Inclusion in Action

What Belonging Looks Like for the Developmental Disabilities Community

Prepared for the Snohomish County Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board

Apr 2026

About This Report

This report was developed to support Snohomish County's efforts to better understand and strengthen community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities (DD). It reflects a countywide assessment of lived experience, system conditions, and opportunities to improve access, participation, and belonging across the lifespan.

Prepared by LISC Puget Sound in partnership with Snohomish County, the report draws on a mixed-methods approach that included a community survey, interviews, and group engagement. The analysis and observations are grounded in input from individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, service providers, and community partners across the county. The report was authored by Jenny Walden, MSW, Principal Consultant at SageSpark Consulting, on behalf of LISC Puget Sound.

The development of this report was informed by ongoing engagement with the 2026 Snohomish County Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board. Their input helped shape priorities, elevate key themes, and ensure the findings reflect community voice and lived experience.

This report is intended to support planning, coordination, and action across Snohomish County. The findings and recommendations reflect community voice and are designed to guide systems, partners, and decision-makers in strengthening community inclusion.

Acknowledgements

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We are especially grateful to the individuals with developmental disabilities, families, caregivers, service providers, and community partners who shared their time, experiences, and perspectives. Their input is the foundation of this report and shaped not only the findings, but the direction of the recommendations that follow.

We also thank the 2026 Snohomish County Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board and County staff for their engagement, input, and ongoing commitment to strengthening community inclusion.

For More Information

For questions about this report, please contact the Snohomish County Human Services Department divisions listed below or use the contact information provided:

Developmental Disabilities
Early Support for Infant and Toddlers
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Executive Summary

This executive summary was co-developed with the 2026 Snohomish County Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board to reflect shared priorities and community voice. The full report was prepared by LISC Puget Sound.

This report examines what meaningful community inclusion looks like for people with developmental disabilities (DD) in Snohomish County and identifies clear opportunities to strengthen access, participation, and belonging. Grounded in input from more than 400 survey respondents, interviews, and community engagement, it centers lived experience as a foundation for system change.

Across all forms of engagement, a clear message emerged: being present in a community is not the same as belonging. Even when individuals with developmental disabilities are physically included in spaces, feeling welcomed, understood, and able to participate fully as themselves is not consistent and is often out of reach. This gap between access and belonging is one of the most critical challenges facing Snohomish County today.

What We Heard

Community members, especially individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, described a system that requires significant effort just to participate in everyday life. Barriers are interconnected and cumulative, shaping whether inclusion is possible at all. Key themes include:

- **Barriers to participation in community life:** Transportation limitations, cost, lack of information, and limited program options prevent people from engaging even when interest is high. These are not secondary issues. They are prerequisites for participation.
- **Caregiver burden and long-term sustainability:** Families are often the primary coordinators of inclusion, dedicated to managing services, transportation, and advocacy over decades. This reliance on unpaid labor is unsustainable and masks system gaps.
- **Gaps in communication and information sharing:** Many individuals and families reported not knowing what is available or how to access it. Fragmented systems and complex processes create unnecessary barriers and increase administrative burden.

- **Limited pathways for adult inclusion:** After leaving school, many individuals experience a “social cliff,” with fewer structured opportunities for connection, purpose, and daily engagement.

At the same time, the findings reinforce that isolation is not inevitable. Where systems are intentionally designed with clear expectations, trained staff, and built-in support, people report significantly higher levels of inclusion and participation.

What Inclusion Requires

Participants consistently emphasized that inclusion is not achieved through individual effort or isolated programs. It requires intentional design across systems and community spaces.

In practice, this means:

- Environments that anticipate sensory, communication, and behavioral needs
- Staff and community members who are prepared to respond with understanding and respect
- Clear, accessible information that reduces the burden of navigation
- Reliable transportation and affordable options that make participation possible

These aren’t extras; they’re what make belonging possible. Without them, participation depends on individual effort, persistence, and luck rather than environments that are designed to include everyone.

Centering Voice, Representation, and Co-Design

A central priority across the Advisory Board and community input is the need to elevate people with developmental disabilities as leaders, co-designers, and decision-makers.

Too often, systems are designed without meaningful input from those most impacted. This report affirms that lasting progress depends on shifting from consultation to shared ownership, ensuring that people with developmental disabilities are actively shaping policies, programs, and community spaces.

A Path Forward

This report translates community voice into a clear framework for action across systems including County government, service providers, transportation, community spaces, employers, schools, and governance bodies.

Priority areas for action include:

- Making systems easier to navigate through clearer communication and coordination
- Expanding flexible, community-based options for adults beyond employment pathways
- Treating transportation as essential infrastructure for inclusion
- Investing in training and universal design to create welcoming environments
- Supporting caregivers to ensure long-term sustainability
- Embedding co-design and representation into decision-making structures

These actions are interconnected and require shared responsibility across sectors. Progress in one area, such as transportation or service design, will not be effective without alignment in others. Meaningful inclusion depends on systems working together to reduce barriers and support participation in everyday community life.

Moving from Awareness to Action

Snohomish County is not starting from scratch. Strong examples of inclusion already exist in schools, community programs, and public spaces where design, staffing, and intention align. The opportunity now is to build on what is working, address persistent gaps, and scale practices that support belonging across the lifespan.

The findings in this report make clear that improving inclusion is both possible and necessary. With more intentional design, better coordination, and stronger support for individuals and families, Snohomish County can move toward a community where people with developmental disabilities are not only present, but welcomed and able to participate in everyday life.

Methodology and Process

To assess the current state of community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities (DD) in Snohomish County, LISC Puget Sound used a mixed-methods approach centered on lived experience and accessibility. The engagement process combined quantitative data from a countywide survey with qualitative insights from interviews and group engagement, providing a clear picture of where inclusion is working, where barriers persist, and where opportunities exist.

Community Survey

A simplified, accessible online survey was distributed countywide to individuals with DD, family members and caregivers, service providers, educators, and community members. The survey was intentionally designed to reduce barriers to participation: it was available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Korean, and Russian, written in plain language, and was simplified by using shorter sentences, visual cues, or more straightforward wording (please see Appendix B).

The Jotform platform was selected for its screen-reader compatibility, mobile-friendly interface, and ability to support keyboard navigation, text-to-speech tools, and assistive technology. Questions could be completed independently or with support, and logic flows minimized scrolling, cognitive load, and unnecessary text. Together, these design elements helped ensure that people with a wide range of communication styles and support needs could participate meaningfully and comfortably.

- **Total responses:** 437
- **Respondent roles:** people with DD, caregivers, providers, and allies
- **Geography:** responses from all five Snohomish County Council districts
- **Topics covered:** belonging and participation; availability and welcoming nature of community spaces; barriers to inclusion; supports currently used; areas of the county with fewer resources; and priorities for the future

Survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and weighted averages for Likert-scale items to accurately show patterns across respondent groups.

Survey Outreach and Awareness

Survey participation was driven primarily by direct outreach methods. Most respondents reported learning about the survey through email communications and mailed postcards, underscoring the effectiveness of targeted, direct contact with individuals, families, and service providers connected to the developmental disabilities community. Additional responses were generated through Snohomish

County communications, community-based organizations, and partner networks, while social media and informal word-of-mouth played a more limited role.

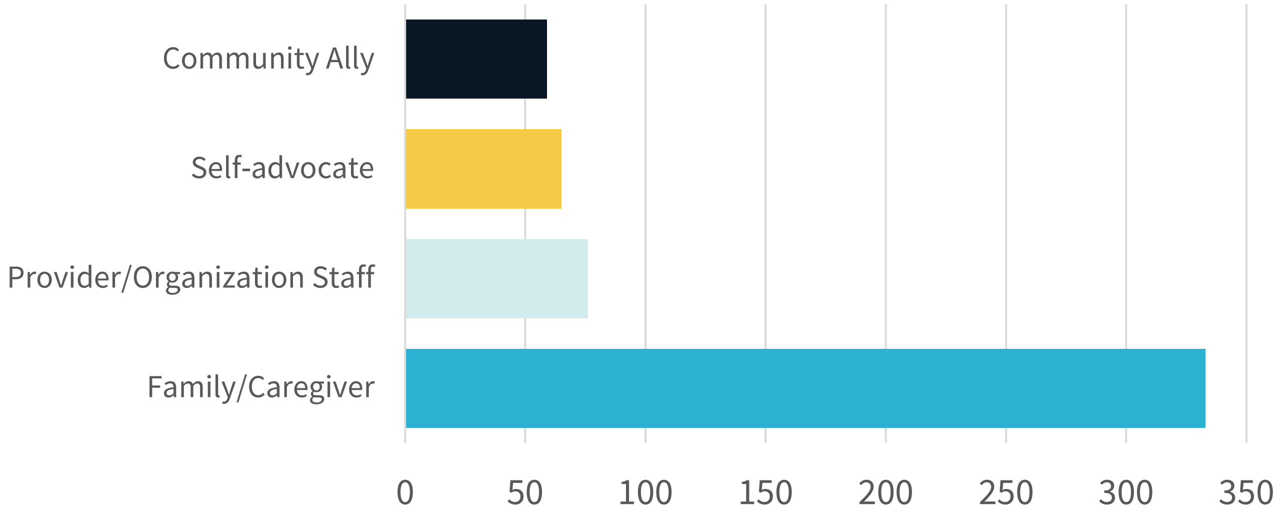
Who Responded to the Survey

Relationship to the Developmental Disability Community

The community survey reached a wide range of people who interact with or are directly part of the DD community in Snohomish County. Respondents included individuals with developmental disabilities, their family members and caregivers, service providers and organizational staff, and community allies who support inclusion in various settings. Together, these insights show that community inclusion is intersectional, and that individuals often navigate multiple overlapping factors that influence their ability to participate fully in community life.

The first chart below illustrates the distribution of respondents by their relationship to the DD community and provides important context for how to interpret the themes that follow.

Figure 1: Survey Question | How are you connected to the developmental disability community? *(You can choose more than one.)*



Of the respondents, 20% indicated more than one connection to the DD community (for example, being both a caregiver and a provider), and among self-advocates, 55% completed the survey independently while 45% participated with assistance. These insights highlight both the diversity of lived experience represented and the accessibility supports built into the survey process.

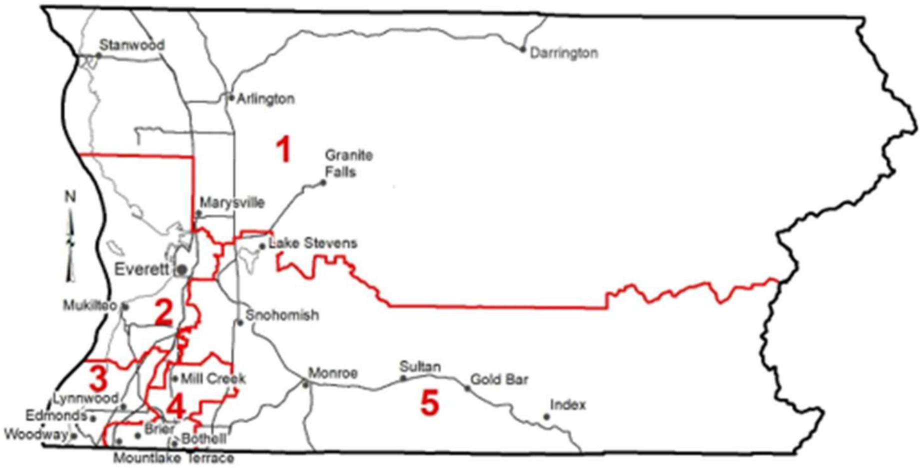
Geography

Survey responses came from every region of Snohomish County, with strong participation across all five council districts. The largest share of respondents live in the central and south-central parts of the county, areas that include Everett, Mukilteo, Lynnwood, Edmonds, Mill Creek, Lake Stevens, and Snohomish, reflecting both higher population density and greater concentrations of DD-serving programs. North County communities (such as Arlington and Marysville) were also well represented, while East County respondents provided important insight from more rural areas where access to inclusive programs and transportation can be more limited. A small number of participants lived outside Snohomish County but were closely connected through caregiving or service roles. Together, this geographic mix ensures that the findings reflect experiences across diverse communities, from urban hubs to rural towns.

Figure 2: Survey Question | What is your zip code?

District	**Respondents (Percent of Total)**	**ZIP Codes Included**
District 1 – North County	18.5%	98223, 98270, 98292, 98271, 98252, 98282
District 2 – Everett / Mukilteo	23.7%	98208, 98201, 98204, 98203, 98275, 98087, 98205
District 3 – Edmonds / Lynnwood / MLT	20.7%	98026, 98036, 98037, 98020, 98043, 98072
District 4 – Lake Stevens / Snohomish / Mill Creek	26.3%	98258, 98012, 98021, 98290, 98296, 98011
District 5 – East County	6.6%	98272, 98294, 98241, 98251
Outside Snohomish County	4.2%	Skagit, Camano, Shoreline, etc.

Figure 3: Snohomish County Council District Map

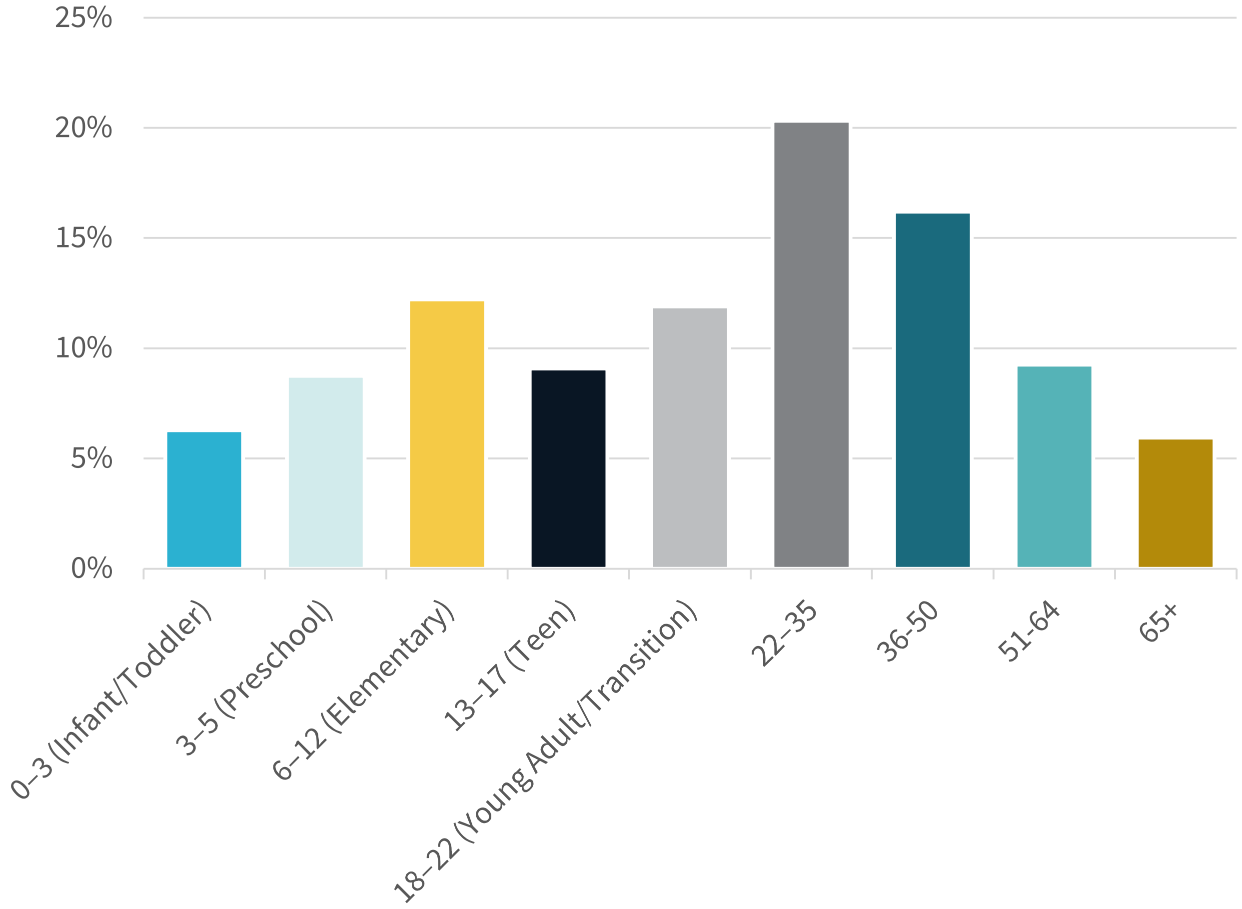


Age Ranges

Survey responses reflected experiences across the full lifespan, with strong participation from families and providers supporting adults as well as youth. The most commonly represented age group was 22–35, followed by 36–50, indicating robust input about the needs of adults navigating employment, community participation, and independent living. At the same time, meaningful representation from early childhood through high school, spanning infants and toddlers, preschoolers, elementary-age children, and teens, ensures that the survey captures the experiences of families across developmental stages.

Responses related to older adults (51–64 and 65+) also highlight that inclusion needs continue well beyond school and transition years. This broad age distribution shows that community inclusion challenges and opportunities extend across the lifespan, and that solutions must be adaptable to different stages of life, support needs, and family circumstances.

Figure 4: Survey Question | Age range of the person with a developmental disability *(Select the age that best describes the person(s) whose experience you are reflecting. If you are a service provider and work across age groups, you can select more than one. Choose all that apply)*



Race & Ethnicity

Survey respondents represented a wide range of racial and ethnic identities, though participation was not evenly proportional to the broader Snohomish County population. White respondents comprised the majority of participants and were slightly under-represented relative to county demographics. Several communities of color, including Asian/Asian American, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino respondents, were notably under-represented in the survey, mirroring long-standing outreach and accessibility challenges identified by both families and providers. At the same time, multi-racial respondents participated at more than twice their proportion in the general population, suggesting that individuals and families with intersecting identities can be more engaged in community inclusion efforts or may experience unique barriers that motivated participation in the survey.

These representation patterns underscore the importance of continued, culturally responsive outreach strategies to ensure that future engagement efforts reflect the full racial and ethnic diversity of Snohomish County. They also demonstrate the need to pair quantitative findings with qualitative input from underrepresented groups to avoid reinforcing disparities and to center perspectives that are too often missing from disability and community inclusion planning.

Figure 5: Survey Question | Race or Ethnicity *(Choose all that apply)*

Identity Category	**Survey % of Respondents**	**Snohomish County Population (ACS 2023)**	**Over / Under Representation**
White (only)	60.28%	63.50%	Slightly under-represented
Asian/Asian-American (only)	7.24%	12.60%	Under-represented
Black/African American (only)	0.93%	3.40%	Under-represented
Hispanic/Latino (only)	5.61%	11.30%	Under-represented
American Indian/Alaska Native (only)	1.17%	1.50%	Close to proportional
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (only)	0.47%	0.60%	Close to proportional
Middle Eastern/North African (only)	0.23%	~0.5%	Proportionally similar
Other (only)	0.93%	0.50%	Slightly over-represented
Prefer not to say (only)	7.71%	N/A	Not comparable
Multi-racial (selected >1 identity)	15.42%	6.60%	Over-represented

Intersectional Identities

Survey respondents described a range of identities and lived experiences that influence how they, or the people they support, feel included in their communities. These included additional disabilities or health conditions, such as multiple disabilities, sensory needs, chronic health issues, and communication differences. Many also identified neurodivergence, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other cognitive differences that shape how they experience and access community spaces. Respondents also highlighted language and cultural identity, especially for individuals who speak languages other than English or who come from immigrant or first-generation families.

Participants additionally noted the importance of LGBTQ+ identities, race and ethnicity, and caregiver or family circumstances, such as caregiver disability, single parenthood, or financial strain, in shaping access, comfort, and belonging. Finally, many pointed to structural barriers like transportation, limited accessible or sensory-friendly spaces, and housing instability.

Engagement Session at the Transition Kick-Off

LISC Puget Sound facilitated a provider-only engagement session at the Snohomish County Transition Kick-Off in August 2025, using a two-part interactive activity to surface system-level insights.

In the first activity, providers individually identified the most common barriers and challenges they see families and individuals with developmental disabilities facing, which LISC then organized into thematic clusters. Later in the day, the group reconvened to build on those themes by proposing concrete solutions; again, participants generated ideas individually before collectively grouping them

into solution themes such as improved communication supports, stronger transition pathways, and better system coordination.

This engagement captured frontline perspectives from providers working across education, employment, and community services, and the resulting themes informed the broader analysis of inclusion needs and opportunities in Snohomish County.

Insights from the Transition Kick-Off were used primarily to contextualize system-level barriers, funding constraints, and policy implications that shape the lived experiences described by individuals with developmental disabilities and families.

Key Informant Interviews

LISC Puget Sound conducted 20 interviews with individuals, families & caregivers, service providers, advocates, and system partners. Interviewees were selected to represent a range of perspectives and expertise, including employment, education, day programs, rural access, and community engagement. These conversations provided essential context about system-level barriers, gaps in service infrastructure, and opportunities for countywide coordination.

Data Synthesis and Theme Development

Quantitative data from the survey and qualitative insights from focus groups, interviews, and open-ended responses “LISC Puget Sound coded and analyzed the data using a thematic approach. Findings were compared across data sources to identify recurring patterns, as well as unique insights that highlight unmet needs and emerging opportunities.

Themes were refined through iterative review, with attention to:

- How frequently issues were raised
- The intensity and impact of experiences described
- Alignment across individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and providers
- The presence of clear implications for system-level action

Findings

Overview

The findings presented reflect patterns that emerged across surveys, interviews, and group engagement with people with developmental disabilities, caregivers, service providers, and community stakeholders throughout Snohomish County. Together, these data sources provide both breadth and depth, allowing this assessment to capture not only how frequently barriers and supports are experienced, but how they shape daily life across different ages, geographies, and levels of support need.

The themes that follow are deeply interconnected. Issues related to communication, sensory environments, systems navigation, caregiving, geography, and the transition to adulthood frequently co-occur and reinforce one another. While each theme is presented separately for clarity, participants consistently described these challenges as part of a broader set of conditions that collectively influence whether inclusion is possible in everyday community settings.

Isolation and Belonging Across the Lifespan

Social isolation emerged as the most pervasive and consistently cited experience shaping daily life for people with developmental disabilities and their families. Participants described isolation not simply as loneliness, but as the absence of meaningful roles, relationships, and opportunities for everyday participation in community life. This isolation was described as cumulative, frequently intensifying over time rather than easing as individuals aged or families gained experience navigating systems.

> *"It wasn't one big moment. It was hundreds of small ones that added up until we just stayed home."*

Early exclusion and family withdrawal

For many caregivers, isolation began in early childhood. Parents described subtle but persistent exclusion from informal community spaces such as birthday parties, playgroups, school events, and neighborhood gatherings after others encountered their child's communication differences, sensory needs, or behaviors. These experiences were rarely framed as explicit rejection; instead, families described a pattern of social distance, discomfort, or avoidance by others that became increasingly difficult to ignore.

Over time, these interactions shaped family behavior. Many caregivers described making calculated decisions to stop attending events or public spaces to protect their child, and themselves, from repeated emotional harm. Several parents noted that the effort required to prepare for outings, advocate for understanding, and manage public reactions ultimately outweighed the benefit of participation. As one parent shared, *"It wasn't one big moment. It was hundreds of small ones that added up until we just stayed home."*

"School Works—Until It Doesn't" – Parent Respondent

What the data shows

During the school years, respondents report stronger alignment between the importance and availability of inclusive spaces, along with higher levels of inclusion across schools and other structured environments. Compared to adulthood, gaps are smaller and experiences of participation are more consistent.

Why this stands out

Schools and school-linked programs are among the few systems where inclusion is mandated, structured, and resourced. Predictable routines, defined responsibility, and required accommodations appear to buffer against isolation during this period.

Why this matters

This contrast demonstrates that:

- Isolation is not inevitable
- Inclusion improves when systems are intentionally designed and accountable
- The sharp drop after school reflects a loss of structure, not a loss of need, interest, or capacity

Figure 6: Inclusion and Participation Across Community Settings

Note: Inclusion levels are based on average responses to Question 13 (“How included do these make you feel?”) using a 1–5 scale. Participation levels reflect the percentage of respondents who reported current involvement in each setting in Question 14. High / Medium / Low designations reflect relative comparisons across settings, not fixed thresholds, and are intended to highlight contrasts between where people feel the most included and where participation is most limited.

Community Setting	Avg. “Feels Included” (Q13)	% Currently Involved (Q14)	Gap Insight
Peer or social groups	High	Low	Strong sense of belonging, limited access
Inclusive community events	High	Low	Designed for inclusion but hard to reach or not available
Faith or spiritual groups	High	Low-Moderate	Welcoming, but uneven participation
Jobs or volunteering	Moderate	Moderate	Participation driven by structure
School or learning places	Moderate	High	Required participation, mixed belonging

The post-21 “social cliff”

Isolation deepened significantly in adulthood. Across interviews and survey responses, participants described a dramatic contraction of social networks after age 21, when school-based communities and structured daily environments end. Very few adult programs or peer spaces exist to replace these connections, particularly for individuals who are not pursuing full-time employment.

