ALTON FORWARD

Alton Forward Civic Organization Survey

AltonWorks and Alton Forward seek to convene, connect, and collaborate with inspiring leaders, partners, and agencies to support projects and programs that transform the City of Alton and the Greater Alton Area into a community that fosters opportunity and social equity. We want our work to contribute to the overall effort to lift the community and our Great Rivers Confluence Region. Our goals are founded on a basis of livability and social equity, with a definition of economic development rooted in a holistic understanding of community health and capabilities.

In 2021, AltonWorks is taking a granular look at community needs and opportunities to inform AltonWorks' non-profit partner, Alton Forward, in shaping its role and priorities to foster positive social change in the community.

In late 2020, Alton Forward conducted a voluntary survey to inventory active civic organizations to capture civic priorities, aspirations, capacity, and needs. We believe this survey will help frame a constructive dialogue across participating organizations and create a starting point to better inform and shape a shared set of strategic civic priorities.

This survey is an entry point and convening opportunity to better account for the community's sense of needs, opportunities, and barriers, as well as the current missions and capacity of active civic organizations in the community.

This report is a small snapshot of the many committed and deeply engaged stakeholders in the Alton area. These findings will be used to guide Alton Forward's priorities as it works to build capacity and catalyze transformational planning opportunities. The survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix B of this report.

I) Alton Community Civic Organization Overview

A total of 22 organizations completed the Alton Civic Organization Survey. These organizations run the gamut of smaller, new organizations to established non-profits and government agencies, with a diverse array of missions, priorities, and resources. This diversity is represented in the varying staffing and funding levels across organizations. Over 70% of the organizations that responded have been operating for more than 20 years, and the highest prevalence of organization priority was Community Services and Youth-Focused Programming. Nearly 60% of the organizations have their own 501(c)(3) certification. The missions of the respondents reflect this overwhelming priority towards Alton community services and youth programs.

II) Staffing and Budgeting

Many of these organizations have been operating for more than 20 years and nearly 70% of responding organizations employ between 0-5 staff.

Figure 1 – Staffing Distribution of Survey Respondents

Civic Organization Full-Time Staff

■ 0 to 5 ■ 6 to 10 ■ 11 to 15 ■ More than 15
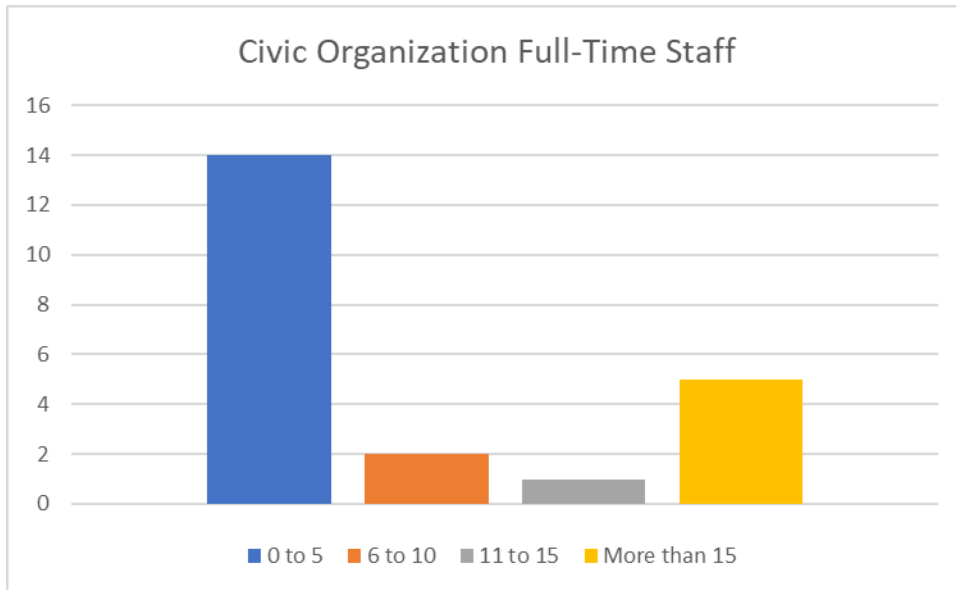
Organization budgets are, on average, above $500,000, which 40% of the respondents selected for their budgetary level. These organizations were predominantly government agencies. The least common response was organizations with budgets below $50,000. This suggests that while most organizations do not have a high number of full-time staff, there are still significant resources across many programs, which may include programs that do not require full-time staffing support.

