

ONE VALDOSTA - LOWNDES

COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY

Question 1: Over the next five years, for Valdosta-Lowndes County to make positive strides in economic and community development, what do you think is most important? (Rank in order with 1 being the most important)

The results indicated that respondents felt the two most important strides the community needs to take to achieve development are working with businesses and industry to increase local opportunity for a variety of jobs and aligning education and training to help individuals be prepared for good jobs.

<i>Choices</i>	<i>Score</i>
Work with business and industry to increase local opportunity for a variety of jobs	5.11
Align education and training to help individuals be prepared for good jobs	5.1
Create a business climate that supports and sustains business growth in all parts of the city & county	4.76
Support entrepreneurialism and business formation efforts	3.86
Create common spaces (parks, trails, etc.) and activities that appeal to families, young people and enhance quality of place	3.37
Support activities that foster vibrant downtowns	3.02
Work with communities to determine how each wants to grow in the future (no one-size-fits-all approach)	2.77

Question 2: What do you see as the community's greatest strengths in attracting new businesses and residents? (Rank based on weakness vs. strength for the community)

The results indicated that the three biggest strengths of the community for attracting new businesses are military presence, opportunities for higher education, and affordability. The biggest weaknesses included leisure and entertainment options, ease of doing business, and workforce talents.

Other comments:

- “VSU's programs in the College of Education & Human Services & College of Nursing and Health Sciences have great strengths for our community-education, leadership, social work, speech & hearing therapy clinic, Family works, exercise physiology and more.”
- “It is not Atlanta, Savannah, Augusta, nor Columbus (low commute times, small communities).”
- “Knowledge of key people in the community.”

<i>Choices</i>	<i>Weakness</i>	<i>Not a Strength</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Substantial strength</i>
Military presence	1.45%	4.99%	42.67%	50.89%
Opportunities for higher education	2.08%	7.37%	58.17%	32.37%
Connectivity – location, traffic and roadways	11.58%	22.99%	46.62%	18.81%

Affordability	5.93%	16.99%	58.49%	18.59%
Education (public and private)	6.42%	24.72%	52.97%	15.89%
Affordable housing	10.84%	22.82%	51.62%	14.72%
Quality of Life	9.19%	22.90%	54.68%	13.23%
Opportunities for job training	7.10%	37.26%	44.35%	11.29%
Parks and recreation facilities	19.13%	34.89%	38.42%	7.56%
Existing industry	13.03%	38.60%	41.21%	7.17%
Ease of doing business	18.99%	31.98%	42.86%	6.17%
Support of entrepreneurs and small business	11.13%	39.68%	43.71%	5.48%
Workforce talents	18.71%	42.58%	34.19%	4.52%
Leisure and entertainment options	35.85%	38.10%	21.54%	4.50%

Question 3: In a number of interviews with community leaders and organizations, the issue of retaining talent – notably college graduates and young professionals was an issue of concern. What do you believe are the biggest challenges to retaining that talent?

Most respondents felt that the lack of jobs with upward mobility was the biggest challenge to retaining talent. Other comments included:

- “Lack of pride or attachment to the community. Lack of cohesion between the university and local government. Lack of cohesion between county and city government.”
- “See the studies, where youth are moving to the main hub cities in order to make a livable wage. Many counties in Georgia are declining, Valdosta has some momentum, but needs focus.”
- “If you're not ‘from here,’ it is hard to break into a new business and move up... families and friends rule the "good ole boy" system.”
- “As mentioned previously, if you go to Atlanta (or even Thomasville), there is a music festival every weekend. There are wine tastings. There are events that encourage participation from young professionals without children. The dry Honeybee and Azalea Festivals are not enough. Want to keep young professionals from moving to Atlanta? Give them fun options like the Chastain Park series. Have Wine Down Wednesdays in the park where people can bring wine in a cooler and listen to a band play after work. We have to be more than high school football on Friday nights. Have a bluegrass festival with a moonshine competition/tasting. Bring a Spartan Race to town.
- “As a recent college graduate looking to move out of Valdosta, I find little opportunity to use my degree and attain a pay that justifies my student debt. It's hard to get jobs if you don't know the right person for the ones that do have that.”
- “...college graduates and those entering the workforce are no longer searching for a job and then a place to live but doing that in reverse order. They find a place to live and THEN find a job that fits. I think we have to remember this and make this a part of our overall economic development strategy. Creating a quality of life, sense of place, outgoing community, etc. for young people to stay in South Georgia. We know we're more affordable than Atlanta but let's work towards being as entertaining. It's attractive to me as a young person that I can leave Valdosta and be at the beach, mountains, major airports, etc. VERY conveniently but I don't

