



HOMETOWN COMPETITIVENESS

A Come-Back/Give-Back Approach to Rural Community Building

YOUTH

A People Attraction Guide

Background and Introduction - This Guide provides important information on the people attraction opportunity associated with youth and young adults. By "youth," we are referring to those younger people who are graduating from high school and in the early formative years of family and career building. Typically this group averages in age from 16 to their late 20s and early 30s.

Youth play many roles in our communities. They are foundational to the demographic renewal of our communities. But their importance is even greater than this role. They are best connected to the future economy and society that our communities will need to compete within. Ensuring a strong and growing community of youth is paramount to your communities to find economic and social relevance in the 21st Century.



People Attraction Guides

The HTC Partnership through generous support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has prepared a series of People Attraction Guides to enable rural communities to take advantage of this development opportunity.

Overview. We have an Overview Guide that is a primer on this development opportunity and the basics of strategy building.

Opportunity Guides. Based on our field experience we have prepared guides around five specific people attraction opportunities common to most rural communities:

- Youth
- Families
- Entrepreneurs
- Professionals
- Retirees

For additional information on HTC's People Attraction Resources contact Don Macke with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship at 402.323.7339 or don@e2mail.org.

This Guide is organized into five sections:

Section 1 - Why Attract Youth to Your Community? Section 1 provides an overview of the primary reasons why your community should consider a youth focused people attraction strategy.

Section 2 - Who Are They? Section 2 profiles the various youth groups that can be candidates for attraction to your community.

Section 3 - Youth Attraction Strategies. Section 3 outlines possible attraction strategies and provides tactic insights that can be helpful to your community as you build your own game plan.

Section 4 - Building Your Community's Game Plan. This fourth section provides general advise for how your community can build a people attraction plan over time.

Section 5 - About Us. Our final section shared a bit about our HTC Group and how you can access additional information on our people attraction resources and training services.

We know that youth are foundational to the future of our rural communities. Yet most rural communities do not have intentional and robust strategies to attract youth. It is important that you take time to build a strong and relevant case for your community before you launch into a youth attraction strategy. The next section provides some important ideas for making your case for youth attraction!

Lessons from the Movie October Sky

Every so often on the movie classics channel on cable television they re-run October Sky. For those of you who have seen this movie you know it provides a powerful set of insights and lessons associated with youth and their rural communities.

For those of you who have not seen October Sky -- let's review the highlights and summarize some of the key lessons.

October Sky is set in a small coal mining town in Western Virginia in the 1960s just as the space program was getting off the ground. The story centers around a group of boys who were passionate about space and rockets. There is tension between the lead boy - Homer and his Dad - a life long coal miner. This story graphically illustrates the historic tension between small towns and their youth. It highlights the need to escape for some and the failure of community to embrace difference and change. The story has a happy ending. Homer escapes, goes to college and works for NASA. Given Homer's passions and talents, leaving was a good choice. But in leaving physically Homer does not need to disconnect from his home town, family and friends. In fact Homer, in real life does remember his home town. He gives back and supports better education for those that followed him.

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Why Attract Youth to Your Community

It is important that you lay a good foundation within your community before you prioritize any new development strategy. While it may seem obvious that every community needs to attract young adults -- it is still valuable to make the case clear and strong for why youth attraction is important. Our rural communities are challenged with many pressing issues. Setting priorities and creating focus is critically important to realizing progress. So we encourage you to make your case to your community for youth attraction.

We would suggest there are five core reasons that form the foundation for pursuing a youth focused people attraction strategy:

Demographic Renewal
New Energy & Ideas
Connections to the Larger World
Economic Force
Creating Tipping Points

People Attraction Today

For much of the last century the key to economic development in rural America centered on two strategies. First, if natural resource industries like farming, ranching, fishing, timber, mining and energy production were healthy - times were good. Second, if your community could attract a manufacturer, warehouse or some other industry - your community would prosper. Times have changed and now people attraction may be the most important development opportunity for many rural communities. The attraction of young people is particularly important. Over their lives one young person will generate between \$5 and \$10 million of economic activity within your community. While the economic contributions are significant - what young people give to our communities is much greater.

