "provides quick access to the beach, shopping, and is nearby everything." Rhode Island's weather was also cited as "some of the best and safest weather in the world."

#2: Small Size of the State

In answering the question about Rhode Island's biggest strength, many attendees mentioned the *Small Size of the State*. Individuals felt that the small size of the state was a great advantage for Rhode Island mostly due to connections made and the ease which people can collaborate and try new things. Some mentioned that the small size enables connections of people from across the state, limits alienation, and helps people get to know each other. One respondent noted that "interaction is easy from community to community." They mentioned that having such a small state is a benefit and contributes to a sense of community inclusiveness and a small-town feel. Further, some discussed how the small size provides easy access to all towns and communities and close proximity to resources. For example, one person wrote, [the] "small size allows for the ability to drive for a few minutes and be in a totally different location with different people."

People also noted that Rhode Island's small size makes the state unique and manageable, promotes closeness, enables collaboration, and brings a sense of possibility. As one person wrote, "The small size makes it a haven for the arts, music, and access to nature for all." Another mentioned that Rhode Island was a "manageable size for government."

A number of people discussed how Rhode Island was a great laboratory for experimenting with new ideas and initiatives and being able to easily scale ideas that work. As one person wrote, [the] "small size is an advantage for trying out ideas and building community." Some also discussed that Rhode Island's small size made it possible to build something incredibly quickly. As one person wrote, "we can make things happen!" Individuals who attended the sessions believed that Rhode Island had a lot of opportunity to innovate. As one person noted, "Given the small size of Rhode Island, we have the opportunity to innovate with greater flexibility, and use programs which might prove unwieldy for larger states."

Related to the geography of the state, Rhode Island's location and proximity to many large metropolitan areas and other states were discussed as being convenient and beneficial. Rhode Island's proximity to both New York and Boston was often cited, and Rhode Island's

artistic community and arts scene was viewed as a strength. As one participant described, Rhode Island has a "creative community."

#3: Sense of Community

The Rhode Island *Sense of Community* was often discussed as a strength by participants. As such, participants frequently cited the closeness of Rhode Island's community. People frequently cited how well they seem to know each other. One attendee stated that "Rhode Island operates like a small town." Similarly, other participants wrote that Rhode Island's strength was being the "Smallest state- more in touch with each other, bonding, & village like," while another described this as a "strong sense of neighborhood." This idea was often simply expressed as "sense of community" or just "community." Several participants described the idea and feeling of family in Rhode Island. A "feeling of family connections" as one participant described it was a regular response to this question. Rhode Islanders, as one participant put it, are "family centered people."

Further, Rhode Islanders themselves were described as a strength of the state. Many respondents simply wrote "its people" in response to the question about strengths in the state. The people of Rhode Island were described often as "friendly." Other participants described Rhode Islanders as "open and welcoming" and "unpretentious people who are friendly and intelligent." The progressive and independent attitudes of Rhode Islanders were also mentioned by several attendees. Rhode Islanders were noted for their philanthropic spirit. Two participants similarly described a willingness "to work to make other's lives better" and the "people here who give their time and efforts to maintain quality of life."

Rhode Island's open-mindedness towards diversity was cited as a strength on several surveys. One attendee described that they thought that "Rhode Island is more inclusive than other communities" and that they thought "Rhode Island is one of the most open-minded states because of this and that it has allowed people to reach goals here that are more difficult to reach in other states." Several participants also described how easy it was to collaborate and connect with fellow Rhode Islanders.

#4: Diversity & Culture

Many people discussed Rhode Island's biggest strength as related to the *Diversity & Culture* of the people. People found that the many diverse cultures and the "unique and diverse population" within the state was one of the greatest strengths for Rhode Island. One person specially wrote, "smart and diverse population." Another person noted Providence was listed as the most diverse city in the U.S. according to one study. Additionally, several participants noted the religious diversity of Rhode Island. People also used other terms, including community diversity, economic diversity, historic diversity, sociological diversity, and geographic diversity to explain Rhode Island's biggest strength. A number of participants felt that Rhode Island was "welcoming" or "attractive" to immigrants. Another person felt that while there are "multiple

ethnicities" in the state, they are "still Rhode Islanders" while another felt that "immigrants that bring their culture were strength to the state."

Rhode Island Native American groups were a source of pride for some participants. One stated that Rhode Island has a "great Indian Heritage," and another stated the Narragansett tribe culture was a strength of the state. One attendee remarked that there was "a rising young Latinx community." Another found that there was "help for Latinos" in Rhode Island. In contrast one respondent stated that "if the Latino Community was more integrated we'd be able to accomplish much more in terms of social progress."

Rhode Island's culture itself was a point of strength. One participant noted that Rhode Island is in "close proximity to different cultures." Others positively noted that Rhode Island is "quirky" and has "unique places and people." Two participants noted that cultural venues and/or events were an asset to the state.

#5 (nearly tied): History & Arts

Rhode Island's *History & Arts* contributions were seen as a point of strength among many of the respondents. The arts scene in Rhode Island was frequently cited as a strength of the state. Theaters, music, waterfire, architecture, and cultural activities were cited as some of the specific artistic resources available in the state. Rhode Island's "creativity" and "artistic communities" were described as state assets. One attendee noted that "the creativity of the entrepreneurs and artists" was a strength and that "it's a great thing that artists are able to sell their work without having to charge sales tax if they have an exemption."

The historical role that Rhode Island played was discussed as a strength by attendees. Several attendees noted the historical preservation efforts and the historical buildings that are found in Rhode Island. One participant noted that Rhode Island was "first in many things in the US." Rhode Island for example was the first state to declare independence from Great Britain. Many participants remarked on the founding principles of Rhode Island. "Roger Williams and religious freedom" were frequently cited as strengths. Rhode Island's ideas of tolerance, democracy and religious freedom were noted as important and founding principles of the state. One participant stated Rhode Island has "a tradition of rights for all peoples/religions.

#5(nearly tied): Business & the Economy

Nearly tied in frequency with Rhode Island's history and arts was the discussions about Rhode Island's strengths in *Business & the Economy*. Many respondents simply cited "businesses" or "small businesses" as an asset. Participants frequently talked about specific industries they felt were a strength, and the tourism and food industries encompass the majority of these discussions. Tourism was felt to be a great asset. Participants cited the "historical New England charm," "great airport," "huge shoreline," and Rhode Island's "recognition worldwide" in relation to the topic of tourism. One person stated that our strength was "our waterfront and the businesses that use it."

Many respondents discussed the food in Rhode Island as a major strength. It was common for respondents to note that Rhode Island has "great food." Aquaculture and seafood were also cited as strengths and the fishing industry was a common topic of discussion. Respondents praised the local restaurants as well as the fishing and sustainable farming industry. One respondent felt that "food is an important connector" in the state, and another cited specific cultural food items such as "coffee milk" and "Del's" lemonade.

Additionally, Rhode Island's innovation was also discussed by several participants. One attendee stated that Rhode Island was a "leader in innovation" and further cited the examples of "the first transatlantic cable, mills, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), and Brown University."

Additional Topics

Many other topics were discussed by participants. *Education* was frequently cited as a strength, although it was not in the top five discussion areas for this question. Participants discussed the point that Rhode Island has well-performing universities and schools, and these were considered an asset. There were also discussions around the benefits, opportunities, and training these universities and schools provide to the residents of the state. Rhode Island's free tuition program was looked upon as a benefit. One student felt that this free tuition program "empowered students to continue their adult education."

Rhode Island's local *Programs & Services* were viewed as an asset by participants. Respondents noted that Rhode Island has a variety of healthcare facilities to serve the community. Attendees specifically wrote one of Rhode Island's strengths was "our strong healthcare system" and having access to a "hospital for children." Many other programs, services, and resources were cited as beneficial to the state, including libraries, the Naval base, festivals, museums, Parks and Recreation Department, financial help, Rhode Island's nonprofit sector, Workforce Development programs, and various community resources. Several participants also felt that Rhode Island's transportation and infrastructure were a strength. One attendee stated that the state's "public transportation is good."

Rhode Island's *Government & Politics* were discussed as being easily accessible and that it was easy to get to know elected officials. In regards to *Social Issues,* respondents felt that Rhode Island has high quality of life and a low crime rate but also felt that the population was shrinking and aging. Related to *Housing & Cost of Living*, a few participants felt that Rhode Island was affordable to live in or at least more affordable than Massachusetts.

2.4. Rhode Island's Biggest Opportunity
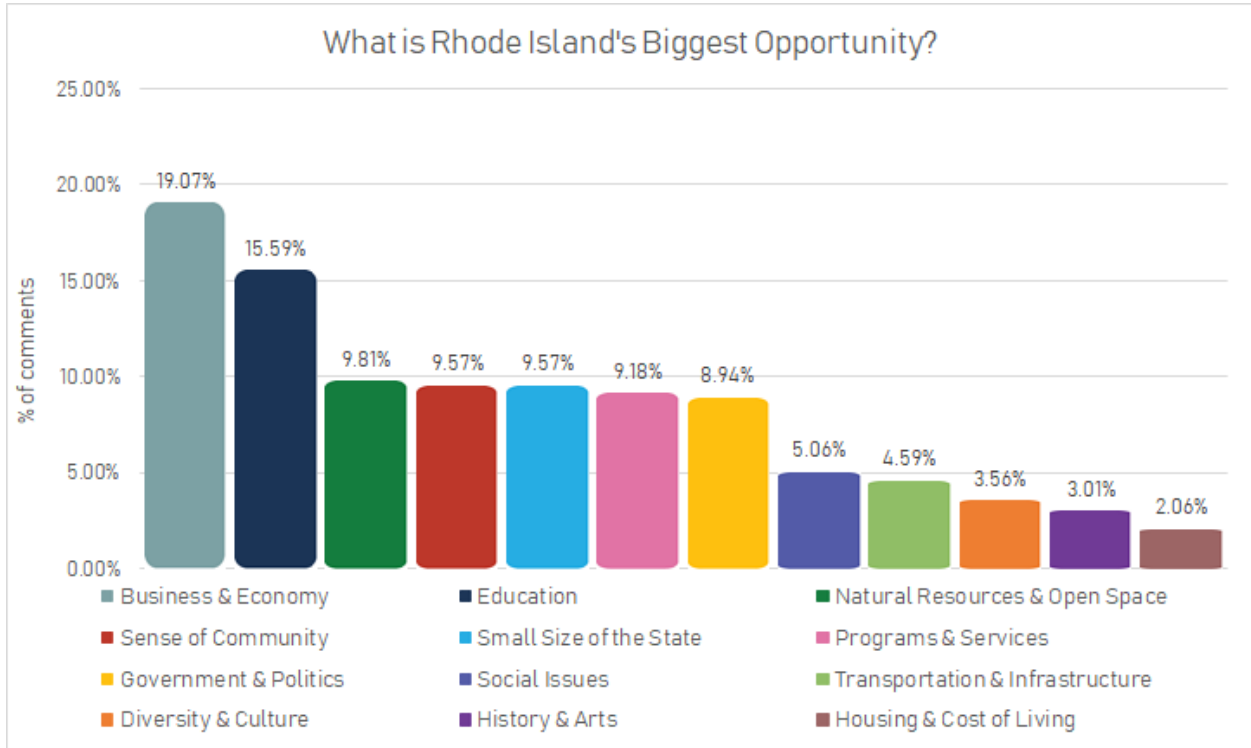
#1: Business & the Economy

 Respondents noted there were several opportunities for the state related to *Business & the Economy*. Farms, foods, and restaurants were frequent topics of discussion among participants, and many felt that Rhode Island's local farming and fishing industries should be expanded. One attendee noted that by "turning our farmland into active food production, we could feed the entire state." Others noted that there is potential for growth in farmer's markets, farm-to-table models of food delivery, and that the state should "promote our restaurants and farmers markets as a destination." Another participant felt that there should be an "incentive for experimental farms." One person had the novel idea that the "Superman building should go to aquaculture" whereas another said Rhode Island has institutions like Johnson and Wales and the state could take advantage of their culinary arts programs.

 A number of participants discussed utilization of the ocean as an opportunity for the state. A couple of participants similarly noted that Rhode Island should "use the ocean" for industries such as tourism, education, food, transportation, and hospitality. One attendee replied that the state should utilize "oceanfront spaces for tourism." Other respondents felt that Rhode Island should be better at promoting the "marine industry and adjacent technologies." With Rhode Island's access to the ocean, one participant felt that Rhode Island "could be [a] world leader in oceanography." Helping people to understand the reputation and value of the University

of Rhode Island (URI) School of Oceanography and its world-renowned research would be worthwhile.

"Tourism is our biggest opportunity" were the words of one respondent, which was a sentiment echoed by many other attendees. Participants responded that Rhode Island has the opportunity "to draw in tourists" and that "tourism is a clean industry. We should promote it very aggressively." Another responded felt that for Rhode Island "tourism is key since we aren't the tech place or manufacturing place anymore." The state should take advantage of our "coastline [for] jobs and tourism," improve "beach accessibility," and seek to "improve the tourism experience" according to three people. Several people suggested improving Rhode Island's promotion of tourism.

A number of respondents felt that Rhode Island should really utilize itself as an incubator for new ideas and innovations. One respondent noted that, "our problems... are the nation's problems if we can come up with solutions we can lead the way. Our small size makes it doable."

Similarly, another responded wrote "though we are small... we have the capacity for innovation, we can provide a great example to the nation," whereas another noted "tech and money into innovative technologies."

In addition to innovation, several participants felt that an increase in collaboration between various entities and the state could produce positive outcomes for the state. A couple of participants suggested collaborating with other states. One individual stated Rhode Island "can do business with other states" while another felt that the state should "collaborate more on coastal management." Other participants felt more intrastate collaborations were needed. One attendee wondered if there could be collaboration between design, maritime issues, and history. Another suggested the state should "pair high tech [and] STEM with tourism." One person suggested there should be a "better integration of business and education for jobs." Similarly another participant suggested "more cooperation between universities, government, locals, [and] businesses." While another said the state should "connect schools to entrepreneurialism." Two suggestions were made "to develop medical and technical businesses in connection with Rhode Island's educational institutions."

Several participants felt the state should continue the improvement and expansion of Rhode Island's airport. Rhode Island's airport has undergone several expansions in the past few decades, and one participant was pleased with this and felt that "tourism is our biggest opportunity--I love what we are currently doing with the airport and getting people to travel from here to foreign countries." Similarly, another participant felt that TF Green should become an "International Airport."

A very common suggestion was that Rhode Island's businesses were an opportunity, with respondents frequently stating that Rhode Island should work to secure more new businesses or improve the business climate. One participant said the state has an opportunity "to bring people into the state [thus] more business." Another person suggested that Rhode Island should "utilize existing empty buildings and sites to attract new businesses." One participant felt that Rhode

Island should be "better at using our strengths to attract businesses." Others suggested Rhode Island should "attract medium-sized businesses to improve our economic base opportunity" and "improve business diversity" through the use of "renewable energy and wind farm expansion." Finally, one person felt the state should provide incentives for women owned businesses.

#2: Education

When it comes to *Education*, many Rhode Islanders felt that quality education and the local educational institutions were a huge opportunity for the state. Opportunities for improvement of Rhode Island's education were frequently discussed; one person suggested improving Rhode Island's education by having "vocational [or] agricultural high school education." Others suggested better teaching of mental and physical health in elementary schools, civics and media literacy, and common sense and manners. One participant suggested the state should "teach students to think critically...less standardized testing and control of our students' minds." There were several comments suggesting general improvement or improving curriculum and quality of the classes.

Several attendees mentioned the need to retain and engage the students educated in Rhode Island. As one respondent put it, "We have RISD and Brown-- two of the best universities in the country, yet most students leave our state. We need to leverage the schools to attract companies and promote startups." Similarly, another respondent wrote "we have a lot of universities here, we have the opportunity to retain [students] in state for business."

Some respondents had suggestions on how to redesign Rhode Island schools. Increased cooperation between universities was suggested by several participants. One participant suggested "if we were able to consolidate our education system [it] would become efficient and innovative." Several others suggested similar ideas of combining or consolidating school districts. One participant suggested the state should look at school models practiced in Finland or China. One respondent felt there was a "lack of accountability by School department's elected officials." A few participants suggested an increased use of technology in education.

Improved access to education and better outcomes for students were discussed on several occasions. Several of those surveyed praised the free Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) tuition model, with one person suggesting that the initiative should be expanded to URI and Rhode Island College (RIC). One participant lamented the fact that "Latinos are 20% of our population but we are ranked lowest in the nation for educational opportunities and outcomes for Latino students." Another participant suggested there should be "scholarships to some students with another language." Increased free job trainings and increased job opportunities for students were also discussed by several attendees as a needed service the state should provide.

#3: Natural Resources & Open Space

Many Rhode Islanders felt that the state's *Natural Resources & Open Space* were a huge opportunity that should be taken advantage of. As one person put it, Rhode Island has the opportunity "to use our natural resources to change the behavior of residents in a positive way."

The use of clean energy was once again a common topic among participants. A number of participants discussed various opportunities in generating clean energy including solar, wind power, tidal energy, and geothermal. Several participants mentioned how Rhode Island leads the nation in the use of offshore wind farms. One participant stated Rhode Island has become "a leader in renewable energy by becoming the first state to commit to 100% renewable energy by 2050." Another participant suggested that Rhode Island should "export clean energy." One attendee discussed at Rhode Island should: "transform our energy system [which would lead to] more jobs, better economy, and a better environment."

Several participants felt that Road Island should be using vacant and open space, lots, and buildings more efficiently. One respondent suggested "Trail marking open spaces, [creating] maps, [and] promoting bike trails," while others suggested more "walkable paths" and "bike paths." Another suggested using our "vacant lands [to] invest in agriculture." A similar suggestion was the opportunity to create community gardens. Several participants suggested the idea of reusing/utilizing "more buildings and empty lots," seemingly sharing the opinion of another person who felt there were "too many vacant spaces throughout Providence." One attendee suggested the "repurposing buildings for community use" as an option for what to do with vacant buildings.

Once again Rhode Island's coastline and water resources were seemingly a major topic of discussion among attendees. As one person wrote, Rhode Island has a "beautiful coastal environment," and another participant noted that the state is "well-positioned for any kind of marine or ocean job opportunities or studies." Two attendees felt there should be "public access to water" and suggested improved beach accessibility and routes for tourism. Others suggested that Rhode Island should "partner up with other New England Governors to collectively and regionally bring tourists to our beaches" to promote the coastline and oceanfront spaces for tourism. Seafood and aquaculture were also seen as opportunities for the state.

Environmental protections were seen as an important source of opportunity and an area in which Rhode Island leads the way. As one respondent suggested that Rhode Island could "provide leadership on ocean health and rise as an incubator." Many respondents wrote the state needs to "address global warming." Another person wrote, "because we are small perhaps we can spearhead some issues like... better environmental care." Similarly, a third person suggested that Rhode Island should be a leader in environmental conservation policy. Several participants had suggestions on how the state could improve environmental protections and programs. Three respondents stated that Rhode Island needs improved recycling, waste management, and composting programs. Another participant stated that we should use "coastal science applied to coast erosion." Several attendees said the state should focus on improving water quality and that the state should "provide grant money to medicate the contaminated waters." Finally, one participant felt that litter was an issue that needed to be addressed.

#4: Sense of Community

Many participants felt Rhode Island has a strong sense of community and saw this as a source of opportunity for the state. A number of respondents attributed the strong sense of community to the small size of the state. Participants variously described Rhode Island communities as accepting, family-oriented, respectful of others' religion, connected, unique, independent, and generous.

A number of participants felt that increased communication was needed in Rhode Island's communities. One participant stated that Rhode Island should to look at the "sharing process of solving complex problems." Another person felt that Rhode Islanders should "demonstrate that collegial relationships can be developed despite political differences." One participant felt that the state should be "using its people, asking them questions, learning from them, and taking their input to heart." The Together RI event was praised by one attendee when stating, "community has the opportunity to be heard from joining events like this one." Several participants expressed the similar view that the state "needs more forums or discussions with all people."

Increased collaboration within communities was discussed by a number of attendees. "Collaboration is key" stated one participant. Attendees stated that communities should be "collaborating with each other for positive change" and that "interconnectedness will allow us to share resources be more efficient and get things done." One respondent suggested that the state "could take resources and opportunities across towns and cities." One person felt that "groups already work collaboratively, but we need to think larger." Two people felt there should be more opportunities to collaborate.

A number of participants called for an increase in various forms of engagement within the community. As two participants similarly put it, communities and the state should be "proactively addressing root issues" and should "identify needs as a state and address them." There were many ideas on how to solve issues and engage residents. One respondent suggested engaging in citizen-led walks such as, "Jane's walks [to] learn about neighborhoods." Others suggested "getting young groups involved in [the] state," "increased civic participation," more "volunteerism," and "student involvement." As one participant stated: "we have the opportunity to get information and help the residents of Rhode Island. The opportunity to integrate the community in different projects to favor our communities"

#5: Small Size of the State

Participants felt the *Small Size of the State* allowed for several unique opportunities. Several participants felt that Rhode Island small size allowed the state to experiment with new solutions and innovations. In the words of one participant, Rhode Island's "small-scale allows us to tackle big problems (or it should)." Another participant felt Rhode Island was "small enough for opportunities" and that one "can see change when it is made." Several participants felt that the state could "leverage our size." One person elaborated on this idea saying the state should "leverage our size to set examples in policy, tax laws, social service organizations, etc." Many

participants felt the state has the opportunity to test out and spearhead new ideas because the state is "small enough to experiment [with] improvements." One attendee stated: "Our size allows us to be the change makers in the country."

The small size of the state and its location were discussed as providing several benefits. Several respondents felt that the size and location of the state made it easy to travel and easy to connect with people. "It is easy to travel from one end to the other" and the "size-ability to reach everyone" were just two of the descriptions by participants conveying this idea. One person felt that: "Being a small state gives us the opportunity to connect more with other communities to cross the bridges or highways to get to know other towns and share resources." One attendee felt that Rhode Island should "form united statewide approaches (due to small size) to benefit the well-being of [the] state." Two participants similarly felt that the size of Rhode Island "gives us a better way to communicate" and that "our small size enables better engagement."

