



# Resident Recruitment:

## The chicken and egg of residential motivations

Benjamin Winchester  
Rural Sociologist  
Extension Center for Community Vitality

## Why the Pandemic Is Making Some City Folks Think Rural

Drawn by remote work, perceived safety and lower cost of living, some young people are making the move.

## Time To Move? Data Suggests Americans May Flee To Rural Areas Post-COVID



**Jeff Rose** Contributor @  
Personal Finance

*I'll show you a new way to accelerate your wealth building.*

# Millennials Could Be a Boon to Smaller Communities. How Can Those Towns Attract Younger Workers?

## Americans Big on Idea of Living in the Country

BY FRANK NEWPORT



## The Heartland's Revival

by Joel Kotkin



UNIVERSITY OF M

## People Fleeing Big Cities May Spur Economic Growth In Smaller Metros



**Remington Tonar and Ellis Talton** Senior Contributor @  
Leadership Strategy

*We explore urban innovation and infrastructure.*

## From Breadbasket to Basket Case

In the 1980s, rural Americans faced fewer teen births and lower divorce rates than their urban counterparts. Now, their positions have flipped entirely.

# HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

*The Rural Brain Drain and  
What It Means for America*

THU SEP 20, 2012 AT 09:04 PM PDT

The slow, agonizing death of the small  
US town

Rural is **changing**,  
not dying.

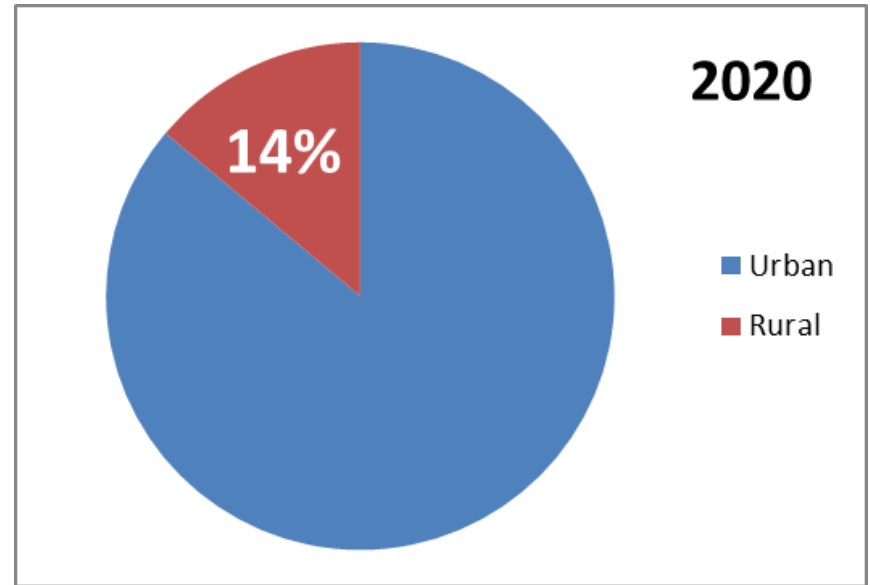
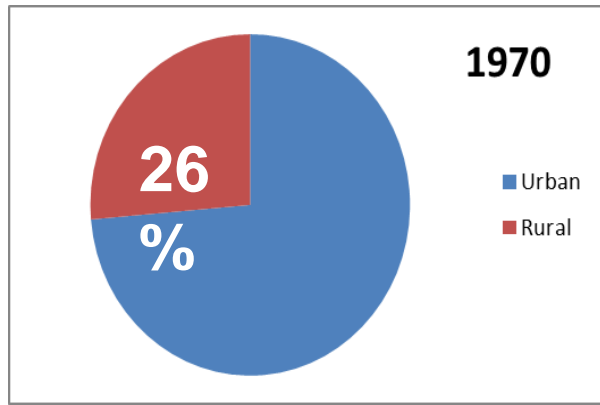


# THE NARRATIVE

- There's a brain drain
  - We live in the middle of nowhere
  - We are a sleepy town
  - Everyone knows one another
  - Nobody lock their doors
- 
- What we had
  - What we don't have
  - What we wish we had
  - What we could have had...



In the U.S. the rural population has  
**increased by 11%**  
since 1970.

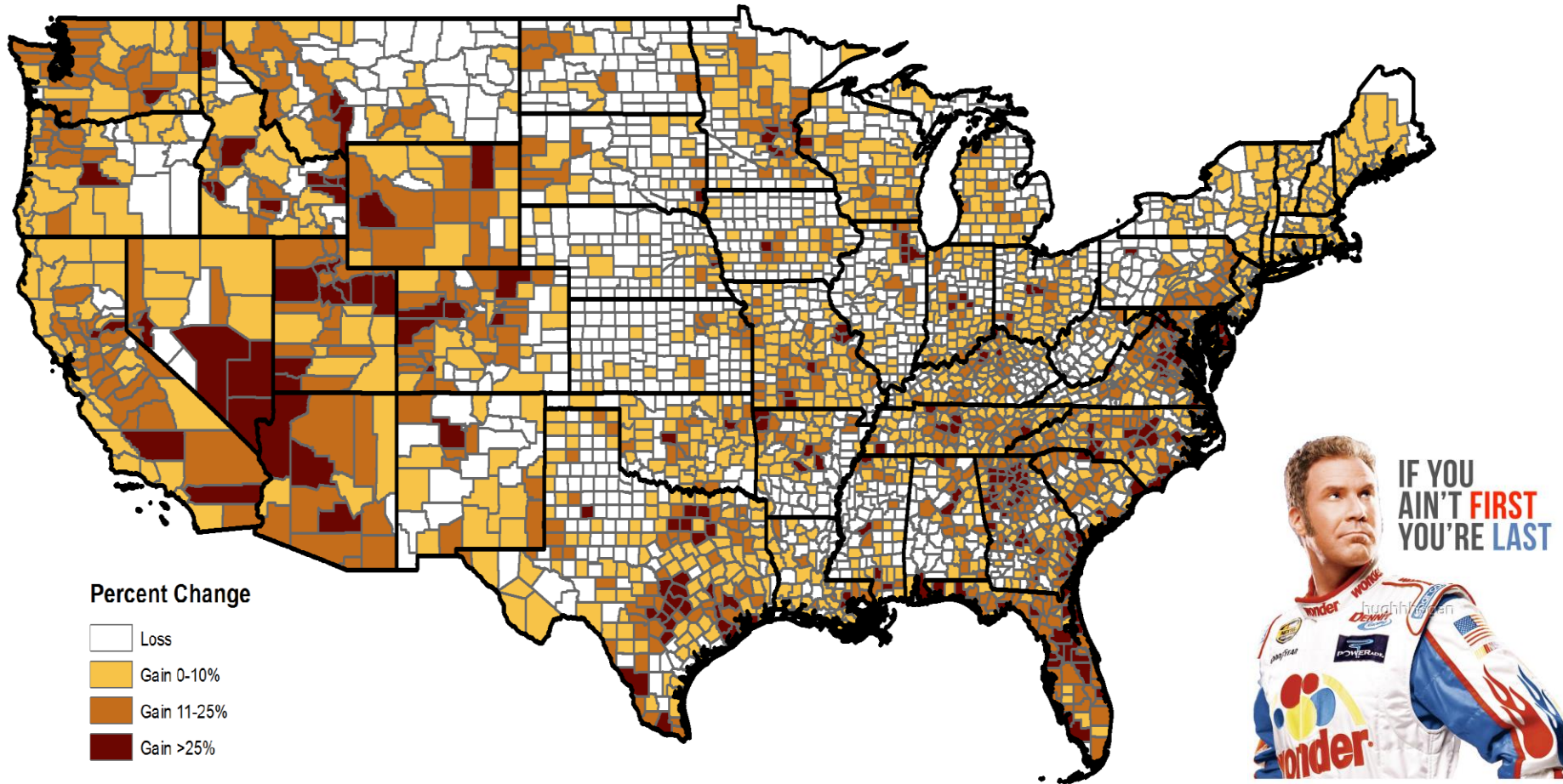


As rural populations grow, residents get  
**reclassified.**



# Total Population Infatuation

*a.k.a. If you're not growing you're dying*





# Total Population Infatuation

## Wait, what?

Comparison Historical Population from 1960 to 2010

Community	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	% Change
<b>UMVRDC Region</b>	<b>69,063</b>	<b>61,806</b>	<b>59,822</b>	<b>50,845</b>	<b>50,011</b>	<b>45,190</b>	<b>-34.57%</b>
<i>Households</i>	19,428	19,367	22,026	20,088	19,846	20,039	3.14%
Big Stone County	8,954	7,941	7,716	6,285	5,820	5,269	-41.15%
Chippewa County	16,320	15,109	14,941	13,228	13,088	12,441	-23.77%
Lac qui Parle County	13,330	11,164	10,592	8,924	8,067	7,259	-45.54%
Swift County	14,936	13,177	12,920	10,724	11,956	9,783	-34.50%
Yellow Medicine County	15,523	14,415	13,653	11,684	11,080	10,438	-32.76%

Source: US Census Bureau





Avg. HH Size:  
1940: 3.6  
2018: 2.6

*With a fixed # homes, you will lose 29% pop  
due to demographic destiny alone.*



Spouse passes

Population: -1

Households: NC

*Yes there is outmigration but demographics work  
against growth and even stability (stagnation).*





## 2010-2019 Population and Housing Units Change

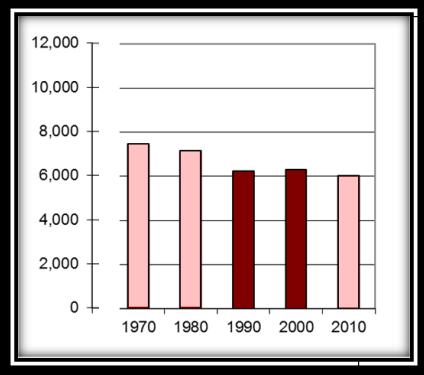
County	Pop Change	Housing Change
Adams	-5%	+5%
Foster	-4%	+2%
<b>Golden Valley</b>	<b>+5%</b>	<b>+9%</b>
Hettinger	+1%	+1%
Traill	-1%	+2%
Walsh	-4%	+2%



