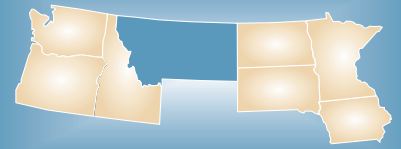


# STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET:

WHAT CAN BE DONE AND WHO SHOULD DO IT?



**MONTANA**

Findings from a state and national survey commissioned by Northwest Area Foundation

March 2006

## WHAT'S IT TAKE TO GET BY?

There's a wide gap between what the federal government says it costs to get by, and what people say it costs to live in their communities. For a family of four, the federal poverty threshold is \$19,806.\* That means a family with income lower than that is "in poverty."

But people say it costs far more than that to live. Forty-six percent of Montanans say a family of four needs at least \$40,000 per year for a basic standard of living in their community. Only 16 percent say that the federal poverty threshold is enough to make ends meet.

People who earn more money also are more likely to say that \$20,000 per year is not enough. But even among people earning less than \$35,000 per year, only 27 percent say that \$20,000 is sufficient.

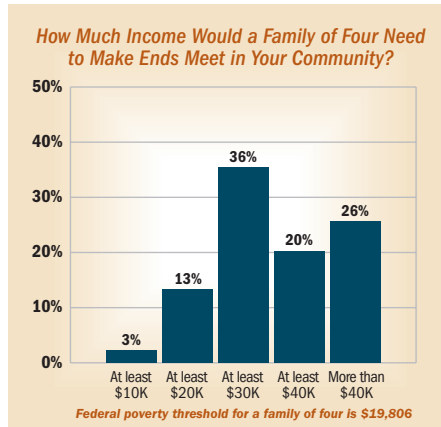
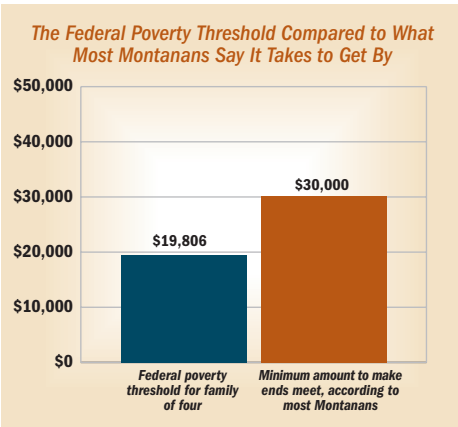
\*U.S. Census Bureau, 2005

## A BRIEFING PAPER FOR LOCAL MONTANA POLICY MAKERS

The Northwest Area Foundation survey reveals a Montana acutely aware of people's financial struggles, yet optimistic that the number of people struggling can be reduced.

Montanans see people struggling to make ends meet in their communities. Their real-world sense of the income needed to get by is greater than what the federal government thinks it takes to survive. Even though people acknowledge tough times around them, they have optimism that their communities can pull together and reduce the number of people struggling to get by. They believe that this is an important issue for their local elected officials to be working on, and they express willingness to take action to help their communities make progress.

This briefing paper gives some further insights into the data.



## PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

When it comes to helping people who are struggling, Montanans are clear about priorities for their local elected officials: Nearly nine out of 10 Montanans say keeping and attracting businesses with good-paying jobs, and improving access and reducing costs related to health care, are the most important issues.

A vast majority — 87 percent of Montanans — say it's important for local elected officials to help people who struggle to make ends meet. Half would be willing to pay more in taxes if they knew the funds would help these people.