Location and proximity to other states was a frequently discussed topic by attendees. Many felt Rhode Island's unique location in the middle of New England provided unique opportunities for the state. Two respondents felt that "collaboration with other states" was a possible opportunity for Rhode Island. One respondent said the state's "proximity to Boston and New York City and the ocean offers opportunities to partner with businesses and education." The state's location between Boston and New York was a common theme throughout the responses. One participant thought the state should "emphasize our position between Boston and NYC (extend commuter rail and transit)." One participant believed that there might be an opportunity to generate "income from neighboring states (MA and CT)." Two respondents with similar ideas felt there was an "opportunity for businesses proximity to Boston (we should look into what they're doing)" and that the state can "improve our economy based partly on our proximity to Boston."

Additional Topics

Various other topics were discussed by respondents. *Programs & Services* was the sixth most commonly discussed topic for this question. Within this category, healthcare services seemed to be a large concern of participants, with improving access to affordable healthcare as a common theme among the discussions. One person felt there was a "lack of access to care," and another felt there should be more support for "innovative services in healthcare." Several participants had other ideas on how to improve or change the healthcare system in Rhode Island. One respondent felt the state should introduce "universal health care," while another stated Rhode Island should "create a health care system based on community needs." Other programs, services and events that connect and benefit the health and well-being of the community were mentioned by a number of participants. These included sporting events, community walks (Jane's walks), community gardens, planning retreats, recycling, free Wi-Fi, legal services, public radio, assistance for seniors, consolidation of redundant services, and support for minority communities.

Government & Politics were a source of many ideas from participants. Respondents had many ideas about various changes and revisions that should be implemented in Rhode Island's political system. Six attendees mentioned that term limits should be implemented. A number of participants felt Rhode Island's politicians were accessible, and several others felt like they personally knew their representatives. However, one participant felt the state needed a "more accessible legislative process." Several participants felt that politicians need to listen to residents better. One respondent suggested the state should "bring all elected officials [into] one room, [providing an] opportunity for [the] community to talk with them." Many participants felt the state needs to consolidate services and districts. Several suggestions from various participants included the state should "regionalize police and fire departments," "consolidate towns and cities," "centralized and abolish the separate 39 districts," and "bring towns together under collaborative administration."

Social Issues were discussed by participants as an opportunity for the state to make change. Many respondents wished to see unemployment further decrease and the economy improve. One respondent said there were "not enough jobs," and another wrote that the state's focus should be on "growing jobs." Many respondents said too many young people and college graduates leave the state. According to one attendee, if we can "attract people to this great place to live [it would result] in economic development." To attract and retain this demographic, two participants similarly stated there needs to be "jobs potential for graduates" and "opportunities for employment for young adults." Along with the high number of young people that leave the state, Rhode Island's population is increasingly growing older. One participant felt it was important to have "affordable and single-level" housing for older people. Homelessness, affordable housing, crime, equality, and opportunities for minorities were other topics mentioned by a few respondents.

A number of participants felt that Rhode Island had an opportunity to improve its *Transportation & Infrastructure* networks. Most of the responses related to this topic involved creating or expanding transportation options. One participant who had similar views to several others said that Rhode Island should create a "commuter train to New York, Providence, and Boston." A few participants mentioned maintenance of roadways, with one person writing that Rhode Island needs to "improve infrastructure on roadways" and another participant requesting "less trash (maintain roadways)."

Many participants cited *Diversity & Culture* and tolerance as positive aspects of the state that can be capitalized upon. A number of people felt there were opportunities within Rhode Island's diverse groups. The ability to have "communication and sharing [of] cultures" was cited as a benefit by one participant. Others wrote about the benefits of diversity including the fact that "immigrants bring their ideas and experience" and that "cultural opportunities are... a draw for the state." A number of respondents felt the state of Rhode Island was very inclusive and welcoming to immigrants. One respondent said Rhode Island could be a model example because the state was "clean safe [and] open to everyone," including those of various sexualities and religions as well as immigrants. However, several participants felt the state could better serve

their immigrant populations. One respondent felt that policymakers could "learn [the] life challenges of immigrants so we can better adapt to them." Another attendee felt that: "we have an incredibly diverse community; if we were able to better include everyone in our programs and activities we'd be able to better foster economic prosperity."

Rhode Island's *History & Arts* was seen as an opportunity to be capitalized upon by some participants. One attendee felt that the state should "leverage cultural [and] historic organizations for tourism." Two participants felt there was opportunity in historic Providence and the local towns. Another cited the Native American history of the state. Rhode Island was generally seen as having a strong art scene and providing several benefits for artists. The fact that Rhode Island does not tax art was mentioned as well as the 'friendliness" towards the arts in general.

Housing & Cost of Living were seen as both providing opportunities and preventing people from taking advantage of opportunities by respondents. Some people thought that Rhode Island was relatively affordable to live in compared to neighboring states. One participant wrote that Rhode Island was "still relatively affordable even with high quality of life, innovation, diversity, and world-class education." Another said the "cost of living is low, which attracts people to come here." Another attendee lamented that "people are coming from Boston and buying up Providence homes, which drive up the prices and gentrifies the community." Two respondents felt that the state should focus on developing affordable housing for older adults, so that they can stay in-state. Two respondents mentioned abandoned or vacant houses. One of these respondents believed that "we can develop unused abandoned buildings... [and] develop communities in them."

2.5. Challenges That Impact Daily Life
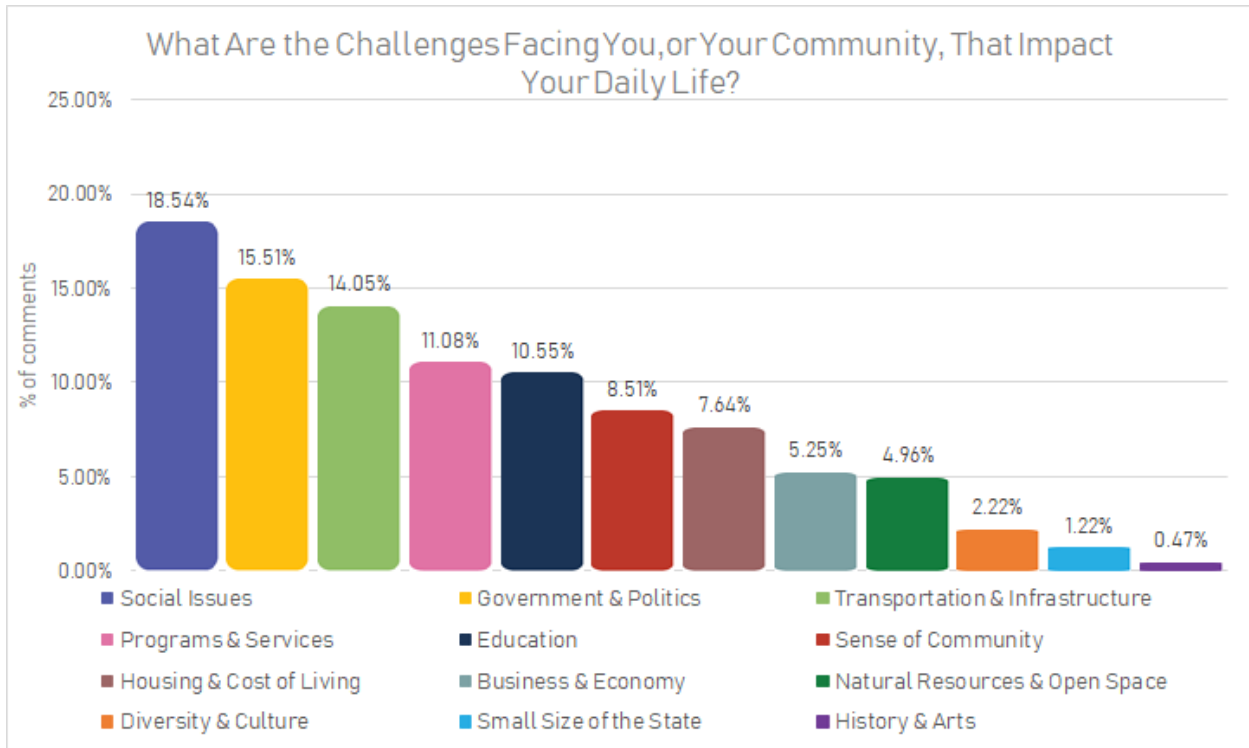
#1: Social Issues

In response to the question about personal and community challenges that impact daily life, participants wrote about many different *Social Issues* that impact individuals and families in Rhode Island. Many people wrote about issues related to securing employment in Rhode Island. Most people who discussed employment issues were concerned about Rhode Island losing young people to businesses in other states. In general, many comments were made related to losing college-educated students to out-of-state (often to Boston), but there were also comments about a lack of job opportunities in general and for those who are uneducated. Some of quotes related to the loss of youth and young adults included: "Not enough good paying or age appropriate jobs for youth and young adults," "No reasonable jobs to keep young people here," "young people don't stay here (can't get jobs)," and "we need more high paying, clean jobs to keep youth in the state." Others simply referred to a "lack of employment" among Rhode Islanders. People referred to various issues, such as low wages once employed, difficulties of surviving on minimum wage, lack of livable wage jobs, and a lack of full-time employment. One person specifically mentioned a lack of "job opportunities with a living wage for non-educated and non-skilled adults." A related issue to securing employment is often the need for affordable daycare and the "need [for an] affordable and safe place for children to go while parents work." This issue was mentioned by a few individuals who attended the events.

Many people referred to issues of drug or alcohol use as significant challenges, including the opioid epidemic (mentioned many times), alcohol, drugs, drug dealing, and drunk drivers.

One person specifically referred to teen drug use, while another wrote that mental health needs were contributing to the opioid crisis as well as other issues such as poor education outcomes and poor health outcomes. One person attributed issues of drugs and alcohol to "not enough students feel[ing] supported by teachers." Another mentioned issues related to "drug awareness and counseling (not enough treatment facilities)."

Many people who attended the events wrote that issues of inequality and equity were challenges they or their communities faced. People specifically referred to wealth inequality, income disparities, financial inequality, and cost of living challenges. A couple of individuals wrote about the lack of opportunities and advancement for females, with one person writing "we love our Governor." A couple of people referred to the pay differentials between men and women, writing that "women [are] paid 70 cents per dollar." Others simply referred to poverty or the cycle of poverty as the major challenge, with one person specifically writing, a "lack of acknowledgement for poverty in SK [South Kingstown]." A number of individuals referred to issues in Rhode Island communities related to racism. One person wrote, the "country [is] not living up to its principles (racism, we keep avoiding it)." Related to this, a few people mentioned issues of discrimination, segregation, racial insensitivity, cultural isolation, racial profiling, and a lack of diversity in higher wage jobs. One person attributed racial divisiveness to a "lack of cross-cultural and cross-economic interactions." On the contrary, one person referred to reverse racism as a challenge. Bringing some of this together, one person wrote that the challenge was "social inequities (same as always, they just look different: racism, sexism, clannism, homophobia, transphobia, fat-phobia, etc.)." Finally, one person wrote that a significant challenge was "immigration: as a dreamer, I want certainty in where my life will be. Rhode Island must act to ensure undocumented immigrants can live without fear in our state."

Many people discussed issues related to the older adult population and those with disabilities. Some people were broader, simply referring to seniors, elderly, age, aging, or disabilities, while others made more specific comments, such as "social support for seniors and disabled population" or "mental health issues (especially isolation for [the] elderly)." A couple of people wrote about retirement issues, such as how retirement income is limited, and others wrote about issues related to age discrimination for those over age 65. One more lengthy comment recognized these issues and gave a suggestion for how the government could respond: "Many people (seniors) who live on Social Security are property tax poor, thus unable to spend, travel or enjoy life. Idea: give exemption or let them pay property tax as a "lien" option which would go against their equity." A couple of individuals recognized that Rhode Island has one of the highest older adult populations in the country, and some people referred to issues related to the need for better age-related services and programs, people's ability to age at home, and the need for better wages for caretakers of vulnerable populations. One person made a comment that connected educational pursuits for college students with issues related to caring for older adults: "The disconnect between college populations and using their resources to help the veterans and elderly. How? Make CNA classes at URI, RIC, and CCRI 5-credit courses so grants can pay for them."

Homelessness was another challenge mentioned by attendees. Related to this, some wrote about issues related to a lack of programs and services for those who are homeless or issues of panhandling. One person wrote, "shelters for the homeless are so poor and affect all communities," while another person wrote, "not enough services and housing for the mentally ill and homeless." One person wrote a lengthy comment related to homelessness in Providence: "The homeless community in Rhode Island faces a lack of opportunities for finding jobs to support themselves financially. They end up hanging around Providence near Crossroads Rhode Island and cause problems. Need to have the attention of our state." Another person made a suggestion to employ those who are homeless to help repair roads. Additionally, hunger was mentioned by multiple people.

A number of people referred to issues of disregard for the law including lawlessness, civil disobedience, arson, break-ins, and "delinquency and the lack of patrols in the community." Some people also mentioned issues of violence, including crime, gang violence, safety, fighting, domestic violence, gun violence, and youth crime. Additionally, some attendees referred to school-related issues, such as bullying and school safety. Some participants simply referred to issues of downtown Providence, saying things like "downtown in shambles" or "third world streets in Providence." A couple of people referred to the need for less mass incarceration, issues related to prison sentences for youth minorities, and the need for more "opportunities/ progression for people with past criminal records." Other challenges mentioned by attendees included: difficulties getting youth engaged, limited youth opportunities, high electric rates, overcrowding, littering, the need to clean up of waste in front yards, suicide, the need for a focus on quality of life issues, declining population, loneliness and isolation, lack of a talent pool, obesity, technology addiction, and teen pregnancy.

#2: Government & Politics

The second most commonly mentioned challenge for individuals and communities was related to Rhode Island *Government & Politics*. First, many individuals referred to issues related to taxes. Some simply wrote "taxes," while others were more specific mentioning that taxes are too high and that property taxes continue to rise (especially in Providence). Others referred to issues with the truck tax and the level of taxation for the reform. A couple of mentioned that taxes were too high for retirees and that this often led people to leave the state after retirement. One person suggested to "create a 'vacancy tax' like Arizona." Related to this, there was a strong desire for more transparency in general and with how tax money is being spent. For example, one person wrote, "lack of transparency with city objectives." Others wrote about the need for "accountability of our public agencies," issues with "state management of budget/money," "inefficient use of tax dollars," a "lack of transparent administration and reporting," and "where is the money going?" One person was concerned about how "911 funds [were] used in [the] general fund," while another mentioned "where is the $ for public works?," and yet another stated "wasted money (welcome center on 295 and 38 studios)."

Many attendees referred to issues of government corruption, some specifically mentioning state-level corruption, and the need to solve it. People connected corruption with political greed or bad politics, and people discussed that the corruption has led to cynicism among Rhode Islanders or that Rhode Island has too much "tolerance to corruption." One quote mentioned the issue of political corruption and "too much 'I know a guy' dealing." Others referred to Rhode Island having "too much unchecked power in Rhode Island House of Representatives" and that "leaders and other decision makers are well-connected rather than the most qualified. This divides the state rather than unifying the communities." One person wrote that that people have "fear of past mistakes [of] corruption getting in the way of progress, like with the new PawSox stadium." One person wrote that "all courts are corrupt in Rhode Island" and another referred to "politicians going to jail." Someone else specifically wrote about issues of the political divide in Tiverton, and another person suggested the need to make more effective use of casino revenue. Some people did not use the word "corruption," but did state that the government was dysfunctional.

Multiple people suggested the need for change among state-level elected officials, with many suggesting the need for term limits. For example, one person suggested "term limits for all government seats." One person wrote "some politicians have been ensconced in their positions too long," while another discussed the "need change in the state house (need to give up power)." Some people were not shy to write that politicians have little regard among the public, with people writing quotes such as "dumb people in high office" or "the reputation of our politicians." One person wrote that Rhode Island struggled with a "lack of innovative thinking in the state government. We seem to be stuck in the 1980's and need new ideas and new people. This has led to a lack of great ideas."

A number of individuals suggested the need for consolidation of administration, cities, and/or school districts or "regionalization." One person suggested the need for "consolidation of schools and services--do we need 39 different school systems?" Another attendee stated, "39 cities and towns in the size of what's 2 or 3 counties in most states." People seemed to believe there were "too many layers of bureaucracy" or "too much red tape" and that there was "poor government planning." A couple of individuals seemed to think that more collaboration across town and country-level governments would help communities understand each other's needs and would open up possibilities for collaborative efforts to solve problems. Some people referred specifically to inefficiencies in their town government. For example, one person quoted that the "town government doesn't seem to work very well," and another wrote "The local and state government costs are way too high. The bureaucracy of government, in general, doesn't work efficiently." Furthermore, multiple individuals mentioned difficulties getting politicians and leaders to listen to the public, with one person stating "government needs to listen to [the] population." One person suggested the need for more open public meetings. A couple of people wrote about concerns with uninformed voters and the need to "help people understand what's going on and with who so they can vote accordingly as the polls." One person simply wrote: "Who is my Congressperson?" Another person referred to low voter turnout as an issue.

These were various issues related to government and politics that were discussed by approximately 1-3 people:

- Lack of government funding and issues with budget deficits and the need for funding for certain areas, such as infrastructure (including roads and bridges), public transportation as people age, legislative grant programs.
- Lack of long-term vision for the state.
- Political differences and divisiveness in the state.
- Political issues and fears related to President Trump, his agenda, and his administration (Betsy Devos specifically mentioned).
- Issues in Rhode Island with a single party-dominated/single opinion and the need for a stronger 2 or 3 party system in government to provide alternative voices.
- Inhospitable attitude of politicians regarding the aging population.
- Enforcement of regulations.
- Challenges getting the general assembly to agree to a constitutional convention.
- Provincialism and local power not representing the voices of minorities and those in poverty.
- Difficulty getting gun legislation on the floor of Rhode Island House & Senate.
- Need to invest in pensions.
- Governor's response to local environmental groups or with compliance with regulations.
- Lack of professionalism from police and people in uniforms.
- Need for better customer service in city halls (Cranston specifically mentioned)

#3: Transportation & Infrastructure

Issues related to *Transportation & Infrastructure* were the third most commonly discussed challenge among attendees of the Together RI events. Most individuals who wrote about transportation simply wrote "transportation" without giving any specifics. However, some did mention a "lack of transportation" or that "transportation is a problem." One person discussed that Rhode Island was a "transportation island and interstate." Another participant was a bit more specific with his/her response, mentioning that "real networked accessible transportation" was a challenge in Rhode Island, and someone else wrote that the issue was "port transportation choices and badly designed commercial centers." Commuter transportation was also discussed as an issue for Rhode Island.

Public transportation must have been a common point of discussion at the events. One participant wrote, "transportation is a challenge, but thinks RIPTA [Rhode Island Public Transit Authority] does well." However, most participants who discussed transportation did refer to public transportation as a challenge, with some people specifically referring to access and route issues and others noting the need for expanded and better public transit. One individual mentioned public transportation as a challenge and wrote that students had a particularly difficult time due to the frequency of route issues and that third-shift workers lacked in public transportation options. However, this same person also referred to public transportation as a

"safety net in abusive situations." One person gave a few more specific issues, stating that public transportation was especially difficult in getting to the beaches or to stores for older residents. Related to this, transportation for older adults was mentioned by a number of participants as a challenge in Rhode Island. A couple of people referred to issues with the transfer station, stating that rats were a concern. Giving some ideas for how to improve public transportation, one participant suggested that the public transportation system should have smaller buses, and another person suggested that Rhode Island needs "street cars like in New Orleans."

Multiple participants also discussed infrastructure needs and how infrastructure across the state should be improved, with challenges regarding the "road conditions" being mentioned quite frequently. One person commented that "Roads and bridges need such improvement!" Some referred to the need for better care and maintenance of Rhode Island's infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, water/sewer pipes, and electricity. However, some participants noted that "roads are always being worked on" and the importance of "having folks understand that resources (roads!) cost money." Improving school infrastructure was often noted in comments about the need for improved infrastructure. Another commented that Rhode Island had "deplorable roads," and someone even noted that Rhode Island has a "legacy of not maintaining roads and school." Potholes were also frequently discussed in areas across the state, and at least one participant mentioned difficulties with manhole covers in the streets. Some participants noted a lack of bike lanes, sidewalks, and crosswalks, and others mentioned that having "dedicated bike lanes in the city" would be welcomed.

Some people referred to "traffic congestion" as an issue, with one person specifically noting difficulties getting "traffic getting into Providence from other communities." One person mentioned that continued development was making traffic more difficult. A number of individuals referred to parking challenges while others referred to driving issues, such as aggressive or distracted driving, which made it dangerous or time-consuming to get across the state. A couple of participants noted that people need to "stop at stop signs!" or had an issue with "insane tailgating." Finally, one person noted that "trucks avoid tolls by going on back roads," referring to the recently implemented law about trucks being charged tolls on the I-95 highway near Exeter and Hopkinton.

#4: Programs & Services

Many attendees discussed issues with various *Programs & Services* in Rhode Island. The cost and affordability of healthcare and health insurance were frequently mentioned. Some referred to the need for better access to healthcare, better benefits, free medical services, or the need for better healthcare for older adults. One individual mentioned the need to "maintain the ACA," while another stated that getting Medicaid benefits was too easy. Another participant discussed the lack of access to services and support for people with chronic health conditions. Some people referred to the high cost of healthcare, stating that Massachusetts does it better. Also related to healthcare, one person suggested the need for interpreters and a program for sign language. The need for better mental health and therapy services was also discussed, with some

participants specifically mentioning needed assistance for those suffering from addiction or for older adults. One person mentioned the importance of destigmatizing mental health care. One participant specifically mentioned access issues and that the major challenge she/he encountered was the "lack of mental health services in Washington County. As a mental health consumer, I have to travel to Providence County to get services. Would like to see drop-in centers, other professionals, invest here in Washington County."

