

# **The National Citizen Survey™**

## **State College, PA**

Community Livability Report

2014

# Contents

About.....	1
Quality of Life in State College.....	2
Community Characteristics.....	3
Governance.....	5
Participation.....	7
Special Topics.....	9
Conclusions.....	13

The National Citizen Survey™  
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# About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of State College. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

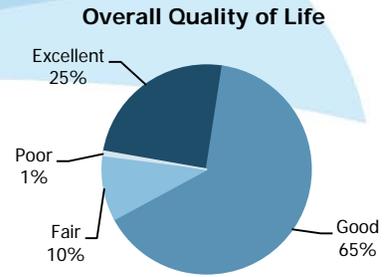
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 489 residents of the Borough of State College. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in State College

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in State College as excellent or good. This rating was similar to other communities in the nation (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.

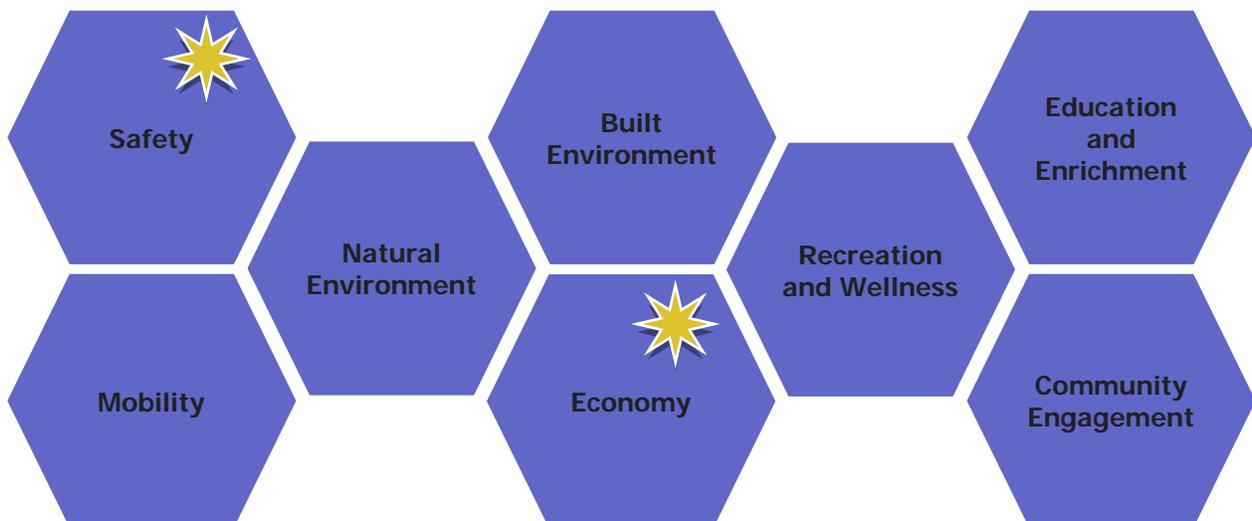
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the State College community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that State College residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets of community. Ratings for Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were also positive and similar to other communities. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where residents see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for State College’s unique questions.

## Legend

-  Higher than national benchmark
-  Similar to national benchmark
-  Lower than national benchmark

 Most important



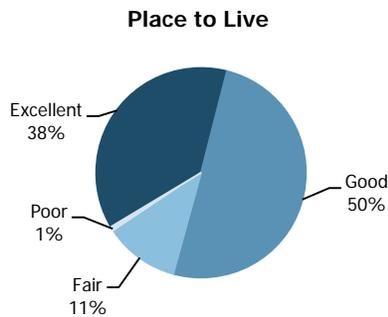
# Community Characteristics

*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of State College, 88% rated the Borough as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of State College as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the Borough as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including State College as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of State College and its overall appearance. At least 8 in 10 respondents rated their neighborhood, State College as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of State College highly. Most participants also gave positive ratings for the overall image of State College and State College as a place to retire.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Nineteen features were rated above the benchmark and only one feature was rated below the benchmark. Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment tended to be rated the most positively, with a majority of features within these facets being rated higher than the benchmark. Safety ratings were also very positive, with almost all participants feeling safe overall, in their neighborhood and in downtown/commercial areas. Mobility ratings varied widely; while only 40% felt that public parking was excellent or good, 91% gave high ratings for ease of walking. Public transportation, ease of walking and paths and walking trails all received ratings higher than other communities. While Economy ratings varied, 7 out of the 8 features listed in Economy received positive ratings by a majority of participants.



