

LOOKBACK TO ROADMAP

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

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Prepared for:

Austin Area Research
Organization

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Overview

In 2023, the Austin Area Research Organization (AARO) conducted a data-gathering process to gain insights into how the Central Texas region has grown and changed over the last 20 years. This 20-year lookback timeframe was intentionally selected, as it has been 20 years since the non-profit planning organization, Envision Central Texas, released its “Vision for Central Texas”. The Envision Central Texas (ECT) process was the first time in the region’s history that individuals representing businesses, civic groups, developers, local governments, environmental organizations, transportation organizations and neighborhoods came together to spearhead the creation of a regional vision. While ECT no longer exists, both the issues addressed, and aspirations articulated, are still relevant today.

As AARO looks ahead at how it can best support the region in addressing today’s opportunities and tomorrow’s challenges, this research can help inform a roadmap for how to approach regional growth issues. Much has changed in 20 years, so this research explored peoples’ views on the most important growth-related issues to address. We also wanted to understand perceptions on regional collaboration and the barriers that exist to working together across boundaries. Central to this research was gathering insights from people involved in the ECT process as to their lessons learned. Lastly, we wanted to understand what people thought were the most essential elements needed today to effectively foster collaborative action on regional issues.

This report summarizes the findings of this research for the key questions explored. The “About This Report” section recaps the research process, which included a survey, focus groups and interviews. The results of the online survey are included in the appendix.

Growth Issues

We asked participants to share their views about growth-related issues, both current challenges in their local community, as well as what they viewed as the most important issues for the future of Central Texans. Online survey participants were asked, “What is the most pressing growth-related challenge facing your local community today?” Of the six topic areas provided, “housing affordability” emerged as the top issue (41%) followed closely by “transportation and infrastructure” (26%). When asked, “What are the most important issues for the future of Central Texans?” survey respondents selected their top three choices from a list of (16) topics. The top ranked issue was “cost of living” (57%), followed by “transportation and congestion” (48%), “housing choices” (36%), and “water availability” (31%).

When considering the most important issues for the future, some participants pointed to concerns over the rapid pace of growth and our region’s ability to keep pace. These concerns were reflected in comments such as, “All, keeping up with the tremendous growth” and “A lot of communities are just constantly playing catch up with the growth that seems to keep coming in faster than anyone expected.” Others pointed to the interconnectedness of these issues and the need to consider them holistically, rather than separately. “These issues are interrelated and cannot be prioritized effectively.”

To gain insight into how people viewed the region’s performance in growth-related issue areas, survey participants were asked to rank how much they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements about the Central Texas region. These statements were based on the seven Envision Central Texas vision elements and touch on a range of issue areas, such as transportation, housing and the environment. The table below reflects these statements, and the degree to which survey respondents agreed or disagreed.

Table 1: Survey responses to question, “When you consider the Central Texas region, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Central Texas boasts an integrated transportation system offering a range of options, including roads, rail, trails, and bikeways, that have significantly improved regional mobility and land use planning.	1 %	13%	15%	48%	23%
Central Texas has preserved its environment and natural resources to provide open spaces, parks, and trails for people to enjoy, while protecting ecologically sensitive areas and ensuring sustainable access to clean water and air for future generations.	13%	50%	23%	11%	3%
Central Texas has become the hub of a diverse and thriving economy with a robust base of businesses and quality job opportunities for citizens, and a distribution of jobs throughout the region.	31%	46%	13%	9%	1%
Central Texas has provided a variety of housing choices, affordable for everyone in the region and offering a mix of styles, such as neighborhoods with pedestrian-friendly streets or housing that is within walking distance to transit and stores.	1%	8%	15%	41%	35%
Central Texas has preserved its unique character by protecting and enhancing towns, rural areas, historic sites, and special sense of place.	4%	32%	34%	22%	8%
Central Texas has built a shared understanding that social equity and racial harmony are core values that strengthen us and actions that foster respect, civility, and opportunities for all.	4%	20%	29%	35%	12%
Central Texas has forged a region-wide understanding that our fortunes are tied together requiring planning, participation and collaboration by stakeholders throughout our region to ensure a successful and livable future for Central Texas.	2%	30%	25%	33%	10%

The statements with the highest level of agreement were related to the environment/natural resources and the economy. Statements related to transportation and housing had the highest level of disagreement. A subsequent survey question asked, “What are some “bright spots” or positive activities that you see happening, either in your local community or in the region, to address growth challenges?” Interestingly, the most frequent survey responses pertaining to positive activities related to mobility initiatives, such as Project Connect (specifically light rail), bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure, I-35 and other roadway improvements.

We explored these growth-related issues further during focus groups and interviews. Participants included current and former elected officials, business leaders, government representatives and heads of non-profit organizations. We wanted to gain deeper insights into how leaders from around the region viewed these top challenges, their thoughts for how to make positive progress, and the potential role of regional collaboration in addressing challenges. There were a range of issues that emerged from these discussions, from housing and transportation to social equity and the environment. However, one of the most frequently mentioned concerns was the ability of communities to meet their future water needs.

Meeting Future Water Needs

The concern over water availability was mentioned by many participants from across the region and across backgrounds. “We’ve got to find a way to ensure that we have plenty of water here in Central

Texas. We all need it to live, and we need it to grow and to be sustainable. There's only so much rainfall that occurs in the watershed, and there's not really a way to change that." Participants raised a range of concerns regarding how water is currently managed, from how Texas law governs water rights and the way water planning entities are split across various jurisdictions, to whether water planning and modeling assumptions accurately reflect future water availability, particularly in light of the growing number of water users and the impacts of climate change. Some participants pointed to land use and development patterns and the insufficiency of funding for land conservation efforts. Others spoke to the lack of county land use authority to regulate growth, state laws and the "rule of capture", and fears that counties and water districts have about being sued should they say no to permits. Some expressed concerns over water lost from aging infrastructure and the high cost to repair or replace, while others emphasized the need for education and implementation of conservation strategies.

Participants also pointed to positive examples of how water issues are being addressed. Examples included water planning efforts, such as Austin's "Water Forward" plan, and planning to protect springs, such as Jacob's Well and Barton Springs. Others mentioned innovative examples of water conservation and reuse, such as the "One Water" approach used at the Blue Hole Primary School in Wimberley. Some spoke to the potential of desalination strategies, as well as efforts by smaller communities to join forces around water production to meet future needs. "With multiple jurisdictions creating water resources and bringing them here, we should use that as a best practice and scale that regionally. I want to make sure we address water supply, not just conservation." When considering what growth challenges could benefit from a regional approach, many pointed to water availability as a key priority. "We don't have a mechanism that facilitates regional water planning today. River authorities have split jurisdiction. You have cities as retail providers. You have groundwater districts. There's a patchwork. Nothing exists right now to bring decision makers together around water within the region. Organizationally, I think it's a real opportunity whose time has come."

Addressing Housing Affordability and Social Inequity

When considering local challenges, participants raised concerns about increasing costs and the challenges that community members are faced with to make ends meet. The most concerning issue in this realm was regarding the high cost of housing and the urgency of creating more affordable housing. "We're still a small community and what's about to come and all the housing is unbelievable. When we talk about housing, it's happening, but you can't afford it." A common sentiment was that people were getting pushed further and further out, away from jobs, opportunities and communities they historically called home. "Poor people are moving out, rich people are moving in." Some raised concerns about the limited planning tools and powers of counties to provide more, and different types, of housing. "If you think about the five-county area, the costs in Austin are driving people out. How do those areas not just become infected by the same challenges that we have." Others spoke to strategies that could help retain affordability while providing housing choice, such as smaller lots and garage apartments.

When exploring this topic, some participants spoke to the issues of displacement, racial inequities and the institutional systems that have disadvantaged communities of color. "Many of the people that lived at East Austin are now in Pflugerville, Round Rock, Cedar Park, Elgin and many want to be in Austin. So there's this seething anger about not being able to come back to their birthplace." Others spoke to the pervasiveness of racial inequities across a range of issues. "The problem is, it can't be by chance that no matter where you look, you see these disparities by race." One participant emphasized the importance of sustaining affordability in a place, as well as investing in strategies to help build intergenerational

wealth for communities of color that have systemically been excluded from home ownership opportunities. Another participant raised concerns that, in a rush to provide more housing, other equity concerns are being pushed aside. “There's this urgency around housing that trumps everything, whether it's community voice, the environment, displacement. All these decisions have adverse effects but those are ignored because we need the housing, right?” When asked about collaboration on regional housing issues, one participant shared, “I kind of think the moment creates the collaborative. You get out there, start doing things, and people who are doing similar things come together. There's a lot we can do without needing a big institution.” Another reflected “There's very specific areas where low-income families are concentrated. We need for more place-based interventions or we're not going to have any economic and racial diversity left in this town.”

Mobility Around the Region

Transportation and congestion continue to be priority issues when considering regional growth challenges. Participants expressed concerns about development patterns that exacerbate congestion issues, especially as housing becomes less affordable and residents move further from the urban core. While some felt that more people are looking at options other than driving and progress has been made on multi-modal approaches, options are still limited and the majority of funding continues to go toward large road projects and not toward things like sidewalks and multi-use trails. “Every time we put money into I-35 or we put money into transit or money into more trails and sidewalks, it seems like it's an all or nothing solution. Having it be more of a blended solution has been very, very slow.” There is also a sense that projects are disconnected and there isn't a shared sense for how these disparate projects fit together. “There's lots of good stuff that goes on here, here and here, it's just not all connected.” Participants pointed to the importance of transit projects like Project Connect and their critical importance to mobility, while also acknowledging that opinions about transit varied widely across the region.

Participants also reflected on the dynamics of regional transportation planning, funding of projects and the tension between the needs and priorities of urban areas versus more suburban and rural areas. “How to balance all of these needs into a cohesive system is an ongoing challenge and really takes a lot of work on the part of elected officials to understand the need to compromise.” One participant from a smaller community commented, “We don't have any support in terms of transportation or mass transit transportation. I think it makes it even more difficult for us today, as the small becoming much bigger community to figure out solutions to some of the challenges we're now facing.” Other concerns raised were the potential of the region going into non-attainment status for air quality and the impacts that may have on transportation planning, funding and health issues.

Barriers to Collaboration

A central part of this qualitative research was aimed at understanding what participants felt was getting in the way of collaborating on growth issues. Survey participants were asked, “What has been the biggest barrier to jurisdictions and other entities working together across the region?” Of the eight answer options provided, answers with the most responses were “Political Ideology” (25%), “Competing Interests” (23%) and “Lack of Trust” (16%). Focus group and interview participants were also asked to explore this question about barriers to collaboration. These discussions provided a more in-depth perspective of the dynamics that people are experiencing in various realms of work, and what they think is hampering forward progress.

Regulatory Barriers and Diverging Interests

When considering what it will take to address regional growth issues, a frequent issue raised was the tension between the ways in which some local authorities would like to manage growth and the restrictions that the state has placed on local regulatory powers. For example, many mentioned the limited ability of counties to regulate development in unincorporated areas. “Lots of pent-up political will at a local level to address all of these issues but we are prevented (and certainly not assisted) by the state government.” More broadly, participants pointed to the difficulty of navigating between divergent interests and priorities across different entities, and the lack of incentives to undertake collaborative efforts. “There's always some regulatory issues that that throw up immediate barriers for different communities or organizations to work together. We all have to satisfy our own funders or rule makers or councils.” Another participant reflected, “There's not much imperative, let alone incentive, to collaborate across lines and across different types of jurisdictions.” A common concern was that organizations tend to operate in silos and “business as usual” does not lend itself to collaborative efforts. “How the various jurisdictions work is not compatible with one another. Because of this it seems all sides just go about their own business.”

Capacity and Resource Constraints

Some participants spoke of the challenges that their local communities have simply keeping up with immediate needs, and that there isn't the additional bandwidth to collaborate across silos. “It's felt like the pace of change, the pace of growth, the pressures especially within the last few years have accelerated dramatically and it feels like capacity is really stretched thinner than ever.” This issue was specifically noted by representatives of smaller jurisdictions. “Part of the trouble I see in the smaller cities is they are overwhelmed and everything, just normal everyday stuff, on top of some very significant growth that's occurred.” Others pointed to funding and other challenges to getting the resources needed to advance solutions for growth challenges. “It doesn't matter how great the ideas are. If you come to an elected official or a city manager and you have no funding, the ideas won't advance because they've got no funding either.” One focus group participant, when discussing housing, shared, “The really smart people who have ideas about how to innovate don't have any financial skin in the game.”

Divisiveness and Disparate Views

Another issue that emerged was the sense that it's increasingly difficult for people to come together across differences, communicate effectively and work together toward solutions. One participant expressed this as, “the somewhat toxic atmosphere that we live in now, on almost every issue you can think of, where there's such a strong an inability to communicate in a reasonable way, have a civil conversation and listen to each other on any kind of controversial issue.” Some pointed to more pervasive feelings of distrust, whether in information or relationships. “There is so much misinformation out there and it is coming from both the right and the left and there is not an ability to have a public forum to come to consensus on ideas and find that best position moving forward.” Another spoke to how distrust gets created. “We don't consider others until we are wanting something from them or until we are wanting them to agree on something and that brings about a type of hostility that does not dissipate just because we've gone on to another issue.” Others pointed to the views that people hold about how to manage growth and the conflicts that emerge when implementing change. “Things are

hard to do on a collective basis because people's opinions about land and property are super entrenched everywhere about property rights." One participant reflected, "We get things moving in a positive direction, but then somebody that doesn't agree with what's happening gets momentum behind them and then you're fighting an uphill battle."

Lack of Shared Direction, Convening and Leadership

Some participants felt that, as a region, there is not a sense of community, understanding of interconnectedness or shared sense of direction. "We need to be more regional, interactive and connected." Others expressed concerns over the siloed approach to the issues. "There are barriers that prevent us from thinking holistically. We deal with different issues and different organizations, and sometimes we just can't join together and mix those things in together." Still others felt that without a shared vision of where the region is heading, it is difficult to collaborate. "Lack of a compelling, shared vision of win-win partnerships." Others reflected on the need to clarify and potentially expand how the region is defined. "What is the region today? Is it Central Texas, is it Austin? San Antonio?" Another frequent concern was the lack of a convenor or forum where people could engage in productive big-picture conversations about growth. "We need places to really talk things through in a somewhat neutral or positive environment. There are some good groups that again have stepped up in particular focus areas. But we don't have quite the same vehicle for regional conversations across the lines that we once did." Others felt there is a lack of leadership, or "champions" for regional efforts, or entities advocating for working collectively on shared challenges. "We don't have that servant leadership mentality and I don't see individuals that are leading."

Lessons Learned from Envision Central Texas

As part of its research into views about regional growth issues, AARO looked back at the work of Envision Central Texas (ECT), a planning non-profit organization that existed between 2001 and 2013. The purpose of ECT was to bring people together across issues areas to create and implement a common vision for the region which would preserve and enhance natural resources, economic vitality, social equity and overall quality of living. Of survey participants, 52% were familiar with ECT and they provided feedback on how they viewed its impact on shaping regional growth. Focus groups and interviews delved further into perceptions about ECT. While many participants were familiar with ECT, there was the sense that many people in the region had no idea about its existence or that this kind of regional visioning work had taken place. Those that were involved in or aware of the effort provided insights into the positive impacts it had on the region, as well as its shortcomings.

Positive Outcomes

Raised Awareness and Fostered Regional Thinking

Many participants felt that ECT played an important role in raising awareness and bringing focused attention to growth challenges, both for leaders and the general public. "ECT placed growth and development issues in the front of the public's mind." Beyond the issues themselves, participants felt that ECT helped shift perspectives towards a more regional outlook. "It moved thought of public officials toward regionalism and away from just their local interests" and "It helped us realize we compete as a region." Some participants focused on the broad conversation about growth management that ECT

sparked. “ECT helped citizens turn the corner to understand that Austin couldn't stop people from moving here.” A comment from one participant captured how these efforts shifted the conversation. “ECT came after very bitter division over growth and development and the impact on the environment. It led to a recognition that there was a common interest to steer development to the central city rather than the environmentally-sensitive areas and toward the importance of mixed-use development in urban areas.” Others cited specific issues areas that the ECT process brought into focus. For example, “ECT did a decent job of getting people to think about the connection between land use and transportation” and “I think it brought more attention to conservation easements, conservation development and water quality.”

