

ELITE BUSINESS
S T R A T E G I E S



Roanoke Youth and Gang Violence Community Assessment

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

The City of Roanoke has been at the forefront in the efforts to reduce gun violence. The establishment of the Gun Violence Prevention Commission was the first of its kind to specifically address gun violence and its impacts on the community. There was a need for vendors to partner with the City of Roanoke to serve numerous functions, with the most urgent being project managing the implementation of many proactive strategies of the city and the Gun Violence Prevention Commission. There were many factors to consider when planning to support the City of Roanoke with this noble and necessary endeavor. Overseeing the complex approach to data collection, analysis and overlaying the quantitative outcomes with the qualitative outcomes towards practical people-oriented recommendations required additional expertise that Elite Business Strategies, LLC was able to provide as the vendor selected by the city to partner with on this initiative. The focus of the assessment was to support the City of Roanoke's ideas and relationships and ensure all current and future plans are tied to actionable steps, with measurable results in community buy-in and education. Finally, there was organized and efficient management of the many partner relationships the City of Roanoke has. Driving the City of Roanoke's comprehensive Youth and Gang Violence Community Assessment was the goal of providing community driven perspectives – particularly youth perspectives - on the issues surrounding gang violence. It is the City's intention to implement programs that seeks to reach young people early enough that they can see that their future can be bright and filled with much more than gun violence, prison and possibly death.

Community Assessment Timeline

Phase I - Planning and Initiation - included a kick-off meeting with stakeholders and that served as a gap analysis of needs specific to the Roanoke community. Also, during this Phase, connections with the community influencers were established to partner with throughout the assessment.

- October 29, 2021: Stakeholder Meeting
- November 1 – 6, 2021: Scheduled Meetings/ Interviews with Community Leaders
- November 7 – 13, 2021: Scheduled Meetings/Interviews with Youth Services Providers and other Stakeholders

Phase II: Development and Implementation - included the "boots on the ground" engagement with the community leveraging relationships/partnerships formed with churches, small business owners, community advocates, association leaders, etc., to provide outreach and information regarding the assessment.

- November 8 - December 10, 2021: Survey Dissemination, Circulation and Outreach

Phase III - Evaluation and Closeout – included measuring and tracking performance and regular progress reporting that was conducted concurrently with Phases I and II via weekly touchpoint meetings with city Project Leads. Also, the Assessment Report that includes narratives describing the survey and interview results along with community recommendations and captures input from all stakeholders.

- December 10 – December 22, 2021: Survey Responses Compilation and Analysis
- December 15, 2021: Quantitative Data Results and Assessment Report Draft
- December 31, 2021: Qualitative Data Results and Final Assessment Report

Assessment Methodology

The assessment was completed through direct interviews with community members and Youth Serving Agencies along with surveys that were created and disseminated through a variety of method including links to survey platform (SoGo); hard copy distribution at libraries and attendance at several community events; and through a scannable QR code. The interviews and the surveys consist of multiple choice and open-ended questions aimed at soliciting feedback from Community Leaders, Community Residents, Youth Services Providers, and Youth and Students on the effects gang violence is having on the community as well as recommendations that will support mitigating the effects and making the community safer. The surveys were completely voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were not asked to share any personally identifiable information. In efforts to reach as many community members as possible, the surveys were made available in Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese (simplified), French, in addition to English. Also, the survey was easily shareable and could be accessed from cell phones and tablets as well as computers. Also, QR codes were set up to take respondents directly to the surveys. To help in ensuring that as many students and parents as possible had access to the surveys, Roanoke Public Schools shared the survey links through their communications channels and city posted information regarding the survey to its' website along with links and QR codes. Additionally, many of the Youth Serving Agencies assisting with disseminating information regarding the assessment by utilizing their social media platforms to post the links and QR codes to encourage community participation.

The Assessment Team convened Monday through Friday during the assessment period at the Melrose Branch Library to conduct interviews either virtually by video teleconference, telephone or in person if allowed. The library location afforded the Assessment Team the opportunity to speak directly with a number of youths as well as some adults that frequented the library after school. Other locations visited to acquire data were Goodwill Headquarters, the Raleigh Court Library, Eureka Park, and Wasena Park. The team also attended several community events including the Stomp the Violence community event, 2021 Hands of Hope Annual Thanksgiving Food Drive, Dickens of a Christmas event sponsored by the city, and attended services at several area churches to conduct interviews and disseminate surveys. Additionally, Elite Business Strategies conducted three (3) outreach events at city libraries consisting of pizza nights, trivia games and provided incentives for the student/youth population to participate in the assessment. The incentives, made possible by the city, included gift cards (McDonalds, Chic-fil-A, Game Stop, Play Station and X-Box) and donated materials for "SWAG" bags from the libraries and several Youth Serving Agencies.

Early on, the Lead Analyst determined that a goal of 60-75 respondents for each of the four (4) surveys would be needed to establish a baseline. Final survey respondents' totals are as follows:

- Community Leaders Survey – 114
- Youth Serving Agency Survey – 63
- Community Resident Survey – 528
- Student and Youth Survey – 259

Also, there were an additional 37 interviews conducted with various Youth Serving Agency representatives and community members.

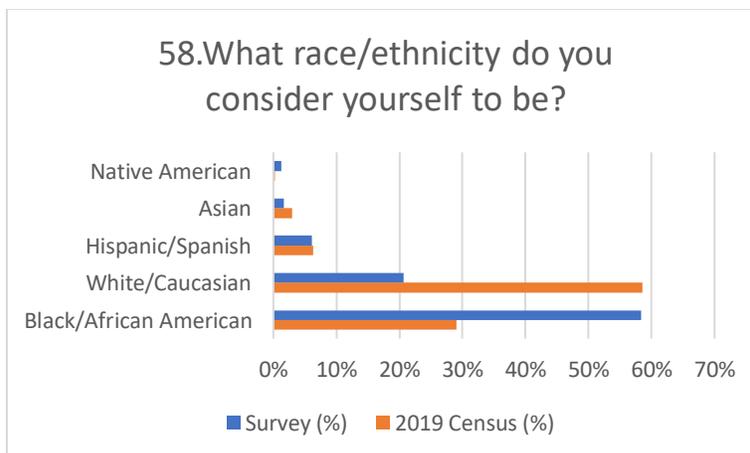
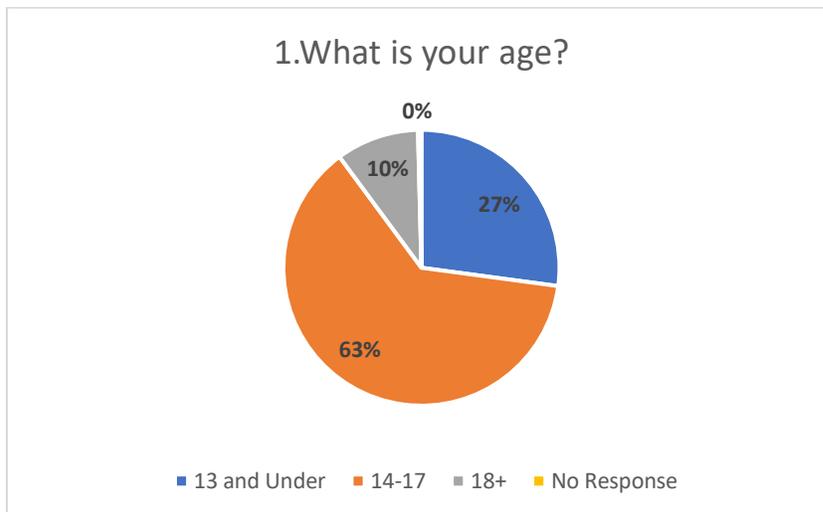
Overall recommendations reflected in the community assessment include more after school activities for youth, access to free individual counseling at schools or community agencies, opportunities for jobs, and ensuring that any programs and opportunities are accessible as well as available as many face transportation issues. Further detail is provided in the Key Findings section of this report.

