

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR SEPTIC TO SEWER CONVERSION PROGRAMS IN FLORIDA: A COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL MARKETING APPROACH

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Center for
Public Issues Education

NEWS

Everyone wants to clean up the lagoon, so why are sewer-conversion grants going unused?

Janet Begley Special to TCPalm

Published 4:07 p.m. ET Jan. 28, 2021

[View Comments](#)



SEBASTIAN—The city's septic-to-sewer conversion program, which provides grants to homeowners and businesses in the community redevelopment area east of U.S. 1 to hook up to the county sewer system, has had few takers.



Sandy Soil And Rising Seas Spell Septic Tank Disaster In Florida

By NPR News

July 17, 2019 Environment

Not everyone accepts reasoning for septic conversions, cost

By ANDREA TRACITZER, Assistant Editor | Oct 8, 2018 | Updated: Jun 23, 2020 | 7 min to read



Wekiva septic conversion stinks for homeowners but it may save the springs

By STEPHEN HUDAK
ORLANDO SENTINEL | NOV 01, 2019 AT 12:29 PM



Ormond Beach suspends septic-to-sewer conversion in unanimous vote



THE TYPICAL APPROACH

WHY MIGHT AN AUDIENCE RESIST CHANGE?

They:

- aren't aware of the need/behavior
- know about it but perceive too many challenges (barriers)
- know about it and don't perceive too many challenges but perceive more benefits to what they are currently doing





COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL MARKETING

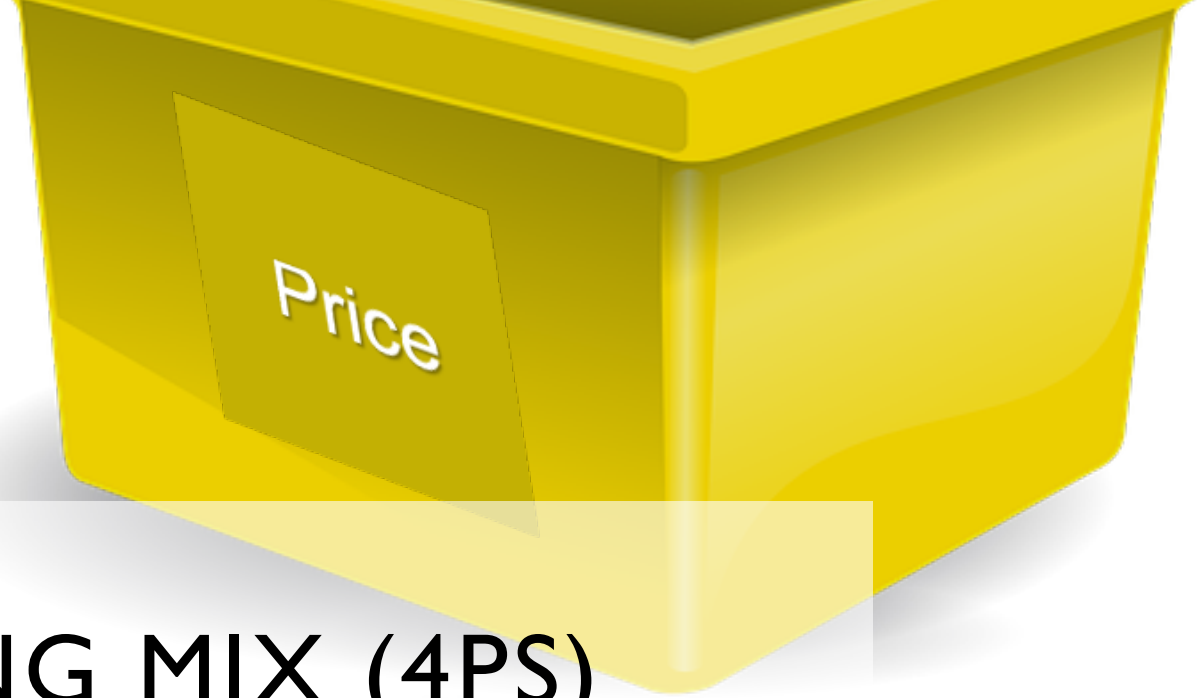
MARKETING MINDSET

When we ask people to change, they must alter or reject another behavior (or behaviors).

We have to understand barriers so we can overcome them— strategies are based on audience

Goal – Make sure that the benefit is outweighed by the cost

People tend to do whatever they perceive has the most benefits and least barriers



THE MARKETING MIX (4PS)





PURPOSE

Use formative methods to develop a statewide education plan through the lens of community-based social marketing to inform septic to sewer (S2S) conversion program marketing efforts

METHODS

1. Select behavior

Septic to sewer conversions

2. Identify audience

State septic homeowners (known and likely)

County-level analysis



3. Barrier & benefit research

Interviews



Focus Groups



Online survey



METHODS

WHO

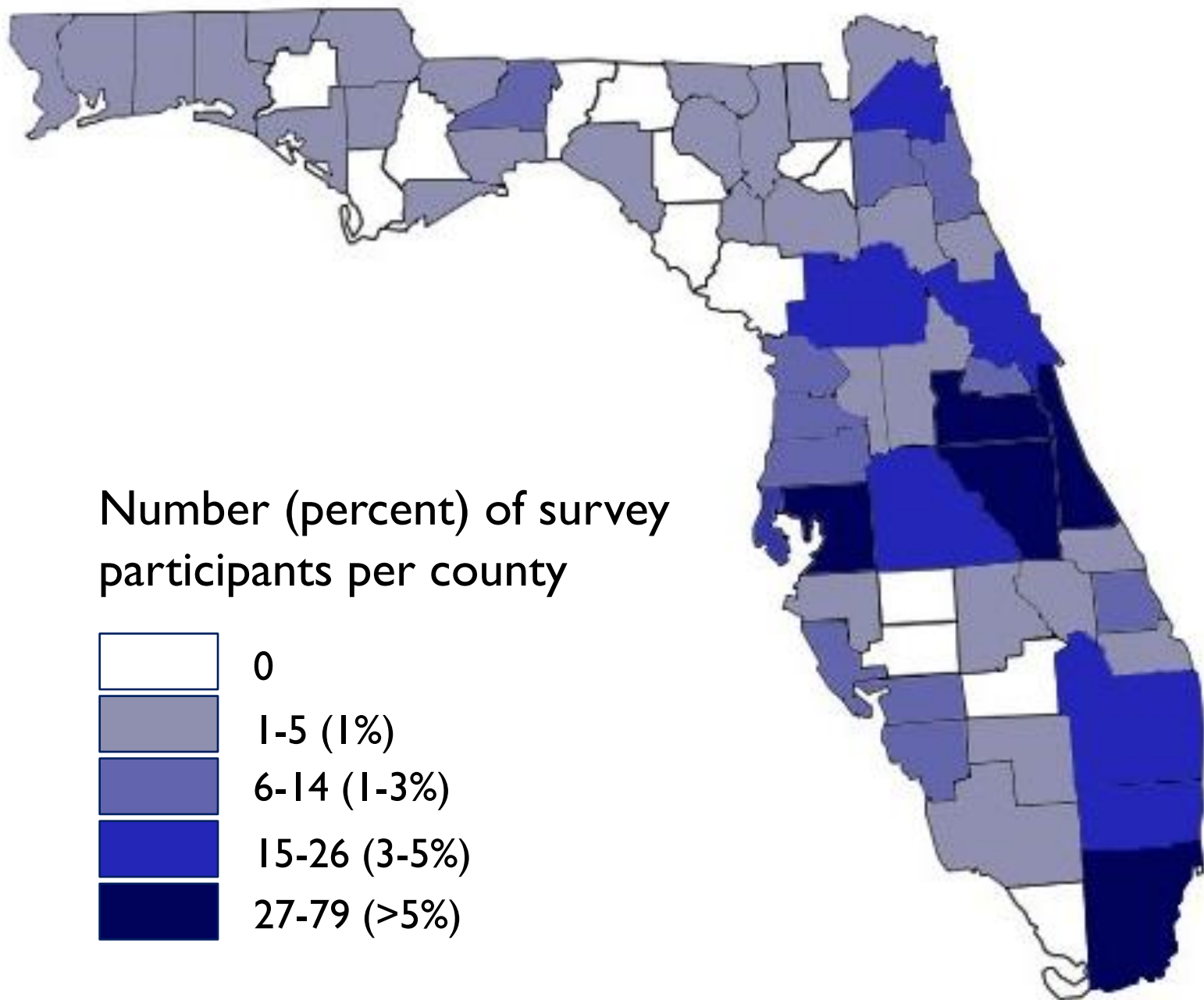
(N = 517)