Figure 1 summarizes key points related to each of these five rationales for youth attraction:

Figure 1 - Building the Case for Youth Attraction

<p>Demographic Renewal</p>	<p>It is a fact of life. Every community needs young people to survive. The realities of aging require that each community attract a certain share of their young people to ensure population replacement and continuation of schools, churches and community life.</p>
<p>New Energy and Ideas</p>	<p>Long-term economic and social success is rooted in new ideas and energy to make them happen. Young people, by their very nature are at the front end of their lives. Their energy and drive to succeed and make their communities better is fundamental. Every community needs this force.</p>
<p>Connections</p>	<p>Most youth, particularly those that leave the community and go out into the larger world, develop important connects with people, ideas and emerging trends. These connections are essential to renewing our communities and ensuring we are connected to the larger world economy and society.</p>
<p>Economic Force</p>	<p>Young people are powerful consumers. Their need for housing, clothing, education, etc. is huge. They are starting out and they need everything. Having young people in our communities can fuel economic vitality and growth.</p>
<p>Tipping Points</p>	<p>A lot has been written about this idea of a tipping point. It is a powerful idea and important to our communities. One important tipping point relates to the number of young people in your community. Once you reach a critical mass of young people, your attraction power goes up. Fall below that critical mass and your challenges around youth attraction become much greater!</p>

We can share more on building the case of youth attraction. But our experience suggests that most communities already get it and do not need a lot of argument to move forward. But it has also been our experience that many communities do not feel the urgency to act and act more aggressively with respect to youth attraction. Making sure you have a compelling case for making youth attraction a development priority is important to your long-term success.

One potential valuable tool you can use to raise awareness, increase interest and mobilize support for youth attraction is our Youth Attraction Formula. The Formula can help you community better understand what you need to accomplish with youth attraction to stabilize your population and see modest growth. The inset on the Youth Attraction Formula provides additional background on this resource.

The scenario on the next page was used by Craig Schroeder with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship with communities served by the Nebraska Public Power District.

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The Impact of Attracting Youth and Young Families Upon Sustaining Rural Community Populations

Example:

1980-90 Population Change for Nebraska Communities 1,000-2,500 Pop. -6.9%

Establishing a Youth and Young Families Attraction Goal:

1000 Pop. x 6.9% = 69 people net loss over 10 years

69 / 10 years = 6.9 people net loss per year

GOAL: Attract 6.9 young people each year over the next decade.

Scenario:

Three promising high school graduates leave their community for education and employment opportunities. After several years, one graduate remains single and two graduates marry a person from outside their home community. After being invited by their families and community to return home, the single person and the two couples return to restore family ties and take advantage of career opportunities presented to them by the community's leaders. The two couples also have two children each over the next ten years. As a result, the cumulative population impact to the community is nine (3 graduates, 2 spouses, 4 children).

Note: This scenario is based upon actual 2000 Census data for rural Nebraska counties. This scenario makes the realistic assumption that these three graduates who left their community to further their education and career would have not returned had their families and community not made the effort to attract them back and helped to create viable economic opportunities for them.

However, because they did, a community of 1,000 people that had been losing population at a rate of -6.9% per decade is now able to turn a decades old scenario of population loss to a net population gain of 2.8%. They also gained new leadership, new energy and ideas, new children in the school, and new business owners and employees with long term wealth creation goals.

Is attracting youth and young families an important goal for your community? If so, what strategies can your community employ to make it happen?

Now that we have spent a bit of time exploring a possible case for youth attraction, let's turn our attention to possible attraction opportunities and targets to accomplish with youth attraction to stabilize your population and see modest growth. The inset on the Youth Attraction Formula provides additional background on this resource.

Who Are They?

For decades if not generations we have assumed many if not most of our children in rural communities would leave and never return home. Recent research by Craig Schroeder and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship suggests a titanic shift in attitudes among rural youth (see the related inset). Many young people would love to live a rural lifestyle and be closer to family and friends if career opportunities and community attitudes welcomed them home.

Youth attraction opportunities fall into five key groups:

Group 1 - Youth Who Never Leave

Group 2 - Youth Who Leave and Want to Return

Group 3 - Friends & Family of Returning Youth

Group 4 - Spouses & Family

Group 5 - Gone, But Still Connected

Youth Who Never Leave. Although many of our community's children do leave to pursue continued education, life experience or work - many choose to stay in their home community or area. These youth become mayors, education board owners, valued workers and business owners. They enjoy a unique place in our communities, but are often forgotten or taken for granted. Many sense that by not leaving they are somewhat less important to the community than those who leave.

Youth Who Leave and Want to Return. Another segment of our community's youth do leave for education or life/work outside of their home community. But they would prefer to come home. They are drawn to cultures of close family and friends or enjoy small town quality of life. Life stage may trigger a desire to come home such as starting a family or the desire to be closer to an aging parent.

Friends & Family of Returning Youth. Peers are important to human beings. We desire to be close to and associate with people who are experiencing similar life stages and challenges such as starting a career, seeking a spouse or having children. There is opportunity to attract other youth to your community through their association with those youth from your community choosing to come home. While it is a very small group in most cases, there are those youth who find their way to your community (such as teachers) with no connections. Depending upon how they grow to connect to your community may well depend whether they put down roots longer term.

