

HOWAREWE?

measuring what matters

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WELL-BEING IN BAYFIELD COUNTY – PILOT RESULTS SUMMARY

PROJECT REPORT

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BACKGROUND

In the United States, we measure societal success around GDP, stock markets, median income, and employment – all being economic indicators. Governments pursue these metrics, the media report them, and policies are based on them, even though they only indicate one aspect of most people's lives. Average incomes in advanced economies exceed what is necessary for us to live happy and satisfied lives. Showing averages without informing about variance and skewed distributions masks large pockets of the population who live economically or otherwise stressful lives.

Because of this disconnect, several alternatives to GDP were tried over the past decades. So far, none of these metrics has truly taken hold. At best they have remained secondary to GDP and other econometric parameters that continue their virtual monopoly as indicators of human progress, despite their shortcomings.

HOWAREWE - A NEW APPROACH

To better assess the wellbeing of our citizens, the HowAreWe project establishes a new set of metrics, mostly based on self-reporting, creating actionable results on local and regional level. The objective is to provide policymakers, institutions, and the public with sufficiently granular data about the life conditions of real people with respect to overall well-being, purpose, health, safety, employment, and governance, allowing for targeted action to improve well-being.

HowAreWe is an initiative of the Institute for Integrated Economic Research (IIER), a non-profit organization registered in the United States and Europe that was established in 2007 with the objective of advancing integrated knowledge about human economic systems and society.

BAYFIELD COUNTY PILOT

This report includes the results of the first HowAreWe rollout in Bayfield County, Wisconsin, providing substantial insight into the viability and feasibility of our approach, as well as delivering tangible results that can be utilized to make life better for everyone in the county.

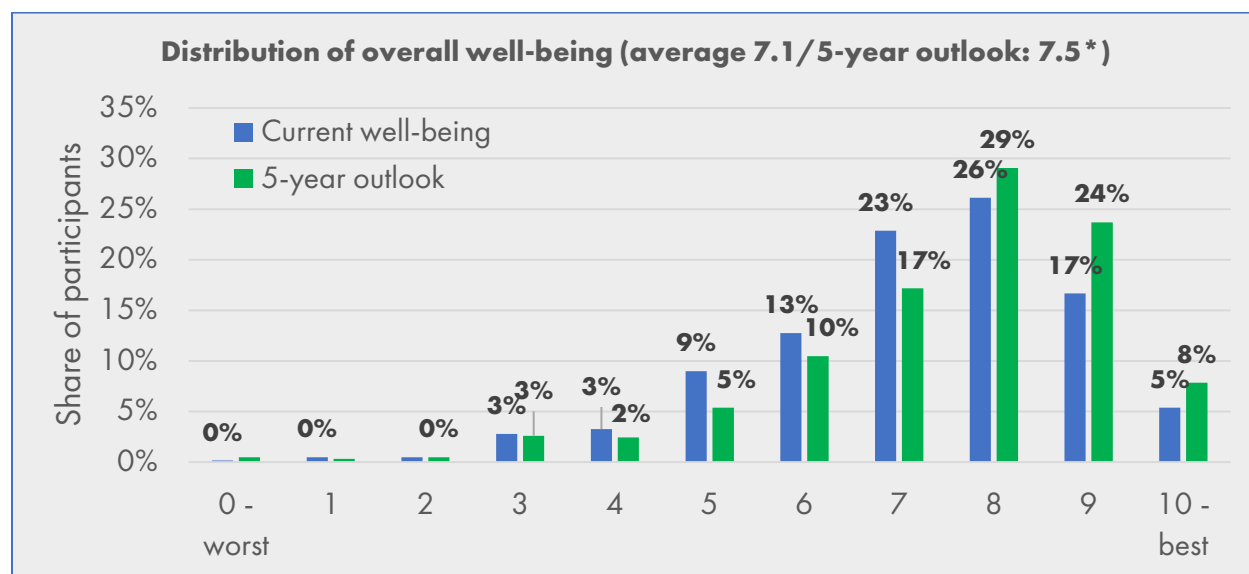
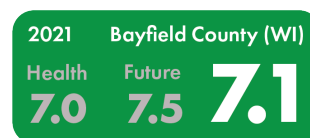
Responses were solicited by a variety of communications efforts, and despite certain groups being slightly underrepresented, HowAreWe was able to overcome these hurdles, securing sufficient participation for statistical adjustment to resolve demographic imbalances.