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

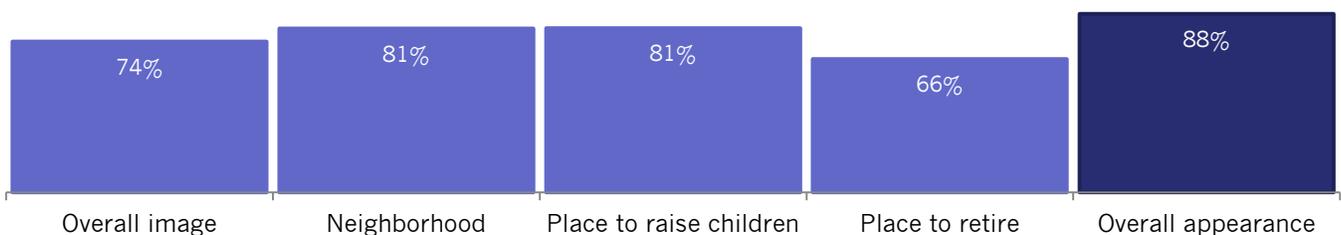
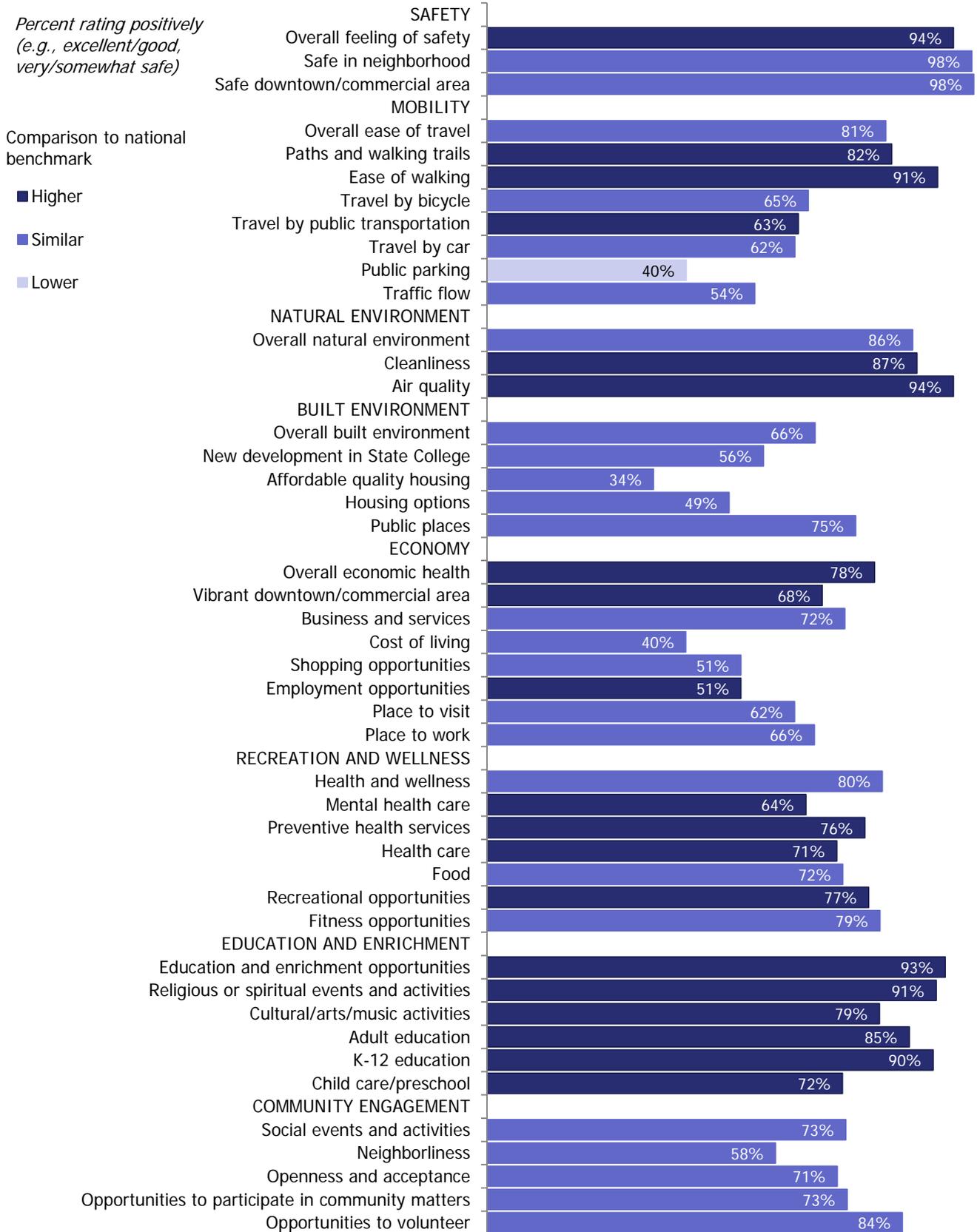


Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



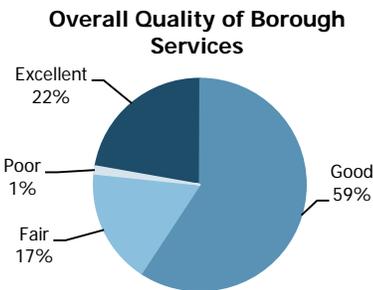
# Governance

*How well does the government of State College meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by State College as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 8 in 10 respondents rated the overall quality of Borough services positively, a rating that is similar to the national benchmark. Meanwhile, ratings for services provided by the Federal Government were rated positively by only 39% of participants.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of State College’s leadership and governance. The value of services for taxes paid, overall direction of State College, acting in the best interest of State College, being honest and customer service all were rated positively by at least 7 in 10 participants. Honesty was rated higher than other jurisdictions. Welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in Borough government and treating all residents fairly were rated positively by a majority of participants and were similar to ratings across the nation.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in State College. All services rated were at least similar to other communities and six services were rated higher than other jurisdictions. Community Engagement and Recreation and Wellness ratings were particularly strong, with at least 8 in 10 respondents rating features within these facets positively. Safety ratings were also positive and ranged from 70% (emergency preparedness) to 96% (ambulance/EMS). Mobility ratings were varied, but street cleaning and bus or transit services received high ratings that were higher than the benchmark. The lowest rated feature in Mobility was street repair, which was rated similar to other communities. Within Economy, economic development was rated positively by 67% of participants and was rated higher than the benchmark.



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

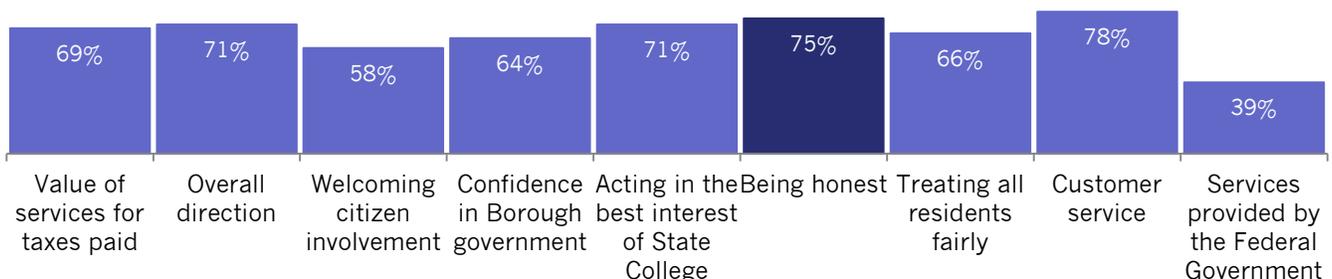
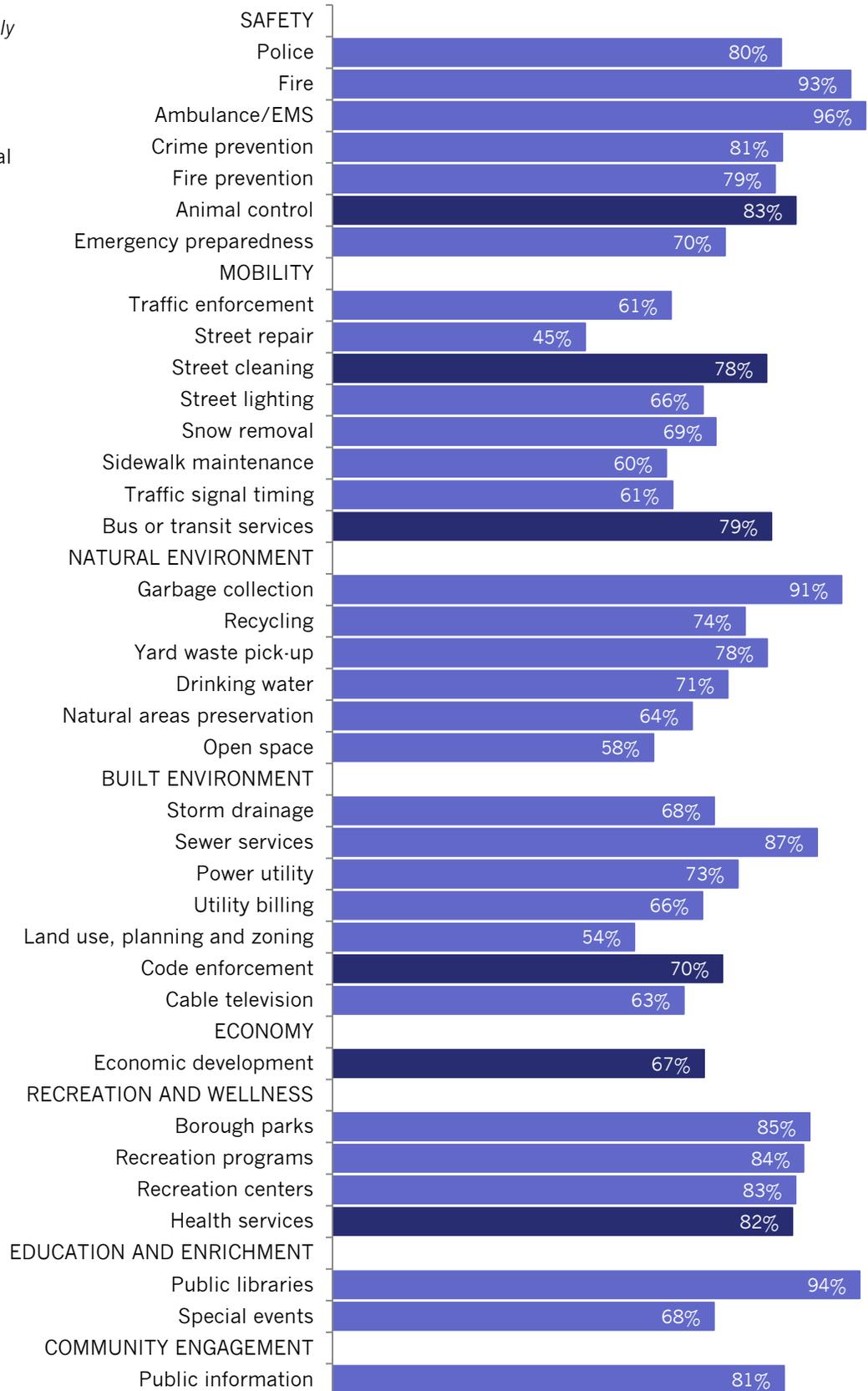


