Engaging Your Community to Attract and Retain New Residents

Perspectives of New Movers and Community Developers to the Buffalo Commons

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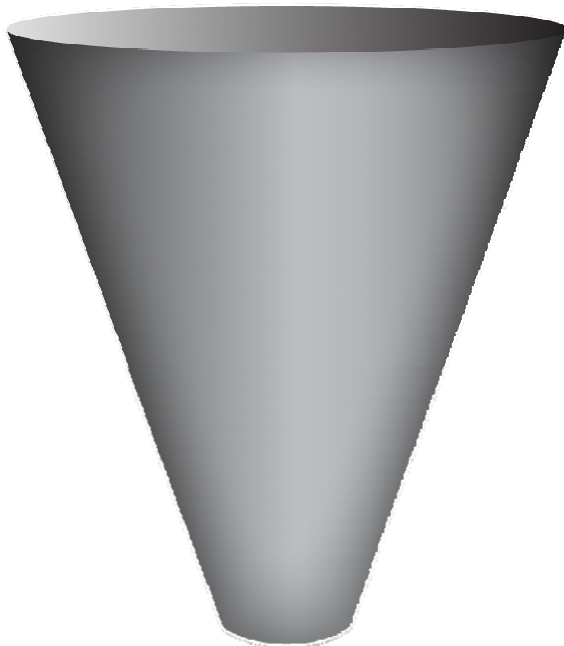
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Research Team

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Depopulation of the Rural Great Plains

The depopulation of the rural Great Plains is often portrayed as a funnel through which the population pours out.

IT IS NOT!

In Reality -

One in every **eight** residents of Nebraska's 11 western county region had arrived there from <u>another state</u> or <u>country</u> during the previous five years

Net out-migration in 1990's = 0.7%

Yet, in-migration = 10,500 people <u>to</u> the Panhandle

Source: 2000 U. S. Census of Population

USDA-National Research Initiative Grant

- ❑ Conducted U. S. Census Research

- ❑ Surveyed over 300 new Panhandle residents about their decision to move

- ❑ Conducted 12 focus group sessions
  - ▪ 78 new residents participated

- ❑ Implemented an on-line 3 step survey for community developers in Nebraska
  - ▪ 1st – 60; 2nd and 3rd = 30 participants

Focused on Three Questions

❑ Who are the new residents?

❑ Why did they move here?

❑ Are they likely to stay?

Who are the New Residents?

❑ **Younger than general Panhandle population**

- Average age = 46 yrs

- *41% between ages 20-40 compared to only 23% of region's population*

❑ **Higher incomes than the general population**

- *48% above $50,000 vs. 28%*

❑ **Higher education level**

- *40% reporting at least 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 with a spouse or family
- ❑ 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%).*

Some 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.

> **About 2/3 did not have previous residential experience with the region**
>
> **These are true newcomers!**

Reasons People Move to the Region of Respondents indicating Important or Very Important

Simpler pace of life	53%		Safer place to live	36%
Less congested place	50%		Job that better fits skills	35%
Closer to relatives	50%		Community that shares values	34%
Lower cost of housing	48%		Better place for kids	32%
Lower cost of living	45%		Closer to friends	32%
Higher paying job	39%		Lower taxes	22%
Desirable natural environment	37%			

