



MICHIGAN'S MOMENT OF TRUTH

What Michigan residents want now from elected leaders

A final report from The Center for Michigan's 2018 statewide public engagement campaign

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Michigan's election year Truth Tour made more than 170 stops all over the state in 2018. We listened to more than 8,000 diverse statewide residents, whose positions and ideas were as diverse as their ZIP codes. But common themes rang out. Beyond partisan rancor on hot-button topics, Michigan residents want basic, effective government. They want leaders to focus on kitchen-table issues: education, roads and infrastructure, clean water and the environment, and government transparency and accountability.

The Truth Tour was The Center for Michigan's seventh year-long statewide public engagement campaign of the past decade. Built on instant polling and moderated conversations statewide, this report is a chronicle of Michigan sentiment during a critical election year.

With many newly elected leaders entering the state capitol at the beginning of 2019, what do Michigan residents want them to do? In diverse, statewide discussions (see methodology and participant demographics on pages 17-19), five key priorities emerged again and again on the Michigan Truth Tour:

1. Fix Hyper-partisanship

This was the top priority in our statewide survey of more than 2,800 residents. Many viewed reducing partisanship a key prerequisite to solving any of the state's other issues. Participants said significant policy progress requires leaders to work together.

2. Improve K-12 Outcomes

Fixing K-12 schools to produce better educated students is a second high priority. Educational outcomes for Michigan's K-12 students have consistently dropped across all demographics. Two-thirds of Truth Tour poll participants are worried this trend will continue. In community conversations about Michigan's education system, 77 percent of participants said fixing K-12 should be the top education priority. There was little consensus about how to achieve this, but the most popular idea was to increase funding to educate lower-income students.

3. Repair Crumbling Infrastructure

In community conversations focused on quality of life in Michigan, nine out of every ten participants said repairing infrastructure should be a high priority for state leaders. Residents wanted to see results in return for the months they spend weaving between traffic cones during construction season. Fixing infrastructure, however, goes beyond "fixing the damn roads" (though that was certainly a common theme in our discussions). Residents wanted safe drinking water, stable bridges, and reliable broadband access.

4. Protect Our Water

Statewide residents consistently raised water concerns throughout the Truth Tour. The Great Lakes are precious to the state economically and culturally, as highlighted by the Line 5 controversy. Issues such as the Flint Water Crisis and PFAS have residents worried that, despite abundant access to fresh water, the state's drinking water is not safe. Public concern about drinking water access is intensified by commercial water withdrawals and urban water shutoffs due to unpaid bills. Because water is vital throughout the state, many residents identified water as a common value Michigan could rally around to move policy forward without partisan squabbles.

5. Increase Government Transparency

Citizen trust in state government remains at historic lows, as The Center for Michigan first found in our 2016 report, "Fractured Trust." The Center for Public Integrity ranks Michigan last among states in government transparency. Participants in our discussions demand we do better. In community conversations about government reform, increased transparency through campaign finance reform and Freedom of Information Act expansion to include the legislature and governor rose to the top of the list.

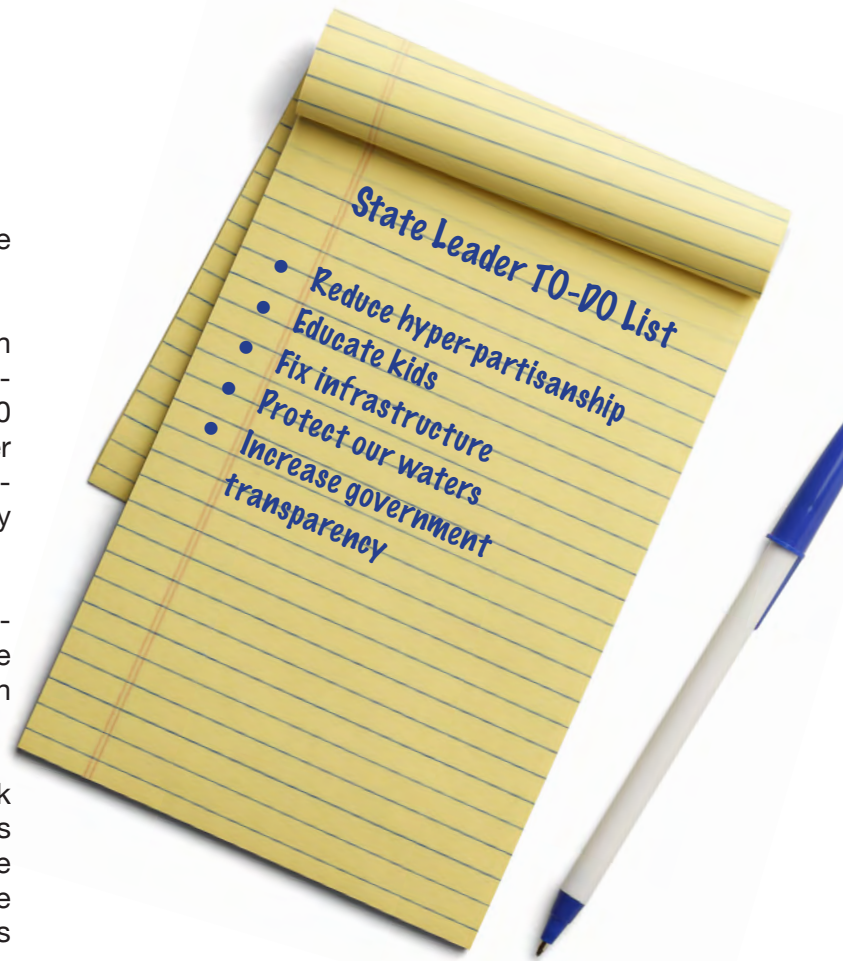
About The Center for Michigan

This report dives into these citizen priorities for state government. Pages 4 to 16 detail our findings.

