

# Community Councils in Cincinnati: Leadership, Issues, Capacity, and Effectiveness

**Dr. Julie Olberding & Dr. Darrin Wilson**  
**Master of Public Administration (MPA) program**  
**Northern Kentucky University**

**Neighborhood Summit 2020**  
**Cincinnati, Ohio**

# Brief introductions

## ■ Dr. Julie Olberding

- Pleasant Ridge resident
- Teaching & research areas:
  - nonprofit management
  - community events
  - community development
  - economic development
- A few relevant publications
  - *Social Enterprise and Special Events: Market-based Approaches to Mission-driven Gatherings*. Published by Routledge in London.
  - Building community together: A study of inter-neighborhood collaboration and development in Cincinnati, Ohio. In *Community Development*.
  - The “Community Entertainment District” designation as a tool for urban redevelopment in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the *Journal of Community Practice*.



# Brief introductions

## ■ Dr. Darrin Wilson

- Walnut Hills resident
- Teaching & research areas:
  - local government management
  - government finance & budgeting
  - economic development
  - community development
- A few relevant publications
  - Institutional collective action during COVID-19: Lessons in local economic development. In *Public Administration Review*.
  - Applying Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) to Sustainable Local Economic Development (SLED). In *Public Affairs Practicum*.
  - Exploring costs of local preferencing: How sustainable procurement can create sustainable economic development. In the *International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic & Social Sustainability*.



# Goals of this community-based research project

- **There's very limited research on Community Councils in Cincinnati.**
- **Community-based goals of this research:** To develop a better understanding of Community Councils for the following groups.
  - Community Councils themselves, particularly their executive councils
  - Invest in Neighborhoods
  - City of Cincinnati departments and agencies
  - Other local organizations
- **Broader research goals of this research:** To study Community Councils in Cincinnati in relation to similar entities in other cities.
  - For example, there's a lot of research on Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles.
  - Identify similarities and differences.
  - Other knowledge or lessons for the "greater good" of neighborhoods and communities.

# Research methods

## ■ Survey instrument

- The survey is based on Li, Wen, and Cooper's study of Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles (2019).
- We worked with Invest in Neighborhoods (IIN) to refine the survey instrument.
- The survey was piloted with IIN board members, familiar with how community councils operate in the City of Cincinnati.

## ■ Survey implementation

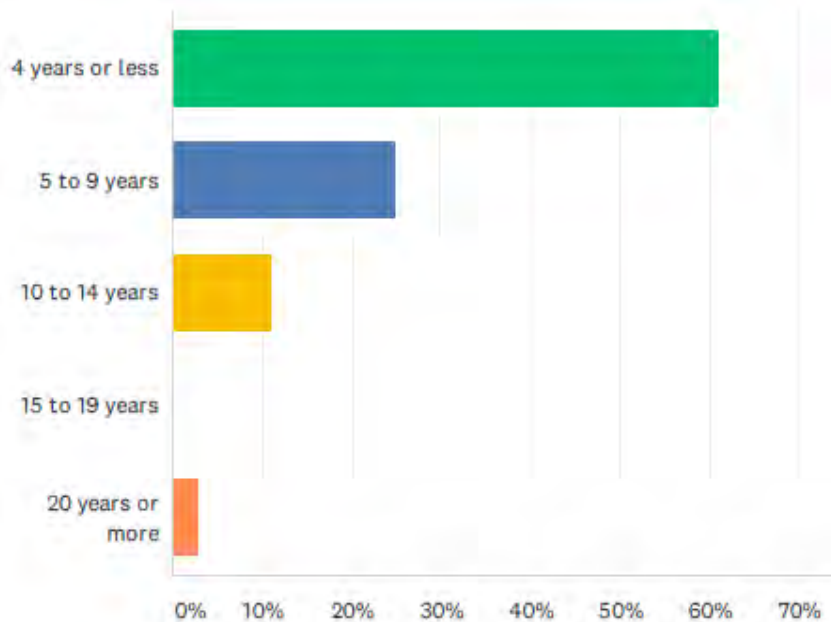
- Dillman's "gold standard" for surveys: pre-notification, notification, post notification.
- IIN sent these messages to board members of the 52 community councils.
- We were scheduled to participate in the 2020 Neighborhood Summit in mid-March to present preliminary results and collect additional survey responses via laptops computers and paper-and-pencil surveys.
- IIN sent the emails and to 187 email addresses. 82 individuals responded; however, some answered very few questions and therefore were taken out of the dataset. The final participant count was 72, so the response rate is 38.5% (decent for an online survey).

# Community Councils represented in the survey results (n=28)

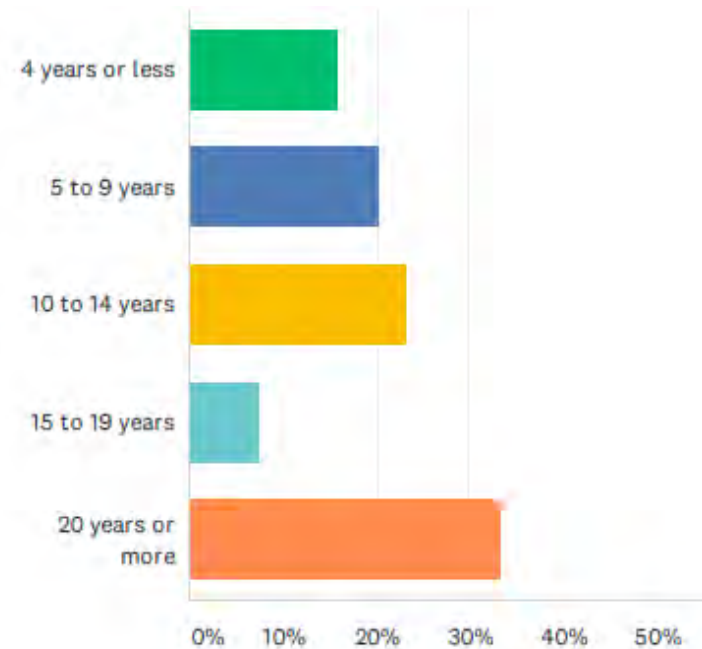
- Avondale Community Council
- Bond Hill Community Council
- California Community Council
- Camp Washington Community Council
- Carthage Civic League
- Clifton Town Meeting
- College Hill Forum
- CUF Neighborhood Association
- Downtown Residents Council
- East Price Hill Improvement Association
- Hartwell Improvement Association
- Kennedy Heights Community Council
- Mount Adams Civic Association
- Mount Airy Town Council
- Mount Auburn Community Council
- Mount Lookout Civic Association
- Mount Washington Community Council
- Northside Community Council
- Over-the-Rhine Community Council
- Pendleton Community Council
- Pleasant Ridge Community Council
- Saylor Park Village Council
- Sedamsville Civic Association
- South Cumminsville Community Council
- South Fairmount Community Council
- Spring Grove Village Community Council
- West End Community Council
- West Price Hill Community Council
- Winton Hills Community Council