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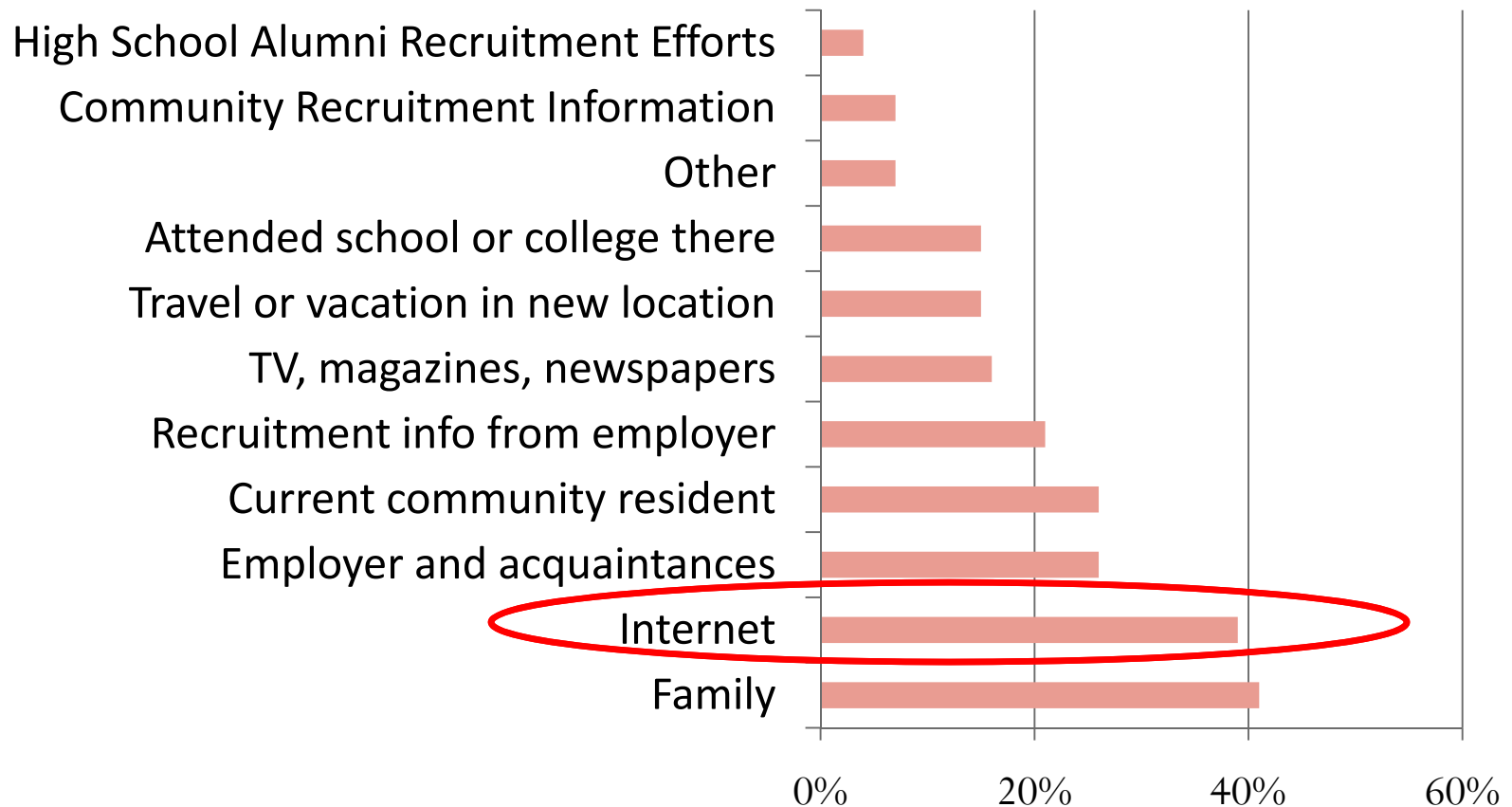UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Lincoln
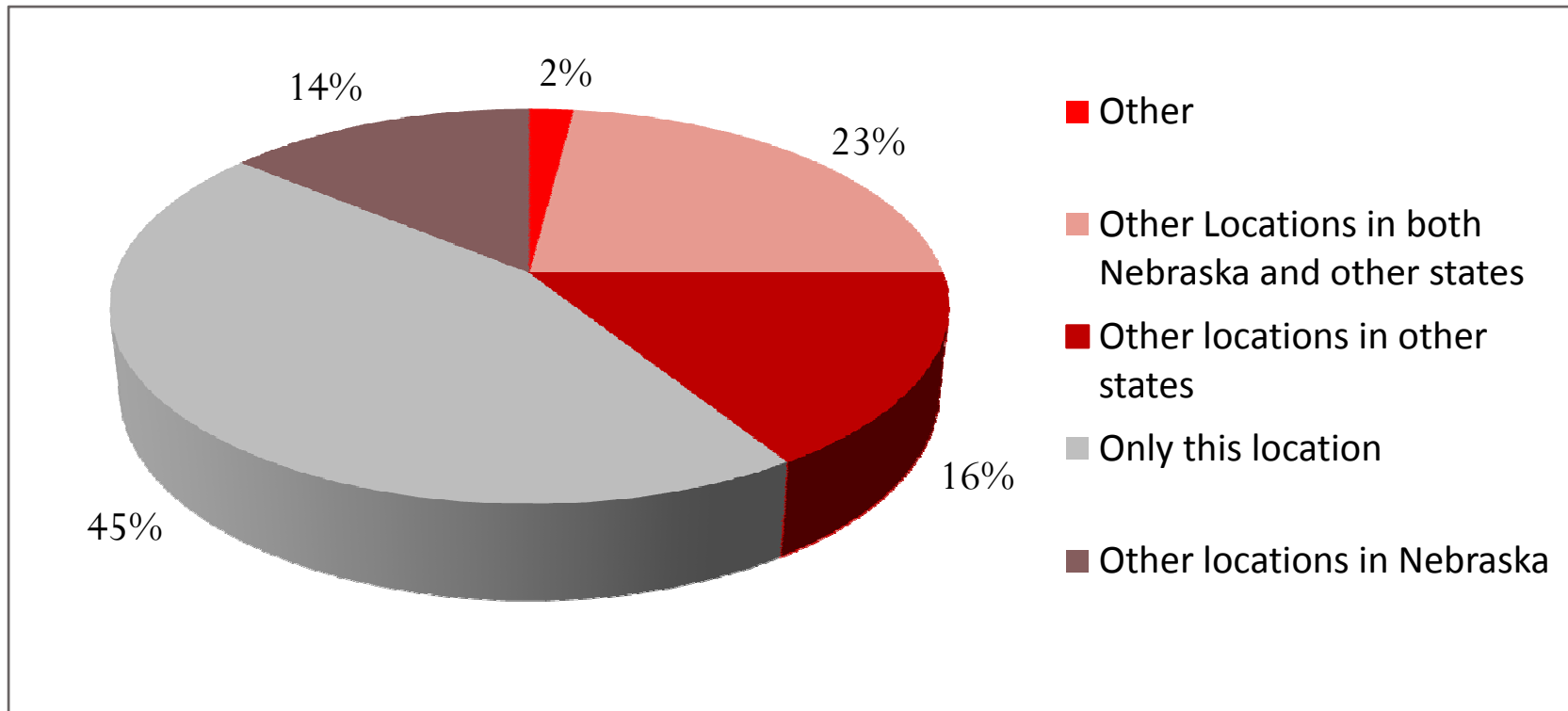
Metro newcomers are here