Many participants of the Together RI events also discussed challenges related to social services. Multiple individuals mentioned the need for better after school program options and the importance of having spaces available for kids and teens to gather and do activities or for youth support groups. On the other end of the lifespan, many people discussed the need for improved senior services. Individuals discussed the need for more funding, councils to support older adults, and the need for better transportation services and housing options. One individual discussed the "lack of dedicated town employee/department to address seniors' problems," and another wrote that the Department of Elderly Affairs had issues. Related to long term care, one attendee wrote, "As a resident of a nursing home, the lack of staffing at all levels," referring to the need for better wages and working conditions to help with recruitment and retention of staff in nursing homes. Others mentioned the challenges related to services for those with addictions, for those who are homeless, and for those with disabilities. A couple of people mentioned challenges related to the Department for Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). One person wrote about the need for more minority representation in non-profit leadership writing,

"Being a minority in a non-profit space is extremely difficult. Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution but furthest from the resources and power." Finally related to social services, some individuals made broad comments about the need for more funding for social services and non-profits, though a couple of people wrote about the need to keep programs accountable, and another person had issues with non-profits not paying taxes.

Many people wrote about issues related to Rhode Island's communication infrastructure, such as newspapers, TV, and signage. A couple of participants suggested that Rhode Island needs to better advertise itself, while others were more concerned about getting information to Rhode Islanders, specifically those less fortunate, about available programs and services. One person wrote that Rhode Island has a "lack of awareness of opportunities (newspaper is outdated)," while another wrote about the "lack of decent unbiased newspaper." Some participants wrote about challenges with recycling and waste services in Rhode Island, with some people referring to concerns about litter from the transfer station, limited time for landfill, the need for sustainable waste management, and a concern about a proposed landfill in Pawtucket. A couple of people discussed digital systems and the "need for high-speed internet at ALL homes for an affordable price."

#5: Education

Many participants wrote about concerns with *Education* and schools, seemingly most related to public schools. For example, one person wrote about the importance of "Improving

public education! We must increase the graduation rates and success of our public schools" while another wrote that "private [education] is expensive, public is poor quality." Furthermore, there were multiple comments made about funding challenges, mostly related to infrastructure and supply needs. However, one person made an overall comment stating that "Taxes are too high because the school budget is unreasonable. Every year it gets higher. The superintendent is aligned with the unions and is not working for taxpayers or the children."

Specific to infrastructure and supply needs, one person wrote, "Schools in deplorable condition and unsafe" while another wrote, "poor condition of public schools (teachers have to purchase own supplies)." Most of the challenges discussed seemed to be related to public elementary through high school, though at least one person referred to public higher education, writing about tuition freezes and lack of planning and investment at places like CCRI. Related to funding challenges, there was some interest in more school consolidation and having more regionalized services, such as school systems, though a couple of people referred to concerns with schools closing. One person wrote, "There are too many school districts and too little school resources (which has led to a poor quality in public education)."

A couple of people wrote about concerns regarding the educational racial gap and the need for more teachers of color. One person discussed the importance of raising the educational level of all, but specifically mentioned the importance of ensuring that Hispanics have access to high-quality education. Related to the need for teachers of color, one person wrote, "the low number of teachers of color (teacher representation! Teachers should be the students' ethnic/racial representation)." Finally, many people wrote about education challenges related to various issues, such as teacher salaries, school accountability, school union contracts, personalized learning plans, costs for elementary through high school programs, inequities in education quality across communities, the need for better media literacy and financial literacy in schools, a need for more fresh fruit and vegetables in schools, and the need for security in schools.

Additional Topics

Many additional topics were discussed related to challenges that impact daily life in Rhode Island. Within the *Sense of Community* category, participants discussed many issues of social divisiveness and polarization and the need for people to get to together and participate in community action. People wrote about concerns about provincial thoughts and ideas, social isolation, resistance to change, insularity, small-mindedness, parochialism, and entrenched thinking. Some participants mentioned difficulties with too many people complaining and not enough "doing." There were also quotes from people concerned about people not being invested in the communities, for example, "transient tourists (2nd homeowners)," and not being willing to come together. People also mentioned that Rhode Island often has negative attitudes towards new residents and a fear of others. Finally, some participants noted concerns with Rhode Island having low self-esteem and being too detached with no state-wide identity.

Within *Housing & Cost of Living*, many participants noted concerns with people being able to afford housing costs and issues of cost of living. People mentioned issues with rental costs being too high and home prices being out of reach. There were multiple comments related to a lack of affordable housing options. Other comments were made about: increasing real estate prices, absentee landlords, abandoned houses, lack of senior housing, out-of-state residents buying properties, difficulties with building a home, and rundown neighborhood.

Related to *Business & the Economy*, participants at the Together RI events discussed a lack of economic growth in Rhode Island as well as economic inequality. People mentioned difficulties with business contracting and with helping small businesses and start-ups. There were also specific mentions of needing to make decisions about the use of the Superman building and where PawSox stadium should be as well as addressing the "extreme power of National Grid" and needing more manufacturing options than Electric Boat and Hasbro. One participant wrote that a challenge was, "preserving rural character in the face of development," while another participant mentioned challenges with "how to grow without ruining the environment (i.e., businesses cut trees for solar farms, businesses take over wooded areas)."

For challenges related to *Natural Resources & Open Space*, participants noted concerns with parks, landfills, pollution, water quality, deforestation, and renewable energy. People also wrote about the need for more sustainable living, such as better recycling options and more composting to address, for example, food waste. Many comments were made about the need to address climate change, including sea level rising and weather concerns.

Related to *Diversity & Culture*, some participants wrote about the fear that Rhode Islanders have for different groups of people and about racial insensitivity and cultural isolation. A number of participants wrote about a lack of racial and ethnic diversity and opportunity. One person noted, for example, a lack of people of color at their particular event. One interesting observation made by a participant was that we tend to "liv[e] in our groups (not many chances to have authentic interactions with people who have different views and experiences)," while another participant noted a lack of diversity in government.

Finally, while most people found Rhode Island's *Small Size of the State* to be a strength, some people were concerned about Rhode Island being small and having an inferiority complex or living in the shadow of Boston. One person mentioned that "Our smallness could make us vulnerable if we cannot keep ourselves up-to-date."

2.6. Proud About Rhode Island

What About, or In, Rhode Island Makes You Proud?
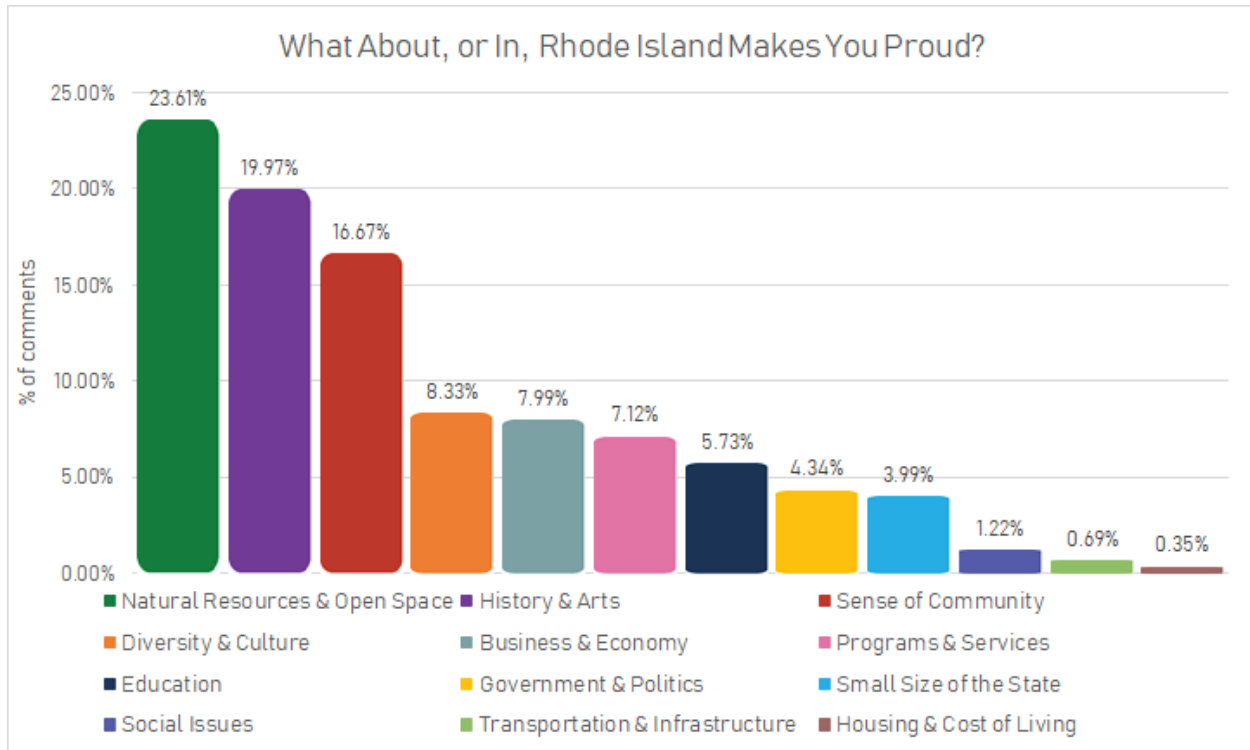
The most frequent response categories to the question about what in Rhode Island makes people proud included: *Natural Resources & Open Space*, *Rhode Island History & Arts*, and *Sense of Community*. Related to *Natural Resources & Open Space*, participants talked about the natural beauty of Rhode Island and "how gorgeous our state is." People noted the scenic landscapes, the beautiful natural spaces, Narragansett Bay, and Newport. Many participants were proud of the ocean, including the beaches and the coast, though others noted appreciation for rivers, ponds, and streams. Some people were proud of the offshore wind farm while others noted appreciation for the parks and walking trails. Others noted they were proud of the weather and the four seasons in Rhode Island.

Within the *History & Arts* category, many participants wrote about being proud of Rhode Island's history and legacy, with multiple comments made related to Roger Williams, democracy and religious freedom, free speech, being the first state to declare freedom from England, being one of the original colonies, and the Declaration of Independence. There were also multiple comments about being proud of the arts community and of artists from Rhode Island. People noted appreciation for arts programs, theatres, ballet, the philharmonic orchestra, and cultural events.

Many attendees at the Together RI events noted how proud they were of Rhode Island's *Sense of Community*. People discussed how wonderful the people of Rhode Island are using adjectives such as kind, helpful, friendly, resilient, open, accepting, strong-minded, non-

judgmental, neighborly, liberal, diverse, warm, caring, and progressive. One person noted that "I love Rhode Island. I think our greatest asset is our people." In these discussions, people talked about Rhode Islanders being willing to help one another; respecting history, culture, and art; sharing resources; working together for a cause; having strong work ethics; having community involvement; and having a capacity to change. A number of comments were made about how people choose to live here and how proud people are to live in Rhode Island.

In the *Business & Economy* category, people mostly mentioned food and restaurants, but a number of people also wrote about tourism, Quonset Point, Providence, and Newport. For *Diversity & Culture*, individuals wrote about Rhode Island's diversity, quirkiness, culture, and immigrant communities. One person even wrote, "celebration of ethnic groups." Within *Education*, participants mentioned that Rhode Island had quality higher education, and some people specifically touted URI, Brown, and RISD. Individuals seemed to believe that Rhode Island had high value in higher education, and that graduates were well-prepared. CCRI's free tuition program (Rhode Island Promise) was also discussed.

For *Government & Politics*, people wrote about being proud of the leaders, appreciating the accessibility of public officials and how they are always looking out for the community, and valuing how people continue to try to improve Rhode Island's politics. Individuals also wrote specific comments about how Rhode Island has "politically left leaning voters" and its "Chicago style politicians, and there were mentions of Senator Whitehouse, Senator Reed, Senator Pell, and Governor Raimondo by name. In discussing *Programs & Services*, attendees wrote about the free recreational and entertainment activities from spring through fall as well as about how Rhode Island has strong non-profit organizations. People also wrote about libraries, family festivals, Social Security, museums, safe clinics, integrated health clinics, medical services, hospitals, and community concerts. Specific activities mentioned included: Waterfire, children's museums, PPAC, Rhode Island Foundation, the ServeRI website, Champlin Foundation, Providence Journal, Blithewold Arboretum, the Bristol Parade, Touro Synagogue, Save the Bay, Sage Clinic, and Roger Williams Park concerts.

For *Small Size of the State*, individuals were proud of the smallness, the location, the geographic diversity, and being a "fun size." Finally, within *Social Issues*, people were proud of Rhode Island's older adult population (having the largest 85+ population of all states & 6th highest for 65+, according to one respondent), having good gun laws compared to other states, how Rhode Island recovered from having the highest unemployment rate in the country, and marriage equality.

2.7. Positive Sense of Community in Rhode Island

What Do You Think Contributes the Most to a Positive Sense of Community in Rhode Island?
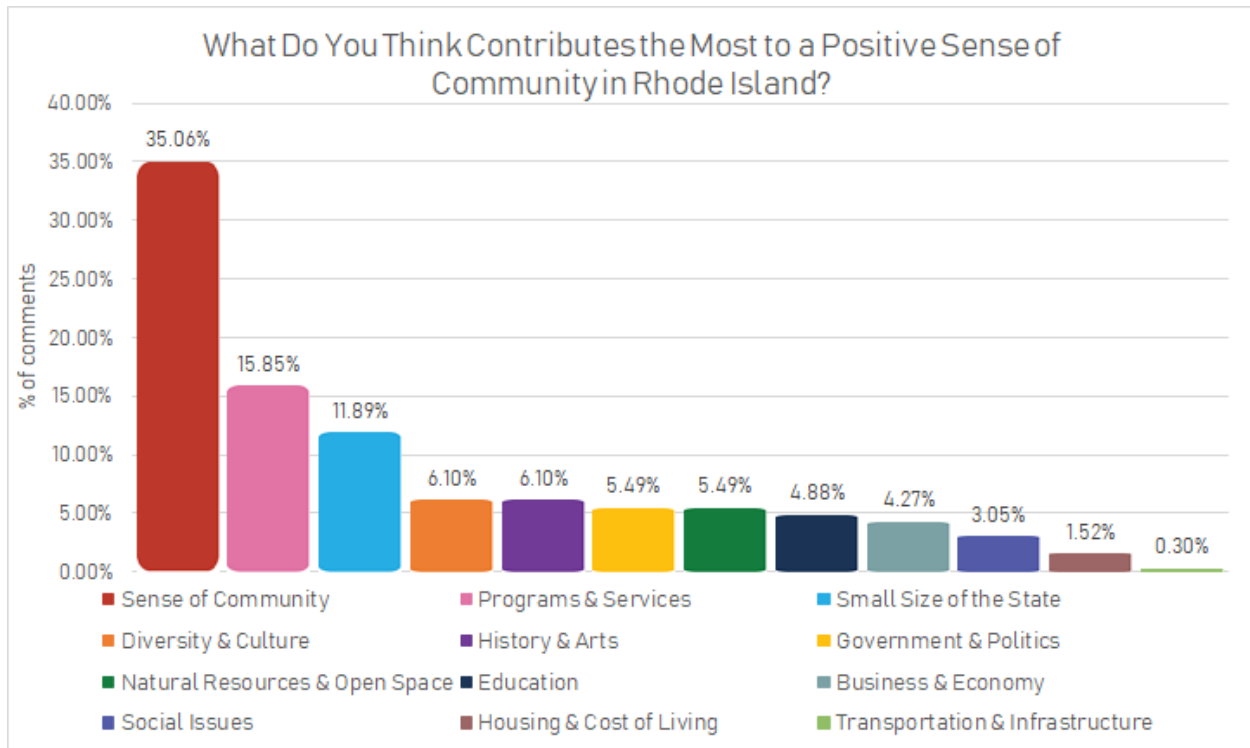
As anticipated, most responses to the question about what contributes the most to a positive sense of community fell within the category of *Sense of Community*.

A large number of respondents extolled the virtues and positive traits of Rhode Island's collective communities. A number of respondents cited the strong "sense of community" and "interconnectedness" they felt living in Rhode Island. "Everyone knows each other," stated one person. Participants often cited the willingness of fellow Rhode Islanders to help each other, and one person stated that Rhode Islanders express "happy helpful interactions to each other no matter what the effort is." Other participants described Rhode Island's communities using various terms such as supportive, open, caring, inclusive, and proud. A few participants had similar statements relating to how Rhode Island's small-size can foster "closeness." However, one respondent in contrast said there "seems to be a common chip on the shoulder for being the smallest state."

Furthermore, a number of respondents noted the willingness of Rhode Island's communities and people to work together. One attendee noted the community has "the ability to listen to each other and compromise." Another felt there was a "willingness of neighbors to pull together and work to improve their community." One person felt some change was needed and responded: "We need to stand together and be united but open communication is key. [There are] too many politics and too many things swept under the rug, we need to be more of an open book." Several respondents believed that Rhode Island was an inclusive and open place to live. "People feel welcome," as one participant described. Another person said despite "being

provincial, Rhode Island is open to newcomers and it's a very convivial place to call your home."
One attendee described the attitude of Rhode Islanders as one of "respect empathy and
understanding."

   Volunteers and various groups within the community were discussed by a few attendees.
One respondent listed several groups they felt contributed to the community saying: "Churches,
town committees, Boy and Girl Scouts, sports, Little League, local organizations in which
regular people can contribute (also the ROTC and Reserve groups)." In relation to the
contributions of various groups one participant said: "I think it comes from each person and it
gets more powerful when they are part of a political/community/religious group...and work
[together] for a common goal."

   When discussing *Programs & Services*, the majority of respondents tended to focus on
community events and organizations and their benefits. Several participants mentioned the
Rhode Island Foundation and the Together RI event. One person stated: "sessions like these and
organizations like the Rhode Island Foundation" contribute to a positive sense of community. In
addition to the Rhode Island Foundation, other organizations and institutions were discussed.
Churches and religious institutions were mentioned by a few participants. Topics of discussion
included libraries, public radio, community centers, Boys & Girls Clubs, AARP, Save The Bay,
community gardens, and neighborhood associations. Others mentioned enjoyable community
events such as waterfire, block parties, festivals, gallery nights, concerts, and other events that
are free of charge as having a positive impact on the community.

   A number of participants mentioned Rhode Island's *Small Size of the State* as
contributing to a sense of community. The small size of the state provided unique opportunities
according to some participants. One person cited: "The fact that there is no place in the state that
is not within an hour's drive you can go anywhere and still get home in time for dinner." Another
participant said the small size created an environment in which "we know people across the state
and we're all in it together." Similarly, another attendee stated "many have strong roots because
of the size, [we] know the same people." Another felt the "scale of Rhode Island makes small
enough to know the state and get things done." Further, Rhode Island's size makes it unique, and
it is something of which many participants seem proud of. As one participant stated we are "the
smallest state with a big history."

   For *History & Arts,* several respondents noted that Rhode Island has a unique history and
thriving arts community. One respondent said Rhode Island has a "history of religious freedom,"
while another person said the people of Rhode Island have a "shared history." Rhode Island's
artistic culture was described by one participant as "vibrant." Within *Diversity & Culture*, a
number of participants discussed the contributions of our diverse communities. There are "lots of
different races ethnicities and cultures in Rhode Island" in the words of one respondent. Three
respondents mentioned the variety of cultural celebrations and events that people participate in in
Rhode Island. One person said Rhode Island has a history of "valuing diversity."

   Other respondents valued Rhode Island's *Natural Resources & Open Space* and felt they
had a positive impact on the states communities. A number of attendees mentioned the beauty of

and enjoyment they experienced in Rhode Island's environments. One respondent said we have "great natural areas... and wonderful downtowns and villages." Other participants mentioned the recreational areas, parks, and walking trails are beneficial. Some attendees discussed aspects of *Government & Politics*. Several respondents mentioned the similar idea that Rhode Island has "accessible elected representatives." Two participants felt that Rhode Island had "positive leadership," and one person remarked that: "the governor sets the tone as well as the general assembly. Right now, the governor projects a positive attitude. Previous governors [did] not always [do so]."

Access to high-quality *Education* was discussed as a building block of communities in Rhode Island. One participant said Rhode Island should "invest in our youth and see them as our strength not our burden." Another respondent praised the "unknown" [people] who keep trying to make things work [including] literacy tutors, mentors, etc." In relation to the *Business & Economy* of the state, most participants talked about small businesses and the opportunities available in state. One respondent noted that Rhode Island has a "willingness to engage small businesses." Another person cited the many "local shopping opportunities" available. Tourism and recreation were also mentioned by a small number of participants.

When discussing *Social Issues,* the respondents tended to mention widespread issues/topics including disability, homelessness, hunger, unemployment, the opioid crisis, and senior citizens. One respondent was concerned about "help for people with disability." Another felt Rhode Island should "push forward in helping and giving ideas to help the homeless all areas." A few respondents talked about the *Housing & Cost of Living* situation in Rhode Island. One attendee mentioned the "affordable living" available in Rhode Island. Two other participants remarked upon the closeness and size of the houses in Rhode Island.