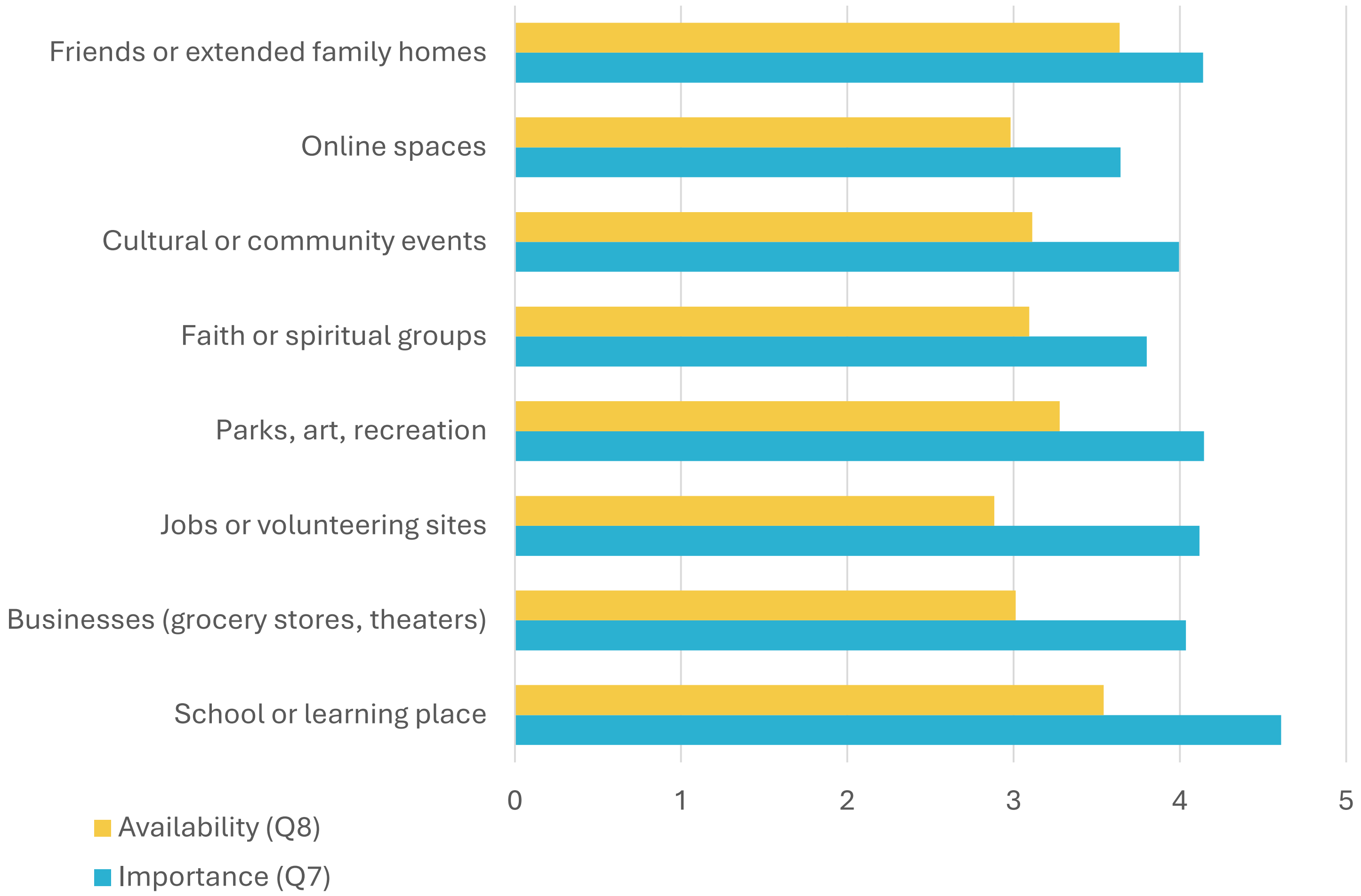
Adults with developmental disabilities rely primarily on paid staff for social interaction, a reality summarized repeatedly by families as “their friends are staff.” While participants emphasized that staff relationships are important and often caring, they also stressed that these relationships are not self-directed, reciprocal, or enduring in the same way as friendships. The absence of organic peer relationships was described as a profound loss that reshaped expectations for adulthood.

Desire for connection, not just services

Survey results reinforce this pattern of unmet desire. Respondents rated a wide range of spaces such as schools, businesses, parks, cultural events, faith communities, online spaces, and even informal settings like friends’ homes as highly important for helping people with developmental disabilities feel included. Across every category, importance exceeded availability, indicating that the challenge is not lack of interest or motivation, but a shortage of accessible, welcoming opportunities.

Adults with developmental disabilities and families consistently emphasized wanting connection in everyday community spaces, not just in disability-specific programs. The gap shown here reflects a strong desire for belonging, routines, and relationships in places where people feel known and valued paired with frustration that these opportunities are not consistently available.

Figure 7: Importance Versus Availability of Community Settings for Inclusion



Communication Access as the Foundation of Inclusion

Participants consistently emphasized that communication access is foundational to inclusion. Without reliable, respectful ways to communicate, through spoken language, Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC), American Sign Language (ASL), visual supports, or other modalities, participation in community life becomes limited or impossible. Communication barriers were described across nearly all settings, including employment, recreation, service navigation, health care, and informal social spaces.

Being misunderstood and talked over

Adults with developmental disabilities and caregivers described frequent experiences of being misunderstood, ignored, or excluded from decision-making because others lacked the skills or patience to engage with different communication styles. Participants shared that assumptions about comprehension or capacity frequently led to conversations happening *around* them rather than *with* them.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing participants described limited access to interpreters, captioning, or staff trained in basic communication supports. Others noted that communication accommodations were inconsistently provided, particularly during moments of stress, transition, or behavioral escalation, precisely when communication support was most critical.

Communication breakdowns and cascading consequences

Providers and employers acknowledged that communication breakdowns frequently lead to avoidable negative outcomes, including program exits, job loss, or disciplinary responses. In many cases, behaviors interpreted as noncompliance or disengagement were later understood as responses to confusion, overload, or unmet communication needs.

> *"Interpreter is not the same as someone actually talking to her. Inclusion is communication — not translation."*

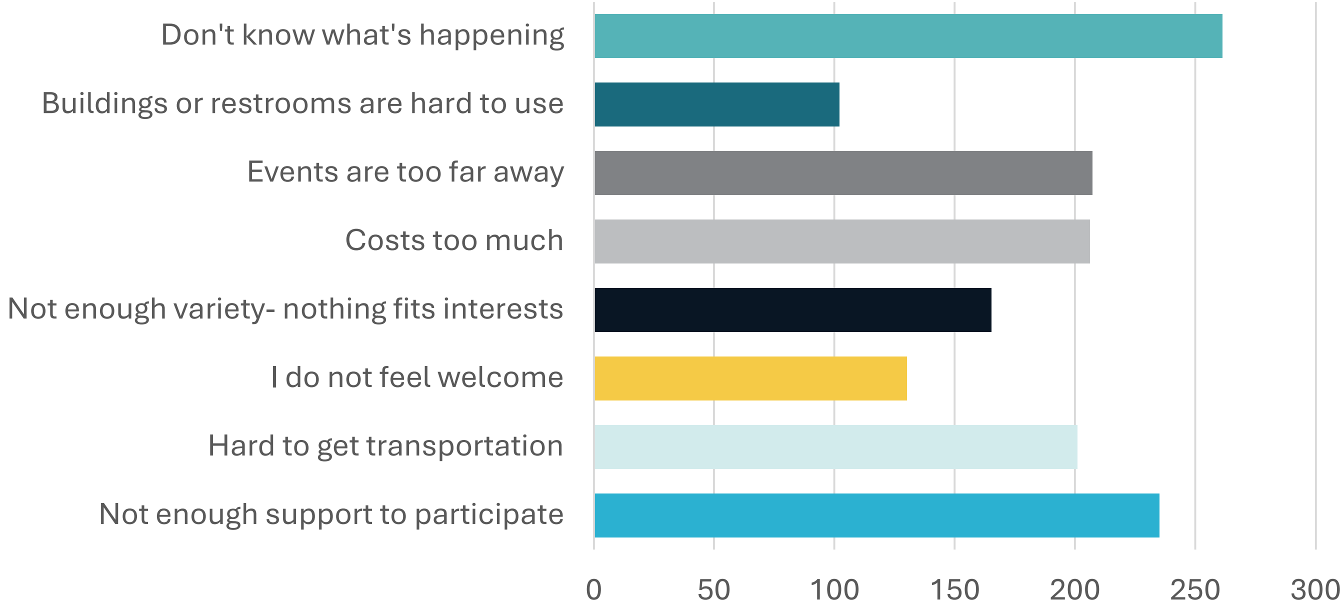
Participants emphasized that communication failures triggered a cascade: misunderstandings led to behavioral responses, which then led to exclusion from programs or spaces. Once removed, re-entry was often difficult or impossible.

Communication barriers hidden in plain sight

Survey responses reinforce these patterns, even when communication was not named explicitly. Among the most frequently cited barriers to inclusion were *"don't know what's happening"* and *"not enough support to participate."* Participants also identified challenges related to navigating events, understanding expectations, and accessing information in accessible formats.

Taken together, these responses reflect communication access challenges before, during, and after participation, including how information is shared, how expectations are communicated, and whether support is available to interpret and respond in real time. These barriers are not about motivation or interest; they point to gaps in how communities design communication and navigation supports for inclusion.

Figure 8: Survey Question | Based on your perspective, what makes it hard for people with DD to feel included in your community? *(Choose all that apply)*



Communication as design, not accommodation

Participants consistently framed communication access not as a special accommodation, but as a basic design requirement. When systems, staff, and environments were prepared to support diverse communication needs, participation improved across settings. When they were not, exclusion occurred regardless of intent.

Psychological Safety, Authenticity, and Social Acceptance

Participants consistently emphasized that inclusion is shaped not only by physical access or formal accommodations, but by whether people feel psychologically safe and socially accepted in community spaces. Many adults with developmental disabilities described inclusion as conditional, available only when they were quiet, compliant, or able to mask key aspects of themselves. When participation required constant self-monitoring or suppression of emotion, it was described as fragile and unsustainable.

Conditional welcome and masking

Adults with developmental disabilities and caregivers described environments where presence was tolerated only under narrow behavioral expectations. Participants shared that community spaces, including recreation programs, events, and even inclusive-designated activities, often signaled implicit rules about acceptable behavior. Deviations from those expectations, particularly related to emotional expression or sensory regulation, frequently led to scrutiny, removal, or subtle pressure to leave.

What Creates Psychological Safety

What respondents emphasized most

In open-ended responses, participants consistently described social and emotional conditions, not physical features alone, as the most important factors supporting inclusion.

Across responses, the most frequently cited elements included:

- Predictability and clarity (knowing what will happen, clear expectations)
- Non-judgmental responses from staff and community members
- Permission to express emotion and regulate without punishment
- Visible signals of welcome and support
- Supportive accompaniment to help navigate spaces and expectations

Notably, few responses focused only on physical accessibility. Instead, respondents emphasized how people respond when needs arise.

Why this matters

These responses reinforce that psychological safety is actively created through social norms, staff behavior, and shared responsibility. When these conditions are present, participation becomes possible, even in imperfect environments.

Several adults described learning to “mask” in order to remain included, suppressing stimming, limiting communication, or avoiding expressing frustration or excitement. While masking sometimes allowed short-term participation, participants emphasized that it came at a cost to mental health and well-being. Caregivers noted that the effort required to maintain this façade resulted in exhaustion or withdrawal over time.

Public judgment and social signaling

Caregivers described public reactions such as staring, whispered comments, unsolicited advice, or visible discomfort, as powerful signals that shaped decisions about where to go and what to attempt. These reactions were particularly impactful in unstructured community settings such as parks, festivals, stores, or social gatherings, where expectations were ambiguous and staff support was limited.

Over time, families described internalizing these social signals. Several shared that they preemptively avoided spaces where they anticipated judgment, even if those spaces were technically accessible. Participants emphasized that exclusion was communicated indirectly, through tone, body language, or silence, rather than explicit denial of access.

Belonging as emotional permission

For many participants, true inclusion was defined by the ability to express a full range of human emotions such as joy, frustration, excitement, and overwhelm without fear of punishment or removal. Adults with developmental disabilities emphasized that being “allowed to be there” was not the same as being welcomed. Belonging required emotional permission and shared responsibility for comfort, rather than placing the burden solely on the individual or their caregiver.

Without psychological safety and acceptance, physical access alone does not translate into meaningful participation.

Sensory, Safety, and Behavioral Support Needs Shape Participation

Sensory environments, safety considerations, and behavioral support needs emerged as foundational determinants of whether participation in community life was possible. Across interviews and survey responses, participants emphasized that the physical and sensory conditions of a space mattered more than the activity itself. When environments were overwhelming, unpredictable, or unsafe, inclusion broke down before it could begin.

Sensory overload as a barrier to access

Caregivers and adults with developmental disabilities described how noise, crowds, lighting, strong smells, and visual clutter could quickly escalate stress or dysregulation. Participants emphasized that many community spaces, such as festivals, recreation centers, businesses, and public events, were designed without consideration for sensory diversity.

Several caregivers shared that even spaces intended to be inclusive became inaccessible when sensory needs were not anticipated. The absence of quiet areas, predictable routines, or sensory accommodations regularly resulted in shortened visits or complete withdrawal from activities.

> *“If every community event had a quiet room, we could actually go. Right now, it’s just too much”*

Safety concerns and constant vigilance

Safety considerations were a dominant theme for many families, particularly those supporting individuals with elopement risk, limited danger awareness, or heightened anxiety. Caregivers described community outings as requiring constant vigilance, advance planning, and contingency strategies to manage safety risks.

When supports were unavailable or staff were unprepared, families described being asked to leave or being placed in situations where safety became unmanageable. Over time, these experiences reinforced patterns of avoidance and reduced willingness to attempt new activities.

Behavior as communication

Providers and caregivers consistently emphasized that behaviors commonly perceived as disruptive or inappropriate were often signals of unmet sensory, communication, or safety needs. However, many community programs lacked training in sensory-informed or trauma-informed approaches, leading to responses that prioritized control or exclusion rather than support.

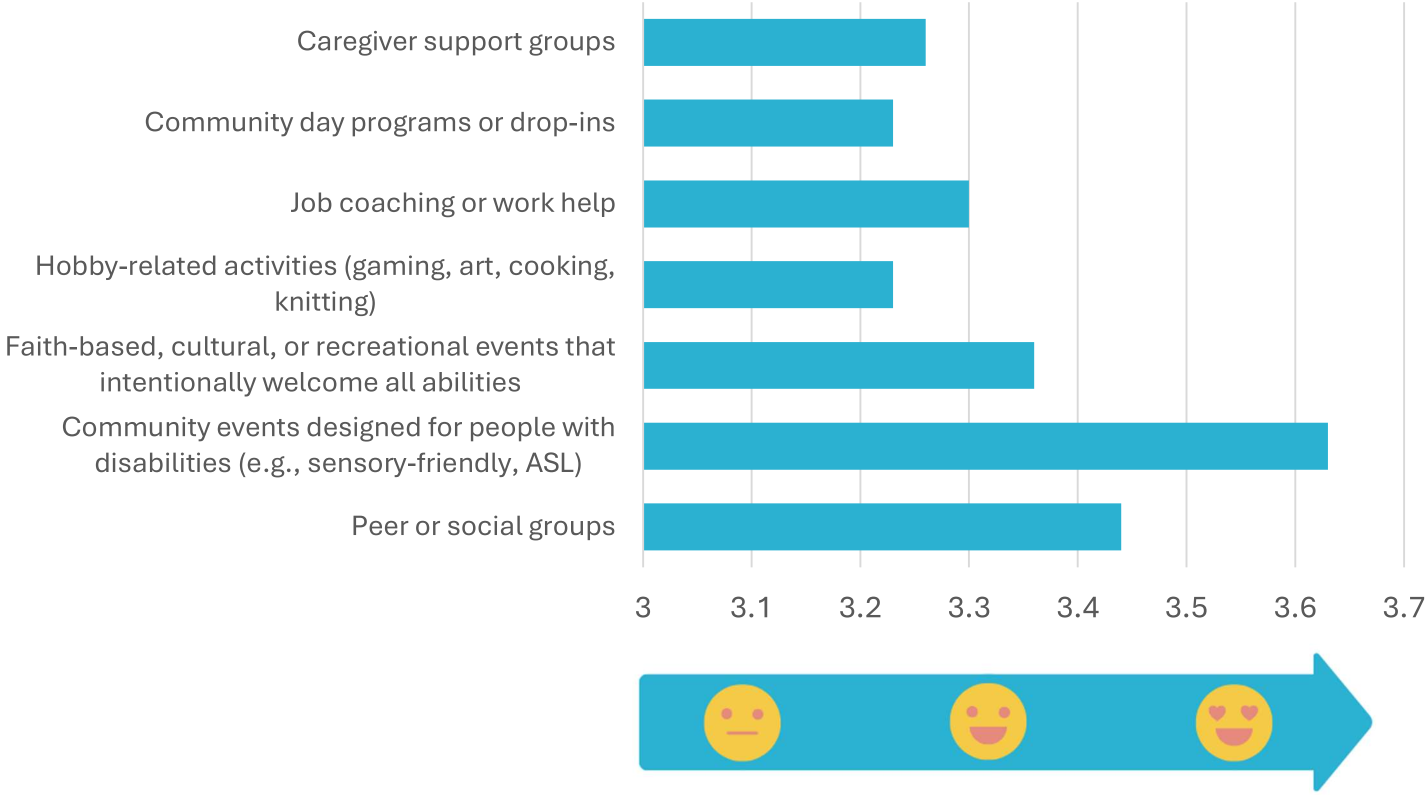
Participants described how behavioral incidents frequently resulted in removal from programs or spaces, with little effort to adapt the environment or provide additional supports. Once excluded, re-entry was difficult, further limiting participation.

The impact of supportive design

Participants shared that when environments were designed with sensory flexibility, clear expectations, and responsive supports, participation increased dramatically. Simple design elements, such as predictable schedules, quiet spaces, staff training, and proactive safety planning, were described as transformative.

Figure 9: Survey Question | How included do these make you feel?

Note: To make the survey more accessible, participants were asked to respond using a 5-point “smiley face” scale. This visual scale was designed to support understanding and allow participants to easily express how included they feel.



Fragmented Systems and the Burden of Navigation

Families and providers consistently described public systems intended to support people with developmental disabilities as fragmented, complex, and difficult to navigate. Rather than functioning as a coordinated continuum, systems related to education, developmental disability services, employment, health care, and community supports operate with separate eligibility rules, timelines, and points of entry. As a result, families shoulder the responsibility of connecting services, filling gaps, and maintaining continuity over time.

Navigating siloed systems

Caregivers described spending significant time and energy managing paperwork, tracking eligibility requirements, attending meetings, and advocating for services across multiple systems. Many emphasized that access to supports depended less on formal eligibility and more on persistence, institutional knowledge, and the ability to navigate bureaucratic processes. Families without the time, language access, or prior experience were often at a disadvantage.

Why Some Families Are Not Using DDCS Services

What respondents reported most frequently

Open-ended survey responses indicate that non-use of DDCS services is driven primarily by system access barriers, not lack of need or interest.

Across responses, participants most frequently cited:

- Application and reapplication processes that are difficult, confusing, and time-consuming
- Long waitlists, delayed approvals, and eligibility cliffs—particularly during adulthood
- Inability to actually use approved services due to provider shortages, turnover, or programs that do not accept DDCS funding
- Limited information about what services are available or how to navigate them
- Negative prior experiences or fear of consequences when engaging with the system

Many respondents described being technically eligible but unable to access meaningful support in practice.

Why this matters

These findings show that non-use of DDCS services reflects system design and capacity limitations, not lack of demand. Families and adults with developmental disabilities consistently expressed the need for support, while describing barriers that make services difficult to access, sustain, or trust.

Several caregivers shared that even when services technically existed, understanding how to access them, or how they interacted with one another, was confusing and overwhelming. Participants described a system where "everything is its own maze," with few clear guideposts and limited proactive outreach.

Providers participating in the Transition Kick-Off engagement reinforced that administrative complexity itself functions as a barrier to inclusion. Participants described how overlapping eligibility rules, duplicative applications, and siloed intake processes across agencies create friction that excludes families long before services begin. Rather than acting as gateways to support, these processes were described as "red tape" that disproportionately impacts families with limited time, language access, or system knowledge. Providers emphasized that reducing administrative burden through clearer pathways, shared intake processes, and stronger interagency coordination would meaningfully increase access to services without requiring new programs or individual resilience.

Transition points as system failure moments

System fragmentation was particularly evident during transition points, including the shift from school-based services to adult systems, changes in eligibility status, or moves between providers. Participants described these moments as periods of heightened instability, when supports were reduced or interrupted precisely when individuals and families needed continuity.

Providers acknowledged that coordination across systems such as DDCS, DVR, school districts, and community-based organizations was inconsistent and often dependent on informal relationships rather than formal processes. This lack of alignment contributed to service gaps, duplication of effort, and missed opportunities for early support.

> *"You need a degree just to understand the DDCS system. Families leave benefits on the table because it's impossible to navigate."*

The invisible labor of coordination

Caregivers emphasized that system navigation is not a one-time task, but an ongoing responsibility that persists across the lifespan. Many described managing systems as a second full-time job, one that requires emotional labor, advocacy skills, and constant vigilance. This burden intensified as individuals aged, supports narrowed, or caregiving responsibilities increased.

Providers confirmed that families frequently absorb the consequences of system fragmentation, stepping in to coordinate services, provide transportation, or fill gaps when formal supports fall short. Over time, this reliance on unpaid caregiver labor becomes normalized, masking the true cost of fragmented systems.

Consequences of complexity

Participants described how system complexity directly limits participation and inclusion. Missed services, delayed supports, and unclear pathways resulted in isolation, caregiver burnout, or crisis-driven responses. In many cases, families described feeling blamed for system failures they were struggling to manage.

These findings illustrate that system fragmentation is not merely an administrative challenge, but a structural barrier to inclusion that shapes daily life for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Figure 10: Awareness and Use of Developmental Disabilities Community Services (DDCS) Services by Race/Ethnicity

Awareness / Use	White respondents	Respondents of color
Currently receive or help someone receive DDCS services	77.00%	62.60%
Heard of DDCS but don’t use services	11.60%	19.60%
Have not heard of DDCS	5.70%	10.30%
Not sure	5.70%	7.50%

Adult Day Programs and the “Missing Middle” of Supports

Participants described a significant gap in adult day and community-based supports, particularly for individuals with moderate support needs who do not fit neatly into existing service categories. While systems prioritize either competitive employment or intensive care, many adults with developmental disabilities seek structured daytime activities that offer social connection, purpose, and meaningful engagement without the expectations or demands of full-time work.

The collapse of adult day options

Families and providers reported closures, reduced capacity, and long waitlists for adult day programs across the county. Several participants described the loss of long-standing programs or the narrowing of eligibility criteria, leaving individuals with few—or no—viable options for daytime engagement.

These losses were described as deeply destabilizing. For many adults, adult day programs provided not only routine and activity, but community, identity, and social connection. When programs closed or downsized, participants described abrupt transitions to long periods at home with little structure.

Falling between systems

Participants frequently referred to adults with moderate support needs as “falling through the cracks.” These individuals often require more support than typical community recreation programs can provide, but do not qualify for, or desire, more intensive care settings. Employment pathways, while meaningful for some, were described as unrealistic or inappropriate for others due to support needs, health conditions, or personal preference.

Families emphasized that the absence of alternatives forced false choices: remain isolated at home, attempt employment without sufficient support, or rely entirely on caregivers for daytime structure. Providers echoed these concerns, noting that the system lacks a coherent pathway for adults seeking social participation without employment as the primary goal.

Funding and service design constraints

Transition Kick-Off participants emphasized that the lack of flexible adult day and community-based options is closely tied to current funding structures and service definitions. Providers described community inclusion services as constrained by rate levels and payment models that limit staffing flexibility, transportation coverage, and the ability to offer varied daytime activities. As a result, many programs are unable to meet the needs of adults who seek social connection and meaningful engagement outside of employment-focused pathways. Participants stressed that without adjustments to community inclusion funding and service design, adults with moderate support needs will continue to fall between systems, reinforcing isolation rather than expanding choice.

Impact on families and inclusion

The absence of adult day options places significant strain on caregivers, many of whom must reduce work hours, leave the workforce, or juggle caregiving alongside other responsibilities. Caregivers described the emotional toll of watching adults lose skills, confidence, and connection in the absence of meaningful engagement.

The need for a broader continuum

Participants emphasized that adult day programs should not be viewed as outdated or secondary, but as a critical component of a broader continuum of inclusive supports. Meaningful inclusion, they argued, requires multiple pathways that reflect diverse abilities, interests, and life goals. These findings highlight a structural gap in how adult supports are designed and funded which cannot be addressed solely through employment-focused solutions.

Employment as One Pathway to Inclusion

Employment was widely viewed as an important pathway to inclusion, dignity, and economic participation, but participants consistently emphasized that it is one pathway, not the only pathway, and not an appropriate goal for everyone at every stage of life. Adults with developmental disabilities expressed interest in work, contribution, and purpose, while also describing substantial barriers that limit access to and sustainability of employment opportunities.

Interest in work, constrained by design

Many adults with developmental disabilities described wanting to work and contribute meaningfully to their communities. However, participants noted that traditional employment systems are designed in ways that exclude them before they have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills. Standard hiring practices, such as competitive interviews, rigid schedules, and productivity expectations, were described as misaligned with the needs and strengths of many individuals with developmental disabilities.

