



Community Connectedness:

Findings from the Rhode Island Voices Panel

Summary

Overall, respondents report positive experiences of social connection within their communities. Many describe their neighborhoods as respectful, accepting, and supportive, but less than half feel strongly connected to others in their lives. Approximately half expect that their neighbors would be willing to respond to urgent situations, but somewhat less likely to address a more routine community concern. Older residents and those living in non-core areas report stronger social ties, more trust in others, and higher expectations of community support and action. Younger residents and those in core cities report lower levels of connectedness and lower perceptions of neighborhood cohesion. A majority of residents express support for strategies to strengthen social connection, especially investments in public spaces (e.g., libraries, community center), green spaces (e.g., parks, sidewalks with shaded trees and benches), and basic internet access. Together, these findings highlight the strengths of Rhode Island communities and the opportunities for targeted investments to strengthen social connection, particularly among populations reporting lower levels of connectedness.

Key Findings

Community Perceptions

- Respondents generally reported positive perceptions of their communities, particularly in terms of respect and neighborly support. Nearly three-quarters (73.7%) agreed that people treat each other with respect, and 70.4% agreed that people are willing to help their neighbors. A majority (60.5%) also reported that people are accepting of others who are not like them.
- Just over half agreed that people in their neighborhood generally get along with each other (56.7%) and can be trusted (56.2%), while 50.6% agreed that theirs is a close-knit neighborhood.

Neighborhood Connectedness and Support

- Just over two-thirds of respondents (67.1%) reported recognizing most of their neighbors. Fewer perceived that their neighbors would help them in a time of need (59.2%). Just over half (51.7%) indicated that they felt a sense of community with others in their neighborhood.
- Respondents aged 50 and older reported stronger neighborhood connectedness than those under age 50. Approximately three-fourths of older residents (72.3%) reported recognizing most of their neighbors, compared to 62.2% of those under age 50; 67.2% of those aged 50 and older perceived that their neighbors would help in a time of need, compared to 51.7% of younger respondents.
- Residents in non-core areas reported substantially higher levels of neighborhood connectedness than those in core cities. For example, 70.9% of residents in non-core areas reported recognizing most of their neighbors, compared to 56.7% of core city residents; 66.4% of those in non-core areas perceived that their neighbors would help in a time of need, compared to 39.6% those living in core cities.

Perceptions of Community Action

- Approximately half (52.1%) reported that their neighbors would be likely to intervene in a violent situation, and 51.7% reported that their neighbors would be likely to organize to prevent a local fire station from closing. Fewer believed that their neighbors would address graffiti on a local building (46.2%).
- Older residents and those living in non-core areas reported higher perceived likelihood of community action. For example, 63.8% of residents aged 50 and older reported that neighbors would be likely to organize to keep a fire station open, compared to 40.3% of those under age 50, and 58.7% of residents in non-core areas reported the same, compared to 32.5% of core city residents.

Personal Connectedness

- Nearly half reported high levels of personal connectedness. Overall, 48.1% of respondents reported feeling very or extremely connected to people in their lives, while 34.5% reported moderate connectedness and 17.4% reported low connectedness.
- More personal connectedness was reported among older residents and those living outside of core cities. Among residents aged 50 and older, 56.1% reported high connectedness, compared to 40.7% of those under age 50. Similarly, 52.2% of residents in non-core areas reported high connectedness, compared to 36.9% of residents in core cities.

Support for Strategies to Reduce Social Isolation

- Respondents expressed strong support for strategies to reduce social isolation. All proposed strategies received average ratings above the midpoint of the scale, with mean support ranging from 3.6 to 4.3 on a scale of 1-5 and between 58.8% and 82.2% of residents reported high support (4 or 5 on the 5-point scale).
- Investing in public spaces and green spaces as well as ensuring internet access received the highest levels of support. More than four in five residents supported investing in public spaces (82.2%), green spaces (80.0%), and ensuring basic internet access (80.3%).
- Notably fewer strongly supported adopting supportive housing policies (62.2%) and mixed-income zoning (58.8%), with substantially higher support among residents in core cities (75.6% and 68.9%, respectively) compared to those in non-core areas (57.3% and 55.1%).
- Support for transportation-related investments was generally strong. Overall, 67.9% indicated strong support for investments in public transportation and 70.6% supported walking and bicycling networks.

Methods

Members of the *Rhode Island Voices* panel were invited to participate in a survey on community connectedness in Rhode Island on a rolling basis starting October 27, 2025, and ending December 8, 2025. A total of 698 of 962 panel members completed the survey (72.6% response rate).

The analytic sample of 698 respondents was weighted to align with the demographic distribution of the Rhode Island population using iterative proportional fitting (raking) based on age, gender, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and geographical location, using Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), with benchmarks derived from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates.

In the appendix, we provide basic frequency tabulations: overall, by age (<50 vs. 50+) and geographical location (residence in a core city vs. non-core area). Core cities are those which have the most children living below the federal poverty level (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket). All survey estimates are weighted to be representative of Rhode Island residents aged 18 and older. Additionally, open-ended questions were coded, and we provide the unweighted frequencies for each identified theme.

Suggested citation:

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APPENDIX

Survey Frequencies Overall, by Age and by Geographic Location

Note: All numbers are percentages unless otherwise noted.

