

# Community Engagement



## Community Engagement Subcommittee

Erin Andrews	Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin
Bev Laska	Community Volunteer
Cecily Mileski	United Way of Portage County
Nathan Sandwick	Portage County University of Wisconsin-Extension
Cathy Scheder	UW-Stevens Point Diversity Council

*"Whatever community organization, whether it's a women's organization, or fighting for racial justice . . . you will get satisfaction out of doing something to give back to the community that you never get in any other way."*

*Ruth Bader Ginsburg*

# Community Engagement Section Summary

## Strengths and Progress

- Portage County has access to its own county-wide website: [volunteersrock.org](http://volunteersrock.org). This is a site for users to find and list volunteer opportunities in the community.
- Our community also has three known Volunteer Centers in the area: United Way of Portage County Volunteer Center, Student Involvement and Employment Office (SIEO) at UW-Stevens Point, and the Aging and Disability Resource Center.
- According to the 2017 LIFE Community Survey, 67% of respondents agree or strongly agree that people of diverse backgrounds are accepted here.
- Create Portage County hosts monthly Identity and Inclusivity (i2i) discussion groups to promote positive dialogue to make Portage County a safe and more inclusive community.
- The UWSP Diversity Council's efforts support diversity and inclusion on the campus and in the community.
- The Portage County Literacy Council, Inc. has been improving literacy rates in the county.
- Higher voter turnout in recent years indicates greater civic engagement.

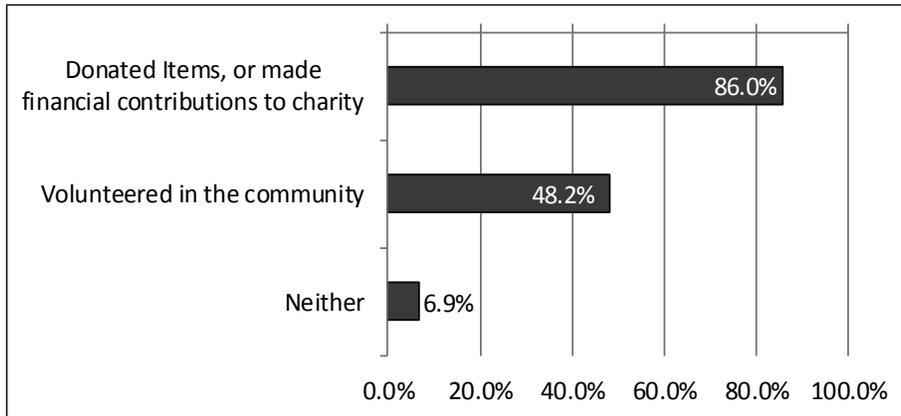
## Challenges and Opportunities to Improve

- Efforts should be made to improve and encourage women's participation in local government offices.
- We should create awareness to improve voter participation in primary and off-year elections.
- The growing racial and ethnic unrest in the country also impacts our area. We must stay vigilant and strong to protect all our citizens.
- Our community needs more awareness of volunteer opportunities in the area and how to find those opportunities.