2.8. Personal Time Working to Improve the State or Community

What Would You Spend Personal Time Working to Improve, or Promote, on Behalf of Your Community OR on Behalf of Our State?
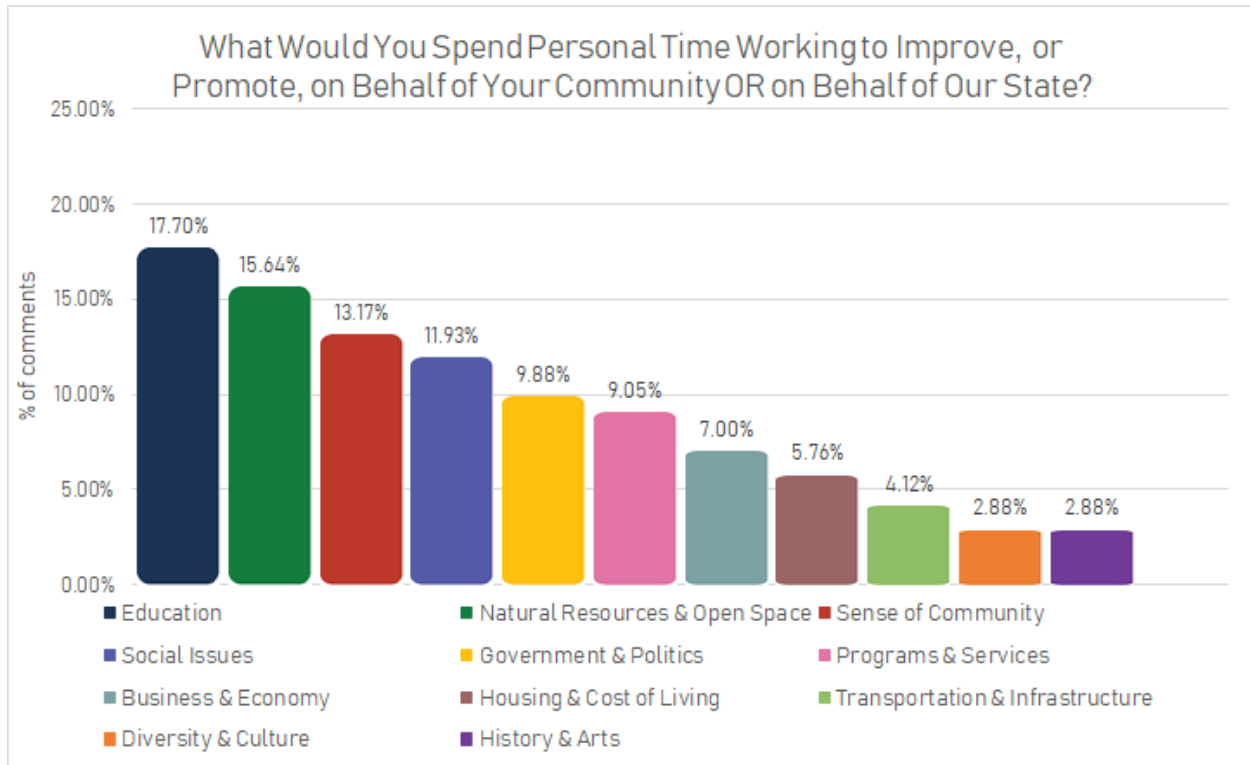
The most frequent response to the question of: "Is there something that was discussed at your table that you would spend personal time working to improve, or promote, on behalf of your community OR on behalf of our state?" was that many already did or planned to spend time working on Rhode Island's *Education.* The majority of the respondents simply wished to see improved education systems in Rhode Island. One participant volunteered information that they planned to volunteer at a local education program, stating "I will be volunteering at the summer literacy program!" Another attendee said: "I support young people training through my company." Several others commented on specific issues they wished to see improvement or change on, the respondents cited issues such as "graduation rates," "equal education and opportunity," a "hands-on learning atmosphere," and "Spanish language education" for native speakers. One participant said that they would like to spend time "helping our students succeed and get above [a] 22 % average reading rate."

A number of participants cited *Natural Resources & Open Space* as an area they wished to improve or that they are putting effort into improving. One attendees said they were "already involved in [the] drive to monitor [the] quality of water at local beaches." Another participant pledged their involvement saying "I will get involved in tree plantings, cleanups, etc." Several others cited cleaning up litter, waste, or other pollution. Two participants mentioned recycling initiatives. The health of Rhode Island's water and coastline was a concern for a number of respondents. Others wished to see Rhode Island shift towards green energy, and while most did

not elaborate on how they would become involved in this issue, one person stated he/she would "work to promote renewable energy."

Rhode Island's *Sense of Community* was the third most discussed topic category for this question. Most responses involved connecting or engaging other Rhode Islanders. Some responses involved simple actions, such as l "connect with people-start a conversation" or "get to know others." Other responses discussed their volunteerism within the community. One person wrote, "I am a very active volunteer," and another said they were a "community and bike activist," while a third person said "I'm already volunteering a lot but always open to new opportunities." Several respondents discussed "getting young people involved" or improving civic engagement. One attendee liked the idea of having a "Sister City." They stated "our sister city idea is unique! Pairing communities serves as a platform to listen and learn about each communities' strengths and weaknesses therefore identifying and solving issues."

There was a wide array of *Social Issues* Rhode Islanders wished to work on or improve. This discussion included topics such as bullying, racism, disability rights, civic engagement, children, senior citizens, homelessness, mental illness, social justice, drug addiction, poverty, women's rights, media literacy, criminal justice reform, job opportunities, gun laws, and taxes. The majority of respondents simply listed a topic they wished to become involved with and did not elaborate further. Some participants stated they were already working on these issues. Others had ideas that they wished to translate into action. One participant stated: "I have tons of ideas like get more poor people to vote [or] we can have places where the pros and cons of bills are debated and translated."

When it came to *Government & Politics*, attendees tended to want to get involved in discussing voting rights or access issues, corruption, various reforms, and taxation. One participant stated they planned on "running for office." Several ideas for reforms were discussed, and some of these included expenditures in general and the expenditure justification process, "direct democracy put into the Rhode Island state constitution," and "more checks and balances between house, senate, governor's office and judiciary." One participant said they wished to "help address Providence's dangerously underfunded pensions."

The few discussions of *Programs & Services* often focused on accessibility and improvement of programs. There were several discussions of making sure those in need are able to access the needed support, and various improvements of programs and services were discussed. One attendee was interesting in getting involved with "more non-profit collaboration," while another wanted athletic programs that were "more inclusive." One person seemed interested in helping to address "the need for a Town Center in Tiverton." When discussing B*usiness & the Economy,* most respondents tended to focus on specific topics or issues, such as the PawSox Stadium issue or the tourism industry, as areas where they might get involved. One person was interested in helping with "marketing plans to actually get more people to come here," and another person mentioned getting involved in "community wealth (not jobs) by forming and supporting workaround co-ops."

Several people mentioned *Housing & Cost of Living,* including affordable housing and addressing abandoned or vacant buildings. A few people discussed the need for *Transportation & Infrastructure* improvements, including having RIPTA meetings and helping to identify better transit options. Within *History & Arts*, some respondents were involved with the arts scene and helped to historical significance of Rhode Island. Two respondents mentioned freedom of expression as a positive trait in Rhode Island. Other respondents were proud of the *Diversity & Culture* of the state. One attendee said "immigration and refugees should be welcomed." Two people mentioned the need for improved services for those who do not speak English.

2.9. Most Frequent Topics from Each Community Event

Providence Area

Providence 1 on April 3
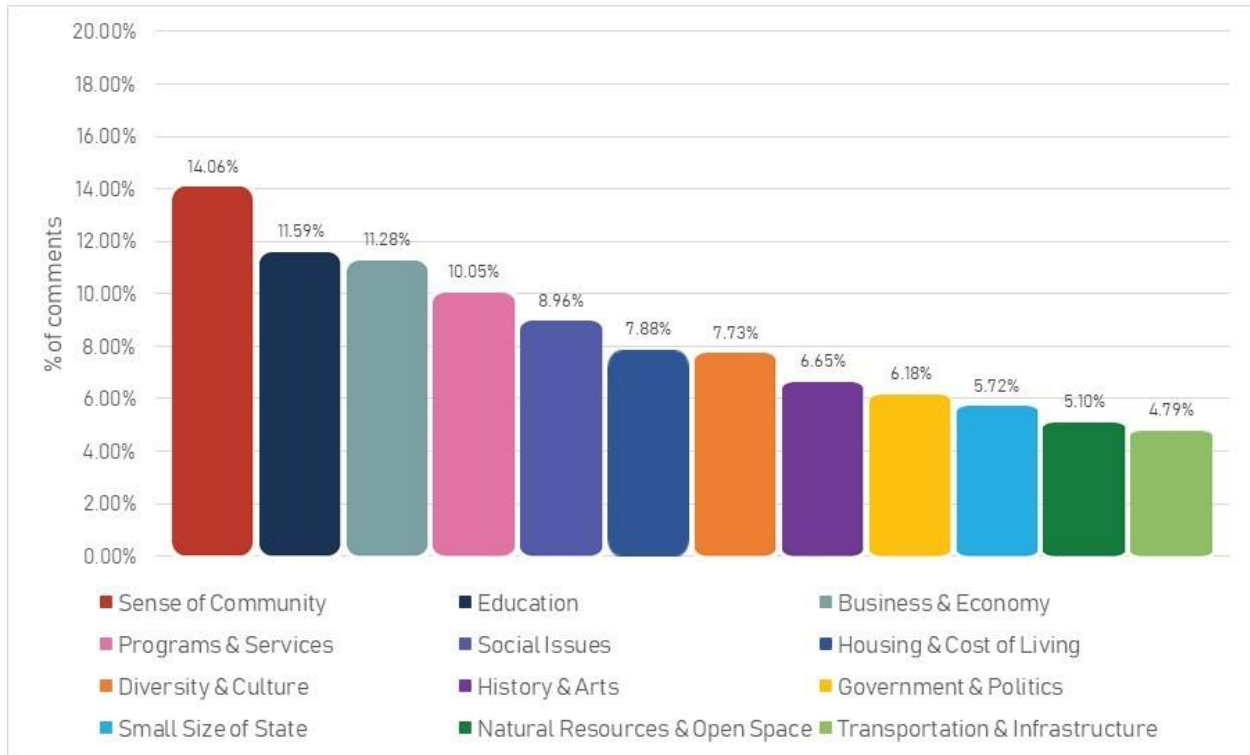
The most commonly mentioned topic at the first Providence dinner in which 120 participants attended focused on Rhode Island's *Sense of Community*. The "intimacy within communities," "big hearts," and "open people" were lauded. One participant answered that Rhode Island's biggest strength was the "community involvement and participation of people working to make Rhode Island better." Another simply answered "we know each other." However, while many respondents appreciated "the unique, spunky, quirky culture, and silent strength of [the] state," others felt that Rhode Island's neighborly communities were a disadvantage. Some attendees felt challenged by the "insularity" and "provincial mindset" of the state. Some of these entries noted that lack inclusivity is a challenge and that "it takes a long time to be considered a 'Rhode Islander'."

Education was the second most talked about topic. Many people who wrote about education specifically noted pride in the "world class universities," often citing Brown, URI, and RISD. Pride in public schools also came up, but not as frequently. Attendees were more likely to be concerned with public education. Of those who mentioned public school, most participants wrote about a lack of funding, inequity, the "need to have access to better public education," and that "quality education [is] only tied to certain communities." The remainder of education-

focused responses wrote about education being an important opportunity for youth, with two people mentioning the Governor's free college initiative.

Although less so than *Sense of Community* and *Education*, *Business & Economy* was another often-mentioned category. In these conversations, participants commonly hailed the food and restaurants as one of Rhode Island's strongest industries. However, while many thought the state's food scene is great, some worried about the state's footprint in other fields. One participant feared Rhode Island is "in [the] shadow of Boston re: science [and] technology." Others followed, writing that if the state seizes its opportunities, it could "be first in innovation" and "attract new businesses."

Providence 2 on May 5
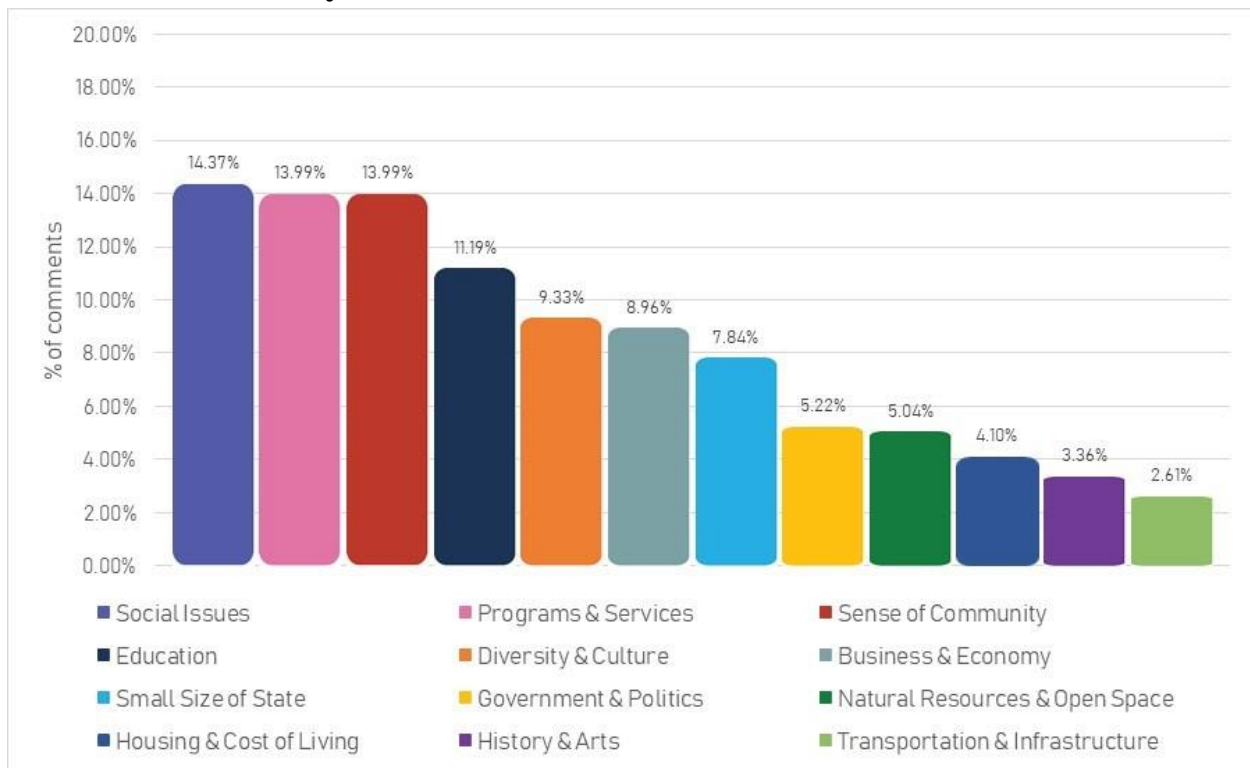
In the second Providence event (the brunch) where 105 people attended, the conversation shifted away from topics that were frequent in the prior event. Respondents talked about *Social Issues* the most often. Most of these comments were about inequities faced by disadvantaged communities, including older adults, Latinx individuals, minorities, those who are homeless, or those who are poor. One respondent said there "is an opportunity to address the structural racism and systemic barriers that are at the root of many of our community's problems," and that addressing it is Rhode Island's biggest opportunity.

In talking about equitability and access, many participants also mentioned those concerns related to *Programs & Services*, the second-most frequent discussion topic. There were many comments related to healthcare and access to healthcare in this category. Many others focused on the lack of jobs in the economy. One participant wrote that a challenge in Rhode Island was

"sources of employment." They noted that Rhode Island needs "more agencies that can bring jobs to the community, but [these] agencies should not discriminate or overlook the workers because of their nationality or color." Multiple responses also applauded Rhode Island on its children hospital, frequently mentioning it as one of Rhode Island's biggest strengths.

Rhode Island's *Sense of Community* was also discussed as much as *Programs and Services*. In this topic, participants' responses were about either the positive aspects of Rhode Island's small community or about the need for change in the state's communities. Of the positive items written, respondents wrote comments such as, "the people are willing to welcome you if you give the chance" and Rhode Island's biggest strength is its "diversity (I think Rhode Island is one of the most open minded states because of this and that it has allowed people to reach goals here that are more difficult to reach in other states)." Within the need for change, discussions criticized a "lack of awareness," called for "community participation (for communities to be aware of events they should participate in)," and suggested that Rhode Island should "...have more community action and actually work together for change." One respondent spoke about how "environmental racism impacts my life daily," writing that they "live in Providence and there's so much toxicity in my neighborhood due to the level of industrialization the area." Another called out to Rhode Island, asking the state to "meet our needs. We have many and we want action."

Pawtucket/Central Falls
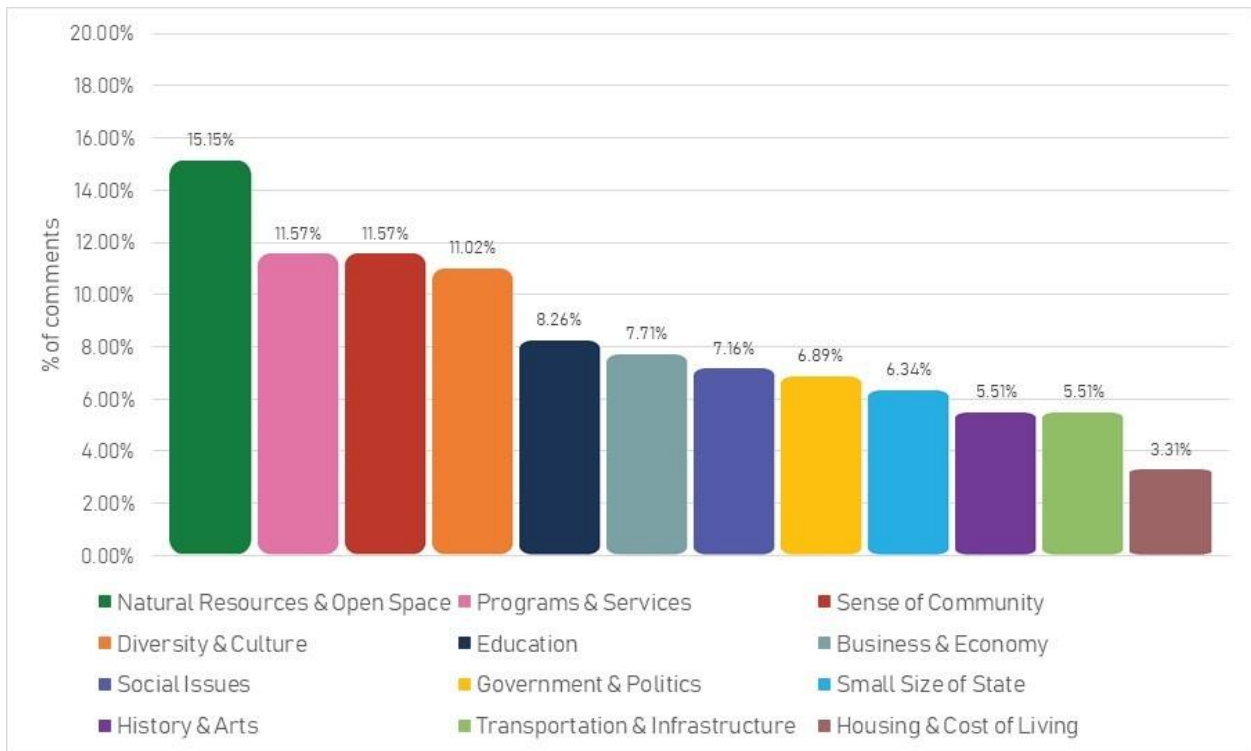
The 60 Pawtucket/Central Falls attendees most frequently wrote about discussions related to *Natural Resources & Open Space* at their event. They overwhelming spoke about the environment as Rhode Island's biggest strength. One participant loved "the fact that we have five magnificent wildlife refuges." Another appreciated "the walkability of Providence and area neighborhoods." Many responses were also about the beauty of Rhode Island's woods, beaches, and lakes.

Programs & Services was another well-discussed topic. Much of that conversation was related to "cuts to social services" and the lack of "services and housing for the mentally ill and homeless." Something special to the Pawtucket/Central Falls conversation that fell within the *Programs & Services* category was the amount of praise given to Rhode Island's libraries. Of those who discussed libraries throughout all of Rhode Island, about a ⅓ of those respondents were from the Pawtucket/Central Falls event. Only one other event had that many who wrote about libraries (the Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth event).

Sense of Community and *Diversity & Culture* were also frequently mentioned subjects. Within *Sense of Community*, respondents wrote about their appreciation for the state's "value system," adding that Rhode Islander's view "family as a strength." Much of the conversation was focused on the "kindness of people" and the intimacy of the state's neighborhoods. "Its closeness," one attendee wrote of Rhode Island's communities, "allows for one-on-one collaboration." Breaking from that theme, another advised that the state participate in more "civil discourse that leads to discovery and different points of view." Another feared that the state's intimate communities were a negative, writing that they were "worried about retribution for speaking up."

The discussion on *Diversity & Culture* was entirely positive and filled with commendations of the state's immigrants. Many participants wrote responses referencing that "immigrants that bring in their culture" are Rhode Island's biggest strength. Another participant wrote, "cultural and Religious celebrations" as the state's strongest trait.