Convened Conversation and Built Relationships

Many participants indicated that one of ECT's most valuable contributions was the role it played in convening people from different backgrounds, geographies and viewpoints. “ECT helped bring together three key groups after a divisive period: developers and environmentalists and also local government leaders.” Participants involved with ECT spoke to how important this type of convening was for thinking about the interrelatedness of the issues, as well as how growth was affecting communities across Central Texas. “ECT was the only organization consistently fostering regional cooperation and it provided a place for a diverse cross-section of people to get together.” Connected to ECT's important role as convener was the positive impact that had on relationships. For example, “ECT was convening a platform, establishing relationships that may not have existed otherwise” and “I think it helped foster relationships across different thought lines.” Several participants involved with ECT mentioned the critical role played by founding chairman Neal Kocurek. “One of the advantages we had was a tremendous leader, Neal Kocurek. Having someone manage that process the way he did was a learning process for me. I've never seen anyone do it quite as well.”

Developed a Vision for Growth

Participants shared that one of the most important outcomes of ECT was the regional vision itself and that “Creating a common vision was a huge win.” One participant reflected, “Despite disparate ideas, we had a path and we agreed where to go.” Some mentioned the data and the growth scenarios developed during the process. “ECT was able to come up with different options of growth. We weren't (previously) talking about what it brought up in our community. The environment and things discussed were important.” Another shared, “The data took away some of the emotion and the prejudice.” Still others expressed appreciation for the framework that the vision document provided when jurisdictions were making growth management decisions. “The outcomes and values (of the ECT vision) were very well done.” Still others said the vision has great relevance today. For example, “We need to pass on what we created, especially the building blocks, the plans and features are a good book that needs to be reread or picked up for the first time” and “The ECT report is still very relevant to the regional issues we are still dealing with 20 years later. I think we need to pick up where we left off in implementing the recommendations.”

Advanced Growth Management Practices

While many felt that ECT fell short on transforming the way growth has occurred, participants provided a range of examples where they thought ECT had a positive impact on growth management practices.

Some spoke about shifts in approaches on topics such as mobility and development. “ECT prepared us for the age of active transportation. People came around and saw importance of bicycle infrastructure around region.” Another participant shared, “It led to talking about denser, mixed-use development so that we don’t impact the environment so much.” Some pointed to examples of city plans influenced by ECT. “The City of Austin legacy is that it was successful in involving many and focusing on open space in corridors which helped Austin pass a comprehensive plan” and “In Elgin we created a comprehensive plan that was informed by ECT’s work. Also, we received a grant, and it helped change and develop our downtown in positive ways.” Several spoke to the importance of the incorporation of the ECT concepts into the regional transportation plan. “ECT was the genesis of the activity centers in the CAMPO 2030 plan”. Still others spoke about the specific tools and planning processes that resulted from ECT. For example, “ECT produced a toolbox for small cities and did mapping of green space” and “ECT created a huge spin off with the Sustainable Places Project, which led to a lot of true implementation of these ideas in the cities that participated.” One participant reflected, “ECT encouraged a framework, and its "DNA" is replete throughout the region.”

Shortcomings

Lack of Authority and Resources

Many participants felt that a fundamental shortcoming was that ECT had no authority to implement its recommendations. For example, “It was an NGO trying to fill gaps left by government” and “ECT did research but did not have authority to get things to happen.” While participants felt that ECT did have some influence, particularly in certain jurisdictions or issue areas, there was a shared sense that, “Influence doesn’t last as long as a structural authority.” Others pointed to a lack of resources, particularly funding, that undermined the sustainability of the ECT effort. For example, “A plan without resources is just a hallucination!” and “ECT needed funding for long-term for implementing, monitoring and reporting.” One participant summarized this perspective as, “The impetus behind ECT was fantastic and the early years of regional collaboration were very positive. The lack of a dedicated funding source and lack of authority doomed its long-term success.”

Lack of Advocacy and Leadership Commitment

Some participants felt that ECT did not effectively advocate for the advancement of the vision. For example, “ECT didn’t advocate, i.e., Lone Star Rail” and “There was a lack of advocacy in key strategic times and areas.” Others spoke to the shortcomings of ECT’s impact on policy and that “ECT was not able to hold elected officials accountable to vision.” Many mentioned that the lack of leadership commitment as a key issue. The top answer in response to the question about ECT’s shortcomings was “Did not have sufficient political support / leadership commitment” (63%). Participant comments further reinforced this perspective. For example, “In the end, a major factor was simply the lack of desire by leaders at that time to implement the plan” and “ECT did not having top-down support for plan adoption and prioritization.” Some mentioned that there were not sufficient efforts to bring new leaders on board with the effort. “Elected officials change. No continuity of ideas with long-term leadership.”

Ineffective Approach to Implementation

Some participants felt that there was not enough planning or effort put toward long-term sustainability and implementation. For example, “Like many other planning efforts, you can make the greatest plan

ever. The devil is in the implementation and that's where the problems lie" and "There was no plan to adopt regulations that promote the development plan as adopted by ECT." Some participants felt ECT did not understand what it would take to effectively change growth patterns, and there were no incentives to implement the vision. Comments reflecting this view included, "Lack of acknowledgment of market transformation as a force and factor of success or failure. ECT was disconnected from the market." and "ECT needed path for incentives to promote and support the desired development plan." Others felt that ECT was not inclusive enough and did not effectively address equity issues. For example, "It wasn't co-created, and the implementers were not a part" and "It was not diverse enough. ECT need to bring in more people from various racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds." One participant reflected, "There was not nearly enough on equity."

Political, Market and Human Dynamics

When providing feedback on ECT's shortcomings, participants touched on a range of issues that related to the broader political, market and human dynamics that impacted its efforts. Many raised issues related to the Texas Legislature and the rules governing growth. For example, "ECT efforts were undermined by the state legislature" and "State law makes it really hard. We have no land use authorities and may never." Some spoke to external market forces driving development, whether corporations siting their businesses or housing construction. "There are a lot of market forces that drive suburban development, from the cost of homes and land, to the models that exist for banking, lending and consumers." Others mentioned limitations of related planning and implementation efforts. For example, "The metropolitan planning organization is not connected to the council of governments and is only interested in transportation planning" and "The lack of regional transportation coordination and lack of transit made it difficult to implement ECT principles across the region." Others spoke to attitudes that impeded collaboration and agreement on how to address growth challenges. Comments included, "Turf wars, rural vs. urban, rest of region vs. Austin" and "NIMBYISM and polarization were its challenge." One participant articulated their view as, "Noble effort that did not overcome tendency of people and organizations to continue as they are and to resist change that threatens control."

Elements Needed for Future Collaboration

To help illuminate potential paths forward, we explored with participants what they felt were the essential elements that needed to be in place for future collaborative efforts. Several survey questions explored these issues. When asked, "What factors lead to successful interjurisdictional collaborations and partnerships?", respondents indicated the highest level of agreement with the statements: "Identifying Common Goals and Priorities" (59%) and "Building Relationships and Fostering a Culture of Collaboration" (42%). When asked, "How should Central Texas leaders respond to the growth challenges that have occurred in the region?", the highest number of responses were to the statements: "Identify and anticipate future data trends to get ahead of the curve" (52%) and "Build a compelling vision that rallies the region towards a shared goal" (52%). Focus groups and interviews provided further insights into these essential elements for collaboration on regional growth issues.

Connection to Interests and Alignment to a Vision

Many participants spoke to the importance of understanding the value proposition for various groups to participate in collaborative efforts that look holistically at growth challenges. For example, "Help people

understand what's in it for them" and "Understand what would motivate entities, especially much larger entities, to participate in these efforts. What is the benefit?" One participant captured this view as, "Make sure political leaders as well as the staff can see what they would achieve rather than a nebulous goal of things would be better if we all talked more." In addition to clearly connecting to interests of diverse groups, many participants felt that it was essential to create alignment and commitment to a shared direction or vision for what the region should become. Participant comments included, "You have to have a road map of some sort or you can't figure out where you're going" and "It's something that these other planning processes, whether what's going on in Travis County or water planning, go on. But they need a regional vision to feed into." One participant summarized this perspective, stating "Issue by issue doesn't seem to be getting us where we need to be. My conclusion from that is that you do need a larger vision, and you need somebody to articulate that vision and be willing to become the public face."

Strengthened Relationships and Committed Champions

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of relationships, and the foundational role that actively nurturing relationships plays in advancing collaborative efforts. "None of those solutions get solved without people knowing each other really well and getting to work together. So that's easy, but not simple." A number of participants felt that small-group conversations and individual connections were key to building a foundation for broader efforts. "We're throwing a pebble in the middle of the pond and those ripples have to expand, but they expand slowly and symmetrically, and it starts with small conversations and one-on-one relationships." Others felt that broadening engagement and taking an inclusive approach was important. For example, "We've really got to have a broad cross section of involvement" and "There needs to be a better outreach to the different communities about their vision and goals." Another frequently mentioned ingredient was champions for these efforts and leaders who are committed to working across boundaries. "What I think the missing ingredient is bold political will, political leaders to step up and want it to happen." The importance of committed leadership was raised by many participants and summarized by one as, "Leadership is the key question, and the committed and continuous leadership is sort of the answer."

Convening Capacity and Implementation Support

Another frequent theme was the importance of having a forum for talking together about these growth challenges. "We need a stable house for these conversations to happen, that's got funding and some cache with a broad group of people." Some felt that one-on-one and small group conversations would be more effective, while other spoke to the importance of bringing broad and diverse groups together. Comments that reflected this range of perspectives included, "When you're talking about solving really complex things that require leaders who have a lot of both depth and experience, that has to start with small groups" and "Need a collaborator that brings all the silos together." Beyond convening, participants spoke to the importance of supporting the implementation of solutions, whether in the form of training, technical support, financial or other resources. For example, "You need some entity can bring resources that the smaller communities don't have. How do we make it profitable for the larger entity to want to team up with, with the smaller communities to create the solution." and "Help there be continuity about the conversation on these issues when leaders do change to build institutional knowledge." There was a desire for collaborative efforts to have an intentional approach to advancing solutions and to think proactively about how to sustain the work and its influence. For example, "Be really intentional about implementation - Someone has to be in charge" and "Need roadmap to

sustaining the effort.” One participant reflected, “There are great best practices that should be scaled, wheels that are being invented in one place that could be shared. That’s really important and somebody needs to be doing that.”

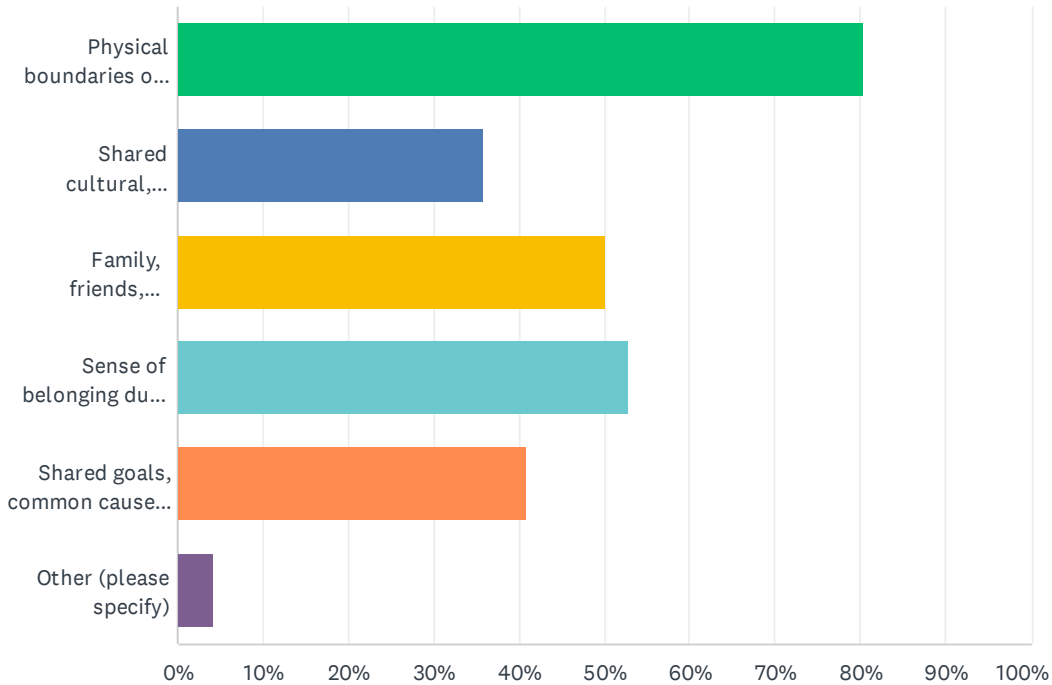
About this Process

In the spring of 2023, AARO engaged Diane Miller of Civic Collaboration to conduct a qualitative research study to gain insights from Central Texas leaders about growth challenges and regional collaboration. During the process, participants representing various sectors, backgrounds and communities in the Central Texas region (Bastrop, Burnet, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson counties) were asked about barriers to regional collaboration, lessons learned from Envision Central Texas (ECT), and the elements that are important to foster collaborative efforts. An online survey was distributed to the former and current members of the AARO network, individuals involved in ECT and other leaders in the six counties. This survey was comprised of 15 questions in the categories of Regional Growth Challenges, Collaborations and Partnerships, Leadership and Civic Participation, and an opt-in section of eight questions for respondents familiar with ECT. There were 143 responses to the survey.

In addition to the survey, AARO hosted one in-person and two online focus group sessions. These sessions were attended by 54 individuals from across the region and included current and former elected officials, business leaders, government representatives and heads of non-profit organizations. Eight additional in-depth interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into specific issue areas.

Q1 How you define your local community? (check all that apply)

Answered: 142 Skipped: 1

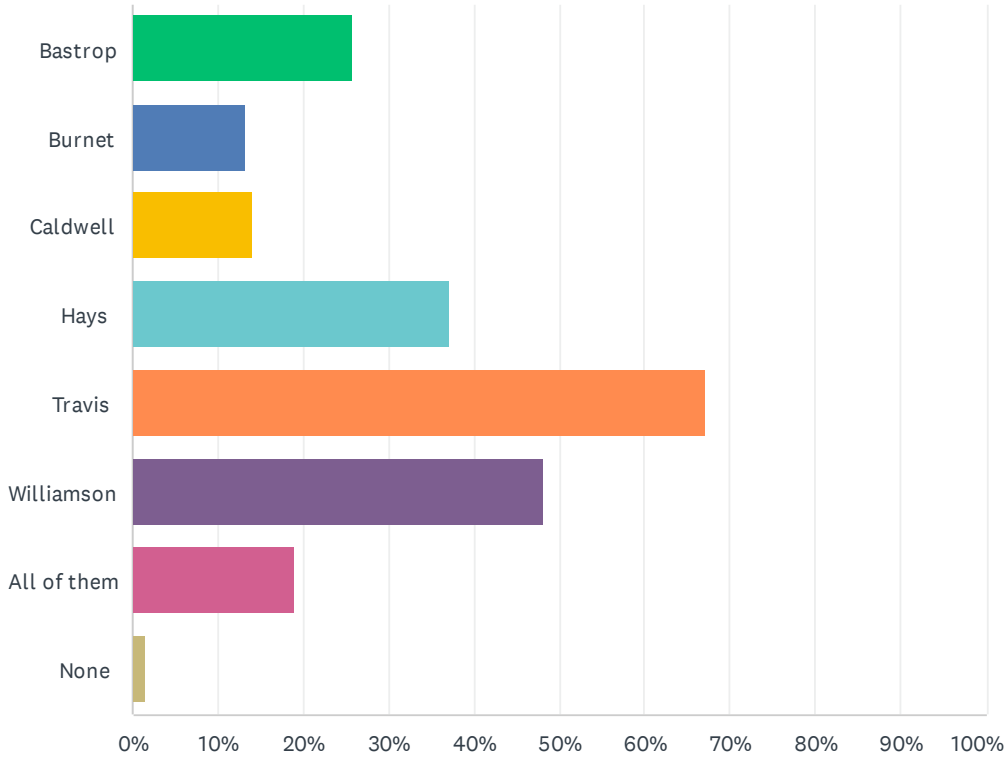


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Physical boundaries of a location such as neighborhood or a city.	80.28%	114
Shared cultural, ethnic or racial characteristics.	35.92%	51
Family, friends, colleagues or fellow members of an organization.	50.00%	71
Sense of belonging due to shared experiences, values or beliefs.	52.82%	75
Shared goals, common cause or mission.	40.85%	58
Other (please specify)	4.23%	6
Total Respondents: 142		

Other (please specify)
According to govt programs and regulations
Economic connections and ethos
Faith community serving the community
Friends, establishments, and activities in close proximity
people who call the area "home"
The other choices are worthy characteristics, but in a diverse community they can divide rather than unite us. We need to be more inclusive.