Variable	f	%
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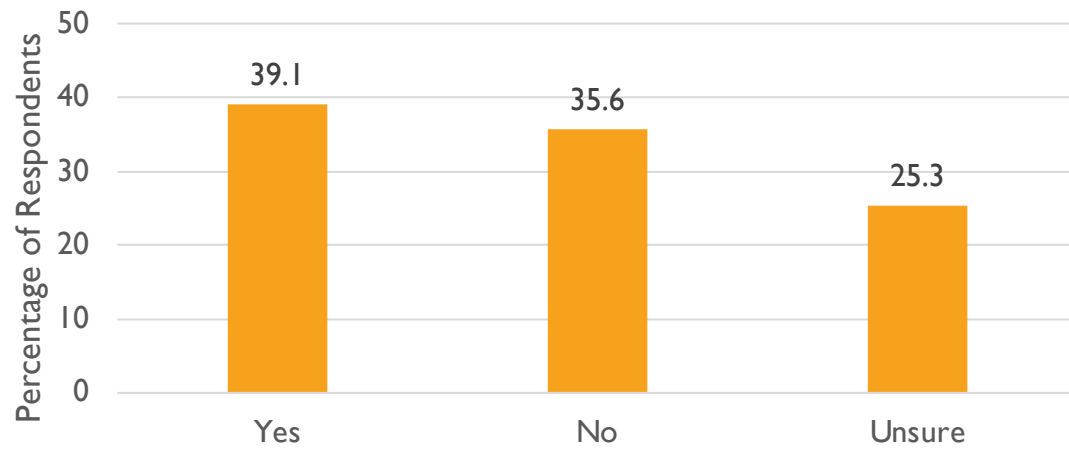
Gender		
Male	294	56.9
Female	222	42.9
Other/Non-binary	1	0.2

Area of Residence		
A farm in a rural area	23	4.4
Rural area, not a farm	72	13.9
Urban or suburban area outside of city limits	280	54.2
Subdivision in a town or city	98	19.0
Downtown area in a town or city	44	8.5

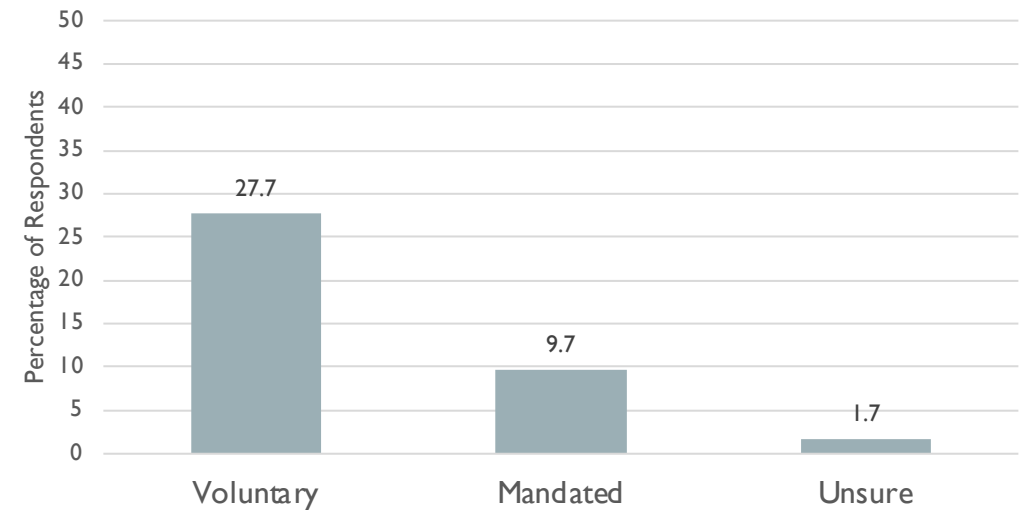
Previously Lived in Home on a Sewer System		
Yes	374	72.3
No	123	23.8



Are there current, future, or completed plans for sewer conversion in your community?

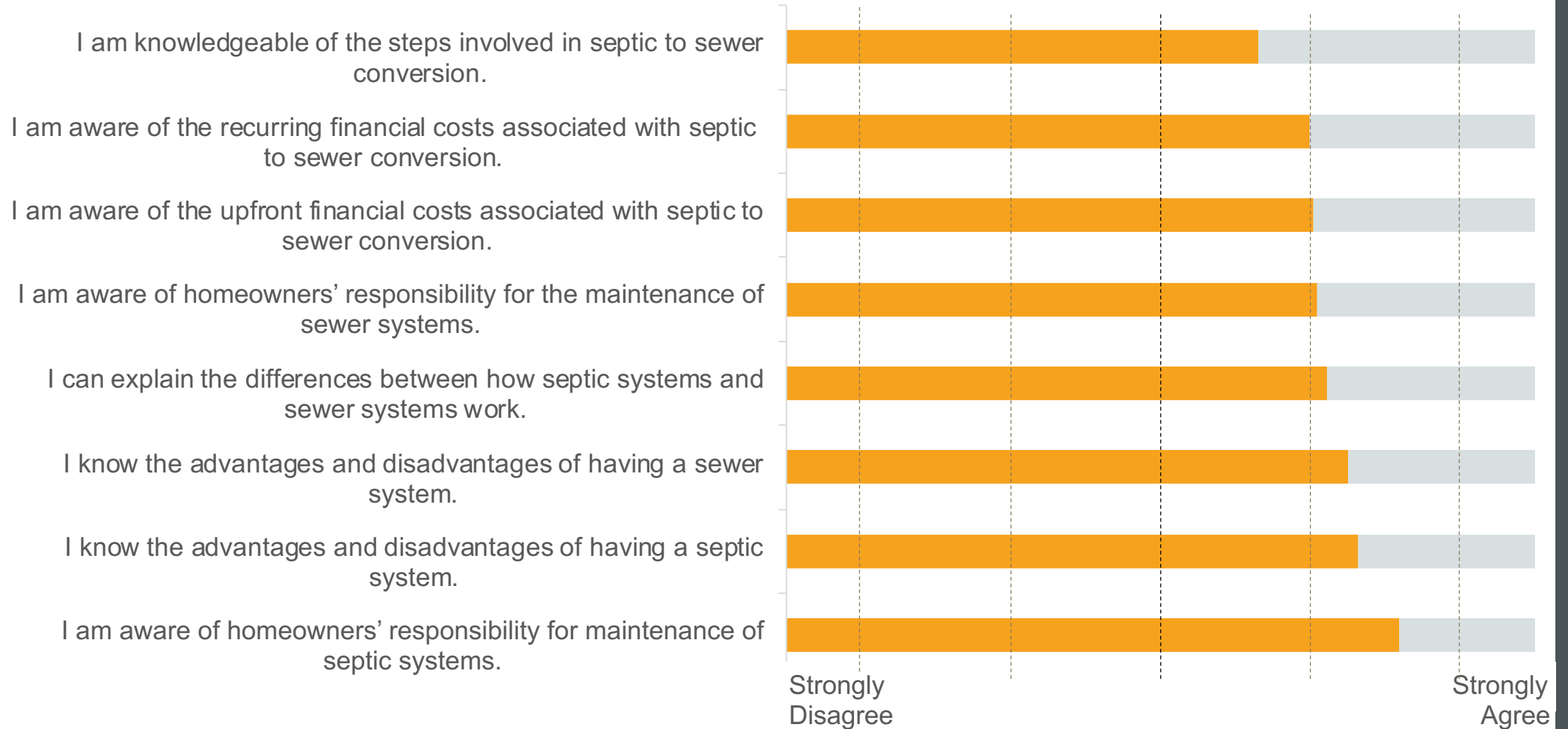


Was this conversion voluntary or mandated?