Providers acknowledged that without intentional accommodations, many capable individuals are screened out early in the hiring process. Respondents emphasized that exclusion occurs not because of inability to work, but because workplaces are not designed to be flexible or supportive.

> *"People want real jobs, but the system punishes them for earning money. For every $2 they make, their benefits go down."*

Fear of losing benefits

A major barrier to employment cited across interviews and survey responses was fear of losing public benefits. Families and self-advocates described concerns about losing health care, income supports, or housing stability if employment income exceeded eligibility thresholds. This fear was particularly acute for individuals with complex medical or support needs, for whom benefit loss posed significant risk.

Participants noted that benefit rules were difficult to understand and that guidance on how employment interacts with benefits was often unclear or inconsistent. As a result, many individuals and families described avoiding employment opportunities altogether or limiting hours to minimize risk.

Support gaps and sustainability

Respondents emphasized that employment success depends on access to ongoing supports, including job coaching, transportation, and workplace accommodations. When these supports were available and consistent, individuals were more likely to obtain and retain employment. However, many described support services as time-limited, fragmented, or difficult to sustain.

Providers noted that employment outcomes were frequently treated as endpoints rather than part of an ongoing support continuum. When challenges arose after placement, individuals were sometimes left without sufficient assistance to adapt or problem-solve, leading to job loss and discouragement.

Employment within a broader continuum

Across stakeholder groups, participants emphasized that employment should be one option within a broader range of inclusive opportunities. Framing employment as the sole or primary measure of success was described as both unrealistic and exclusionary. Meaningful inclusion, participants argued, requires recognizing diverse goals, capacities, and definitions of contribution.

Caregiver Burden and Long-Term Sustainability

Caregivers described carrying sustained responsibility for supporting inclusion across nearly every domain of life, often for decades. This burden included coordinating services, advocating for accommodations, providing transportation, managing crises, and creating opportunities in the absence of accessible systems. Participants emphasized that caregiver strain is not episodic, but cumulative, intensifying over time.

Decades of advocacy and coordination

Parents and caregivers described long-term advocacy as a defining feature of their lives. From early childhood through adulthood, caregivers reported spending significant time navigating systems, educating others, and compensating for service gaps. Many emphasized that the effort required did not decrease as their children aged; instead, it became more complex as formal supports narrowed.

Parents of adults with developmental disabilities described a sense of exhaustion rooted not in caregiving itself, but in constant system management. Several shared that they had become default case managers, advocates, and coordinators, roles they never anticipated and were never trained for.

Emotional, financial, and personal impacts

Caregiver burden was described as affecting every aspect of life, including employment, financial stability, health, and social relationships. Some caregivers reported reducing work hours or leaving the workforce entirely due to lack of daytime supports or transportation options. Others described chronic stress, isolation, and limited opportunities for rest or respite.

Respondents emphasized that caregiving responsibilities often extend indefinitely, with little planning or support for later life stages. Many shared persistent anxiety about what would happen when they were no longer able to provide care, advocate, or intervene on behalf of their family member.

Highest Overall Inclusion Gaps

What the data shows

District 5, which includes Snohomish, Gold Bar, and Sultan exhibits the largest overall gap between what respondents identify as important and what is currently available for people with developmental disabilities. The most pronounced gaps appear in jobs and volunteering, school or learning opportunities, and accessible everyday businesses.

Why this matters

These gaps indicate that residents in District 5 face compounded barriers across multiple parts of daily life, pointing to the need for coordinated, place-based approaches that link education, employment, and inclusive community spaces.

Normalization of unpaid labor

Providers confirmed that systems regularly rely implicitly on unpaid caregiver labor to function. Families are expected to fill gaps, manage transitions, and absorb the consequences of system failures. Over time, this reliance becomes normalized, obscuring the true cost of inadequate services and fragmented supports. Caregivers emphasized that while they are committed to supporting their loved ones, long-term sustainability requires shared responsibility across systems and communities.

Geographic Inequities, Basic Needs, and Access to Community Life

Geography emerged as a powerful determinant of access to inclusive opportunities, interacting closely with basic needs such as transportation, affordability, and access to information. Participants emphasized that where someone lives in Snohomish County significantly shapes not only their proximity to services and social spaces, but also their ability to meet the practical conditions required for participation. These challenges were not experienced in isolation; they frequently co-occurred, compounding barriers to inclusion and deepening inequities across communities.

Transition Kick-Off providers echoed this perspective, emphasizing that transportation, housing stability, and access to basic needs are not parallel concerns but foundational conditions for community inclusion. Participants noted that without reliable transportation, affordable options, and predictable access to food and housing, individuals cannot meaningfully participate in community programs, employment, or social activities regardless of interest or motivation. From a systems perspective, inclusion efforts were described as routinely undermined when these basic conditions are unaddressed, particularly in rural and low-density areas where distance and limited infrastructure compound barriers.

Survey results reinforce this pattern. Across respondents, the most commonly cited barriers to inclusion included not knowing what is happening or what is available, lack of support to participate, transportation challenges, distance, and cost. Together, these barriers point to a convergence of geographic and basic needs constraints that shape whether participation is possible at all.

Racial differences in how barriers are experienced

While many barriers were widely shared, respondents of color were more likely to report barriers related to cost, distance, and feeling unwelcome, underscoring how geographic and basic needs challenges intersect with race. These findings suggest that inclusion barriers are not evenly distributed, and that structural factors, such as affordability, transportation access, and social climate, compound differently across communities.

At the same time, white respondents were more likely to report transportation challenges and lack of information, highlighting that while barriers are pervasive, their relative weight and lived impact vary. Taken together, these differences reinforce that geographic inequities are experienced through multiple lenses and cannot be addressed through one-size-fits-all solutions.

Figure 11: Barriers to Community Inclusion by Race/Ethnicity

Barrier	White respondents	Respondents of color
Don’t know what’s happening / what’s available	61.90%	54.30%
Not enough support to participate	53.10%	56.00%
Hard to get transportation	48.10%	40.50%
Events are too far away	45.60%	52.60%
Costs too much	43.80%	56.90%
Not enough variety / nothing fits interests	38.80%	35.30%
I do not feel welcome	27.50%	36.20%
Buildings or restrooms are hard to use	23.40%	23.30%

Limited access in rural and outlying communities

Families living in East County, Stanwood, Gold Bar, Sultan, Darrington, and other rural areas described a near-total lack of inclusive programs, social activities, and employment opportunities. Participants emphasized that even when services existed elsewhere in the county, distance, travel time, and cost made participation impractical or impossible, particularly for individuals requiring support or accompaniment.

Providers confirmed that many programs do not extend into rural areas due to staffing constraints, travel costs, and difficulty sustaining caseloads. As a result, families in these regions often face fewer choices and greater isolation, with limited ability to "piece together" options that might be available to those living closer to service hubs.

> *"Parents are worn down and worn out. We're aging, and there is no plan for what happens when we're gone."*

Transportation as a basic condition for inclusion

Transportation emerged as a gatekeeper across geographies but was particularly consequential in rural and low-density areas. Participants described limited access to reliable, flexible transportation options, especially for individuals who cannot drive or who require specialized support. Missed rides, long travel times, and rigid scheduling were described as routine barriers.

Transportation challenges were most pronounced for employment and adult day programs, where strict schedules and reliable arrival times are essential. When transportation was late, inconsistent, or unavailable, individuals were unable to participate at all, even when programs were otherwise a good fit.

Compounding effects of place and unmet basic needs

Geographic inequities were described as amplifying other challenges identified throughout this report, including isolation, caregiver burden, and fragmented systems. Families facing distance, cost, and transportation barriers described being overlooked in planning and decision-making, reinforcing a perception that inclusion efforts were designed for those living closer to urban centers or with greater resources.

These findings highlight that inclusion is inseparable from basic needs. Without reliable transportation, affordable options, accessible information, and geographically distributed services, participation remains out of reach, regardless of intent or policy commitments.

A Community Vision for Inclusion and Belonging

This section synthesizes findings across surveys, interviews, and community conversations to articulate a shared, community-voiced vision for inclusion in Snohomish County. Rather than restating individual findings, it lifts up the patterns, priorities, and lived experiences that point toward what inclusion should look like in practice.

Across all forms of engagement, participants described a vision for inclusion that is grounded in everyday belonging, dignity, and access to community life. For people with developmental disabilities and their families, inclusion is not defined by proximity to others or the presence of accommodations alone, but by being known, welcomed, and able to participate without constant explanation, self-advocacy, or adaptation to environments that were not designed with them in mind.

At its core, this vision centers on belonging: the ability to show up in community spaces as one's full self and to be met with respect, understanding, and shared responsibility.

Inclusion as Belonging, Not Just Access

Participants consistently emphasized that inclusion is not achieved through physical access alone. Across interviews and open-ended responses, people described inclusion as something that is felt and sustained over time. It is shaped by social interactions, community norms, and whether individuals feel emotionally and psychologically safe in a space.

Adults with developmental disabilities and caregivers described experiences where participation was technically permitted but socially conditional. Inclusion was often dependent on being quiet, compliant, or able to mask communication differences, sensory needs, or emotional expression. In contrast, genuine inclusion was described as environments where people could express joy, frustration, excitement, or overwhelm without fear of punishment, removal, or judgment.

These experiences show that belonging requires more than tolerance. It requires acceptance, respect, and an assumption of competence in everyday interactions.

Inclusion as Intentional Design, Not Individual Effort

The community's vision consistently emphasized that inclusion works best when it is designed intentionally, rather than relying on individuals or families to navigate barriers or compensate for gaps. When asked what would make neighborhoods and local spaces more inclusive, respondents most frequently identified foundational supports such as free or low-cost programs, trained and prepared staff, support for families and caregivers, welcoming events, inclusive public spaces, and reliable transportation.

> *"We could build something beautiful if we actually designed with disabled people, not for them."*

These priorities demonstrate a shared understanding that inclusion depends on capacity and readiness, not motivation. Respondents consistently conveyed that interest in participation is high. What is missing are environments that anticipate diverse needs and share responsibility for access.

When communities invest in preparation, staffing, and affordability, participation becomes possible and sustainable. When these conditions are absent, inclusion breaks down before it can begin.

Figure 12: Community-Identified Priorities for Inclusion

Improvement Identified	% of Respondents
Free or low-cost community programs	51.0%
More trained staff and helpers	51.0%
Help for families and caregivers	50.0%
Events that welcome everyone	49.0%
Better transportation	47.1%
More inclusive parks and public spaces	45.1%
Leadership opportunities for people with developmental disabilities	34.3%

Building on What Is Already Working

Community members also identified clear examples of where inclusion is already happening and should be protected or expanded. Schools, Early Support programs, and youth-focused systems were most frequently cited as relative strengths, particularly where inclusion is supported by structure, staffing, and accountability. Inclusive public spaces such as parks, libraries, playgrounds, and pools were also named as places where thoughtful design and supportive staff enabled participation.

Nonprofit and community-based organizations emerged as essential anchors of inclusion. Respondents named specific programs and expressed concern about their long-term sustainability, highlighting how much inclusion currently depends on a limited number of organizations and dedicated individuals.

At the same time, many respondents reported being unaware of inclusive efforts in their community. This lack of visibility indicates that even when inclusion is working, it remains uneven, fragile, and insufficiently communicated.

Figure 13: Survey Question | What's Working Now — Community Strengths to Build On
Note: Relative frequency based on open-ended response patterns.

Area Identified as Working Well	Relative Frequency
Schools and early support	High
Parks, libraries, public spaces	High
Nonprofit/community programs	High
Sensory-friendly events	Moderate
Transportation supports	Moderate
Employment programs	Moderate
"Not aware / nothing"	High

Where People Are Participating Today

Patterns of current participation further illuminate this vision. When asked where they are currently involved, respondents most often identified peer or social groups, followed by intentionally inclusive community events, faith-based or cultural spaces that explicitly welcome all abilities, and hobby-based activities. Participation was notably lower in more formal or service-driven settings.
These patterns indicate that people are actively seeking connection and belonging in social and interest-based spaces, particularly where inclusion is clearly signaled and environments feel

predictable and welcoming. Participation is highest where social connection is prioritized and barriers are anticipated, reinforcing that inclusion is most sustainable when embedded in everyday community life rather than limited to specialized programs.

Figure 14: Survey Question | Current Community Participation Patterns
Note: Relative frequency based on open-ended response patterns.

Type of Setting	Relative Participation
Peer or social groups	Very High
Disability-inclusive community events	High
Faith-based / cultural inclusive events	High
Hobby-related activities	High
Job coaching or work help	Moderate
Community day programs or drop-ins	Moderate
Caregiver support groups	Moderate-Low

Supporting Families Strengthens Inclusion for Everyone

Across surveys and interviews, support for families and caregivers emerged as a consistent and cross-cutting priority. Caregivers described serving as navigators, advocates, and facilitators of participation across the lifespan, often filling gaps left by fragmented systems.

Respondents emphasized that when families are supported through clear information, respite, transportation, and responsive services, individuals with developmental disabilities are better able to engage, connect, and sustain participation. Inclusion, in this sense, is not an individual achievement, but a collective outcome shaped by the capacity of families, staff, and systems to share responsibility.

From Access to Agency

While access and participation were foundational themes, many respondents also expressed a desire to move beyond inclusion toward agency and voice. Opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to lead, contribute, and shape community life were identified as an important aspiration, even when immediate needs such as transportation, staffing, and affordability remain unmet.

This progression from access, to belonging, to shared ownership reflects a vision of inclusion that evolves over time. It recognizes that true inclusion is not only about being present, but about being valued and having influence within one's community.

A Shared Vision Forward

Taken together, community input paints a vision of inclusion that is practical, relational, and hopeful. It calls for communities that are welcoming by design, grounded in empathy, and supported by coordinated systems that make participation possible in everyday life.

Inclusion, as articulated by participants, is not achieved through isolated programs or individual resilience. It is built through sustained, place-based commitments that align environments, supports, and social norms. This shared, community-voiced vision provides the foundation for the recommendations that follow, translating lived experience and data into clear opportunities for action across Snohomish County.

Recommendations: Turning Community Voice into System Action

Priority Actions: Where to Start

The recommendations that follow span multiple systems and reflect the complexity of building inclusive communities. While all actions are important, community input consistently pointed to a small set of priorities that would deliver the greatest near-term impact if addressed first.

These priority actions are intended to guide sequencing, coordination, and early implementation.

1. **Make it Easier for Families and Self-Advocates to Navigate Services**
   Streamline navigation across County, DDCS, education, and provider systems by improving coordination, communication, and shared intake where possible. Families identified administrative complexity as one of the most exhausting and exclusionary barriers to participation.

2. **Expand Flexible Daytime and Community-Based Options**
   Increase access to non-employment-focused daytime activities that support routine, social connection, and belonging, particularly for adults with moderate support needs who fall between existing service categories.

3. **Treat Transportation as Foundational Infrastructure**
   Address transportation reliability, flexibility, and geographic coverage as a prerequisite for inclusion, not a secondary support. Without transportation, investments in programs, employment, and services cannot reach their intended impact.

4. **Strengthen Preparedness of Community Spaces and Staff**
   Invest in training, sensory- and communication-informed design, and clear expectations across public spaces, providers, and employers so inclusion does not depend on individual advocacy or crisis response.

5. **Support Caregiver Sustainability Across the Lifespan**
   Recognize and reduce the long-term burden placed on caregivers by improving access to information, respite, navigation support, and predictable services, particularly during transition points.

6. **Elevate People with Developmental Disabilities as Co-Designers**
   Create meaningful, supported roles for people with developmental disabilities in planning, governance, and evaluation to ensure systems reflect lived experience and adapt over time.

System 1: Snohomish County, DDCS, and Other Governmental Systems

Why This System Matters

County leadership, in partnership with Developmental Disabilities Community Services (DDCS), plays a central role in shaping the conditions for inclusion through funding decisions, service definitions, contracts, and cross-agency coordination. Across surveys, interviews, and provider engagement, participants consistently identified County systems as both a key barrier and a critical lever for improving access, flexibility, and sustainability of community inclusion supports.

What We Heard

Participants described County and state systems as fragmented, difficult to navigate, and overly rigid, particularly during transition points and adulthood. Families and providers emphasized that many inclusion challenges are not caused by lack of interest or motivation, but by service structures, eligibility rules, and funding models that limit flexibility and choice. Providers highlighted the strain created by low community inclusion rates, limited transportation coverage, and administrative processes that require families to manage complexity across multiple systems.

At the same time, participants recognized the County's unique ability to convene partners, align systems, and set expectations that can reduce friction and expand inclusive opportunities countywide.

Priority Actions

Snohomish County and DDCS are well-positioned to:

- **Reduce administrative friction across systems** by exploring shared intake processes, clearer eligibility pathways, and improved coordination between DDCS, DVR, school districts, and community-based organizations.
- **Review community inclusion service definitions and funding structures** to increase flexibility for daytime, non-employment-focused activities, including transportation coverage and staffing models that support varied participation.
- **Strengthen navigation and information access** by investing in clearer, proactive communication about available services, eligibility changes, and transition timelines for families and self-advocates.
- **Support rural and geographically isolated communities** through place-based strategies, mobile services, or funding models that account for travel time, distance, and lower population density.
- **Use contracting and funding levers to encourage inclusive practices**, such as sensory-informed design, communication access, and family engagement across provider settings.
- **Create intentional feedback loops** that allow people with developmental disabilities and caregivers to inform program design, service gaps, and policy adjustments on an ongoing basis.

What Success Looks Like

- Families spend less time navigating systems and more time supporting meaningful participation.
- Adults with developmental disabilities have access to flexible, daytime community inclusion options that reflect their interests and support needs.
- Service availability is more consistent across geography, reducing isolation in rural and outlying areas.
- County systems are experienced as coordinated, predictable, and responsive rather than fragmented and reactive.

System 2: Service Providers and Community-Based Organizations

Why This System Matters

Service providers and community-based organizations are typically the most consistent point of contact for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. Across the engagement process, participants emphasized that providers play a critical role not only in delivering services, but in shaping whether inclusion feels flexible, relational, and responsive to real life. Providers are also frequently tasked with filling gaps created by fragmented systems, limited funding, and workforce constraints.

What We Heard

Families and adults with developmental disabilities described relying heavily on providers to help navigate systems, access information, and create opportunities for connection in the absence of inclusive community options. Providers acknowledged these expectations, while also describing significant constraints related to staffing capacity, transportation coverage, and funding flexibility. Many emphasized the challenge of offering daytime, community-based activities that are not tied to employment outcomes, particularly for adults with moderate support needs.

Participants also highlighted the importance of staff preparedness, communication access, and trauma- and sensory-informed practices in determining whether programs feel welcoming or exclusionary. When providers were able to adapt environments, anticipate needs, and maintain consistent relationships, participation and belonging increased.

Priority Actions

Service providers and community-based organizations are well positioned to:

- **Expand flexible, interest-based daytime options** that prioritize social connection, routine, and community participation beyond employment-focused pathways.
- **Design programs with sensory, communication, and behavioral needs in mind**, incorporating predictable schedules, clear expectations, quiet spaces, and staff training in trauma- and sensory-informed practices.
- **Strengthen communication with families and self-advocates**, including clearer onboarding, regular updates, and transparent discussion of program expectations and limitations.
- **Create intentional opportunities for peer connection**, supporting relationships that extend beyond staff-client interactions and promote reciprocal social engagement.
- **Collaborate across organizations and systems** to reduce duplication, share resources, and support continuity during transition points such as aging out of school-based services.
- **Center lived experience in program design**, engaging people with developmental disabilities and caregivers as advisors, co-designers, or facilitators rather than only as service recipients.

What Success Looks Like

- Adults with developmental disabilities have access to a wider range of daytime, community-based options that demonstrate their interests and support needs.
- Programs feel predictable, welcoming, and emotionally safe for participants and families.
- Peer relationships become a core outcome of services, not an incidental benefit.
- Providers experience greater alignment between service expectations, funding structures, and the realities of supporting inclusion in community settings.

System 3: Transportation and Mobility Systems

Why This System Matters

Transportation emerged as one of the most consistent and consequential barriers to community inclusion across surveys, interviews, and provider engagement. Regardless of interest, availability of programs, or level of support, participants emphasized that without reliable, flexible transportation, inclusion efforts break down before participation can begin. Transportation systems therefore function as a gatekeeper to employment, adult day activities, health care, social connection, and everyday community life.

What We Heard

Individuals with developmental disabilities, caregivers, and providers described transportation as unpredictable, limited in scope, and poorly aligned with the realities of daily life. Participants reported missed rides, long wait times, rigid scheduling, and limited coverage outside core service areas, particularly in rural and low-density communities. Transportation challenges were especially acute for daytime activities, employment with nonstandard hours, and community-based programs that are not located near fixed bus routes.

Providers emphasized that transportation constraints often make otherwise appropriate services unusable, limiting the impact of investments in programs and supports. Families described transportation as a constant source of stress and planning burden, frequently forcing caregivers to reduce work hours or provide transportation themselves to fill system gaps

Priority Actions

Transportation agencies, County partners, and mobility providers are well-positioned to:

- **Increase reliability and flexibility of transportation options** for people with developmental disabilities, including reduced wait times, clearer communication, and accommodations for varying support needs.
- **Align transportation availability with service schedules**, particularly for adult day programs, employment, and community-based activities that occur during daytime hours.
- **Expand transportation solutions in rural and outlying areas**, recognizing that fixed-route models may not meet the needs of low-density communities.
- **Support non-commute and non-employment trips**, including social, recreational, and community participation activities that are central to inclusion and well-being.
- **Strengthen coordination between transportation providers and service systems**, reducing gaps where transportation eligibility or scheduling prevents service utilization.
- **Explore innovative and supplemental mobility options**, such as shared rides, on-demand services, or partnerships with community organizations, to increase access where traditional models fall short.

What Success Looks Like

- Individuals with developmental disabilities can reliably get to community activities, services, and social opportunities without excessive planning or stress.
- Transportation is no longer a primary reason for missed services, job loss, or isolation.
- Rural residents experience improved access to inclusive opportunities closer to home.
- Caregivers spend less time compensating for transportation gaps and more time supporting participation and connection.

System 4: Parks, Recreation, Libraries, and Community Spaces

Why This System Matters

Parks, recreation programs, libraries, and other public community spaces play a central role in everyday inclusion. Unlike formal service systems, these settings offer opportunities for spontaneous connection, shared experiences, and participation alongside neighbors and peers without disabilities. Across engagement efforts, participants emphasized that true inclusion depends on whether these everyday spaces feel predictable, welcoming, and safe for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

What We Heard

Individuals with developmental disabilities and caregivers described mixed experiences in community spaces. While some parks, libraries, and recreation programs were cited as inclusive and welcoming, many participants shared that participation depended heavily on staff awareness, program design, and social norms rather than physical access alone. Sensory overload, unclear expectations, and inconsistent staff responses were common barriers, particularly in unstructured or high-stimulation environments.

Participants emphasized that inclusion was more likely when spaces offered predictable routines, visible signals of welcome, and staff who were prepared to respond supportively to sensory, communication, or behavioral needs. Daytime programming and opportunities for regular participation were also identified as important, especially for adults who lack structured daily activities after leaving school-based systems.

Priority Actions

Parks, recreation departments, libraries, and community space operators are well-positioned to:

- **Design programs and spaces with sensory and communication needs in mind**, including predictable schedules, clear information, quiet or low-stimulation options, and visual supports.
- **Invest in staff training** focused on disability awareness, trauma-informed and sensory-informed practices, and supportive responses to behavioral needs.
- **Expand inclusive daytime programming**, particularly for adults with developmental disabilities seeking routine, social connection, and community participation.
- **Use visible signals of welcome**, such as inclusive language, signage, and program descriptions that clearly communicate who is welcome and what supports are available.
- **Embed universal design principles** into facilities, programming, and communication to reduce the need for individual accommodations.
- **Partner with service providers and community organizations** to co-create inclusive offerings and reduce reliance on disability-specific programming alone.

What Success Looks Like

- People with developmental disabilities feel welcome and comfortable participating in everyday community spaces without needing to explain or advocate for themselves.
- Families can rely on public spaces as predictable, supportive environments rather than sources of stress or exclusion.
- Inclusion becomes embedded in routine programming and operations, not limited to special events.
- Community spaces function as true “third places” where people with and without disabilities connect, participate, and belong.

System 5: Employers and Workforce Systems

Why This System Matters

Employment is a meaningful pathway to inclusion, dignity, and economic participation for many people with developmental disabilities. Employers, workforce agencies, and employment support systems shape whether work opportunities are accessible, sustainable, and aligned with individual strengths and interests. Participants consistently emphasized that employment outcomes depend not only on job availability, but on workplace culture, flexibility, and ongoing support.

What We Heard

Adults with developmental disabilities expressed a strong desire to contribute, earn income, and be valued for their skills. At the same time, families and providers described employment systems that are rigid, risk-averse, and poorly aligned with diverse support needs. Traditional hiring practices, such as competitive interviews, inflexible schedules, and narrow productivity expectations, were frequently cited as barriers that exclude individuals before they have an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities.

Participants also emphasized fear of losing public benefits as a major deterrent to employment, particularly for individuals with complex medical or support needs. Providers noted that while job placement may occur, long-term success often depends on continued job coaching, transportation, and employer willingness to adapt. When supports taper too quickly or employers lack understanding, job loss and discouragement are common.

