

CHOTEAU, MONTANA

COMMUNITY REVIEW

MARCH 19 – 20, 2018 * Phase 1



A service of the Montana Economic Developers Association in partnership with Montana Department of Commerce, Montana State University Extension, the University of Idaho and the University of Wyoming.

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COMMUNITY REVIEW REPORT

for

Choteau, Montana

MARCH 19 – 20, 2018



The Montana Community Review Program is a collaboration of federal, state, tribal, and local governments along with the private sector and nonprofits. Montana Community Reviews are made possible with sponsorship from Montana Department of Commerce and coordinated by Montana Economic Developers Association.



SPONSORING AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

**Choteau Area Port Authority
Choteau TBID
Lion's Club
Teton Economic Development Corp
Stage Stop Inn**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of the Choteau Community Review is due to the many individuals who generously shared their time, opinions, and knowledge by serving on the home team, completing a survey, or participating in a listening session or other conversation with the visiting team. Special thanks to Mary Sexton, Corlene Martin, and Steve Dogiakos with Choteau Area Port Authority.

Finally, the visiting team thanks the organizations, businesses, and individuals below for their contributions of support, time, and information to this project.

**Choteau Area Port Authority
Sweetgrass Development**

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- ❖ **Economic Development – Corlene Martin**
- ❖ **Tourism and Recreation – Mary Sexton**
- ❖ **Art and History – Susan Luinstra**
- ❖ **E-Commerce – Steve Dogiakos**
- ❖ **Seniors and Youth – Blair Patten**

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INTRODUCTION

It was a privilege for the Choteau Advance Team to spend time in your beautiful community. Thank you for your hospitality, your time, and for sharing with the team the vision you have for your community.

Before diving into the report, thanks are due Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC) for its support of the Montana Economic Developers Association (MEDA). It is a partnership between MDOC and MEDA that makes the Montana Community Review program available across the state.

If you participated in the Choteau Community Review, you know that Choteau now has the distinction of being the very first Montana Community Review. Due to a three-state grant project including Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, MEDA is collaborating with the University of Idaho, University of Wyoming, and Montana State University to develop the very best review process in each of our states. Dr. Lorie Higgins, University of Idaho Extension, is leading and guiding the project.

As a part of the three-state collaboration, each state has its own Design Team. Members of the Montana Design Team include Sue Taylor, Economic Development Director, Beartooth RC&D; Gus Byrom, Community Development Division, MT Dept. of Commerce; Dr. Paul Lachapelle, Local Government Center, Montana State University, and Gloria O'Rourke, Coordinator, MEDA. The Montana Design Team is guiding the three-phase process to help identify community needs, build community capacity, and provide resource information to address community needs.

The Community Review website is now under construction at <http://www.communityreview.org>; it will prove to be of immense help to communities in the near future. Stay tuned.

Thank you again for sharing your hope and vision for Choteau with the Choteau Community Review Team. Working together, much will be accomplished!



Choteau Advance Team
LtoR: Gloria O'Rourke, Lorie Higgins, Paul Lachapelle

MONTANA PROCESS OVERVIEW

The three-phase Montana Community Review Process begins with an application. The purpose of the application is to assist the Montana Design Team in learning about a community and to help in determining readiness for a team visit. In addition, if a community is under the umbrella of a Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC) the CRDC must agree to support the Community Review. With support from the CRDC, the MEDA Board lends its support; the Montana Design Team proceeds with implementing Phase 1.

In a nutshell, Phase 1 is the discovery process for all involved and includes a survey as well as a community profile. Phase 1 also includes a community visit from the Advance Team. Phase 2 is the learning phase of the process and involves digging deep into the topics and issues the community identified in Phase 1. Phase 3 is all about implementation, evaluation, and celebrating success.

CHOTEAU COMMUNITY REVIEW ~ PREPARATION FOR PHASE 1

Approximately six months prior to the Choteau Community Review, Sarah Converse, Executive Director, Sweetgrass Development, indicated to MEDA that the community of Choteau was interested in an assessment process. The MEDA Board gave the “go” to proceed. In the meantime, the ID-WY-MT Community Review Teams were collaborating, researching, learning from each other, and fine-tuning each state’s process.

Representatives from the Choteau Area Port Authority began making serious inquiries as to the process and worked hand-in-hand with the Montana Design Team to host the first Montana Community Review. The Choteau Area Port Authority completed the MEDA Community Review Application and identified topic areas that would likely come to the surface during the Advance Team visit. The Choteau Area Port Authority also assisted with a mailed survey and advertising for the Community Review. Over 300 people responded to the survey. In addition, the Port Authority formed the Home Team to help with on-the-ground participation for the people of Choteau and planned the agenda and logistics for the Advance Team Visit.



PHASE 1 ~ Advance Visiting Team in Choteau

Below is Choteau Community Review Agenda.

Choteau Community Review Agenda

March 19 & 20, 2018

All meetings are at the Hinch Building at 304 N. Main unless otherwise noted

- 12:00 – 1:20 Working Lunch Meeting for Advance Visiting Team, Home Team and Cross Section of Community Members - Welcome and Introductions; Review of Agenda and Process
- 1:30 – 3:15 Tour of Choteau and Surrounding Area
- 3:30 – 3:50 State of the Community
Jack Conatser, Mayor
Jodi Rogers, Finance Officer
- 4:00 - 5:30 Economic Development Discussion
- 6:00 Team Dinner and Preparation for Open Discovery Session
- 7:00 Public Discovery Session, Stage Stop Inn - South Fork Room
- March 20
- 7:30 – 8:30 Breakfast Meeting Stage Stop Inn
- 9:00 – 10:20 Recreation Discussion
- 10:30 – 11:50 E-Commerce Discussion
- 12:00 – 1:00 Lunch
- 1:00 – 1:50 Ag Discussion
- 2:00 – 2:50 Youth & Seniors
- 3:00 – 3:50 Arts & History
- 4:00 – 4:50 Always Lived Here, Came Back Here, Chose to Live Here
- 5:00 – 6:30 Team Dinner at Hinch Building
- 7:00 Town Hall Meeting - Stage Stop Inn, South Fork Room

Tour of Choteau

Corlene Martin, Choteau Area Port Authority, conducted a tour including:

1:30 - 2:00	Mike Maples	Sewage Treatment Plant
	Drive By	Jerry Dunckel's Neighborhood
2:00 - 3:00	Drive By	Choteau Schools
	Drive By	Sunset Court Apartments
	Drive By	Benefis Teton Medical Center
	Drive By	Skyline Lodge
	Drive By	Mountain Front Market
	Drive By	Water Works Building
	Drive By	Richem Well
	Drive By	Airport Hill to
	Drive By	Choteau Golf Course
	Drive By	Choteau Airport
	Drive By	Back down the hill
	Drive By	Through Country Club Addition
	Drive By	Pro-West Subdivision
	Drive By	City Park
	Drive By	Rex's & Elevators
	Drive By	Left at 4 Way Stop
	Drive By	Teton County Courthouse
	Drive By	Swimming Pool
	Drive By	Up the Bellview to the top of Byrd Hill
	Drive By	Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile site
	Drive By	Through Main Street
	Drive By	North of Town to the Canyon Road
	Drive By	Back to the Hinch Building



COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS

Community listening sessions are open-ended, focus group-like discussions with key stakeholder groups identified by the home and visiting teams. The purpose is simple: we ask open-ended



questions of a cross-section of community residents with diverse perspectives, listen to their answers, and reflect back what we hear. This means that for the most part, we're telling you exactly what we heard from residents; we also made a few observations and will share those at the end of this section.

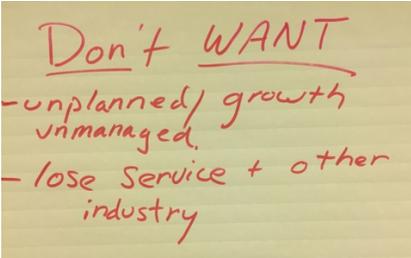
Ten community listening sessions were held with the Choteau Community Review Advance Team. Over 150 people responded either in person or in writing their answers to three questions: 1. What don't you

want to see happen in Choteau in the next five years, 2. What do you want to see happen in Choteau in the next five years, and 3. What, who and where are the assets that can benefit Choteau? Below is a summary of each of these questions based on what the team heard.

As listed on the agenda, the Choteau Community Review included listening sessions with the following stakeholder groups: Economic Development, Open House, Recreation, E-Commerce, Agriculture, Youth and Seniors, Art and History, and Always Lived Here, Came Back Here, Chose to Live Here.

What DON'T you want to see happen in Choteau in the next five years?

While it's never good to dwell on the things we don't want to see happen, the Choteau Review Team believes it is important that the conversation take place and the overriding themes be compiled and described. We asked locals to discuss and identify what they don't want to see happen in Choteau in the next five years and heard many items emerge that can be broadly categorized around three principal themes of 1. Population Loss, 2. Loss of Business Opportunities and Infrastructure Decline, and 3. Impacts to Natural Amenities. Listening session participants shared many comments as reflected by the following word cloud.



This word cloud visually represents the most frequently voiced responses when listening session participants were asked what they did not want to see in the community over the coming 5-10 years. Larger text indicates items mentioned most often.



Population Loss

In the listening sessions, people from different sectors consistently described concerns with the loss of population to the community and region. Specifically, individuals discussed their thoughts on how the loss of students after they graduate, leave for college or take jobs outside of the region and then don't return will impact the community. The loss of farmers and farming and ranching opportunities because of various pressures was also heard. Some described the resistance to change by some in the community as a concern to addressing current issues. As was repeated regarding assets and identifying what people want to see happen, a stable population of residents, particularly young people, is seen as integral to the future of Choteau.

Loss of Business Opportunities and Infrastructure Decline

The Choteau Review Team often heard descriptions of the importance of maintaining existing business and infrastructure in the community and concerns with the loss of businesses, future business and job opportunities and the needs of maintaining and servicing the many infrastructural needs in the town. Specifically, discussion focused on Main Street and the need to prevent further loss of a business and retail presence in the store fronts. Concerns of the impacts of boom and bust economies in other areas and how future scenarios may impact the community were discussed as well as related issues of crime and drugs. Equally important was the need to address recent factors that have impacted or been associated with the ski hill, local restaurants, library, and impacts to schools and other critical infrastructure such as streets and subdivisions.

As the graphic above indicates, the most often mentioned impact was loss of businesses which was discussed as influenced by the loss of population and students in particular. Related to this is the

Community Enhancement

Operation Facelift: Though visitors to Choteau frequently remark on the picturesque quality of Choteau's downtown, locals feel it is time for some cosmetic improvements – paint and façade updates while retaining the charm and spirit of Choteau.

Highway 89 construction will impact Choteau's Main Street in 3 – 4 years and there will be major upgrades then. The community will need to make some decisions about design and features, but in the meantime, could be creating more curb appeal in the run up to the overhaul.

Residents would also like to see some community clean up, especially at the entrances to Choteau. Cleaning up properties and screening would help give visitors a more inviting first impression.

Welcome and Engage Newcomers: Connecting with newcomers has been hit and miss, it seems. We heard reports that sometimes people new to town don't know how to get involved, do not feel welcome in local hangouts, or in some way feel marginalized by the close-knit town. In discussions, part of the problem identified was that there isn't a single source where most people get their news and information about community activities. In other words, there is a lack of awareness sometimes when there are new residents in town, especially of those who telecommute. One solution discussed was to rekindle a kind of Welcome Wagon program and identify other ways to enhance the existing culture of care and connection among residents.



Live Local: We were told Choteau is the kind of town that inspires residents to “live locally,” which involves being engaged in community, sharing the good and pitching in to fix the bad, at multiple levels. Like the Welcome Wagon idea, many in Choteau want to identify new ways to foster this approach to community life.

Restaurants: One of the most often mentioned desires, by far, was for a variety of eateries, from supper clubs to bistro fare, that can be sustained in Choteau. According to some we spoke with, there is no place to eat on Sunday evenings. This item could easily fit into the other categories below in that culinary businesses can be great economic drivers, especially as a cornerstone of the tourism industry.

