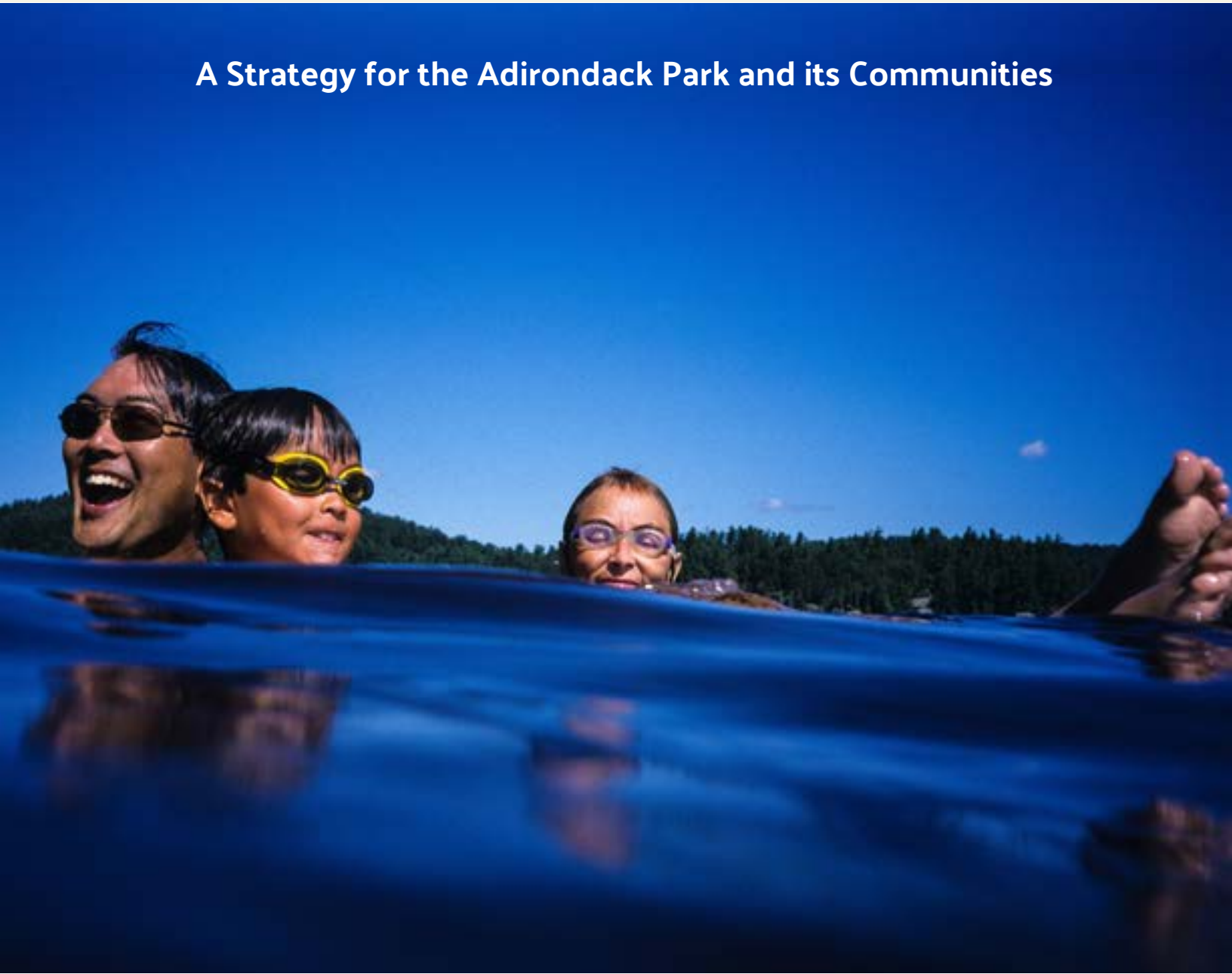


# ⤴ ATTRACTING NEW RESIDENTS

## A Strategy for the Adirondack Park and its Communities



FEBRUARY, 2021

# Introduction

Over the past fifty years, conserved land within the Adirondack Park has dramatically increased, permanently preserving hundreds of thousands of acres. At the same time, global economic, technology and consumer changes ushered in tectonic shifts in the resource-based economy that once fueled corporate, community and individual prosperity in the region. Thousands of forestry, mining and manufacturing jobs that supported prosperous communities left – and with them, young people seeking opportunity. Municipal budgets, infrastructure and vitality suffered accordingly, hollowing out many communities and making them less desirable places to live. The costs to support critical civic institutions – schools, health care, emergency services – exceed the local capacity necessary to sustain them.

**The crisis today is that there are simply not enough young people to sustain Adirondack communities.**

This strategy seeks to build on the lessons of the past and the many strengths of the region, including natural resources that attract millions of visitors annually and supports forest-based and outdoor recreation jobs. The strategy is designed to provide community leaders and local, regional, and state nonprofits and public entities with a guide for creating the conditions that may help attract a new generation of residents to the Adirondacks and encourage young people who have left to return. To have a chance at success, stakeholders from diverse perspectives must acknowledge and break current business-as-usual practices, align priorities, attract new resources and redirect existing ones, and bring new urgency to collective and community-based action.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*(Note: Community Assessment Questionnaire is available as a fillable pdf, upon request.)*

# Project Background

The Attracting New Residents strategy grew out of a private initiative intended to address the central challenge hindering the Adirondack Park's communities from realizing a vibrant future. The objective of this work is to attract young and entrepreneurial new residents to relocate to communities within the Adirondack Park. In this context, "entrepreneurial" is not defined as a vocation, but rather a mindset and attitude characterized by creativity, innovation, and adaptability.