Priority Actions

Employers, workforce agencies, and employment support systems are well-positioned to:

- **Normalize flexible hiring and workplace practices**, including alternative interview formats, trial work experiences, customized roles, and varied scheduling.
- **Proactively incorporate accommodations** into job design and workplace culture, reducing the burden on individuals to request or justify support.
- **Strengthen ongoing employment supports**, recognizing that job coaching and problem-solving may be needed beyond initial placement.
- **Improve benefits counseling and navigation**, helping individuals and families understand how employment interacts with health care, income supports, and long-term stability.
- **Engage employers as partners in inclusion**, offering education, technical assistance, and peer learning opportunities that highlight the value of inclusive employment.
- **Coordinate employment pathways with community inclusion options**, ensuring that work is one part of a broader continuum of meaningful daytime engagement.

What Success Looks Like

- People with developmental disabilities access employment opportunities that demonstrate their interests, strengths, and support needs.
- Employers view flexibility and accommodation as standard practice rather than exception.
- Job placements are more stable and sustainable over time.
- Employment contributes to connection, purpose, and inclusion without jeopardizing essential supports or benefits.

System 6: Schools, Transition Programs, and Postsecondary Systems

Why This System Matters

Schools and transition programs are among the few systems where inclusion is structured, resourced, and expected. Participants consistently identified school-based environments as places where inclusion works better, not because needs are lower, but because roles, accountability, and supports are clearly defined. How schools prepare students, families, and systems for life after age 22 strongly influences whether inclusion is sustained or collapses in adulthood.

What We Heard

Families, adults with developmental disabilities, and providers described a sharp contrast between school-based inclusion and adult systems. During school years, predictable routines, mandated accommodations, and built-in social environments help buffer against isolation. After exit, many individuals experience an abrupt loss of structure, community, and support, frequently referred to as a "social cliff."

Participants emphasized that transition planning frequently focuses narrowly on employment or eligibility paperwork, rather than on broader community participation, social connection, and daily life needs. Families reported feeling underprepared for adult systems, particularly around transportation, adult day options, benefits navigation, and the realities of limited service availability.

Providers noted that weak coordination between schools, DDCS, DVR, and community-based programs contributes to service gaps and lost momentum during transition.

Priority Actions

Schools, transition programs, and postsecondary systems are well-positioned to:

- **Broaden the definition of successful transition**, incorporating community inclusion, social connection, and daily life participation alongside employment goals.
- **Introduce families earlier to adult systems and realities**, including transportation options, service limitations, and eligibility timelines, to reduce shock and instability after exit.
- **Strengthen coordination across transition partners**, including school districts, DDCS, DVR, community providers, and transportation systems.
- **Create opportunities for community-based participation during school years**, allowing students to build familiarity with inclusive spaces before school-based supports end.
- **Support family education and planning**, particularly for caregivers navigating benefits, adult services, and long-term sustainability.
- **Ensure that transition planning centers student voice and preferences**, recognizing diverse goals, capacities, and definitions of meaningful adulthood.

What Success Looks Like

- Young people leave school with realistic, supported pathways into adult community life.
- Families feel informed, prepared, and connected before school-based supports end.
- Transitions result in continuity of participation rather than isolation or service loss.
- Adult inclusion feels like an extension of school-based inclusion, not a rupture.

System 7: Advisory Bodies, Policymakers, and Governance Structures

Why This System Matters

Advisory bodies, policymakers, and governance structures shape how priorities are set, resources are allocated, and decisions are made across systems. Participants consistently emphasized that inclusion cannot be fully realized without shared power and meaningful involvement of people with developmental disabilities in the decisions that affect their lives. Governance structures therefore play a critical role in moving inclusion from intention to accountability.

What We Heard

Across surveys, interviews, and provider engagement, participants emphasized that people with developmental disabilities are often consulted but rarely positioned as decision-makers. Individuals and families described experiences where policies and programs were designed without their direct involvement, resulting in solutions that did not reflect lived realities. Providers echoed this concern, noting that system-level decisions are frequently shaped by administrative or compliance considerations rather than by day-to-day experiences of inclusion.

Transition Kick-Off participants in particular emphasized that advisory roles are most effective when people with developmental disabilities have clear authority, preparation, and support to participate meaningfully. Participants stressed that inclusion in governance is not symbolic; it is essential for designing responsive systems and avoiding unintended barriers.

Priority Actions

Advisory bodies, policymakers, and governance entities are well-positioned to:

- **Create formal roles for people with developmental disabilities** on advisory boards, planning bodies, and decision-making committees that shape programs, policies, and funding.
- **Adopt co-design approaches** that involve people with developmental disabilities and caregivers early and continuously in policy development, rather than only at the feedback stage.
- **Ensure accessible participation in governance**, including plain language materials, communication supports, compensation for time, and preparation to support meaningful engagement.
- **Establish feedback loops and accountability mechanisms** that allow community input to influence ongoing adjustments to policies and programs.
- **Use data and lived experience together** to monitor inclusion outcomes, identify gaps, and guide course correction.
- **Align governance structures across systems**, reducing silos and reinforcing shared responsibility for community inclusion outcomes.

What Success Looks Like

- People with developmental disabilities are recognized as leaders, advisors, and decision-makers, not just service recipients.
- Policies and programs reflect lived experience and adapt more quickly to real-world challenges.
- Advisory processes feel transparent, accessible, and meaningful to participants.
- Inclusion is reinforced through accountability, not dependent on individual champions or goodwill.

Conclusion

Community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities is not the result of individual effort or isolated programs. It is the outcome of systems working together to reduce barriers, expand choice, and create environments where participation is predictable, supported, and sustainable across the lifespan.

The findings in this report make clear that many of the barriers to inclusion in Snohomish County are structural. Families and individuals are navigating fragmented systems, limited daytime options, and transportation constraints that restrict participation even when interest, motivation, and capacity are present. At the same time, the findings also point to real opportunities. When systems are coordinated, environments are designed with inclusion in mind, and lived experience informs decision-making, participation increases and isolation decreases.

The recommendations outlined in this report provide a practical framework for action. They identify where change is most needed, who is well positioned to lead, and how shared accountability across County departments, service providers, community institutions, employers, schools, transportation systems, and governance bodies can strengthen inclusion outcomes. Taken together, they offer a path toward systems that are more predictable, responsive, and aligned with the realities of daily life for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

LISC Puget Sound looks forward to continuing to partner with Snohomish County, service providers, and community stakeholders to support implementation of these recommendations. Advancing inclusion will require sustained coordination, investment, and learning over time. By grounding action in lived experience and treating inclusion as a shared responsibility, Snohomish County can move toward a more connected, inclusive community where people with developmental disabilities are not only present, but supported to belong, participate, and lead.

About LISC Puget Sound

Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is one of the country's largest community development organizations, working to build vibrant, resilient communities across America. LISC partners with residents, local leaders, and institutions to close gaps in health, wealth, and opportunity so people and places can thrive.

Since its founding in 1979, LISC has invested more than $35 billion to support community-driven solutions nationwide. This work has helped create over 530,000 affordable homes and apartments, develop more than 83 million square feet of retail, community, and educational space, and connect tens of thousands of people to jobs, capital, and financial opportunity. LISC brings together flexible capital, deep technical expertise, and trusted partnerships to help communities address urgent challenges and build long-term stability.

LISC Puget Sound advances this mission across Washington State, with a focus on King, Snohomish, and Pierce Counties. We do the work in Washington State by investing early capital, providing hands-on technical assistance, and convening cross-sector partners to unlock solutions that would not happen otherwise.

Our work centers emerging and mission-driven housing developers, small businesses, and community-led organizations, particularly in places experiencing rapid growth and displacement pressures. Through initiatives like the Housing Accelerator Fellowship, place-based strategies, and partnerships with public agencies, philanthropy, and employers, LISC Puget Sound helps remove barriers to housing production, expand access to good jobs, and ensure communities can remain rooted and thrive as regions grow.

We believe inclusive economic development starts with listening to community, investing early, and building the systems and capital needed to turn vision into reality.

Appendix A | Glossary of Key Terms

Adult Day Programs

Structured daytime programs that provide social, recreational, and supportive activities for adults with developmental disabilities, particularly for individuals who are not employed or enrolled in school.

Caregiver

A family member or other unpaid individual who provides regular support to a person with a developmental disability.

Community Inclusion Rates

The reimbursement rates used by DDCS to fund community inclusion services, which influence staffing levels, transportation coverage, and program flexibility.

Community Inclusion Services

DDCS-funded services intended to support individuals with developmental disabilities in participating in community activities, social connection, and skill-building outside of employment-focused services.

Developmental Disabilities (DD)

A group of lifelong conditions that typically begin before age 22 and can affect cognitive, physical, communication, or adaptive functioning. Examples include autism, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy.

Developmental Disabilities Community Services (DDCS)

A Washington State agency within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) that administers services and supports for eligible individuals with developmental disabilities.

DSHS (Department of Social and Health Services)

The Washington State agency that oversees multiple service administrations, including the Developmental Disabilities Community Services.

Eligibility (DDCS Eligibility)

The criteria used to determine whether an individual qualifies for services through the Developmental Disabilities Community Services, based on disability type, age of onset, and functional limitations.

Individual Employment Services

DDCS-funded services that support individuals with developmental disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain paid employment, often with ongoing job coaching or supports.

Job Coaching

Ongoing employment support provided to individuals with developmental disabilities to assist with learning job tasks, navigating workplace expectations, and maintaining employment.

Supported Employment

An employment approach that combines paid work in integrated settings with individualized supports for people with disabilities.

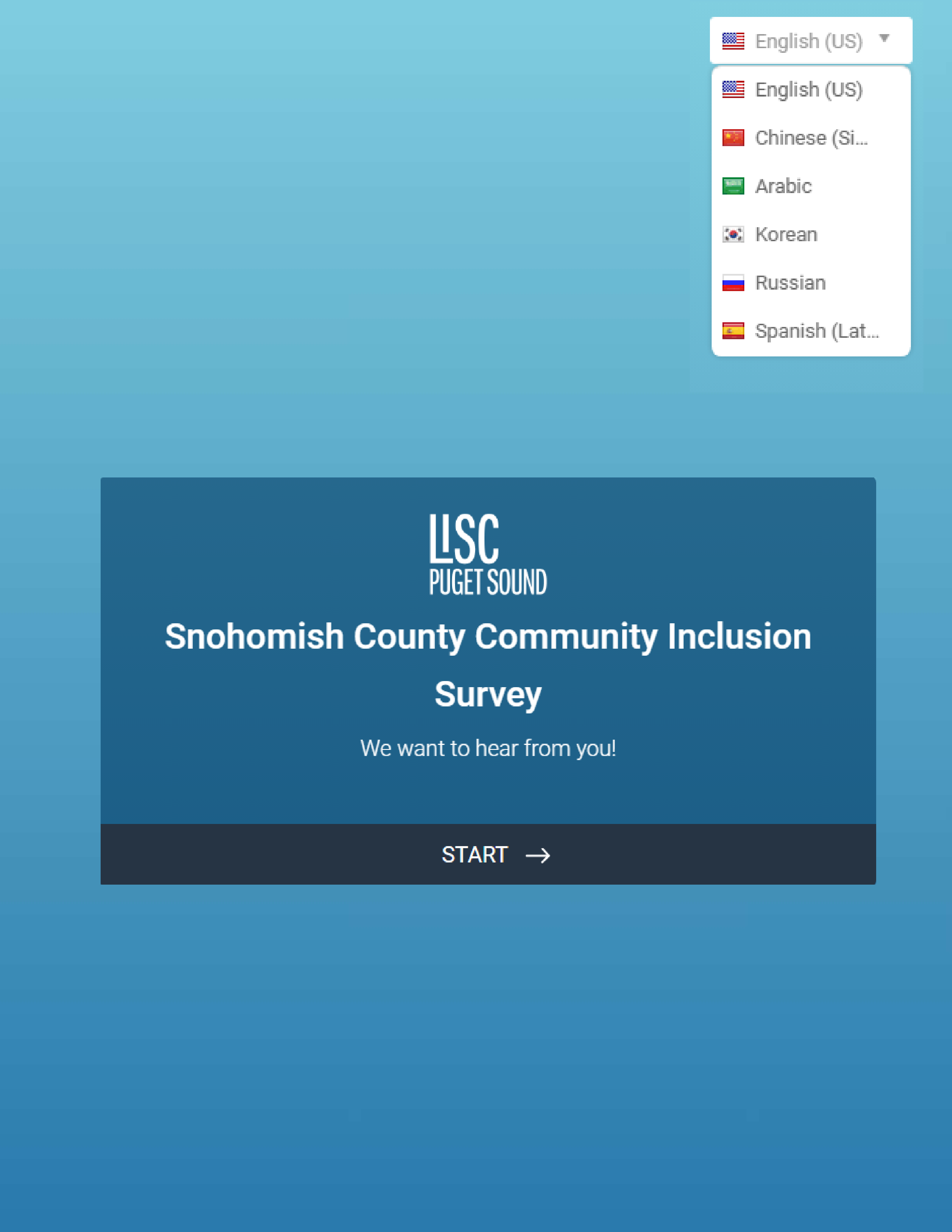
Transition (School-to-Adult Services)

The period when a young person with a developmental disability exits school-based services (typically at age 21) and moves into adult systems of support, including employment and community inclusion services.

Transition Cliff / Social Cliff

The abrupt loss of structured services, social connection, and daily supports that many individuals with developmental disabilities experience after leaving school-based systems.

Appendix B | Snohomish County Community Inclusion Survey

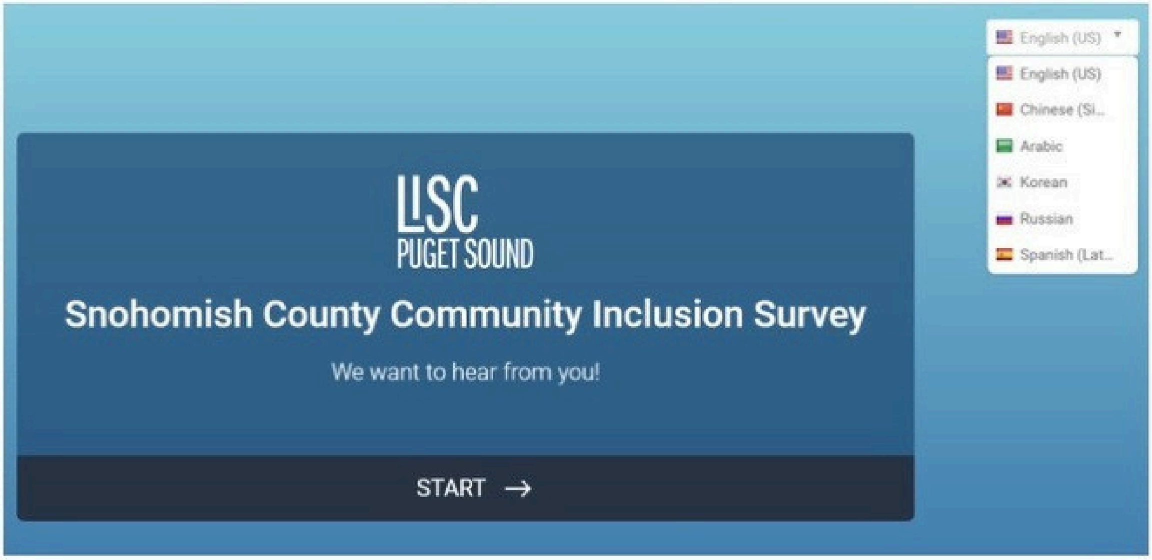


Snohomish County Community Inclusion Survey

We want to hear from you!

English (US) ▾

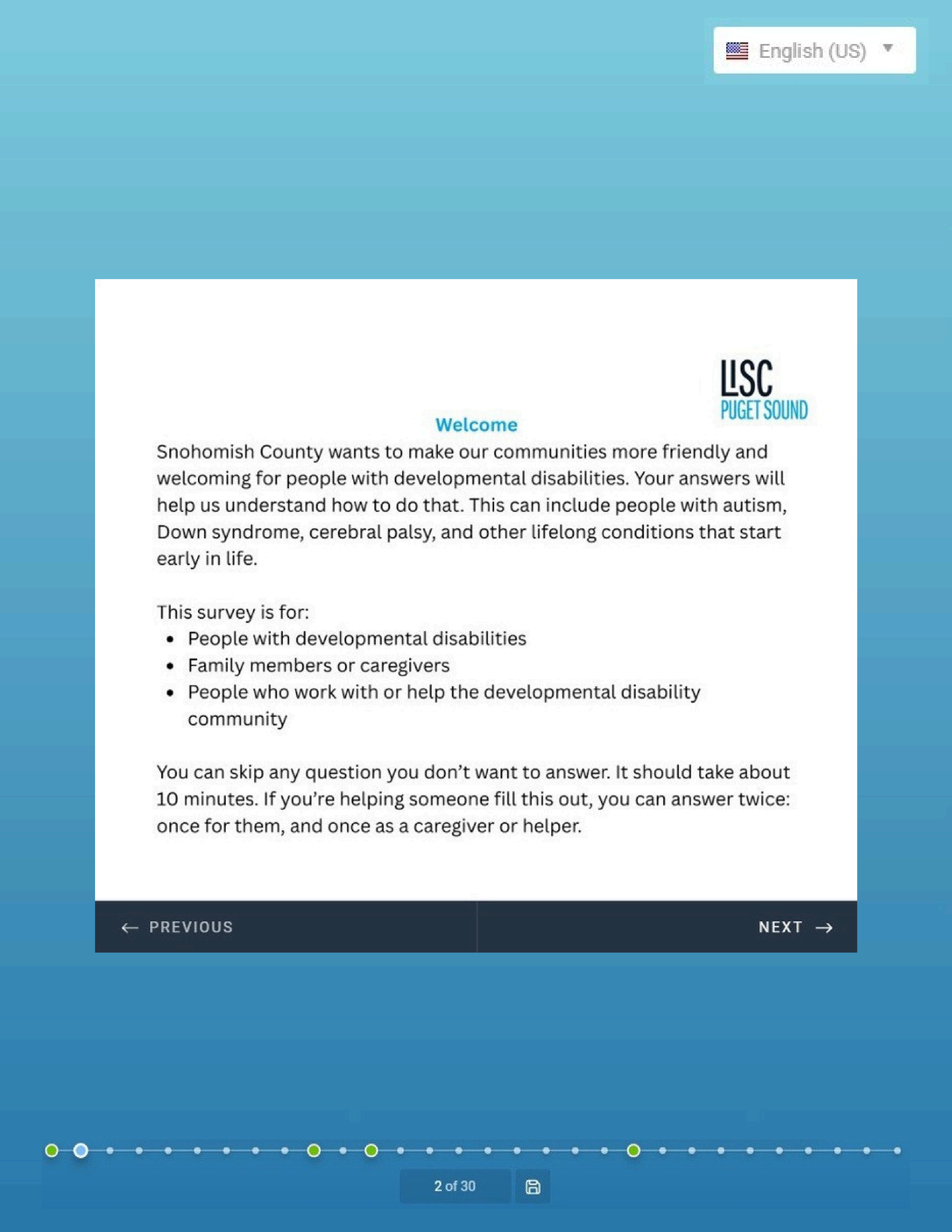
Click the button in the **top right corner** to change the language.



Snohomish County Community Inclusion Survey

We want to hear from you!

NEXT →



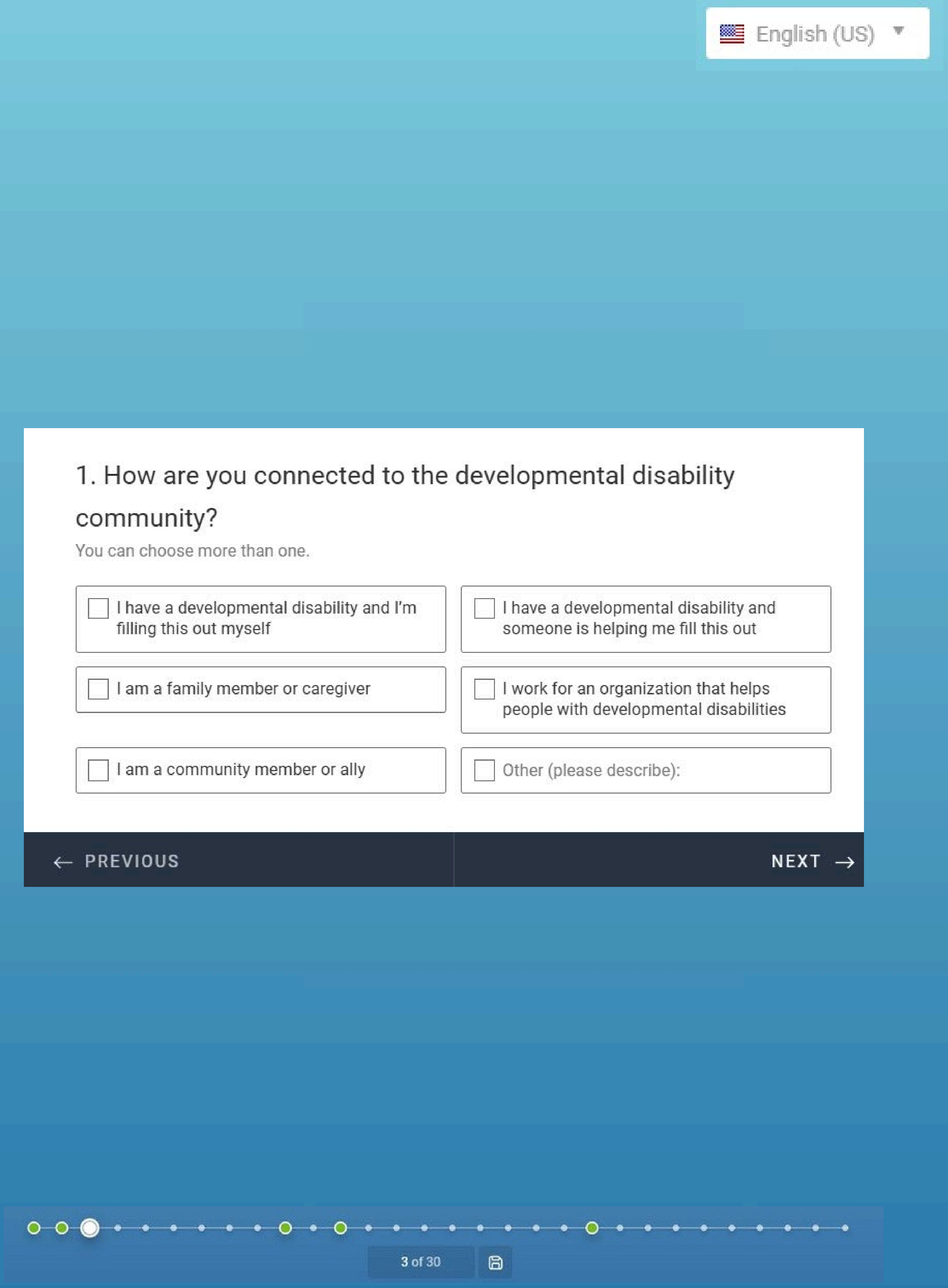
Welcome

Snohomish County wants to make our communities more friendly and welcoming for people with developmental disabilities. Your answers will help us understand how to do that. This can include people with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and other lifelong conditions that start early in life.

This survey is for:

- People with developmental disabilities
- Family members or caregivers
- People who work with or help the developmental disability community

You can skip any question you don't want to answer. It should take about 10 minutes. If you're helping someone fill this out, you can answer twice: once for them, and once as a caregiver or helper.



1. How are you connected to the developmental disability community?

You can choose more than one.

