

Fourth Annual

TALENT ATTRACTION SCORECARD



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TALENT ON THE MOVE

[McKinsey](#) estimates that by 2020, the world will face a shortage of more than 40 million college workers. It's a shortage that promises to affect and exacerbate every other type of scarcity problem. Without high-skill workers, innovation that solves global problems, wages that drive economic prosperity, and public investment that funds infrastructure and education all fall by the wayside.

Counties all across America are fighting to make themselves the most attractive location for new talent to settle in. But talent attraction isn't just a matter of importing new residents. In this scorecard, you'll see the varying routes the winners took to victory. And you'll get an equally varied set of strategies that you can implement in your own region.

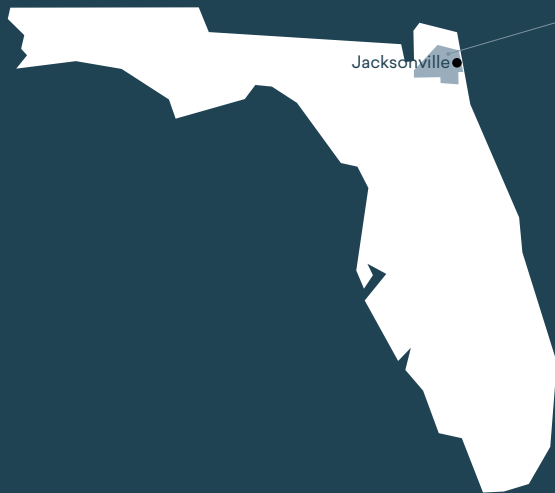
Every year, we divide the Talent Attraction Scorecard into big counties (100,000 population and above) and small counties (5,000 to 99,999). This year, we're also taking a look at standouts in some of the very smallest counties, with populations of 5,000 or below. As the future of rural America emerges as a key concern for policymakers and economic development organizations alike, we wanted to spotlight communities making strides with a pre-existing population that's significantly lower than average.

We found a story about rural America that's full of promise: small southern counties rising to the top of the rankings on a tide of infrastructure investment, micro-counties in the rural West punching above their weight, and mid-sized western counties emerging as future hubs.

Let's take a look at the 2019 talent attraction leaders...

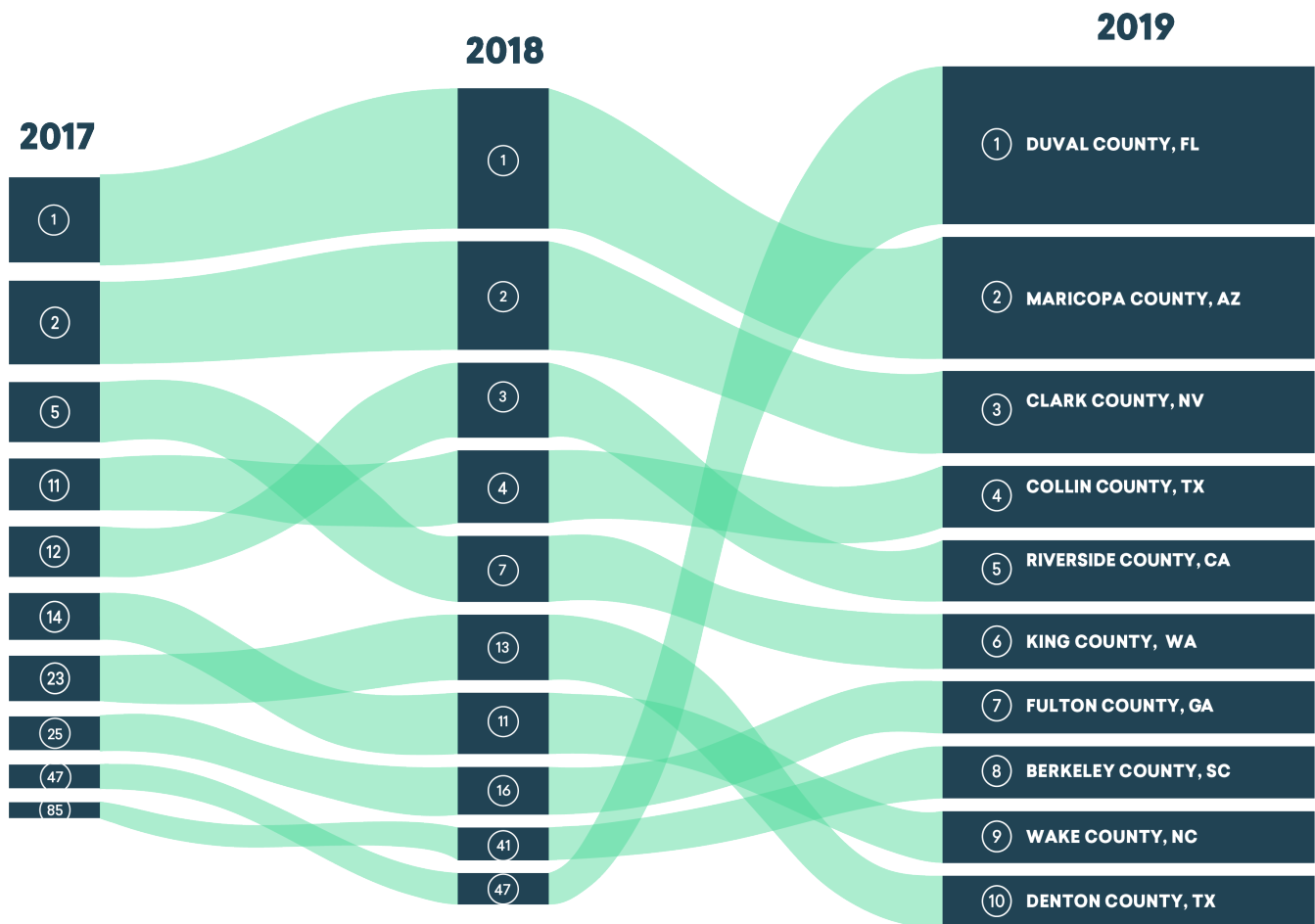
LARGE COUNTIES

Population of 100,000+



- ① Duval County, FL (Jacksonville)
- ② Maricopa County, AZ (Phoenix)
- ③ Clark County, NV (Las Vegas)
- ④ Collin County, TX (Dallas-Fort Worth)
- ⑤ Riverside County, CA (Riverside)
- ⑥ King County, WA (Seattle)
- ⑦ Fulton County, GA (Atlanta)
- ⑧ Berkeley County, SC (Charleston)
- ⑨ Wake County, NC (Raleigh)
- ⑩ Denton County, TX (Denton)

