

# STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

Hard Hit By Recession, Americans Take Action but Expect Officials to Do More

# 2009

## Montana Toolkit for Action

The 2009 national survey, “Struggling to Make Ends Meet,” asked adults across Montana, the region and the nation about how they see the struggle within their homes and communities. It provides a local picture that looks beyond official poverty levels and unemployment figures. This toolkit contains summaries of the findings as well as tools to help you apply this data to your work. Additional reports, charts and graphs, and the full database are available at [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org).

This is the fourth annual survey commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation, and designed and administered by Lake Research Partners – a highly experienced and respected research firm with offices in Washington, D.C. We initiated this project in an effort to gather data that would be helpful to programs and initiatives focused on poverty reduction. An underlying premise in this survey is that the struggle to make ends meet reaches beyond official poverty thresholds or unemployment figures. This survey was designed to learn how adults across the Upper Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and across the country perceive the struggle to make ends meet at home and locally, how they are responding to it, and what they expect from elected officials.

The majority of those polled within the Foundation’s eight-state region\* are seeing more of their friends and neighbors facing this struggle, and while they’re pitching in and helping others, they look to their elected officials to take action. The findings also reveal hope, and a willingness to seek the common good.

We hope this information will aid in your ongoing efforts to re-frame the discussion and responses by the public and private sectors to address the struggle of families and individuals.

Your response to, and use of, this data are very important to us. Please let us know how you plan to use these poll findings in your work, [info@nwaf.org](mailto:info@nwaf.org). Thank you.

*The mission of the Northwest Area Foundation is to support efforts by the people, organizations and communities of our eight-state region to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable prosperity.*

\*Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon.

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Additional resources available to download at [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org):

- Full Data Set
- Charts and Graphics
- Toplines
- Crosstabs
- Tools for States – by Strategies to Eliminate Poverty
- PolicyMatters – A series of policy papers by various thought leaders

# STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

# MONTANA

Hard Hit by Recession, Montanans Take Action but Expect Officials to Do More

Montanans say that things are even tougher for their families than suggested by the official unemployment ratings. According to a statewide survey of 401 adults, they have seen more people struggling to make ends meet in the past 12 months than in the previous year. Many report job losses, reduced work hours, and smaller budgets for food, medical care and other basic needs. Respondents say they have taken steps such as lending money to family and friends in need, and some report sheltering loved ones, yet nearly half say they are unsure of where to turn for help if they need it.

While many said they are willing to do more to help those who are struggling, they also believe elected officials are not doing enough. A majority of respondents said local elected officials have responsibility to attract well-paying jobs, to improve access to affordable health care and education, and to ensure a housing safety net. And most of those surveyed said they think about this when they go to vote.

## Families Hit Hard by Recession

When asked about the economic struggle within their homes and communities, almost two-thirds of Montanans (62%) say they have cut back their spending as a result of the recession. More Montana women (66%) than men (57%) say they have cut back. Two-thirds of those who have reduced spending say they think their reduced spending will be permanent (66%). Half of Montanans (49%) say that in the past year, they or a family member have specifically cut back on the amount they spend on food.

One-quarter (24%) say they or a family member living with them have lost a job in the past 12 months. Three in 10 (30%) say that they have had their hours cut at work.

Three in 10 families (30%) also have had problems paying for basic necessities like mortgage or rent, heating or food. Almost five in 10 (47%) have cut back on their retirement savings.

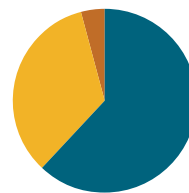
In all, two-thirds (65%) of Montanans say more people are struggling in their community now, compared to a year ago. More people in rural areas than in urban areas say they see more people struggling (67% vs. 55%).

A majority (53%) says they would benefit personally if the number of people struggling in their community was reduced.

“The need for help has spiked – food bank visits have jumped by as much as 35 percent, and requests for housing and utility assistance are up nearly 25 percent. Much of it is coming from new clients – people who had good jobs just a year ago, but now are unemployed and have depleted their savings.”

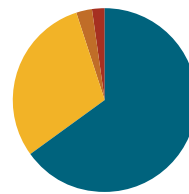
– Elissa Mitchell,  
president,

Montana Association of Human Resource Development Councils



As a result of the recession, have you/are you:

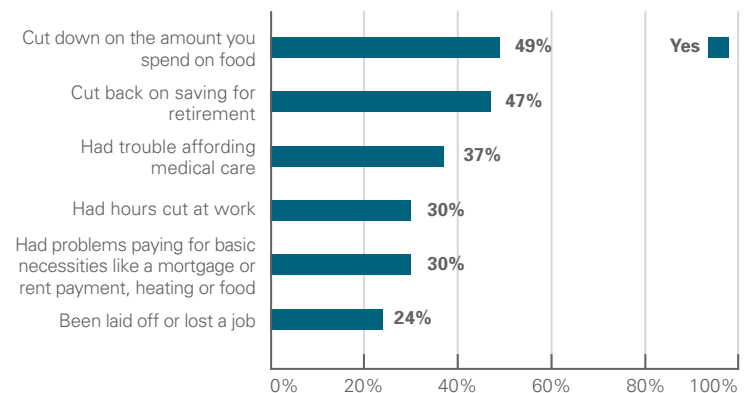
- Cut back on spending **62%**
- Spending the usual amount **34%**
- Spending more than usual **4%**
- Refuse **0%**
- Don't know **0%**



Compared to a year ago, do you see more people in your community who are struggling to make ends meet, less people who are struggling, or has it remained about the same in the past year?