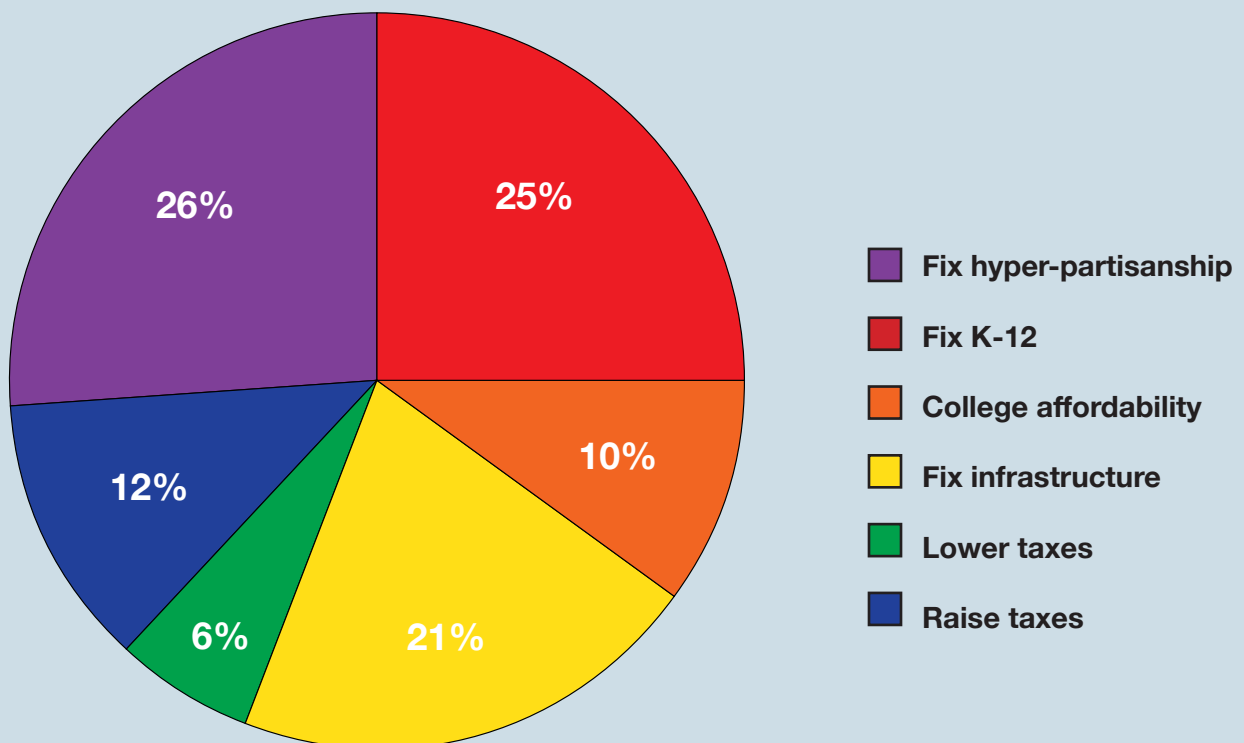
The Center for Michigan is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “think-and-do” tank. Since 2007, our public engagement campaigns have involved more than 65,000 Michigan residents. The purpose is to make a better state by amplifying the voices and ideas of Michigan residents and assuring those voices are heard by elected leaders.

This campaign would not be possible without the generous support for The Center for Michigan from the individuals, foundations, and corporations listed on page 21.

Thank you to the more than 8,000 residents who took the time to share their detailed insights and priorities with us – and to the thousands more we met along the Truth Tour trail. We look forward to working with state policy leaders on the public priorities outlined in this report.



Michigan will elect a new governor and legislature this year. If Michigan’s leaders could solve just one big issue over the next four years, what should it be?



Source: Center for Michigan’s 2018 Truth Tour • Number of respondents: 2,840

MESSAGES FOR MICHIGAN'S ELECTED LEADERS

If state leaders could solve just one big issue over the next four years, what should it be?

We asked this question of 2,840 residents across the state in the lead-up to the 2018 November election. **Their top priority? Fixing hyper partisanship. Seeing Democrats and Republicans working together to solve the state's problems was number one on the wish list of respondents.**

Those concerned with excessive partisanship felt that reducing the friction and gridlock would free Lansing to better address other issues.

Comments included:

"We will never achieve in fixing any of those [other priorities] until they all come together."

"If the Republicans and Democrats could work together to solve problems in Michigan all of the above choices could be accomplished."

"Model bipartisan cooperation, inclusion, civility. [Have] actual concern for solutions that make a difference."

Michigan's Message to our New Governor: Fix Education and Infrastructure. Protect the Environment and Economy

If you had 5 minutes with Michigan's governor, what would be the one thing you would ask that leader to do?

The primary theme of participant responses to this question was a request to focus on the basics: effective education, sound infrastructure, clean environment, a robust economy. Michigan residents want a leader who will deliver on the fundamental functions of government.

Here is a representative sample of additional answers to this question:

Resident Voices on Education:

"Come visit classes. Come see what we can do, let's have a conversation."

"In Michigan I have noticed the education is not evenly distributed. My school is really good with a lot of resources to get ahead in secondary education, but not all schools are fortunate enough to share the same opportunity. How can you work on making all public schools great, not just wealthy ones?"

"Make higher education more affordable by raising state funding for community colleges and state universities."

"Provide more educational opportunities for non-college-bound young people?"

Resident Voices on the Economy:

"Economic development would be my issue. If there was more money in communities, there would be more business development, which would then lead to more tax revenue, which then leads to funding for things like education. It's a great bedrock."

"Our economy is competitive and our policies are on the right track. I am concerned if we abandon some of those policies."

"How do you plan on retaining recent college graduates? How can we keep these young people in the state?"

"Decrease regulation and allow capitalism to do its job by allowing competition in the marketplace to govern growth."

Resident Voices on the Environment:

"Recognize the specific importance of Michigan as the upholder of the Great Lakes and act for future generations."

"Make our environment a top priority. We all share equally a need for clean air, water, and non-contaminated food."

"I want to see more emphasis on the environment. We spend a lot of time up north and want our grandchildren and their children to enjoy the natural resources here in Michigan as we have."

Q: If you had 5 minutes with Michigan’s governor, what would be the one thing you would ask that leader to do?

A: “I’ve had this conversation in my head. I think our problem has been like exercise. Leaders need to focus on the core and then everything else will go along with it. If our education, roads, infrastructure is stable, everything else will come along with it.” - Michigan Truth Tour Participant

“Climate change is creating increasing instability and natural resource protection is key—I’m very concerned about water pollution—can we please be thinking about future generations?”

Resident Voices on Infrastructure:

“Fix the roads so we can have a ride without potholes. Learn to work together across party lines and for the betterment of Michigan.”

“Fixing infrastructure is very important. Michigan and particularly the west side of the state draws in a lot of tourism, so if we were to continue having high revenue it would be a beneficial idea to improve infrastructure to draw in those people.”

“I would ask [leaders] to fix up infrastructure in Michigan especially in metro areas. Roads need to be fixed properly. Water and sewer systems are not safe.”

“Do everything you can to help the people of Flint have

access to good drinking water.”

Resident Voices on Government Reform:

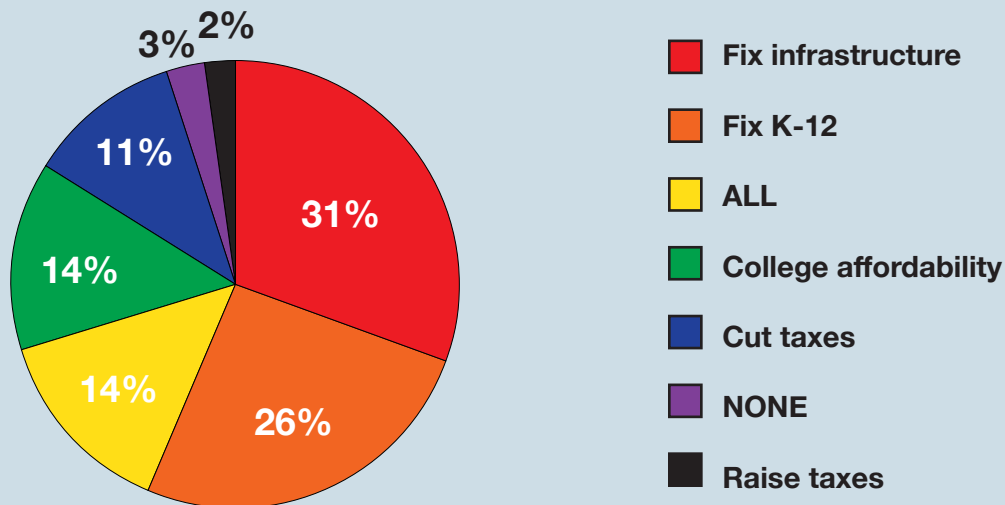
“The governor’s office needs to understand how communities are hurting financially and that communication needs to improve going forward.”

