

Regional Plan Engagement Strategies

OUTREACH METHOD & TIMELINE	TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT	WHERE	WHO	ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION	PARTNERS
Planning Commission Meetings (2025)	BCRC staff visits individual Planning Commission meetings to discuss FLU maps and housing targets	Town offices/virtual	Municipal planning commission members, town staff, members of the public	Presentation and materials distributed to planning commissions were designed to be clear and understandable by people from a variety of background	Municipalities
Tabling at Public Events (May-October 2025)	Quick, interactive opportunities for engagement at a variety of regional events	Stamford Resilience Fair, Sheldon Store Coffee Hour, Manchester Street Fest, Celebrate Pownal Day, Norman's Attic, North Bennington Village Block Party, Harvest Fest	General public, Environmental Justice Focus Populations	Outreach materials were written in plain language and translated into Dari and Spanish; variety of methods to provide input including verbal feedback transcribed by staff, written feedback on idea boards, drawing activity for youth, and tactile exploration of the region via a 3D printed topographical map of the region	
Community Centers Outreach (August - October 2025)	Engage community members on questions of how they envision the region in the future through installations/idea posters at libraries, schools, and community centers around the region	Local libraries, community centers	General public, Environmental Justice Focus Populations	Idea poster questions were written in plain language and translated into Dari and Spanish	JG McCullough Free Library, Martha Canfield Memorial Library, Solomon Wright Public Library, Bennington County Multicultural Community Center (BCMCC)
Focus Groups (September 2025)	Engage specific populations on their experiences in the region and how they envision the future through casual, small-group conversations	Local schools, community centers	New Americans/people with limited English proficiency, youth	Focus group questions were posed in plain language, interpretation was provided at the event with BCMCC, food provided at both events	BCMCC, Southwest Tech
Survey (June - October 2025)	Solicit detailed input on a variety of topics covered in the regional plan	Virtual/paper surveys available at tabling events, and idea poster locations	General public, Environmental Justice Focus Populations	Survey was available online, in several physical locations, and mailed upon request. The survey was translated into Dari and Spanish	

EVENT SCHEDULE			
Event	Date	Municipality	# of Interactions
Stamford Resilience Fair	5/10/2025	Stamford	12
Coffee Hour at the Sheldon Store	6/28/2025	Rupert	23
Manchester Street Fest	7/11/2025	Manchester	44
Celebrate Pownal Today	7/26/2025	Pownal	37
BCMCC Focus Group	9/12/2025	Bennington	7
Norman's Attic	9/13/2025	Arlington	121
SW Tech Focus Group	9/17/2025	Bennington	7
North Bennington Village Block Party	9/28/2025	North Bennington	15
Harvest Fest	10/18/2025	Bennington	83
			349

IDEA POSTER LOCATIONS	
Location	Timeframe
JG McCullough Free Library	August - mid-September
Martha Canfield Library	August - mid-September
Solomon Wright Public Library	September
Bennington County Multicultural Community Center	Mid-September - Mid-Oct

