



## HOMETOWN COMPETITIVENESS

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

# PROFESSIONALS

## A People Attraction Guide

**Background and Introduction** - This Guide provides important information on the people attraction opportunity of professionals. By "professionals," we are referring to a rather large and diverse group with one thing in common -- they all provide a specialized skill we need in our communities. Whether the professional is an electrician or physician, our communities need skilled persons who can meet our everyday needs. A key to community success is its ability to offer critically important services. For smaller communities some of these services may be provided from other communities in your region. This Guide provides useful information on how your community can build a strategy to retain and attract professionals.



### 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](mailto:don@e2mail.org).

## **This Guide is organized into five sections:**

**Section 1 - Why Attract Professionals to Your Community?** Section 1 provides an overview of the primary reasons your community should consider a “professional” focused people attraction strategy.

**Section 2 - Who Are Your Professional Attraction Opportunities?** Section 2 profiles the various professional groups that can be candidates for attraction to your community.

**Section 3 - Recommended Attraction Strategies & Tactics.** This section provides general advice for how your community can build a professional attraction game plan. In the case of professional we specifically explore issues of career, quality of life, transition and family, community support and attraction pathways.

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

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

First let us explore why attracting professionals to your community is so important to your future.

## **Access to Professionals**

We all want access to competent and affordable professionals. But perceptions of reasonable access can vary and can be shaped. Reasonable access for a heart attack victim is defined in terms of emergency services close by. Conversely, if we need an attorney to help with business transition planning, chances are someone within the region is just fine. Next in this Guide we explore this idea of “reasonable” access in a bit more detail to help your community build your professionals attraction game plan.



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## Why Attract Professionals to Your Community?

Your community faces many challenges and opportunities. Setting priorities is always tough. Various interests in your community are pulling in one direction or another. It may seem obvious that your community needs a diversity of professions. But making a strong and long-term commitment to retaining and attracting professionals is another matter. A solid game plan needs commitment and resources. So taking time to build and present your case for attracting professionals is important. This may be one of your first steps in creating a professional attraction game plan.

## Five Core Reasons

We would offer five core reasons for why professional attraction should be an economic development priority for most rural communities:

1. Survival of Your Community.
2. Increased Economic Competitiveness.
3. Diversity.
4. Economic Engine.
5. Youth Attraction.

Let's explore each of these rationales for prioritization and action next.

### Survival of Your Community

Anyway you cut it, access to key professionals is important to both commerce and quality of life. Most rural communities can not support the full range of professionals. Our markets are simply too small. But, to the extent your community can grow a strong and vibrant

professionals sector, your chances of continued economic and social survival go up. A bit later we explore several perspectives on access to professionals that can be important to your community and how it is perceived by locals and outsiders.

### Increased Economic Competitiveness

Your ability to maintain local education and health care are keys to ensuring your community's economic competitiveness. Moving beyond survival, growing your professionals sector both in numbers and quality can be as important to your economic development as attracting a new manufacturing plant. However, your efforts must be grounded in harsh realities. There must be enough consumers and spending to support professionals. Do your homework and make sure you focus on those opportunities that make the most sense given your size and location.

### Diversity

Communities are better when they are diverse. When communities have a wide range of people, professions and businesses are richer both socially and economically. Building a strong and robust professionals sector directly increases your community's diversity. Having doctors, attorneys, CPAs, plumbers, social workers and carpenters in the same community enriches the community in so many ways. This diversity can lead to better leadership, stronger community give back, connections to the outside resources and greater ability to work through challenging times.

## **Economic Engine**

When a community has a wide range of professionals it also has important businesses and ventures that can fuel your economy. These businesses create many impacts including drawing consumers to your community along with their spending. Often times a great attorney or CPA will attract clients from an entire region. When they are in town they often patronize other local businesses, increasing overall economy activity. These businesses also prevent spending leakages by local consumers. To the extent you have a good base of professional services -- your community will retain consumers and their spending locally. Both of these impacts grow your economy and increase prosperity.

## **Professional Attraction**

In the next section we explore the various groups that fall under this umbrella of professionals. As you will discover, it runs from physicians to landscapers. Professionals create a very diverse set of career and job opportunities. Maintaining and growing a strong professionals sector in your community and area provides important pathways for young people to come home. Bottom line, focusing on this attraction opportunity is foundational to building a successful youth attraction game plan as well.

As much as we would all love to have every kind of professional possible living and working in our rural community, reality would argue that is not possible. Next, let us explore some perspectives that can help your community pursue a grounded and realistic professionals' attraction game plan.