Large County Leaders: Movement Over Time



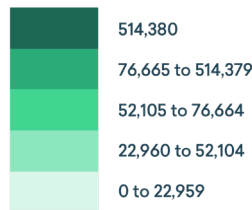
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NEW LEADERS EMERGE

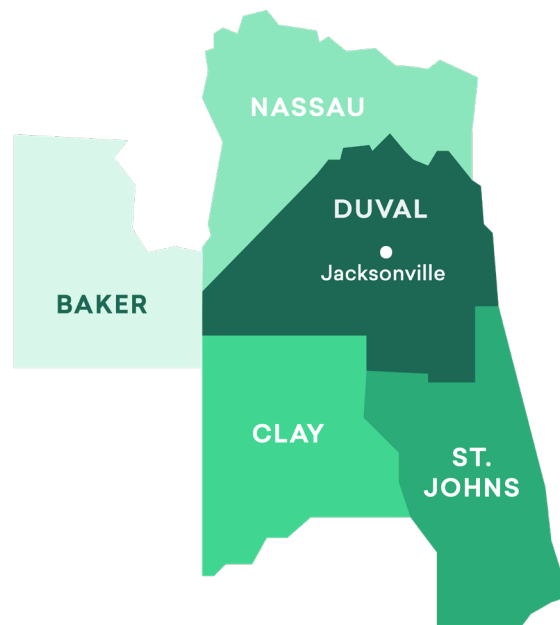
Among large counties, the changes from last year are more modest than among small counties. Duval County (Jacksonville, Florida) has knocked Maricopa County (Phoenix) out of first place, but only into second. Berkeley County (Charleston, South Carolina) has climbed into the top 10 after ranking 41st last year and 85th in 2017, and both Fulton County (Atlanta) and Denton County (suburban Dallas-Fort Worth) have likewise moved steadily upward over the past few years. This slower rate of change among large counties is to some degree a function of their existing advantages: because they have more population, more jobs, and more openings than small counties, positive change is felt more as steady improvement than seismic shift.

Jacksonville MSA Jobs by County

2018 JOBS



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DUVAL COUNTY, FLORIDA NO. 1

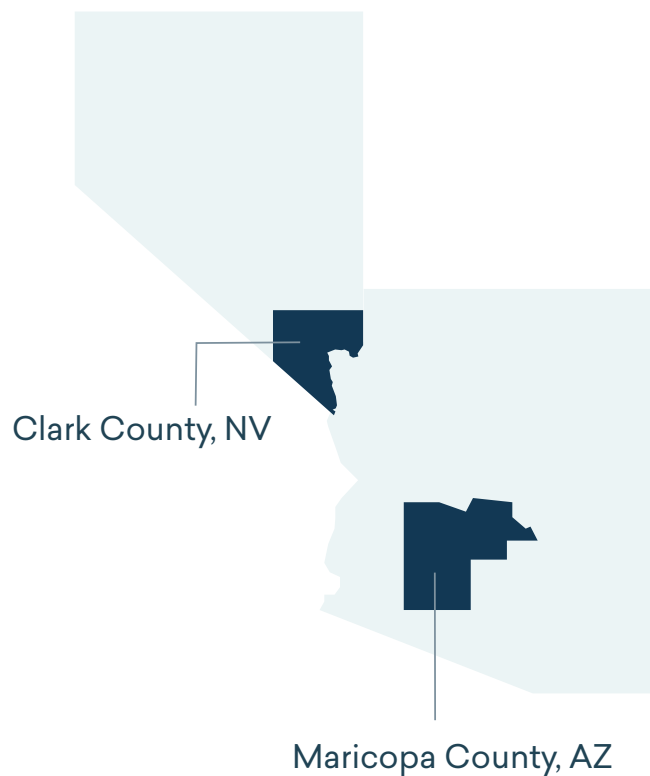
In 2017 and 2018, Duval County ranked 47th in our scorecard—a solid, steady showing that was drowned out by the performance of larger or more emerging Southern and Western counties.

That all changes this year.

Duval County is the heart of the Jacksonville metro, a rising economic powerhouse that is consistently attracting new residents and growing its talent base. Its population increased 7% from 2014 to 2018. Jobs were up 11% over the same time, nearly twice the national rate.

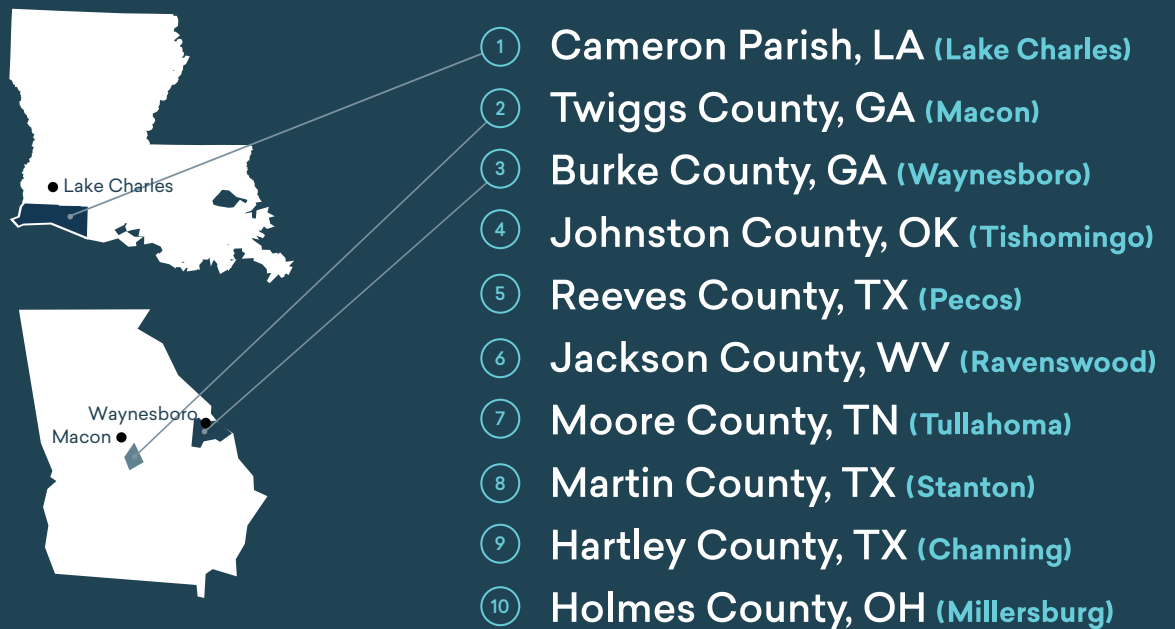
Notably, the largest industries in Duval County are restaurants and hospitals—the kind of industries that exist everywhere, and which do not usually involve the big manufacturing centers we tend to think of as job drivers. But over the past two years, the presence of both Wayfair and Amazon distribution centers has spurred 242% growth in the electronic shopping industry, an addition of over 5,000 more jobs than expected given national trends.