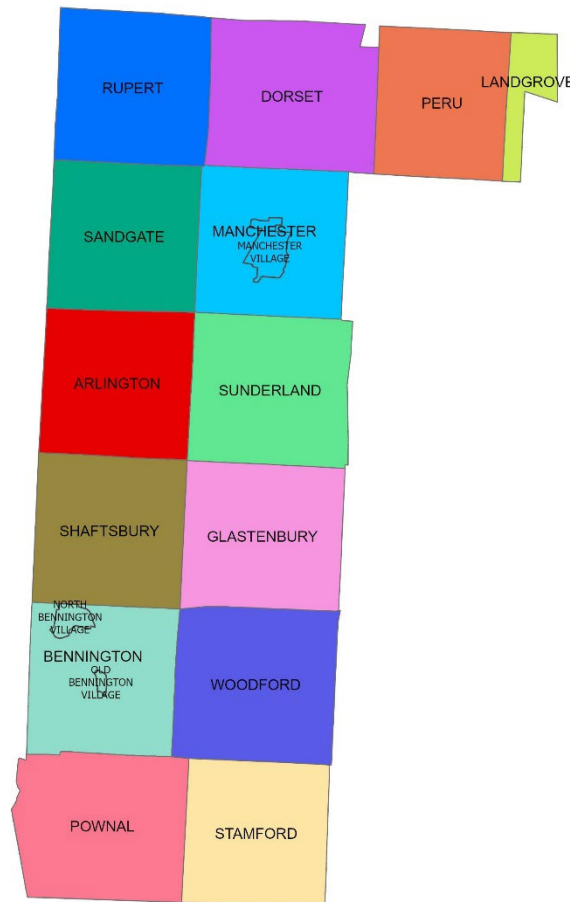
2026 Bennington Regional Plan Survey

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) is one of eleven statewide regional planning commissions. We provide support to 17 municipalities in the region, and we are also responsible for developing a regional plan every eight years. The plan must meet several state requirements for [content](#) and [process](#), and is informed by community input. For more information about the regional plan update, please visit bcrct.org/regional-plan.

If you or someone you know needs translation or interpretation to respond to this survey, please contact Callie Fishburn at cfishburn@bcrct.org.

Completed surveys can be returned to the BCRC Office at 210 South St. Suite 6, Bennington, VT.

The BCRC serves 17 municipalities in Bennington County - 14 towns and 3 incorporated villages. Whenever we ask about "the region" in this survey, we are referring to the geographic area shown below.



Economic Development

1. Which types of jobs would you like to see more of in the region? (Select 1-3)

- a) Manufacturing
- b) Trades/Construction
- c) Retail
- d) Education
- e) Health care
- f) Social services
- g) Entrepreneurial (start-ups, small business)
- h) Tourism and Hospitality
- i) Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
- j) Ag, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting
- k) Other

2. Where are the best places for our communities to grow? (Select 1-2)

- a) Downtowns
- b) Village centers
- c) Neighborhoods
- d) Major highway corridors
- e) Rural areas
- f) Near recreation areas
- g) Other

3. When considering growth, which of the following do you consider to be the top priority in your community? (Select only 1)

- a) Attract new businesses and employment opportunities to diversify the tax base
- b) Preserve natural landscapes and rural character
- c) Attract new residents and grow the tax base
- d) Increase recreation, arts, and cultural opportunities
- e) Other

4. Please rank the following potential economic development challenges from least important to most important. (One response per column)

	1 – Least Important	2	3	4	5 – Most Important
Availability of workforce					
Lack of adequate employment opportunities					
Lack of support for small businesses and/or entrepreneurs					
Lack of workforce development or vocational training					
Lack of commercial or industrial space					

5. Please rank the workforce development programs in order of those that you would be most likely to support. (One response per column)

	1- Least likely	2	3	4	5- Most likely
Internships for high school and college students					
More capacity and programming at technical centers					
In-school programs for k-12 students					
Job shadowing partnerships with local employers					
Apprenticeships and adult job (re)training					

6. How do you rate the diversity of the regional economy? (1-5 scale)

1 – It seems like we have a lot of the same type of businesses

2

3

4

5 – It seems like we have a wide variety of businesses

Transportation and Mobility

7. What are the greatest transportation safety concerns in the region? (Select 1-2)

- a) Poor infrastructure and/or maintenance
- b) Lack of adequate sidewalks, bike lanes, and shared-use paths
- c) Speeding/traffic
- d) Unsafe roads and/or intersections
- e) Other

8. Rank the modes of transportation that are most important to you. (One response per column)

	1 – Least important	2	3	4	5	6	7 – Most Important
Driving							
Walking							
Public transit							
Biking							
Carpooling							
Rolling (i.e. using a wheelchair, scooter, skateboarding)							
Plane or train							

