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'Live, Work, and Play': Attracting and Retaining Tomorrow's Talent



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

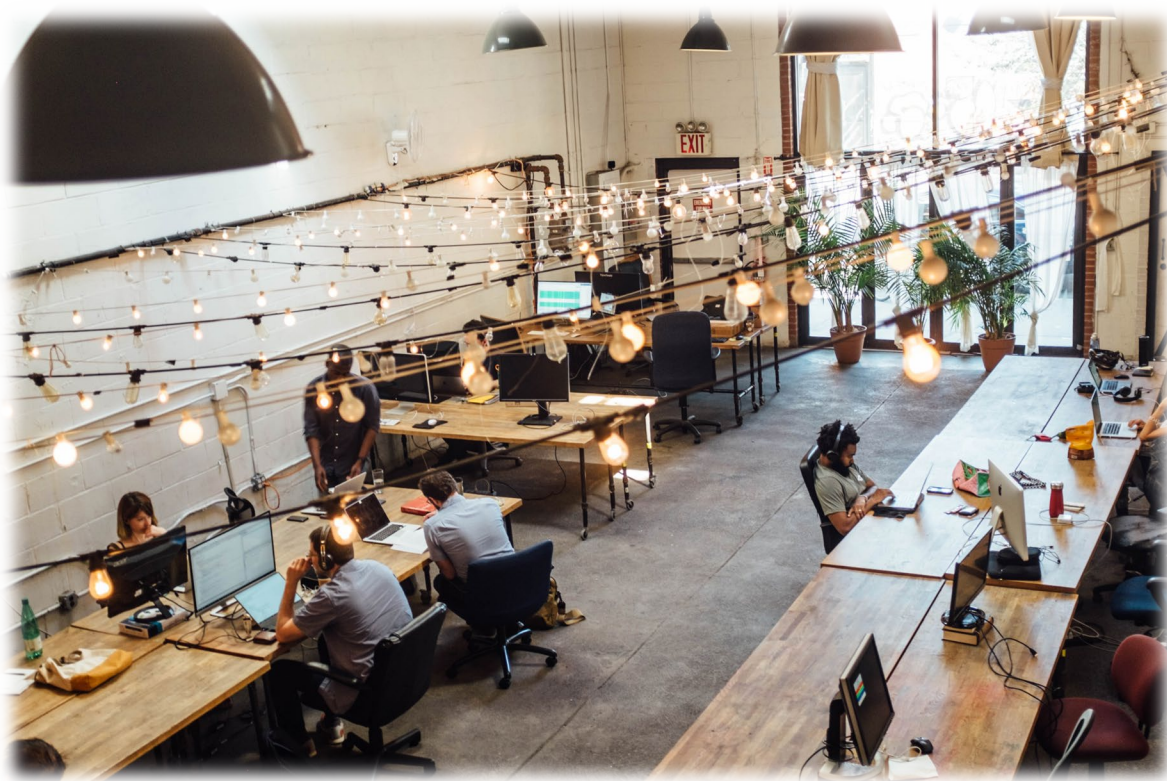
Communities and employers are competing for a persistently tight supply of workers. In the United States and many other places around the globe, aging populations, declining labor force participation and other factors will continue to constrain the talent supply well into the future. And with the rise of remote work, today's workers have unprecedented choice in where they choose to live and work.

Millennials and Generation Z – those ages 18-42 – comprise about half of the workforce currently, and value factors such as vibrancy, flexibility, diversity, connection, and social and environmental responsibility in their work and life choices. In response, communities and economic development organizations are putting significant resources into marketing strategies and cultivating local assets to appeal to these workers. Talent attraction and retention strategies discussed in this report include:

- Talent marketing collateral and tools, including references and links to dozens of EDO and community talent programs
- Targeting specific populations, such as students, immigrants, and military families
- Fostering civic and social engagement through networking groups and tools
- Investing in livability and vibrancy to improve quality of life
- Remote worker attraction programs, evidence of their impact, and suggested best practices

The report concludes with five tips for implementing talent retention and attraction programs:

- Start with research to determine the community's unique needs, strengths, and weaknesses
- Invest in basic amenities for talent, such as housing and broadband
- Partner with employers to share information and collaborate on strategy
- Work with community partners who have similar goals to share and amplify resources
- Create outlets and pathways for new residents to connect with the community



INTRODUCTION

Competition among communities for talent has been fierce for nearly a decade, but the events of 2020 changed the game completely.

Covid-19 was the biggest catalyst, pushing many older workers out of the labor force permanently and prompting others to find safer, more flexible, and higher-paying jobs. The pandemic highlighted the importance of employee well-being and made workers more aware of their rights and expectations in the workplace. In addition, it led many to re-evaluate their relationship with work versus other areas of their lives, with many deciding to quit, change jobs or careers, or prioritize family or other pursuits.

Yet the rise of remote work may be the most significant change the pandemic had on employer-worker relationships. In 2019, 4.8 percent of full paid working days were done from home.¹ After jumping to 60-plus percent almost overnight in 2020, the figure has stabilized at 28 percent in March 2023, a change whose impacts on workers, businesses and communities will resound for years.²

The pandemic wasn't the only event of 2020 with long-term impacts on the workforce and society. The murder of George Floyd brought structural racism and inequality into the spotlight both in the United States and around the world. Employers committed to diversity and inclusion objectives in internal operations, corporate culture, and employee recruitment, retention and development, and today's workers – particularly younger generations – expect progress and accountability on these measures.

Also in 2020, Millennials began to approach age 40, and Generation Z began to enter the workforce in significant numbers. Members of Gen Z are “more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and they are on track to be the most well-educated generation yet. They are also [digital natives](#) who have little or no memory of the world as it existed before smartphones,” according to Pew Research.³

In sum, today's younger workers have very different expectations than those widely held in February 2020. Given the ongoing labor shortage, employers and communities have little choice but to adapt. And they are doing so; many communities are putting efforts into attracting and retaining talent that 20 years ago would have been focused exclusively on businesses.

This paper begins by examining the characteristics and values of today's younger workers and what they want from employers and communities. It then explores talent attraction and retention programs that have expanded widely in recent years and their characteristics, including remote worker programs. The paper concludes with actions economic development organizations (EDOs) and partners can take to ensure that their communities have the workers they need for the future.

Talent is increasingly unwilling to sacrifice their quality of life for a job.... There has never been a time where talent has had as much flexibility and control in choosing not just a job but also a lifestyle.

Source: [DCI](#)

WHO ARE THE WORKERS OF THE FUTURE?

In 2022, the median age of the U.S. workforce was 42.3, meaning that Millennials and Gen Z comprise almost exactly half of the current labor force. Over the next two decades, they will become an even larger portion of all. In 20 years, the oldest of these groups will be 62 and the youngest 31.⁴

Who counts as “Millennial” and “Gen Z”?

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Birth years (Pew Research definition)	1997-2012	1981-1996	1965-1980	1946-1964
Current ages	11-26	27-42	43-58	59-74

Trends show that the future labor force will...