“Fix campaign finance reform because it affects the way we run elections in the state. It makes the race between the haves and the have-nots.”

“I would say take a look at the term limits. Most people in the legislature don’t have that much experience and that’s why there is no consistency and no experience. It has shifted the power away from government to lobbyists.”

“But the biggest problem is transparency I think—we have no idea where the money in government contracts is going, or who our legislators are having dinner with, or where they are getting lobbied.”

The Center participated in Michigan State University’s Fall 2018 State of the State Survey. Participants were asked: “Given the following options, what should be the top priority in 2019 for Michigan’s new governor and legislature? Would you say K-12 education, college affordability, roads and infrastructure, cutting taxes, or raising taxes?”



Source: MSU 2018 State of the State Survey • Number of respondents: 955 • Margin of error: +/-4% • Confidence level: 95%

AN EDUCATED MICHIGAN

A Mandate to Fix Education at Every Step, but Start with K-12

During the Michigan Truth Tour, 207 participants gathered in 14 meetings facilitated by The Center for Michigan's public engagement team to discuss education. Conversations explored perspectives on the state's education system from pre-K through post-secondary schooling and gauged support for potential policy changes.

Participants told us the most important issue was improving the quality of K-12 education. They also wanted to see increased access to both pre-K and skilled trades programs, and more affordable college. Participants did not have a clear consensus for how to achieve these goals.

Thirst for Change. Little Hope it will Happen

The majority of participants (59 percent) ranked Michigan's K-12 education as "ineffective" or "very ineffective," and said they were "worried" or "very worried" about the education system over the next four years (65 percent). Reasons for worry included:

- Overcrowded classrooms
- Overemphasis on standardized testing
- Inadequate funding
- Inequitable funding across districts
- Shrinking educator talent pipeline
- Negative public discourse about educators

Public anxiety kicks in even before kindergarten. The overwhelming majority (75 percent) of participants said Lansing should make access to preschool and childcare a high priority. Twenty-six percent of participants said such early childhood programs are their top education concern, making it the second most common concern after slipping K-12 performance.

State education trends show why the public is worried:

- National rankings continue to drop - Michigan has fallen to 41st in the nation for reading and 37th for math, with only 29 percent of students ranked "proficient" in either subject. Other states with similar demographics, such as Tennessee, have improved education outcomes while Michigan has

fallen behind.¹

- Educational achievement is sliding across the state - decreasing test scores are not due solely to a few underperforming districts. As expressed by the Education Trust-Midwest, a education data-tracking and reform organization, "white, black, brown, higher-income, low-income - it doesn't matter who they are or where they live, Michigan students' achievement levels in early reading and middle-school math are not keeping up with the rest of the U.S. and world."²
- Many families struggle to afford childcare - the average Michigan family spends nearly \$10,000 a year on childcare. This is estimated to consume a quarter of an economically vulnerable family's budget, yet state programs only serve one in five low-income families.³

Participants had higher confidence in the state's post-secondary education systems. Most participants (68 percent) thought the state's post-high school education does an "effective" or "very effective" job of preparing students for life and career success.

A Mandate for Improvement, Little Consensus How to Do It

Despite their worry that education will not improve, participants implored state leaders to make a concerted effort. A large majority of participants (77 percent) said improving K-12 should be a high priority for the legislature, and a third of participants said it should be state leaders' top priority.

Though faith in postsecondary education was high, participants saw room for improvement. Both addressing the high cost of college and improving access to skilled trades were ranked as high priorities for the legislature by the majority of participants (57 percent and 65 percent, respectively).

While participants were united in their concerns, they were not unified in how to address them.

The most popular remedy for K-12 educational woes (22 percent) was increased funding to educate lower income students. Support ranked in the teens for: re-

duced class sizes, more classroom rigor and accountability for student/educator performance, increased preschool/childcare access, and improving educator training/support. The least popular idea (4 percent) was providing financial incentives for top teachers to work at underperforming schools.

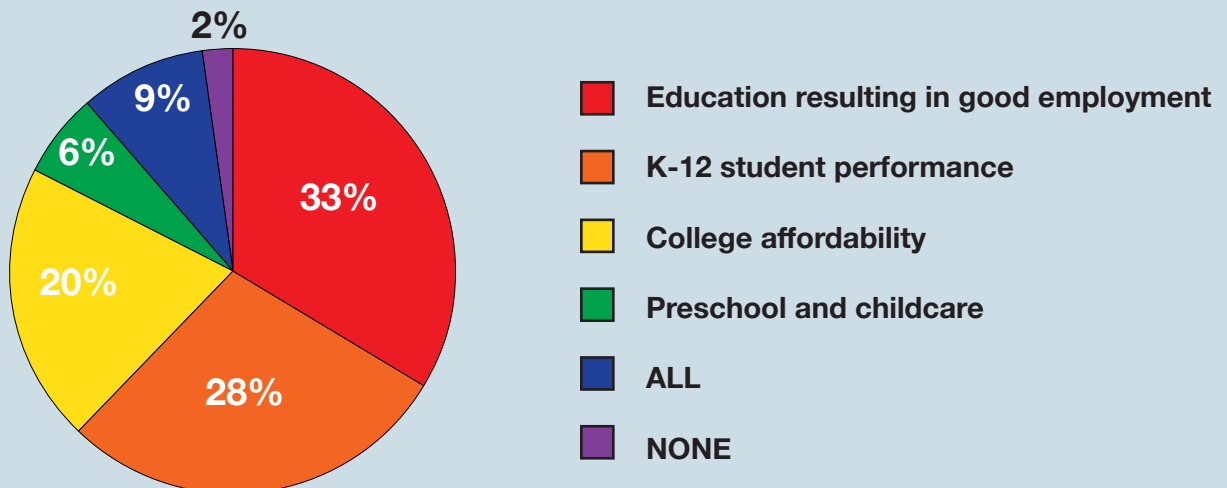
In our open conversations, a popular request was for any legislative changes to be well informed and lasting. “Education program research is growing and the legislators are making decisions without stepping into a classroom or a program,” worried one participant. Another added that over the “last ten years the legislature has blown opportunities for any useful research because they change the benchmark every year so we don’t have any useful knowledge to base the state of our education off of. Changing tests just makes it difficult to know where we are.”



Backing for college affordability cures is similarly scattered. Supporting public-private partnerships between post-secondary training institutions and employers was the most popular policy (22 percent). Investing in community college was the second most attractive idea (20 percent). Support polled in the teens for providing more state funding to colleges and universities, and for investing in state funded financial

aid and scholarships for post-high school education. There was little support for state-funding penalties on institutions that increase tuition dramatically (6 percent) or providing retraining scholarships for those seeking a new career path (5 percent).

MSU POLL: “Given the following options, what is your top concern related to education in Michigan? Would you say preschool and child care, K-12 student performance, college affordability, college graduation rates, or education resulting in good employment?”