Northern Rhode Island
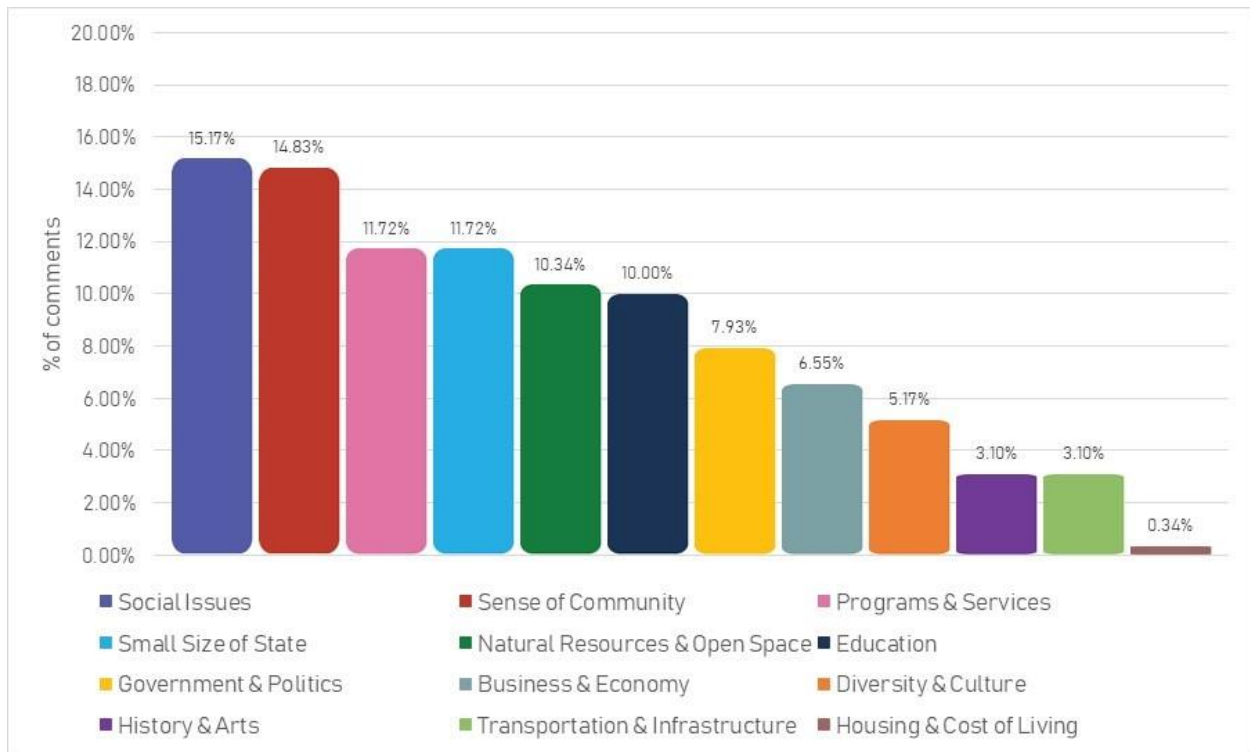
Woonsocket

Conversations at the Woonsocket event, where at least 46 people attended, seemed to revolve largely around *Social Issues* and *Sense of Community*. Within *Social Issues*, a wide variety of topics were discussed ranging from drugs and the opioid epidemic to bullying, homelessness, infrastructure, and unemployment. One respondent criticized the "lack of funding for children who have had trauma" and said Rhode Island is "unable to support them and their families. Kids have stresses that past kids didn't have. [We] need to teach kids how to deal with these stresses."

Within *Sense of Community,* people often spoke about Rhode Island's "ability to listen to each other and compromise" and the "neighbor-helping-neighbor" mentality of communities. One participant appreciated that "people are in tune with cultural events." However, respondents were again challenged by Rhode Island's "provincial thoughts and ideas." Other concerns were "entrenched thinking" and "the need to think larger."

Cumberland/Lincoln
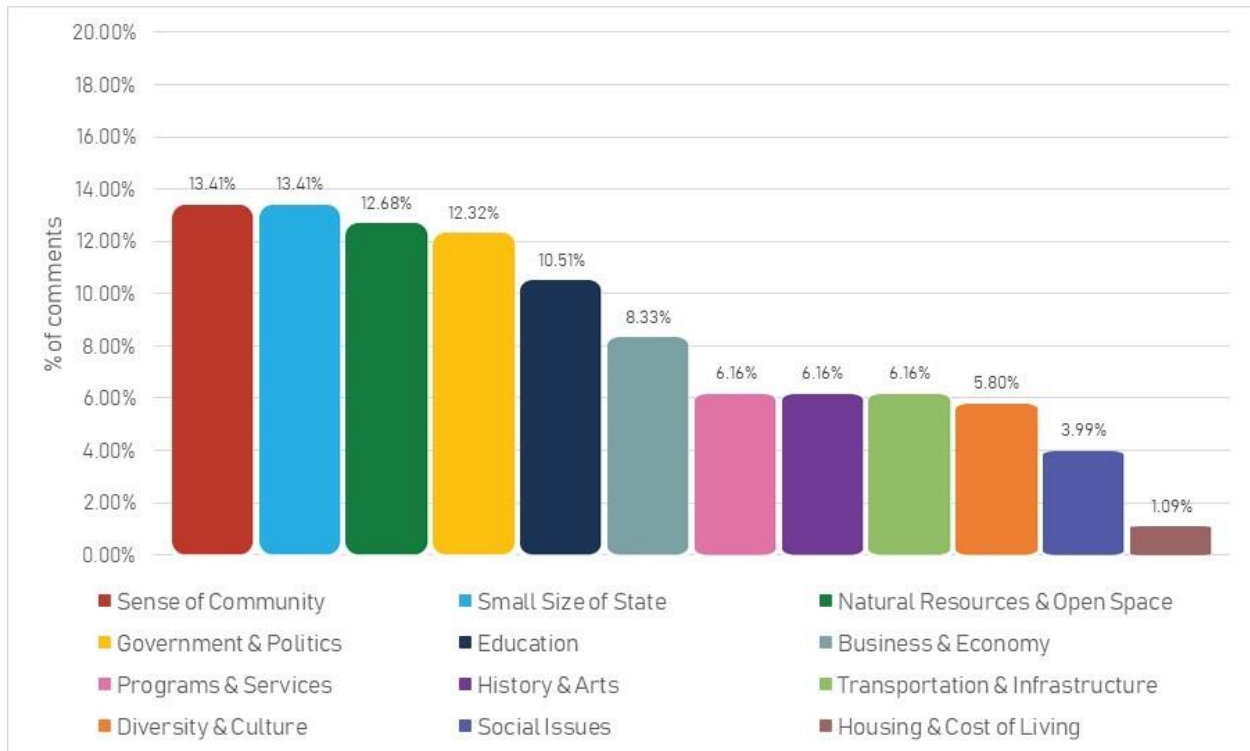
The conversation in Cumberland/Lincoln, with 65 participants, centered around four topics: *Small Size of the State, Sense of Community, Natural Resources & Open Space,* and *Government & Politics*. Many people saw the smallness of the state as an advantage, writing responses such as "because we are small, perhaps we can spearhead some issues like veteran services, healthcare for all, or bigger/better environmental care," and that our size is a "convenience (easy to get around, little traffic, close to Boston and NYC)." In fact, the only respondent who mentioned size negatively wrote "small state but large government."

Those who discussed *Sense of Community* wrote about a broad mix of topics, with some participants applauding the amount of "people giving back to the community" and "the willingness of people to work to make other's lives better," while others were challenged by "the lack of participation in community action." One respondent questioned whether Rhode Islanders are actually neighborly at all, writing "not sure if we really have a sense of community here." Another felt that the community was an issue, stating they were burdened by the state's "parochial attitudes ([there's] resilience to change. We need to adapt more)."

When the conversation was about *Natural Resources & Open Space*, there was a mix of different replies. Many were about the beauty of the state, its coastline, and its "environmental diversity." Others, however, were about the opportunity of taking on "green initiatives" and the need to "transform our energy system [for] more jobs, [a] better economy, and a better environment." One of these responses called for creating a "sustainable urban living," something that was not commonly mentioned throughout Rhode Island.

In the *Government & Politics* discussion, most replies were criticisms on the state's government and legislators. The "state political system doesn't meet the needs of the individual or the business community," wrote one attendant. "Get control of the budget," recommended another, writing that the state needs a "line item veto." Many respondents called for change of some form, whether it was mitigating the "unchecked power in [the] Rhode Island House of Representative," or finding different leaders. The state's current "leaders and other decision makers are well connected rather than the most qualified. This divides the state rather than unifying the communities." Pushing against the critique, one attendee wrote that people need "to stop thinking local and trust our decision making process as being for the good of the state."

North Providence/Smithfield
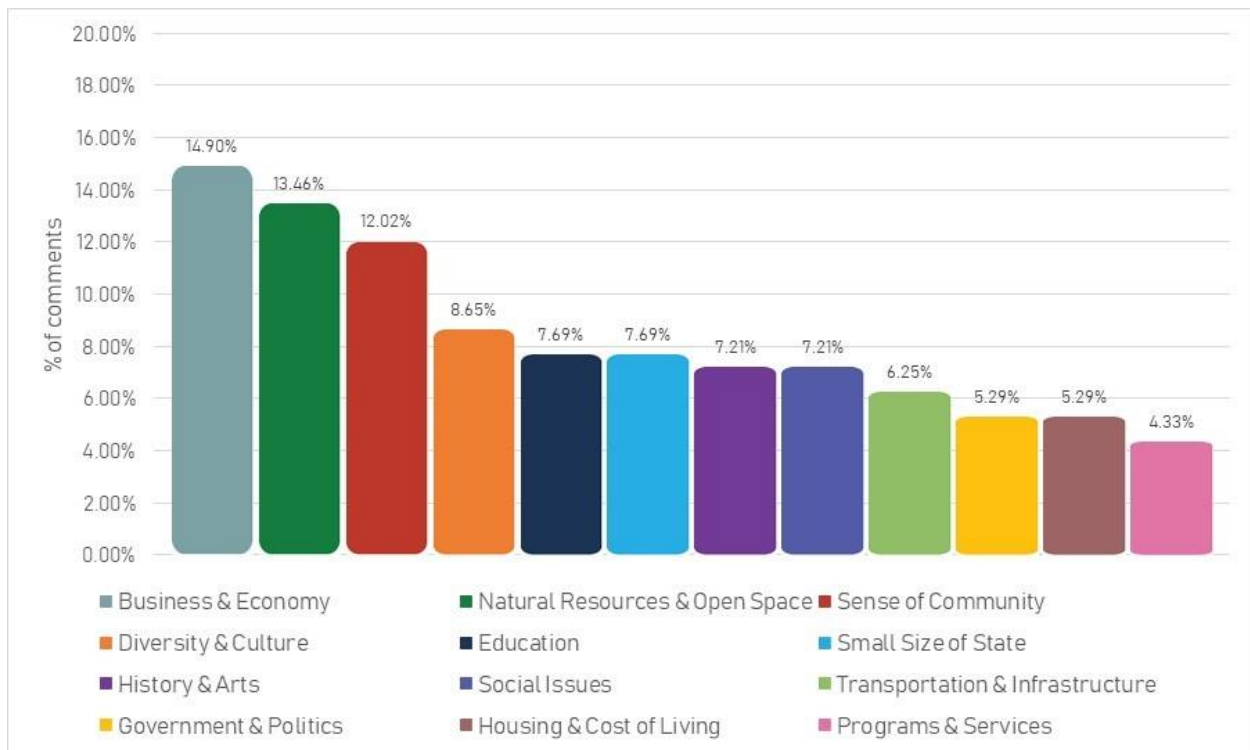
At the North Providence/Smithfield event, 40 participants spoke mostly about *Business & Economy, Natural Resources & Open Space,* and *Sense of Community*. At this event, the *Business and Economy* discussion seemed to be separated into two topics: participants who wrote about how much they loved the local restaurant and food scene, and participants who called for economic expansion. While there were multiple respondents who thought Rhode Island's biggest strength was "our food and restaurants," the latter category was more common. Many people called for the state to capitalize on tourism to fuel business growth. Two responses that capture the sentiment of the event well wrote that Rhode Island's biggest opportunity is to "expand our tourism and utilize our existing infrastructure," and "to modernize: bring our cities back to life." Two other participants specifically noted they were challenged by the scarcity of stores in their area, writing "no local neighborhood stores" and "lack of a supermarket."

Natural Resources and Open Space was also frequently mentioned at the North Providence/Smithfield event. Many of the comments were about particular natural landmarks, such as "the Blackstone River and National Park" and "the bike path." Some responses were also about Rhode Island's environmental impact. These participants wrote about the need to "build jobs around green economy," the opportunities of "renewable energy (wind farm and solar)," and the challenge of "environmental pollution."

In discussions about *Sense of Community*, there were a handful of criticisms amidst many compliments. These criticisms were "Rhode Islanders are set in their ways," the state is "cliquey [and a] good old boy network," and that there's a sense of "mistrust in neighbors and nearby people." However, the praise for the state's "tolerant and easy going" people and its "great downtowns and villages" far outnumbered these critiques. One respondent wrote Rhode Island's strength is that "everyone who wants to grow and improve themselves has the opportunity [to]."

Foster/Glocester
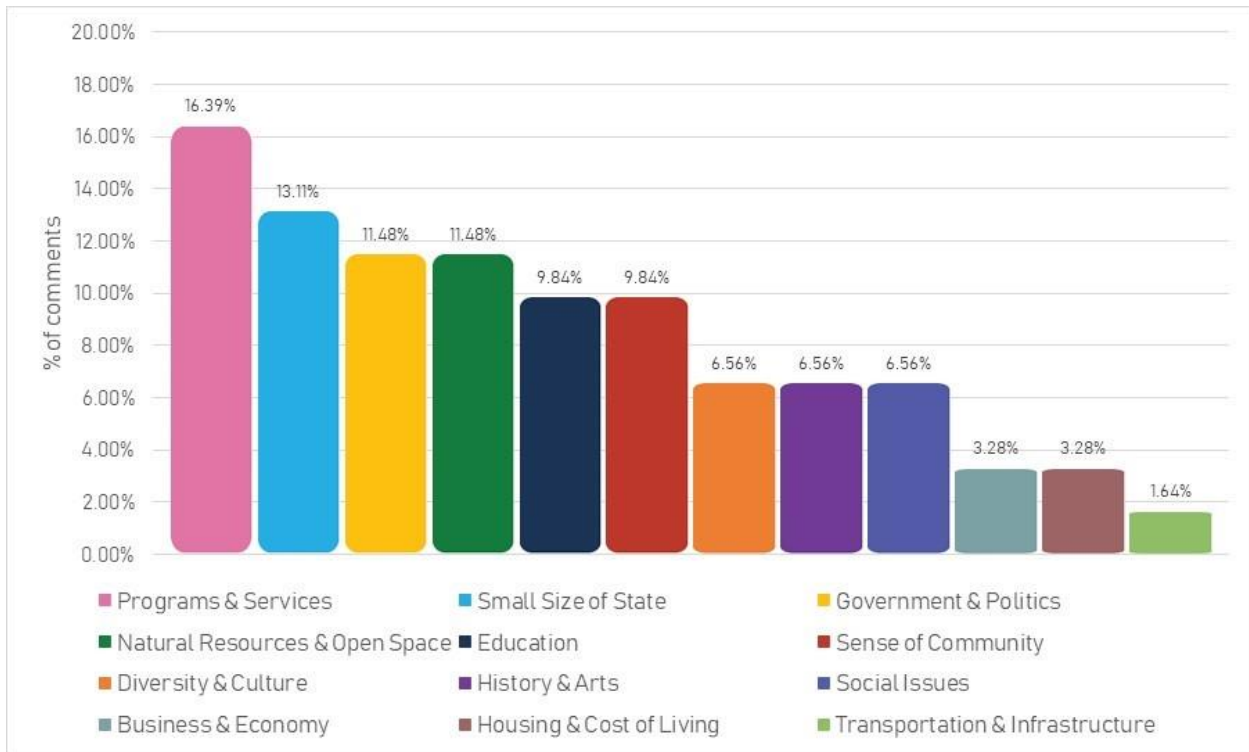
Although the Foster/Glocester event had a low turnout with 22 participants compared to other events, the conversation seemed to be far-reaching. *Programs and Services* was the most discussed area, followed by the *Small Size of the State*. The participants talking about *Programs and Services* were almost exclusively talking about challenges. One respondent wrote about a lack of stores and of land in the area, while another felt that the absence of street lights was a problem. Another wrote that Rhode Island needs to do more to "clean up litter."

While *Programs and Services* were often spoken about as a need, comments about the *Small Size of the State* were entirely positive. In these discussions, most participants talked about

the location of Rhode Island being the state's biggest strength, often putting the "location is close to Boston and NYC." One attendee proudly wrote that Rhode Island's small "size [makes it] easy to assemble and collaborate / easy for people to participate in organized events."

Natural Resources & Open Space and *Government & Politics* were both mentioned equally, with respondents calling for change in each category. One attendee wrote that the state should be more involved in "trailmarking open spaces… [and] promoting bike paths." For *Government & Politics*, one response was that Rhode Island needs to "consolidate cities and towns into counties to economize resources and use that money."

East Bay & Aquidneck Island
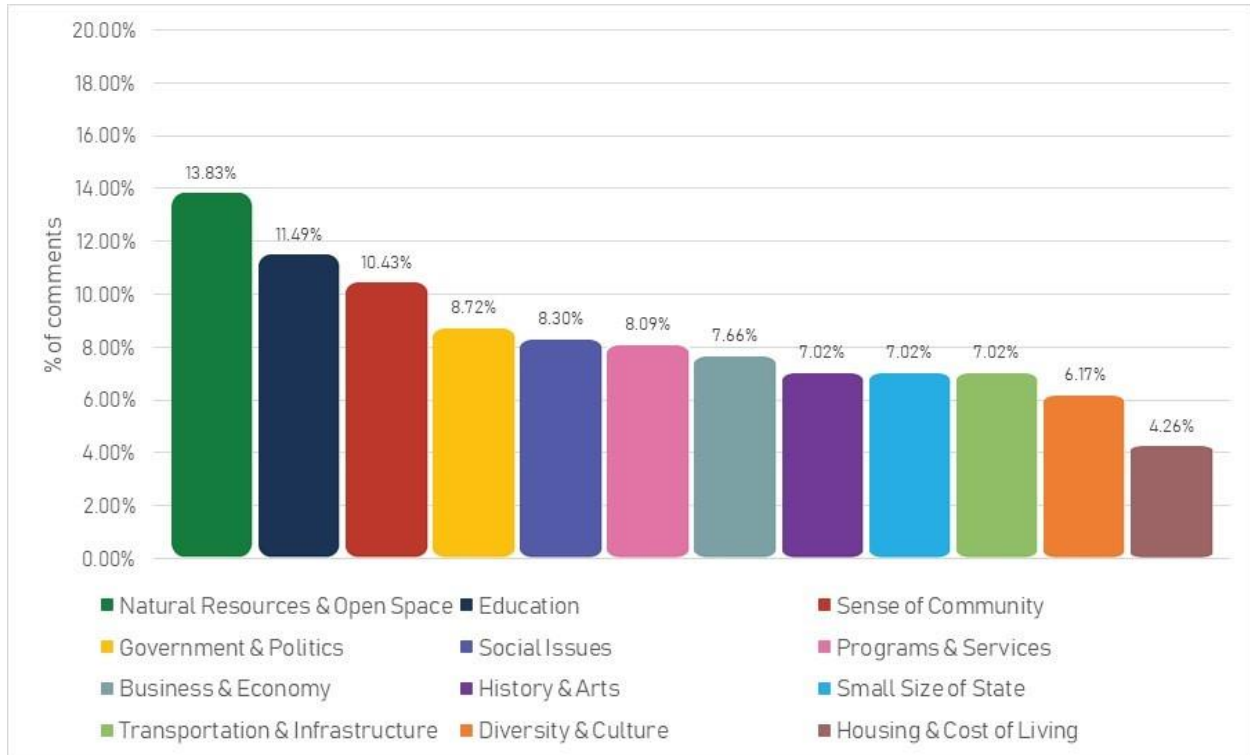
East Providence

At the East Providence event that had 77 participants, the most discussed topic was *Natural Resources & Open Space,* followed by *Education* and *Sense of Community*. In East Providence, the conversation seemed to frequently involve climate change and the need for renewable energy. Many respondents wrote about "renewable energy options (wind, solar, tidal)" as being Rhode Island's biggest opportunity. One respondent even wrote that Rhode Island's biggest opportunity was "becoming a leader in renewable energy by becoming the first state to commit to 100% renewable energy by 2050." Other responses varied from praising "the bike paths" and the "beautiful waterfront and harbors" to general reflections on our "pretty state." One of the few critical responses was "the governor's lack of a response to meeting requests from local environmental groups."

Education was also frequently discussed, mostly regarding criticism of the quality of public education and the state of public school infrastructure in Rhode Island. Many participants had responses similar to "our biggest opportunity is improving our education system" or noted that Rhode Island has a "legacy of not maintaining...schools." Another was disheartened by Rhode Island's school districting, writing that our biggest opportunity was "consolidation of schools and services."

Participants who spoke about *Sense of Community* praised the people of the state, writing that Rhode Islanders have a "curiosity and appreciation of each other" and that "people stay in

Rhode Island, [are] invested and loyal to [the] state, [and have] deep roots." Following that theme, other respondents wrote about Rhode Island's "inclusion" and "open mindedness [and] ability to speak about current events without party politics."