Spouses & Family. Your son or daughter goes off into the world and at college they meet the love of their life. They want to come home and persuade this new spouse that their hometown is the right place to put down roots. Often times these spouses or significant others have family (e.g., children, parents or an aging relative) who eventually follow them as well. Group 4 offers great opportunity for leveraging your attraction efforts, but this Group also comes with challenges you must address if long-term success is to be realized.

Gone, But Still Connected. We live in a virtual world and it is clear that no community will attract home to all their youth. There are always those because of personal dreams (e.g., love, career or circumstance) will leave physically and not return (at least in their youth). But Group 5 is important and can be attracted to your community virtually. They can stay connected and give back in other ways. These life long relationships often keep the doors open for them to return later in life.

Youth Attraction Strategies

Knowing this important is one thing -- but moving to effective action is another thing. As we explore possible options for building a youth attraction strategy in your community we approach this question from three different perspectives:

- First, we take a look at why young people are leaving rural communities and how this information can help us build a better game plan.
- Next we take an opposite view and look into those attributes that seem to support youth attraction.
- Finally, we take a detailed look at each of the five youth attraction opportunities and summarize key amenities essential for attraction success.

So let's now take a look what some of the research around why youth are leaving.

Why Do Youth Leave Rural Communities?

There is some research on this topic of why youth leave their rural communities. There is even more myth and story that have become fact on this topic absent the benefit of objective research. Chances are good if you pulled together and group of youth who have left your community and asked this question you would soon have a good sense of why they leave. The following is what we have learned around this critical question.

Figure 2 - Most Common Reasons Why Youth Leave

<p>They Are Asked to Leave</p>	<p>We do not come right out and say it, but for many generations we have been sending a strong message to your young people that they should leave. Out of our misguided desire for them to build better lives, we convince them that greater opportunities are somewhere else. Most listen and leave.</p>
<p>Family Challenges</p>	<p>We love family. We celebrate family. We see family as the building block of all society. Yet for some, family is not a positive thing. For some of our youth, they leave to get away from abusive, controlling or unacceptable family situations. For them, somewhere else must be better.</p>
<p>Community</p>	<p>Just as not all families are healthy, not all communities are healthy either. Communities like families can be controlling, abusive and limiting. Communities that are not tolerant of differences and provide room for growth can drive young people away.</p>
<p>Career</p>	<p>Most of us have dreams around what we want to with our lives. Not every dream can be realized in our rural communities. Whether the dream is to be a missionary or a brain doctor - some will leave (at least for now) because of their career choices.</p>
<p>A Way to Make a Living</p>	<p>Let's face it, many of our rural communities continue to struggle and provide economic opportunities. For many, the question is more basic than a career dream - "is there a good job?" Providing reasonable job opportunities is foundation if we are to attract more of our youth back home.</p>

We think it is important that as part of your youth attraction strategy you take time to ask this question. Learning first hand why your youth are leaving can provide you essential insight necessary for attracting those home who are good candidates for returning. We all know there are “good” and “bad” reasons for coming home. Accept and support those who must leave and focus your energy on those that want to come home by creating appropriate and supportive environments and pathways home.

Now let us take a look at the flip side of the question we just addressed and identify the foundations of successful youth attraction strategies.

Foundations of Youth Attraction. Each person is different and there are multiple factors that impact a decision to return or move to a rural community. But we would suggest there are five core foundations that lead to youth attraction:

- Lifestyle Preferences**
- Feeling Connected**
- Career & Job Fits**
- Social Satisfaction**
- Generational Acceptance**

Figure 3 summarizes important insight around each of these youth attraction foundations.

Why Youth Return A Story from Kansas

The Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) sponsored a “Young Farmers & Ranchers” (YF&R) organization. Each year members of this organization gather to learn, network and renew old friendships.

In 2009, we surveyed nearly 159 younger adult members of YF&R in Wichita to gain insight on why they returned home. Here is what we found with respect to their reasons they came home:

- 89% - To Farm, Ranch or Take a Job
- 78% - Family Ties
- 74% - Good Place to Raise a Family
- 43% - To Be Close to Friends
- 37% - Cost of Living

We also surveyed 127 college age YF&R members. 78% or 4 out of 5 indicated that they want to return home after college. The following are their reasons for moving back home:

- 75% - Good Place to Raise a Family
- 69% - Community & Family Ties
- 48% - To Be Close to Friends
- 45% - Good Schools
- 34% - Cost of Living

For the 22% not planning on going home their indicated career opportunities, a desire to make more money and lack of entertainment.

