

# *Teen Spending Survey*

## Introduction

There has been much discussion and debate in the community about the proposed Trinity Site Development and other developments and whether Los Alamos has the spending power to support more retail development. There is also debate about what type of retail and services do we want as a community. Within that discussion, we have heard about how much income is lost here due to spending “off the hill”. As Youth Mobilizers, we wanted to study the buying habits of teens and how teens spend their money in Los Alamos. We desired to know where teens were getting their money; whether it was given to them by their parents or they received it elsewhere. We also wanted to know where and on what they normally spend it on. We wanted to know whether they spend their money at locally owned businesses and retail stores or outside of Los Alamos; including internet purchases. It was also important for us to know what sorts of things teens were spending most of their money on. Being teens in Los Alamos, we had a general idea of how teens were spending their money. We decided to form a survey questioning teens aging from 11-18 years. We met with leaders of the community such as, Barb Marcille and Kevin Holsapple. After discussing our survey plans with them, they gave us further questions to put on our survey. It is our desire to provide to community and business leaders a “youth voice” as to what retail services are desired in Los Alamos.

## Method

We first met with Barb Marcille, and she gave us many suggestions about how to administer the surveys. She suggested that we set up a table on Central Avenue, possibly outside of Starbucks, and ask passer bys to take a minute and fill out the survey. She also gave us the idea of putting the surveys online for students to take. We didn’t think this was a good idea because most students would not take the time to go online and fill out a survey. We then decided to give out the survey during advisement for the high school,

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and during lunch for the middle school. This way we would get plenty of students to fill out the survey and by receiving more, our results would be more representative of the teen population. Before we could hand out the surveys to the schools, we met with Grace Brown, the principal of the high school, and Gerry Washburn, the vice principal of the middle school. Ms. Brown was receptive to the idea of handing out the survey during advisement mainly because there is a lot of free time during it, and because of the content of the survey. After approaching Ms. Brown, she advised us to go have the athletic director and the head of advisement to revise it. Although there were concerns about the length of the survey, we got permission to hand it out anyway.

In order to administer the survey at the middle school, we had to meet with Gerry Washburn to get permission. Like Ms. Brown, Mr. Washburn was very responsive to the survey, and interested in seeing the results. We discussed the importance of it, and he told us to set up a table in the lunchroom so that we could pass out the surveys during lunch.

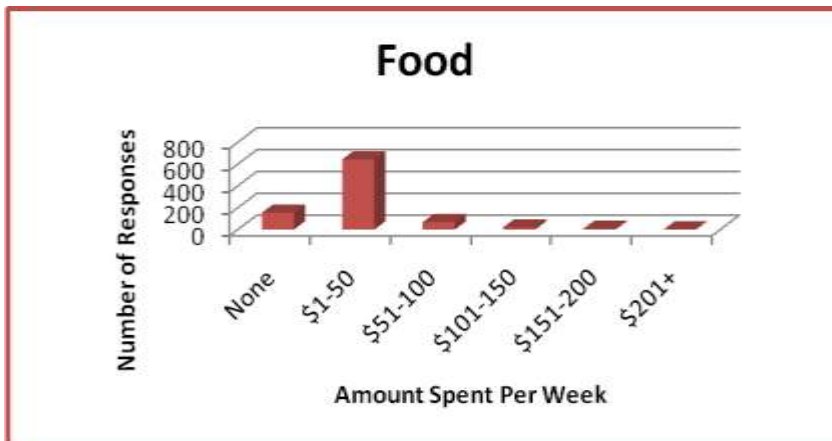
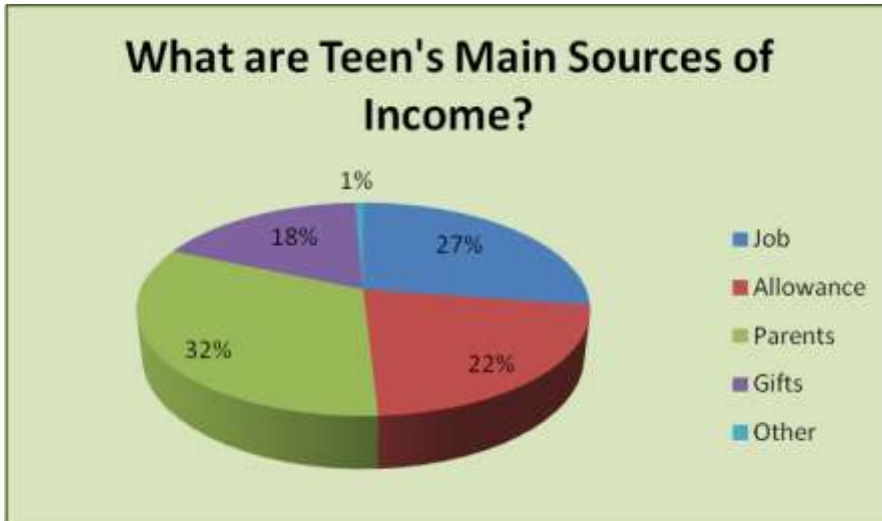
Once we gathered all the information, we developed questions and eventually revised them to fit onto a two page, anonymous survey. We started off by asking basic demographic questions, and then we asked several questions about spending habits and also about internet spending. We asked many opened ended questions and some closed ended to help get more direct information. The open ended questions primarily asked what stores and brands students preferred, and would like to see here in Los Alamos. The closed ended questions provided us with information such as where the students received and spent their money, their reasons for not purchasing things in Los Alamos, and the average amount of money they spent each week.