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)

Where Do People Find Relocation Information?

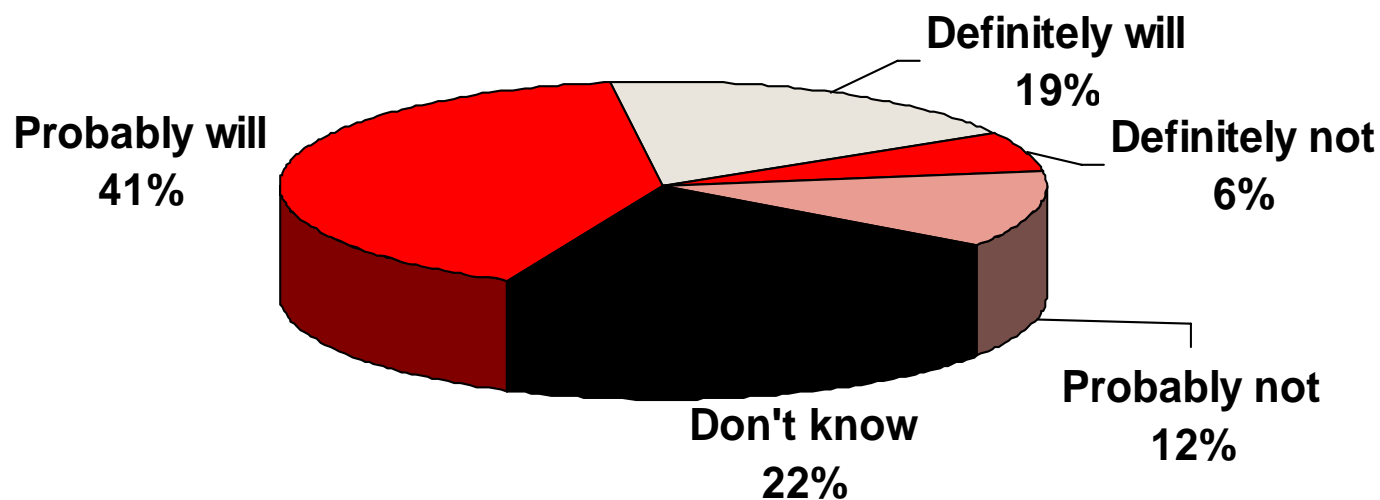# New Residents Consider
Other Locations – They Shop Around