think we sell that to others. I also think we forget to take pride and make folks aware of what we have. We need to strongly look at our ordinances and codes and have more of a can-do attitude instead of a can't do attitude. Think food trucks, festivals, etc. that will attract young people to stay upon graduating or move here after graduating another university. I don't think we're missing out on jobs with decent pay and upward mobility; I think we're not telling our story to college grads. I moved here 15 years ago for VSU and immediately had a job (before graduating) and have progressed in my career all while living in Valdosta Georgia.”

Choices	Responses
Lack of jobs with upward mobility	81.40%
Lack of entertainment options that appeal to young people	57.07%
Lack of awareness of what the community has to offer	33.39%
Lack of support for recent graduates / young people to start their own businesses	28.62%
Other (please specify)	16.22%

Question 4: What type of businesses and industry do you want to see in the Valdosta-Lowndes Community? (Check all that apply)

Most respondents wished to see home-grown/local entrepreneurial businesses and advanced manufacturing.

- “More technological jobs to keep STEM graduates here instead of going to Atlanta for better jobs.”
- “All of the above and see what fits/works best for Valdosta. Something to be known for other than VSU and Moody even though VSU and Moody are great.”
- “I'd like to see more industry built around the top 5 education programs of both VSU and Wiregrass - that way our city can retain the talent it has invested into training and our institutions can grow with the industries they are directly growing.”
- “Valdosta is large enough to support all jobs. We could be the capitol of South Georgia if people cared.”

Answer Choices	Responses
Advanced Manufacturing/Light industry	65.34%
Home-grown/local entrepreneurial businesses	65.82%
Service providers (medical, financial, higher education, etc.)	57.07%
Healthcare	50.24%
Retail	50.24%
Distribution/warehousing operations	47.06%
Heavy Industry	30.21%
Back-office type operations (call centers, accounting, financial services, etc.)	28.46%
Other (please specify)	13.67%

Question 5: What barriers do you see that currently impede growth for the community?

The biggest barriers for growth indicated in the responses were lack of entertainment/recreation opportunities, lack of shared vision, and local governments not working together. Crime and safety, access to technical education, and quality of schools were indicated to be the smallest barriers to growth in the community.

Other responses:

- “Lack of cooperative leadership between hospital authority, county, city, industrial authority, etc. to lead us forward in spite of the consequences.”
- “Unwillingness to relinquish a small-town mentality in terms of attracting new industry, retail, and entertainment venues, in favor of select few keeping key resources.”
- “Lack of transportation impacts lifestyle, health and education for many people in this area.”

Choices	Substantial barrier	Slight barrier	Not a barrier
Lack of entertainment / recreation opportunities	52.24%	37.54%	10.22%
Lack of shared vision	50.96%	42.44%	6.59%
Local governments not working together	50.00%	37.50%	12.50%
Lack of workforce/Lack of trained workforce	40.03%	47.91%	12.06%
Lack of access to capital for small businesses and start-ups	33.82%	51.47%	14.71%
Restrictive regulatory environment	28.69%	47.54%	23.77%
Lack of workforce training programs	26.86%	49.35%	23.79%
Infrastructure	25.81%	56.33%	17.86%
Concerns about progress impacting the current quality of life	25.73%	44.82%	29.45%
Quality of life issues	23.10%	53.96%	22.94%
Crime and personal safety	19.45%	44.57%	35.98%
Education/Quality of Schools	18.97%	45.02%	36.01%
Access to technical education	7.94%	25.93%	66.13%

Question 6: What should be the region’s top measurable goals or strategies for economic and community development? (What would the community like to achieve?) Please select up to five strategies.

