



The EDACENTER

at the University of Minnesota, Crookston

**Regional Recruitment:
Strategies to Attract and
Retain Newcomers**

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About the EDA Center

The EDA Center at the University of Minnesota, Crookston is one of more than 40 university centers nationwide, supported by the Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. The EDA Center conducts applied research, provides direct technical assistance and delivers educational programs to economic development agencies that support the economy of economically-distressed communities throughout Minnesota.

Our Mission:

Our mission is to engage university faculty, staff and students with local, county, tribal and regional economic development agencies in support of our Minnesota economy. Our focus is to utilize the capacity of the University of Minnesota, Crookston in partnership with the broader U of M system and economic development agencies to support job creation, capital investment, business recruitment and job retention.

To learn more about The EDA Center go to: www.edacenter.org

About the Author

Ben has been blessed with opportunities to work in and for small towns across the Midwest for the past 20 years – with a focus on his home state of Minnesota. He is currently a Research Fellow for the University of Minnesota Extension, Center for Community Vitality. He conducts research on two topics that are vital to rural Minnesota. The first is documenting “newcomers” – the influx of 30-49 year old people – to identify the social and economic opportunities of this migration.

The second area involves the analysis of rural community leadership, specifically examining the community-wide requirements to “keep the town running” through the public sector. Overall, he works on cultivating connections between institutions of higher education and rural places by involving university faculty, staff, students, and programs in everyday community life.



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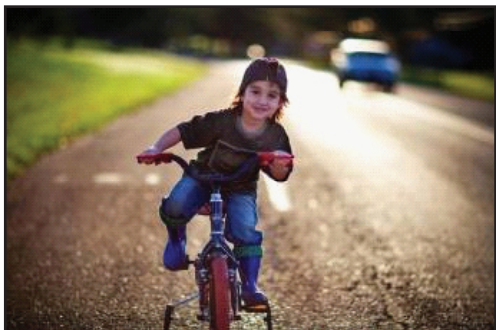
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I. Introduction

A group of regional economic development professionals have to come together to address the issue of regional recruitment. Specifically this group is interested in strategies to retain higher skill, higher wage demographics that are contributing to the “brain gain” phenomenon illustrated in data provided by the University of Minnesota Extension. Data has shown that those in the age range of 35 – 45 years are seeking out rural lifestyles and actually bringing education and wealth into the region despite the significant losses from younger demographics leaving for school, which is commonly referred to as the “brain drain”. By developing strategies that attract and retain the “brain gain” demographic this effort will further diversify the region with higher skill, higher wage jobs and is likely to increase entrepreneurship and job creation that would fulfill niches in the region that are currently un-served or under served. This project is supported by the EDA Center based at the University of Minnesota, Crookston.

II. Methods

The geographic region covered by this project includes Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine. The following agencies have been involved in this effort:

- Benson Rural Development Finance Authority
- City of Madison
- Lac qui Parle Economic Development Authority
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- Minnesota West Community & Technical College
- Ortonville Economic Development Authority
- Southwest Adult Basic Education
- Southwest Initiative Foundation
- Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission

These groups met between February and July, 2010 to achieve a number of tasks which are listed in the table below.

Date	Tasks
February	Solidify tasks and time line for efforts required
March	Meeting with realtors Identify focus group participants
April	Meeting with realtors Identify focus group participants Plan focus group locations, script, and facilitators
May	Focus Groups & new resident survey
June	Focus Groups & new resident survey Meetings with businesses, auxiliary skill inventory Inventory recruitment resources utilized by communities in region
July	Analysis of auxiliary skill inventory Economic Impact Analysis research project Final report detailing strategies based on research and education

III. Findings

This section of the report highlights the results of the data collection tasks.

Realtor Interviews

A discussion was held with a small number of realtors in the region. Questions were asked of the realtors about people from outside the region who were interested in moving in. At first uncertain, the realtors proved to be a valuable source of information about the motivations and regional amenities that were sought out by prospective home buyers. As the project was described to them, there was a growing realization that a partnership between them and the regional recruitment team could prove to be valuable. These interviews were one of the first efforts completed by the group and helped to frame the type, and nature, of motivations. A database of realtors in the region was compiled and a worksheet was distributed to them that captured the family structure, jobs, push/pull factors, amenities, and the region of inquiry of prospective new residents. A copy of this worksheet can be found in Appendix A.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held in May and June in Appleton, Canby, Dawson, Granite Falls, Madison, Montevideo, and Ortonville. Newcomer lists were generated and up to twelve were personally invited to participate. A reminder postcard was also mailed to their address. The focus groups were facilitated by Toby Spanier with the University of Minnesota Extension. Audio recordings were made of these conversations and transcribed.

The following topics were discussed in-depth in the sessions:

1. What was important to newcomers in making the decision to migrate to the region?
2. Why was it important?
3. What were the “pull” and/or “push” factors that influenced them?
 - a. Push – what drove them away from their previous community?
 - b. Pull – what brought them to their current community?
4. How did they find a particular community?
5. How many regions did they consider before choosing?
6. How many communities did they consider before choosing the one they currently live in?
7. Was the community what they expected?
8. Are they currently active in community activities?
9. Do they wish to be active?
10. What is keeping them here?
11. What might push them away from this location in the future?
12. Do you have any final advice to give to local community leaders about recruitment and retention of new residents?