☐ I have a developmental disability and I’m filling this out myself

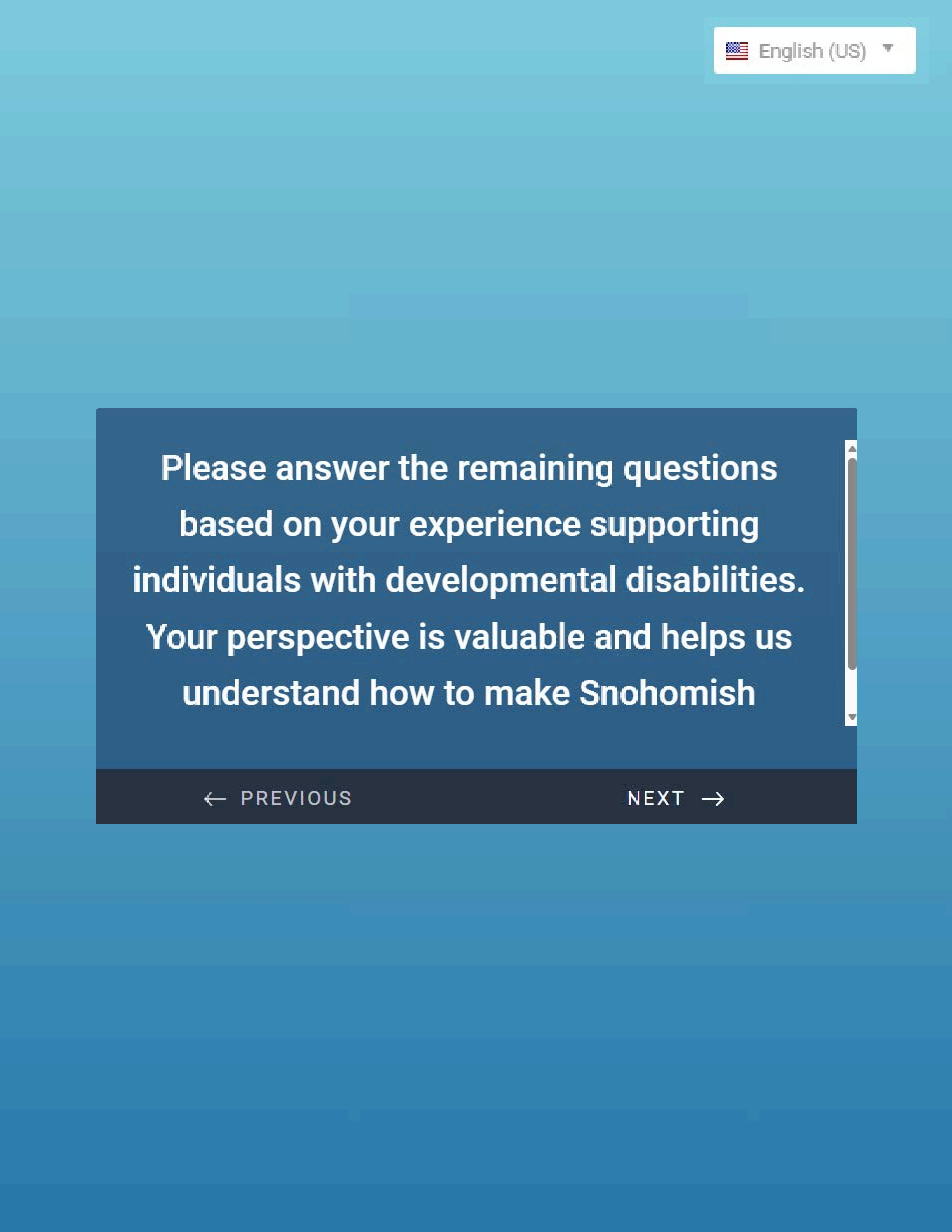
☐ I have a developmental disability and someone is helping me fill this out

☐ I am a family member or caregiver

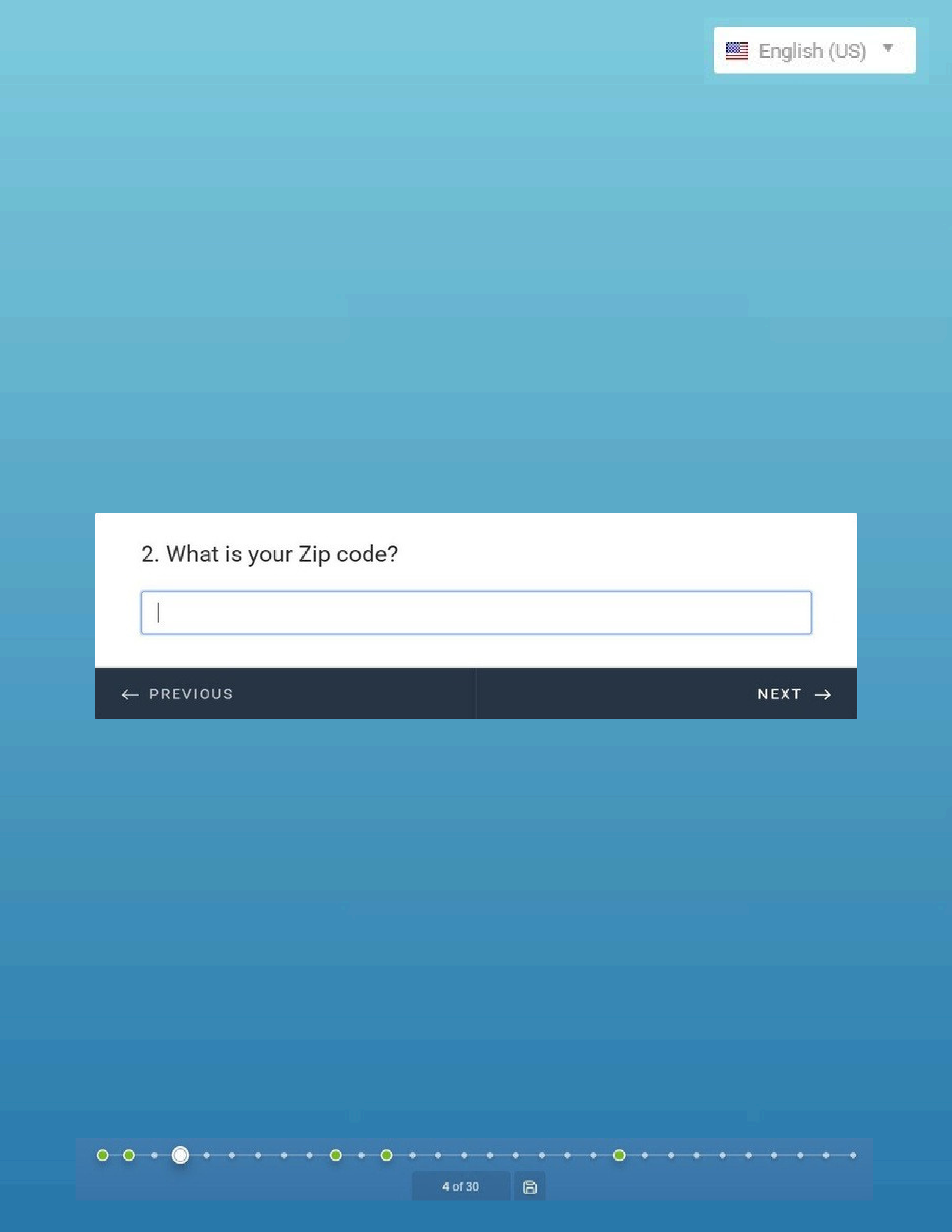
☐ I work for an organization that helps people with developmental disabilities

☐ I am a community member or ally

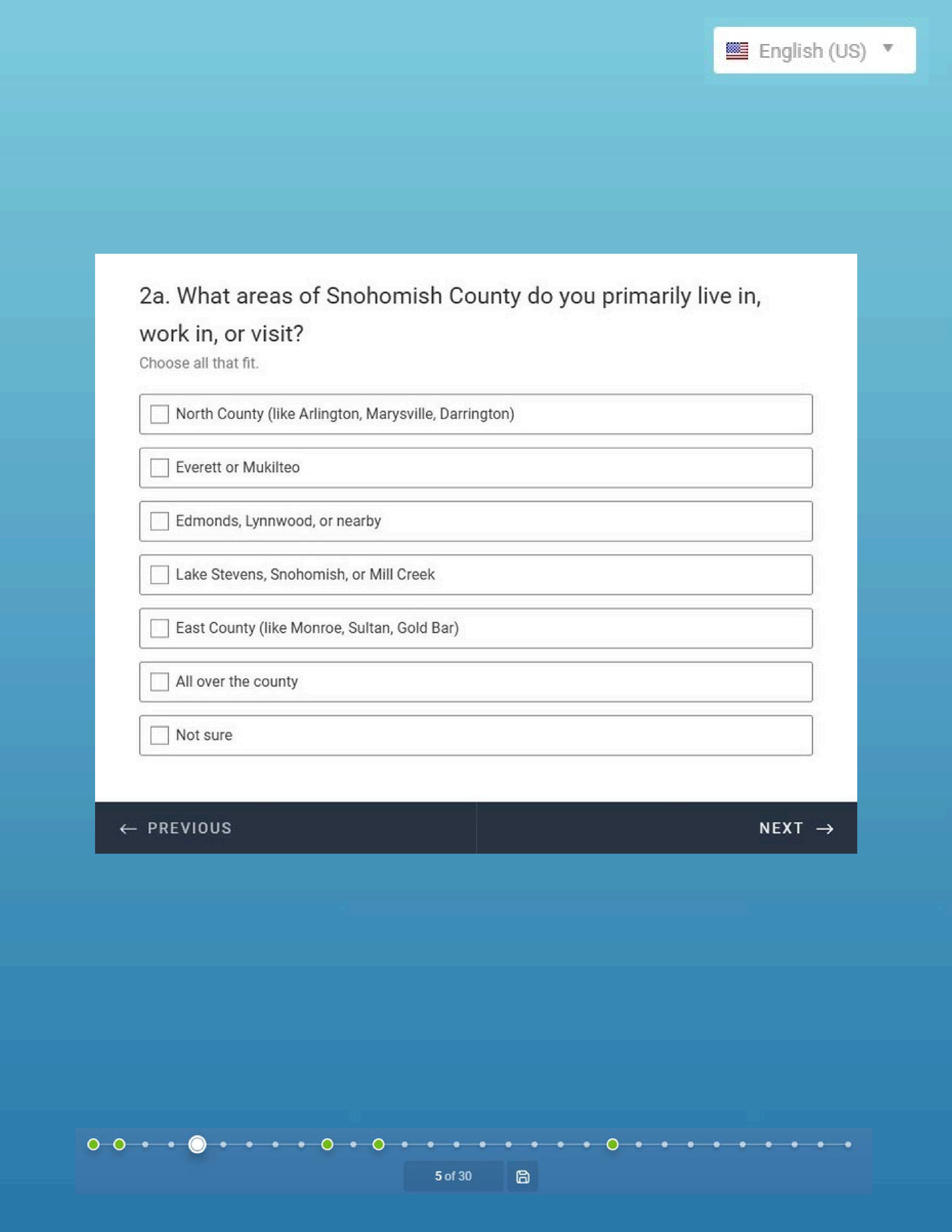
☐ Other (please describe):



Please answer the remaining questions based on your experience supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. Your perspective is valuable and helps us understand how to make Snohomish



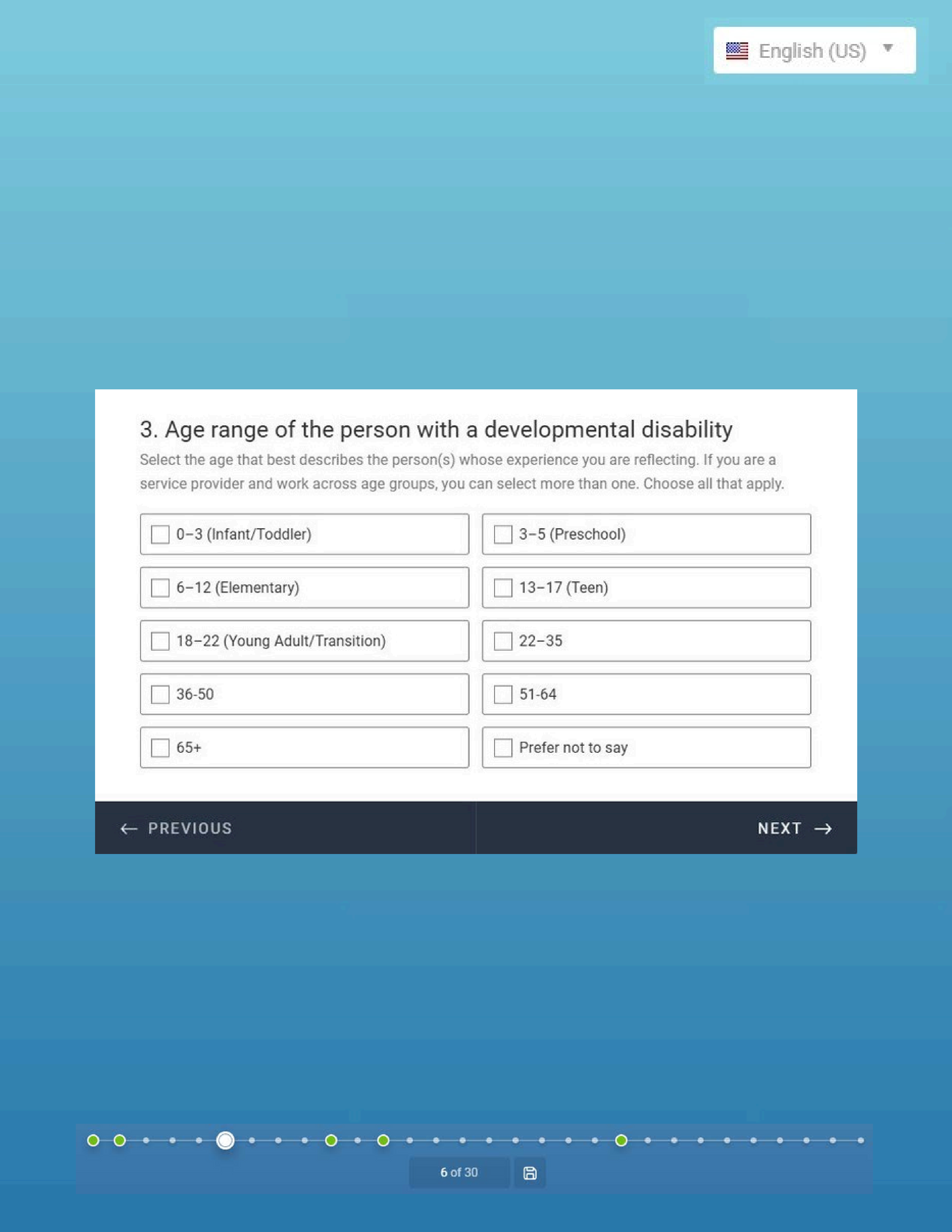
2. What is your Zip code?



2a. What areas of Snohomish County do you primarily live in, work in, or visit?

Choose all that fit.

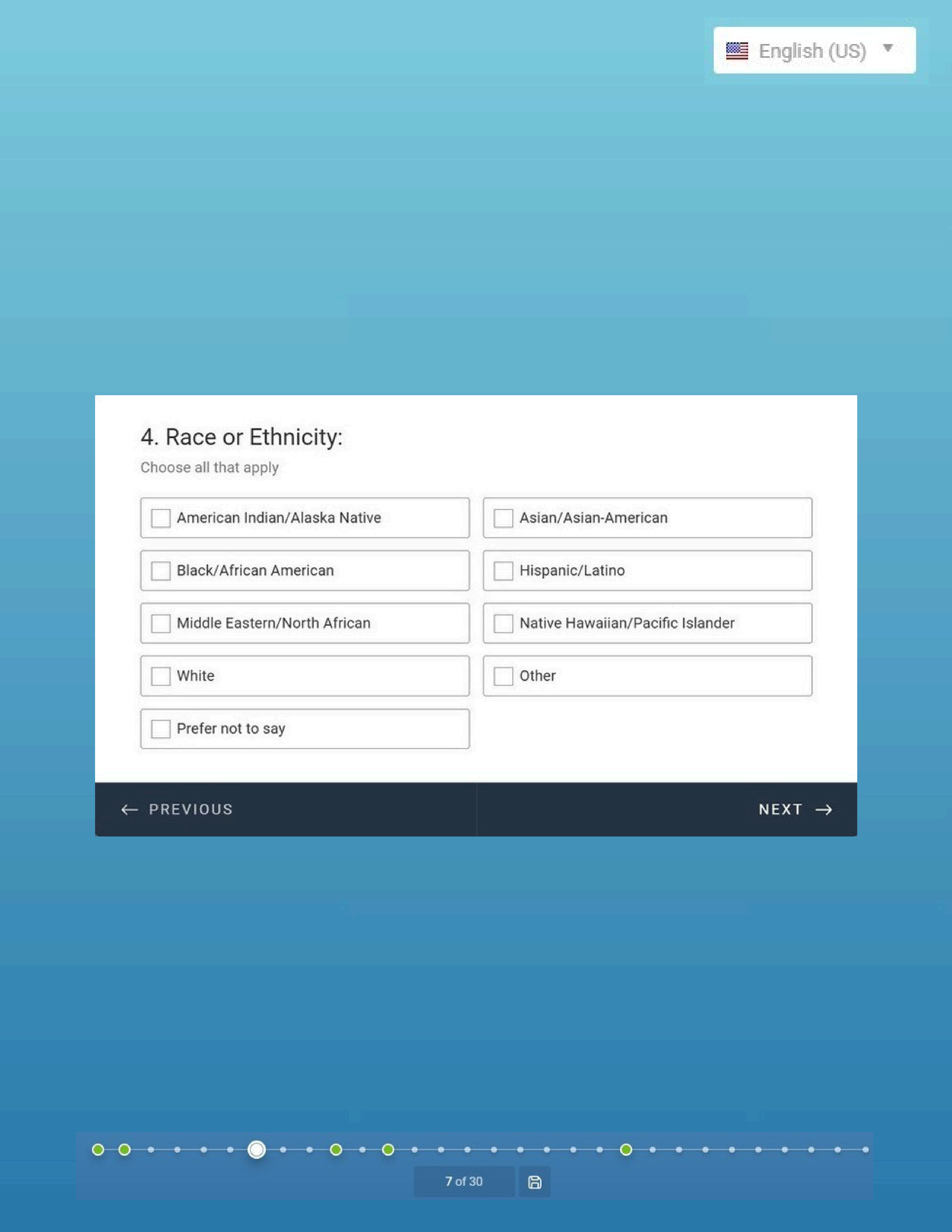
- ☐ North County (like Arlington, Marysville, Darrington)
- ☐ Everett or Mukilteo
- ☐ Edmonds, Lynnwood, or nearby
- ☐ Lake Stevens, Snohomish, or Mill Creek
- ☐ East County (like Monroe, Sultan, Gold Bar)
- ☐ All over the county
- ☐ Not sure



3. Age range of the person with a developmental disability

Select the age that best describes the person(s) whose experience you are reflecting. If you are a service provider and work across age groups, you can select more than one. Choose all that apply.

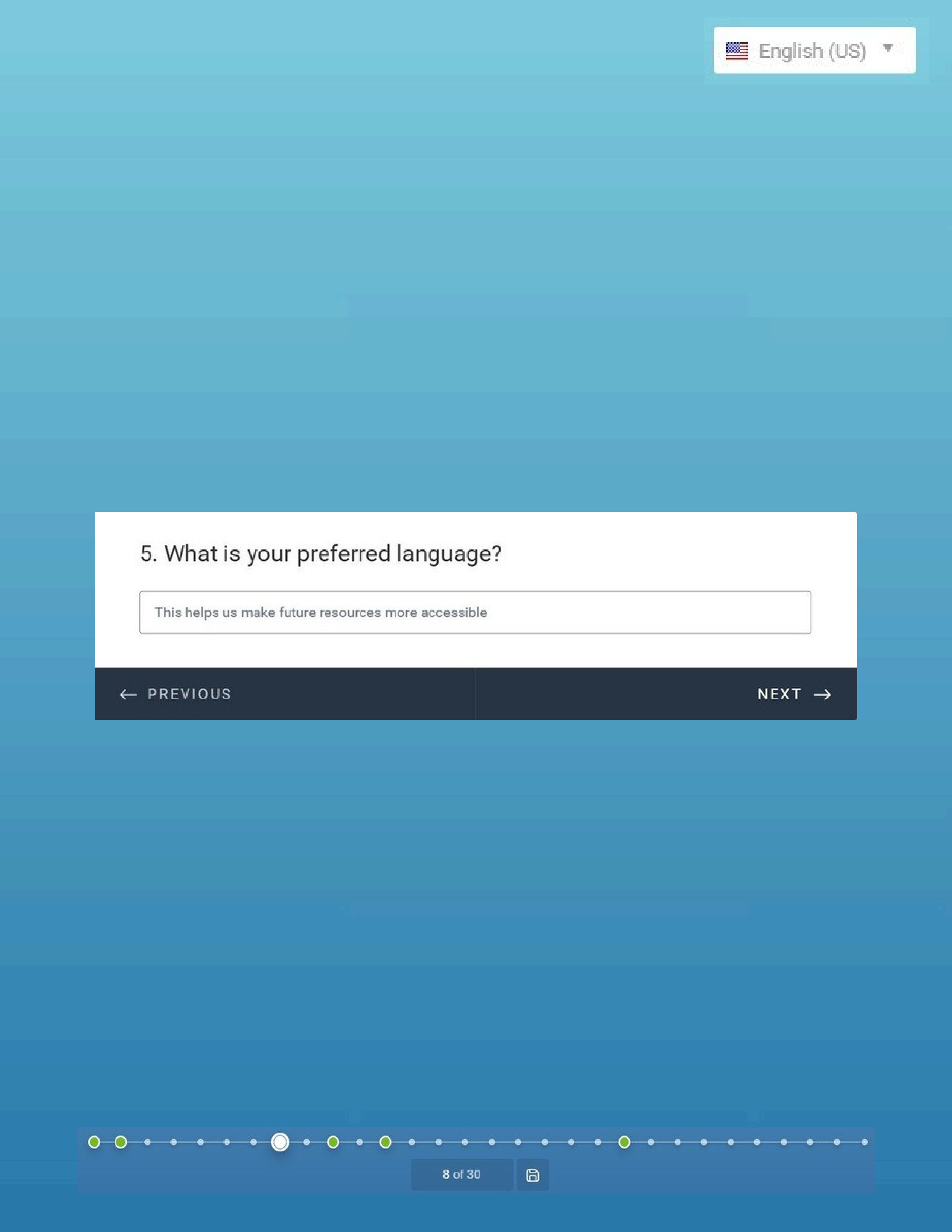
- ☐ 0–3 (Infant/Toddler)
- ☐ 3–5 (Preschool)
- ☐ 6–12 (Elementary)
- ☐ 13–17 (Teen)
- ☐ 18–22 (Young Adult/Transition)
- ☐ 22–35
- ☐ 36-50
- ☐ 51-64
- ☐ 65+
- ☐ Prefer not to say



4. Race or Ethnicity:

Choose all that apply

☐ American Indian/Alaska Native
☐ Asian/Asian-American
☐ Black/African American
☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ Middle Eastern/North African
☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to say

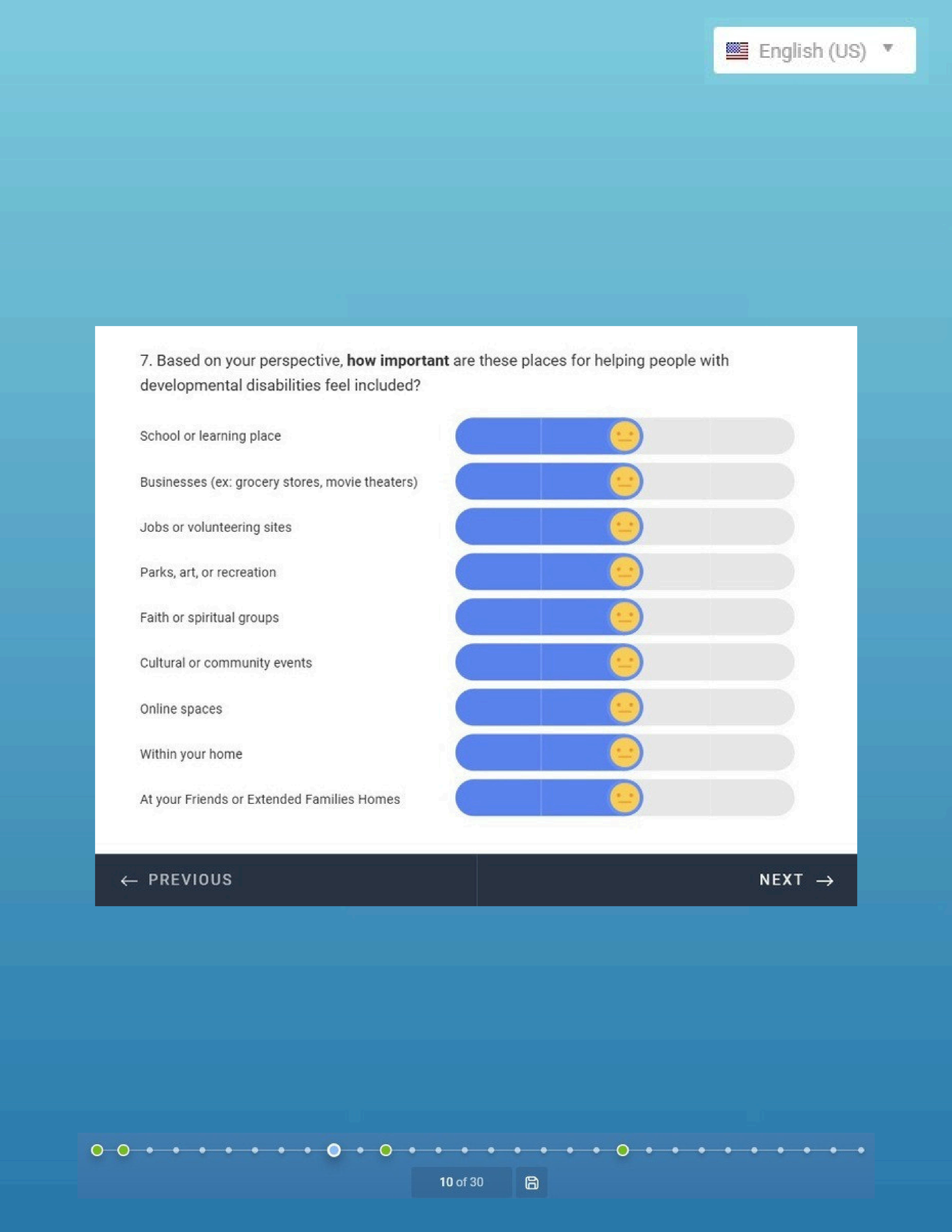


5. What is your preferred language?

This helps us make future resources more accessible

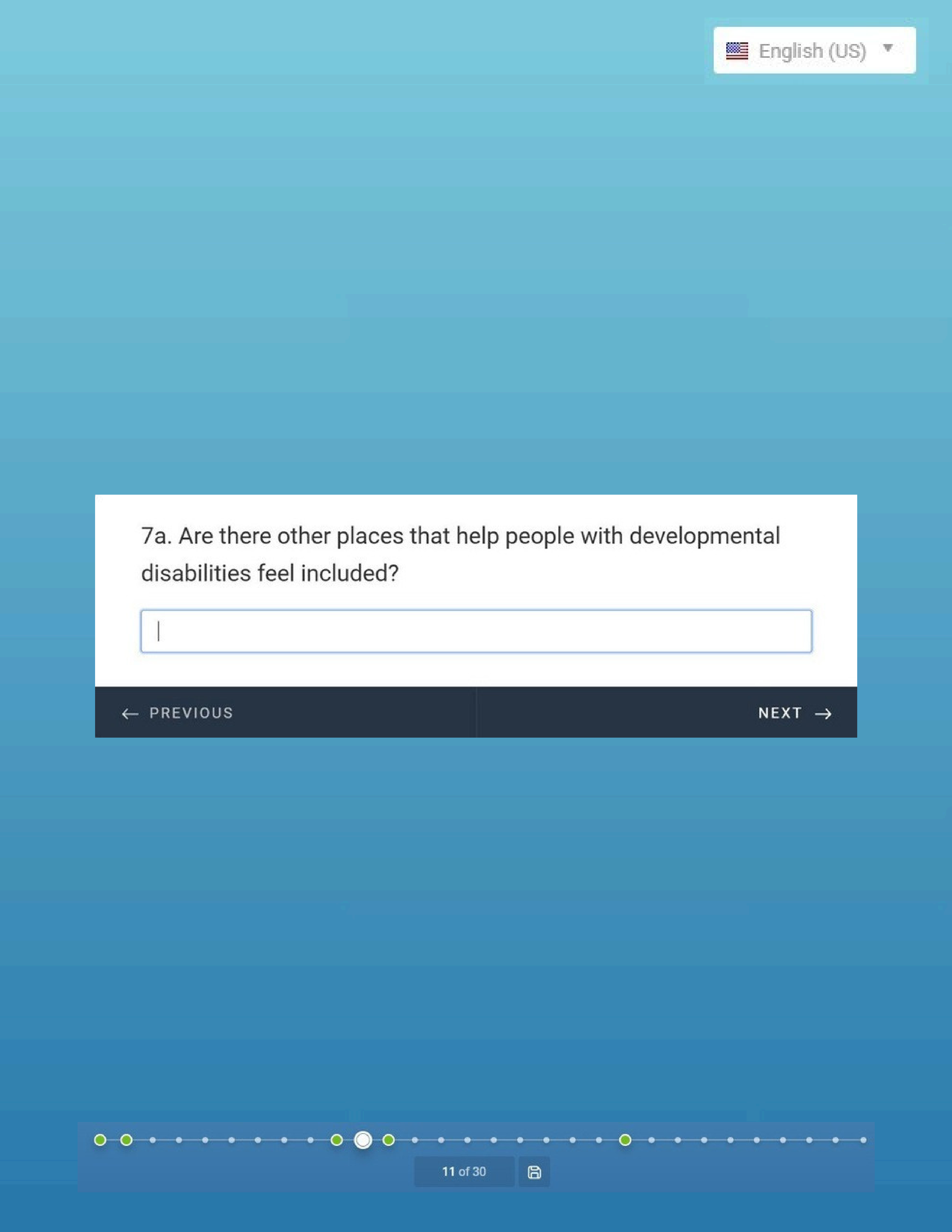
6. Are there other identities or experiences that affect how you (or the person you support) feel included in your community?