2009 YF&R Survey, Kansas Farm Bureau

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Figure 3 - Foundations of Youth Attraction

Lifestyle Preferences	We all have lifestyle preferences. Some of us want the big city life, to travel or live somewhere else. Others of us have lifestyle preferences that match what rural communities have to offer. There are certain attributes and amenities that only small towns and rural areas can afford related to pace of life, safety, outdoors access and sense of community.
Feeling Connected	Even though our kids spend years growing up in our communities that does not ensure they feel connected. Youth that feel part of a community and become engaged are much more likely to return and stay long-term.
Career and Job Fits	Making a living doing something we like most days is very important. The ability of our communities to provide desirable careers and jobs is powerfully important. Often times youth that really want to live rural will make compromises around work to enable this lifestyle.
Social Satisfaction	We are social being and youth are particularly social. They need and want peers that become friends and associates. It is important to be able to share life's experiences with those who are going through the same things. Creating an environment that meets these social needs is paramount and it is called "social satisfaction."
General Acceptance	We love each other, but sometimes we can not be around each other. Older generations can dominate rural communities and not only define what gets done, but when and how. Too often too little room is provided for younger generations to have a say. It is critically important that different generations are tolerant of youth (preferences & behaviors) and provide space for them to become active members of the community.

We encourage you to keep these foundations for youth attraction handy as you build your own game plan. Use this Chart from time to time to check in and see if you are getting it right. Now let's take a deeper look at what are the key amenities for effective youth attraction for our five youth groups.

Youth Attraction Opportunities. Earlier in this Guide we identified five key groups that represent core opportunities for youth attraction to our rural communities. Now let's dig a bit deeper into the characteristics of each group and "what is the right stuff" (key amenities) for attraction success.

Youth Who Never Leave. Several years ago there was wide spread media coverage of the "brain drain." While intentions are sincere, this term is rough on those who have not left. We remember one community workshop where a 30 something stood up after the word "brain drain" had been used by a speaker too often and complained. Their comment went like this -- "So if all the people with brains have left, what does that say about me and my friends who stayed?"

Unfortunately there is a real stigma around leaving and staying. For too often we have counseled those we felt "could make it" to leave and better themselves. This sent a very negative and destructive message to those that chose to stay and eventually become our community's mayor, school board members, volunteer firemen and women and leaders of our business community. Too often when class reunions are held those from out of town come and those living right in the area stay away. This pattern says so much about the power of the brain drain message.

The fact is most who decide to stay have very good reasons...

- They are part of a family enterprise like a farm, ranch or main street business that they love and want to be part of.
- They have important connections with family and friends that are central to their lives and part of what they want to be.
- They like the kind of lifestyle that their community offers -- space, hunting, Friday night football and town celebrations.
- They have personalities that draw them to community.

Even though we are one of the most mobile societies in the world, most people do not move around. In places with good quality of life and reasonable economic opportunities move rates are even lower. The time has come to recognize those who do not leave should be celebrated and never again should we utter the words -- "brain drain"!

Figure 4 summarizes important amenities central to keeping those that have not left and made that all important decision to put down roots in your community.



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Figure 4 - Youth Who Never Leave Amenities

Validation Recognition	First and foremost we must be intentional in sending the right messages. We must be clear as a community that their choice of make your community their hometown was a great choice. Recognize and respect their personal reasons for this choice.
Meaningful Engagement	4-H talks about “doing to,” “doing for” and “doing with.” Make sure that those who have stayed are engaged in your community. Too often, too many live and work on the margins of your community. Adopt the “do with” approach to ensure meaningful engagement.
Appropriate Peer Groups	It is a constant challenge as too many of our youth are leaving -- but work hard to ensure that there is a strong and relevant peer group(s)) available. Encourage and support peer group formation to foster social networking particularly among those that are not engaged in the life of your community.
Generational Space	Let go and give up some control. Provide youth space in your community to become involved and assert their own ideas and ways of doing things. It may be hard and there are some risks, but this is so important to creating a supportive environment for young adults.
Right Infrastructure	Talk to your youth and they will educate you as to what is needed. Chances are good that excellent internet service, cell phone access and gathering places and events are paramount. Chances are also good, given some support and encouragement, they can create their own venues for gathering .

Before we move on to the next group let’s review why this group is so important:

- They have made a good personal decision and it is an endorsement of what is right and good about your community. Exposing this reality is a powerful message to all (both current and prospective residents) that your community has a future.
- Those who have stayed, once recognized and empowered, can become your most effective ambassadors to others considering your community. A strong and positive message from these folks is so important to making your case to those you are trying to attract.
- They are the future of your community. Eventually, if they become engaged, they will be the ones to lead your schools, answer that emergency call and coach the next generation to learn the game of baseball.

Youth Who Leave and Want to Return. America is very mobile, but most Americans do not move or move often. Yet in rural America there is this stigma that if you do not leave something is wrong with you. This myth is build upon the foundation

that brighter futures are elsewhere. But for many youth there are good and strong reasons to return home. Let’s explore what they youth need so they can come home.