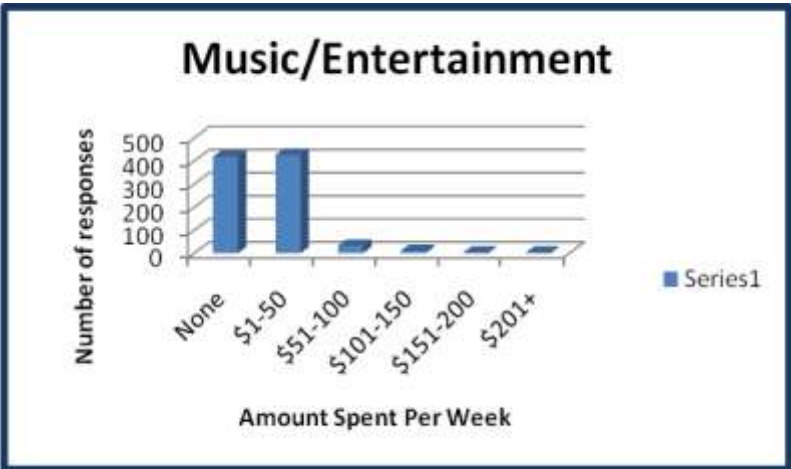
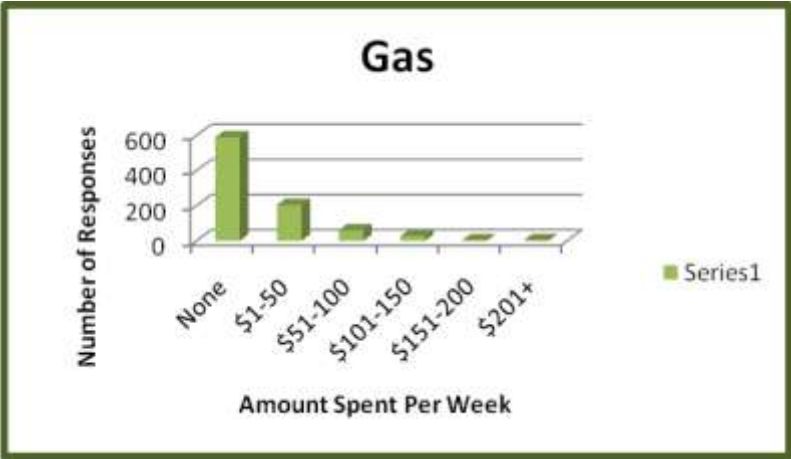
After we met with the head of advisement at the high school, we got a copy of the list of advisors and the number of advisees they have. We decided to distribute the survey to the middle school and to the high school so that we could get a relatively broad range of teens. At the middle school, we handed out the survey during lunch to seventh and eighth graders. Upon completion, they were allowed to have a piece of candy each as an incentive for taking the survey. At the high school, we handed out the survey during advisement which assured us that we would be surveying the vast majority of the school student body. Once we collected the surveys, we tallied them; keeping the high school surveys separate from the middle school surveys. We tallied by taking a blank survey and