9. Please rank the walking or biking improvements that you would like to see in the region from last important to most important. (One response per column)

	1 – Least important	2	3	4	5 – Most important
More/improve sidewalks					
More shared-use paths					
More bike lanes					
More/improved crosswalks					
Slower vehicle speeds					

10. How often do you use transit (local or regional buses) to navigate the region?

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) Once or twice a year
- e) Have never used

11. What factors would make you more likely to use public transit? (Select 1-2)

- a) Better information on bus routes, schedules, and how to ride
- b) More routes in rural areas
- c) On demand service
- d) Better amenities (shelters, benches, etc.)
- e) More weekend and evening options
- f) Improved safety and cleanliness
- g) Nothing
- h) Other

Housing

12. Which statement best describes the housing situation in your community? (Select 1-2)

- a) We need more housing of all types
- b) We need to restore our existing housing
- c) We only need specific types of housing (please explain under “other” below)
- d) We need more housing but only in certain areas
- e) We do not need more housing
- f) Other, explain:

13. Which types of housing are most needed in the region? (Select 1-3)

- a) Accessory dwelling units/tiny homes
- b) Apartments
- c) Senior housing
- d) Market rate housing
- e) Workforce housing
- f) Middle income homes
- g) Affordable housing
- h) Emergency housing/shelters

i) Other, explain:

14. What do you consider to be the biggest challenges related to housing in the region?
(Select 1-3)

- a) Lack of rental units
- b) Old or blighted housing stock
- c) Homelessness
- d) Need for more housing stock in downtowns and village centers
- e) Lack of senior housing and assisted living facilities
- f) Lack of low/middle income homes
- g) Lack of market rate housing
- h) Other

15. Which of the following do you see as a major barrier to housing growth in the region?
(Select 1-3)

- a) Lack of available land for housing
- b) Lack of contractors to build housing
- c) Access to financing to build housing
- d) Unavailability of water/sewer utilities
- e) Local land use regulations (zoning, design review, etc.)
- f) State land use regulations (Act 250, stormwater, etc.)
- g) Cost to build relative to the market
- h) Other

Public Facilities, Utilities, and Services

16. Which public utilities/facilities/services do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)

- a) Childcare
- b) Public safety (fire, police, EMS)
- c) Schools and vocational centers
- d) Broadband internet
- e) Public water and sewer infrastructure
- f) Recreational facilities
- g) Public transportation
- h) Public libraries
- i) Other

Energy and the Environment

17. Which of the following home energy efficiency products do you currently have? (Select all that apply)

- a) Weatherization
- b) Heat pumps
- c) Solar
- d) New energy efficient furnace or boiler
- e) Energy efficient appliances
- f) Battery storage
- g) None of the above
- h) Other

18. What home energy efficiency projects would you be most interested in? (Select all that apply)

- a) Weatherization
- b) Heat pumps
- c) Solar
- d) New energy efficient furnace or boiler
- e) Energy efficient appliances
- f) Battery storage
- g) None of the above
- h) Other

19. What is your biggest concern regarding energy in our region? (Select only 1)

- a) Climate impacts
- b) Cost of energy
- c) Electric grid reliability
- d) Aesthetic concerns
- e) Other

20. Rate your agreement with the following statement: the region is sufficiently prepared for natural disasters and has the resources to address them.