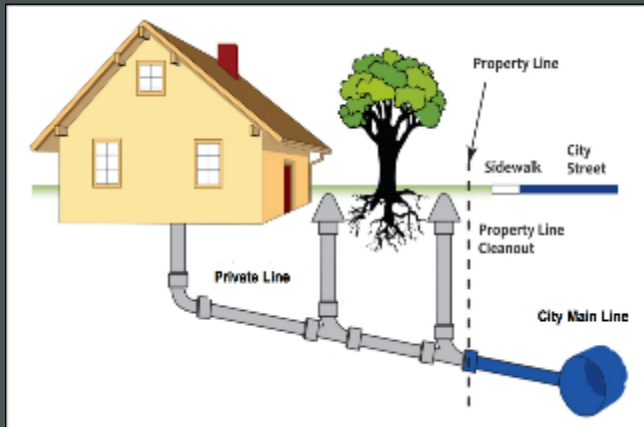
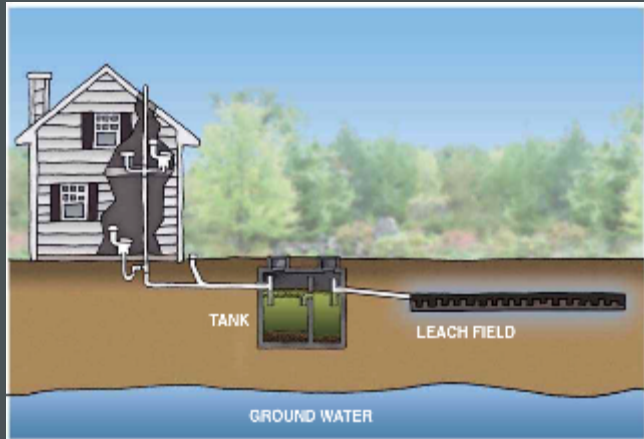
KNOWLEDGE

Respondents' self-perceived knowledge of septic to sewer conversion topics



Percent correct for respondents' **objective** knowledge assessment

54.7%



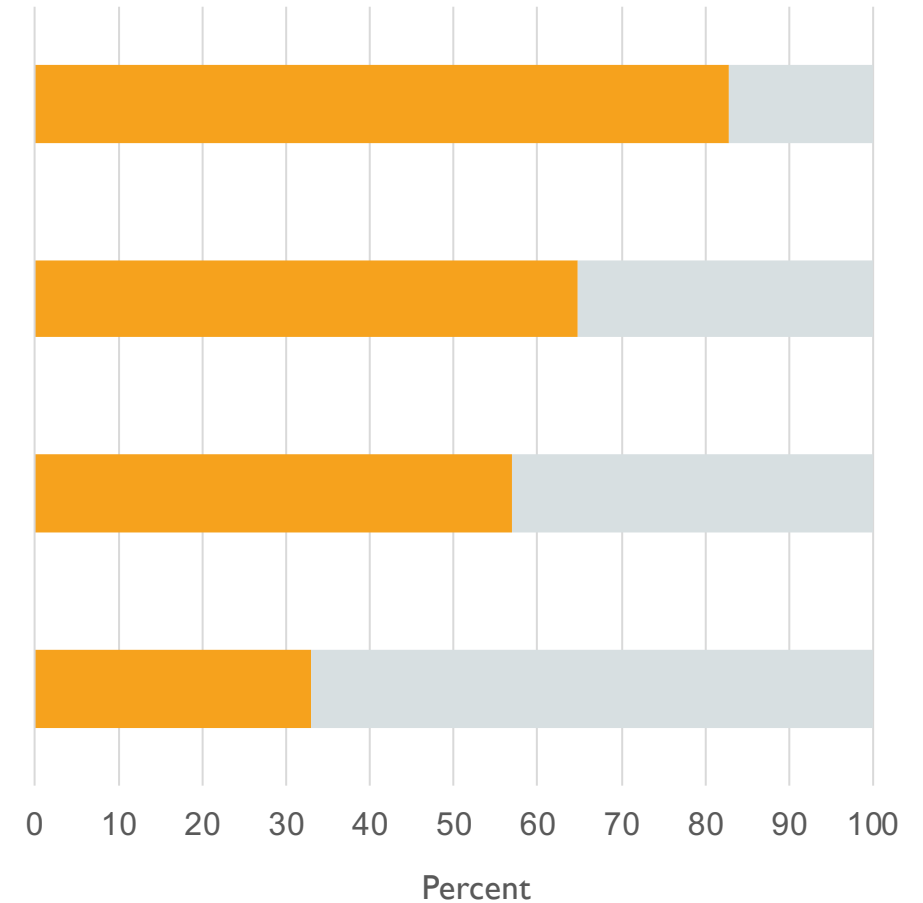
Who is primarily responsible for the maintenance of residential septic systems?

Which type of waste treatment system is depicted in this diagram?

Which type of waste treatment system is depicted in this diagram?

How often does a household septic system typically need to be pumped out?

A. Every 6 months	127	24.6
B. Every 1-2 years	163	31.5
C. Every 3-5 years	171	33.1
D. Every 10 years	56	10.8





REVIEW

Knowledge can be a barrier to adoption.

People are more knowledgeable than one might expect, but there are gaps in the details.

Subjective knowledge assessments indicate educational opportunities in:

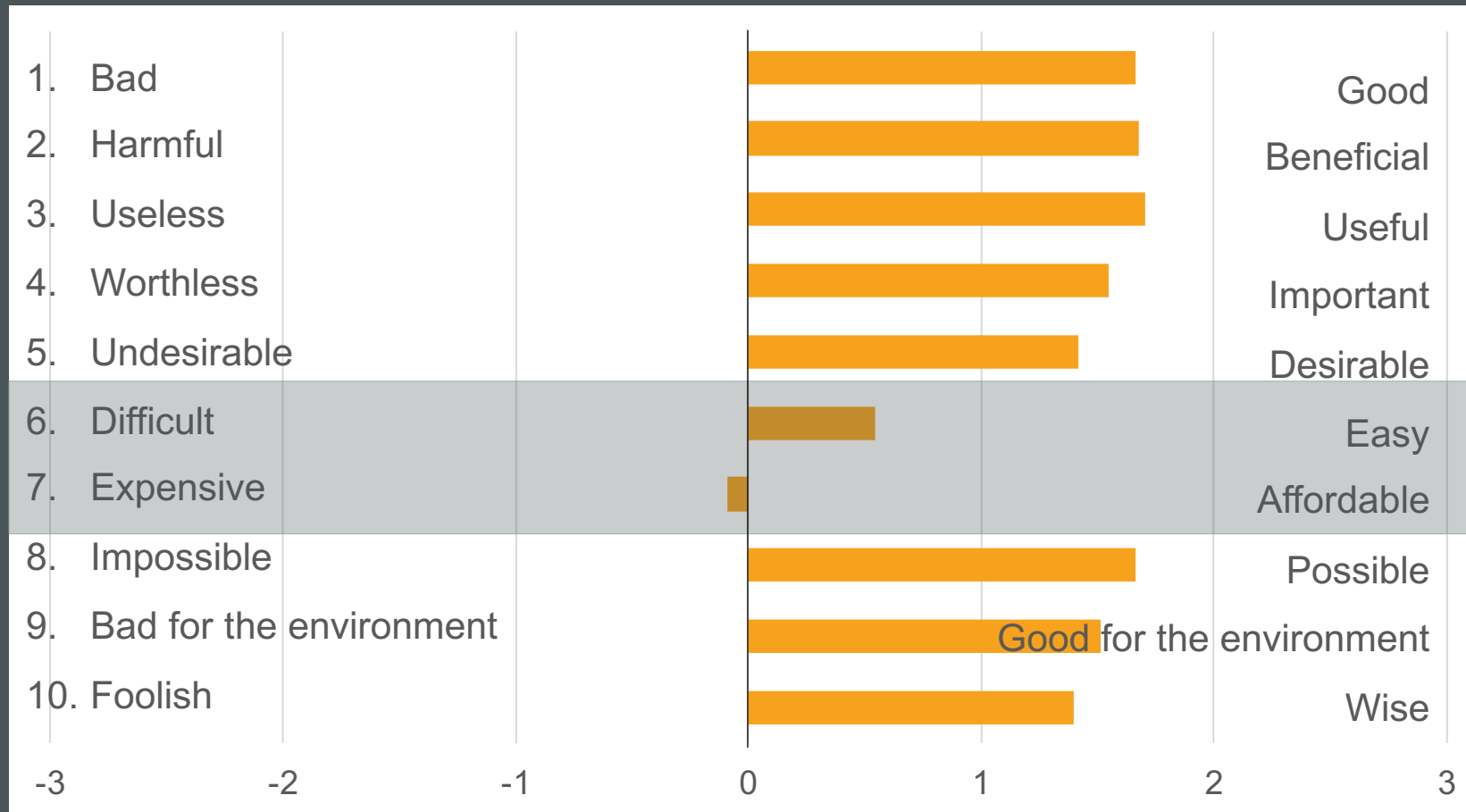
- Steps involved in S2S conversion
- Recurring costs associated with S2S conversion

Objective knowledge assessments suggest individuals have a better understanding of septic systems than central sewer.

ATTITUDES

Respondents' **attitude** towards septic to sewer conversion topics

M = 1.3





REVIEW

Overall, respondents had a slightly positive attitude towards converting S2S.

Respondents were more neutral in their perceptions of whether conversion is difficult or easy.

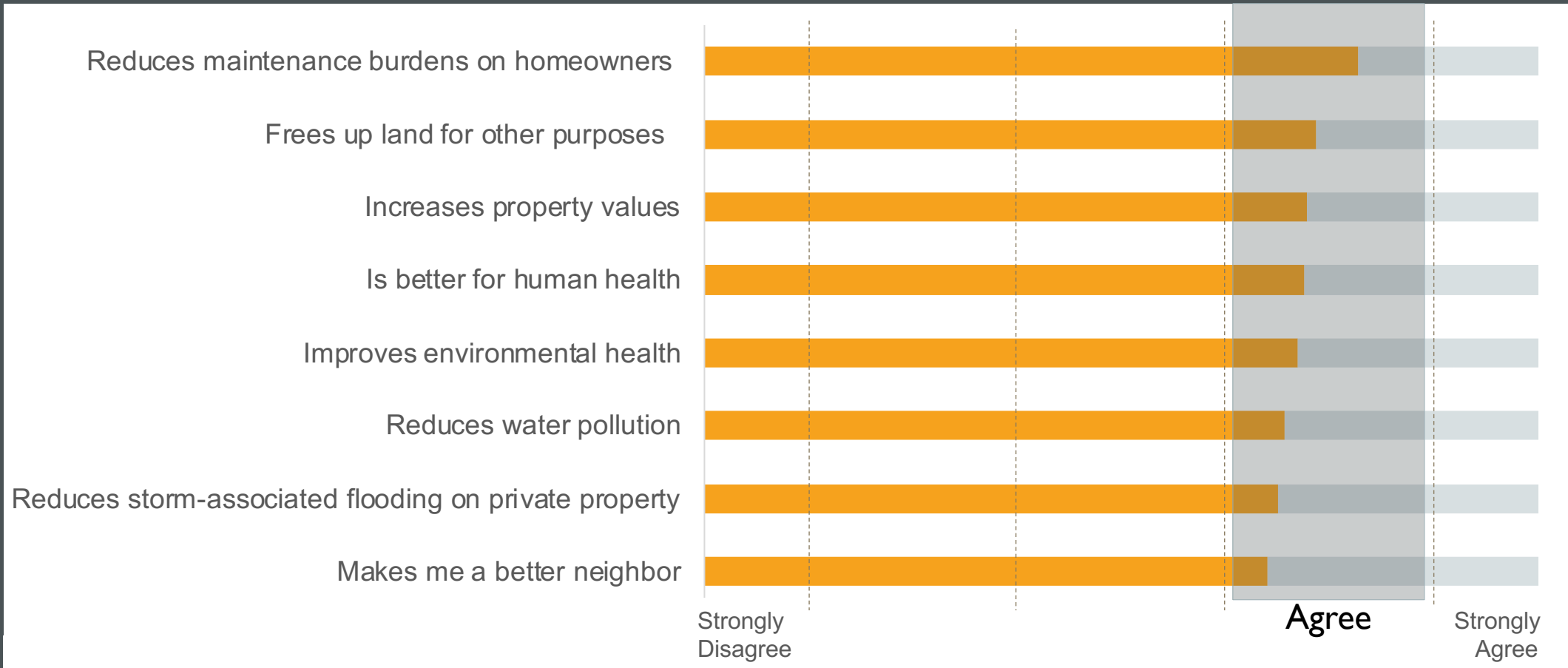
Respondents had slightly negative attitudes regarding the affordability of S2S conversion.

PERCEIVED BENEFITS & BARRIERS

Level of agreement - Benefits

Converting from a septic system to a sewer system...

M = 3.86



Level of agreement – External Barriers

M = 3.58

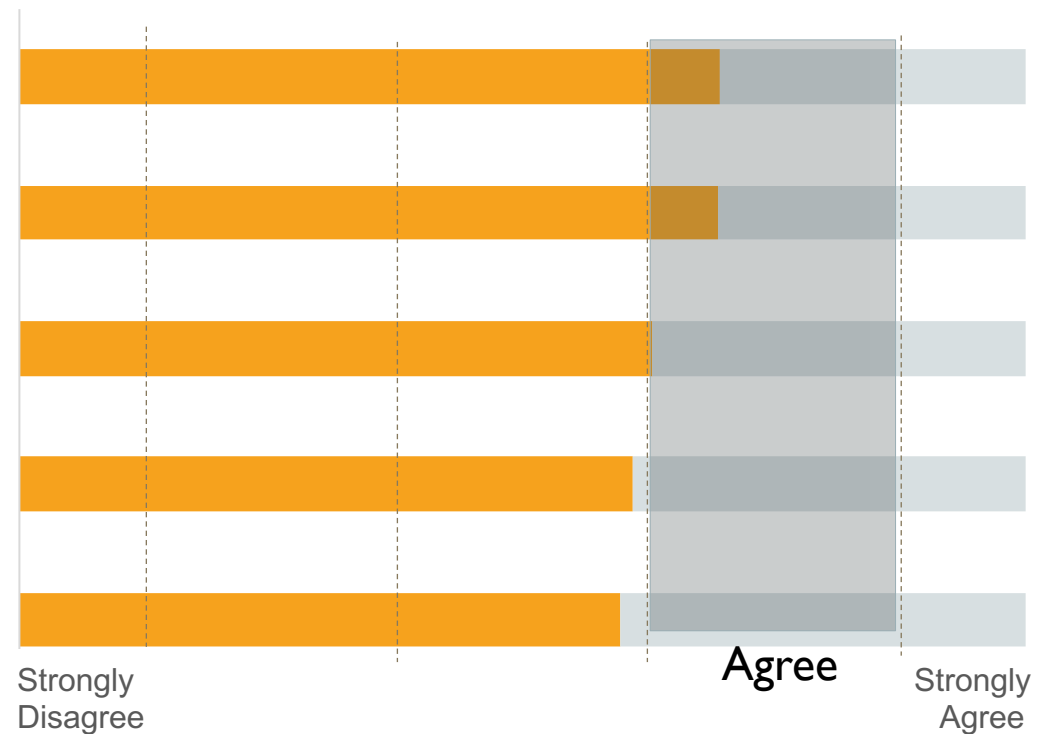
Lack of availability of a sewer hook-up in my area hinders me from converting to a sewer system.