The responding organizations have a high level of volunteer support, with 46% of respondents stating they received over 1,000 volunteer hours a year. Most organizations do not offer internships or apprenticeships, with four offering internships. Most organizations rated all funding types as "low," outside of individual donors and government funding, which were more commonly claimed as a "high" source of funding.

Figure 2 – Funding Distribution of Survey Respondents

What are the primary sources of your funding?

■ Low ■ Medium ■ High
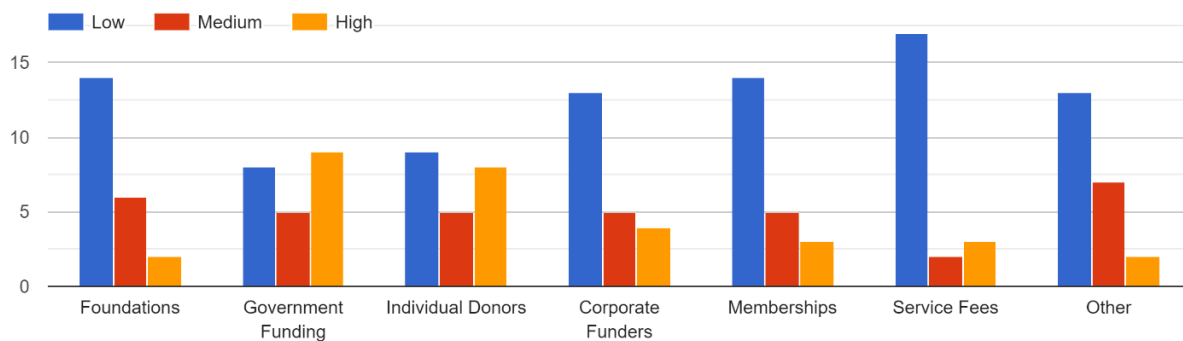
Government funding and Individual donors were most equally rated across levels, while foundations, membership funding, service fees, and other sources were all more commonly rated as "low" sources of funding.

Figure 3 – Civic Organization Fundraising Efficacy

Ranking	Fundraising Capacity	Fundraising Needs
1 (Low)	2	2
2	2	1
3 (Medium)	9	3
4	5	8
5 (High)	4	8

However, while there are clear funding gaps, most organizations (18 of 22) rated their fundraising capacity between 3 and 5 (the highest levels). This is contrasted by the overwhelming majority of organizations (16 of 22) that selected the highest levels of 4 and 5 for their fundraising needs.

III) Partnerships and Collaboration

Although there was a high degree of overlap in program service areas across organizations, there is little overlap among each reporting organization's listed partners. However, this may simply reflect the high number of organizations in the area, as well as the fact that several organizations simply listed the type of collaborators, such as "social service agencies in Madison County" rather than listing specific partners.

Most organizations stated that they often enter formal partnerships (17 of 22 selected levels 3 through 5) and nearly all (21 of 22) respondents stated they believe their partnerships are effective, selecting levels 3-5.

Figure 4 – Partnership Efficacy

Ranking	Frequency of Partnerships	Effectiveness of Partnerships
1 (Low)	2	1
2	3	0
3 (Medium)	6	10
4	4	3
5 (High)	7	8

There was a similar spread answering how involved community members are in making decisions at the organization, but this response was more clustered around the 3 (medium) level.

IV) Organization Goals and Assets

A high proportion of organizations listed funding, staffing, and community engagement as key resources that help their organization succeed. Technical skills received the most diverse response and were relatively equally related as either "low," "medium," or "high". Most organizations did not list a major

resource outside of the available list, but resources listed included Facebook, Leadership and Development Coaching, Community Needs Assessment, and Volunteers.

