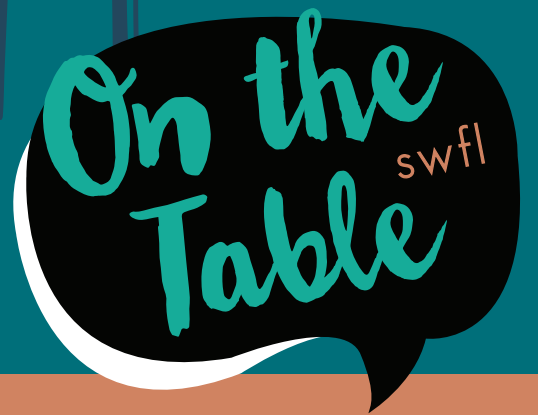


Together we are building
a better, stronger
Southwest Florida.



2023 Community Conversation Report

What

On the Table SWFL was a regional initiative among the Charlotte Community Foundation, Collaboratory, and Collier Community Foundation. On March 30, 2023, thousands of neighbors, colleagues, friends, and new acquaintances joined together to discuss the region’s major challenges and strategize solutions to strengthen our communities.

The goal was simple: engage all voices in meaningful conversation to improve SWFL and set the table for regional change.



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Setting the Table for Southwest Florida

In 2019, Collaboratory hosted the first On the Table SWFL initiative. Nearly a thousand residents participated to gain a deeper understanding of the shared challenges faced by the community.

Participants resolved to make On the Table SWFL a recurring event, pledging “to reach every corner of the five county region” and engage the Charlotte Community Foundation and Collier Community Foundation to ensure everyone’s voice was represented. Then, the unthinkable happened...

A once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic swept through communities around the world for more than two years. Just as Southwest Florida residents moved out of the pandemic and prepared to re-debut On the Table SWFL in October 2022, the area was hit by Hurricane Ian.

Unprecedented growth, blossoming enterprise, and unwavering resilience have helped rally the region, but these events have accelerated already pressing social issues like affordable workforce housing and mental health and substance abuse. It was time for all residents of Southwest Florida to gather around the table and share their ideas for making our region better for all.



About the Survey

In partnership with Florida Gulf Coast University, Foundation partners captured discussion themes and identified region-wide social priorities to help support sustainable and vibrant solutions to Southwest Florida's most pressing issues.

All participants who took part in On the Table SWFL were encouraged to complete a voluntary and anonymous survey about their understanding of community social issues.

Respondents constitute a non-random sample, as such conclusions cannot be scientifically generalized beyond the collected survey. Yet, even with that caveat, data provided powerful insights into the most important social issues facing the region.



On the Table SWFL brought together residents from the five county area of all ages, genders, backgrounds, and economic circumstances.

More than 1,000 people responded to the survey, representing a 25% sample of On the Table SWFL's ~4,000 participants. Data and insights in this report are based on 811 completed responses.

Priorities for

Addressing Important Issues

Conversation participants raised major social issues they would like their community to address. Of the 20 social issues considered, survey respondents from across the region were unified on the top 7 of 10 social issues.

Most urgent priorities that call for collective action are:

- » **Affordable Housing**
- » **Homelessness**
- » **Mental Health and Substance Abuse**
- » **Healthcare Access and Cost**
- » **Jobs/Economic Development**

“Many issues that community members struggle with (housing insecurity, healthcare, education, transportation, employment, etc.) are directly related to the need for affordable housing.”



