Relocation to the Buffalo Commons

Using a marketing approach to understand residential decisions among migrants to Nebraska’s Panhandle

Research Team: Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, Randy Cantrell, Bruce Johnson, Charlotte Narjes Rebecca Vogt
Sponsored by:
USDA-CSREES National Research Initiative
UNL Department of Agricultural Economics
UN Rural Initiative
UNL Center for Applied Rural Innovation
UNL Extension

Census Review, Mail Survey, Focus Groups & Online Survey of Economic Developers
Depopulation of the rural Great Plains
This is **NOT** the case

1 in every 8 residents* of Nebraska’s eleven western county region had arrived there from another state or country during the previous five years  *2000 Census of Population

Net out-migration in 1990’s = 0.7%

Yet, in-migration = 10,500 people **to** the Panhandle
As a %, rural Western Nebraska sees more recent in-migrants than any other part of the state.

For some small areas, newcomers can exceed 1/3rd of the population.
Persons Age 5-Years and Older in 2000
Who Resided in Another County, State or Country in 1995
Percent of Total Population

Percent of Population
- 0
- 0.1 - 10
- 10.1 - 20
- 20.1 - 30
- 30.1 - 75.2

Source: 2000 Census of Population SF3
Prepared by Nebraska Rural Initiative
In-migration is essential in rural areas

Tradition = development through job creation

  • Dependent upon the availability of a labor force of sufficient size to fill new jobs
  • Assumption workers will follow jobs “that if we build it they will come” - not realistic

*Active recruitment of new residents must be part of the economic development strategy*
The Bad News...

• New arrivals to the Panhandle (similar in other rural areas) are not enough to offset those that leave

• Net out-migration of all age groups in the Panhandle, 2000 – 2005
The Good News ...

- New residents *can be* successfully recruited
In 2007:

- Analyzed U.S. Census research
- Surveyed over 300 new Panhandle residents about their decision to move
  - Results based on response rate = 33%
- Conducted 12 focus group session
  - 78 new residents (Sidney, Kimball, Scottsbluff, Morrill, Alliance, Chadron)
- Implemented an on-line 3 step survey for community developers in NE
  - 1st = 60; 2nd & 3rd = 30 participants
Focused on three questions...

- Who are the new residents?
- Why did they move here?
- Are they likely to stay?
Who are new residents?

• Younger than average - 46 yrs
  – 41% between ages 20-40 compared to only 23% of region

• Higher incomes than the general population
  – 48% above $50,000 vs. 28%

• Higher education level
  – 40% reporting at least a B.S. vs. 18%
Newcomers bring important occupational skills

- Professional and related occupation skills (44%)
- Management, business and financial operations skills (41%)
- Sales and related skills (28%)
- Office and administrative support skills (24%)
- Agriculture skills (23%)
- Owned a business, farm or ranch in their previous community (21%)
Most newcomers arrive with families

67% moved here with a spouse/partner
25% moved alone
37% brought children with them

(a higher percentage of households with children than is found in the region on average 32.8%).
New residents are *returning* – some are *true* newcomers

About one-third of new residents (26% of spouses) had previously resided in the Panhandle county to which they moved.

Half (50%) of new residents moved in part to be nearer to friends and relatives.

- Half of the new residents did not move to be near family
- About 2/3 did not have previous residential experience with the region

*These are true newcomers!*
Where do people find relocation information?
Why move? Push & pull factors equally important

Why Did You Move?

- Wanted to move to the place I am now living: 17%
- Wanted to leave the place I was living: 14%
- Both considerations are about the same: 27%
- Neither of these reasons apply: 42%

44% of new Panhandle residents indicate that their move was inspired at least in part by a desire to reside in that region.
Most new Panhandle residents (75%) had some prior contact with their new communities

Previous Contact with Community

- Lived here previously: 39%
- Vacationed here or traveled through: 16%
- Visited family here: 33%
- Visited during work-related travel: 16%
- Visited friends here: 20%
- Attended college here: 6%
- Other: 11%

Percentages based on respondents who had been to their current community before
Many don’t shop around, but most do...

Locations Considered Before Choosing Current Location

- Only this location: 45%
- Other locations in NE: 14%
- Other locations in both NE and other states: 23%
- Other locations in other states: 16%
- Other: 2%

Family & vacation visits are VERY important!
Why do people move to the region?

% of Respondents indicating Important or Very Important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simpler pace of life</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less congested place</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to relatives</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower cost of housing</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower cost of living</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher paying job</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable natural environment</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safer place to live</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job that better fits skills</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community that shares values</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better place for kids</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to friends</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower taxes</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Metro newcomers are here

61% - majority of newcomers are from metro areas

- quality of life considerations associated with an image of rural living was a primary motivation in their decision to move (60% + of metro newcomers)
Attracting newcomers ≠ Keeping them

Likelihood of Living in Community Five Years from Now

- Definitely will: 19%
- Definitely not: 6%
- Probably will: 41%
- Probably not: 12%
- Don't know: 22%

Most likely to move away = the best educated and those with professional occupations
“Feeling of Belonging” is important!