Q2 Which counties in Central Texas have you followed closely in terms of their growth and development?

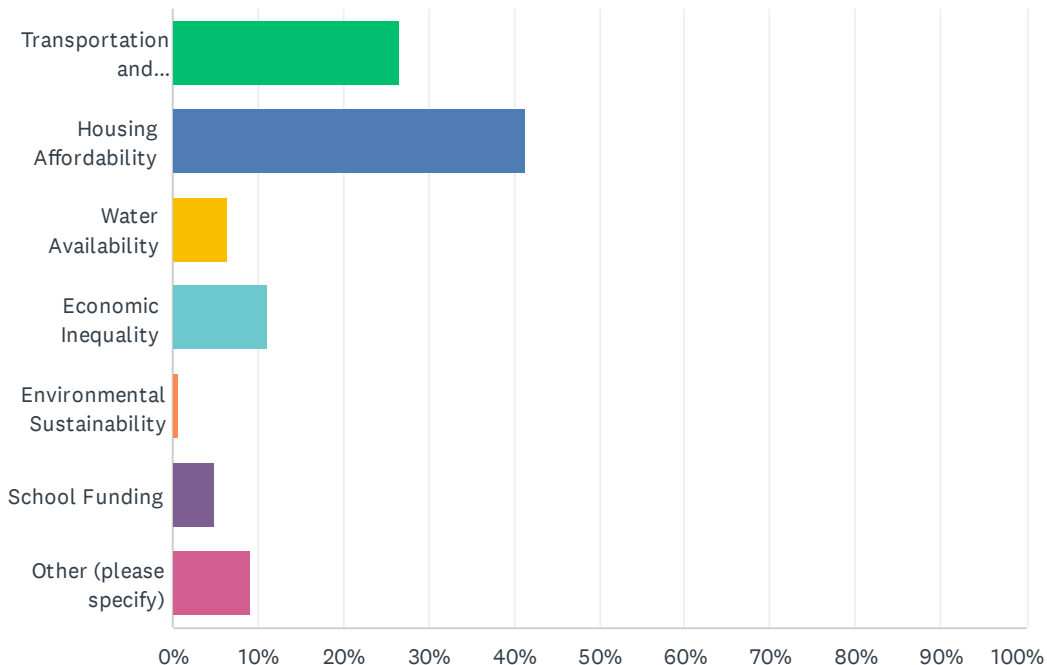
Answered: 143 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Bastrop	25.87%	37
Burnet	13.29%	19
Caldwell	13.99%	20
Hays	37.06%	53
Travis	67.13%	96
Williamson	48.25%	69
All of them	18.88%	27
None	1.40%	2
Total Respondents: 143		

Q3 What is the most pressing growth-related challenge facing your local community today?

Answered: 143 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Transportation and Infrastructure	26.57%	38
Housing Affordability	41.26%	59
Water Availability	6.29%	9
Economic Inequality	11.19%	16
Environmental Sustainability	0.70%	1
School Funding	4.90%	7
Other (please specify)	9.09%	13
TOTAL		143

Regional Growth Survey

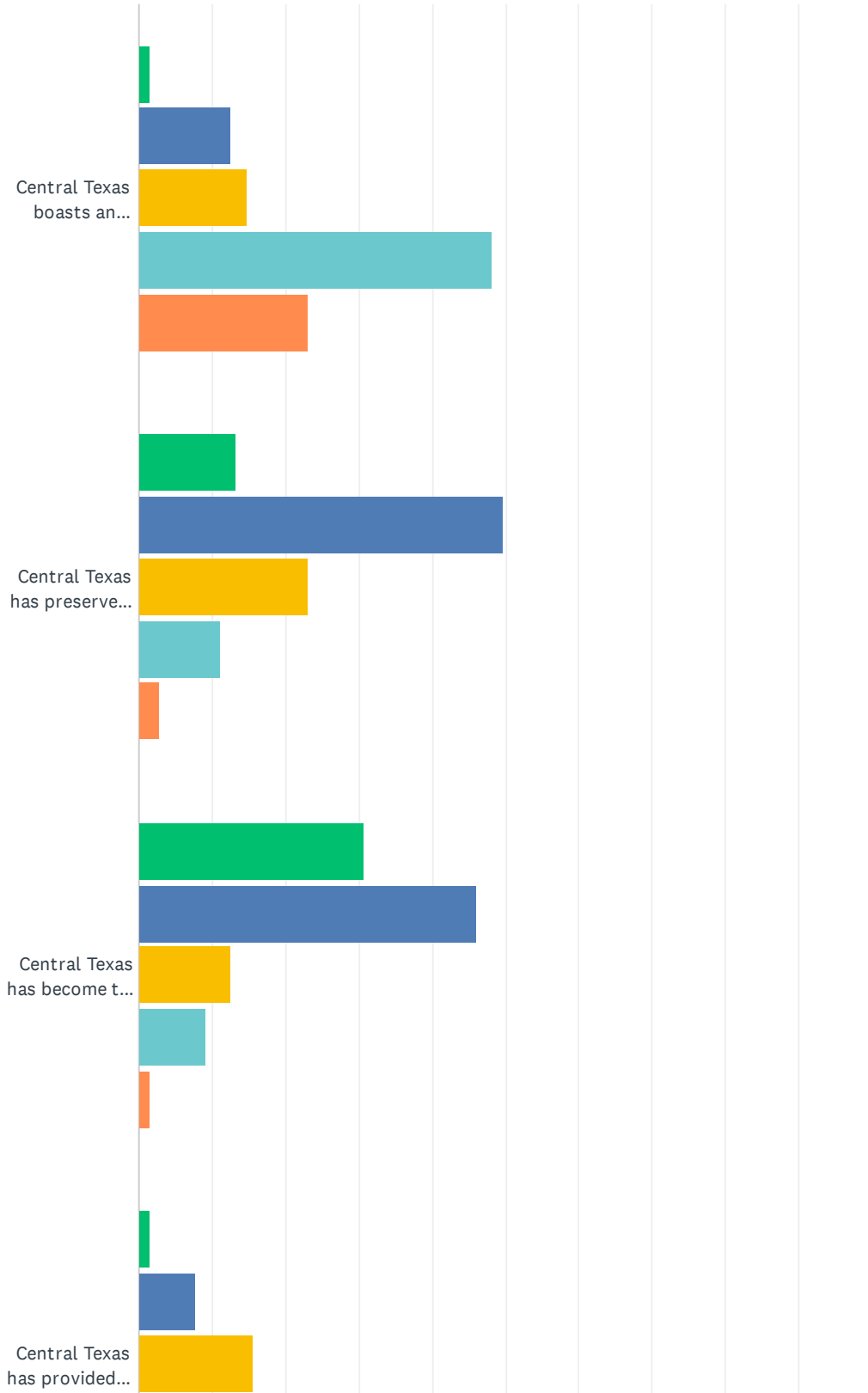
Q3 What is the most pressing growth-related challenge facing your local community today?

Answered: 143. Skipped: 0

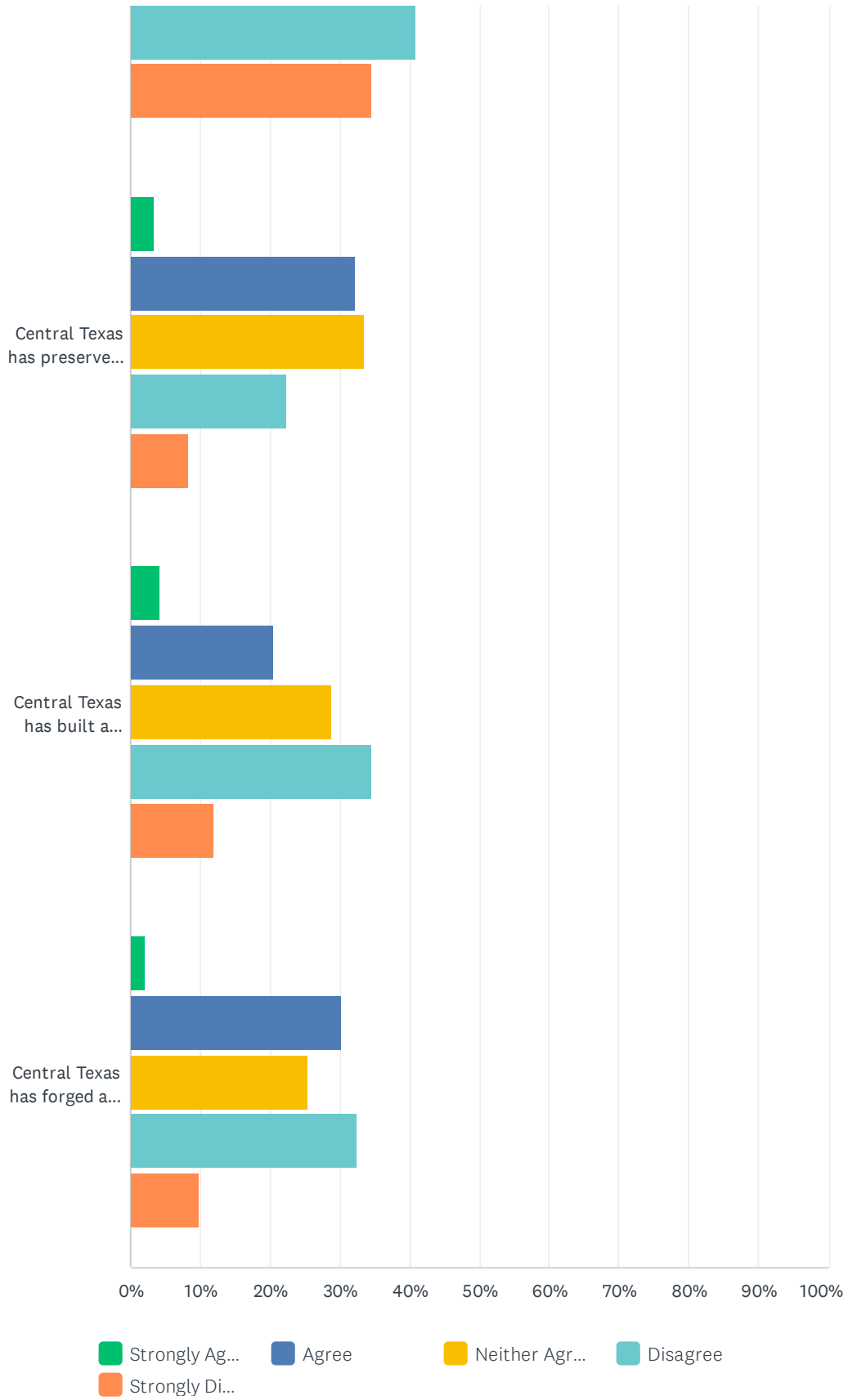
Other (please specify)
all, keeping up with tremendous growth
Economic Inequality and School Funding are tied together
Followed by infrastructure/transportation
governance... lots of <u>pent up</u> political will at a local level to address all of these issues but we are prevented (and certainly not assisted) by the State Government
Hard to say the "most" pressing - would say affordability, transportation and overall <u>degradation</u> of open space, including water resources.
high taxation and government fees
Housing affordability and availability
Industry/Jobs/Taxes
Need for improved policing and 911 response <u>times</u> ; addressing drug use and mental illness among the homeless
pace of growth
These are all connected. <u>So</u> all of the above.
These issues are interrelated and cannot be prioritized effectively
Water for sure! Then public transportation as we are so far behind on this in central TX.

Q4 When you consider the Central Texas region, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Answered: 143 Skipped: 0



Regional Growth Survey



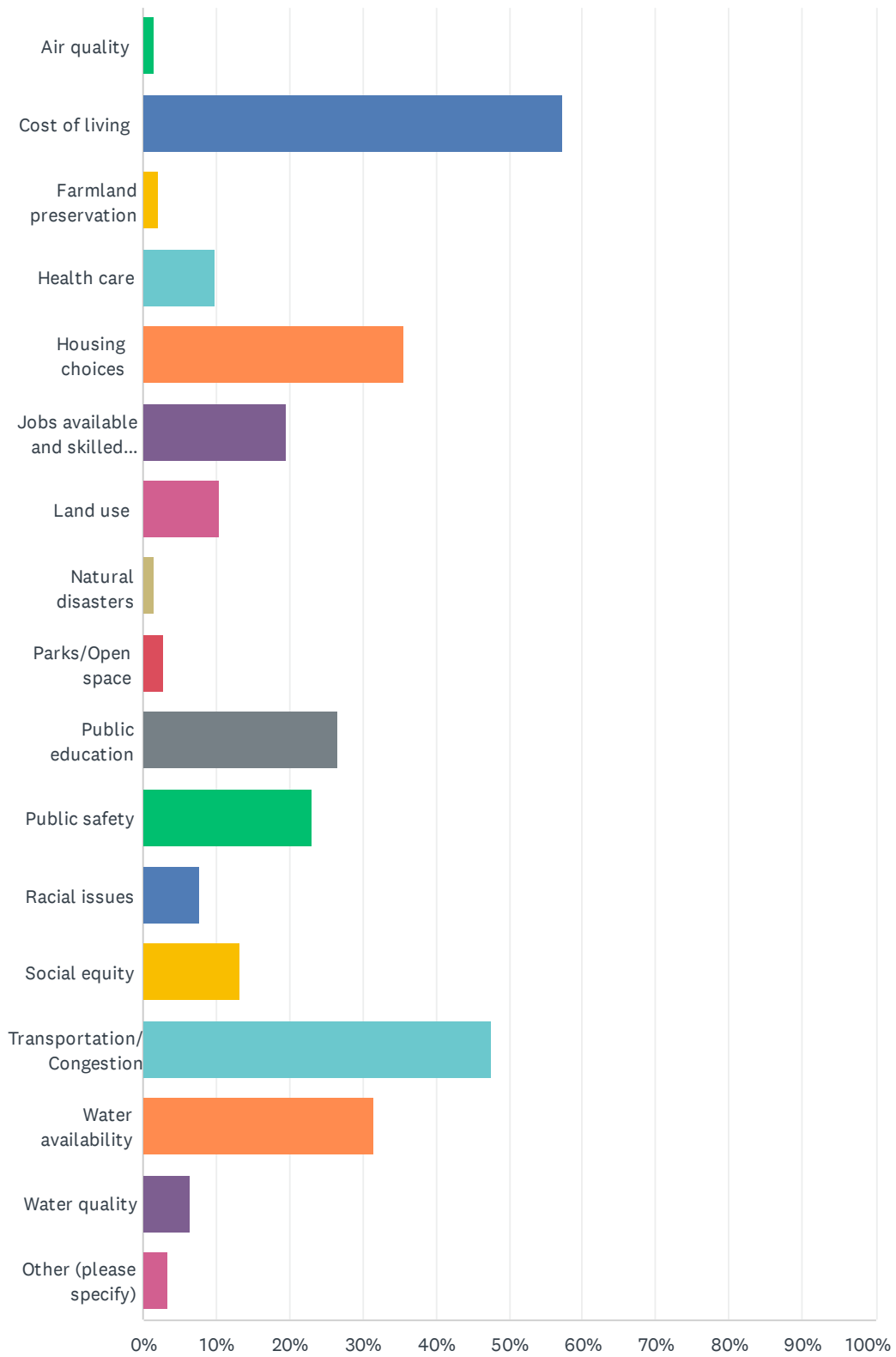
Regional Growth Survey

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Central Texas boasts an integrated transportation system offering a range of options, including roads, rail, trails, and bikeways, that have significantly improved regional mobility and land use planning.	1.40% 2	12.59% 18	14.69% 21	48.25% 69	23.08% 33	143
Central Texas has preserved its environment and natural resources to provide open spaces, parks, and trails for people to enjoy, while protecting ecologically sensitive areas and ensuring sustainable access to clean water and air for future generations.	13.29% 19	49.65% 71	23.08% 33	11.19% 16	2.80% 4	143
Central Texas has become the hub of a diverse and thriving economy with a robust base of businesses and quality job opportunities for citizens, and a distribution of jobs throughout the region.	30.77% 44	46.15% 66	12.59% 18	9.09% 13	1.40% 2	143
Central Texas has provided a variety of housing choices, affordable for everyone in the region and offering a mix of styles, such as neighborhoods with pedestrian-friendly streets or housing that is within walking distance to transit and stores.	1.41% 2	7.75% 11	15.49% 22	40.85% 58	34.51% 49	142
Central Texas has preserved its unique character by protecting and enhancing towns, rural areas, historic sites, and special sense of place.	3.50% 5	32.17% 46	33.57% 48	22.38% 32	8.39% 12	143
Central Texas has built a shared understanding that social equity and racial harmony are core values that strengthen us and actions that foster respect, civility, and opportunities for all.	4.23% 6	20.42% 29	28.87% 41	34.51% 49	11.97% 17	142
Central Texas has forged a region-wide understanding that our fortunes are tied together requiring planning, participation and collaboration by stakeholders throughout our region to ensure	2.11% 3	30.28% 43	25.35% 36	32.39% 46	9.86% 14	142

**Q5 What are the most important issues for the future of Central Texans?
(select three)**

Answered: 143 Skipped: 0

Regional Growth Survey



Regional Growth Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Air quality	1.40%	2
Cost of living	57.34%	82
Farmland preservation	2.10%	3
Health care	9.79%	14
Housing choices	35.66%	51
Jobs available and skilled workers	19.58%	28
Land use	10.49%	15
Natural disasters	1.40%	2
Parks/Open space	2.80%	4
Public education	26.57%	38
Public safety	23.08%	33
Racial issues	7.69%	11
Social equity	13.29%	19
Transportation/Congestion	47.55%	68
Water availability	31.47%	45
Water quality	6.29%	9
Other (please specify)	3.50%	5
Total Respondents: 143		

Other (please specify)
Homeless in Downtown and on street corners
Regional coordination
School Choice (Vouchers)
water
Workforce

Regional Growth Survey

Q6 What are some "bright spots" or positive activities that you see happening, either in your local community or in the region, to address growth challenges?