Core assumptions underlying the initiative include:

- a. **Common Need:** Adirondack Park communities need to retain and attract younger residents to ensure economic, community and environmental well-being.
- b. **Natural and Human Assets:** The Adirondack Park's value propositions include the sheer scale of its protected natural landscape, proximity to urban areas, broad appreciation by public and private entities, and a sizeable number of visitors who have an established and ongoing relationship with the region.
- c. **Shared Ownership:** Multiple communities, entities and individuals are already working on components of this strategy. Their participation is critical to make this strategy work; bringing in more voices – including those less frequently heard – is also essential.
- d. **Coordinated Strategy:** The demographic challenge facing the Adirondack Park is decades in the making and will require a focused, sustained, and well-funded campaign to alleviate. This strategy must be community-driven; it will not meet its objectives if it is assumed to be led by the state or one lone entity. While coordination of the strategy will require centralized stewardship, communities across the Adirondacks need to be active and engaged owners of its delivery if the region is serious about reversing the current socio-demographic trends.

Hundreds of voices have contributed to this document through individual interviews, online surveys, focus groups, and the annual Common Ground Alliance (CGA) forum held virtually over three days in July 2020. This strategy provides community stakeholders and leaders with a base map from which to position themselves for future population stability and growth, recognizing the conditions that are necessary to attract the target audience. This is a long-term value proposition. As such, it requires significant and sustained leadership and resources and the alignment and support of the region's nonprofit and public sectors to realize the long-term vision.

“

The theme of 'Attracting the Next Generation' for the 2020 CGA Forum was well received – and rightfully so. It is a common subject around which all discussions can focus and produce useful action items. It is a common concern that is seen as the weak link/limiting factor to vibrant society & economy of the Adirondacks.

*Craig Leggett, Supervisor,  
Town of Chester*

”

# Regional Need

The demographic challenges facing the Adirondacks and other rural parts of the country are well-documented. Within the past decade, several publications focused on the Adirondacks have looked at these trends extensively, including the [Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project](#) (2009); the five-year update to this project, [The Adirondack Park: Seeking Balance](#) (2014); the Northern Border Regional Commission [Five Year Strategic Plan, 2017-2021](#); and [The Adirondack Park and Rural America: Economic and Population Trends 1970-2010](#) (2019).

These publications share a common recognition that the Adirondacks face a demographic challenge through population decline and the aging of the population. Notable conclusions include:

- **Increase in Median Age:** The median age of residents of the Adirondacks has been increasing at a rate that is outpacing the rising median age of New York State and the country overall. By 2030, a third of Park residents are projected to be over 60.
- **Loss of Young People:** Population projections based on current trends indicate that population loss across the Park – especially among younger people – is projected to continue and accelerate through 2030.
- **Insufficient In-Migration:** The past six decades of census data reveals a common *out*-migration trend among younger age cohorts coupled with a rebound effect of *in*-migration for members of each generation over 30. In-migration does not compensate for overall population loss, however; we still see a *net* population loss among the Late Baby Boom, Gen X, Pre-Millennial and Millennial generations.
- **Adirondack Competitive Advantage:** The Adirondack Park attracts significantly more young retirees (ages 55–64) than other rural parts of the country. This brings significant resources to Adirondack communities, but because of their stage of life, these individuals are not fixing our demographic challenges, such as stabilizing our school populations or expanding our workforce.

Our analysis of these trends across the Northern Forest – the 30-million-acre region encompassing New York’s Tug Hill Plateau and Adirondack regions, Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom, New Hampshire’s North Country, and Maine’s North Woods, which share ecological and economic patterns – confirms the significance of these issues while placing Adirondack trends in the context of a broader and similar region. The analysis also highlights distinct opportunities to attract more diverse populations to rural communities.

The Adirondacks face a demographic challenge: population decline and the aging of the population.

## *Regional Need, continued*

The loss of younger people and the aging of the existing population pose several significant challenges to the long-term viability of our communities, including:

- Schools are at the center of vibrant, demographically diverse communities, and shrinking school populations threaten these important community institutions.
- Workforce participation is vital to support the businesses and services required to sustain and grow our economy and support our communities.
- Volunteerism in key community institutions such as emergency services is threatened by the lack of younger residents.
- Several of these impacts have cyclical impacts – for example, it may be harder to attract new residents to communities with shrinking school populations, which in turn reinforces the trend.

To sustain year-round businesses, community services and strong local schools, we must arrest overall community population decline and take an intentional and strategic shift to work collectively to attract and retain new residents to bolster the strength of our communities.