## **Myth and Reality**

No matter where we choose to live and work there are

benefits and compromises. Depending on our personal preferences, this mix of benefits and compromises may shift.

Whether someone is in business or meeting family needs, we want access to professionals. But as is the case with lifestyle preferences, meanings of access vary from professional group to group and are based on other key considerations such as life stage.

Having access to professionals in a community is foundational to a broader people attraction strategy. You may be marketing your community to young adults, families with children, entrepreneurs or retirees. Each group has a perception on what is desirable and preferred access based on their own life experiences and circumstances.

Most people who choose a rural life understand that the community cannot be expected to provide everything they might want or need locally. While there are clearly more offerings and greater choice in more urban areas when compared to most rural communities, access should be measured (and most importantly marketed) based on availability, price and time (not distance).

## **You Have More Than You Think**

Your community wants to attract new residents. You inventory your locally available professional services and you find you have more gaps than assets. But consider a larger geography! You may not have "x", "y" or "z" professional locally, but chances are if you consider a 30- minute or even 60-minute commuting time, that list of professional offerings will grow.

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We believe in “asset based economic development.” By asset based we mean a community should focus on what it has or its assets. Too often we focus on what we do not have. In other cases, we draw our boundaries too narrowly thereby excluding assets that we really do have access to. Having access to a robust set of professionals is foundational to community vitality and competitive-

ness. But we suggest that you do not over do it. Focus on recruiting those professionals that make sense and where you have really opportunity. Then be prepared to recognize the professionals in your larger area that can serve your community and make you whole. Figure 1 summarizes these three points of “availability,” “price” and “time” (not distance).

**Figure 1 - Availability, Price & Time**

<b>Availability</b>	You may not have an attorney right in town, but there is a good chance you have one in the area. Picture a larger community when considering what professionals you have and do not have. Emphasize those professionals you have locally, but also note what you have in the area.
<b>Price</b>	Chances are you may have fewer options, but the cost of professionals in rural areas will typically be lower when compared to larger cities. Be sure to do some research and point out these “cost of living” differences.
<b>Time</b>	If you live in Seattle your doctor may only be five miles away, but during rush hour it may take more than 30 minutes of hard driving to get there. You have to navigate a crowded parking garage to boot. Convert distances to travel time and be sure to emphasize that getting around in rural communities is easier with less congestion and parking right at the door!

Now that we have introduced this topic and shared some views on the importance of attracting professionals, let us explore who we are talking about with respect to professionals.



## Who Are Your Professional Attraction Opportunities?

First, let's define professional. This is a large group that includes everything from skilled trades, such as plumbing and construction, to doctors, teachers and administrators. Every community needs professionals and most rural communities are struggling to replace key professionals as they age, retire, die or move away. We have identified five key groups for attraction consideration:

- Group 1 - Health and Human Services
- Group 2 - Education
- Group 3 - Government
- Group 4 - Advisors
- Group 5 - Skilled Trades

Figure 2 provides some additional definition of these five kinds of professionals that are important to your community and can be the focus of recruitment efforts. Figure 3 visits this all important topic of access and can help guide your strategic targeting based on community preference, need and opportunity.



## Getting Your Priorities Right

As your community considers attracting professionals, we suggest a simple game plan that ensures your priorities are right.

**Locals** - First, work hard to support those professionals you already have in your community. Make them part of your regularly business visitation program. Such visits can help your community do a better job of keeping them and knowing when a transition might be coming.

**Area Professionals** - Remember that you live in a regional community and economy. Some of your best professionals may not live in your town, but provide important services. Be sure to know who these folks are and support them. Consider making them part of your business visitation program.

**Area Recruits** - Explore who in your community might be interested in meeting your professional needs. Maybe there is a young adult in law school who would consider coming home to transition a practice if encouraged.

**External Recruits** - If your community still has an important gap to fill, consider reaching out to professionals in your region to see if they would consider setting up a branch operation in your community. You may also want to consider marketing efforts with schools that train and place professionals.

With attraction it always best to focus on opportunities within your community and area first before you engage in outside attraction efforts. Always take care of those who have made the choice to be in your community first.