Answered: 95. Skipped: 48

Other (please specify)
Homeless in Downtown and on street corners
Regional coordination
School Choice (Vouchers)
water
Workforce
Open-Ended Response
...maybe there is an emerging sense that greater Austin absolutely must begin thinking, planning and acting regionally, we are falling behind our competitor cities in this regard, compare with Denver to understand just how far behind we are on this score.
2023 legislature further limited management of growth. Local governments are trying their best with the few tools left.
A consensus seems to be developing throughout the region that our fortunes are inked together. The towns and cities surrounding Austin are in different stages of dealing with all of the issues Austin has been dealing with for the past 20-30 years. We need to work together.
Advocacy for government cannot do it all. It costs too much and it doesn't do things well. A bright spot is silent majority speaking more and not letting minority voice or loudest voice unfairly influence decision making; plus, people need to be accountable for their actions.
An improved and soon to be updated downtown area - Lockhart
Approval of Project Connect
Austin has developed a very pro-active 100-year water plan.
awareness of environmental impacts, job creation in more areas of the region
Bond and other funding is being directed to housing, multi-modal transit, open spaces - but it's not enough and it's implemented too slowly. Non-profits are providing education and increasing awareness and advocate for better integration of land use, transportation, public health, and other quality of life issues. But elected officials are not making changes quickly or boldly enough.
Bridges are being built between Communities that have not existed heretofore. I'm bullish on the next generation of emerging Leaders.
Broad focus on reducing housing costs
City of Austin is trying very hard to make a dent into the housing affordability crisis, and should be acknowledged for the effort; growth-sensibilities are becoming more regionalized -- "Central Texas" as opposed to this or that city or county within the region -- a very good thing.
City's commitment to raising the minimum wage for its employees, thus raising the bar for organizations & businesses. A livable wage is critical for a vibrant community.
Civic engagement
Collaboration across organizations and governmental agencies to work together in support of unhoused populations.
Collaboration between the City of Lockhart, Caldwell County, and Lockhart ISD to manage growth

Regional Growth Survey

Q6 What are some "bright spots" or positive activities that you see happening, either in your local community or in the region, to address growth challenges?

Answered: 95. Skipped: 48

Collaboration between the community, local, state and federal government to plan for future challenges. Funding opportunities have been made accessible to help fund key infrastructure improvements.
collaborative efforts by medical, social, and behavioral health leaders to provide community resources at no cost to rural community members.
Community will to address homelessness before it becomes a bigger problem than exists today.
Construction of regionally planned Wastewater Treatment Plant and Water Treatment Plant
Conversation & collaboration with San Antonio leaders and economic development organizations
Cooperative efforts and working to preserve the culture and small town feel
Coordination and collaboration amongst non-political governmental entities.
Diverse economy developing diverse jobs and educational opportunities,
Diversification of the economy Suburbs waking up to regional challenges
Diversion center and criminal justice reform. Investments in permanent supportive housing & affordable housing. Project Connect and investments in rail.
Downtown Austin
Easier development along corridors, which provides additional housing. Also, the preservation bonus, which provides incentive to preserve existing housing, while also adding units.
Economic development
Election of Kirk Watson
Events and programs that respond to the community's needs and or are created with community involvement are seeing great participation.
focus on making communities feel safer and more accessible.
getting Project Connect passed
Great job opportunities; Project Connect; I-35 IF it includes cap and stitch (who cares if not); Travis County parkland acquisition; hopefully a land code rewrite . . . all of this is threatened by activities at the state leg.
Growth.
I am seeing progress being made on bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure. Some progress on public transportation (if we could just keep the politicians out of the discussion).
I believe the work that AARO does is one of the bright spots.
I no longer see hope in central Texas. It is just another big "city"/region that has sold off the best parts of itself for unrestrained capitalistic growth.
I recently moved from Austin to Smithville, TX and here there is a diverse community of artists, musicians, writers, and businesses all working together to build a harmonious town, even though there are different political beliefs here. Every Wednesday night downtown on our Main Street of historic buildings, there is a free community gathering where we can meet others, share wine and food, play instruments or ping pong, or simply sit in comfy chairs outside Silky's (a historic building) talking and enjoying one another's company. I've met so many new friends through this endeavor and always bring friends when they come to town. Very pro-active and supportive community!
I think increasingly there are people focusing on issues of equity and environment. But we have a long way to go.

Regional Growth Survey

Q6 What are some "bright spots" or positive activities that you see happening, either in your local community or in the region, to address growth challenges?

Answered: 95. Skipped: 48

im pleased with open space planning for the future although it is terribly underfunded in some locales. Clean air is going to become more important as we become more densely populated, hopefully electric vehicles will help in that regard.
increased awareness and focus on equity of opportunity
Innovation District, Waterloo Greenway. That's it for bright spots.
Land protection. Public funding support for conservation and open spaces. Increased trails and greenways. A hint of transit in the future. The Water Forward, Austin Water plan.
Light rail. The growth of Texas State. The failure of the voucher system at the Legislature.
local developers stepping up to build responsibly in their home communities
Lockhart has the opportunity to transform our children's future in regards to jobs and education. It is up to US to do the hard work to get that ball rolling in the right direction.
Looking forward to the completion of Project Connect.
Managed development, collaboration in the region, spotlight on underfunded school districts
Mayor Watson; state legislative checks on local regulations
mixed use development with affordable options for housing
more housing
More housing choices being allowed
New community development in Mueller
nothing yet
Organizations like Foundation Communities and Community First. Young diverse leaders.
Our mayor Kirk Watson. His leadership.
Project Connect
project connect and cap and stitch
Project Connect, Housing Bonds to support affordability, potential for redesigning the land development code. Election of Mayor Watson and hiring of Jesus Garza as Interim City Manager.
Project Connect, IH 35 improvements, renewed interest in resolving public safety issues, new Austin City Council and Mayor, LCRA becoming more aggressive in acquiring water resources, openness on the part of CAMPO to more input from regional business leaders.
Project Connect, new Zoning revisions, city work to address climate change
Project Connect, Non-profit sector
Project Connect, Water Conservation, some low income housing initiatives
Recognition that growth has gotten out of control versus resource availability.
Recycling of wastewater into potable water, as is already done all over the world and anytime you are on a cruise ship.
Right now nothing. This region continues to grow more and more divisive every day. Whether it is economics, racial differences, or politics we are being divided by our elected officials (both sides). Nobody wants to listen, learn, or understand. Both sides act like children who do not get their way I am just going to take my toys and go home saying I am right and you are wrong. We are accomplishing nothing.

Regional Growth Survey

Q6 What are some "bright spots" or positive activities that you see happening, either in your local community or in the region, to address growth challenges?

Answered: 95. Skipped: 48

Saving and adaptive reuse of historic downtowns such as Taylor, Hutto, Georgetown, Bastrop, Elgin.
Start of Project Connect
strong public education systems
Taxation is theft. Property owners should not have to carry the weight. Success should not be a punishment. Voting age should be raised to 21. What is your fair share of what someone else has earned? Things will always be fiscally unequal. Quit playing into this victim mentality and virtue signaling. You have either worked hard and saved or you have not. All of these California refugees will vote Texas into the same place they ran from.
The fact that this survey is being undertaken by AARO is a positive sign. Another is a sense of an actively engaged citizenry who are concerned about the varied challenges and opportunities in our community. But "the devil is in the details" and the execution of the solutions/approaches to addressing these challenges.
The most recent rail initiative, Project Connect, was a strong move forward.
The plans for rail and transportation infrastructure will greatly improve the gridlock our community is experiencing (hopefully)!
The presence of some regs that mandate certain number of units in developments for affordable housing. Several strong nonprofits that are dedicated to expanding affordable living spaces. (although we need much more) Presence of future parkland space and the trails project (even though those parks are under financed for getting to fruition of plans). Expansion of economic development strategies resulting in super job growth and more engaged ISDs and other learning organizations dedicated to job training and preparation.
The strength of some groups focused on challenging the actions of elected officials.
The thriving business community.
There are people who are willing to have the conversation about the challenges facing our region; and groups have formed to begin to address some of the challenges
there are conversations around "mobility" and training for good jobs
there are proposals like Project Connect to get more public transportation
There is awareness that cost of living is a real issue for a lot of folks. That's a start.
Toll roads have been a welcome addition. We need more roadways and enhancements to existing roadways.
Toll roads, airport
Trend towards greater density, light rail system.
Underrepresented communities are organizing, sharing their ideas/opinions and asking for a seat at the table.
Unsure
Urban rail; cognizance of quality-of-life challenges in face of rapid rise in housing costs
Virtually everyone who wants a job has one. People will continue to move to Central Texas which is good for the economy and job growth.
We are seeing progress in many areas with great leaders taking charge to push forward. Economic growth with companies still moving here is one of our biggest bright spots. We are also a destination city with a rapidly growing population.
we have a wealth of amazing people in our community who can be part of the solution
We have an awareness of the issues and their interrelationships which some communities do not. We have an engaged community working on many of these issues. We have an awareness of the regional nature of many of

Regional Growth Survey

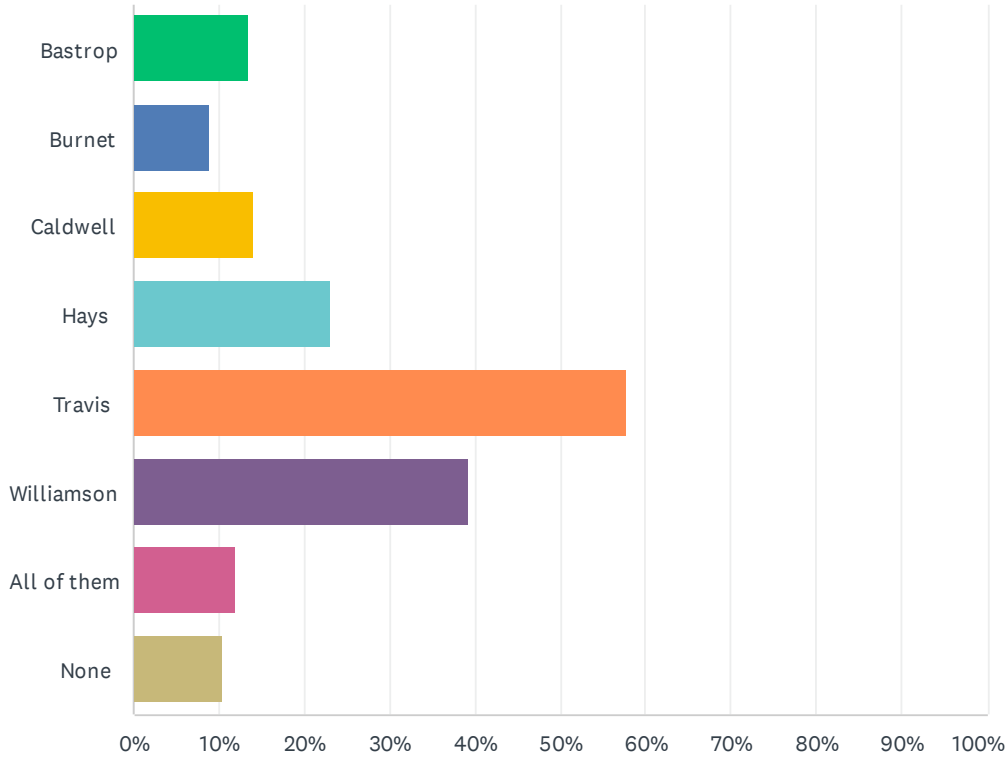
Q6 What are some "bright spots" or positive activities that you see happening, either in your local community or in the region, to address growth challenges?

Answered: 95. Skipped: 48

our challenges. We have a vibrant economy which has the capacity to support decisions we make (whether we make wise ones is a different matter).
We have very talented leaders, who increasingly are working on issues for our region and not just their jurisdiction.
We manage our growth. We don't cater. As a developer, you provide what we need or you don't move forward. We make sure growth doesn't become a challenge.
Workforce development efforts. Strong business philanthropy.
workforce development initiatives and the Community College in particular

Q7 Which counties in Central Texas have you followed closely in terms of private-public partnerships and/or inter-jurisdictional collaborations?

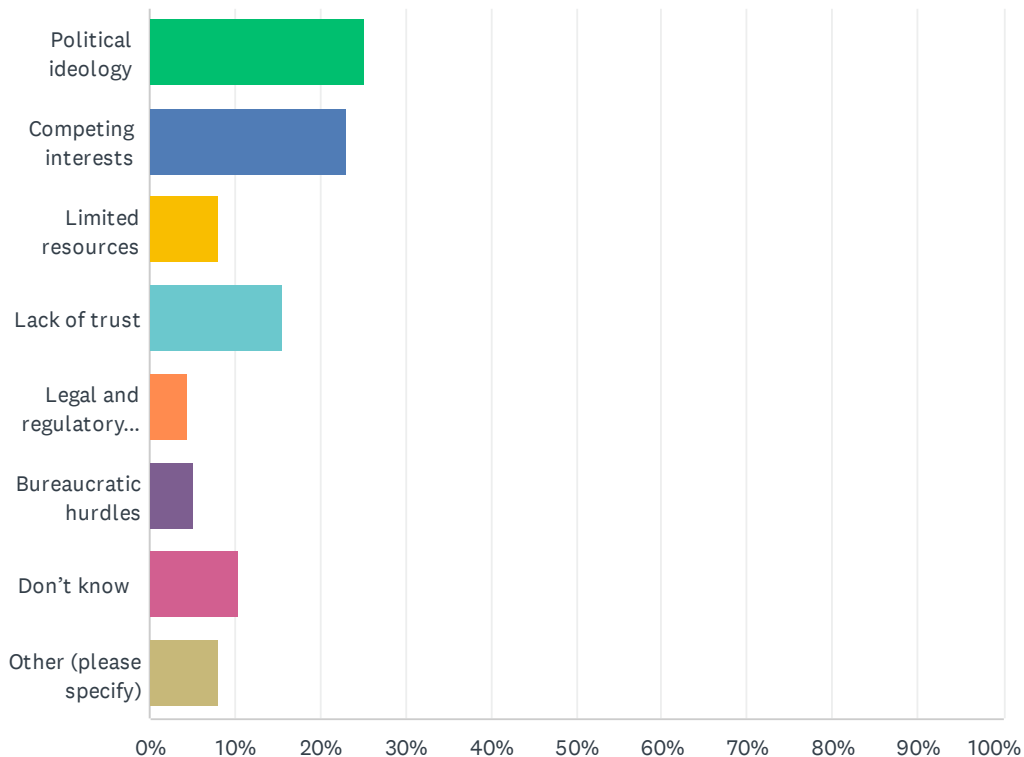
Answered: 135 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Bastrop	13.33%	18
Burnet	8.89%	12
Caldwell	14.07%	19
Hays	22.96%	31
Travis	57.78%	78
Williamson	39.26%	53
All of them	11.85%	16
None	10.37%	14
Total Respondents: 135		

Q8 What has been the biggest barrier to jurisdictions and other entities working together across the region?