Grow more slowly than in the past. U.S. population growth has been slowing for years due to low fertility rates, an aging population, reduced immigration, and lower life expectancies.⁵ Population growth rates exceeded 2 percent annually in the late 1970s, slowing to 0.9 percent more recently and is projected to decline further to 0.7 percent annually between 2021-2031.⁶

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), labor force growth will continue slowing as well. At a projected 0.5 percent annual increase between 2021-2031, the rate is slower than that in much of recent history.⁷

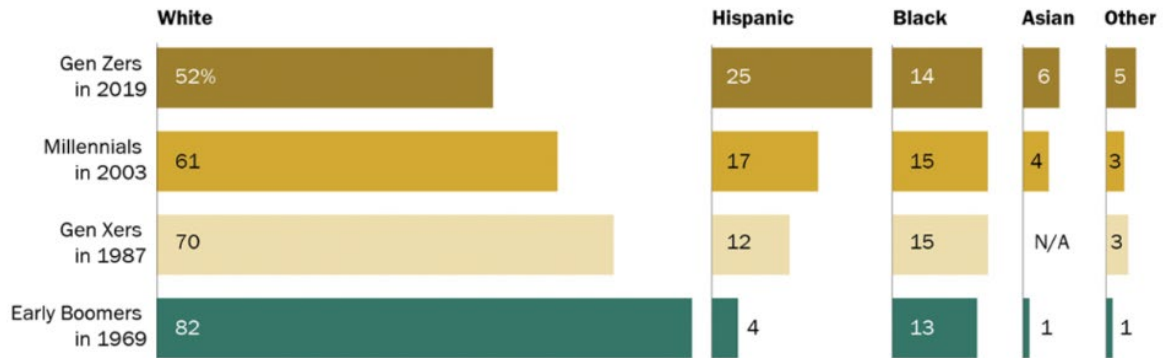
Be a smaller portion of the overall population – that is, defined by a lower labor force participation rate. As noted in EDRP’s January 2023 paper ([Growing Your Workforce: Strategies to Raise Local Labor Force Participation](#)), the labor force participation rate has been declining from a high of 67.3 percent in 2000 to 62.6 percent as of March 2023.⁸ BLS projects labor force participation to drop to 60.1 percent by 2031, due largely to the aging population.⁹

Be more racially and ethnically diverse. As the United States becomes more diverse, so will the workforce. In 2019, for the first time, most newly hired prime-age workers (ages 25-54) were people of color. In 2020, the share of Gen Z voters (ages 18-23) who identified as Hispanic was significantly higher than older generations.¹⁰ By 2028, the Hispanic population is expected to comprise more than 20 percent of the labor force.¹¹



One-in-four members of Gen Z are Hispanic

% of 7- to 22-year-olds who are ...



Source: [Pew Research](#)

Be better educated than previous generations. According to Pew Research, Gen Z is on track to be the best-educated generation yet. They are more likely to finish high school and pursue college compared to earlier generations: In 2020, among “18- to 21-year-olds no longer in high school in 2018, 57% were enrolled in a two-year or four-year college. This compares with 52% among Millennials in 2003 and 43% among members of Gen X in 1987.”¹²

Place high importance on social values such as equity and environmental sustainability. In general, Millennials and Gen Z tend to hold more socially conscious views than Gen X and baby boomers. For example, Pew Research reports their views on the following issues:

- **Race.** Two-thirds of Gen Z (66 percent) and 62 percent of Millennials say Black people are treated less fairly than white people in the United States today. These generations also are more vocal on the benefits to U.S. society of increased racial and ethnic diversity.¹³
- **Climate change.** Significantly larger shares of Millennials and Gen Z are concerned about and expect action on climate change, compared to older generations: 71 percent and 67 percent, respectively, say “climate should be the top priority to ensure a sustainable planet for future generations.”¹⁴
- **Gender and sexuality.** Just 15 percent of Millennials and Gen Z view same-sex marriage unfavorably, a significantly smaller number than older cohorts.¹⁵ According to a 2021 survey by Ipsos, younger generations are much more likely to describe themselves as being attracted to members of the same sex (18 percent for Gen Z, 12 percent for Millennials, 9 percent for Gen X and 7 percent for Boomers), as well as to identify as transgender, non-binary, non-conforming, genderfluid, or in a way other than male or female (4 percent of Gen Z vs. 2 percent of Millennials, 1 percent of Gen X and less than 1 percent of Boomers).¹⁶

WHERE DO THEY WANT TO LIVE?

Before exploring the location choices of Millennials and Gen Z, some broader context is important. Annual domestic migration rates (movers as a percentage of total population) have been declining since the late 1940s through the 1960s, from 20-plus percent to 8.7 percent in 2021-2022. Of movers, more than half move within the same county. A smaller portion moves across counties, and the smallest portion moves between states, though that number ticked up slightly during 2021-2022.¹⁷

In fact, “nearly six in 10 young adults live within 10 miles of where they grew up, and eight in 10 live within 100 miles,” according to a study by the Census Bureau in collaboration with Harvard University.¹⁸ (Visit <https://migrationpatterns.org/> to see where people in your community have moved to and from.)

Also important to note is that people are significantly less likely to relocate after a certain age: young adults ages 20-34 have the highest migration rates, with a steady decline occurring with age.¹⁹

Where talent is moving. Much is still unknown about post-pandemic migration trends, but a few points stand out.

Sharp population losses that occurred in urban core counties and major metro areas during the first year of the pandemic slowed during 2021-2022 and in some cases reversed (international migration was a significant element of these gains).²⁰

However, a recent analysis of Census microdata finds that more college-educated workers have been moving out of expensive coastal metros such as San Francisco, New York and Washington, D.C., than have been moving in. Those workers are migrating in the greatest number to large, non-coastal metros (populations of 1 million-plus, such as Phoenix, Atlanta, and Tampa), and to a lesser degree, mid-size cities (populations of 250,000 to 1 million). Small metros and rural areas also saw positive migration of college graduates.²¹

In a continuation of pre-pandemic trends, the fastest-growing states and cities remain in the Sunbelt. From 2021-2022, the top states for in-migration were Florida, Texas, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee.²² The top cities to which people migrated were Ocala, Fla.; Tallahassee, Fla.; Charlotte, N.C.; Savannah, Ga.; and Houston, Texas.²³

Why talent moves

Marketing consultancy DCI surveyed 1,000 people who moved at least 100 miles away from their previous residence over the past two years as part of its annual “[Talent Wars](#)” study. Selected results worth highlighting from their 2022 report include:

The top three reasons workers moved:

1. To have a better quality of life
2. To be closer to family
3. To have a different lifestyle

Most important factors in the decision to relocate:

1. Cost of living
2. Housing availability
3. Housing cost

So where are Millennials and Gen Z moving? Choices vary by age among the youngest and oldest of these groups, and in many ways appear to follow those of preceding generations. Older Millennials – those in the family-forming years of their 30s and 40s – have been leaving urban cores for the suburbs. Yet younger Millennials and Gen Z continue to gravitate toward urban neighborhoods, so even as early Millennials suburbanize, both “the number and share of young adults in urban neighborhoods have gradually increased.”²⁴

New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago had the largest net decreases in Millennials. At the same time, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia had net increases in Gen Z residents “while showing major net decreases for all other generations.”²⁵

Top Destinations of Young Adults Who Leave Their Childhood Commuting Zones

Rank	Pooled		White		Black		Hispanic		Asian	
	Destination	% Movers	Destination	% Movers	Destination	% Movers	Destination	% Movers	Destination	% Movers
1	New York, NY	3.19	New York, NY	3.15	Atlanta, GA	6.68	Los Angeles, CA	5.16	Los Angeles, CA	8.38
2	Los Angeles, CA	3.05	Los Angeles, CA	2.64	Houston, TX	3.03	New York, NY	3.19	New York, NY	8.29
3	Washington, DC	2.22	Washington, DC	2.25	Washington, DC	2.77	San Antonio, TX	3.11	San Francisco, CA	7.61
4	Atlanta, GA	1.89	Denver, CO	1.99	New York, NY	2.71	Phoenix, AZ	2.99	Washington, DC	3.52
5	Seattle, WA	1.81	Chicago, IL	1.93	Dallas, TX	2.65	Houston, TX	2.75	San Diego, CA	3.3
6	Chicago, IL	1.79	Seattle, WA	1.88	Los Angeles, CA	2.31	San Diego, CA	2.72	Seattle, WA	3.26
7	Denver, CO	1.72	Boston, MA	1.72	Charlotte, NC	1.94	Austin, TX	2.50	San Jose, CA	3.05
8	San Francisco, CA	1.72	San Francisco, CA	1.54	Raleigh, NC	1.65	San Francisco, CA	2.40	Boston, MA	2.85
9	Dallas, TX	1.65	Dallas, TX	1.41	Chicago, IL	1.45	Dallas, TX	2.27	Sacramento, CA	2.65
10	Houston, TX	1.62	Phoenix, AZ	1.41	Fort Worth, TX	1.44	Orlando, FL	2.09	Chicago, IL	2.59

