

Midwest Environmental Justice Network

October 2020

Analysis of Grassroots Environmental Justice Groups and Indigenous organizations in the Midwest



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- Sub-regional Analysis:
Indigenous/Native
groups and tribes, IL, MI,
MN, WI, IA, OH
- Conclusion, Context and Next Steps



— Midwest Environmental Justice Network

The mission of the Midwest Environmental Justice Network (MWEJN) is to connect and strengthen frontline and grassroots organizations to achieve environmental justice (EJ) in the Midwest.



Photo credit: Emma Lockridge, 2017

— Midwest Environmental Justice Network

MWEJN seeks to ensure that grassroots EJ organizations have the resources to effectively organize their communities to address environmental issues and to participate in local, state, regional, and federal policy development.



Purpose

Grassroots EJ organizations are doing urgent and important work in the Midwest, yet they are often operating invisibly – without recognition or funding.

MWEJN analyzed our small grant applicant data to increase understanding of the geographic distribution, size, and priorities of grassroots EJ groups working in the Midwest.

Our goal is to lift up overall trends, opportunities, and challenges facing grassroots EJ groups in the region.

Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice (EJ) is based on the belief that every community has a right to a healthy environment in which all residents can live, learn, work, pray, and play.

To reverse the long history of government and industry decision-making that has led to environmental racism and inequality, EJ communities must be placed at the center of environmental efforts.



 MWEJN is made up of, and seeks to support, grassroots EJ groups who are:

- Rooted in, made up of, and accountable to communities of color, low-income communities, tribes, and Indigenous communities who are most directly impacted by environmental and public health issues;
- Committed to building grassroots power and leadership to influence the decisions that affect their communities; and,
- Working to uphold EJ in at least one of the 12 Midwestern states: IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI

Methodology

Our data comes from submissions for MWEJN's online Request For Information (RFI) form as a part of our Small Grants Program from 2017 and 2018.

The findings from our study offer the first regional-scale look at grassroots EJ groups across the Midwest region.



— Methodology: Native and Indigenous

This study includes the priorities and interests of the tribes which participated in MWEJN's Request for Information Process. Although tribes are sovereign nations, their priorities are important to the EJ region.

This analysis also includes twelve 501c3 or fiscally-sponsored nonprofit EJ groups that primarily serve Native and Indigenous communities.



Methodology

For this report, MWEJN analyzed a total of 87 applications, with 75 from grassroots EJ groups, 10 from nonprofit Native and Indigenous groups, and 2 from tribes. We sought to understand:



- **Priority Issues:** What EJ issues are the most important for each organization's community?
- **Location:** Where are grassroots EJ groups located? What is the balance of urban and rural work represented?

Methodology

- **Budget Size:** What is the financial capacity of grassroots EJ groups?
- **Status:** Which groups have 501c3 status? How many are fiscally sponsored? How many are sovereign nations?
- **Scale of Operations:** At what scales do grassroots EJ groups operate? (international, tribal, national, regional, state, county, city, and/or community/neighborhood)

Methodology

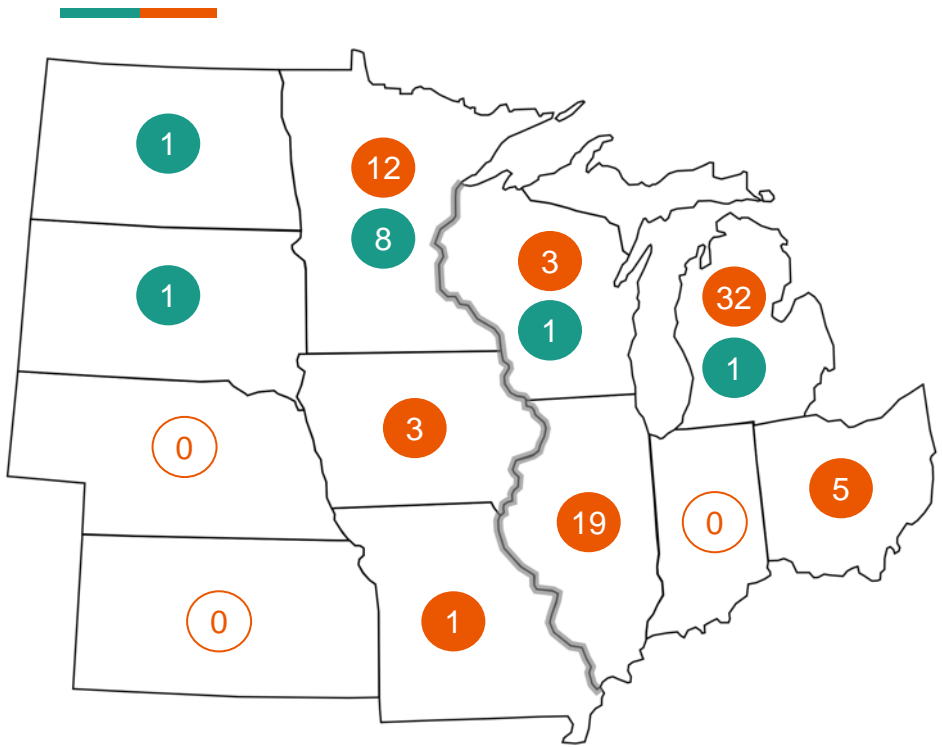
Note: The data and analysis for this study was conducted before the compounding crises of COVID-19 and the racial justice uprisings of 2020.

We consider the current context at the end of this report, as part of the discussion on next steps.

Regional Analysis of Request for Information Data 2017-2018



REGIONAL ANALYSIS | Geographic Distribution of Applicants



- # EJ grassroots groups (total = 75)
- # Indigenous and Native representation (total = 12): Tribes (2), grassroots groups (10)
- 0 Received no applications



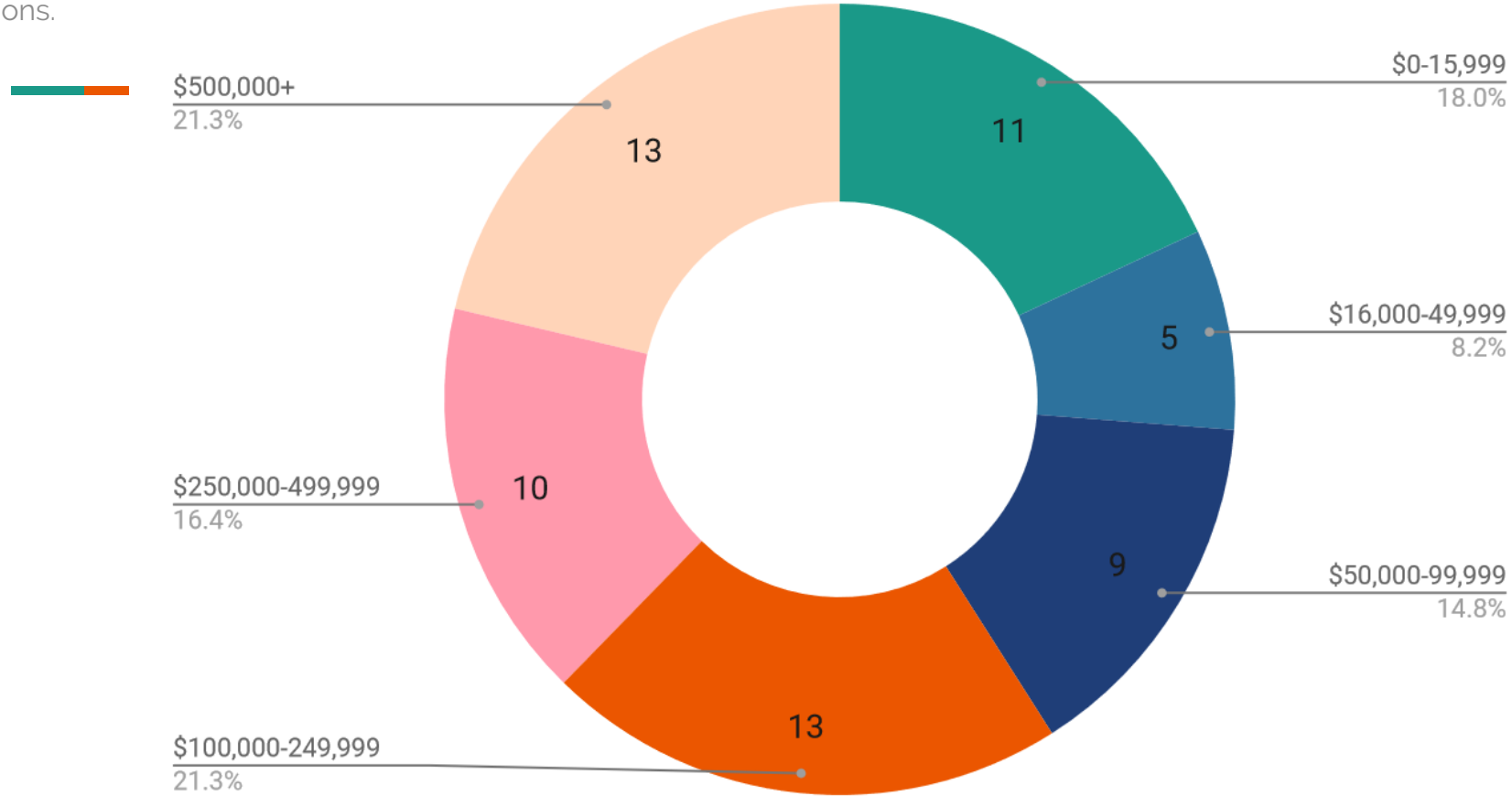
73% (n = 63) of the 85 grassroots respondents are 501c3 organizations*

The remaining 37% (n=34) are in the process of obtaining 501c3 status, have a fiscal sponsor, or are open to working with a fiscal sponsor.*

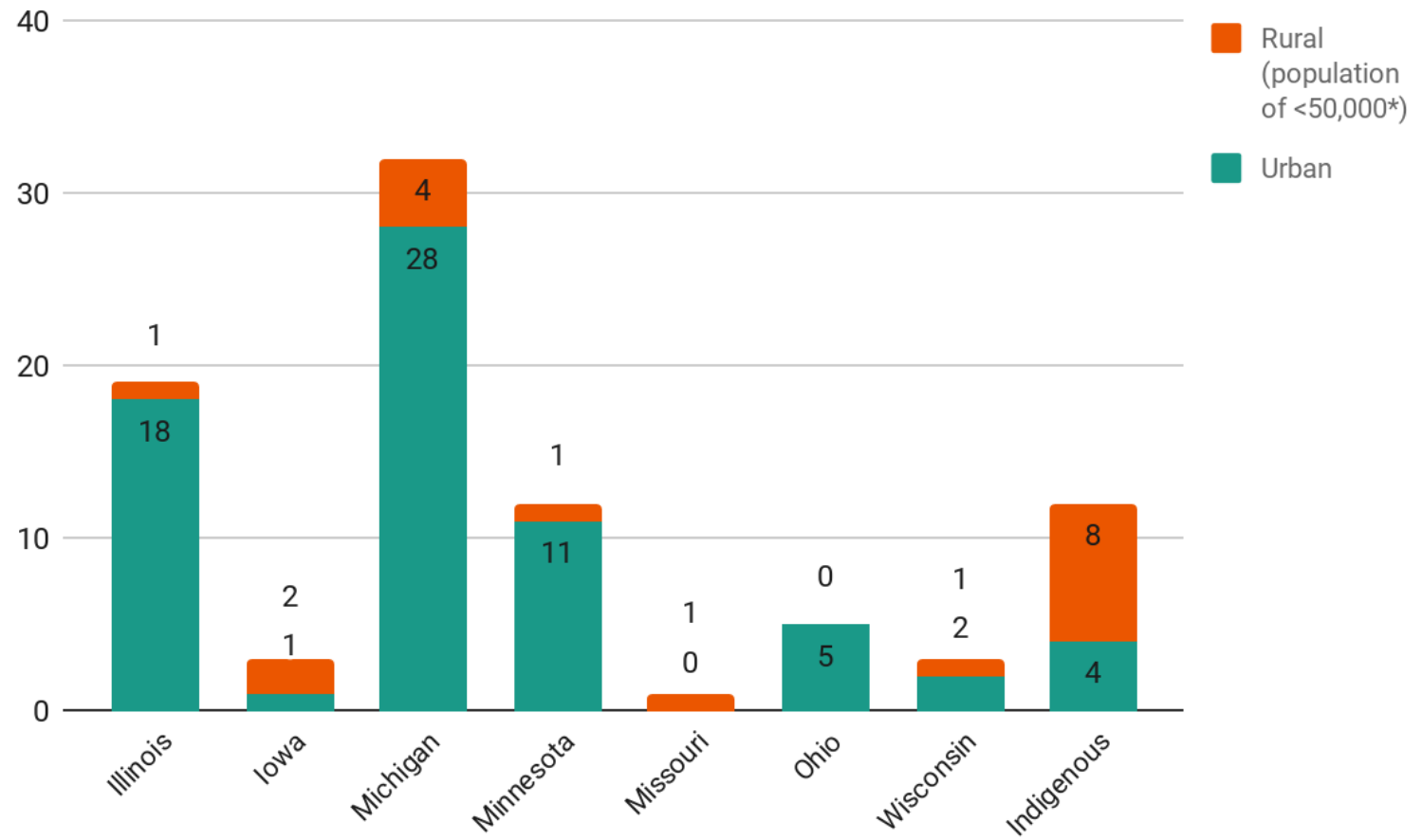
*Tribes are not included in this analysis as they are sovereign nations.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS | budgets (61 respondents, tribes not included)

Budget data is from 2018 applicants + Leadership Team organizations.



