



Douglas County Anti-Poverty Survey

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Douglas County Anti-Poverty Survey

“COVID has taught us all that we cannot live in a society where people do not make a living wage and have benefits [or] help if they lose their jobs or the economy falls down. We need to rethink all of this for a long-term solution and that includes how we help and view poverty in our county.”

-Douglas County resident

Background and Introduction

The goal of this project was engaging community members, especially those of low-income, to share ideas to address poverty and well-being in Douglas County. With support from a multi-sectoral leadership team, 787 Douglas County community members completed surveys to share their ideas on how to improve quality of life in Douglas County. Two focus groups held in organizations in Douglas County were also conducted to learn more about conditions to foster a thriving, healthy, and equitable community. The prevalence of poverty in Douglas County is an important public health issue. Research shows a clear link between poverty, socioeconomic status, and health outcomes. According to the [2018 Health Equity Report](#) created by the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department, “residents earning less than \$35,000 are 6.6 times more likely to be uninsured and to be diagnosed with asthma. They are more likely to not go to the doctor due to cost and to have poor mental and physical well-being.” The [Douglas County Community Health Plan](#) is sharing with the community how it is taking steps to address health equity through the [Healthier Together: Creating the Conditions for Health for All online platform](#).

One recent initiative that centered equity included the Kansas Health Foundation-funded Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI) Health Equity Project, which in 2019 found that the most common employment barriers were educational opportunities and prejudice for those most at risk of marginalization in Douglas County. This anti-poverty survey was a follow-up to specifically identify strategies the community would like to see in addressing poverty and quality of life.

Multisectoral support & leadership team

This project was led by the United Way of Douglas County and Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health in partnership with an interdisciplinary group including community members and representatives from organizations including the following:

Ballard Center
Chamber of Commerce
City of Lawrence
City of Eudora
Douglas County KS
Family Promise
Housing and Credit Counseling, INC
Kansas Appleseed
KU Center for Community Health & Development
Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority
Lawrence Public Library
People's Owned and Operated Collective Housing
Sexual Trauma and Abuse Care Center
University of Kansas
USD 497

Approach and methods

Work group members met regularly to review existing data, design the survey, plan for survey dissemination, and review survey responses. This survey was distributed online with hard copies placed in community sites. Two focus groups were held with a total of 15 participants. Recruitment was done through e-mail, social media, and in-person invitations across organizations in Douglas County. Additionally, a \$5 gift card was provided to thank the first 100 people for their time. In all, 870 people completed the survey. Of the total number of surveys received, 83 surveys were excluded for having zip codes outside of Douglas County; 787 participant data were included for the survey.

Community input

There are individuals of low socioeconomic status in Douglas County who face barriers to obtain or maintain employment that moves beyond minimum wage. The goal of the project was to identify solutions from within the community allowing individuals to reach their fullest potential with respect to employment. The report below describes findings from the survey.

Top community ideas to address poverty

Participants were asked, “What do you see as the most important changes to help people living without enough money meet their needs?” Seventy percent of community members reported **job training opportunities** (70%). This is in alignment with the HCI Health Equity 2019 report, which found educational opportunities as one of the top two barriers to employment in Douglas County. Additionally, 57% of participants indicated top ideas to address poverty included **employer applications that do not ask about criminal background** (57%), and **no-interest loans** (53%). Figure 1 below displays the different ideas the community would like to see implemented to address poverty in Douglas County.

The top 3 ideas for improving poverty included job training opportunities, employer applications that do not ask about criminal background, and no-interest loans