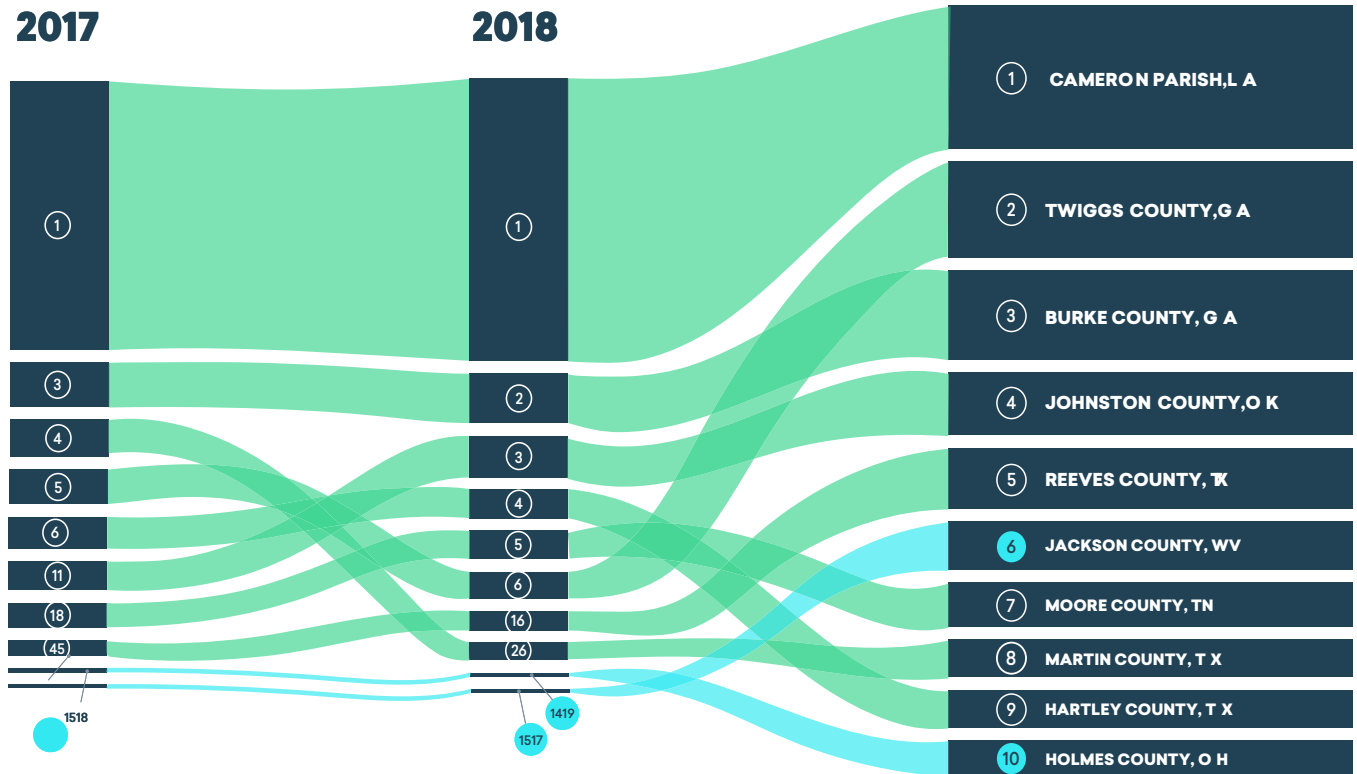
Maricopa County and Clark County (Las Vegas) also continue to see huge population and economic booms.



SMALL COUNTIES

Population of 5,000 - 99,999





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CAMERON MAINTAINS THE TOP SPOT

Cameron Parish, Louisiana, comes in first for the second year in a row, while Twigg County, Georgia, has climbed from sixth place to second over the past two years. But the biggest story of the small counties is the astounding ascendance of Jackson County, West Virginia, and Holmes County, Ohio. In 2018, Jackson and Holmes counties sat far down in the rankings, well into the thousands. This year, they each leapt well over a thousand places into the top 10.

Holmes is the overall leader for net migration of the small counties, and 8.3% of its workforce is remote (compared to the national average, just over 4%).

Jackson, on the other hand, has nearly doubled both its jobs and its workforce participation in the last five years, and increased its skilled jobs by almost half—no mean feat in a region famously [struggling](#) to meet the challenges posed by job loss and industry change.



CAMERON COUNTY



BURKE COUNTY

CAMERON AND BURKE: NOTABLE STANDOUTS

The leader of the small counties (Cameron Parish) is on the smaller end of our spectrum, just making the cutoff with a population of 7,000. Fueled by energy investments, employment has mushroomed 94% increase over the last five years, an astounding 13 times the national rate.

Cameron Parish's largest and fastest-growing industry is construction, and while the population has grown a modest 4% in the last five years, the need for new houses and stores is not driving the construction boom. Instead, it's most likely the result of major capital [investments by energy companies](#) like Cheniere Energy and Sasol GTL & Derivatives. Natural gas pipeline construction and other energy projects create enormous demand for a wide variety of jobs, from engineers to skilled tradesmen to construction crews—a demand that has increased Cameron's labor force participation rates by seven percentage points over the last five years.