These sessions provided a valuable source of information about the motivations of these new residents in their migration to the region. The typical and unique answers are reported, followed by a selection of quotes from focus group participants.

#1 – What was important to you in making the decision to migrate to the region?

Typical answers: family, job or employment, financial – cheaper to live, rural values

Unique answers: Opportunity to start a business, be own boss, make a new start

“I guess it was just kind of an escalation that the city wore me down, so I was just kind of drawn to the country area I guess because of the quiet, a different pace of life too.”

“Because of the job. In a bigger city it is a lot tougher to make that all fly. It just doesn’t compute when you sit down and do the math and the family thing was really big. Both of us growing up in smaller towns, we wanted our kids to have to the opportunity to participate.”

“We just decided to stay close to her parents for now.”

“Probably the biggest reason we moved back was the opportunity to be self-employed and just to have that control over your life for me to be self employed.”

[person 1] “That was my focus that was my reason to come back, to have that self employment farming. But we did want supplementary income so we looked around to see what businesses were for sale and stuff like that, the flower shop happened to be for sale. That’s the only reason. It just happened to be for sale at the time. And we just looked at the numbers and it looked ok. And at the time my wife didn’t really have anything to do so she was able to really concentrate on the Flower Shop.”

[Facilitator] “But in your case it could have been the local hardware store that could have been for sale and you might have bought that?”

[person 1] “Exactly.”

“So we decided we were going to make the decision when we had kids. So we have kids then I said well than we got to move out here on land. We have two boys and we came out here in ‘03, so that was our reasoning for coming out here, well rural. And anything within an hour or so of the cities, you know, we are thinking about our jobs. So, we moved out because of the kids, and growing up and wide open spaces, and found a school and Dawson has a great school. They have secondary school too.”

“We didn’t have kids yet, but we knew that we wanted to be out here when we did have kids and eventually wanted to be a stay at home mom and that wasn’t going to happen in the Twin Cities, I knew we wouldn’t be able to afford that. My husband’s family is here and so is mine.”

“We kind of started talking about moving once we had kids.”

“My motivation for moving here was to get away from the city, from the rat race because I lived in the Twin Cities area and my husbands family is in the area, so it was a positive for both of us.”

#2 – Why was it important?

Typical answers: Raised in the area, family support system, create memories for children that I have, sick of metro area, enjoy small town life, education system

Unique answers: Pull of nature and the land, health would be improved

#3 – What were the “pull” and/or “push” factors that influenced you?

a. Push – what drove you away from their previous community?

Typical: Traffic and commute time, crime, cost of living, not feeling at home,

Unique: Getting away from the idea of being an employee to being my own boss

“I think cost was a factor for us, I mean commuting and that was a time when gas was pretty high so that was you know definitely a factor when you are driving everyday.”

“I definitely have a feeling that MN is my home and Minnesotans are my people.”

“Yeah. So the need for a double income because the job he was doing wouldn’t allow me to stay home. I hated sending my kid to daycare. I hated it. That was kind of a push. But there wasn’t anything negative about the community.”

“Two of the biggest push factors were cost of living and, this is just me and how I kind of learned it, just getting away from being the employee.”

“I guess for me the one thing that pushed me from there was the traffic and the commuting, probably the bigger thing was the area that I’d been living in. I could tell over the course of a couple of years that the community had been changing, the people that were moving in it was getting to be more of a see a cop every night thing.”

“I think one of the things that maybe pushed me away from that area was just population expansion.”

“The congestion and traffic was about enough to drive you crazy.”

“I left Marshall because it was too crowded, too noisy, can’t hear because you know, I’d been here before. It’s centrally located here so like it is an easy commute to Marshall, it’s an easy commute to Willmar, Montevideo, so I mean, if I did have to find a different job somewhere else I more than likely wouldn’t have to move because of it.”

“For me the push was, I was living in the cities and I don’t have a masters degree and I was having a hard time finding a job in my field without a masters.”

b. Pull – what brought you to their current community?

Typical: Reasonably priced land, school system, friendly community, lower cost of owning house, job, family, centrally located community

Unique: Reinvention process, office space available, retirement community

“I got invested in coming to a small town where I didn’t know any one else besides the people I’d known in the first 10 years of our marriage, and

so it was cool because I got what I wanted. I got the wide open spaces, I got the farm atmosphere, the gardening, the big house and the barn.”

“Once we made the decision to relocate out here one of the pulls that came into play for us was the local school system, the sports and the athletic programs, the educational curriculum their and the closeness to family made the decision a whole lot easier.”

“We both wanted to live in a country setting and every house we’ve lived in has had a little more acreage so now we are finally on a ten acre hobby farm which, you know, this is an ideal area affordability wise to find that sort of setting because in the Twin Cities that same amount of acreage would be astronomical, so it is affordable.”

#4 – How did you find a particular community?

Typical answers: Family, internet, job postings, EDA and Chamber

Unique: Individual happened to have a connection with someone who once passed through the community and enjoyed their experience and told them about it.

“I think it was Ask.com and he was like I’m a senior planner... American family looking for location, logical places are welcome.”