Answered: 135 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Political ideology	25.19%	34
Competing interests	22.96%	31
Limited resources	8.15%	11
Lack of trust	15.56%	21
Legal and regulatory barriers	4.44%	6
Bureaucratic hurdles	5.19%	7
Don't know	10.37%	14
Other (please specify)	8.15%	11
TOTAL		135

Regional Growth Survey

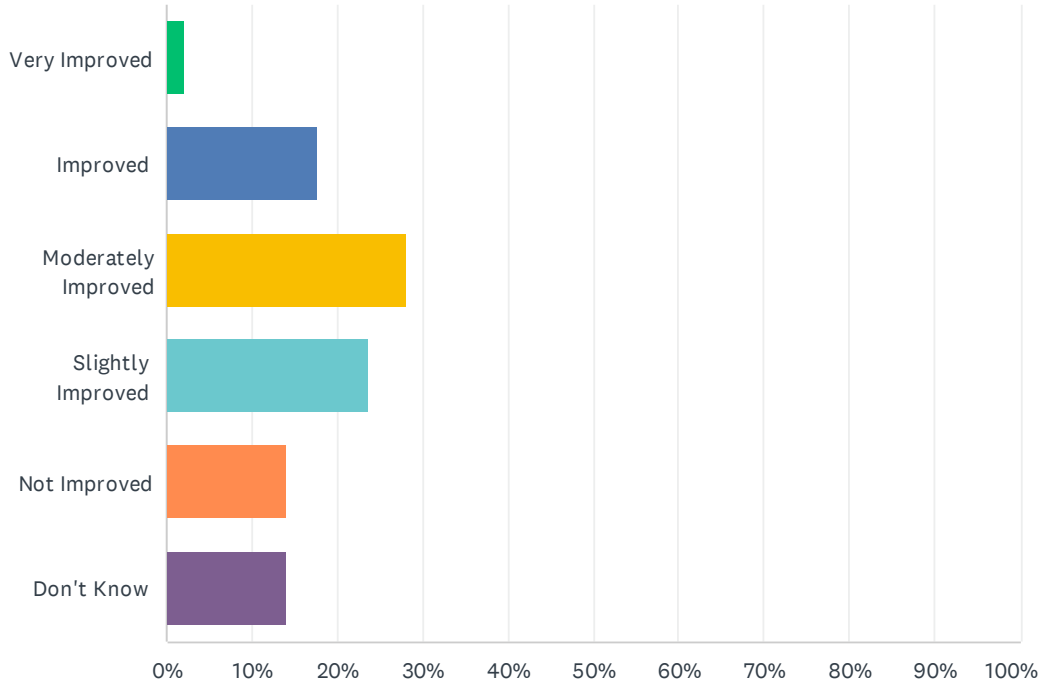
Q8 What has been the biggest barrier to jurisdictions and other entities working together across the region?

Answered: 135. Skipped: 8

Other (please specify)
Constituent reaction (politics)
I suspect most of the above but am not informed enough to speak to the jurisdictional, etc. barriers
Lack of a compelling, shared vision of win-win partnerships
Lack of regional leadership
No leadership by elected officials
People just not knowing each other and not having places to convene
Politics ... not R versus D, but how the various jurisdictions work are not compatible with one another. Because of this it seems all sides just go about their own business.
Silo mentality.
There is nothing to force the jurisdictions in the region to work together
they are not being brought together to talk about and figure out solutions - to see where they could be working together.
WATER - Everyone is in need of water! Many counties and small CCNs are in need of water and growth will not happen because cities control that water and won't allow them to have more for those moving here and for possible future businesses, new homes, and industrial expanse outside of the larger cities. Austin is impossible to work with!

Q9 To what degree have regional collaborations or partnerships improved in Central Texas?

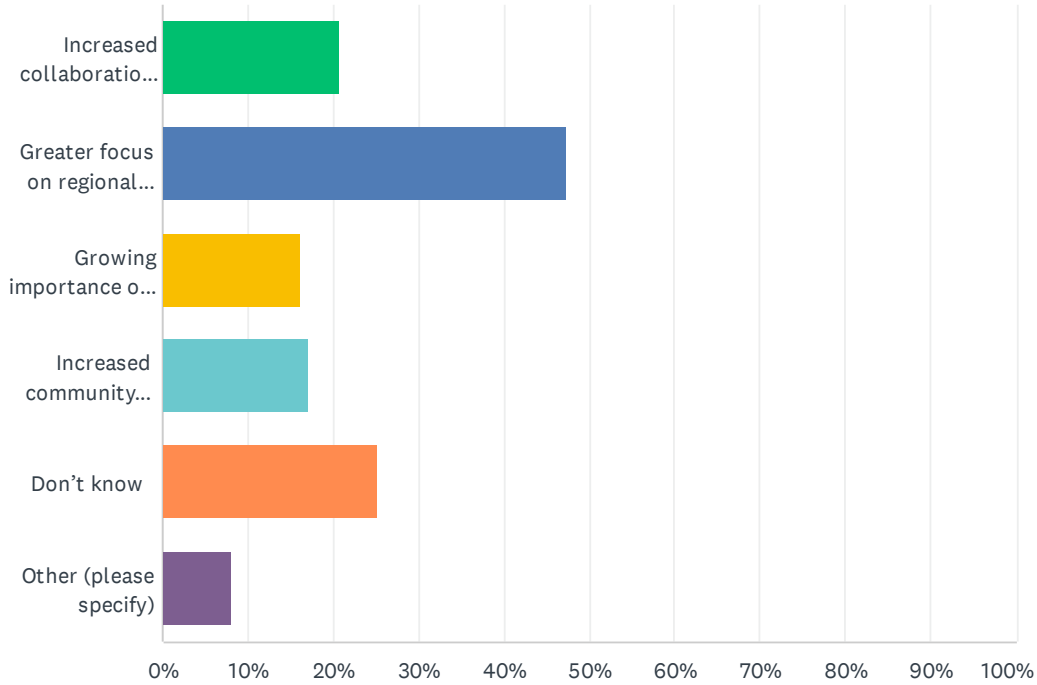
Answered: 135 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very Improved	2.22%	3
Improved	17.78%	24
Moderately Improved	28.15%	38
Slightly Improved	23.70%	32
Not Improved	14.07%	19
Don't Know	14.07%	19
TOTAL		135

Q10 How have regional collaborations or partnerships improved in Central Texas? (select up to two)

Answered: 135 Skipped: 8



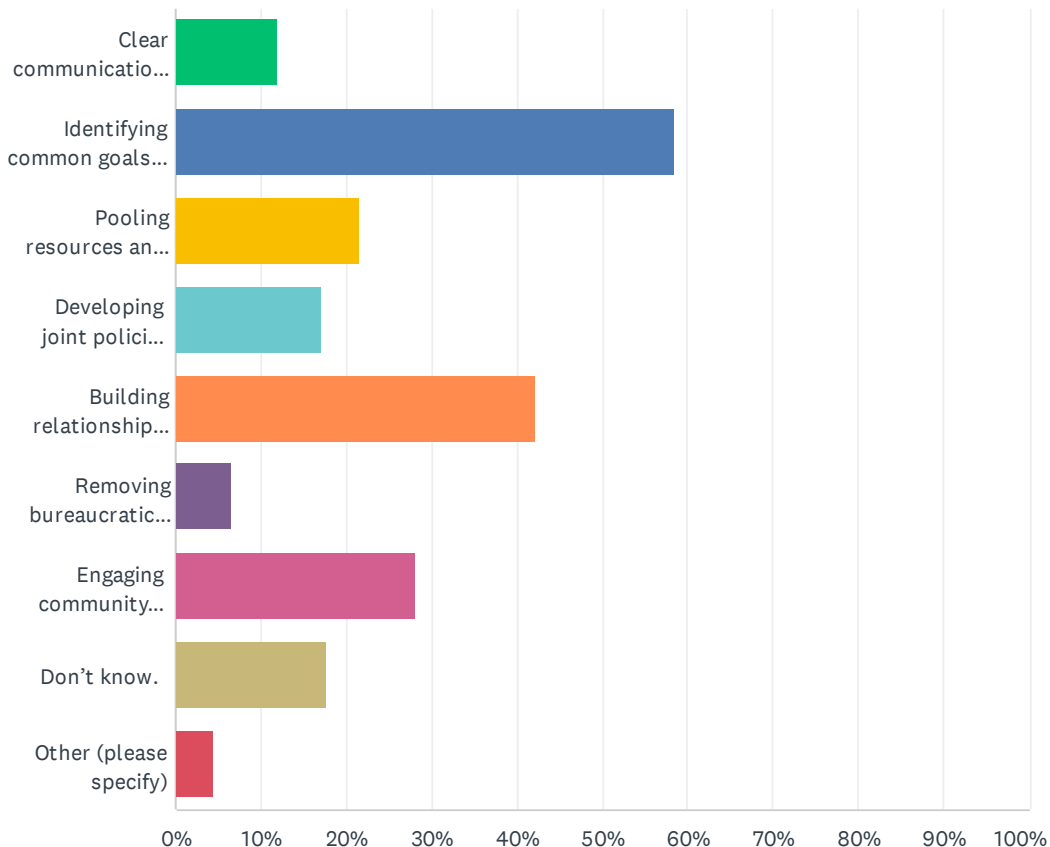
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Increased collaboration between governments	20.74%	28
Greater focus on regional issues	47.41%	64
Growing importance of private-public partnerships	16.30%	22
Increased community participation	17.04%	23
Don't know	25.19%	34
Other (please specify)	8.15%	11
Total Respondents: 135		

Other (please specify)

- CapMetro has done a good job of facilitating collaboration
- Collaboration between Opportunity Austin & Greater:SATX as well as inter-chamber communication
- Economic development
- hasn't improved- may have digressed
- have not improved
- I do not think they have. We are selling off our future for short-term gains (e.g. corporate tax give aways to harm infrastructure needs; multi-national companies pushing small business out of business in Taylor, etc.)
- in some cases, they are a detriment not an improvement.
- N/A
- Regional collaborations do not exist in central Texas.
- Relationship-building between people representing disparate groups.

Q11 What factors have led to successful interjurisdictional collaborations and partnerships? (select up to three)

Answered: 135 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Clear communication channels	11.85%	16
Identifying common goals and priorities	58.52%	79
Pooling resources and sharing costs on joint initiatives	21.48%	29
Developing joint policies and plans	17.04%	23
Building relationships and fostering a culture of collaboration	42.22%	57
Removing bureaucratic barriers	6.67%	9
Engaging community members	28.15%	38
Don't know.	17.78%	24
Other (please specify)	4.44%	6
Total Respondents: 135		

Regional Growth Survey

Q11 What factors have led to successful interjurisdictional collaborations and partnerships? (select up to three)

Answered: 135. Skipped: 8

Other (please specify)
CapMetro has been pushing collaboration with outlying cities
Leadership, leadership, leadership
none i know of
Regional collaborations do not exist in central Texas.
This pre-supposes things are good. They are not. This is a bias question (like the ones before)
urgent necessity

Q12. What examples have you seen of successful collaborations or partnerships in Central Texas?

Answered: 58. Skipped: 85

Open-Ended Response
"Project Connect" is one of those successful collaborations when it is all built up accordingly.
AARO
AARO, CAPCOG, CAMPO, Hill Country Alliance
AARO, Foundation Communities
Addressing Cancer Together (ACT)
Austin Community College's public-private collaboration in the region on education and workforce development, including redevelopment of the Highland campus. Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority's transportation network in the region. Central Health District & UT Dell Medical School Project Connect
CAMPO moderately successful, and health care
CAMPO, TWDB Regional Water Plans, transportation coordination
Capital Metro and City of Austin on Project Connect and the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, TXDOT and the City of Austin on the IH 35 central project and the associated Cap and Stitch
CapMetro working with Leander, Georgetown, Hutto, Manor and Roundrock.
CARTS
cities / counties coming together to support an MSA-wide climate pollution reduction grant from the EPA
Community First Village
Construction Partnership Program (a work in progress)
CTRMA
CTRMA, several water supply projects, Austin Chamber's Momentum (bringing Army Futures Command, Tesla and Samsung)
CTRMA; LCRA
CTRMA. If CAPCOG was empowered, that would be transformative.
don't know
E3 Alliance
Economic development
Economic development.. Tesla, samsung
Greater San Marcos Partnership Northern Caldwell County Coalition
Healthcare
I have seen higher education systems continue to partner and expand collaborations with K-12. Like Career Pathways. however, there is a still a lot of work to be done.
I need examples. I know of none. Has there been a collaboration successful or not? The City of Lago Vista and Travis County ESD1 has been successful. What else is there?
IH 35 improvement planning
It appears as though we are seeing stronger partnership in healthcare (Seton, St. David's and Baylor Scott & White).
Long-term, none. People are too busy going for political wins to make hard choices for the long-term health of the region.

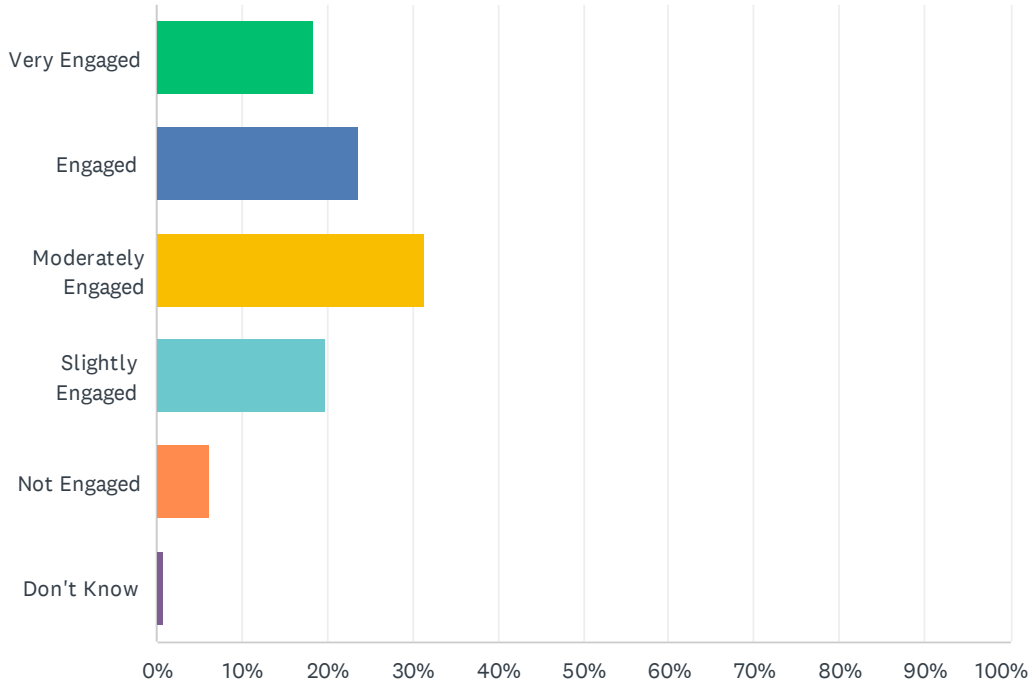
Q12. What examples have you seen of successful collaborations or partnerships in Central Texas?

Answered: 58. Skipped: 85

Master development agreements between city and private developers. Public improvement districts and tax increment financing districts.
Moody Center, SH130 and SH45
More open discussions in both the public and private sectors.
Most of these partnerships, for better or not, are related to transportation (vehicular).
None
none
None recently due to political ideology and agendas. There are no leaders/facilitators that are neutral to make community engagement and ownership possible. Lack of trust and true cooperation that is not motivated by money and power.
Not informed enough beyond what's reported in the media
Not sure what the question is- basically none that have managed growth
Opportunity Austin
Opportunity Austin
Opportunity Austin working collaboratively within the 5 county region especially with public officials, civic leaders & eco dev organizations in counties outside of Travis. Also see response to #10 "Other".
Our school districts have worked together to advocate for more funding from the legislature
Parks
Regional collaborations do not exist in central Texas.
Response of hospitals to Covid.
Revised 1445 between municipality and county
SH-130, Project Connect, Loop 1/MoPac
The Hill Country Conservancy, based in Austin, has worked extensively with the Hays County Commissioner's Court to help them conserve and preserve important lands for conservation and public uses. Sharing their knowledge and expertise in a county where there was not much of a tradition or history of doing this.
The partnership between TxDOT and local governments in collaborating on future development projects and transportation master planning.
The Regional Water Quality Protection Plan for sure!! Funding partnerships for Conservation Easements. They are established on case by case basis. COA, Travis Co. Hays Co. TNC, NRCS, HCC.
Transit development plans, improved partnerships between Austin/Travis County
Transportation has required collaboration over time as has long term planning for water resources.
United Way's merging with Williamson County
UT Medical School in Austin, Addressing Cancer Together initiative (AARO)
vaccine collaborative among Travis County and surrounding counties
Very little to be honest.
water quality protection lands
What the new Mayor is trying to accomplish.