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree

- e) Strongly disagree

Natural and Cultural Resource

21. What are the benefits of a strong agricultural sector in the Bennington Region? (Select all that apply)

- a) Provides access to fresh, healthy food
- b) Supports farmers markets, CSAs and local food
- c) Preserves farmland
- d) Boosts the local economy and provides jobs
- e) Provides a network for farmers to collaborate
- f) Food security and independence
- g) Other

22. What should be done to improve access to the region's natural resources? (Select all that apply)

- a) Expand and connect hiking and walking trails
- b) Expand and connect snowmobile and ATV trails
- c) Improve parking at parks, trailheads, etc.
- d) Expand fishing, boating, and paddling public access
- e) Expand accessibility for beginners and persons with disabilities
- f) Expand access to hunting on public lands
- g) Other

23. What natural resources do you value in your community?

24. What are the top three cultural, historical, or recreational resources that you value in the region?

25. What do you consider to be the greatest strength of the region?

26. What do you consider to be the greatest challenge for the region?

About You – Demographic Questions

All of the following questions are optional but answering them will help us understand who we've reached with this survey. Thank you!

27. What is your relationship to the region? (Select all that apply)

- a) I live in the region
- b) I work in the region
- c) I go to school in the region
- d) I own a business in the region
- e) I often visit
- f) Other

28. What municipality do you live in?

- a) Arlington
- b) Bennington
- c) Dorset
- d) Glastenbury
- e) Landgrove
- f) Manchester
- g) Manchester Village
- h) North Bennington
- i) Old Bennington
- j) Peru
- k) Pownal
- l) Rupert
- m) Sandgate
- n) Shaftsbury
- o) Stamford
- p) Sunderland
- q) Woodford

r) I live outside the Bennington Region

29. How old are you?

- a) Under 18
- b) 18 – 29
- c) 30 – 44
- d) 45 – 59
- e) 60 – 74
- f) 75+
- g) Prefer not to answer

30. Are you a renter, homeowner or other?

- a) Renter
- b) Homeowner
- c) Prefer not to answer
- d) Other

31. What kind of housing do you live in?

- a) Single-family house
- b) Two-family housing (duplex)
- c) Condominium or townhouse
- d) Multi-family building (apartments)
- e) Mobile home
- f) I do not have permanent housing
- g) Prefer not to answer
- h) Other

32. Did you grow up in the region?

- a) Yes
- b) No

33. What is your race?

- a) White
- b) Black, African, or African American
- c) American Indian, Indigenous, or Native American
- d) Pacific Islander
- e) Asian or Asian American
- f) Two or more races

- g) Prefer not to answer
- h) Other

34. Are you Latinx or Hispanic?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to answer

35. What is your gender?

- a) Female
- b) Male
- c) Non-binary/non-conforming
- d) Prefer not to answer
- e) Other

36. What is your household income?

- a) Less than \$25,000
- b) \$25,000 to \$49,999
- c) \$50,000 to \$74,999
- d) \$75,000 to \$99,999
- e) \$100,000 to \$149,999
- f) \$150,000 or more
- g) Prefer not to answer

Bennington Regional Plan Survey – Key Themes in Open-Ended Responses

✓ 1. Natural Beauty & Outdoor Recreation

- Frequent mentions of **mountains, rivers, forests, lakes, and scenic views**.
 - Strong emphasis on **hiking trails, bike paths, and access to nature**.
 - Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF), Battenkill River, and local parks are highly valued.
-

✓ 2. Cultural & Historical Resources

- **Bennington Battle Monument, Bennington Museum, and historic architecture** appear repeatedly.
 - Local theaters, arts centers, and libraries are considered important cultural assets.
-

✓ 3. Sense of Community

- Many responses highlight **neighborly support**, resilience during crises, and a “think local” mindset.
 - Community spaces and events are seen as vital for social connection.
-

✓ 4. Greatest Strengths

- **Natural beauty, rural character, and small-town feel** dominate.
 - Access to outdoor recreation and proximity to major cities (Albany, NYC, Boston) is seen as an advantage.
-

✓ 5. Greatest Challenges

- **Housing affordability and availability** is the most cited issue.
- **Economic concerns:** lack of jobs, low wages, limited growth opportunities.
- **Resistance to change** and reluctance to adapt to new realities.

- **Social issues:** poverty, homelessness, drug use.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** healthcare, technological readiness, and public services.