The barriers listed provided a much more diverse response from the survey respondents.

Figure 5 – Barriers to Civic Organization Success

What are the major barriers that impact your organization's success?
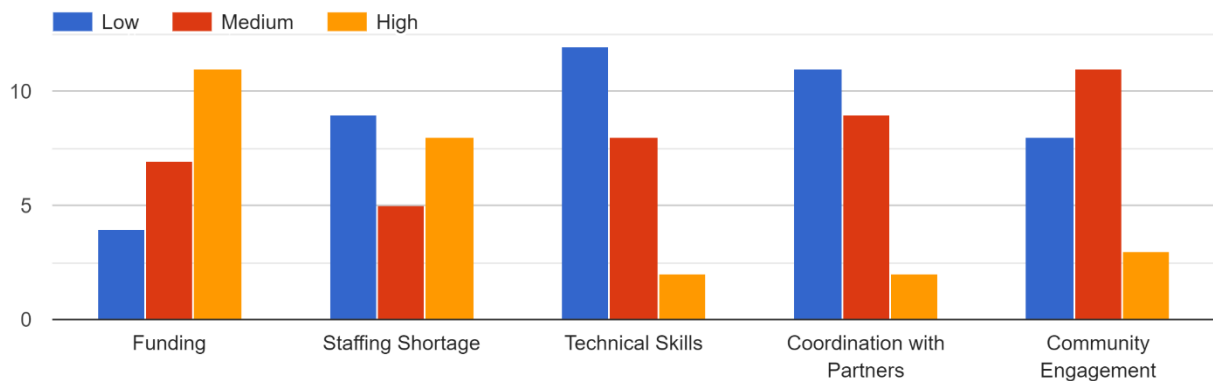
Funding, unsurprisingly, received the most attention and nearly all organizations listed it as either a medium or high barrier. Technical skills were listed as low barriers, reflecting a higher degree of confidence from respondents. Community engagement, which was listed as a high resource by most organizations, was listed as a medium barrier in 10 organizations.

The barriers listed outside of the provided list were exclusively specific to the respondent's efforts, such as capital ownership concerns or stigmas around mental health and substance abuse. Similarly, there is little overlap between the projects that organizations would undertake if fully resourced, with most respondents focused on expanding their programming.

V) Alton Assessment and COVID-19 Impact

Generally, respondents rated that Alton had a high degree of health, livability, and sense of belonging among community members. Most respondents selected either 3 or 4 on the health and livability of Alton, and there was a higher number of respondents who selected a 4 for a sense of well-being and belonging in Alton.

Figure 6 – Civic Organization Assessment of Alton Community

Ranking	Health and Livability	Sense of Place and Belonging
1 (Low)	0	0
2	4	5
3 (Medium)	9	4
4	8	12
5 (High)	1	1

When asked about the top three social and civil challenges in Alton, there was a wide variety of responses. However, there was a clear focus on race and racism, with half of the respondents focusing on equity and structural racism concerns. These were often correlated with concerns around poverty, access to housing and employment opportunities, and overall civic engagement. The other most clear concern was poverty, with nine respondents focusing on poverty specifically.

When asked about the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on their organization, respondents were split into two groups of responses. The first type focused on the challenges of operating their programs under social distance guidelines, noting challenges with volunteers, in-person events, and programmatic concerns. The other type of response was from organizations that are deemed essential workers, which have faced higher volumes of needs, staff burnout, and programmatic challenges.

VI) Community Needs and Opportunities

When asked about the various program focus areas, there were clear correlations among responses. In each category of Internet Connectivity, Food Security, Urban and Rural Open Spaces, Health and Well-Being, and Downtown Business Revitalization, respondents overwhelmingly strongly agreed that these were pressing needs and opportunities as well as a desirable strength in the community.

Where these categories vary is in the questions around if these topics were community priorities or a priority at the respondent's organizations. An example Spread of Responses for Urban and Rural Open Spaces and Active Living is below.