“Yeah mine was just my friend’s connection out here. And, the way that I found the land though was kind of interesting because I was in NM and my friend was in Minneapolis and we just decided to come up to meet with a realtor, first time around, and we wanted to show her that we were interested and serious about it.”

“To me, the school district was huge and I swear my husband was set on us living here because he wanted the boys to play several different sports. He only had the opportunity to really play baseball, but he swears he would have been good at all of them had he been given the opportunity. But I think that was huge for him, you can play basketball and football and baseball.”

[person 1] “Yeah, but look at how awesome the students are.”

[person 2] “I know!”

[person 1] “Because most of them are active.”

[person 2] “I know!”

“I mean, that is impressive to me, I didn’t grow up in the school district, but we laugh at this because before we move back, we don’t even have kids, and I said we were moving back and bought a house and like this Dawson school district parent goes, “Well where are your kids going to go to school?” I don’t even have one! I have been stopped in the grocery store and talked to, “Hi I haven’t seen you around, I’m so-and-so, where do you live? Do you have any kids? Oh that’s because I’m in charge of blah-blah-blah with the school district and you know, if you have any kids we’d love to have them.” And I’m like they recruit kids before they are born around here!”

“Dad moved and Mom lived up here for a couple of years and right after he got out of high school he went to school and didn’t have a job right away and so he moved back home and then we got married and we lived here and that was the way. So... I’m not sure how it just, we just kind of landed here. And we didn’t have any relatives around here which was just as well. You know I’m kidding. That didn’t come out right. We don’t have relatives here, but we are fine with that. They are close enough. They are within driving distance.”

#5 – How many regions did you consider before choosing?

Typical: Zero to 3 or 4, most didn’t consider other regions, but thought of other towns.

“When we were considering coming back we had a triangle of Willmar, Hutch and St. Cloud.”

“I talked to my dad, but we were looking nationally as well.”

“I was really looking anywhere in Minnesota.”

“I did look at other places. Mine was really job related. I was looking for something in the field that I was going to school for. The places that I interviewed were like the Marshall area, that, here and Columbus for me.”

#6 – How many communities did you consider before choosing the one they currently live in?

Typical: Zero to 3 or 4, usually they indicated other community in rural Minnesota roughly the same size or larger. Common towns were – Marshall, Redwood Falls, Montevideo, Willmar, Hutchinson and St. Cloud.

“I thought of a handful, I mean they were all in this region but I looked at houses.”

[Facilitator] “So the housing was very important to you? I mean if the right house was in a neighboring community it would have been ok?”

“Yeah because I had already been commuting an hour so if I cut that time in half I would have been good with that. So yeah, I considered quite a few.”

“When I started looking for office space to move back to I did contact the Economic Development offices in all three of those communities and all be flat honest, I got three very different responses, and the response that I got from Montevideo sucked me to that community like that! Because they put me in touch with multiple people that had office space for rent, the guy in that office had, within 48 hours, had probably five or six different office spaces available for me to move that business to that community that would suit my needs, that would fit my criteria of what I was looking for.”

“I work for a company that is actually based out of Kensington, Alberta and we supply software and hardware to every stage of the livestock supply chain from cow cap operations all the way through the processing plants in the US, Canada and China. I told my boss, “We’re going, you can keep me or I’ll I don’t know, work with Dad or do something. We are

going to go.” And he said, “Alright, we’ll try it part time.” At part time, so I came out here three times a week, cut my salary, but it’s better than nothing. After two months he decided I was working out so well, it was great I was about ready to ask and we were renovating our farmhouse. So anyway, and I said my company is up and down and oh my god, you know if I could hang onto this job, they actually got me where they wanted me, what am I going to do? What am I going to use to leave with? I can’t say give me a raise or I’ll walk, but it is a fantastic opportunity. The stress is minimal, the commute time is eleven minutes flat, unless you get stuck behind a combine. Productivity went way up. I was getting as much done in three days as I was getting done in five days. ”

“We were paying \$70,000 a month when our company in the cities and to give my finance to the boss, he grew up in Alexandria, but you know what, one months rent in the cities you could put up a poll shed out here and he said, you know what, and seriously considered it and this is a major technical company, he said I would consider it but the fact are you are not close enough to a major air port we have internationals coming back and forth and he also said how would you draw high tech people to a small town?”

#7 – Was the community what you expected?

Typical: Yes, nicer than what was expected, friendlier, knew what to expect.

Unique: Still learning, surprised by the number of young adults, appreciate the community as an adult when we didn’t as youth.

“We found a ton of people our age and friends, people with kids, that surprised me, that has been really fun. I mean I like our neighbors more than I like 70 or 80 year olds. We met more friends in the short time we were here than the five years we were in Sioux Falls.”

“There was nothing different when I moved back, but I’d say it was probably better than I expected when I moved back.”

“We have a really nice, we don’t have a super awesome house, I mean it is a nice place but, the lot where we live, we live in a cul-de-sac, we just love our neighbors and we love the area down there. We are just on the fringe of town. For us we just really enjoy where we live and our life style.”