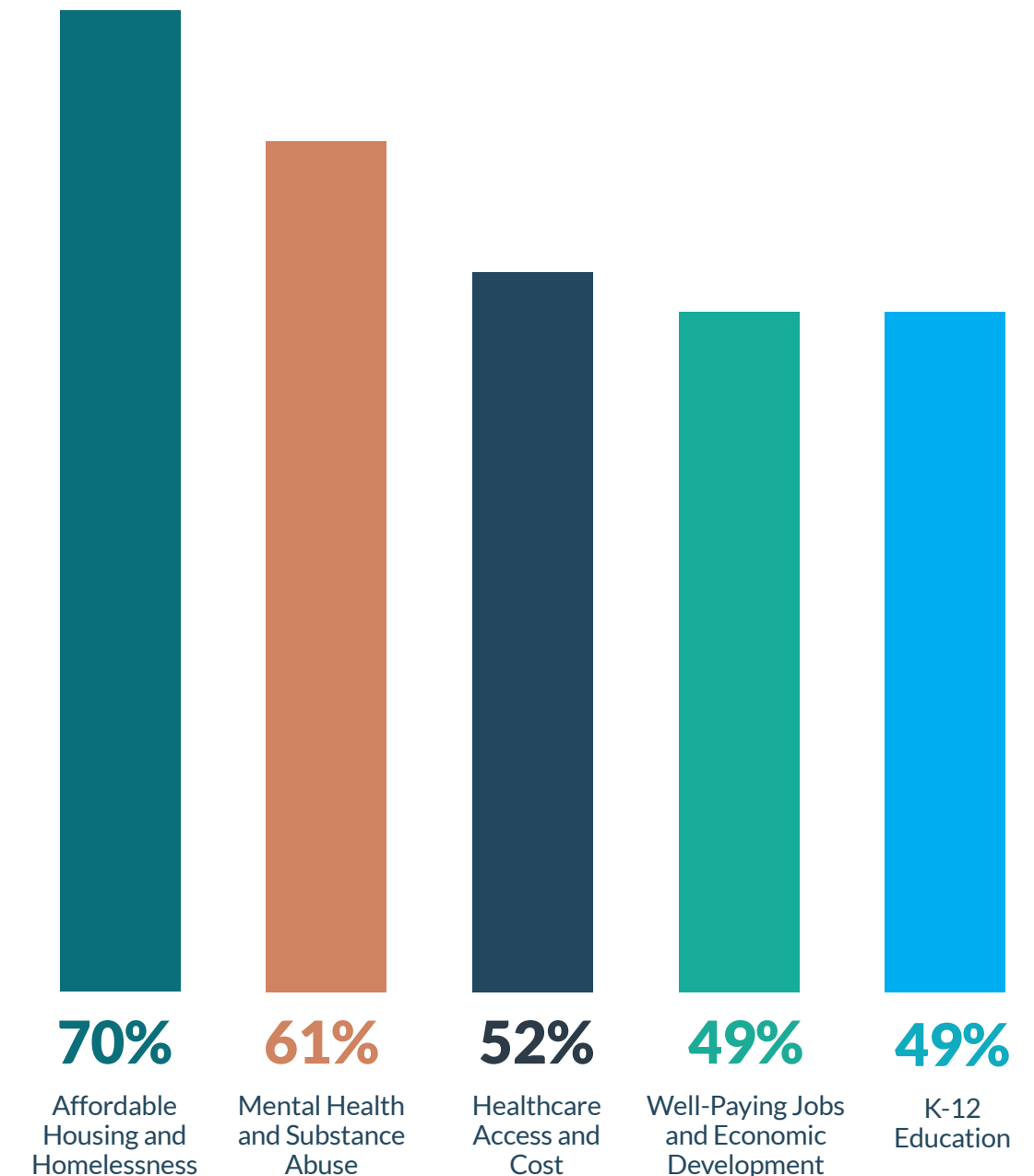
“People need to be able to work and live here, and affordable housing and mental healthcare are key to productivity and the health of our society.”

Social issues most frequently ranked by county

	SWFL	Charlotte	Collier	Lee	Hendry	Glades
1	Housing and Homelessness	Housing and Homelessness	Housing and Homelessness	Housing and Homelessness	Housing and Homelessness	Housing and Homelessness
2	Mental Health and Substance Abuse	Jobs/Economic Development	Mental Health and Substance Abuse	Mental Health and Substance Abuse	Mental Health and Substance Abuse	Hunger and Food Insecurity
3	Jobs/Economic Development	Mental Health and Substance Abuse	Jobs/Economic Development	Jobs/Economic Development	Healthcare Access and Cost	Jobs/Economic Development
4	Healthcare Access and Cost	Hunger and Food Insecurity	Healthcare Access and Cost	Healthcare Access and Cost	Hunger and Food Insecurity	Healthcare Access and Cost
5	K-12 Education	Healthcare Access and Cost	Transportation and Traffic	K-12 Education	Transportation and Traffic	Transportation and Traffic
6	Transportation and Traffic	Transportation and Traffic	K-12 Education	Environmental Issues	Jobs/Economic Development	K-12 Education
7	Hunger and Food Insecurity	K-12 Education	Hunger and Food Insecurity	Transportation and Traffic	K-12 Education	Mental Health and Substance Abuse
8	Environmental Issues	Environmental Issues	Environmental Issues	Hunger and Food Insecurity	Services for Disabled	Senior Citizens
9	Social Justice and Equality	Crime, Violence, and Safety	Early Childhood Development	Social Justice and Equality	Senior Citizens	Crime, Violence, and Safety
10	Crime, Violence, and Safety	Social Justice and Equality	Social Justice and Equality	Crime, Violence, and Safety	Social Justice and Equality	Generational Poverty