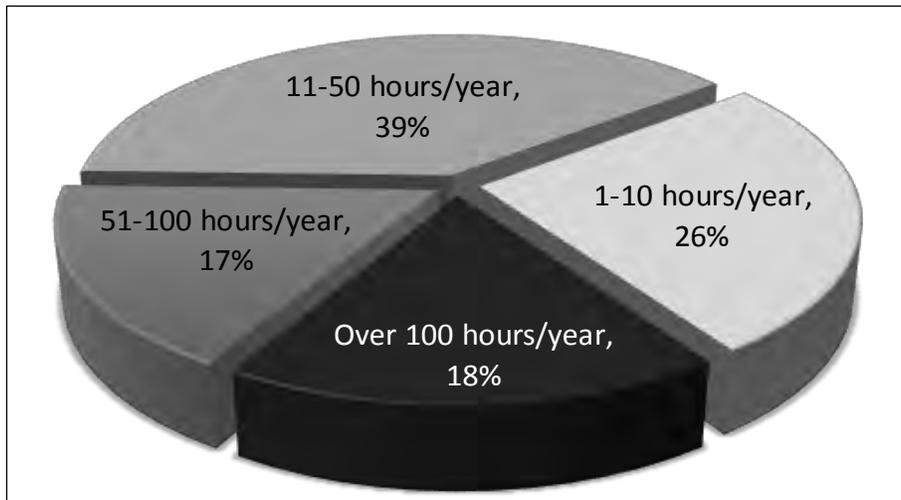
## Opportunities for Action

<b>For Individuals</b>	Create an awareness of the diversity needs of a community to help promote an acceptance of diverse backgrounds. Open channels of communication, listening and tolerance to our neighbors. Help those that are different from you to feel welcome and encourage youth to do the same. Discourage hate and bigotry within our families, neighborhoods, schools and communities. Be an agent of change where needed. Get out in the community and lend a helping hand by volunteering. Find out if your employer offers Volunteer Time Off (VTO) and utilize it. Vote in elections.
<b>For Organizations</b>	Encourage and accept new participants in the many public and private organizations in the community. Participate in a variety of community endeavors and functions to make organizations known to more of the population. Work with our news organizations and social media to encourage action. Offer and promote Volunteer Time Off (VTO). Provide professional development and training related to diversity.
<b>For the Community</b>	Celebrate the diversity of our county and encourage the growth of diversity. Work with campus and community groups to encourage and support diversity efforts throughout the community. Hold our elected officials accountable for ensuring acceptance and tolerance. Promote and encourage volunteer opportunities and volunteerism.

**Key Measure:** 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey Responses Regarding Volunteering or Contributing to Community Agencies



**Key Measure:** Volunteer Hours Served by 2017 LIFE in Portage County Survey Respondents



### COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Portage County has diverse opportunities for volunteerism. Many nonprofit and service organizations throughout Portage County depend upon volunteers to provide a wide variety of services. Local nonprofit organizations include churches, sports, arts and culture, educational, community service, member associations, professional associations, workers' unions, foundations and other organizations that are active in Portage County.

Volunteer experiences enrich the lives of all community members. These dedicated volunteers provide solutions to families who struggle to care for elders, people with disabilities, and children. They might volunteer as mentors or tutors to increase literacy,

or provide comfort to those in hospice, those in hospitals, or the homeless. They staff food pantries, rake leaves and disburse school supplies. These volunteers make the quality of life better for all community members in Portage County.

Portage County has many service opportunities and resources to connect volunteers with local agencies. United Way of Portage County Volunteer Center, volunteersrock.org, Retired Senior and Volunteer Program and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Student Involvement and Employment Office are contact locations for local residents ready to give their time and talents.

### DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- According to the 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey, 93.1% of respondents had either donated items or made financial contributions to a charity.
- In 2016, local Portage County agencies reported utilizing more than 5,728 volunteers. Combined, these volunteers provided over 183,489 hours of service throughout the county.
- The value of the volunteer time contributed to Portage County in 2016 was more than \$4,429,424.
- Portage County is home to hundreds of community organizations, as indicated by 329 having completed nonprofit organization tax reports (990) with the IRS.
- Residents and visitors to Portage County enjoy a wide variety of festivals and events that occur throughout the year with the help of volunteers.

\*These statistics are based off of data provided by agencies. Not all Portage County agencies provided data.

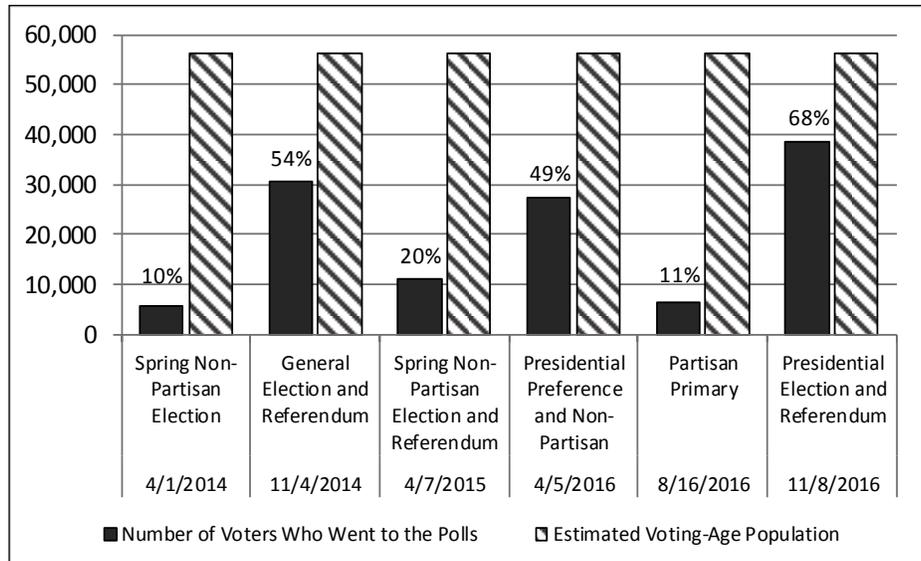
### SOURCES

- **2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey**
- **U.S. Internal Revenue Service Exempt Organizations Business Master File Extract (EO BMF) 2016**
- **Independent Sector**  
<https://www.independentsector.org/resource/the-value-of-volunteer-time/>
- **2016 Portage County Volunteer Report**  
<http://www.co.portage.wi.us/home/showdocument?id=8282>