# Survey results: CC executive committee members

## Years served on Community Council

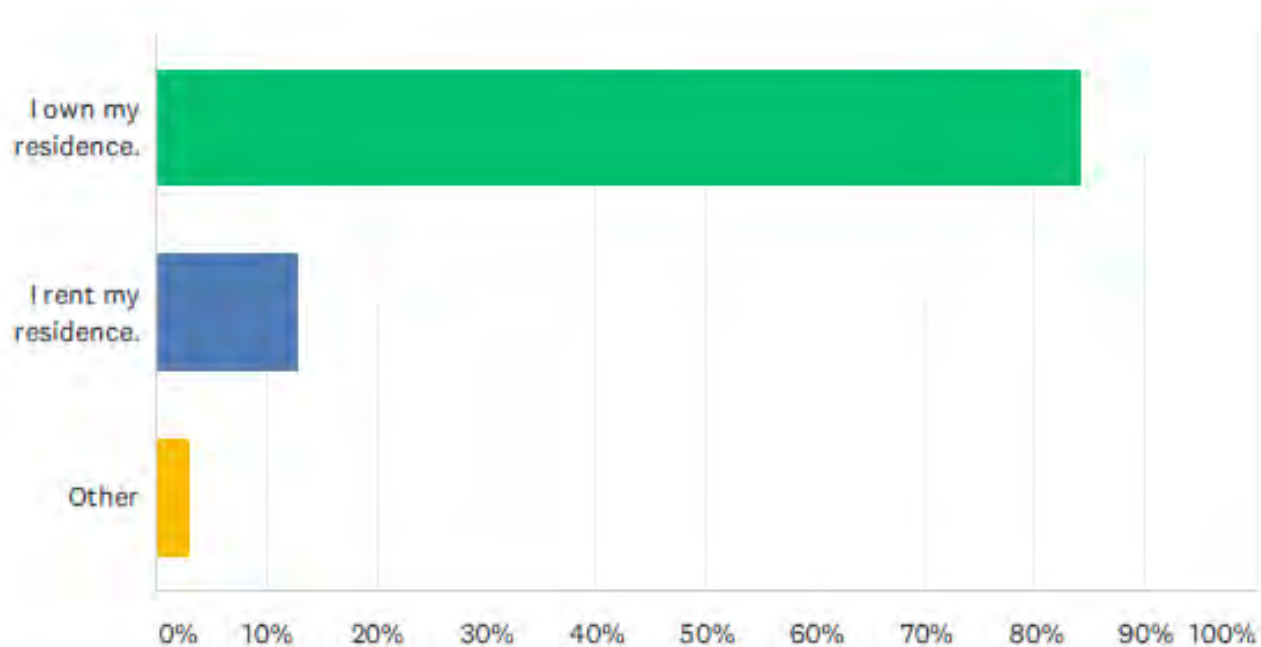


## Years lived in neighborhood



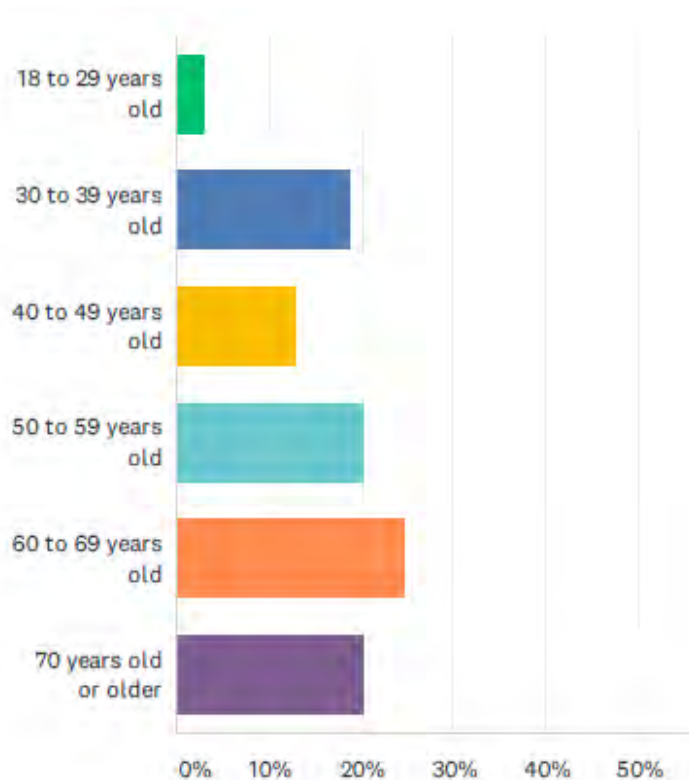
# Survey results: CC executive committee members