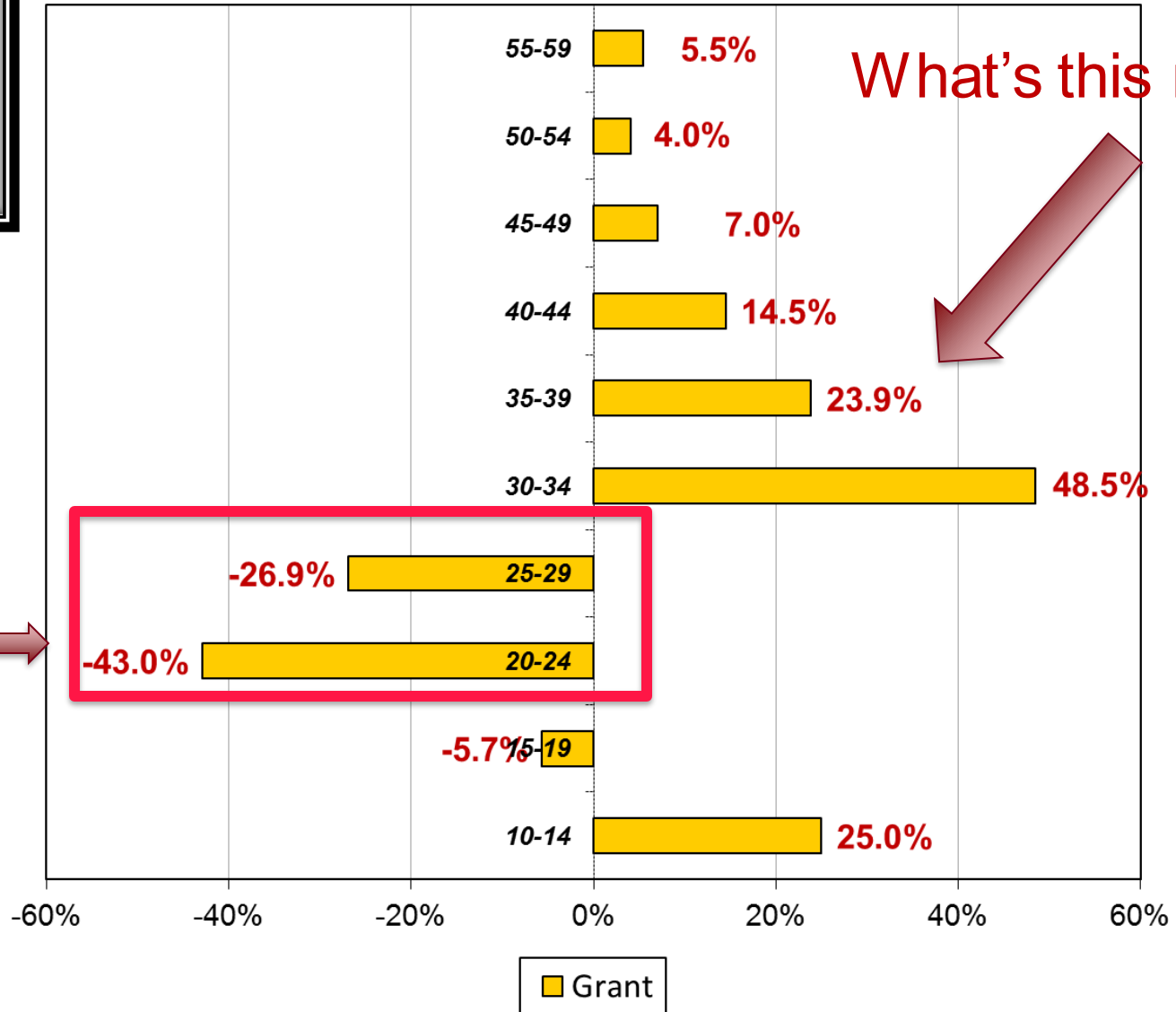
**Myth: Only the “lucky few” escape rural America which results in a Brain DRAIN.**

40%-50% of residents **move**  
every 5 years.





1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change



Brain Drain

What's this now?



# The Rural Brain Gain

They choose rural age

**30-49**

And also when they are 50-64  
(since the 1970s)





# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

**Nebraska Buffalo Commons  
Research 2012**

**Workforce Movers  
University of Minnesota,  
2004, 2012, 2019**



# MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

## EXTENSION



MONTANA  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION



**Montana Movers Study, 2021**



# Newcomers: Why?

Simpler pace of life



Safety and Security



Low Housing Cost





# Newcomers: Who?

- 41% moved primarily for a job  
(50% youngest/ 35% oldest)
- 25% lived there previously
- 91% have some college or bachelor's
- 75% household incomes over \$50k
- 47% have children in household
- 14% telecommute!

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.





# Newcomers: Who?



	MN	MT
Moved primarily for a job	41%	35%
Lived in the community before	25%	34%*
Have children in household	47%	39%
Household income >\$50k	75%	78%

**14% telecommute  
(pre-pandemic!)**

**\* Social  
housing  
supply?**

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

2021 Montana State University Extension Movers Study.

## Move Factors with Preference

*Proportion of households that indicated it was important in some way.*

	Percent
Take advantage of the slower pace of life	71
To live closer to relatives	70
To find a less congested place to live	69
To live among people with similar values	68
To find lower priced housing	67
To find a safer place to live	67
To live in a smaller community	66
To find a lower cost of living	65
To find a good environment for raising children	65
To find a job that allowed a better work-life balance	61
To find a job that matches my skills	60
To take on a new job	58
To find a higher paying job	56
To live closer to friends	50
To find higher quality schools	49

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

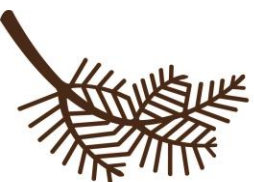


# TELECOMMUTING

Question: Do you typically telecommute or work remotely for a company not located in your region?  
(of those in workforce)