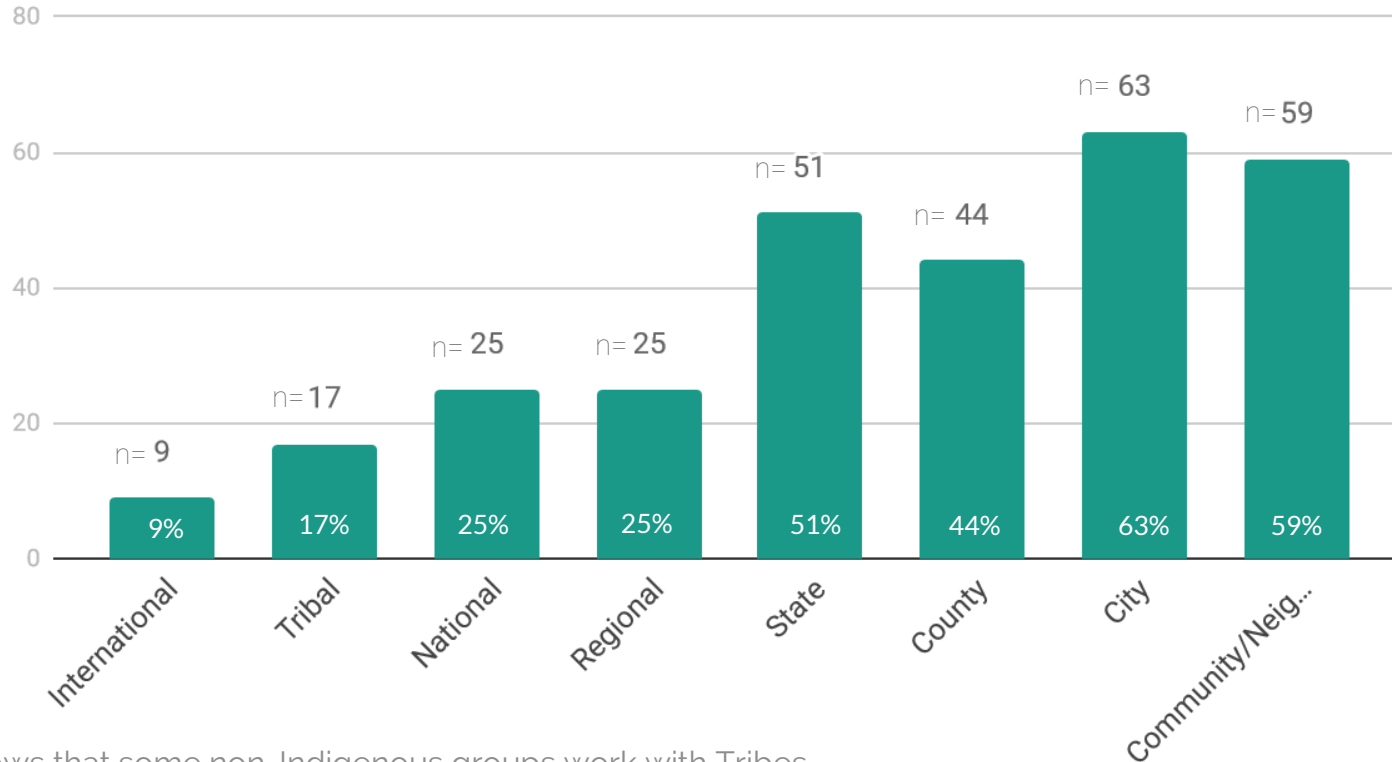
REGIONAL ANALYSIS | urban/rural



REGIONAL ANALYSIS | scale

Applicants noted every scale at which they operate.

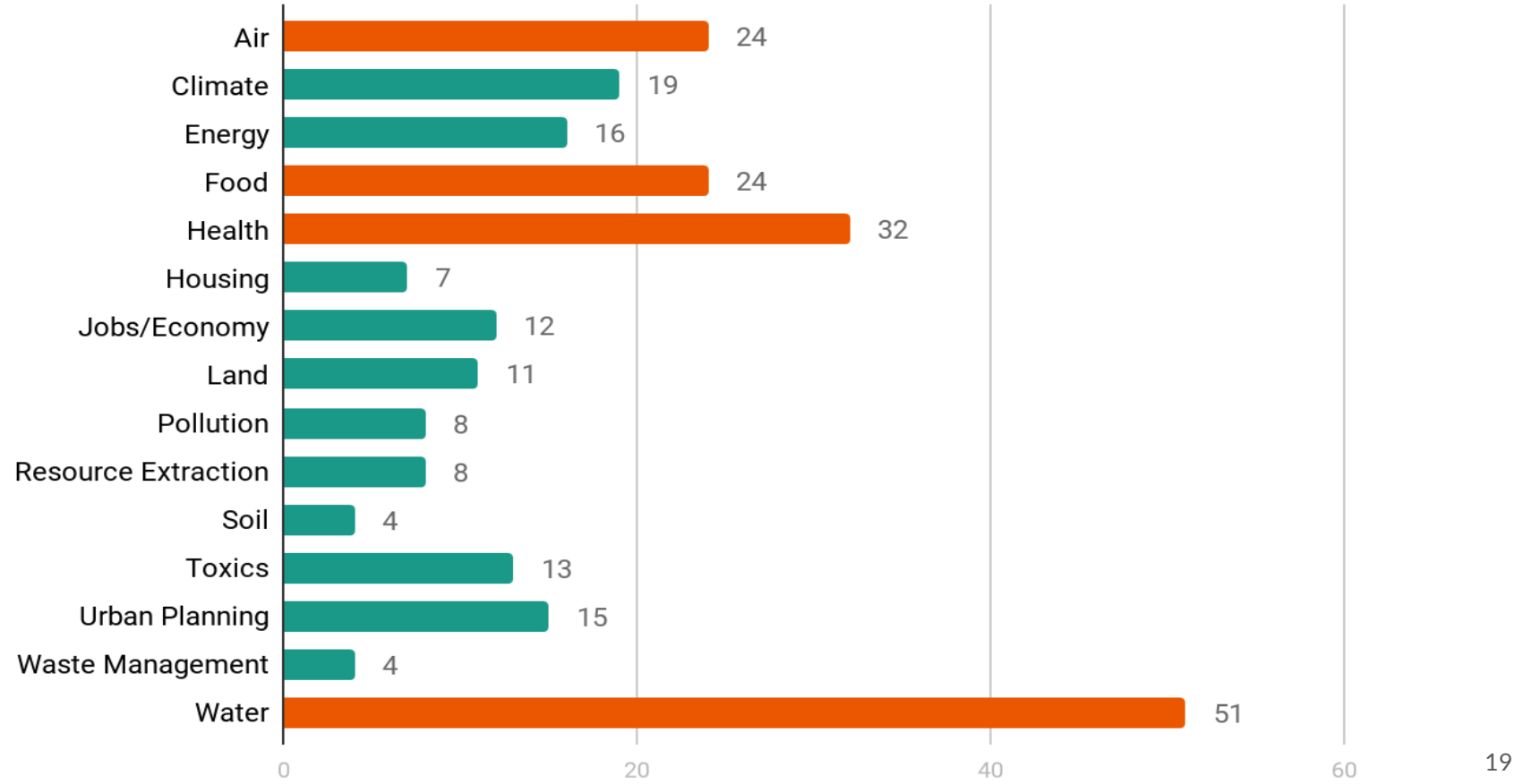
Percentage of Applicants Working at Each Scale



This graph shows that some non-Indigenous groups work with Tribes.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS | Primary Issue Areas

Applicants were asked to check the three priority EJ issues for their communities. The top 4 issues are highlighted in orange. This data reflects all applicants, including tribes.





EJ groups approach their work in holistic and cross-sectional ways. They do not work in siloes.

Water was the most-cited area of concern. Midwestern EJ groups address water challenges in connection with community health, economic stability, climate resiliency, and care for the earth and environment.

Sub-regional Analysis of Request for Information Data 2017-2018

Indigenous Groups | Illinois | Michigan | Minnesota | Wisconsin | Iowa | Ohio



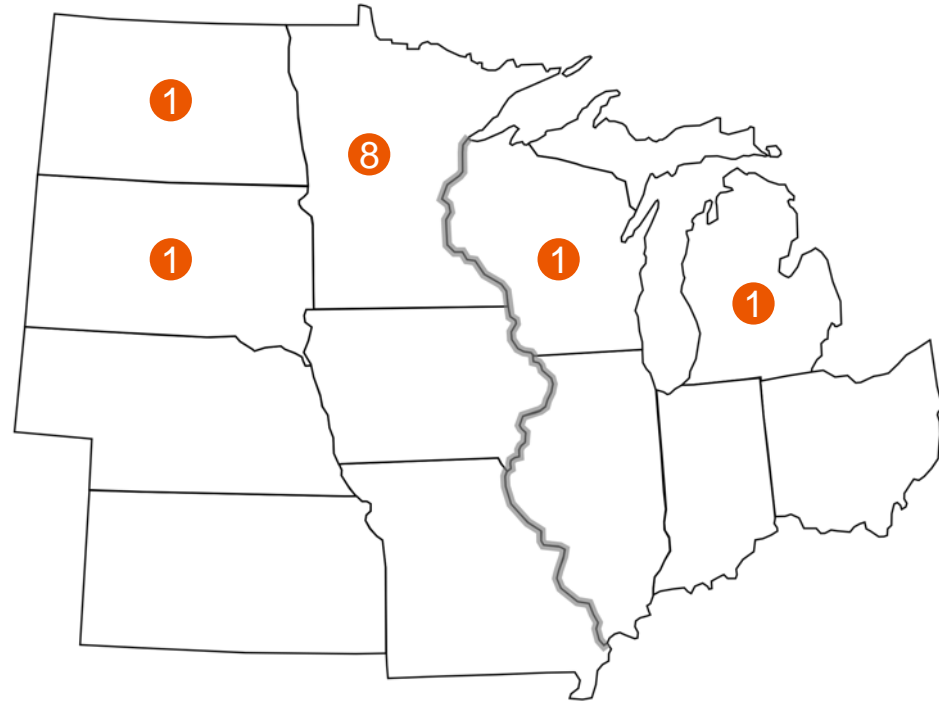
INDIGENOUS GROUP Respondents (total = 12)