Economic Activity

New businesses and higher wages topped the list of what residents want for Choteau. However, creating an environment that fosters both is multifaceted. Choteauans say paths to a Choteau where everyone thrives will involve more support for local businesses, marketing Choteau's assets, and a concerted focus on E-Commerce development, recreation and value-added agriculture.

Live Local, Buy Local: “Buy Local” is a useful concept for small towns, but Choteau residents argue that supporting local businesses really comes out of a personal commitment to community – to “living locally.” This includes the careful care and feeding of Choteau's anchor businesses. When there are major initiatives to grow new businesses or recruit from other places, local businesses can feel neglected.

Market Choteau: Choteau went through a branding process, but the visiting team left without a clear sense of what it is. It is the “front porch to the Rockies” on the Chamber website, the visitor's guide says it is “the little town next to everything,” while there are references to Choteau being a “Gateway” at

the visitor's center. One key to successfully marketing a community is consistent, multifaceted use of the brand message. That marketing Choteau was frequently mentioned as a need by discovery session participants suggests the brand isn't widely known or utilized. We heard things like "be ready to sell Choteau as the place to come for relaxation and a break from the world – to unplug," "find Choteau's identity," "capitalize on history tourism," and "some identity for Choteau – branding – to make us unique...something to unite us all."

E-Commerce Development: In addition to basic business / entrepreneurship training for youth and adults, locals would like to see some specialized training and services geared toward internet businesses. Even Main Street businesses could benefit from an enhanced online presence. Establishing a "co-work" space in Choteau was mentioned a number of times. As a growing number of Americans work from home, co-work spaces are offering a way to share equipment such as printers, a premium broadband connection, coffee pots and meeting spaces and video conferencing gear.

It was also suggested that the library could play a larger role in providing space for these classes and youth needing to complete required service projects could choose to assist local businesses with their website and social media sales and marketing efforts. Choteau has a triad of assets (youth, telecommuting workers, and a library with capacity) that if connected, could help build world-class businesses in the heart of Choteau.

Light Industry & Value-Added Agriculture: While some discovery session participants said they would gladly welcome the meat packing plant being discussed in Great Falls, most expressed a preference for light, quiet industries. Food processing for niche markets – ways to add value to locally produced crops and livestock – was mentioned several times as a type of business that builds on local culture and available economic assets.

Tourism and Recreation

While some residents feel tourism is not the ideal target for economic development, most believe it definitely has to be part of the economic mix for Choteau. Agriculture has become more automated and the number of farms has declined (as farms have grown in size), leading to a need to develop other kinds of assets available to the community.

Leverage Assets: Most of the comments we heard related to recreation and tourism involved leveraging assets like the park, creek, rodeo grounds and Pavilion, Choteau's history, Stage Stop Inn, the arts, dinosaur bones, museums, solitude, the ski hill (if a way is found to reopen and sustain it), fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing.

We heard that some critical components of successfully leveraging these assets are missing. Wayfinding and signage, aligned businesses, and more community events are among the identified missing pieces.

Wayfinding: A comprehensive signage and wayfinding plan that uses a brand-driven design to link Choteau's assets, from the ski hill to Freezeout Lake, was recommended as was maps and guides to trails, access points and viewing sites. These maps should be available from local businesses that visitors might frequent.

Recreation Businesses: A place that rents and sells outdoor recreation equipment would be a good fit for Choteau, according to a number of residents. Guiding and outfitting businesses, as well as craft and art-related businesses, including craft brewing, would cater to the same market.



Youth Amenities: Park playground equipment is outdated and probably doesn't meet current safety standards. A recent effort was initiated but was suspended before completion. However, we are told there is still lots of interest and that playground improvements are a priority.

The Arts: A greater emphasis on the arts would also have benefits for local residents while enriching visitors' experiences. A downtown art center is a goal of the local arts organization. An art walk, art classes and shows were also mentioned as possibilities given an abundance of artists in the region.

Events: Community events, like Choteau's famous 4th of July festivities, are effective and sustainable ways to bring visitors and their dollars into rural communities. Some in Choteau believe it is feasible to develop a range of annual festivals and art shows.

Infrastructure

Other ways that residents would like to put a shine on Choteau include fixing roads and streets, taking down dead trees, a more visible arts presence downtown, sidewalks in most neighborhoods, and improved walkability. One suggestion was for a walking path from the Stage Stop Inn to Downtown.

Workforce housing is another issue that inhibits new families from taking root. Cost is one issue, but availability of adequate housing stock presents significant challenges to those who want a home in Choteau.

An adequate assisted living facility is another desire for Choteau. Residents want to age in place rather than move to Fairfield or Great Falls.

Health and Safety: Besides sketchy playground equipment we heard concerns about the safety of children walking to and from school. Some drivers tend to speed past the school complex, but according to residents of the neighborhood, are rarely ticketed. Bike lanes, sidewalks, and crosswalks were also mentioned as a need in Choteau.

What, who, and where are the assets that can benefit Choteau:

As outsiders looking in, we always take note of a community's setting within the surrounding landscape — whether it's forested, pastoral farmland, high desert, or near water. Next, we look for historic architecture or unique community features that define a sense of place.



Places

Those participating in the listening sessions stated the obvious about the unique and beautiful location of Choteau. Between two national parks and near incredible outdoor and wildlife resources, Choteau is truly a Montana treasure. A favorite quote the team heard was, “We ARE a Hallmark Card.”

The team heard a long list under the category of places in Choteau. In summary: outdoor recreation, birding, existing businesses, Freezeout Lake, public lands, museums, pool, parks, ski hill, essential services, amenities, and agricultural land. Emotion was attached to the special “place” of Choteau with comments such as:

- Enjoy the small community, small family feel
- Picturesque Main Street
- A place where people care

Organizations

The Choteau Community Review Team was amazed at the large number of organizations actively engaged within your community. These organizations work hard to plan events, serve those in need, take care of the town’s physical needs, educate youth, provide healthcare, and so much more. The team heard about the incredible 4th of July celebration, existing businesses, the quality education provided by the school, pool facility, hospital and health care, Choteau Area Port Authority, and your award winning newspaper.

As the graphic above indicates, the most often mentioned organizational assets included the school, StageStop Inn, hospital, Soroptimists, and Library.