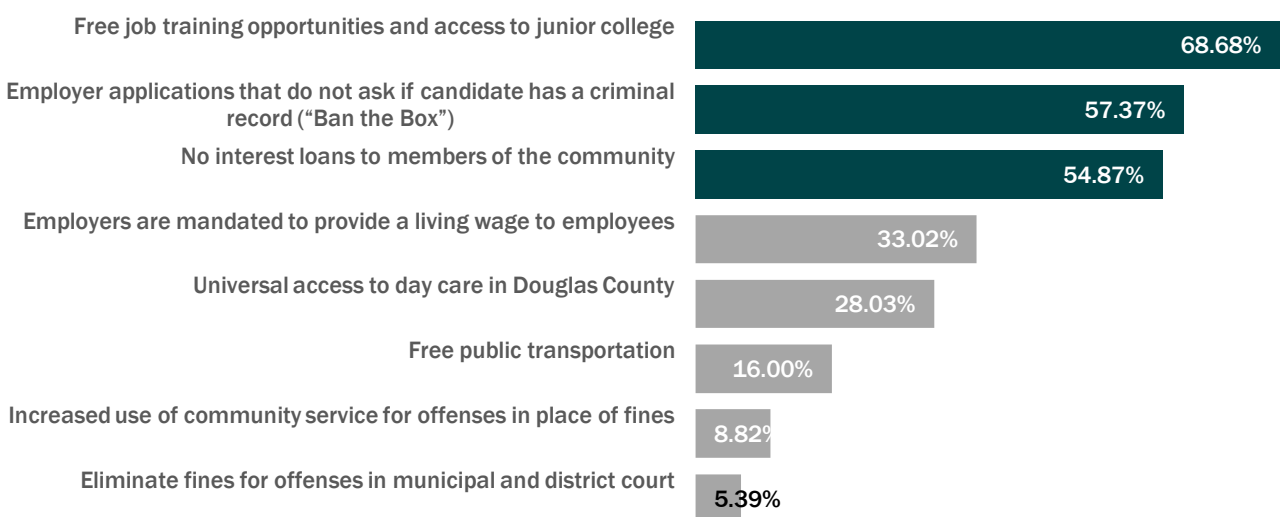


Figure 1: Important changes to help people living in poverty to meet their needs

Additional important changes to help people living without enough money meet their needs



In addition to the responses shown in the graph above, participants were asked to write-in their ideas of the most important changes to help people living without enough money meet their needs. The most common written responses for the most important change to help people living without enough money to meet their needs were **affordable housing**, followed by more **job and educational opportunities**, **healthcare for**

all, **affordable daycare with flexible hours**, and **addressing mental health**.

Big ideas to improve wages



Participants were asked what is their “ONE big idea” to improve wages in the community. The most common ideas participants suggested were **affordable housing**, **increasing minimum wage**, **incentives for businesses to provide a living wage**, and **attracting businesses that offer tech and professional jobs**. Many suggested at least a \$15 minimum wage, and access to resources such as computers (e.g., more time, more computers across different

places, with more hours of availability) would be helpful.

Illustrative Ideas

“Increase the minimum wage (with opportunity for benefits at less hours) and increase wages for state employees, teachers, and social workers.”

“Raise the minimum wage so a single-income household can support at least two people. At least \$15 per hour to support the cost of daycare.”

“Mandatory living wage meeting the Douglas County average rent cost.”

“Accountability from employers to provide adequate wages and benefits to their employees.”

“Restaurants/service industry must provide livable wage instead of small hourly wage plus tips.”

Big ideas to address racism



Participants were asked what is their “ONE big idea” to address racism in the community. Ideas were **creating a safe and equitable community** through implicit bias and anti-racism **training** in our community and schools, ongoing small-group and **community conversations**, **reallocation of police funding** to unarmed community-based responders trained in de-escalation, substance abuse, domestic violence, and

mental health, and **police training**. Other ideas were **to include Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in positions of power in the community**, **acknowledge white privilege**, and **call out policies that negatively affect people of color**.

Illustrative Ideas

“Fund community programs in the schools that promote diversity and understanding at an extremely early age.”

“Provide support for individuals to advocate for themselves when they have been discriminated against. There are still many businesses in Lawrence-Douglas County that do not have people of color employed in their facility. Especially most dental and other health care offices, police department (officers nor administrative staff), court house. When our community, especially children don't see all races represented in these fields it sends the silent message that 'this field/office does not hire staff of color'. Examine the number of staff of color that are in high wage jobs in the companies that employ people of color.”

“Racism in the judicial system must be addressed. The jail expansion shouldn't go through, police need to be held accountable for their actions, and we need to work with POC community leaders to find the best way to move forward.”

"We've worked with KU to make Lawrence home to retirees, to bioscience companies, to engineers. What if we worked with KU to retain graduates of color in Lawrence?"

"Learning from our children who are being taught differently is the best way to overcome our obstacles - learn from our children who are being taught better than we."