### PERCENTAGE OF MONTANANS WHO SAY THIS ISSUE SHOULD BE A "TOP" OR "HIGH" PRIORITY FOR LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Keeping and attracting businesses that have good-paying jobs	89%
Improving access to health care and dealing with health care costs	85%
Creating more affordable housing	70%
Improving public transportation	39%

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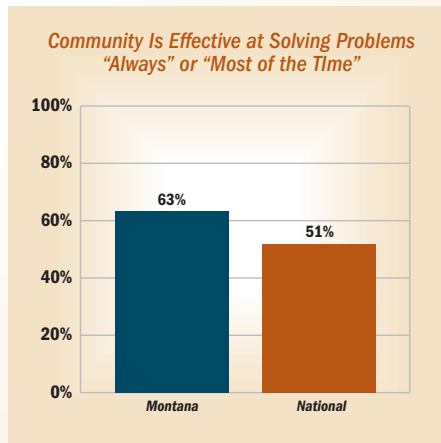
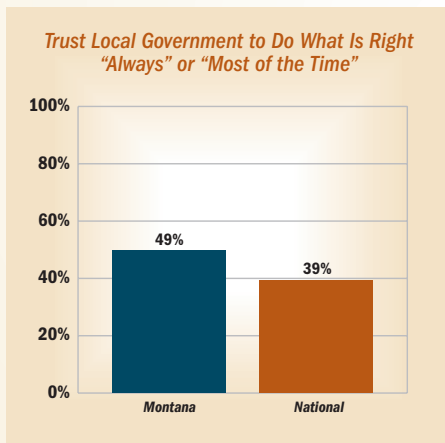
- A Lot of People Are Struggling
- Who Is Struggling to Make Ends Meet?
- State Snapshot
- Something Can Be Done to Reduce Poverty
- Especially for Elected Officials

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- Who Should Work on Reducing Poverty?
- Asked of Montanans: Whose Role Is It?

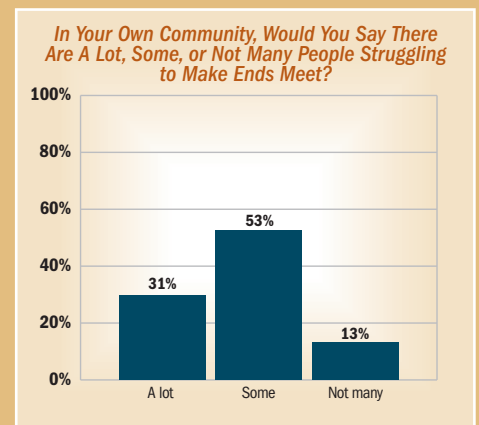
## STATE SNAPSHOT – MONTANANS TRUST LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SAY THEIR COMMUNITIES ARE EFFECTIVE

Montana has a reputation among some as a state where the independent Western streak extends to a deep mistrust of government. But more Montanans say they trust local government than do Americans as a whole, and Montanans give higher marks to their communities when it comes to effectiveness at problem solving.



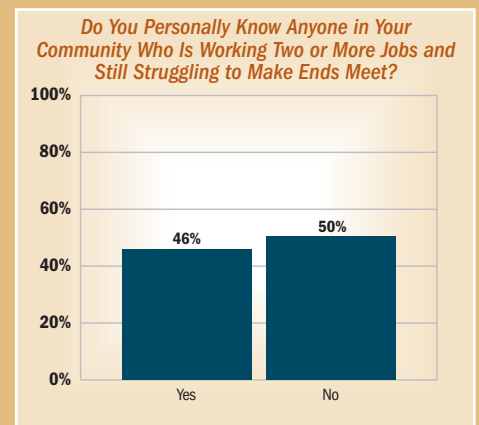
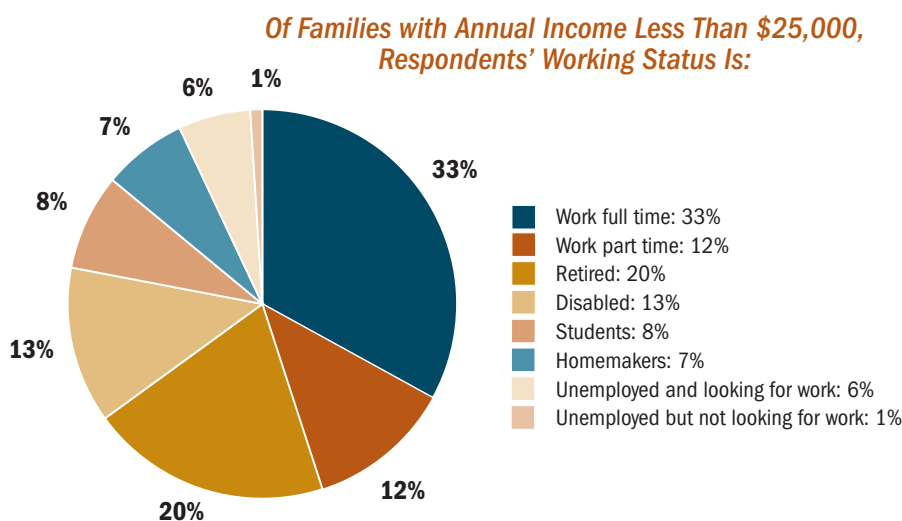
## A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING