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Voter participation reached a high (71.1% of the estimated voting age population) in the fall Presidential elections in 2012.
- The turnout rate for the fall Presidential election in 2016 was 68.5%. The lowest participation in recent years (10.2%) occurred in the spring non-partisan primary election in 2014.
- Among the 115 trustees and council members of all 27 municipalities in Portage County, 13 are women (11%).
- Seven women serve on the City of Stevens Point Common Council, which is currently the only local government body where women outnumber men.
- Women occupy 3 (12%) of the 25 seats on the Portage County Board of Supervisors.

Key Measure: Voter Turnout in Portage County, 2014-2016



COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

According to the American Psychological Association, civic engagement is “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.” It can also be defined as citizens working together to make a change or difference in the community in both political and non-political actions. The goal of civic engagement is to address public concerns and promote the quality of the community.

One of the common indicators of civic engagement is voter turnout. Voter turnout gauges citizens’ level of political involvement and is a prerequisite for maintaining public accountability. People who do not vote also tend not to participate in politics in other ways.

Other activities that may serve as indicators of civic engagement include discussing politics, volunteering, writing an editorial, attending a public meeting, engaging in a boycott, helping to address a neighborhood concern or contacting a public official. In 2015, 13% of Wisconsin residents reported attending a public meeting. In addition, 11.4% of Wisconsin residents reported being active in their neighborhoods in 2015, up from 8.7% in 2014.

County and municipal government units provide a variety of opportunities for people to participate in local decision-

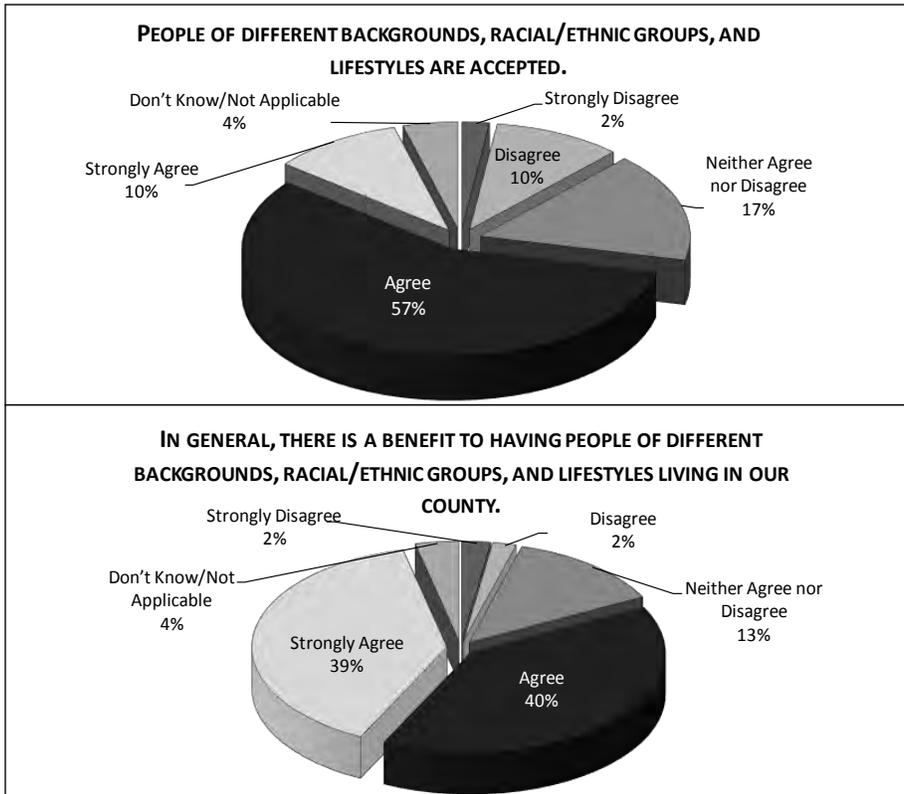
making. Community members can stay engaged by attending public meetings and discussing community issues. Local newspapers throughout Portage County invite letters to the editor as an outlet to share one’s views. Social media is a growing method of self expression on civic issues.

