



HOMETOWN COMPETITIVENESS

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

FAMILIES

A People Attraction Guide

Background and Introduction - This Guide provides important information on the People Attraction Opportunity of Families. For many rural communities, this attraction opportunity is very important as it holds the potential for population diversity and growth. When young people leave their home communities for education and life experience and do not return, the potential pool of Families typically declines. As a result, the sustainability of everything from local schools to the richness of youth oriented activities can be affected. But more is lost within the social fabric of communities as fewer Families remain. Children symbolize the future. Communities with fewer and fewer children may lose their hope for tomorrow.



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 Families to Your Community? Section 1 provides an overview of the primary reasons why your community should consider a family focused people attraction strategy.

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

Section 3 - Recommended Attraction Strategies & Tactics. 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 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.



Making Your Home in North Dakota

After growing up in Fargo, Donald Cameron left the state in search of a career. He returned for visits, and thought his final trip to North Dakota would be to Westhope for his grandfather's funeral in 1975. Following the services, he and his family traveled to Lake Metigoshe for dinner and "one last look."

"We were surprised to see our former family lake cabin for sale, and arranged for my mother to purchase it the next day," he said. "Since then, my family and I have visited nearly every summer. I am now beginning to build a retirement home - not in Palm Springs or Lake Tahoe - but on beautiful Lake Metigoshe."

The lake home will provide the ideal place for the former Californian to enjoy his favorite North Dakota activities - boating, hiking and bicycling. He looks forward to sharing the beauty of the area with his out-of-state friends.

His mother's words left a lasting impression Donald carried with him during his years away from home. "She used to say North Dakota had four things very few states have: clean air, fresh water, open spaces and, best of all, friendly people. I cannot agree more. Almost everyone you meet would make a great neighbor."

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Why Focus on Families?

Take a while to do your home work and be sure of your specific attraction strategies. The following inset provides a summary of reasons why your community might want to focus on families as a people attraction target.

Why Families?

#1 Demographic Renewal – Many smaller communities are struggling to have enough kids to support schools and other important aspects of community life. Increasing the number of families over time can stabilize population, ensure that more services stay local and create an attitude that our community does have a future.

#2 Spending Engine - Families need lots of goods and services, from food to housing to car repairs. They are spending engines that can create commerce and help keep area businesses more viable and profitable.

#3 Workforce - Parents in these families represent workforce that can meet the needs of local businesses, government, education, health care and agriculture. Generally speaking, these are the very folks in the prime years of their working lives.

#4 Innovation - new and better ideas -- is centrally important to community progress and sustainability. Younger families are inherently wired to be innovative. They think outside of the box until we grow them up to know better. Communities with vibrant younger families are better positioned to be innovative and progressive.

#5 - Roots of Wealth - Most young families start life very poor. But eventually hard work and good financial values create wealth, both in human talent and money. Communities that can support and grow families also grow community wealth, ranging from volunteers to donors for good causes.

Who Are They?

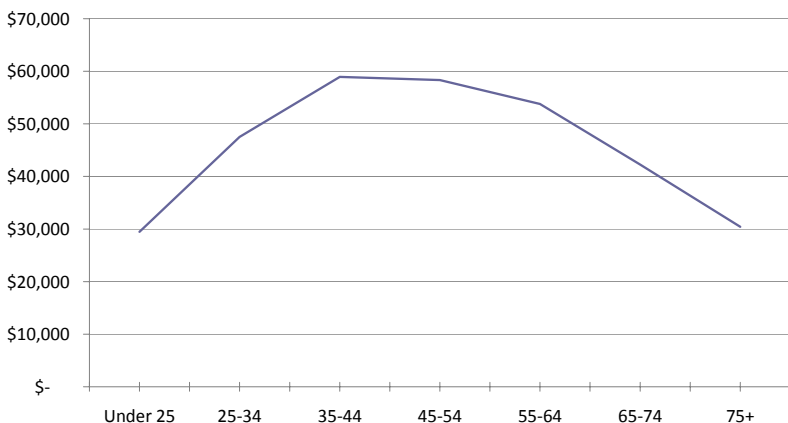
Families are a very diverse group, represented in rural communities by five very important sub-groups:

1. Couples with Pre-K Children.
2. Couples with Elementary Age Children.
3. Couples with High School Age Children.
4. Single Parents.
5. Older Couples with Grandchildren.