Nearly one-third of Montanans say "a lot" of people are working but still struggling to make ends meet in their communities. Just under half of the people surveyed say they know someone who is working two or more jobs, yet still has trouble getting by.



## WHO IS STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET IN AMERICA?

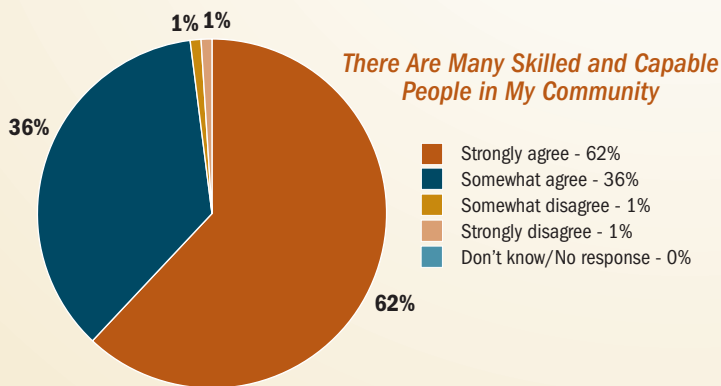
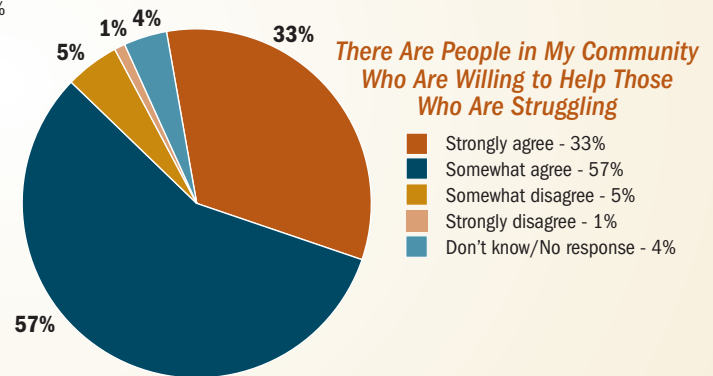
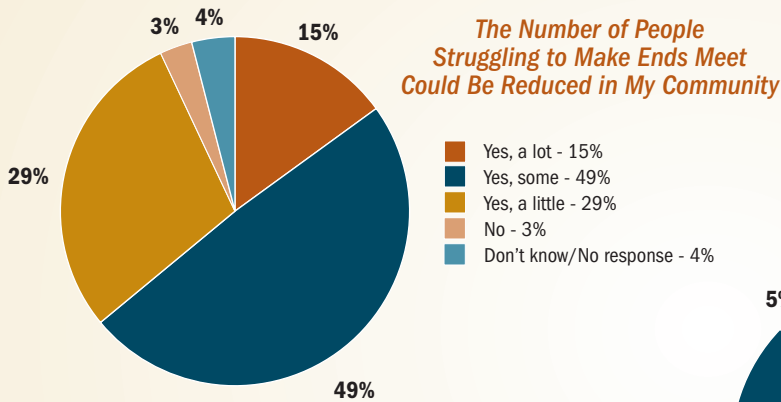
Low incomes are not the result of idleness. Almost half of Americans whose family incomes are less than \$25,000 per year are working full or part time. Seven percent are homemakers and 13 percent are disabled. Seven percent say they are unemployed, and the vast majority of these people are looking for work.