For example: being part of the LGBTQ+ community, speaking a different language, having another disability, etc.

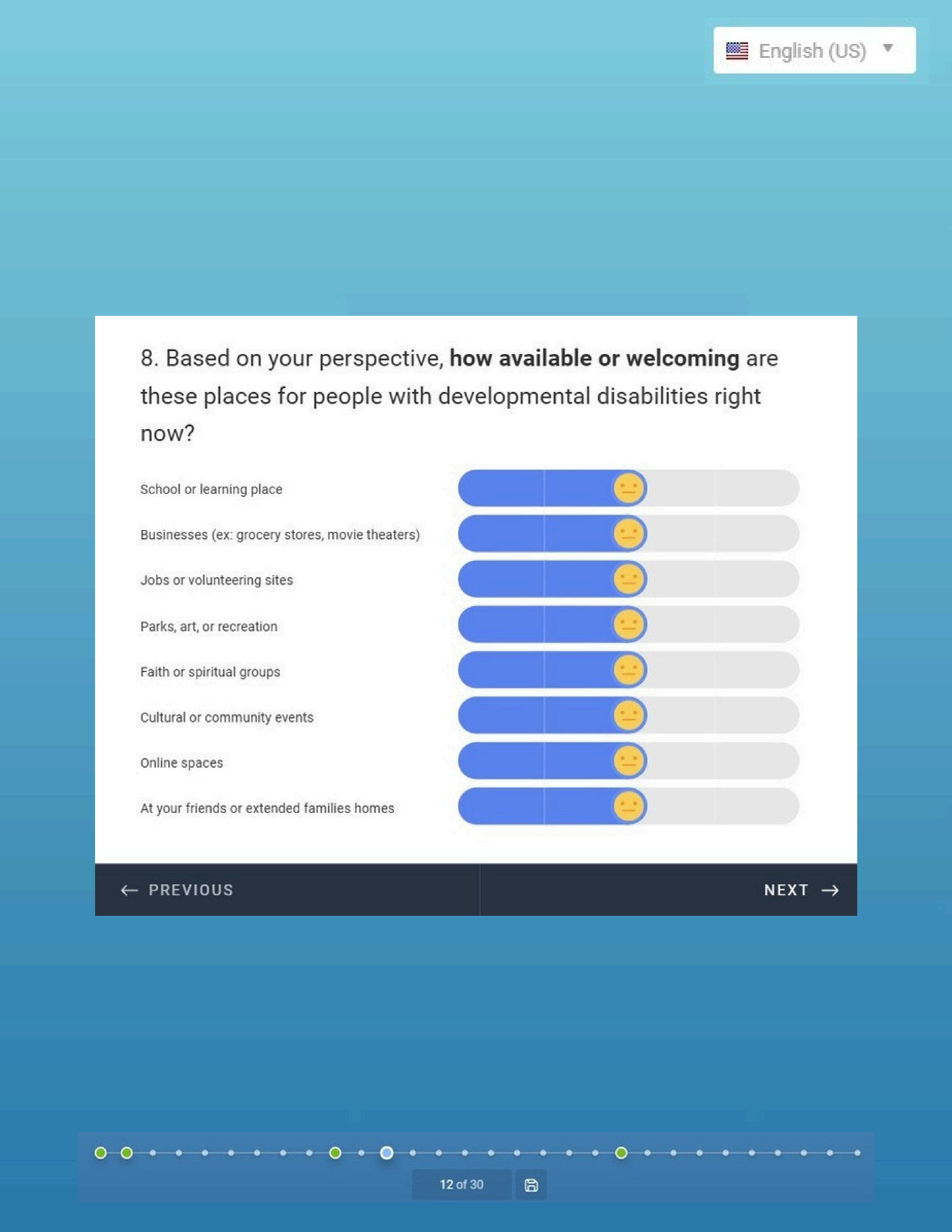


7. Based on your perspective, **how important** are these places for helping people with developmental disabilities feel included?

- School or learning place
- Businesses (ex: grocery stores, movie theaters)
- Jobs or volunteering sites
- Parks, art, or recreation
- Faith or spiritual groups
- Cultural or community events
- Online spaces
- Within your home
- At your Friends or Extended Families Homes



7a. Are there other places that help people with developmental disabilities feel included?



8. Based on your perspective, **how available or welcoming** are these places for people with developmental disabilities right now?

School or learning place

Businesses (ex: grocery stores, movie theaters)

Jobs or volunteering sites

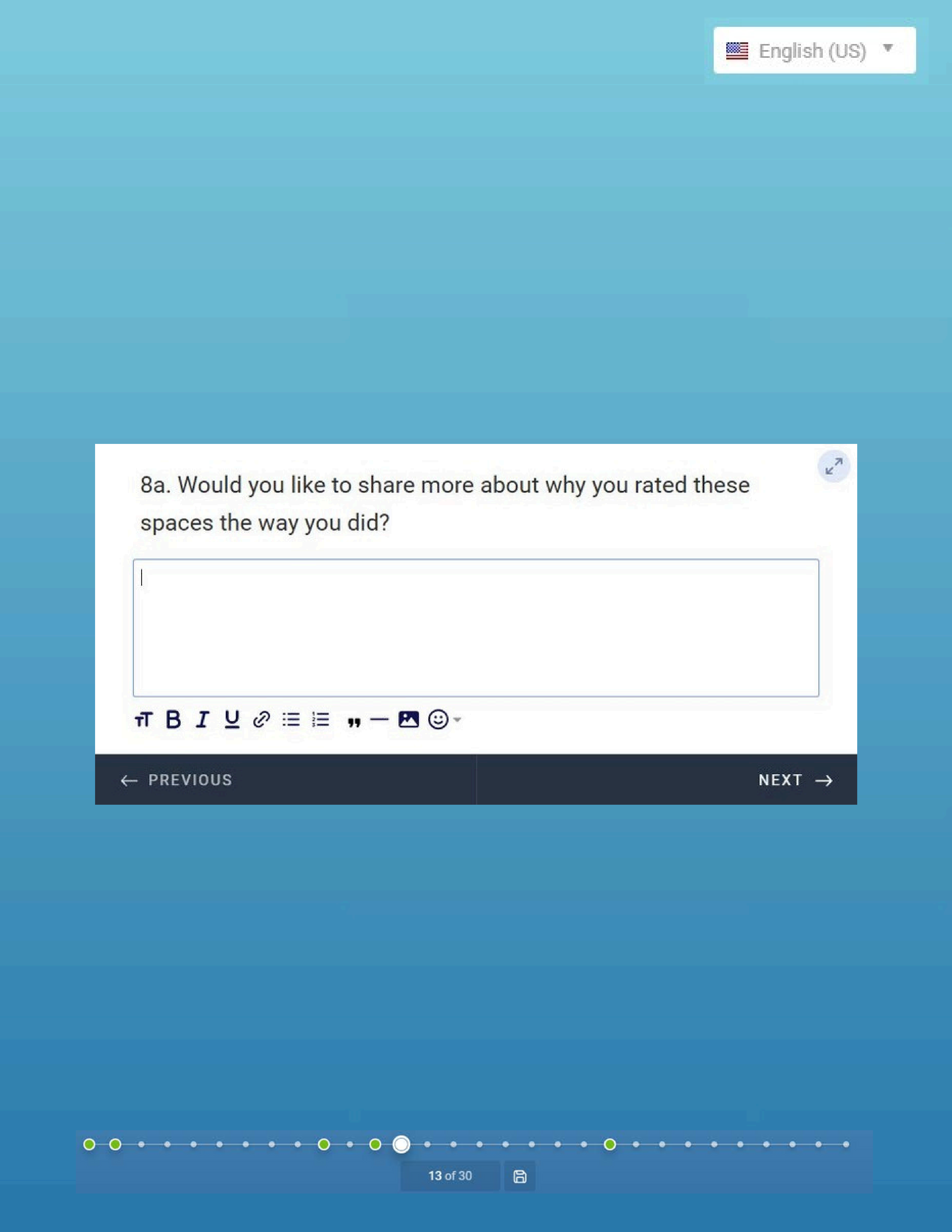
Parks, art, or recreation

Faith or spiritual groups

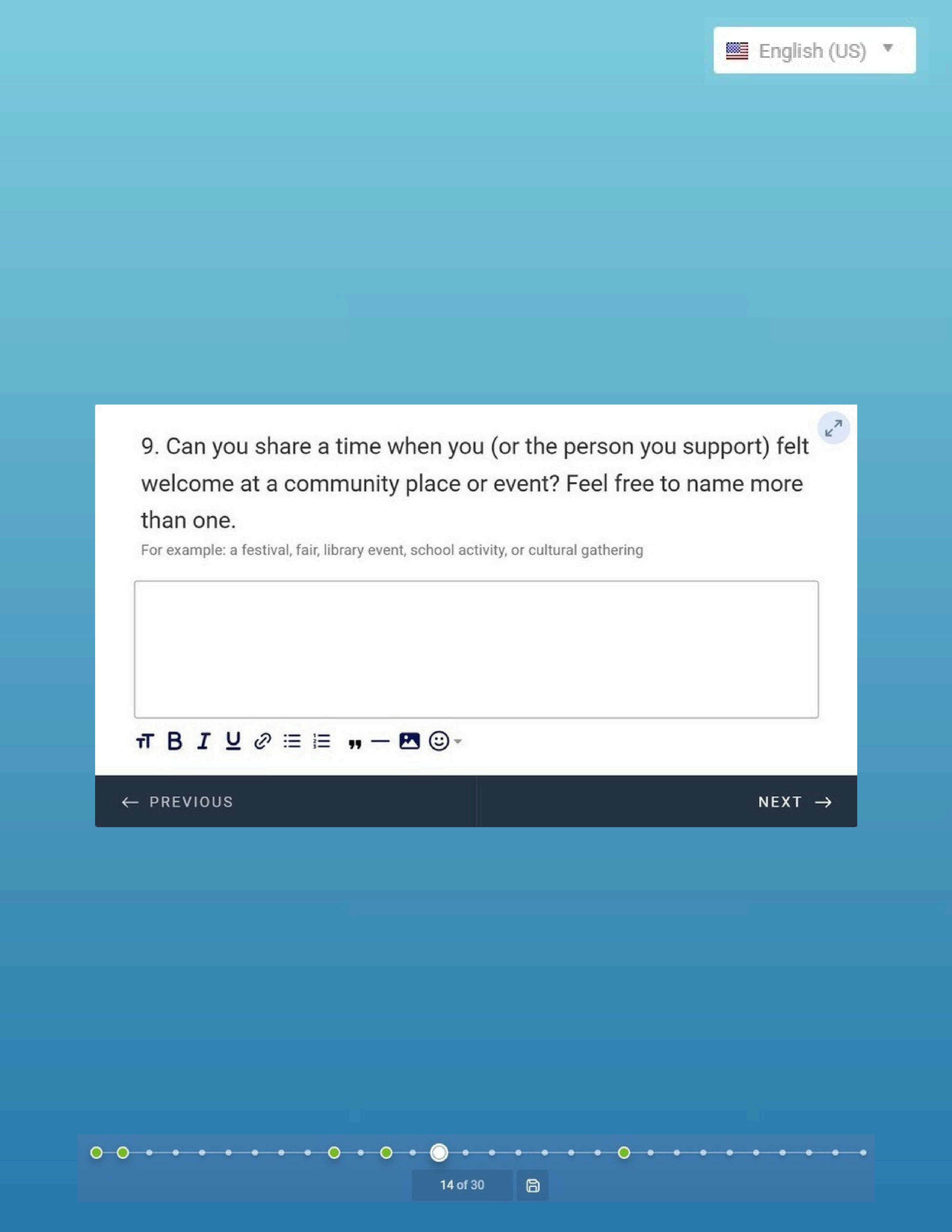
Cultural or community events

Online spaces

At your friends or extended families homes

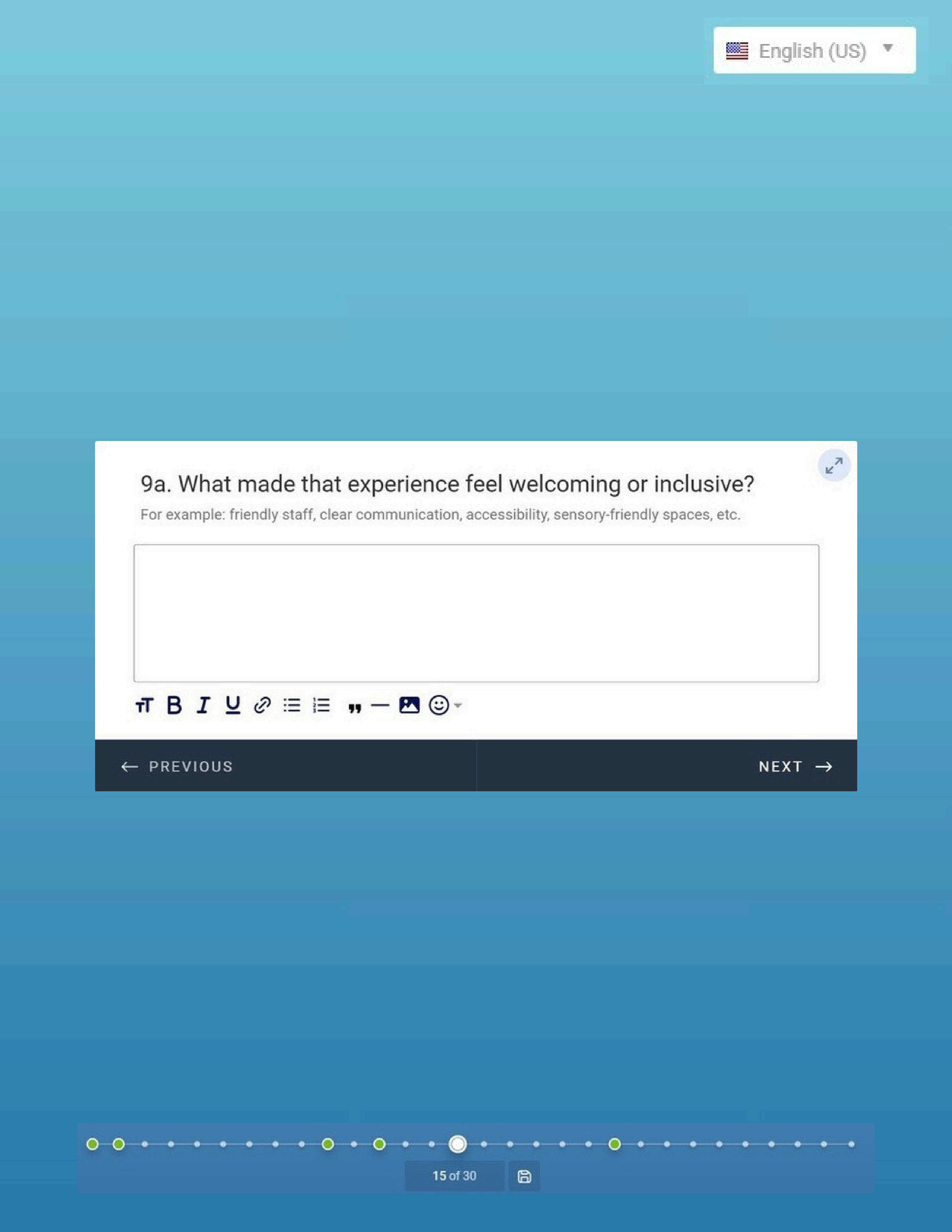


8a. Would you like to share more about why you rated these spaces the way you did?



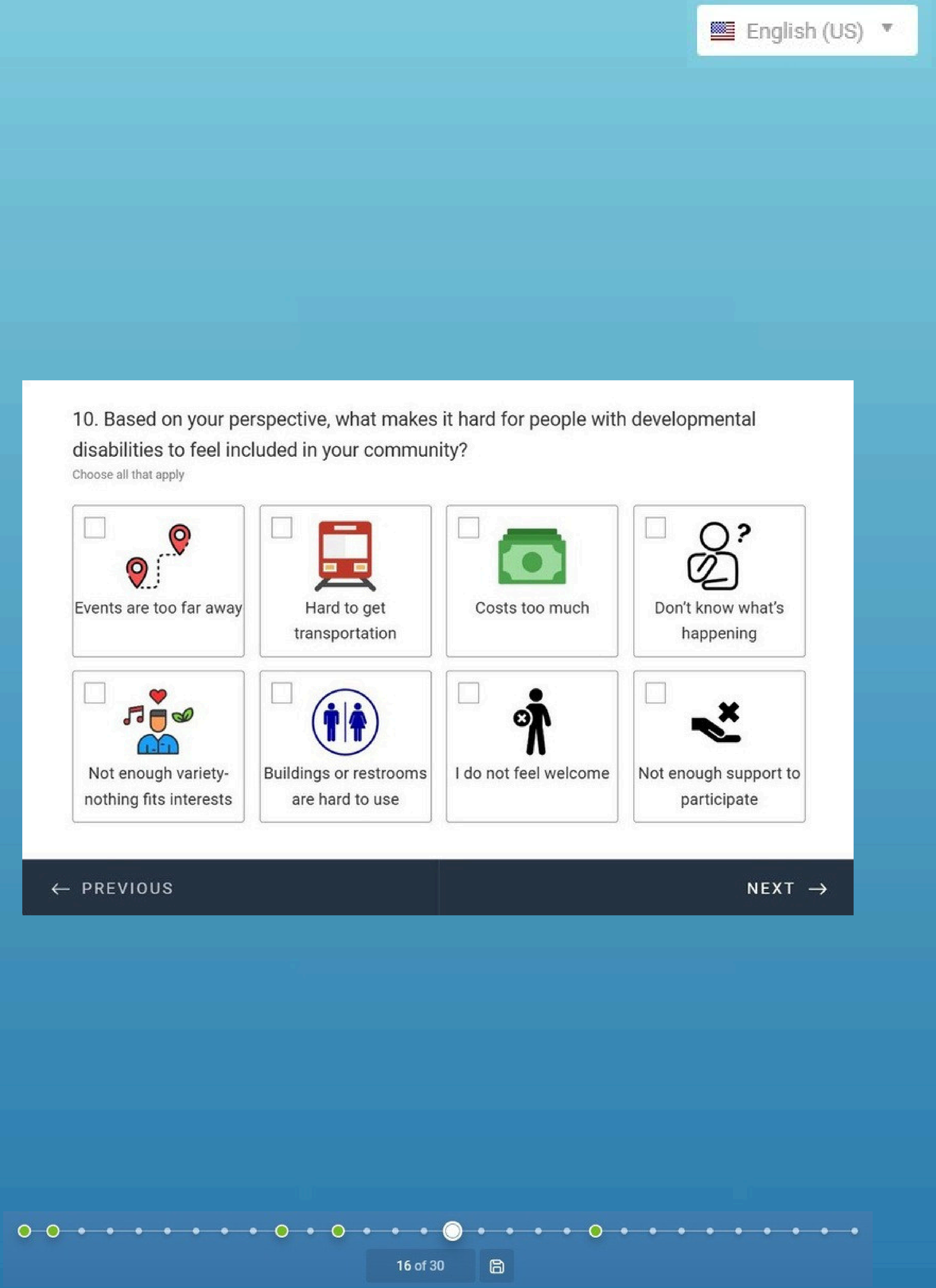
9. Can you share a time when you (or the person you support) felt welcome at a community place or event? Feel free to name more than one.

For example: a festival, fair, library event, school activity, or cultural gathering



9a. What made that experience feel welcoming or inclusive?

For example: friendly staff, clear communication, accessibility, sensory-friendly spaces, etc.

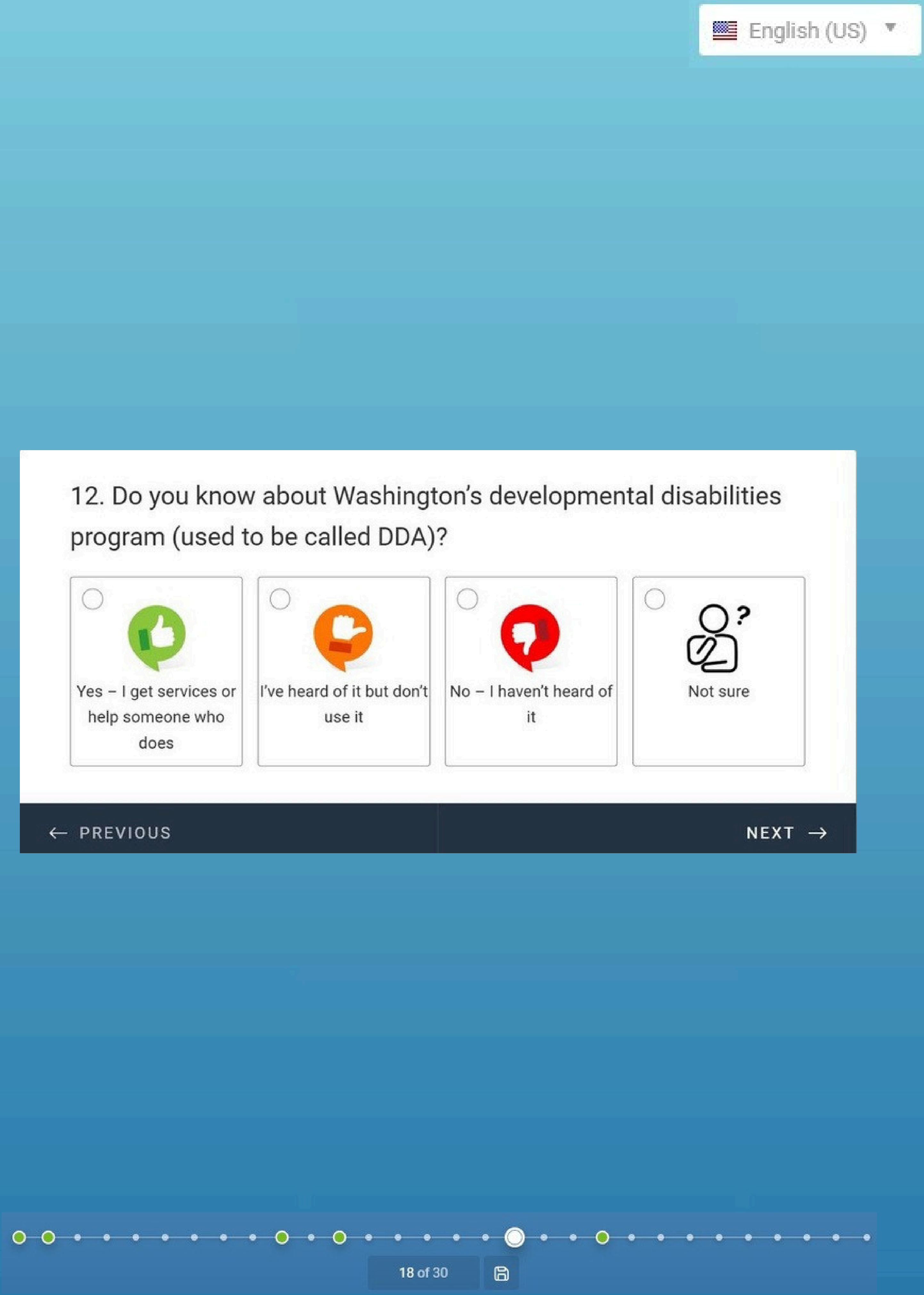


10. Based on your perspective, what makes it hard for people with developmental disabilities to feel included in your community?