Survey Results

A “Community Satisfaction Survey” was conducted in Choteau prior to the Advance Team visit on March 19th. This survey was conducted by University of Idaho and the HELPS Lab at Montana State University. The full survey is included in Appendix B of this report.

Survey Respondent Description

Response

Surveys completed: 312

Response rate: 31%* (of 1206 surveys sent, about 150 had address problems and were returned)

Surveys completed on line: 177

Paper surveys completed: 135

*NOTE: This is an excellent response rate! Thanks to the people of Choteau and the Port Authority!



Sex

Female: 175

Male: 105

Prefer not to answer: 31

Other Demographics of Respondents

Mean age: 61 (average age of those responding)

Median Income: \$50-75k (range most often reported)

Race & ethnicity: Approximately 93% white

Live inside or outside of community: About 70% in the community

Years in community: 9% under 5 years, 29% from 6-20 years and 61% over 20 years

A note about the “satisfaction” section of the survey results: reported percentages are of those who answered the question. In a few cases a majority of respondents did not select any of the options. Those items include Childcare/Early Childhood Education, Public Transportation, and Mental Health. This is probably because respondents did not know enough to answer or because services, such as public transportation, are very limited.

There were several opportunities for survey respondents to explain their satisfaction ratings and provide additional information and ideas. Although there were lots of accolades for the Choteau’s people, places and organizations, responses tended to focus on why people are less than perfectly satisfied with items on the survey. Some of these comments are included here when they reflect other comments, are constructive, and suggest ways that life in Choteau can be improved. Please do not overemphasize those sentiments in your overall takeaway from this section – the glass is more than half full!

Infrastructure

Respondents were more SATISFIED than dissatisfied with the following aspects of infrastructure, though the percentage of those who were satisfied is, in all cases, under fifty percent. That such a high percentage of respondents selected the neutral category suggests mixed feelings about that item.

- Appearance of Downtown (46% vs 21% dissatisfied and 33% neutral)
- Appearance of Neighborhoods (43% vs 20% dissatisfied and 37% neutral)
- Bike and Pedestrian Access (44% vs 25% dissatisfied and 31% neutral)
- Internet Service (36% vs 32% and 32% neutral)
- Housing (27% vs 24% dissatisfied and 48% neutral)

Responses to *“Would you like to comment or explain why you rated your satisfaction with any of these public services and community amenities in the way you did?”* tended to explain concerns more than reasons for being satisfied. That said, the positive comments mostly focus on the beauty of Choteau, and the quaint, friendly, small town look and feel of the community.

This comment explaining a lower rating for bike and pedestrian access represents many of the related responses to this question

“Sidewalks and pedestrian routes in Choteau are generally poorly designed and maintained, often times dangerous given vehicle traffic, and sometimes overrun with business or industrial activities.”

This last part was echoed in other comments that cars, boats and work vehicles often line the streets, perhaps because there is little off-street parking. One respondent suggested a *“S.I.D. to fund our sidewalks and streets?”*

Though bike and pedestrian access got more high ratings than low, many commented about the lack of sidewalks, the dangerous conditions for children walking to school, snow and ice removal, especially in areas frequented by senior citizens, and the need for bike and walking paths for safety (several mentioned the narrow shoulders on the highway), to promote more active lifestyles and to attract bike tourists.

Similarly, though Internet Service also received fairly high ratings, there were quite a few comments about the speed and cost of internet service. The concerns likely come more from younger respondents, those who rely on the internet for their livelihood and newcomers to the community who come from places where internet service is higher quality and less expensive. Improvements in the works by Three Rivers will result in overall increase in satisfaction with broadband.



An exceptionally high number of responses selected the neutral category with regard to housing. This is probably because most people are happy with their own homes. That said, there were quite a few comments that suggested a lack of available housing creates challenges for newcomers, young families looking for a starter home, and renters. The consensus is that housing costs are high, given relative quality and lower wages and salaries for local workers. This comment represents much of the sentiment we read (and heard in listening sessions) with regard to housing:

“We have lost several friends that chose to move to Fairfield or other areas close by so that they could afford their house. We know Choteau is a beautiful town and we have the Teton County Courthouse here, yet we wonder why housing is so much higher than other neighboring areas. It is sad to see people have to choose other locations to live due to the housing cost when they were already making the sacrifice of less pay to live in such a beautiful, friendly and safe place!”

Respondents were more DISSATISFIED than satisfied with the following aspects of Choteau’s infrastructure:

- Public Transportation (51% vs 3% satisfied and 34% Don’t know)
- Condition of Roads & Streets (45% vs 23% satisfied)

The high number of dissatisfied and “don’t know” ranking for public transportation is likely because there is very little public transportation available. There were a few follow-up comments about it:

“We need bus transportation to Great Falls + for in town (to golf course). Also, bike paths along Hwy. 89 to Bynum + Fairfield.”

Choteau’s streets and roads, like many other small western towns, are in fair to poor condition. The good news is that MDT will be coming through in three to four years to

reconstruct Main St. and the highway. Unfortunately, most other streets in town won't be impacted and with a limited tax base, street and road improvement is likely to be a slow process.

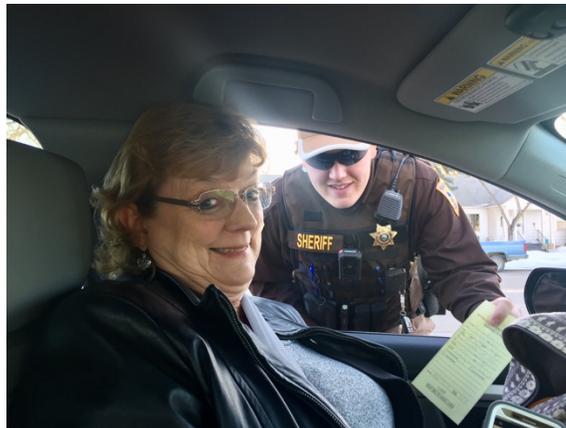
Public Services

Surveyed residents were more SATISFIED than dissatisfied with the following services:

- Police protection/law enforcement (71% vs 9% dissatisfied)
- Local K-12 school system (78% vs 6% dissatisfied)
- Childcare/early childhood education (64% vs 10% dissatisfied and 53% no answer)
- Medical care services (49% vs 21% dissatisfied)
- Senior Citizen support services (53% vs 14% dissatisfied and 26% neutral)
- Responsiveness of local government (40% vs 23% dissatisfied and 33% neutral)

There were few comments about law enforcement, which one respondent noted is *“friendly and helpful!”* Concerns primarily centered around city code enforcement, which is less about how local officers do their jobs and more about city management of code enforcement. There were a few comments by residents who would like to see more enforcement of speed limits and other traffic violations.