BCRC Community Engagement Data Analysis - Values/Challenges Boards

(Updated copy - includes Harvest Fest data for Bennington)

BCRC Data Analysis

```
library(readr)
data <- read_csv("UpdatedDataset.csv")
#data successfully loaded
```

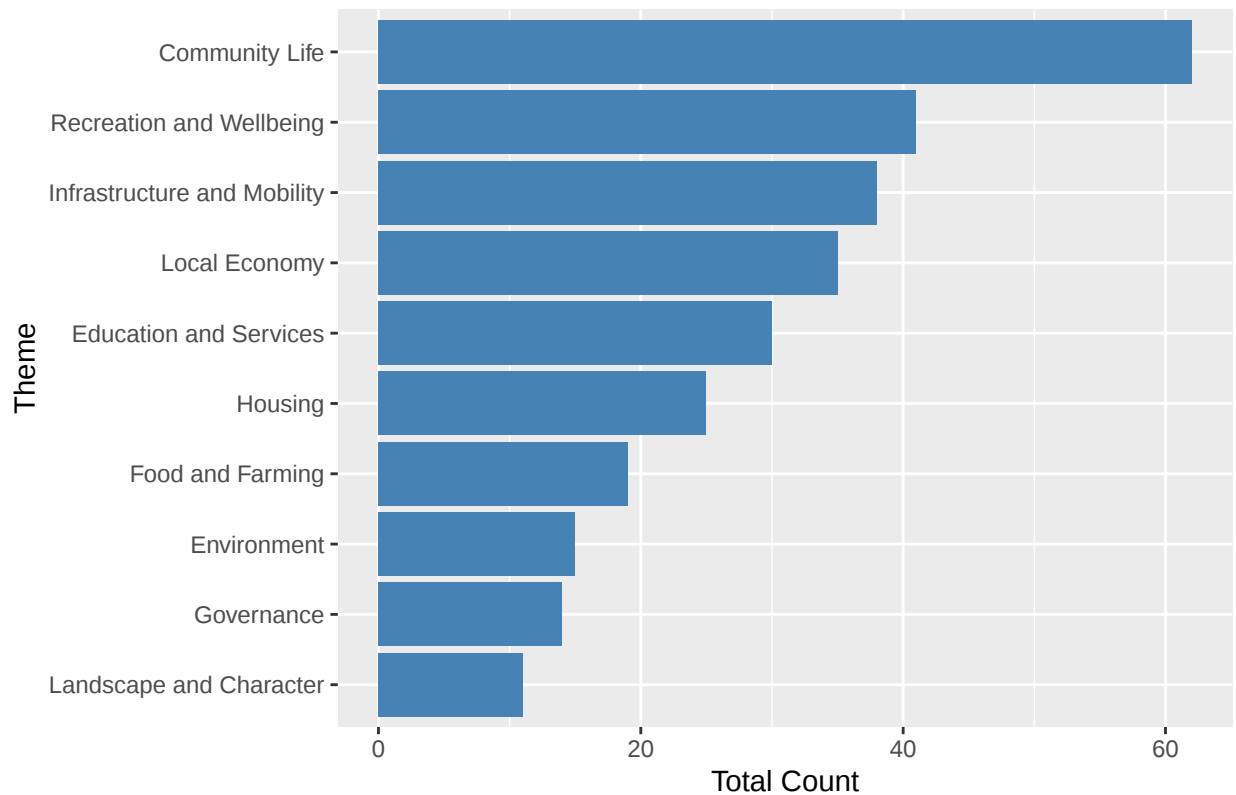
```
#top categories by total count (countywide)
#which themes appear most frequently overall?
theme_summary <- data %>%
  group_by(Theme) %>%
  summarize(Total_Count = sum(Count)) %>%
  arrange(desc(Total_Count))
```

```
theme_summary
```

```
## # A tibble: 10 x 2
##   Theme                Total_Count
##   <chr>                <dbl>
## 1 Community Life        62
## 2 Recreation and Wellbeing 41
## 3 Infrastructure and Mobility 38
## 4 Local Economy         35
## 5 Education and Services 30
## 6 Housing              25
## 7 Food and Farming      19
## 8 Environment           15
## 9 Governance            14
## 10 Landscape and Character 11
```

```
#visualization
theme_summary %>%
  ggplot(aes(x = reorder(Theme, Total_Count), y = Total_Count)) +
  geom_col(fill = "steelblue") +
  coord_flip() +
  labs(title = "Top Themes Across Bennington County", x = "Theme", y = "Total Count")
```