## Living situation

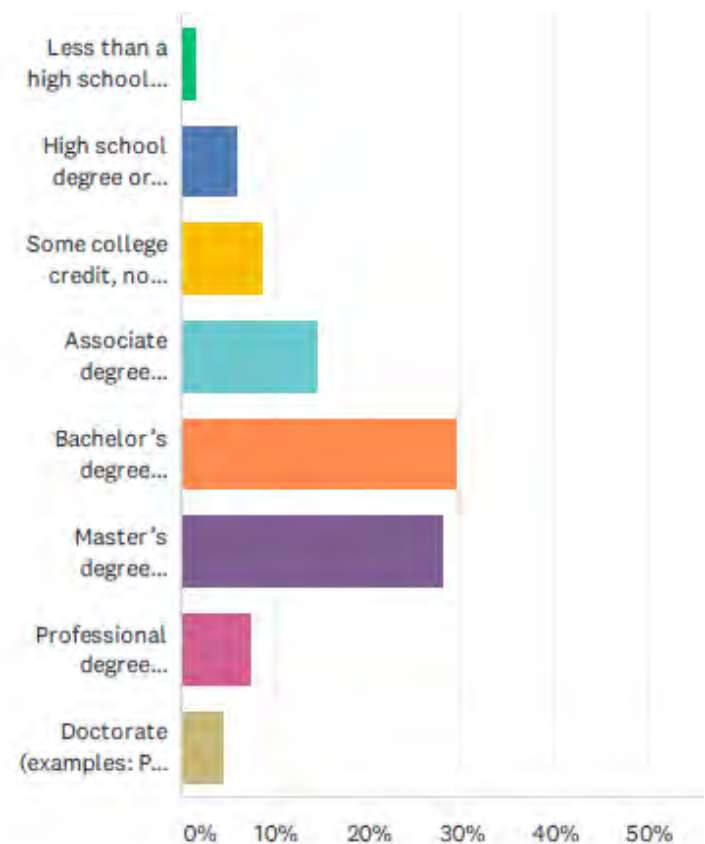


# Survey results: CC executive committee members

## Age range

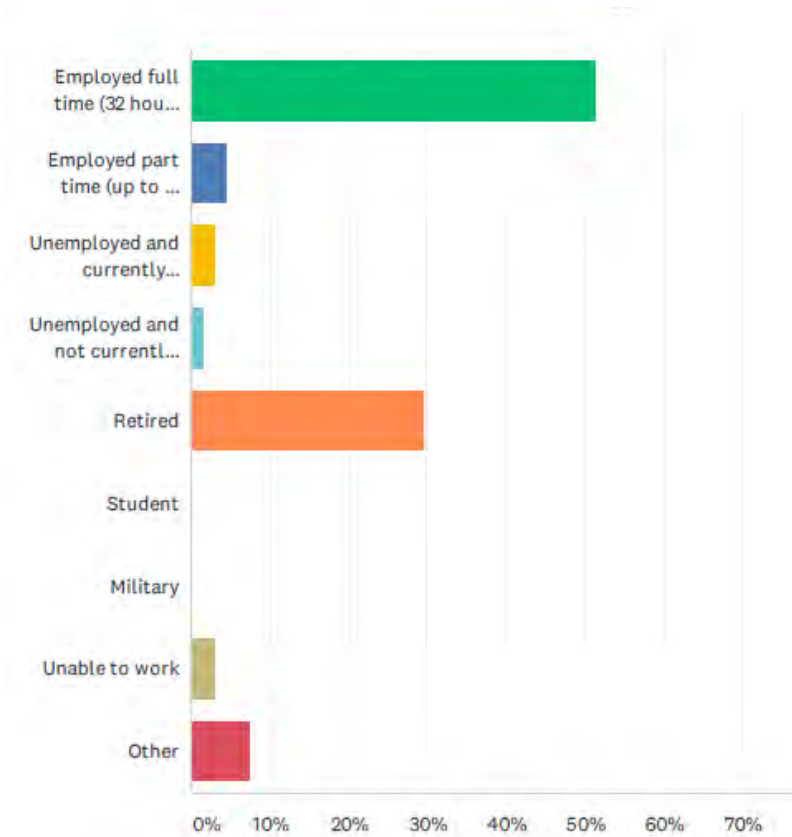


## Education

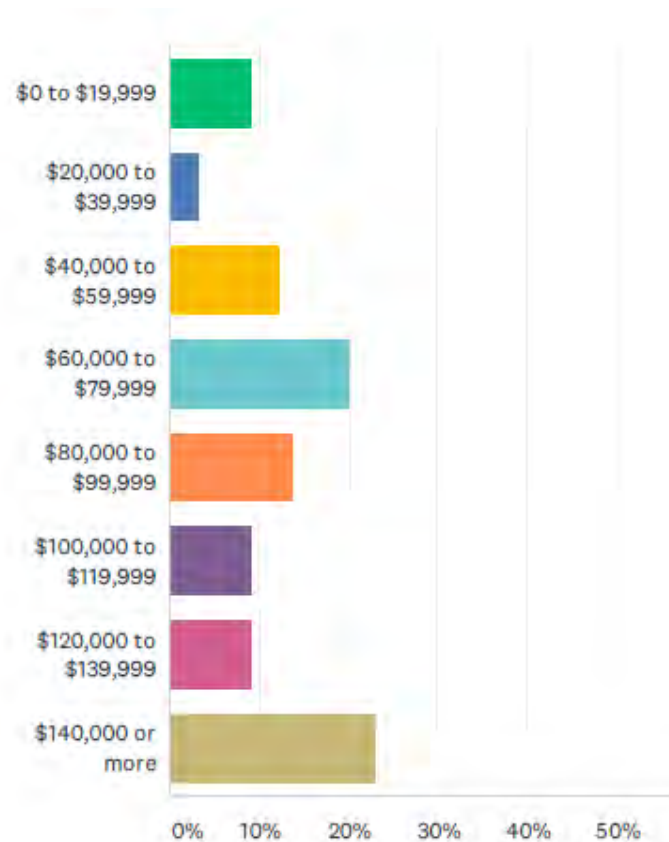


# Survey results: CC executive committee members

## Employment status

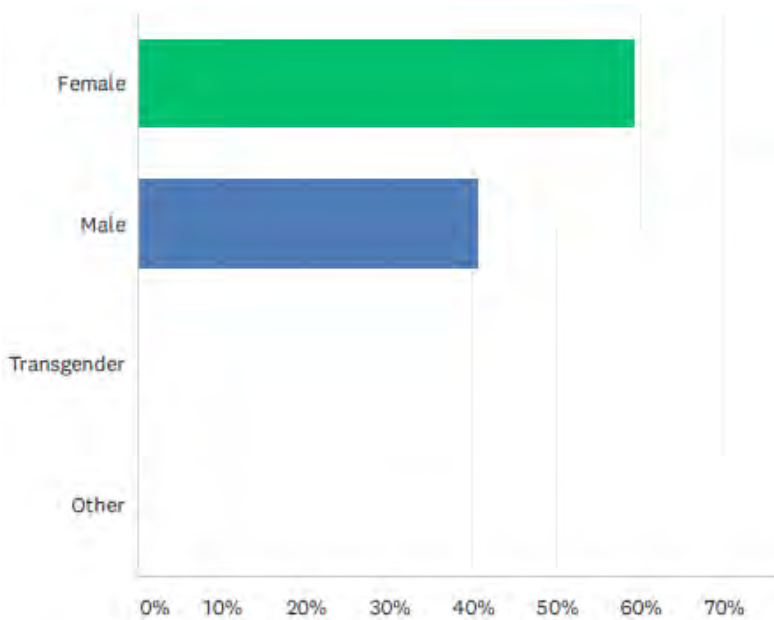