Upfront financial costs of converting from a septic system to sewer system hinder me from doing so.

The costs of paying a monthly sewer bill hinder me from converting to a sewer system.

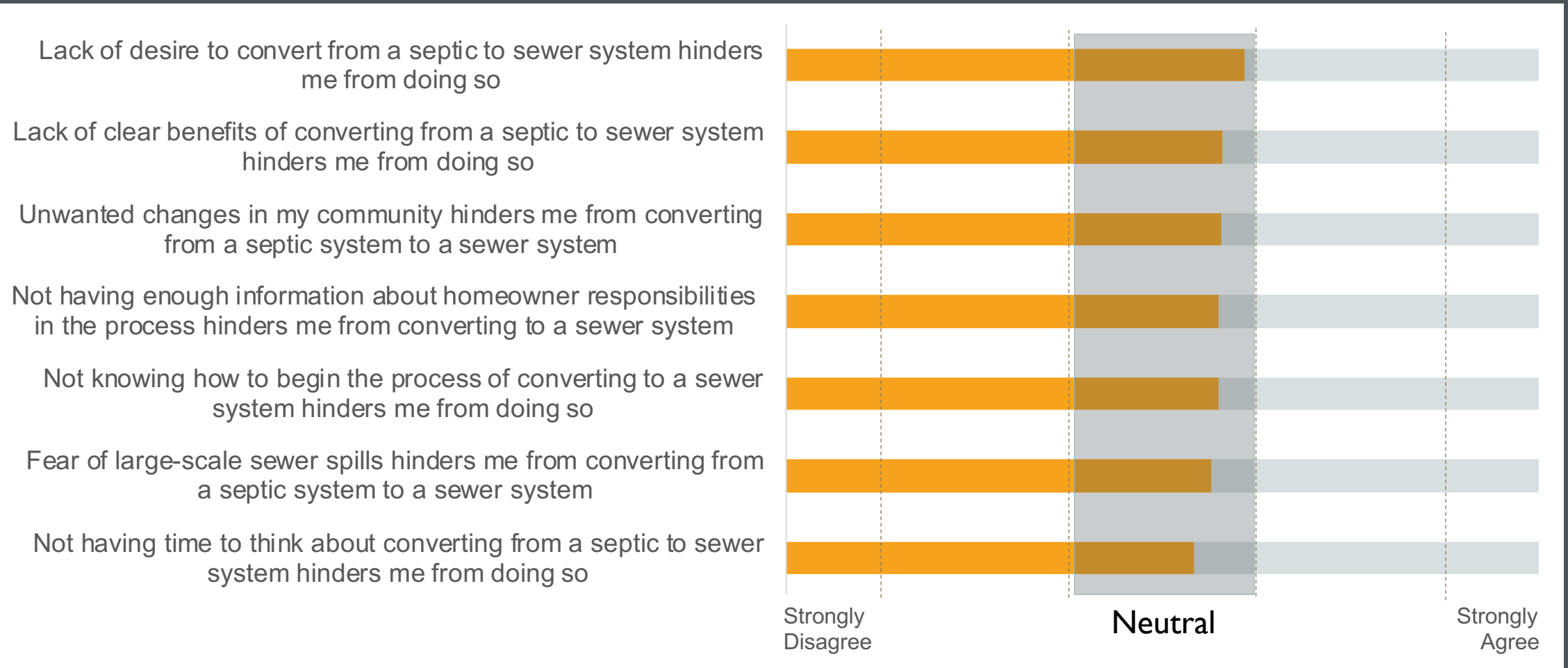
Inconvenience of construction in my community hinders me from converting to a sewer system.

Disruptions on my property associated with construction hinder me from converting to a sewer system.



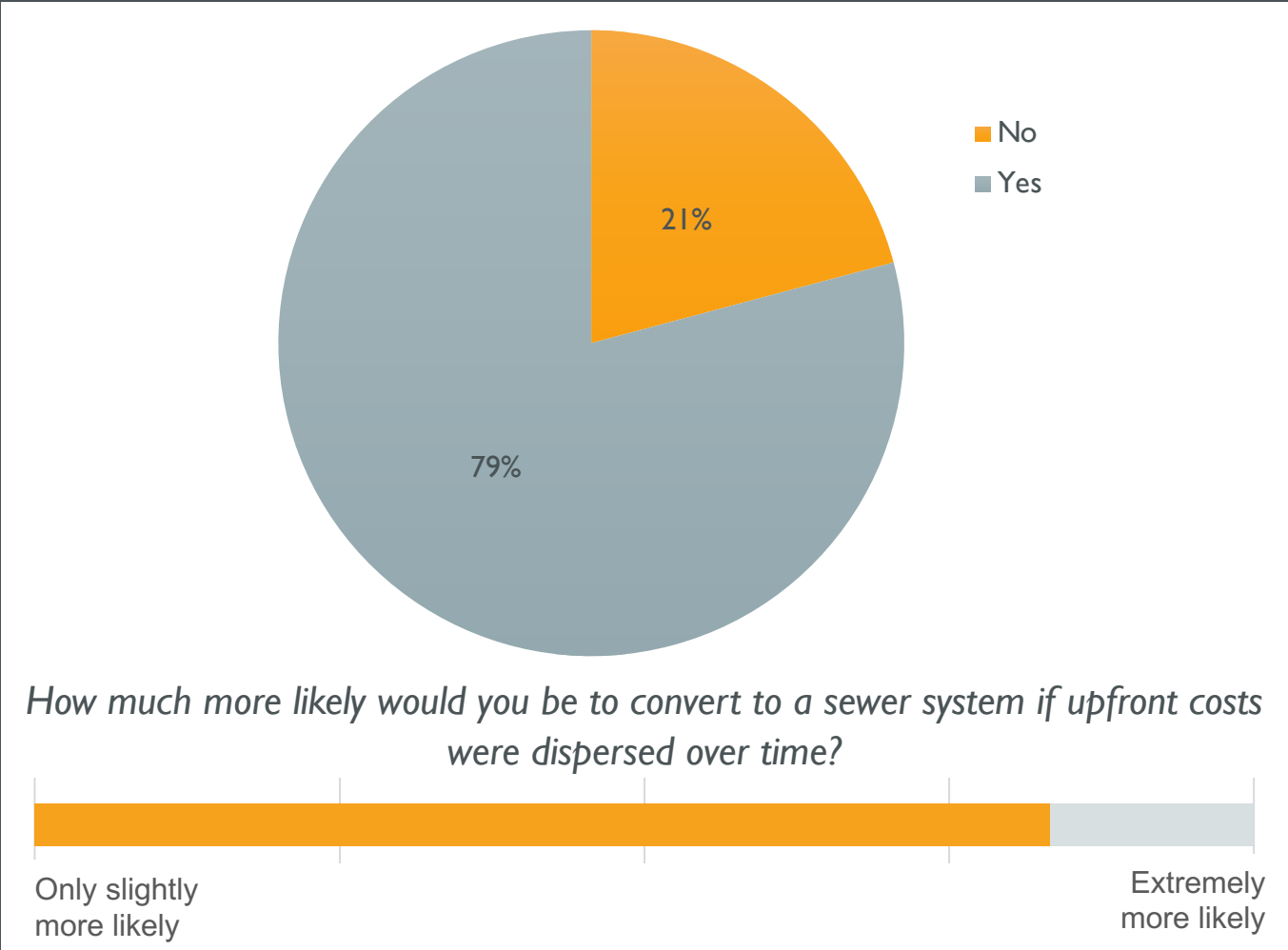
Level of agreement – Internal Barriers

M = 3.29



Level of agreement – Cost

If the upfront costs of converting from a septic system to a sewer system were dispersed over time, would you be more likely to convert to a sewer system?