Barriers that hinder civic engagement in Wisconsin include time away from family and time away from other activities. In addition to these widely-acknowledged barriers, many women indicated a lack of self-confidence in their ability to serve on a local governing body. This barrier was not as evident in potential male candidates nor among those already serving on a county board of supervisors. It is important that we seek to encourage civic participation from a diversity of residents in Portage County.

SOURCES

- **Wisconsin Elections Commission**  
Wisconsin Election Results  
<http://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/results>
- **Portage County**  
2017 Official Directory, Portage County Wisconsin
- **UW-Extension, Cooperative Extension Department of Community Resource Development**  
Women and Political Ambition: The Wisconsin Local Government Perspective (Erickson, Hill, & Solomon, 2017)  
<http://cnred.ces.uwex.edu/files/2017/05/WomenAndPolitical-Ambition-The-Wisconsin-Local-Govt-Perspective.pdf>

### Key Measure: Portage County Survey Responses to Cultural Diversity Statements, 2017



### COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

The complexity of the world today requires a diverse of citizens to offer fresh ideas and help solve problems. Most respondents to the 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey agreed with the statement that people of different backgrounds, racial/ethnic groups and lifestyles are accepted in Portage County (67%); an even stronger majority (79%) agreed that there is a benefit to having a diversity of people in Portage County.

Embracing and celebrating diversity is important for a sustainable and healthy community. Actively celebrating diversity, the Portage County Cultural Festival features a wide range of cultural offerings and entertainment from across the globe, and is one of the area's most popular events. In addition there are a number of other culture-based activities and festivals held in Portage County every year.

Examples of diversity in a community include race, ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, economic situation, age, physical and cognitive

abilities, sexual orientation and gender identity. The UWSP Diversity Council is a leading governing group that supports diversity and inclusion efforts on the campus and in the community. In addition, a monthly discussion group hosted by Create Portage County brings individuals together to create shared learning experiences through dialogue about issues related to inclusivity .

Many leaders of various mission-oriented organizations in Portage County strive to be inclusive and overcome barriers that keep people from being more involved in community. For instance, the Portage County Literacy Council teaches English classes and helps individuals enhance their literacy skills. In addition, Hmong UPLIFT is a multi-generational family literacy program that helps bridge gaps within families looking to improve their lives.

As our community is becoming increasingly diverse, it is important to recognize this diversity is a source of strength and opportunity.

### DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- The minority population in Portage County increased from 4.3% in 2000 to 5.8% in 2010. It remained close to that at 5.6% in 2015.
- Portage County's largest racial minority is of Asian descent, with a slight increase from 2.8% in 2010 to 2.9% in 2015.
- The Hispanic/Latino population in Portage County continues to grow, from 1.4% in 2000, 2.6% in 2010 and 3.1% in 2015.
- In Portage County, 5.9% of the population speaks a language other than English in their home, with approximately 2/3 of them speaking English very well. This compares to 6.4% in 2010.
- Of the student body population at UW-Stevens Point, 11.8% identify as a minority.
- The racial and ethnic diversity in our school system has increased over the years. For instance, in 2016-17, in the Stevens Point School district, 19% of students identified as a racial or ethnic minority, and in Almond Bancroft, 25.2% of the students.

### SOURCES

- **U.S. Census Bureau**  
Portage County Quick Facts  
[https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/55097\\_00](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/55097_00)
- **American FactFinder**  
<https://factfinder.census.gov/>
- **Wisconsin Literacy**  
<http://wisconsinliteracy.org/health-literacy/>
- **2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey**