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Declining affordability and the acceptance of remote work appear to be among the drivers pushing educated workers out of coastal metros. Another factor, according to Stanford economist Rebecca Diamond, could be the increased attractiveness of middle-tier cities. Her work has found that since 2000, “college graduates have increasingly been moving toward high-amenity cities and away from the highest-wage ones.”²⁶

Key Takeaways:

- Domestic migration is at a historical low; most workers stay close to where they were born.
- States and cities in the South with strong job growth continue to attract the most in-migrants.
- Cities and urban neighborhoods continue to appeal to the youngest workers.
- As workers enter their 30s and 40s, they seek less expensive, more spacious single-family housing, mostly available in suburban neighborhoods. Many also seek cities with lower costs of living but many big-city amenities, such as restaurants and entertainment.

WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM EMPLOYERS?

Millennials and Gen Z have different expectations of employers and in the workplace than previous generations.

Flexible hours and location. According to a study of 2,000 knowledge workers and 500 human resources directors, “88% of knowledge workers say that when searching for a new position, they will look for one that offers complete flexibility in their hours and location.” In addition, 76 percent of the workers polled said they would be “more likely to prioritize lifestyle (family and personal interests) over proximity to work, and will pursue jobs in locations where they can focus on both — even if it means taking a pay cut.”²⁷



“Good” jobs. MIT researchers define this as “good pay and benefits, a stable and predictable schedule, a career path, security and safety, and a fair and equitable work environment.” Younger workers seek fair and transparent compensation systems, opportunities to learn and grow, and a voice in critical business decisions that impact them.²⁸

Support for mental health and work-life balance. Younger workers have greater expectations than older workers that employers should support their mental well-being. Research from the Society for Human Resource Management

found that “61 percent of Generation Z respondents said they would strongly consider leaving their current job if offered a new one with significantly better mental health benefits.”²⁹ In terms of work-life balance, younger workers seek time to pursue personal interests and passions and are more likely to set boundaries around working nights and weekends.

Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Economists at Glassdoor and Indeed found that 72 percent of workers ages 18-34 would consider turning down a job offer or leaving a company if their manager did not support DEI initiatives. For the same age group, 67 percent of workers would do the same based on a gender imbalance in company leadership, and 65 percent would do so based on a lack of racial or ethnic diversity in company leadership.³⁰

Alignment with values. Social and environmental responsibility are significant enough to the young and emerging workforce that they impact their choices of where to work. According to MIT’s Sloan School of Management, “64 percent of millennials won’t take a job if it doesn’t have a strong corporate social responsibility policy, and 83 percent would be more loyal to a company that helps them contribute to social and environmental issues.”³¹

THE GAME-CHANGER: THE NORMALIZING OF REMOTE WORK

As noted earlier, 4.8 percent of full paid working days in 2019 were done from home.³² After jumping sharply in 2020, the percent of days worked remotely dropped to the upper 20s and has remained there through the beginning of 2023 (28 percent in May).³³

Fully on-site is still the most common working arrangement, accounting for 59 percent of full paid working days as of May 2023 (12 percent were fully remote and 29 percent in a hybrid arrangement).³⁴ Work from home (WFH) will not only stick but increase, according to leading researcher Nicholas Bloom of Stanford, for five reasons:

- Better-than-expected WFH experiences,
- New investments in physical and human capital that enable WFH,
- Greatly diminished stigma associated with WFH,
- Lingering concerns about crowds and contagion risks, and
- A pandemic-driven surge in technological innovations that support WFH.³⁵

Remote work is simply what many workers want. Employers offer fewer fully remote jobs and more fully onsite jobs than employees want, according to Bloom and colleagues' research. Workers who have hybrid arrangements preferred more time to work remotely than the average of 2.2 days per week their employers permitted.

Though employers may disagree, many workers – having proven in 2020 that they can work effectively, and often more productively, from places other than the office – see in-person requirements as unnecessary. Millennials and Gen Z aren't the only generations that value the flexibility and improved work-life balance that remote work offers. Reclaimed commuting time, increased flexibility for caregiving responsibilities, better ability to care for physical and mental health all are valued by the post-pandemic workforce.

Remote work also appears to have benefits for diversity, equity, and inclusion. For workers who differ from their colleagues in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or religion, remote work can lift the pressure and mental burden of conforming to office norms.³⁶ For people with physical disabilities, remote work removes hurdles of getting to or around an office and makes it easier to use adaptive tools or technology. Neurodivergent workers may find a home environment less stimulating and more productive. According to Facebook's annual diversity report, remote work helped it recruit and retain workers from underrepresented groups; in the United States, the company's remote jobs were filled at a higher rate by people of color, people with disabilities, and veterans.³⁷

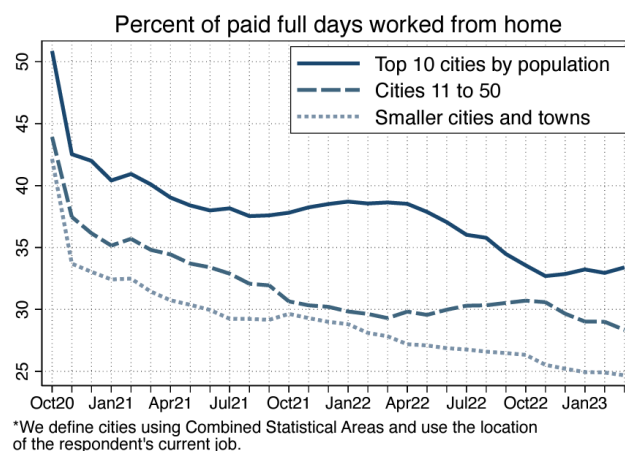
Other findings from Stanford's Bloom and his colleagues include:

- Remote work is more common in major cities than in smaller towns and cities, and is most prevalent in the tech, finance, and business services sectors.

- For college graduates, fully on-site and hybrid are the most common working patterns (44.1 percent fully on-site, 40.8 percent hybrid and 15.1 percent fully remote).

For communities, the impacts of remote work on talent retention and attraction are mixed, and in many cases are yet to be revealed.

Many can measure significant positive economic impact of remote workers, or perceived economic benefits; others have not had the hoped-for impact for a variety of reasons. In small communities and areas with fewer job opportunities, remote work offers the chance for residents to stay in town or move back and still have a good job – provided that those places can offer accessible broadband and housing at a minimum. Absent quality amenities or personal connections, remote work appears unlikely to attract many new workers and residents.



Source: [WFHresearch.com](https://www.wfhresearch.com)

‘LIVE, WORK, AND PLAY’: TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION STRATEGIES

Community and EDO programs to attract and retain workers, rather than companies, have been around for more than two decades. Two early examples include Campus Philly, which formed in the early 2000s with the goal of keeping Philadelphia’s thousands of college students in the city after graduation, and the HomeTown Competitiveness initiative, which started in rural Nebraska in 2002 and targeted youth and young adults to “cultivate a sense of belonging, investment and community involvement so that remaining or returning home is seen as an attractive option.”