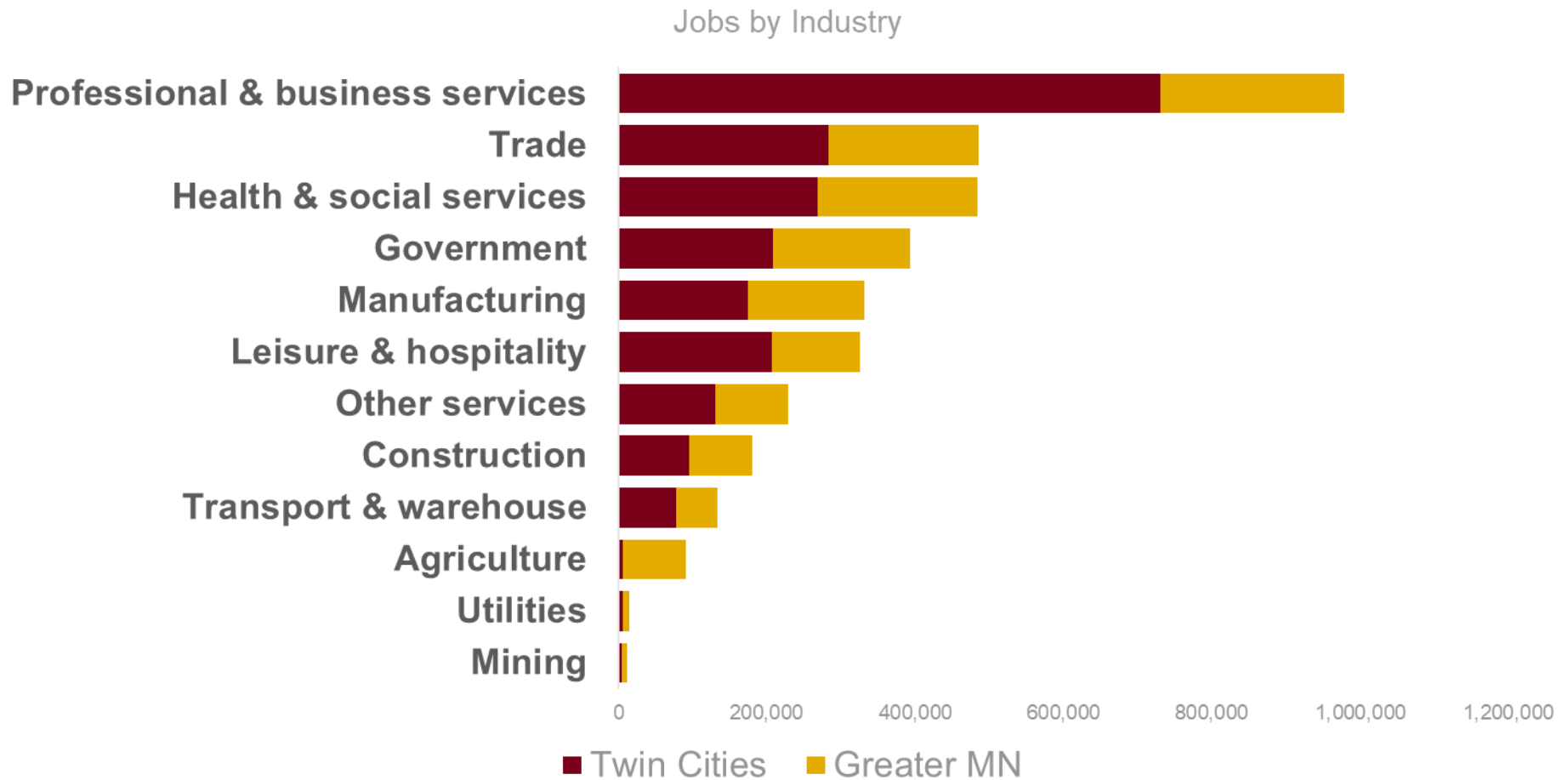
Respondent	14%
Spouse	16%

***21% of Households have a member that telecommutes!***



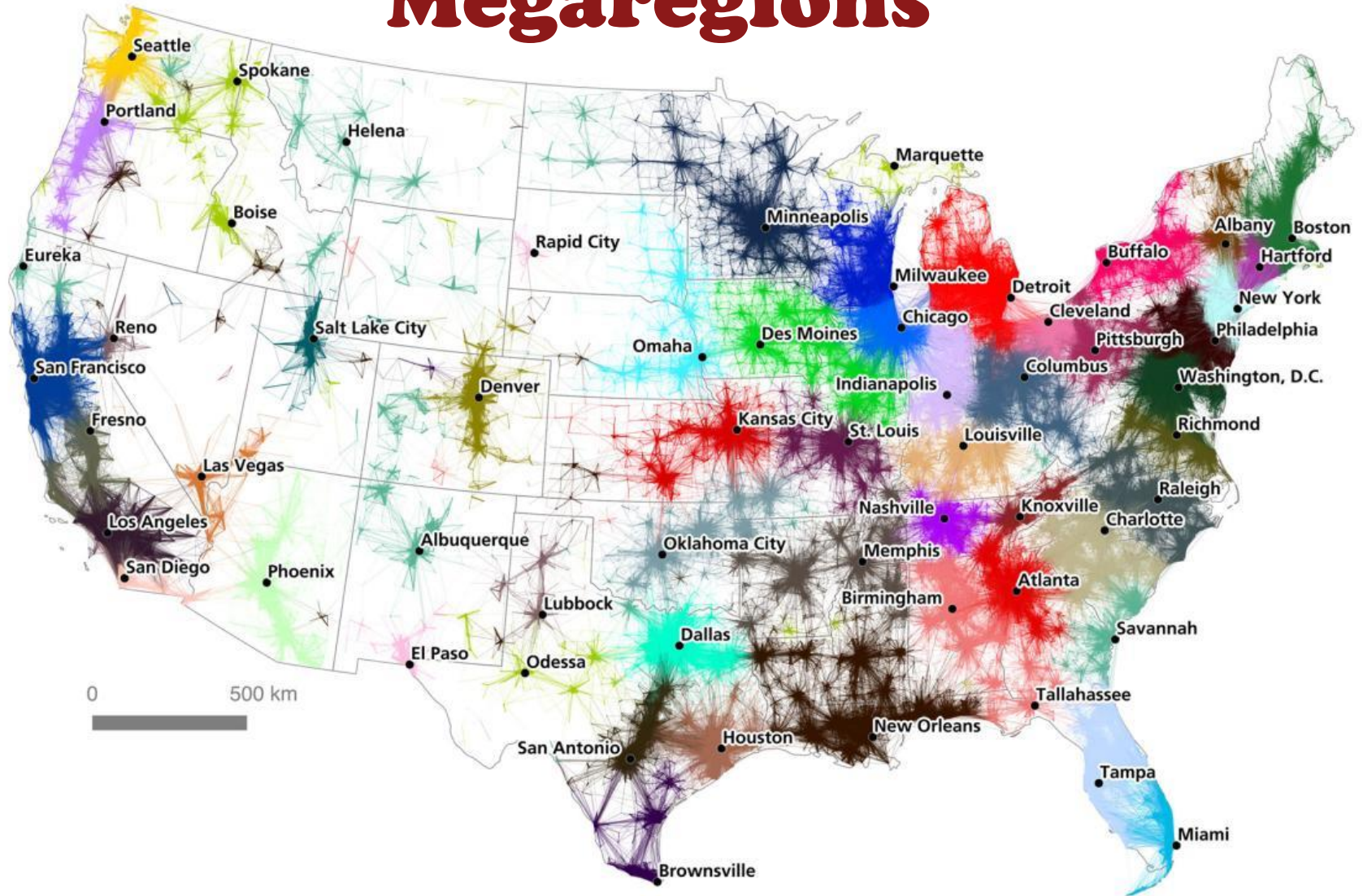
Blandin Foundation™  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

# Diversifying the **rural economy**





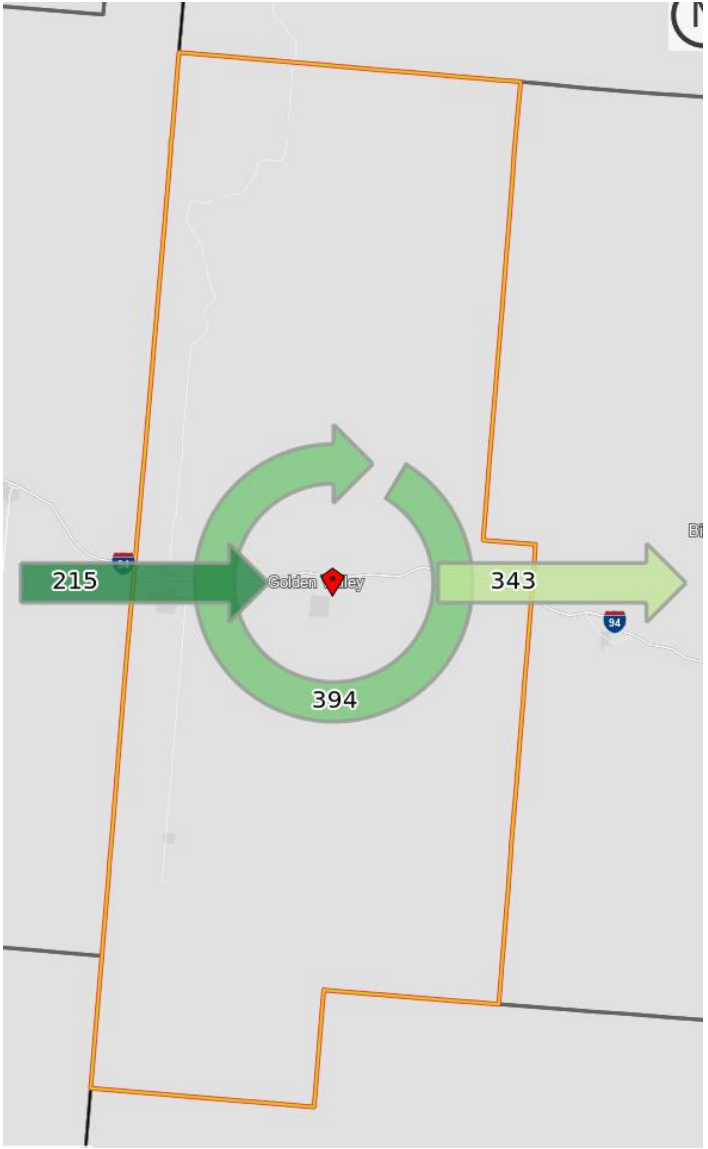
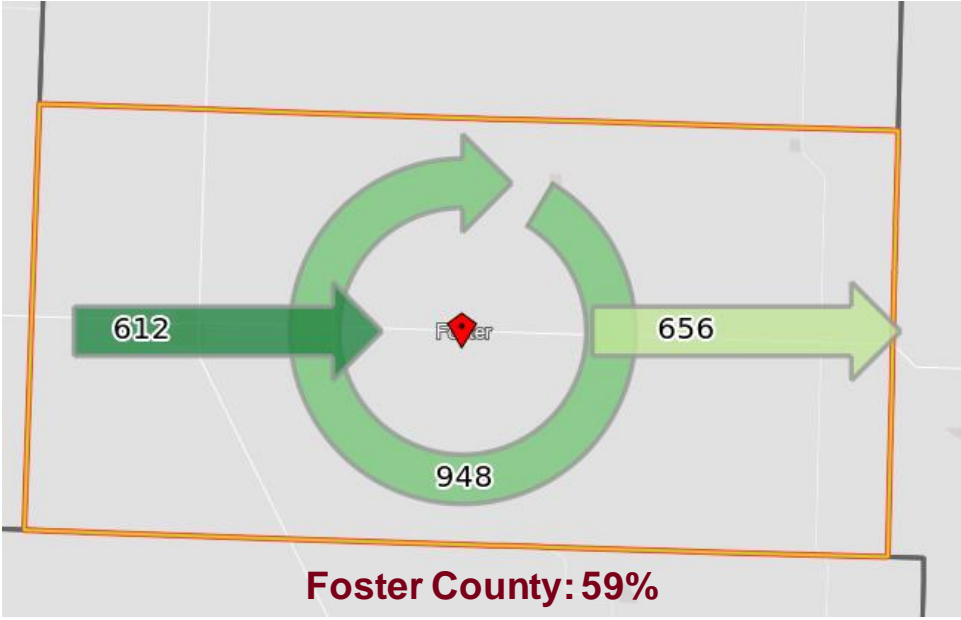
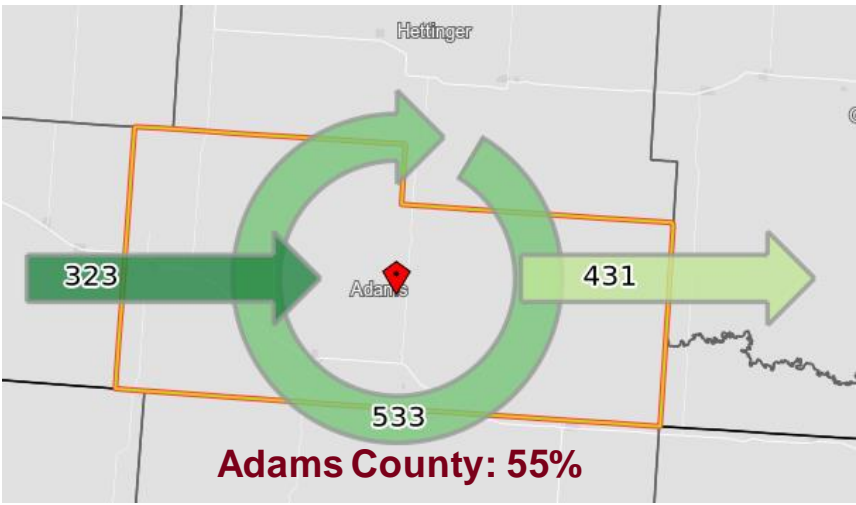
# Megaregions