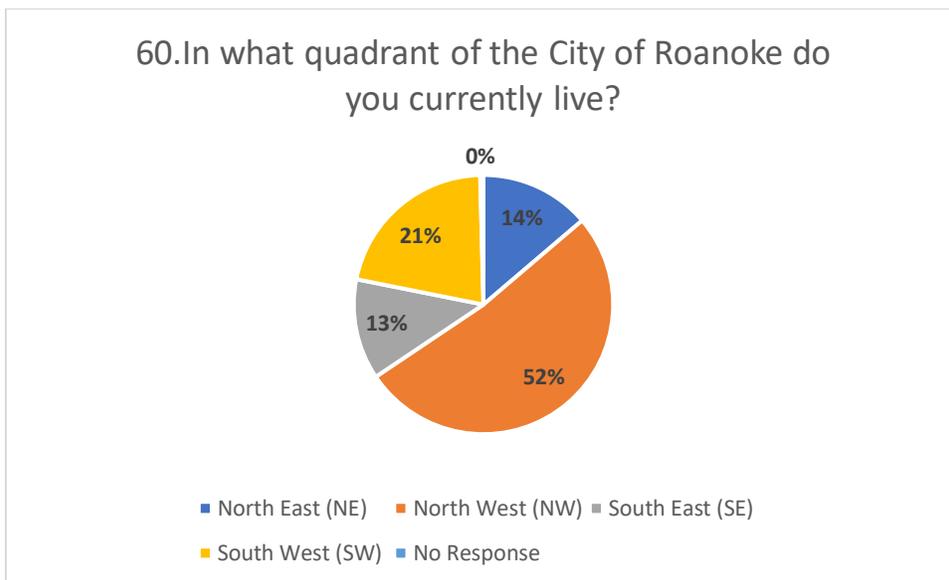
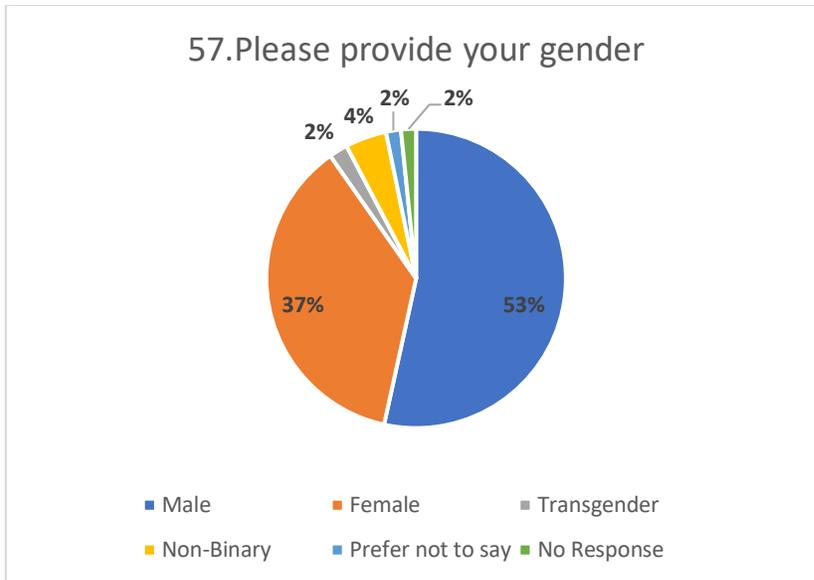
Key Findings

I. Youth and Student Survey

Demographic Data

- The survey was successful at reaching people of the appropriate age group when most youth join gangs. As the surveys was designed to reach primarily disadvantaged youth in quadrants of city where higher gang activity had already been reported (NW and SW) the, respondents from those areas of the city and Black/African American respondents were oversampled. Additionally, there are changes to the response options for gender and race/ethnicity that will give respondents the ability to share more accurate information about themselves.

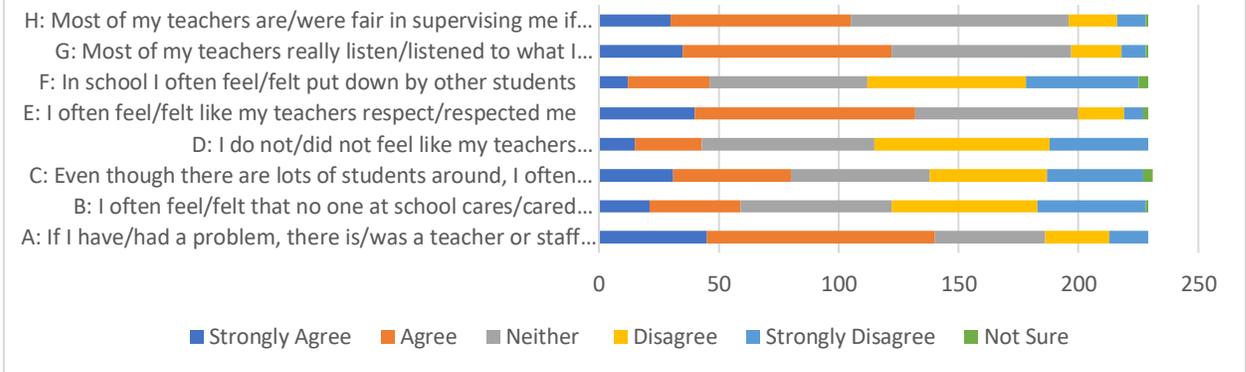




School Environment

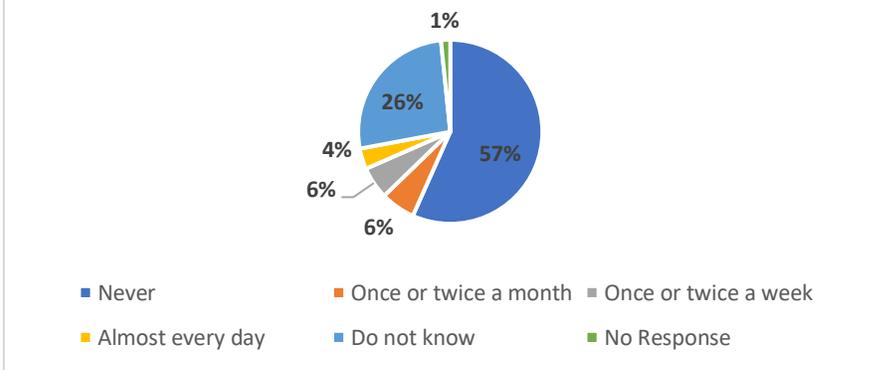
- Overall youth’s perception of their school environment skews positive to neutral. Most agree that there are teachers/staff they can talk to and that they are treated with respect by those teachers/staff.

10.School Environment Linkert Questions: For your current/most recent school, how much do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

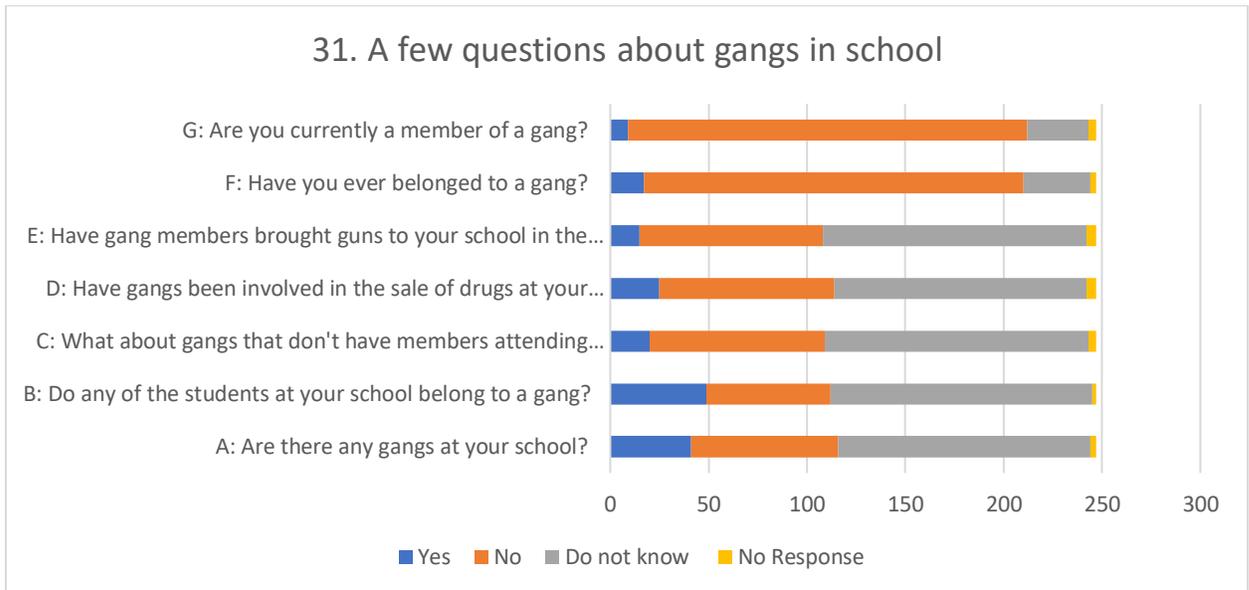
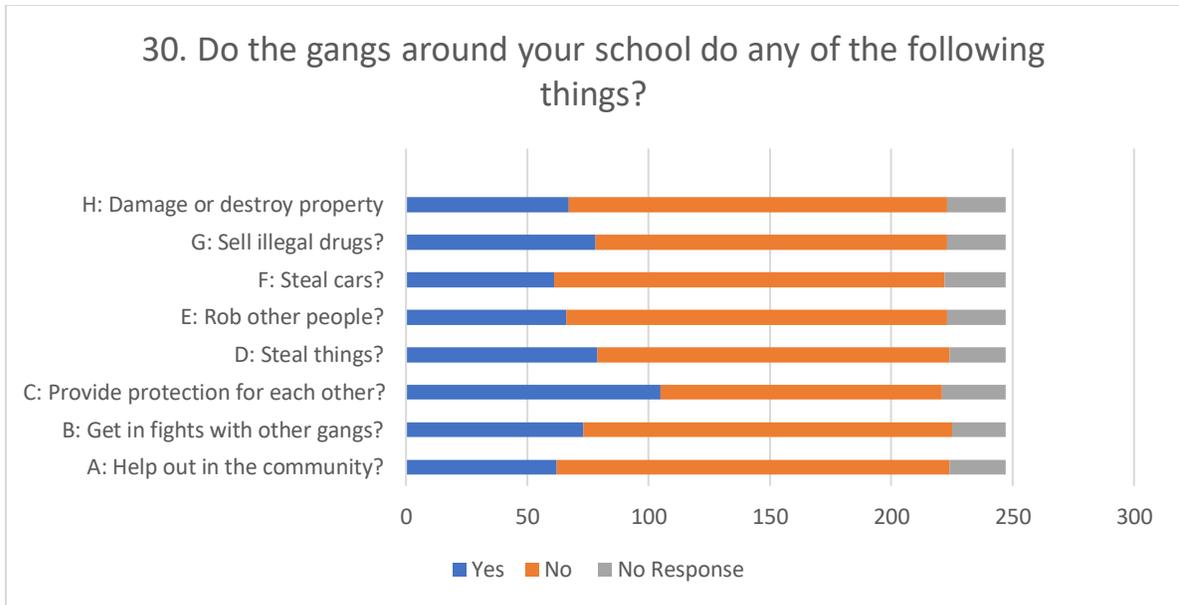


