



***Marketing Rural Communities
to Attract and Retain Workers
in a Changing Economy***

Part I
Online and Local Focus Groups

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Purpose: Apply innovative marketing concepts and methods to attract new residents to rural communities and regions.



PARTNER COMMUNITIES

Who are the partner communities?

North Dakota

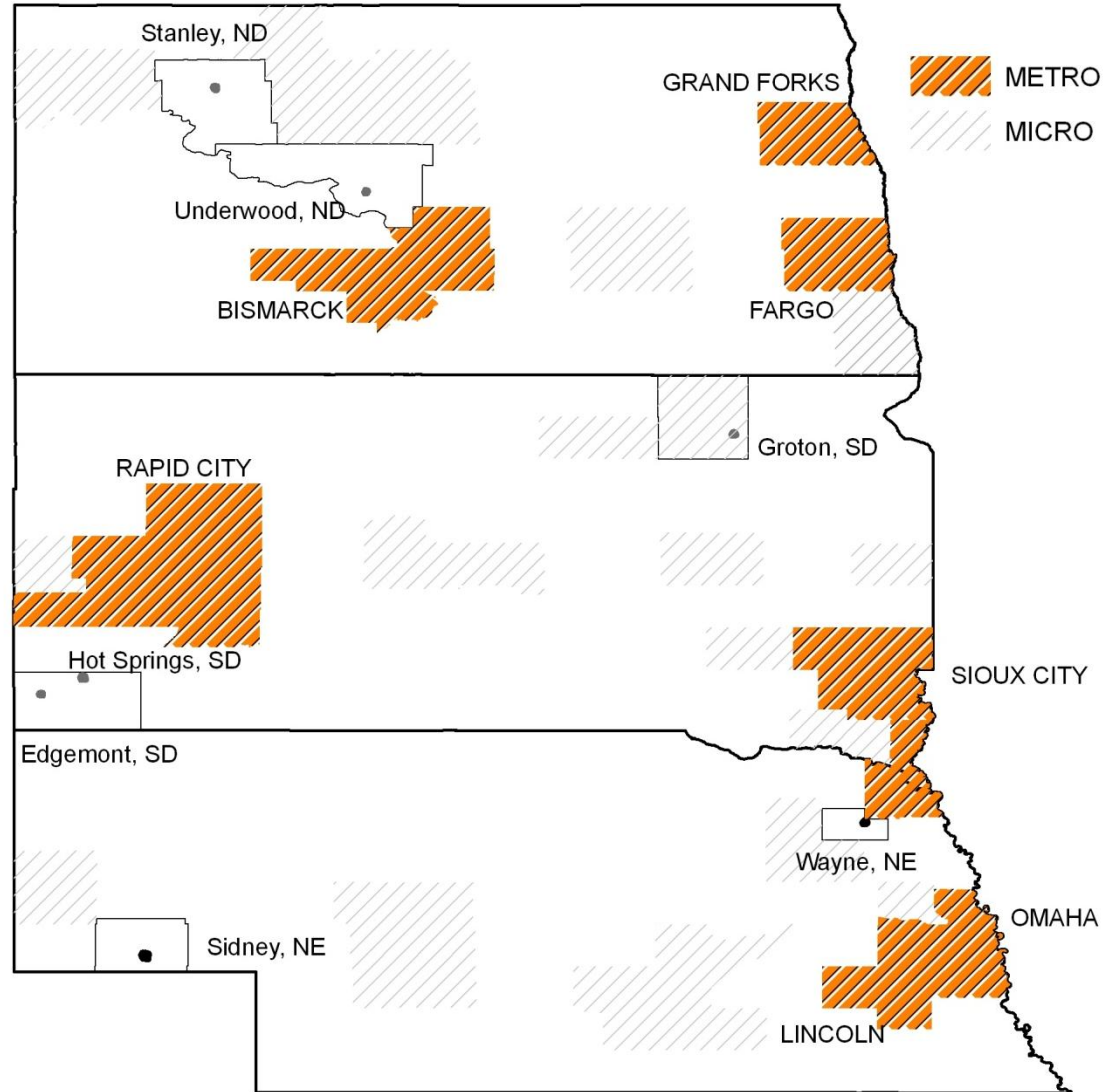
- Stanley
- Underwood

South Dakota

- Edgemont–Hot Springs
 - Groton

Nebraska

- Sidney
- Wayne



Integrated Research & Extension Project

Research Components

- Household surveys of new residents
- Labor vacancy surveys
- Synthesis Process
- Consumer focus groups
 - ✓ Face to face
 - ✓ Online

Extension Components

- Engaged Process

<http://cari.unl.edu/communitymarketing>

Purpose of Focus Groups

- What do people see when they look at images of your community?
- The Internet allows pictures of your community to be used for marketing to new residents.
- These pictures convey meaning to those viewing them. Are they seeing what you want them to?
- Is there a way to help the picture carry the meaning you want?