We have segmented this demographic group based on three considerations:

- The age of children in the household.
- Whether the head of household is a single parent or couple.
- Second generation parents.

Expenditure, 2007



Why We Move?

The Pew Research Center each year conducts national research focusing on American mobility or why we move. The most recent research provides some interesting insights around **Why People Move or Stay**.

Pew found the following reasons why people tend to stay rooted in their current hometowns:

- 74% - Tug of family ties
- 69% - Desire to live where they grew up
- 59% - Great place to raise this children
- 40% - Job or economic opportunity

So what did Pew find with respect to why people move? Let's look at their results:

- 44% - Job or economic opportunity
- 36% - Great place to raise their children
- 35% - Family ties

Pew found that those in the Western parts of the United States are likely to stay or move to be close to amenities like climate or recreation.

Pew also found that those who have moved in the past are more likely to move again.

Your community may want to take a look at research like the Pew Study to gain deeper insights on the motivators around people moving or rooting. We can help you build such a library at a very affordable price.

American Mobility, Who Moves? Who Stays Put? Where's Home?, Pew Research Center, 2008.

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We have made these distinctions based on the respective likely needs and wants of these different groups. Here is more detail about each of these five subgroups:

Couples with Pre-K Children. As a general rule, couples with pre-K children tend to be younger themselves, at the beginning of their careers and with limited incomes and wealth. However, this is not always the case since many couples are deciding to start families later in life. But the needs and wants of these families with little ones create unique community demands.

Couples with Elementary Age Children. Life changes with each life stage change. At this stage, schools, play groups, recreational leagues, youth groups and faith groups all become very important. These realities drive the need for an entirely new set of community assets to ensure attractiveness.



Couples with High School Age Children. High school is the beginning of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Needs and wants change as access to peers, education, recreation, entertainment and work become more complex and more demanding. The bigger world becomes more important and appreciation of home place becomes more challenging. Engagement of youth in community becomes powerfully important.

Single Parents. Single parenthood comes in many varieties. It is now a significant demographic within the larger group of Families. Single parents face the same challenges as couples, plus additional challenges. In many cases single parent households move into rural settings to be close to family and friends for financial and moral support. Community acceptance may vary depending on the situation -- never married, gay, separated, divorced or widowed.

Older Parents with Grandchildren. Today's families cover a wide waterfront. A growing demographic are grandparents becoming custodial parents of grandchildren or other extended family members. A growing number of grandparents are assuming this responsibility due to drugs, the need to work someplace that is kid unfriendly, unemployment, military deployment or prison.

Now that we have introduced the various family related attraction opportunities likely available to your community, our next topic focused on possible attraction strategies.

Strategy Options & Action Tips

America was settled by “people attraction.” Every Anglo-American community in America was settled by people who left their home in search of new opportunities. For those in the American West, the Homestead and Kincaid Acts enabled millions of Americans and immigrants to seek out new opportunities in entirely new communities. We have a heritage and legacy rooted in people attraction. Interestingly enough, some of newer movements to attract families to rural America are called homesteading. We know this history and we can once again employ this strategy to make our communities better and stronger.

What Should We Do?

□ Do your homework and do not just jump in. Concentrate on three fundamental things. First, take a look at what is already happening in your community. If you are seeing families returning or new ones moving into your community, you have opportunity. Second, be focused and target those opportunities for attraction that match up with your preferences, assets and needs. Finally, check into those communities that have been doing this for a while, and learn from them before you launch.

□ Every community has an opportunity to attract families because every community has families. Do some simple market research around three key groups. First, bring together some folks who never left and ask them why they choose to live in your community. Second, find some folks who left and then returned and ask them why they made this decision. You may also explore what kind of experiences they have had with your community since returning. Finally, bring in those folks who are new to your community and learn from them their reason for coming and why they choose to call your community home.