- 15% of youth/students admit to at least 1 instance of gang violence at their school within the last 6 months compared to 57% that stated there have been no such instances. These results suggest that while youth gang violence at school is not a widespread issue there is an undercurrent of such violence. Limited instance of violence may still have an greater effect on feelings of security among students the same way that school shootings though rare have a larger psychological impact on the student population. Next year include questions to assess how safe students feel at school and causes of their fear/anxiety

28.How often have gangs been involved in fights, attacks, or violence at your school in the past 6 months?



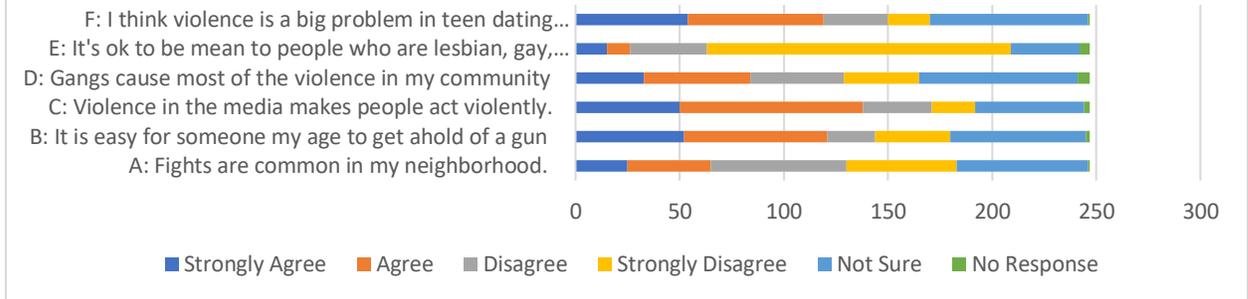
- Overall, most respondents reported that approximately 25-30% of school gangs engage in criminal activity or violence, their primary activity is providing protection to one another, which will be later reflected in responses from gang members themselves.



Environmental Violence

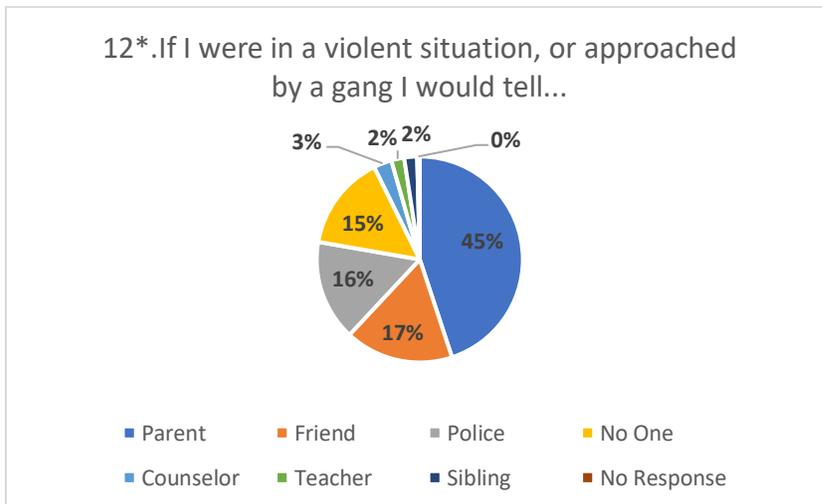
- Results for questions 11A-F were either similar across all four city quadrants or there were too many non-responses to make any conclusions about dissimilarities
- Almost half of respondents, 48.2%, either agreed or strongly agreed that violence is a big problem in teen dating. Teen dating violence is an often-overlooked issue and teens exploring relationship boundaries for the first time are particularly vulnerable. Schools can be an important role in teaching students about healthy relationships and providing guidance in how to identify and remove themselves from abusive relationships.

11. For each statement please select your thoughts on whether you; Strongly Agree, Agree, are Not Sure, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.:

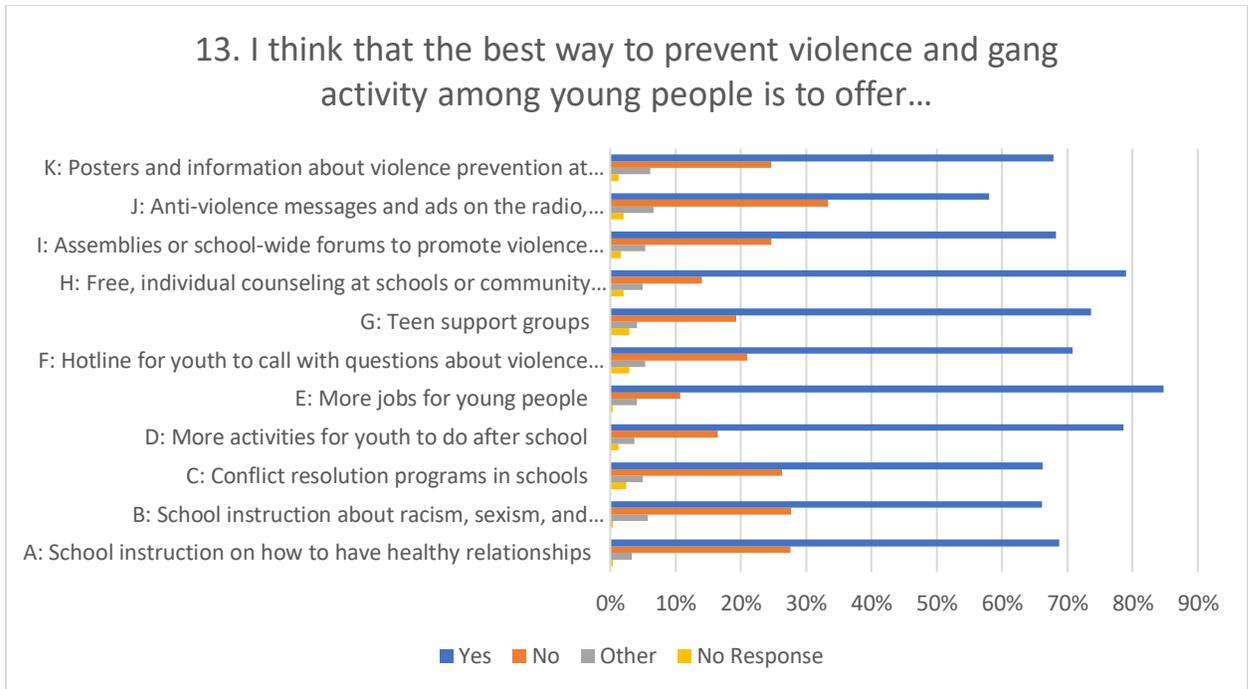


Dealing with Violence and Gangs

- While most respondents would inform their parents or another adult authority if in a violent situation or approached by a gang 15% of respondents would inform no one. It would be important to find a way to reach out to those respondents and provide resources for parents/teachers/staff to recognize the signs that a student dealing with conflict
- Next year include open-ended questions for those who answered “No One” why they would not reach out
- Try to engage past gang members on their openness with family about their gang activity and how their families responded
- Rather than an adult authority 19% would inform a peer (friend or sibling) Provide resources for youth to identify and engage with friends who are dealing with violent situations or being approached by a gang