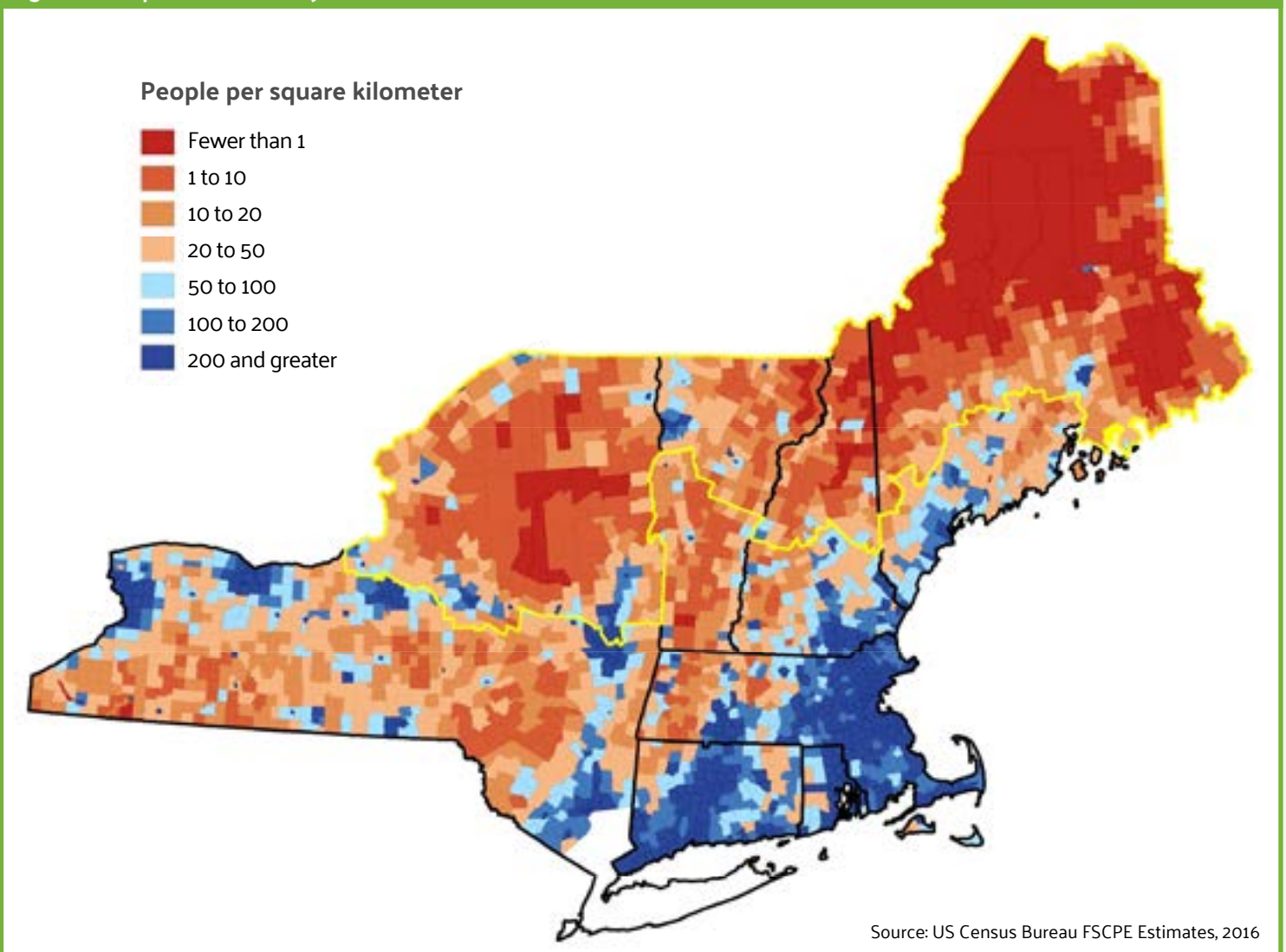
# Adirondack and Regional Data

The maps below illustrate the need for a new approach to address the Adirondacks' demographic challenges. Regional data helps us draw conclusions as to what caused the current condition, while more granular data helps identify more specific opportunities within the Park's communities.

Below are selected slides and comments presented by Joe Short, Vice-President of the Northern Forest Center, at the 2020 Adirondack Common Ground Alliance.

- In many demographic analyses the Adirondacks looks like most rural parts of the Northern Forest –particularly northern Maine – allowing us to compare experiences between the region's communities.