## Income

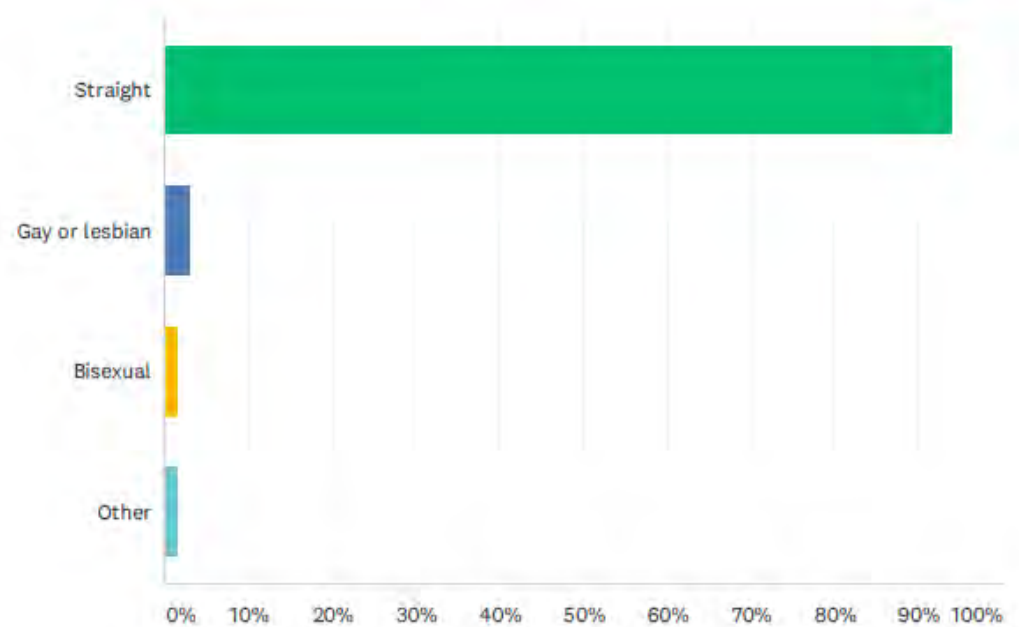


# Survey results: CC executive committee members

## Gender identity

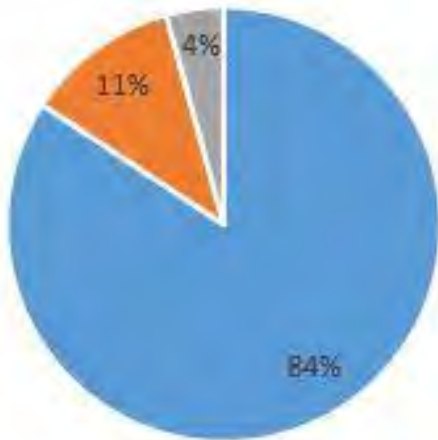


## Sexual orientation



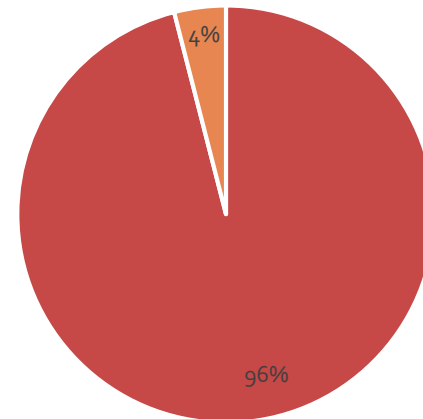
# Survey results: CC executive committee members