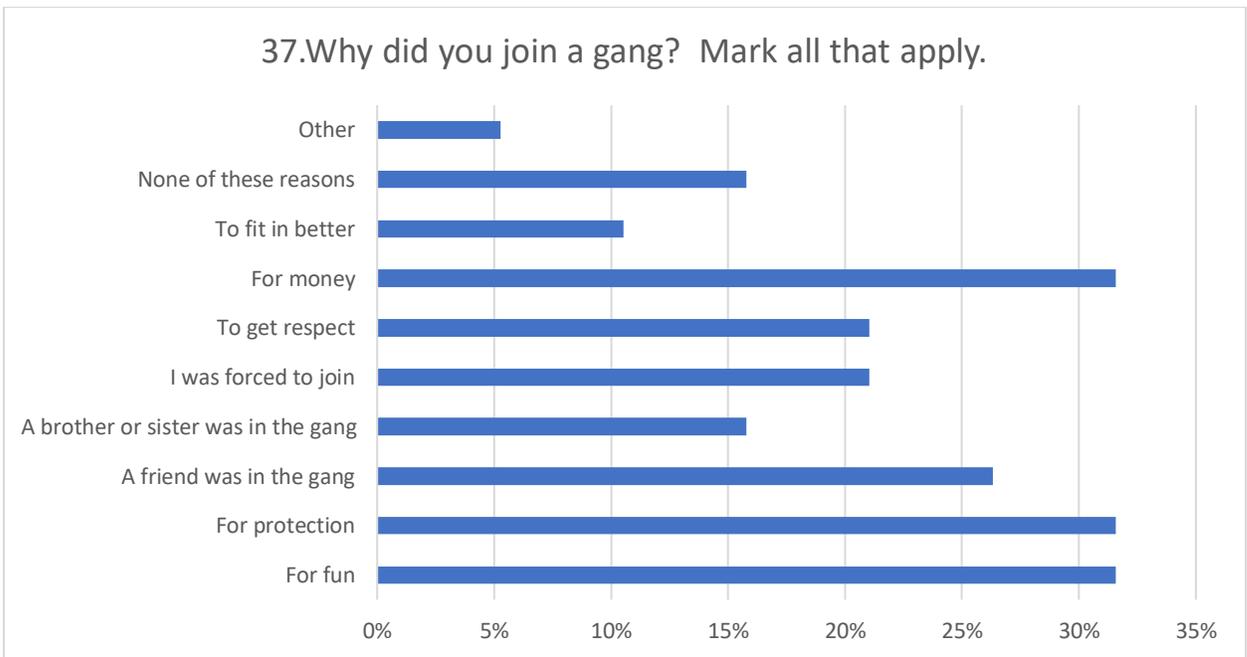
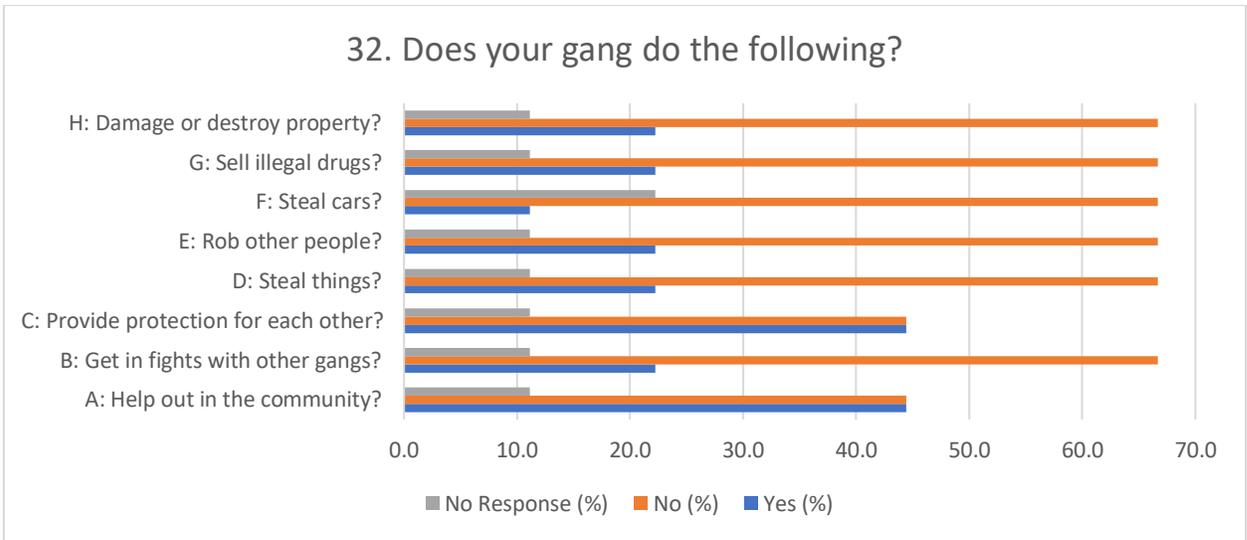


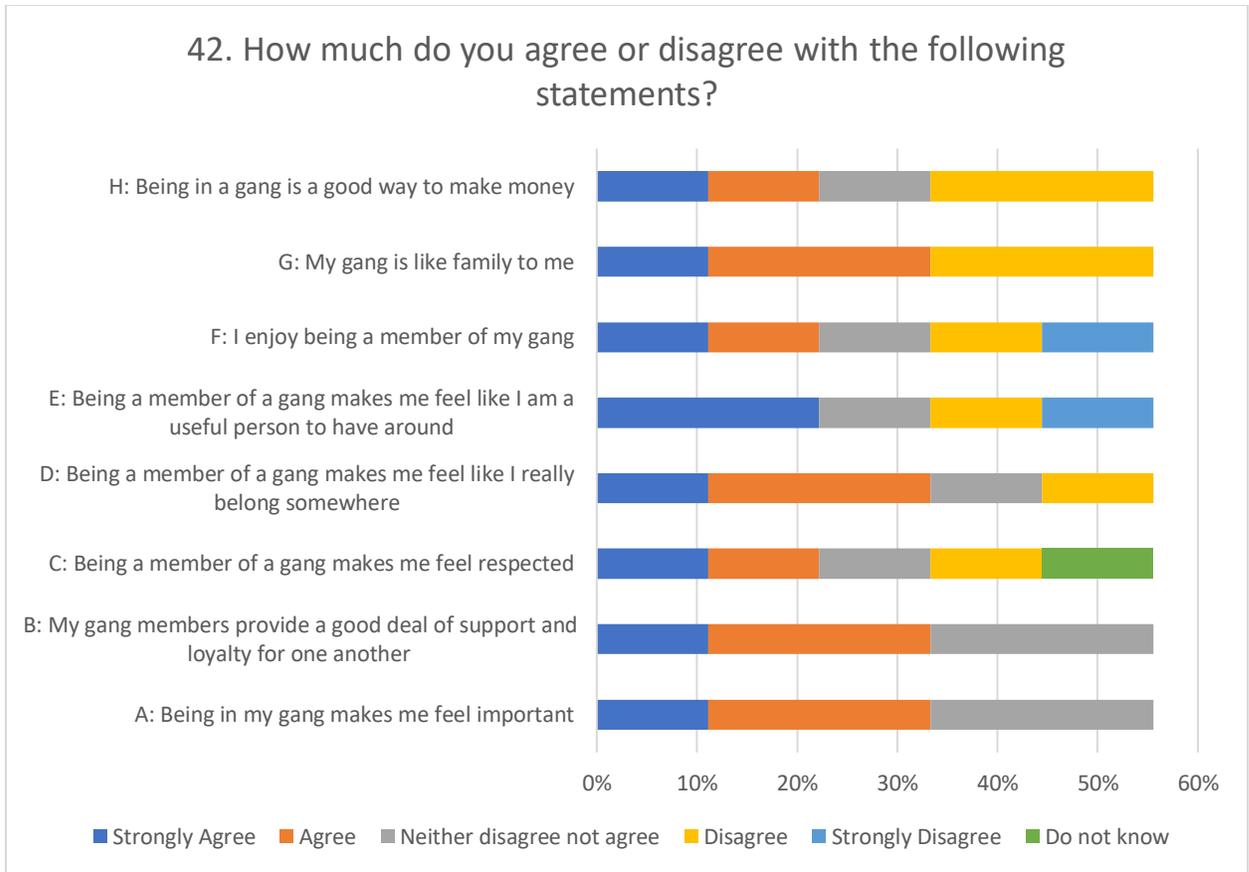
- Overall, students were positive about the solutions suggested for preventing youth violence and gang membership.
- Results from question 11 will be discussed below in regard to responses from gang members.