□ With this knowledge in hand, build a strategy. Start small and stay focused. Avoid gimmicks. Use the very knowledge from your interviews and focus groups to craft a message on why others should consider your community.

□ A key part of your strategy is targeting. If the closest school is some distance away, you might want to focus on retirees rather than families. Targeting can be informed by your core assets. Play to your assets.

□ Be sure you have a well designed and supported community web site that can quickly share your family-friendly assets and stories. Your target may be newcomers, but do not forget those already in your community who may be thinking of leaving. Each family you keep because of a strong attraction game plan is one less family you need to attract.

□ You do not need gimmicks or even incentives. Focus on what you have and where you are genuine. Use stories and testimonials from those who love your community. This passion will help you sell your community.

□ Stretch your definition of community. Picture your small town as a wonderful neighborhood in a county wide community. Partner, collaborate and present your community as part of this larger regional community. Remember you have more to sell as you become bigger. Every community has access to every possible amenity and asset: It is simply a question of how far you must travel to reach it. In this new era of telecommunications, distances have been reduced offering an advantage to rural communities.

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□ Play on this theme of larger community and employ some humor. Humor is powerful as a marketing tool when properly used. For example:

- Our community offers world class snow skiing in the winter and rock climbing in the summer. Just a half a day's drive to the Rocky Mountains.
- Our community offers a full range of professional sports including football, basketball, hockey and baseball. Just a half a day's drive to Chicago, Illinois.
- Our community offers advanced medical services through a regional medical center, just 90 minutes away. Local health care includes a full-time clinic, emergency services, family services and skilled nursing.
- By the way, the community we have in mind, with fewer than 500 people, is home to three of the world's finest Scottish Links Golf Courses - Really!



Have Fun

Life can be really serious. Families that are considering a life change such as moving to a new community can really be stressed. There are always concerns about...

"Are we making the right decision?"

or

"Is this going to be a huge mistake?"

We suggest that you have a great case for why a family would consider your community their future hometown. But understand that you do not have the perfect case and that there are more than facts and statistics to making a good impression.

Consider having some fun and making your case with some good old fashioned humor.

People are smart and they know that there is no perfect community. But if they perceive your community is a lively place, with a soon sense of humor and open to having some fun - you will go a long way to making a positive impression.

Value Comparisons

Value is particularly important to most Families. Nearly one-third of all American families are unable to save each month for a rainy day or special purchases. For Americans who are able to save, 50% save only \$100 or less each month. This reality illustrates the challenges that most American families are facing each and every day. For those families that are looking to "go home" or move into a rural community for whatever reason, chances are the "value equation" of cost relative to quality of life is powerfully important.

Your community needs to fully understand your value equation relative to "reference communities." If you live in Hayes, Kansas, for example, your reference communities might be Wichita, Kansas City and Denver. Gather information on core costs and affordability such as housing, taxes, child care, energy and the like. Incomes may be lower in rural communities for the same occupations and jobs when compared to these cities, but costs will be lower as well. Find clear and direct comparisons that paint a good picture. Testimonials are also important, particularly from families that have chosen to move to your community.



Community Attributes

Overall your community must compete with other community options on three fronts -- social satisfaction, lifestyle preferences and career opportunities. The following figure defines these three core attributes.

Cost? & Value!

Most families are working families. They live from paycheck to paycheck. Costs and value are very important to them. The perception is that rural communities have a lower cost of living when compared to larger cities. This can be true because of housing costs, but if longer travel may be required, fuel costs can offset lower housing costs. Know your costs and values. Be able to communicate them to those you are trying to attract. Remember that in many larger cities, public schools are struggling. Many urban families are spending small fortunes on private schooling. Be sure to note realistically the quality and value of public schools as a competitive asset. Focus on those families that will find your community a great value, where housing costs are affordable and public schools are excellent.