## PEOPLE SAY SOMETHING CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE POVERTY

Far from throwing up their hands in defeat, people say things can be done in their communities to reduce the number of people who are struggling. They say there are many skilled and capable people in their communities, and many people who are willing to help their neighbors.

Montanans also say they have confidence in the abilities of people in their communities to work to solve problems, and many respondents say they would be willing to pitch in, too.



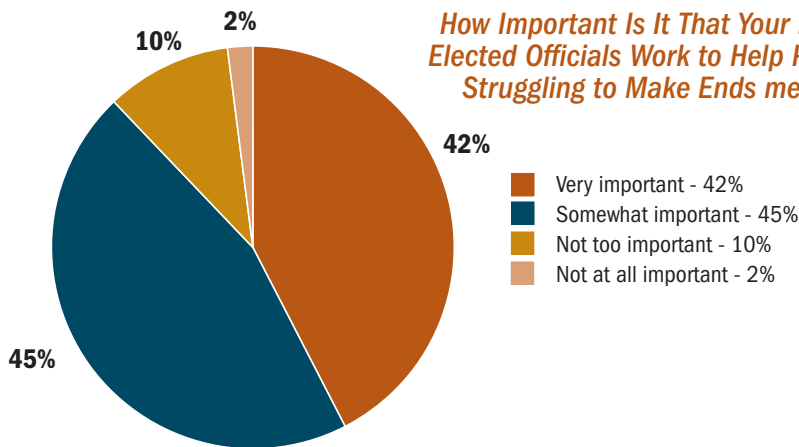
## ESPECIALLY FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

For elected officials who worry that Montanans aren't willing to make the trade-offs necessary to address poverty in the community, or who worry that people won't give them the room to try something new, these numbers are for you:

- 80 percent say helping people in their communities who are struggling is a “top” or “middle” concern
- 51 percent say that, when they cast their votes, they think about how well a candidate would help those struggling to make ends meet
- 49 percent say they would pay \$50 more per year in taxes for programs in their communities to help people struggling to make ends meet

## WHO SHOULD WORK ON REDUCING POVERTY?

Most Montanans say they are personally willing to pitch in and do more to help people in their own communities. They say that their local elected officials are knowledgeable about what it's like for people struggling to make ends meet, and that their local elected officials have a clear role to play in reducing poverty in their community. Fifty-five percent say that local elected officials are working hard on the issue.



*Data reflected in this publication are from a survey commissioned by Northwest Area Foundation and conducted by Lake Research Partners on Dec. 14-22, 2005. The national survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points and was weighted for gender, age, race and region. The margin of error for comparisons between U.S. and an individual state is +/- 10 percentage points.*

For more information, copies of the final survey report and downloadable graphics, go to Northwest Area Foundation at [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org).

## ASKED OF MONTANANS: WHOSE ROLE IS IT?

**Are local elected officials knowledgeable about people's struggles to make ends meet?**

**75%** "very" or "somewhat" knowledgeable

**Are local elected officials working hard to help people struggling in your community?**

**55%** "very" or "somewhat" hard

**Is it a good idea for people in the community to get together to discuss ways to help those who are struggling?**

**86%** "very" or "somewhat" good idea

**Would you attend this type of community discussion?**

**73%** "very" or "somewhat" likely to attend



**Northwest Area  
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*The Northwest Area Foundation, headquartered in Saint Paul, Minn., helps communities reduce poverty in its eight-state region: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. The Foundation brings technical assistance and financial resources that help identify, share and advocate community-focused strategies for long-term poverty reduction. The Foundation does not accept unsolicited grants.*

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