Tribes

2

Indigenous Groups with
501c3 Status

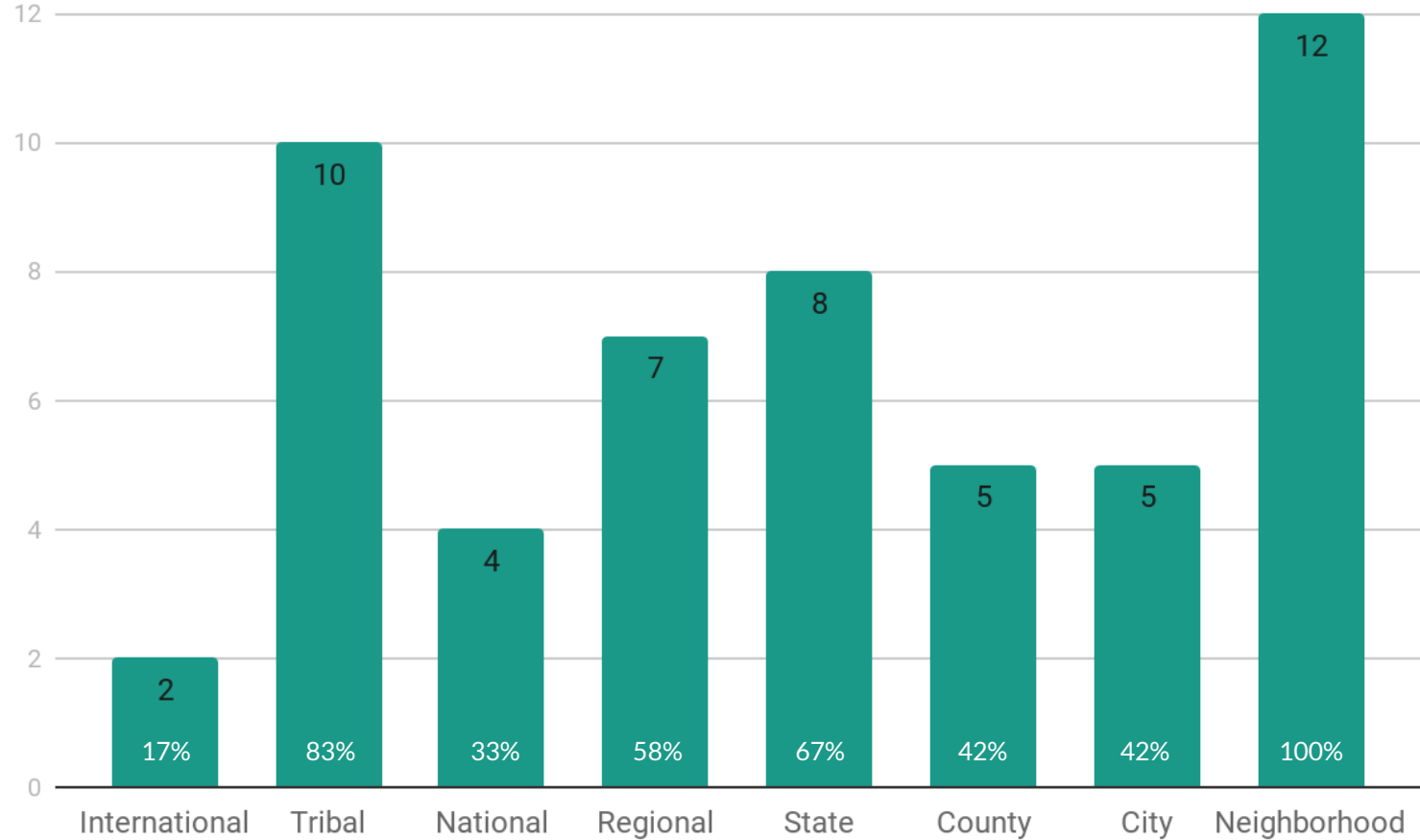
8



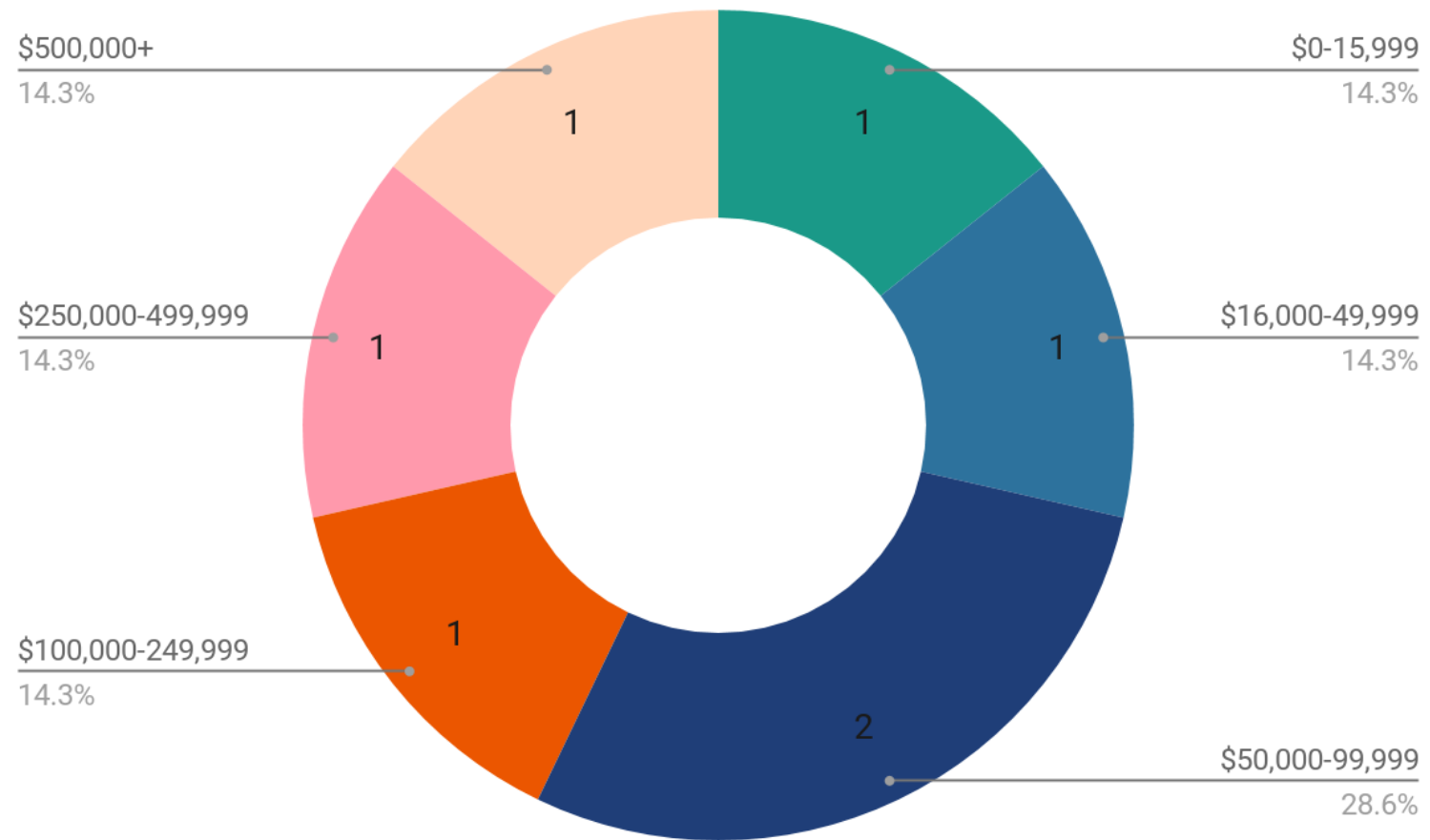
Note: the numbers indicate where the applications came from, not necessarily where the organization would identify themselves being from/working in.

INDIGENOUS GROUPS | scale

Respondents noted every scale at which they operate.

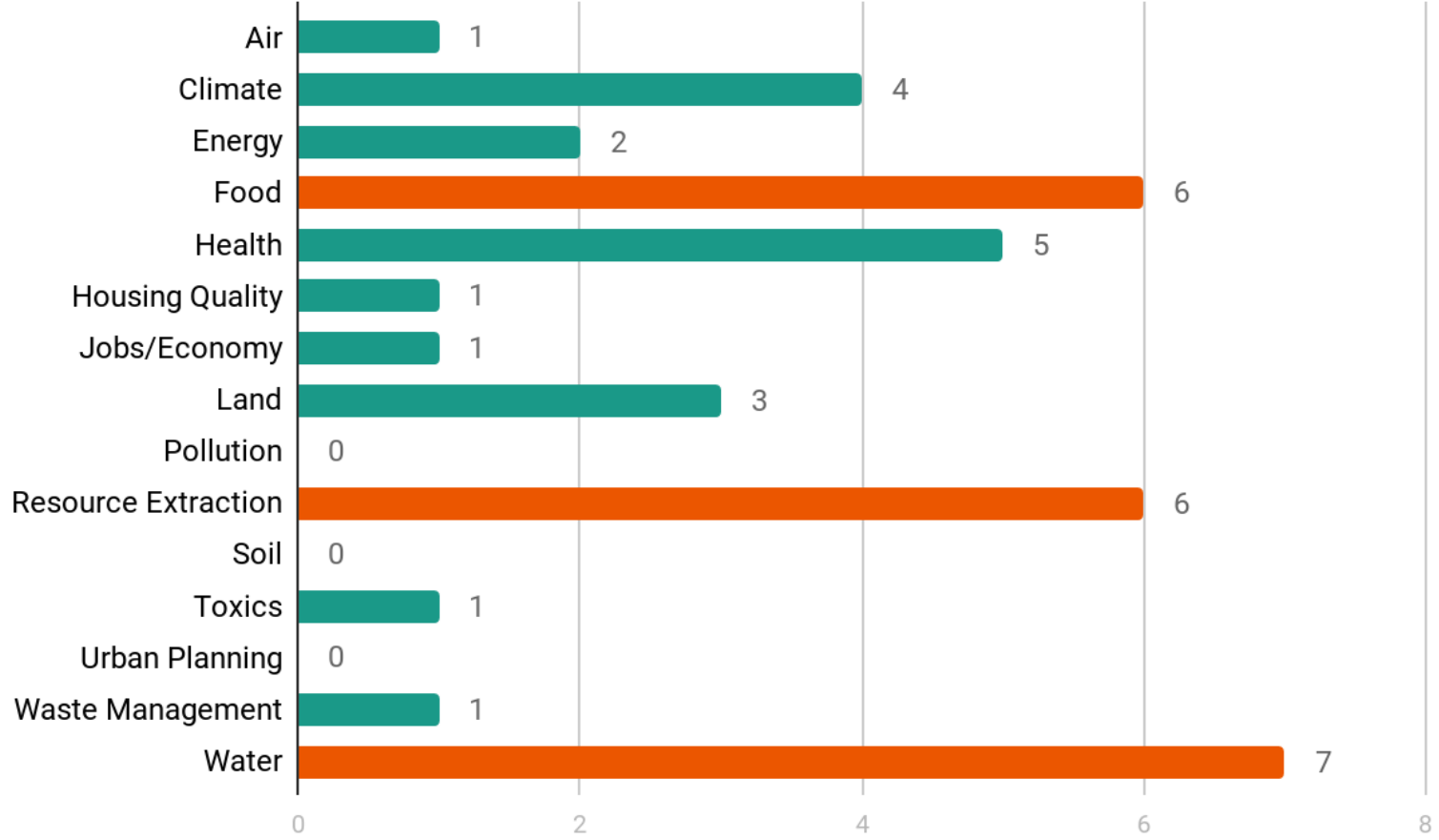


INDIGENOUS GROUPS | budgets (7 non-tribe respondents, 2018 data)



INDIGENOUS GROUPS | issue areas (top 3 in orange)

This data reflects all Indigenous and Native applicants, including tribes.