Figure 5 - Youth Who Leave and Want to Return

Connection	Many leave short-term to obtain education and life experience. Most leave long-term because there is a weak connection between them and their hometown. Investing early in meaningful youth engagement beginning in elementary school will create stronger bonds and strengthen positive perceptions of their hometowns.
Invitation	Indirectly we counsel our youth to leave because we believe there are greater opportunities elsewhere. This is very confusing and stressful message. If we want them to have the choice to return we need to make sure there is a clear message inviting them back home if that is their choice.
Career & Job	There must be economic opportunities that can match up to career and job dreams. People are practical and flexible. There are no perfect jobs, but you have to make sure that you can offer good economic opportunities. For many entrepreneurship may be the ticket.
Peers	We are social animals and peers are hugely important to younger persons. Friends and possible mates are particularly important for youth. It is important that you make sure to cultivate strong peer groups for youth. Use of the “young professionals” model can be helpful.
Amenities	They know that your small town does not have the kinds of amenities that big cities offer. But you need to have core amenities including the right kinds of housing, cell service, high speed internet and appropriate gathering places for socializing.

Now let’s take a look at the kinds of amenities that friends and family of returning youth want and need.

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Friends and Family of Returning Youth. Your son or daughter is returning home. They know the lay of the land. They can quickly fall into old roles that are comfortable with the community. But they are bringing home a good friend or loved one who

has no clue what the ground rules are. Being intentional and sensitive to these issues is hugely important if you want to want them all to stay.

Figure 6 - Friends and Family of Returning Youth

Education	For a minute think about moving to a new county. There are issues of culture, language and customs. To a lesser degree someone who is moving to your community because of friendship or family ties (a new spouse) face some of the same issues. Be prepared to help educate them about these issues early on. It will help make a positive transition and enhance them rooting long term.
Support	Give these new folks a break. They need some support. They are making a huge change in their lives because of love and friendship. They want to make this work and they your understanding and active support. Knowing that your community is aware of what they are going through and supportive will go a long way to help.
People Like Them	This situation is not new. Think about creating a special welcome wagon composed of folks who have made this transition. This is kind of like a support group. This group can help them become educated and work through the tough spots that will undoubtedly occur.
Help with Career	Like everyone else they have to find meaningful employment. Be ready to work with them and support them in finding a good fit based on interest, talent and economic needs. You may have to be creative knowing that you have fewer options than bigger communities.
Give Them Room!	Many will come from more urban areas and they will not be use to living in a fish bowl. Given them some room and some privacy. Educate your community that it must provide this space or the normal chatter and too much help can be a put off and undermine rooting.

Our next youth group is spouses and family. They have similar needs and wants of friends and family of returning youth, but there are some very important differences that you should consider.

Spouses and Family. They may be from the next town over or from across the country. They may be single or they may already have a child or two. They may be familiar with rural living or it is totally new. Either way, because of marriage or life commitment,

they are now coming to your community and seeking to make it their home.

Figure 7 - Spouses and Family

<p>Acceptance</p>	<p>Okay they are different. They may even be from a rival community. They are fearful of whether they will be accepted. We joke about it taking a generation to become a local. Get over it. These patterns of acceptance are a huge turn off and create a hostile environment for newcomers. Take stock and make your community ready to accept these new spouses and family members.</p>
<p>Supporting Their Spouse</p>	<p>Those who grow up in a community and return home have an identity and history. They are now living in two worlds, their old world and the one they are creating with the love of their life. This can be really hard. Provide support groups that can help them deal with these two worlds.</p>
<p>Kids & Parents</p>	<p>When we marry or make that long-term commitment it is often with more than our significant other. Sometimes there are kids and even aging parents. They are not only becoming part of a new family, but now have a new hometown as well. They need to be welcomed and supported as well. Consider support groups.</p>
<p>Expect Change</p>	<p>New people bring new ideas and even values. It is important that your community be ready to fairly welcome both your new residents, but also their ideas and ways of behaving. Take time to learn and accept, before judging.</p>
<p>They Need Room Too!</p>	<p>Unless they grew up in a small town, they will be surprised at how little privacy they have. Communities succeeding with attracting are learning to provide room and more privacy for their new residents.</p>

Our final group has left and may never return physically. But emotionally they want to remain connected. They have much to contribute with ideas, connections and financial gifts. Let's look at this group next.

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Gone, But Still Connected. The Pew Research Center in their 2009 Study of American Mobility discovered some important insights into those who have left our communities physically, but not emotionally. Pew found that 50% of those who have left

their “home town” stay in close touch with family and friends back home. 45% visit home each year! Another 53% phone home at least weekly and 46% now email home at least weekly.