Burke County, No. 3 in the small county ranking, is also notable. Unlike most of the other talent attraction leaders, Burke's population declined by nearly 2% over the past five years. It has room to grow in educational attainment as well, with only 15% of the population holding a post-secondary degree. But like Cameron Parish, Burke County shines in job growth. Since 2014, jobs have nearly doubled. And of those new jobs, almost half are skilled, giving a clear advantage when it comes to attracting potential new residents and firms.

With the necessary pathways in place, the number of skilled jobs in the area could also offer a viable end-goal for workers interested in upskilling or returning to the labor force. A key part of talent attraction strategy is cultivating home-grown talent within the existing labor force. And that's an easier ask when skilled jobs that workers can aspire to already exist, rather than depending on a future move.

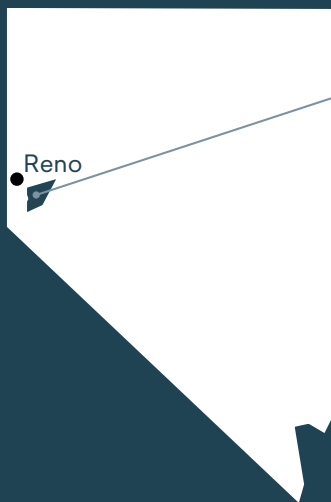
Interestingly, the construction of water line and related structures has grown by 900% in the last two years, and by more than 10,000% since 2014. These jobs may be driven by the expansion of the Alvin Vogtle nuclear generation plant in Waynesboro, Burke's county seat. The plant's growth is part of a [plan](#), proposed by Georgia Power and approved by the Georgia Public Service Commission, to transition away from coal and meet the electricity demands of Georgia's steadily growing population.

Burke's performance offers two important lessons:

FIRST, Burke demonstrates there are multiple routes to growth and prosperity. Attracting a high-profile company can sound the most attractive on paper, but investing in existing assets and regional infrastructure is often the most feasible first step.

SECOND, it offers a reminder that talent attraction is not a utopian measure that only perfect communities can meet. Burke has real work ahead to improve the educational attainment of its population, and halt that population's decline. But its overwhelming success in key areas of talent attraction—job growth, and especially skilled job growth—mean that there's a real opportunity to meet those challenges in the coming years.

MICRO COUNTIES



- ① Storey County, NV
- ② Butte County, ID
- ③ Loving County, TX
- ④ Petroleum County, MT
- ⑤ Alpine County, CA
- ⑥ Eureka County, NV
- ⑦ Liberty County, MT
- ⑧ Chase County, KS
- ⑨ McPherson County, NE
- ⑩ Glasscock County, TX

STOREY, NEVADA: A COMMUTER HUB

Storey County, Nevada is remarkable for having the highest overall score of any county in the US, despite its population of 4,000—just under the cutoff for inclusion in our year-to-year rankings. It's been steadily climbing over the past few years, going from 30 to 50 to nearly 80—and proving that talent attraction is by no means the exclusive territory of large metropolitan areas. At 4,048, Storey is the third least-populous county in Nevada. But its population is making modest increases, with nearly 7% growth since 2013 and another 4.5% projected by 2023.

Storey's jobs, on the other hand, are growing at a tremendous pace, with nearly a 330% increase since 2013 (320% times the national growth rate). The number of jobs grew from 4,058—roughly congruent with its population—to 17,398, over four times its size. Essentially, Storey has become a commuter hub, a place where people from other regions come to earn and spend money. To some degree, this is probably driven by the Western tourist industry. But the primary cause is almost certainly the [Tahoe Reno Industrial Center](#), home to the Tesla Gigafactory 1, and the largest industrial park in the world.

Storey shows how porous the boundaries of real-world economic development can be. Small towns trying to attract businesses to their area shouldn't restrict themselves to rigid city and county boundaries when making their case. If you have land, roads, and infrastructure, skilled talent may be able to commute, offering businesses a low-competition environment with an available workforce just next door.

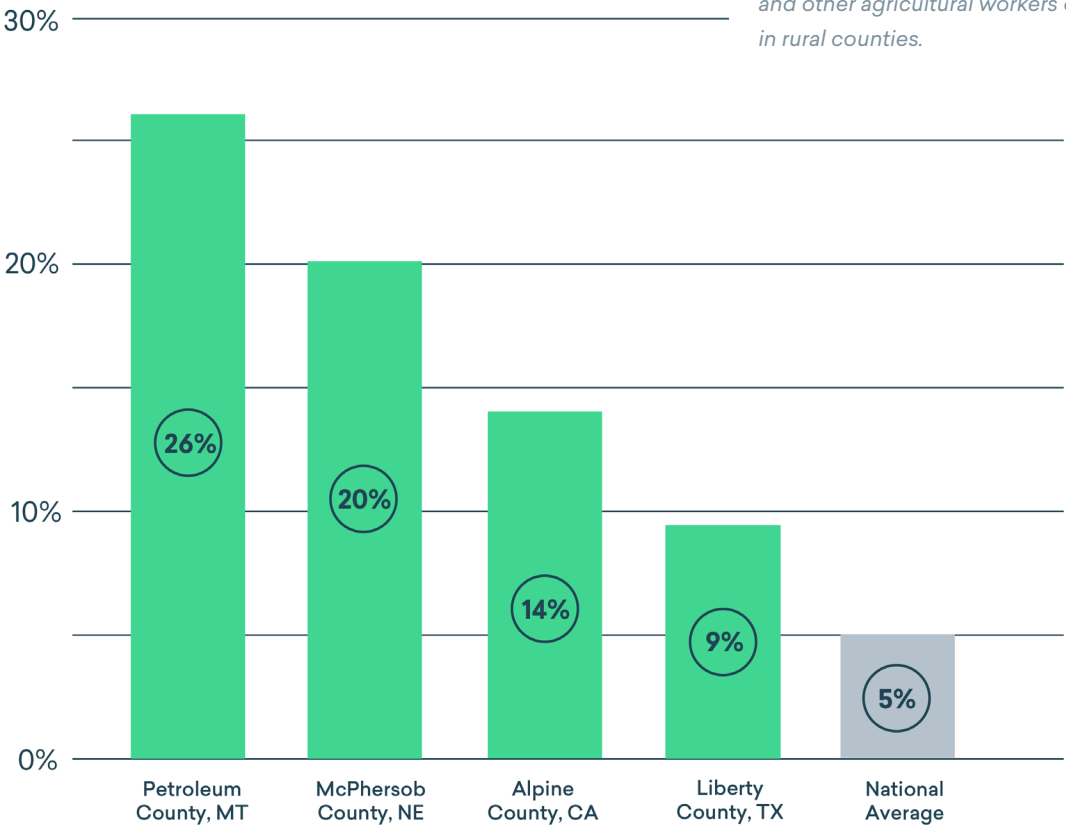
Extremely small counties tend to preclude much extrapolation or confident analysis of patterns, since the sample size involved is so small. Nevertheless, these counties are where thousands of Americans live, work and call home. As such, it's both fascinating and valuable to observe them to the best of our admittedly limited ability.