**We spent 6 months looking at different communities …
50% job, 25% community, 25% schools"**

Attracting newcomers ≠ Keeping them

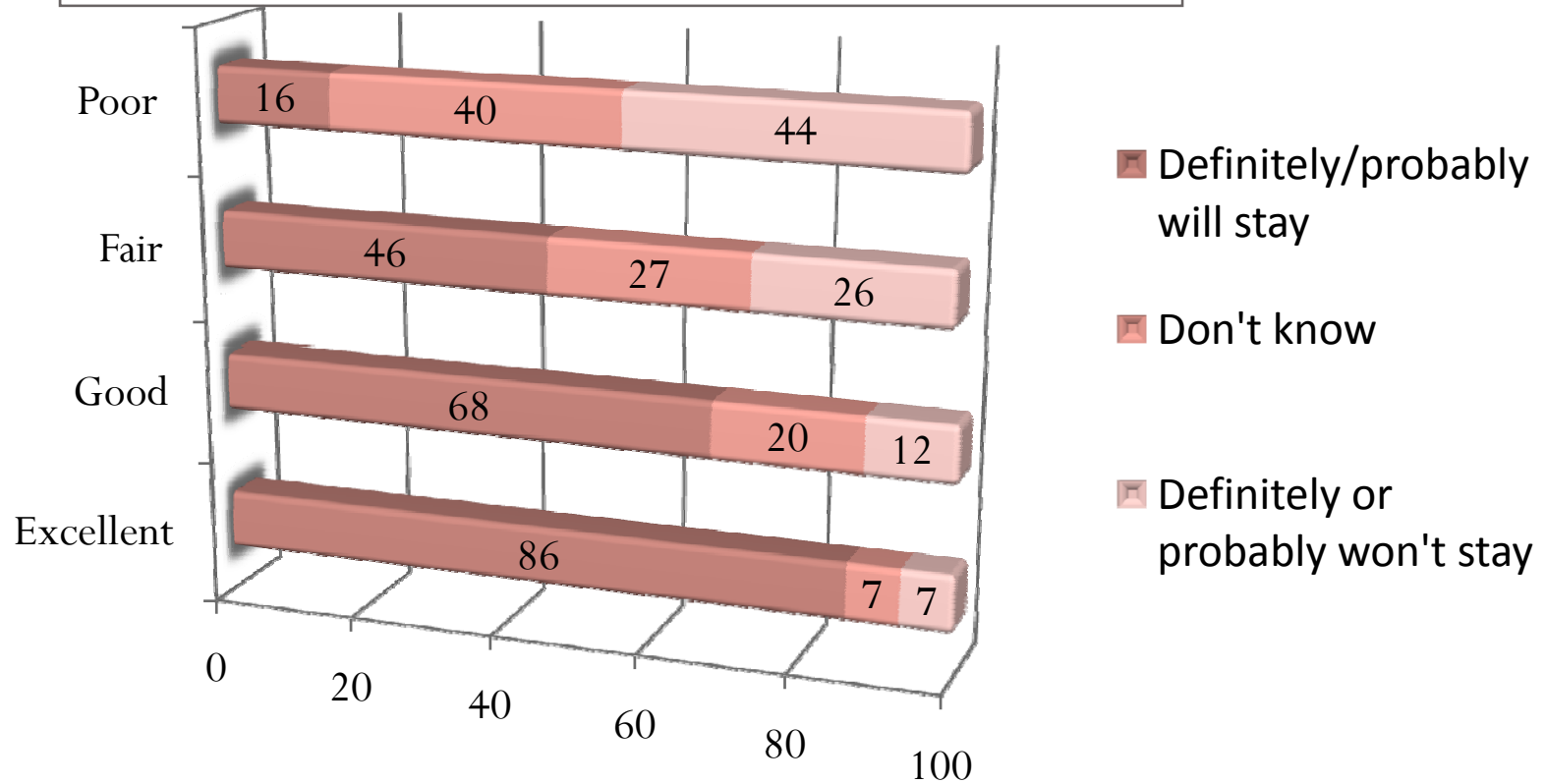**Likelihood of Living in Community Five Years from Now**

Probably will
41%

Definitely will
19%

Definitely not
6%

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

Poor: 16, 40, 44
Fair: 46, 27, 26
Good: 68, 20, 12
Excellent: 86, 7, 7

- Definitely/probably will stay
- Don't know
- Definitely or probably won't stay

0 20 40 60 80 100

Lots of Questions....