Figure 8 - Gone, But Still Connected

Stay Connected	They may be in touch with mom and dad or sister Rita or brother Bill - but they may not be connected to their home town. Build a strategy to help them stay informed and connected. Let them know that you value them as members of your community even though they live half-way across the world.
Great Web Site	More and more people get their information from the world wide web. Make sure your community has a great web site that former residents (as well a potential new residents) can use. Get your community active in building and using your web site. They will promote it to those they are in touch with.
Free Newspaper	Consider raising money to provide every former resident a free subscription to your community’s local newspaper or newsletter. Better yet, work with your newspaper publisher to provide an email version of the newspaper. Trade an annual subscription for an annual gift to your town’s community foundation betterment fund.
More Than Alumni Weekends	Most communities have annual alumni events. These are great parties and opportunities to renew friendship. Be strategic and use these events to cultivate your relationship with those who have left, but come home for these events.
Give Them the Chance to Give Back!	Most people do not give because they have not been personally asked. Take time through your communications with former residents to provide them multiple opportunities to give. Do not do appeals, but present giveback opportunities - there is a huge difference.

Okay, there is an important reason to target youth and young adults for attraction. Now let us explore how to build a game plan.

Building Your Community's Game Plan.

Your People Attraction game plan should be firmly rooted in three foundational considerations:

1. Your Unique Opportunities for Attraction
2. Your Attraction Assets
3. Your Community's Preferences for Attraction

Let's explore each of the game plan building considerations a bit more before we map out a framework and process for moving forward.

Opportunities. Within our People Attraction Guides we have identified 25 specific groups that can be candidates for attraction to your community. These possibilities run from you own kids coming home and making their future in their hometown to recruiting a new doctor to your community's clinic or hospital. There are entrepreneurs, different kinds of retirees and families of various stripes. It is important that you focus on those groups where you community has real opportunity for meaningful attraction.

Assets. With a good idea of your best opportunities for attraction you can now focus on what assets you have to work with. Assets are the resources, amenities and quality of life and work characteristics important to those you are trying to attract. In many cases, you will decide where your best opportunities are based on your strengths or assets. Always remember your assets are the building blocks of competing for the hearts and minds of those considering your community to become their hometown.

Preferences. Finally, your community is likely to have some preferences. You may have all the right stuff for attracting early retirees. You may actually focus some time and energy on this attraction opportunity. But your community really wants to ensure your school's future. In this case your community preference may drive more resources towards attracting families with children and younger adults. Always know that where there is passion among your community's residents, there is also strong rationale for action.

With these three considerations as a foundation for building your community's people attraction game plan, let's layout a plan building framework and process. Figure 9 provides a visual presentation of the key elements essential to good plan building. In this case we are talking about a plan that enables and guides action and gets results.



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Figure 9 - Building a Game Plan



Development is not linear, clear or often logical. There are always unforeseen challenges and new opportunities. It is important to be entrepreneurial focusing on your desired outcome, but willing to change course when it makes sense to do so. So view our framework and process as a road map -- a road map with many routes to the same destinations. Only you and your community can determine which route will work best for you.

Now let's turn our attention to the first cornerstone of our plan building framework - Making a Commitment.

Making a Commitment

Too often development is like a boat drifting on a lake. You will get somewhere eventually, but it may not make your community stronger or better. It is important to be thoughtful, strategic and very intentional with respect to what you want to accomplish with development. Making a commitment that is real and deep is the keystone to long-term success. We offer five process steps within Making a Commitment:

- Early Organizing
- Opportunity Exploration
- Building a Case
- Engaging Stakeholders
- Early TTT Commitments

Let's look at each of these action steps in turn.

Early Organizing. You have to start somewhere and chances are good that you and some other folks have decided this is something important to do within your community. Think a bit about others in your community who might care about your proposed people attraction strategy and invite them to coffee and talk it through. See if you can form an informal group to work through the next action steps together.

Opportunity Exploration. Generally the next step is to spend some time exploring your specific opportunities. You might want to use our three considerations outlined in the start of Section 4 as a guide for exploring your community's people attraction opportunities. You may want to do a little research as you sort this question out and gain focus on which opportunities make the strongest case.

Building a Case. You may decide with your informal group to move forward on your own and see what you can make happen. However, it is likely that you will want some community support. So that means you need to build a good case that you can make to those you hope will become involved and supportive. Your case for moving forward need not be complicated. It is more a matter of organizing your points and making sure you have some reasonable answers to the likely questions that might arise. Do not worry about getting it all right initially. The community will ultimately help you get your case refined.

Engaging Stakeholders. As you are building your case think about the key stakeholder groups in your community that might have a vested interest in what you are doing. If your passion is to attract young people back home, chances are good that your school, health care and churches might be really interested. With more young people come babies, students and kids in Sunday school. Given some thought to why these groups should care and that will really help you build a great list and refine your case for action.