Newport/Middletown
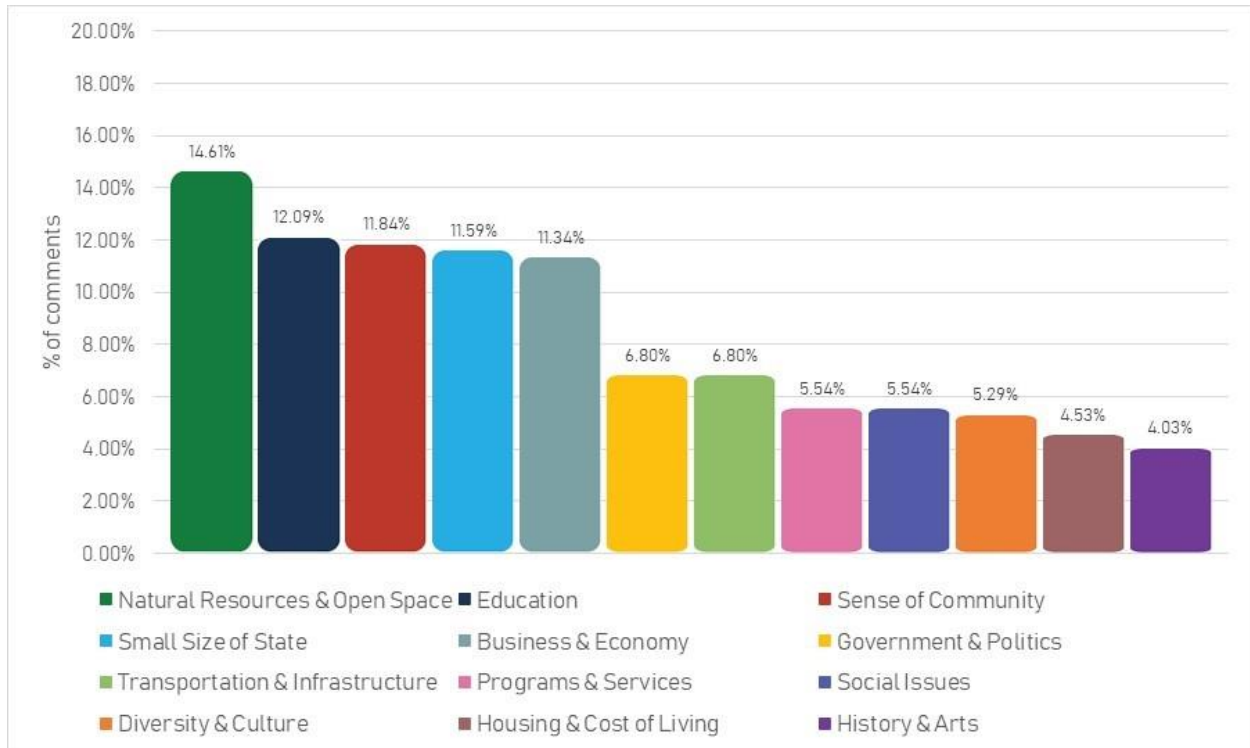
At the Newport/Middletown event with 83 participants, *Natural Resources & Open Space* was again the seemingly most popular discussion topic, though *Education*, *Sense of Community*, *Small Size of the State*, and *Business & the Economy* were also mentioned quite often. Within the *Natural Resources & Open Space* category, the conversation split between respondents who were burdened by environmental challenges, landfill use, and a lack of clean energy or recycling, and respondents who were in awe at "the potential of the ocean," "the views," the "460 miles of shoreline," and "the beauty of the seasons." Two respondents called for clean-up of the water and shores. Many other attendees simply wrote how much they appreciated the ocean.

Education was also commonly discussed in the Newport/Middletown conversations. The majority of education-centered comments were from Newport/Middletown participants who saw education as the biggest way to grow the state. A few answered that Rhode Island could better itself by "improving graduation rates," with one person adding, "...particularly [in] Newport."

The discussion around *Sense of Community* frequently highlighted the "family-oriented proximity" and "potential for connectedness" in the community. However, a few participants mentioned challenges of the community that affect them. "Polarization," lack of "community engagement," and "the two edged sword of transient tourists," were some of these challenges.

When the *Small Size of The State* was being discussed, people wrote about the opportunities that Rhode Island's size lends to the state. Multiple participants responded that the state's "small scale allows us to tackle big problems" and that its central New England location allows for "possible collaboration with other states."

While talking about *Business & Economy*, many respondents wrote about opportunities for Rhode Island to grow different sectors. Some of these included responses such as "airport expansion," "international tourism," and "us[ing] the ocean."

Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth
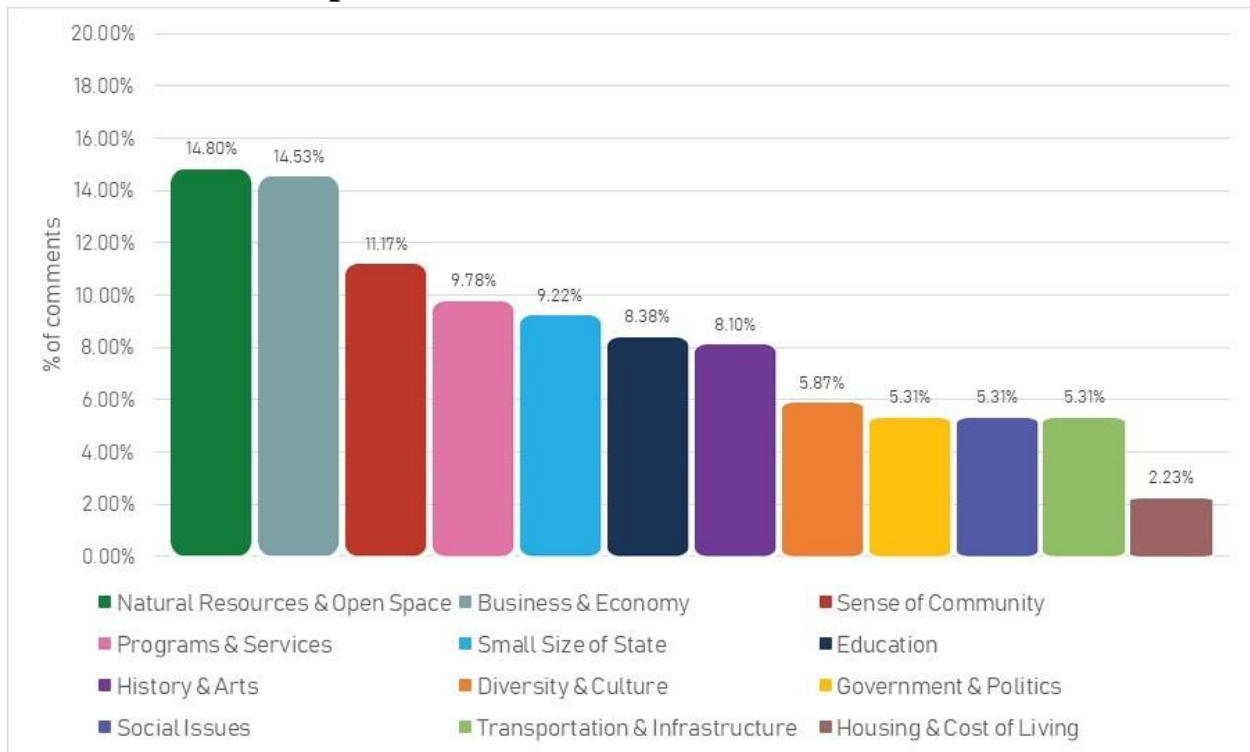
The Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth event had 41 participants who seemed to write primarily about two areas: *Natural Resources & Open Space* and *Business & the Economy*. Both of these topics had the most comments from these participants, more so than any other subject. In talking about *Natural Resources & Open Space*, the majority of respondents talked about either the "natural beauty" of Rhode Island or the challenges associated with the degrading environmental health. Many of the attendees who wrote about the beauty of Rhode Island simply wrote that they believed the "scenic landscapes," "coastal environment," and "view[s] from the bridges" were the state's biggest strengths. The "walkability" and "outdoor activities" were appreciated by a few participants as well who mentioned "biking, hiking, walking," and "sailing" as strengths of the state. However, participants also frequently felt challenged by "environmental health" and called for the state to "address global warming," increase "coastal habitat restoration," and improve "recycling, composting, and sustainability."

When attendees were talking about *Business & the Economy*, the conversation must have been extremely varied. The few common threads were in praise of the food and restaurants in the state and the desire to develop the economy and improve "revenue through better tourist promotion." One local-specific comment worried about making "effective use of the [new] casino revenue," referencing a new development in the Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth area. Another unique response noted the challenge of "preserving rural character in the face of development." As mentioned previously, the Tiverton/Little Compton/Portsmouth event also had a distinctively high number of mentions of the value of the library.

Barrington/Bristol/Warren
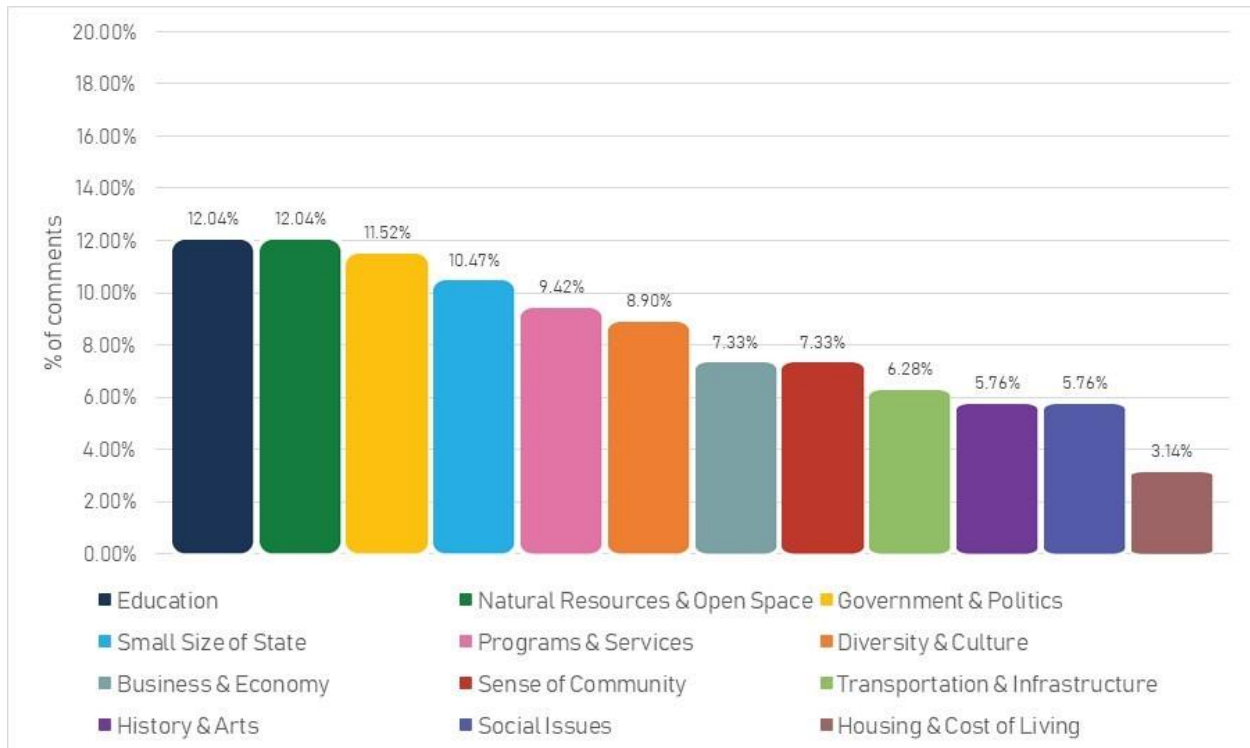
The Barrington/Bristol/Warren event had 64 participants who spoke about a wide variety of subjects. Three categories were mentioned the most frequently: *Education, Natural Resources & Open Space*, and *Government & Politics*. Within the categories, there were some interesting anomalies that did not seem to occur at the other events throughout Rhode Island. For example, the comments about *Natural Resources & Open Space* was quite uniform, with almost every respondent writing about the natural beauty of the state and its landscapes, whereas other events had more diversity within the category. Only a single participant wrote about the challenge of rising sea levels.
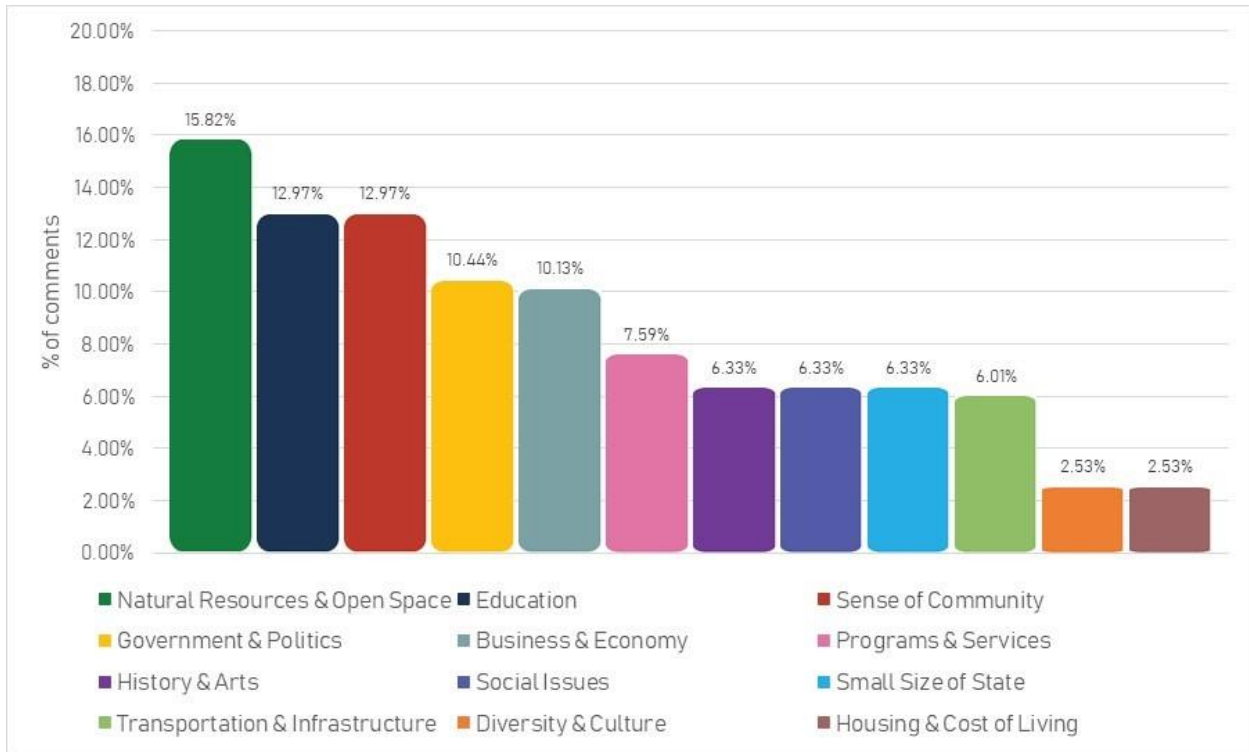
When participants wrote about *Education*, the conversation was only slightly less homogenous. The frequent theme was that education is a strength of Rhode Island, but the state need to do more "to use our resources to educate children and get millennials to stay." That is, the *brain drain* of the state was a popular concern at this event. One attendee voiced his/her issue

regarding the Rhode Island public school system, writing that they were challenged by "education issues" and that the state was "not preparing our students."

The conversation about *Government & Politics* had a much more diverse range of matters than the other two. A fairly large number of people replied that taxes were one of their biggest burdens, but there also many more nuanced responses. Two participants called for the state to "consolidate towns and cities." Multiple people pointed to "proximity to legislators and to state capitol" as Rhode Island's biggest strength. One attendee wrote that "lack of public transportation is a problem as we age, and the inhospitable attitude of our politicians regarding the aging population is impactful."
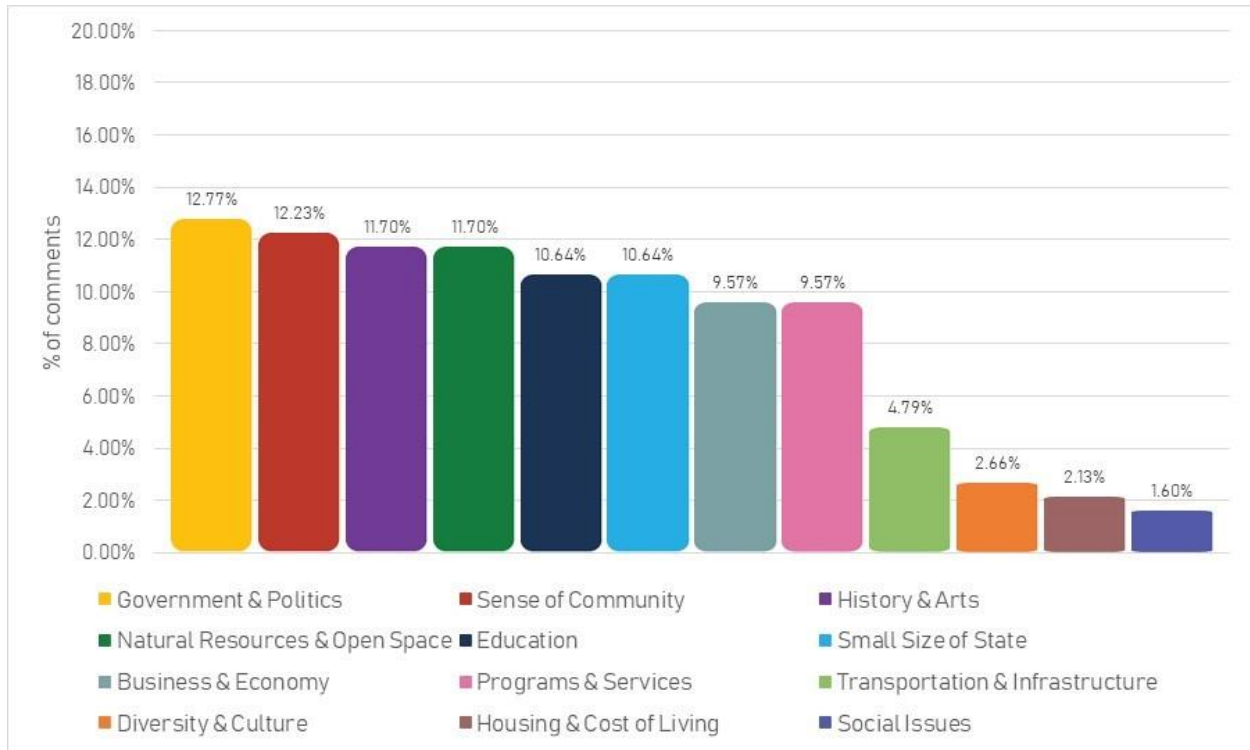
Warwick

The Warwick event with 60 participants seemed to have a clear subject matter focus. Participants wrote about *Natural Resources & Open Space* more often than any other topic. *Education* and *Sense of Community* were the next most frequently discussed topics. The *Natural Resources & Open Space* conversation seemed to mention similar topics compared to the other events, except for two new points: the "acidity of the bay" and the call for "focusing on wind [energy]." While mentions of these themes have infrequently appeared in other events, the Warwick event had an especially large amount of them. Wind energy, in particular, was mentioned much more at the Warwick event compared to other Together RI events.

Within the *Education* category, the central point of discussion seemed to be that participants took issue with the quality of Rhode Island's public schools, writing that the state's "public schools [are] in poor conditions," and that "Massachusetts does [education] better." One person asked Rhode Island to "combine school districts" and many participants complained about the poor funding given to teachers and school systems. When the conversation turned to *Sense of Community*, the comments lacked diversity, with the majority of attendees writing about how beneficial it was to live in a "small," "connected," "open," and "loving" community.

East Greenwich/Warwick

At the East Greenwich/Warwick event, the conversation categories among the 88 participants were spread out more so than many other events. *Government & Politics* was the most frequent topic, followed closely by *Sense of Community*, *History & Arts*, and *Natural Resources & Open Space*. When participants wrote about *Government & Politics*, they very often made the argument for the state to "combine the 39 cities and towns," and work toward "consolidation of government services." The burden of taxes was commonly tossed into the *Government & Politics* conversation, but the clear central focus was on consolidation.

In mentioning *Sense of Community*, attendees of the East Greenwich/Warwick event spoke about "our unique, independent spirit," and the idea that "being a small state gives us the opportunity to connect more with other communities." A couple respondents criticized the "lack of communication between groups" and felt there was a "disrespect for people."

At East Greenwich/Warwick, the *History & Arts* category came up as one the most common conversation subjects. This subject matter did not have much variety, however, and was mostly praise for "our history of religious freedom" and our "very strong arts community." The conversation at this event also seemed to touch upon *Natural Resources & Open Space* but was, again, very homogenous. Participants mostly commented on the benefit of the State's "recreational opportunities" and "the natural beauty [of] the ocean."

Cranston
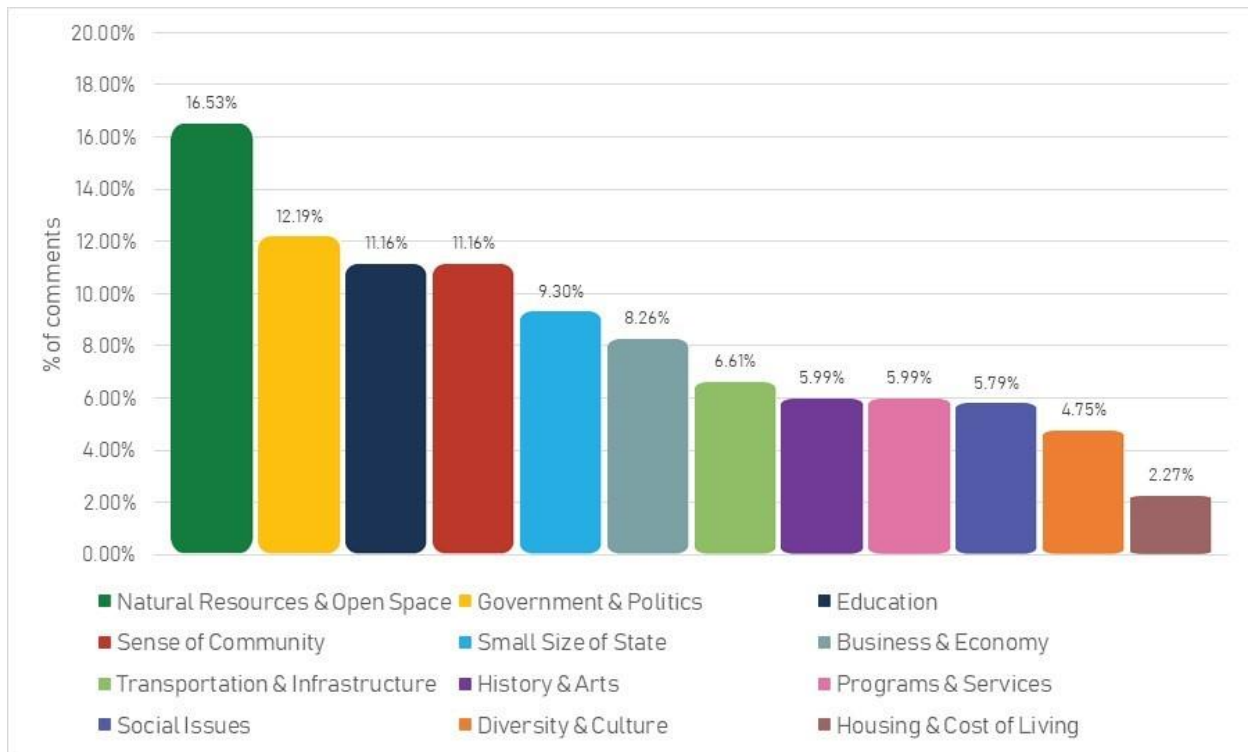
The Cranston event with 66 participants seemed to have a conversation that was extremely focused on *Natural Resources & Open Space*. The gap between this topic and the second-most frequent conversation theme, *Government & Politics*, was one of the largest differences throughout all the Together RI events. The biggest themes within the *Natural Resources & Open Space* category were related to environmental health and an appreciation of Rhode Island's coastlines and beaches. Many participants echoed the sentiments of one respondent, who wrote that "we need to step up our recycling, sustainable living, and renewable energy." A few participants wrote that they felt challenged by the state's "fossil fuel infrastructure" and suggested that Rhode Island "tax coal." One attendee wrote that the area "need[s] community garden space[s]."