Figure 7 – Civic Organization Priority Ranking example
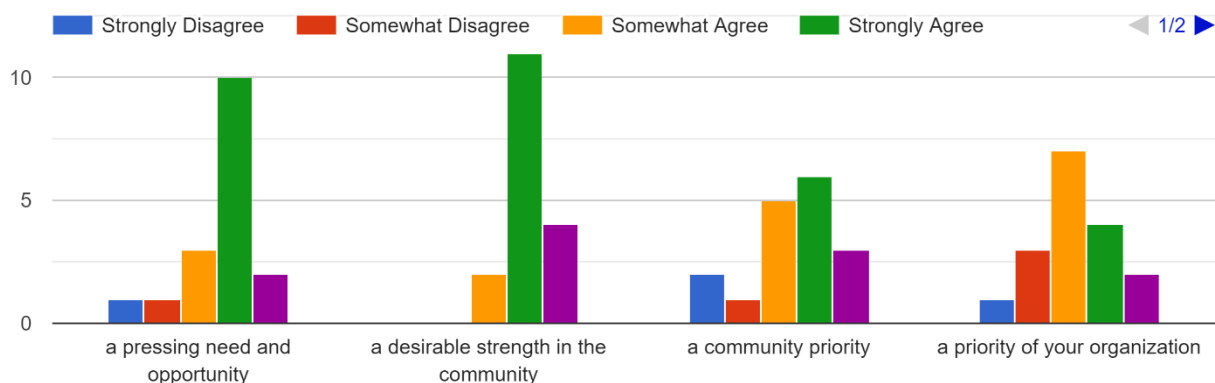
Each response category reflected a similar spread, highlighting an important capacity gap among surveyed organizations. While each focus area was valued highly, it was less frequently selected as a priority among the responding organizations.

These responses were coded with a corresponding value, between Strongly Disagree ranked as "1" and Strongly Agree ranked as "4," with responses of "Have No Opinion" dropped from the analysis. When the responses are averaged, all focus areas are seen as key priority areas.

Figure 8 – Civic Organization Priority Rankings

Focus Area	Pressing Need	Desirable Strength	Community Priority	Priority for your Organization
Internet Connectivity	3.7	3.7	3.3	3.1
Food Security	3.9	3.5	3.2	3.3
Urban and Rural Open Spaces	3.4	3.8	3.1	3.0
Health and Wellbeing	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.3
Downtown Business Revitalization	3.5	3.7	3.3	3.0

When asked about Alton's greatest assets and challenges across fields, the responses were primarily focused on areas where their organization had expertise. Many respondents stated that they did not have enough expertise or information to provide their input into areas such as Internet Connectivity, Food Security, and Downtown Business Revitalization. A summary of these responses can be found in the appendix of this report.

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses for Alton to emerge as a key downstate regional center and hub, the skilled workforce, innovation and problem-solving culture, leadership, and capacity building were relatively equally rated as both a strength and weakness.

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of Alton emerging as a preferred relocation destination, there is a wide variety in ratings. These were:

- Start-Up Culture – Weakness
- Architecture and Streetscapes - Strength
- Affordable Housing Choices – Weakness
- Affordable Childcare - Weakness
- Walkable Neighborhoods - Weakness
- Open Spaces and Natural Assets - Strength
- High-Quality Schools - Strength
- Strong Sense of Place - Strength

VI) Report Findings and Conclusion

Alton Forward's Community Civic Organization Survey aimed to offer context and a starting point engagement and conversations with local stakeholders, as well as begin to assess the status and priorities of local organizations. These survey responses will support Alton Forward's efforts to identify capacity gaps in the community, as well as spur conversations and community building activities to forge a stronger community network.

These preliminary findings are limited by the scope of this survey, as well as the engagement capabilities of conducting this survey in the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, these responses were given in the Winter of 2020-2021 and as such are influenced by the ramifications of the pandemic, which has significantly influenced

the programmatic and financial capabilities of civic organizations. However, there are commonalities and findings amongst the surveyed organizations that provide helpful context as Alton Forward establishes itself as a capacity-building collaborator in the community.