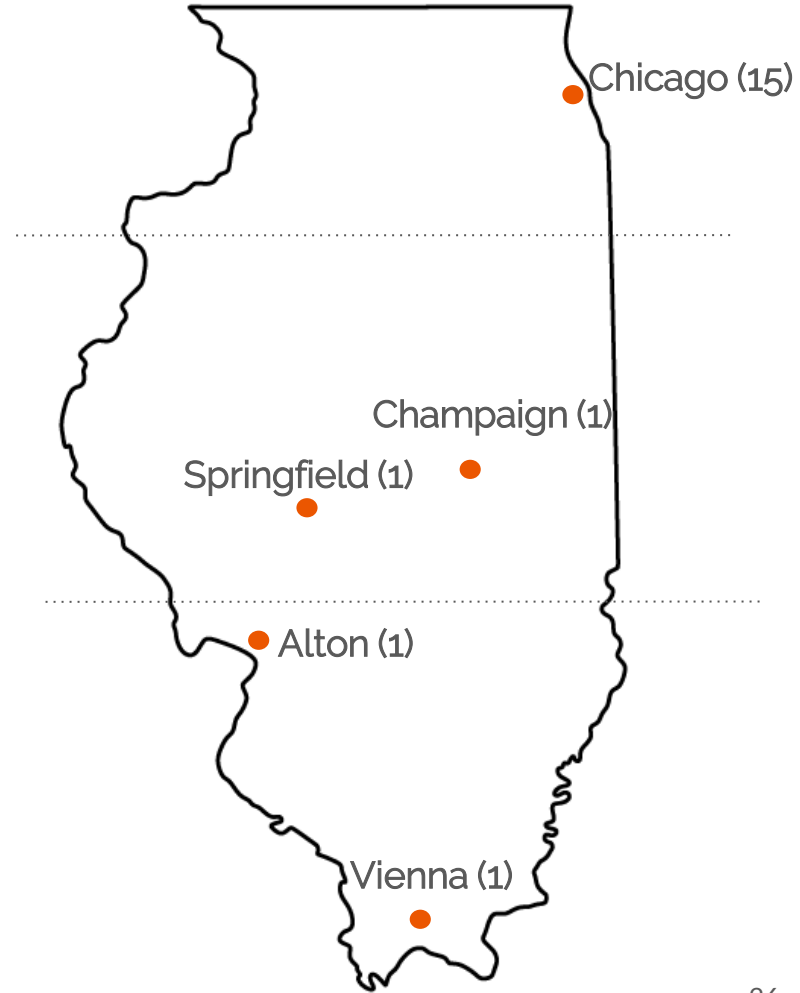
ILLINOIS Respondents

Total Responses

19

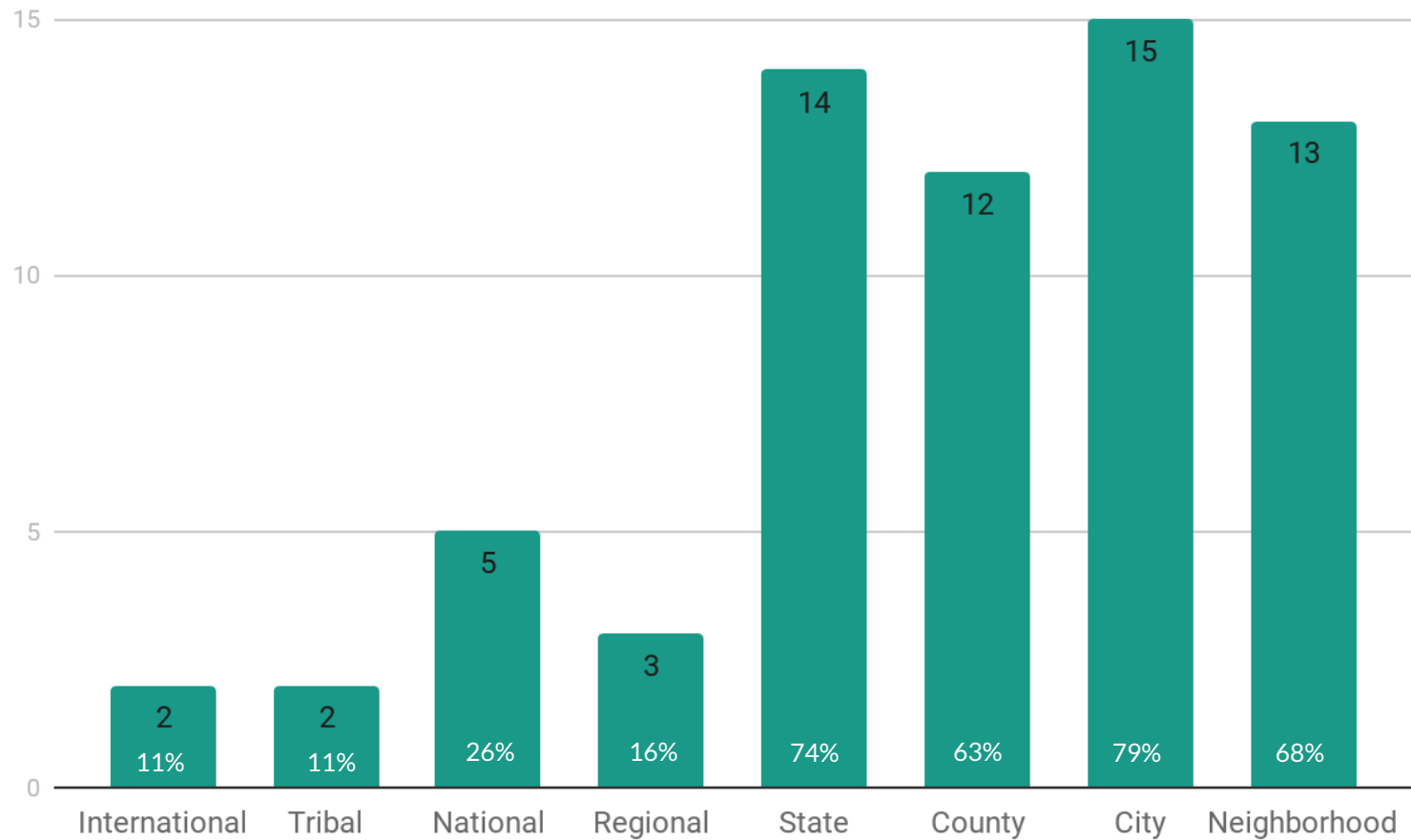
501c3 Organizations

14

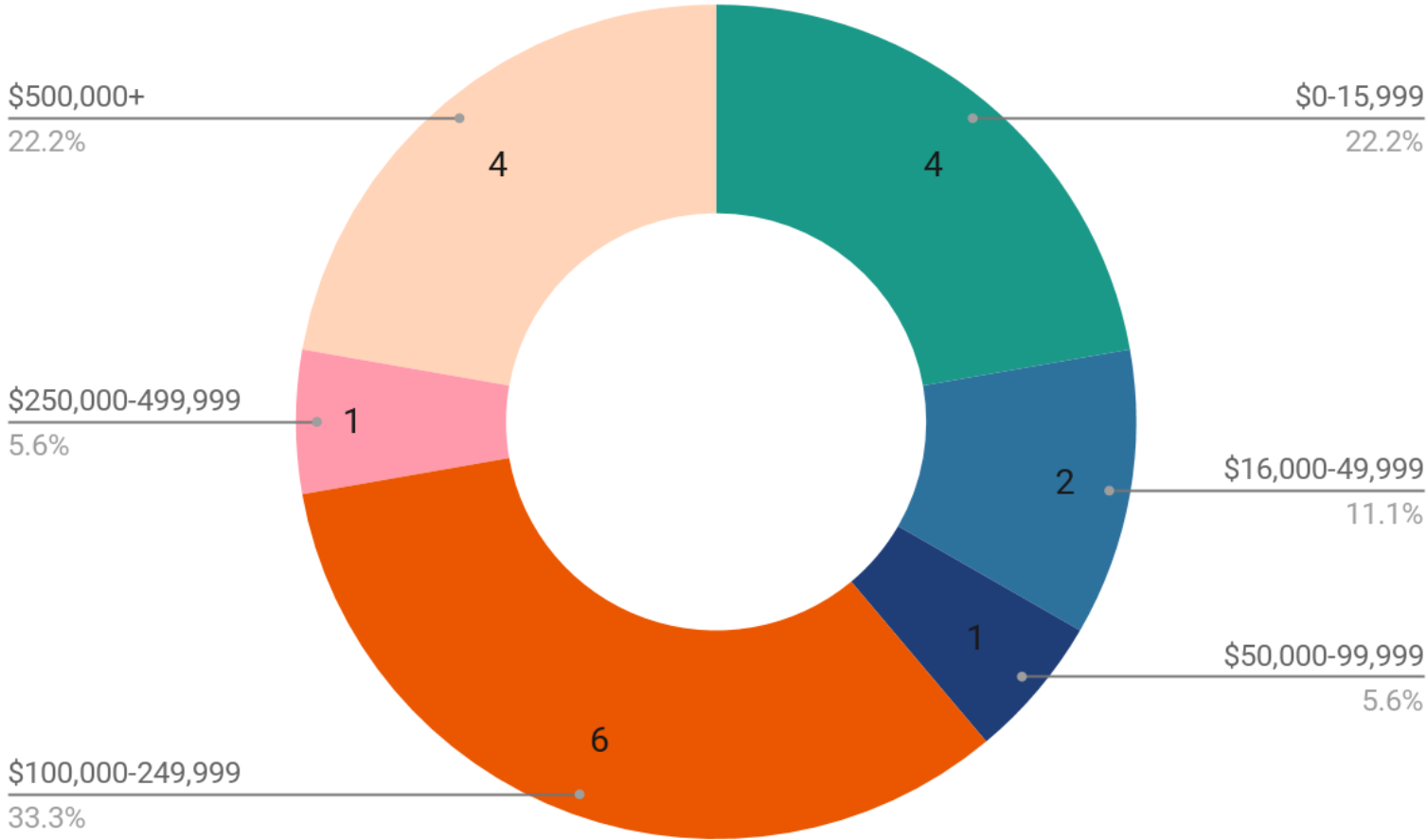


ILLINOIS | scale

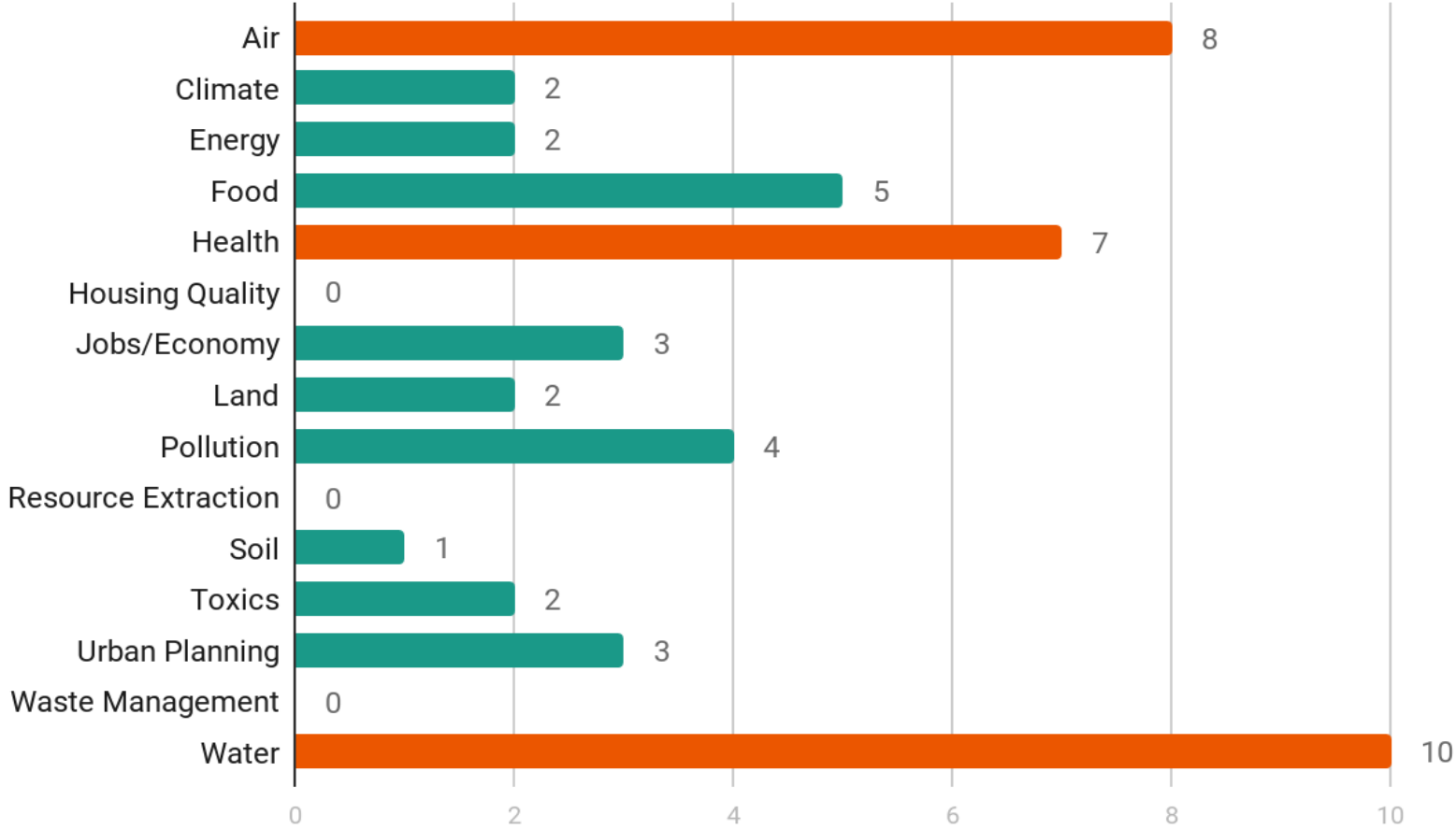
Respondents noted every scale at which they operate.



ILLINOIS | budgets (18 respondents, 2018 data)



ILLINOIS | issue areas (top 3 issues in orange)