- More people **65%**
- Remained the same **30%**
- Don't know **3%**
- Less people **2%**
- Refuse **0%**

In the past 12 months, have you or a family member in your household:



Yes

## Circumstances Beyond People's Control

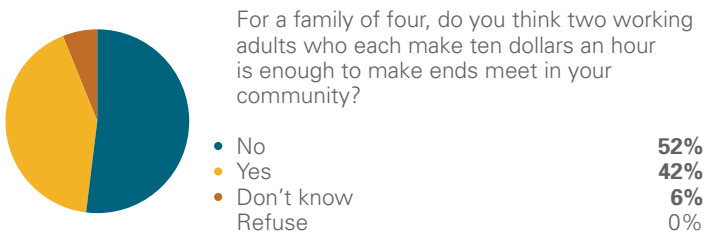
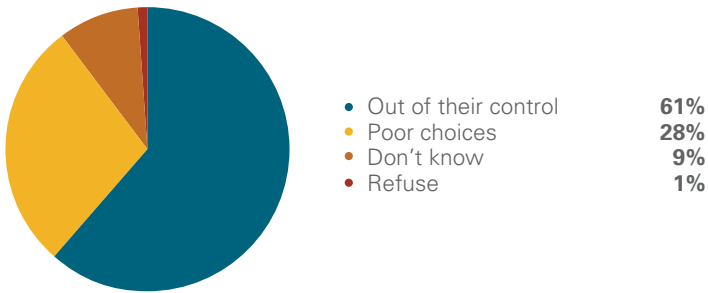
Six in 10 Montanans (61%) say people are struggling because of circumstances outside of their control. Only 28 percent say it's due to poor choices.

Montanans also say it takes almost twice as much to get by as the federal government says it does. For a family of four with two adults and two children, the federal "poverty threshold" is \$21,834, according to the Census Bureau. That means that a family whose yearly income is less than that is, according to the government, "in poverty."

However, nearly six in 10 Montanans (56%) say that it takes at least \$40,000 for a family of four to make ends meet in their community.

More than half of Montanans (52%) say that for a family of four, if both adults each make \$10 per hour, it is still not enough to get by.

Do you think people are struggling to make ends meet right now mostly because of their own poor choices, or mostly because of circumstances outside of their control?

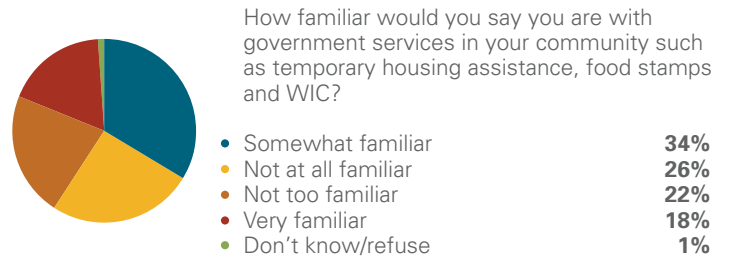
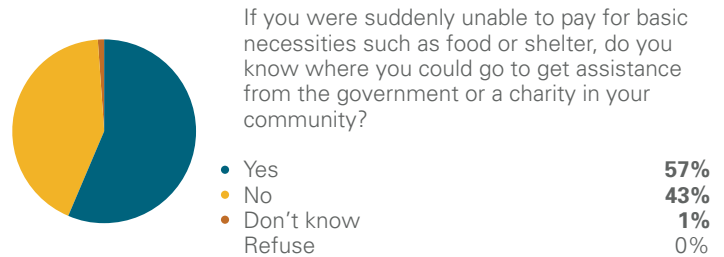


## Not Sure Where to Turn

Almost two-thirds (65%) of Montanans say they see more people struggling in their communities than a year ago. Even so, people say they are not sure what they would do if they were hit with a financial crisis.

Almost half the public (43%) does not know where they could go in their community if they needed help with basic necessities like food or shelter. More rural Montanans (47%) than those in urban areas (31%) say they would not know where to turn.

Forty-seven percent of Montanans say they are not familiar with government services in their community like temporary housing assistance and food stamps. Only 18 percent are "very" familiar with these kinds of services.



"Northwest Area Foundation's critically important survey further confirms the devastating current scenario that we are far too often seeing and experiencing in all of our Catholic Charities agencies around the country. Northwest Area Foundation and CCUSA share a strong bond in our focus on the poor and helping them achieve a greater level of prosperity. These times may test our human and financial resources, but they do not weaken our will – or our resolve – in the work to reduce poverty in America."

– Father Larry Snyder,  
president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA

## Worried, but Hopeful

Montanans remain worried about the economy, as they have said they were in previous surveys. Two-thirds of Montanans (67%) say they are worried that their local economy may get worse in the upcoming year. Twenty-four percent are “very” worried about this.

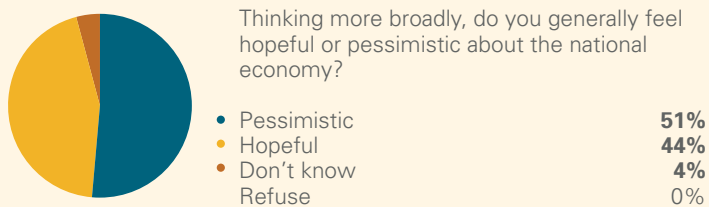
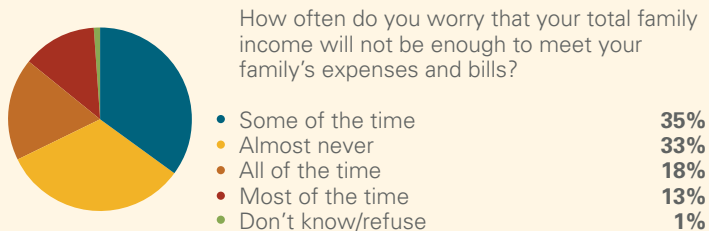
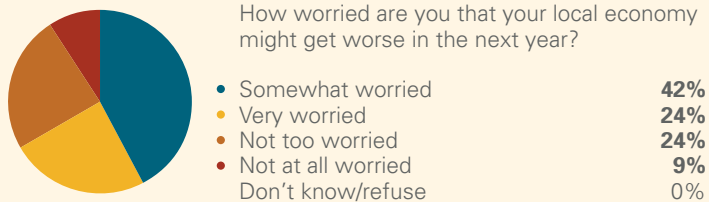
Closer to home, three in 10 Montanans (31%) say they worry all or most of the time that their total family income will not be enough to meet their family’s expenses and bills.