However, the visiting team got to see local law enforcement in action and based on our experience we think they are doing a good job spotting traffic law violations!



Most of the comments about the K-12 school system in Choteau were positive: *“The educators in our school system have been fantastic over the years,”* and *“School system is top notch.”* There were a number of concerns about bullying, however, especially in the grade school. Other concerns were about homework (or the lack thereof) doing a disservice to students by *“not challenging them beyond what they can complete during the school day.”* We had not heard about either of these issues during listening sessions.

One person suggested the curriculum needs to be updated to “prepare youth for the 21st century,” which would involve...

“A more play-based curriculum utilizing lots of outdoor time for K-3 and project-based learning for 4-12 with a well-rounded education to mean a complete incorporation of arts, music, trades, and classical education as well as technology. We have a supreme outdoor venue...lets create an outdoor adventure and science and art school!”

The other topic most commented about was a desire for local access to higher education. One respondent said he/she would like to see access to higher education via “live streaming classes coordinated with places like the Hospital, Public Library, High School, etc.” Along with a wide range of degree or continuing education options, dual credit classes for high school students was also mentioned.

Choteau residents are happy to have a local medical facility, but would like to have at least one local doctor and higher wages for workers in this sector (and others, such as teachers).

- Mental health services (26% vs 12% satisfied and 40% Don't know)

This response to mental health services is likely due to a lack of knowledge of what is available, and/or little need for these services among the survey respondents. Concerns were not raised during listening sessions.

Business and the Economy

Residents were more DISSATISFIED than satisfied with all of the items in this category, which is not terribly surprising since it is the reason the Choteau Port Authority requested the community review.

- Available jobs (50% vs 10% satisfied and 29% neutral)
- Pay rates (49% vs 9% and 26% neutral)
- Variety of goods and services (46% vs 19% satisfied and 33% neutral)
- Access to higher education (38% vs 17% satisfied and 24% Don't know)
- Variety of industry (61% vs 6%)

Another question on the survey asked respondents how important promoting **tourism** is for Choteau (only seven people taking survey did not answer this question):

- Very important: 58%
- Somewhat important: 29%
- Somewhat unimportant: 10%
- Very unimportant: 3%





One person summed up the majority of comments on the subject of jobs and wages: “we need more jobs to keep people here and better wages to attract them.” With regard to retail, many noted the challenge of sustaining local businesses when people do their shopping in larger communities:

“We could use more shopping opportunities too, but so many people drive to Great Falls to shop, it is little wonder that businesses find it hard to stay open. We need a way to change attitudes so people shop local first.”

Another question on the survey asked respondents what challenged their ability to support local businesses. The responses were:

- Availability of products, services or both: 38%
- Prices: 24%
- Hours of operation: 16%

We heard concerns about hours of operation with regard to being visitor friendly, but for local residents this is not as big an issue.

Other economic points made by those who chose to explain their ratings:

- Diversify the economy – it’s the path to growth
- Embrace telecommuting as a component of that diversity
- Embrace tourism as a component of that diversity, but also build agricultural opportunities such as value-added products from what is locally grown
- Support women entrepreneurs as a diversification strategy
- Focus on aligning the cost of living with wages and salaries
- Focus on revitalizing Main Street – many are concerned about the growing number of empty buildings
- Elected leaders should align themselves with these priorities

There is wide acknowledgement that the Choteau region is rich in recreational opportunities. The one survey respondents most connected to economic development is the ski hill.

“We need to open the ski area!”

“Encourage the ski hill to move its rental and equipment maintenance into Choteau and not up on the ski hill (might help reduce costs for them as well as provide added incentive for folks to return to town).”

“A couple cross country ski trails – groomed or not – could be set up with local unused land, the golf course, etc. Even one set up outside of town but not all the way at the ski hill would entice travelers.”

“Create a local bike trail in the community and a business to rent bikes for folks to use (...with also mountain biking on the ski hill).”

One person expressed appreciation for the range of recreation opportunities in Choteau:

“Excellent recreation opportunities (gyms, running club, yoga, etc.). The Soroptimist walking path, the beauty of the landscape!”

Another idea to entice travelers was shared by a survey respondent: *“RV parking downtown.”*

During listening sessions we heard about the need for more social gathering places, coffee shops, restaurants and lots of interest in a craft brewery. This was also reflected in the survey comments:

“The community needs a brewery.... It is a growing industry, provides a “non-bar atmosphere” for locals to congregate and numerous people now travel specifically to visit breweries.”

Quality of Life and Civic Engagement

Some of the quotes below were in response to the question asking for explanations of satisfaction ratings and some are in response to the question about how effective residents are at working together. Of those answering the effectiveness question, 18% selected “very effective,” 71% selected “somewhat effective,” and 11%, “not at all effective.” In explaining a “somewhat effective” rating, one person commented,

“Projects tend to take an extended time to come to fruition and it is difficult to keep that nucleus of people working consistently through literally years to bring a project to reality. Because of this I rated effectiveness at only somewhat effective. It’s not that we don’t have people willing to volunteer, it’s just very difficult to sustain the energy and the commitment over the long periods of time needed.”

Unlike with economic indicators, residents were more SATISFIED than dissatisfied with all aspects of local quality of life and citizen involvement in the community. In response to the question, “Is Choteau a good place to raise a family?”, 93% of those answering the question said “Yes.”