Likelihood of Living in Community
Five Years from Now by Feeling of Belonging in Community*

- Excellent: Definitely/probably will stay (86%); Don't know (7%); Definitely or probably won't stay (7%)
- Good: Definitely/probably will stay (68%); Don't know (20%); Definitely or probably won't stay (12%)
- Fair: Definitely/probably will stay (46%); Don't know (27%); Definitely or probably won't stay (26%)
- Poor: Definitely/probably will stay (16%); Don't know (40%); Definitely or probably won't stay (44%

*The chart shows the percentage of respondents who feel a certain level of belonging in their community and their likelihood of living there five years from now.
### Interviews: What would influence recruitment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactics to <em>Attract</em> New Residents</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
<th>To a Moderate Extent</th>
<th>To a Slight Extent</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter from high school alumni/class member encouraging you to move back</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered a free residential lot</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements promoting the area</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally visited with a representative of the community</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View a community web site that showcases the area</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited actively by the community</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Interviews: What would influence retention?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactics to <strong>Retain</strong> New Residents</th>
<th>To a Great Extent</th>
<th>To a Moderate Extent</th>
<th>To a Slight Extent</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New resident welcome programs</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to participate in community</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New resident networking opportunities</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community social functions</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Interviews: What would influence retention?

## Tactics to *Retain*, cont’d.

| N = 78 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Opportunities for leadership development | To a Great Extent | To a Moderate Extent | To a Slight Extent | Not at All |
| 19.7% | 40.8% | 30.3% | 9.2% |
| Clear, positive community vision | 39% | 35.1% | 22.1% | 3.9% |
| Individual job and career enhancement | 57.1% | 26% | 15.6% | 1.3% |
| Open-minded community attitude toward new residents/new ideas | 62.8% | 24.4% | 11.5% | 1.3% |
What is happening in Nebraska?

Data gathered from on-line survey of Nebraska community development professionals

☑ About half the communities/regions actively are recruiting new residents

☑ Community/region acceptance of new-resident recruitment is passive
Front Door Management (New Resident Recruitment)

• Ranking by Professionals:
  – Highest
    • Employment Opportunities
    • Housing availability/affordability
  – Lowest
    • Amenities (natural, cultural, area)
    • Community acceptance of diversity
    • Active citizen involvement
Back Door Management (New Resident Retention)

• Majority of communities have no retention strategies

Could the lack of new resident community involvement/interaction negate some recruitment gains?
Practitioners feel...

✓ “Multiple contact strategy plus follow-up” is essential
  - only about one-fourth are currently doing it

✓ Almost all of them anticipate using it in the future
Are there recruitment disconnects?

Ranking by Professionals:

- Highest priority
  - Employment Opportunities
  - Housing availability/affordability

- Lowest priority
  - Amenities (natural, cultural, area)
  - Community acceptance of diversity
  - Active citizen involvement

Ranking by New Residents:

- “Why Did You Move?”
  - Simpler pace of life 53%
  - Less congested place 50%
  - Closer to relatives 50%
  - Lower cost of housing 48%
  - Lower cost of living 45%
  - Higher paying job 39%
Are there retention disconnects?

Ranking by Professionals:
Highest priority
• Employment Opportunities
• Housing availability/affordability

Lowest priority
• Amenities (natural, cultural, area)
• Community acceptance of diversity
• Active citizen involvement

Ranking by New Residents:
“What will influence retention?”

1) Open-minded community attitude toward new residents & new ideas
2) Clear, positive community vision
3) Individual job and career enhancement
What if…

✓ Jobs and housing are a “given”?  
✓ Decisions are now based on “other things”?  
  – Proximity to family (generally)  
  – Family oriented communities  
  – Availability of community assets i.e. churches  
  – Perception of a “slower pace of life”  
  – Community vision  
  – Quality of the educational system
Bright spot: Newcomer advice

• “Do you have any final advice to give to local community leaders about recruitment and retention of new residents?”
  – Market the community assets accurately
  – Almost one-fourth: focus on knowing your “product” and/or creating a community vision
  – Appeared that job opportunities & housing were understood to be essential
  – They want to be involved!

“it is much more complex planning than simply saying ... we have jobs”
Basic Conclusions

The community is a “product” to newcomers
- *there is a need to sell or market it*

Recruitment partnership: employers + community
- lines between economic & community development are blurred

The Internet – a very important recruitment tool
- especially for better educated, more highly skilled individuals
Urbanites may need help in understanding “rural”

- communication needs to be accurate

A comprehensive recruitment program should include retention tactics

- people want to feel they belong & are valued

Multiple recruitment methods and personal contacts *make a difference*

Retention – perceived acceptance & community vision *make a difference*
Marketing Rural Communities to Attract and Retain Workers
Your Comments? Your insight?

For more information:
http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo/
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