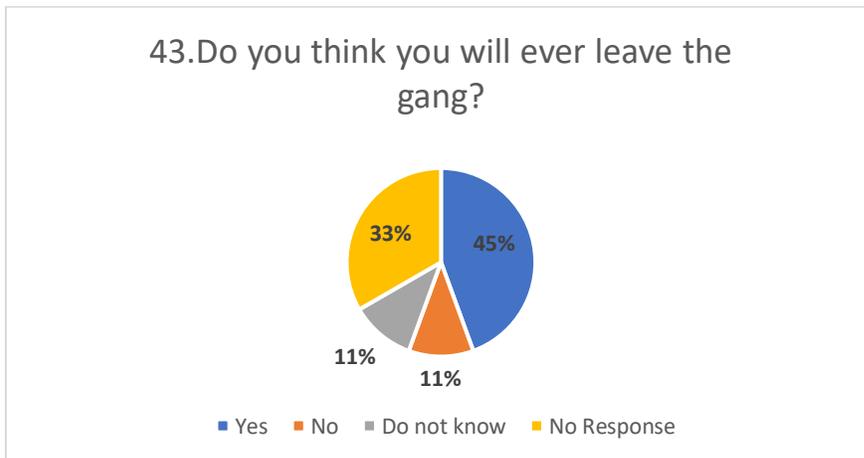
Gang Members

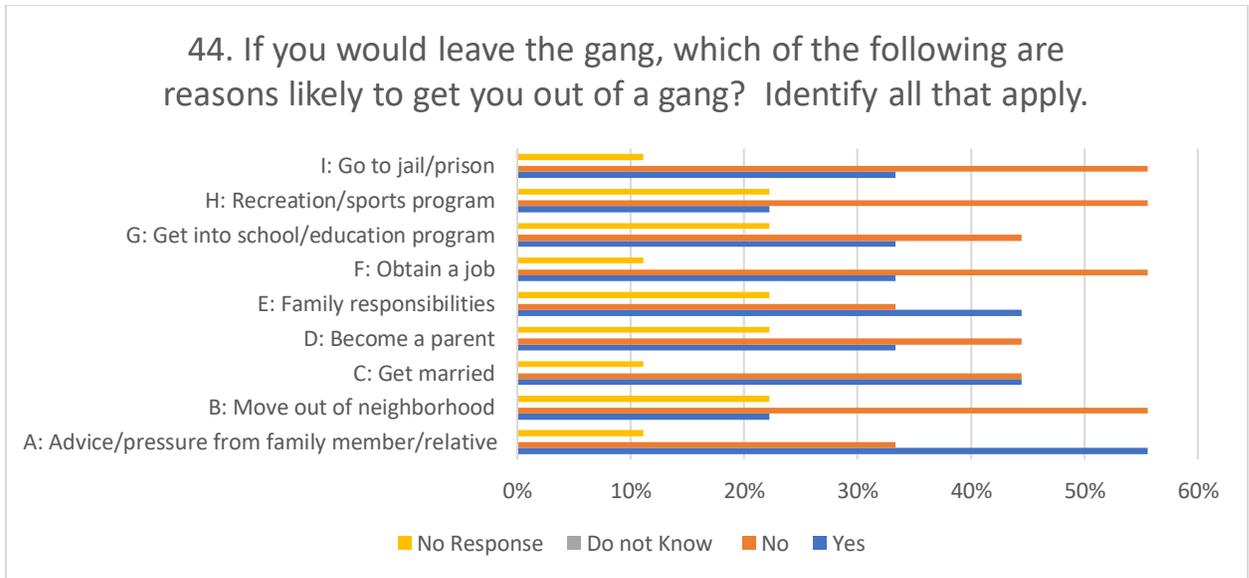
- Of the 247 respondents 19 (7.7%) admitted to being either currently or previously involved in gangs. The small sample size combined with the many skipping questions makes it difficult to obtain any significant results from the survey. The sample size is too small to confidently say it accurately reflects the wider youth gang population or how they compare to the wider student and youth population. The results obtain from these respondents have been analyzed but this limitation in the data needs to be recognized.
- Gang members primary motivations and activities revolve around protection, social bonding, money, and entertainment. Gang culture for these participants provides both emotional and material fulfillment. They gain a sense of belonging and closeness as well as potential security with the potential benefit of financial freedom. Attempts to draw youth and students away from gang culture will have to focus on providing healthy alternative sources for the benefits of gang membership. These results suggest that the solutions for preventing violence and gang activity respondents approved of most in the survey would be effective. The most popular solutions were “More jobs for young people”, “More activities for youth to do after school” and “Free, individual counseling at schools or community agencies”. For both after-school activities and individual counseling, it would be important to ensure that these opportunities are accessible as well as available.





- Unfortunately, for those already in gangs, recreation and sports were given as the least motivating reason for leaving a gang. Obtaining a job was more ranked higher and advice/pressure from family members was the reason most frequently listed that would get them to leave their gang. Getting married and family responsibilities were the next closest reasons as well, therefore for most members its family life takes precedence over gang life. Based on these results providing guidance and resources to the family of gang members to try is worth investment.



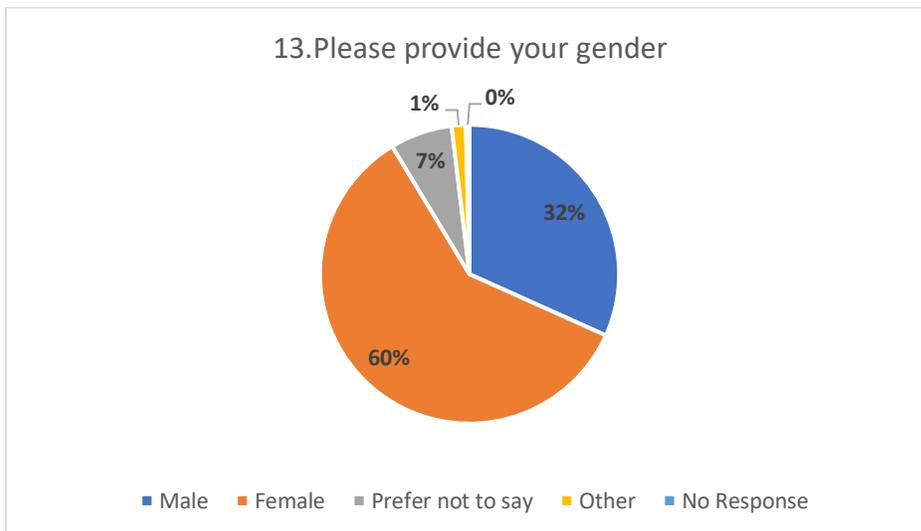


II. Community Resident Survey

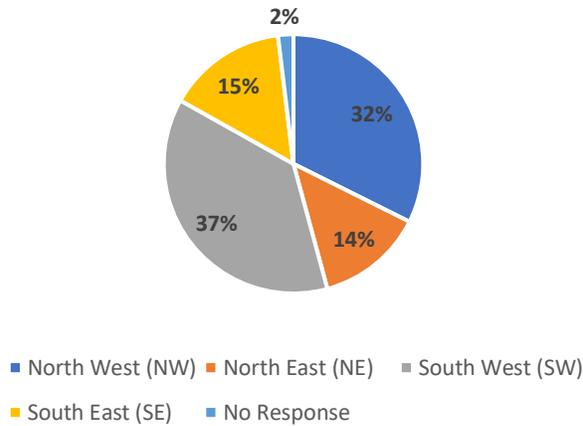
- Many of the residents when asked to pick their top three answers to a question chose more than 3 answers. This harms the reliability of the data as there is no way to know what they would have chosen as their priority if limited to three answers nor what others would have chosen if allowed more than three. Next year it is recommended that the survey is hosted on a platform that limits the number of responses participants can give for certain questions.

Demographics

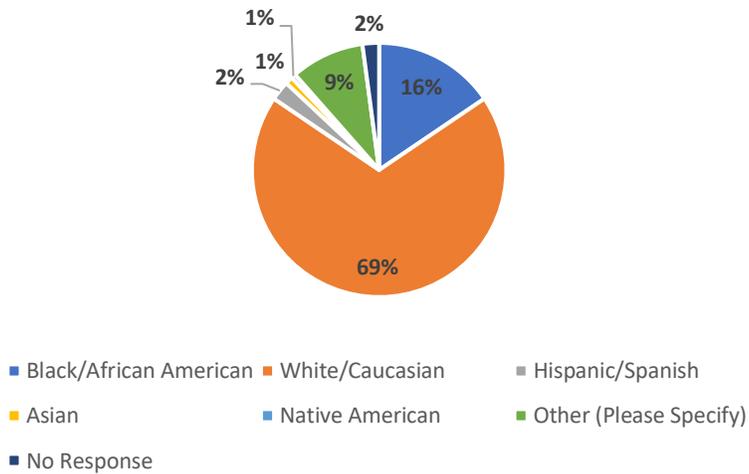
- In comparison to the youth survey, as the resident survey was given out more broadly with the exception of location, more responses were gathered from white/Caucasian females. However, the same suggested changes the response options for gender and race/ethnicity that will give respondents the ability to share more accurate information about themselves.



15. In what quadrant of the City of Roanoke do you currently live?



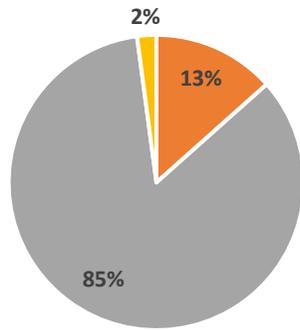
14.1. What race/ethnicity do you consider yourself to be?