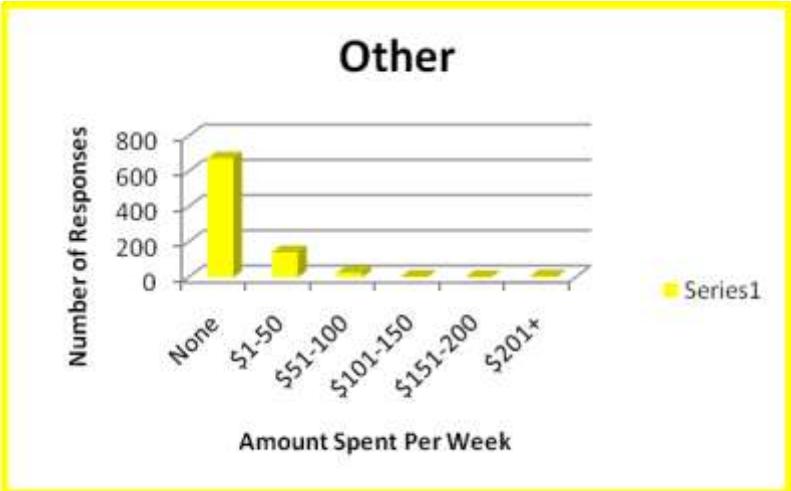
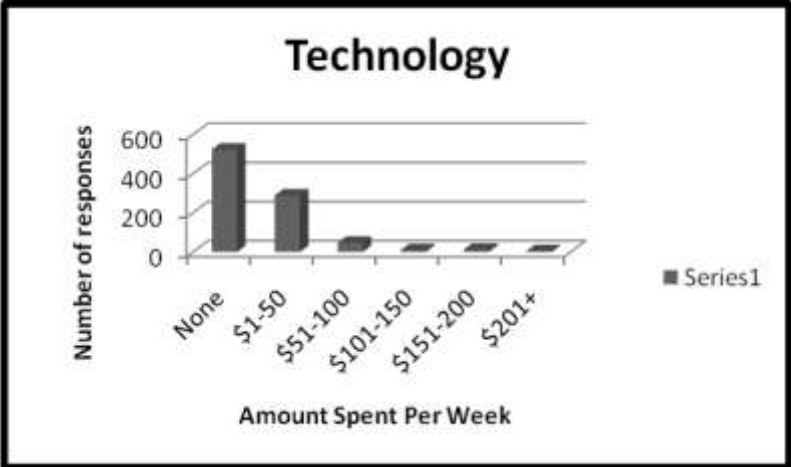
tallying all the answers on the sheet. The tallying of the surveys took about two weeks for us to accomplish.

### Data and Analysis

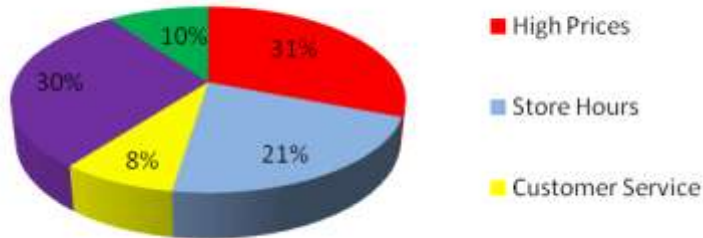
Out of the 1356 surveys we handed out, we got 899 back which is 66% return rate. Below are graphs of all the data we collected from the surveys.