Social issues most frequently rated “most urgent” by region

When asked why these issues were the most urgent, many stated that they were basic human needs essential for communities to thrive.



Why Participants Took a Seat at the Table

The vast majority of On the Table SWFL respondents said that **gathering to discuss and address important issues** in the community was the top reason they participated in a conversation.

This was especially true for **Gen X and Baby Boomer** individuals. People welcomed this unique opportunity to connect with friends, neighbors, colleagues, and new acquaintances.



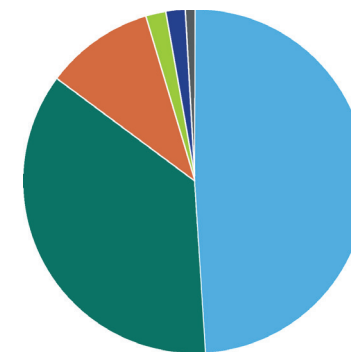
Reasons for participating in On the Table SWFL



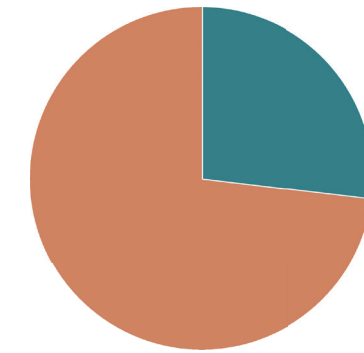
Demographic Overview

Just over half of survey respondents reside in Lee County, with Collier and Charlotte counties collectively accounting for just under half. Hendry, Glades, and other counties rounded out the respondents. The Foundation partners successfully worked to include a more diversified representation of participants and respondents versus the 2019 initiative.

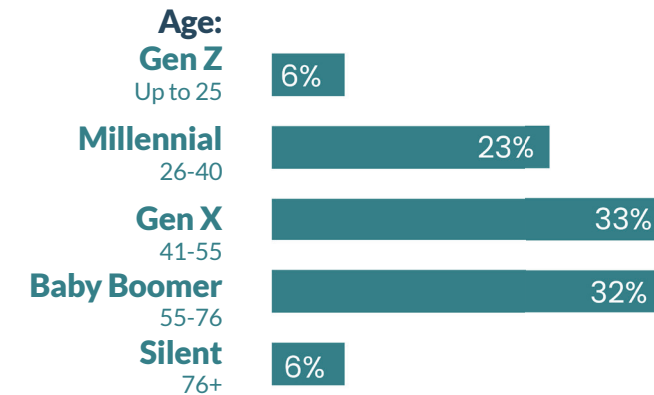
The 2023 survey reflects more than three times as many respondents overall than in 2019.



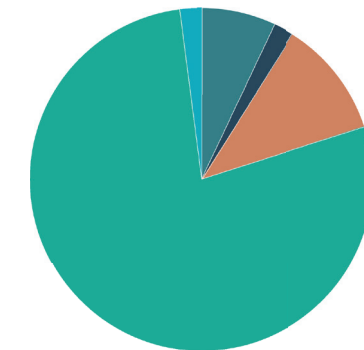
County:
Lee: 53%
Collier: 39%
Charlotte: 11%
Hendry: 2%
Glades: 2%
Other: 1%



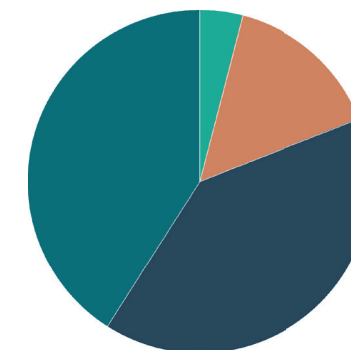
Gender:
Female: 78%
Male: 22%



Age:
Gen Z
 Up to 25
Millennial
 26-40
Gen X
 41-55
Baby Boomer
 55-76
Silent
 76+