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

Percent rating positively  
(e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



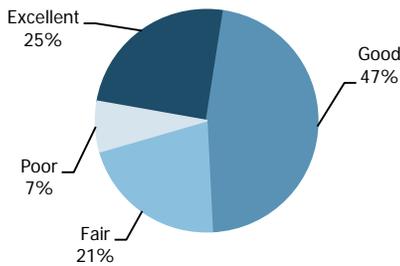
# Participation

*Are the residents of State College connected to the community and each other?*

An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community; a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. About 7 in 10 participants felt the sense of community in State College was excellent or good, a rating that was similar to other jurisdictions. Most participants would recommend State College to others, but few plan on remaining in State College.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Participation ratings in State College were mostly similar to or lower than the benchmark, but a handful of participation ratings were higher than seen in other communities. Mobility ratings were particularly strong with more participants than other communities using bus services or walking instead of driving. A majority of participants also carpooled instead of driving alone. Within Recreation and Wellness, a majority of respondents visited a Borough park, ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables, exercised and reported being in excellent or good health. Less than half of participants used a Centre Region recreation center, a rating that has decreased since 2012 (see *Trends over Time Report* provided under separate cover). Fewer respondents in State College participated in Education and Enrichment activities than is seen elsewhere. Community Engagement ratings also varied, with lower rates of participation compared to other communities in 6 of the 10 features within this facet. Participation in clubs however was strong and greater than what's seen in other communities.