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**Figure 2 - Key Professional Groups**

<b>Health &amp; Human Services</b>	Health care and human services are cornerstones of our communities. For many considering rural life, reasonable access to such services is very important. For some, for example, a parent whose child has an ear infection or a retiree with chest pains, reasonable access to such services is of paramount importance. Doctors, nurses, dentists and social workers are examples of key professionals essential to providing adequate health and human services.
<b>Education</b>	Access to education is very important, particularly for families with children. In most cases families want local education access. While rural Americans are used to travelling, we prefer not to have our first grader on a bus for hours each day. But education is more than K-12, and lifelong learning is increasingly important. Access to continuing education through distance learning, web-based classrooms and satellite campuses is also important to our community's attorneys, bankers, and entrepreneurs. Finding teachers, para-professionals, administrators, coaches and other educators is central to maintaining necessary education assets in our communities.
<b>Government</b>	Local and area governments are increasingly sophisticated in what they do, ranging from engineering roads to providing law enforcement to delivering clean water at our taps. Local and area governments need a wide range of highly skilled persons to operate effectively and efficiently. Our ability to attract and retain skilled government employees is essential to cost-effective and high-quality government services. Such services are fundamental to our community's quality of life and economic competitiveness.
<b>Advisors</b>	We live in very complicated times, and households, businesses, farmers and governments need a wide range of advisors. Many of these advisors, if highly specialized, might reside outside of our community. Most rural communities, for example, retain engineering services from a regional firm versus procuring such services locally. But it is important to have local access to basic advisors, such as attorneys, accountants, financial counselors and soil scientists.
<b>Skilled Trade Persons</b>	It is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and everyone in the extended family is coming home to the farm. Unfortunately, there is a major plumbing problem that must be fixed and fixed soon. Technology in our homes, businesses, farms, plants and motor vehicles is becoming more complex. While most rural people are pretty handy mechanically, there is a growing need for skilled trades such as plumbing, electrical, auto, engines and computers. Our ability to grow, attract and retain skilled trades is essential to a thriving community today.

**Figure 3 - Access Preferences & Bottom Lines**

<p><b>Health &amp; Human Services</b></p>	<p>There is a continuum of health care and human services. Immediate access to emergency health care is very important. If one is reasonably healthy and young, there may be little concern that your hospital is not local but 10 miles down the highway. Every community does not need its own hospital or human services department, but every community does need access. Use of visiting clinics and clear information on what is available where can assure people that they have access to quality health care and social services.</p>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p>Most rural people assume they will be sending their kids away to college somewhere distant. There are growing expectations that lifelong learning -- particularly in support of professional credentials -- should be accessible via online classes and through satellite courses.</p> <p>We do not want our 6 year old spending too much time on the bus and we would prefer that our 16 year old does not have 30 miles to travel home after basketball practice. But we do understand that distance to K-12 educational services might require some travel. Communities should work to provide as much local access as possible. Employ collaborative approaches and local learning centers versus consolidation and loss of all local educational access.</p>
<p><b>Government</b></p>	<p>Local government by design is local. But the quality of local government can become challenged when it is too small. Consider options of partnering with other communities, cities with counties and use of government authorities to provide higher quality government services. Employ circuit rider, toll free telephone numbers and online approaches to provide high touch and high quality access to local government that may not be local.</p>
<p><b>Advisors</b></p>	<p>We all need advisors (e.g., attorneys, accountants) when we need them. We also want choice. In some cases we may not want a local attorney or bank to handle confidential business and we prefer someone 30 miles away. Be sure your community takes an area approach when providing information on available advisors. Work with your local advisors to make sure they are comfortable with this approach and recognize that consumers have choices and they need to be competitive.</p>
<p><b>Skilled Trade Persons</b></p>	<p>The same is true with skilled trade persons (e.g. plumbers, electricians) as with advisors. But chances are that more immediate access is very important. It may be more important to ensure you have local trades related services even if the home shop is down the road, but it can be accessed through another local business such as the hardware store.</p>

Now that we have profiled “professionals,” let’s take a deeper look at what rural communities can do to ensure they can attract the professional talent needed for your community.



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## Recommended Attraction Strategies & Tactics.

Many rural areas are short of such talent and must recruit it to meet needs. In too many cases it is not a question of a job being available, but finding someone who wants a rural life to take the job.

Professional recruitment into rural areas is a mixed bag of success and failure. What we know is that a job, even a great job, is not enough to create a sustainable fit. Many who have the right job qualifications are poorly suited for a rural lifestyle. Most of the more successful recruitment programs try to connect folks who want a particular rural lifestyle and also have the right skill and experience sets. A good example of this approach is the Nebraska Rural Health Opportunity Program or RHOP.

### Rural Health Opportunity Program

Rural areas for years have struggled to recruit and particularly retain skilled health care professions, ranging from doctors to lab techs. Despite impressive incentives such as signing bonuses, guaranteed compensation and free housing, many recruited health care workers leave following the required contract period.