Q13 How do you view the level of engagement in your local community as it pertains to growth-related issues?

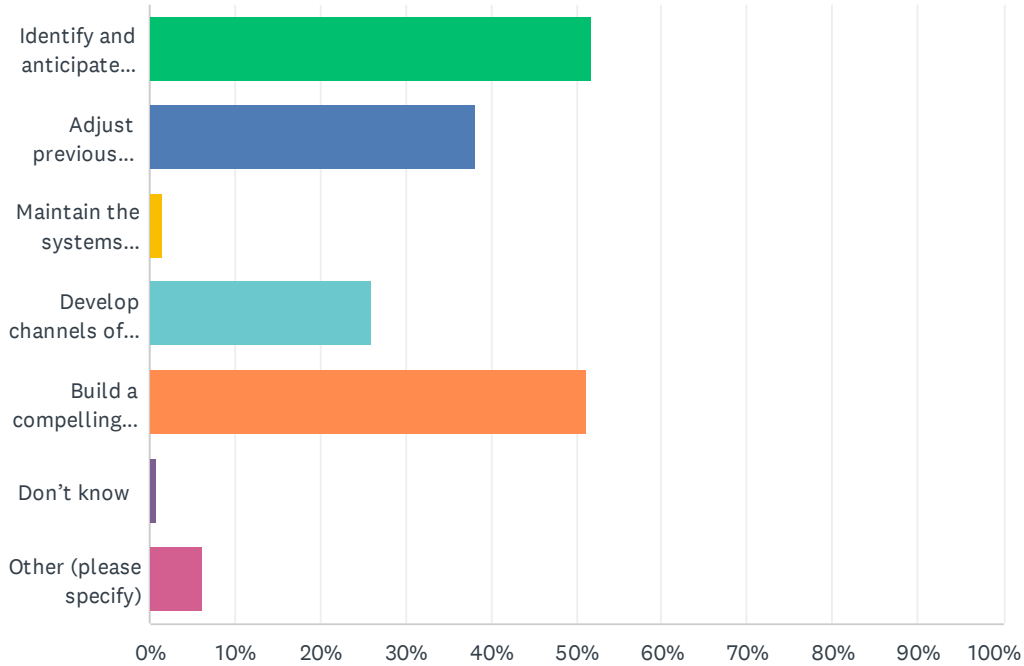
Answered: 131 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very Engaged	18.32%	24
Engaged	23.66%	31
Moderately Engaged	31.30%	41
Slightly Engaged	19.85%	26
Not Engaged	6.11%	8
Don't Know	0.76%	1
TOTAL		131

Q14 How should Central Texas leaders respond to the growth challenges that have occurred in the region? (select up to two)

Answered: 131 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Identify and anticipate future data trends to get ahead of the curve.	51.91%	68
Adjust previous strategies and tactics to address our current challenges.	38.17%	50
Maintain the systems currently in place.	1.53%	2
Develop channels of communication and platforms for constructive dialogue.	25.95%	34
Build a compelling vision that rallies the region towards a shared goal.	51.15%	67
Don't know	0.76%	1
Other (please specify)	6.11%	8
Total Respondents: 131		

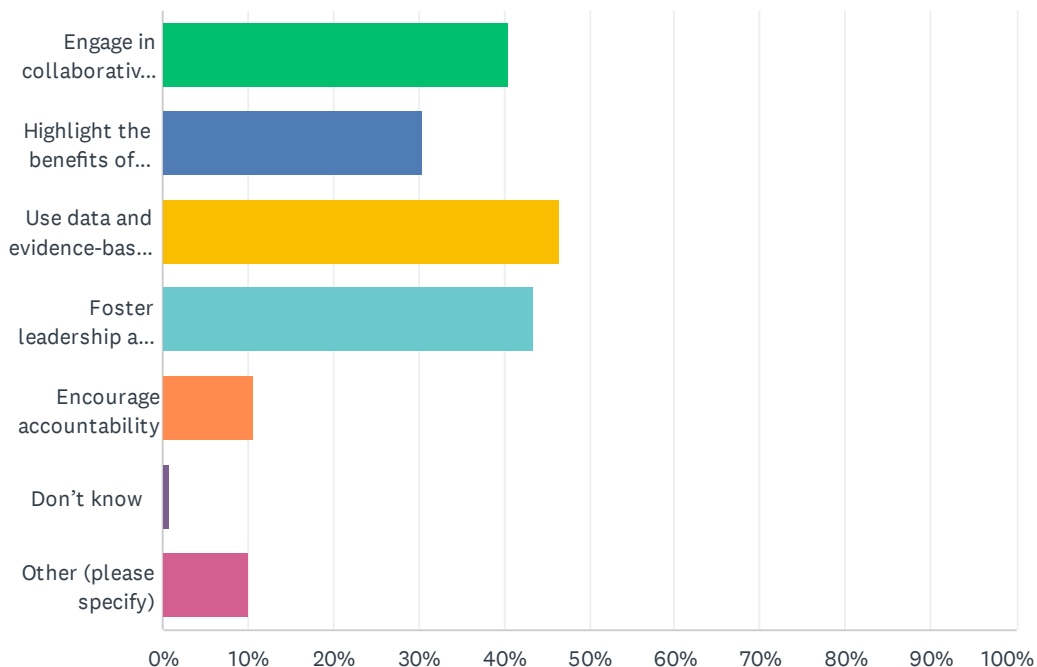
Q14. How should Central Texas leaders respond to the growth challenges that have occurred in the region? (select up to two)

Answered: 131. Skipped: 12

Other (please specify)
Be open about priorities between groups so that win-win solutions might be more easily discovered.
Develop authentic micro and macro surveys/polls of neighborhoods and districts (keep politics and leading/biased questions out)
I think it is time to ask Gary Farmer and Opportunity Austin to take their foot off the gas pedal and slow the recruitment of companies and people to Austin. And they have been using a lot of public funds to do this.
limit legislative influence from developers/builders/realtors
Put the needs of their current citizens ahead of those of people that are relocating to the area
realize there's not enough water
Think about our water issues and how large and small communities cannot currently provide or will not in the future if we continue to have growth. What are you doing to address the needs of water companies to provide for future growth. If we don't have water, they cannot build.
Total systemic tear down with a focus on rebuilding a long-term narrative of what the region could be when we make tough choices for future generations

Q15 How would you create the will amongst people and institutions to address regional growth challenges? (select up to two)

Answered: 131 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Engage in collaborative planning	40.46%	53
Highlight the benefits of addressing growth challenges	30.53%	40
Use data and evidence-based research	46.56%	61
Foster leadership and vision	43.51%	57
Encourage accountability	10.69%	14
Don't know	0.76%	1
Other (please specify)	9.92%	13
Total Respondents: 131		

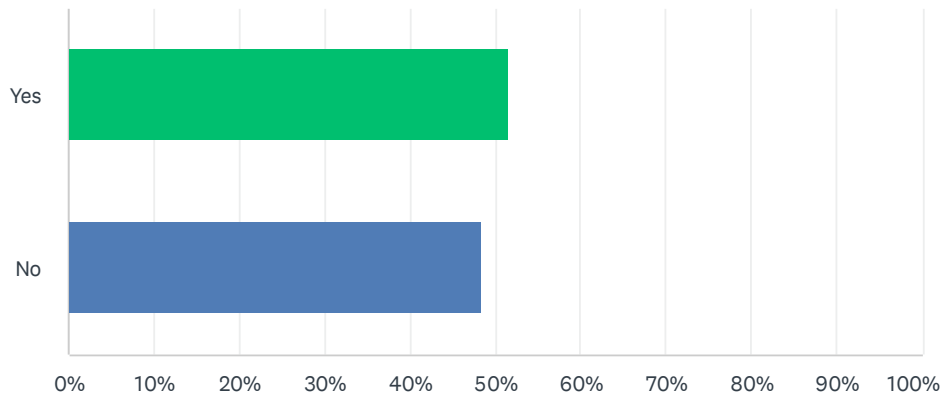
Q15 How would you create the will amongst people and institutions to address regional growth challenges? (select up to two)

Answered: 131. Skipped: 12

Other (please specify)
Bring new, non-political, people into the conversation. People who do not have their hands out, they just want to help our community thrive.
Build trust
elect smarter Electeds like Mayor Watson
Expand collaborative planning to include our entire 13 county region & corridor shared with San Antonio as the ASA region is the critical southwest corner of the Texas Triangle and as such needs to jointly plan resources, infrastructure, workforce & development and not be overly concerned with competing interests.
find more ways to engage public input in person
Get to know each other as leaders
highlight opportunities of regional resilience
If you want citizens to be engaged and support, invite them to participate. Allow them to fill out this survey, not just leaders. What is the will of the people? You'll only find out if you ask THEM.

Q16 Are you aware of the work of Envision Central Texas (ECT)?

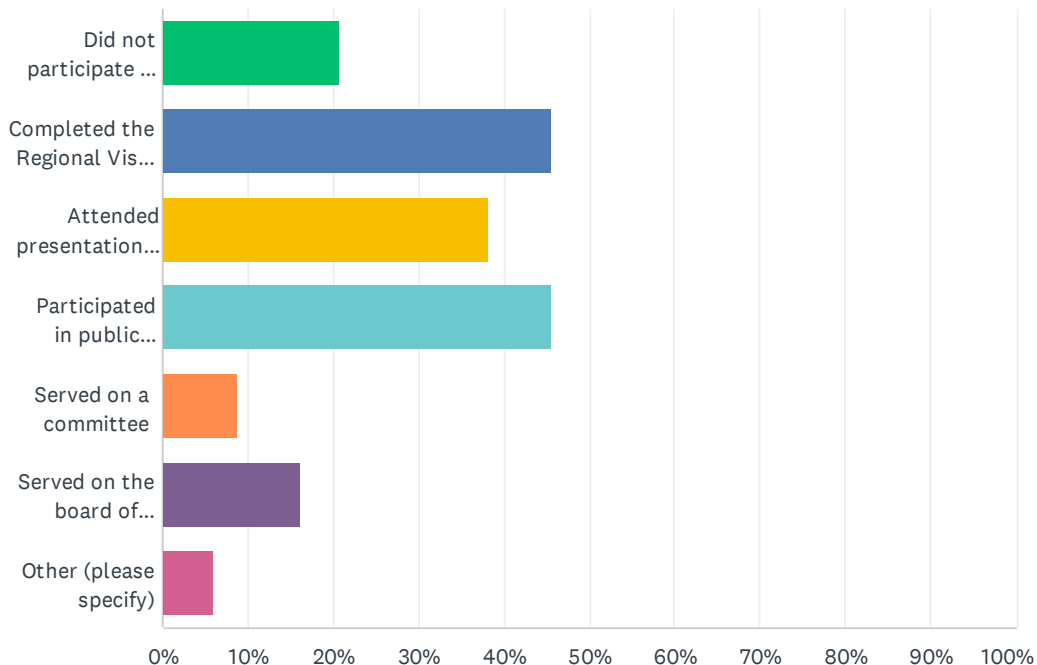
Answered: 130 Skipped: 13



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	51.54%	67
No	48.46%	63
TOTAL		130

Q17 What level of involvement did you have with ECT? (check all that apply)

Answered: 68 Skipped: 75

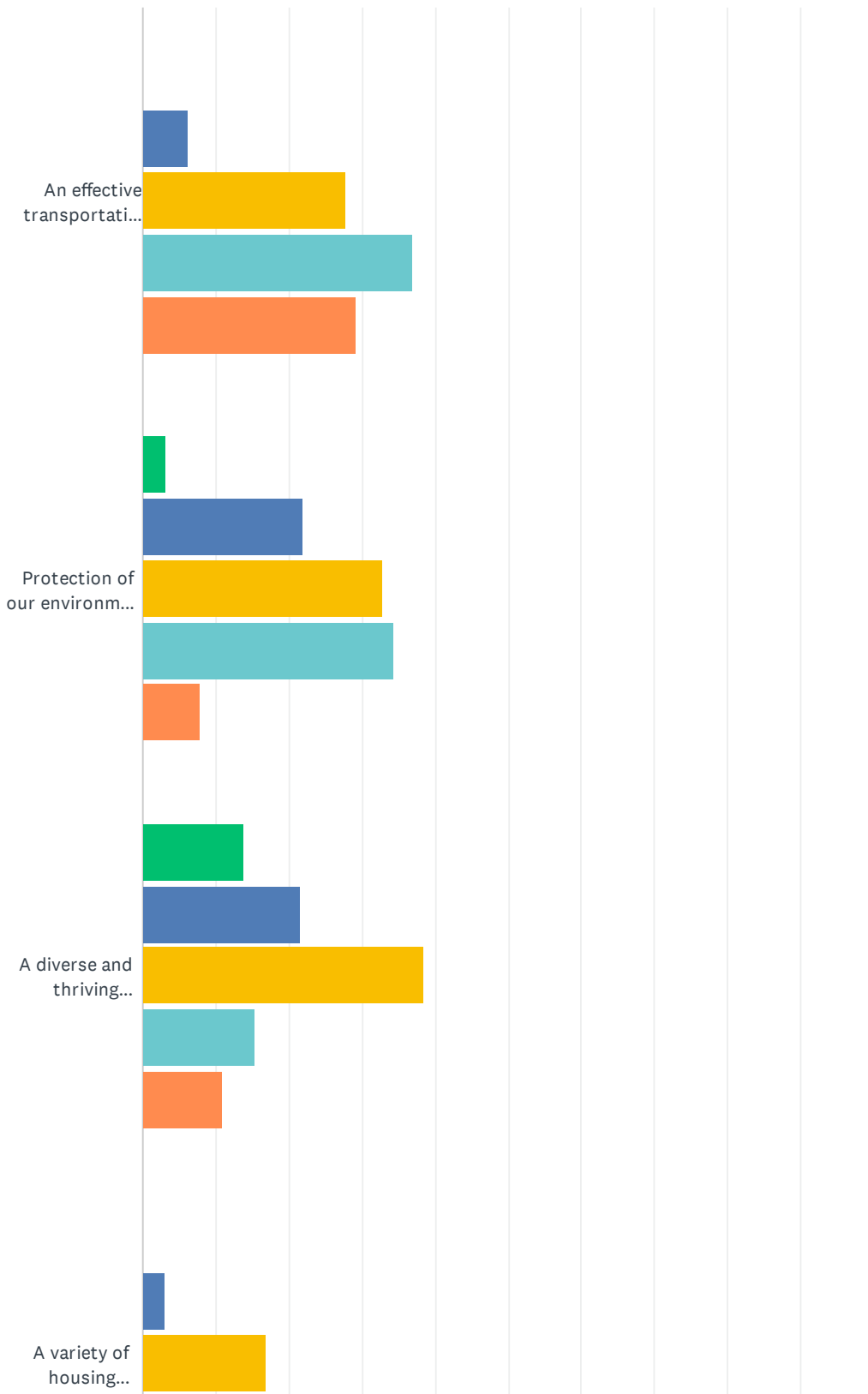


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Did not participate in any ECT activities	20.59%	14
Completed the Regional Vision Survey	45.59%	31
Attended presentations or award luncheon	38.24%	26
Participated in public meetings and/or workshops	45.59%	31
Served on a committee	8.82%	6
Served on the board of directors	16.18%	11
Other (please specify)	5.88%	4
Total Respondents: 68		