Overall, the HowAreWe project was positively received by both local stakeholders and the public. Participation reached about 5% of the adult county population (641 responses from approximately 12,500 adult full-time residents), which is equivalent to approximately 230,000 responses for a statewide rollout in Wisconsin. This excellent result for a non-mandatory general population survey provides enough data to make statistically significant statements about the county's overall well-being. This response rate is even more remarkable given that the HowAreWe project was in its pilot phase and previously unknown to participants.

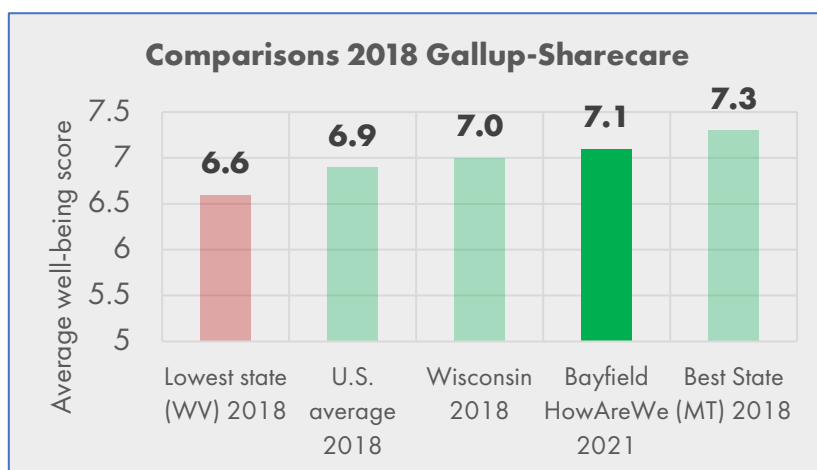
PILOT RESULTS

Most well-being parameters were evaluated using the self-centered Cantril scale from 0-10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 marking the highest level. This scale has been used by other well-being studies for decades in more than 150 countries, but never as a tool to foster civic engagement on a local and regional level. However, past iterations of surveys using the Cantril scale offer a meaningful reference point to validate the HowAreWe project results.

Typically, well-being scores between 7 and 10 stand for a “thriving” life situation, individuals reporting a 5 or 6 can be seen as “struggling”, and those answering with a score of 0 to 4 as “suffering”. With an average of 7.1, the Bayfield County population is doing well. 71.2% of Bayfield residents see their current situation as positive (7 or above). When asked about their 5-year outlook, the overall expectation is higher at 7.5. The first year of the Covid pandemic, 2020, is retrospectively seen as more difficult, with an average well-being score of only 6.5, and just 56% of respondents rating their 2020 well-being at 7 or above.



The last iteration of a survey using the Cantril scale to measure well-being, the Gallup-Sharecare Index of 2018 on state and metropolitan level in Wisconsin, allows for comparison of the HowAreWe results with historical data. In 2018, values for Wisconsin were at 7.0 for overall well-being, and at 7.5 for the 5-year outlook¹. Our data is highly consistent with these results and validates



¹ https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Sharecare-CWBI_2018_State_Rankings_v5.pdf

the sampling methodology used. This consistency with previous data suggests that the unique information from more specific questions asked are also representative for the county population.

At a level of 7.1, **Bayfield County is already doing well** on average. A value of 7.3 would be considered excellent, and as we will demonstrate, realistically obtainable.

KEY ACTION POINTS

This section summarizes the key findings of the survey, which are supported by more detail in the main report. One of the objectives of the HowAreWe project is to identify actionable elements where targeted interventions could lead to significant well-being improvements.