Overall, 44 percent of Montanans feel optimistic about the national economy. More than half (51%) say they are “pessimistic.” Montanans older than 55 are more likely to say they are pessimistic (57% vs. 48% for those less than 55).

Montanans also remain optimistic, however, in a key respect.

While people worry about the economy’s effect on their communities, people are very optimistic that the numbers of people struggling locally could be reduced. Eight in 10 (82%) say this is possible within their communities.

Since this survey began in 2005, Montanans have continued to express this same American spirit, despite the decline in the economy.



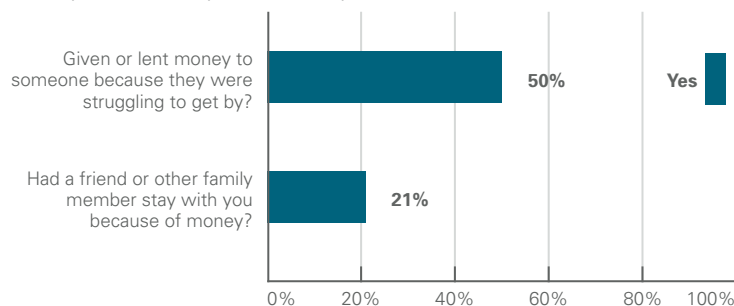
## Montanans Take Steps to Help

In Montana’s communities, people say they are already helping out friends and neighbors.

Half (50%) say they or someone in their household have given or lent money in the past year to someone who was struggling to get by. This includes a similar share (50%) of people in lower income brackets (\$35,000 per year or less) who say so.

People are extending themselves in other ways, too. More than half (53%) say that, in the past 12 months, they have joined with others to work to fix or improve something in their community. Nearly one-quarter (21%) say they have taken a friend or family member into their home because of money.

Have you or a family member in your household in the last 12 months:

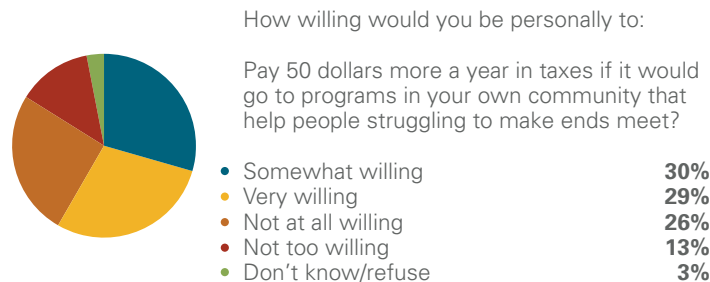


## Willing to Do More

Strong majorities of people say they are willing to do even more to help their neighbors who are struggling.

Eight in 10 (81%) say they are willing to volunteer for an organization that helps people who are struggling. Four in 10 (39%) are “very” willing. Not only that, but two-thirds (65%) are willing to get more involved in their local government by attending meetings or contacting elected officials.

Even though times are tough, six out of 10 Montanans (58%) say they would be willing to pay \$50 more in taxes if it went to local programs to help people struggling in their community. Half that number (29%) would be “very” willing to pay such a tax.



## What Would Make a Difference

Montanans have clear priorities when it comes to what they say would make a difference in the lives of people who are struggling to make ends meet.

A vast majority of the public (92%) says local elected officials have a great deal or some responsibility in keeping and attracting good-paying jobs. Eighty-two percent say this should be a top or high priority.

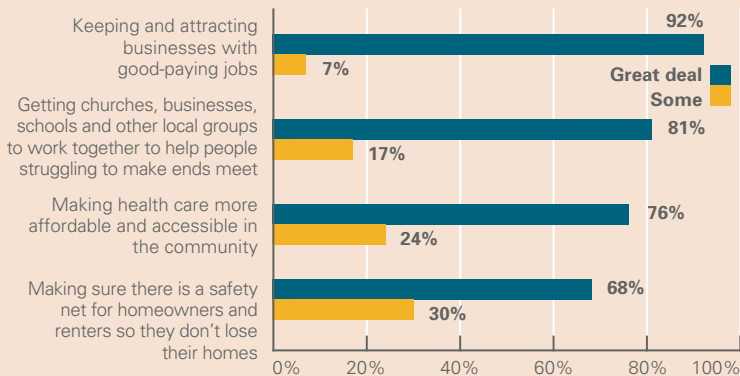
Seven in 10 (67%) say having affordable health care makes a big difference in a family's ability to make ends meet. Three out of four (76%) say that local elected officials should have responsibility for this. Sixty-six percent say that this should be a top or high priority for local officials.

Sixty-three percent of Montanans say that making college and vocational education more affordable should be a top or high priority for local officials.

Seven in 10 (68%) say that local elected officials should have some or a great deal of responsibility in making sure that there is a safety net for homeowners and renters so they do not lose their homes. Fifty-two percent say this should be a top or high priority for local officials.

