

Elkhorn City at a Glance

“The river is our lifeblood...”



Demographics

- Population: 964 (2013 est.)
- Median Income: \$19,653 (2010)
- 25% of Residents are over 65

Natural Assets

- Breaks Interstate Park
- Russell Fork River
- Pine Mountain Trail
- TransAmerica Bike Trail

Elkhorn City is a rural town located in Pike County in Eastern Kentucky which aspires to develop their ecotourism and community. Over the past 16 years they have taken steps to expand adventure tourism on the Russell Fork River, obtaining their “Kentucky Trail Town” certification, and revitalization of their community. These three steps embody the three assets of the community including the river, the trail systems, and the community itself. The community has created plans for each of these assets. Through these plans the community hopes to create a diverse and participatory economy that will create and sustain business.

Throughout the years of working on the development for tourism they have accomplished many of their goals such as: conducting visitor and resident surveys, forming community task forces, focusing on community economic planning, becoming a certified “Trail Town,” completing a “Walkable Communities Inventory” and participating in grant writing workshops. These accomplishments have helped build up long term plans for the future of Elkhorn City.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research seeks to empower people rather than placing an emphasis on physical infrastructure and technology.

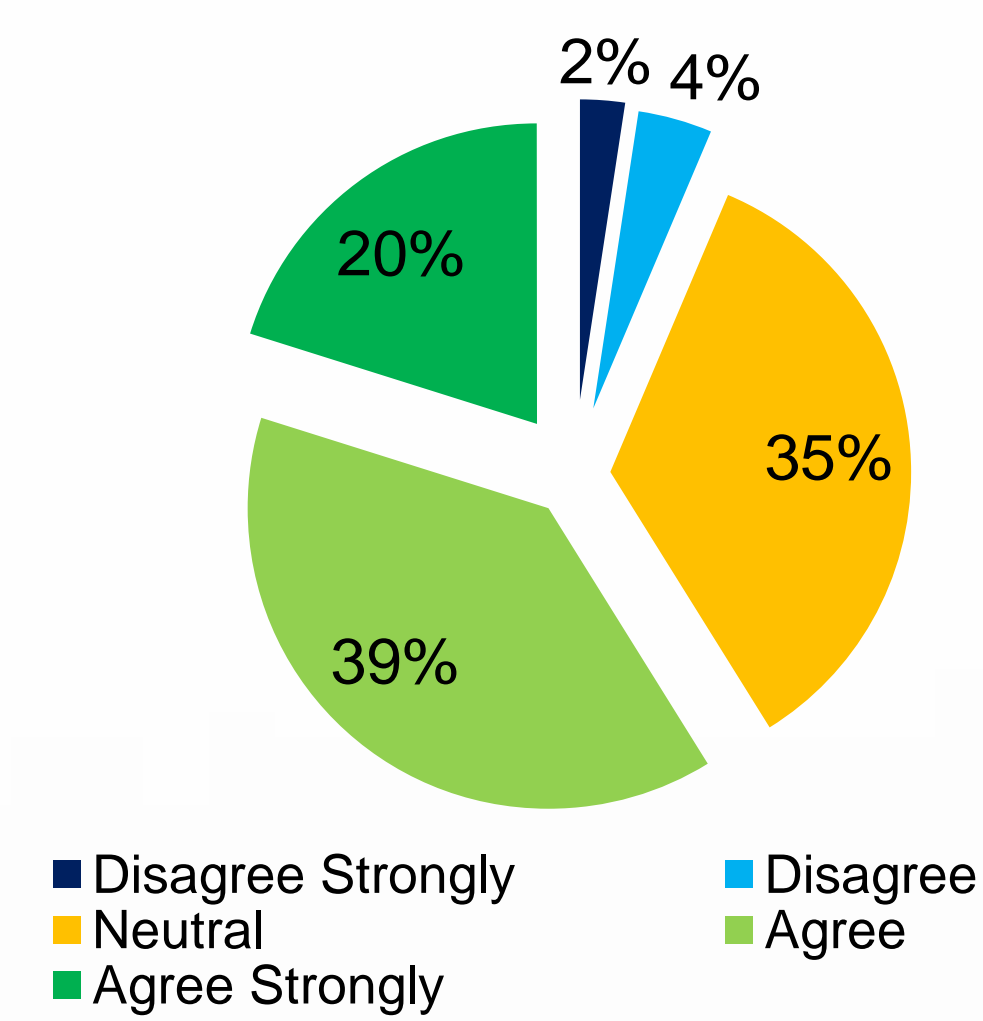
“In **participatory research**, community members are understood to be active, knowledgeable agents who can understand issues, develop research questions, and collaborate in data collection and analysis.”
– Susan Keefe (2009)

“An important part of **community development** is education for empowerment, so that marginal groups can enter into communication and negotiation with the power elite. Until the members of a group have self-confidence, pride, knowledge, and communication skills, they are unable to participate as full partners in the planning process.”
– Helen Lewis (1995)