- Friendliness of residents (78% vs 9% dissatisfied)
- Parks & playgrounds (68% vs 8% dissatisfied and 27% neutral)
- Availability of fresh fruits & veggies (60% vs 14% dissatisfied and 26% neutral)
- Civic and non-profit organizations (58% vs 8% dissatisfied and 27% neutral)

- Recreation/entertainment opportunities (52% vs 18% dissatisfied and 28% neutral)
- Responsiveness of local government (37% vs 20% dissatisfied and 33% neutral)
- Arts, entertainment & cultural activities (36% vs 25% dissatisfied and 34% neutral)



Friendliness of residents topped the list in terms of satisfaction. The few who expressed dissatisfaction felt outsiders and newcomers are not always welcomed to participate in local organizations or decision making. We did hear some comments during listening sessions about this and there was a good deal of discussion about focusing on being more welcoming and inclusive in engaging all residents in community activities.

Despite some comments about a desire to update the playground equipment in the park, 68% of those who responded to the parks and playgrounds item were somewhat or highly satisfied. Related to this, recreation and entertainment options appreciated by survey respondents include the golf course, movie theater, skiing and other outdoor activities and the events at the park/pavilion/rodeo grounds.

In the next tier is availability of fresh fruits and vegetables. Comments were appreciative of the *“Wonderful fresh food because of Jill’s Market and the Hutterites.”*

Though more were satisfied than dissatisfied with arts, entertainment and cultural activities, the smaller margin is likely due to both recognition of high quality local artists and art organizations and a feeling that more can be done in this area. These ideas are also linked to prospects for economic development that brings visitors who come to town, spend lots of money, and then go away.

“The Roxy does a great job bringing movies to our community and enjoy supporting their work. Some other rural communities have had success tapping into small film festivals with much success. Polson has multiple events that are community supported and, again, bring consumers to the community.”

“Tap into the idea of more events – Dupuyer has Grizzly Days, Ivan Doig Day, etc. Perhaps we can have AB Guthrie Day, Old North Trail day, etc. and target getting those events advertised via Facebook groups, and papers in Helena and Great Falls.”

The community in general, civic organizations and responsiveness of local government received high marks from residents:

“The community and people are amazing. Very kind and helpful!”

“Whenever there is a need, there is a quick and generous response.”

“Choteau is a wonderful small town that has a lot to offer for its size. There is a caring group of people that live here. Great place to raise kids!”

There is recognition of strong, effective leadership and action that has some traction:

“The civic and non-profit organizations deserve the highest accolades. Fundraisers are always well supported for the swimming pool, the animal shelter, pavilion, scouts, 4-H, weather beaters, food pantry, and various church projects. The generosity of local citizens is outstanding!”



“Thank you to the groups of people working on our challenges.”

“There’s an enthusiastic group of citizens who are involved. We need more of them.”

“I think that members of our community concerned with the development of our city are greatly determined to work together to get some things going.”

“Throughout the years, Choteau residents have been very good about facing the problems of the community and solving them. People in Choteau are generally willing to put out much energy and thought towards solving problems.”

That said, several comments responding to the question about how effective residents are at working together suggest that elected leadership and residents could be more open to change, willing to try new ideas, and less resigned to the status quo:

“There seems to be a difference between two groups of people, those who would like change and those who want things to remain the same.”

“But change IS happening, whether we like it or not. So why not step up and take charge of that change?”

“I have routinely heard that we need to be careful about the future because we do not want to be the next Bozeman or Missoula. I think that will always be expressed as a concern but should not be given as a reason to not do anything.”

“After a while, people just give up.”

And though active organizations are applauded for local initiatives, some think there is a need for more coordination and alignment of visions among them:

“The community usually has several diverse groups or opinions. Very conservative to fairly open-minded and more liberal. Depending on the issue, sometimes the opposing opinions do not come together, causing a stalemate.”

“My sense is that there are many groups working hard to make improvements in the community. However, these groups are not always good at communicating with each other, so efforts are duplicated or even conflicting with each other.”

That is not to say that people are not hopeful. Positive begets positive and that shines through this comment:

“People in our community are willing to go above and beyond to help determine what can be done to make it better. It takes many people to make progress on such a large project. If we continue to get a few more each time, we’ll all be working together towards the best possible solutions for our community.”



To that point, many recognize the need for new voices in these efforts – particularly younger residents. This was in response to “I would volunteer more if...”:

“We need new blood to help keep these projects going and to spread the work around.”

“I’d also be more willing to help if I knew people my age (25-30) would be there helping.”

And to the point that some in the community feel there are barriers to being meaningfully involved, this person finished the “if” sentence with:

“More people of Choteau make you feel like it’s your hometown too.”

Another elaborated on this idea:

“Too many people are excluded from many of the organizations/committees that discuss these issues and often ignore comments that are contrary to their predetermined outcomes.”

That this was echoed in listening sessions suggests there is a very real perception, among some Choteau residents, of exclusiveness with regard to who is welcomed into community conversations.



Volunteerism in Choteau

Kudos to Choteau for having such an engaged, giving and caring community. We asked whether respondents to the survey volunteered in the last year and if they did, what did they volunteer for. Of those answering the question *“Have you been involved in community projects in the last 12 months?”*, **46% said yes and 48% said no**. We then asked respondents to list the community projects they have worked on. Counting all the volunteerism reported by survey respondents was quite an undertaking! Here is the list:



<p><u>Cultural</u> Old Trail Museum 3 Museum (old trail?) 5 Shakespeare in the Park 2 Fireworks 4 4th of July 7 Rodeo 2 Easter egg hunt 3 Art 5</p>	<p><u>Youth</u> OFA Scholarships 4 Boy Scouts 8 Girl Scouts 2 Swimming Pool 6 School 24 Youth 15 4-H 5 Playground 4 Reading Buddies 2 Sports 6</p>	<p><u>Health and Safety</u> Soroptimist 5 Fire Dept 6 EMS 4 Hospital 10 Health 6 Search and Rescue 2 Red Cross 3 Food Pantry 8</p>
<p><u>Community Quality of Life</u> Senior Center 6 Church 20 Animal Shelter 7 Lions Club 17 Community Educ 2 Clean-up 5 Service 11 Fundraising 52 Library 4 Community 26 CASA 2</p>	<p><u>Economic Development</u> Port Authority 2 Chamber 5 Visitors Center 2</p>	