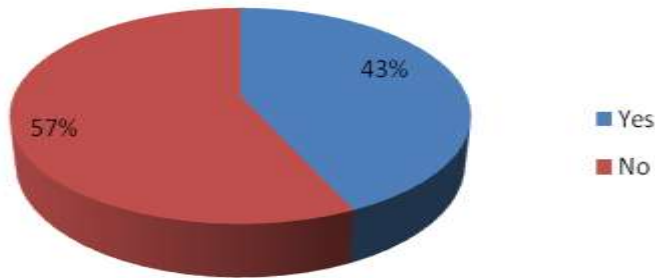




## What are the Main Obstacles to Spending Money in Los Alamos?

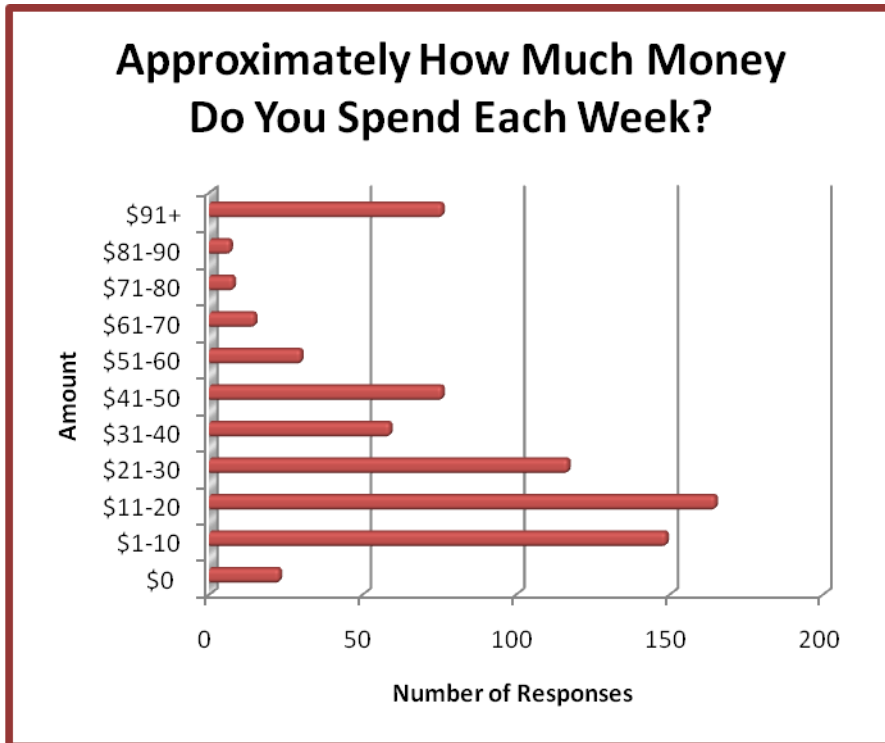


## Do You Purchase Items on the Internet?



## Why do You Shop on the Internet?





As the graphs show, most of the teens in Los Alamos receive money from their parents. Of the 899 teens surveyed:

- 72% spend \$1 to \$50 per week on food.
- 36% spend \$1 to \$50 per week on clothing/accessories.
- 23% spend \$1 to \$50 per week on gas.
- 47% spend \$1 to \$50 per week on music/entertainment.
- 32% spend \$1 to \$50 per week on technology.
- 37% spend \$1 to \$50 per week on recreation.

For the obstacles of spending money in Los Alamos, the majority of teens said that both high prices, store hours, and availability of merchandise were the main reasons why they tend to not purchase items in town.

When we asked whether they purchased items on the internet or not, the majority of teens said that they did not. This puzzled us because before seeing the results of the survey, we guessed that the majority of students did, in fact, purchase items online. Of

those who said that they did shop on the internet, the majority said that their main reason was due to the availability online. However, this could explain that most internet purchases require a credit card, which teens typically do not have.

Finally, when we asked the students to give an estimate of about how much money they spent each week, 18% said that they spent 11 to 20 dollars each week.

### Conclusion

The information we collected will be useful to not only the Los Alamos Chamber of Commerce, but also for the upcoming Trinity Site Development Project. The information may also help other local businesses find ways to improve the obstacles we found in the way of teenagers spending money in Los Alamos. For example; merchants may want to consider extended store hours with the knowledge that many teens are committed to other activities until 6 p.m.

Some of the questions that arise are whether or not we could have changed something in our process to receive better data. One problem we faced at the middle school was the students thought that we wanted them to describe the spending habits of their parents and families, but after clearing that up, the information we received was still helpful. Questions that arose with us that are more on the topic of teen spending were along the lines of students not being direct enough in answering some of the questions, such as store names and brands. We hoped to have more stores and brand names to work with and present in this report. Some suggestions of retailers that Los Alamos teens would like to see here are Target, Gamestop, Hollister, Trader Joe's, and a larger variety of fast food.

The survey information is important because it represents a broad range of teenagers throughout the County. We would like to extend a special thank you to Grace Brown and Gerry Washburn and other administrators for letting us distribute the survey through the schools, and to the teenagers who completed the surveys and helped us get the information we needed to show the power of the teen's dollar. We would also like to thank Barb Marcille for suggesting the spending survey as a first project and Joanna Davis for her guidance and expertise.



Finally, according to USA Today, teenagers are becoming more and more influential in parental spending habits. Up to 90% of grocery and apparel purchases are influenced by teens. Parents are asking their teens for advice on what type and what brands of computers, electronics, cell phones etc. to purchase, this according to USA Today.