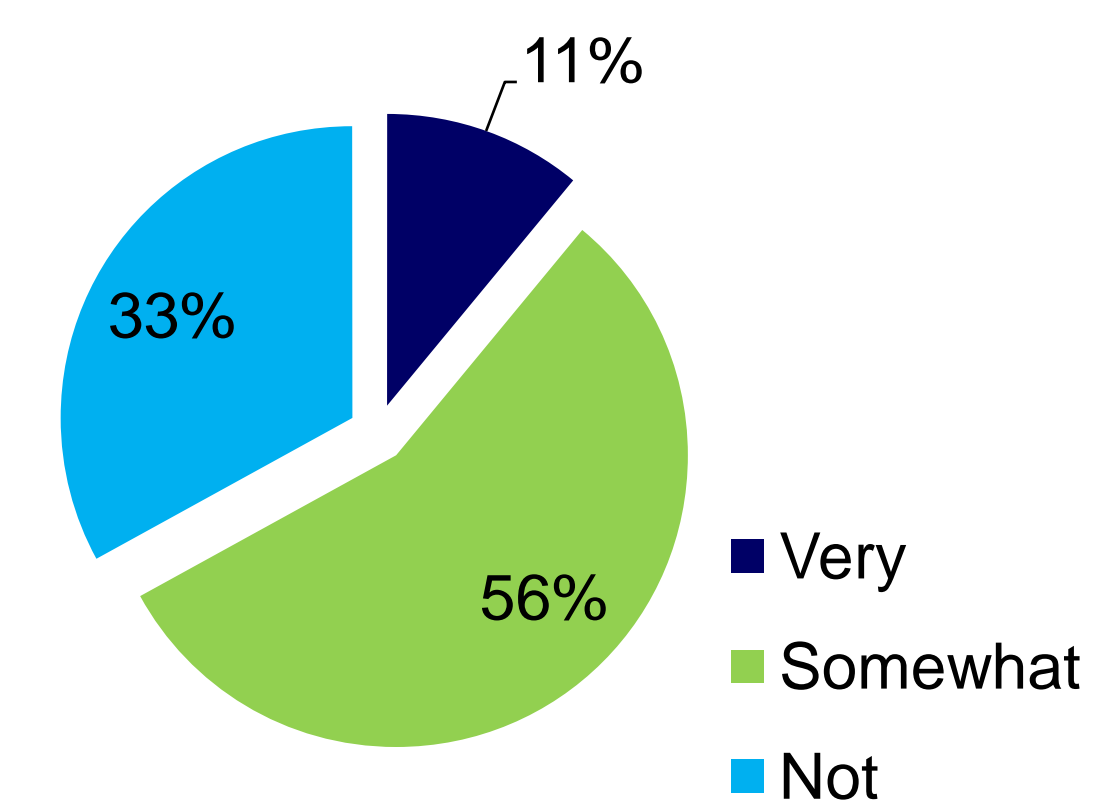
Need for Greater Community Involvement

Between August 2012 and March 2014, 130 residents of Elkhorn City were surveyed and 21 residents were interviewed.

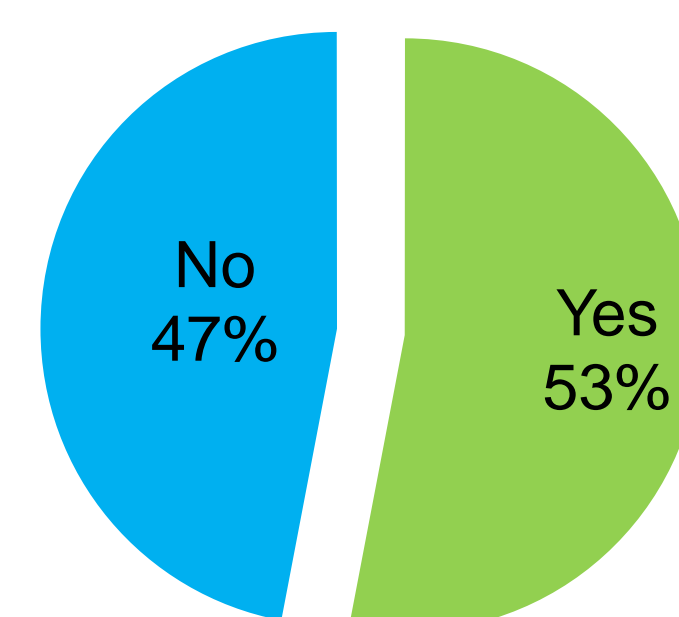
Graph 2. Want to Be More Involved in Community