RHOP (Rural Health Opportunity Program) was launched by the University of Nebraska Medical Center. RHOP marries two important insights. First, find folks who really do want to live in rural areas. Second, provide them access to health care education and ensure that their practical rotations are in rural settings. The retention rates with RHOP compared to traditional health care recruitment programs is impressive.

## Keys to Attracting Professionals

We suggest there are a number of “keys” that contribute to more successful recruitment of professionals to rural communities. Let’s review these keys now:

**Know What You Need.** It takes some time, but identify where you have potential need for professionals. Use your chamber or development corporation structures to capture what your community needs are. Having this information is central to crafting a more aggressive professional recruitment game plan.

**Anticipate!** Be pro-active and break out of the trap of reacting in crisis. It is hard, but try to anticipate evolving gaps in the ranks of your community’s professionals. If your only plumber is 90 years old, chances are your community will have a need for this professional sooner as opposed to later.

**Marketing Game Plan.** You need an established and on-going marketing game plan that is letting potential candidates know you may have opportunities. Do not bypass your own residents. Some of your best candidates may surface through family and friends.

**Draw on Your Business Attraction Skills.** If your community has been active in business attraction, chances are good you have some good experience, skills and resources that can be employed in support of professional recruitment. For example, your hosting capabilities can readily be adapted in support of professional recruitment. Build on this asset as you create your new strategy.

**Focus on the More than the Job Offer.** Your ability to recruit professionals requires more than a good job or business opportunity. There are a number of “attraction considerations” that can greatly increase your community’s competitiveness.

The preceding keys to attracting professionals provide important insight necessary to building a strong game plan. Next let’s explore the building blocks that can help you fine tune your strategy and approach.

### Keys to Attracting Professionals

In building a community game plan to attract professionals there are a number of key considerations that can help you grow a more effective program.

Next we will explore five of these attraction considerations:

- Career**
- Quality of Life**
- Transition & Family**
- Community Support**
- Strategies**

Let’s take a quick look at these five key “professional” attraction considerations and then explore them in greater detail. The next Figure summarizes these considerations. Following our short description of each attraction consideration we provide more detailed insight and suggestions.

**Figure 4 - Key Attraction Considerations**

<b>Career</b>	Most professionals have choices among locations where they can use their specialized skills. Probably one of the most critical considerations is whether there is a good career fit with respect to compensation, duties and work environment.
<b>Quality Of Life</b>	Every community affords a certain quality of life. Rural communities are no different. It is essential that you play to your quality of life assets and work to connect with professionals who want your kind of quality of life.
<b>Transition &amp; Family</b>	Most of the professionals we seek to attract to our rural community come as units. There are spouses, children and sometimes extended family members. Working to ensure a good community fit with the entire family is important and should be a focus of your attraction game plan.
<b>Community Support</b>	Managing expectations is important. People have choices and they may not choose to support a new professional that you have attracted to your community. It is important that you help your new recruit become “competitive” in winning patronage.
<b>Strategies</b>	There is growing innovation on the part of rural communities with respect to the attraction of professionals. Our approach outlines some of the more promising emerging strategies.

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## Career

When recruiting a professional, a community is likely to experience two different realities:

**Reality #1** - If you are recruiting a teacher, city administrator, doctor or other key professional that is part of a larger employer or system, typically good information and resources are available on what the career market realities exist by professional area. For example, if your community is seeking a new city manager, chances are good that your city council has a pretty good idea what it will take to be competitive. If not, state associations of cities, counties, hospitals and schools provide this kind of information as part of their membership services.

**Reality #2** - Many other professionals are self-employed entrepreneurs. For example, your town's only plumber retires and leaves your community without such a service. Now, instead of looking for a key employee, you are looking for someone to provide this service. In this case, there may be far less information on what their expectations might be. If possible, it is best to be pro-active and ensure such transitions occur before you are without such key professional services. If this is not possible, you need to work a bit harder to make the case that your community can provide a reasonable opportunity for success.

We urge you to be a bit cautious and not act in crisis. Pressure can be great to fill a void when you lose your only plumber or you are desperate to attract a new doctor who is essential to keeping your hospital open. But your community wants to solve this challenge long-term. Filling this void short-term with the wrong solution can result in serious problems and a recurring challenge in the future if you must start over because of a bad fit.

Most communities through their development corporation have a standing committee that supports business attraction. Create a standing committee within your development corporation or chamber of commerce to ensure you are pro-active and effective in attracting the professionals needed to be successful. This committee can track who you have and anticipate when you might have gaps that need to be filled. This committee's work can be connected to your community's business transition strategy if you have one. Invest in this committee so they can become expert in the process of professional attraction. Investing in this kind of knowledge can ensure your community has the sophisticated capacity to negotiate sustainable and positive deals.