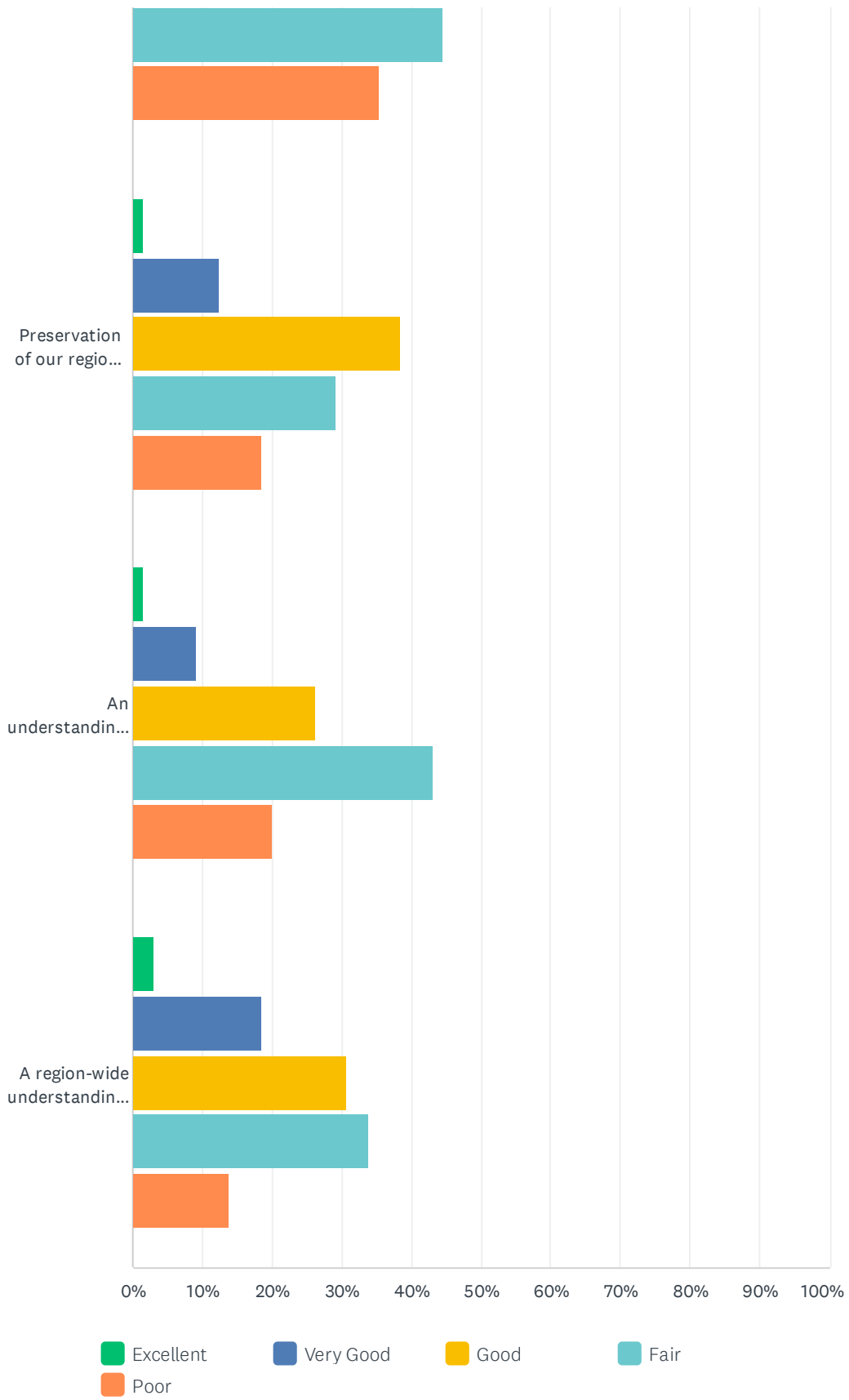
Other (please specify)
(we were not living here at the time)
Co-chaired Transportation Committee
May have attended meetings but that's water under the bridge by now...
was aware of the effort

Q18 How would you rate the initiative's success for each of the seven ECT Vision elements listed below?

Answered: 65 Skipped: 78



Regional Growth Survey

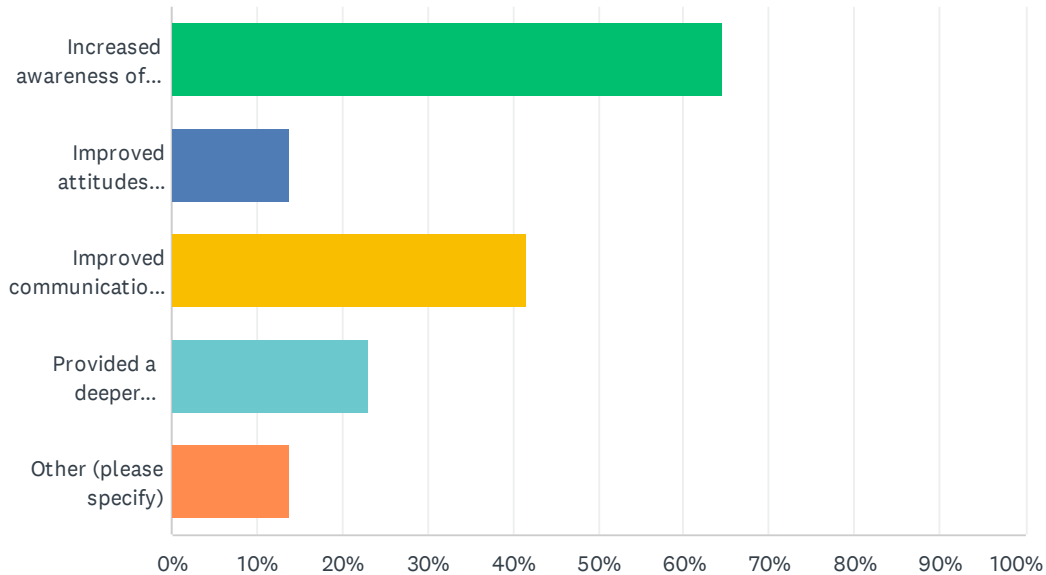


Regional Growth Survey

	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	TOTAL
An effective transportation system that improves mobility throughout the region, increases transportation choices, including roads, rail, trails and bikeways, and is coordinated with land use planning.	0.00% 0	6.15% 4	27.69% 18	36.92% 24	29.23% 19	65
Protection of our environment and natural resources so we will have the open space, parks and trails that people cherish, preserve our ecologically sensitive land and ensure sustainable clean water and air for future generations.	3.13% 2	21.88% 14	32.81% 21	34.38% 22	7.81% 5	64
A diverse and thriving economy with a robust base of businesses and quality job opportunities for citizens and a distribution of jobs throughout the region.	13.85% 9	21.54% 14	38.46% 25	15.38% 10	10.77% 7	65
A variety of housing choices, affordable for everyone in the region and offering a mix of styles, such as neighborhoods with pedestrian-friendly streets or housing that is within walking distance to transit and stores.	0.00% 0	3.08% 2	16.92% 11	44.62% 29	35.38% 23	65
Preservation of our region's unique character by protecting and enhancing our neighborhoods, towns, rural areas, historic sites, and special sense of place.	1.54% 1	12.31% 8	38.46% 25	29.23% 19	18.46% 12	65
An understanding that social equity and racial harmony are core values that strengthen us and actions that foster respect, civility, and opportunities for all.	1.54% 1	9.23% 6	26.15% 17	43.08% 28	20.00% 13	65
A region-wide understanding that our fortunes are tied together requiring planning, participation and collaboration by stakeholders throughout our region to ensure a successful and livable future for Central Texas.	3.08% 2	18.46% 12	30.77% 20	33.85% 22	13.85% 9	65

Q19 What, if any, impacts do you think ECT had on the public's awareness, attitudes, behaviors, etc.?

Answered: 65 Skipped: 78



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Increased awareness of the regional need for planning and collaboration.	64.62%	42
Improved attitudes towards civic engagement and meaningful community participation.	13.85%	9
Improved communication channels between local governments and communities throughout Central Texas	41.54%	27
Provided a deeper understanding of the trade-offs and challenges of shaping regional growth	23.08%	15
Other (please specify)	13.85%	9
Total Respondents: 65		

Other (please specify)
again, taking the positive frame. there are no current positives. we are pushing BIPOC communities out of the region, increasing cost, decreasing the building of quality affordable housing, and inching towards non-attainment for air quality while giving away the biggest tax benefits to Fortune 500 companies. We are about to be San Fran and nobody wants to do anything about it.
Envision Central Texas was a total failure, a complete waste of time, money and people's energy.
Got leaders of all kinds engaged and collaborating but did not do long-term follow-thru
great % of current population did not live here in 2000 and/or have forgotten ECT.
It did a nice job in bringing people together to discuss the region's shared future, but it never was able to follow through.
Little has been carried forward in a coherent fashion since it was abandoned
No impact on the <u>general public</u> .
None, it was too long ago, now it's irrelevant.
Very Little

Q20 What, if any, impacts do you think ECT had on jurisdiction or agency policies, plans, regulations, funding, etc.?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 108

Open-Ended Response
At one time, ECT had some clout - not so much anymore.
don't know
ECT encouraged a framework, and its "DNA" is replete throughout the region.
ECT had limited impact because we didn't really get to the collaborative implementation phase after establishing the regional preferred vision
ECT motivated more planning and policy initiatives in each area. But, it has been much more difficult to achieve a local political consensus to implement the plans and policies, and the State often overrides the local consensus.
For those that received direct assistance through an ECT program or recognition, it had an impact. Otherwise, there was little impact on policy development.
I am not able to speak to those because I have not followed their initiatives that closely
I am not sure. I think it raised awareness and offered a glimpse of what is possible, but I am not sure of the lasting impact of the actual work. I do think it laid the foundation for much of the collaboration that has evolved over the years.
I don't know
I think it brought more attention to conservation easements, conservation development and water quality.
I think it definitely educated the public and elected officials on the ECT regional vision. I don't think it had much effect on the implementation of that vision. The state has not helped.
In Elgin we created a comprehensive plan that was informed by ECT's work. Also we received a grant and it helped change and develop our downtown in positive ways.
It helped inspire better discussions about policies and how to approach them, but policy-making and implementation in Central Texas is still poor and does not represent the community's needs and priorities.
It impacted those involved at the time. It got many in the region talking the same language and on a similar page and have people to consult or refer them to others.
It laid the groundwork for regional planning. But that was quickly pushed aside.
It makes people think wins are being made when that is absolutely not the case. Just look at Troxclair how she is making us vote on Project Connect again. It is 1 step forward 4 steps back and we are so focused on the 1 step forward that we are losing sight on how messed up our region is becoming.
it must have pissed someone off because it is no longer here. :) But forcing/coercing cooperation amongst members is really, really difficult and important.
little, some in transportation
moderate through contacts with business, political and community leaders
No idea
None
none
None. ECT has had no effect whatsoever on anything measurable across the region. If nothing else, the ECT project illustrated just how shallow and meaningless most "planning" efforts truly are. It's basically "stuff white people like."

Regional Growth Survey

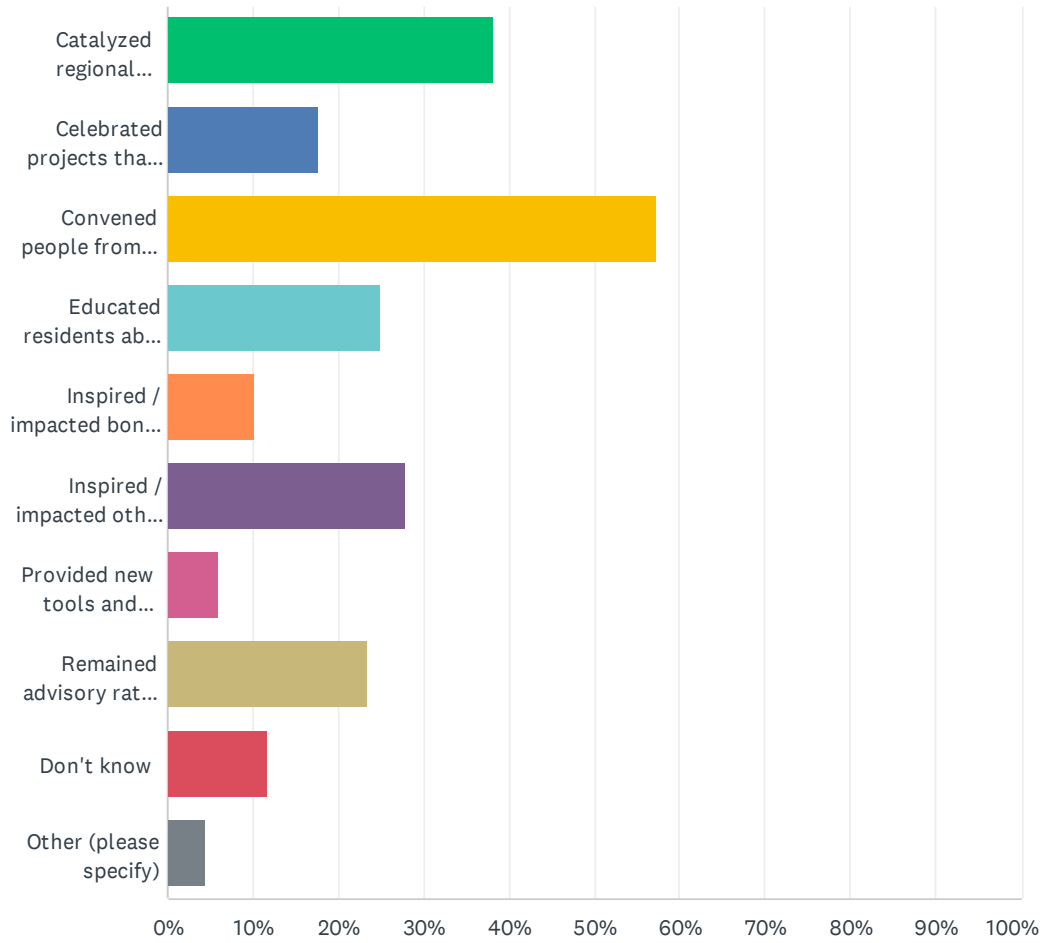
Q20 What, if any, impacts do you think ECT had on jurisdiction or agency policies, plans, regulations, funding, etc.?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 108

Not many...lots of talk, not much action except for CTRMA
not sure
Not sure
Not sure
Project Connect.
Provided awareness and started conversations, but definitive action plans were not instituted.
Raised awareness
Some effect, but mostly limited to larger cities and Travis County
That is an ongoing process and very difficult. ECT stays the course though.
Very Little
Virtually none.
When push came to shove, no regional regulations were passed that supported ECT's vision

Q21 What were the most important positive outcomes of ECT? (select up to 3)

Answered: 68 Skipped: 75



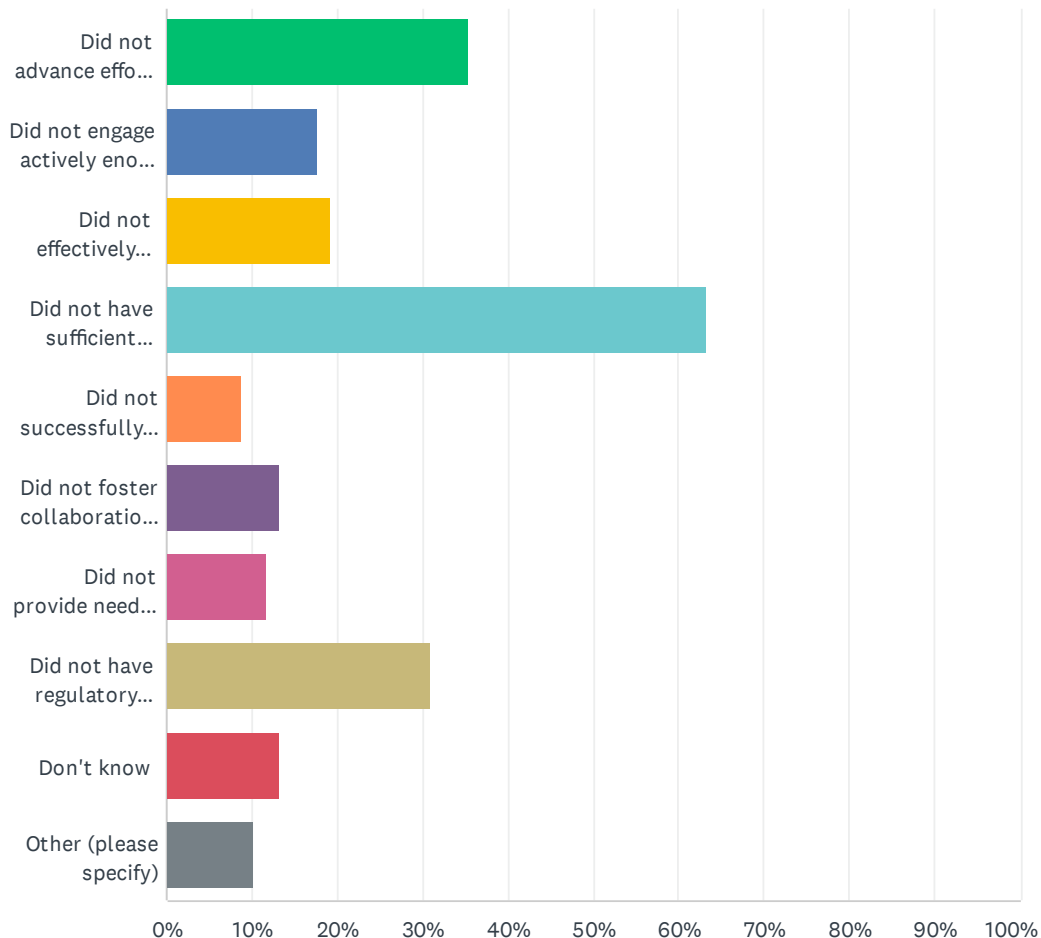
Regional Growth Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Catalyzed regional cooperation	38.24%	26
Celebrated projects that aligned with Vision	17.65%	12
Convened people from diverse viewpoints	57.35%	39
Educated residents about ways to address growth	25.00%	17
Inspired / impacted bond initiatives	10.29%	7
Inspired / impacted other local planning efforts	27.94%	19
Provided new tools and resources to communities	5.88%	4
Remained advisory rather than regulatory	23.53%	16
Don't know	11.76%	8
Other (please specify)	4.41%	3
Total Respondents: 68		

Other (please specify)
Again, I am not sure I can speak to those.
None. See previous comments.
There were no positive effects of ECT.