More than eight in 10 (81%) say local officials have a responsibility to get churches, businesses, schools and other local groups to work together to help people struggling to make ends meet.

Responsibility of Local Elected Officials:



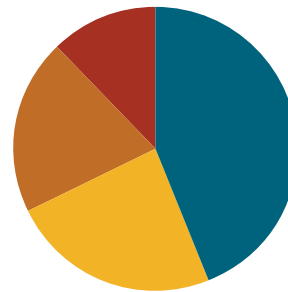
## Looking for Leadership

Montanans are willing to roll up their sleeves, but they also are looking to elected officials and to government to do their parts to help people facing tough times.

Nearly half (44%) say the government does too little to help people who are struggling. Just 24 percent say the government is doing "too much."

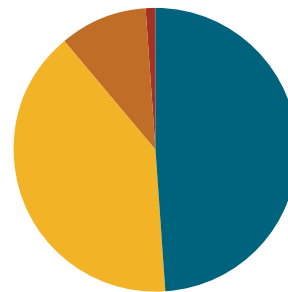
Forty percent of Montanans say helping people to make ends meet is a top concern, and another 49 percent say it's a middle concern. Against this backdrop, three in four (74%) say that when they go into the voting booth, they think about how well a candidate for office would help those struggling.

Three-quarters (73%) of Montanans say their local elected officials are knowledgeable about the struggles people face in their community, though just 24 percent say local officials are "very" knowledgeable. Less than half (45%) say national elected officials are knowledgeable about people's struggles.



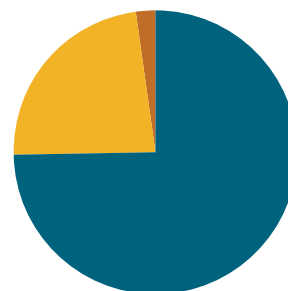
In general, do you think the government is doing too much, too little, or the right amount to help people struggling to make ends meet?

- Too little **44%**
- Too much **24%**
- Right amount **20%**
- Don't know/refuse **12%**



Thinking about all of the concerns you personally have about your community, is helping people struggling to make ends meet a top concern, a middle concern, or a low concern?

- Middle concern **49%**
- Top concern **40%**
- Low concern **10%**
- Don't know/refuse **1%**



When you vote in an election, do you think about how well a candidate would help those struggling to make ends meet?

- Yes **74%**
- No **23%**
- Don't know/ refuse **2%**

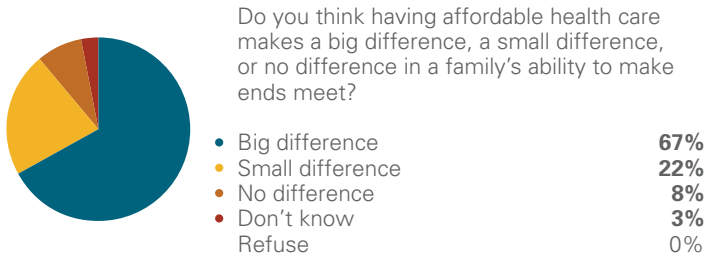
## Health Care

Sixty-six percent of Montanans say that improving access to health care and dealing with health care costs should be a top or high priority for their local elected officials.

Four in 10 (37%) say they have had trouble affording medical care in the past 12 months.

More than six in 10 Montanans (67%) say that having affordable health care makes a “big difference” in a family’s ability to make ends meet.

Three of four (76%) say that local elected officials should have responsibility for making health care more affordable and accessible to everyone in the community.



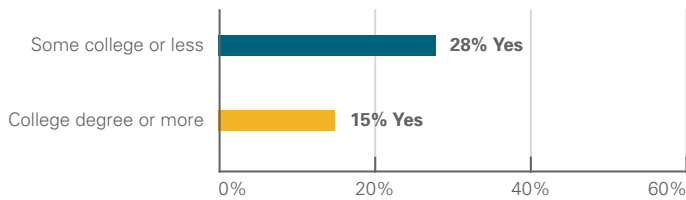
## Education

Education – the challenges posed by having less of it as well as the benefits of creating policies to foster more of it – figures prominently throughout this survey.

Tough economic times are hitting people with less education harder than other Montanans. While 15 percent of Montanans with a college degree say they or a family member have lost a job in the past 12 months, almost twice as many (28%) Montanans with less than a college education say the same thing.

Sixty-three percent say making college and vocational education more affordable should be a top or high priority for officials.

In the past 12 months, have you or a family member in your household been laid off or lost a job?

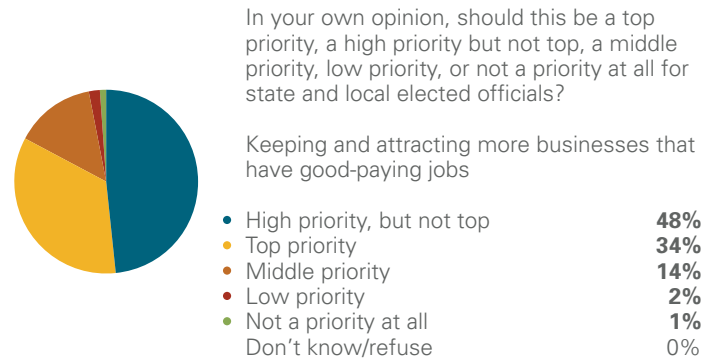


## Jobs and the Economy

People are worried about the economy, say they have lost jobs, and see improving these two conditions as important tasks for local officials.