- <u>Fundraising Needs</u> – Funding was the most selected barrier for responding organizations. This is an unsurprising finding, particularly amidst the pandemic when resources were scarce for non-profit organizations. In addition, survey responses were predominately provided by organizations leaders, who were acutely focused on staffing capacity during this time.

- <u>Belief in Alton</u> – Respondents had consistent responses in strongly believing that Alton had a strong sense of community and place, as well as high levels of health and livability. Similarly, the various assets in each priority area demonstrated the existing strengths in the community. But this belief is most strongly seen abstractly around overarching feelings of livability and a sense of place. When asked about specific strengths and weaknesses, such as affordable housing, walkable communities, and childcare opportunities, respondents were more likely to provide a diverse array of responses and note perceived weaknesses. In addition, when asked about the top challenges facing Alton, most organizations focused on concerns around equity and structural racism. This suggests that while most survey respondents believe in the ideals of Alton as a strong community, there are specific concerns that most survey respondents believe are high-priority focus areas.

- <u>Sense of Shared Priorities</u> – The five outlined priorities were all given high responses, with all priorities receiving average responses between "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree" for community priorities, needs in the community, and desirable strengths. These responses ranked higher than the average response for ranking priorities for each organization, which suggests that while these are key focus areas, Alton Forward can fill a demonstrated need as a convening organizer and capacity builder in these fields.

As Alton Forward continues to engage the community and civic stakeholders of Alton, these findings will be used to inform and shape the organization's strategic priorities and direction. We thank all the organizations who participated in this survey.

Appendix A – Respondents Input on Strengths and Weaknesses of Alton Area

Priority Area	Asset	Challenge
Internet Connectivity	- A majority of families have access to Internet and devices to access Internet - Strong sense of community and growth - Local Colleges	- Infrastructure and investment. - Making it a funding priority - Financial concerns - Local government participation - Access to Internet - Supporting underserved neighborhoods
Food Security	- Community helpers and volunteers - Restaurant community and farmers markets - Local investment in agriculture and food systems - Strong network of local farmers - Farmers Markets	- Access to healthy food options, including price and transportation to food options - Input from communities in need of support - Poverty and perceptions of people in poverty, their food needs, and internal and external barriers - Community Engagement - Nutrition Education - Resources for food education Food distribution logistics
Urban and Rural Open Spaces and Active Living	- Community parks, park system, Gordon Moore Park - Natural resources such as Mississippi Riverfront - Accessible and open space	- Park District management - Accessibility and inclusion - Public Interest - Funding - Equitable siting of parks
Health and Wellbeing	- Two local hospitals - Other health focused organizations - Mental Health support organizations	- Accessibility of health and dental care - Health education - Funding - Public perception - Local government

		• Lack of walkable communities • Affordability of service and health insurance
Downtown Business Revitalization	• Riverfront and architecture • Available and open space • Financial resources and investment • Local business community • Strong Main Street organization	• Uniting around a common vision and plan • Eliminating barriers for startups • Potential flooding • Financial resources • Age and condition of properties • Local government engagement • Affordable housing access • Needing wider focus on larger community

Appendix B – Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questions

Contact Information

- Organization Name:
- Contact Person:
- Phone Number:
- Email:
- Website:
- Address:

Section 1) Organization Information

1. How long has your organization been in operation?

    - Less than one year
    - 1-5 years
    - 6-10 years
    - 11-20 years
    - More than 20

2. How would you categorize your organization's primary focus?

    - Arts, Culture, and Humanities
    - Youth-Focused Programming and Education
    - Health and Wellbeing
    - Community Services
    - Workforce Opportunities
    - Housing and Community Development
    - Agriculture, Food, and Nutrition
    - Crime and Legal Related
    - Recreation and Sports
    - Environment and Animals

3. What is your organization's certification status?

    - Unincorporated
    - 501(c)(3) or (c)(4) incorporated
    - Utilize other organization's 501(c)(3) or (c)(4) status
    - Other