❑ What influences new residents as they are making their decision?

❑ What **works?**

So we asked new residents!

• 12 Focus groups, 78 participants

Focus Group Interviews:
What Would Influence Recruitment?

Tactics to _Attract_ New Residents N=78	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Slight Extent	Not at All
Letter from high school alumni/class member encouraging you to move back	0	5.1%	24.4%	70.5%
Offered a free residential lot	14.1%	29.5%	34.6%	21.8%
Advertisements promoting the area	7.8%	29.9%	40.3%	22.1%
Personally visited with a representative of the community	10.4%	36.4%	42.9%	10.4%
View a community web site that showcases the area	20.5%	50%	21.8%	7.7%
Recruited actively by the community	31.6%	26.3%	27.6%	14.5%

Focus Group Interviews:
What Would Influence Retention?

Tactics to _Retain_ New Residents N = 78	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Slight Extent	Not at All
New resident welcome programs	15.6%	31.2%	42.9%	10.4%
Opportunities to participate in community	29.5%	39.7%	25.6%	5.1%
New resident networking opportunities	21.3%	40%	28%	10.7%
Community social functions	18.4%	43.4%	31.6%	6.6%

Focus Group Interviews:
What Would Influence Retention?

Tactics to _Retain_, cont'd. N = 78	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Slight Extent	Not at All
Opportunities for leadership development	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%

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

What community developers said

Data gathered from on-line
survey of 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 <u>Recruitment</u>)

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 <u>Retention)</u>

Majority of communities do not have retention strategies

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

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

Basic Conclusions

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

Sharing the Results

❑ Community Forums – Summer 2008

❑ Publications – Great Plains Journal Article, Research Briefs and Cornhusker Economics Articles

❑ Presentations – 2008 Governor's Rural Development Conference and 2007 Nebraska Rural Institute

❑ Webinars –

  ❑ Nebraska Information Technology Commission Developing Websites for Community Growth project - The project is focused on content development, website enhancements, and marketing.

  ❑ Nebraska Building Entrepreneurial Communities (BECA) Grant Recipients
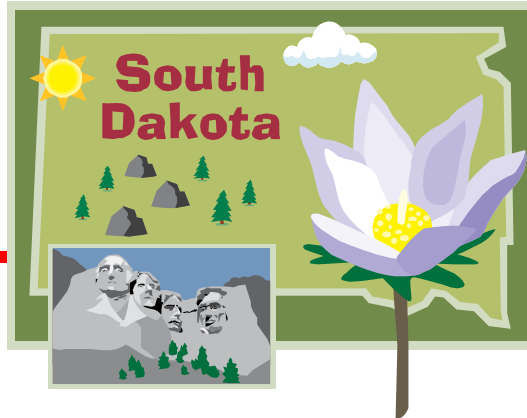
NRI Grant Funded Research

Marketing Rural Communities to Attract and Retain Workers

Your comments? Your insight?

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

Understanding the Motives of New Residents to Rural Communities

An Attraction and Retention Model to Engage Your Community

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Focus Group Research Questions

❑ What motivated the new residents to move to the Nebraska Panhandle

❑ To what extent are residents satisfied that their new communities meet expectations and provide a welcoming environment

Sampling Procedure

- ❑ Eleven counties referred to as Panhandle
- ❑ Identified through national marketing firm - household survey included postcard for participation
- ❑ Focus groups determined based on location of potential participants (3-9 in attendance)
- ❑ Researchers called participants to schedule focus group and confirmation letter sent
- ❑ Received $50.00 incentive

Sample

❑ Over 100 postcards were returned

❑ 78 participants representing 10 of the 11 Panhandle counties participated.