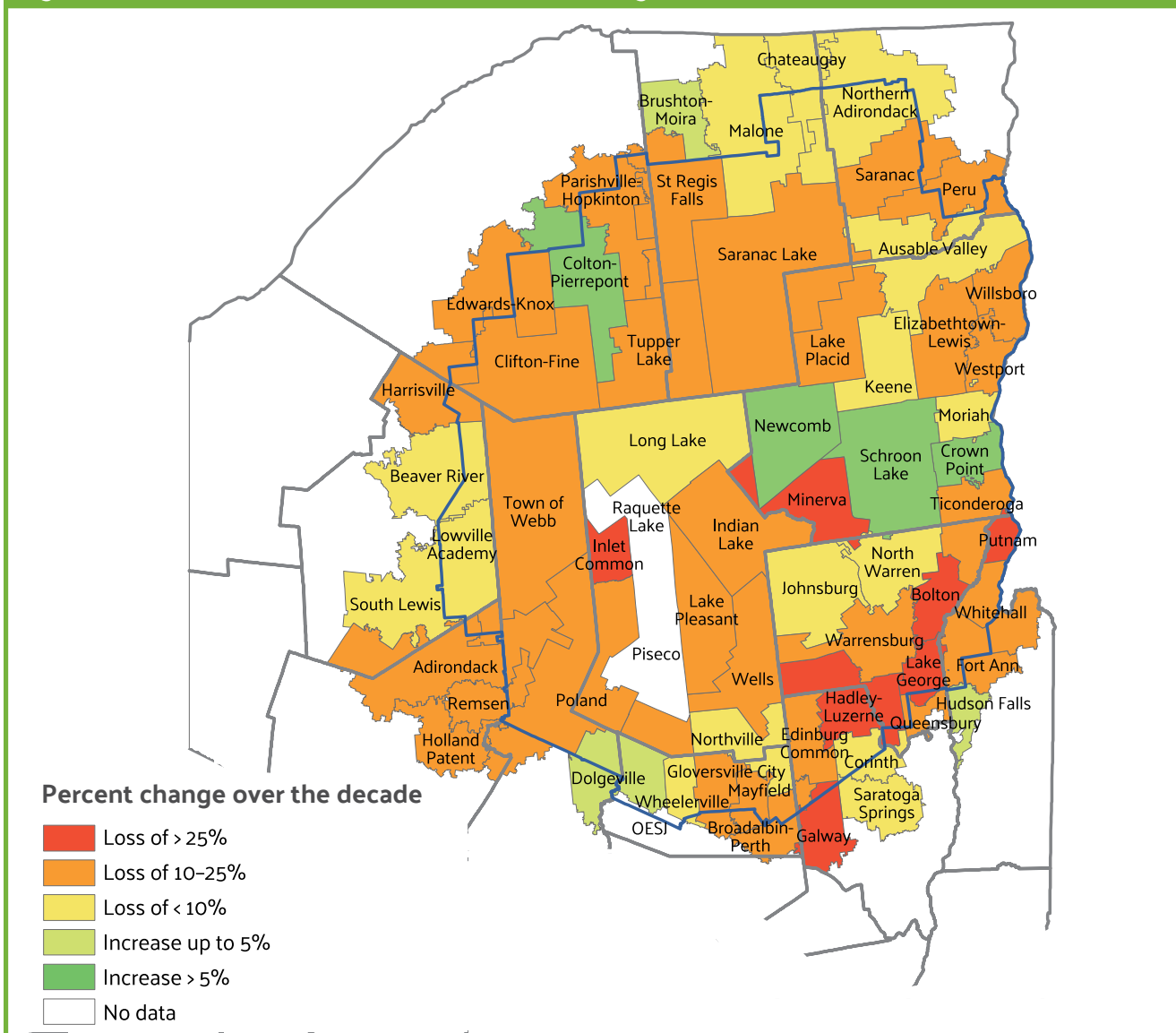
Figure 1: Population density in the Northern Forest



Credit: Demographic Change in the Northern Forest, presentation by Dr. Kenneth Johnson, University of New Hampshire Carsey Institute, March 2018

- School enrollment in most Adirondack school districts has dropped over the past decade, many by more than 10% and some by more than 20%.
- Nationally, counties classified by USDA as “recreation counties” are attracting younger, family-aged adults and older adults more than “manufacturing counties.” However, we intuit that counties with strong manufacturing *and* recreation sectors would outpace both, suggesting an opportunity for the Adirondacks to capitalize on its manufacturing legacy and its many recreation amenities.
- The racial diversity of the Adirondacks and the Northern Forest overall is low, while the most diverse parts of the country tend to be those places that are attracting the greatest number of new residents.