Section 2) Organization Mission, Budget, and Staffing

4. What is the stated mission/purpose of your organization?

5. Please identify core programs and services (up to three) that your organization provides:

6. How many full-time staff does your organization employ?

   - 0-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - More than 15

7. What is your organization's reported annual budget?

   - Less than $50,000
   - $50,000 - $150,000
   - $150,000 - $500,000
   - Above $500,000

8. Approximately, how many volunteer hours does your organization annually receive?

   - Less than 50
   - 50-100
   - 101-1,000
   - More than 1,000

9. Does your organization routinely offer compensated internship and/or apprenticeship opportunities? (*have ability to select either, neither, or both*)

10. What are the primary sources of your funding? (*each option has a ranking option of "low", "medium", or "high"*)

    - Foundations
    - Government Funding
    - Individual Donors
    - Corporate Funders
    - Membership
    - Service Fees
    - Other

11. How would you assess your organization's fundraising capacity? (*ranked choice option of 1-5 scale with 1 as low and 5 as high*)

12. How would you assess your organization's fundraising needs? (*ranked choice option of 1-5 scale with 1 as low and 5 as high*)

Section 3) Organization Partnerships and Collaboration

13. What organizations do you consider to be primary collaborators?

14. How often does your organization enter formal partnerships or joint ventures to advance your mission? (*ranked choice option of 1-5 scale with 1 as low and 5 as high*)

15. How would you characterize the overall effectiveness of your collaborations with partner organizations? (*ranked choice option of 1-5 scale with 1 as low and 5 as high*)

16. How involved are community members in making decisions at your organization? (*ranked choice option of 1-5 scale with 1 as low and 5 as high*)

Section 4) Organization Goals and Assets

17. What are the key resources that help your organization succeed? – *(each option has a ranked choice option of "low", "medium", or "high")*

   - Funding
   - Staffing
   - Coordination with Partners
   - Community Engagement
   - Technical Skills

18. Is there a major resource available to your organization that you can reveal that was not included in the list above? If so, please describe.

19. What are the major barriers that impact your organization's success? - *(each option has a ranked choice option of "low", "medium", or "high")*

   - Funding
   - Staffing Shortage
   - Coordination with Partners
   - Community Engagement
   - Technical Skills

20. Is there a perceived barrier that not listed? If so, please briefly describe.

21. If your organization were fully resourced, what difference making project would your organization undertake to further your mission?

22. How would you rate the general health and livability of the community of Alton and Greater Alton area? (*ranked choice option of 1-5 scale with 1 as low and 5 as high*)

23. How would you rate the general sense of belonging and well being of community members of Alton and the Greater Alton area? (*ranked choice option of 1-5 scale with 1 as low and 5 as high*)

24. What do you think are the top three social/civic challenges facing the community of Alton and the Greater Alton area?

25. Could you briefly explain the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted your mission, operations, and service levels?

Section 5) Community Needs and Opportunities

To learn more about your organization's efforts across various community-building areas, as well as your opinion about the needs and opportunities within the community, the following questions request information about your organization's work in these fields and observations of relevant community needs and assets.

26. Need for Expanded Internet Connectivity and Digital Inclusion (affordable, fast, and available Internet Service) is: - (*the options below all allow for a selection of either "Strongly Disagree", "Somewhat Disagree", "Somewhat Agree", "Strongly Agree", or "Have No Opinion"*)

- a pressing need and opportunity
- a desirable strength in the community
- a community priority
- a priority for your organization

27. Alton's greatest asset(s) in this focus area is:

28. Alton's greatest challenge in achieving expanded digital access, use, and proficiency is:

29. Food Security (access to healthy foods, affordable and available food stores, connections with local agriculture, and opportunities to develop a thriving regional and local food system) is: - (*the options below all allow for a selection of either "Strongly Disagree", "Somewhat Disagree", "Somewhat Agree", "Strongly Agree", or "Have No Opinion"*)