REMOTE WORKERS

Remote workers are a great, but often under-utilized way to build up your talent base. They tend to be employed in high skill jobs, often in tech-related or created fields. There are over 7 million remote workers in the US today—4.7% of the total workforce. And according to [Business Insider](#), the remote model is spreading to other roles, including legal, STEM, management, and marketing professions.

Remote Workers In Micro-Counties

Source: 5-Year American Community Survey (via Emsi Developer). Remote workers are those that respond positively to question of whether they work from home. This includes farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers often concentrated in rural counties.

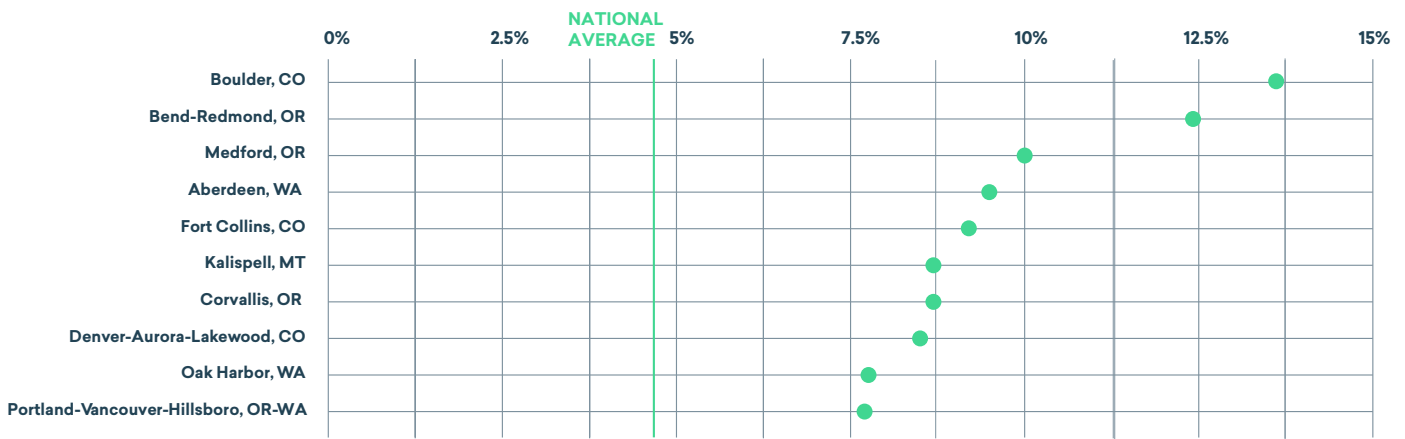


Even if remote workers aren't currently working at a company in your region, they're bringing their spending to the local economy, their tax dollars to local government, and their social capital to local schools and institutions. You can use their presence as evidence of an educated labor pool in discussion with prospective new firms. And when they're ready to make a change in their careers, the natural choice will be a business in the community where they already live and work.

We saw a higher than average percentage of remote workers in some of the micro counties too small to make it into our year to year rankings. This is probably due in part to the nature of the ACS survey, but it's not beyond the scope of possibility that remote workers will be a growing presence in rural areas in the coming years.

A few years ago, in a move that made [local news](#), BuzzFeed writer Anne Helen Petersen left her job in NYC to report remotely from Missoula, MT, on the American West for the site. Montana had several advantages: cost of living, a more peaceful lifestyle, and natural beauty. Plus, the Mountain West is her home turf: while many leave the regions to pursue educational and career opportunities, home exerts a powerful pull. These are all advantages that rural areas are positioned to capitalize on in coming years, especially as remote work becomes more prominent.

Remote Workers in Western Metro-Areas



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Moreover, we also saw several Western MSAs display similar patterns. Boulder, Colorado, has a noticeable 13% of its workforce working remotely, while Denver has nearly 8%. But several smaller cities also followed this pattern, including Bend, Oregon, and Kalispell, Montana.

WESTERN CITIES ON THE RISE

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CITIES IN LARGE COUNTIES

- 25 Denver, CO
- 27 Boise, ID
- 30 Bend, Oregon
- 34 Salt Lake City, Utah
- 29 Provo, Utah

CITIES IN SMALL COUNTIES

- 16 Astoria, OR
- 44 McCall, ID
- 45 Pendleton, OR

Interestingly, the counties associated with these smaller Western metropolitan areas appeared repeatedly in our top fifty.