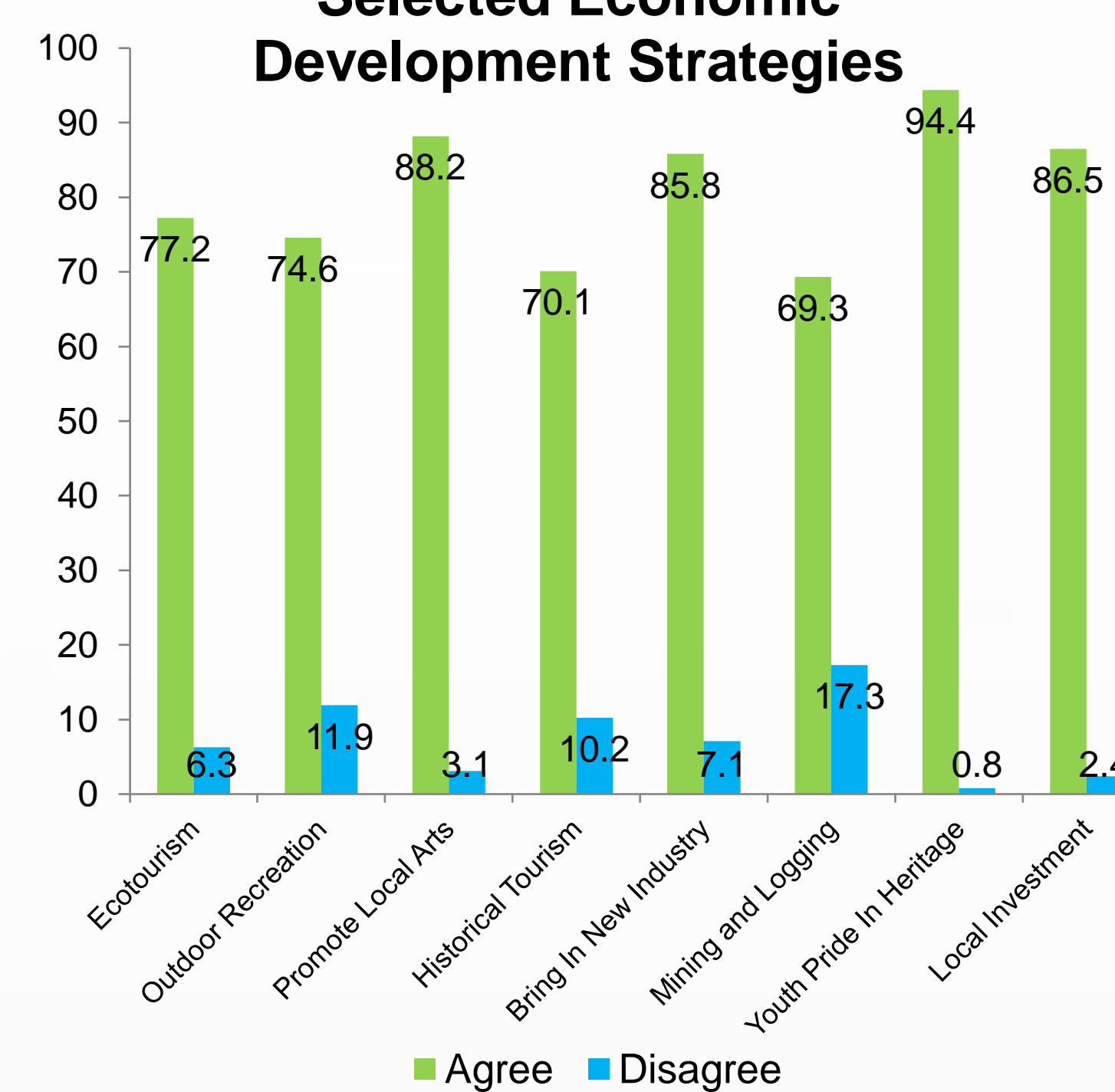
Graph 1. Current Resident Community Involvement



Graph 3. Does Resident Know About the Development Plan for Elkhorn City?



Graph 4. Attitudes Toward Selected Economic Development Strategies



Understanding the Graphs

Understanding how power functions within the participatory development process allows all voices to be heard among researchers, community organizations, and marginalized groups within the community. Because of this it is important as researchers to avoid prescriptive writing or action. However, if participatory action researchers gather important information through interviews and surveys, this information should be shared with community development organizations as they move forward with their strategies. The research that has been conducted by faculty and students from ECU and UK suggest that over half of the community reports being uninvolved in the community (Graph 1) and yet many people have a desire to be more involved in the community (Graph 2). There is work to be done to inform more citizens about the development plans and to include a more diverse group of people in economic and community development efforts in Elkhorn City (Graph 3). Finally, another challenge for participatory development in Elkhorn City is finding consensus about development strategies since there is a diffuse number of ideas about how to pursue economic development among citizens (Graph 4).

Community-University Partnership

The Elkhorn City Heritage Council collaborates with faculty, students, and staff from several universities, including the University of Kentucky and Eastern Kentucky University. In 2012, the ECHC approached ECU to consult about the town’s community development initiative. Both ECU and UK became involved in assessing challenges and opportunities for adventure-based recreation in the region, interviewing Elkhorn City residents and visitors, leading workshops on grant-writing, and in the spring of 2015 conducting an oral history project in Elkhorn City.



Next Steps

- “Elkhorn City’s Story” oral history project with UK students
- Increase community & youth involvement
- Infrastructure improvement
- Add whitewater recreation to Flanagan Dam mission
- Resident workshops on social media fundraising and oral history archiving



Acknowledgements

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References

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- Keefe, S. E. (2009). *Participatory development in Appalachia: Cultural identity, community, and sustainability*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.