Source: MSU 2018 State of the State Survey • Number of respondents: 955 • Margin of error: +/-4% • Confidence level: 95%

IMPROVING STATE GOVERNMENT

To Make State Government Work, Residents Say: Be Transparent, Fix the Legislative Districts, Work Together

As part of the Michigan Truth Tour, host communities had several choices of topic areas to discuss in town hall forums hosted by the Center for Michigan's public engagement team. In this critical election year, eight discussion hosts chose "Good Government" as the topic most pressing to the residents of their community.

In these "Good Government" discussions, we asked 254 participants to share their thoughts on state taxing and spending priorities, potential 2018 ballot initiatives, additional ideas for reforming state government, and their top priority for incoming state elected leaders. The theme of the reforms suggested by these state residents to their elected leaders: Work together and get something done.

Top Reform Suggestions Focus on Transparency and Electoral Fairness

Town hall participants' top priorities for state government reform suggested a desire for legislators who are more beholden to those who elect them. When asked to choose their preferred (non-ballot issue) strategy for improving state government, 40 percent of discussion participants said they support campaign finance reform and another 34 percent support Freedom of Information Act reform (forcing the legislature and governor to provide more documents to the public and media). Given Michigan's poor national ranking on transparency issues, this is not particularly surprising: Michigan sits dead last among all states in a ranking by the Center for Public Integrity of government accountability and transparency. Its overall grade is F.⁴ One participant said, "On a national level, they have financial disclosures. However, Michigan is like a mafia - nothing is disclosed!"

When asked about their preferred ballot issue proposal, more than half (59 percent) of participants voted for redistricting reform. One discussion participant said, "We need redistricting reform. The way the lines are drawn right now is up to the legislature. Take it away from the legislature. Having an independent commission is needed." And Michigan residents agree - a bal-

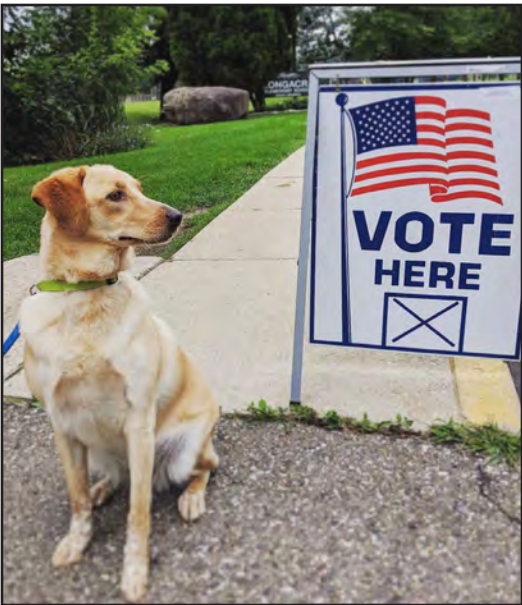
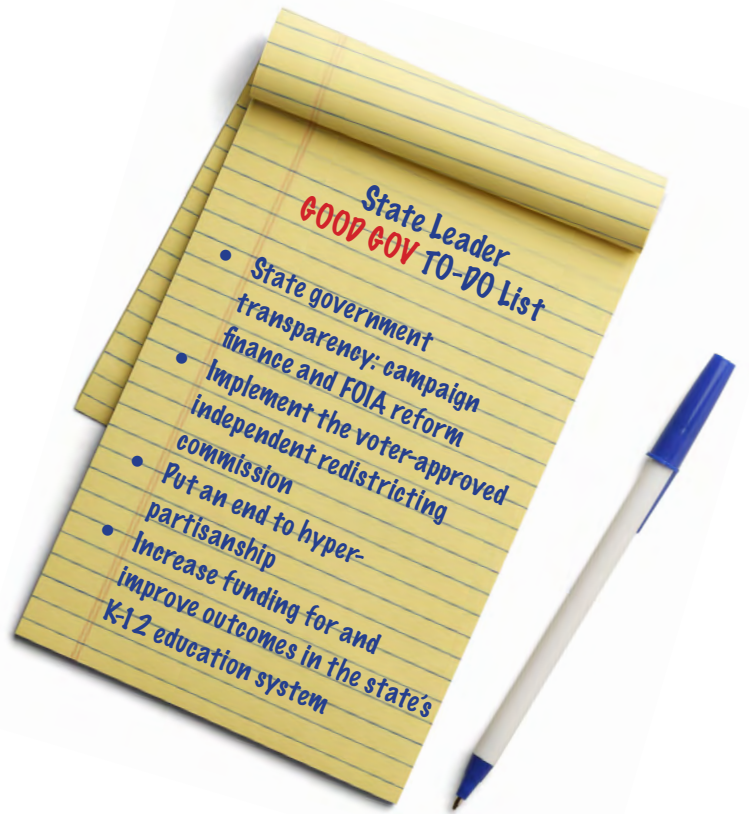
lot measure to do just this was approved by 61 percent of the Michigan electorate (a strikingly similar percentage to that of our results) in November's election.

Moreover, the largest percentages of Good Government discussion participants identified fixing hyper-partisanship in state government and improving K-12 student performance as their top priorities for incoming legislators, with a quarter of participants choosing each issue. Participants' desire for an end to hyper-partisanship in particular aligned with their desire for improved transparency and redistricting reform—discussion participants priorities coalesced around a demand for elected officials who work on behalf of those they were elected to represent, rather than special interests, their party, or donors. They sought increased sunlight on state government as a means of ensuring that lawmakers are working on their behalf. And they wanted their legislative districts to be drawn in a nonpartisan fashion, possibly as a means for achieving a fix to hyper-partisanship in Michigan's state government. As one Michigan resident asked, "Don't you think the hyper-partisanship is connected to the issue of redistricting? I think the politicians play to the districts that are drawn to reflect Democrats or Republicans and that is really at the heart of everything that ails us."

Tax and spending priorities

We asked participants to choose which major budget area they would most like to increase, and which they would most like to cut. A wide majority (62 percent) chose to expand the budget of K-12 education, and an even wider majority (74 percent) said they wouldn't cut any major budget area. As one participant said, "About 20 years ago we were considered in the top 20 for education and now we are at the bottom. If we increased funding I would want it to go to the teachers and the schools." This sentiment was common amongst discussion participants, as many pointed to Michigan's sliding student performance compared to their peers in other states as a reason to invest more dollars into K-12 education.

The desire to increase funding for K-12 education aligned with participants' choice of fixing K-12 student performance as one of their two top priorities for the incoming legislators.⁵



A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

To Create Livable Communities, Participants Demand Infrastructure Fixes

One of the most popular topics in this year's Michigan Truth Tour was placemaking. Our "Great Place to Live" town hall discussions attracted 749 participants in 10 conversations across Michigan. Discussion participants shared their thoughts and ideas for creating and maintaining strong communities and their priorities for improving quality of life in our state.

In each discussion, participants placed infrastructure improvements at the top of their placemaking to-do list. However, good-paying jobs and healthy natural resources and environment also ranked as high priorities for the majority of Great Place to Live discussion participants. And, even in this divisive political climate, these participants shared a great deal of optimism about how things are going in Michigan communities and expressed cautious optimism about where we are headed as a state.