Early TTT Commitments. Okay what is "TTT?" TTT stands for "time, talent and treasure" (money). Anything worth doing that is likely to have a meaningful impact requires the three Ts. Early on you will need some time commitments, some human talent and probably a little cash. As you move forward you will need more of all three.

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You have reached the point where your community (or at least a segment of it) has made a commitment to move forward. So what comes next?

Strategy Development

Working smart is so important today. It is particularly important for smaller rural communities. At any given time you have lots to do and only so much time, talent and treasure. Making a bit larger investment on the front in to build a really strong strategy will pay lots of dividends on the back end when you really are struggling to find the leaders, volunteers, ideas and money to keep your strategy going forward. At this stage in building your community's people attraction game plan we offer the following action steps:

- Build a More Formal Working Group
- Do Deeper Assessment
- Undertake Due Diligence on Possible Strategy Options
- Make an Informed Decision
- Finalize Your Plan of Action

Let's map out these action steps in more detail next.

Working Group. Grow your informal group to a more formal and recognized working group. At this stage the mission of this working group is to build the plan and then transition into action. It is important that folks are given the option to commit for specific tasks and then let other assume next stage tasks. Your working group should include representatives from all your committed stakeholders.

Assessment. As a middle school student is likely to question - "why is there always more homework." Building a strong strategy or game plan requires more home work and critical thinking. We have resources that can help you map out your particular assessment needs to guide this part of the work.

Options Due Diligence. Related to assessment is the task of doing due diligence on specific strategy options. For example if your mission is to attract skilled trades (e.g., electricians, plumbers, etc.) to your community there are an associated set of options you can adopt in building your plan. You may want to offer incentives or low interest money for buying a building. It is important to work through all your options, evaluate their likely effectiveness and probable costs.

Informed Decision. Once you have done your homework and completed your due diligence on options - make some decisions. Enable your working group to set some priorities and adopt some strategy options based on your work to date. Be sure to celebrate your decisions and get ready to move to the next step.

Plan of Action. Once you had decided what your strategy options will be you can nail down the details. We urge you to not over complicate this step, but set your goals, be clear on what action steps are needed, establish a time line with target dates and be sure you have two budgets - one for needed money and the second for your human resources.

Congratulations! You now have a clear and strong plan of action. We are now ready to move to implementation.

Thoughts on Assessment

Chances are good you have already done some assessment since you have determined that youth attraction is a priority. Before you get too deep into strategy building a bit more assessment is a good idea. This step can help your community really sort out your options and determine your trade-offs. Finding the right fit that makes the most sense for your community is really important to initial and long-term success. We would suggest the following assessment activities:

Engage Your Target - If your goal is to attract professionals back to your community take time to engage those you are targeting. Get them involved and take time to learn from them. They have great insight that can help you build a better plan. Their involvement can really energize your efforts.

Visit Other Communities - Check around and see if other communities in your region have a related strategy. Make some assignments, do some web research and make some phone calls to learn more. If you find a couple of communities with strategies that look good, load up the car with some folks and make a visit. This kind of research can really pay dividends in building a better plan.

Inventory Your Assets - If your community is like most other rural communities you do not have a ready supply of money, people and knowledge ready to go in support of your efforts. But your community does have valuable assets that can enable your plan to take life and get going. Have a working session and map out possible assets that can be connected to resource your game plan. Be creative and innovative - for example - engage your area's real estate agency. They along with your banks might really be interested in such a strategy. Why - professionals need housing and the services of real estate folks and bankers. Map out your possible resources and recruit help as needed.

Line Up Those Who Can Help - Reach beyond your community and explore what kind of resources might be out there that can help you. Often times organizations like Cooperative Extension, state development agencies, area colleges and universities, regional development organizations, etc. have expertise and capacity to assist you. Also, do not miss resources right at home. You have organizations like your school and hospital that have to recruit workers from time to time - they have associations that have expertise that can sometimes be really valuable.

See if Funding is Available - Sooner or later you will need some cash to fuel your game plan. It is never too soon to begin to identify and explore possible funding sources. Begin local and then investigate external resources. On the local front check out the likely suspects -- chamber, development corporation, local utilities, main street, banks, health care and anyone else that might have a self-interest in youth attraction. For possible external resources if your community is part of a regional council of government or area development agency, chances are good they have a grant writer who can do some research on possible foundation, federal and state resources that might be a good fit.

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Implementation

All the work your community has done to date is to get to this point - moving to action. We have identified five action steps that moves you from a plan to impact:

- Doing a Campaign
- Expanding Leaders & Volunteers
- Raising Money
- Finding a Host Organization
- Executing the Plan

Doing a Campaign. Most of us do not like politics, but one gift from the political world is the idea of a "campaign." The nice thing about campaigns is they have a clear outcome, start and end and lots of focus. Consider adopting a "campaign approach" as you move to action.