Figure 2: 2008 – 2018 school district enrollment changes

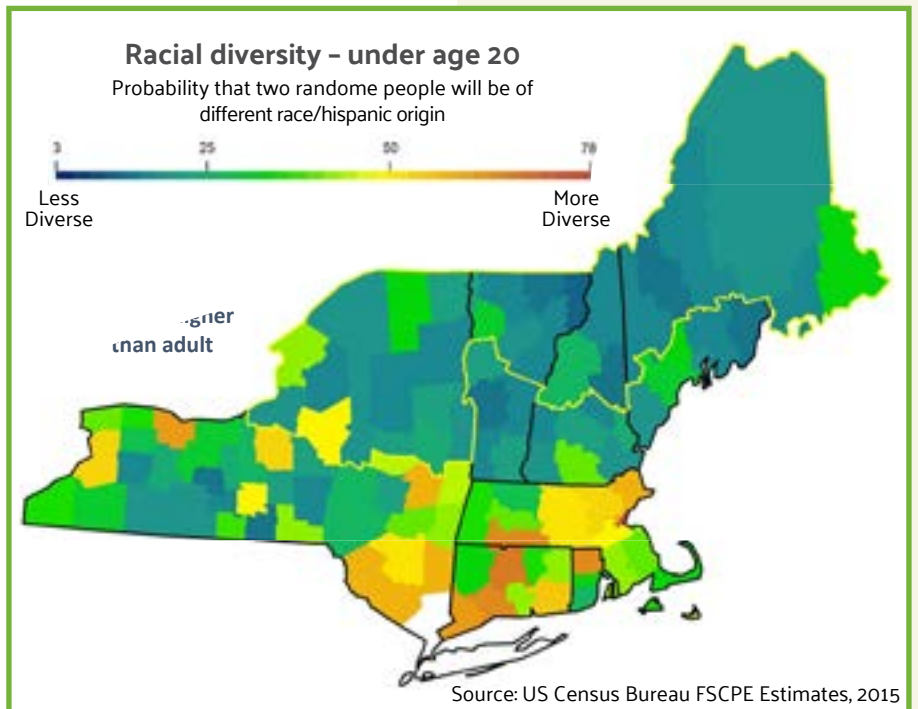
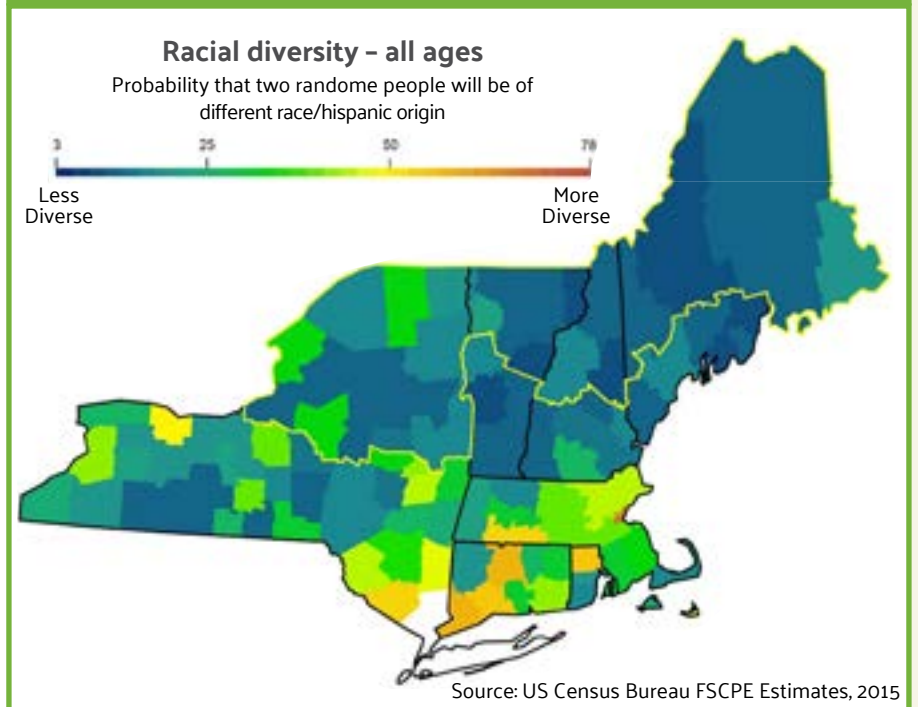




- The Adirondacks have greater racial diversity among children under 20 than in the population as a whole – reflecting a potential path toward becoming a more diverse region and indicating that we need to continue welcoming more diverse and younger people.

The data presented at the 2020 Common Ground Alliance and outlined in the previously cited reports point to the acute demographic need that is well understood by people in the region. Polling among the ~200 participants in the 2020 Common Ground Alliance Forum revealed that there is a widespread recognition of the need to attract new residents. Eighty-four percent of participants agree or strongly agree that the demographics of the Adirondacks pose a problem for communities, and 98% agree or strongly agree that attracting new residents, particularly younger ones, is necessary and positive.

Figure 3: Racial diversity in the northeast in 2015: All ages and youth



Credit: Demographic Change in the Northern Forest, presentation by Dr. Kenneth Johnson, University of New Hampshire Carsey Institute, March 2018

# Strategy Context

## Coronavirus Pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has created a significant – and unprecedented – context for this work. On one hand, anecdotal data points to a strong resurgence in the regional real estate market and individuals who are now seeing a new opportunity to relocate to the Adirondacks while working remotely for their existing employers. On the other hand, many institutions and businesses central to the strength of our communities have been threatened by the pandemic, and many existing residents have been strained by its economic impacts.

This strategy is mindful of, but not beholden to, the impacts of the pandemic. This work was important before the pandemic and it remains important in the context of all that we are experiencing today. While we cannot perfectly understand the implications of the pandemic for this topic, we believe that:

- More people than ever are experiencing the opportunity to work remotely. Regions that are well-positioned to attract these individuals will benefit from this trend, while other regions will lag – emphasizing the importance of the project presented here.
- The qualities and amenities of the Adirondacks position the region to benefit from this trend. Strong communities, an abundance of public land, ready access to recreational areas, and the opportunity to easily socially distance are qualities that individuals and families are seeking out in the short term and presumably will be attractive in the longer term as well.
- The pandemic is also casting new light on the central importance of our healthcare facilities, childcare opportunities, schools, higher education institutions, social services, and businesses, many of which are facing new stresses today. The effort to attract new residents cannot succeed unless our communities' foundation is strong.
- Increased pressure on housing in the Adirondacks is having and will continue to have negative implications on younger people seeking quality housing, and in this way the pandemic's fueling of the real estate market (for second homes, etc.) is a challenge exacerbating our existing housing problems.