When talking about *Government & Politics*, most participants voiced the same concerns: the need to "reform legislator term limits" and curb "political corruption." In fact, the *Government & Politics* comments revolved mostly around these two points and rarely strayed. While talking about *Education*, there was a single narrative coming from all the respondents: while Rhode Island's colleges and universities are "wonderful," its public schools are "in deplorable condition[s]" and suffer from "inequity."

The *Sense of Community* conversation had a wider variety of responses. While many participants wrote about appreciating the intimacy of the "great communities" in Rhode Island, which was a common theme throughout the Together RI events, many others wrote about "the state's willingness to grow," the "opportunities for people to connect and share ideas," and the "community involvement" of Rhode Islanders. One attendee appreciated that there was "a sense

of where the center of the community is [and] where things happen. [There is] a sense of the character of the state and its places and people."

Scituate/Johnston
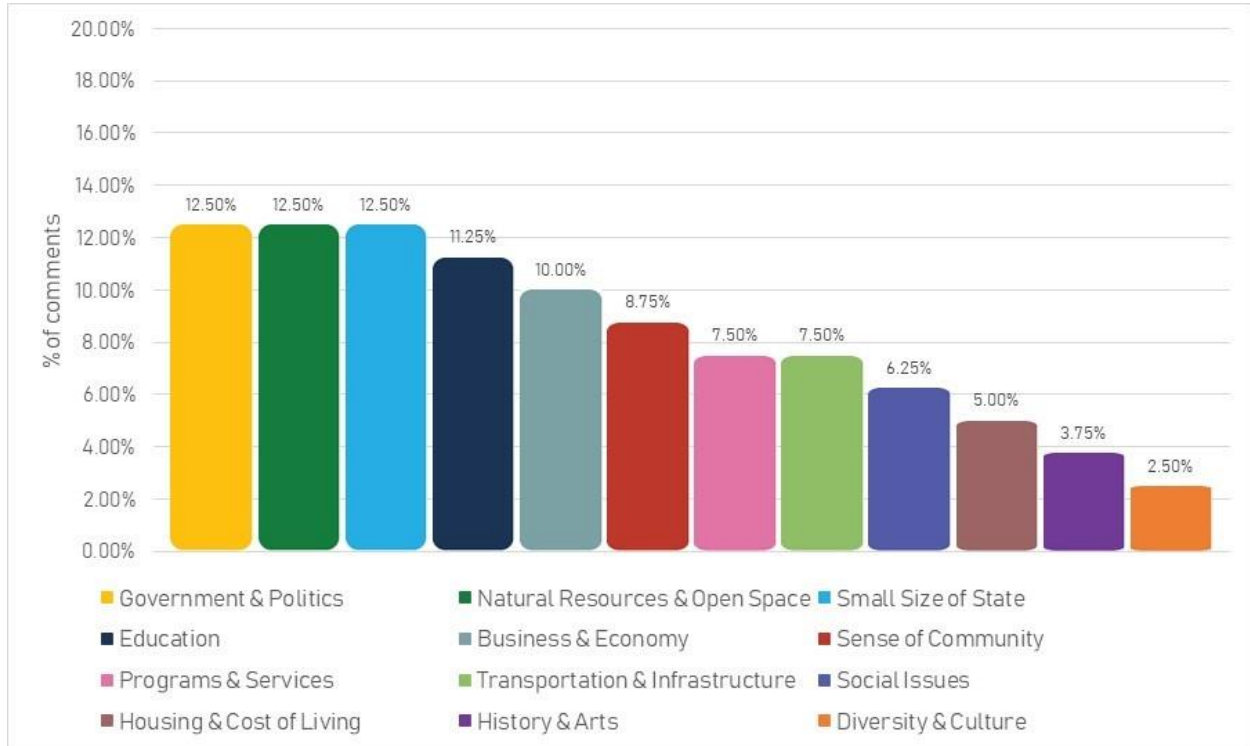
The comments from the Scituate/Johnston event, which also had a lower turnout with 26 participants, focused on three key categories: *Government & Politics*, *the Small Size of the State*, and *Natural Resources & Open Space*. Although the event did not have as many participants as some of the other events, the attendee comments had quite the range of different responses. Within the *Government & Politics* category, there was a cry for "visibility to [the] state budget," which was written a few times, while another respondent asked for "serious consideration of consolidation." One frustrated participant wrote "no one is listening" in reference to the state government.

When the *Small Size of the State* was discussed, many respondents wrote that the state's "proximity to larger cities," such as Boston and NYC, as one of Rhode Island's biggest strengths. Another wrote that Rhode Island is "small enough to affect change." In conversations on *Natural Resources and Open Space*, participants wrote a lot about our "access to beaches" while a few people briefly mentioned "the bay," "the water supply," and "sustainability."

Coventry/West Warwick
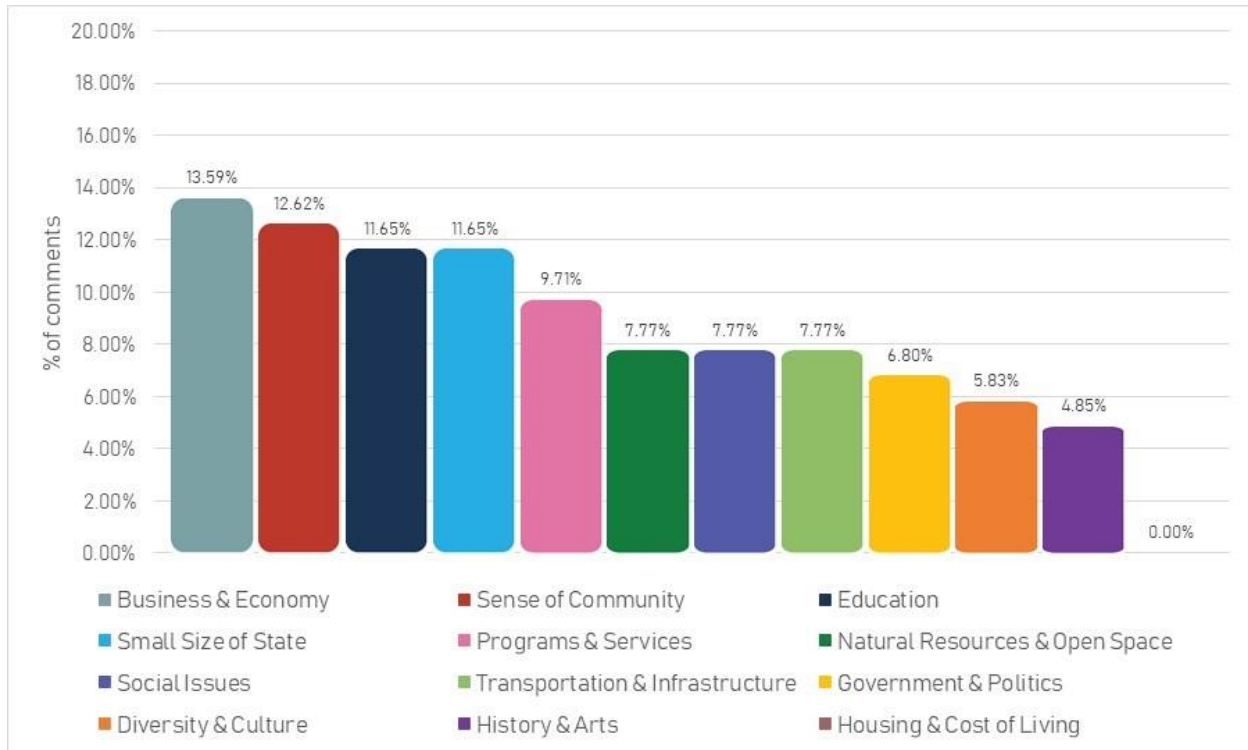
At the Coventry/West Warwick Together RI event, 29 attendees wrote mostly about the *Business & the Economy*. *Sense of Community* was often spoken about relatively frequently as well as *Education* and the *Small Size of the State*. The comments within the *Business & the Economy* category seemed to be varied, with "food" and "restaurants" being one of the few reoccurring themes. Another wrote that they were burdened by their "pensions collapsing," while a different participant said that "budgets [and] resources" were their most difficult challenge.

Within the S*ense of Community* category, comments were interesting in that they were not as positive as other events that spoke widely about the topic. Throughout Rhode Island, *Sense of Community* frequently referenced pride in the state's happy, welcoming people. At the Coventry/Warwick event, some participants mentioned positive comments, but others wrote about the challenges of Rhode Island's "urban/suburban divide," the difference between connecting "in person vs detached virtual," and a feeling that the state has a "willingness to blame others for things. We do not 'hold our own' responsible."

When participants spoke about *Education*, almost every response was lauding the colleges and universities in Rhode Island. One attendee wrote that they were challenged on how to work toward "protecting students (school safety)." Finally, for comments about the *Small Size of the State*, every response was similar related to the state's small size as its biggest strength and that it "means we're able to solve problems."

South County

Chariho
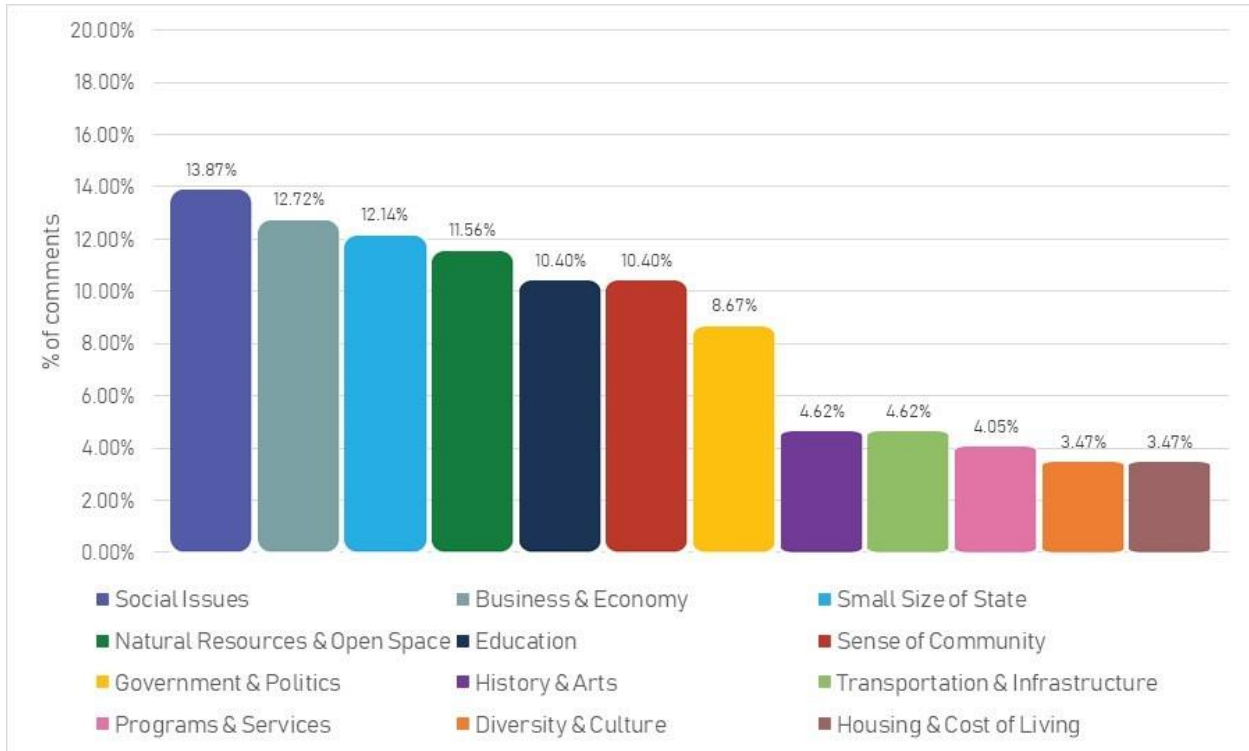
During the Chariho event, 46 attendees wrote frequently about *Social Issues*, which was similar to the second Providence event. *Business & the Economy* was another common subject at the Chariho event, as well as the *Small Size of the State*. The main themes within the *Social Issues* category seemed to be "homelessness" and "poverty," "the opioid epidemic," and the "lack of good jobs." One respondent wrote that they were overwhelmed by a sense of "loneliness and isolation." A couple others mentioned "inequity" and "political divisiveness."

While writing about *Business & the Economy*, the major theme was on "expand[ing] tourism," with a few notes on how that could be done including a focus on the "coastline," "creat[ing] a boardwalk," and "help[ing] Providence build on its emergence as an attractive place to live for young people." A unique response was the suggestion that the state "should better use the resources of our universities to improve all aspects of life here (better funding for research, better integration of business and education for jobs, etc.)."

When participants wrote about the *Small Size of the State,* most wrote about either the benefit of its "easy access to NYC and Boston," or about the strengths of its "size (creates connections, networks)." One respondent loved "the fact that there is no place in the state that is not within an hour's drive," noting that "you can go anywhere and still get home in time for dinner." Another wrote that the state has "close opportunities to so many things including city, coastline, and woods." *Natural Resources & Open Space* was also discussed at this event. For this category, respondents were almost all in agreement that the state's "beaches" were its biggest strength.

Westerly
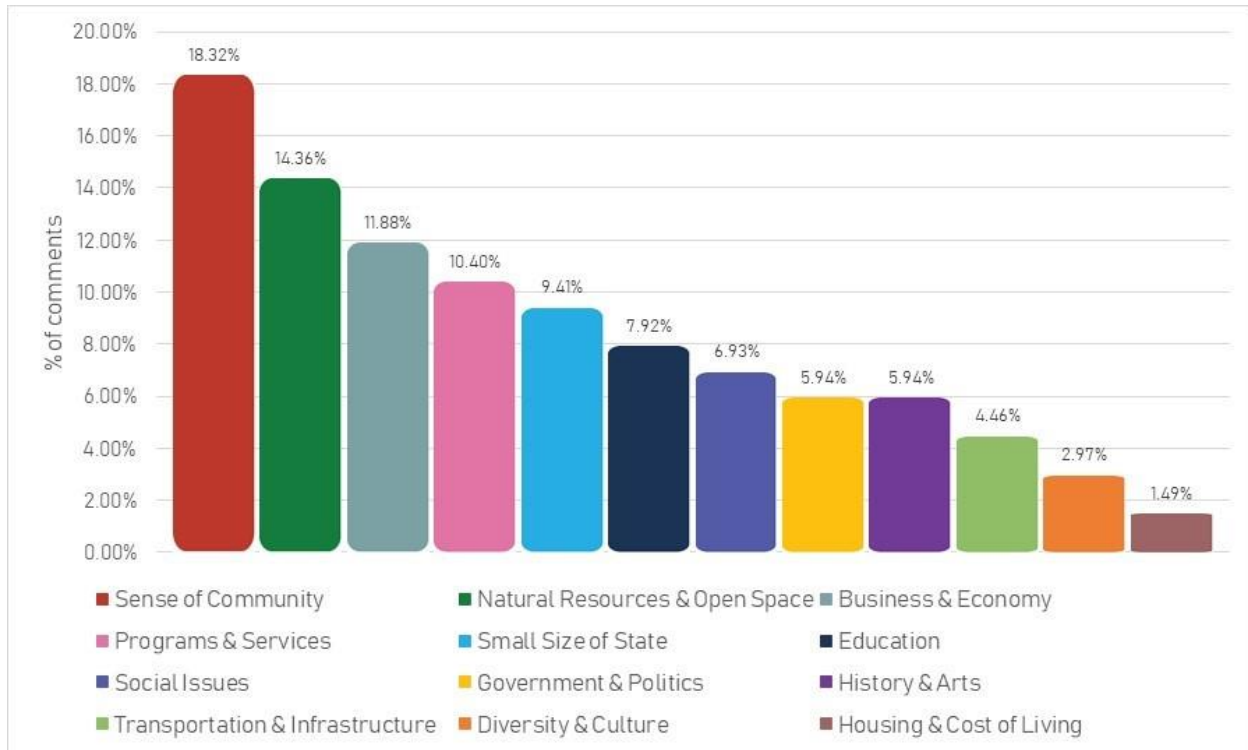
At the Westerly event that had 48 participants, *Sense of Community* was the most common category followed by *Natural Resources & Open Space*. When talking about *Sense of Community*, participants were entirely positive, writing frequently about the "support" of their neighbors and a community that's "warm and friendly." The only critical response was that people in the state are "clinging to the past." One respondent suggested that the state "need[s] to stand together and be united," adding that "open communication is key." Another appreciated that there was such "respect for history, culture, and art" in the state.

Within the *Natural Resources & Open Space* category, participants had uniform responses. The resounding narrative was that the "shoreline," "oceans," and "state [are] stunning," but "the [waters] need protection from offshore drilling." "Being a coastal state," one respondent wrote, "[our] beaches draw people to come for a short time and stay forever. That, to me, is the [state's] biggest draw." There were a handful of responses calling for "clean energy" through "wind [and] solar," but most participants focused on the beauty of the beaches and ocean.

Business & Economy was also a frequently mentioned subject, with almost every respondent mentioning tourism. One attendee complimented the state's current efforts, writing that "tourism is our biggest opportunity. I love what we are currently doing with the airport and getting people to travel here from foreign countries." Another wrote "tourism is a clean industry. We should promote it very aggressively."
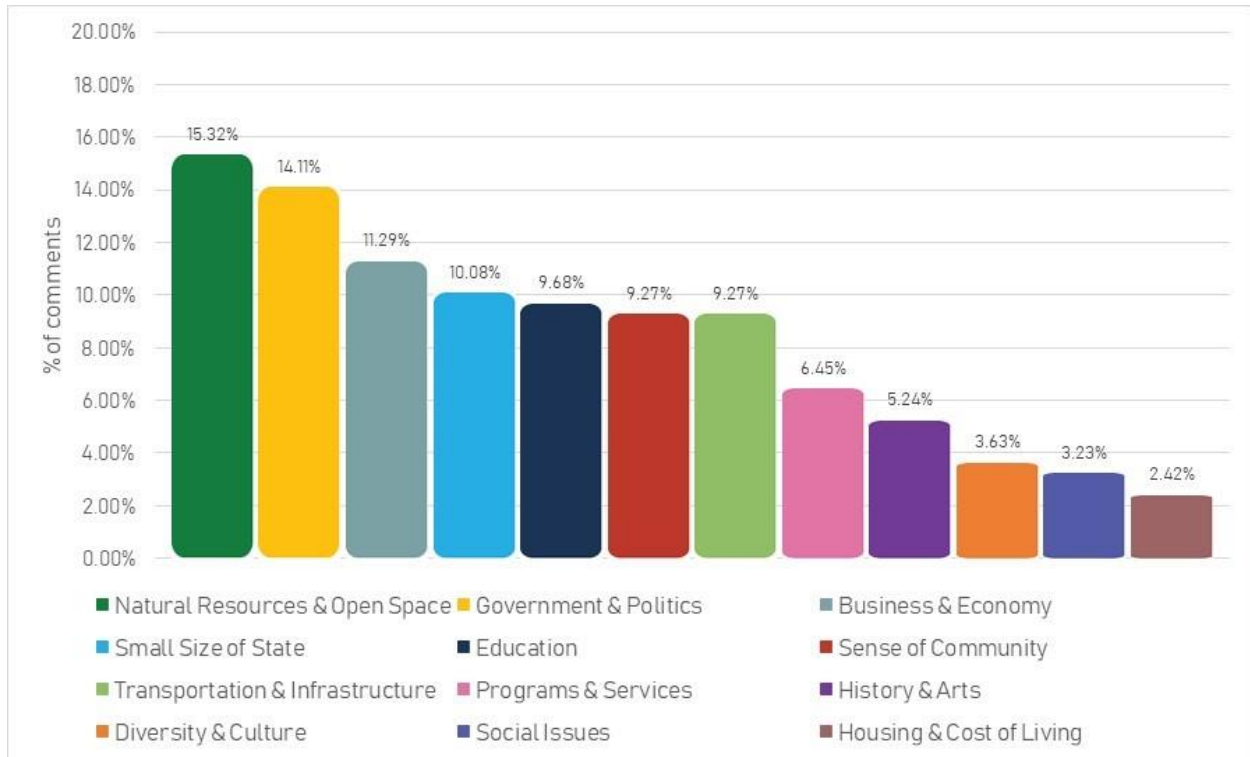
South Kingstown
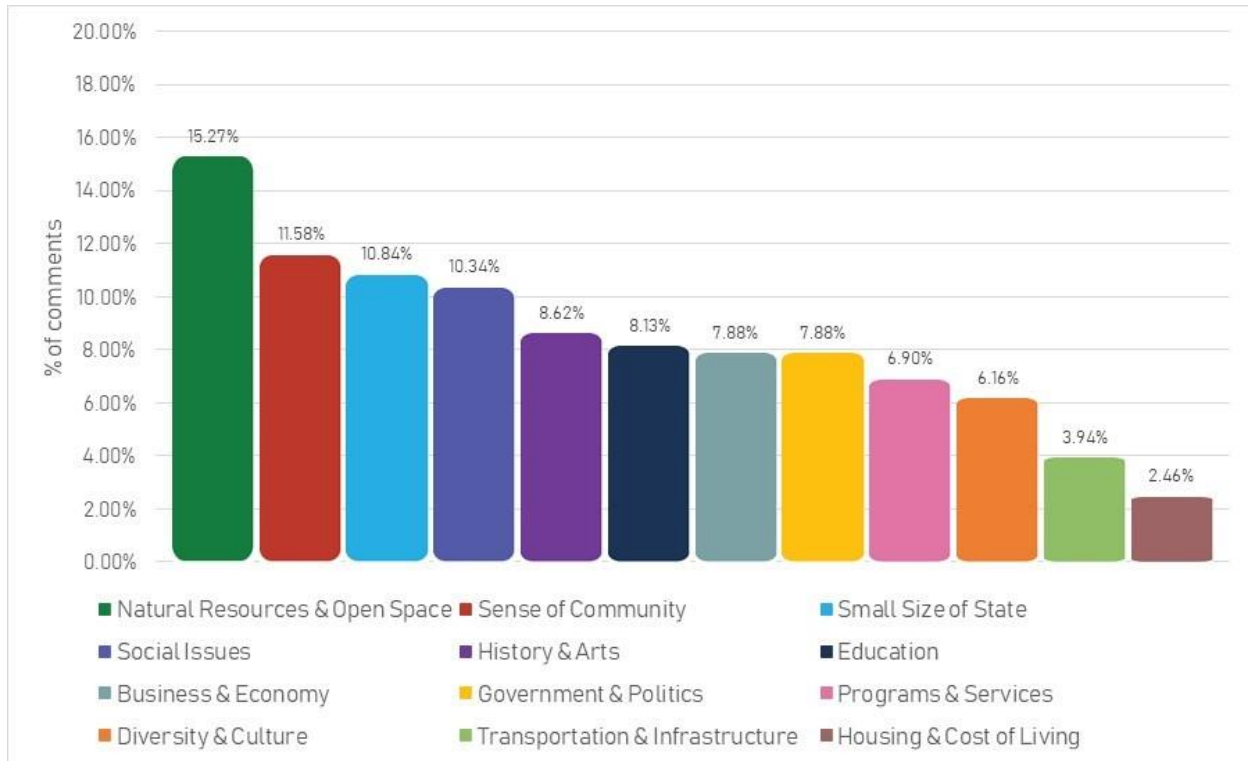
The 81 attendees of the South Kingstown Together RI event predominantly wrote comments in the *Natural Resources & Open Space* category. South Kingstown participants wrote about this topic much more than every other subject. The next most common category of discussion was *Sense of Community*. The comments in the *Natural Resources & Open Space* category were thematically similar but had a lot of variety. As a respondent succinctly wrote, participants at the South Kingstown even were quite interested in "smart growth [and] sensible land use." That is, "sustainable energy (tidal energy, off-shore wind farm, solar" were still common threads, but they were spoken about in the context of developing a "green infrastructure" more than any other event. In that vein of preparing for a green future, two responses stood out: the need to "protect the forests, we lose more green space every year," and the difficulties of "supporting open space and farmers and green energy without [having a] negative impact on the environment." One participant simply wrote "recycle everything!" as one of Rhode Island's biggest opportunities.