Choose all that apply

- ☐ Events are too far away
- ☐ Hard to get transportation
- ☐ Costs too much
- ☐ Don't know what's happening
- ☐ Not enough variety- nothing fits interests
- ☐ Buildings or restrooms are hard to use
- ☐ I do not feel welcome
- ☐ Not enough support to participate

11. What helps you—or the people you support or work with—feel safe, included, and able to participate in community life?



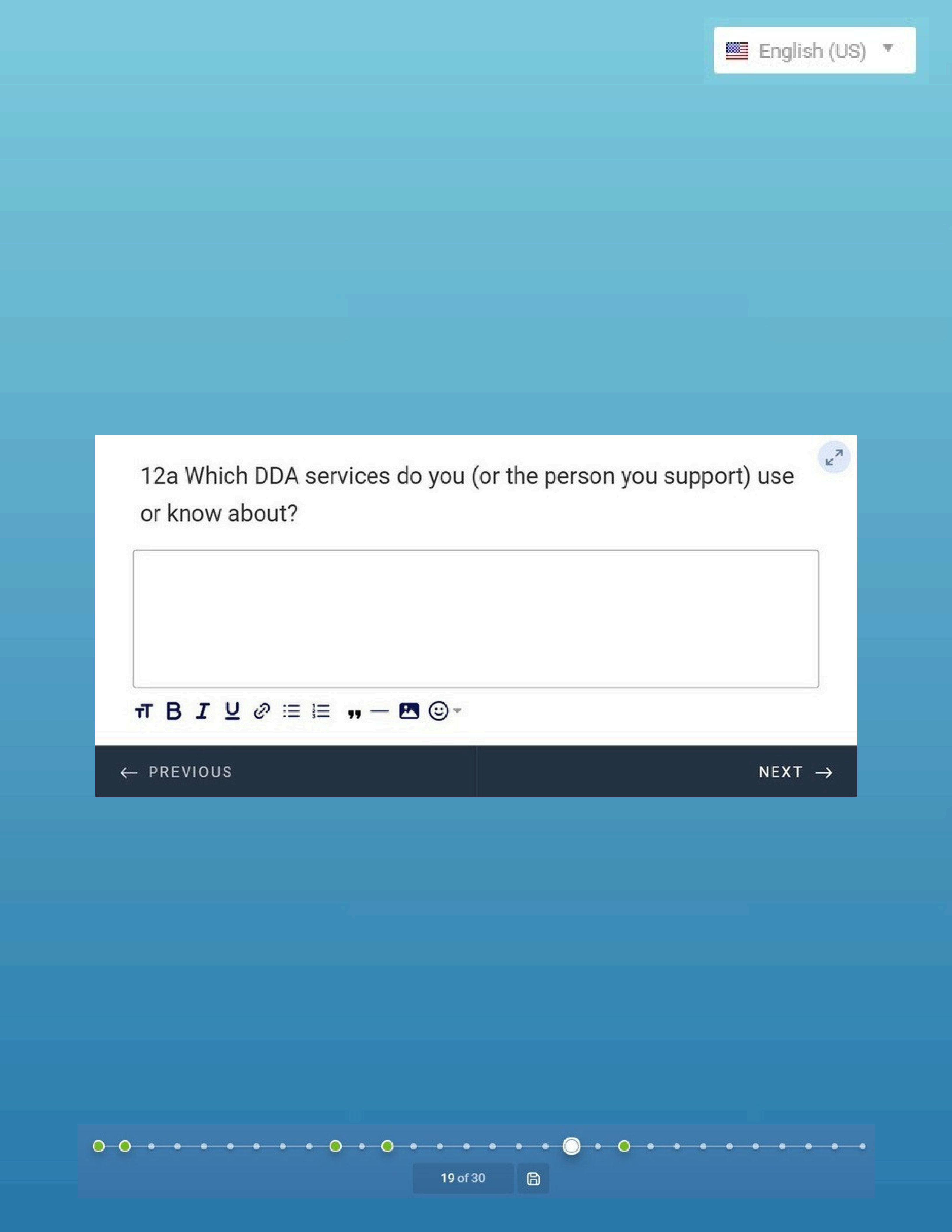
12. Do you know about Washington's developmental disabilities program (used to be called DDA)?

○ Yes – I get services or help someone who does

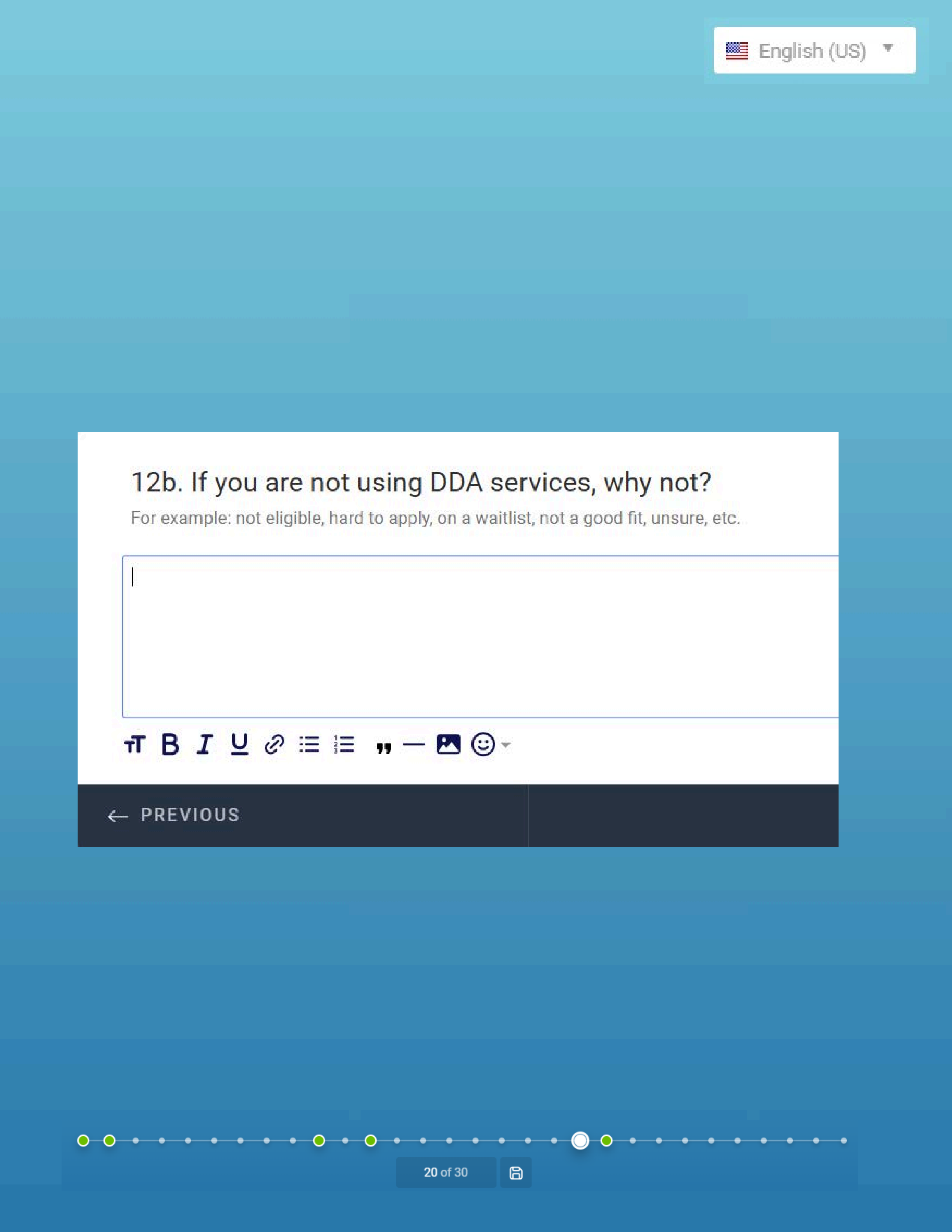
○ I've heard of it but don't use it

○ No – I haven't heard of it

○ Not sure

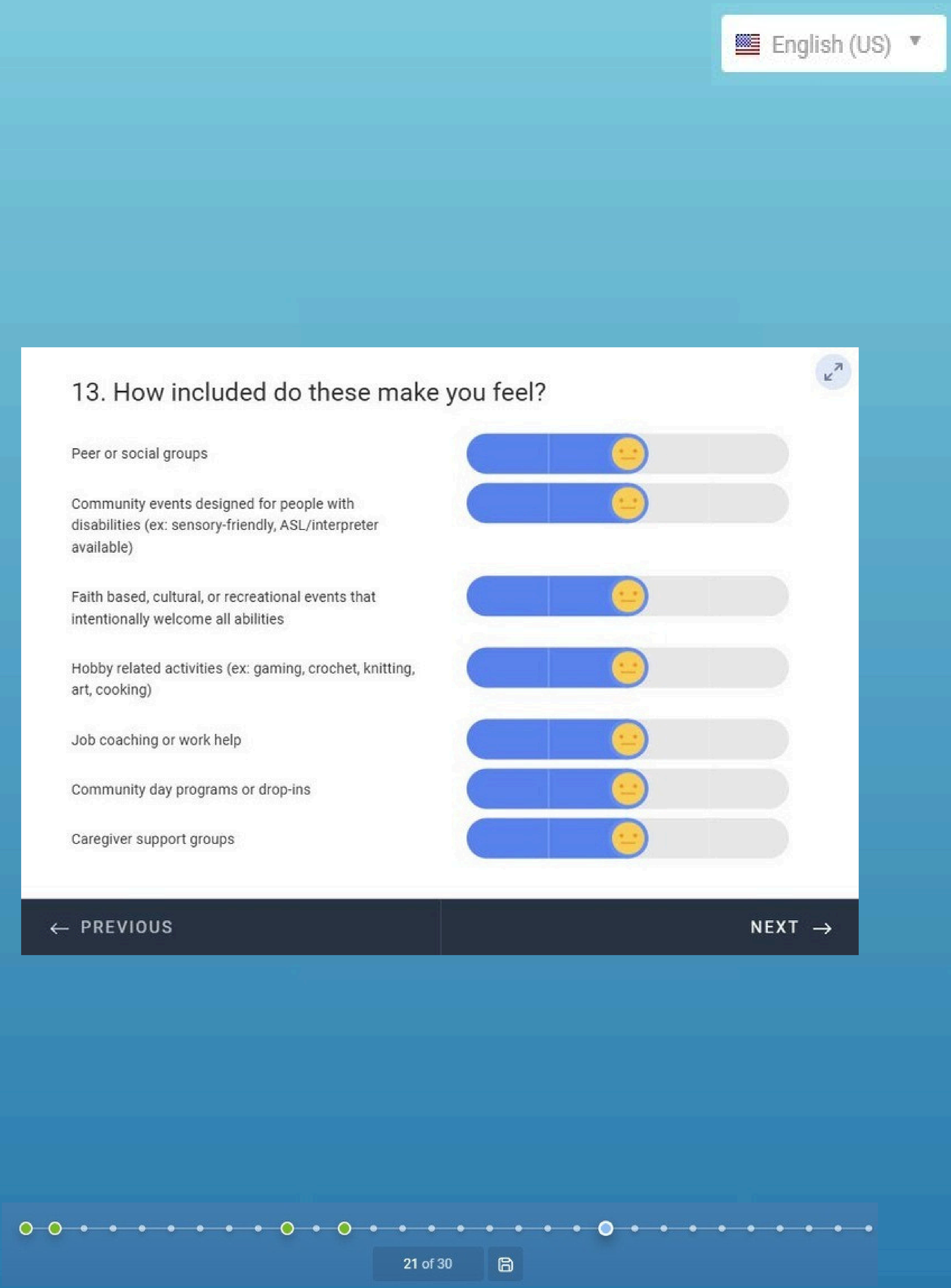


12a Which DDA services do you (or the person you support) use or know about?



12b. If you are not using DDA services, why not?

For example: not eligible, hard to apply, on a waitlist, not a good fit, unsure, etc.



13. How included do these make you feel?

Peer or social groups

Community events designed for people with disabilities (ex: sensory-friendly, ASL/interpreter available)

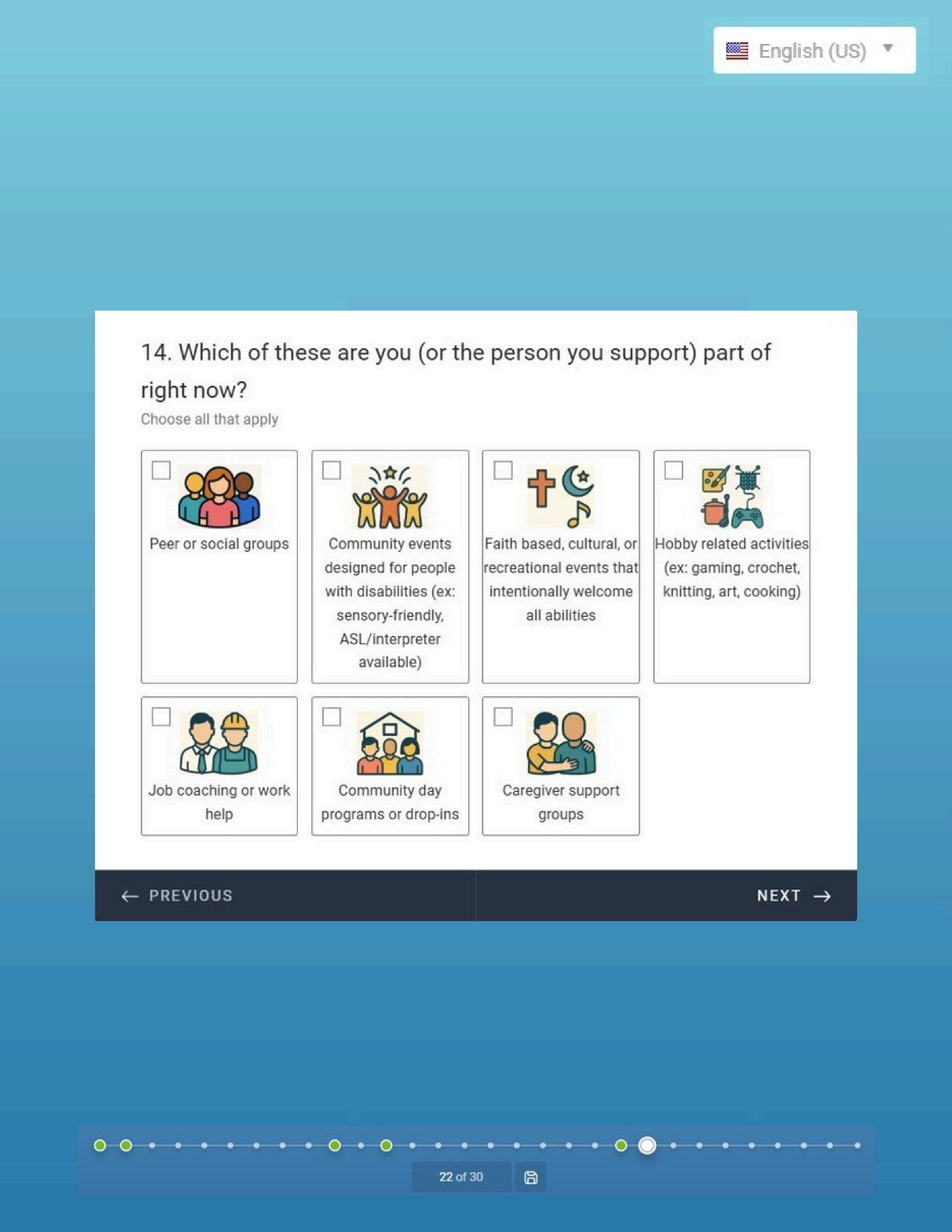
Faith based, cultural, or recreational events that intentionally welcome all abilities

Hobby related activities (ex: gaming, crochet, knitting, art, cooking)

Job coaching or work help

Community day programs or drop-ins

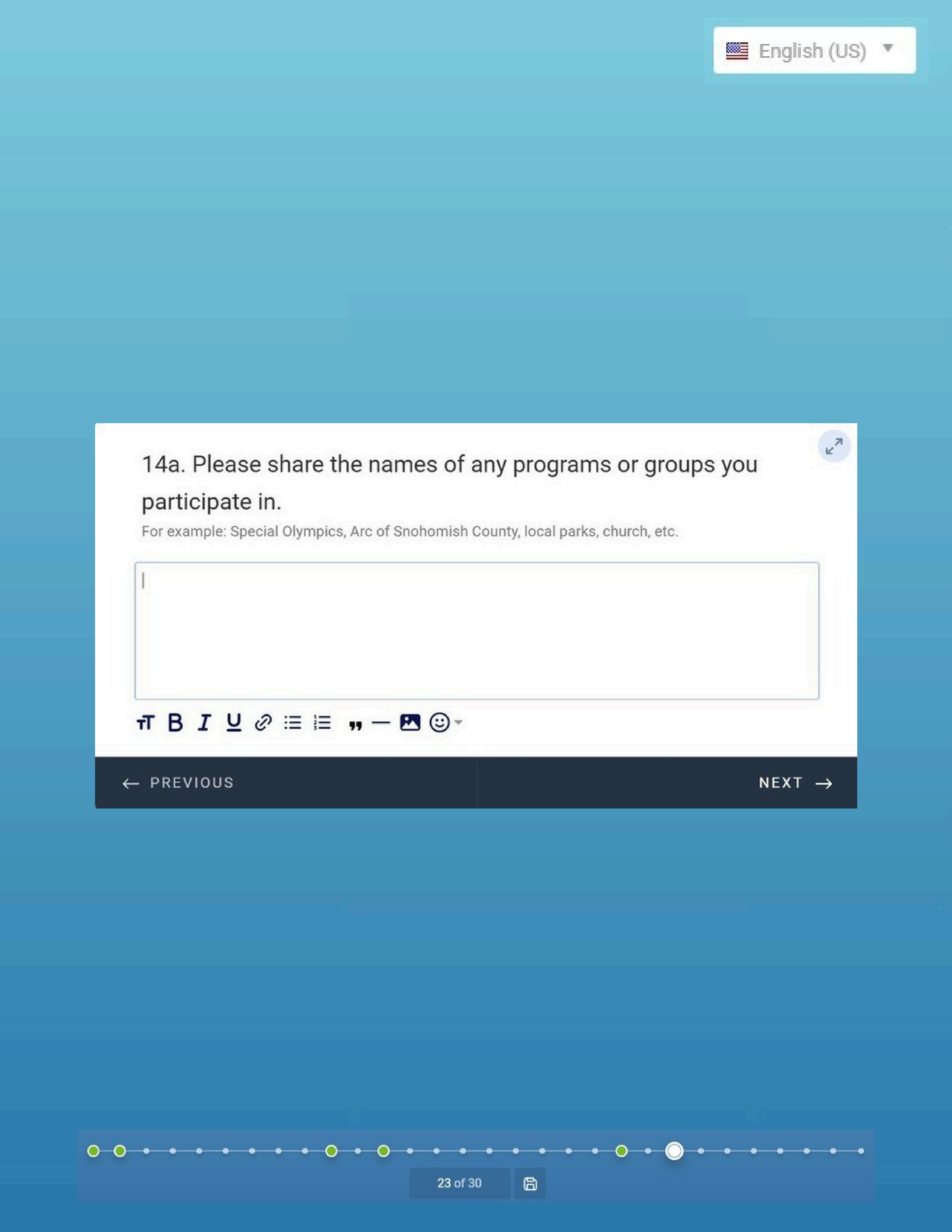
Caregiver support groups



14. Which of these are you (or the person you support) part of right now?

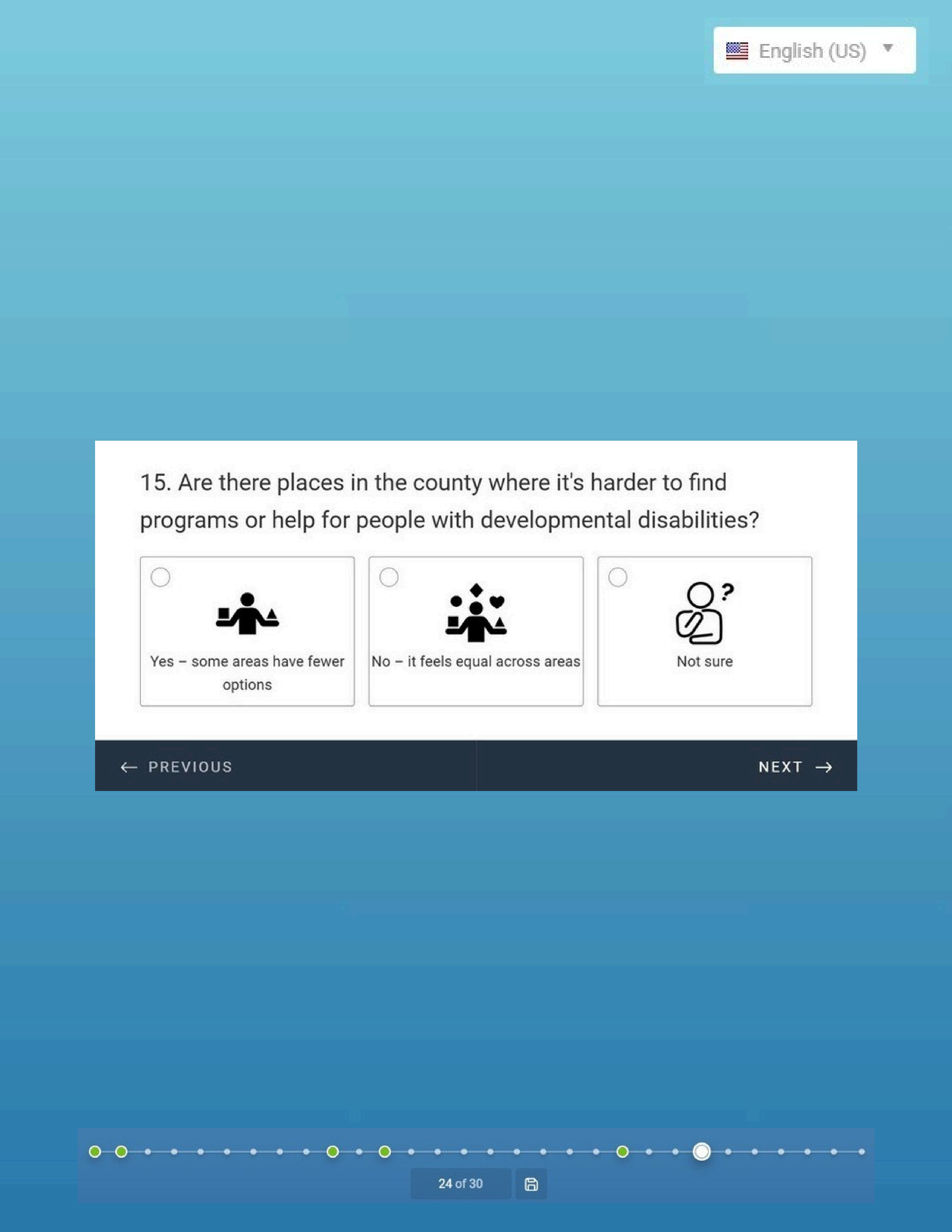
Choose all that apply

- ☐ Peer or social groups
- ☐ Community events designed for people with disabilities (ex: sensory-friendly, ASL/interpreter available)
- ☐ Faith based, cultural, or recreational events that intentionally welcome all abilities
- ☐ Hobby related activities (ex: gaming, crochet, knitting, art, cooking)
- ☐ Job coaching or work help
- ☐ Community day programs or drop-ins
- ☐ Caregiver support groups



14a. Please share the names of any programs or groups you participate in.

For example: Special Olympics, Arc of Snohomish County, local parks, church, etc.