Two-thirds (67%) of Montanans say they are worried that their local economy might get worse in the next year. Twenty-four percent have seen someone in their household lose a job or get laid off in the past year. Eight percent say they themselves are unemployed.

**Eight in 10 (82%) say that it should be a top or high priority for local elected officials to keep and attract more businesses that have good-paying jobs.** Ninety-two percent say that doing this is the responsibility of these officials.

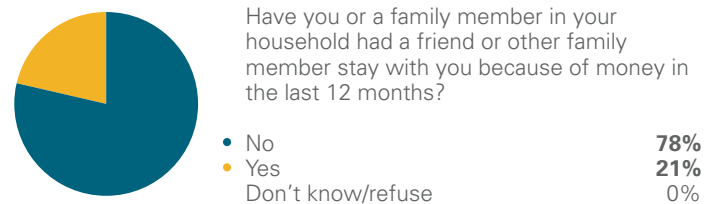


## Housing

Housing is a concern in many communities, as foreclosures continue to rise and home values do not. Montanans say they want a safety net to be in place so that people do not lose their homes.

In some cases, people say they are providing that safety net for friends and family. One of every five (21%) say they have had a friend or family member stay with them because of money in the past year. Only 18 percent say they are “very familiar” with government services in their community, including temporary housing assistance, to help people who are struggling.

More than two-thirds of Montanans (68%) say that making sure there is a safety net so homeowners and renters do not lose their homes should be the responsibility of local elected officials. Half (52%) say it should be a top or high priority.



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## About

This survey is the fourth in a series of annual surveys commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation, replicating selected questions from surveys released to the public in March 2006, March 2007 and April 2008.

The Northwest Area Foundation's mission is to support the people, organizations and communities of its eight-state region to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable prosperity. Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon were states served by the Great Northern Railway, founded by James J. Hill. In 1934, Hill's son Louis W. Hill established the Foundation.

For full details on the national poll, including access to the full data set, visit [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org).

Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey conducted by telephone among 4,004 Americans age 18 and older, from June 18–July 13, 2009. A total of 800 interviews were conducted nationally, and oversamples of 400 interviews were conducted in eight states, including 401 interviews in Montana. The margin of error for the Montana results is +/- 5 percentage points.

This survey brief was written by Brad Rourke.

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# 2009

## Talking Points for Montana

### *The recession is having a major impact on people in Montana*

- **People in Montana are having to cut back their lifestyles.** 62% say they have cut their spending because of the recession, and 66% of those say the cut in spending habits will be permanent.
- **Montana residents are losing jobs and income.** 24% say someone in their household has lost a job in the last year and 30% say someone has had working hours cut. Those who don't have a college degree are more likely to report a job loss than someone with a degree.
- **People in Montana tend to be more discouraged about the national economy compared to respondents nationally.** State residents are more pessimistic than optimistic, with 44% optimistic versus 56% nationally.
- **Montana families are having difficulty paying for basic needs.** 30% say they had trouble paying for basic things like housing, utilities, and food in the past year.
- **Many don't know where to turn in the event of financial difficult.** 43% of Montanans say they would not know where to go for help and 47% say they are not familiar with government services such as food stamps.
- **Montanans want more help from their elected.** 44% say the government is doing too little to help those who are struggling.

### *Despite the economic gloom, there remains hope for better days ahead*

- **There's hope things can get better.** 82% have said they believe the number of struggling people in their community can be reduced.
- **Willing to do their part.** 81% said they would be willing to volunteer to help others.

# Perspectives on Poverty Among Adults in Montana

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

The Northwest Area Foundation commissioned Lake Research Partners to conduct a national survey to explore the effects of the recession on families, perceptions of poverty in one's own community, attitudes toward the roles of local elected officials, and ways in which to address poverty. The survey was conducted among 4,004 Americans age 18 and older, from June 18 – July 13, 2009. A total of 800 interviews were conducted nationally, and oversamples of 400 interviews were conducted in eight states, including 401 interviews in Montana. The margin of error for the Montana results is  $\pm 5$  percentage points. This is the fourth survey of its kind, replicating selected questions from surveys released to the public in March 2006, March 2007 and April 2008<sup>1</sup>.

### Key Findings

Main findings among Montanans include:

- The recession is having a major impact on many Montana families. More than six in 10 Montanans (62%) say they have cut back their spending as a result of the recession. Women are more likely than men to say they have cut back spending (66% versus 57%). Of those who have cut back, 66 percent say these new habits are likely to be permanent.
- Close to one in four (24%) say they or a family member living in their household have lost a job in the past 12 months, and 30 percent say their or a family member's hours have been cut at work. Those with less than a college education (28%) are more likely to say someone in their household has lost their job than those with a college degree (15%). Thirty percent of Montana families have had problems paying for basic necessities such as mortgage or rent, heating and food. Nearly half (49%) have cut back on the amount they spend on food in the past year.

### Snapshot of Results

Data from the survey show how far-reaching the effects of the economic recession have become for Montanans. Many families are facing cuts in work hours and job losses, particularly those without a college education. Some have had trouble paying for basic needs such as housing and food. A majority has seen an increase in the number of people struggling in their community. Montanans are less hopeful about the national economy than Americans at large. In fact, state residents are more pessimistic than hopeful about the national economy. However, a majority feels the number of people struggling in their community can be reduced. Many Montanans are already helping out friends and family – giving money and shelter to people in their lives who are struggling. They are willing to do more, but also want elected officials to take more action to help people who are struggling.

<sup>1</sup> The survey released in 2006 included a national sample of 800 interviews, with oversamples of 200 interviews in each of eight states, including Montana. The 2007 and 2008 surveys were conducted among a national sample of 800 adults, with oversamples of 400 interviews in each of eight states, including Montana.