HOW TO READ THE DATA

HowAreWe has developed an approach that identifies the potential increase in overall well-being for the entire county if half of the group struggling in a certain area were to see improvement. For example, if 50% of those who don't feel heard by their local government were made to feel differently, Bayfield County's well-being could increase from today's 7.1 average to 7.3, which would be a significant improvement.

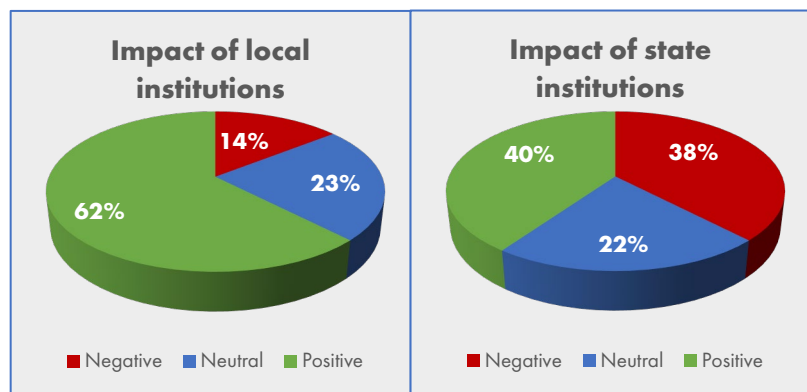
We identified two types of interventions: the first (blue label) refers to interventions that would greatly increase the well-being of specific sub-groups of the population, while the second (green label) identifies interventions with the potential to improve the lives of almost everyone.

Focused inter-ventions	This category focuses on improving the situation of specific groups within society via targeted interventions, which in turn can significantly lift overall well-being in the county.	<div>Targeted change +0.1</div> <div>Sample label</div>
County-wide inter-ventions	These elements have the potential to lift well-being for most people in the county. These are opportunities to identify common ground and create improvement across society.	<div>Society-level change +0.1</div> <div>Sample label</div>

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT – BEING HEARD

Respondents' feedback shows that while national politics are mostly seen negatively, perceptions are still more positive on the local and state level: 85% see a positive or neutral impact of local government on their lives, and 62% report the same on state level.

The share of people who feel that elected officials on the local and state level listen to them is still considerable. Between 40% and 80% respond that they "somewhat" or "mostly" feel heard by state and local institutions. This positive perception could



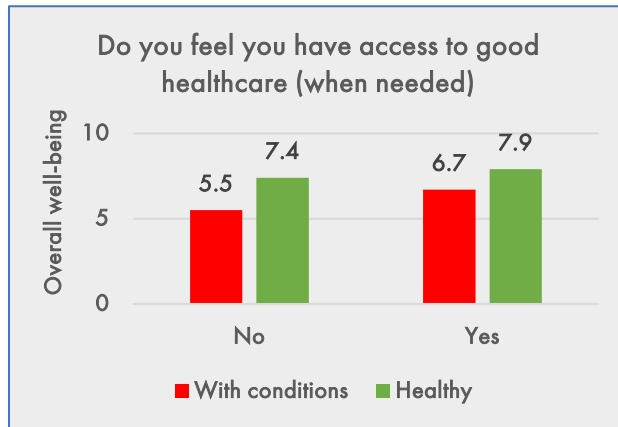
be a lever to further improve the dialogue between policymakers and the county population creates an opportunity for greater civic engagement, and improved community well-being.

Politics: being heard

+0.2

Actively using the results of the HowAreWe project as a means of strengthening the dialogue between government and citizens could give the Bayfield County population the feeling of being involved and included in government. This suggestion is consistent with many participants' perception that **improved political institutions would considerably lift their sense of well-being.**

HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND MENTAL HEALTH



Health, as a key contributor to well-being, is an important leverage point despite the complexity of the healthcare system. Improving availability and access to healthcare in the county could shift well-being positively for all, given the correlation between well-being and perceived availability of adequate healthcare, even by healthy individuals.

