Executive Summary
The 2019 Sangamon County Citizen Survey is the fourth iteration in an ongoing project that aims to evaluate resident assessments of the quality of life in Sangamon County. Results are based on a mail survey conducted by the Survey Research Office at University of Illinois Springfield of 652 randomly selected Sangamon County residents on over 60 questions across several different areas, including: culture and recreation, social well-being, health, education, economy, gambling, government and civic participation, environment, and public safety.

Life in Sangamon County
A majority of respondents (52%) report the County is moving in the right direction. While this is down from 2017 (62%), this is similar to 2015 (53%). The two most likely groups to say Sangamon County is moving in the right direction are those with less than a high school diploma (77%) and those with graduate degrees (66%). Further, majorities rate Sangamon County as an excellent or good place to live (63%), raise kids (61%) and work (55%). However, only a bit over one-third (37%) rate Sangamon County as an excellent or good place to retire. These results are similar to patterns seen since 2013. The group most likely to say Sangamon County is an excellent or good place to retire are those most familiar with the topic, retired respondents (53%). 84% of all respondents say that Sangamon County is welcoming. Those respondents with Bachelor’s degrees (91%) and respondents ages 18 to 34 (89%) are most likely to report Sangamon County is welcoming.

The Population of Sangamon County
57% of survey respondents report that they have considered moving out of Sangamon County in the past year. The two most likely groups to say they’ve thought about moving away from Sangamon County are those ages 35 to 44 (67%) and ages 45 to 54 (67%). Additionally, 79% of respondents think young people are better off moving out of Sangamon County. The most likely group to report younger people are better off moving are those ages 45 to 54 (88%). However, nearly two-thirds (62%) of survey respondents say they would like to see the population of Sangamon County grow.

More respondents (50%) said they are likely to recommend moving to the area than those who said they were unlikely to (35%). The two most likely groups to recommend moving to the area are those with Bachelor’s degrees (64%) and those ages 18 to 34 (62%). Lastly, 70% of those surveyed say immigrants help Sangamon County. The highest level of support comes from those with less than a high school education (86%) and those ages 18 to 34 (86%).
The Economy and Sangamon County
Of respondents who said they had considered moving out of Sangamon County, economic growth was the second most cited change that could make them stay (20%) next to lower taxes (23%). Less than one-third (30%) of all respondents think Sangamon County has an excellent or good reputation for starting a business. Less than a quarter (21%) report that Sangamon County has an excellent or good reputation for attracting new businesses. Less than one-fifth (19%) say Sangamon County has an excellent or good reputation for retaining existing businesses. As well, only a bit over one-fourth (27%) of respondents describe the Sangamon County economy as excellent or good. Further, one-third (33%) of respondents say local business conditions are worse compared to 12 months ago, compared to 10% saying conditions are better.

Culture and Recreation
Majorities say parks (77%), public libraries (75%), outdoor recreation (60%), community educational offerings (6%), and outdoor concerts/festivals (54%) are excellent or good. However, less than half of respondents (44%) say they are satisfied with their access to local cultural and recreational options. These results suggest that possibly while a majority of residents are happy with local cultural and recreational opportunities, they do not find them convenient due to location, time, cost, or other factors. The two most likely groups to report being satisfied with their access to cultural and recreational options are those with an annual household income greater than $100,000 (57%) and those ages 65 and older (55%).

Health in Sangamon County
The rate of respondents who report experiencing poor physical health has not changed much since 2017 (39% to 35%). Those making less than $30,000 a year (54%) and those with some college education (47%) are more likely to report experiencing poor physical health. There is a 13-point difference between those who report having at least one day of poor mental health in the previous 30 days in 2019 edition of the survey (41%) compared to the 2017 version (28%). The two most likely groups to report having experienced poor mental health are those with less than a high school degree (75%) and those making less than $30,000 a year (69%). In total, 28% of those surveyed in the 2019 iteration report they had at least one day a month where their physical or mental health was not good.

Further, large portions of respondents are concerned about obesity (54%), opioid abuse (48%), access to mental healthcare (44%), and tobacco use (43%) in Sangamon County. Lastly, over a quarter of respondents (28%) report there was a time they did not have enough money to pay for their healthcare in the past year. This result is an all-time high since this survey began in 2013. The two groups who are the most likely to report that they could not afford health care are those with less than a high school diploma and those reporting less than $30,000 an annual household income.

More information
Funding for this study was by the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln, the United Way of Central Illinois, and the Center for State Policy and Leadership at UIS. A steering committee composed of community leaders developed the survey in Spring of 2019. A more detailed report of the 2019 study, along with previous years, can be found at www.uis.edu/surveyresearchoffice.