“I think people are surprised at how nice and supportive people were. Like when we moved back there were a lot of people who were excited when we moved back and with the flower shop, we are definitely not perfect, but Canby has done a great job supporting our Flower shop and doing that. And, once again, the basketball and the parents. There are just a lot of nice people around here. Makes it a more comfortable atmosphere. Growing up I just knew my friends and didn’t know any adults and we lived out on a farm and when you live out on the farm you don’t get to know many community members.”

“It was, I didn’t realize that things completely close down in small towns.”

#8 – Are you currently active in community activities?

Typical: Yes, very active, you can be as active as you want, can be busy every night.

Unique: Small towns require you to be more outgoing than a metro community does. Some communities hesitate to welcome newcomers, you have to have a more outgoing personality to get involved. Lots of associations.

“If I want to do things I have to be much more proactive than say in Willmar. In Willmar I had people ask me to do things and there were programs that were readily available and whether it was adult rec or whatever. And out here there is less of that and I have to take more on myself to make things happen if I am interested and I’ve noticed that.”

“Once I really got to know the community and how people operated I found myself wanting to reach out for a project.”

“I find that now I have to be more thoughtful and like you said, proactive. It’s like do you want to be with people? To be with people. Call people up.”

“My wife likes to say too involved. But, yeah being a business owner I mean I’m on the EDA board and soon I’ll be president of the Chamber of Commerce and rotary which I haven’t been attending as faithfully as I use to. All kinds of activities and I think with my job and the clients that I have I am kind of forced to be involved.”

“We’ve been here five years and our youngest two graduated two years ago. So while they were in school, the sports and so forth was an opportunity to meet other families and now since they’ve graduated we’ve dropped off the board. So, I don’t get community opportunities, besides from working as well. But, just being involved in the community.”

[Facilitator] That is very common that what I’ve heard from a group of new comers is that people who generally live in communities, if you have children it’s a different level of activity that you get than those who don’t have children. There have been several people in the focus groups who are new comers that are single or don’t have children and that level activity that comes, it is pretty standard in small communities where if you have children it’s automatically you are connected to others because you have children that play together and have school activities together. It is sometimes a little harder for someone who doesn’t have children to be as active unless they somehow find a niche. Obviously working at the paper you know what’s going on, but sometimes people said well I’d like to be more active, but sometimes it’s hard in the smaller community because I don’t have children.

#9– Do you wish to be active?

Typical: Happy with current involvement and activity. Yes, but current life situations don't allow the time to be more active ex. small children.

Unique: Probably too active, would like some unique opportunities like learning to play an instrument, currently active with friends and family in previous community – travel back often on weekends.

“There is no lack of people wanting you to do things.”

“My husband works in town, he can say hi to people with little kids, but you aren't in that inner circle until you have kids.”

“And it was funny because I grew up there and everyone knew that and we moved two miles from a church and nobody ever came up to the yard and said hey you want come join. And it was funny because we debated for a long time on where to go to church, so we finally made the decision and some travel went into going back to the church I was raised at, twenty miles one way.”

“Once you get tagged you're going do it until you are on professional boards.”

[Facilitator] “But when you came from the rush of the cities were you able to stay busy enough?”

[person 1] “No.”

[person 2] “That's what happened to me I got all this free time and I got to find something to do.”

[person 1] “You get bored.”

[person 2] “We're remodeling our house.”

#10–What is keeping you here?

Typical: Job, family, money, business, friendly community

Unique: Work-life balance

“I grew up on a farm and I did, I was a farm girl through and through. All my friends thought it was the greatest thing to come to my house and I thought it was the greatest thing to go into town. Just to ride your bike on tar roads, I mean come on! And my kids now, they love to go out to Gma and Gpa's farm but, they would not, they probably would adjust, I mean look at your kids and you guys are out on a farm. They love to be outside, we live in an area of town where they can ride their bikes on the street and we can just sit and watch them.”

“I picture moving trucks you know, I can picture moving from Minneapolis to here, but I can't picture the moving truck coming out of my driveway.”

“It is kind of like once you are here you feel forever connected in some way shape or form so I can't imagine not.”

“I really, I love it here. You can do a lot of stuff here without taking a dollar out of your pocket.”

"Maybe it is just people coming back and deciding to have kids here. Just like you moved back from the cities, I have friends that are in Colorado and are going to college and they are like if I can find a job in Canby I'll work there and have my kids there because we know what the school system is like to go through and I hope my kids can have some of my old teachers. I loved that school so much for them too."

"Family. Comfortable life. Low stress. And all these are examples as to why I left the cities. I mean I had a good job in the cities I was working for a big fortune five hundred company and life was great and what finally convinced me it was time, and I knew at some point I was going to leave the twin cities, but what finally convinced me there was about a three week stretch where every time I was driving home and I was fortunate enough to always be driving into the city when everyone else was trying to get out, but when I was driving down the freeway I94 or highway 280 or any one of those, 694 and you look to the person driving in the car next to you and you could just see on their face this look of oh gosh I've got to be in this building and I've got to do this and this and I gotta run here and I gotta run here. Just every person you drove by just had this overwhelming look of you know, stress, and I finally developed the motto of I worked to live not I live to work. And that was not the mentality that you saw in the people that I was driving by. And then within a month I was out of there."

"I find it very interesting here just the people and the environment. I have really fallen in love."

#11– What might push you away from this location in the future?