Expanding Leaders & Volunteers. Now that you have a plan you have a much clearer idea of kinds of human resource needs are required. Divide and conquer. Ask many people to make small contributions leveraging your core team's commitment of vision, planning and engagement. Again political campaigns are masters at this. So think about whom in community is really good at designing and running campaigns - they can help you figure out this piece.

Raising Money. Your plan also gives you a really good idea of what kinds of money you need. Consider both cash and in-kind approach to raising money you need to make your plan happen. For example, you need some printing done. You can get a donation to pay to have it done or may be one of your businesses with a good photocopier can do the job for you.

Finding a Host Organization. With people attraction you are looking at a long-term game plan. It would be a good idea to think about finding a host organization that is willing to take this initiative on long-term. Short-term projects can be organic and informal. But long-term projects geared to major impact need more structure and often part of this answer is an established host organization like the city, school, chamber or development corporation. If you have your stakeholder groups well engaged, figuring out which organization would be your best choice for hosting your initiative will become clear in time.

Executing the Plan. One of our favorite entrepreneurs is known to say that there are two keys to success. First, make sure you have a good plan. Second, work really hard to executive your plan well. We agree whole heartedly! There is a lot of work getting to this point - but the real work begins now. Make sure you have new blood that is ready to run with the plan you have created.

Searching, dreaming, assessing, planning and organizing are now behind you. You have a plan and you are implementing it. You are making real progress and the next phase focuses on staying on the right track and sustaining your effort.

Tracking Progress

Even the best plans well executed will need to be adjusted. Our world is not static. We guarantee and you know from hard earned experience that there will be curves in the road, new opportunities will emerge and adjusting your plan is important. But as is the case with driving a car - do not over steer!

People Attraction Guides

The HTC Partnership through generous support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has prepared a series of People Attraction Guides to enable rural communities to take advantage of this development opportunity.

Overview. We have an Overview Guide that is a primer on this development opportunity and the basics of strategy building.

Opportunity Guides. Based on our field experience we have prepared guides around five specific people attraction opportunities common to most rural communities:

- Youth
- Families
- Entrepreneurs
- Professionals
- Retirees

Contact us for additional information on how you can access these materials and connect with training options.

Guide Authors

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Don Macke with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship served as the lead author for this Guide. Milan Wall with the Heartland Center for Leadership Development served as a Guide editor. Craig Schroeder with the Center was a major contributor. Taina Radenslaben with the Center produced the format for the Guide and Ahmet Binerer with the Center provided supporting research and analysis.

Need More Information

This People Attraction Guide was originally produced in 2009. Some of the data may be outdated, but we feel that it is still a useful resource with valuable information to be shared. For additional information on other People Attraction Resources contact Don Macke with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship at 402.323.7336 or don@e2mail.org.

You can find all of these guides and many other valuable resources on our website at www.energizingentrepreneurs.org. Don't miss our e2 University online resource with a dozen packages containing training and learning opportunities.



HTC Partners

Our People Attraction Initiative is enabled by HomeTown Competitiveness and its founding partners the Nebraska Community Foundation, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development and the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. This work has been made possible through the generous support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

energizing entrepreneurial communities

Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship is a leading resource for rural regions and communities seeking economic growth through support of local entrepreneurs. The Center has worked with rural communities throughout the United States and abroad to address development associated with business, social and civic entrepreneurship. The Center's resources can help communities assess their opportunities for entrepreneurial development and build strategies to increase economic growth through local entrepreneurs. For more information on the Center, check out our website at www.energizingentrepreneurs.org.



Nebraska Community Foundation

The Nebraska Community Foundation has completed wealth transfer analysis for each of Nebraska's 93 counties. Rural residents do not always recognize local wealth because so much of it is held through land ownership. Most people are at first shocked, and then highly motivated, once they understand the enormous amount of local wealth that will likely transfer to heirs who have migrated out of the area. In rural Nebraska alone, more than \$94 billion is at stake over the next few decades. Both the power and the will to use these assets will no longer be tied to the community unless planned gifts are cultivated now. Using this data, HTC sets a reasonable target of converting at least 5% of the local wealth transfer into charitable assets endowed in community foundations to fund future community and economic development efforts. For more information, visit the Foundation's web site at www.nebcommfound.org.



Heartland Center for Leadership Development

For small towns to compete in the 21st century they must tap into everyone's potential knowledge, talent and aspirations. The Heartland Center for Leadership Development rejects the outdated notion of relying on "the usual suspects" to get things done. Rural communities must be intentional about recruiting and nurturing an increasing number of women, minorities and young people into decision-making roles. They need continuing leadership training programs, because today's leadership must constantly reinvent itself to reflect the challenges of a changing global environment. For more information, visit the Center's web site at www.heartlandcenter.info.