Ideas to improve quality of life



Ideas to improve quality of life in the community included **increasing access to mental health treatment** and **access to healthcare regardless of insurance status, affordable housing, more community events, quality childcare, free community events, better education, and high-quality jobs**. Some suggested if we **decriminalize marijuana** a lot of people in our community will feel more safe and secure in their future

Illustrative Ideas

"Give more funding to affordable housing and other social programs to uplift our community's population in need. When everyone has the space to learn, grow, and thrive, our community can start to do the same."

"If we want to improve the quality of life for all people in our community we need to focus on being the change we want to see in our community. Live lives of virtue, integrity and character. Get involved civically, and encourage others to do the same."

"We need free, reliable transportation for low income residents. This has to extend to other communities in Douglas County, not just Lawrence."

"Douglas county is so expensive to live in compared to many counties around. Taxes are too high; property prices and rent are too high. We need a small community of tiny houses to help those that want/ need a home."

"The solution to poverty is super straightforward. That's not the hard or complex part. The hard part is letting go of our internal values that reinforce a reality in which poverty is viewed as a natural outcome and an individual failing. That part is the real barrier."

“Better access to affordable housing, strong social systems, reducing or eliminating stigma around mental health, poverty, racism, culture... accepting diversity starts with celebrating diversity.”

“Be better about looking at what can help people long term instead of short term. Offering a night to stay in a shelter is not a long-term plan.”

“Make community buildings that have exercise, swimming, etc. for free. Better health and quality of life will follow.”

Demographics

Of the 787 participants, most were Hispanic or Latino (50%), followed by White or Caucasian (37.6%). Blacks or African Americans represented 4.19% of those taking the survey, while Native/Indigenous participants made up 2.16% of respondents. Of all participants, 1.78% were multiracial and 1.65% Asian or Pacific Islander. The demographics from survey respondents are different than our county’s general demographics which includes a population with 78% White, 7% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Black, 2% Native, 6% Asian, and 5% Multiracial individuals. The 50% Latino population for this survey is a much higher percentage than the 7% overall county average for Latinos, and demonstrates the broad reach of this survey to populations underserved.

Figure 3 shows that most participants identified as female (72.7%), while Figure 4 shows that most who took the survey are caregivers, or people who provides direct care (as for children, elderly people, or the chronically ill). The highest level of education for most participants as seen in Figure 5 was a high school diploma (56.5%), followed by a college degree (36.9%). Table 1 below shows that most people who took the survey (34.9%) were between 25-34-year-olds.