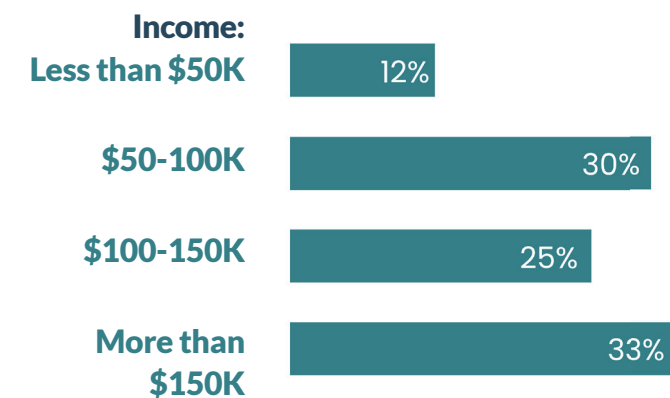


Race:
White: 78%
Hispanic: 11%
African American: 7%
Asian: 2%
Native American: 2%



Education:
Post-graduate degree: 41%
Bachelor's degree: 40%

Some college, technical or 2-year degree: 15%
High school or GED: 4%



Income:
Less than \$50K
\$50-100K
\$100-150K
More than \$150K

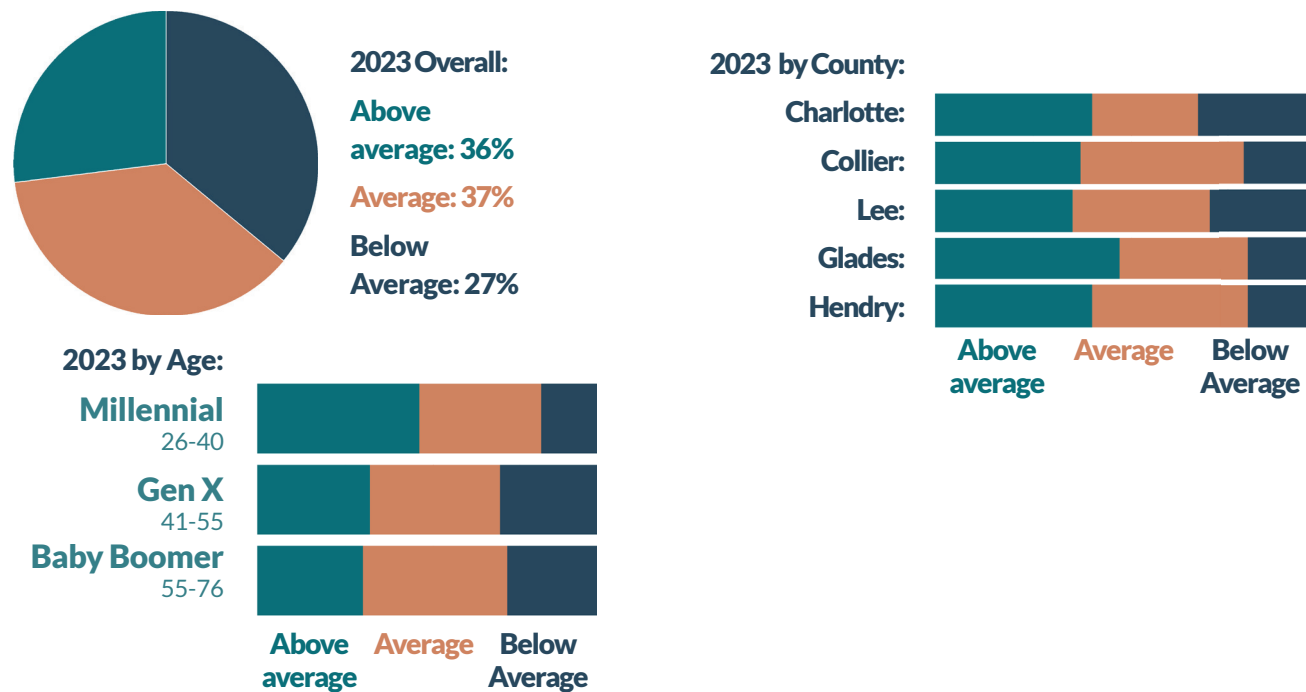


What We Learned About Community Outlook

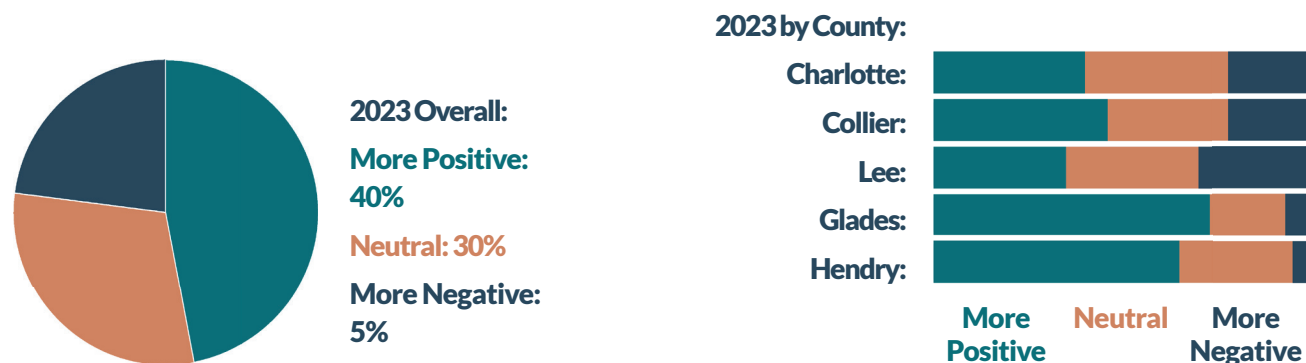
The data reflects a spirit of optimism.

Respondents are hopeful about the current situation in Southwest Florida even as they acknowledge that there is work to be done.

How well are the most important social issues currently being addressed in Southwest Florida?



Looking to the next five years, what is your outlook for the future of Southwest Florida?



What Does the Community Need?

Southwest Florida is a special part of our state – a place where a diverse population of residents and visitors from around the world are surrounded by white sand beaches, mangrove estuaries, sun-drenched days, and unique wildlife.

While exceptionally beautiful, it's important to ensure that our region's quality of life is attainable to all. Action is on the minds of most respondents, and they understand that collaboration is key.

Change begins with addressing the basics: Can my loved ones or I access a safe place to call home? Will my child receive the kind of education that prepares them for success? If my elderly neighbor needs added care or support, will it be there? Is my job secure?

If you've pondered any of these questions, you're not alone. On the Table SWFL community foundation partners are committed to mobilizing the action and supporting the collaboration necessary for the priorities voiced as the next step in creating a stronger, more vibrant region.

"More and more people are moving to Southwest Florida. To serve them and their families, we need more affordable housing, basic educational services, and healthcare access."