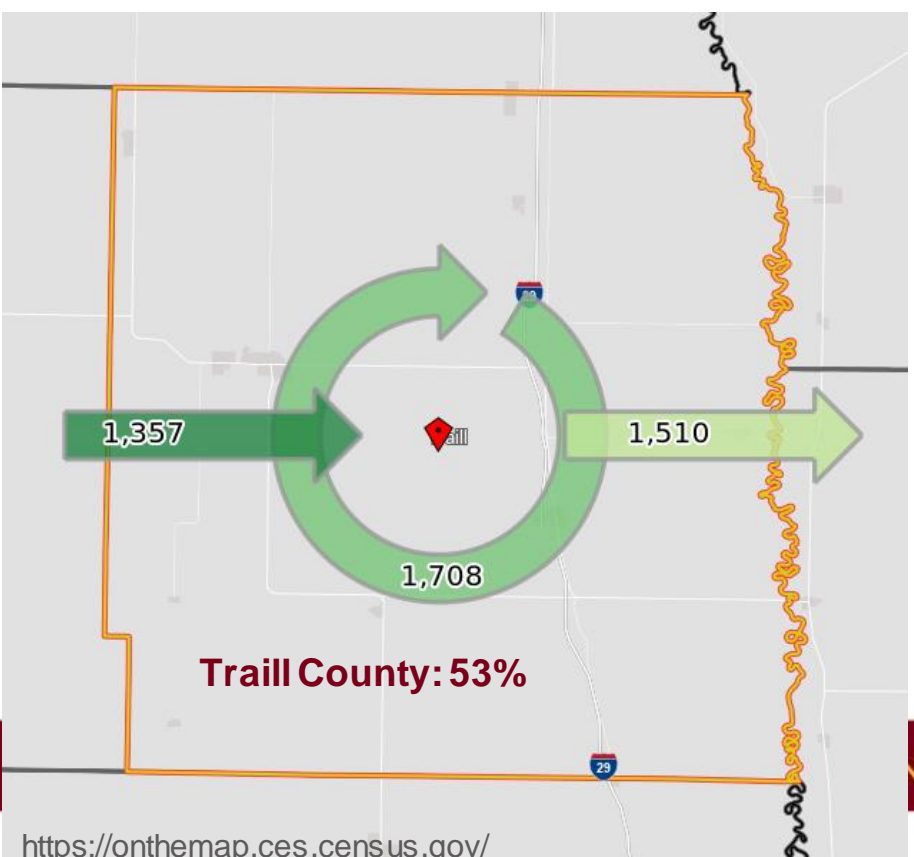
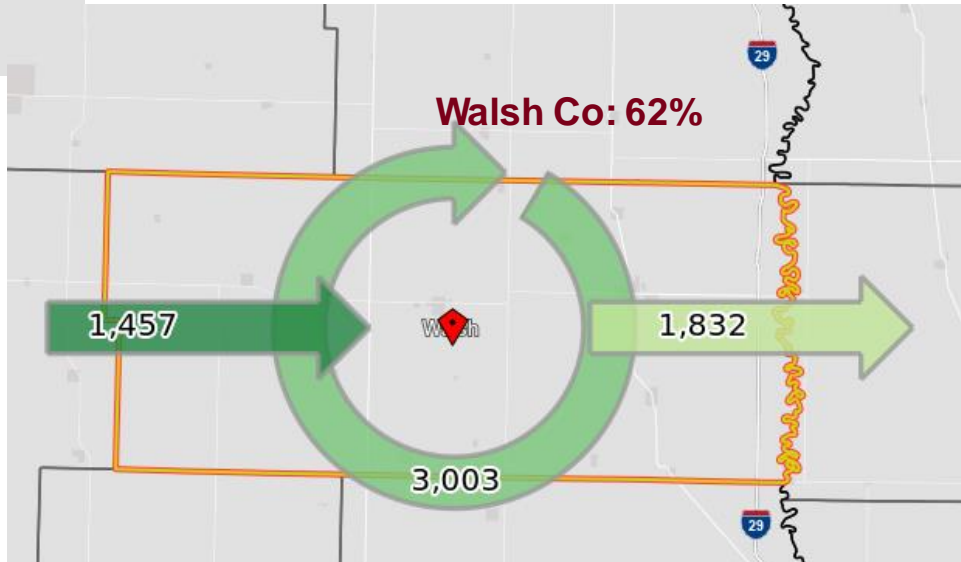
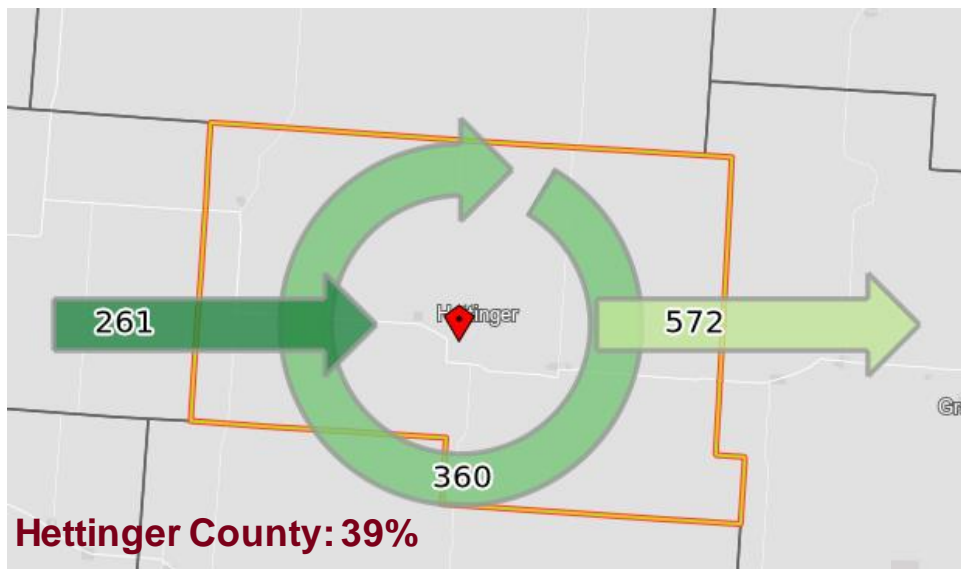


<http://discovery.dartmouth.edu/megaregions/>



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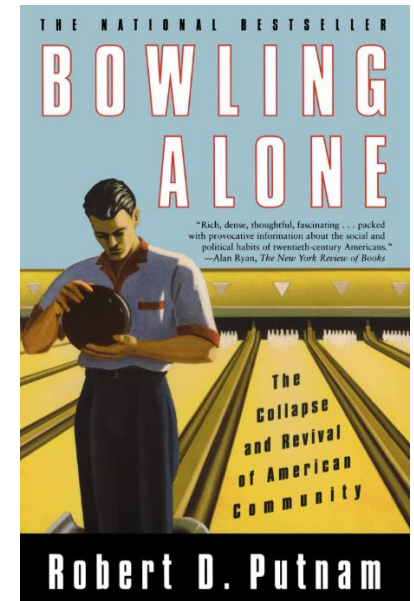
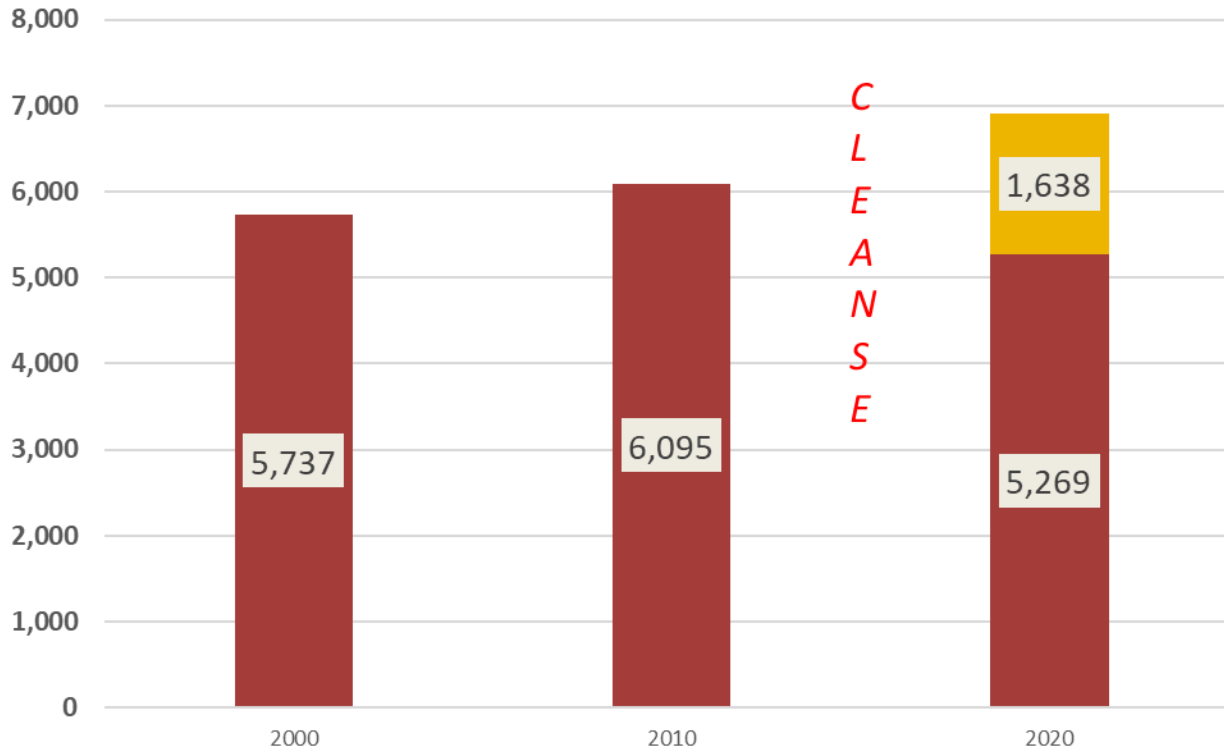