## Race



■ White or Caucasian ■ Black or African American ■ Other

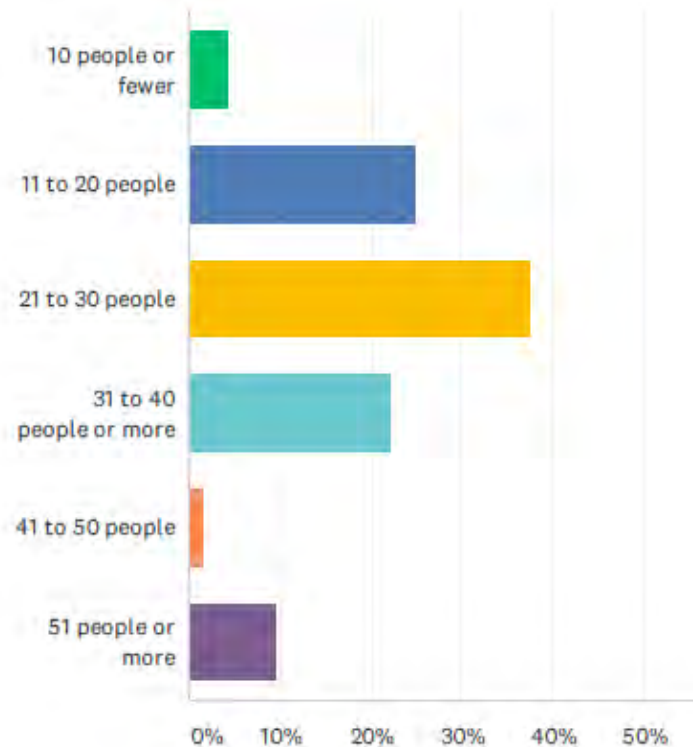
## Ethnicity



■ Not Hispanic/Latino ■ Hispanic/Latino

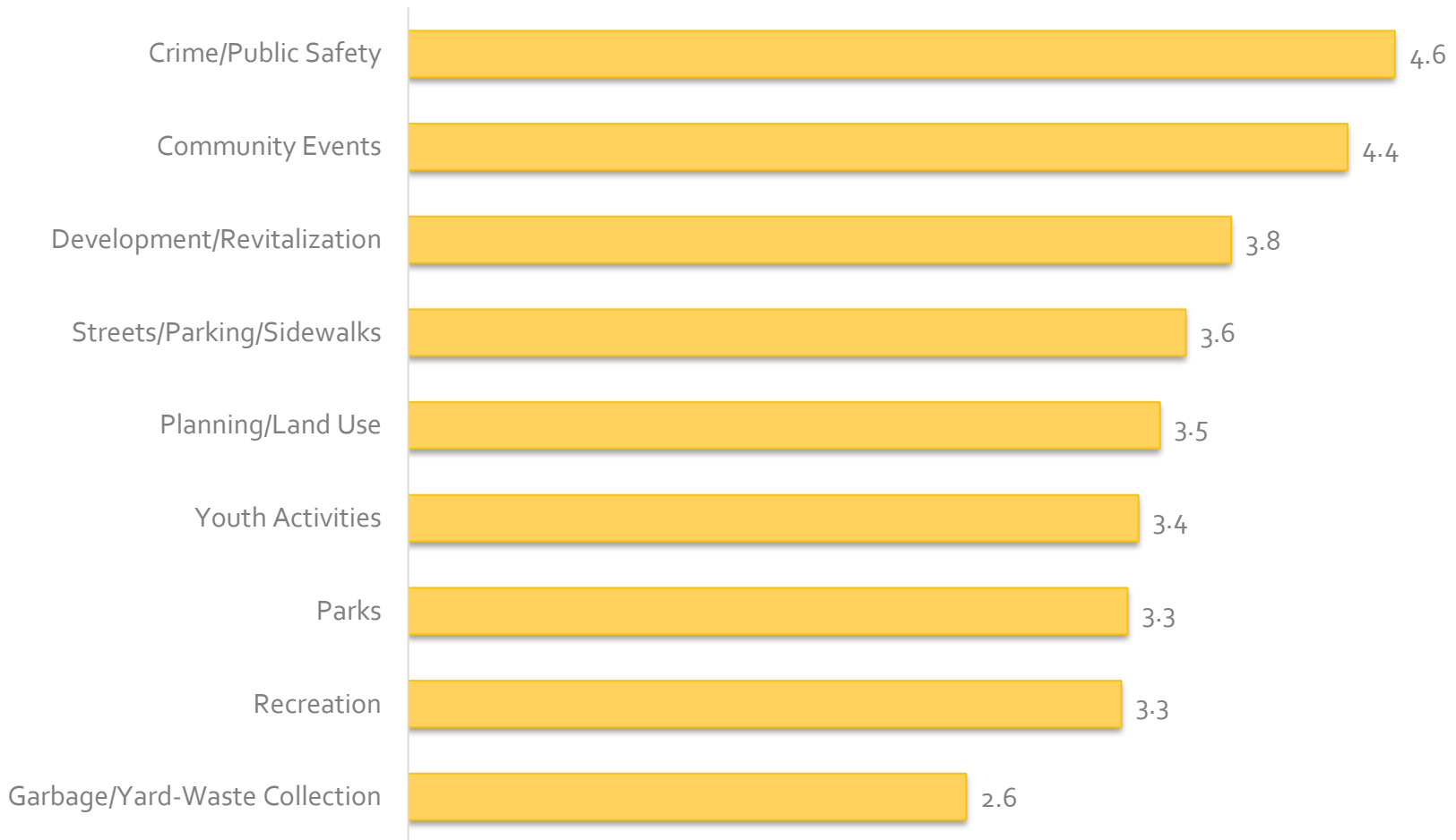