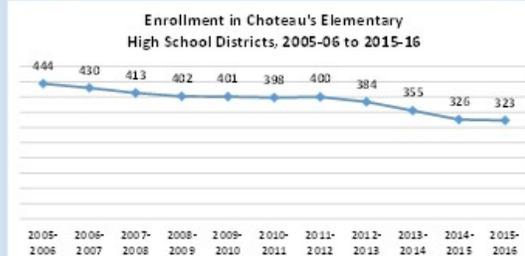
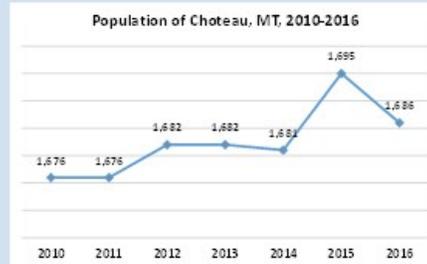
Appendix A: Community Profile

CHOTEAU, MONTANA COMMUNITY PROFILE



POPULATION

	Choteau City	Teton County
Total population		
2016, number	1,686	6,056
2010, number	1,684	6,073
Change 2010-2016, percent	0.1	-0.3
Components of population change, 2010-2016		
Net migration change (in-migrants minus out-migrants)		
Number	---	-102
Percent	---	-1.7
Natural change (births minus deaths)		
Number	---	29
Percent	---	0.5
Population by race, 2012-2016 average, percent of total		
White	94	95
American Indian or Alaskan Native	4	2
Other	2	3
Population by ethnicity, 2012-2016 average, percent of total		
Non-Hispanic	98	99
Hispanic	2	1
Population by age group, 2012-2016 average, percent of total		
Under age 18	13	24
Age 18-64	61	54
Age 65 and older	26	22
Median age, 2012-2016 average, years	50.8	44.6

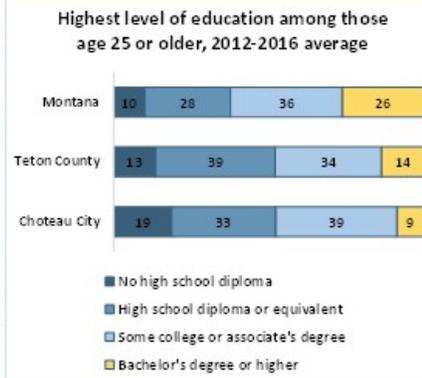


SOURCES: US Census Bureau, US Department of Education

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

	Choteau City	Teton County	Montana State
Income			
Per capita income, 2012-2016 average, dollars	25,974	25,740	27,309
Median household income, 2012-2016 average, dollars	39,375	49,047	48,380
Poverty			
Overall poverty, 2012-2016 average			
Number	158	631	148,677
Rate, percent	9.5	10.6	14.9
Children living in poverty, 2012-2016 average			
Number	8	157	40,953
Rate, percent	3.7	11.2	18.6
Food Insecurity			
Overall rate, 2015, percent	---	11.7	13.0
Rate among children, 2015, percent	---	17.4	18.8

SOURCES: US Census Bureau, Feeding America

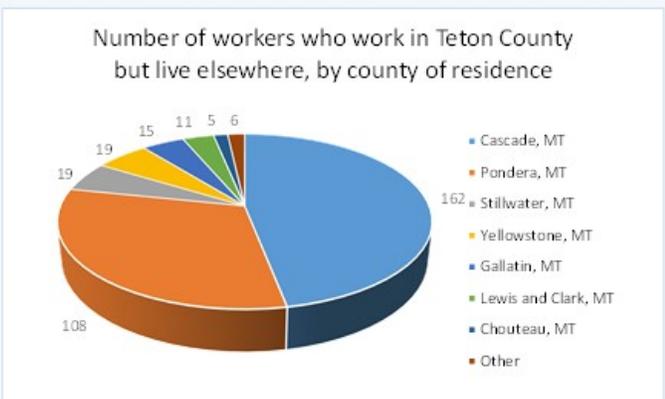
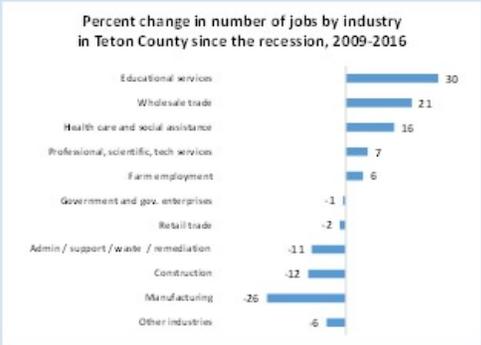
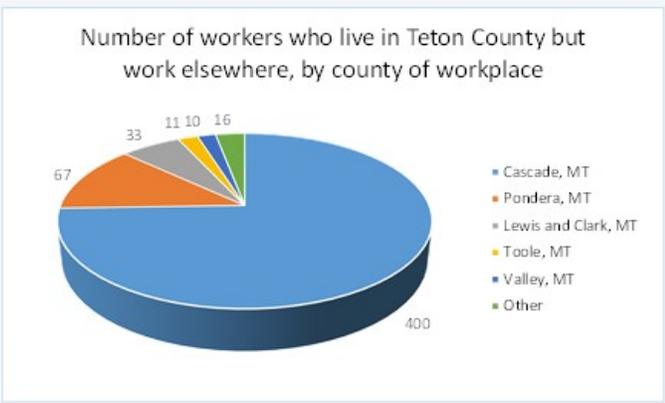
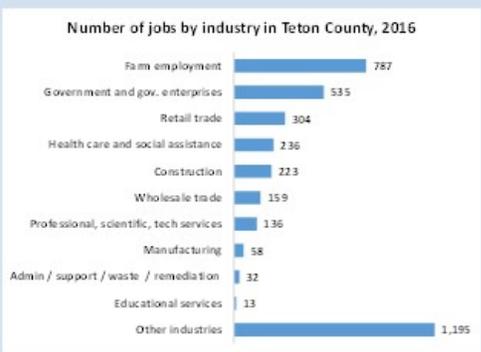
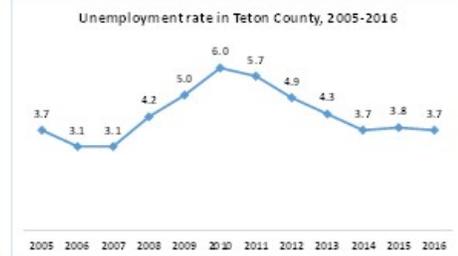
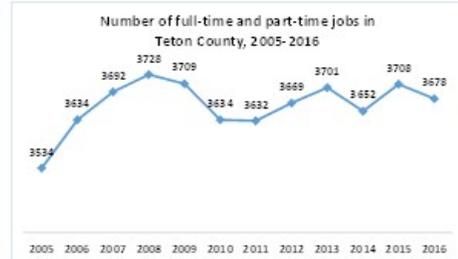