**Sense of Community**



*Percent rating positively (e.g., very/somewhat likely, yes)*

Comparison to national benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

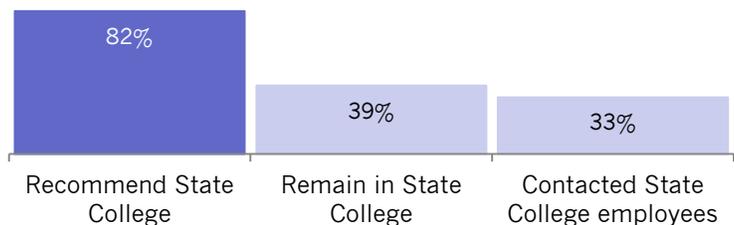
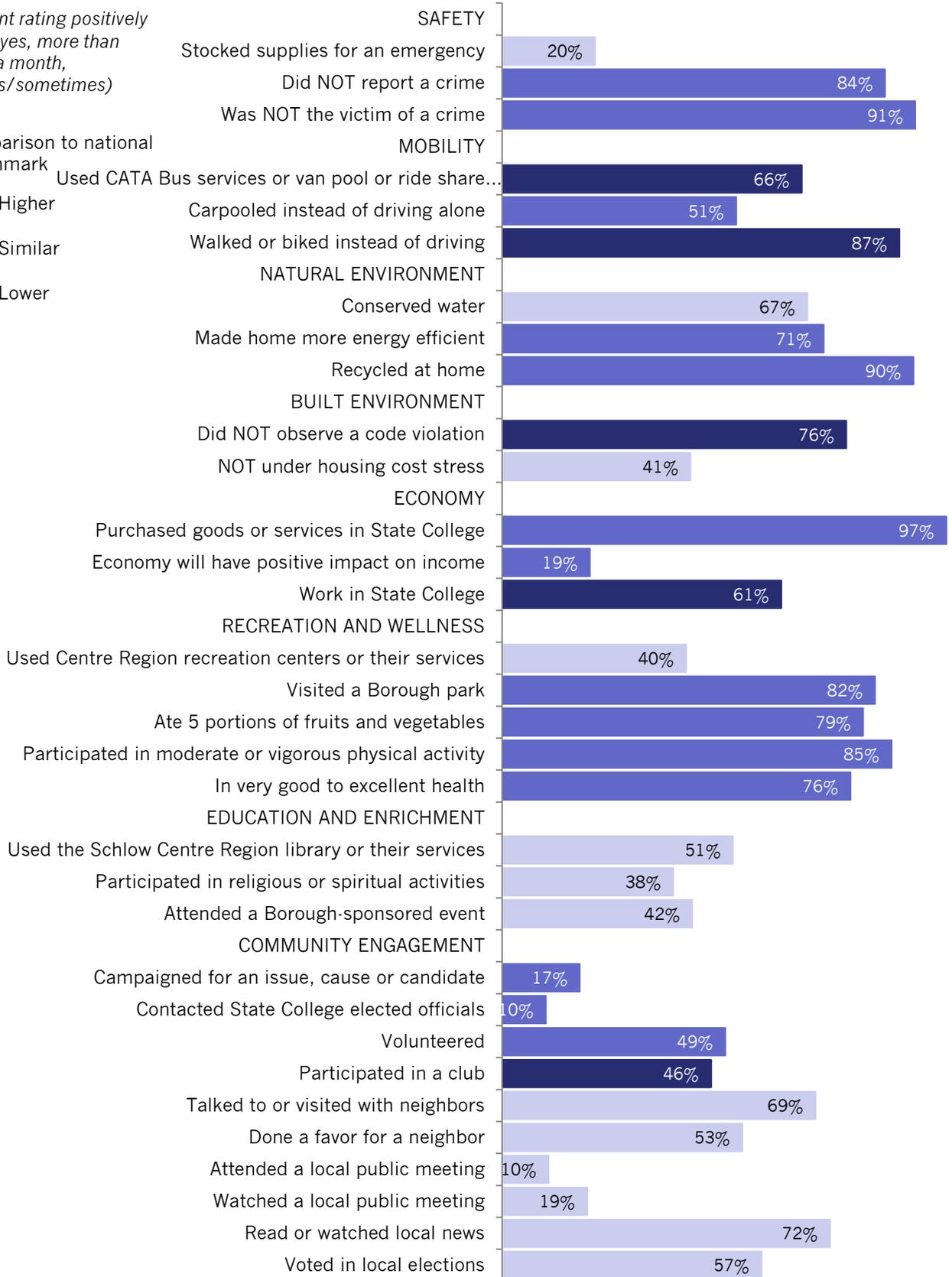


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

Percent rating positively  
(e.g., yes, more than  
once a month,  
always/sometimes)