# Social Life is Not Dying

## North Dakota

■ Number of Nonprofits ■ Revocations 2011-20



National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau

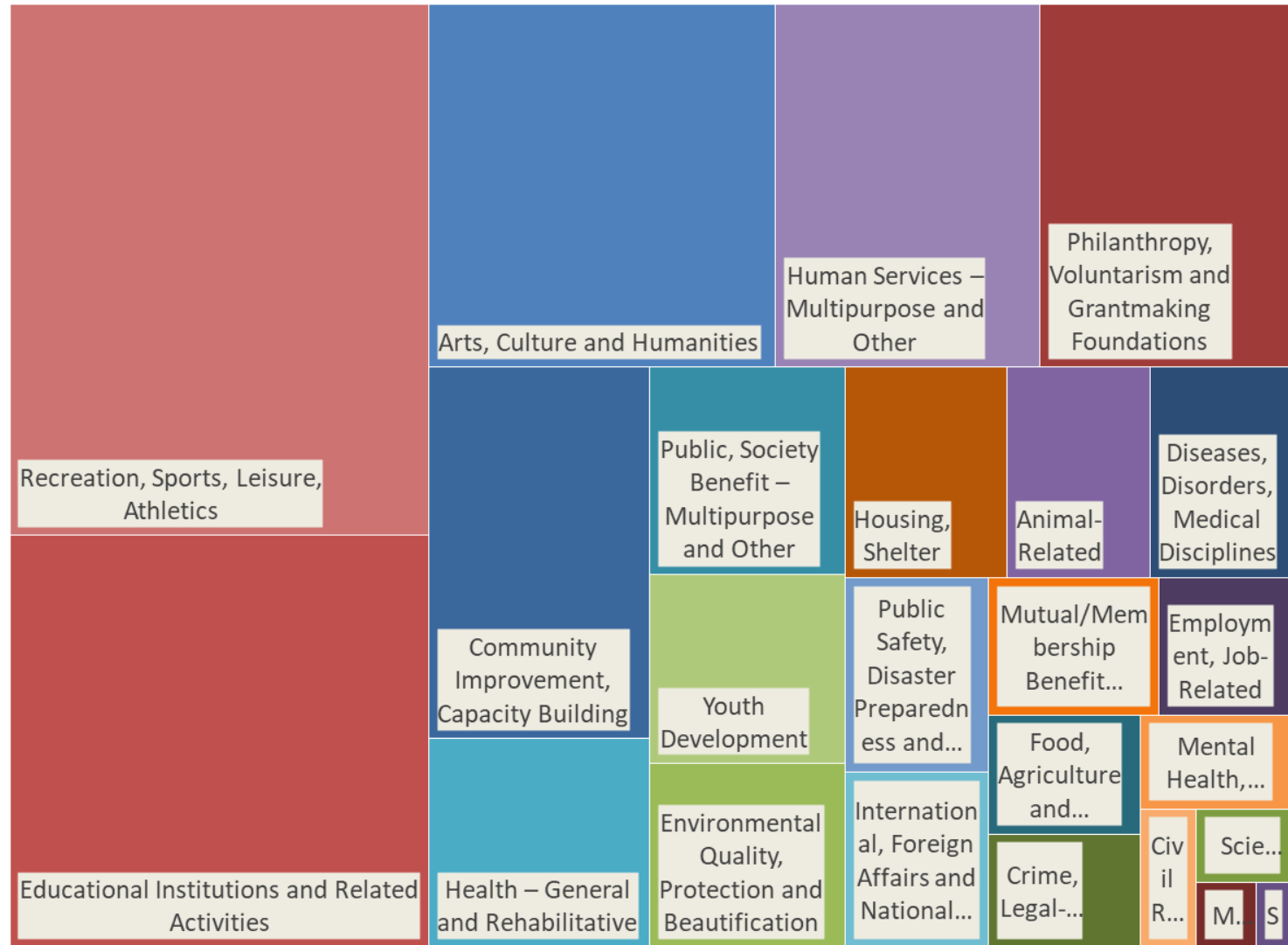


UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

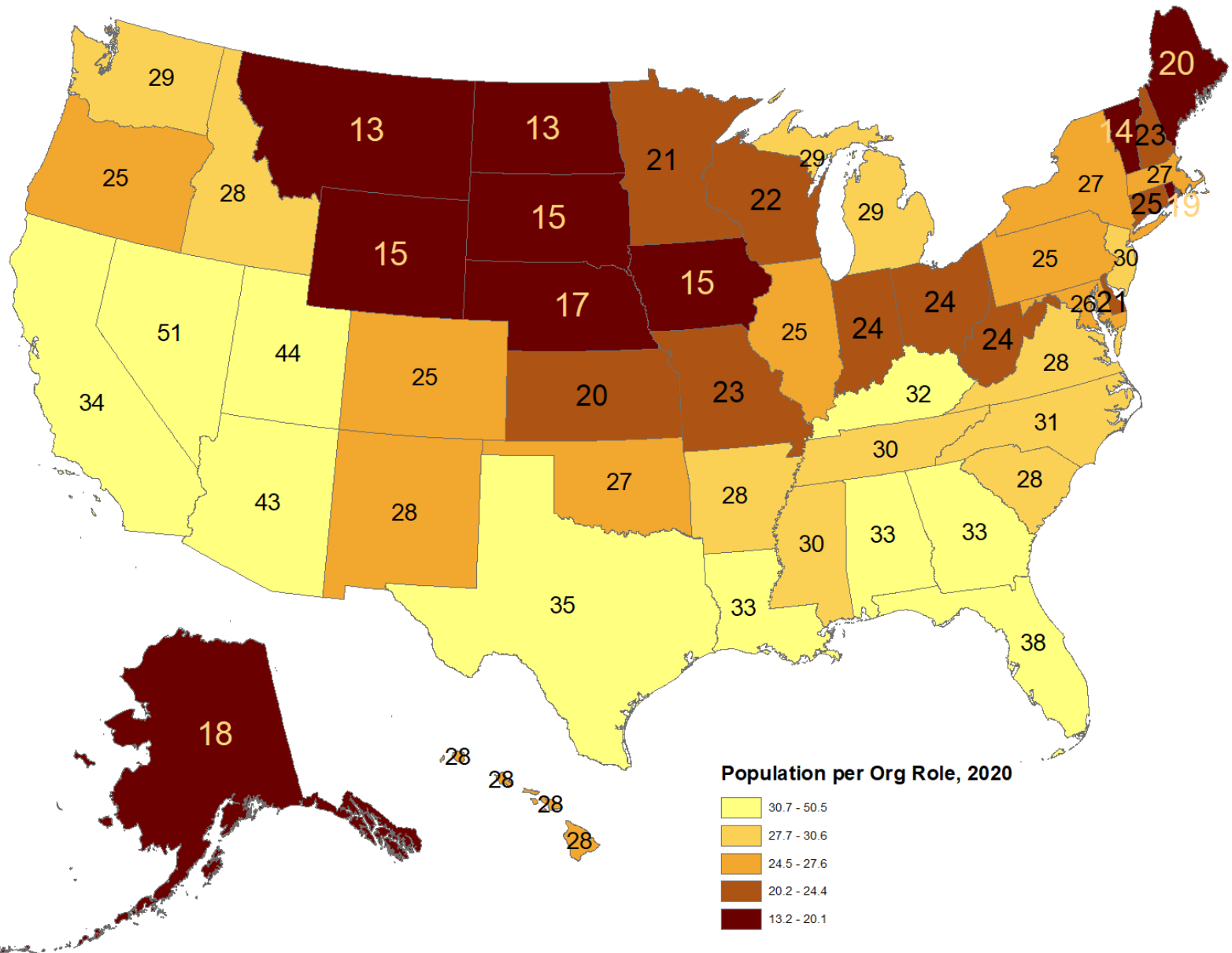
# 41% of all nonprofits created in the last 30 years!

## North Dakota

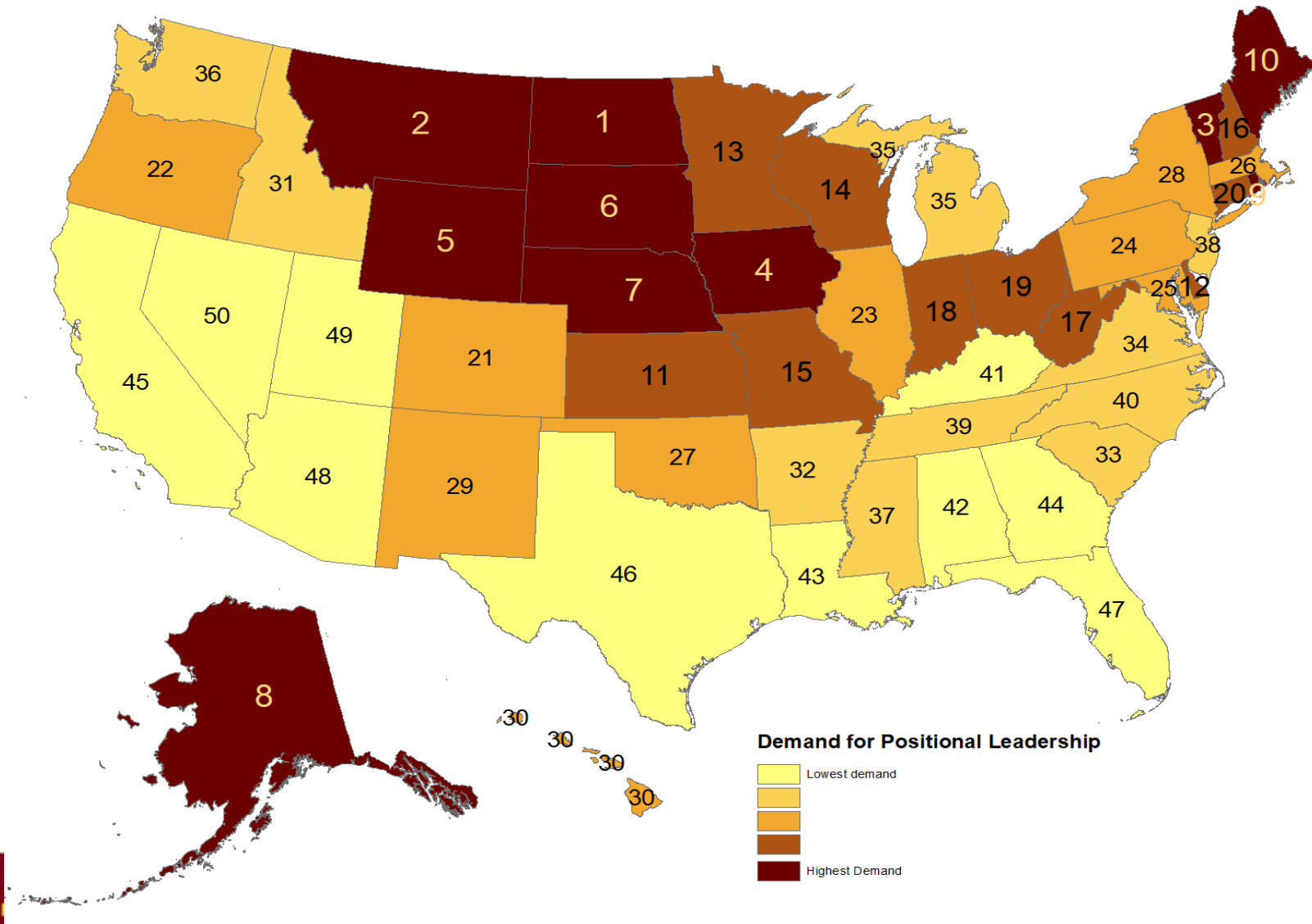
2020 Nonprofit NTEE composition not including Religion, groups formed last 30 years



# POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE, 2020



# Rank of Organizational Demands, 2020





## How Many People Run Our Towns?

### Fact Sheet: Positional Leadership Across Rural and Urban North Dakota

May 20, 2023

Benjamin Winchester, Rural Sociology Educator, Community Vitality

benw@umn.edu

#### Extension Topics

[4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT](#)

[AGRICULTURE](#)

[DISASTERS](#)

## Leadership and Civic Engagement

	Leadership Demand
Adams	1 in 5
Foster	1 in 7
Golden Valley	1 in 5
Hettinger	1 in 5
Traill	1 in 8
Walsh	1 in 8





**We live in a REGIONAL COMMUNITY**



**in the Middle of Everywhere**



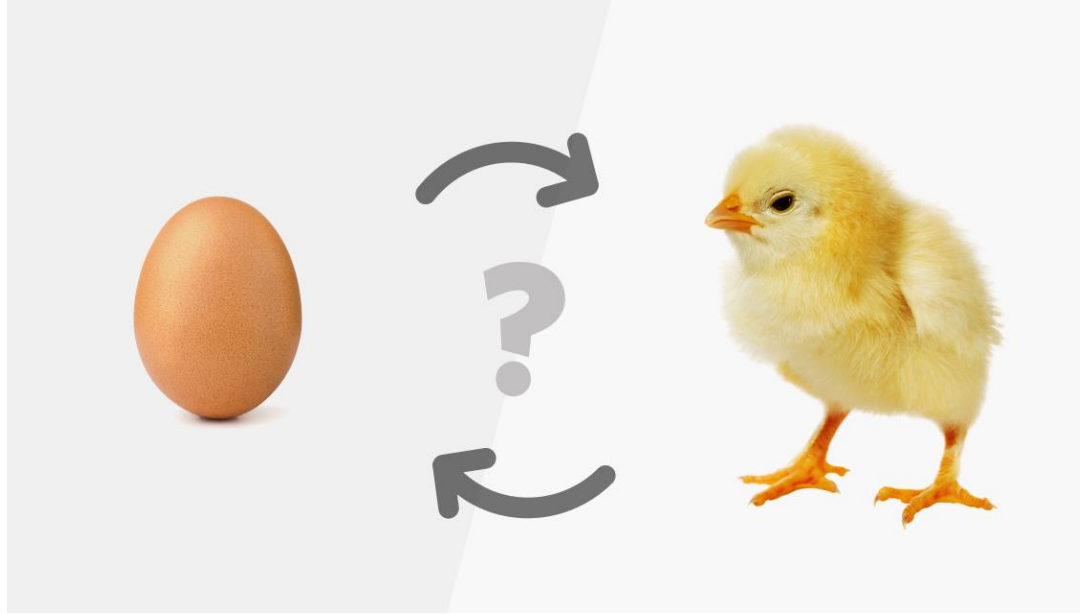
# THE COMMUNITY IS WELCOMING OF NEW RESIDENTS BY THOSE LIKELY TO STILL LIVE IN COMMUNITY IN 5 YEARS

The Community is Welcoming	Likely to Live Here in 5 Years
Strongly agree	86%
Agree	77%
Disagree	68%
Strongly Disagree	44%
<b>All respondents</b>	<b>78%</b>





# Traditional: Employer-based Community Resident Recruitment



Jobs are the attraction for new residents.  
Without a job why would anyone move here?  
What we've found...