## Quality of Life

In our companion People Attraction Guides we address quality of life based on life stage and associated preferences. As one might expect, a young doctor with elementary age children will be most interested in the quality of life attributes associated with Families with Children. We encourage you to review our other guides as appropriate.

Overall your community must compete with other communities on three fronts -- social satisfaction, lifestyle preferences and career opportunities. In this case, career is less of an issue because there is typically an opening that can be evaluated to see if it is a good career fit or not. The following figure defines these three core attributes.

**Figure 5 - Core Community Attraction Attributes**

<p><b>Social Satisfaction</b></p>	<p>Social satisfaction is a concept that Jim Beddow at the South Dakota Rural Center is advancing. In our view, social satisfaction includes the following key considerations based on the work of Dr. John Allen, Dr. Sam Cordes and Dr. Cornelia Flora:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Presence of desired peers &amp; peer groups.</li> <li>•Adequate socialization opportunities.</li> <li>•An appropriate &amp; welcoming community culture.</li> <li>•Opportunities for deep community engagement.</li> <li>•Avoidance of excessive volunteer recruitment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lifestyle Preferences</b></p>	<p>Lifestyle preferences or acceptance is important if newcomers are to root. Lifestyle preferences can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Open spaces.</li> <li>•Slower life pacing.</li> <li>•Rural recreation.</li> <li>•Presence of family &amp; friends.</li> <li>•Ability to keep animals (including larger animals).</li> <li>•Greater freedom of action (land use, for example).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Career Opportunities</b></p>	<p>Most people contemplating moving to a rural community must still make a living (with the exception of some retirees). But for many who would like to live in a rural area, it is more than simply a job being available. It is even more than a particular salary tied to a job. There must also be a career match that is appropriate. Offering a wider range of career choices that match up with the kinds of jobs people are seeking is powerfully important.</p>

We encourage communities to focus on a complete fit when attracting professionals. Go beyond the job considerations and listen carefully to ensure that there is a good potential fit with lifestyle and social satisfaction considerations. As the next section addresses, involve the entire family, not just the professional in this exploration. The new doctor may be fine with the move, but family and kids may not feel the same way.

## **Norfolk Area Recruiters**

Norfolk, Nebraska (population 25,000) is a progressive community located in Northeast Nebraska. Norfolk has been a national leader in innovative rural economic development.

A relatively recent addition to Norfolk's development game plan is Norfolk Area Recruiters ([www.norfolkarea.org](http://www.norfolkarea.org)). NAR is a non-profit collaborative organization with the mission of "bringing talented young professionals back to Northeast Nebraska."

NAR employs a cutting edge networking approach to professional recruitment. First and foremost, NAR was created by and run by younger professionals from the Norfolk area. They have brought their experience and knowledge of the community and young professionals to creating this remarkable strategy and service.

Second, NAR is web based with a high touch personal approach to recruitment. The NAR web site provides a community portal that can network potential professionals with this region. There is very relevant and well presented employment and community information. NAR recognizes that young professionals are looking for both good career moves and the right community amenities.

Third, NAR employs a very high personal touch compliment to its web site. Staff and volunteers track inquiries on the web site and provide real time and active personal follow up. They want to make a great first impression and quickly identify good recruitment leads.

NAR is relatively new and it is still learning. But it is becoming a regional model for attracting young professionals back to Northeast Nebraska and Norfolk. Communities around the country are studying NAR and learning from its experience.

NAR has created one other important outcome. Since NAR is created by and run by younger professionals in the Norfolk area, it is has engaged and energized this important group. There is a growing culture in Norfolk that speaks to younger adults declaring that this community is a good choice for young professionals.

[www.norfolkarea.org](http://www.norfolkarea.org)



## Transition and Family

You have the right fit -- great pay, strong work environment and good career match -- and everything looks fantastic for attracting that new professional to town. But there is a hitch - the professional you are trying to attract is not the only decision maker in the mix. Your new prospect is ready to go, but their family is not so sure. During their visit to your community they were left on their own and what they discovered was not great.

We know how important families and their well-being are to most of us. Our happiness is just one piece of a larger puzzle where the spouse, children and even extended family like a mother also have an important say. When you are recruiting professionals, you are also recruiting their loved ones. Your attraction efforts logically focus on the professional you are trying to recruit to town, but you also need a game plan for the rest of the team.