Top Themes Across Bennington County



```
#identify most frequent themes by community
theme_by_community <- data %>%
  group_by(Community, Theme) %>%
  summarize(Total_Count = sum(Count)) %>%
  arrange(Community, desc(Total_Count))

theme_by_community
```

```
## # A tibble: 53 x 3
## # Groups:   Community [6]
##   Community Theme                Total_Count
##   <chr>      <chr>                <dbl>
## 1 Arlington Community Life          24
## 2 Arlington Local Economy           20
## 3 Arlington Recreation and Wellbeing 20
## 4 Arlington Infrastructure and Mobility 18
## 5 Arlington Education and Services    16
## 6 Arlington Food and Farming          13
## 7 Arlington Governance               11
## 8 Arlington Environment               7
## 9 Arlington Housing                   6
## 10 Arlington Landscape and Character    4
## # i 43 more rows
```

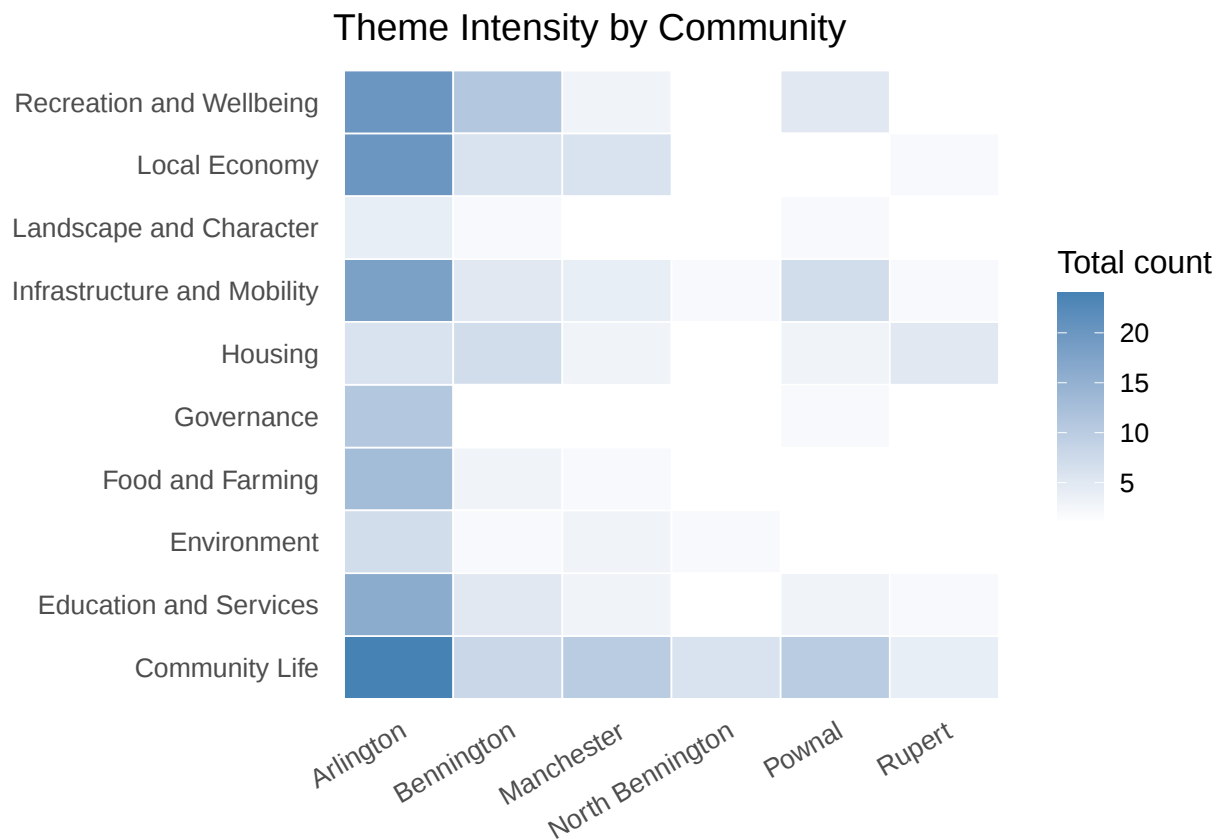
```

#make visualization

library(ggplot2)

# Heatmap of total counts by community & theme
theme_by_community %>%
  ggplot(aes(x = Community, y = Theme, fill = Total_Count)) +
  geom_tile(color = "white", linewidth = 0.3) +
  scale_fill_gradient(low = "white", high = "steelblue") +
  labs(
    title = "Theme Intensity by Community",
    x = NULL, y = NULL, fill = "Total count"
  ) +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid = element_blank(),
    axis.text.x = element_text(angle = 30, hjust = 1)
  )