- Despite these hardships, 43 percent of Montanans do not know where they could go in their community if they needed help with basic necessities. Those in rural Montana are more likely than those in urban areas to say they would not know where to turn (47% versus 31%). Additionally, close to half (47%) of Montanans are unfamiliar with government services in their community such as temporary housing assistance and food stamps (only 18% are very familiar with these services).
- Montanans are also seeing others struggling in their community. Nearly two-thirds (65%) say more people are struggling in their community compared to a year ago. Residents in rural areas are particularly likely to see more people struggling (67% versus 55% in urban areas). Currently, Montanans are more likely to see people struggling because of circumstances outside their control (61%) rather than people's own poor choices (28%).
- More than half of Montanans (56%) say a family of four living in their community would need \$40,000 or more to make ends meet, far beyond the federal government's poverty income threshold of \$21,834.
- Two-thirds of the state's residents (67%) are worried that their local economy will worsen over the next year. In terms of the national economy, Montanans are less hopeful than Americans at large. About half (51%) of Montanans feel pessimistic (versus 38% nationally), and 44 percent feel hopeful (versus 56%) about the national economy. Montanans ages 55 and older feel more pessimistic (57%) than those under age 55 (48%).
- Despite this pessimism, 82 percent of Montana residents believe the number of people struggling in their community can be reduced. This proportion has remained virtually unchanged since 2005. Additionally, 53 percent say they would benefit personally if the number of people struggling in their community was reduced.
- Many Montanans are already doing things to help out people they know. Half (50%) say they or someone in their household have given or lent money in the past 12 months to someone who was struggling to get by, including 50 percent of those in the lowest income brackets (\$35,000 per year or less). One in five (21%) have taken a friend or family member into their home because of money. Additionally, 81 percent say they are willing to volunteer for an organization that helps people who are struggling (39% very willing). Nearly two-thirds (65%) are at least somewhat willing to get more involved in their local government by attending meetings or contacting elected officials (25% very willing). A majority (58%) says they would be willing to pay \$50 more in taxes if it went to local programs to help people struggling in their community (29% very willing).

- Montanans also look to elected officials for action. Four in 10 (44%) say the government is doing too little to help those who are struggling (24% say it is doing too much), and 74 percent say that when they vote, they think about how well a candidate for office would help those struggling. Nearly three in four (73%) say their local elected officials are knowledgeable about the struggles people face in their community (24% say very knowledgeable), compared to 45 percent who say the same about national elected officials.
- In terms of solutions, 67 percent of Montanans say affordable health care makes a big difference in a family's ability to make ends meet and they view this as a top or high priority (66%) for local elected officials. Sixty-three percent also say making college and vocational education more affordable should be a top or high priority for local officials. A vast majority of Montanans (92%) says local elected officials have a great deal or some responsibility in keeping and attracting good-paying jobs. About eight in 10 (81%) say local officials have a responsibility to get churches, businesses, schools and other local groups to work together to help people struggling to make ends meet.

## Easy Ways to Share the Findings with Your Network

Please feel free to share the survey findings with the people you serve, your peer networks, and others. All the findings are available in downloadable electronic format – easy to use in press releases, on your websites or listserves, newsletters, and e-mail. Or just point your colleagues to the Northwest Area Foundation website for a full selection of findings in various forms: briefs, charts, reports.

Please consider using these findings to support messages about your own work and the people you serve. Use these findings and be a source of new information of value to your networks. Use the following samples for distribution.

### Sample email blast:

#### **Americans Share Their Views on “The Struggle to Make Ends Meet”**

How do the people within your state see the struggle to make ends meet? What have they lost, and how are their lives changed? Do they believe things can get better, and if so, how?

The *(YOUR ORG NAME, summary language of your mission/work.)* The results from the survey emphasizes that our work is more important than ever and provides a deeper understanding of the issues facing our clients/the people in our community.

Northwest Area Foundation commissioned a survey that asked adults in (state), and across the country, how they see the struggle to make ends meet within their homes and communities. The findings reveal how people in have been hit by the recession – the losses they experienced and the sacrifices they’ve made. The survey of 4,000 individuals revealed the following:

- **Fifty-three percent say they’ve cut down on the amount they’ve spent on food.**
- **Twenty-four percent have had a friend or family member stay with them due to lack of funds.**
- **Thirty-two percent have had trouble affording medical care.**
- ***(ADDITIONAL “TALKING POINTS” found in the tool kit - insert those that most closely align with the work of your organization.)***

The economic crisis continues to dominate legislative focus and news coverage. We hope the survey findings will contribute to the impact you’re trying to make during these tough times.

You can find the full survey results at the Northwest Area Foundations website at [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org). Please feel free to use this information and to share it with community members, with partners, in your dealings with policymakers, and as you talk with news reporters.

### List-serve and Social Media posts

Use your twitter, facebook, LinkedIn, and professional list-serve memberships to post links to the survey.

**Sample post:** “Northwest Area Foundation has released their survey findings that asked adults in *(state)*, and across the country, how they see the struggle to make ends meet within their homes and communities. The findings reveal how people in have been hit by the recession – the losses they experienced and the sacrifices they’ve made. Check it out the survey findings at [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org) – valuable info!”

Or post a “TALKING POINT” (found in tool kit) you think will most entice your target audience with a link to the survey findings!