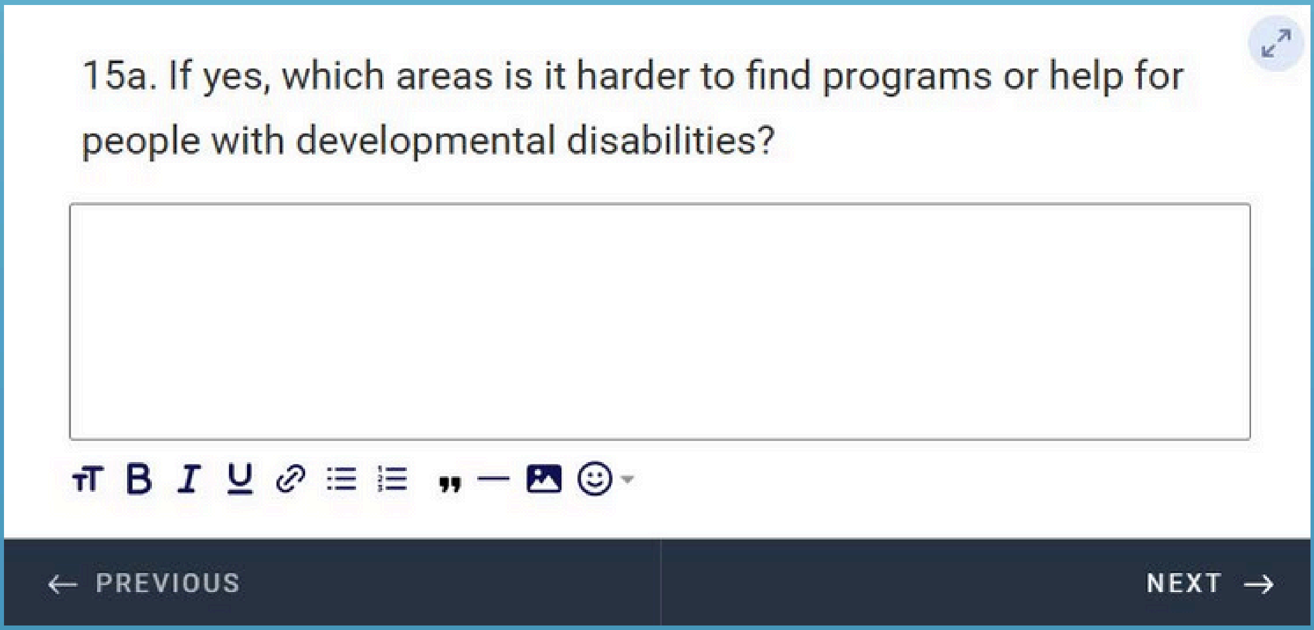
15. Are there places in the county where it's harder to find programs or help for people with developmental disabilities?

○ Yes – some areas have fewer options

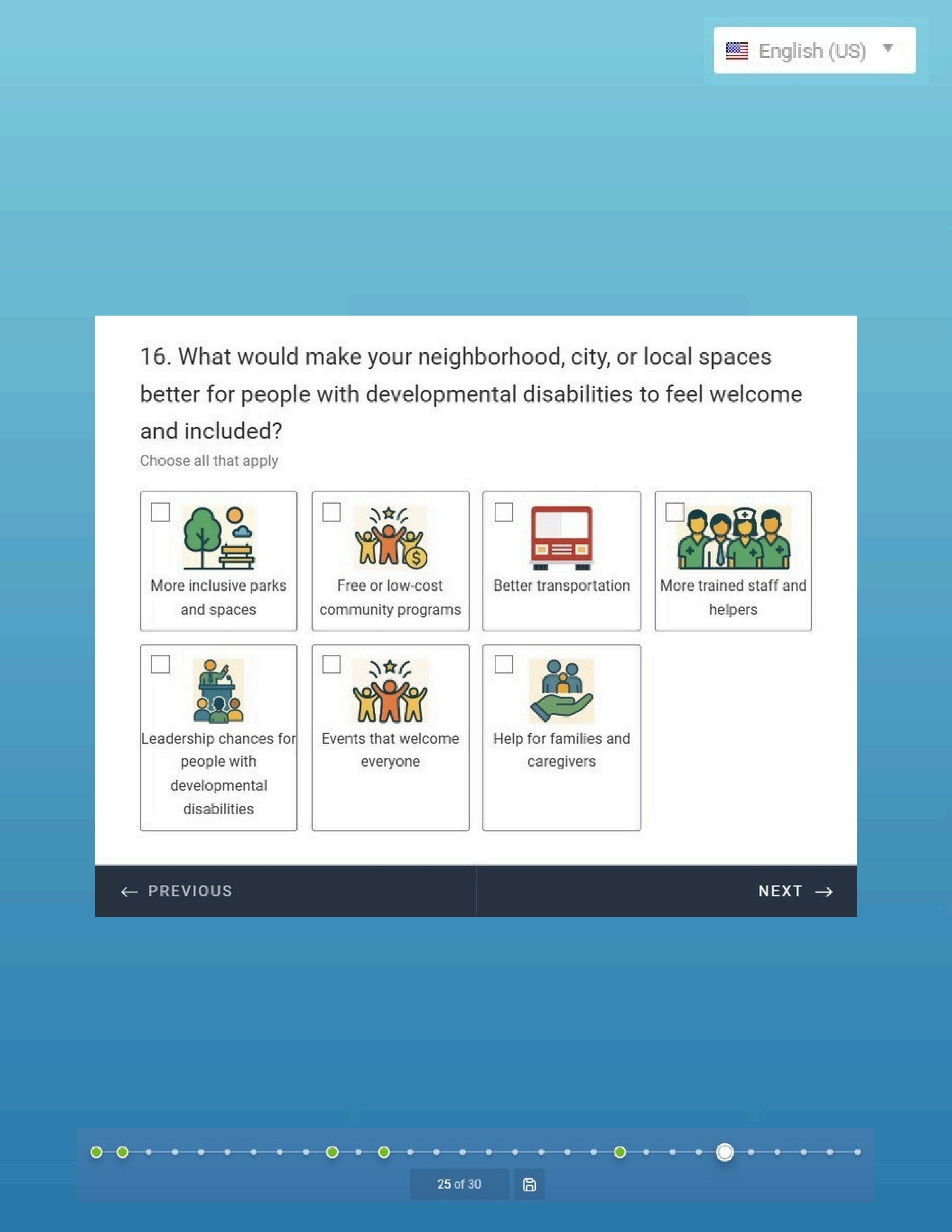
○ No – it feels equal across areas

○ Not sure

English (US) ▼



15a. If yes, which areas is it harder to find programs or help for people with developmental disabilities?

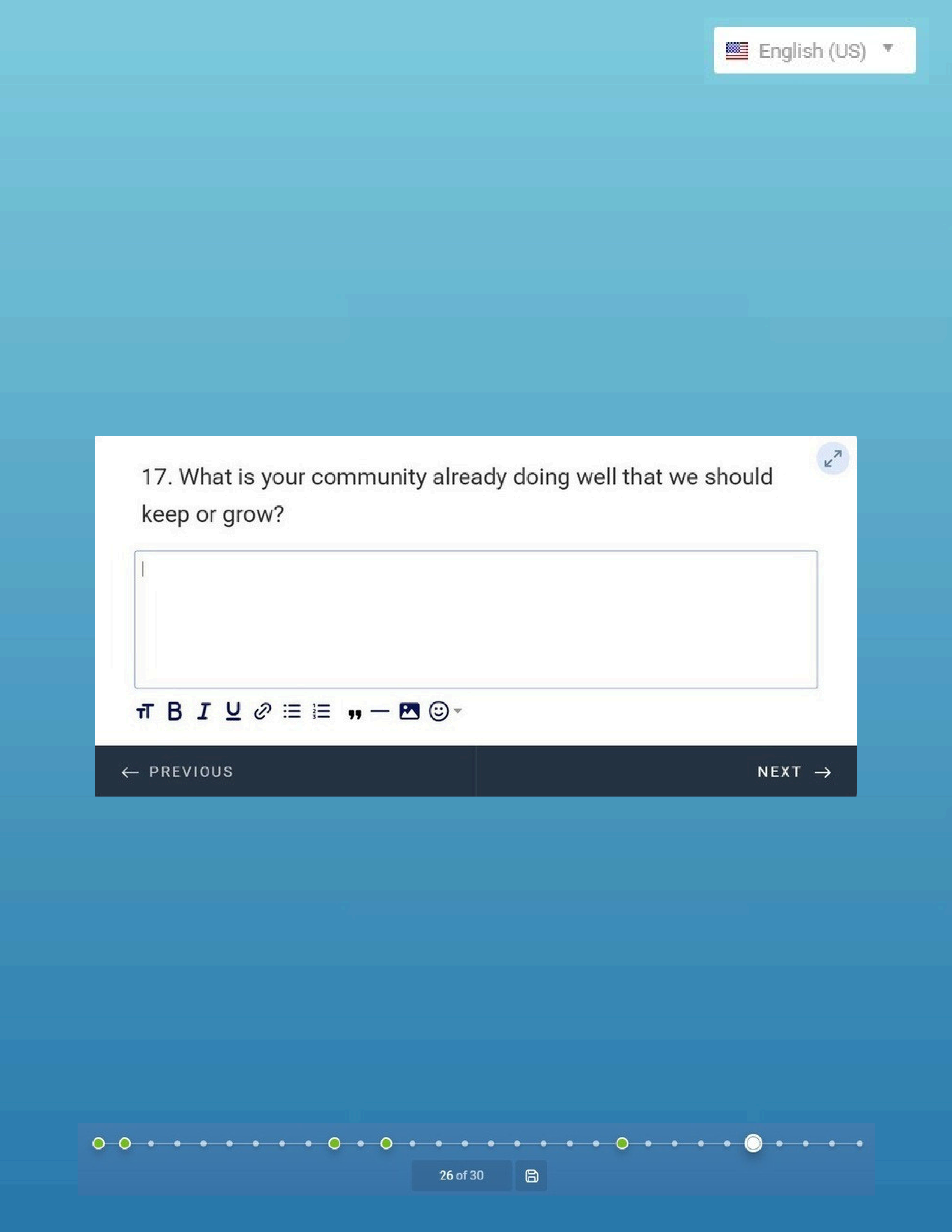


English (US) ▼

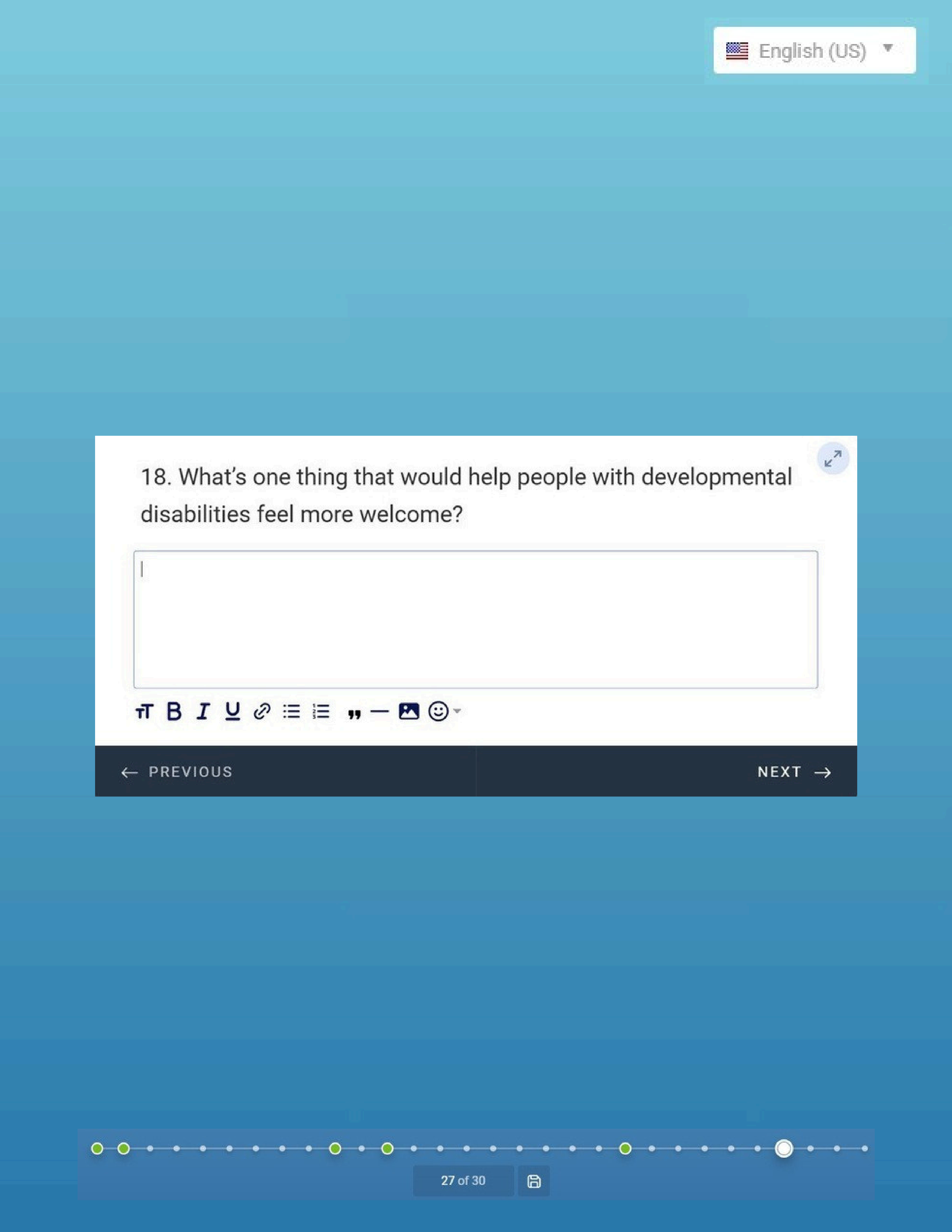
16. What would make your neighborhood, city, or local spaces better for people with developmental disabilities to feel welcome and included?

Choose all that apply

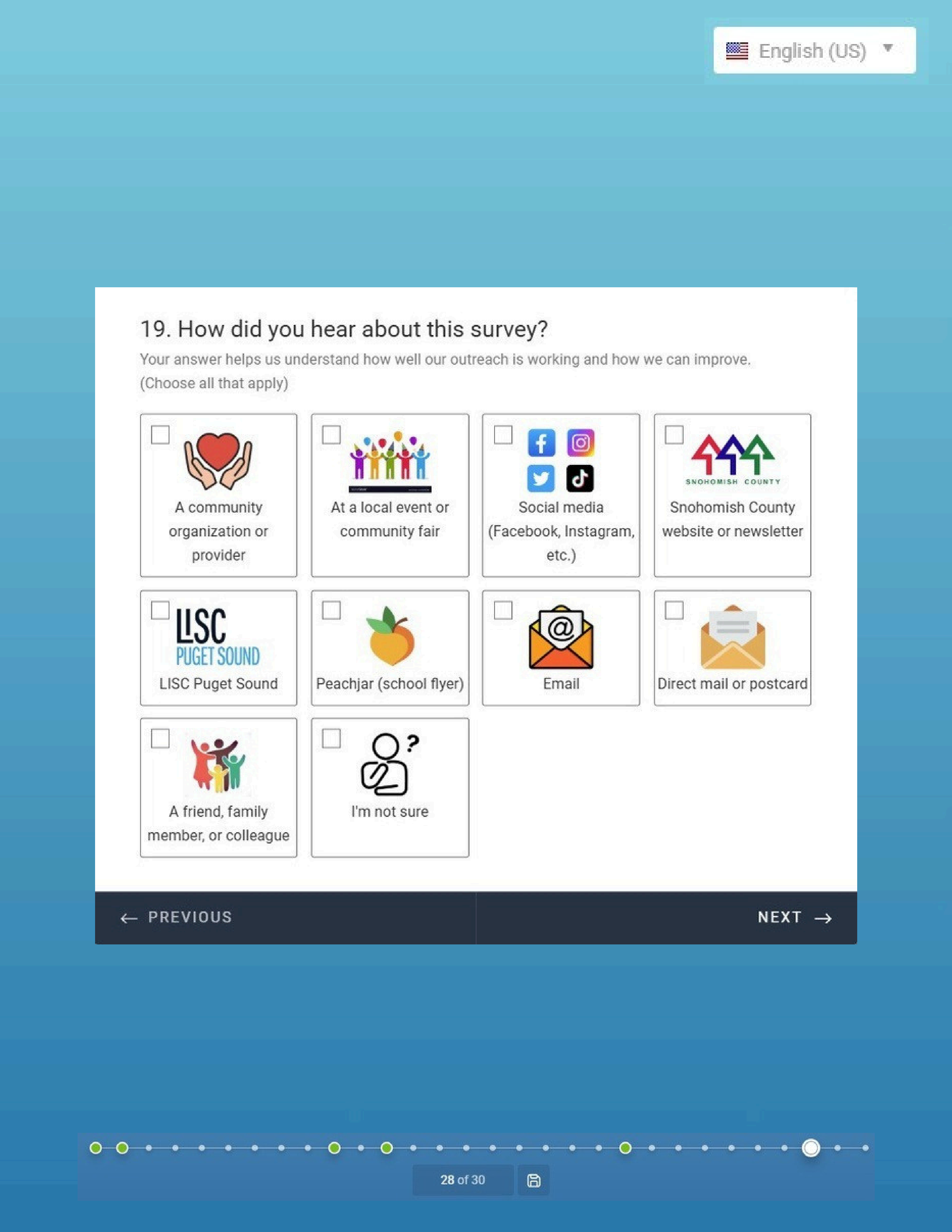
- ☐ More inclusive parks and spaces
- ☐ Free or low-cost community programs
- ☐ Better transportation
- ☐ More trained staff and helpers
- ☐ Leadership chances for people with developmental disabilities
- ☐ Events that welcome everyone
- ☐ Help for families and caregivers



17. What is your community already doing well that we should keep or grow?



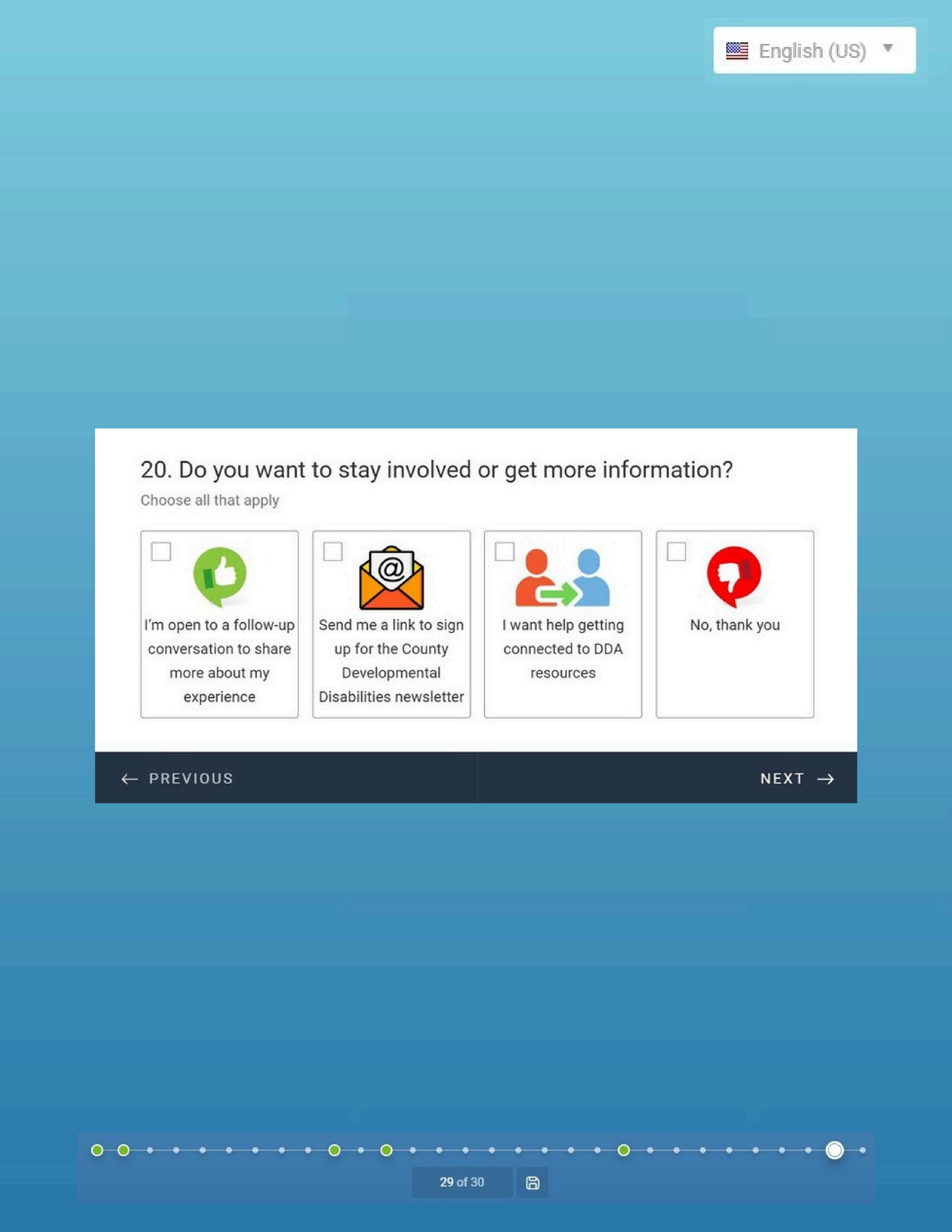
18. What's one thing that would help people with developmental disabilities feel more welcome?



19. How did you hear about this survey?

Your answer helps us understand how well our outreach is working and how we can improve. (Choose all that apply)

- ☐ A community organization or provider
- ☐ At a local event or community fair
- ☐ Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- ☐ Snohomish County website or newsletter
- ☐ LISC Puget Sound
- ☐ Peachjar (school flyer)
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Direct mail or postcard
- ☐ A friend, family member, or colleague
- ☐ I'm not sure



20. Do you want to stay involved or get more information?

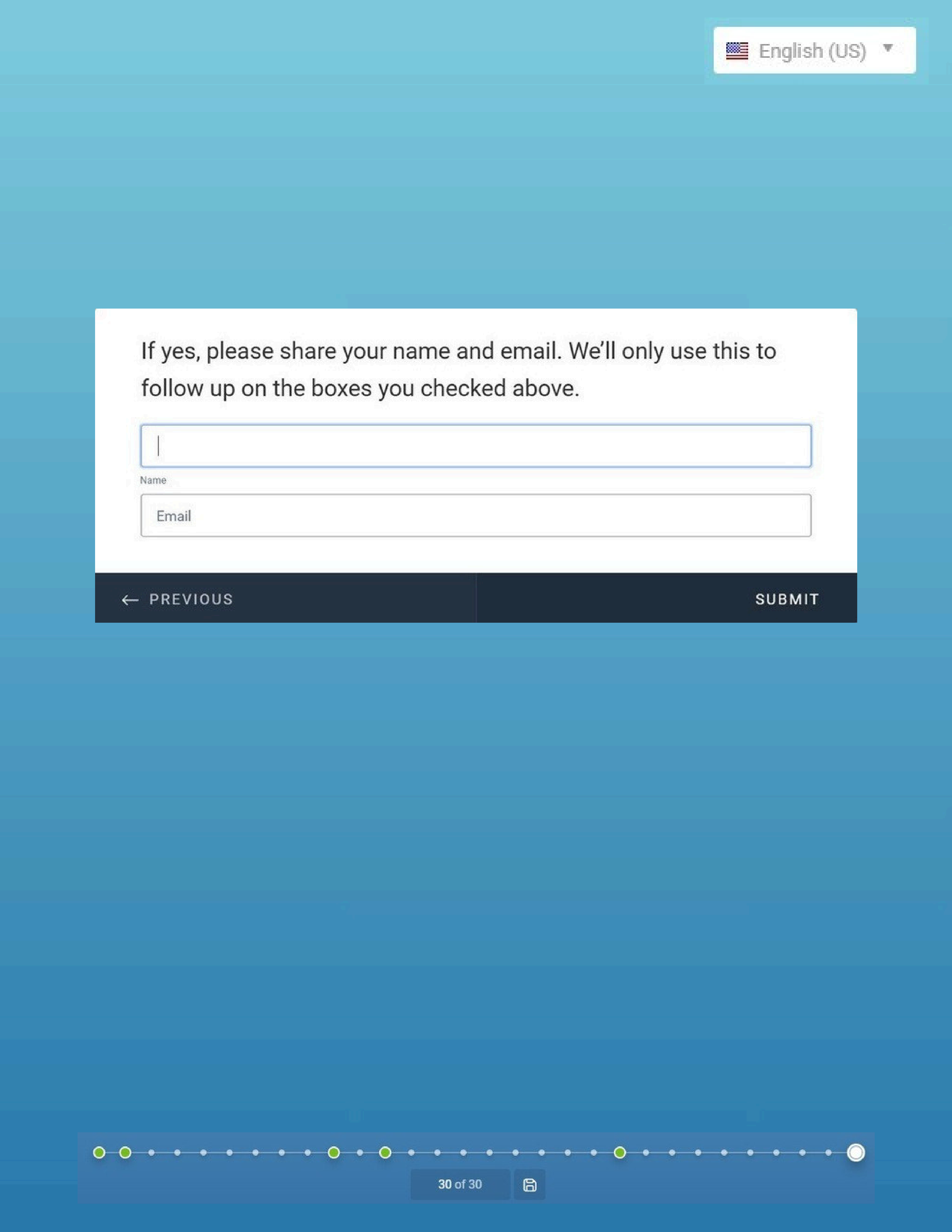
Choose all that apply

☐ I'm open to a follow-up conversation to share more about my experience

☐ Send me a link to sign up for the County Developmental Disabilities newsletter

☐ I want help getting connected to DDA resources

☐ No, thank you



If yes, please share your name and email. We'll only use this to follow up on the boxes you checked above.

Name

Email