Figure 1 - Core Community Attraction Attributes

<p>Social Satisfaction</p>	<p>Social satisfaction is a concept that Jim Beddow at the South Dakota Rural Learning Center is advancing. In our view, social satisfaction included 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"> •Presence of desired peers & peer groups. •Adequate socialization opportunities. •An appropriate & welcoming community culture. •Opportunities for deep community engagement. •Avoidance of excessive volunteer recruitment.
<p>Lifestyle Preferences</p>	<p>Lifestyle preferences or acceptance is important if new comers are to root. Lifestyle preferences can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Open Spaces. •Slower Life Pacing. •Rural Recreation. •Presence of Family & Friends. •Ability to Keep Animals (including larger animals). •Greater Freedom of Action (land use, for example).
<p>Career Opportunities</p>	<p>Most people contemplating on moving to a rural community must still make a living (with the exception of some retirees). But for many who would like to live rural 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. We theorize that there must also be a career match that is appropriate. Offering a wider range of career choices that match up better with the kinds of jobs people are seeking is powerfully important.</p>

Another way to map your community's attraction attributes are represented by the following table to support assessment and strategy building. In the case of family attraction, we believe there seven key attributes, including amenities for adults, activities for youth, education, health care, safety, housing and peers.

Figure 2 - Core Community Attraction Attribute Check List

<p>Adult Amenities</p>	<p>Parents have lives beyond their kids. It is important to provide good services that parents need, such as quality day care, as well as recreation and entertainment amenities that enable parents to be adults, gather, make friends and create support groups. Think about how to provide child-friendly services that provide child care to enable such socialization. Be creative with these parents.</p>
<p>Youth Activities</p>	<p>Lifestyle preferences or acceptance is important if new comers are kids who today engage in more activities. Cities are rich in age-appropriate youth activities. There is no way a smaller community can directly compete. Think regionally and capture the full range of youth activities from clubs to youth groups to recreational offerings.</p>
<p>Education</p>	<p>Educational access and quality are important. Be honest and focus on your true education assets including class size and strong school communities.</p>
<p>Health Care</p>	<p>Health care is important to all age groups. Think regionally and create an honest picture of your health care system. If you do not have comprehensive health care services locally, work to provide basic services such as vaccinations and physicals as a convenience for busy families.</p>
<p>Safety</p>	<p>Safety is primarily an urban concern. However, it should not be taken for granted that families will automatically perceive your community to be safe. Work with area law enforcement to (1) fully understand the safety challenges confronting your community and (2) partner with area law enforcement to address real issues such as drugs, alcohol and speeding in school zones and residential areas.</p>
<p>Housing</p>	<p>Most rural communities have lower-cost housing but are more limited in selection when compared to cities. Be aggressive in ensuring appropriate and affordable housing from rentals for young families to single homes for growing families. Being pro-active in helping families move to home ownership may be one of the more effective attraction incentive strategies.</p>
<p>Peers</p>	<p>Be sure that your community communicates that there are peers. Knowing that there are adults in similar life stages who can become friends is important. Use your amenities to create opportunities of peer group formation.</p>

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Attraction Prerequisites

The following series of charts provide more specific insight on the “attraction prerequisites” by family group.

Figure 3 - Couples with Pre-K Children

Adult Amenities	Having the youngest of children can be very demanding with little or no time for parents. Access to “time away” or “adult time” is important, including quality pre-school education, child care and baby sitters. Make sure your community provides these parents with gathering places to meet, recreate and be entertained.
Youth Activities	At this age children are not generally formally engaged in activities. But the cross-over between child care and early learning and enrichment are important. Also, community activities should ensure they are “young kid” appropriate and friendly. Issues of language, smoking and drinking can create hostile environments for young families.
Education	Formal education has not yet started, but learning is a priority. More and more parents understand that early childhood education is important both in the home and in day care settings. Communities that move beyond “baby sitting” to pre-school enrichment will have a competitive edge.
Health Care	Any parent with a baby on the way or at home knows how important access to primary health care is. Access to appropriate emergency services is equally important in times of crisis. Make sure you capture your health care assets not only locally but within your area to provide a strong health care picture.
Safety	Beyond normal issues of crime, most rural communities are viewed as very safe for young families and their kids when compared to more urban places. Make sure this is true for your community where kids in the street and reckless drivers may be your biggest safety concern.
Housing	Housing affordability is important as most parents at this life stage are just starting out. They dream of owning a home, but may be struggling to pay the rent. Ensure there is a range of housing that creates a stair step of home ownership opportunities for these families.
Peers	Create opportunities for these families to come into contact and form support groups. Peers are hugely important just as the extended circle of family and friends is important.