A third example is Oklahoma City’s MAPs (Metropolitan Area Projects) program, which focused on improving the city’s downtown. The program – a \$0.01 sales tax to fund new and upgraded cultural, sports, recreation, entertainment, and convention facilities – was approved by voters in 1993 after the city lost its bid for an airline hub to Indianapolis because the latter offered a more vibrant quality of life. Since then, MAPs has been renewed several times; the public investments have leveraged millions of dollars in private investment and helped attract and retain businesses and residents.

These programs employ a mix of strategies that are still in use today: retaining people already in the community; helping people make connections with the community and each other; marketing to people who already have a relationship with a place; and improving amenities and quality of life. Two key differences between those programs and today’s are the ubiquity of the internet and social media for marketing, which helps talent and communities find each other, and the acceptance of remote work, which widens the field of locations talent could consider.

Talent attraction programs and strategies discussed in this section include:

- Marketing collateral and tools
- Targeting specific populations
- Fostering civic and social engagement
- Investing in livability and vibrancy
- Remote worker attraction programs

Marketing Collateral and Tools

Talent marketing collateral invariably includes a website and social media presence. It often also includes some combination of printed or digital livability magazines, pocket guides, and flyers; lookbooks, blogs, and newsletters; and compilations of photography and videography that are used in the outlets above and by employers, recruiters, and other talent attraction partners in their communication channels). The focus of these branded materials varies by the area’s strengths, target audience, and goals (e.g., raising the region’s profile, filling local jobs, attracting remote workers), but it typically is organized into a version of the “live-work-play” framework.

For Atlanta, ChooseATL.com is divided into a ‘live-work’ section and a ‘play’ section, the first highlighting the city’s professional opportunities and lifestyle options (job search function, cost of living, neighborhoods and startup scene) and the second highlighting the city’s music and sports scene, green spaces, diverse culture and sense of community.

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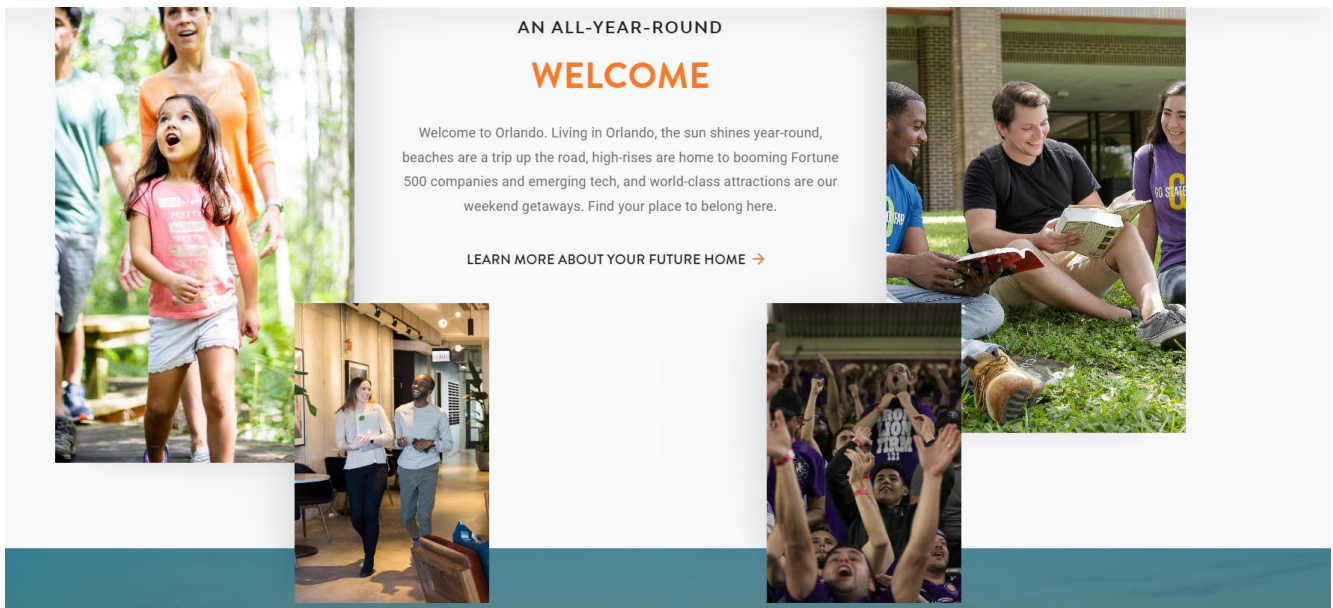
Source: ChooseATL.com

FIND HOMES 

Live It Nashville (liveitnash.com) is “a guide to living, working and playing in the Nashville region” under the headings of Economy, Lifestyle and Entertainment. “Lifestyle” includes sections on education (K-12 and higher education options), diversity (highlighting the region’s immigrant, racial and ethnic, and LGBT communities), creative culture (arts and culture, creative industry workers), neighborhoods, and community impact (volunteer opportunities, sustainability, and community service initiatives). “Entertainment” features the city’s food, music, sports, arts, nightlife, and outdoors scenes. “Economy” highlights the cost of living, geographic accessibility, job growth, major employers, and startup scene. It also has a separate page of links to practical information (e.g., voter and vehicle registration, utilities, taxes, weather, crime rate, and a mortgage calculator). Below are descriptions of common elements included in these guides, with examples.

- **Jobs and the economy.** Communities where economic opportunities are a key draw – typically but not always larger communities – often start with statistics about the strength of the local economy, such as overall job growth in the region, the concentration of employment in particular fields (“2.5 times the national average of industrial engineers”, [MoveUpstateSC](https://MoveUpstateSC.com)). They often include information on median salaries for particular fields, and highlight job openings in specific fields, education and training opportunities, and the local entrepreneurial scene. Many sites include links to job postings in the area.

Orlando Economic Partnership’s [Life.Orlando](https://Life.Orlando.com) site features four key clusters in the region – aviation, healthcare, engineering and creative services – including the median salary for each, as well as lists of major local employers in each sector and links to their job posting sites.



Source: [Life.Orlando.org](https://www.lifeorlando.org)

Northwest Arkansas hosts a [Talent Network](#) that functions as a sort of regional LinkedIn, serving both employers and job seekers. Job seekers both in and outside the region can sign up and post information such as resume, portfolio, skills, and experience and receive notifications about openings for the types of opportunities they are seeking. The platform hosts a curated set of employers based on the region's top talent needs, aggregating and featuring selected jobs; recruiters can access the network and reach out to members. The Northwest Arkansas Council has a talent ambassador on staff who meets with members and helps steward the network.

Using Instagram Guides

Guides are a new(ish) feature on Instagram that allow users to make collections of posts in one place. These collections can include posts from people you follow as well as saved posts — all without needing any rights or permission from the original creators. This makes it an efficient way for EDOs to leverage user-generated content (UGC) in their marketing to gain traction and attract more people to their social media profiles.

In addition, guides allow EDOs to repurpose copy and itineraries already posted on their website to create attractive visual guides about their destination.

Creating a guide is simple — just search through Instagram for pictures that best represent your community and the companies and employers that make this a great place to live and work and click “save.” Once you have enough pictures, click “draft collection” under “Guides” in your profile menu. From there, you can add titles, captions, tags, etc., and even share your guide in stories or tag partners. Examples include [Partner Tulsa](#), which used guides to feature local partners, and the [Fairfax County Economic Development Authority](#), which used guides to feature neighborhoods for people looking for job in Northern Virginia.