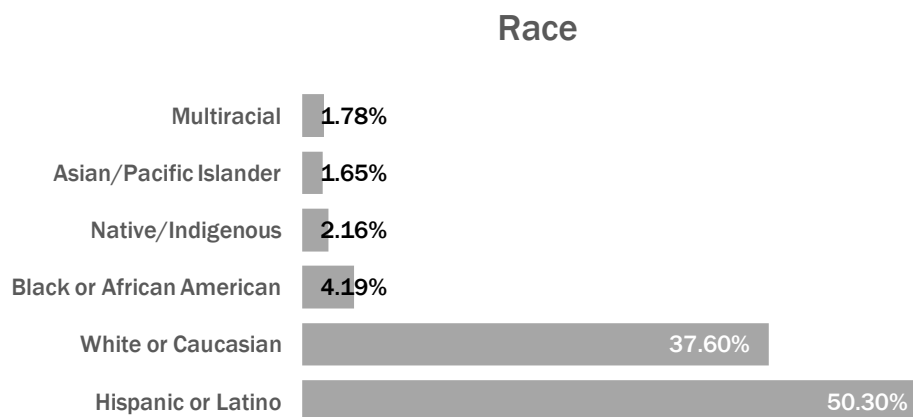


Figure 2: Race of survey respondents

Most participants were female

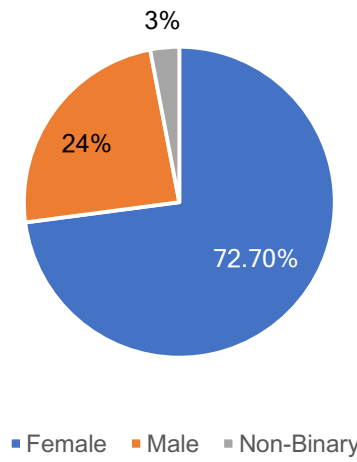


Figure 3: Gender of survey respondents

Most participants were caregivers

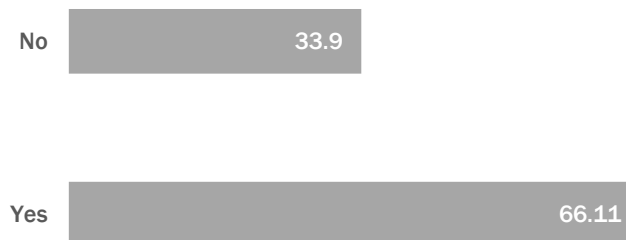


Figure 4: Rate of respondents who are caregivers

The highest education level of most participants was a high school diploma

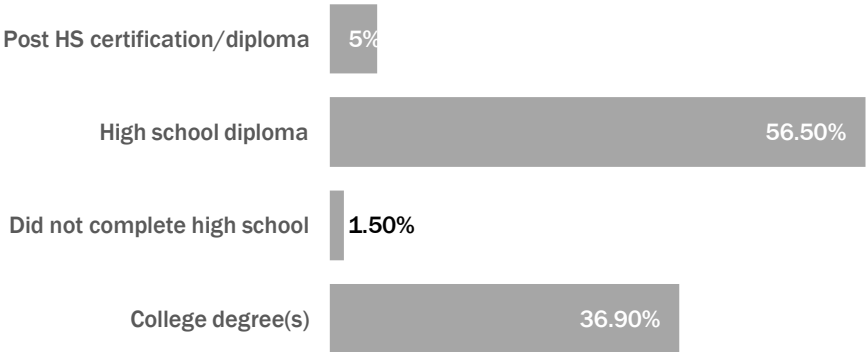


Figure 5: Highest education level

Table 1: Age

Age	Percent
18-24	18.80%
25-34	34.90%
35-44	26.9%
45-54	8.00%
45-55	0.26%
55-64	6.70%
65-74	3.40%
75+	0.92%

Figure 6 below shows that most people who took the survey made \$36,000-49,000 annually (57.3%), while 12.4% of participants made less than \$24,000 a year. When viewing Figure 7, most Hispanic or Latino populations made \$36,000-\$49,000 a year. Of those who made less than \$24,000, the majority (64 individuals) were White or Caucasian.