Outlook on Michigan: Sunny, With a Chance of Clouds

Great Place to Live discussion participants were upbeat in their description of quality of life in Michigan today; more than 90 percent labelled it either "great" or "good." When asked how quality of life compared to four years ago, more than half (58 percent) answered "much better" or "better." We also asked participants to look into their crystal ball and share their predictions about quality of life over the next four years. While more than half of participants (56 percent) said that they feel either "very hopeful" or "hopeful," many placed conditions on this hope, depending on the outcomes of the 2018 election, attempts at bipartisan solutions, and/or future policies put in place in Lansing. As one discussion participant said, "I would tell the governor to listen to [their] representatives and senators and work together... they want our children to be better students. They want our children to be healthier. And if we work together we can get there. But we have to work together."

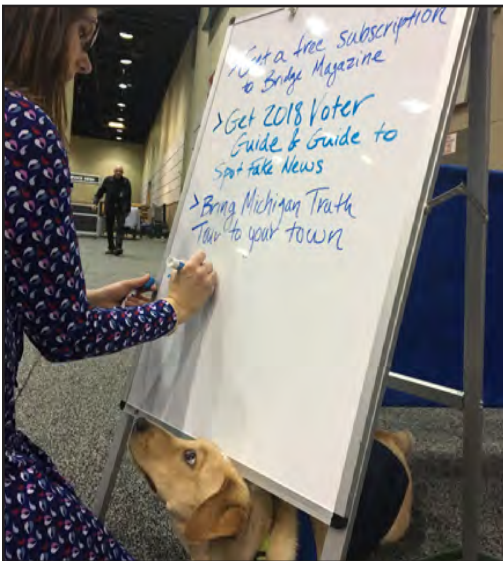
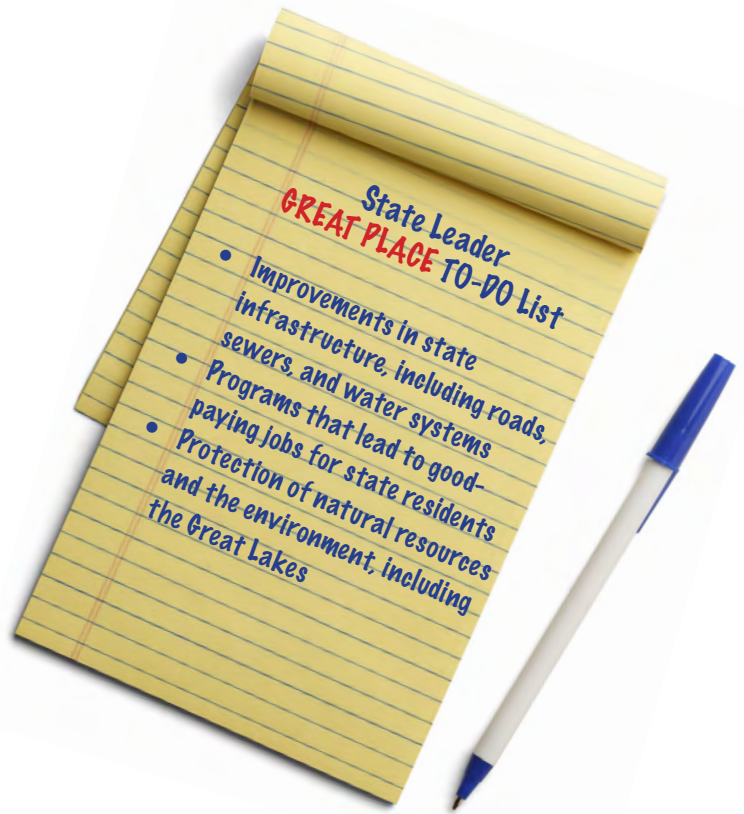
Placemaking Priorities

Of the six different quality of life issues we asked about, the largest percentage of participants identi-

fied infrastructure as a high priority, with 89 percent saying improvement should be on the to-do list for state leaders. Both good-paying jobs (60 percent) and healthy natural resources and environment (72 percent) were also chosen as high priorities by the majority of placemaking discussion participants. And some participants pointed to the connection between these issues. As one participant said, "Historically, unions and others pitted the environmental concerns against job creation. But I don't think things have to be that way—it seems to me we can have development and protect our environment." Yet another said, "I chose infrastructure [as a high priority] because it is interrelated to both environmental health and public health—it's a domino effect."

Public safety and crime and public health were identified as medium priorities by the largest percentage of participants, and attractive and livable cities was chosen as a high priority by the largest percentage of participants (48 percent), but not by a majority.

We also asked participants to choose their top priority issue for state leaders to tackle over the next four years. Even when the issue was situated amongst choices unrelated to placemaking, the largest percentage of Great Place to Live participants (30 percent) chose infrastructure as their most pressing issue. This challenge will be a difficult one for Michigan to face, with updates and maintenance of the state's roads, bridges, water, sewer, and communications infrastructure estimated to cost at least \$4 billion more per year for decades to come.⁶ But discussion participants believed these costs are necessary to incur. As one participant said, "What discourages me is higher levels of government don't realize that you cannot have economic prosperity without investing in infrastructure. Our work has been piecemeal. I think the issue is that infrastructure investment would help local communities. It would help attract businesses to areas. This does not appear to be a priority at the state level, which is discouraging."



INSIDE THE TRUTH TOUR

A Different Approach to Public Engagement

The 2018 Truth Tour was the Center for Michigan's answer to the seemingly intractable issue of participating in modern politics. How does one engage in a divisive, seemingly post-factual world?

Open ears, facts, a few games and a puppy go a long way.

Loaded into our Truth Van, armed with our Michigan Facts Guide and the spokespuppy Truth Dog, we hosted 173 events across the state. Our goal was to help Michigan residents get ready for the election and hear their priorities for the incoming legislature.

Along the way, we partnered with movie theaters and townships, Chambers of Commerce and bars, environmental groups and churches. We attended Arts, Beats, and Eats, and marched in the Coast Guard Parade. Some events had three people, others had thousands.

In total, more than 23,000 residents participated in person and online, taking home with them more than 10,000 copies of our Michigan Facts Guide and nearly 5,000 copies of our Fake News Guide. The Michigan Facts Guide received more than 57,700 views online. More than 4,000 people submitted their own mock state budgets through our online You Be The Governor Game. Over 1,000 people competed in our Michigan Trivia Championship. More than a thousand people watched our documentary Michigan Divided, which explored residents' lives and the causes of political animosity. Viewers engaged in dialogue after each screening to discuss how to decrease division in their own communities. Hundreds more gathered to tell us their priorities for the state's education, government, and quality of life.

Common ground was more common than you'd expect. Residents have similar desires across the state: A good education for their children. Clean water for drinking and recreation. Safe commutes to work on smooth roads and secure bridges. State government they can trust to work honestly for the average person.

While the public engagement team criss-crossed the state, our team of journalists at Bridge Magazine

worked tirelessly to provide Michigan voters with the continuous coverage they need to cast an informed vote.

Their work began with drafting our Michigan Facts Guide in November of 2017, and it did not stop until after the election in November 2018. They probed ballot initiatives, assessed gubernatorial platforms, investigated gerrymandering, and fact-checked politicians. Reporters crossed the state to profile local issues in tandem with the Truth Tour. They highlighted housing affordability in Petoskey and economic revitalization efforts in West Branch. Their reporting culminated in our online Voter Toolbox, a guide to state-level issues designed to complement the Michigan Facts Guide. In a world of candy clickbait, voters happily ate their vegetables, accessing this online toolbox nearly 75,000 times.