When the *Sense of Community* topic was discussed, two very distinct groups emerged: participants who applauded the amount of "collaboration" between communities in Rhode Island, and participants who felt that "parochialism" and "provincial attitudes" held the state back from successful collaboration. From the former, responses ranged from writing that the state's biggest strength was the "kindness of [its] people" to the belief that "Rhode Islanders help others on the side of the road." One respondent stated that the state's biggest opportunity was "to be[come] a model example: clean, safe, [and] open to everyone." The group of respondents who didn't think this vision was possible frequently felt challenged by "parochialism," "insular

thinking," and "people stuck in old ways of thinking." The state's best plan of action, wrote one participant, is "to become worldly and bring in other viewpoints to develop best practices." Another added that we need more "chances to have authentic interactions with people who have different views and experiences."

North Kingstown/Exeter

The 54 North Kingstown/Exeter participants wrote many comments about *Natural Resources & Open Space* and *Government & Politics*. Both topics were common and written about much more frequently than any other subject. When attendees wrote about *Natural Resources & Open Space*, they focused on "the beauty of water all around" and on "protecting our natural resources." While other conversations that had these themes seemed to discuss sustainable energy (such as wind farms or solar generated energy), North Kingstown/Exeter participants rarely mentioned it. Only one participant said that one of Rhode Island's biggest opportunities was "wind and solar energy." Every other respondent either noted the "beauty of the bay, sea, rivers, and ponds," or pointed out that "climate change will impact Rhode Island more than other states given our coastline and low elevation." Many participants mentioned the importance of environmental conservation, even asking the state government to "recognize Rhode Island as, and actually be, a leader in environmental conservation policy." One respondent pleaded for "initiatives to stop plastic waste: newspaper bags, grocery plastic bags, plastic bottles and cups, [and] straws (in this state, too much ends up in the bay and the sea)."

When North Kingstown/Exeter participants wrote about *Government & Politics*, the apparent theme was a call for "expedit[ing] the legislative service." Many participants claimed

that Rhode Island's "bloated state government," bicameral assembly (multiple attendees suggested the state 'go to a unicameral assembly')," and lack of "government consolidation" have led to an "entrenched political structure" that is "stuck in no changes." According to attendees, Rhode Island needs to "be forward looking," "improve the structure of general assembly (4-year senate terms, term limits, 2-year budget)," and "take a more long-term look on all public policy issues."

   Business & Economy was discussed a little less than *Government & Politics*, but still frequently. It was common for participants in this conversation to call for Rhode Island to "be an innovation hub" and provide "innovative solutions [for the] economy, jobs, [and] education." A few participants were more specific, writing exactly what Rhode Island could do. Giving "incentives for experimental farms [and] women's businesses" was one idea, and another idea participant suggested that resources are needed for the aquaculture industry. In general, the responses calling for more economic innovation were mentioning the economic opportunities of Rhode Island's tourism industry.

Appendix A: Topics by Town

Table A1: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by town

Providence region	Providence (April 3)	Pawtucket/ Central Falls	Providence (May 5)
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 60.00%	Diversity 33.33%	Community 45.71%
	Size/ Location 17.14%	Community 16.67%	Education 22.86%
	Diversity 8.57%	Natural Resources 16.67%	Diversity 20.00%
	Natural resources 8.57%	Economy 11.11%	Economy 5.71%
	Economy 2.86%	Education 11.11%	Size/ Location 5.71%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Education 27.78%	Government/ Taxes 29.17%	Inequality 18.60%
	Inequality 18.52%	Inequality 12.50%	Services/ Healthcare/Healthcare 13.95%
	Affordable Housing 12.96%	Education 12.50%	Education 11.63%
	Community 12.96%	Natural Resources 12.50%	Community 9.30%
	Economy 9.26%	Community 8.33%	Economy 9.30%

Table A2: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by town

Northern RI	Woonsocket	Foster/ Glocester	Cumberland/ Lincoln	N. Providence/ Smithfield
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 64.71%	Community 33.33%	Community 55.17%	Community 50.00%
	Diversity 11.76%	Diversity 22.22%	Education 24.14%	Education 16.67%
	Size/ Location 11.76%	Natural Resources 22.22%	Size/ Location 13.79%	Diversity 11.11%
	Education 5.88%	Size/ Location 22.22%	Economy 3.45%	Economy 11.11%
	Natural Resources 5.88%	N/A	Natural Resources 3.45%	Natural Resources 5.56%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Community 46.67%	Community 40.00%	Government/ Taxes 44.12%	Government/ Taxes 25.00%
	Economy 16.67%	Government/ Taxes 20.00%	Community 23.53%	Community 15.00%
	Government/ Taxes 10.00%	Inequality 13.33%	Inequality 11.76%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 15.00%
	Inequality 6.67%	Services/ Healthcare 13.33%	Education 11.76%	Affordable Housing 10.00%
	Education 6.67%	Economy 6.67%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 5.88%	Inequality 10.00%

Table A3: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by town

East Bay & Aquidneck	Newport/ Middletown	Barrington/ Bristol/ Warren	Tiverton/ Little Compton/ Portsmouth	East Providence
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 42.31%	Community 34.78%	Community 40.00%	Community 28.57%
	Education 19.23%	Size/ Location 30.43%	Natural Resources 26.67%	Education 17.86%
	Size/ Location 15.38%	Natural Resources 17.39%	Size/ Location 13.33%	Size/ Location 17.86%
	Economy 11.54%	Education 8.70%	Diversity 6.67%	Transportation 14.29%
	Natural Resources 11.54%	Diversity 4.35%	Education 6.67%	Economy 10.71%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Education 23.91%	Government/ Taxes 39.47%	Government/ Taxes 22.22%	Education 37.78%
	Economy 17.39%	Education 13.16%	Community 14.81%	Government/ Taxes 13.33%
	Inequality 15.22%	Services/ Healthcare 13.16%	Inequality 14.81%	Diversity 8.89%
	Transportation/ Infrastructure 15.22%	Community 10.53%	Education 14.81%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 8.89%
	Affordable Housing 10.87%	Economy 10.53%	Diversity 7.41%	Community 6.67%

Table A4: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by town

West Bay	Warwick	Coventry/ West Warwick	Scituate/ Johnston	Cranston	East Greenwich/ Warwick
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 31.25%	Community 33.33%	Size/ Location 40.00%	Community 35.14%	Community 32.26%
	Natural Resources 25.00%	Size/ Location 33.33%	Community 20.00%	Size/ Location 21.62%	Economy 16.13%
	Diversity 18.75%	Diversity 22.22%	Education 20.00%	Education 13.51%	Diversity 12.90%
	Economy 12.50%	Economy 11.11%	Natural Resources 20.00%	Transportation 10.81%	Natural Resources 12.90%
	Education 6.25%	N/A	N/A	Economy 8.11%	Education 9.68%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Government/ Taxes 26.67%	Government/ Taxes 25.00%	Economy 25.00%	Government/ Taxes 26.53%	Government/ Taxes 22.81%
	Community 16.67%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 25.00%	Government/ Taxes 25.00%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 22.45%	Education 17.54%
	Services/ Healthcare 13.33%	Community 20.00%	Affordable Housing 16.67%	Inequality 12.24%	Services/ Healthcare 17.54%
	Transportation/ Infrastructure 13.33%	Inequality 10.00%	Community 16.67%	Community 10.20%	Economy 10.53%
	Inequality 10.00%	Services/ Healthcare 10.00%	Diversity 8.33%	Education 10.20%	Affordable housing 7.02%

Table A5: Five most common encouraging and challenging topics discussed (substantive only), by town

South County	Westerly	Chariho	South Kingstown	Exeter/ North Kingstown
Encouraging topics (Q1)	Community 36.84%	Community 52.38%	Community 33.33%	Community 40.00%
	Natural Resources 21.05%	Diversity 9.52%	Size/ Location 22.22%	Diversity 12.00%
	Diversity 15.79%	Economy 9.52%	Education 18.52%	Education 12.00%
	Size/ Location 10.53%	Education 9.52%	Natural Resources 14.81%	Natural Resources 12.00%
	Transportation 10.53%	Natural Resources 9.52%	Economy 7.41%	Transportation 12.00%
Challenging topics (Q2)	Government/ Taxes 40.00%	Government/ Taxes 24.00%	Government/ Taxes 28.57%	Government/ Taxes 28.57%
	Education 20.00%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 24.00%	Community 21.43%	Economy 20.00%
	Transportation/ Infrastructure 20.00%	Affordable Housing 16.00%	Affordable Housing 16.67%	Transportation/ Infrastructure 17.14%
	Community 8.00%	Economy 16.00%	Inequality 14.29%	Education 11.43%
	Services/ Healthcare 8.00%	Community 8.00%	Diversity 9.52%	Services/ Healthcare 11.43%

Notes: Percentages reported are of those who provided any substantive answer, not all respondents.

Appendix B: Survey Analysis Research Methodology

The data was cleaned and analyzed using Qualtrics, NVivo, SPSS, and STATA data analysis packages.

Q1   What do you believe was the most encouraging topic discussed at your table?

Q2   What do you believe was the most challenging topic discussed at your table?

For these questions, participants wrote in their answers – an open-ended question – rather than choosing from a list of options (close-ended question). To code their answers, we began by entering the survey data for Q1 and Q2 into NVivo to utilize the auto-coding and word frequency features. The auto-coding technique in NVivo uses pattern-based coding (meaning a combination of linguistic processes and a specialized sentiment dictionary) to produce themes, and the word frequency feature identifies the most commonly stated words or phrases within the document. This produced an initial 22 codes. Then two of the researchers coded a random sub-sample of answers (ten percent) for Question 1 and reduced the codes to the 11 below. We did the same thing for question 2 but came up with slightly different list of codes for each question. For question 1, the codes were reduced from the original 22 to a final list of 11.

More information about the codes (categories) for question 1:

- Challenges – Even though this question asked about the most encouraging topic, many respondents wrote instead about areas of concern. Some answers were vague, such as "challenges facing this community," while others were more specific challenges such as "workplace bullying and environmental issues." Since only about 7% of all respondents wrote about this, it made more sense to group them under the general "challenges" heading and save specific problems mentions for question 2.
- Opportunities – many respondents were rather vague and talked about general strengths, improvements to the state, or changes to the state. For example, the answer – "finding our strengths. It makes you realize just how much we have going for us."
- Discussion – this code was used for respondents who were referring to the conversation at the event, rather than a specific topic. For this, respondents wrote about the process, reflecting on the event, or commenting on enjoying chatting with others and sharing common viewpoints.
- Community – this is a broad category that includes mentions of working with others, collaborating, volunteering, and civic engagement. Also positive or enthusiastic feelings about the community itself in Rhode Island.
- Diversity – this was for any answer pertaining to cultural, racial/ethnic, or age diversity as a strength.

- Economy – anything to do with the economy. Tourism is included in this topic.
- Education – any answers pertaining to RI's K-12 education and higher education.
- Location/Size – this included mentions either of Rhode Island's location, such as proximity to Boston, or its small size. For example, one respondent wrote – "ability to innovate due to small size – we can be nimble."
- Natural resources – anything having to do with natural resources, the environment, the ocean, or the built environment – such as parks. An example of this would be 1 respondent's writing – "commitment to green space."
- Transportation – this includes mentions of public transportation or the state of RI's roads.
- Other – topics that did not fit into the above categories.

Q2   What do you believe was the most challenging topic discussed at your table?

From the original 22 codes produced by NVivo, the list was revised to 20 codes. The final list is the following where we combined the following categories: government and taxes; infrastructure and transportation; healthcare and services.

- Challenges, general – about seven percent of participants wrote in general answers and did not name a specific topic. For example, one person wrote in – "The challenges we face in RI for our community"
- Discussion – similar to Q1, this code was used for respondents who were referring to the conversation at the event, rather than a specific topic. For this, respondents wrote about the process, reflecting on the event, or commenting on enjoying chatting with others and sharing common viewpoints.
- Opportunities – although the question was about the most challenging topic, about four percent of respondents mentioned opportunities.
- Affordable housing – anything having to do with affordable housing. For example, the response – "lack of affordable housing for young professionals."
- Community – this is a relatively broad category that includes mentions of how to get people involved with community life, getting to know neighbors, engaging with certain age groups. This also includes sense of identity for the state. For example, the response – "how to better communicate with and connect all people of the state."
- Inequality – this includes any answer that referred to disadvantaged people, such as those living in poverty or the homeless.
- Diversity – mentions of diversity or race.
- Economy – anything having to do with the economy, jobs, or business.
- Education – anything having to do with the education system, schools, universities, or teacher pay.

- Government/taxes – this was a large category that included mentions of the government, voting, taxes, politics, corruption, town vs. state vs. national government.
- Healthcare/services – this includes things connected to health or healthcare – such as affordability, availability, insurance, and also things relating to services in general, such as trash pickup or pensions.
- Infrastructure/Transportation – many people specifically mentioned the word "infrastructure" or "transportation". Also water, bridges, roads, transit.
- Natural resources – this includes answers relating to the environment, climate change, or energy.
- Brain drain - answers pertaining to people leaving the state, or how to get people to stay.
- Crime - answers about crime, violence, gun control, or corrections.
- Other – respondents who provided an answer but it was a response like "none" or "topics weren't challenging."

Appendix C: Discussion Questions and Survey

Discussion Questions

Together RI

Discussion Questions

1. In your opinion, what is Rhode Island's biggest strength?

2. In your opinion, what is the biggest opportunity we have as a state?

3. What are the challenges facing you, or your community, that impact your daily life?

Additional Discussion Questions

If time allows, please see additional discussion questions on the back side of this page.

4. What about, or in, Rhode Island makes you proud?

5. What do you think contributes the most to a positive sense of community in Rhode Island?

6. Is there something that was discussed at your table that you would spend personal time working to improve, or promote, on behalf of your community OR on behalf of our state?

Survey

Thank you for participating in Together RI! Please complete the following survey. Answers should reflect your personal views and beliefs. All information collected from this survey is anonymous. Your individual responses will remain confidential; only combined results from all survey participants will be shared. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you may stop at any time. The information collected from Together RI participant surveys will be analyzed by researchers at the University of Rhode Island and used by the Rhode Island Foundation to produce a public report.

1. What do you believe was the most encouraging topic discussed at your table?

2. What do you believe was the most challenging topic discussed at your table?

3. In general, how would you describe the overall tone of the conversation?
   (Please choose the word you feel is the best fit)

   Friendly ......O   Direct......O   Serious......O   Tense......O   Thoughtful ......O

   Other...O, Please describe: _____

4. Was there a dominant theme at your table?

   Yes ... O   No ... O

   If so, what was it?

5. Did you meet someone new at your table?

   Yes ... O   No ... O

6. After participating in today's conversation(s), I better understand the issues facing my community?

   Strongly Agree ......O   Agree......O   Neither agree......O   Disagree ......O   Strongly disagree ......O
                                              nor disagree

7. As a result of today's conversation(s), I am more likely to get involved in conversations and/or activities related to community issues.

   Strongly Agree ......O   Agree......O   Neither agree......O   Disagree ......O   Strongly disagree ......O
                                               nor disagree

8. What gender do you identify as?
   Female ... O   Male ... O   Prefer not to respond ... O

9. Are you...(mark all that apply)
   White... O   Black... O   Asian... O   Hispanic... O   Native American... O   Other... O
   Prefer not to respond ... O

10. To what age group do you belong?
    18-29 ... O   30-44 ... O   45-54 ... O   55-64 ... O   65 or over ... O
    Prefer not to respond ... O

11. What zip code do you live in?

12. What is your household income?
    Less than $30K... O $30 - 49K... O $50 - 74K... O $75- 99K... O   Over $100K... O
    Prefer not to respond ... O

13. How did you hear about TogetherRI?
    News story or advertisement... O
    Rhode Island Foundation's Facebook or Twitter page... O
    Other social media O
    Someone told me about it O
    From a community group or nonprofit organization (please specify) O:

    _____

    Other (please specify) O:

    _____

14. If similar conversations are planned in future, would you participate again?

    Yes ... O   No ... O

Thank you for taking our survey! If you shared your e-mail with us, we will notify you when the public report is available.

Appendix D: Discussion Analysis Research Methodology

Once the answers to the discussion questions were gathered by Rhode Island Foundation staff, the answers to the questions were typed into a Qualtrics database by one of the URI research team members. The URI research team working on the discussion questions included Dr. Skye Leedahl (Assistant Professor of Human Development & Family Studies and Political Science), Kristin Sodhi (graduate student in the Political Science International Relations program), and Travis Doumaney (undergraduate student in the Political Science Department) Then, the database with all the typed, written responses was uploaded into the NVivo Plus software package, a qualitative data analysis computer software package that enables the analysis of rich text-based information. Once the data was in NVivo, the team utilized the auto-coding feature and the word frequency feature to assist Dr. Leedahl in identifying the main categories from the answers to the six questions. The auto-coding technique in NVivo uses pattern-based coding (meaning a combination of linguistic processes and a specialized sentiment dictionary) to produce themes, and the word frequency feature identifies the most commonly stated words or phrases within the document. At this point in the analysis, the team put together the report that the Rhode Island Foundation presented at the annual meeting.

However, it was imperative that we continue to analyze the data to ensure all responses were accounted for within the categories because the auto-coding and word frequency features did not code every respond. Therefore, Dr. Leedahl went through every response to each question word-by-word to code the responses into one or more of the main categories. Responses were sometimes coded into multiple categories depending on the nature of the response. For example, if someone said that a challenge in Rhode Island was related to property taxes and education costs, this would get coded in "Education" as well as in "Government & Politics." In addition, any responses that did not fit the existing category were put into the "Other" category.

Once every response was coded into at least one main category, Dr. Leedahl examined the "Other" category and identified that most of the codes would fit into a new category focused on "History & Arts." Dr. Leedahl then reviewed the categories and some of the codes from the "Other" category with the Principal Investigator on the project, Dr. Shanna Pearson Merkowitz. This was a helpful exercise for ensuring validity of the categories and their definitions as well as getting another perspective on the codes and where they might best fit. The two of them talked through each category and made decisions about collapsing some of the categories. For example, at one point "Healthcare & Mental Health" was its own category, but the decision was made to put all of those codes into the "Programs & Services" category. In the end, twelve main categories remained, and all responses fit within the twelve categories.

Finally, to write the report, the three team members (Leedahl, Sodhi, and Doumaney) split up the sections of the report and wrote up each section. NVivo enables the development of tables and summary documents based on discussion question by main category or city of the event by main category. Therefore, we were able to make bar graphs for each question as well as

review all the responses within one category to a question or by city when writing each section and identifying pertinent quotes.