Typical: Loss of employment, loss of the amenities the town has ex school, hospital, parks, etc. Increase in cost of housing, population decline

Unique: Travel distances to larger regional centers, natural disasters


"A tornado."

#12– Do you have any final advice to give to local community leaders about recruitment and retention of new residents?

Typical: Create more job opportunities, recruit new families, keep what we have, put jobs and opportunities on internet, share the stories of success and quality to life, stay creative, put energy into our assets not focusing on what we don't have, be welcoming, keep the businesses open longer difficult to shop after work, be proactive with our amenities.

Unique: Have new comers matched up with a community mentor for the first year, provide shuttle type service to metro or larger communities.

"Keep sprucing up the town, polish it up. Make it that attractive town you want it to be."



“The website, oh gosh that makes me overwhelmed. That’s the first thing that I do, I mean when I’m going anywhere, I Google it. You know, that’s my generation, that’s what I do. But the websites in this region need an overhaul something that captures peoples attention, that they can navigate quickly and easily and have that marketing appeal.”

“I guess I would just say be open to change, tradition is so strong but be open to exploring. It’s not all doom and gloom, the new things that are happening.”

“When you go to college you are there for 5 years, a couple of degrees later, I thought that I had to be in the metro to stay in my field, to grow in a career, you know, and it turns out that’s not the case. I don’t have to be there and I can still support myself and I can still have a life.”

“But the housing is just not available. And I’ve heard that several times from several people is that there’s just not the really nice houses. I think for even for us we considered building when we moved here just simply because we couldn’t find anything that was really nice and that we would want to live in for the rest of our lives.”

“I can think of a couple [business] places in town that aren’t for sale, but if you went up and asked and made the right offer, it would be for sale. Or there are some that have been on the market for a long time and are looking for someone from the city to start a business out here, they are just looking to retire.”

“You need to promote the telecommuting option because you are not going to bring the big cat companies, but there is so much telecommuting going on that if you can find the ones that want to move here and telecommute they’ll bring in good jobs.”

“I think one of the things too is the city of Dawson has to find somebody for these telecommuters that they can actually go back and do some teleconferencing and video conferencing.”

“Even like, you know, we live across from school, and now the boys are seven not six they can go across the street to the playground and play by themselves as long as there is no big kids over there. But I mean, I could not ever allow that in Omaha.”

“You couldn’t let your kids out of your sight.”

“No, not at all.”

“How about housing? My gosh, houses you can buy for less that a new car out here.”

“Another thing we talked about was better internet too out here.”

“If we get that it would be huge.”

“Oh, we need a new website. The website is absolutely from 1980.”



[person 1] "We have a state park within 15 minutes."

[person 2] "They have great trails and great. I mean they are so much fun things to do."

[person 1] "That needs to be promoted more."

"One thing that springs to my mind is that not a lot of homes are for sale and I realize to buy a home you probably need a job in the area or something to do in your home, but I often wonder if the community actually reaches out to more populated areas to try to recruit people to come into the smaller communities where the office buildings may be more affordable."

"I think a draw for people is the landscape of the area and if we focus on outdoor activities that tend to occur in this area could draw a whole adventurous crew of people. You know, like if you go up North like Grand Marais has all those people looking for adventures people living in that community and I think you really could draw that too. With the right advertising."

"When we moved to town the only reason I knew about the chamber or their welcome basket was because I called the chamber to get a list of rentals and they said oh hey, by the way if you move to town make sure you stop by and pick up your welcome thingy. And I don't know how you get that information for those welcome baskets, but that was really cool. But I wouldn't have known about it otherwise. That was kind of cool and it got me out to different places to see what it was."

Toby Spanier did have one reflective comment that I wish to include here:

"Well there have been a couple of stories that have been told, as I said, in other focus groups where somebody had a position in the metro area and they could just as easily work here as there and eventually when they made the change there was some skepticism by the company they work with that they would be productive and work um, so the person started off part time. But after only a few months the corporation or the company realized that yeah, this person can actually be more productive. The costs for having that person were much cheaper to have that person in their room than to have that person taking up office space in the metro. Well, the person even asked, I think the person told the story even jokingly that the corporation said well how do I get 15 other people to kind of move out to your community and you know the big factor was, you are not going to find, I mean not everybody would want to move to Appleton, somebody that maybe was born and raised in Chicago and now lives in Minneapolis, I mean, Appleton would be the end of the world. So, but I mean there is, depending on what attracts them and the stories that are told you know. The typical new growth of this community is probably in two areas, one would be persons of color and the other would be people that are fed up with traffic on 494 and they say, they don't have any information on what rural life is like and they say, hey I'm a computer designer, I could go work out of a small town or live out in the country and have ten acres."

New Residents Survey

This survey was administered to focus group participants in May and June, 2010. The goal of the survey was to capture economic, social, and demographic characteristics of residents who have moved into the region. There were seven sessions held across seven communities of west central Minnesota: Appleton, Canby, Dawson, Granite Falls, Madison, Montevideo, and Ortonville. A total of 61 surveys were completed, of which seven were excluded from the analysis as they were identified as intra-regional migrants. One additional survey was excluded as the respondent moved to the region fifteen years ago. The total sample size was 53. This data was also used to complete an economic impact analysis (see next section).