REVIEW

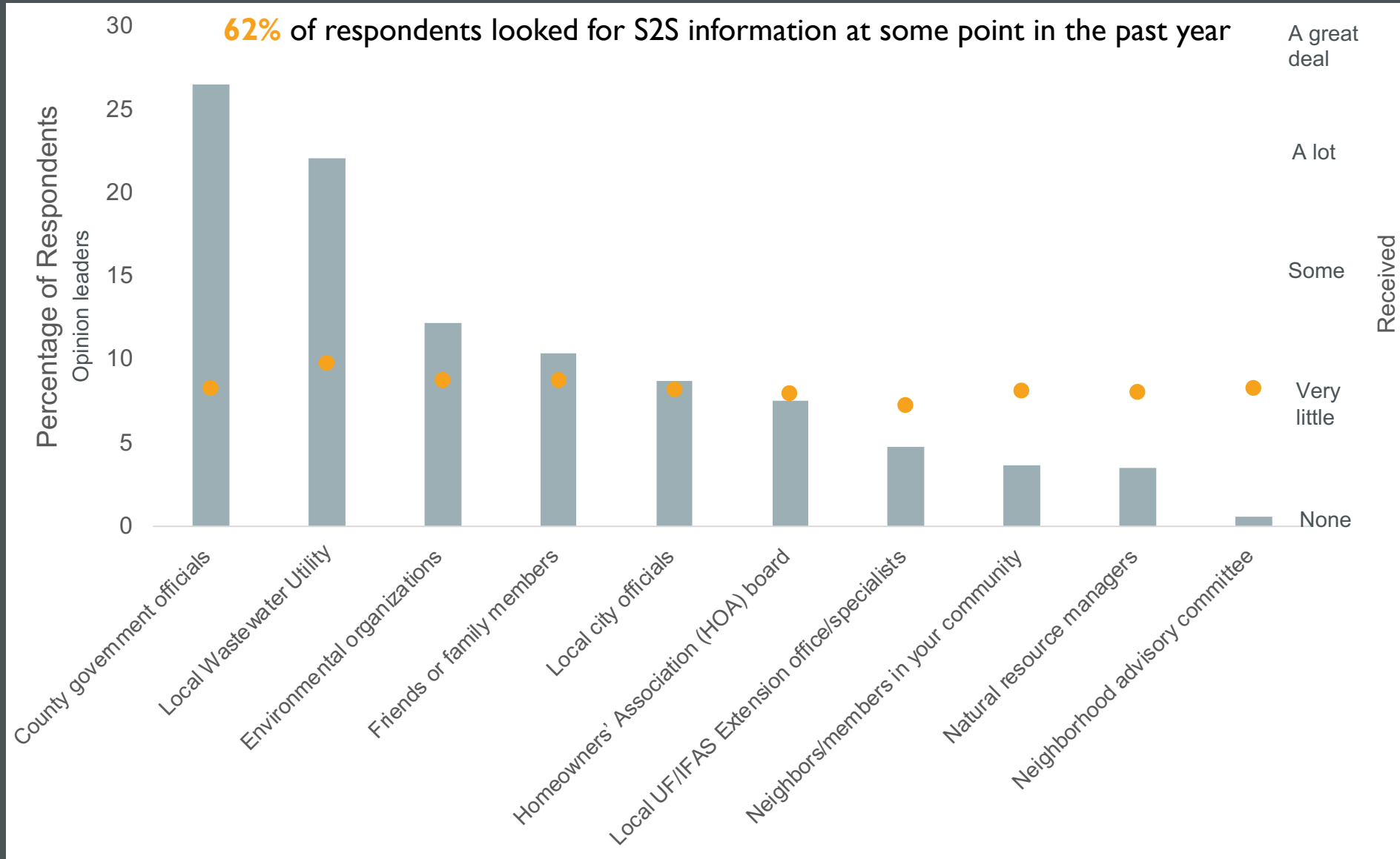
Benefits – Respondents agreed that all attributes were benefits to S2S conversion. Respondents agreed most that converting **reduces maintenance burdens** and **frees up land**.

Barriers – External attributes were the greatest barrier to conversion including **lack of availability** to hook-up and **upfront costs**. Respondents were neutral to all other external and internal attributes.

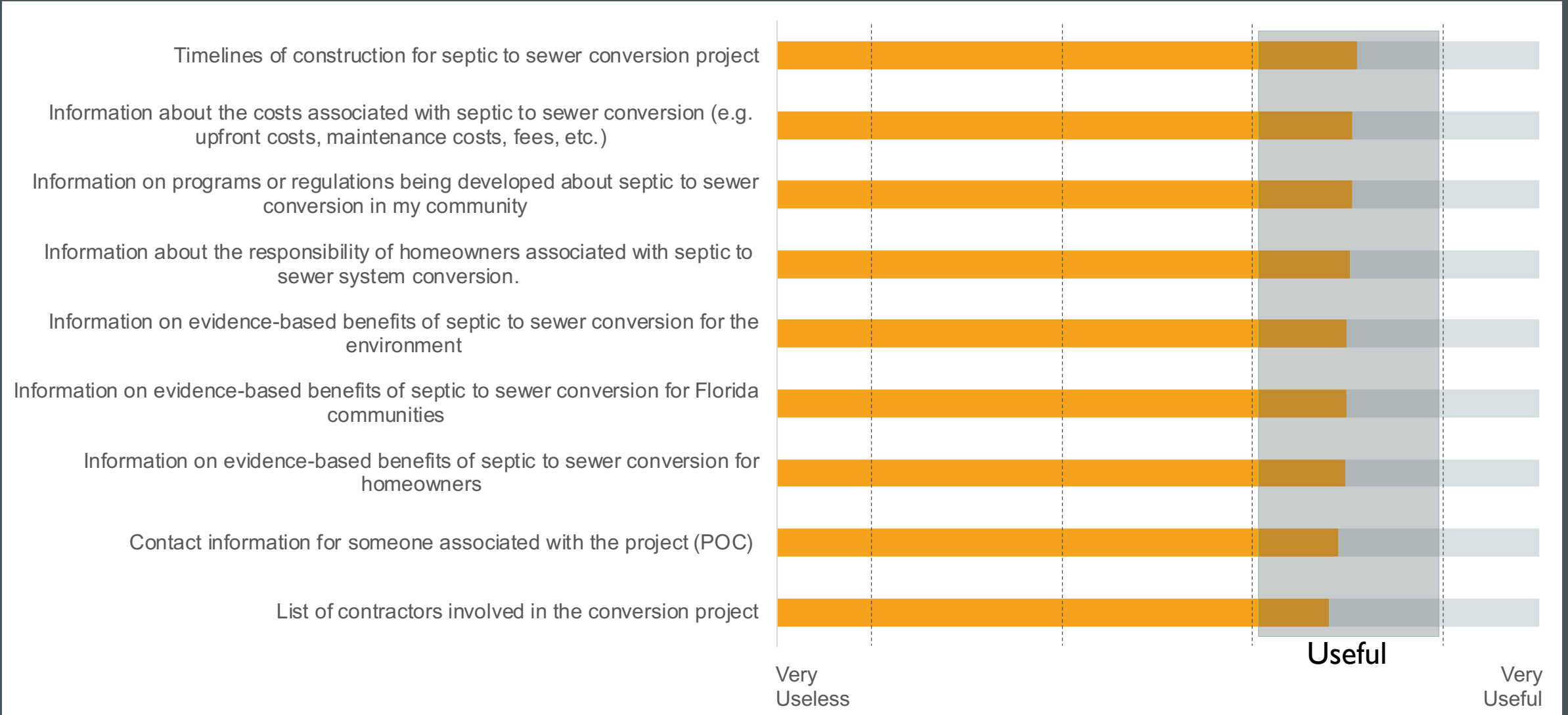
Barriers to upfront cost could be reduced if costs could be disbursed over time.