**The pandemic has  
created new opportunity  
- and new challenges -  
for Adirondack  
communities.**

## Racial Equity and Justice

The increased national attention on the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as specific acts of racism within our own communities, have opened and broadened conversations in the Adirondacks about diversity, equity, and inclusion. This strategy is not a full dive into the issue of how this region can address these issues; however, diversity, equity and inclusion are still important lenses through which this strategy's success will be measured. Our work will not be successful if these issues are not elevated and addressed at the community level through the understanding that:

- Our actions speak volumes; wherever possible, we need to bring diverse perspectives to the table.
- Inclusive engagement of current residents – including the least well-off in our communities – is an important step towards holistic community development.
- Developing assets and renewing economic vitality cannot be done at the expense of vulnerable populations.

The Adirondacks *can* be a welcoming place to visit and to live for everyone regardless of race, class, gender or sexual preference – but this is not the current reality. We must acknowledge and address these weaknesses – an idea that is explored, imperfectly and incompletely, in this strategy. Moving towards inclusiveness will require commitment, partnerships, and honest reflection, and will be an ongoing process for Adirondack communities.

# Assessing Target Audiences

This effort builds on a diversity of other complementary regional initiatives and publications, some of which took place in the past and some of which are ongoing. Those with published findings include:

- The [Hamlets of the Adirondacks studies](#), which articulate a vision of community vitality centered in the Park's hamlets which is closely related to the community enhancements needed to ensure that we can attract new residents.
- [The Adirondack Park: The Next Twenty-Five Years](#), a vision and strategy document by Jim Herman and Dave Mason based on extensive community input through a scenario-planning exercise, envisions strong, locally-rooted communities that build on their strengths and address their challenges. One idea that directly speaks to our approach is: *"Many new residents start off as visitors. Whenever we promote the Park, we include promoting it as a place to live, start a business or go to college. We attract new families to come live here and add more age and racial diversity to our communities."*
- The [Adirondack Initiative for Wired Work Survey Report](#). This publication, commissioned by Clarkson University, specifically assesses opportunities for remote work. The analysis was completed in 2010 and some of its findings are less relevant today, but some remain useful, including this takeaway from their survey: *"There is a direct positive correlation between length of time visiting the Park and the likelihood considering living in the Park and telecommuting."*
- [Meeting the Needs of Adirondack Communities: Challenges and Opportunities](#), an initiative by the Adirondack Foundation, includes a focused look at relevant topics such as housing and childcare. More generally, the report discusses the need to ensure that current residents of the Park's communities can thrive here – a concept that is central to our strategy.
- [Connecting Millennials to the Adirondacks](#), an initiative by the Wild Center to understand how we can better attract younger visitors. While the publication is focused on travel, it sheds light on young visitors' preferences and the limitations of the current Adirondack brand – overly focused on hiking, the outdoors, and natural scenery at the expense of cultural vitality, food and agriculture, activities for kids, and community gathering opportunities.

“

I love the strong sense of community here. People are steeped in the culture of the place. Yes, there is a beautiful landscape, but that is second [to the community and the people]. It's not easy to live here, so if you do it, you do it with the support of your community.

”

## Target Audience #1: Visitors

The region's tourism agencies, notably the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST), provide data that build an understanding of our current visitors and their needs and perceptions. From several research reports, including the [2018 Leisure Travel Study](#) and the [2017 Longwoods International Adirondacks Visitor Research report](#), we can compile a fairly robust picture of Adirondack visitors (with the caveat that the Leisure Travel Study focuses on visitors to Essex, Franklin and Hamilton Counties). The reports show that:

- 60–70% of visitors to the Adirondacks are from New York State, many from the Albany, Syracuse, and Rochester areas, and some from NYC.
- Visitors are primarily (>93%) white/Caucasian.
- Children make up a quarter to a third of our visitors.
- Of adults staying overnight, half are between 25 and 44 and more than half have one or more children in their household.
- 45% of visitors' primary trip purpose is to visit friends or relatives, more than any other category.
- Many visitors are repeat visitors. 83% have been to the Adirondacks before, and 64% have visited within the past year.
- A great majority of visitors (83%) traveled by personal car or truck, with 7% utilizing a personal camper, RV, or motorcycle and 11% using a rental car. Only 9% used a bus or a train as part of their travel transportation.
- Visitors have high levels of satisfaction with their overall trip experience and particular components of their trip, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Elements driving visitors' trip satisfaction



## Assessing Target Audiences, continued

These data suggest a solid base in terms of converting visitors into residents but indicate several challenges as well, including:

- Low ethnic diversity among visitors is a problem if we want to use our existing visitor base to attract a more diverse population.
- Relative satisfaction among visitors is lower related to food and music/entertainment. These features are important to showing younger visitors that they could live here. They may in part indicate an information problem (e.g., no good way to learn about local music).
- High reliance on personal vehicles for travel impedes travel to the Adirondacks for some, including those who prefer public transportation options.