**Don’t forget to provide a link to the survey findings on your web-site home page!**

# STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

Hard Hit By Recession, Americans Take Action but Expect Officials to Do More

# 2009

## “Elevator Talks” on Key Findings

### Jobs and the Economy

*Do you know someone that has lost his or her job, or who is worried about losing it? Did you know that a majority of Americans say they are worried that their local economy might get worse in the next year?* Hi, I am (insert name) and I work at (insert organization name) in (insert City). That is a main finding of a national poll commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation. Nearly 70% of those surveyed are worried about the economy and nearly 30% say they have seen someone in their household lose a job or get laid off in the past year. Thirteen percent say they themselves are unemployed.

*What would you say would make a difference in the lives of people who are struggling to make ends meet?* Well, I know we can agree that expanding economic opportunity to create a more robust, fair and sustainable economy for all of us is a priority. More than 80% say that it should be a top or high priority for local elected officials to keep and attract more businesses that have good-paying jobs. The national survey also includes results on our state. *Can I share them with you and discuss how our organization is addressing this in our community?*

### Health Care

*What would you say would make a difference in the lives of people who are struggling to make ends meet?* Well, a new national poll reveals that more than 70% surveyed say having affordable health care makes a big difference in a family's ability to make ends meet. Hi, I am (insert name) and I work at (insert organization name) in (insert City). That is a main finding of a national poll commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation. In fact, over a third of respondents say they have had trouble affording medical care in the past 12 months.

It's heartening that many Americans surveyed said they are willing to do more to help those who are struggling. But 81% say that local elected officials should have responsibility for making health care more affordable and accessible to everyone in the community. The national survey also includes results on our state. *Can I share them with you and discuss how our organization is addressing this in our community?*

## Education

*Did you know that a new national poll reveals that tough economic times are hitting people with less education harder than other Americans? Hi, I am (insert name) and I work at (insert organization name) in (insert City). That is a main finding of a national poll commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation. In fact, one third (33%) of Americans with a high school education or less say they or a family member has lost a job in the past 12 months. And 35% of people with a high school education or less are twice as likely as those with a college degree to say their family has had trouble affording basic necessities.*

In fact, 73% percent of Americans surveyed say that making college and vocational education more affordable should be a top or high priority for local officials. The national survey also includes results on our state. *Can I share them with you and discuss how our organization is addressing this in our community?*

## Housing

*Did you know that almost one in four (24%) Americans say they have had a friend or family member stay with them because of money in the past year? Hi, I am (insert name) and I work at (insert organization name) in (insert City). That is a main finding of a national poll commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation. In some cases, people say they are providing that safety net for friends and family.*

*What would you say would make a difference in the lives of people who are struggling to make ends meet? In fact, three-quarters of Americans surveyed (75%) say that making sure there is a safety net so homeowners and renters do not lose their homes should be the responsibility of local elected officials.*

Part of the challenge is that only 15% say they are “very familiar” with government services in their community to help people who are struggling, including temporary housing assistance. This is an opportunity to do more to educate people on the resources that are available in our community. The national survey also includes results on our state. *Can I share them with you and discuss how our organization is addressing this in our community?*

## Communicating with Policy Makers

Policy makers play a critical role in shaping policy and funding decisions that directly affect your organization and the people you serve. The “Struggling to Make Ends Meet” survey offers an opportunity for you to build, or initiate your relationship with policymakers and provide them with valuable information on the issues important to both of you.

Elected officials want, and need, to hear from their constituents regarding issues they will ultimately have to make decisions about. This survey will likely be of special interest to them because it includes data on what people say they want from their elected officials and what issues motivate them to vote one way or the other. The survey was conducted by Lake Research Partners, a very well-known and respected research organization in Washington DC.

### Tips for contacting elected officials and establishing a value-based relationship

- Schedule your meeting in advance. Be on time and keep the meeting to the agreed upon length – be respectful of their busy schedule.
- Try to schedule a meeting with your state legislators when they are not in session, are in the local area, and are more flexible with their time.
- Local elected officials often hold “open office hours” – check the elected official or local government web-site for these times.
- Your congressional delegation has local offices and staff that you can schedule a meeting with – ask for the staff person that deals with the issue you want to discuss. If you want to meet with the delegate in person, ask the staff person when there will be an opportunity to schedule with them when they are in the district/state.
- When meeting with elected officials, make sure to introduce yourself as a constituent.
- When possible, and appropriate, bring a client that is willing to share their personal story about the issue you want to discuss. **(See “personalizing stories” in tool kit)**
- Share information about your organization, your mission, and the people you serve.
- Present the NWAFF survey findings as a resource for them to refer to and make the connection to your issue focus. **(See “sample elevator speeches” in the tool kit)**
- If there is a specific legislation you want to discuss, let them know why the issue is important to you and why you are asking them to vote one way or the other.
- Ask them how they feel about the issue – listen carefully – you can gain valuable insight into how to approach the issue with them by understanding how they view the issue – what’s most important to them about that issue.
- If a staff person sat in on the meeting, make sure to get their contact information for future use.
- Make sure that you send a thank you note or email and let them know you plan to stay in touch.

## GETTING THE NEWS OUT

### How To Use the NWA Survey National Release To Gain Media Attention for Your Organization Locally

Journalists rely on experts and trusted sources – like your organization – so that they can best tell a story to their readers and listeners.

There are simple ways to provide a local angle to a national news event and ensure that you come forward as a valuable resource for local media. These steps may help in your efforts to reach your community through news coverage.