	Overall (N=698)				Age		Geographic Location	
Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about your neighborhood:	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree	% Don't know	<50 % Agree (N=342)	50+ % Agree (N=356)	Core City % Agree (N=249)	Non-Core Area % Agree (N=449)
People treat each other with respect	17.2	8.9	73.7	^	70.5	77.2	57.8	79.6
People are accepting of others who are not like them	25.1	13.5	60.5	1.0	57.0	64.2	60.7	60.4
People are willing to help their neighbors	13.9	12.8	70.4	2.9	60.7	80.8	58.4	74.8
This is a close-knit neighborhood	22.8	24.9	50.6	1.7	40.3	61.6	36.6	55.7
People can be trusted	21.5	20.9	56.2	1.4	48.7	64.2	40.1	62.1
People generally don't get along with each other	56.7	24.8	17.1	1.5	20.6	13.3	31.3	11.8
People do not share the same values	29.9	26.3	37.7	6.2	39.8	35.4	47.4	34.1

^: Less than 5 responses

Response options included completely disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor disagree, somewhat agree, completely agree, and don't know. Completely and somewhat were combined for both agreement and disagreement.

	Overall (N=698)			Age		Geographic Location	
The next questions are about your neighbors. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree	<50 % Agree (N=342)	50+ % Agree (N=356)	Core City % Agree (N=249)	Non-Core Area % Agree (N=449)
I can recognize most of my neighbors	23.4	9.5	67.1	62.2	72.3	56.7	70.9
I believe my neighbors would help me in a time of need	19.8	21.0	59.2	51.7	67.2	39.6	66.4
I feel a sense of community with others in my neighborhood	28.1	20.2	51.7	44.4	59.5	37.4	57.0

Response options included completely disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor disagree, somewhat agree, and completely agree. Completely and somewhat were combined for both agreement and disagreement.

Scenario	Overall (N=698)				Age		Geographic Location	
	% Likely	% Neutral	% Unlikely	% Don't know	<50 % Likely (N=342)	50+ % Likely (N=356)	Core City % Likely (N=249)	Non-Core Area % Likely (N=449)
If there was graffiti spray-painted on a local building, how likely is it that your neighbors would do something about it?	42.6	13.7	36.6	7.2	34.9	50.8	25.2	49.0
If there was a fight in front of your house and someone was being beaten or threatened, how likely is it that your neighbors would break it up?	52.1	12.9	25.1	9.9	48.3	56.2	45.6	54.5
Suppose that because of budget cuts the fire station closest to you was going to be closed down. How likely is it that neighborhood residents would organize to try to do something to keep the fire station open?	51.7	13.4	23.8	11.1	40.3	63.8	32.5	58.7

Response options included: very likely, likely, neither likely nor unlikely, unlikely, very unlikely, and don't know. Very likely and likely were combined as "likely"; unlikely and very unlikely were combined as "unlikely".

	Overall (N=698)			Age		Geographic Location	
	% Low	% Moderate	% High	<50 % High (N=342)	50+ % High (N=356)	Core City % High (N=249)	Non-Core Area % High (N=449)
How connected do you feel to people in your life, for example, your family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, or others?	17.4	34.5	48.1	40.7	56.1	36.9	52.2

Response options included: not at all connected, slightly connected, moderately connected, very connected, and extremely connected. Not at all and slightly connected were combined as "low"; very and extremely connected were combined as "high".

	Overall		Age				Geographic Location			
	(N=698)		<50 (N=342)		50+ (N=356)		Core City (N=249)		Non-Core Area (N=449)	
Other places across the United States have adopted strategies to help to reduce social isolation among their residents. Please rate how much you would support each strategy if it were adopted to reduce social isolation among residents of Rhode Island. ¹	Mean	% 4-5	Mean	% 4-5	Mean	% 4-5	Mean	% 4-5	Mean	% 4-5
Invest in public spaces for people of all ages to gather, such as libraries, community centers and shared-use school yards	4.3	82.2	4.4	83.8	4.2	80.6	4.3	78.3	4.3	83.7
Allow temporary closures of public streets to create safe spaces in communities for gatherings and active play or children	3.7	63.4	3.7	63.3	3.7	63.5	3.7	64.1	3.7	63.1
Invest in public transportation	3.9	67.9	4.1	73.7	3.7	61.6	4.2	74.2	3.8	66.5
Invest in walking and bicycling networks	4.0	70.6	4.1	74.6	3.8	66.3	4.0	64.4	4.0	72.9
Adopt supportive housing policies such as rent regulations and limiting the reasons a landlord can evict tenants to causes such as non-payment for rent, damage to the property, or rental lease violations	3.6	62.2	3.9	71.0	3.3	52.9	4.0	75.6	3.4	57.3
Include zoning ordinances that promote mixed-income housing with spaces for gathering and activities	3.6	58.8	3.8	62.7	3.4	54.6	3.9	68.9	3.5	55.1
Invest in green spaces such as parks, community gardens, sidewalks with shaded trees and benches	4.3	80.0	4.5	85.6	4.1	73.9	4.4	81.4	4.3	79.4
Ensure basic internet access for all Rhode Island residents	4.2	80.3	4.4	85.9	4.0	74.4	4.3	83.7	4.2	79.1

¹Respondents were instructed they could choose any number between 0 and 5, where 0 = I would not support this strategy to 5 = I would very much support this strategy.

In your opinion, what is the most important thing we can do in Rhode Island to help residents feel less socially isolated?

Coded responses include:	Frequency
Increase the number and/or types of community events for all (e.g., affordable, accessible)	189
Support more community spaces (e.g., third spaces)	140
Have more reliable, affordable public transportation options	72
Encourage individual kindness to others and openness to learning about differences	57
Address safety concerns	32
More greenspace	31
Walkable environments	30
Address housing challenges (e.g., affordability, limited availability, limited types)	30
More communication about opportunities for socialization such as community events, volunteer opportunities	29
Support volunteerism and neighbors helping neighbors (e.g., Village Common, neighborhood associations)	26
Lower cost of living	20