The Truth Tour revealed that, despite an air of uncertainty and anger, people are hungry for facts and substantive dialogue. It's not that people don't want to be civically engaged - it's that they don't want to be screamed at while they do it.

Truth Dog!

A fluffy spokespuppy took on the monumental task of making policy approachable.

Truth Dog traveled the state through 2018, vowing to watchdog Michigan politics and make citizenship fun. A lab/blue heeler mix adopted from the Humane Society of Huron Valley, he was one of nine puppies born August 20, 2017. His hobbies include playing tug-of-war, going for walks, eating treats, and taking a bite out of fake news.

Residents across the state flocked to play with him, increasing public engagement and levity in a major election year.

The Michigan Trivia Championship

To make facts fun and accessible, The Center for Michigan and its publication Bridge Magazine partnered with Sporcle Live!, a pub trivia company based in Southfield. Players across Michigan competed twice in 2018 to win the title of Michigan Trivia Cham-

pion and thousands in prize money. This citizenship game connected The Center for Michigan with over 1,200 voting age residents, many of them younger voters, who walked away with vital information about the state.

The Center for Michigan wrote Michigan-centric questions to be asked at participating pubs along with Sporcle's typical questions. Some of our questions focused on general Michigan knowledge (such as when the state was founded), while others were pulled from the Michigan Facts and Issues Guide. Center for Michigan representatives gave players a Michigan Facts Guide as they arrived at each event. Players could rifle through the Fact Guide during the game, making it easier to score points. It exposed them to vital voting knowledge in an entertaining, competitive manner. Teams also received a bonus point if every member signed up for a free subscription to Bridge Magazine, resulting in hundreds of new readers.

The winner from each location was invited to participate in their regional Michigan Trivia Championship. At this final round, every question was about Michigan. Many questions came from the Facts Guide, but guides could not be used during game play. This incentivized players to learn the information in the packet. In the end, teams that took extra Issue Guides after the qualifiers to study at home won both the East and West Michigan Trivia Championships



MICHIGAN DIVIDED

Belief in Shared Values Persists Through Division

To explore the social divisions increasingly apparent in the state, the Center for Michigan and Bridge produced a documentary titled Michigan Divided. Following eight Michigan residents leading very different lives across the state in 2017, it probed their beliefs and why they hold them. In exploring what divides us now, it sought to explore what could unite us going forward.

As a part of our 2018 Michigan Truth Tour, 51 screenings were hosted across the state in partnership with local organizations. 1,138 participants engaged in a guided conversation after the film to explore major themes in our modern political environment: What creates the divide? What perpetuates it? What can be done to overcome it?

These conversations revealed a belief in shared values despite persistent division, and yielded a call for decreased hyper-partisanship in Lansing. Fixing hyper-partisanship was participants' top priority (32 percent) for the incoming legislature. The second priority (26 percent) was fixing K-12 education.

Division Abounds

Conversation participants ranked our current political division in comparison to the political climate in 2016, 2008, and 2000. At each comparison point, residents said the state is more divided now than in the past. Fifty-seven percent believed Michigan is more divided now than in 2016. Seventy-two percent rank 2018 as more divided than 2008, and 64 percent say the state is more divided now than in 2000.

As to what perpetuates continued division, the most common responses during open dialogue centered on the modern media ecosystem. Concerns included fractured news consumption, the spread of poor quality information, lack of critical consumption, and shorter attention spans.

Participant comments included:

"Media silos allow people to watch the news that feed [their] beliefs and nothing else."

"There aren't very many shared news sources and people tend to view the news that they agree with."

"I look at Facebook. There I see a major divide through groups and the news in different timelines."

"It makes a difference what news you watch. If you watch Fox News you get a totally different perception than MSNBC."

Some participants voiced a concern that social media served to amplify the issues present in traditional media due to its hostile environment and a lack of fact checking.

In tandem, many Michigan residents felt it is becoming increasingly difficult to engage in dialogue across difference. Participants conveyed the sense that people speak to score points, not gain a better understanding of others.

"I think a lot of people on both sides don't want to sit down and hear each other out,"

"They automatically want to point fingers by saying, 'I'm right, you're wrong.' People want everyone to understand them but to never understand the opposing side."

These issues can compound on one another. Without a shared narrative, there is little basis for concrete discussion.

"The lack of a shared truth and shared facts makes it difficult to communicate and look at things with common sense."

Others attributed the divide to fear and residents rarely coming in contact with those who have different views.

Belief in Shared Values

Despite sensing increased divisiveness, 90 percent of participants believe that Michigan residents have some shared values which can create more unity in the state. The most commonly cited shared value in open dialogue was water. Following that were children, education, and the general environment.

When asked how state leaders could leverage these shared values to govern, infrastructure was the area where residents most commonly thought leaders could find common ground.

Outside of fixing the roads, participants could not provide concrete steps for Lansing. The division, some felt, is not from a lack of shared values but disparate visions on how to put them into practice.

You can watch the full documentary at:

Michigandivided.com



YOU BE THE GOVERNOR GAME

Michigan Residents Create Their Own State Budgets

In the 2018 election year, The Center for Michigan gave residents the chance to be governor for a day.

Our online “You Be the Governor” game let Michigan residents take a crack at one of the governor’s main responsibilities - crafting a balanced state budget.

Michigan jumped at the opportunity, with over 4,500 residents submitting more than 4,100 budgets.

Throughout the game, players were presented with spending and taxing policies they could cut, increase, or leave at the current rate. At the end of the game, players were shown their final budget and how their choices compared to other players.

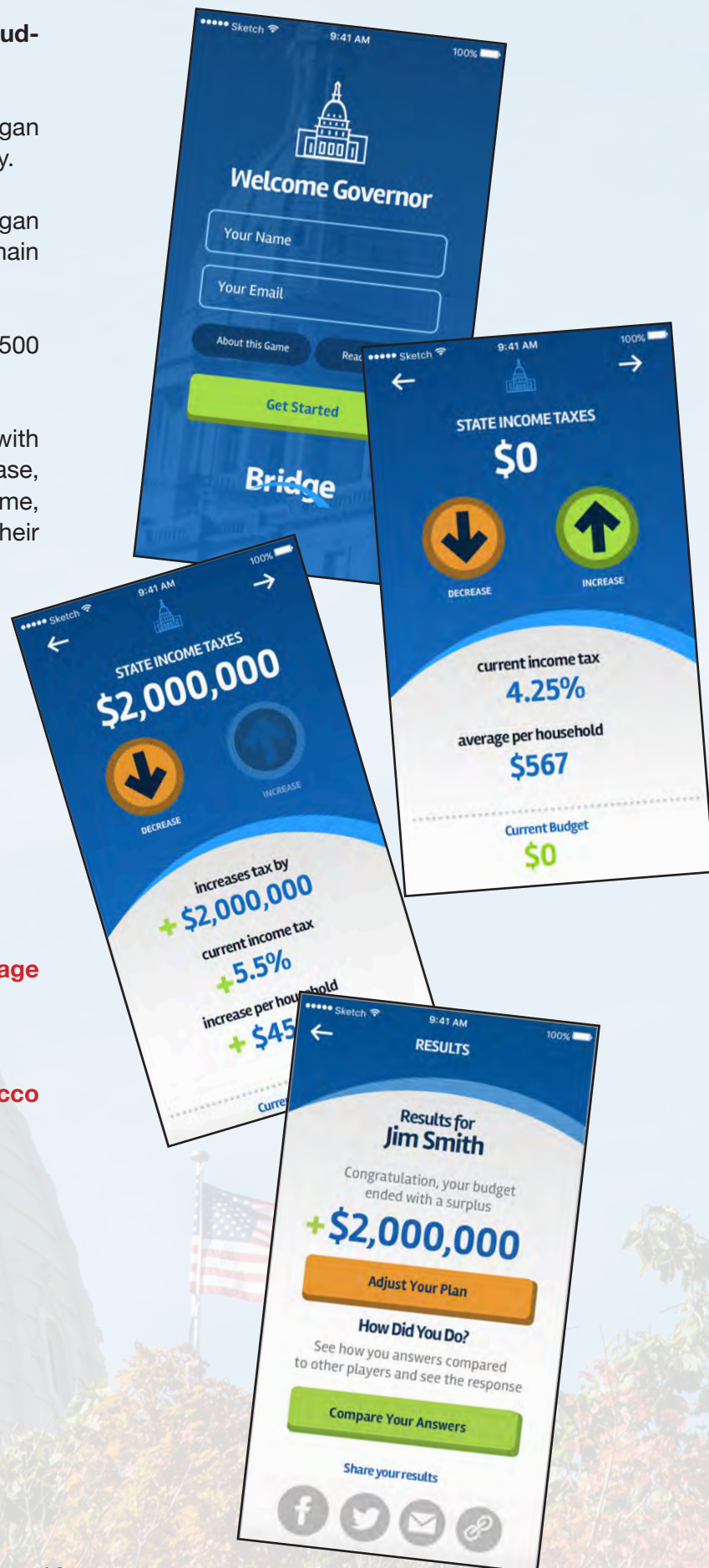
Average state budget:
Deficit -\$599,818,839

