The Tioga Tells Quality of Life Assessment began in August 2018 as a way to identify the strengths and challenges influencing quality of life for Tioga County residents. There has long been widespread understanding among community partners that, while numerical data tells us about a community’s status for a specific snapshot in time, it does not tell us the factors influencing those outcomes through the voices of the people who live, work, play, and thrive in that community. Tioga Tells created an opportunity to collect that information through a brief survey and over a dozen community discussions. At its core, Tioga Tells’ purpose is to invite Tioga County residents to the table to tell their own stories.

**STEP 01**

_in September 2018, a brief, one-page survey was created and distributed to those who live or work in Tioga County in order to gain a broad understanding of perceptions of quality of life in Tioga County. The survey yielded 315 responses._

**STEP 02**

_315 survey participants

**STEP 03**

_36 kickoff focus group

**STEP 04**

_149 discussions

**STEP 05**

_500 participants

**The Delivery**

_In the final months of the project, data from the discussions were analyzed, a final report and supplemental materials were created and distributed to stakeholders and residents, future recommendations were developed, and presentations were conducted in the county._
Survey Findings:

- Natural capital is viewed most positively, as 49% of respondents report a positive outlook on the quality of the county’s soil, air, and water resources.
- Residents have a generally positive view of social and human capital, with 74% reporting the quality of each to be positive or stable.
- Financial, political, and cultural capital are perceived most negatively, with over 38% of respondents reporting a negative outlook on each.
- Respondents view their independence levels and spirituality most positively, with over 80% of participants rating these factors as either “good” or “excellent.”
- Participants were most dissatisfied with their financial well-being, as nearly 30% of survey-takers report being in a “fair” or “poor” financial condition.
- Respondents overwhelmingly believe Tioga County to be a safe, active, and kid-friendly community with good schools, but that the county lack sufficient job opportunities.
- Over 60% of respondents believe there is a sense of community pride and an opportunity to make a difference in Tioga County.
- Most respondents (53%) believe that there are barriers to participation and a mutual trust and respect between decision-makers and residents exists (55%).

Next Steps:

In an effort to customize realistic action planning and improvement strategies while addressing the identified challenges, the following broad objectives were created for the 2019-2020 period:

Objective #1: Retain and increase engagement of the Tioga Tells Steering Committee.

Objective #2: Increase opportunities for Tioga County residents to learn about services, resources, and/or recreational opportunities available within the county.

Objective #3: Increase opportunities for community members to play a role in municipal policy.

Objective #4: Promote activities that expand upon the strengths identified in the 2018-2019 study.

At first glance, this collection of data seemed to paint a contradictory picture of social capital in Tioga County. While most survey respondents perceived social capital to be positive, other data revealed some negative aspects of social capital. Upon further investigation, we found that participants tended to describe these elements of social capital in two differing ways: among people with similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics in their immediate network, or between people with different traits outside their immediate network. These two forms of social capital are also known as bonding and bridging social capital, respectively. Read the full report for more details!

Focus Group Results:

When discussing life in Tioga County, participants identified the following strengths and challenges as impacting their quality of life:

1. Nature Appeal
2. Local Schools
3. Sense of Community
4. Community Organizations
5. Disconnect and Division
6. Traveling out of Tioga County
7. Lack of Social Support
8. Nostalgia
9. Transportation Barrier

Tioga Tells is supported in partnership by the Rural Health Network of SCNY, Tioga County Public Health, and Tioga Opportunities, Inc.

Prepared by AmeriCorps VISTA, Deanna Hutchison