1. **Identify your target media.** Start with a small list – the top daily, target ethnic weekly, and/or one or two television or radio stations. If you don't know which reporter to reach, get the contact information for the editor or the assignment desk. Most newsroom contact information is posted on media web sites. This will take from 5-15 minutes.
2. **Reporters want news.** Reporters define news as anything that's new or different, and that affects lots of people. These survey findings are part of the news. What your organization thinks about the findings is a very important part of the news. A story about a person living the struggle to make ends meet puts a face on the findings and on the efforts of your organization.
3. **Create a brief press release.** Use the provided sample press release and add information that ties the findings to your community and your organization's work in the local community.
4. **E-mail your press release.** Send the release to as many media contacts as possible. More and more reporters prefer receiving releases by e-mail.
5. **Follow-up with a telephone call.** Just sending out a press release is not enough. Call the reporter or editors to:
  - Introduce yourself and your organization.
  - Confirm they have received the press release.
  - Summarize your message in 30-60 seconds. This is called a "pitch", and reporters may get dozens in a day. They want to know what the news is – quickly. Consider one of the "elevator talks" provided in this kit to help you shape your pitch.
  - Let them know that you are available to answer questions. Provide your contact information.
  - Send a follow-up email thanking them for their time and interest.

## Bringing Your Story to Life

### How to “Personalize” Your Issue for the Media and Policy Makers

There is no better way to bring attention to your organization’s mission and purpose than by making the connection to real people who live in your community – it’s what the media needs to tell your story. When approaching the media and policy makers, offer them specific and real examples of the importance of your work through these personal stories.

#### Steps To Take

Are there individuals your organization has served that could put a face and story to your work (or the need for the services you advocate)? If so:

- Have someone in your organization (preferably a staff member who has a relationship with the individual) contact that person and confirm their willingness to tell their story.
- Be very specific about what you’d like them to consider doing – provide a quote, speak directly to a reporter and have their story appear in print or on television.
- Would they be willing to visit policy makers with your staff to tell their story in person?
- Write a paragraph summary of their story and have them look it over and approve the language you use.
- Set aside time to meet with them in person and prepare them before they speak to media or visit policy makers. Provide them with “talking points”, if needed.

# STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

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# 2009

***Note: Use your organization's letterhead for your release***

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

News Release

For Full Details: (your web-site with link to NWAf report)

[www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org) (for full survey report)

Contact: NAME  
TITLE  
ZYZ ORG NAME  
(CONTACT PHONE)  
CONTACT EMAIL

### ***ZYZ Organization Sees 25% of Children Whose Only Meal is at School***

***National poll reveals Recession-Weary Americans Struggle With Basic Food, Shelter, Utility and Medical Costs***

CITY, STATE. (September 17, 2009) – ***(insert “Quote from ZYZ Organization.”)***

***(Insert Quick introduction of story about ZYZ client.)***

A recession that has seen an unprecedented collapse of financial institutions, ongoing home foreclosures, high unemployment, and bankruptcies in the auto industry has many Americans struggling to pay for basic necessities. A poll of more than 4,000 adults shows American families have cut spending, taken in friends or relatives and lent or given money to those in need.

Commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation, the poll shows two-thirds of Americans see more people struggling to make ends meet than a year ago, mostly because of circumstances they believe are beyond their control. Sixty-one percent of Americans say they've had to reduce spending. More than half, 57 percent, report the change in spending will be permanent.

In the past year, families report:

- **Twenty-seven percent had problems paying for basic necessities like their mortgage, rent or heating.**
- **Fifty-three percent say they've cut down on the amount they've spent on food.**
- **Forty-four percent have cut back on saving for retirement.**
- **Twenty-four percent have had a friend or family member stay with them due to lack of funds.**
- **Thirty-two percent have had trouble affording medical care.**
- ***(ADDITIONAL “TALKING POINTS” in tool kit – insert those that most closely align with the work/mission of your organization.)***

***(Insert more about the story from ZYZ client.)***

Compounding those challenges, half of all Americans, 49 percent, say they would not know where to go in their community for help, and 52 percent say they are not familiar with government services such as food stamps. For the second year in a row, people said they worry their paychecks won't be enough to meet their bills, a response that may be related to reports of job insecurity:

- **Twenty-seven percent say someone in their household has been laid off or lost a job.**
- **Thirty-eight percent say someone in their household has had their work hours cut.**
- *(insert ADDITIONAL "TALKING POINTS" in tool kit)*

An overwhelming majority of Americans also reported:

- **It takes at least \$40,000 a year to meet basic needs of a family of four, which is nearly twice the federal poverty level of \$21,834 – the fourth year in a row that a majority of respondents has expressed this belief.**
- **Sixty-three percent say two adults earning \$10 per hour is not enough to make ends meet for a family of four.**
- *(insert ADDITIONAL "TALKING POINTS" in tool kit)*

"Americans told us that things are even tougher for their families than the official unemployment and poverty rates suggest," said Kevin F. Walker, president and CEO of the Northwest Area Foundation. "They also say elected officials need to join them in finding solutions. Public policy is a critical tool in moving low-income people – and our nation – toward prosperity that lasts."

Fifty-one percent of respondents said the government is doing too little to help. Their top priorities for lawmakers include: attracting and keeping well-paying jobs, making medical care more accessible, making college and vocational education more affordable, and making sure there is a safety net for renters and homeowners. Overwhelmingly Americans said that when they vote, they will think about how well the candidate would help those struggling to make ends meet.

*(Insert final comment from ZYZ organization)*

Despite the tough times, American resolve remains strong. Fifty-six percent say they are hopeful about the national economy. Eighty-four percent say they believe the number of people struggling to get by in their community can be reduced significantly. Eighty percent say they are willing to volunteer to help, and 56 percent say someone in their household has gone so far as to lend or give money to someone who was in need.

For the full report, and to download topline, policy briefs, executive summaries and [charts](#), visit [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org).

-END-