- a pressing need and opportunity
- a desirable strength in the community
- a community priority
- a priority for your organization

30. Alton's greatest asset(s) for building a viable regional food ecosystem is:

31. Alton's greatest challenge in this focus area is:

32. Urban and Rural Open Space and Active Living (public land stewardship, parks, recreation activities, and outdoor programming opportunities) is:- (*the options below all allow for a*

selection of either "Strongly Disagree", "Somewhat Disagree", "Somewhat Agree", "Strongly Agree", or "Have No Opinion")

- a pressing need and opportunity
- a desirable strength in the community
- a community priority
- a priority for your organization

33. Alton's greatest asset(s) in this focus area is:

34. Alton's greatest challenge in this focus area is:

35. Health and Wellbeing (available and affordable health care, health programming, accessible support services, active living amenities and programming, viable platforms to influence and positively impact the social determinants of health and wellness) is - (*the options below all allow for a selection of either "Strongly Disagree", "Somewhat Disagree", "Somewhat Agree", "Strongly Agree", or "Have No Opinion")*

- a pressing need and opportunity
- a desirable strength in the community
- a community priority
- a priority for your organization

36. Alton's greatest asset(s) in this focus area is:

37. Alton's greatest challenge in this focus area is:

38. Downtown Business District Revitalization (building out Downtown commercial and residential opportunities planned for placemaking, repurposing the built environment for the 21st century and as a catalyst for community building) is -(*the options below all allow for a selection of either "Strongly Disagree", "Somewhat Disagree", "Somewhat Agree", "Strong Agree", or "Have No Opinion")*

- a pressing need and opportunity
- a desirable strength in the community
- a community priority
- a priority for your organization

39. Alton's greatest asset in this focus area is:

40. Alton's greatest challenge in this focus area is:

41. Regional Innovation Opportunities (Greater Alton as emerging Innovation Hub, Business Training Center, and start-up accelerator) is: -(*the options below all allow for a selection of either "Strongly Disagree", "Somewhat Disagree", "Somewhat Agree", "Strong Agree", or "Have No Opinion")*

- a pressing need and opportunity
- a desirable strength in the community
- a community priority
- a priority for your organization

42. Please indicate whether the following assets are a strength or a weakness for the Alton community to emerge as a key downstate regional center and hub: *(the following options allow a selection of strength or weakness)*

- Skilled Workforce
- Innovation and Problem-Solving Culture
- Leadership
- Capacity Building Institutions

43. Please indicate whether the following assets are a strength or weakness for the Alton community to emerge as a preferred relocation destination for young families, retirees, talent, and new businesses: *(the following options allow a selection of strength or weakness)*

- Start-up Culture
- Architecture and Streetscapes
- Affordable Housing Choices
- Affordable Child Care
- Walkable Neighborhoods
- Open Space and Natural Assets
- High-quality Schools
- Strong Sense of Place

44. Would you be interested in participating in a follow up dialogue to advance the concept of a community-wide civic enterprise to encourage greater opportunities for increased civic collaboration, measurable social impact, and positive social outcomes?

45. Would you/your organization be willing to participate in a workgroup to brainstorm how to best proceed to advance this effort overall?

46. Is there anything that this survey did not ask about that you feel is important to add at this point in the conversation?

Acknowledgements

This survey was developed by an ad hoc advisory committee. The committee recommended utilizing this survey as a starting point for an expanded inclusive civic dialogue to guide and frame Alton Forward's social impact agenda and priorities.

We thank the ad hoc committee that developed this survey, which includes:

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- Jason Harrison
- Jeff Maynard

- Patrick McGinnis
- Susan Ryan
- Trudy Bodenbach

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AltonWorks is a development company focused on the revitalization of Historic Downtown Alton to catalyze community building and the larger shared goal of sustaining a healthy, equitable, and vibrant community and region.

Alton Forward is a not-for-profit collaboration of AltonWorks, aspiring to activate ideas and inspire stakeholders to create a more livable, prosperous and inclusive Alton that benefits and lifts the entire region.