

# Community Perspectives on Poverty Among Adults in Idaho

## - Results from a National Survey with an Oversample of Idahoans -

The Northwest Area Foundation (NWAFF) commissioned Lake Research Partners (LRP) to conduct a national tracking survey to explore the public's perception of poverty in one's own community, attitudes toward the roles of local elected officials, and ways in which to address the issue. The survey was conducted among 4,011 Americans age 18 and older, from February 8-29, 2008. A total of 800 interviews were conducted nationally, and oversamples of 400 interviews were conducted in eight states, including 405 interviews in Idaho. The margin of sampling error for the Idaho results is  $\pm 5$  percentage points. This is the third survey of its kind, replicating a survey first conducted in December 2005 and released to the public in March 2006, and repeated in March 2007.<sup>1</sup> These findings focus on the 2008 data; overall, we find many consistencies with the 2007 report, along with a few areas of greater intensity.

### Key Findings

Main findings among Idahoans include:

- Fifty-two percent of Idahoans say the economic conditions in their own community are only fair (31%) or poor (16%). Residents with household incomes of less than \$35,000 per year are more likely to give these ratings than those earning \$75,000 or more (58% vs. 40%).
- Additionally, two-thirds of residents (67%) are worried that these conditions might get worse in the coming year – and this concern cuts across the lowest and highest income groups.
- About one in three Idahoans (35%) worry all or most of the time that their total family income will not be enough to meet their family's expenses and bills, including 58 percent of those earning \$35,000 or less per year. Another 36 percent say they worry some of the time about making ends meet.

### Snapshot of Results

About half of Idahoans rate their local economy as only fair or poor. A majority in the state is also worried about local economic conditions getting worse over the next year. Several Idahoans are feeling squeezed financially – about one in three say they worry all or most of the time about earning enough income to pay their bills and expenses. Additionally, six in 10 Idahoans say it takes \$40,000 or more for a family of four to get by in their community. Despite these worries, however, Idahoans remain hopeful and optimistic about their communities: they are willing to help those who are struggling and believe their own community can come together to reduce the number of people struggling to make ends meet. They also look to local elected officials to take action on these issues, and say they take these concerns into the voting booth.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2005-2006 survey included a national sample of 800 interviews, with oversamples of 200 interviews in each state. The 2007 survey was conducted among a national sample of 800 adults, with oversamples of 400 interviews in each state.

- Half of Idahoans (62%) say a family of four living in their own community would need \$40,000 or more to make ends meet – far beyond the federal government’s poverty income threshold of \$21,027. Thirty percent say a family of four needs *more than* \$40,000 to get by – an increase of seven percentage points since last year (23%).
- Slightly more than one in two Idahoans (54%) perceive a lot of people are struggling to make ends meet in their community, and 46 percent say a lot of people are working full-time jobs, yet still struggling to get by. Slightly more than half of residents (55%) know someone personally in their community who works two or more jobs and is struggling. Women are more likely than men to perceive a lot of people struggling in their community (62% vs. 46%). Rural Idahoans are most likely to perceive a lot of people struggling (59%), followed by suburban (55%) and urban (47%) residents. Additionally, lower-income Idahoans (earning less than \$35,000) are much more likely to say they see a lot of people struggling than those earning \$75,000 or more (59% vs. 34%).
- Helping people struggling to make ends meet is a top concern for 46 percent of Idahoans, and a middle concern for another 42 percent of residents. This concern seems to carry through to the voting booth. Seven in 10 Idahoans (70%) say that when they vote, they think about how well a candidate would help those struggling to make ends meet.
- Trust in local government has dropped slightly since last year. Thirty-eight percent of Idahoans say they can trust local government to do what is right always or most of the time, compared to 44 percent who said the same last year.
- Despite economic worries and a slight decline in trust, the survey reveals hope and optimism for reducing poverty locally; a majority (84%) feels the number of people struggling could be reduced. This optimism may stem in part from the perceived efficacy of their communities – 50 percent of Idahoans say their own community is effective at dealing with local problems either always or most of the time – or may be fueled by perceptions of their neighbors’ willingness to help.
- Idahoans are also ready and willing to engage in this issue personally. Eighty-nine percent say they would like to do more to help people struggling. Nine in 10 (92%) say it would be a good idea to hold a community discussion on helping those struggling – with 52 percent saying it would be a *very* good idea. Seven in 10 Idahoans (71%) say they would be likely to attend such a discussion. Six in 10 residents (61%) say they would be willing to pay \$50 more a year in taxes if it would go to programs in their own community to help people struggling to make ends meet.
- Finally, Idahoans look to their local elected officials to take action on poverty issues. Eighty-five percent say it is important for local officials to work to help those struggling to make ends meet, and 73 percent say their local elected officials are knowledgeable about the struggles people face in their community. Facilitating community efforts as well as setting up ways for community members to become involved are among the responsibilities Idahoans see for their local officials.