# Survey results: CC meetings

## Average attendance

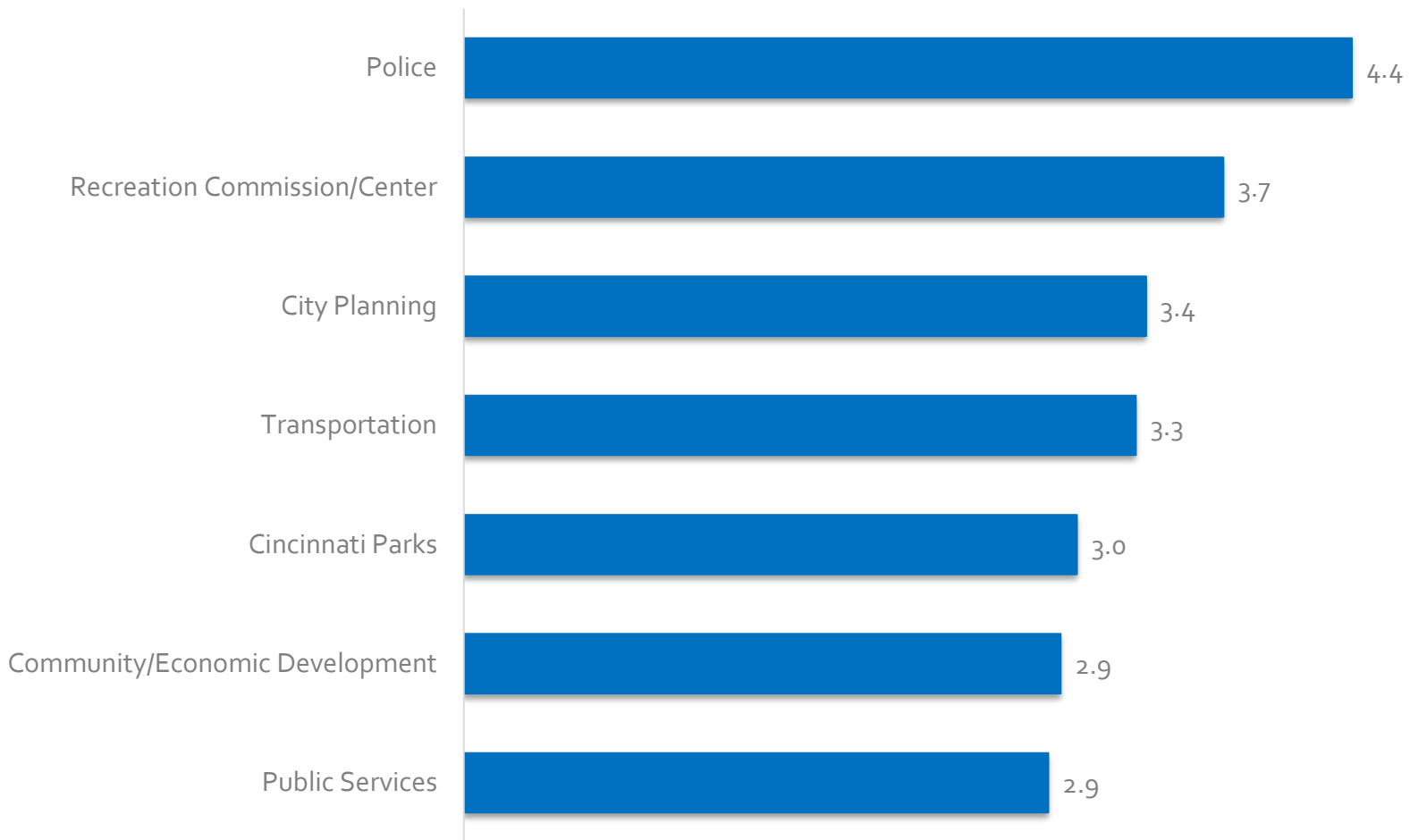


# Response means: Issues discussed by Community Councils

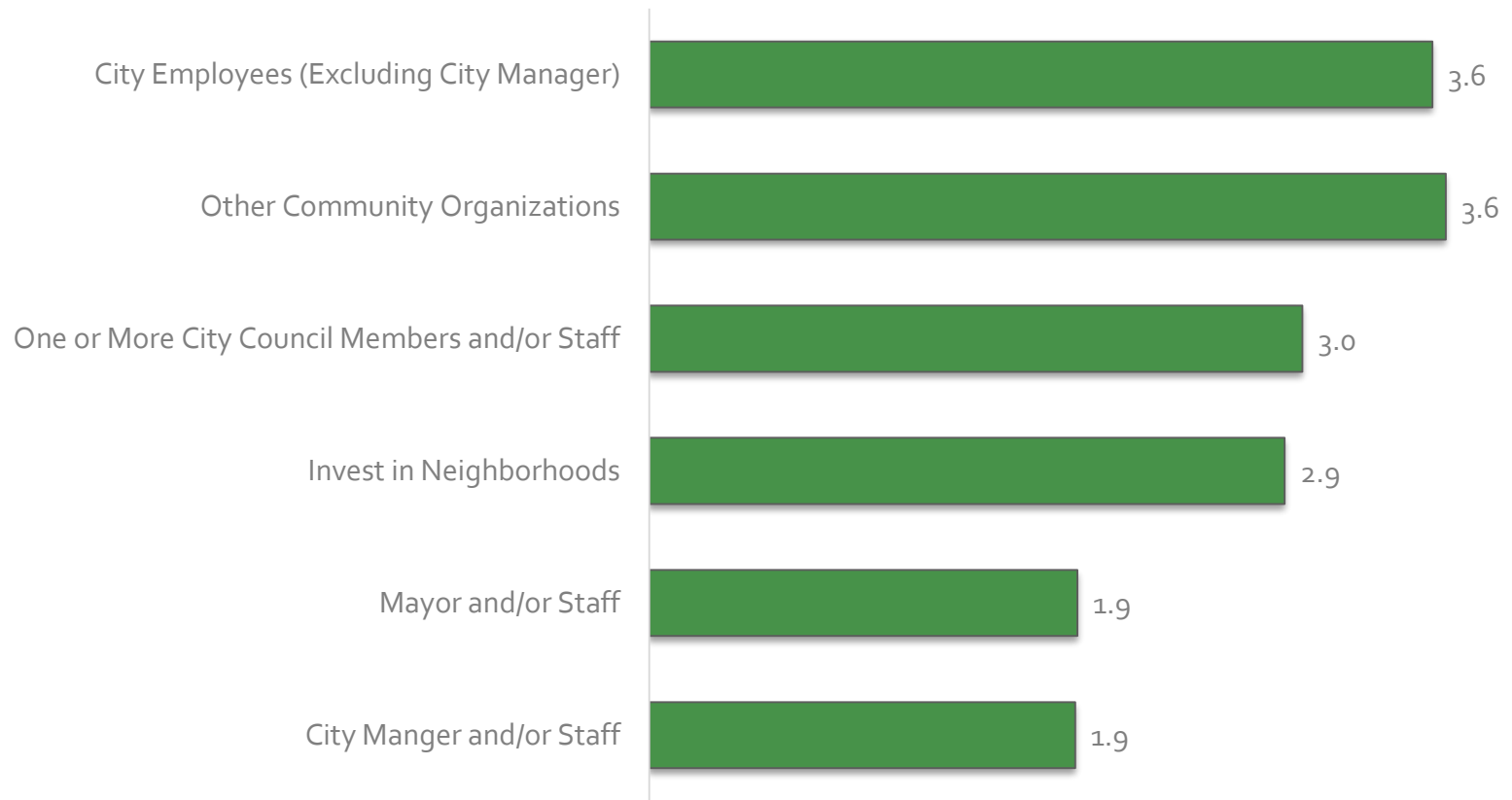
(1=never, 2=rarely, 3=occasionally, 4=frequently, 5=always)