```



```

#identify top theme per community
top_theme_per_community <- theme_by_community %>%
  slice_max(order_by = Total_Count, n = 1, with_ties = FALSE)

top_theme_per_community

```

```
## # A tibble: 6 x 3
```

```
## # Groups:   Community [6]
##   Community      Theme                Total_Count
##   <chr>         <chr>                <dbl>
## 1 Arlington     Community Life          24
## 2 Bennington    Recreation and Wellbeing          11
## 3 Manchester     Community Life          10
## 4 North Bennington Community Life           6
## 5 Pownal         Community Life          10
## 6 Rupert        Housing              5
```

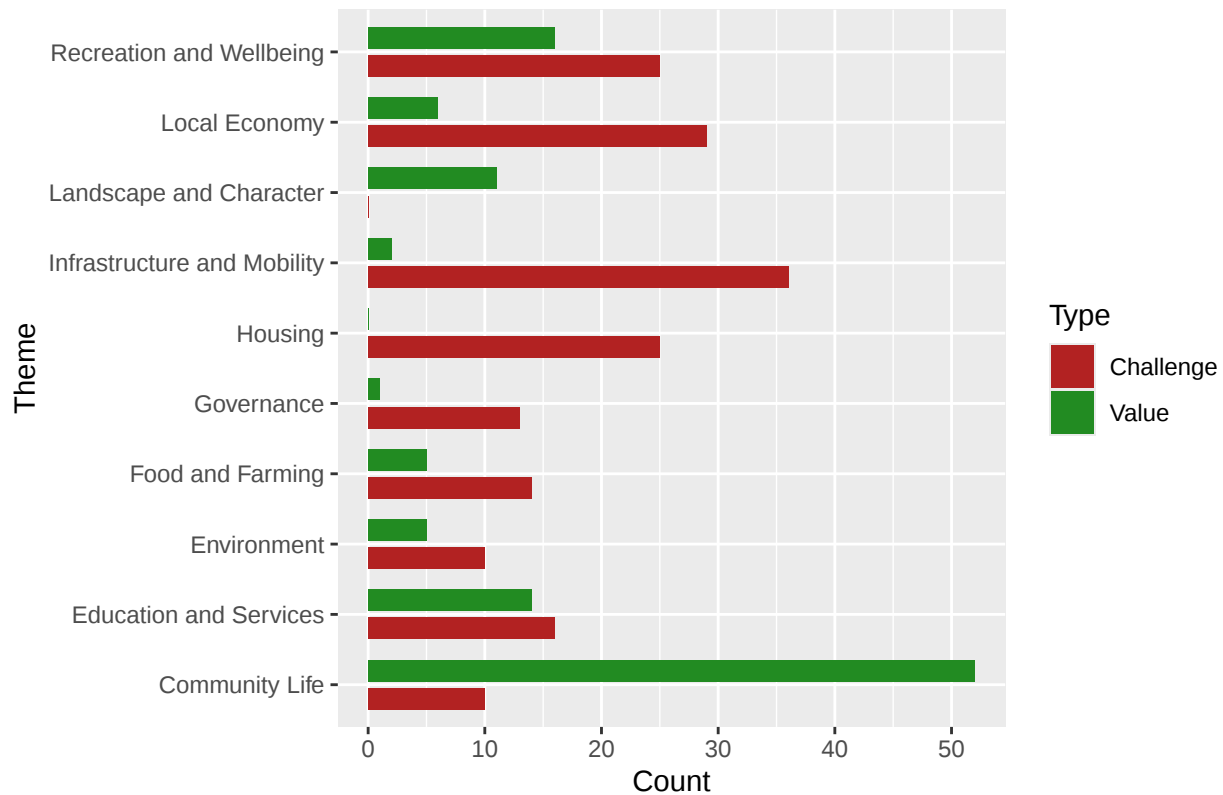
```
#compare values vs. challenges within each theme
values_vs_challenges <- data %>%
  group_by(Theme, Type) %>%
  summarize(Total_Count = sum(Count)) %>%
  pivot_wider(names_from = Type, values_from = Total_Count, values_fill = 0)

values_vs_challenges
```

```
## # A tibble: 10 x 3
## # Groups:   Theme [10]
##   Theme                Challenge Value
##   <chr>                <dbl> <dbl>
## 1 Community Life          10    52
## 2 Education and Services   16    14
## 3 Environment             10     5
## 4 Food and Farming         14     5
## 5 Governance              13     1
## 6 Housing                 25     0
## 7 Infrastructure and Mobility 36     2
## 8 Landscape and Character    0    11
## 9 Local Economy            29     6
## 10 Recreation and Wellbeing  25    16
```

```
#visualize
values_vs_challenges %>%