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

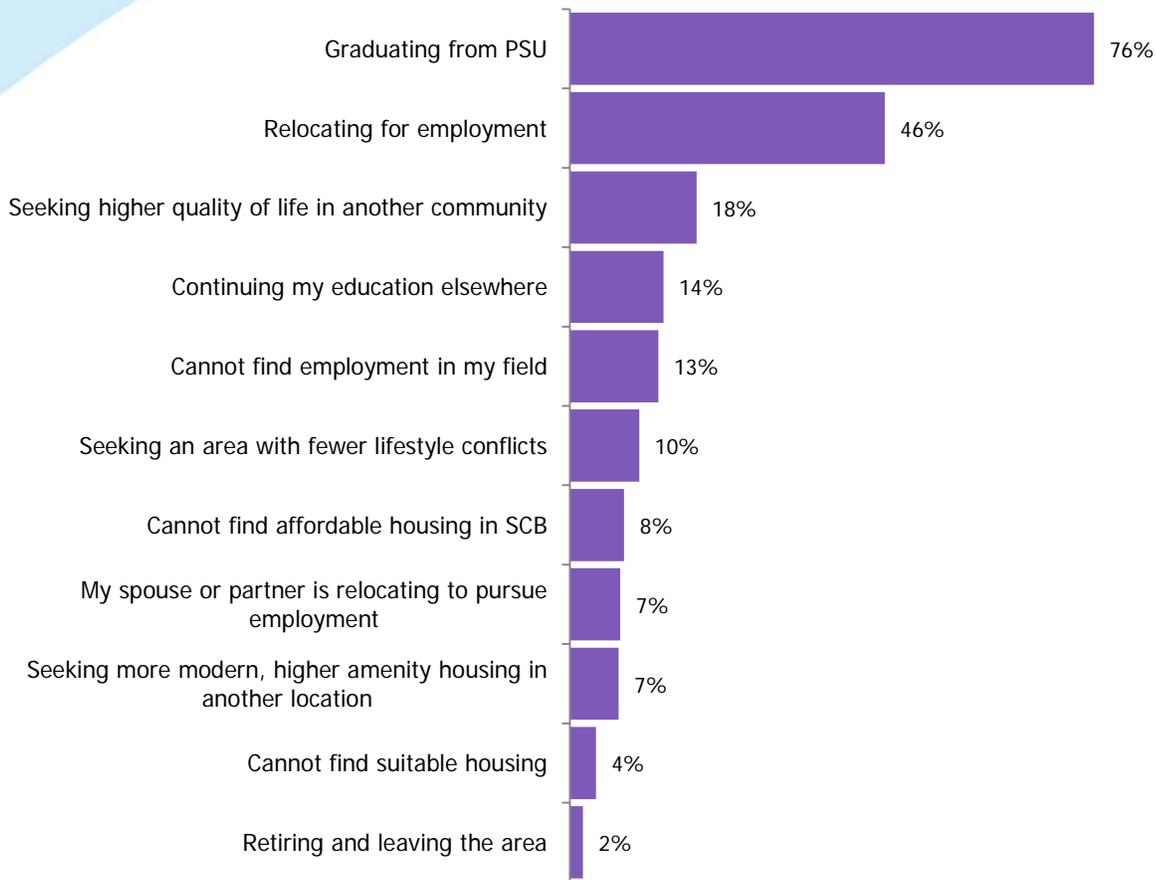


# Special Topics

The Borough of State College included five questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked participants why they might be leaving the Borough in the next five years. Most participants indicated they were leaving due to graduating from PSU. Almost half of participants indicated they would be relocating for employment. Very few participants indicated that finding suitable housing or retirement were reasons for leaving the Borough.

Figure 4: Reasons for leaving the Borough

*If you are planning on leaving the Borough within the next five years, please indicate why (check all that apply):*