Adapted from [DCI](#)

The Baton Rouge Area Chamber has a strategic goal to increase the percentage of the regional population aged 25-44 by 5 percent. In pursuit of this goal, the chamber established [BR Works](#) as the region's foremost jobs portal, featuring openings and the ability for job seekers to create a profile, be matched to opportunities, and to connect with upskilling and training resources.

- **Recreation and entertainment.** Showing the fun things to do in a region and amenities that contribute to quality of life is central to most talent attraction collateral. Common categories to show include dining, outdoor recreation, fairs and festivals, family attractions, nightlife, local sports, and the arts and culture scene. The 'play' section of [Choose Greater Peoria](#) includes information on Family Fun, Exploring the Outdoors, Culinary Adventures, Sports Scene, Arts and Culture and Events and Activities. [Life in Sarasota Manatee's](#) 'Play Here' page includes similar sections, as does [Denver.org](#), [Choose Ketchikan](#) and nearly all other talent attraction websites mentioned here.
- **Cost of living.** Lower cost of living is an asset that contributes to a more flexible lifestyle. Though professionals through their mid- to late 20s are still migrating to large, expensive cities in significant numbers, they tend to start moving out to less dense, more affordable places as they enter their 30s and their family-forming years. Communities that compare positively for their cost of living often highlight this prominently, with a table contrasting it with selected cities or a calculator widget for visitors to plug in information to see what that income will buy in the new community, and testimonials. Examples of ways that different communities show a favorable cost of living include [BelInBuffalo](#), [FindYourJax](#), [ChooseGreaterPeoria](#) and [Choose Wichita](#).
- **Neighborhoods.** Guides for larger cities and metro areas describe the character of various neighborhoods to help relocators picture themselves in a community that aligns with their preferences. [Livelt Nashville](#) includes profiles of the 10 counties in the region plus descriptions of individual neighborhoods (e.g., hip and diverse, family friendly, eclectic, and artistic, fast-growing). [FindYourJax](#) includes a quiz to help relocators find the right neighborhood. Other sites with neighborhood profiles include Richmond, Va.'s [RVA Now](#) and [BelInBuffalo](#).
- **Education and training resources.** Technical, university, and short-term credentialing options are of interest to workers of all ages but especially those in earlier career stages. Information on K-12 information systems is important to workers who would bring family members with them. [Finding Northwest Arkansas](#) provides a comprehensive listing of education resources, including early childhood centers, independent and private schools, public and charter schools, homeschooling, higher education and specialty education.

[MoveUpstateSC](#), the site for the 10-county region around Greenville-Spartanburg, S.C., has a "Skill Up" section that includes information on in-demand careers that can be accessed through short-term training programs. Featured fields are skilled trades, manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and transportation and logistics. Specific occupations are featured under each field along with statistics about local job growth and salary ranges, key employers in the field, and local technical training options.

- **Testimonials, profiles, ambassadors, and influencers.** Current residents are one of a community's best marketing assets. Photos, videos, and text show happy (typically young) workers who talk about where they came from and what drew them to the region (e.g., career opportunities, housing availability, arts, outdoors, dining).

Choose Wichita features [Wichita Insiders](#), “Wichitans ready to answer any and all of your pressing questions” about life in the city. Profiles include mini biographies of residents with diverse backgrounds, careers, and interests that a wide range of visitors can relate to, along with lists of subjects to “Ask Me About” and social media handles to connect.

[ThinkVermont](#) offers the opportunity to “connect with a Vermonter.” Prospective residents are asked to choose a region of interest and provide some basic demographic and contact information, and then are connected to people who can act as a local concierge service to help them “build relationships with employers, realtors, and community members in their region.”

Influencers in the Wild: Angie O, Peoria

In Peoria, Illinois, Angie Ostaszewski, a Peoria transplant herself, started promoting the city’s low cost of living and welcoming community through her TikTok profile in 2020 ([NYTimes](#)). Though not a realtor herself, “Angie O” began posting videos of affordable homes for sale in Peoria and encouraging her 37,000 followers to consider moving there, through her TikTok, [AngiesListings](#). More than 300 have relocated to Peoria, with about half of those purchasing homes in the city.

As the unofficial “Peoria ambassador, welcoming committee and city guide,” Angie posts videos with more information than just the city’s affordable housing. She features small businesses, local elections, and community-building events, and hosts events such as “transplant parties” to help people make friends and learn about local resources.

This effort has been timely for the city of Peoria, whose population has declined. Peoria’s pitch is that it’s a mid-sized, affordable midwestern city, but also a place where people are open to forming diverse communities, inclusive of race, sexuality and gender. While the TikToks are for anyone who finds their way to Angie’s page, her focus has been on attracting people who, like herself, didn’t think they would ever achieve homeownership.

The Greater Peoria EDC launched its own talent attraction campaign in 2021, and leverages and amplifies Angie’s content as part of its efforts. It created [video content](#) to spread the word about her approach and the impact that one community member can have to attract talent. The EDC also has sponsored transplant parties to provide resources for new residents, and connected with new transplants through her.

The value of a community ambassador with the enthusiasm and reach of Angie O can’t be overstated. Her work has injected a new vibrancy into the city, generated economic impact and gained significant media coverage, according to David Aduama, communications manager of the EDC. Her authenticity and genuine love for Peoria is part of what makes her approach so successful. Peoria doesn’t have a reputation as a cool place, so she shows the appealing sides of the city that don’t show up other places online. “Her model can be duplicated in other communities,” said Aduama. “Which was: I love my community, and I want to share it.”

Other examples: [MoveUpstateSC](#), which features profiles of “Upstarters” sharing what it’s like to live and work in the region. The Roanoke region of Virginia’s Get2KnowNoke talent attraction

program features [talent ambassadors](#) who are “working and living here while building a community that is reflective of the diverse backgrounds, careers, and lifestyles in the region.” Visitors can view their profiles and connect with them on LinkedIn.

Partnering with Employers and Community Organizations

EDOs are creating tools and aggregating content not just for their own talent attraction efforts, but to help employers recruit for specific positions and to boost the candidate pool for certain types of jobs. They also are creating and sharing content in partnership with tourism promotion groups and chambers of commerce to enhance and augment regional branding efforts.

Northeast Indiana Regional Economic Partnership’s “[Make It Your Own](#)” campaign is the region’s branding initiative to attract target talent ages 21-45 to live and work in the 11-county region around Fort Wayne. It was developed using internal focus groups and national perception surveys for “businesses to use in their talent recruitment efforts to tell Northeast Indiana’s compelling story through a logo, tagline, marketing collateral and authentic narrative.” These resources include:

- [Talent Attraction Website](#)
- [Brand Guide \(key messages and website, logo, and color standards\)](#)
- [Pocket Guide for Employers](#)
- [Make It Your Own Logo](#)
- [Make It Your Own Promotional Video](#)
- [#NEIpride Social Media Mosaic](#)
- [Lookbook Vol. 1](#) and [Lookbook Vol. 2](#)
- [Branding Webinar Presentation](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [News](#)

The Great Falls Development Authority’s (GFDA) [talent attraction toolbox](#) for employers includes:

- Five “key messages” that describe different reasons why Great Falls “is an ideal location for talent” that employers can use on their website, job boards, in marketing materials, on social media, relocation packets, etc.
- [High-quality photo and video](#)
- [Great Falls Livability Magazine](#), relocation website [liveingreatfalls.com](#), and a Great Falls at-a-glance flyer
- [Hot Jobs in Great Falls blog](#), some of which are featured also on the ‘Live in Great Falls’ [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#) accounts
- Quarterly talent attraction receptions where hiring managers and recruiters can:
 - Chat with GFDA team members about talent attraction tools that include Jobs EQ, Livability, Hot Jobs, Trailing Partner Eblasts, video/photo library, and Great Falls at a Glance
 - Record a 30-second recruitment video
 - Pick up copies of *Great Falls Livability* magazine

Choose Wichita’s [employer toolkit](#) includes downloadable materials such as a key messages document, a visual guide comparing cost of living to other Midwest cities, and a “bucket list” of some of the region’s best experiences in the arts, dining, etc. (also available in Spanish), among other resources.