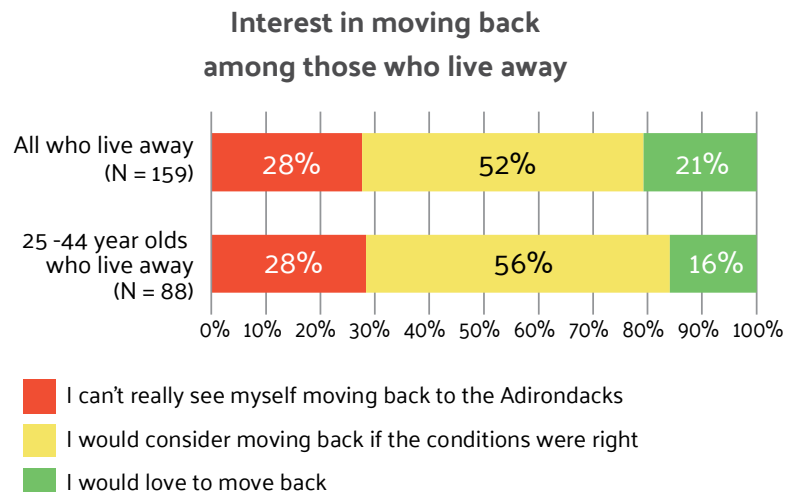
### Target Audience #2: Adirondack High School and College Alumni

To test the hypothesis that familiarity with the Adirondacks increases some individual's interest in returning, we surveyed individuals who attended or graduated from schools (primary, secondary, or college) in the Adirondacks. We distributed an online survey via partner networks, email lists, alumni groups, and on social media in August 2020, asking questions about the factors and preferences affecting this group's decisions on where to live.

We received 361 complete surveys. We asked what path respondents took after graduation and received the following responses, shown here with the shorthand names we've used for these categories in the results as well as the response rates for each:

- Stayed in the same community [Stayed] – 17% (61 individuals)
- Moved within the Adirondacks [Moved within] – 6% (23 individuals)
- Moved away and then returned [Away then back] – 33% (118 individuals)
- Moved away and not returned [Away not back] – 34% (123 individuals)
- Moved away, returned, and then moved away again [Away back away] – 10% (36 individuals)

Figure 5 - Can we entice our alumni to return?



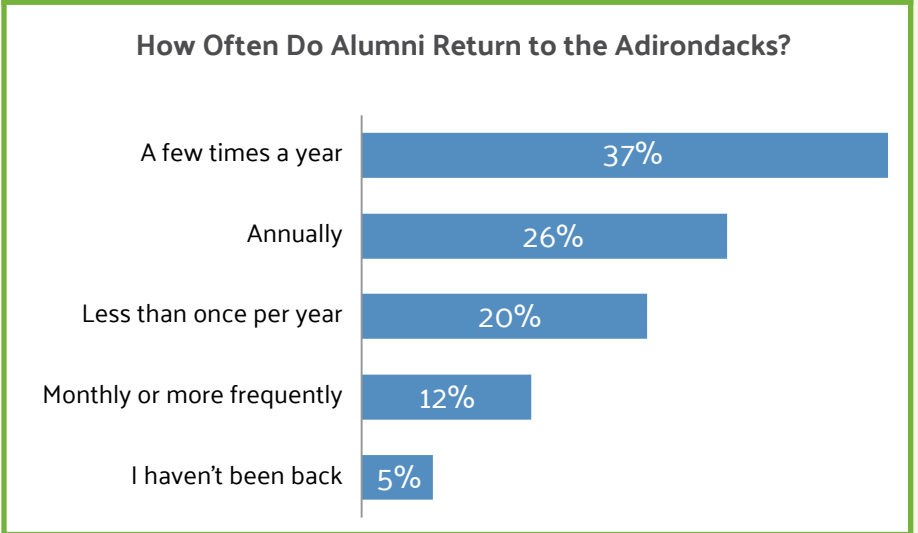
## Assessing Target Audiences, continued

In addition to asking about basic demographic information, we captured information about the specific factors that have influenced respondents' decisions and their attitudes about living in the Adirondacks. We found that a high proportion of the respondents not currently living in the Adirondacks are open to, or are very interested in, moving back.

Among this same group, we asked how often they have visited the Adirondacks since graduation. The responses are shown in Figure 6. We already know that these individuals are knowledgeable about life in the Adirondacks; these results confirm that area alumni are loyal visitors to the region, and a significant majority of them are open to or quite interested in moving back if they can find a way to do so.

Additional findings from the survey are discussed below and are presented in Appendix 3.

Figure 6 – Our alumni are visitors



## Learning from Existing Residents

To better understand the perspectives of newer regional residents, especially younger ones, we reviewed notes from previous interviews with 13 residents and conducted 13 additional interviews with young residents. We sought to understand the nuances of the decision-making process for these individuals and learn about their experiences.

Jobs prospects – and perceptions of career opportunity – figure centrally in the decision-making process that our target demographic (working-age individuals) face as they think about where to live. This dynamic played out differently in the Adirondacks for the individuals we interviewed. For some, the job was what brought them to the area; for others, they came to the area first and then looked for a job. Others found a way to be self-employed while living here, and still others found ways to work remotely with their previous employer.