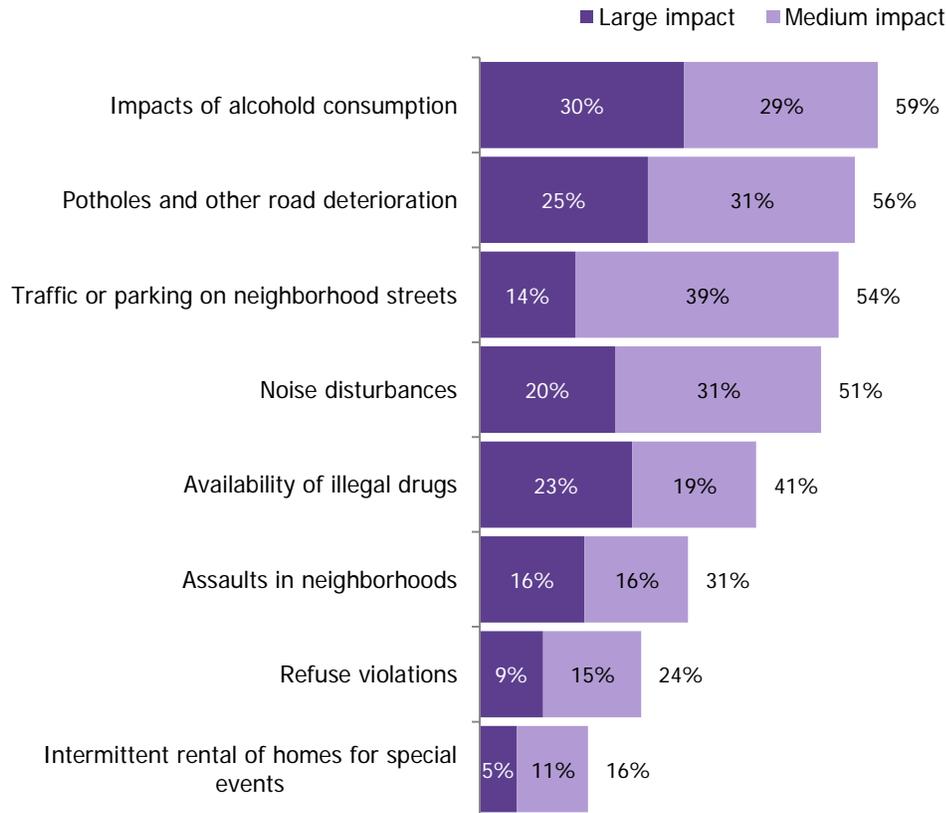


Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

The second question inquired about different factors having a negative impact on quality of life. Most participants indicated that alcohol consumption, potholes and other road deterioration, traffic and parking on neighborhood streets and noise disturbances had the biggest impact on their quality of life. Less than half of participants indicated that illegal drugs, assaults, refuse violations or rental of homes for special events were factors that would have a large or medium impact on their quality of life.

Figure 5: Factors having negative impact on quality of life

*The Borough is interested in learning which of these factors you believe currently have the greatest negative impact on quality of life in the Borough?*

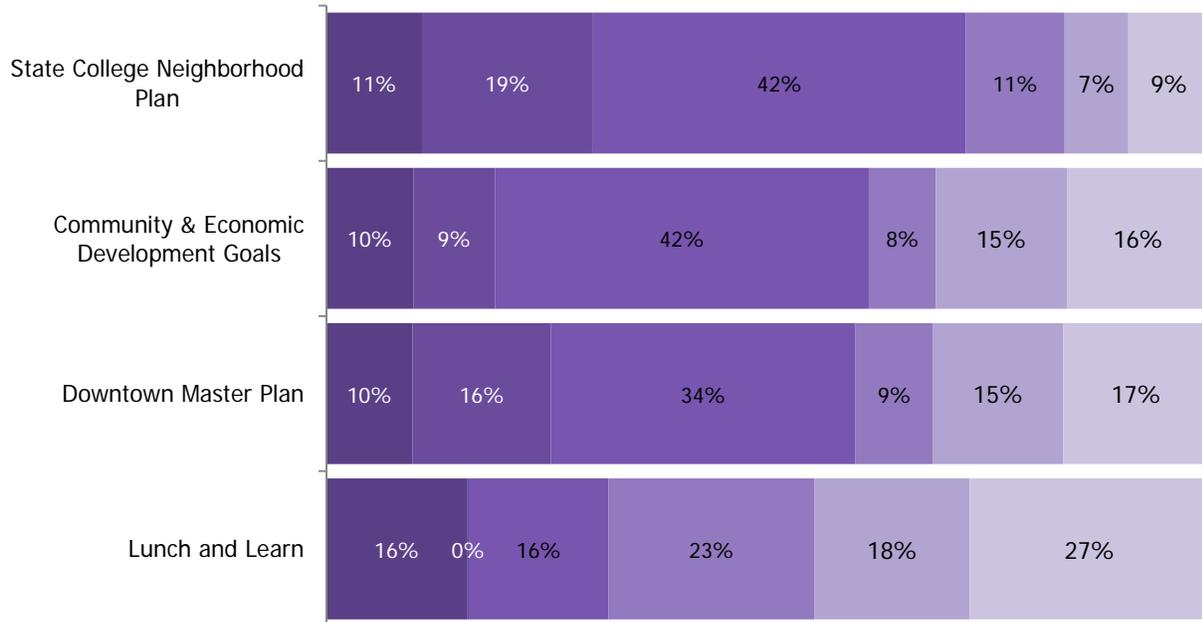


The next question gauged participation in a variety of Community Planning Initiatives. The Community Planning Initiative with the most amount of participation was the State College Neighborhood Plan; the Lunch and Learn initiative had the least amount of participation.

Figure 6: Participation in Community Planning Initiatives

*Below is a list of community planning initiatives that were completed in 2013. Using the following scale please identify your level of involvement with each activity.*