❑ Ages – from 21 – 81

❑ 61% are first time residents to the Panhandle

Data Collection

- ❑ Process – followed Krueger Focus Group structure

- ❑ Structured Interview Process

- ❑ Guidelines were established

- ❑ Audio taped and transcribed verbatim

- ❑ Questions developed to gain understanding of the motivations and factors that led to Nebraska panhandle.

24 States Represented

East – *New Jersey, Pennsylvania*

Great Plains – *Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming*

Midwest - *Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio*

Northwest – *Idaho, Oregon, Washington*

South/Southeast - *Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas*

Southwest – *Arizona, New Mexico*

Data Analysis

- ❑ Constructivist Grounded Theory

- ❑ AtlasTI – close to data, in vivo and concept. Grouping similar codes to themes and categorizing.

- ❑ Through comparison and interpretation a framework emerged.

- ❑ Theories used in discussion – Migration, Community Interaction and Social Capital

Considering a Move

- ❑ Life Cycle Changes
- ❑ Healthier Quality of Life
- ❑ Being Pushed Away

Life Cycle Changes

- ❑ "I am retired. I moved by myself."

- ❑ "My wife…passed away."

- ❑ "We moved when I got out of the service."

- ❑ "I had no desire to raise my children where I grew up."

- ❑ "I was right out of college."

Healthier Quality of Life

- ❑ "She [her mother] was afraid to live in the [city]."

- ❑ "I was [in a position] there for 10 years, and I was tired of the crime … I wanted to raise my kids in a small town."

- ❑ "I think it was climate and … health reasons."

- ❑ "I put 40,000 miles on a car in one year because I had three kids involved, and my husband worked … our lifestyle was not, it wasn't family."

Being Pushed Away

- ❑ "I would say the amount of time spent in your car commuting and not just the traffic, but the timing."
- ❑ "Too crowded. [City] was just getting too crowded."
- ❑ "When I was a kid, it was just a little farming community. It is not a farming community any more."
- ❑ "I couldn't get a job at home…it's the last one out, turn off the light. It still is."

Opportunity to Move

- A Job Opportunity *(47.4%)*

- Family *(17.9%)*

- Location – *including ability to purchase property, climate, region (34.6%)*

Focus Group Participants - General Demographic Information by Location

Pop Size Community Moved To	Job Opportunity	Family Friend	Location
Farm or Ranch *(9)*		11%	89%
< 3,500 *(20)*	50%	5%	45%
> 5,000 *(27)*	67%	26%	7%
> 10,000 *(22)*	36%	27%	36%
Total Sample	47%	18%	35%

Note: Gering/Scottsbluff is only area over 10,000. There are not any communities in Panhandle in the 3,500-5,000 population range.

Strategies to Learn About Community

Strategies to learn about communities:
- Family/Friend Connections
- Previously Lived
- Internet
- Visiting Community

Advice - Market Community – Know Who You Are, Know Who You Want

New Residents Looked Around

❑ "We spent about six months looking at different communities all throughout the Midwest … we were in the position of being able to move where we wanted to, to the job we wanted to … we developed a little formula that it was 50% job for me … 25% community, 25% school. [This] … was the first place where all the pieces of the pie seemed to be right."

Know Who You Want

❑ "It behooves the cities, the small town cities to really get together as a group and individually say what really are the things that their cities want to market. What are their strong points, what are their weak points? If we did this, how would that increase our attraction."

❑ "A number of years ago, the phrase was coined 'ecotourism'. .. we are talking about eco-residentialism. One of the things that can pull people here is just the climate, the ecology, the outdoors, the slow pace of life all rolled up into one."