Most popular cuts to state government
Legislator pay and benefits

Most popular spending increases to state government
10% bump for K-12

Most popular tax cut
\$500 million decrease to income taxes, an average household decrease of \$94 per year

Most popular tax increase
\$500 million increase of the ‘sin tax’ on tobacco and alcohol



METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2018, a critical election year in Michigan, the Center for Michigan and Bridge Magazine sought to inject fact into the public discourse about Michigan's future and engage thousands of residents in thoughtful discussion about their state. From April 2018 through November's election day, the Center's public engagement team travelled the state in our trusty Truth Van to gather public input and share information with the Michigan public as part of the 2018 Michigan Truth Tour. From engagements during 173 tour stops we collected data on residents' top concerns, hopes, and ideas for the state's future. This report contains a snapshot of Michigan at an important moment—an election year when our state elected a new governor, new attorney general, new secretary of state, and every seat in the legislature was up for grabs.

Participant Demographics

In total, 23,155 citizens were engaged in the Michigan Truth Tour from April 3, 2018–November 6, 2018. Methods of engagement included the following:

- Five half-day policy conferences across Michigan called Solutions Summits
- In-person Truth Tour stops, which involved the Truth Van travelling to communities, and our engagement team members gathering input about participants' priorities through our "60 second poll," signing up participants for free subscriptions to Bridge Magazine, distributing our Facts and Issues guide, giving participants an opportunity to meet and take photos with Truth Dog, handing out Bridge T-shirts, tote bags and stickers.
- In-person town hall meetings on three topics: An Educated Michigan, Good Government, and a Great Place to Live
- In-person screenings of our documentary, Michigan Divided, with moderated discussions afterward
- Facebook Live streaming of our policy conferences, Truth Tour stops including a livestream of a gubernatorial debate, and several livestreams of Michigan Divided
- Community-hosted screenings of Michigan Divided in local venues
- Online participation in our "You Be the Governor" game, a decision-making exercise that asked participants to make choices about taxing and spending priorities, with a goal of balancing the state budget
- In-person participation in "Michigan Trivia" nights at bars and restaurants in West Michigan and Southeast Michigan, in partnership with Sporcle Live. Questions required knowledge of the facts taken from our Facts and Issues Guide.

Tour Stop Scheduling

Our public engagement team partnered with local community partners to determine the locations, dates, and times of each Truth Tour stop. These local tour stop "hosts" helped us determine locations for the Truth Van set up and also invited their network to participate in their scheduled town hall meeting and/or documentary screening and discussion. Additionally, stops that required only our Truth Van set up were arranged by our public engagement staff with organizers of local farmers' markets, festivals, and other events that attracted many Michigan residents.

Town Hall Methodology

Town hall discussion hosts had the option of choosing one of three topics for their meeting: An Educated Michigan, which focused on improving student outcomes in K-12 and post-secondary education; Good Government, which focused on state taxing and spending and government reform; and A Great Place to Live, which focused on ideas for improving and maintaining quality of life in Michigan. In these 60-minute discussions, participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts on each topic quantitatively by voting on several multiple choice questions as well as qualitatively in open-ended, moderated discussion. Where common themes emerged in both the quantitative and qualitative data, we shared the findings in this report.

An Educated Michigan

The 14 Educated Michigan discussions held across the state included 242 participants. These moderated conversations included 12 multiple choice questions related to education and five demographic questions. The open discussion portion included four discussion prompts.

Good Government

The eight Good Government discussions we held included 254 participants. This round of discussions included eight multiple choice questions related to

government reform, taxing, and spending, and five demographic questions. Moderators guided participants through five discussion prompts.

A Great Place to Live

These quality of life-focused discussions took place in 10 different communities and included 749 participants. These conversations included 11 multiple choice questions about placemaking and five demographic questions. The open dialogue portion of these discussions included six discussion prompts.

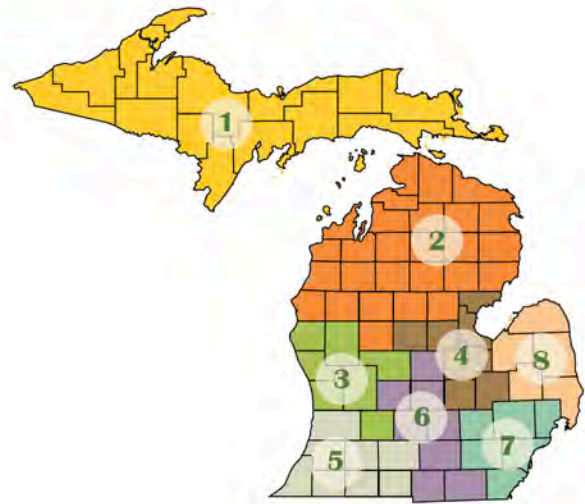
Documentary Screening Methodology

The Center worked with local hosts to hold 51 screenings of Michigan Divided with moderated discussions on the themes in the film. The 48-minute film was screened first, and then Center for Michigan engagement team members led the viewers in a discussion that included both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The discussions included six multiple choice questions about the participants’ reactions to the film and their thoughts about shared values in Michigan. The dialogue portion included six conversation prompts.