  pivot_longer(cols = c("Value", "Challenge"), names_to = "Type", values_to = "Count") %>%
  ggplot(aes(x = Theme, y = Count, fill = Type)) +
  geom_col(position = position_dodge(width = 0.8), width = 0.6) +
  scale_fill_manual(values = c("Value" = "forestgreen", "Challenge" = "firebrick")) +
  coord_flip() +
  labs(title = "Values vs. Challenges by Theme", x = "Theme", y = "Count")
```

Values vs. Challenges by Theme



```
#themes appearing in >50% of communities
themes_by_town <- data %>%
  group_by(Community, Theme) %>%
  summarize(Total_Count = sum(Count)) %>%
  ungroup()

theme_presence <- themes_by_town %>%
  group_by(Theme) %>%
  summarize(Town_Count = n_distinct(Community)) %>%
  mutate(Pct_of_Towns = Town_Count / n_distinct(data$Community) * 100) %>%
  filter(Pct_of_Towns > 50)
```

```
theme_presence
```

```
## # A tibble: 9 x 3
##   Theme                               Town_Count Pct_of_Towns
##   <chr>                                <int>      <dbl>
## 1 Community Life                        6         100
## 2 Education and Services                6         100
## 3 Environment                          5          83.3
## 4 Food and Farming                     4          66.7
## 5 Housing                              6         100
## 6 Infrastructure and Mobility            6         100
## 7 Landscape and Character               6         100
## 8 Local Economy                        5          83.3
## 9 Recreation and Wellbeing              6         100
```