# Response means: Communication with city departments (1=never ... 5=always)

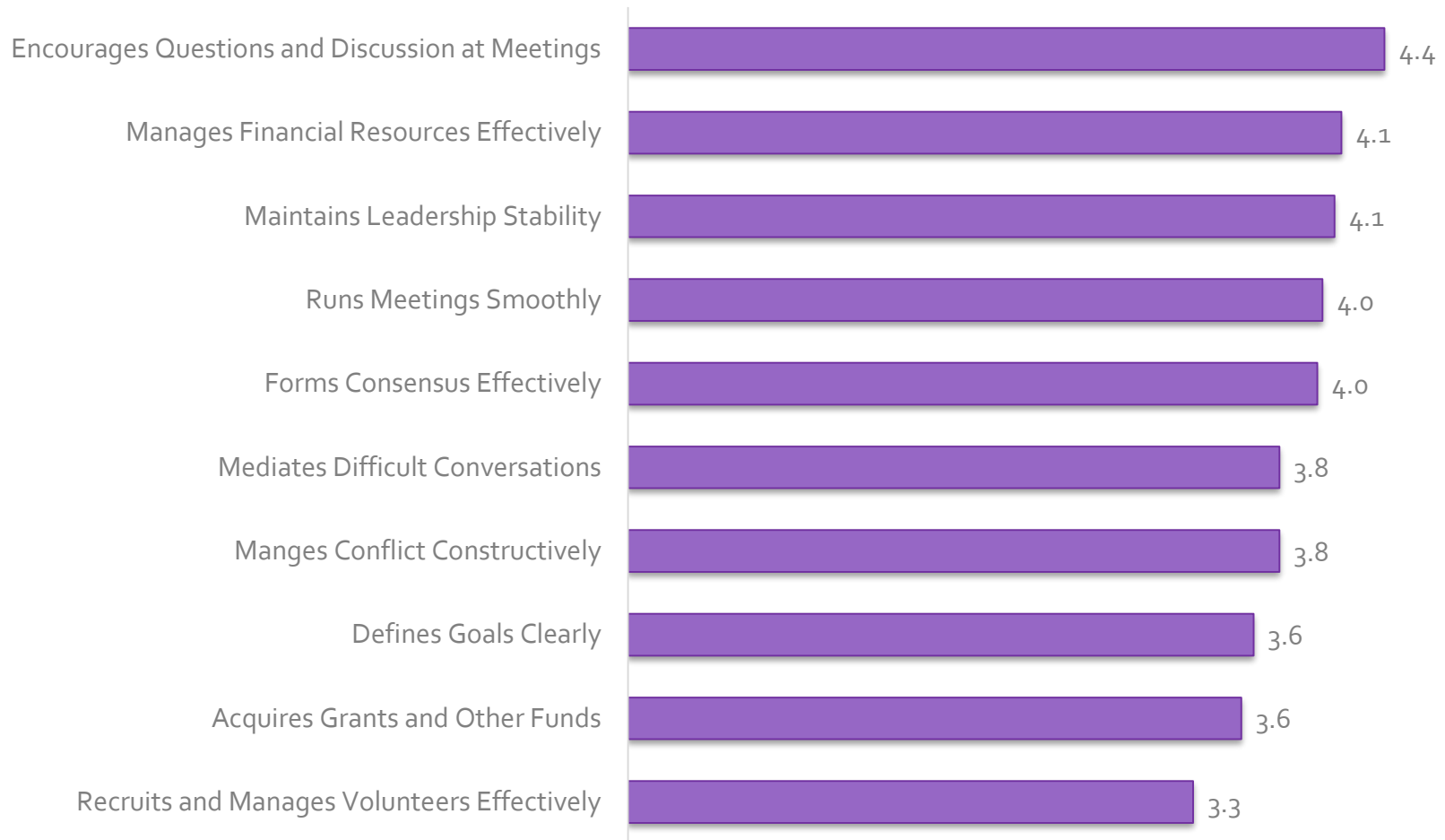


# Response means: Frequency CC board contacted external organizations & individuals (1=never ... 5=always)



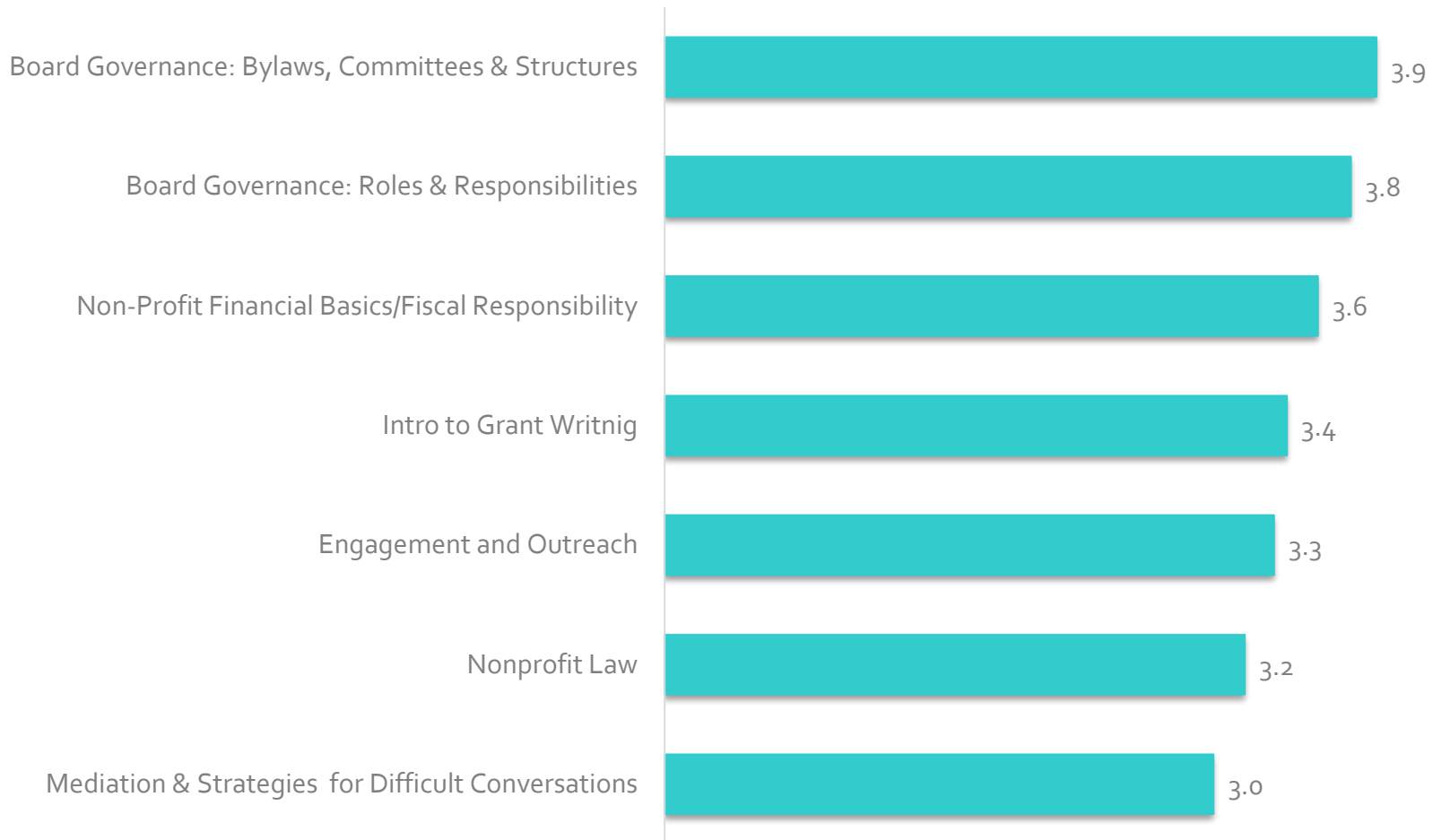
# Response means: CC board's internal capacity

(1=strongly disagree ... 5=strongly agree)



# Survey results: Effectiveness of IIN workshops

(1=not at all effective ... 5=extremely effective)



# Survey results: Topics for future IIN workshops



# Key takeaways

- **There is a wide range in average attendance at CC meetings.**
  - Fewer than 10 people
  - More than 50
- **CCs in Cincinnati address a range of issues:**
  - Top issues in Cincinnati: crime/public safety, community events, development and revitalization
  - In other cities, like Raleigh, community or neighborhood councils tend to focus on one issue like zoning ... NIMBY!
- **CC executive board members communicate:**
  - Often with city departments – most notably Police, Recreation, and Planning – as well as organizations in their community.
  - Fairly often with city council members, Invest in Neighborhoods, and their staff.
  - Minimally with mayor, city manager, and their staff.

# Key takeaways (cont'd)

- **The capacity of Community Councils (CCs) overall:**
  - ***Strengths:***
    - running meetings
    - encouraging discussion
    - managing financial resources
  - ***Areas for improvement:***
    - recruiting and managing volunteers
    - acquiring grants and resources
    - defining goals clearly
    - managing conflict
- **The survey identified under-representation of CC board members in terms of:**
  - race (people of color)
  - age (under 30 years old)
  - living situation (renters)

# Two breakout topics

~5 minutes for each, 10 minutes total

- **Meeting changes due to Covid-19:** Since this survey was conducted, Covid-19 has changed how all of us handle meetings.
  - What changes have been made to your Community Council meetings, and how have they impacted attendance and participation?
  - Any lessons learned or good ideas that you'd like to share?
- **Board diversity:** Overall, the survey found limited diversity on CC boards in areas such as race, age, living situation (i.e., renters).