Data Collected at Each Tour Stop

Throughout the Truth Tour, two common questions were asked at each in-person engagement event. These forward-looking, governance and policy focused questions were designed to identify the top priority of Michigan residents for their newly elected leaders to tackle in the next four years. The first question was multiple choice, and the answer options included the six most frequent issues Michigan residents have requested as topics for statewide community discussions moderated by the Center for Michigan over the last 12 years. This question, “Michigan will elect a new governor and legislature this year. If Michigan’s leaders could solve just one big issue over the next four years, what should it be?” had 2,840 responses. The other question, “If you had five minutes with Michigan’s next governor, what is the one thing you would ask that leader to do?” was open-ended, and fielded 41 Word document pages of responses. The most frequent responses to each question are featured prominently throughout this report, and highlighted specifically in the “Messages for Michigan’s Elected Leaders” section.

Regions



Upper Peninsula	22
Northern Lower Peninsula	279
West Michigan	216
Bay Region	169
Southwest Michigan	138
Mid-Michigan	177
Southeast Michigan	829
Thumb	66

Race/ethnicity

African American/Black	11%
American Indian	1%
Arab American	1%
Asian American	2%
Caucasian/White	80%
Hispanic/Latino	3%
Multiracial	3%

Income

Less than \$10,000	5%
\$10,000-\$14,999	3%
\$15,000-\$24,999	4%
\$25,000-\$34,999	4%
\$35,000-\$49,999	9%
\$50,000-\$74,999	18%
\$75,000-\$99,999	17%
\$100,000-\$149,999	22%
\$150,000-\$199,999	10%
\$200,000 or more	7%



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact Your Leaders

Make your voice heard! Call or write your legislators and urge them to act on the priorities outlined in this report, as well as your additional ideas for improving our state. To find the name and contact information for your state representative, visit www.house.mi.gov. To find the name and contact information for your state senator, visit www.senate.michigan.gov. Your voice matters!

Sign Up to Receive Bridge Magazine

You can subscribe for free to Bridge Magazine, an on-line publication of the Center for Michigan. Bridge was named the Michigan Press Association “Newspaper of the Year” in each of the last three years and is your source for nonpartisan, fact-based journalism about issues important to the future of Michigan. Bridge subscribers receive this in-depth coverage in their email inbox at no cost. Subscribe today at www.bridgemi.com.

Get Involved in Your Community

You participated in the Michigan Truth Tour because you care about your state. Use that civic engagement momentum to make your community a better place. Thousands of nonprofit organizations statewide could use your time and talent to help fulfill their missions. The Center for Michigan has partnered with the Michigan Community Service Commission to present Community Conversation participants information about allforgood.org's volunteer match tool, which allows you to search for volunteer opportunities by zip code or key term. Visit www.allforgood.org today!

Follow Bridge Magazine on Social Media

We constantly update our social media accounts with our latest stories, information about our public engagement activities, and ways you can stay involved in your state. “Like” us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/bridgemichigan, follow us on Twitter @BridgeMichigan, as well as Instagram, @Bridge.Michigan.



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Credits

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Consultants

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Photos

Photos by Dwayne Barnes, Amber DeLind, Allie Schmidt, Lon Horwedel, Prasanth Panicker/ The Michigan Daily



ABOUT THE CENTER FOR MICHIGAN AND BRIDGE MAGAZINE

The Center for Michigan is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and nonpartisan think-and-do tank, founded in 2006. Our work is defined by three verbs: Engage, Inform, and Achieve.

Engage: We are the state’s leading practitioner of nonpartisan public engagement. We make citizenship interesting, convenient, and meaningful through interactive, small-group Community Conversations, large town hall conferences, phone polling, and online engagement tools. More than 65,000 residents have engaged with us to date. This bottom-up public engagement can, and does, lead to actual policy change.

Inform: Bridge Magazine, our free online news magazine (www.bridgemi.com), focuses on the “how” and “why” of Michigan current events. Our differentiated, in-depth, data-driven reporting accentuates—and partners with—traditional publishers increasingly focused on the “who,” “what,” “where,” and “when” of the 24-hour news cycle.

In 2018, Bridge:

- Doubled readership. More than 1.6 million unique visitors read Bridge in 2018.
- Doubled our publishing frequency and continued to build a large following as Michigan’s leading provider of in-depth public interest journalism, with special emphasis on such key topics as 2018 statewide election coverage, K-12 education, college affordability, Michigan’s economic future, challenges and opportunities facing Michigan cities, and Michigan’s environment.
- Earned some 50 state and national journalism awards, including our third straight Michigan Press Association “Newspaper of the Year” honor and the Frank J. Kelley Consumer Protection Award from the State Bar of Michigan.
- Added three reporters to our team, helping build the capacity necessary for the most challenging watchdog journalism, including groundbreaking investigations of gerrymandering, hyper-political attempts to rewrite state social studies teaching standards, and Medicaid work requirements which treated different residents in vastly different ways depending on where they live.
- Offered the exclusive first broadcast of a gubernatorial debate and published hour-long video in-

terviews with every candidate for governor (by far the most detailed interviews in the state during the campaign).

Achieve: We take the findings of our public engagement campaigns and Bridge journalism to get things done for Michigan. Some examples of positive change: 1) The nation’s largest expansion of public preschool; 2) Some \$250 million in savings from prison system reforms; 3) Stopping the erosion of the traditional 180-day K-12 school year; 4) Approval of tougher certification tests for new teachers; 5) Deeper investment in the Pure Michigan marketing campaign; 6) Approval of a more rigorous teacher evaluation system; and 7) Reform of state business taxes.

Governance & Staff

The Center for Michigan was founded in 2006 by retired newspaper publisher Philip Power and is governed by an 11-member board of directors. The Center is counselled by a venerable bipartisan steering committee of nearly two dozen Michigan leaders. A similarly experienced and respected statewide board of advisors provides key journalistic guidance to Bridge Magazine. Read more about The Center for Michigan on our website: thecenterformichigan.net/about. Read more about Bridge Magazine at bridgemi.com/about-bridge. The Center for Michigan employs 15 professionals with backgrounds in journalism, public engagement, and public policy. Staff bios are available on our websites.

Board of Directors

The Center is incorporated in Michigan as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Its officers and directors are: Philip H. Power, Chairman; Kathleen K. Power, Vice President; John Bebow, President and CEO; Loyal A. Eldridge III, Esq., Secretary; Karla Campbell, Treasurer; Paula Cunningham, Director; Paul Hillegonds, Director; Michael Jandernoa, Director; Dr. Glenda D. Price, Director; Douglas Rothwell, Director; Dr. Marilyn Schlack, Director.

Steering Committee members

The Center has been fortunate to attract a group of distinguished Michigan residents to serve on its Steer-

ing Committee. They include:

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- **Paul Courant**, Former Provost, University of Michigan Librarian Emeritus
- **Paul Dimond**, Of Counsel, Miller Canfield
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- **Cynthia Wilbanks**, Vice President for Government Relations, University of Michigan



NOTES

1. <https://www.bridgemi.com/special-report/michigans-k-12-performance-dropping-alarming-rate>
2. <https://www.bridgemi.com/special-report/michigans-k-12-performance-dropping-alarming-rate>
3. <https://www.bridgemi.com/special-report/michigan-preschool-funding-has-improved-child-care-still-unaffordable>
4. <https://www.bridgemi.com/special-report/despite-low-trust-govt-michigan-legislators-have-done-little-change>
5. <https://www.bridgemi.com/special-report/michigans-k-12-performance-dropping-alarming-rate>
6. <https://www.bridgemi.com/special-report/michigan-needs-4b-more-year-infrastructure-how-pay-it>





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