Healthcare access

+0.2

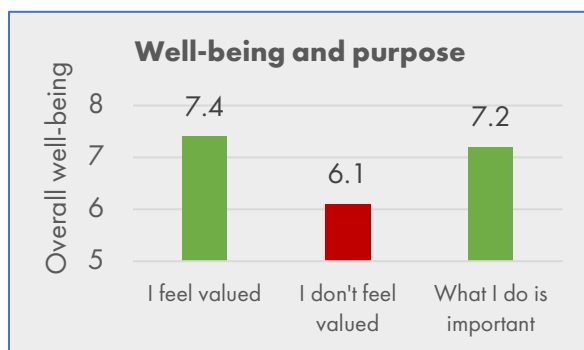
A more targeted intervention suggested by the data is finding answers to

Mental health help

+0.1

problems related to mental health. This could improve well-being for affected individuals who on average have well-being scores below 6, well below the county average. Consistent with national data, 21% of participants report symptoms indicating mental health problems, of which only about half are receiving any kind of treatment. This opportunity might not be limited to traditional methods of intervention but could include community-based responses driven by volunteers and self-help approaches.

LIFE PURPOSE



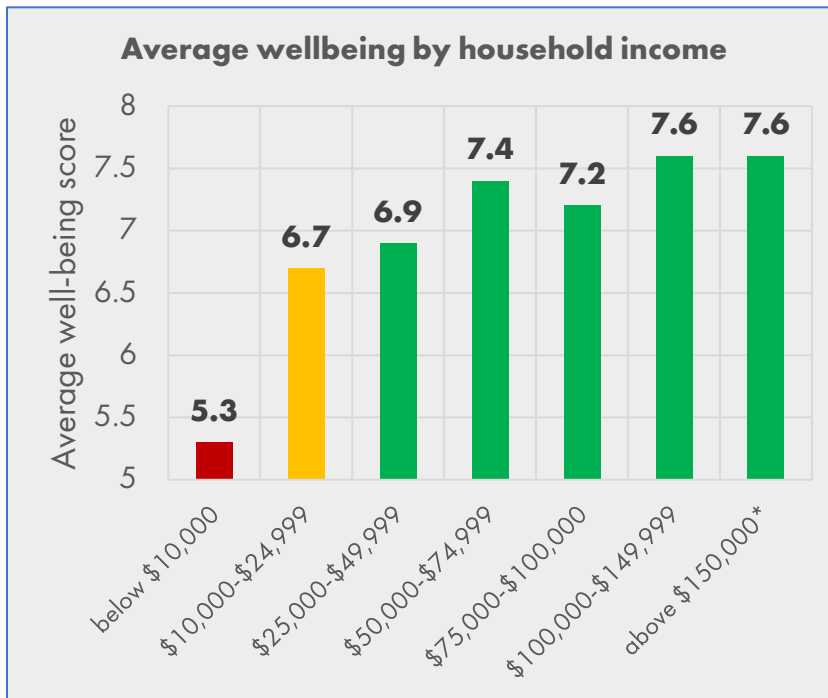
Contrary to the low self-reported importance of occupation for overall well-being, what people do during the largest share of their waking hours seems to impact life satisfaction significantly, explaining about a third of their well-being score. The most important drivers we identified relate to purpose and feeling that one's occupation is important and valued. Satisfaction with one's role and feelings of recognition are

Purpose

+0.2

key leverage points for improving overall well-being. Increasing people's feeling of purpose in their occupation is a clear opportunity to raise the well-being of the entire community.