Community Safety

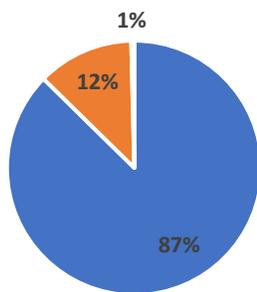
- Overall, residents feel less safe in their community. Gang activity is the primary concern followed by other violent crime, drugs, and destruction of property. Among “other” concerns brought up were affordable housing and homelessness as well as lack of opportunities for youth and gun violence. 87% of community residents believe there are gangs in the community and 60% believe their activity has increased.

17. Do you feel safer in your community than you did two years ago?



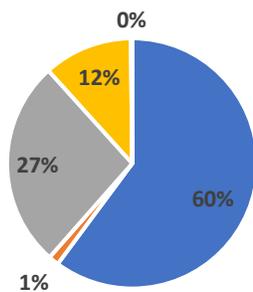
■ Yes ■ No ■ No Response

2.1. Do you think there are gangs in your community?



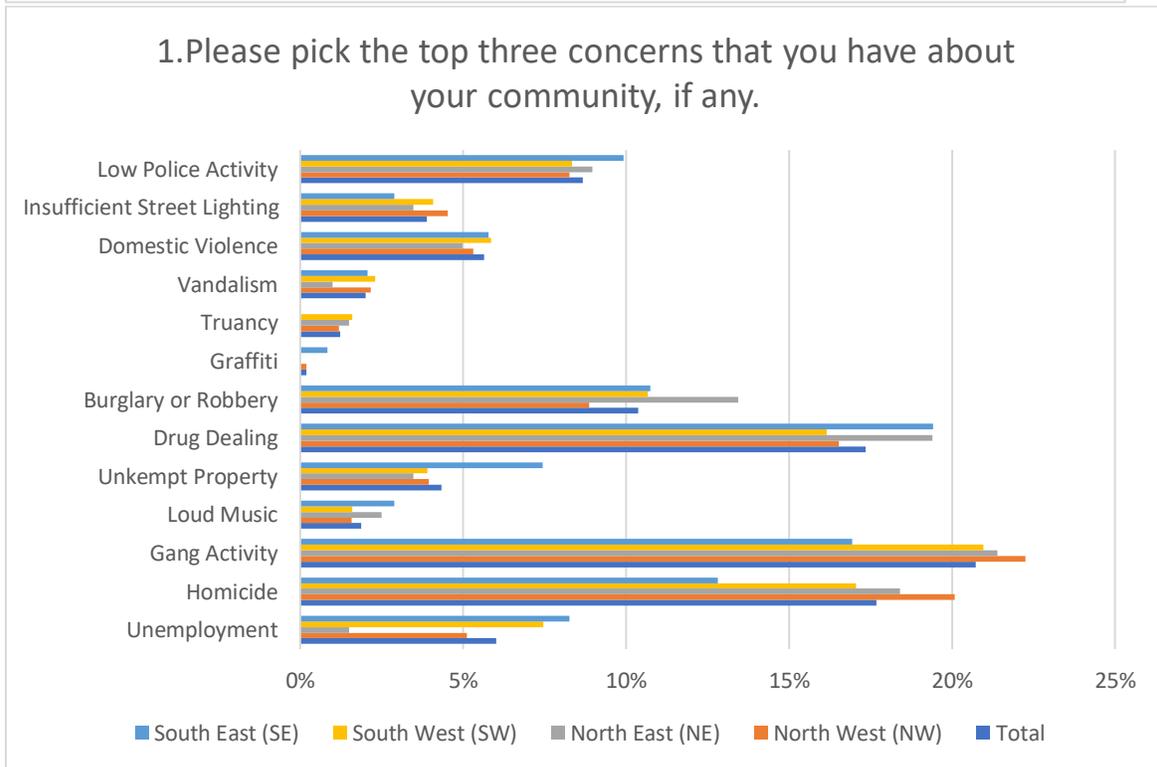
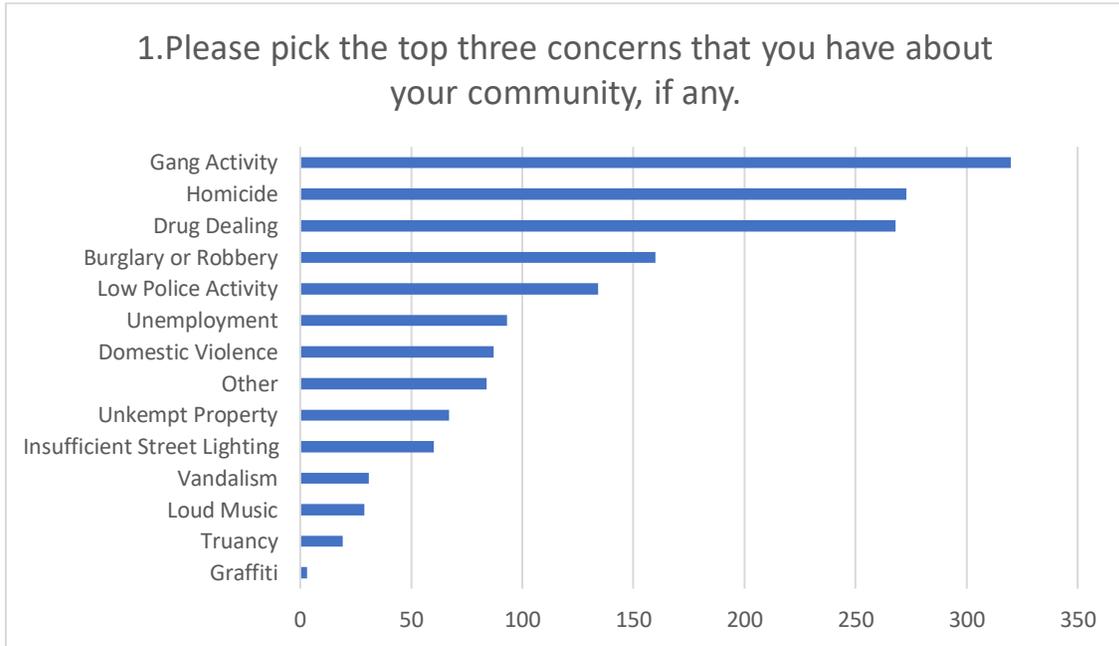
■ Yes ■ No ■ No Response

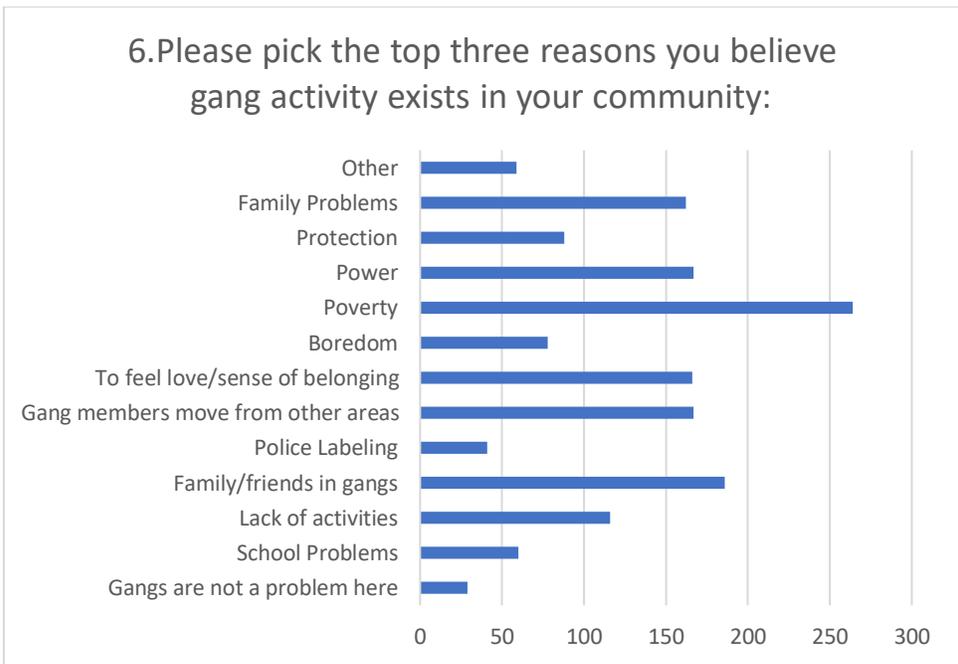
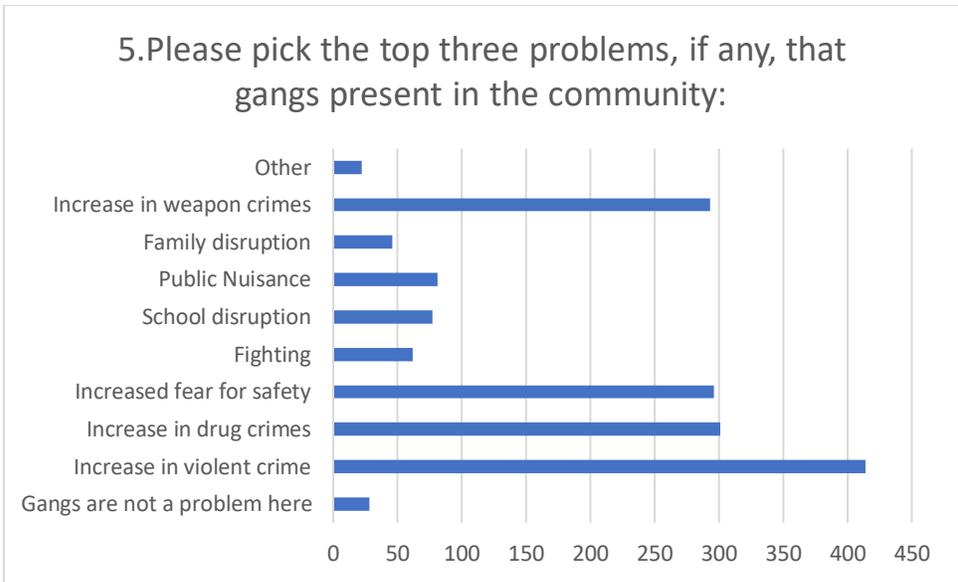
4.1. In the past year, has gang activity in your community:



■ Increased ■ Decreased ■ Remained about the same ■ Other ■ No Response

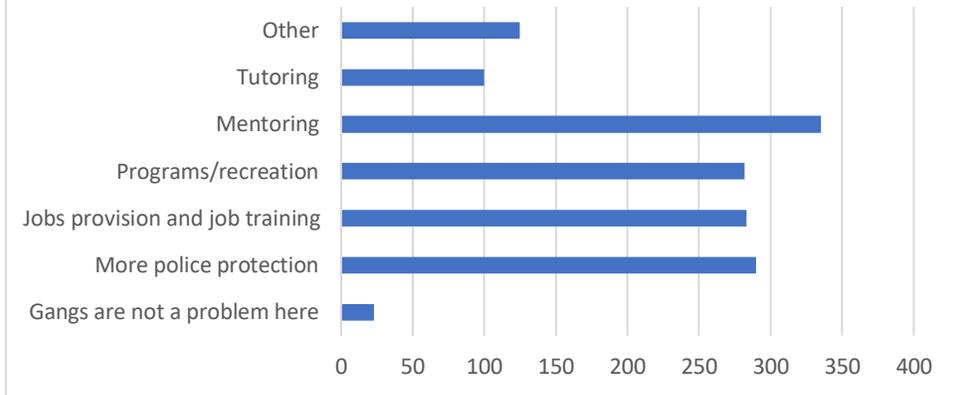
- Major concerns with gangs over violence and drugs. Most respondents consider poverty a leading factor in creating gang culture, followed by family issues and power. In comparison to students and youth, fewer residents considered protection as a primary motivation for gang membership. Under “Other”, residences also suggested that drug use/trade and lack of incarceration/legal punishment/ policing – a sort of general “weak on crime” perspective - were primary causes.





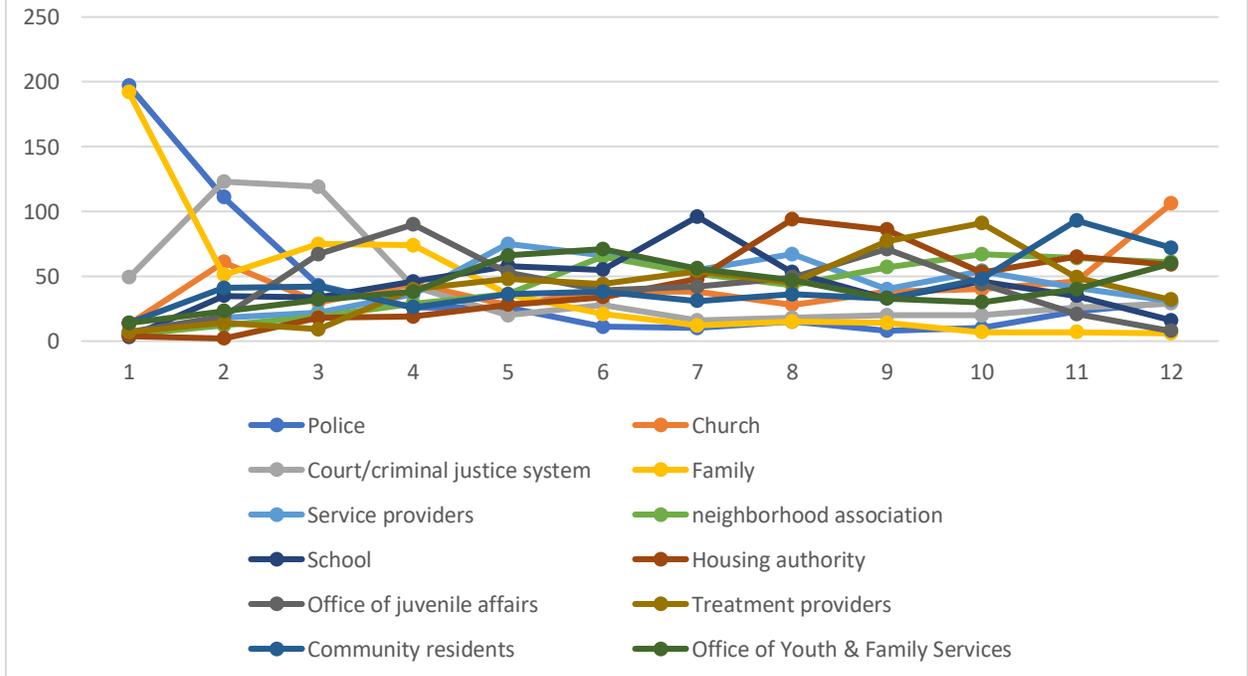
- Overall, residents are in favor of a wide range of solutions. As with the previous question, responses under “other” saw calls for more criminalization and harsher penalties.

7. Please pick the top three things you believe should be done about gangs and gang activity in your community:



- As shown in the previous question, the police and family are considered the primary organizations responsible for dealing with gangs, followed closely behind by the criminal justice system. Overall, there is a general dissatisfaction with current responses and a belief that more can be done.

8. Please rank the following organizations from most responsible (1) for dealing with gangs and gang activity to least responsible (12) for dealing with gangs and gang activity:



III. Community Leader Survey

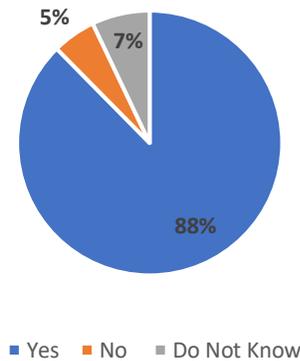
Demographic

- Same issues ran into with the community resident survey

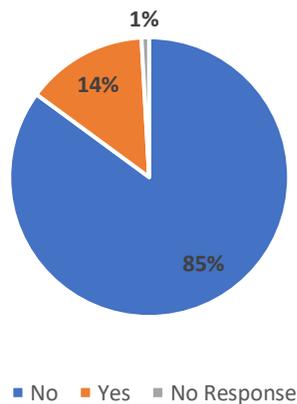
Community Safety

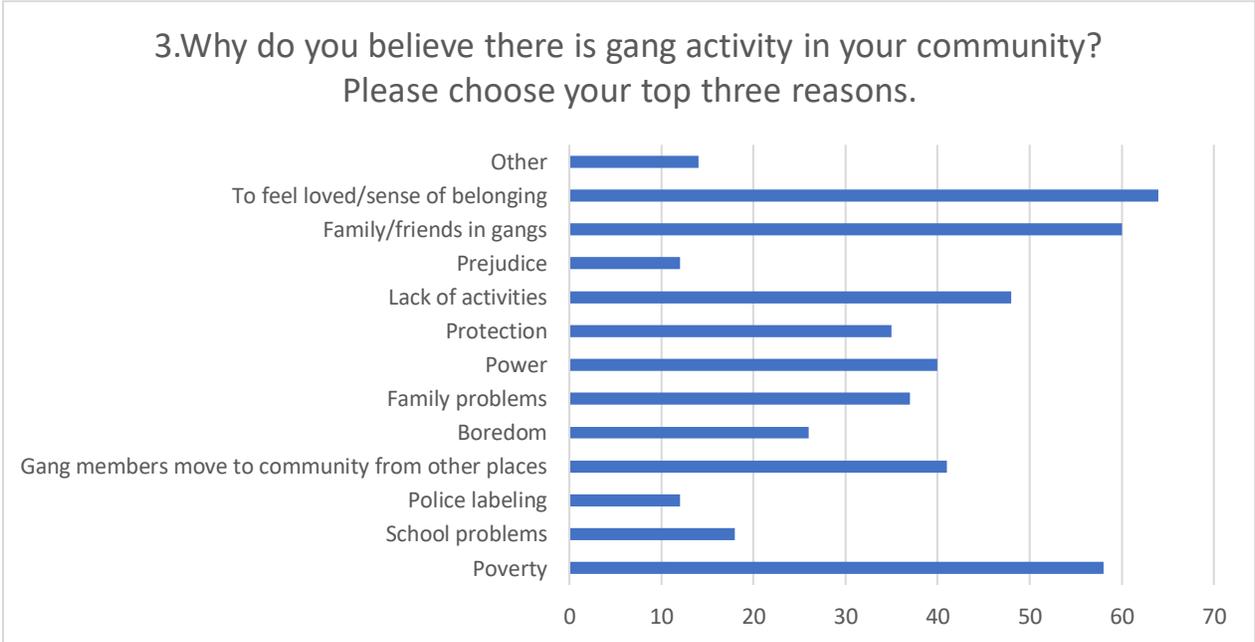
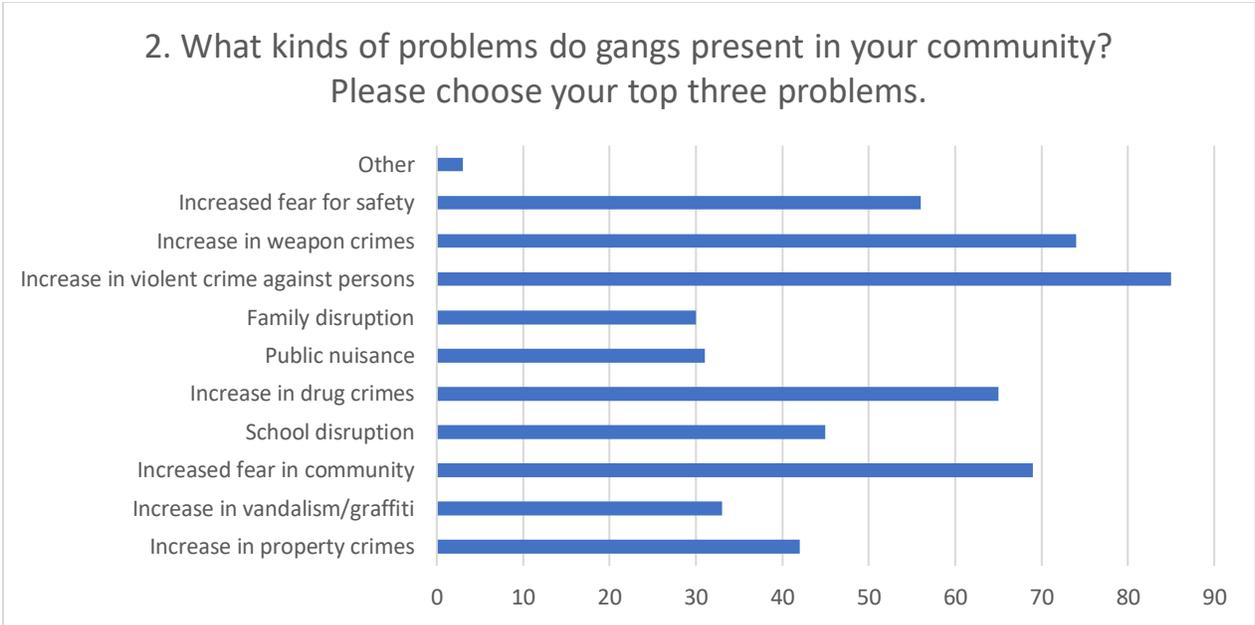
- On issues of youth and gang violence community leaders' perspectives represents the residents' perspectives well. Community leaders agree with residents concerning the presence of gangs and decreasing community safety. They also share the same concerns regarding gangs causing problems with violence and drug use, as well as additional concerns over generalized fear in the community. Similarly, they share similar opinions on what should be done about gangs as residents, while also supporting new laws/ordinances and greater parental involvement. Community leaders will be a good source for understanding the communities' perspective on solutions to youth and gang violence and could also function as an asset if gotten on board of convincing residents of the potential of less carceral solutions.

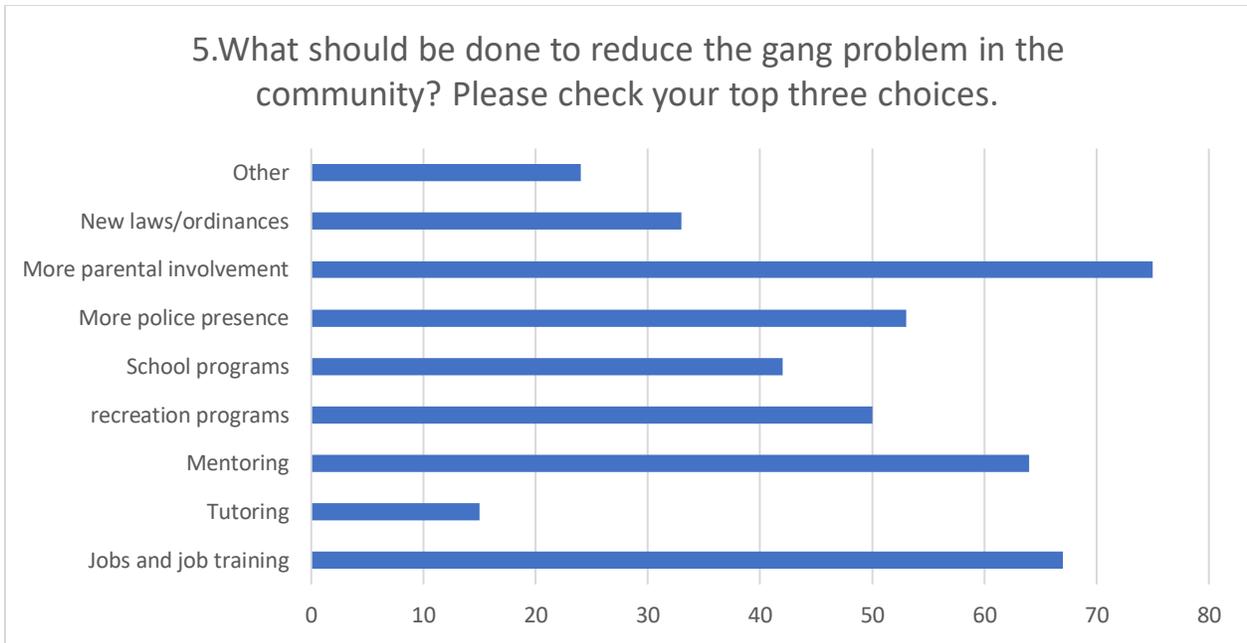
1. Do you believe gangs are a problem in your community?



14. Do you feel safer in your community than you did two years ago?







IV. Youth Serving Agency Survey

- On feelings of safety and gang activity respondents from youth serving agencies are in agreement with community residents and leaders.
- As for the way, many from youth agencies emphasize a lack of activities for youth and as one respondent said, “Lack of options for building a sense of belonging outside of school”. Others insist that the level of activity hasn’t change but that it is now being more widely reported. They also mention generational poverty, generalized gun violence, and lack of stable family/home life. Overall, in comparison to community residents and leaders, their solutions revolve less around the criminal justice system and more social welfare, therapy, and youth programs.

V. Youth Serving Agencies and Community Questionnaires and Interviews

- Respondents feel that the strengths of Roanoke lie in its championing of diversity, “small town” community feel and the breadth of resources available to the community as well as in the collaboration of the different agencies that provide them.
- Respondents identified a wide range of community issues including **gun** violence, generalized youth violence, gang violence, domestic violence, drug use/addiction, lack of mental health resources, poverty, lack of resources, lack of youth opportunities, homelessness/affordable housing, community fear/mistrust, legal cynicism, and institutionalized racism.
- Respondents were consistent that violence was impacting residents’ quality of life but many also elaborated that it was concentrated in the NW and SE quadrants of the city and also intersected with racial segregation. The trauma caused by increasing violence is engendering the communities with fear and mistrust.
- For the causes of violence respondents pointed toward poverty and racial injustice, both from lack of opportunity to provide for oneself and family as well as an outlet for built up frustration. Many mentioned that youth violence was not necessarily gang related but interpersonal

violence springing from miscommunication and conflict. In both cases youth feel they do not have alternatives to violence and means of building healthy relationships. Drug addiction and trafficking are also sources of conflict that turn to violence as a solution.

- Respondents point to young, poor, black/African American boys as the primary victims, as well as low-income youth in general. The homeless, elderly, and drug addicted also become easy targets for violence.
- Aside from violence, affordable housing and lack of transportation were identified as primary concerns for Roanoke.
- Underlying causes of these problems mentioned were systemic racism, mistrust/legal cynicism, and lack of youth opportunities
- In terms of solutions for criminal justice, while there were calls for more accountability and criminal punishment there were also many calls for system reform to be more preventative and take a less carceral approach, embracing diversity, and building back community trust.