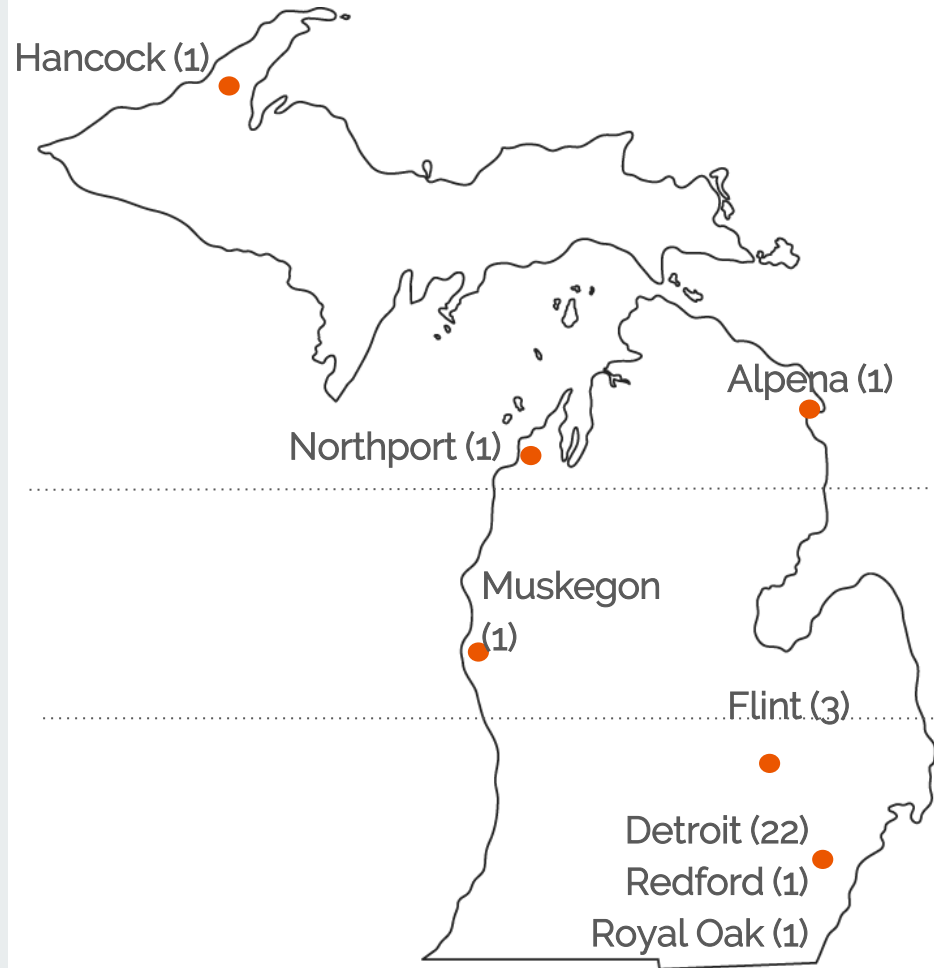
MICHIGAN Respondents

Total Responses

32

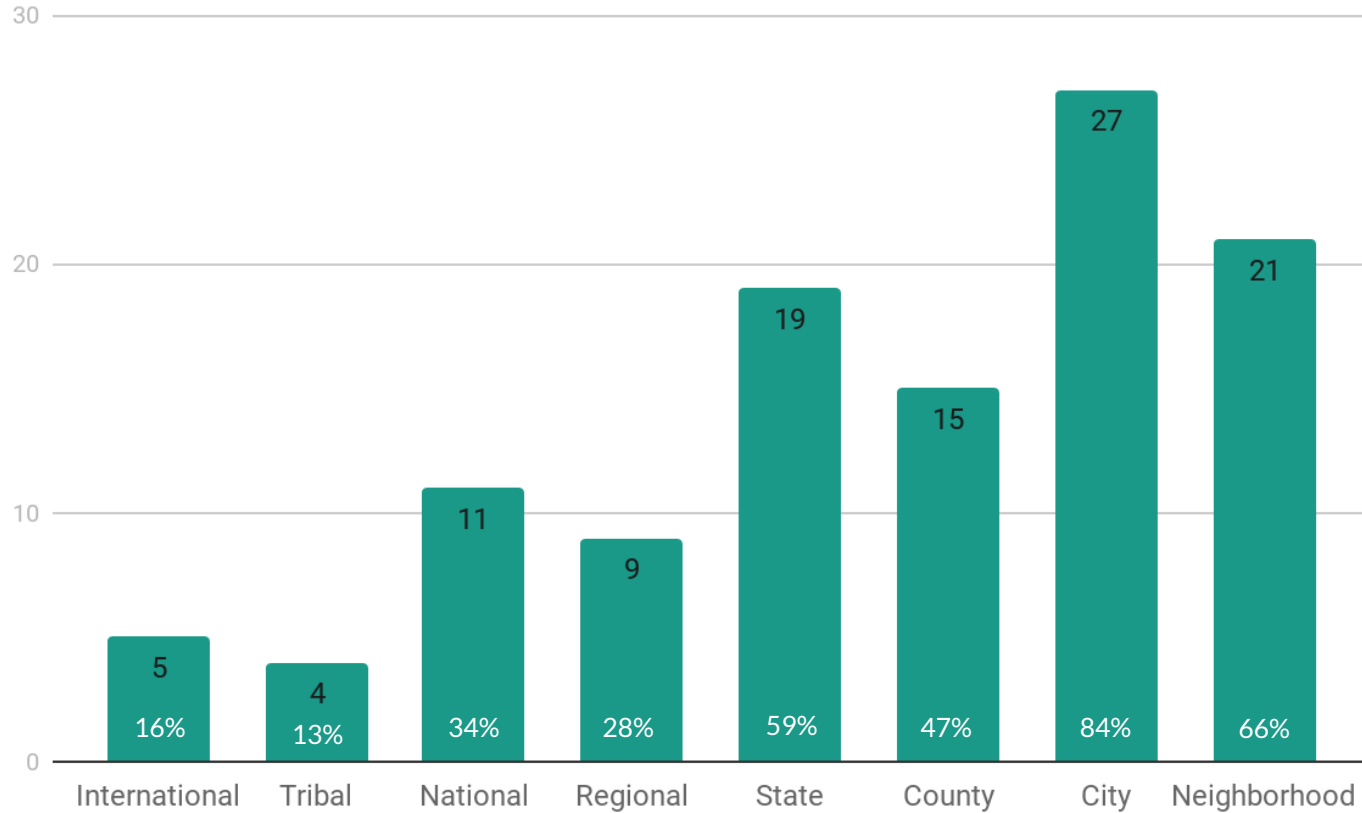
501c3 Organizations

18

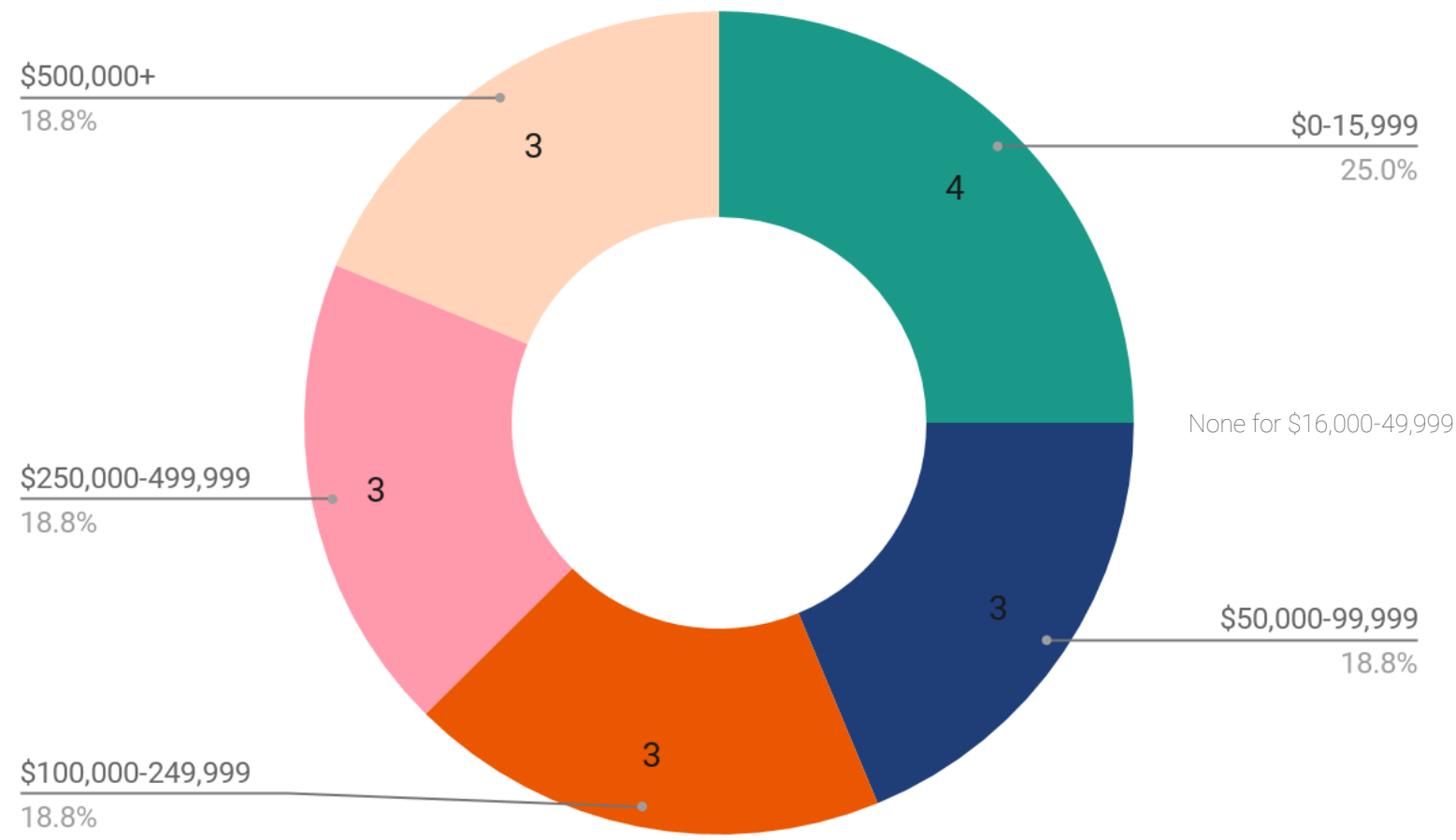


MICHIGAN | scale

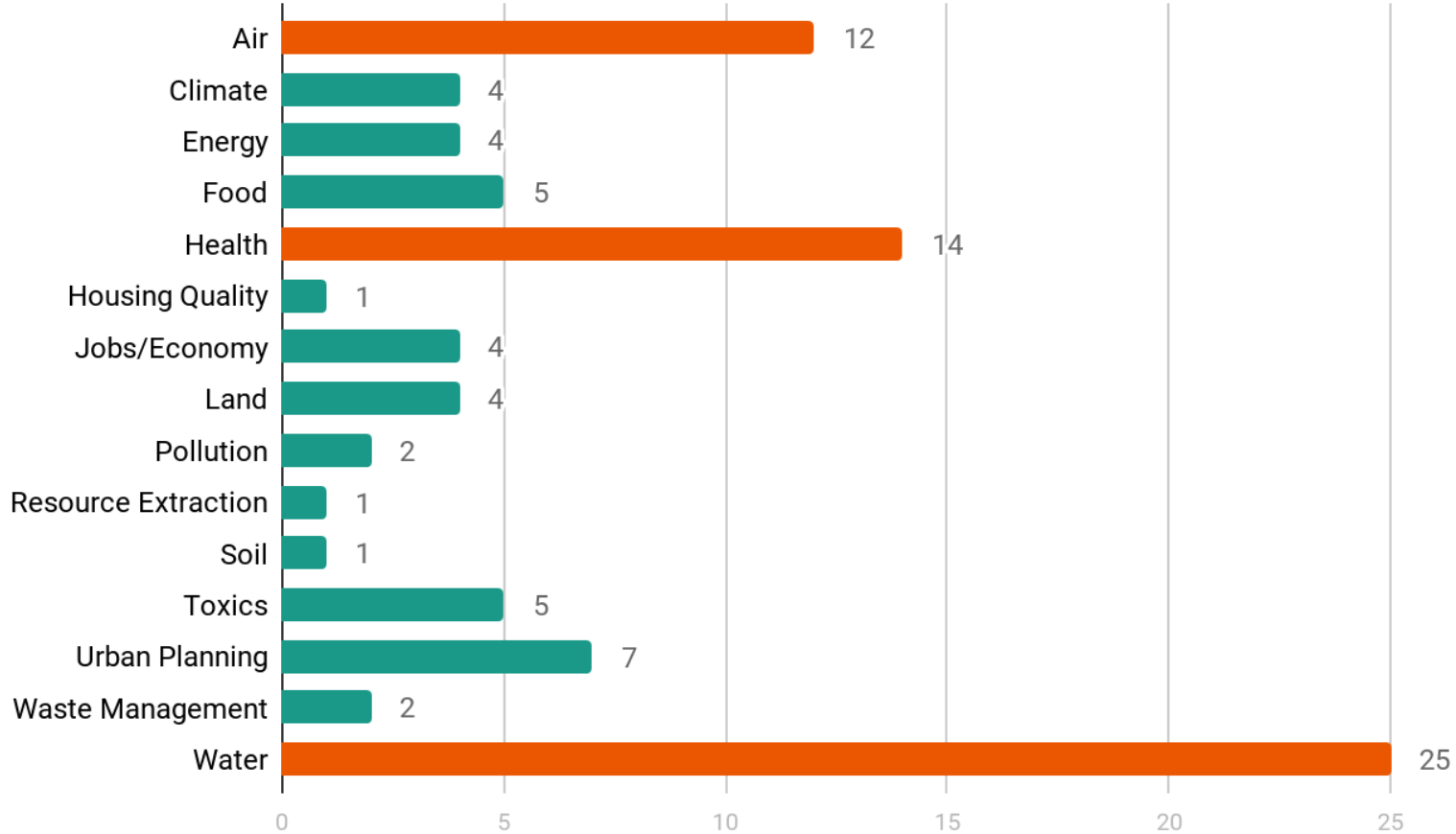
Respondents noted every scale at which they operate.



MICHIGAN | budgets (16 respondents, 2018 data)



MICHIGAN | issue areas (top 3 in orange)