  - How do you think this finding reflects your CC board? Has your CC board tried strategies in the past to enhance diversity, and have they been effective?
  - Any plans or ideas for addressing diversity on the board in the future?

# Potential next steps

- **Invest in Neighborhoods**

- Consider implementing additional workshops and training.
  - Repeat previous workshops.
  - Organize workshops on other topics identified via survey, such as engagement with the city (i.e., advocacy) and community engagement.
  - Look at modes of delivery other than face-to-face on weekday evenings.

- **Community Council (CC) executive board members**

- Consider participating in IIN workshops to build CC's internal capacity.
- Delve more into the diversity of your own executive board, particularly related to certain factors and your neighborhood, including race (people of color), age (under 30 years old), and living situation (renters).
- Discuss strategies to recruit and engage these individuals.

# Potential next steps (cont'd)

- **Olberding & Wilson**
  - Use the framework of Li et al. (2019) to continue analyzing data, particularly the relationships between variables such as capacity and effectiveness.
  - Develop a manuscript for an academic journal.
- **IIN, CCs, and Olberding & Wilson (collaboratively)**
  - Plan to repeat the survey, possibly a year from now, with a goal of increasing the number of CCs represented in results.
  - Compare and contrast the results in 2021 to those in 2020. Examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CC particularly in terms of key issues, capacity, and effectiveness.
  - Identify any innovative changes or ideas by CCs to enhance capacity and effectiveness, based on IIN workshops and other resources.
  - Share these changes and ideas across CCs.

# Contact info

- Email: [olberdingj@nku.edu](mailto:olberdingj@nku.edu) and [wilsond32@nku.edu](mailto:wilsond32@nku.edu)
  - [NKU MPA program](http://nku.edu/mpa) (nku.edu/mpa)
    - [NKU MPA Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/NKU.MPA.Program)  
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