Focus Group Participants

Local Focus groups

- Conducted in project communities
- New residents and local residents
- Local and online focus groups will complement each other, enabling comparisons
 - ✓ TurningPoint software

Online Focus groups

- Separate surveys were developed for each community
- 61 participants

Impressions

The first 10 pictures used represented the top reasons that new residents moved (across all six communities)

- Simpler pace of life
- Quality time with family
- Employment opportunities
- Less congested place to live

The impression responses represent all 6 communities.

New Resident Survey conducted in 2009.

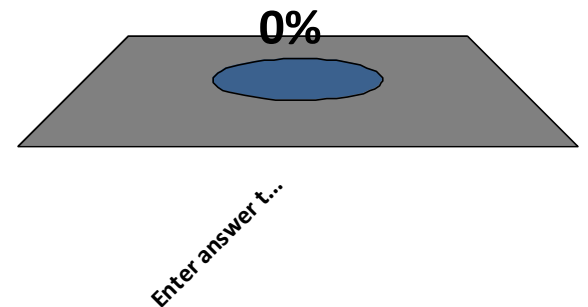
At your table: Discuss your impression of the community portrayed in the picture.

1



Image 1

1. Rural
2. Safe
3. Family oriented
4. Town busing – value
5. All white
6. Racial integration



Impressions



Comments were mixed ---

- Positive school (20%)
- Could be any community (20%)
 - Safe (18%)
 - Family Oriented (15%)
 - Middle class (12%)
- Predominantly white (10%)

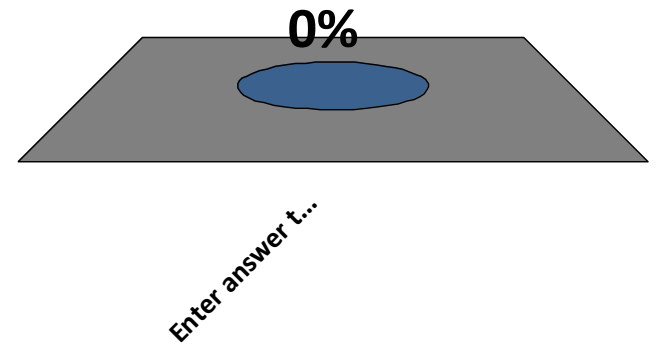
- *It looks like there is no cultural diversity. All white kids.*
- *Looks like any suburban area.*
- *It's a community with young families.*
- *It appears to be an ideal and safe place to raise kids.*
- *This looks like a middle class suburban area based on the children's clothing and accessories.*

2



Image 2

1. Enter answer text...



Impressions

This picture brought many positive comments ---

- a community showing generational respect (77%)
- a community connected (10%)
- quality elder care (10%)

“there is a place for the senior citizen in this community, and children have a socially healthy atmosphere to grow in”

“It looks like the older people are involved in the community, not shoved away into a home”

“The community is involved with the elderly”

“In this community we see a young child taking the time to interact with the communities eldest citizens. This allows for the sharing of culture from one generation to the next”



Impressions

Described as:

- Family Oriented (58%)
- Rural (33%)
- Recreational (32%)
Peaceful (24%)
- Safe (13%)
- Healthy Community (12%)



“Family oriented, working class people. Enjoy the outdoors, farmers market available for fresh produce. Healthy community.”

Impressions

Majority described as well-maintained homes (55.7%).
Some identified affordable housing (11.5%), quiet
(14.8%), and clean environment (40.2%).



“Established neighborhoods where there is mostly a pride of ownership and of the community.”

Impressions

Majority indicated jobs are available (75%) – Others saw jobs in technology (25%) and a community with a strong work ethic (9%)



“High tech and skilled tradesmen.”

“Technological advances and a good work ethic are important and companies looking to expand there “

“industries into the rural community can expect a strong work ethic in these communities.”

“Many occupations open. Workforce is composed of trained and skilled workers. Good working conditions and atmosphere. Tools provided as required for the job. Seems advanced in technology.”

Impressions



Described as –

- A place to worship, of respect (27%)
- Traditional (21%)
- Community gathering place (18%)
- A calming, quiet palace (13%)

And others related to –

- A very small and rural community (12%).
- A potentially abandoned place (10%)

“Traditional. Safe. Picturesque.”

“Good moral values. With a touch of our midwestern past included, because the church is an older building.”

“The church is well taken care of, which indicates both strong faith-based history, and the community places value on historic preservation.”

“A small town place of worship. This is a beautiful and idealic image, with the snow, the bright day and the lovely little church. It immediately gives the subliminal impression of community, stability and morality. A very positive photo.”

“An old and unused church as the snow has not been moved”

Communities were Engaged and Used in Their Own Way

- Communities better understood that an image may not represent what intended
 - Pictures were thrown out
- Products developed
 - Marketing brochures created
 - Relocation guide created
 - Web site created
- Increased interest in marketing community
 - Conversations around marketing and community
 - New members to marketing teams
 - Focus in marketing/purpose

Lessons Learned

- Local champion engaged in process
- Flexibility to allow community to be engaged and use the information
- Extension members can be a catalyst to bring people together.
- Players change – continue to reengage

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