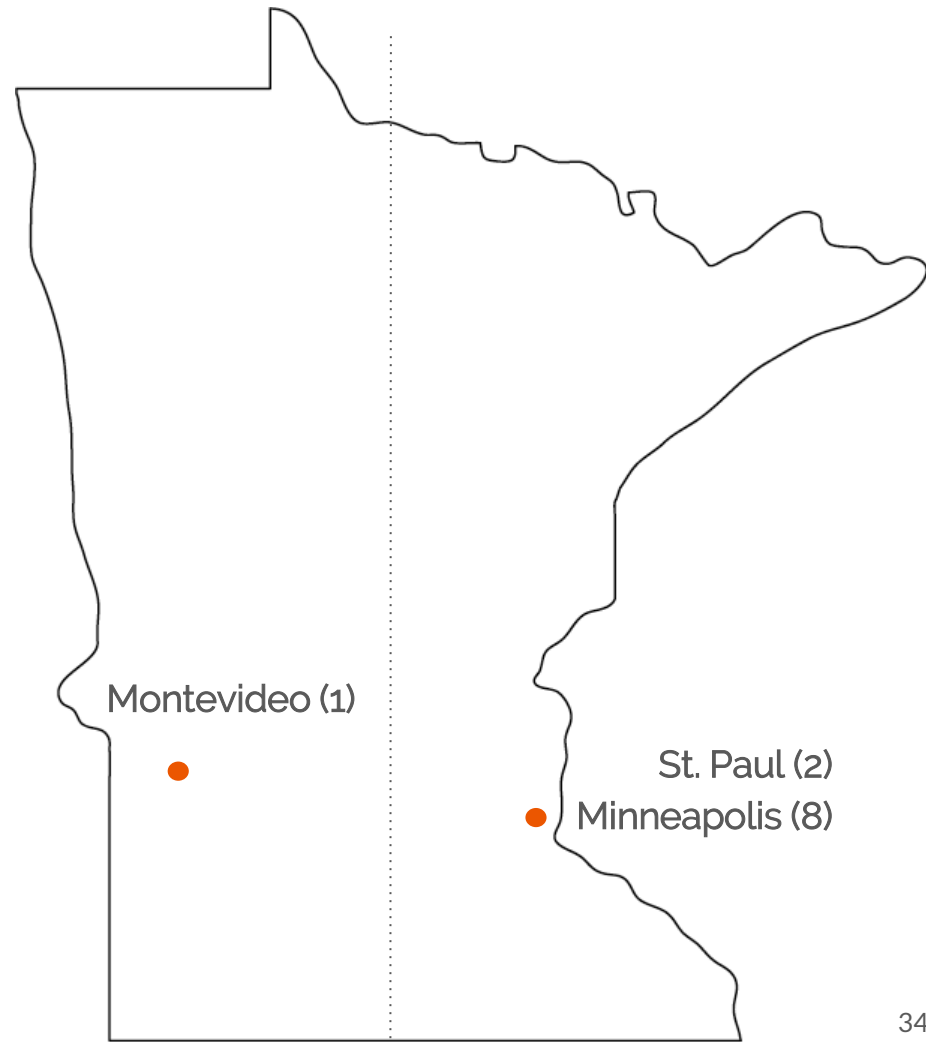
MINNESOTA Respondents

Total Responses

12

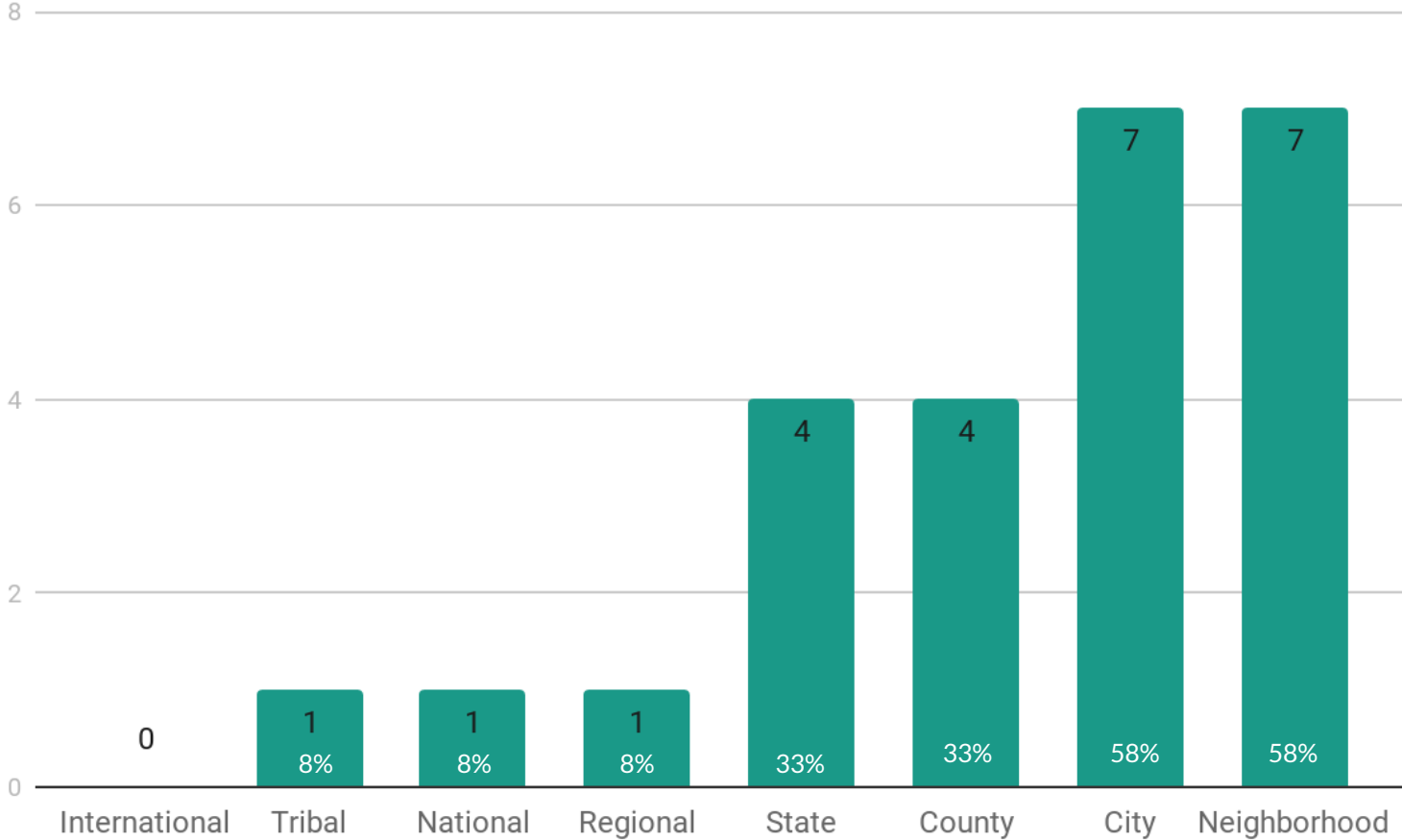
501c3 Organizations

9

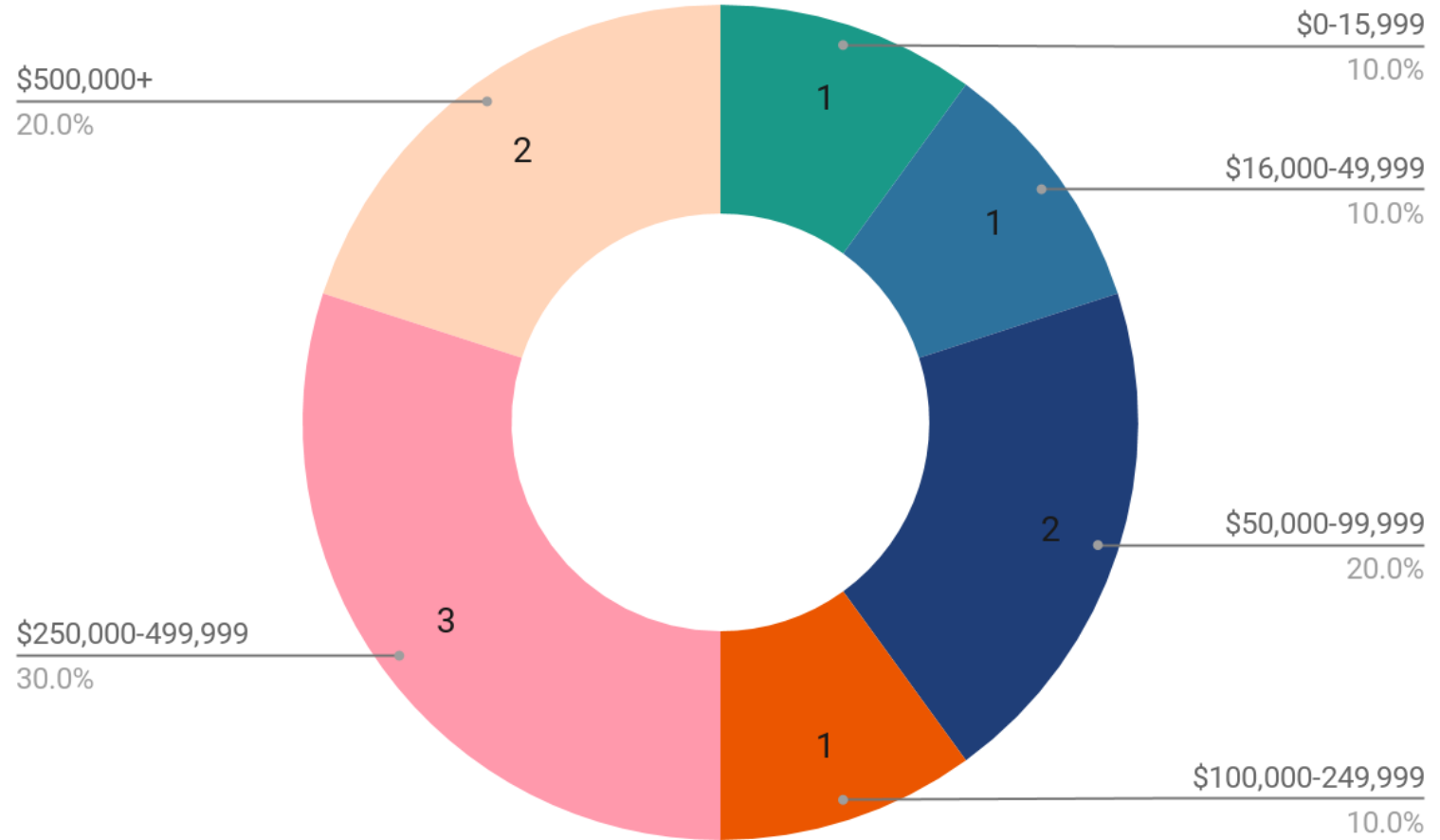


MINNESOTA | scale

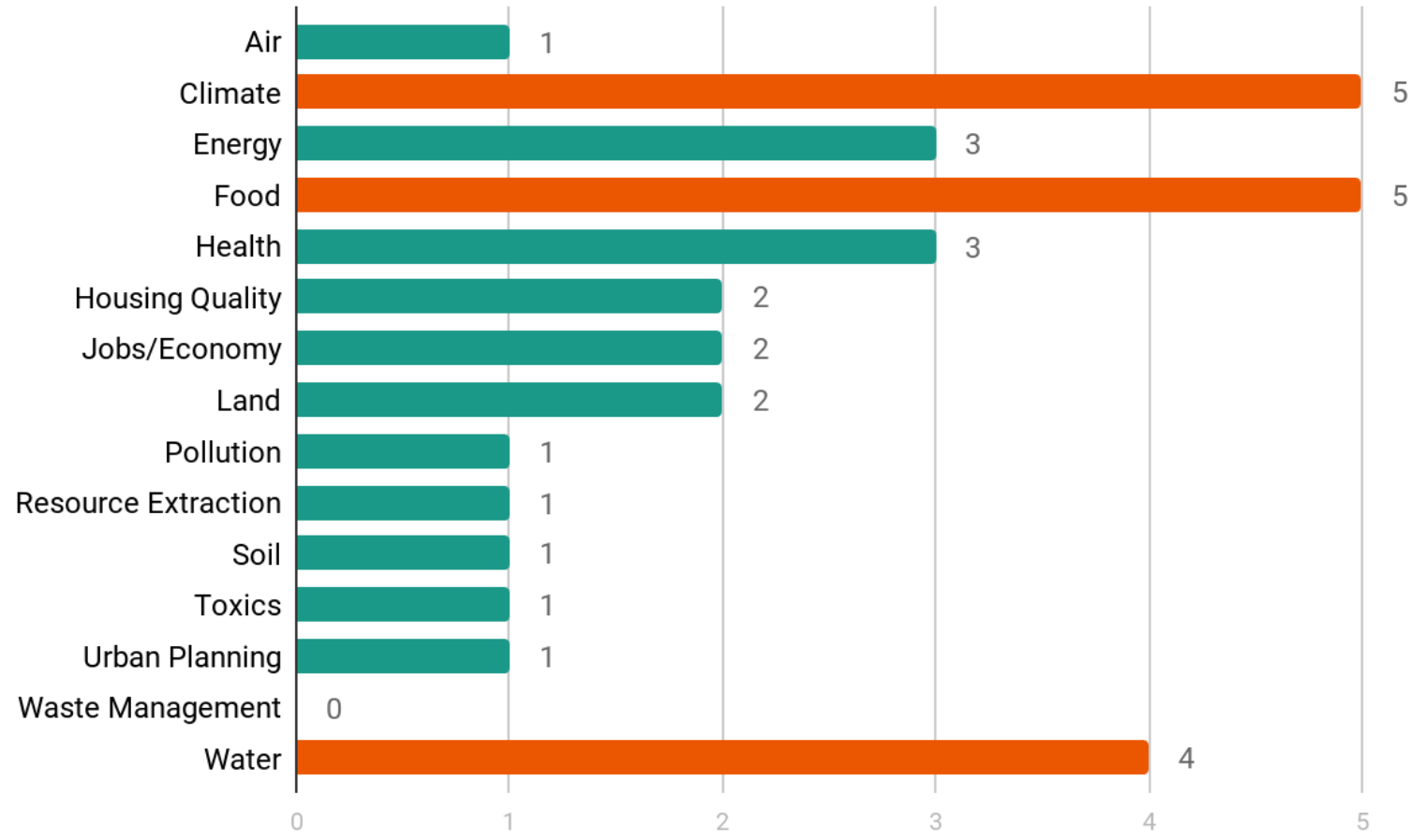
Respondents noted every scale at which they operate.



MINNESOTA | budgets (10 respondents, 2018 data)



MINNESOTA | issue areas (top 3 in orange)