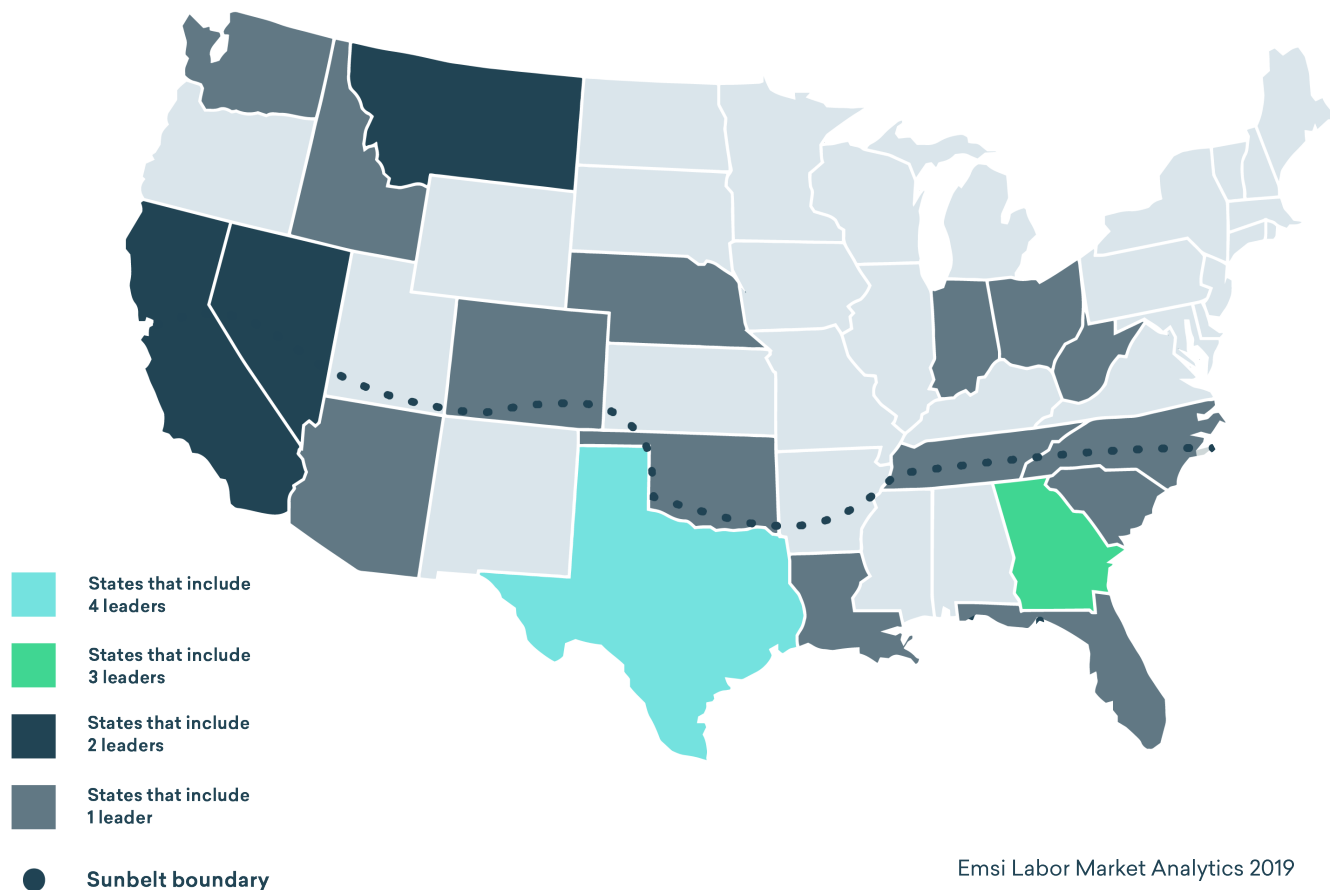
More and more creative class and digital workers seek to escape the pressures of long-standing tech and cultural enclaves. The growth pattern for smaller Western cities will probably only increase as educated, relatively affluent West Coast residents flee the housing markets of San Francisco and Seattle for cities like [Boise](#), [Denver](#), [Boulder](#), which host tech booms of their own.

THE SUNBELT DOMINATES

Over half of all our talent attraction leaders were located in Sun Belt states: the warm, sunny part of the US that stretches from the Southeast to the Southwest (60% of the big county leaders were in Southern states). This is probably due in large part to the southerly migration that picked up speed in and after World War II. The Sun Belt [has continued to grow steadily](#) since the recession. Population growth tends to mean a construction boom, which, coupled with the presence of tech and manufacturing companies, means a dynamic, high-growth environment.


In fact, overall job growth was a running motif for this year's high-scorers, which may mean there's room for non-Sunbelt regions to gain a talent edge by focusing heavily on education.


Concentration of top 10 leaders by state





METHODOLOGY


The following six metrics were equally weighted to create a z-score index to determine the best regions for talent attraction.


 **Net migration** uses IRS data collected between 2012 and 2016 to measure the net new residents that came to a county from inside or outside its state.

 **Overall job growth** is the 2014–18 percent job change for all wage-and-salary employees.

 **Skilled job growth** looks at 2014–18 percent growth for occupations that fall into one or more of the following three categories: those that typically require 1) a postsecondary certificate or above, 2) long-term on-the-job training, an apprenticeship, or residency/internship, or 3) five years or more of work experience in a related occupation. This allows us to see growth of jobs in occupations that require formal education (from a certificate to an advanced degree) and those in which experience or on-the-job training is preferred by employers. All education levels are reported at the national level by the BLS.

 **Educational attainment** is the 2014–18 percent change for adults over 25 with at least an associate degree

 **Regional competitiveness** is the 2014–18 competitive effect for skilled occupations (see above) using shift share. Competitive effect explains how much of job change is due to a region’s unique competitive advantages. This explains which counties are gaining (or losing) a greater share of skilled labor.

 **Annual openings per capita** are the sum of 2014–18 new jobs and replacement jobs (i.e., openings due to attrition) per 1,000 residents. Some regions might not create a flood of new jobs, but because of the attrition of its workforce through retirements, etc., replacement job needs could be high.



WHAT CAN MY COMMUNITY DO?

As the scorecard demonstrates, talent attraction takes place within a larger context of workforce development. This year, we saw several communities rise in rankings not because they imported a raft of millennial knowledge workers, but because they grew their overall economies and increased labor force participation. Nor is talent attraction simply a function of population and GRP, a game that smaller or more rural regions can't hope to win. In fact, Los Angeles, America's second largest city, consistently ranks near the bottom for large counties.

But workforce development is fraught with its own challenges. Too often, service delivery is fragmented, with different types of institutions missing the benefits of collaboration, and without sufficient connection to the real, immediate needs of businesses. Moreover, too often all relevant parties—workers, businesses, educational institutions, and workforce development

organizations—speak mutually unintelligible languages about what they need and offer.

The following is a roadmap for overcoming these challenges, along with concrete examples of best practices. This roadmap consists of a few basic principles—coordinate and collaborate, follow the lead of employers, focus on skills—over the span of a full talent development cycle.

Regions of any size can follow this time-tested roadmap for attracting new talent, developing already existing workers, and connecting both to employers. These strategies include regional steps for both short- and long-term talent growth that communities have been adopting since Emsi released its first report four years ago. This talent roadmap has evolved over time to incorporate real-world community best practice. It represents a crucial component of the talent-attraction toolbox for large and small regions alike.