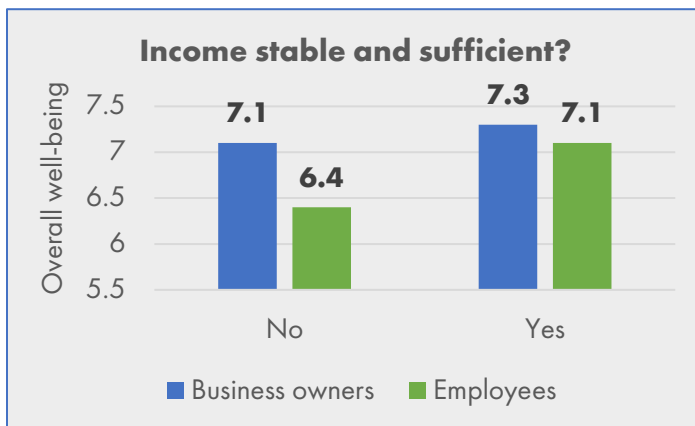
POVERTY AND FINANCIAL STABILITY



Previous research shows that high household incomes contribute only marginally to overall well-being². This is confirmed by the results of the HowAreWe project. However, poverty, identified by a household income below \$10,000 annually and below \$25,000 for households with children disproportionately decreases overall well-being. Finding ways to reduce these pockets of true and partial poverty in the population would improve the entire county's overall well-being

Lift above poverty
+0.1

index. Focusing on **growing overall per-capita GDP or median incomes would do nothing for overall well-being.**



In an economy where 55% of business owners and 40% of employees don't consider their income reliable and stable, improvements in financial stability would contribute positively to overall well-being, although this objective might be difficult to achieve in a partially seasonal economy dependent on tourism and part-time residents like Bayfield County.

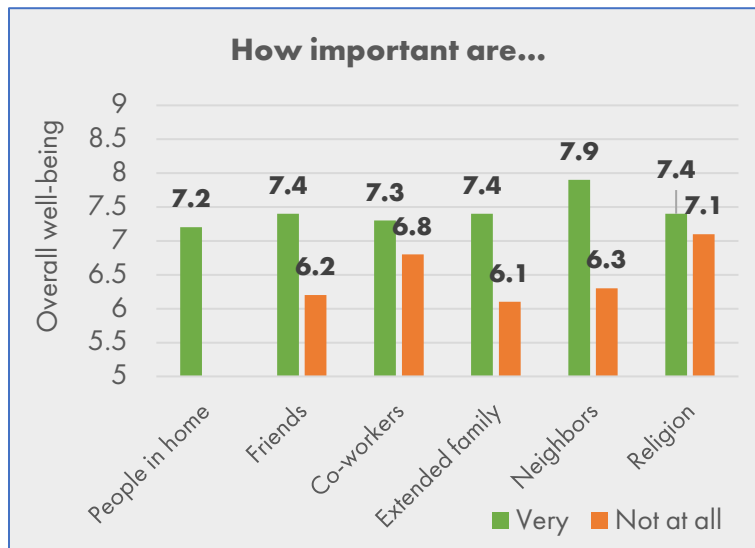
Financial Stability
+0.1

Business owners in general show a significantly higher level of overall well-being than the rest of the working population, even in less-than-ideal circumstances such as economic instability. Therefore, efforts to support the formation and long-term success of small businesses would increase well-being across the county.

Business Formation
+0.1

² See Appendix B for references

STRENGTHENING NEIGHBORHOODS



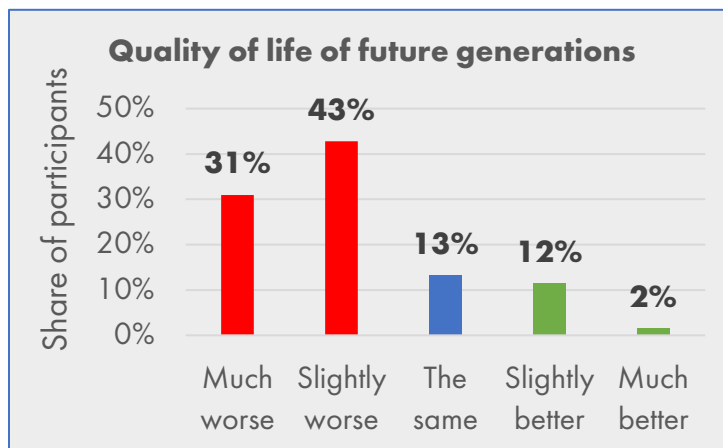
One unexpected result of the HowAreWe

Neighborhoods
+0.4

survey was that the most influential factor for well-being is the perceived support received from a person's neighborhood. While feeling supported makes people happier overall, those who can rely on their neighbors have a higher well-being score (7.9/10) than any other group, while those who don't are severely affected (6.3). This benefit can be observed across all demographics irrespective of e.g. age, income, and life situation.