Work and Home **continue to decouple**



# resident recruitment

## Community Development

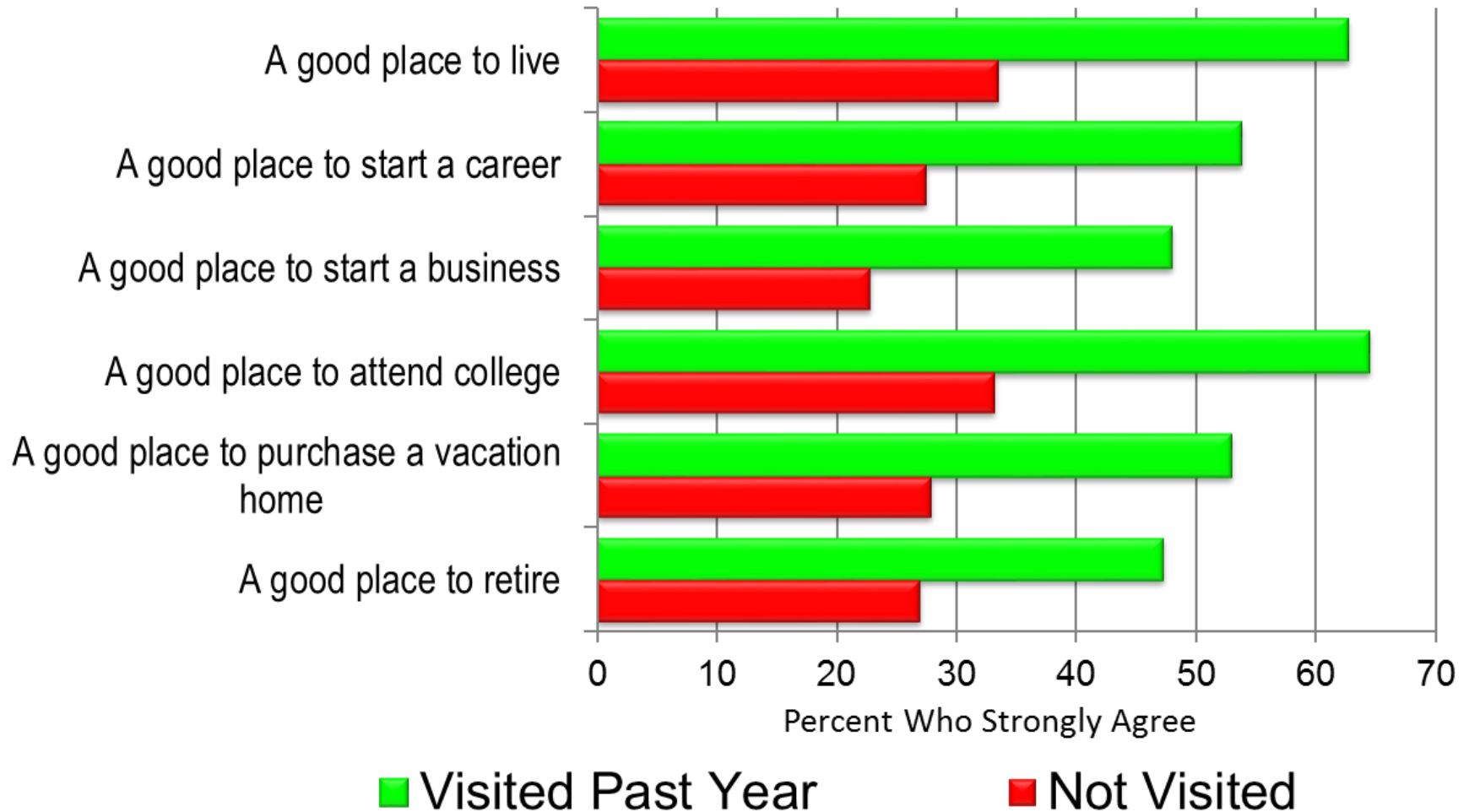
## Economic Development

## Tourism

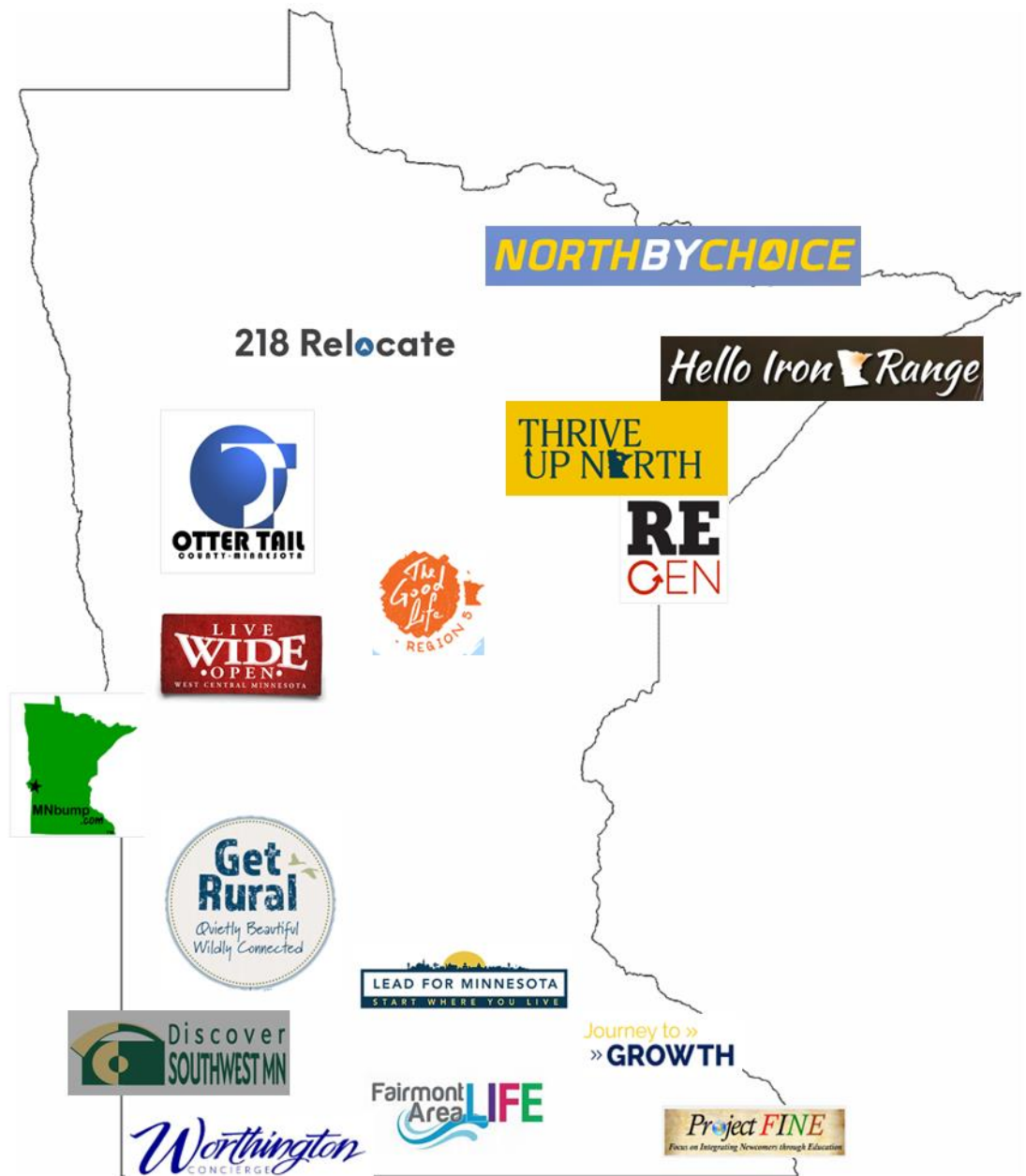
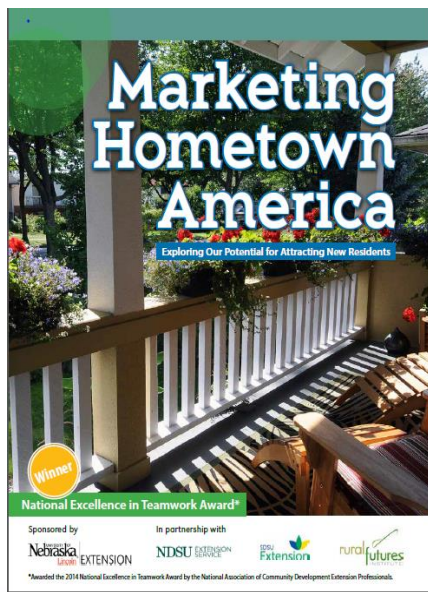
*On the Map – Over the Edge – Welcome Home*



# HALO EFFECT: VISITATION AND IMAGE



# Resident Recruitment Efforts In Minnesota



# resident recruitment

*The coordinated economic and community development actions needed to identify, attract, and invite new residents moving to the region.*

- Distributes recruitment (and retention) costs across the communities.
- In a tight labor market...**labor has the power to choose.** Why will they choose your town over another? Seems everything but the job matters...
- The **LIFE-WORK** balance