The respondents indicated that the top measurable goals for economic and community development should be supporting ongoing academic and skills improvement in public school systems and diversifying the economic tax base leading to the creation of new jobs and increased per capita income.

Answer Choices	Responses
Support ongoing academic and skills improvement in public school systems, both city and county	70.11%
Diversify the economic base leading to the creation of new jobs and increased per capita income	67.57%
Encourage the growth of existing businesses and industries	56.92%

Create a common vision and strategies for community growth across the cities and county	56.76%
Improve the quality of life and community amenities such as livability and recreation	55.64%
Increase and enhance job skills, particularly technical skills, of local workforce	53.90%
Encourage downtown revitalization	43.08%
Create a strong entrepreneurial climate	35.93%
Create programs and opportunities that focus on safety and wellness	19.24%

Question 7: In addition to the One Valdosta-Lowndes steering committee members and their representative organizations, what key community organizations should be involved in the creation and implementation of the economic development plan? Check all that apply.

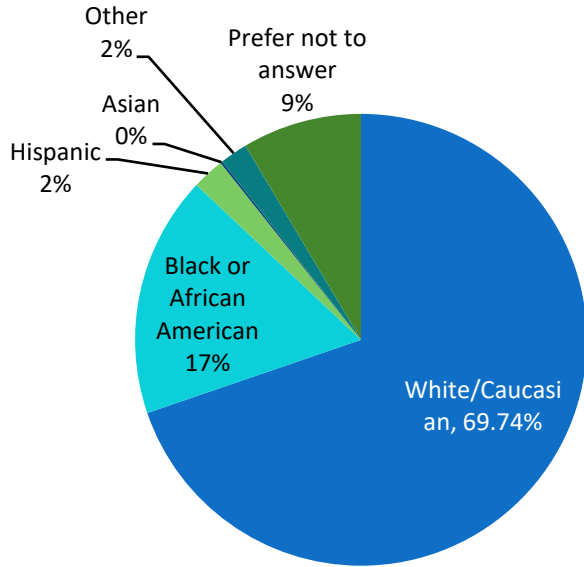
Respondents indicated that small businesses and entrepreneurs, county government, Chamber of Commerce, and major employers need to be involved in economic development plan.

- “VSU, SGMC, Wiregrass.”
- “Students may be able to give some insight into what will keep and draw young people & families here.”
- “Perhaps choose some individuals from communities that are outperforming us and invite them to join us. Also, I think we should be contacting industries that choose other markets with some type follow up survey as to what we could have done better to attract them to our markets.”

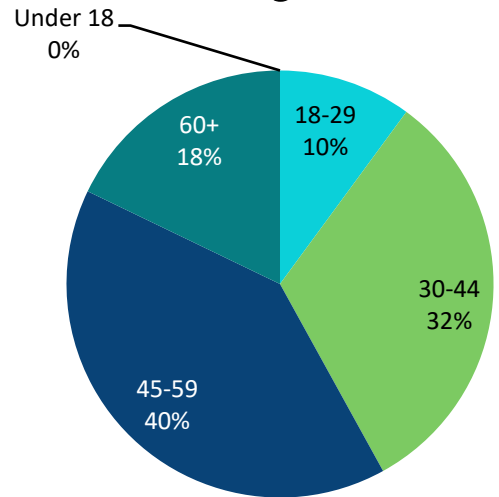
Answer Choices	Responses
Small businesses and entrepreneurs	71.22%
County government	71.07%
Chamber of Commerce	70.11%
Major employers	67.57%
Municipal government	64.55%
Military and support personal	59.62%
Small Business Development Centers	58.19%
Professional groups, i.e.: Young Professionals Associations	57.87%
Main Street or downtown marketing organization	56.12%
Students	48.33%
Civic/Service organizations, i.e. Rotary, Kiwanis	42.77%
Non-profit organizations, i.e., Girls and Boys Clubs, etc.	40.06%
Faith-based groups	37.36%
I want to be involved!	24.48%
Other (please specify)	11.76%

Questions 8, 9 and 10 were optional and included to provide demographic information about the respondents.

Race



Age



Education