WISCONSIN Respondents

Total Responses

3

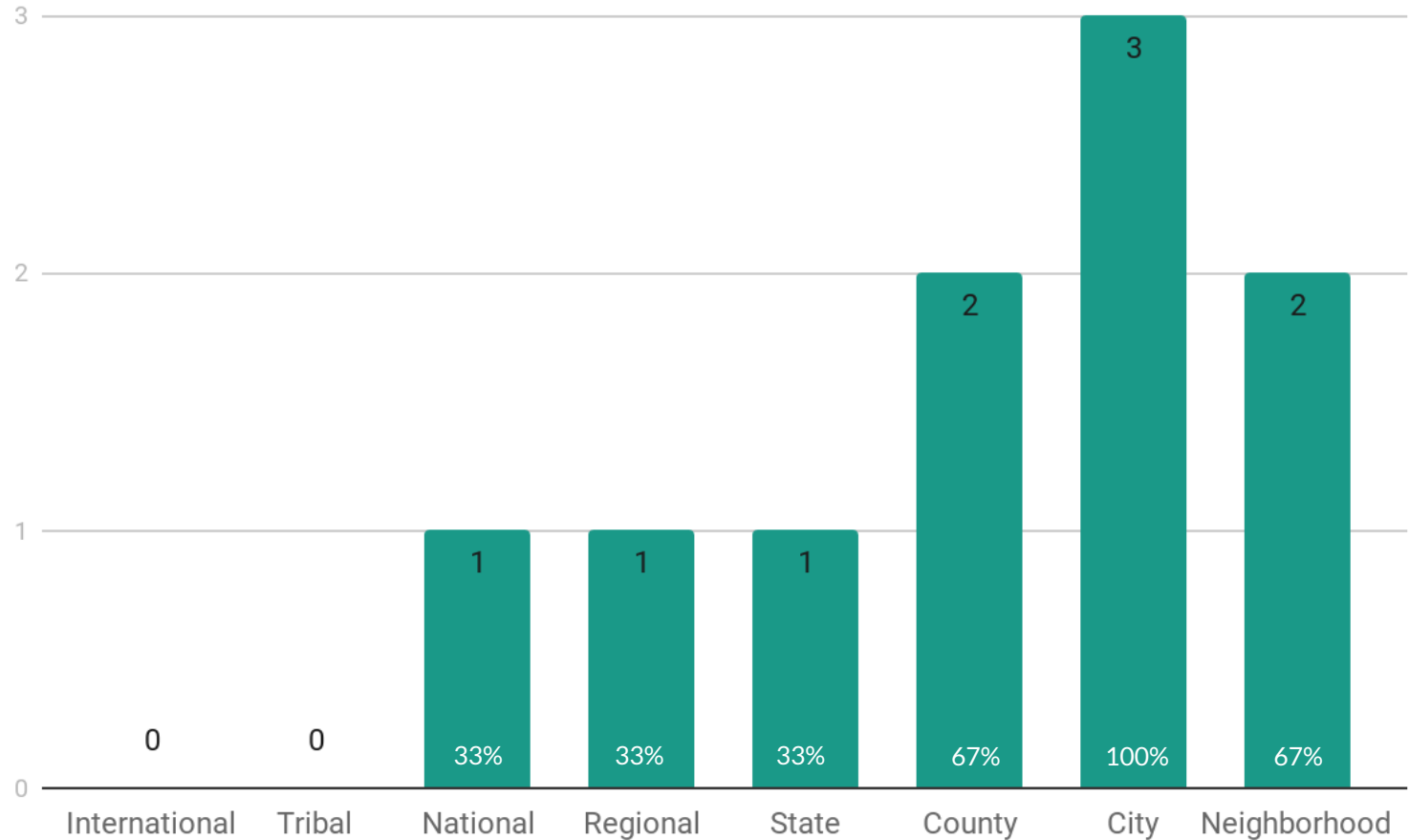
501c3 Organizations

0

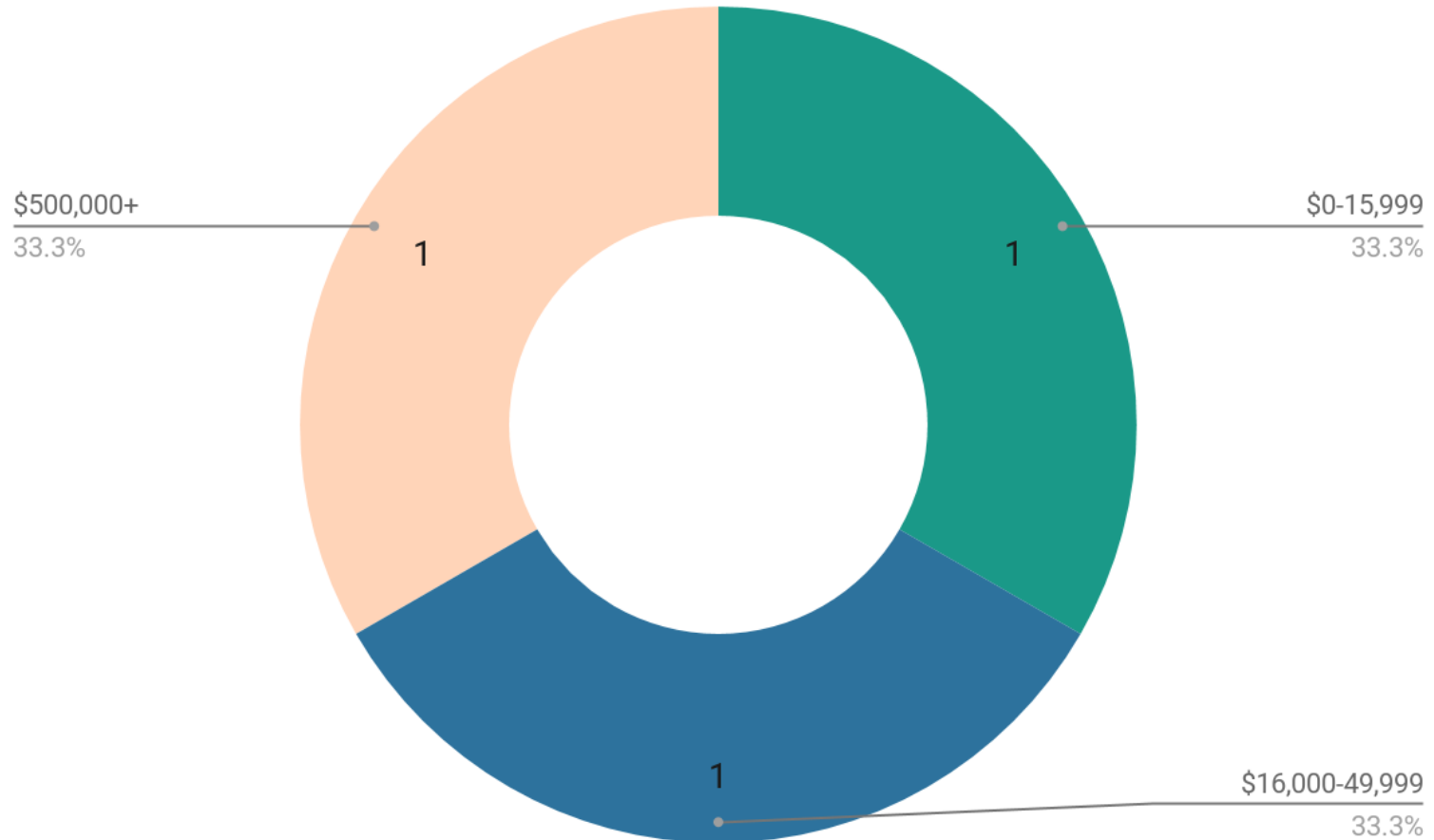


WISCONSIN | scale

Respondents noted every scale at which they operate.



WISCONSIN | budgets (3 respondents, 2018 data)



WISCONSIN | issue areas



*one each



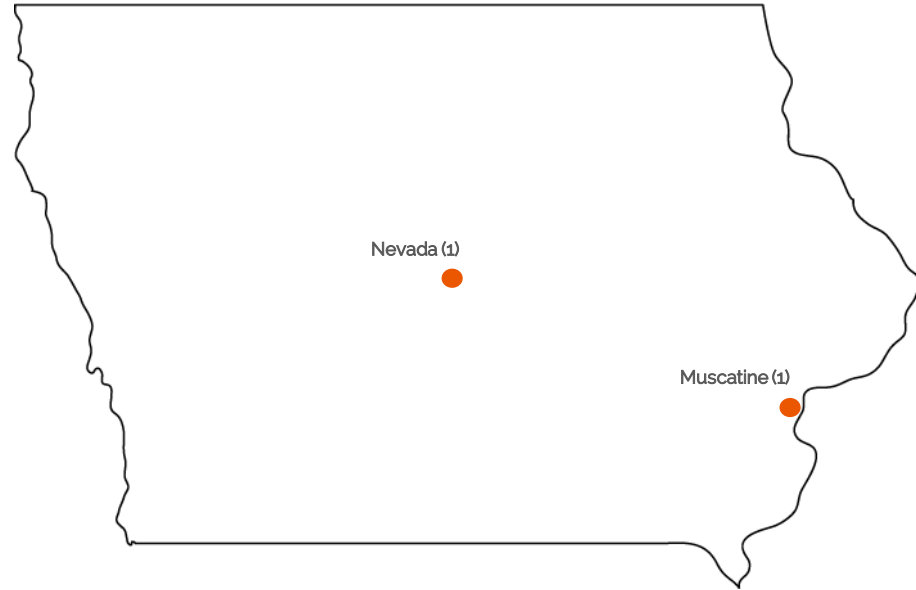
IOWA Respondents

Total Responses

3

501c3 Organizations

3



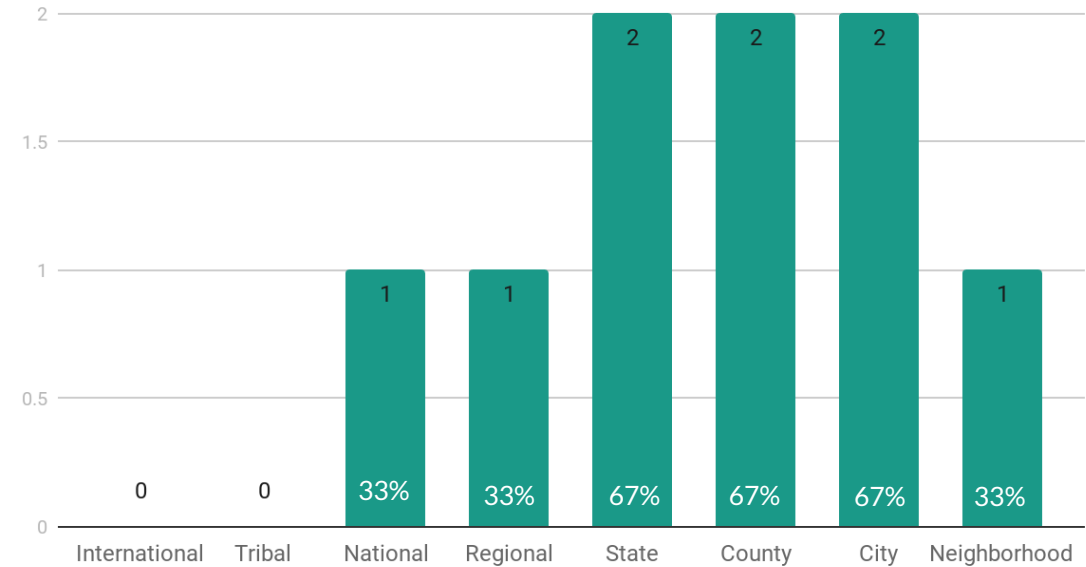
IOWA | budget and scale

Respondents noted every scale at which they operate.

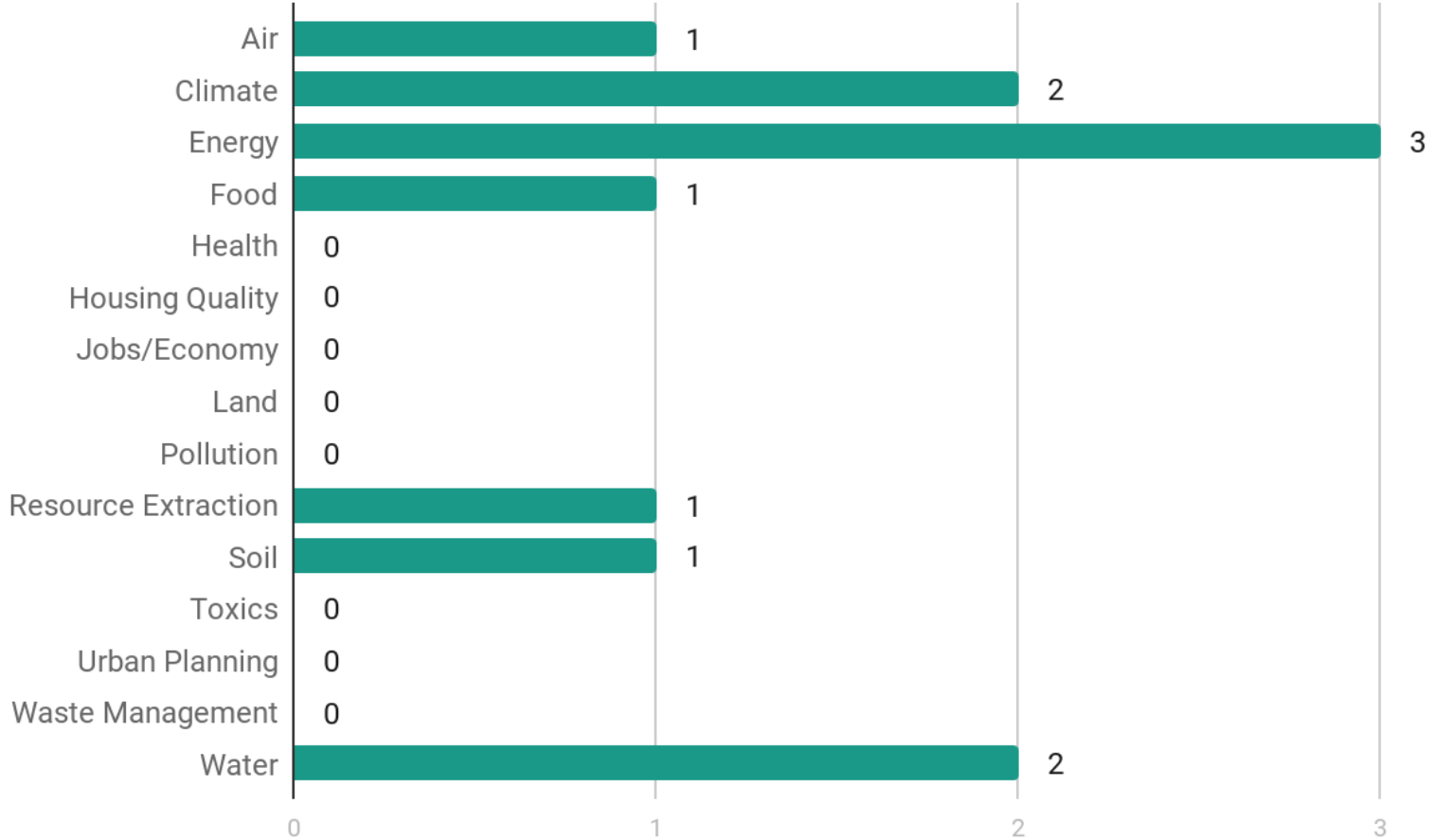

Budget

Insufficient Data

Iowa Scale of Operations



IOWA | issue areas (not enough information to show top issue areas)