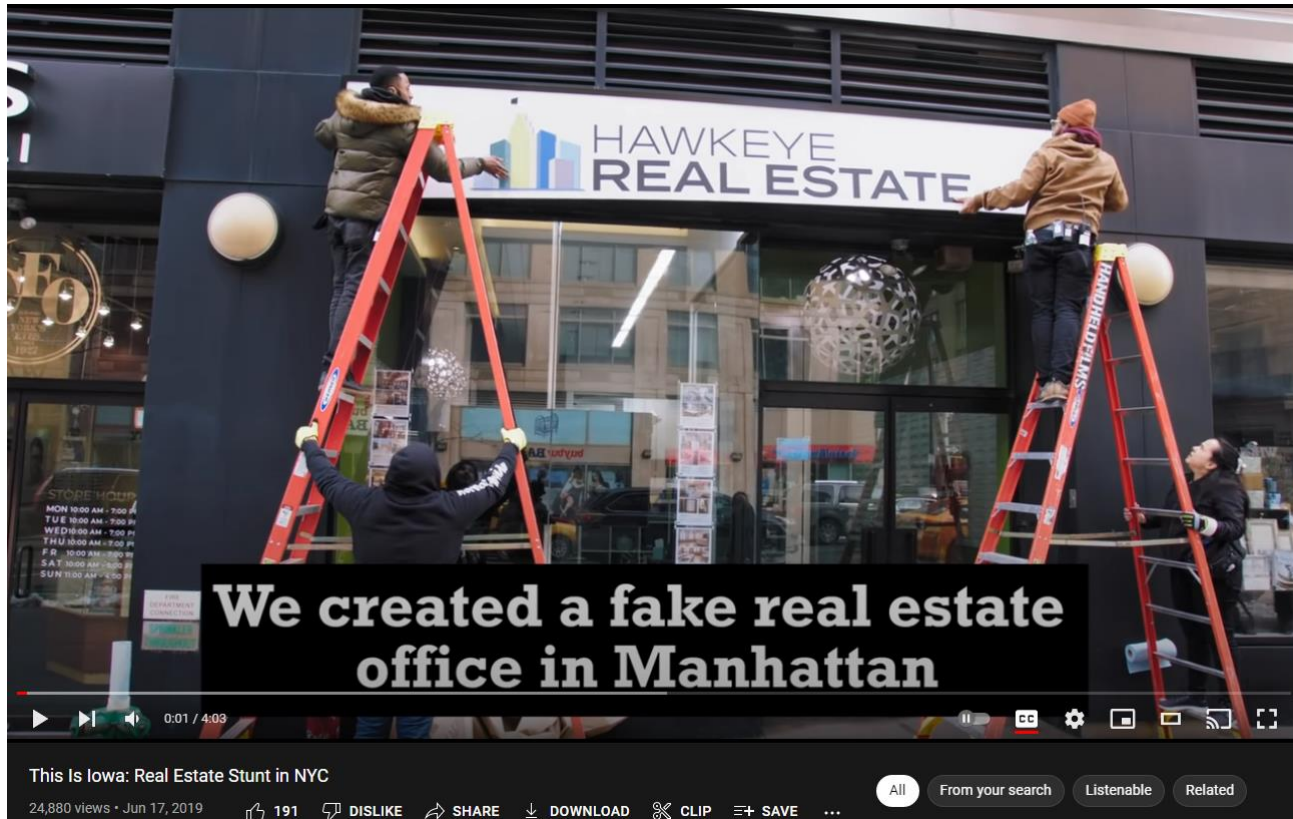
# resident recruitment

## Invitations

- Graduates / class reunions
- Tourism locations - narrative
- Media / Facebook / Google Ads
- Existing resident networks – lift up voices of newcomers
- Narrative matters here!







<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3FPtb2v6Zc>





# resident recruitment

## Incentives

tulsa  
remote

- Land, utility waiver, tax credits
  - Cash, moving costs, down payment
  - Bicycles / park passes
  - Co-working spaces
- 
- Community incentives can stack here with occupational incentives (lawyers, doctors, public service workers)



# resident recruitment

economic supports

- Broadband
- Child care
- Remote workforce training
- Co-work space, self-employment support
- Business Succession programs
- Spousal employment
- Regional housing inventory

**There is a tension here with housing**



# resident recruitment

Welcoming

Front lines: Real estate agents, property managers, city clerks, school districts

- Front line narrative training program
- Concierge service
- Welcoming Communities program
- Grab-a-bite (Otter Tail county)
- Newcomer supper



# School as Anchor Institution



RURAL SCHOOLS  
COLLABORATIVE

Schools are a **point of continuity** for the community and political jurisdictions and also form the basis for regional community identities.

Schools can use the **community as a laboratory**: business partnerships and talent pipeline.

**Hosting** conversations and convening events.



# resident recruitment

Involving

- Making it Home program
- Regional events and organizations
- Involvement starts with a small request
- Make room for newcomers to “leave their mark” for themselves



# The Middle of Everywhere

## Exercise

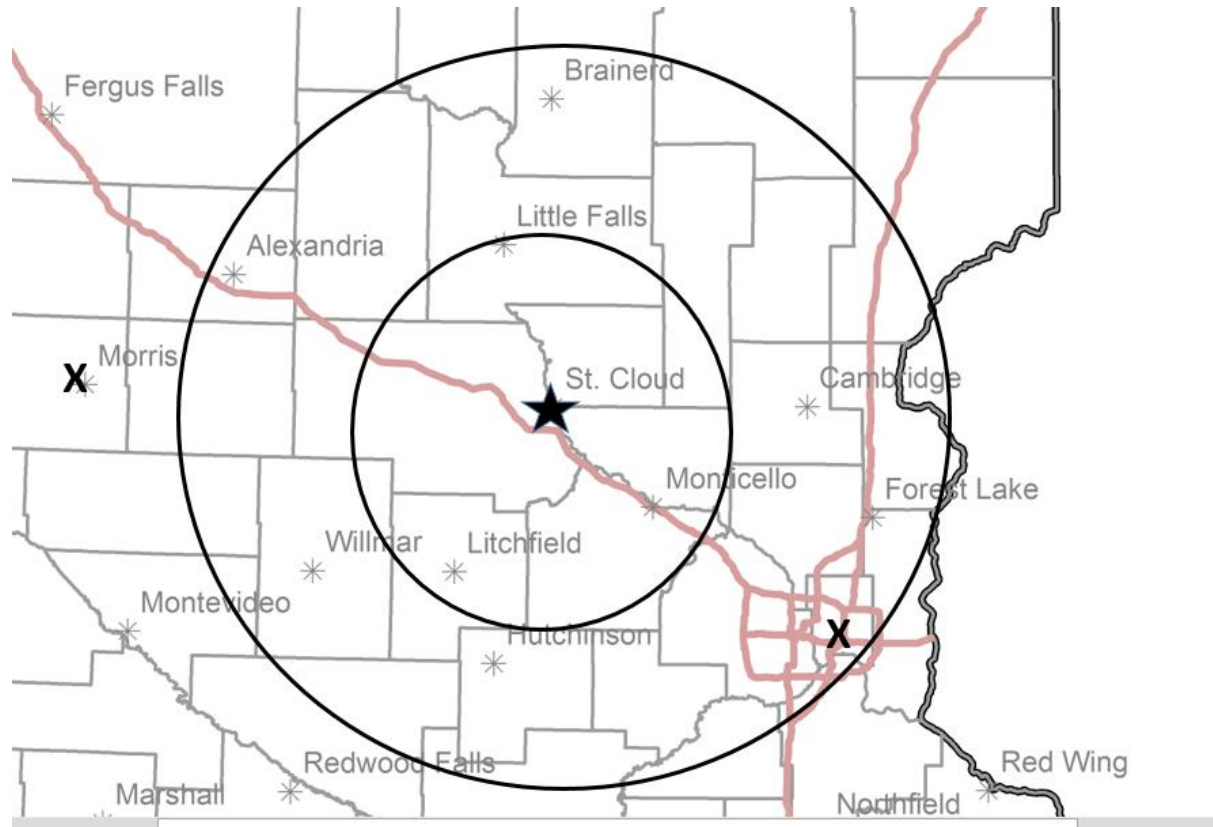
- ★ where you live
- X where you work

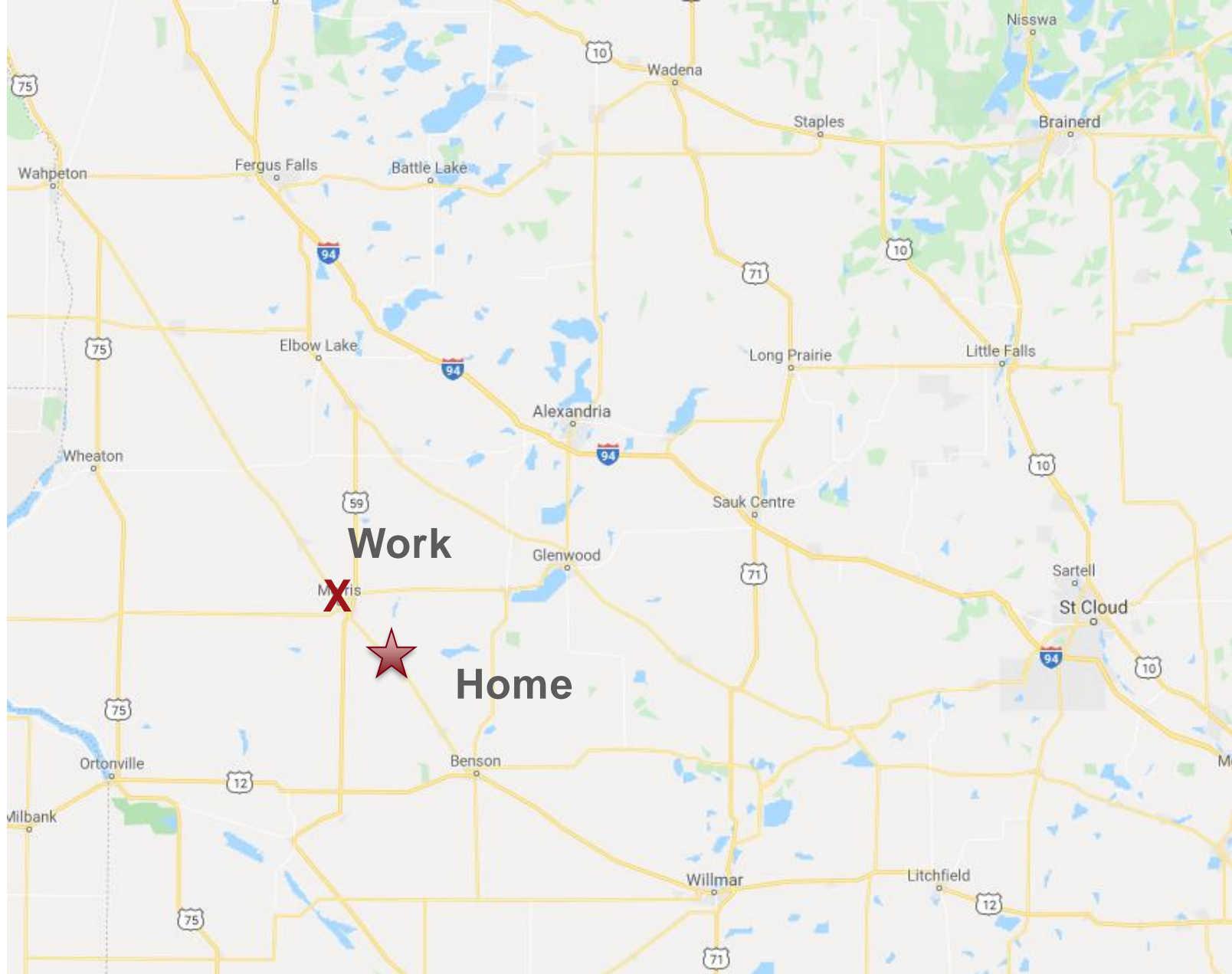
Circle around:

1. Shop / eat out
2. Play / recreate

Age range

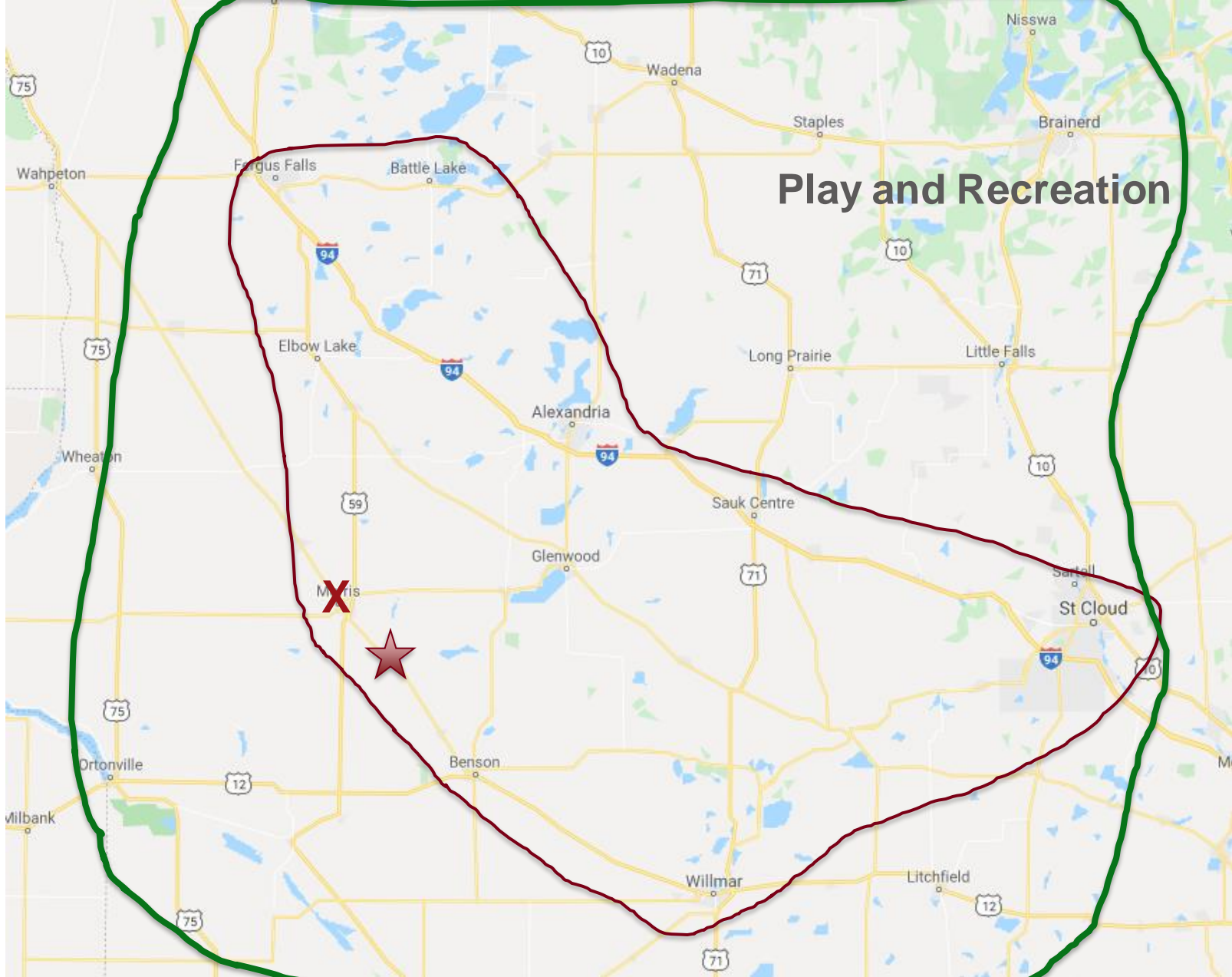
Assets











## Play and Recreation



# MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

How can we make local decisions while at the same time respect the reality of lives?

**The REGION is the primary unit of interest**

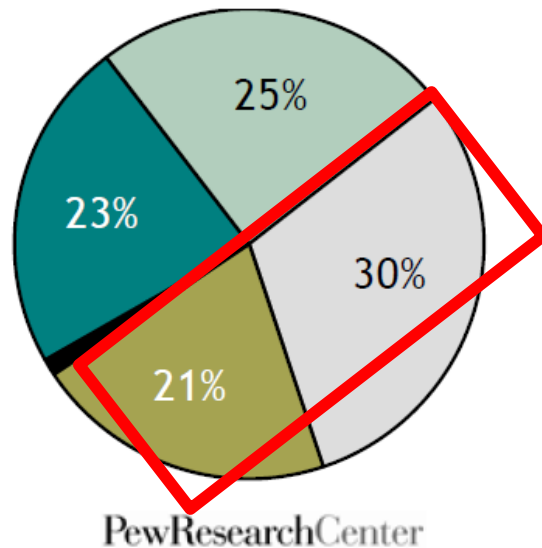
**Mayor, how do you market your town if you don't know what's going on around you?**



## Where We Live and Where We'd Like to Live

by community type

■ City      ■ Suburb  
■ Small town      ■ Rural area



**20% live rural/small town**

**51% would PREFER to**

# MOVING IN : Demand for rural and small town living!

Source: "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else". Pew Research Center, 2009.



# Workforce housing shortage?

There's plenty of workforce housing, It's currently occupied by our seniors.



# Change is coming

30% of rural homeowners are 70+!

75% are baby boomers  
and older!





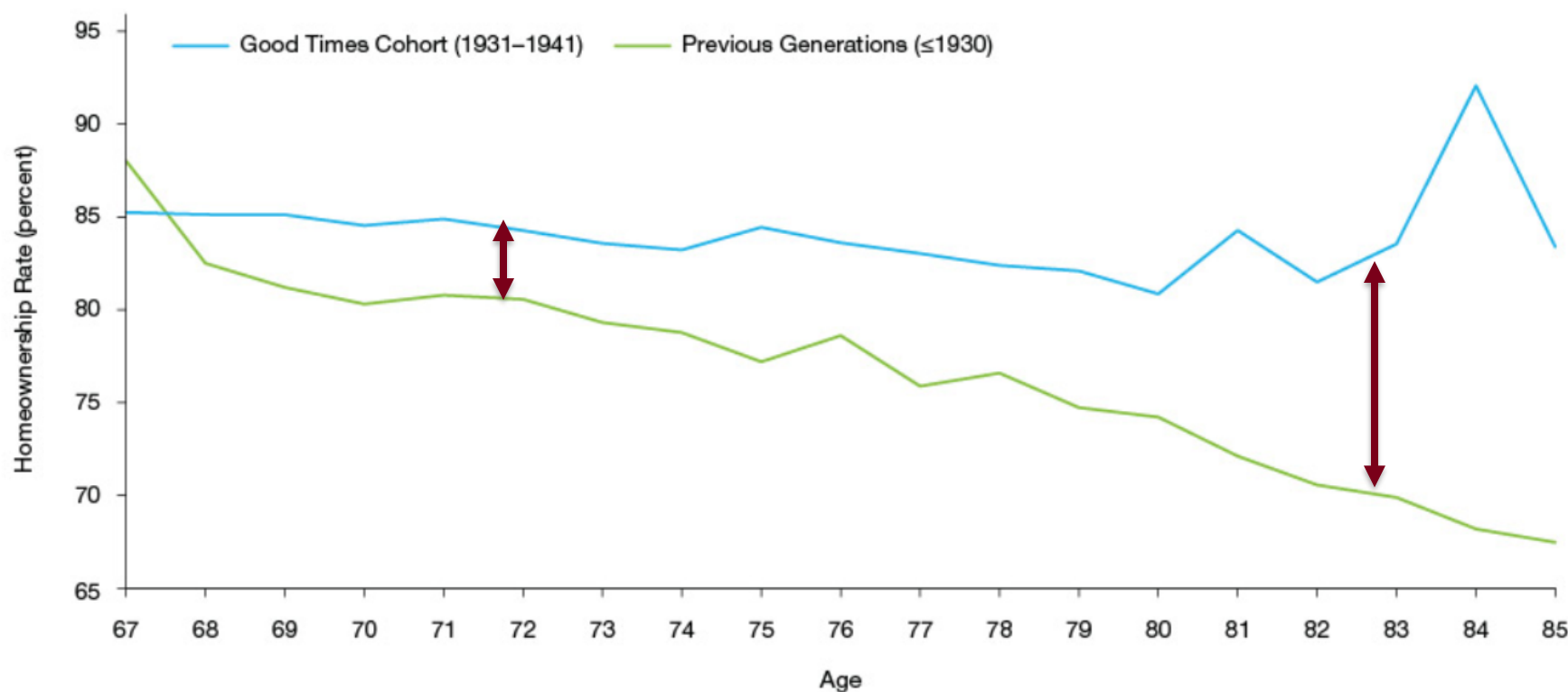


**58%** of older adults have not changed residences in more than 20 years

## Exhibit 1

### Historical homeownership rates for household heads aged 67–85

Current generations of older homeowners are holding onto their homes for longer than previous generations



# Housing Substitutions

*OUT*



*IN*



*47% of newcomer households  
have children*

*Through death comes rebirth!*



# *Narrative Matters*



## *Rural is...*

1. Durable – we are resilient
2. Desirable – housing is full
3. Engaging – nonprofits growing
4. Diversifying – demographically and economically



# The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

- Creating groups, building their community
- Diversifying the economy
- Buying/starting businesses, working from home
- Living in a region (no longer a 1-stop-shop)
- More than warm bodies (employee recruitment)



# ***The Rural Choice: Opening New Doors and Welcoming New Neighbors***

The bottom line is people WANT  
to live and move here for  
**what you are today and will be tomorrow,**  
not what may have been!

**Rural Revitalization is Upon Us!**







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**Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>**



Thank you.

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