Income

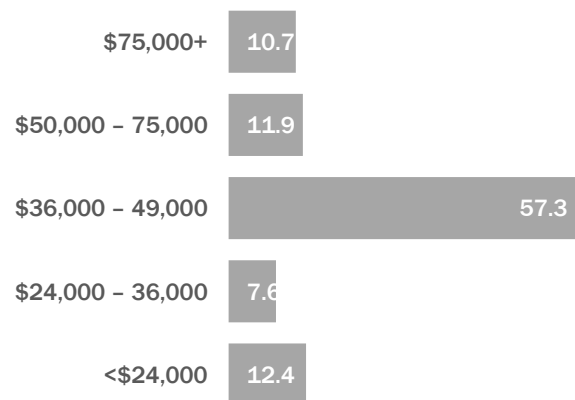


Figure 6: Income level

Income by Race

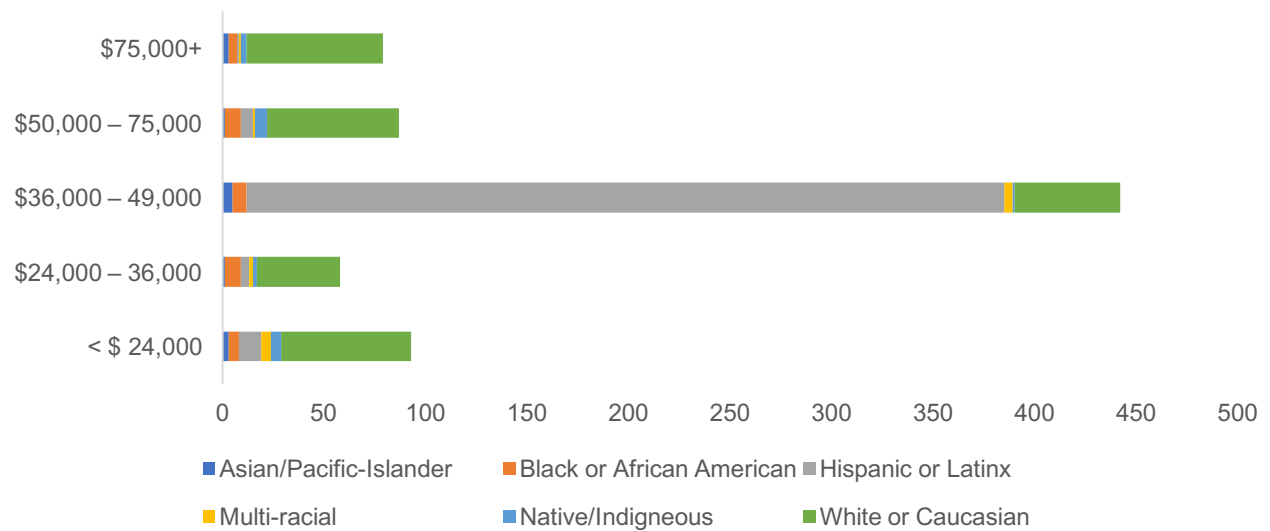


Figure 7: Income by race

Local secondary data supports the importance of anti-poverty work. Figures 8-10 below show that while Douglas County has a lower rate of child poverty compared to the state of Kansas and the US overall, food insecurity is disproportionately higher in Douglas County. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods or uncertain ability to acquire these foods in socially acceptable ways.” Poverty and unemployment are often predictors of food insecurity in the United States. 2020 is a year where many are facing economic hardships, especially with COVID-19, so the issue of poverty is more important than ever.

Local Secondary Data

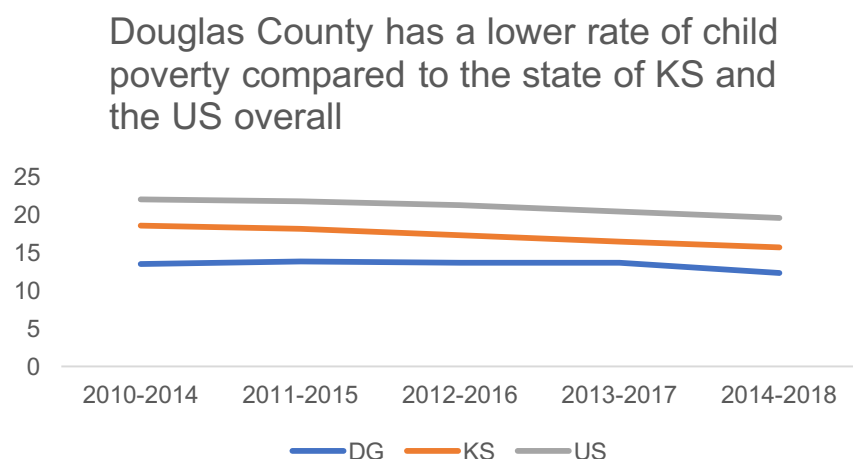


Figure 8: Percent of children living in poverty in Douglas County, the state of Kansas, and the United States. Kansas Health Matters, US Census Bureau

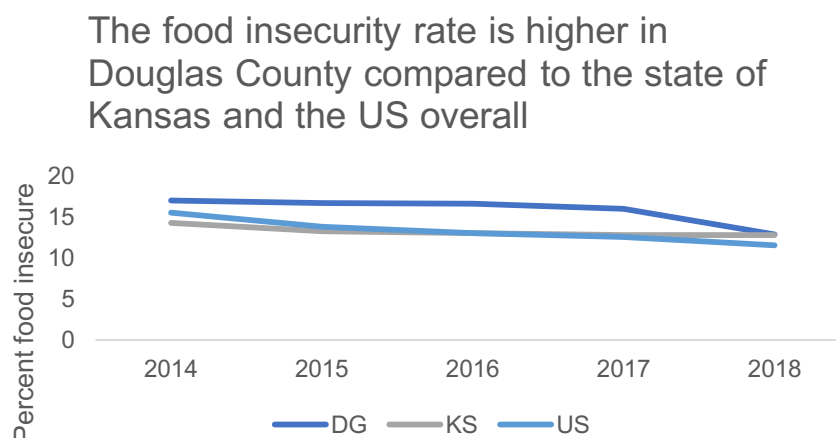


Figure 9: Percent of food insecurity in Douglas County, the state of Kansas, and the United States. Kansas Health Matters, US Census Bureau