Q22 What do you think were the greatest shortcomings of ECT? (select up to 3)

Answered: 68 Skipped: 75



Regional Growth Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Did not advance efforts through advocacy	35.29%	24
Did not engage actively enough with communities	17.65%	12
Did not effectively measure progress toward the Vision	19.12%	13
Did not have sufficient political support / leadership commitment	63.24%	43
Did not successfully educate residents about growth challenges	8.82%	6
Did not foster collaboration between jurisdictions and other organizations	13.24%	9
Did not provide needed tools and technical assistance to communities	11.76%	8
Did not have regulatory authority	30.88%	21
Don't know	13.24%	9
Other (please specify)	10.29%	7
Total Respondents: 68		

Other (please specify)
It ceased to continue.
leaders do not use ECT as a guide when they vote, allocate funding, etc. - in my opinion.
Needed better and more secure funding
Not sure I can speak to those. I need to get more involved <u>and in my county</u> ECT did not have a huge Presence or I did not hear about them.
The government systems are difficult to work with but the is not their fault.
There are no measures of success for real people only economic successes that would have been attained any way given our policy infrastructure. <u>So</u> we sold the baby with the bathwater and call that a win.
you can lead a horse to water...some communities seemed hell-bent on growing, growing quickly, and the costs and challenges be damned.

Q23 Are there any other reflections about ECT you'd like to share?

Answered: 27. Skipped: 116

Open-Ended Response
"A plan without resources is just a hallucination!" ECT ended up not providing the support or resources necessary to achieve its goals.
Communication among Leaders need to have also include definitive plans
ECT did not live up to its aspirations.
ECT didn't really survive Neil Kocurek's passing, we failed to sustain the aspirational spirit of self-less regionalism that Neil espoused and recruited with ... I'm not sure Central Texas has the 'civic servant' personalities any more that can marshal the political tolerance/cooperation that Neil did, so any kind of ECT 2.0 effort will need to find another self-less, multi-purpose (business, environment, transp, equity, etc) vehicle to promote a new vision and new implementation approach
Even though ECT continued, it did not contact members or former members frequently or gather them together like previously or engage communities/areas beyond those meetings (go to them).
Good idea but region did not fully embrace it. People did not think regionally.
Good leadership.
Great ideas; little understanding or leverage of economic incentives and alignment
I am aware of ECT but I have no knowledge of the details
I would get more information to better provide insights in the future.
It was a shame to see it end. The demise seemed to be political in nature, folks who just didn't want to take the necessary steps to achieve the vision that could have been.
It was an NGO trying to fill gaps left by government. It raised important issues and inspired new thinking and ways of working, but the political environment did not want to change and did not want to implement the vision - which is when it becomes real and impactful, and to some, threatening. Personally, it was very educational and inspirational and enabled meaningful, trusted relationships.
It was the only organization consistently fostering regional cooperation and it provided a place for a diverse cross-section of people to get together.
N/A
Never overcame distrust from many suburban or rural communities.
no
No
no
No
Noble effort that did not overcome tendency of people and organizatons to continue as they are and to resist change that threatens control
The ECT report is still very relevant to the regional issues we are still dealing with 20 years later. I think we need to pick up where we left off in implementing the recommendations.
The entire effort was simply too theoretical for most folks to grasp. But the biggest problem was that ECT had no authority of any kind, it was a purely academic enterprise.
The impetus behind ECT was fantastic and the early years of regional collaboration were very positive. The lack of a dedicated funding source and lack of authority doomed its long term success.
There needs to be a better outreach to the different communities about their vision and goals.

Q23 Are there any other reflections about ECT you'd like to share?

Answered: 27. Skipped: 116

This seems to be a theme in this region....we do a lot of planning and everyone gets high and behind. When it comes time to execute the plan everyone walks away or they say you can do it but I will continue down the path I am headed.

This survey is fishing for positives. I would encourage you all to talk to real people and see the harms going on in our community. The reality is, Central Texas is a mess, and nobody is doing systemic work to address those concerns. Of course, ECT looks like a win on paper, but it is just re-inforcing current systems to do lasting harm on for the majority of people in the region.

wish it had evolved into a more regional authority with more ability to affect outcomes

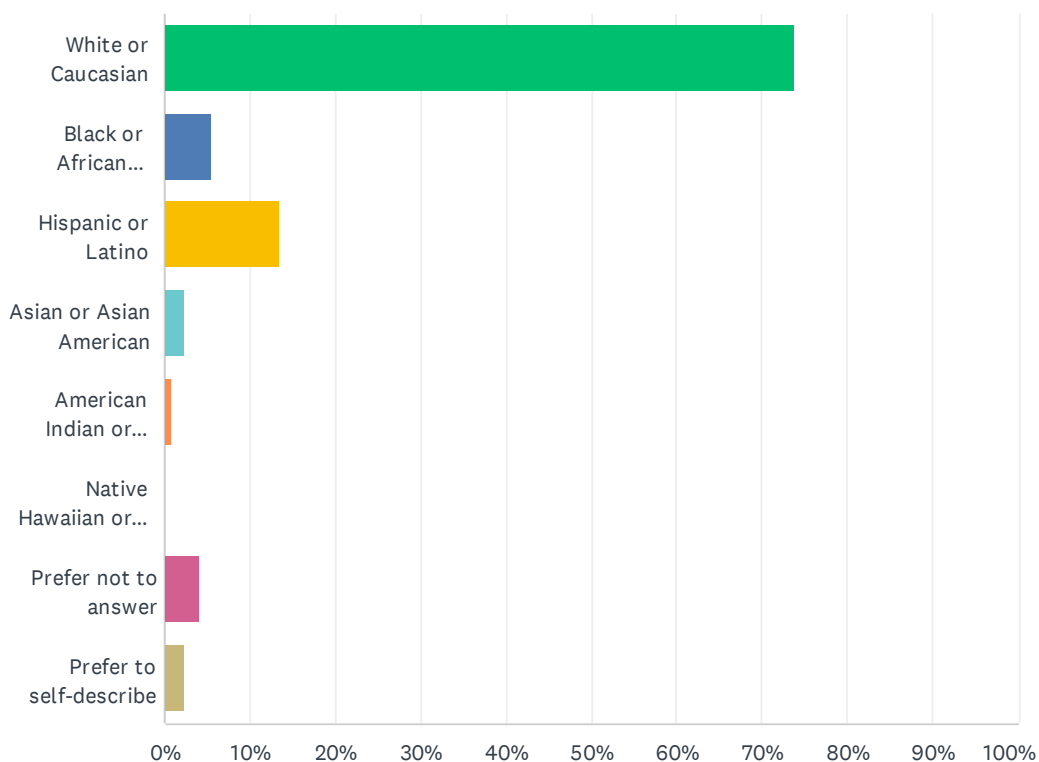
Q24 These questions help us to evaluate who we're hearing from in this process. We appreciate your willingness to answer them.

Answered: 126 Skipped: 17

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Name	80.16%	101
Organization	68.25%	86
Title	62.70%	79
Address 2	0.00%	0
City/Town	0.00%	0
State/Province	0.00%	0
ZIP/Postal Code	100.00%	126
Country	0.00%	0
Title	0.00%	0
Phone Number	0.00%	0

Q25 How would you describe your race/ethnicity? (check all that apply)

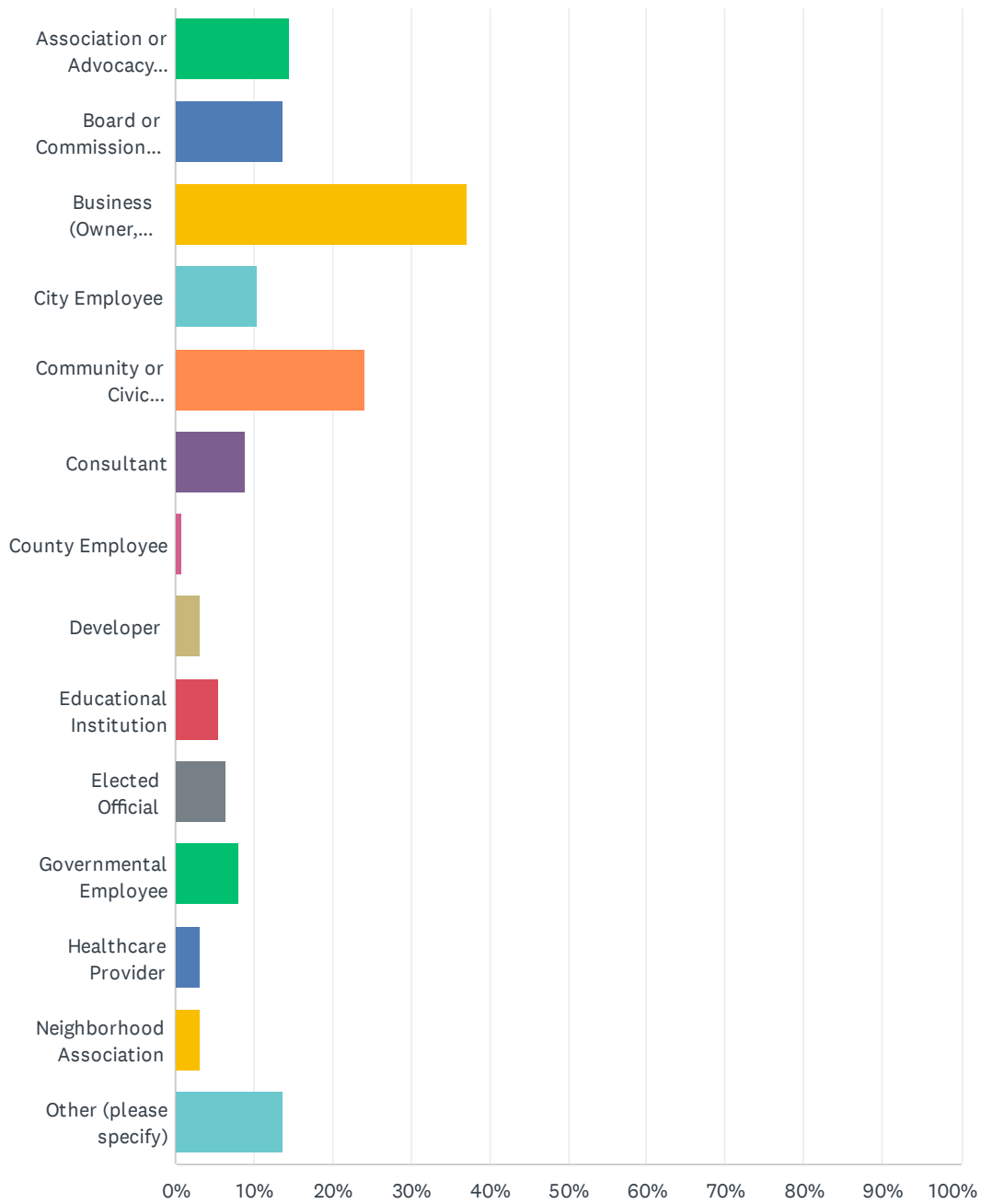
Answered: 126 Skipped: 17



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
White or Caucasian	73.81%	93
Black or African American	5.56%	7
Hispanic or Latino	13.49%	17
Asian or Asian American	2.38%	3
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.79%	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
Prefer not to answer	3.97%	5
Prefer to self-describe	2.38%	3
Total Respondents: 126		

Q26 Tell us about your organizational role (check all that apply):

Answered: 124 Skipped: 19

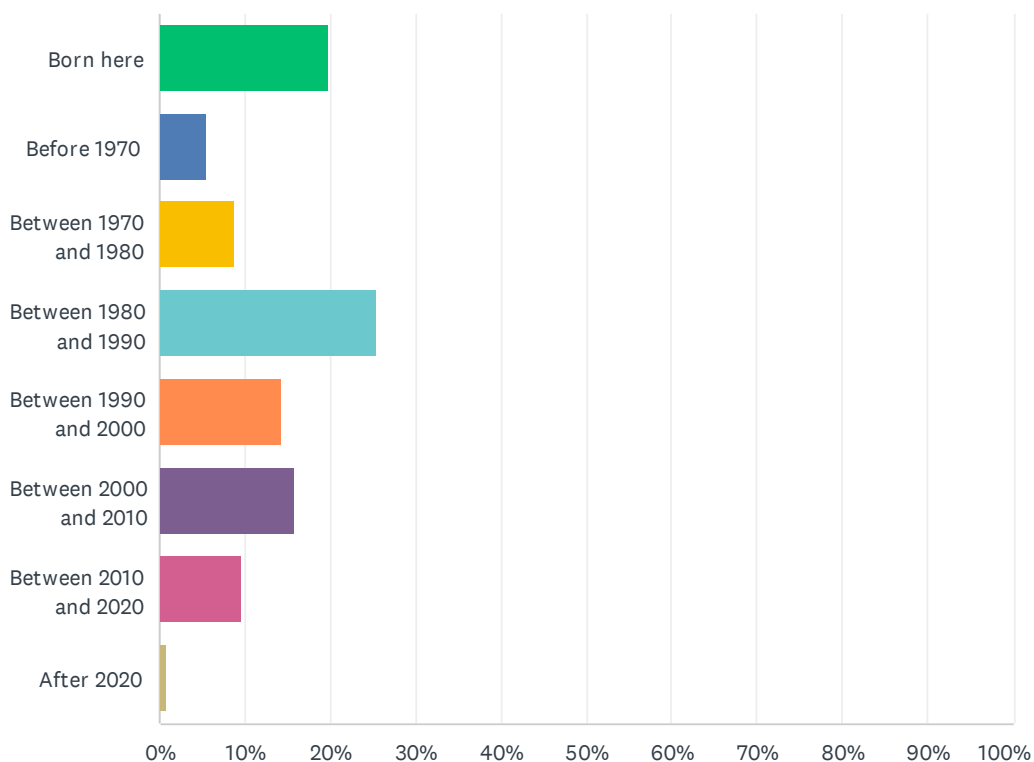


Regional Growth Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Association or Advocacy Organization	14.52%	18
Board or Commission Representative	13.71%	17
Business (Owner, Manager, Employer)	37.10%	46
City Employee	10.48%	13
Community or Civic Organization	24.19%	30
Consultant	8.87%	11
County Employee	0.81%	1
Developer	3.23%	4
Educational Institution	5.65%	7
Elected Official	6.45%	8
Governmental Employee	8.06%	10
Healthcare Provider	3.23%	4
Neighborhood Association	3.23%	4
Other (please specify)	13.71%	17
Total Respondents: 124		

Q27 In what year did you move to Central Texas?

Answered: 126 Skipped: 17



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Born here	19.84%	25
Before 1970	5.56%	7
Between 1970 and 1980	8.73%	11
Between 1980 and 1990	25.40%	32
Between 1990 and 2000	14.29%	18
Between 2000 and 2010	15.87%	20
Between 2010 and 2020	9.52%	12
After 2020	0.79%	1
TOTAL		126