The residents moved to the region from as far away as California, Pennsylvania, and Nebraska. Closer to home, but still from out-state, there were 3 from Iowa, 2 from North Dakota, and 6 from South Dakota. Within Minnesota, there were 16 from Ramsey and Hennepin counties.

A copy of the full report of survey results is available upon request. The key findings include:

- 75% of respondents moved with their spouse/partner. 25% moved alone.
- 51% moved with children.
- 43% of respondents lived in or near their community before returning, 30% of their spouses.
- 45% have occupational skills in management, business, financial, or professional fields, even if they are not currently using them. A total of 50% of respondents were trained in another field or profession that they are currently not utilizing.
- 34% have occupational skills in the office/administrative support field.
- In their previous community, 8% of respondents owned/operated a farm or business. In the current community, 23% own/operate a farm or business.
- In their previous community, 36% held a leadership role in a community, church, school, civic, or any other type of group or organization. This rose to 60% for those in their current community.
- In their previous community, 9% held public office or served on a government board/committee. This rose to 23% in their current community.
- In their previous community, 62% donated money to local community organizations, charities or causes. This rose to 81% in their current community.
- There were a number of factors that were important in the newcomer decision to move.
 - o To find a less congested place to live (77%)
 - o A better environment for raising children (75%)
 - o To find better quality local schools (69%)
 - o To find a safer place to live (69%)
 - o To lower the cost of housing (66%)
 - o To find a simpler pace of life (66%)
 - o To find more outdoor recreational activities (63%)
 - o To be closer to relatives (62%)
 - o To live in a desirable natural environment (60%)
 - o To lower the cost of living (53%)

- The newcomers utilized a variety of sources of information when making their decision to move.
 - o Family (53%)
 - o Internet (36%)
 - o Friends and acquaintances (32%)
 - o Current community resident (25%)
 - o Employer or co-workers (25%)
- 68% of respondents obtained a bachelors degree or higher. 19% obtained an associate degree

	Skills possessed	Current primary occupation
Management, business and financial operations	24 (45%)	10 (22%)*
Professional and related occupations	24 (45%)	11 (24%)*
Healthcare support	6 (11%)	6 (13%)
Protective services	3 (6%)	
Food preparation and serving	8 (15%)	1 (2%)*
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Personal care and services	5 (9%)	
Sales and related	10 (19%)	1 (2%)
Office and administrative support	18 (34%)	4 (9%)*
Construction and extraction		
Installation, maintenance and repair	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
Production	2 (4%)	
Transportation and materials moving		
Agriculture	7 (13%)	1 (2%)*
Other	15 (28%)	8 (18%)

There are some interesting insights when we compare the skills possessed by newcomers and those that they use in their primary occupation. They are marked with an asterisk (*) in the table above. Newcomers with healthcare support skills were successful at locating a job in the region that fits this skill set. At the same time, those with management, professional and sales skills were not as successful. Those with food preparation and office/administrative support also may have not found jobs utilizing their skills, however, these occupations tend to be of lower wage and leaving that job may actually improve their overall situation and outlook. Surprisingly, agricultural skills were not utilized to find a job in the region.

It was also found that those with Masters degrees had difficulty locating jobs. After digging in to the data a bit more, the number of stay at home moms (and dads) with professional skills is surprising, yet this does provide a fresh perspective on the ability for families to raise their children on one income in the region.

Economic Impact Analysis

An economic impact analysis (EIA) was completed by Brigid Tuck with the University of Minnesota, Extension Center for Community Vitality. The key findings from this study indicate:

- ◆ In focus groups of 52 “newcomer” households in the five-county region, 24 (or 46%) reported household incomes of \$75,000 or greater in 2009.
- ◆ The newcomers reported total household incomes of \$3.7 million in 2009.
- ◆ Due to the spending of this income, an additional \$1.7 million in economic output was created in the five-county region in 2009.
- ◆ This included 16 additional jobs and \$433,000 in labor income. Because of the 52 newcomer households, 16 other households received income at an average of \$27,000 per household.
- ◆ For every 3 “newcomer” households, 1 existing household potentially receives \$27,000 in new income.
- ◆ In total, the 52 “newcomer” households created \$132,000 in state and local tax collections in 2009.

This study focuses on the spending of household income by newcomers to the region. Clearly, newcomers create economic impacts in ways other than their household income. For example, newcomers may start a new business. The spending by the new business would also generate economic impacts. In fact, 12 of the 52 respondents indicate they operate a farm and/or business. However, the data collected by the survey did not provide enough detail to model these impacts.


The children of these families most likely will attend public schools, impacting school funding. These scenarios are not included in this study. Therefore, the results of this study should be considered a conservative estimation of the economic impact of newcomers in the region.

Lessons from Nebraska

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been involved in work surrounding newcomers that helped to guide the work done in this project.¹ The purpose of their study was to “explore new resident recruitment and retention patterns, perceptions, and development strategies from both sides of the market – the demand side (new residents) and the supply/provider side (communities marketing themselves as a desirable place to live).” It was found that community and economic development agencies did not take these issues of recruitment or retention seriously. However, after becoming informed about the concerns of newcomers, there was a greater willingness to meet these expectations.