1

Reach Out: 0 to 6 Months

Long-term investment is critical, but you can't wait to reap the 10-year harvest before attending to the needs of businesses hungry for talent right now. This is the time to think about the migration section of the index: if your community doesn't yet have the local workforce and prospective businesses need, can you get them to move to you? Adding to your talent base in the short term works synergistically with long-term efforts: by finding professionals and skilled workers for businesses, you ensure that they stay in your community and add to local prosperity, enabling ambitious long-term plans.

Consider what your community has to offer.

Is your cost of living lower than average? Do you have amenities that make it a great place for families? Are businesses ready to offer jobs to those who relocate?

Find out where the talent is.

Do you have a local college you can recruit from? If students tend to leave the area for education, do you

know where they tend to go? You'll have the best chance of competing with every other county in America if you target workers who already have some connection to the region.

Think outside the box.

Remote workers don't need a job in hand to relocate, and once they're in your region, they're part of both your tax base and your potential pool of skilled labor. Caregivers who have temporarily left the workforce may have highly valuable skills. College students looking for internships offer both talent for employers and an opportunity to cement their ties with your region.

In all cases, you'll need a strong web presence driving the curious to a homepage where you can make the case for your region. In addition, a well coordinated marketing strategy that focuses on the needs of the target audience you are attracting back to your community, makes all the difference. Affordable real estate and stellar schools can help seal the deal with people with children. Millennials are drawn to cultural and lifestyle amenities, sure, but [research from Livability](#) shows

they are most concerned about affordability and job opportunity when considering relocation. Those two concerns transcend generations.

An explosion of talent attraction websites and remote worker programs have cropped up in recent years from regional economic development organizations and cities or states. One of the first to the scene was Greater MSP's "[Make It. MSP](#)" initiative—which goes well beyond a website. Upstate SC Alliance's "[Move Up](#)" campaign, which includes a robust talent site and job board, is another well-executed and full-orbed talent attraction initiative. The common ingredients with these and other examples are a blend of job seeker resources, key local business and industry callouts, and community profiles, all fueled by high-quality research.

[ICR Iowa](#), a regional EDO serving the Iowa City-Cedar Rapids (ICR) metro, provides another example of outside-the-box talent attraction thinking. It has brilliantly branded and marketed ICR through

lighthearted, informative [videos and ads](#). And it offers innovative services like [ICR Talent Hub](#) that connects job seekers to career opportunities and individualized support to navigate the job-finding experience and a program called [Wingman](#) that helps new ICR residents get the lay of the region by connecting them to a community champion, or a “wingman.”

2

Microcredentials & Just-In-Time Programs: 6 Months to 2 Years

We are living through exciting—and challenging—transitions in the economy. Technological advances means that new businesses and even industries are appearing at a rapid pace, while manufacturing is increasingly moving toward a blended model where traditional production knowledge must be matched with design, engineering, and management skills.

Furthermore, all these changes are manifesting differently in different regional contexts.

Traditional education still provides a necessary foundation for this

fast-paced change, but in many cases, it's no longer enough on its own. Quickly attainable, stackable credentials that meet industry needs as they emerge are critical to help workers learn new skills, or transfer existing skills to a new context. Just-in-time inventory management matches raw material delivery to production schedules. Just-in-time programs should do the same with human capital. These programs need to be agile enough to respond to emerging needs, and require less investment from workers than longer-term educational programs.

Take your cues from employers.

Short-term upskilling programs should be pegged to urgent, expressed needs from local employers. Bring business leaders into conversation with local community colleges and workforce development institutions; ask what specific skills are most keenly felt as lacking.

Think in terms of skills.

Skills are the point at which the activities of educators, employers, and job seekers all converge. At

every level of training, they offer a language that brings actors from different contexts into alignment. But they're especially crucial in short-term credentialing, where they help cut through noise and create lean on-ramps to specific capabilities.

Take advantage of opportunities outside traditional higher ed.

Not that higher ed isn't an invaluable partner, but community colleges and four-year institutions play their most important role later in the pipeline. Right now, coding academies, business incubators, apprenticeship programs, internships, and certifications like the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate are all your friends. Workforce boards can also offer valuable assistance here, by identifying individuals whose skills are mostly transferable to a new job, and working with businesses to provide the last leg of training necessary.

Fortunately, there's no shortage of cutting-edge programs leading the way. For example, [LED FastStart](#), an industry-led state workforce training

program in Louisiana, gives new and expanding businesses customized training, recruitment help, and more. Rather than simply offering a pre-set selection of courses, LED FastStart works with a company to develop a custom training program. So far, they've helped companies train talent in everything from project management to web design to 3D graphics. [Skillful](#), a non-profit initiative of the Markle Foundation, works directly with Colorado residents who lack a college degree. Their career coaching focuses on helping their enrollees gain specific skills, and they partner with over 100 workforce boards, employer associations, and other institutions. And [Ascend Indiana](#) helps fill local skill gaps by connecting local employers to local talent using online networks.

programs. These programs, which often take place at the associate's level or in the community college context more generally, require more of a time investment from workers. That's why they're helpful in developing broader and more rigorous technical competencies, and preparing the workforce for an industry as well as a specific job or business.

Incorporate employers into big-picture planning.

This is a great time to think about sector strategies. What industries do you want your region to be competitive for in five or 10 years? What would it take to bring them to your region? Developing a plan around specific industry clusters can make it easier to get buy-in from key stakeholders in both government and higher education.

Keep thinking about local business needs.

While you develop your sector-focused strategy, it's important to keep helping local businesses solve the talent problems they're facing right now. And once you've identified the needs, partnerships

3

Certificates & Technical Programs: 2 to 4 Years

This stage is an extension of the micro-credentialing phase. But rather than just-in-time upskilling, the focus is on growing your region's base on skilled workers with technical and certificate

between community colleges and local firms can help businesses fill talent gaps faster while providing students a smooth pathway to employment.

Partner with community colleges.

Two-year colleges want their programs to be aligned with regional demand. If you have a clear strategy, and can validate your plan with data, you can work together to review curriculum and identify any gaps between existing programs important skills. A data-validated plan can also help colleges secure grants and other funding to launch any potential new programs.

[Columbus State Community College](#) has reaped the rewards of close collaboration with employers. The school's Modern Manufacturing program offers three majors—Electronic Engineering, Electro-Mechanical Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering—pegged to the needs of local industry partners. In turn, those employers create mentorship work study programs for students before they've finished their education. In a similar vein, [Columbus Technical](#)

[College](#) in Georgia serves as a workforce development hub for the region, both developing programs according to feedback from the business community, and using the college's talent pipeline to pitch new industry partners.