This finding holds promise, because **improving neighborhood relationships offers an opportunity that doesn't require complex interventions or significant monetary investment**. Local civic engagement is likely sufficient to strengthen the social fabric that supports people and significantly improves their well-being. This effect may be particularly true for sparsely populated areas with limited access to infrastructure like stores, schools, hospitals, etc.

PERSPECTIVES FOR YOUNGER GENERATIONS



The most concerning finding of the HowAreWe survey are the perceptions

Perspectives for young people
+0.2

about the future of next generations. Almost three quarters of respondents are pessimistic about the quality of life and well-being of future generations, mostly independent of their own well-being and other demographic factors. Additionally, the current 5-year outlook of participants under 30 years is lower than well-

being levels of older generations, showing pessimism across an entire generation. This is further supported by our finding that close to 50% of individuals under 30 years old state "a positive future" for themselves as the number one factor that would improve their own well-being.

This issue presents more barriers to forming actionable suggestions to improve overall well-being, due to the lack of information about specific concerns for the future available in the data. Nevertheless, engaging with the young about their own perspectives seems to be an essential aspect of improving well-being. This would likely also improve this group's low share of

participants who “feel heard” by local and state politics, and promote civic engagement in young people, who are often less engaged in local and regional politics.

BRIDGING THE “RELIGION GAP”

Life priorities (outside of religion)

1. [Health](#)
2. [Friends and Family](#)
3. [Financial Stability](#)
4. [A positive future for next generations](#)
5. [Nature and Outdoors](#)
6. [Home and Neighborhood](#)
7. [An effective government](#)
8. [Occupation](#)
9. [Access to luxuries](#)

Another remarkable HowAreWe finding is

- while the county population is heavily polarized when it comes to the importance of religion and spirituality in their lives - this appears to be the only real distinction between the two polar groups. Answers related to other factors, including life priorities and overall well-being, are literally indistinguishable.

Close to 37% see religion as an important support pillar in life, while another 30% assign no importance to it. This discrepancy is less associated with political leaning than expected, despite a larger proportion of political conservatives in the more religious group.

Focusing on the commonalities between these two different groups of the population would likely be a significant contributor to societal cohesion and better relationships, reducing

polarization and improving well-being. However, due to the lack of specific data on stress resulting from societal rifts, we are unable to calculate improvement potential.

Bridging the
religion gap
+?

NOTE ON IMPROVEMENT POTENTIAL

Improvement potentials indicated above cannot be added to compute a theoretical overall improvement across all dimensions, as many of those factors support each other. For example, people who are well-supported by their neighborhood (improvement potential of 0.4) also feel better about being heard politically (improvement potential of 0.2) and access to healthcare (improvement potential of 0.2), possibly because being well-embedded in a neighborhood indirectly leads to changed perceptions of healthcare access. Thus, improving one aspect (e.g. neighborhood relations) might partially limit positive effects of other improvements on the overall well-being score.

CALL-TO-ACTION

With over 5% of the adult population of Bayfield County participating, people have clearly heard and responded to the “Make Your Voice Heard” motto of HowAreWe. It is important that the results and suggestions outlined here are actively used by policymakers, institutions and communities. Putting this data to use in a tangible way can strengthen the county and improve well-being. Based on our data, we consider it **a realistic target to improve the overall well-being score of the county by 0.2-0.3 points within 12 months**, and by 0.5 points over the course of 5 years. Utilization of this unique and valuable data by communities and their leaders could have a lasting impact on the well-being of the entire community.

Follow
HowAreWe

NEXT STEPS

HowAreWe will be actively disseminating the results to stakeholders and the public in Bayfield County and beyond during the second quarter of 2022 and plans to conduct a follow-up survey as part of a statewide rollout later in the year. We encourage interested parties to reach out, support, and share this initiative for the betterment of their communities.

SUPPORT
HowAreWe

HOWAREWE?
measuring what matters

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