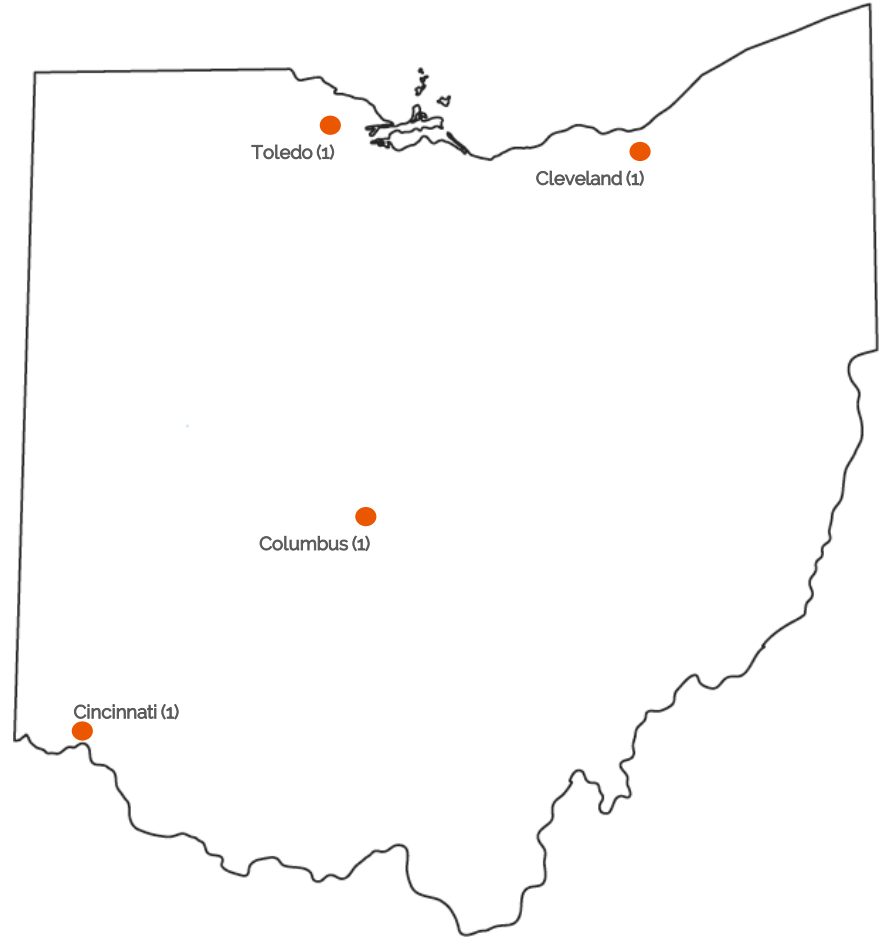
OHIO Respondents

Total Responses

5

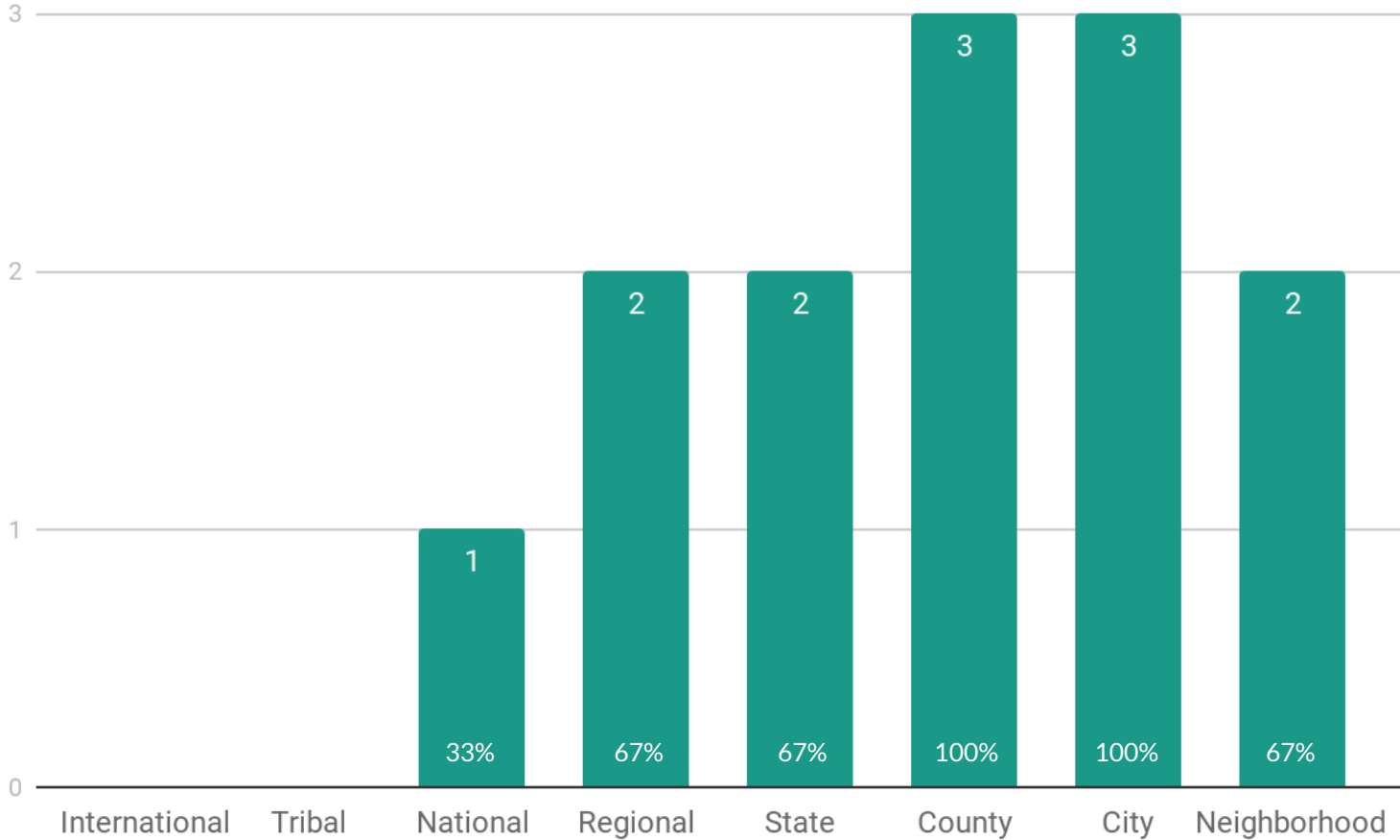
501c3 Organizations

3

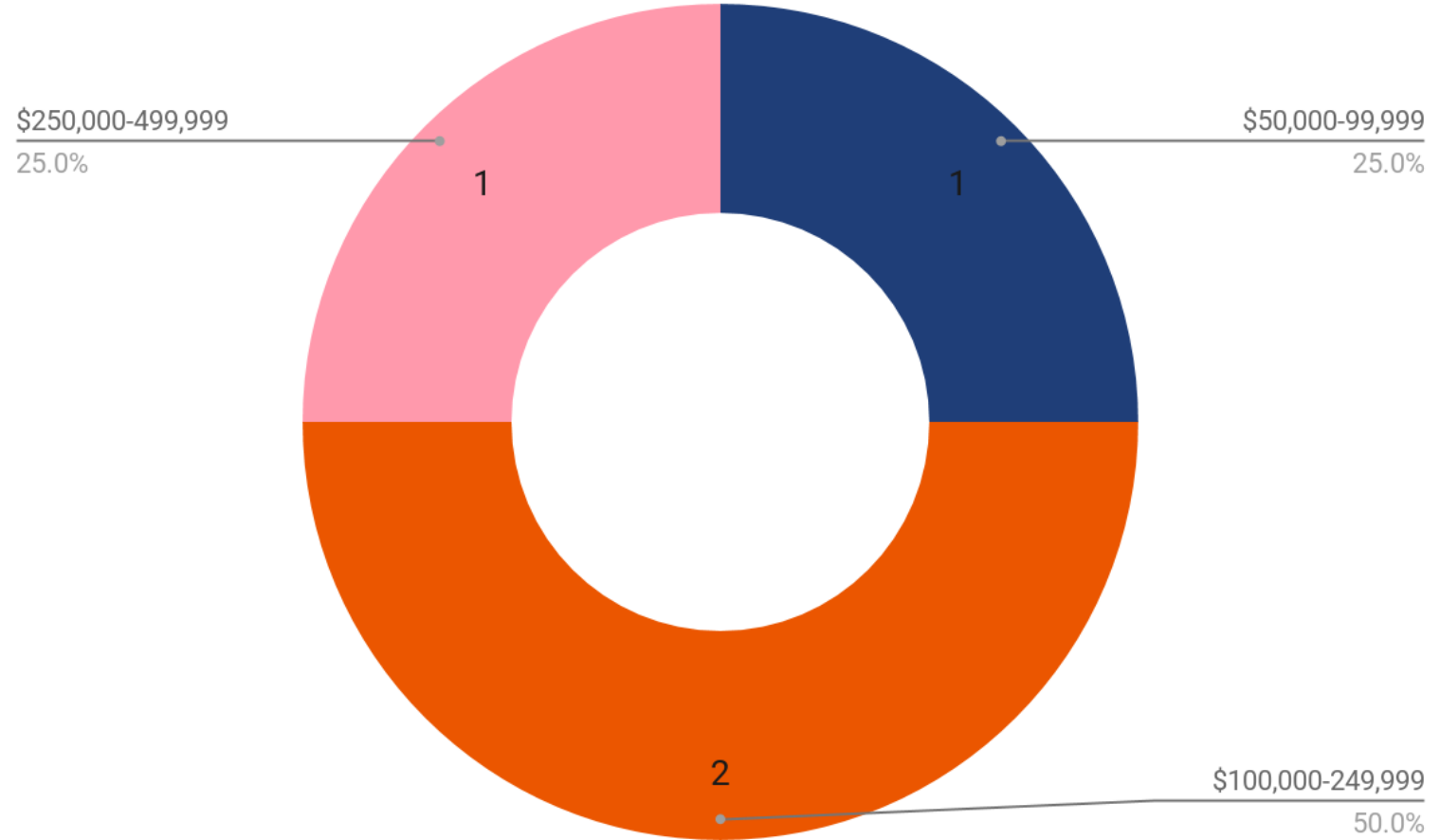


OHIO | scale

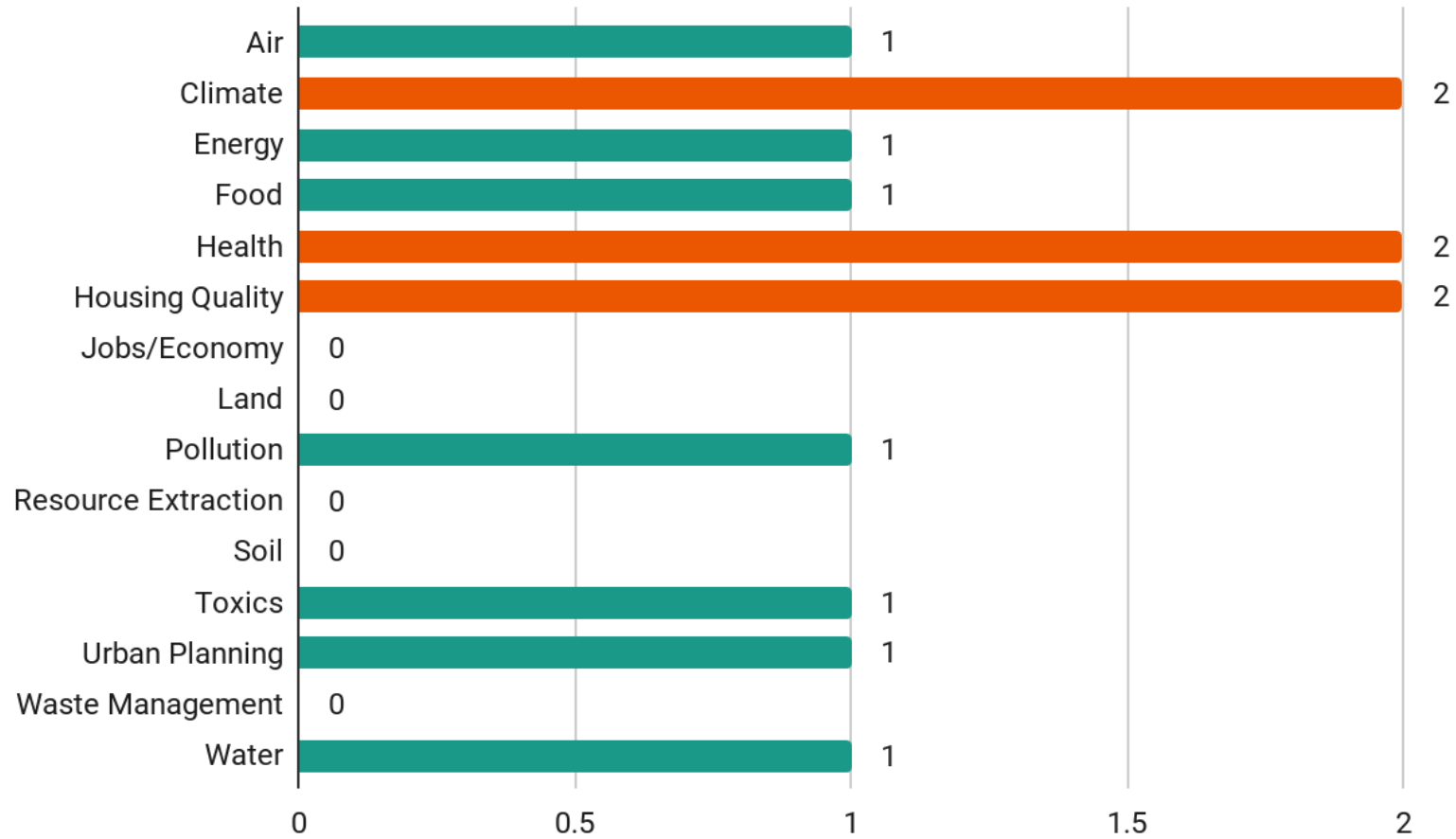
Respondents noted every scale at which they operate.



OHIO | budgets (3 respondents, 2018 data)



OHIO | issue areas (top 3 in orange)





Indigenous and Native Groups: primarily work with specific Native American/tribes and have deep cultural expertise and community connections.

IL: More respondents report working with Latinx communities than any other state.

MI: EJ grassroots orgs work with are largely Black/African American communities.

MN: More respondents report working with immigrant groups than other states.

WI, IA, MO, OH: Most organizations responding work in primarily Black/African American communities.

Conclusions, Context, & Next Steps





Grassroots EJ organizations and Indigenous groups in the Midwest are struggling to raise funds for their work.



79% of EJ applicants have budgets below \$500,000 and a majority (62%) have budgets below \$250,000*

Only 5 of the 67 applicants had budgets over \$2 million. Larger budgets sizes were primarily due to programs aimed at educational, workforce training, or economic development.*

* These numbers do not include tribes.



Grassroots EJ groups are not spread evenly across the Midwest.

Michigan has the highest number of grassroots EJ applicants (32), followed by Illinois (19), and Minnesota (12). The remaining states had 5 or fewer applications.



Minnesota is home to the largest number of applicants from Indigenous organizations (7) and tribes (1).

MWEJN received only 1 Indigenous group application each from Michigan, North Dakota, & South Dakota and 1 application from a tribe in Wisconsin.



While nearly all EJ and Indigenous/Native groups, and tribes are rooted and active in their local communities, many also engage at larger scales (despite minimal resources):

51% are active at in statewide efforts

25% are active regionally and nationally

21% are engaged in international efforts



Of the 9 applicants who work at the international scale:

2 are from Indigenous groups/tribes

2 are from Illinois

5 are from Michigan



Midwestern EJ groups who are well-known in national and international networks often lack visibility with state and regional funders and decision-makers.



EJ and Indigenous groups work in holistic ways.

Traditional funding silos (water, energy, food, etc.) do not align with the cross-sectional approach and people-centered values of EJ and Indigenous organizations.



Water was the most-cited area of concern that EJ groups address in connection with community health, economic stability, climate resiliency, and care for the earth and environment.



INDIGENOUS GROUPS: Issues of water and food are often discussed in context of cultural preservation/protection.

ILLINOIS: Respondents in Illinois reported the most varied answers for the category of health, indicating EJ grassroots groups have an inclusive understanding of health issues.

MICHIGAN: Water concerns in Michigan encompass a range of issues including water shut-offs, affordability, and lake/lakeshore health.



2020 has brought multiple, compounding challenges that have done the most damage to Indigenous and Native, Black, and Latinx communities.

Network partners note their current top concerns include the high rates of COVID-19 illness and related mortality; ongoing police violence; lack of mental health supports; water and electricity shutoffs; home evictions; and adequate childcare.



MWEJN's grassroots EJ partners are adapting by:

1. Deepening connections & solidarity
2. Finding new ways to support staff and volunteers
3. Transforming programs



4. Providing Mutual Aid (grassroots helping grassroots). MWEJN partners are providing and coordinating:

- o Direct cash Assistance
- o Food delivery/reciprocity
- o Water delivery
- o And much more



MWEJN will :

Increase general operating and emergency response funding for all grassroots groups (including those that serve Indigenous and Native communities) and tribes.

Support partner transitions to remote workspaces, which includes technology acquisition and training to use new programs.



Support relationship-building through gatherings, regular communication, and peer-learning opportunities

Convene EJ partners to develop a regional policy agenda.

Hold space for healing, grieving, and visioning a new future.

Thank you!

Midwest EJ Network Leadership Team:

Cecilia Martinez, Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy

Debra Taylor, We the People of Detroit

Kim Wasserman, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

Consultants: Victoria Loong & Jumana Vasi