Figure 4 - Couples with Elementary Age Children

<p>Adult Amenities</p>	<p>Life launches with the start of school. This stage creates both time and space for parents, as well as new demands. Become familiar with the school annual calendar and daily schedule. Make sure that adult activities do not create conflicts with school requirements.</p>
<p>Youth Activities</p>	<p>Kids get involved with activities at this age ranging from youth sports to Cub Scouts to 4-H and the list can go on and on. These activities are important as part of your attraction package. Think regionally and map out the youth activity opportunities in your “larger” community.</p>
<p>Education</p>	<p>Educational quality and access become primarily important with this group. The ability to provide locally available elementary education is important. If your schools are consolidated, you will need to work harder to overcome distance concerns of parents. Focus on travel time, not distance.</p>
<p>Health Care</p>	<p>Health care needs lessen somewhat as children grow older, but they remain important. Access to both primary care and emergency care services needs to be addressed and communicated.</p>
<p>Safety</p>	<p>There are not really any special safety concerns beyond the normal issues of crime and school safety. As children become older and more mobile, the ability to move around the community on their own is an asset. Create a culture where every home is a “safe” home for kids.</p>
<p>Housing</p>	<p>Housing needs change as families grow. The ability of your community to provide affordable housing with more room is important. Housing rehabilitation, ownership and new construction programs are important to ensure that supply matches demand.</p>
<p>Peers</p>	<p>There are thresholds that must be met and these thresholds vary from family to family. Having enough kids to support a soccer league or a scout troop requires creativity and community-to-community collaboration. You can make a better case if you do not do it alone and are willing to partner with your neighboring communities.</p>

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Figure 5 - Couples with High School Age Children

Adult Amenities	Adult amenity needs remain relatively the same through most groups. Issues of day care and kid-friendly gathering places become less of an issue with high school students. Focus on basics such as community engagement, recreation and school-related socialization opportunities.
Youth Activities	Small towns do a remarkable job of providing activity opportunities within and external to the school. Older kids are extremely busy. This is an asset that you can play to. In smaller towns compared to cities, youth can try everything from a part-time job to debate to sports.
Education	As a student moves from middle school to high school, educational quality and particularly a variety of offerings become very important. The ability to offer a wider range of quality classes can be enhanced by employing distance learning technologies.
Health Care	Health care needs really do not create any special considerations beyond those already mentioned.
Safety	Safety issues really change. Community culture can change from high school class and year to year. Know the at-risk behavior patterns and trends. If there is risky behavior that is part of a class's culture, address it. Many urbanites are looking for rural communities to get their kids out of unsafe environments. Make sure your community is a safe place for young people.
Housing	As families age, housing needs increase. Having access to good trades that can handle additions and improvements is important.
Peers	One attribute of small town life is that parents and families become part of their high schooler's life. If the kids play sports, sporting events are important. If they are in the arts or humanities, these events become important socializing opportunities. Create appropriate opportunities for parental involvement without working them to death. Parents know that in a short few years their child will move on, so they want to be involved in positive and fun ways.