Targeting Specific Populations

Many communities target specific populations with whom they already have relationships (e.g., college students; area natives, a.k.a. “boomerangs”; military families) or to increase a sense of connection, provide resources, and make them feel welcome (e.g., immigrants, entrepreneurs).

Immigrants

In St. Louis, [The Mosaic Project](#) is one of the first and most comprehensive immigrant welcoming programs in the United States, involving companies, schools, individuals, foreign students, and others in multiple programs. It plays an important role in attracting foreign-owned firms and in retaining both domestic and foreign-owned companies.

In Salt Lake County, a task force focused on making the community more attractive, welcoming, and globally competitive for international talent and business resulted in the creation of the [Mayor’s Office for New Americans](#). The office runs programs to foster entrepreneurship, promote naturalization and increase access to English as a Second Language programs.

In Southern Idaho, the [Unity Alliance](#) was created by the chamber, city, and the largest employer in the community to provide education about the value of immigrants and support refugee integration. A backlash against the refugee resettlement program sparked the creation of the alliance.

Canada has multiple programs to encourage immigration for talent purposes. Its [Express Entry](#) program facilitates immigration applications for skilled workers in a range of fields, from medical to management to technology and skilled trades. The [Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot](#) program creates a path to permanent residence for skilled foreign workers who want to work and live in one of the 11 [participating communities](#). As a community-driven program, participating communities assess prospective candidates who “best fit the economic needs of these community; have a genuine employment opportunity that meets their community requirements; and have the intention of staying in the community.” Newcomers recommended for acceptance get connected with settlement services and mentoring opportunities with established residents.

In Europe, citizens of countries with membership in the European Union are free to migrate and work across borders. In Austria, Vienna aims to make it easier for international talent to relocate with [Vienna Wurstelstand](#), a lifestyle and city guide publication in English that includes resources like “[The Comprehensive Vienna Expat Survival Guide](#)”. The guide provides cross-cultural terminology and tips for house hunting, key documents needed, profiles of districts and neighborhoods, information on language classes and more.

College students

[I choose Montreal](#) is a campaign to attract international students to Montreal, encourage them to stay in the city after graduation, and to support employers in recruiting international students during and after their studies. To get prospective students interested in the city, it includes information on local educational institutions; [Study Connect](#), a tool to match potential students with schools that fit their field of choice; and resources such as how to apply for a Quebec Assistance Certificate and study permit, find housing, or immigrate permanently to Quebec. The site also features stories from former international students, plus the usual information on neighborhoods, things to do and job opportunities.

[Campus Greensboro](#) aims to prepare the city's 50,000-plus college and university students for the workforce, motivate them to get to know the city outside of their campuses, and help students discover local career options. Its flagship initiative is the Fellows Program, a competitive, 10-week summer experience that includes a paid industry internship, networking and professional development and community engagement. Campus Greensboro also facilitates a variety of other year-round events.

Veterans and military families

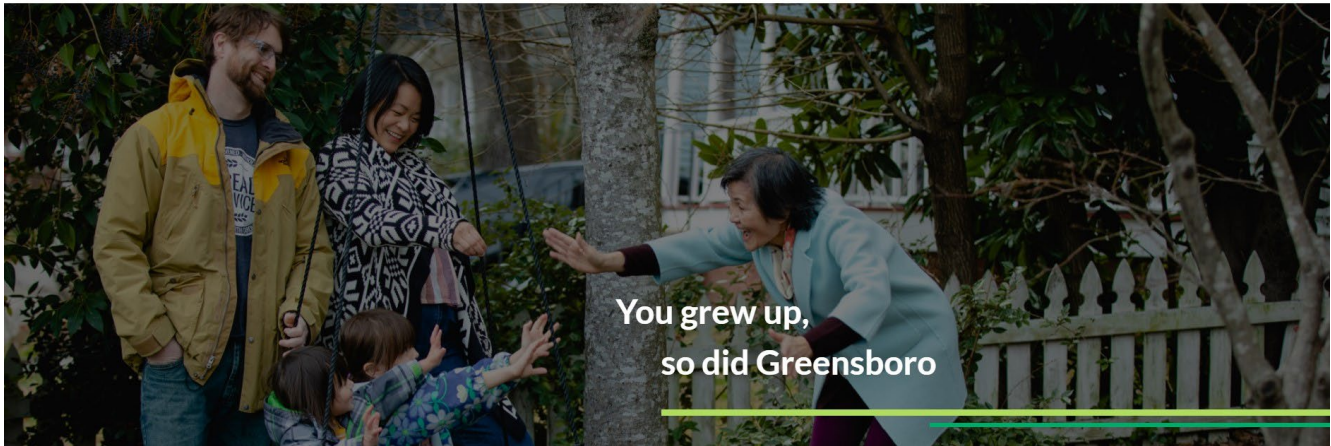
Wichita Falls, Texas, is home to Sheppard Air Force Base, which draws nearly 10,000 active duty and civilian personnel and their 3,000-plus dependents to the area. The Wichita Fall Chamber of Commerce [Military Integration and Development](#) program aims to connect the base with the community through multiple programs, such as the Military Spouse Employment Program, which offers resources and local connections; quarterly virtual and in-person tours and workshops for military spouses to welcome them to Wichita Falls and provide exposure to valuable community resources and assets; and communication and advocacy with local employers around the benefits of hiring military affiliates as a unique talent pipeline.

[Home Base Iowa](#) (HBI) connects veterans, military personnel, and their family members with resources and opportunities in Iowa. Localities can apply to receive a 'Home Base Iowa Community' designation by meeting five requirements: a signed resolution from the public governing body; 10 percent of eligible businesses are designated as HBI businesses; an incentive package that will help attract and retain veterans and their families in a community; signage; and a designation ceremony. Examples of incentives provided by various localities include property tax abatements, \$2,500 in relocation expenses and discounted home building lots. The state also provides a \$5,000 grant to service members and veterans for down payments and closing costs on qualifying homes.

In Hickory, N.C., [HKY4vets](#), affiliated with the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation, is an initiative developed to encourage servicemembers and military families to consider relocating to the area after discharge. As many as 10,000 to 12,000 servicemembers and their families exit the military in North Carolina alone each year; Hickory is located within a three-hour drive of Camp Lejeune and Fort Bragg, and within a half day's drive of other military installations. The program offers no-cost transition coaching, resume review and assistance; relationships with regional employers, including virtual hiring events targeted at military installations in the Southeast; local insight into living in the Hickory metro area; and peer networking.

Area natives (“boomerangs”)

Targeting people who grew up in a region and who often still have connections there is a common talent recruitment strategy. [Boomerang Greensboro](#) is an initiative of the Greensboro, N.C., Chamber of Commerce that aims to attract area natives to return (tagline: “You grew up. So did Greensboro”). The site features profiles of “Recent Boomerangs” – photos, videos, and stories of young people with information on where they moved from, why they returned, and favorite local spots.



BOOMERANG: (NOUN) A PERSON WHO LIVED IN GREENSBORO AND HAS MOVED BACK FOR OUR EXCELLENT QUALITY OF LIFE.