“New residents found it tough to buy houses, to get services, and to locate small business assistance programs. They often expressed feeling left out since their communities are not doing much in terms of social activities and involvement tailored for new residents.”

¹Nene, Gibson et al. 2009. *Community Recruitment and Retention of New Residents: A Study Using a Market Assessment Process*. The Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy. 4(1).



Efforts related to retention were found to directly impact recruitment success. Effective use of media and internet for marketing should build upon this newcomer-centered identity relating the experiences that are viewed as important. Incorporating actual newcomers into development efforts will prove fruitful. These experiences are not always related to jobs:

“While...jobs has been traditionally emphasized in community development efforts, it is increasingly evident that new resident recruitment and retention is just as critical, if not more, to community sustainability.”

Small towns themselves are rarely involved in the recruitment of new residents. However, given these social factors that heavily influence community selection, they should. The incentive inventory conducted by the Minnesota team indicates that this is true here as well. The implementation of “multiple-follow-up interactions” with these new residents from community practitioners was views as especially important in this context. For more information visit: <http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo/>


V. Strategies

Strategies fall into three categories. The first category focuses on individual newcomers to support efforts that put the region “on the map” and allow potential newcomers to find out more about the region as they begin actively pursuing housing and employment solutions. The second category encompasses economic activities related to self-employment, telecommuting, and identifying emerging clusters of skills that are being created by the newcomers. The third category identifies community and economic supports for newcomers after they move to the region.

On the Map Strategies

Strategy: Provide avenues for potential newcomers to learn more about the region. This strategy can provide a big challenge as the infrastructure is not entirely in place. Need to integrate the information infrastructure of regional partners - not only to the residents, but between themselves and the sources of information. While there are tremendous assets, such as the natural amenities and FTTH broadband, it can be difficult for those outside the region to find out about them. Recruitment is not about tourism, it’s about supporting those that are at a life-changing point in their life – pulling up roots and moving them to the prairie-waters part of the state. New residents are looking for information about jobs, businesses for sale, available properties, and opportunities for children to be involved in school.

Existing residents are also a source of information that is “fed” to potential newcomers. However, existing resident knowledge tends to be sporadic and local. Avenues for existing residents to refer potential newcomers to the regional recruitment team should be sought.



There has been significant fragmentation in media. No longer are there just a few sources of information and news about a community. Web sites, social media outlets, and other forms of electronic media provide multiple windows into a community. There are some sources of conversation on the internet, such as the Reimagine Rural blog, that can provide some insight on successful social media strategies in these residential attraction efforts. Another source is the work of Becky McCray at the Small Biz Survival blog who notes:

“Putting people in your pictures gives you instant social proof. It draws your potential visitor into the story.”

Really, this story needs to be told, and told by those who have made the move. This would provide the tie between retention and recruitment. Individual towns in the region indicate that they need help with their website and other promotional efforts. Should the regional recruitment group develop an information portal such as this, it is recommended that there are links to this site on all community websites in the region. There are imagery issues as well. One of the overall values that the group has witnessed has been one of self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and a general return to the “frontier” life both economically and socially.

Strategy: Provide a resource that allows potential newcomers to establish a personal connection to the region. The movement of newcomers to the region over the past twenty years has occurred without a concerted effort by those in the region to attract or recruit them. This effort is described as a one-stop-shop whereby interested parties can identify their skills, interests, and motivations while the regional recruitment collaborative can provide them with a type of “matching service” based on their profile. One group in Nebraska has built upon the findings of Nebraska newcomers to market the community in this way. There are a few examples of regional efforts geared towards those looking to their respective regions:
Norfolk Area Recruiters (<http://www.norfolkarea.org/>)
Wayne Works (<http://www.waynetworks.org/>)

Strategy: Engage with real estate agents and property owners to track motivations and interests of newcomers. These housing agents are on the front lines of potential newcomer connections and can track the “pulse” of new migrants to the region. The benefits of this engagement serve the interests of both the regional recruitment team as well as the agents themselves.

Employment Strategies

Strategy: Build upon existing connections to metropolitan businesses that are allowing skilled employees to telecommute from rural Minnesota. In rural Minnesota we are witnessing a migration of newcomers with employment by a metropolitan employer. Computer programmers, writers, editors, and others were identified through the survey. Additional interviews would need to be conducted to determine the breadth of companies that could be engaged in development.

These niche occupations provide an opportunity to build knowledge clusters in the prairie, serving both business needs and employee quality of life requirements. Discussions should be held with these employers to determine models of economic development cooperation. We now find that economic development may need to occur proactively outside of the immediate area. However, this is not a “shot in the dark” approach as there are existing connections and proven success that can drive future growth.

Strategy: Identify and build upon auxiliary skills of newcomers. Many of the new residents have left an occupation or high-skill employment situation that is not required in their new setting. Survey results indicate this disconnect between the human capital (education, skills and training) of the newcomers and the reality of their employment situation. By explicitly engaging these new residents to discuss the skills sets they may have left behind, there are opportunities to not only further engage newcomers economically, but to diversify the overall economy of the region.