COMMUNICATION

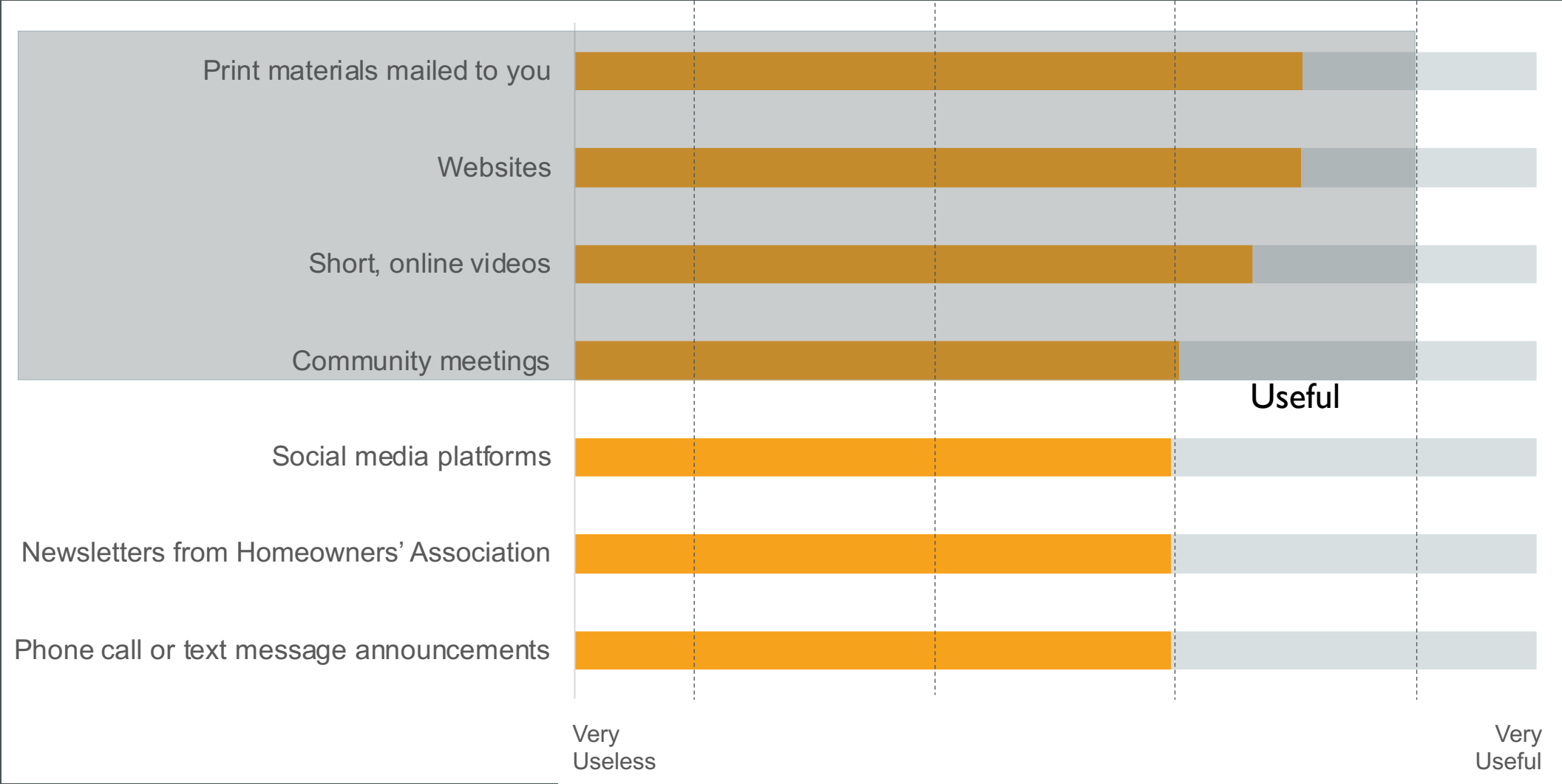
Sources of information



Perceived usefulness of information



Preferred methods for receiving information





REVIEW

Overall, respondents were most likely to consult **county governments** and **local wastewater utilities** about S2S conversion.

Respondents perceived all topics as useful. The most useful was information about **construction timelines** and **costs** for S2S conversion.

Respondents identified **mailed print materials, websites, short, online videos** and **community meetings** as the most useful sources of informational delivery methods

S2S STRATEGY

AUDIENCE

Miami-Dade



Brevard



No single approach will appeal to all.

A single campaign should include several aligned messages and formats.

MOST USEFUL SEPTIC TO SEWER TOPICS

- 1** Programs and regulations for community septic to sewer projects
- 2** Evidence-based benefits for the environment
- 3** The responsibility of homeowners in septic to sewer conversion
- 4** Evidence-based benefits for Florida communities
- 5** Evidence-based benefits for homeowners

MOST USEFUL SEPTIC TO SEWER TOPICS

- 1** Evidence-based benefits of septic to sewer conversion for the environment
- 2** Programs and regulations for community septic to sewer projects
- 3** Costs associated with septic to sewer conversion projects
- 4** Evidence-based benefits for homeowners
- 5** Timelines of construction for septic to sewer conversion projects



COMMUNICATION

Informational materials should emphasize homeowner priorities and be branded with county government or local utility logos.

Reduce maintenance burdens

A simple line-art icon of a clock face with hands.

Free up land for other purposes

A simple line-art icon of a house with a chimney and two windows.

Increase in property values

A simple line-art icon of a stack of three banknotes.

Human health

A simple line-art icon of a first aid kit with a cross symbol on the front.



Host the holidays
without the added stress
Convert to sewer and leave the maintenance to us



SPRINGHILL COUNTY SEPTIC TO SEWER PROGRAM

For more information visit: www.springhillsewer.gov
555-555-5555

FINALLY BUILD THE
SHESSED OF YOUR
DREAMS

Convert to sewer and reclaim
your land and your time



**SPRINGHILL
COUNTY SEPTIC
TO SEWER
PROGRAM**

For more information visit:
www.springhillsewer.gov
555-555-5555





INVEST IN YOUR HEALTH

SPRINGHILL COUNTY
SEPTIC TO SEWER
PROGRAM

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:

WWW.SPRINGHILLSEWER.GOV
555-555-5555



Your property qualifies for the
Springhill County septic to
sewer conversion project.