Source: [Boomerang Greensboro](#)

Entrepreneurs

Communities with a strong start-up scene and entrepreneurial ecosystems market themselves to entrepreneurs as a good place to start or relocate their business. In northwest Arkansas, [StartupNWA](#) features earned media about its reputation as a strong region for startups, the availability of entrepreneur support organizations and programs across the business life cycle, relevant events, maker spaces, access to capital and more. [ChooseATL](#) highlights Atlanta’s entrepreneurship scene and links to the city’s startup ecosystem guide. [BeInBuffalo](#) features the city’s local startup scene and resources for entrepreneurs.

[Because.Berlin](#) is a talent attraction initiative that emphasizes support services to attract not just workers but entrepreneurial talent from around the world, billing the city as “Europe’s capital for founders”. The site includes key information for would-be entrepreneurs and business owners to spark interest in relocating to Berlin, partly by showcasing how welcoming, diverse and inclusive the city is. Would-be migrants are encouraged to contact staff regarding their goals for relocation to get connected to resources, guidance and advice.

Fostering Civic and Social Engagement

Helping newcomers connect with each other, with locals and the community is a key component of talent attraction and retention and was fundamental to early initiatives such as Campus Philly and Hometown Competitiveness. Research on the success of remote worker attraction programs has noted the importance of making meaningful connections to help newcomers put down roots.

Young professionals (YP) organizations are a common vehicle to give young workers opportunities to connect with each other and with the community through professional networking, socializing, service projects and civic engagement. Partnering with young professionals group [Forum 225](#) is a key part of the Baton Rouge Area Chamber’s strategy to attract and retain early-career talent.

The Chattanooga Chamber has a Young Professionals of Chattanooga group as well as [Protégé Chattanooga](#), a cohort program to connect professionals ages 21-40 with area business and community leaders to “develop their business and civic-engagement potential, as well as build

enduring personal and professional connections.” Greensboro, N.C.’s [synerG](#) is a networking group for under-40 that aims to attract, engage, and connect young professionals to the city and grow their leadership skills.

Programs focused on helping college students and interns make connections are common. ChooseATL has an “[Interns After 5](#)” program that gives interns at metro Atlanta-based companies opportunities to interact, learn from industry leaders, and get to know the city. [One of the goals of Campus Tulsa](#) is to “support students in making meaningful connections and building community” in the city and show them what it can offer to early-career professionals.

Other types of networking initiatives include community leadership programs and newcomers groups. There are hundreds if not more community leadership programs – e.g., [Leadership Louisville](#), [Leadership Omaha](#), and [Greater Tucson Leadership](#) – which aim to develop emerging leaders, help participants understand key community issues, and connect them with local organizations and each other.

In addition to its other networking programs, the Chattanooga Area Chamber has a “ChattaNewbies” group to help new residents learn more about the city and establish roots in the community. The group offers online networking and gathers monthly for happy hours.

Investing in Livability and Vibrancy

All communities continually seek ways to maintain and improve quality-of-life assets for residents, but many undertake such projects with the specific goal of attracting and retaining talent. For this discussion, “livability” refers to the basic needs of everyday life (e.g., housing, education, public safety, broadband access, and transportation), while “vibrancy” refers to assets for recreation, entertainment, and quality of place (e.g., an active downtown or other urban spaces, parks and greenways, farmers markets, fairs and festivals, restaurants, arts, sports, and music venues).



This section includes examples of four types of these investments: housing, broadband, placemaking, and entrepreneurship assets.

Housing availability and affordability has become a key issue in talent retention and recruitment. The Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership tackled this by commissioning a housing study which found that 76 percent of the demand for new housing in the 10-county region was from those in the 24-40 age range. The study’s findings pushed seven of the region’s communities to create local coalitions to implement housing strategies. For example, the city of Wabash is using a residential tax increment financing tool to create a 44-unit infill development; the city of Warsaw is leveraging financial support from a major employer to secure state dollars to seed a local housing fund; and with the support of a local bank, the towns of LaGrange and Topeka have undertaken housing developments in or close to their downtowns.³⁸

Broadband access is critical to most young professional workers’ quality of life, but particularly to those who can or do work from home. The City of Fort Collins, Colorado, decided to build its own fiber optic network for multiple business, civic and institutional needs, but also as a talent retention and attraction tool. The availability, affordability, and reliability of 1-gig service at home is a selling point for the city to remote workers. Well before the pandemic, “from an economic development perspective, we knew our residents needed broadband to be able to work from anywhere,” said SeonAh Kendall, the city’s economic health manager at the time.³⁹

Placemaking plays a significant role in attracting and retaining talent. The term is used here to mean “the process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in,” according to Mark Wyckoff, a leading researcher on the subject.⁴⁰ He defines “quality places” as those

...where people and businesses want to be. They are active, unique locations, interesting, visually attractive, often with public art and creative activities. They are people-friendly, safe, and walkable with mixed uses; they have good building dimensions relative to the street, and quality façades; they are often alluring with pizzazz.

Key elements of quality places include:

- Mixed uses
- Quality public spaces
- Broadband-enabled
- Multiple transportation options
- Multiple housing options
- Preservation of historic structures
- Community heritage
- Arts, culture, and creativity
- Recreation
- Green spaces

Vibrant downtowns and neighborhood districts offer a variety of amenities and attractions that are attractive to young professionals and their families, who have come to expect things like a lively nightlife and dining options, cultural attractions, parks, and places where people can connect with each other. Communities across the world focus on creating vibrant spaces with talent attraction in mind; images of these spaces are featured in most talent attraction collateral.

In Port Huron, Mich., the Community Foundation of St. Clair County recently spotlighted the impact of its downtown projects on attracting both new and former residents.⁴¹ Those projects have included mixed-use redevelopment, a performance arts theater, and a public arts program.⁴² One of the young residents who had moved away and later returned to St. Clair County observed that

“downtown St. Clair...ha[d] greatly improved” since her childhood. The revitalization program is accompanied by a talent attraction grant to help cover moving expenses.⁴³

Wabash, Ind., economic developers see downtown revitalization as a key talent attraction tool. Promoted as a model for its downtown transformation, the City of Wabash has seen the renovation of a historic theater, the installation of new pedestrian-friendly riverwalks and vibrant streetscaping, and new housing developments.⁴⁴ Wabash Mayor Scott Long sees the efforts as a way to “make Wabash the best city to raise a family and work.”⁴⁵

Entrepreneurship assets are another valuable tool for attracting talent. Entrepreneurship education programs, incubators and accelerators, co-working spaces, networking groups, funding sources, and other elements of entrepreneurial ecosystems are attractive to many people who are looking to relocate a business or start a venture in a new community.

Austin, Texas, and Pittsburgh, Pa., are two cities that have successfully leveraged their reputations and assets in technology and entrepreneurship to attract aspiring business founders. In Austin, the Austin Technology Incubator and the Capital Factory have helped attract young tech professionals to the city. Pittsburgh offers several [entrepreneurship education programs](#).⁴⁶ Organizations such as the Idea Foundry, Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse, and the Technology Collaborative help entrepreneurs plan and launch their businesses. The Grove City College Center organizes a 3-day “Startup Weekend” to help entrepreneurs learn about the ecosystem and its resources.

Remote Worker Attraction Programs

Remote worker attraction programs have sprung up by the hundreds since the pandemic began. [MakeMyMove.com](#), a website launched in 2021 to connect potential movers with remote worker attraction programs, listed 181 participating communities as of May 2023.

Many (but not all) remote worker programs offer incentives for new residents that range from \$12,000 cash ([Ascend West Virginia](#)) to discounted broadband and local gym memberships. This typically involves a formal application process with qualifying criteria, such as moving from an area at least 300 miles from the destination city, or from out of state; holding a job with an annual income of at least \$50,000 or \$60,000, or being self-employed and bringing a business; and being willing to relocate within six months and stay for at least two years.