Community Image Desired

- Safe
- Family Oriented
- Faith Oriented
- Small Town Atmosphere
- Free of Congestion
- Proximity to Family
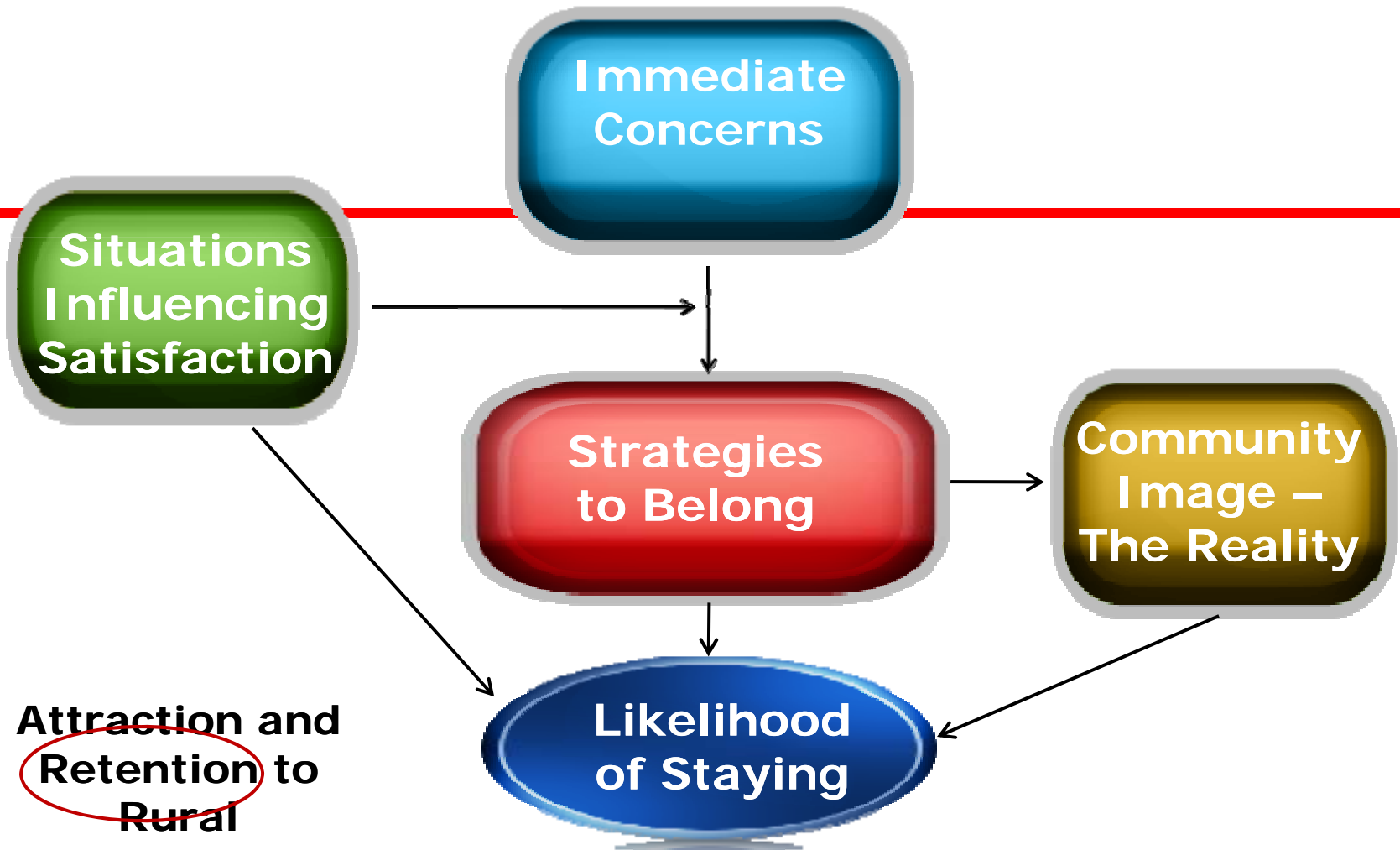
Immediate Concerns

- Job Opportunities
- Housing
- Services
- Getting Connected

Situations Influencing Satisfaction

- Positive People Experiences

- Transitioning to the Community

- Services Available

- Housing Availability and Affordability

- Job Opportunities

- Information Sharing

- Small Business Struggles

- Socio-Economic Issues

Transitioning to the Community

- "Whenever I said that I had just moved here – somebody would say "Why?" … Don't you know what is going on over there where you have to wait."

- "I almost feel like people are friendly to you to the point of being cordial."

- "It's hard as a new resident to really get to know people."

- "It's a lot more conservative than I thought."

- "More laid back than I am used too."

Services Available

- "It was kinda culture shock … nothing's open on Sundays."

- "I found that the community to be better than I expected … there's a lot of community gatherings."

- "I think they do a remarkable job in giving care [hospitals] here."

- "Our medical situation is really a problem."

- "We have had trouble getting people to the ranch to do things."