Be sure to learn who all is within the family unit impacted by a move:

- Spouse or Significant Other
- Children
- Extended Family such as Mother or Father

As part of your recruitment effort be sure to gather input from these other family members. Employ a survey or better yet telephone interviews in advance of a serious community visit. Consider employing volunteers that are age appropriate. A 16 year old being contacted by another 16 year old will work better than an adult calling. Form a team that matches up with the prospective family. If they do the advance intake, then they can serve

as community visit hosts. Be sensitive to personality fits. This contact should focus on three key areas:

1. **Wants that are important to a family member.** For example, the 14 year old son is in band and really wants to make sure your community has a strong music program.
2. **Needs that are important to the family.** For example, the youngest daughter has a serious health challenge and good medical care is important.
3. **Finally there will be concerns.** Try to understand where the family has lived before and what kind of settings they are use to. You do not have a Mall, but you have options and knowing these concerns can help you be prepared with solutions.

It is important that you be genuine. Do not try to be something you are not. Be honest and candid. Also take pride in what your community offers. Think a bit more broadly and identify the assets that your have in your area. Remember, a family moving from LA may drive 30



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minutes to take in a movie. Your town may not have a movie theatre, but just 30 minutes down the road your neighboring community has a great theatre.

If someone is moving from a larger community to your smaller rural community there is no way that you can offer the amenities that larger communities offer. But your community has one asset that most larger communities struggle to create. Your community every day provides a safe and supportive environment. People know and care about each other. Your ace in the hole is personal touch. Even though you come up short on some needs

and wants, your effort to create a welcoming environment can carry the day.

Today, more and more families are looking for strong communities. Material goods only bring so much happiness and with a little effort everything available in larger cities can be accessed in your community. The way you host potential new family members can make a huge difference in how they perceive your community. This approach ensures your best bet for a good start and a long-term fit.

**Figure 6 - Summary Tips for Family Hosting**

<b>Do Your Research</b>	From your first contact with a prospective professional begin to gather information on their family. Be up front and let your candidate know what you are doing. If possible, interview each family member before a community visit to gather first hand information about them and establish a personal relationship.
<b>Age Appropriate Hosts</b>	Use a hosting team approach. Make sure you have age appropriate team members that match up with your family members. You may want to have back ups as conflicts always occur. Do a little training on being a host.
<b>Be Prepared</b>	Use your research and be prepared. Anticipate questions based on what you have learned. Listen carefully and respond honestly. Soft sales versus hard sales are key.
<b>Follow Up</b>	If this is your candidate, be sure to follow up after the visit to ensure you have done your hosting job.

## Community Support

There are three fundamental realities that professionals face as they try to make a career and earn a living in rural communities:

- First, the size of markets that they must depend upon is inherently smaller when compared to larger and more prosperous urban markets. In other words, there are likely fewer customers with less spending capacity on which a practice can be established and sustained.
- Second, rural communities are more intimate, and consumers' decisions to use one's professional services are determined by many factors. For example, there may be considerations that have nothing to do with a professional's certification and skills, such as the church you attend or your marital status. The gossip trail can also help and hurt based on what the community spin is.
- Finally, people build preferences based on how they conduct their own business. In theory, they may want a local attorney, but in reality may use someone from outside the community to provide greater perceived confidentiality. Local folks may welcome a new face or be very cautious before trying a new provider.

Communities can do three important things to help with community support.

1. Work with those you are attracting to your community and help them make this transition. Even if they grew up in your community and are returning, they may not have the sensitivity to these issues and what it takes to succeed in a rural setting. Issues of pricing, service and behavior are all important to good first impressions and long-term success.

2. Work with your community. Do not just assume that, because you need an electrician or doctor, your community will welcome and patronize them. Use your community's grapevine to get positive spin out and promote your new attraction. Practice what you preach and patronize new recruits yourself.

3. Work with the family members of a new professional recruit. Their behavior and attitudes are important as well. Reputation, acceptance and support are shaped in part based on the entire family's conduct.

It is also important to be sensitive to potential local competitors who are already part of your community. You may be welcoming a new real estate agent to your community and forget that down the road there is already an agent who belongs to a local church, believes they are part of your community and already does business in your community. In thin markets where relationships matter, you need to work hard to ensure that new competition is not railroaded by existing professionals. Taking time to really assess needs and work with existing providers is important to long-term success.



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## Listen & Engage

We strongly recommend an active program of business visitation. If maintaining strong professionals in your community is important, focus on these businesses. Take time to visit them, learn of their transition plans and, if they are planning to retire in the near future, engage them in helping with attraction. Additionally, during transitions, existing professionals who have succeeded in your community can be remarkably helpful to newcomers. Their willingness to provide counsel to new professionals can provide the edge that will enable success. Also, this new role for retiring professionals can acknowledge, celebrate and ease the transition from old to new.