Benefits offered by remote worker attraction programs	
More common	Less common
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash, relocation expenses • Co-working space (free or discounted) • Broadband services (free or discounted) • Memberships to gyms, country clubs, arts organizations • Passes to community amenities such as skating rinks, sporting events, museums • One-time experiences, e.g., boating, mountain biking, birding, tours • Access to events and groups for professional networking, socializing, or volunteering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Babysitting • Free mountain bike • Student loan repayment • Mortgage down payment assistance • Free coffee or sandwiches for a year • Tax abatement for building a new home

Some communities are using remote worker programs to try to fill locally in-demand jobs. For example, on top of a \$5,000 incentive for a remote worker, [Move to Eastern Kentucky](#) offers a \$2,500 bonus for those who bring a partner with them who will work locally in education or healthcare.



How successful are these programs? Two of the longest-running remote worker programs are the [Vermont New Remote Workers Grant Program](#) and [Tulsa Remote](#), both of which launched in 2018, when 5.7 percent of the U.S. workforce worked remotely.^{47,48} Evaluations of these two initiatives found that the workers attracted were younger than state averages, had higher levels of education, and had higher individual or household median incomes than state or local levels. Both programs have had high retention rates (Tulsa 87.5 percent, Vermont 97 percent).⁴⁹

An evaluation of Tulsa Remote by Brookings also found that program participants:

1. Have a higher chance of staying in their new community in the mid- to long-term;
2. Have higher pro-social engagement (e.g., volunteering, participation in local organizations, and sponsoring local businesses) in the community; and
3. Have higher real income growth without a (perceived) drop in productivity.⁵⁰

The evaluation concluded that public policies promoting remote work “may lead to a longer-term attachment of workers to new regions—and not only to a short-term reallocation associated with the one-year financial incentive to move.” Another evaluation of Tulsa Remote, by the Economic Innovation Group, found that program participants present as of the beginning of 2021 were expected to add \$62 million in new local earnings during that year, and create approximately one new job in Tulsa for every two remote workers who relocated.⁵¹

While remote worker attraction programs clearly can provide benefits to communities, there are caveats. Tulsa’s success is due in part to unique factors such as early-mover advantage and significant private funding (from the George Kaiser Family Foundation). Remote programs require significant work to set up (e.g., setting, reviewing, and verifying eligibility requirements), as well as ongoing funding. And with the proliferation of remote programs, there is significant competition today that didn’t exist just two to three years ago. Some communities have run remote worker incentive programs for one or two cycles, then ended them to focus on talent attraction generally.

With those caveats in mind, a study of 19 established remote worker incentive programs identified six best practices for communities that are considering establishing a similar program:

1. Establish a sustainable funding source. Most of the programs examined in the study are funded from donations, posing challenges for funding sustainability.
2. Create proper eligibility criteria, verification, and selection process. Eligibility criteria should be tailored to the type of applicants the program wants to attract and include verification measures. The research found that many programs started out seeking workers with high incomes or in specific fields but evolved based on applicants who appeared to be a better “fit” with the community, such as desire for community involvement, or dependents the applicant would bring to the community.
3. Ensure sufficient housing options and high-speed internet are available. Four of the programs reported that insufficient housing impacted their success (e.g., lack of pet-friendly rentals, high housing prices, and overall lack of housing availability). In addition, a community must have sufficient broadband coverage for remote workers to do their jobs.
4. Develop success measures to effectively evaluate the program impacts. Programs studied did not share consistent measurements of success but reported using economic impact analyses and participant surveys.
5. Implement creative marketing plans to remain competitive. Remote worker programs are now widespread, so it can be tough for a community to stand out from the crowd. This makes it especially important to be realistic about the target audience and what the community has to offer it.
6. Establish robust community engagement among participants. While incentives are important, many programs found that applicants ultimately were seeking to be part of the community, and that this helps retain participants over time. The study notes that it is critical to build engagement among participants so they can support each other and to assist them in connecting with the community.⁵²

Selected remote worker programs highlighted in the study:

[Move to Paducah](#)

[Bloomington Remote](#)

[Johnson City Remote](#)

[Greater ROC Remote](#)

[Move to Michigan](#)

Taking a broader view, research on remote worker programs by Smart Incentives and the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC) offers four key takeaways for communities:

- Incentives are unlikely to be the only reason for an individual’s relocation decision, but they can be an important factor for many and provide an “extra push” to encourage individuals to make the move.
- Incentives are most effective when they are part of holistic economic development strategies. Places that are considering these incentives should embrace what makes their community great – but also understand/address the factors that may make relocation difficult.
- Incentives tend to resonate with people who have some connection to or experience in your community already.
- Relocating remote workers are seeking to make meaningful connections within their new communities. Building community connections is important to helping remote workers put down roots and creating places where people want to be.⁵³

Relocation Incentives Not Tied to Remote Work

[Maine’s Student Loan Repayment Credit](#), administered by the state’s department of revenue, reimburses student loan payments for graduates who live and work in the state. It provides a \$2,500 refundable tax credit per year for up to 10 years (\$25,000 lifetime value).

Some programs are designed to address particular labor force needs. Maine’s [Health Care Provider Loan Repayment Pilot Program](#) aims to attract and retain health care professionals by repaying outstanding student loans of participants who commit to living and working in Maine for at least three years, paying up to \$25,000 per year or, in aggregate, the lesser of \$75,000 or 50 percent of the recipient’s outstanding loan balance.

In Kansas, 95 counties are authorized to offer state income tax waivers and student loan repayment to new, full-time Kansas residents, as part of its [Rural Opportunity Zone](#) program.

CONCLUSION: FIVE TIPS FOR TALENT ATTRACTION

Talent remains in the driver's seat in terms of where to live, and as the most important economic development asset, must be viewed and planned for differently than it has before. EDOs are responding by innovating based on both larger trends and local data, taking strategic and proactive approaches to what they have to offer this smaller pool of workers and how they promote themselves. Five tips can help communities implement successful talent attraction programs.

Know your community's unique needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Once a community has identified current and projected talent trends locally, at larger levels, and in particular industries, it can determine its target audience. That requires looking at itself from an outsider's perspective and asking who would and wouldn't live there and why. Also key is to look at the community from the insider's perspective: Who locally is like the target audience, and what do they love about the community?

Invest in the basics. The hard truth is that there are real reasons why some communities have trouble attracting and retaining residents. Those may be any combination of lack of broadband, lack of housing availability or affordability, a soft job market, poor schools or few high education opportunities; or a lack of amenities.

Partner with employers. Recruiters and hiring managers can offer invaluable information about why candidates decide to come to a community or not. They can be partners in helping create (or sponsor the creation of) promotional materials and suggest newly relocated employees who could be good ambassadors and provide testimonials about the benefits of living and working in the community. From the business perspective, providing recruiting collateral and tools, making connections, hosting events, and promoting job listings all are valuable services EDOs can provide to employers.

Work with community partners who have similar goals. Chambers of commerce and tourism development groups are valuable partners with talent attraction programs for creating, amplifying, and sharing content. Chambers and tourism bureaus invest significantly in creating content for websites, social media, and publications to showcase community assets; collaborating with these groups can allow EDOs to align branding, share the cost of photography, videography, and other content development, and expand their reach.

Create outlets and pathways for new residents to connect with the community. Like business attraction, talent attraction requires some 'aftercare' to help new residents get comfortable and put down roots. Identifying and filling gaps in networking and connection-building for newcomers, professional growth, students, "boomerangs," and other groups are critical ways to help people form lasting local attachments.

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Tulsa Regional Chamber
Upstate Colorado Economic Development
Virginia Economic Development Partnership
Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation



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