Housing Availability

- "My wife and I left here [after interview], it was kinda rough because housing was a problem and the real estate agent was very uncooperative."

- "The housing you can't beat it."

- "We were lucky enough to buy a new house."

- "Actually didn't get what I wanted, but it was, in my mind, the best deal … some of ht houses are so bad the basements are crumbling on them."

Information Sharing

- "We've got this little phone book that is very incomplete."

- "Okay. They had three [sports] practices and three games and we knew 24 hours in advance when the games were … it's been a rough year."

- "There's a garden club here?"

- "There is a shuttle from Denver, to here … Your kidding me."

Small Business Struggles

- "Just plain available labor."

- "I talked to both banks here in town and they basically said, 'we don't work with people like you.' So, I bank in [a family owned bank outside of community."

- "They'll [community] spend way more money and bring in an outside business than will help the local one expand."

Small Business Struggles"

- "When I first started it was hard ... if you do what is right and be truthful and honest and good ... you set an example ... you do make your own way."

- "I've met so many nice people ... and some prejudice too."

- "The alcoholism."

- "There is a really good recovery group [in some communities] ... in [other communities] we don't have much."

- "I put the application in for Habitat for Humanity ... I got the home."

Strategies to Belong

Strategies to Belong to a Community:
- Welcome Programs
- Local News Media
- Getting Involved

Advice – Community Vision, Comprehensive Welcome Programs, Open-Minded Attitude, Career Opportunities

Community Vision

- 75% of the new residents indicated a clear positive community vision for the future was important

- 86% would like to see an open minded attitude towards new resident ideas.

Open-Minded Attitude

- "To listen … things could grow out of conversation … I don't know what the conversation would be like if it were [the community] that listens to itself, not just newcomers … it might discover there's more desire for change."

Community Image – the Reality

- Safe
- Family Oriented
- Faith Oriented
- Small Town Atmosphere
- Free of Congestion
- Proximity to Family

One Town's Perspective

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Appreciative Inquiry

Discovery – What are the values we treasure?

Dreaming – What do we want to look like in
  2020?

Design – What do we need to do to make
  this happen?

Destiny – What is the 3, 5, 7 year plan?

Community Themes

❑ Economic Development

❑ Activities and Recreation

❑ County-wide Foundation

❑ Education

❑ Public Transportation

Mission

To provide a community development plan that is vision driven, collaborative effort with a region focus with the best use of our time, finances and people.

Commitment Statements

2020 vision
CHEYENNE COUNTY

- ❑ We are a growing area
- ❑ We are a network of regional communities
- ❑ We own a "Can Do" attitude
- ❑ We create strong leaders
- ❑ We compete on a national basis
- ❑ We support an entrepreneurial spirit
- ❑ We value historic preservation

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Websites for Growth

Developing Websites for Community Growth - Objectives

- ❑ Pre Meeting
  - ❑ Homework - questionnaire
  - ❑ Sitemap
- ❑ First Meeting –
  - ❑ Community Inventory
  - ❑ Worksheets to help create content
- ❑ Second Meeting
  - ❑ Review content
- ❑ Third Meeting
  - ❑ Marketing ideas
- ❑ Fourth Meeting
  - ❑ Review and analyze

Process

- ❑ Pre Meeting
  - ❑ Homework - questionnaire
  - ❑ Sitemap
- ❑ First Meeting –
  - ❑ Community Inventory
  - ❑ Worksheets to help create content
- ❑ Second Meeting
  - ❑ Review content
- ❑ Third Meeting
  - ❑ Marketing ideas
- ❑ Fourth Meeting
  - ❑ Review and analyze

Ongoing Trainings

❑ Webinars

  ❑ Each month provide a one hour webinar

    ❑ Google apps

    ❑ Podcasting

    ❑ Flicker/Blogs

    ❑ Social Networking

    ❑ SEO

    ❑ Analytics

Support

- ❑ Webinars Web 2.0 applications
- ❑ Blog
- ❑ Google Docs
- ❑ Facilitators & Project Leaders

Research

- ❑ Presented research information to all participating communities
- ❑ Is the foundation to creating the sitemap
- ❑ Helps communities focus on target audience
- ❑ Helps communities focus on what content is most important

For more information

http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo
http://websitesforgrowth.com

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