"Southwest Florida is a great place to live with lots of resources, but affordability is a huge concern."

"Southwest Florida is going to experience an even higher population, higher rent, and many more people will face food and housing insecurity. We need to make a change in housing and transportation industries across our communities."

Keeping the Conversation Going to Create Meaningful Change

Building on the conversations, Foundation partners are working on many fronts to prioritize social issues identified as important by On the Table SWFL participants. The partners are focused on working together with a wide range of Southwest Florida voices to tackle urgent areas of concern, including mental health and substance abuse, as well as affordable housing.

Inviting people to share their ideas and collaborate is a key step to addressing Southwest Florida's major issues. Lasting, meaningful change requires the voices, resources, and efforts of every individual, organization, leader, and business in the region so we benefit from everyone who has a stake in our shared future.



"I've realized that others feel the same way I do about the concerns in our community, but similarly don't feel like they have a say in the matter or do not know how to get change rolling on their own."

"Our On the Table participants became so enthusiastic that they decided as a group to work on a community project of their own, providing free books to preschool and elementary schools."

For ways to get involved, to learn more about the community-centric work already taking place, or to receive a copy of the full statistical survey findings, please contact us.

Your voice matters!



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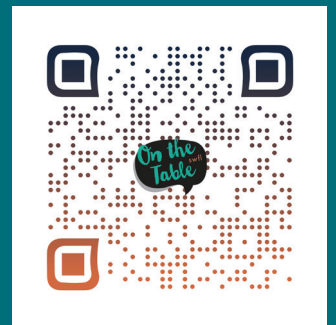


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