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ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

	Choteau City	Teton County
Full- and part-time jobs		
Total number, 2016	---	3,678
Total number, 2011	---	3,632
Total number, 2006	---	3,634
Change, 2011-2016, percent	---	1.3
Change, 2006-2011, percent	---	-0.1
Employment characteristics		
Labor force participation rate, 2012-2016 average, percent	56.5	61.4
Unemployment rate, 2012-2016 average, percent	3.3	5.5
Self-employment rate, 2016, percent	---	46.2
Average annual pay, 2016, dollars	---	33,383
Business establishments with paid employees, by size, 2015		
All establishments, number	---	211
Establishments with 1-4 paid employees, number	---	151
Establishments with 5-9 paid employees, number	---	32
Establishments with 10-19 paid employees, number	---	16
Establishments with 20-49 paid employees, number	---	9
Establishments with 50 or more paid employees, number	---	3



NOTE: "Other" industries include forestry, fishing, and related activities; mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction; utilities; transportation and warehousing; information; finance and insurance; real estate and rental and leasing; management of companies and enterprises; arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services; and other services.

SOURCES: US Census Bureau, US Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Labor

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

	Choteau City	Teton County
Total housing units, 2012-2016 average		
Number of units	945	2,882
Housing tenure, 2012-2016 average, percent of housing units		
Owner-occupied units	59	70
Renter-occupied units	41	30
Housing type, 2012-2016 average, percent of housing units		
1 unit, attached or detached	72	81
2-4 units	5	2
5 or more units	16	7
Mobile home, boat, RV, van, etc.	8	11
Housing affordability, 2012-2016 average		
Households spending 30% or more of income on housing costs		
Owner-occupied units, percent	14	18
Renter-occupied units, percent	38	30

SOURCES: US Census Bureau



RESOURCES

Headwaters Economics, Economic Profile System

<https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/economic-profile-system/>

- Choteau City – Demographics
- Teton County – Multiple topics
 - Demographics
 - Socioeconomic measures
 - Agriculture, timber, and mining, including oil & gas
 - Services and tourism
 - Government
 - Non-labor income
 - Public land amenities
 - Federal land payments
 - Wildland urban interface

PROJECT PARTNERS

Montana State University

Montana Economic Developers Association

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Appendix B: Community Satisfaction Survey Instrument

Choteau Community Survey

Choteau Community Survey

Q1. Listed below are public services and community amenities. Thinking about availability, cost, quality, and any other considerations important to you, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following aspects of your community? Please circle a number from 1 (highly dissatisfied) to 5 (highly satisfied), or “don’t know.”

	Highly dissatisfied			Highly satisfied		Don't know
a. Local K-12 school system	1	2	3	4	5	DK
b. Childcare/early childhood education programs	1	2	3	4	5	DK
c. Housing	1	2	3	4	5	DK
d. Parks & playgrounds	1	2	3	4	5	DK
e. Bicycle & pedestrian access	1	2	3	4	5	DK
f. Condition of streets & roads	1	2	3	4	5	DK
g. Public transportation	1	2	3	4	5	DK
h. Internet service	1	2	3	4	5	DK
i. Appearance of downtown	1	2	3	4	5	DK
j. Appearance of neighborhoods	1	2	3	4	5	DK
k. Police protection/law enforcement	1	2	3	4	5	DK
l. Medical care services	1	2	3	4	5	DK
m. Mental health services	1	2	3	4	5	DK
n. Senior citizen support services	1	2	3	4	5	DK
o. Available jobs	1	2	3	4	5	DK
p. Pay rates (salaries/wages)	1	2	3	4	5	DK
q. Access to higher education (e.g., college, technical)	1	2	3	4	5	DK
r. Variety of goods & services available	1	2	3	4	5	DK
s. Responsiveness of local government	1	2	3	4	5	DK
t. Civic & nonprofit organizations	1	2	3	4	5	DK
u. Arts, entertainment, & cultural activities	1	2	3	4	5	DK
v. Friendliness of residents	1	2	3	4	5	DK
w. Availability of fresh fruits & vegetables	1	2	3	4	5	DK
x. Recreation/entertainment opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	DK
y. Variety of industry	1	2	3	4	5	DK

Q2. Would you like to comment or explain why you rated your satisfaction with any of these public services and community amenities in the way you did? If so, please provide your comments/explanation here:

Q3. Would you like to comment on your level of satisfaction with any other public services or community amenities that are not listed above? If so, please explain here:

Q4. In general, how effective do you think the residents of your community are at working together to solve challenges?

- Very effective Somewhat effective Not at all effective

Q5. Please briefly explain why you answered the previous question (Q4) in the way you did:

Q6. Have you been involved in a neighborhood or community project in the last 12 months? *For example, youth development, community beautification, fund raiser, etc.*

- Yes
- No

If yes, please tell us the type(s) of projects you have been involved in:

Q7. Please complete this sentence: "I would be involved in more community projects if..."

Q8. Do any of the following factors challenge your ability to support Choteau's locally owned businesses? *Please select all that apply.*

- Prices
- Hours of operation
- Parking
- Availability of products, services, or both
- Nothing/no challenges
- Other challenge(s)—please specify: _____

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Choteau is a good place to raise a family"?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q10. How important or unimportant is encouraging tourism in the area?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

Q11. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

Q12. What is your race? *Please select all that apply.*

- African American/Black
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Other

Q13. What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic
- Non-Hispanic

Q14. In what year were you born?

_____ birth year

Q15. What is your annual household income?

- Under \$25,000
- \$25,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$100,000
- Above \$100,000

Q16. Do you live within or outside the Choteau city limits?

- Within city limits
- Outside city limits

Q17. How many years have you lived in Choteau or the immediate area?

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years