Figure 6 - Single Parents

<p>Adult Amenities</p>	<p>Single parents face all the same challenges as couples with kids, but it may be harder for them to fit in and satisfy meet their needs. Depending on their situation, the community may not be very supportive. Single parents of all stripes are part of our communities today. Talk with them, listen and work to meet their special needs if you want them to choose your community.</p>
<p>Youth Activities</p>	<p>Depending upon age group, the youth activities desired will change. Please review the first three Groups for detailed information on this question.</p>
<p>Education</p>	<p>The same is true with educational needs based on the age of children. Check out the education sections of the earlier groups.</p>
<p>Health Care</p>	<p>The same is true with health care needs based on the age of children. Check out the education sections for the earlier groups. Because of the potential income limitations of single parents, health care affordability may be a bigger issue. Creating access through public clinics that treat all within a community can send a powerful signal of welcome.</p>
<p>Safety</p>	<p>There are special safety concerns as single parents often have little or no back up. If they must work, who can attend to a child in need? Here, smaller communities can play to one of their inherent strengths -- being good neighbors. Be ready to help when needed while respecting the privacy of others.</p>
<p>Housing</p>	<p>Housing affordability may be a tougher challenge for single parents. Based on national statistics, single parents tend to have more limited financial capabilities than couples. Ensuring quality and affordable rental and home ownership options may be critical in attracting this group.</p>
<p>Peers</p>	<p>There are two important considerations here. First, single parents want folks like themselves as one peer group. But second, they do not want to be segregated from couples with children. We encourage communities that are unsure how to work with a group such as single parents to slow down and engage in a dialogue. Some good conversations and openness can create clearer strategies for action.</p>

You have raised three kids and you and your loved one are now focused on some time off. But you now find that you must step in and help a child raise their children. This scenario is happening more and more. Be pro-active and learn what you can do to help these older couples deal with their new reality.

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Figure 7 - Older Couples with Grandchildren

<p>Adult Amenities</p>	<p>By this stage in their life, grand parents know what they like and want. Given their new role as parents once again they will need help from the community. Everything has changed since they were parents. Their instincts are good and their love is strong - but they may not have a clue how to relate to their grand-kids in a parental role. Support groups and services through school or church can be a important amenity for this group.</p>
<p>Youth Activities</p>	<p>The activity mix is defined by the age group. But there are special needs. Kids in this situation often have lost parents due to death, drugs, unemployment, crime or simply the inability to be a parent right now. Older kids feel like they have failed and they need activities to re-establish self-worth and deal with negative peer reactions.</p>
<p>Education</p>	<p>Educational needs are also the same. But as with youth activities, schools must be prepared to help these kids cope with the challenge of losing parents and the behavioral issues such an experience can create.</p>
<p>Health Care</p>	<p>Health care issues are also the same and are driven by age. But kids in stress often engage in higher levels of at-risk behavior.</p>
<p>Safety</p>	<p>Safety issues are the same as with all kids. But kids struggling to cope effectively with their loss and their new situation need special understanding. Awareness, training and appropriate response by law enforcement may mean the difference between tragedy and a happy life.</p>
<p>Housing</p>	<p>Since most older adults in this situation already have housing, this may not be an important issue to this group.</p>
<p>Peers</p>	<p>There may be few peers either for the grandparents or the grandchildren. They need broader community acceptance and support as well as the ability to connect with living this new life.</p>

We hope the previous tables provide your community a pretty good idea of the preferences and needs of various kinds of families that may be considering your community to become their hometown. While the differences in amenities or concerns around safety may vary slightly, these differences are important. To the extent your community can address them effectively, will increase your attraction appeal and your competitiveness in this growing trend of family relocation.

A Word on Travel Perceptions. . . .

Chances are your community does not have or offer all the things that a larger city provides. But if you think regionally, you really have a lot more to offer than is available locally. Travel has two components -- time and distance. In urban areas, the distance to services, schools and amenities may be shorter when compared to rural areas. But when travel time is considered, rural areas often come out on top. Ten miles in Seattle or Kansas City may take as much time to travel as 20 or 30 miles in a rural area. Furthermore, the stress of travel in rural areas is often far lower when compared to freeway congestion.

The information on attributes is based on generalized knowledge. Your community must be prepared to engage in your own market research. Start with those who have already chosen your community to gain this important insight.



Hometown --Where Living is Easy

Travel time & cost to a movie in the city:

40 minutes of congested traffic, large parking lot & \$12 tickets.

Travel time and cost to a movie in Hometown:

30 minutes of open road, parking at the door & \$6 tickets.

...and concessions cost one-third to one-half less than at city movie theaters.

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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. 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.

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 homework 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 family 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.

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 Families was developed and produced by the following team:



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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 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.