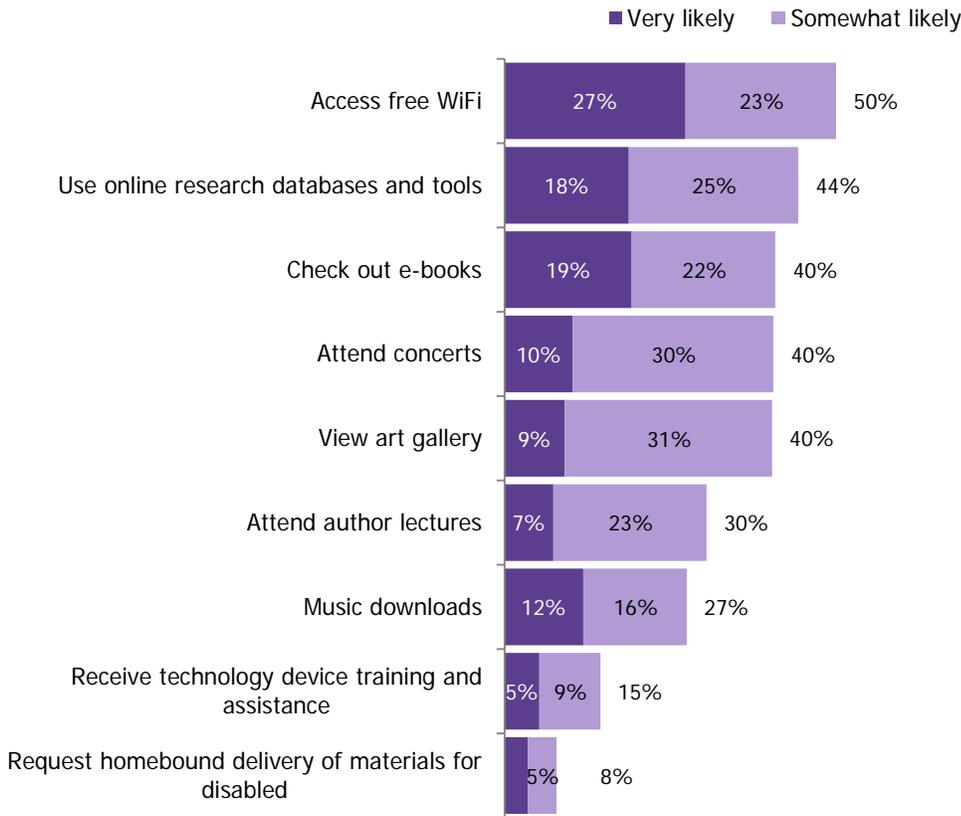
- Participated in public meetings
- Reviewed online
- Read about in news
- Read about on social media
- Heard about from friend or neighbor
- Didn't want to participate



The fourth question asked participants to indicate how likely they would be to use certain Schlow Centre Region Library services. Most participants (50%) were somewhat or very likely to access the library's free WiFi. About 4 in 10 respondents were also likely to use online research databases and tools, check out e-books, attend concerts and view the art gallery.

Figure 7: Schlow Centre Region Library Services

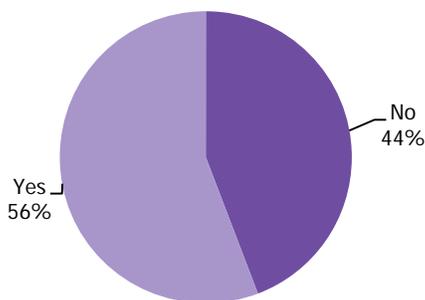
*Schlow Centre Region Library currently provides the following services. How likely or unlikely would you be to use the following services in the next 12 months?*



The final question asked whether or not the participant was enrolled as a student at Penn State. A little over half of survey respondents indicated that they were a full-time student at Penn State.

Figure 8: Enrollment as student at Penn State

*Are you currently enrolled as a full-time student at Penn State?*



# Conclusions

## Life is good in State College.

Residents gave high ratings to their overall quality of life and most residents think State College is an excellent or good place to live. Participants are especially pleased with the overall appearance of State College and also gave positive ratings to their neighborhoods and State College as a place to live. Residents are pleased with the services provided by the Borough and would also recommend State College to others. However, less than half of respondents plan on remaining in State College. Common reasons for leaving the Borough include graduation from PSU and relocating for employment. Residents are concerned that alcohol consumption, potholes and other road deterioration, traffic and parking on neighborhood streets and noise disturbances have the biggest impact on their quality of life.

## The Economy is important to residents.

Residents indicated that the Economy was an essential or very important facet for the community to focus on over the next two years. Most residents are pleased with the overall economic health of State College and think the downtown/commercial areas are excellent or good; both of these features were rated higher than other communities in the nation. Residents also gave high ratings for employment opportunities when compared to other communities. Economic development services also received high ratings. Participants were least impressed with the cost of living and were not very hopeful that the economy would have a positive impact on their income.

## Education and Enrichment opportunities abound in State College.

Participants think Education and Enrichment opportunities in the community are plentiful and are of high quality. Child care/preschool, K-12 education, adult education, cultural/arts/music activities and religious or spiritual events and activities all received high ratings by at least three-quarters of respondents and were rated higher than other communities. Despite the excellent Education and Enrichment opportunities, fewer participants are taking advantage of these resources; compared to other communities, fewer residents use the library, participate in religious or spiritual events and activities or attend Borough sponsored events.