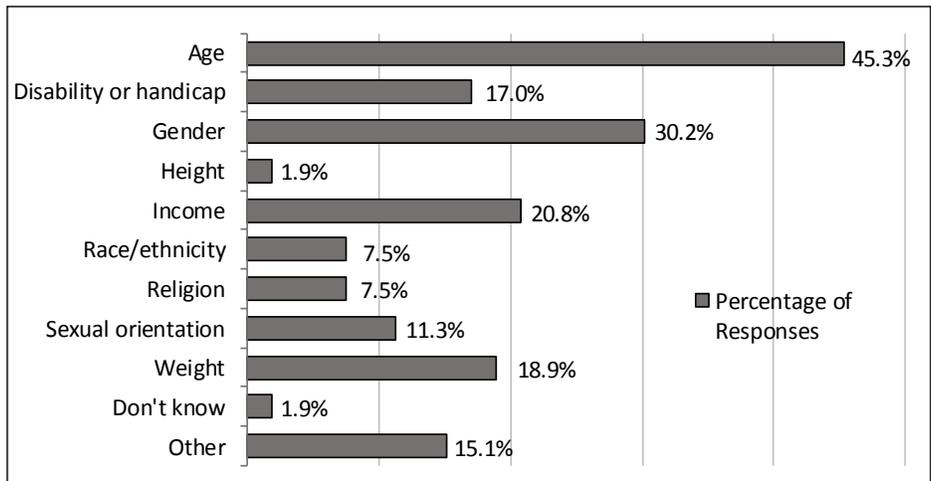
## DATA HIGHLIGHTS

- Of LIFE Community Survey respondents, 8% stated they had experienced discrimination in Portage County, a decrease from 11% in 2012.
- According to the version of the LIFE in Portage County Survey that targeted low income and minority populations, 13.5% of targeted survey respondents reported they have experienced discrimination, a significant decline from 23.8% reporting discrimination in 2012.
- Targeted survey respondents reporting discrimination listed race and ethnicity (44.4%) as the highest reported category followed by income (33.4%) and gender (22.2%) whereas in the random community-wide survey respondents reported age (45.3%) and gender (30.2%) as the top reasons for discrimination.
- Reports of discrimination by UWSP students have increased from 5 in 2013 to 19 in 2016. The increase may have resulted from a variety of factors including: an increase in the diversity of the student body, a formal process for reporting discrimination, and students' willingness to report incidents. Of the incidences reported at UWSP in the 2016-2017 academic year, race and ethnicity was the highest category followed by sexual orientation and sex.
- In 2016, 62 hate crimes or charges of bias were reported statewide. However, this may not reflect the true number as incidents often go unreported.

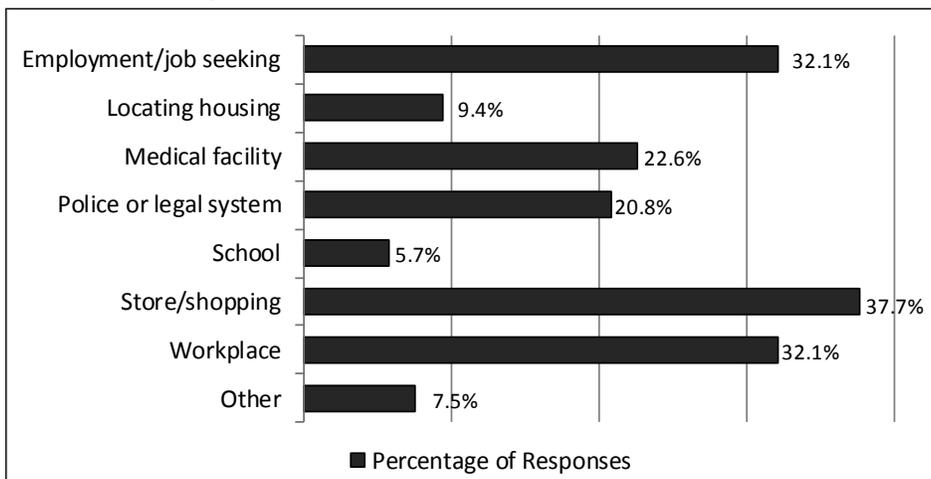
## SOURCES

- 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey Question 14
- UWSP Dean of Students Office
- Wisconsin Department of Justice

**Key Measure:** 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey: Reported Bases for Discrimination



**Key Measure:** 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey: Reported Setting of Discrimination



## COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Discrimination is generally defined as the unfair treatment of individuals or groups. Discrimination usually occurs because of prejudices of a person or entity towards characteristics of others such as race, ethnicity, age, religion, or gender. It occurs where social inequalities exist and acts to reinforce boundaries between groups.

Discrimination is a stressful life experience that may negatively affect psychological or physical health. Discrimination or perceived discrimination affects organizations and the community, interfering with their members' abilities to develop shared common values that helps people to work well together.

Expressions of hate, bias, and discrimination continue to proliferate across our country and close to home. Progress can only begin when our community recognizes that racism and other forms of oppression exist not only in large metropolitan areas across the country, but in Central Wisconsin as well.

Residents of Portage County pride themselves on being a welcoming and inclusive community. A critical need for dialogue about race and diversity in the Central Wisconsin community has become apparent in order to decrease discrimination and ensure that all residents feel safe, respected, and valued.