Conversely, do not be afraid to act in behalf of your community's interests and future. You may have a long-time dentist who has for all practical purposes retired, but has not taken the formal action. Your community needs a replacement or that practice will go somewhere else. Be pro-active with transitions to ensure they occur in a timely manner. Helping someone transition out of business to free up room for others to get established is important. But, once again, how you stimulate and support these transitions is important to maintaining a healthy social fabric in your community.

Change is always hard in smaller rural communities. Getting good at enabling needed change is one of the most important leadership skills your community can acquire.

Section 4 provides a no-nonsense framework for building a people attraction game plan, but before we move to Section 4 it is important we spend a bit of time focusing on the issue of "incentives."





## Incentives

As a community working to attract needed professionals, you may consider it important, even essential, to provide incentives. We live in a very competitive world, and oftentimes incentives are essential to succeeding in attracting a professional. We urge you to consider the following items when exploring the need for and development of an incentive package.

**Figure 7 - Incentive Considerations**

<b>Target</b>	Your community needs lots of different kinds of professionals. Be clear on which professionals you are prepared to provide incentives. Take the time to build a thoughtful program based on good research. Keep your program current.
<b>Research</b>	Do your research to find out what other communities are doing by way of incentives. Work to be competitive but prudent in what you offer. Keep current on what kinds of incentives are being used in other communities with the professionals you are targeting.
<b>Negotiate</b>	Don't be afraid to negotiate, particularly if the incentive package is a keen consideration for your candidate. Make sure you make a good deal for your community. Remember, you are setting precedent each time you use incentives, and others in your community are watching. If you are too generous, it may result in serious resentment.
<b>Due Diligence</b>	Be sure to do reasonable due diligence on those candidates that you are considering offering incentives. Make sure their references and credentials check out. Make sure that they are what they represent and do not have a history of taking advantage of these kinds of situations.
<b>Accountability</b>	If you provide incentives, be sure you have a contract with clear performance standards. Ensure there is a process for transparent accountability for both parties.

Most important, we urge you to not lead with incentives. If your incentive package is the primary reason a professional will consider your community, you may well be on thin ice. Other factors should drive whether your community is a right choice and good fit. Chances are good that incentives alone are not enough to ensure a professional makes a long-term commitment to your community. Also, if money and benefits are the primary deciding point, is this the kind of person you really want? Use incentives to be competitive if need be and then work on other considerations to make your case to candidates.



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## Incentives Stories

Milan Wall with the Heartland Center for Leadership Development ([www.heartlandcenter.info](http://www.heartlandcenter.info)) summarizes some recent interesting stories highlighting rural attraction efforts.

### **Towns offer free land to newcomers – USA Today, February 2005**

This article describes some Midwest states, including Kansas, that are offering incentives, such as free land and employment, to move to small towns. It also describes "economic gardening," which includes encouraging small business start-ups and reaching into high schools to teach entrepreneurship and persuade students to come back after college. The article briefly mentions HTC and describes success of Ord and Valley County, including the return of a wealthy alum from Arizona to teach entrepreneurship classes, a graduate from Lincoln, Nebraska starting an irrigation-well firm, and another graduate opening a dental practice. Stresses town pride, low crime rate and recreation opportunities as reasons people living in urban areas return to rural areas.

### **Rural town lures one back – Omaha World-Herald, February 2005**

After attending college, Trent Wilson went back to Mullen, Nebraska to start his own mechanics business. He never thought he would go back to this small town, but the article describes the impact HTC has made on the community and its focus on luring back youth.

### **Family focuses on growth for smaller businesses – Lincoln Journal Star, May 2007 - Evelyn Alonso**

wanted to support her children but still be able to raise them, so she decided the best solution was to start her own business. Now Evelyn and her brother Rich have relocated from Omaha to Nebraska City, where they own The Art of Music, a main street retail business selling music instruments and artwork as well as offering instrument repair and painting services. The article emphasizes the need for entrepreneurship support services and workshops to help small towns maintain and grow.

### **North Dakota luring expatriates home – Lincoln Journal Star, September 2007 - North Dakota held a**

job fair to promote its jobs and quality of life. The article specifically describes one couple, David and Amy Mayer, who moved back to Bismarck after living in Minneapolis. David is a landscape architect and Amy is an analyst in state government. The Mayers wanted to move back closer to home to raise a family.