4

Higher Education: 4 to 7 Years

Mid-skill workers are an integral part of the economy, but at the end of the day, you can't attract talent-hungry businesses without a college-educated workforce. While you can certainly attract mid-career workers from elsewhere, the most efficient way to capture the demographic is enabling them to build their careers in your community from the beginning. Local colleges and universities are key. They are the pipeline that brings high-skill workers into your region—your goal is to prevent that pipeline from being diverted elsewhere. The first step to capturing the pipeline is understanding where it's going. Using [Profile Analytics](#), you can track alumni migration trends to understand how far or close local students tend to move, and even

what they tend to move for. Once you understand the situation on the ground, you can take action to retain more graduates.

Help college students begin thinking about careers in the context of your area.

Economic development organizations can partner with college career centers to host information centers on local talent demand, and direct local firms to the career fairs where they can connect with college students. And if regional colleges and universities have [Career Coach](#) as a web plug-in, students can explore the local opportunities directly related to their degrees.

Build and promote internship opportunities.

College students are as eager to find a job as communities are to attract talent. If you can help them forge connections with area businesses and gain on-the-job training before they graduate, they're less likely to begin their search in an entirely new and unknown locale upon graduation.

Use data to help firms broaden their search criteria for college-educated talent.

Making new hires is expensive, and it's no wonder that human resource departments play it safe by limiting their search to the degrees that seem most directly connected to the job at hand. But a recent [Emsi analysis](#) of nearly a million profiles found that often, students from degrees as dissimilar as philosophy and business are filling the same roles within businesses, and exhibiting many of the same skills. The data shows that businesses are already finding valuable talent from degrees outside business and STEM. If you can alert them to this fact, and help them start thinking in terms of skills rather than abstract qualifications, they can start actively recruiting from a wider pool at local colleges.

[Greater New Orleans Inc.](#) is an economic development organization serving the larger NOLA region. One of their initiatives, GNOu, develops custom training programs and curricula for local colleges and universities. Potential programs can come from either a company with a need or a college or university with

an idea they'd like to try. Crucially, GNOu then validates the program idea with data to ensure that it will serve the entire New Orleans region. Some colleges even have internal versions of this practice. [Southern New Hampshire University](#) has an in-house academic research and development unit, the Sandbox CoLABorative, which uses labor market data to continually monitor how well the college is meeting local economic needs, and adapt accordingly.

5

Preparing For a Long-Term Future: 7 to 10 Years

The final stage of talent attraction is all about laying the foundation for the future. This means thinking about students at every stage of their progress through the educational system. We often think of recruitment and career preparation as something that takes place in a narrow window between the ages 18 and 22. But how many of us are working in a field at least indirectly related to a dream, a hobby, or a talent that manifested in high school or earlier? To develop a steady stream of talent rather than a

short-lived flash flood, you need to start early.

Bring career counseling to the high school level.

Secondary students can take career assessments, attend career fairs and information sessions, and even participate in internships. And the sooner they start thinking about the opportunities in their hometown, the more likely they are to pursue those opportunities when it comes time to make decisions.

Look for ways to keep more students in the educational pipeline.

No matter how many amazing educational institutions and career guidance resources exist in your community, an information gap can prevent students from taking full advantage of them. Students with high social capital often have parents and school counselors shepherding towards optimal post-secondary choices. For students from less fortunate backgrounds especially, economic development organizations can fill a crucial gap. Educate students about the scholarships, grants, community

college transfer programs, loans, and work-studies available to help students from all walks of life who want to pursue higher education. Promote the many options between a four-year degree and further education. Students who are not college bound can still benefit greatly from apprenticeships, technical certificates, and associate's degrees.

Think about hands-on, accessible opportunities to develop key skills.

Research has shown that early exposure helps keep more students on a STEM focused path. And don't limit yourself to STEM: real fluency in skills like public speaking, problem solving, and critical analysis are extremely valuable to employers. Nor is the classroom the only place where young children can interact with these concepts and skills—anything from a 4H club to a theater troupe can help put students on a path of lifelong learning.

Push for investments in your community.

What would make your region a more attractive place to live? Do you have efficient and well-

functioning public (Phoenix, the seat of Maricopa County, recently voted to [continue financing expansion](#) of the light rail system constructed in 2008)? Do you have publicly accessible wi-fi? A recent [Pew report](#) found that a third of rural Americans do not have broadband at home, making this a strong area for enterprising rural communities to gain a competitive edge.

[SA Works](#), a nationally recognized workforce development program in San Antonio, develops career pathways and provides massive work-based learning program to prepare workers for in-demand regional jobs and increase economic mobility. Meanwhile, [Workforce Solutions](#), in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley, is [bringing Emsi's Career Coach to high schools](#). And innovative educational materials like [PhysicsQuest](#) (fun, interactive, physics learning modules) are helping bring STEM enthusiasm to the grade-school level.

MOVING FORWARD

The talent attraction strategy outlined above boils down to three basic steps, articulated differently over different time frames.

Assess your community's strengths and weaknesses.

Be honest about the problems you're facing, so that you can come up with real solutions. By the same token, be the most enthusiastic cheerleader for your community's strengths. If you see what's wonderful about your home, others will as well.

Identify the most pressing needs in your community.

Resources are always more limited than we would like, so you need to prioritize the most urgent needs and the greatest potential impact. Communicating with employers and framing discussions in terms of skills wherever possible will keep you focused on the essential over the extraneous.

Use data to guide your strategy.

If you want to deliver measurable improvements to your community, data is your best friend. Not only does it ensure that you won't be led astray by wishful thinking or bias as you develop your plan, it's the single best way to get key stakeholders on board with your vision.

Building a local talent base is not an easy task. But it offers incalculable benefits to the economy, to the strength and resilience of our communities, and to future generations of Americans.

Good luck.

We'll see you here next year, steadily climbing the list.



Successfully attracting talent to your community requires a good understanding of your area, businesses, and people. Our aim is to give you the insight to identify areas of opportunity and take actionable steps to meet your goals.

We would love to hear about the challenges you face and discuss how we can work together.

Emsi is the industry leader in labor market data and guiding to professionals in economic development, workforce development, higher education, commercial real estate, and talent acquisition.

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