We will be hosting a community
meeting to discuss project
details:

FEBRUARY 25TH, 2021
6 - 8 PM
SPRINGHILL COMMUNITY HALL
111 Main Street
Springhill, FL 33333

We hope to see you there.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:

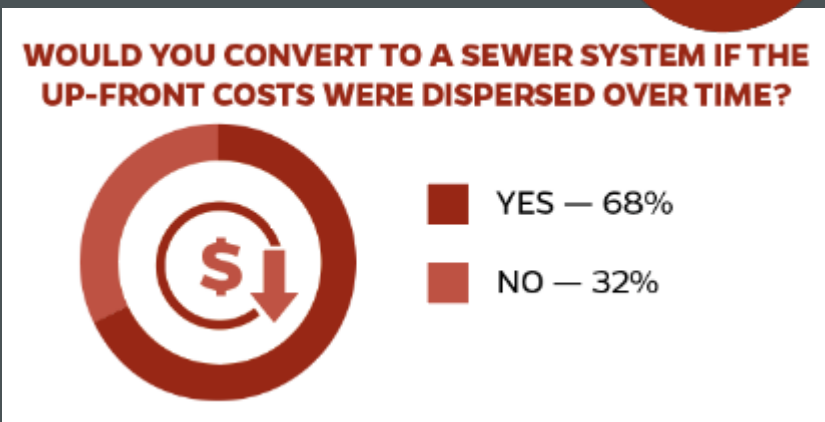
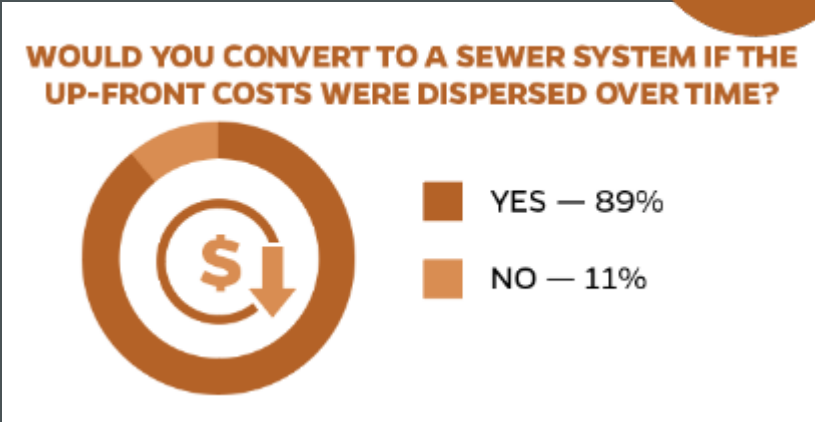
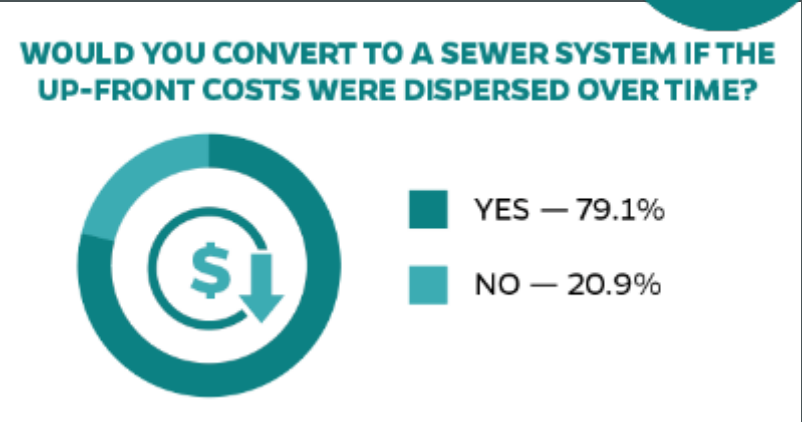
WWW.SPRINGHILLSEWER.GOV
555-555-5555





REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

If costs can be dispersed overtime, the barrier of upfront financial costs can be eliminated.





CONVENIENCE

Enhance mailings and update websites to include timely, accurate, and community-specific information:



Project specific details

Upfront costs

Average, low and high ranges for water and sewer bills (recurring)

Rebates or incentive information

Construction timelines

List of approved contractors

Contact information for a person



DIFFUSION & NORMS

Create a visible campaign of simple, consistent signs and videos that can be displayed in communities and available online.

Work with community ambassadors to create dialogue and encourage adoption (for voluntary programs)

**THIS HOUSE JUST
INCREASED IT'S
PROPERTY VALUE BY
8%**

Ask us how



SPRINGHILL COUNTY SEPTIC TO SEWER PROGRAM
For more information visit: www.springhillsewer.gov
555-555-5555

Data: Mt. Pleasant Township Municipal Authority. 2019.
Market Study: Impact of Sewer Availability on Property Values

**Together, we protected
the health of our
community by preventing
more than 1 ton of
nitrogen from entering our
waterways.**



LOGO NAME
SLOGAN HERE

Ask us how

SPRINGHILL COUNTY SEPTIC TO SEWER PROGRAM

For more information visit:
www.springhillsewer.gov; 555-555-5555

Data: Toor et al. 2011
Estimated 100 homes, 4 people per home, 7.8 g N/person/day



COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL MARKETING

RESOURCES

<https://water.ifas.ufl.edu/septic-systems/local-governments/>

- Social Marketing Quarterly (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/smq>)
- Journal of Extension (joe.org)
- Social Marketing Association of North America (smana.org)
- Doug McKenzie-Mohr's Fostering Sustainable Behavior (www.cbsm.com)
- UF's EDIS library (edis.ufl.edu)

SEPTIC to SEWER

Informational Needs and Perceptions of Florida Residents



The purpose of this study was to examine the Florida public's perceptions, informational needs and informational delivery preferences regarding septic to sewer conversion. This information will assist local governments in facilitating homeowners' conversion from an onsite wastewater treatment system to a centralized sewer system. This study was conducted in October 2020 with 517 Florida homeowners who currently use a septic system as their wastewater treatment system.

PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO CONVERSION

Respondents were asked about their perceived external and internal barriers to converting from a septic system to a sewer system. The external barriers reported most were lack of availability of a sewer hook-up in their area, up-front financial costs and costs of monthly sewer bills.

The internal barriers reported most were a lack of desire to convert, a lack of clear benefits to conversion and not having enough information about homeowner responsibilities in the conversion process.

In reference to the perceived barrier of up-front costs, 79.1% of respondents indicated they were more likely to convert to a sewer system if up-front costs were dispersed over time.

WOULD YOU CONVERT TO A SEWER SYSTEM IF THE UP-FRONT COSTS WERE DISPERSED OVER TIME?



■ YES — 79.1%
■ NO — 20.9%

PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF CONVERSION

When asked about their perceived benefits of converting from a septic to sewer system, respondents agreed most that converting from a septic system to sewer system reduces maintenance burdens on homeowners, frees up land for other purposes, increases property values and is better for human health.

When asked how useful various informational topics about septic to sewer conversion would be to them, respondents identified the most useful topics as: timelines of construction for conversion projects, community programs or regulations, costs associated with conversion, evidence-based benefits for the environment and evidence-based benefits for homeowners.

MOST USEFUL SEPTIC TO SEWER TOPICS

- 1 Timelines of construction for septic to sewer conversion projects
- 2 Programs and regulations for community septic to sewer projects
- 3 Costs associated with septic to sewer conversion projects
- 4 Evidence-based benefits for the environment
- 5 Evidence-based benefits for homeowners

Respondents found mailed print materials, websites and short online videos to be the most useful methods of delivery for receiving information about septic to sewer conversion.

PREFERRED FORMATS OF SEPTIC TO SEWER INFORMATION DELIVERY



MAILED PRINT MATERIALS



WEBSITES



SHORT ONLINE VIDEOS

Rampold, S. D., Krinsky, L., Telg, R. W., & Warner, L. (2021). Florida homeowners' knowledge, perceptions, and informational needs regarding septic to sewer conversion. PIE2020/21-05. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

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UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



Center for
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www.piecenter.com

QUESTIONS?

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UF/IFAS Extension, Florida Sea Grant

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