### **Rural Nebraska makes progress in luring back former residents – Omaha World-Herald, October**

**2007 - Sisters Betty Sayers and Nancy Herhahn returned to Holdrege, Nebraska after living in Chicago, Kansas City and San Diego. They created Nebraska Rural Living to help attract entrepreneurs to small towns. The article stresses that small towns are just as well connected to global communications as big cities and offer no traffic slowdowns, low housing costs, and a good environment to raise kids.**

Next we will share some promising best practices and programs that can inspire, educate and assist your community in your professionals' attraction efforts.

## Promising Programs and Resources

From our earliest history America has been on the move. We are a large country physically, but our remarkable transportation system coupled with a culture that largely embraces moving enables and drives relocation. We embrace the idea that moving to places with opportunity for betterment and enrichment is a good thing. Despite this rich history -- there is not a well documented or established document related to "people attraction." For decades our communities have engaged in the recruitment of professions -- but there is little documentation of practice, experience and knowledge associated with these attraction efforts.

We are in the process of gathering promising programs and resources first in our home state of Nebraska and regionally within the Great Plains. Eventually, we hope to gather stories, strategies, practices and resources from throughout North America. Canada has a much different foreign immigration policy. The flow of professional talent into Canada is much greater than in the United States. In the future we hope America will look at these practices to potentially open our doors wider and expand the pool of professionals from which we can draw to our communities.

- AIM
- Health Care Workers
- DSU Head Hunter Program

Our next Section provides a process and framework to help your community explore your attraction opportunities and build a strong game plan.

## AIM's Career Link

The AIM Institute in Omaha is working with rural employers and communities across America helping them find the human talent they need. Careerlink-TM provides web based information on employers, jobs, resume postings and career fairs. Check out [www.careerlink.com](http://www.careerlink.com) .

## Health Care Workers

Rural hospitals often face challenges in filling key professionals ranging from administrators to doctors. Many rural hospitals employ incentives to attract these workers including signing bonuses, moving expenses, income guarantees and even help with housing.

## DSU Head Hunter Program

Dickinson State University in partnership with major employers in Southwestern North Dakota provides a professional job service. Employers are funding this program and using the DSU service to recruit skilled workers replacing fees once paid to outside head hunter firms.



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## 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.



**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.

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## 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. Give 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.



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 others 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.

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## Thoughts on Assessment

Chances are good you have already done some assessment since you have determined that professional 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 corporations, 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.

## 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!

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We have identified five additional action steps that will take your game plan to impact:

- What is Success?
- Evaluating for Progress
- Accountability
- Learning & Growing
- Celebrating Progress

**What is Success?** Americans love to keep score. We track everything and take joy in knowing how we are measuring up. Use this cultural trait to its advantage. Be sure you have some idea of what success looks like. We suggest you employ a wonderful performance system developed by Milan Wall at the Heartland Center for Leadership Development called the Hierarchy of Community Impacts. We will even share a free copy of the Hierarchy so you can get started with defining success for your initiative.

**Evaluating for Progress.** With success defined, you can track your progress. We Americans can really be patient and work hard if we believe we are making progress. Every quarter take a few minutes to measure your progress against your vision of success. Even modest progress will provide energy and encourage your team and community to stay the course. Conversely, if you are off track, this exercise will enable you to refocus, set new goals and get moving again.

**Accountability.** Often times even the best projects, programs or initiatives get lost in the fog of unaccountability. In fact we are pros at leaving things kind of vague. This habit is a death sentence to your work. For example, we decide to take a certain action, but we are unclear as to

WHO is responsible. A month later we meet again and discover that no progress has been realized. Of course no progress is realized because of the fog of unaccountability. Be honest with what is possible - but then create a culture of accountability to each other so that the work agreed to gets done.

**Learning & Growing.** Sometimes we are so busy doing the work that we fail to slow down and take stock of how we are doing. This process of defining success, tracking progress and holding each other accountable can help your team and initiative learn and grow. By taking time to do a "no fault autopsy" of something that did not work can provide invaluable insight into what you need to do to progress the next time. Failure is part of progress and getting your community more comfortable with this reality will empower you to do more.

**Celebrating Progress.** This should not be all work. Developing our hometowns and accomplishing important work should be rewarding and can be fun. There is a reason that after a baptism, graduation or other major event we have food and celebrate. Be sure to create times when you can celebrate and thank those who have labored to make your community better.

We hope this information is helpful to you and your community as you begin to build your people attraction strategy. The final section in this Guide provides some important information on how we can help you realize your dreams.

## 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

Our People Attraction Guide on Professionals was developed and produced by the following team:



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## 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](mailto:don@e2mail.org).

You can find all of these guides and many other valuable resources on our website at [www.energizingentrepreneurs.org](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.heartlandcenter.info).