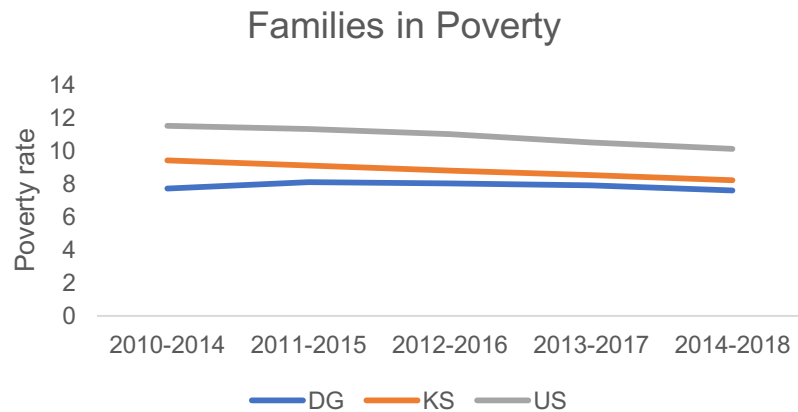


Figure 10: Percent of families living in poverty in Douglas County, the state of Kansas, and the United States. Kansas Health Matters, US Census Bureau

Recommendations

- Invest in jobs, affordable, high-quality childcare, and education for all. This will help families in poverty obtain the child care they need to work and improve the future economic mobility of America's children.
- Expand access to mental health services. Meeting the needs of the community regarding mental health access and treatment will support individuals living in poverty.
- Reform the criminal justice system and enact policies that support successful reentry. Because mass incarceration is a key driver of poverty, reforming the criminal justice system means that a family will not have to find a way to make ends meet without a source of income because a parent is incarcerated. Even a minor criminal record comes with consequences that serve as barriers to getting out of poverty. According to the [Center for American Progress](#), this is one of several ways to reduce poverty. The community shared that People having a criminal record adds barriers to employment, housing, education, public assistance, and building good credit. Policymakers should explore alternatives to incarceration, such as diversion programs for people with mental health and substance abuse challenges.
- Expanding Medicaid would mean more than access to health care. It would free up limited household income for other basic needs such as paying rent and buying food and groceries.
- Create an equitable environment through bias training in schools and the community, and increase opportunity for the community to connect through small-group or community conversations.

Appendix A: Survey Questions: Meeting the Goal of Reducing Poverty in Douglas County

How do you imagine Douglas County reducing or ending poverty?

Hello! We want to invite you to share your thoughts on how we can make Douglas County a better place to live. The purpose of this survey is to identify the main strategies the community would like to see to help reduce poverty. Your responses are anonymous and will not be attributed to you.

Please share your opinions on the questions below.

1. What do you see as the most important changes to help people living without enough money meet their needs? Select up to three of the options below.

___ Employers are mandated to provide a living wage to employees

___ Free job training opportunities and access to junior college

___ Universal access to day care in Douglas County

___ Employer applications that do not ask if you have a criminal record ("Ban the Box")

___ No interest loans to members of the community

___ Free public transportation

___ Eliminate fines for offenses in municipal and district court

___ Increased use of community service for offenses

___ Or tell us your ideas!

2. What would be your one big idea to improve:

a. Wages in our community _____

b. Racism in our community _____

c. A better quality of life for all people in our community _____

3. Please provide a few demographics.

Race: Select as many as apply

☐ Asian/Pacific Islander

☐ Black

☐ Hispanic/Latinx

☐ Native/Indigenous

☐ White

Tell us how you identify if not listed: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____

Zip Code: _____

Are you a caregiver for a family member? ☐ Yes

☐ No

Circle Highest Education Level: Did not complete high school

High school diploma

Post HS certification/diploma

College degree(s)

Income: ☐ Less than \$ 24,000

☐ \$24,000 – 36,000

☐ \$36,000 – 49,000

☐ \$50,000 – 75,000

☐ \$75,000+