Strategy: Disseminate the model of regional recruitment to local decision-makers. This model will describe the investment required, and the return on that investment, to support newcomer strategies. The intermingling of social and economic decisions made by newcomers is not necessarily recognized by decision makers of economic development agencies. The increased mobility of employees and workplaces does require a rethinking by those bound in the traditional model of industrial attraction. The economic impact analysis completed by Brigid Tuck does provide data regarding this return, and it is significant. The analysis should be presented to decision-makers in the region.

Strategy: Integrate business succession planning. There were a surprisingly high number of newcomers that were self-employed or small businesses owners after their move. These economic opportunities offer great potential for business succession planning efforts. The aging of established business owners is not a new trend for rural Minnesota. As the businesses are not necessarily “on the market” they can be difficult to locate without living in the community. The engagement of these businesses owners can provide a pool of opportunity that would further enhance a recruitment model.

Newcomer Support Strategies

It was found that newcomers may have difficulty connecting to the local social infrastructure. Therefore, a strategy dedicated to supporting newcomers soon after they make the move is recommended.

Strategy: Emphasize newcomers among regional partner agencies. This committee would connect local and regional development agents to better serve those moving to the region. This includes city clerks, EDA representatives, housing agents, school administrators, as well as real estate and property management agents. This committee would be responsible for not only coordinating their response to newcomer inquiries described earlier, but would also provide a source of support for small towns that are interested in developing support mechanisms. These include welcome wagons (in-person and online) as a first point of contact and activities/events for younger residents in town to get to know one another. The focus groups found that while newcomers expected the community to be composed of older residents, they were surprised that there were so many young people (age 30-45) in town. The focus groups themselves proved to be a valuable opportunity for these unconnected newcomers to connect. In Montevideo, a young professionals group has been formed following the focus group. The Ortonville Independent newspaper has started a series highlighting residents who have moved to town. Examples of two of these stories can be found in Appendix B.

Future Questions

Study the utilization and effectiveness of incentives. An inventory of incentives offered by communities to new residents was completed. The city of Maynard offers a residential incentive whereby new residents can purchase a lot for \$1 and would only be assessed for the cost of water and sewer hookups. It is not known whether residential incentive programs are a strategy for recruitment as, surprisingly, there has been little systematic research of these efforts.

APPENDIX A: Realtor Reflection Worksheet

Realty Reflections – please provide information for those people looking to move into the region. Push includes reasons they are leaving their current location, and Pull includes reasons they are moving to our region. The Inquiry Region indicates how wide of a “net” they are casting when they look for a new home.

Family Structure	Jobs	Push/Pull	Amenities	Inquiry Region
Husband, wife, 2 children	H: electrician, W: nurse	Want a slower pace of life to raise kids. Housing.	School, bike paths, hunting	Appx. 30 mile radius around Appleton

APPENDIX B: Ortonville Independent Stories



MUNISH AND RAJ KAUSHAL along with children Aryan and Arav at home in Ortonville.

Munish and Raj Kaushal

When Munish Kaushal arrived in the United States from his home country of India, he was looking to invest in a new business venture. When the Econolodge in Ortonville became available, he decided to buy it. He officially became the owner on Oct. 9, 2009.

Munish's wife, Raj, had been working for Orange County in California and didn't make the move to Ortonville with their two children until last month. Their oldest son, Aryan, will be two years old in March and Arav is three months old. Munish is happy to have his family here by his side.

"It is so nice to have my family here now," said Munish. "This has been quite a transition but we enjoy it here."

Munish and Raj were both born and raised in India. They have been married for five years and even though Raj has been here for a short time, she says the Big Stone Lake Area is a nice place to raise their family.

"This community is so beautiful," said Raj. "The people here have been so nice and treated us well."

One adjustment for the Kaushal's was seeing all this snow. "The snow is amazing," said Munish. "We knew about the Minnesota winters, but had no idea that we would see this much snow."

As a family, they enjoy traveling, reading and spending quality time as a family. Munish stated that he would like to try his hand in fishing and hunting. He also said that after watching many snowmobilers out this winter that he would like to give that a try as well.

Raj's parents and siblings still reside in California, while Munish's parent's and brother live in Canada, but have been visiting here for the past few weeks.

Munish and his family hope to have a long stay and we welcome them to the Big Stone Lake Area.

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PETE AND DEANNA LUNDBERG are happy to be back home in Ortonville.

Pete and Deanna Lundberg

Pete and Deanna were high school classmates at Ortonville, graduating in 1989. After graduation, they both went their separate ways. Pete spent 14 years in Colorado working at Copper Mountain Ski Resort. Deanna resided in the Twin Cities for 12 years working in the Insurance industry.

Their paths crossed a few years ago when both returned to Ortonville to live. The couple started dating and were married on Apr. 25 of this year.

"It nice to be home," said Deanna. "We both grew up here and love the area, so we hope to have a long stay in Ortonville."

Pete's parents, Roger and Ann, and Deanna's parents Don and Bev reside

in Ortonville as well.

Deanna is currently employed with the DNR Fisheries and also with the Upper Minnesota River Watershed District as an Administrative Assistant. Pete is working for his father and brother, Richard, at Lundberg Construction.

The couple have two dogs, a beagle and a Chihuahua, and one cat.

They also received some welcomed news that they are expecting their first child in December of this year.

Deanna and Pete are members of First English Lutheran Church in Ortonville. We welcome Pete and Deanna back to the Big Stone Lake Area.

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