Some, on the other hand, now plan to leave the area for job-related reasons – either because their position has ended (in one case, as the result of COVID-related budget cuts) or because they seek further education or greater career growth than they perceive as possible within the region.

While Park residents have found creative ways to make employment work for them, it's evident that the limited scale and diversity of job and career prospects is an obstacle to attracting new residents. In our alumni survey, employment for oneself and one's partner/spouse was by far the most significant obstacle to

*Assessing Target Audiences, continued*

returning to the Park. We know from conversations with employers, however, that they are indeed searching for qualified applicants – there appears to be a gap between people’s perceptions of the job market and what is actually available in health care, education, the trades, general services, and other fields.

The focus on employment highlights the need to support both small business development and the entrepreneurial mindset that allows individuals to create their own opportunities and fill persistent market gaps. As described elsewhere in this strategy, specific conditions must exist for this entrepreneurial context to work, the most significant being universal, affordable, high-speed internet.

Beyond jobs and careers, we have heard the following themes expressed in these interviews, represented here as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This table is not an exhaustive analysis, but rather represents what our conversations have revealed about the Adirondacks’ value proposition for attracting new residents.

	HELPFUL	HARMFUL
INTERNAL	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wonderful, caring people and strong communities</li> <li>• Beautiful landscapes and stunning scenery</li> <li>• Abundant access to the outdoors and recreation</li> <li>• Not just like every other place – it feels different</li> <li>• More arts and culture than expected of a rural region</li> <li>• High quality of life, including:</li> <li>• Short commutes</li> <li>• Reasonable cost of living</li> <li>• Recreation can be part of everyday life</li> <li>• Supportive communities – feeling like you will find a helping hand if needed</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing is a real stumbling block for many</li> <li>• Urban/suburban amenities simply aren’t here – no 2am Thai delivery or big-box retail</li> <li>• Broadband and cell phone access is inconsistent and often lacking</li> <li>• Not easy to research the area as a potential place to live</li> <li>• Food access/diversity is inconsistent across seasons and region.</li> <li>• It can be hard to access services without inside information and/or personal networks</li> <li>• Poor/nonexistent public transportation</li> <li>• Lack of racial/ethnic diversity</li> <li>• Many communities lack places to gather, network, and meet new people</li> </ul>
EXTERNAL	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals can readily get involved and make an impact in communities.</li> <li>• Many people are tied to this place via their personal and family histories, creating a strong sense of connection</li> <li>• Increased opportunities for remote work make living here possible for more people than ever</li> <li>• For entrepreneurs, there’s ample space in the market for new services and products</li> <li>• Once one person moves to the area, their friends or family may follow</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are many other places across the country for mobile young people to choose from when deciding where to live</li> <li>• The Adirondacks is never going to please everyone; it requires a certain type of person to be happy here</li> <li>• Cold and snow are real detractors for some</li> </ul>



## Assessing Target Audiences, continued

The Adirondacks is not the right home for everyone. Those who detest snow or want to work in certain job environments will not be happy here. But for the right person, the Adirondack region:

- **Aligns with their values.** This person is likely to place higher value on community, sustainability, and quality of life over corporate success or consumerism.
- **Has sufficient career opportunity.** This person can find job and career opportunities here, whether they do it in region, virtually, or some combination.
- **Presents entrepreneurial opportunity.** Significant gaps exist in the business environment, from services such as plumbing and heating to new ventures capitalizing on the Adirondack 'brand' and natural amenities.
- **Has many desirable assets.** While we should continue to address our weaknesses as a region, we should start this effort by building on our strengths.

We have included a few anonymous quotes in the margins of this strategy. They were collected as part of the interview process.

“

For me quality of life is a lot of factors. It's not having a long commute. It's having friends and family who will be there for you. It's a relatively low cost of living. It's being able to go out on a boat at 2 PM on a Tuesday.

”

# Community Readiness to Attract New Residents

People looking to relocate literally have a world of options to choose from. Towns that have invested in the amenities they seek – and that effectively communicate their positive qualities – are better poised to attract these new residents.

From experience and research, we have identified the characteristics below as especially important to attracting new, younger residents to rural places. It is not a comprehensive list, and focuses mostly on characteristics over which individual communities have more direct agency and control. Those included here are intended to prompt reflection and generate ideas; see Appendix 4 for a more robust community assessment tool.

## 1. Jobs and careers.

It's one thing to get a job that pays the bills, but many people seek more than a paycheck – they want meaning, skill-building, and opportunities to advance.

- Area employers find support systems to thrive, grow, and find quality employees.
- Job openings are well-publicized.
- Networking opportunities exist within the region as a path to career growth.

## 2. 21<sup>st</sup> century community amenities

For young people looking to relocate, one of the first questions after whether there is a job or entrepreneurial opportunity is whether the community has the necessary amenities to meet a family's needs, including:

- **Reliable and affordable high-speed internet and cell coverage.** New residents have an easy time finding a home or apartment with good broadband access and cell coverage.
- **Quality childcare, primary and secondary educational opportunities.** Strong schools provide the environment for students to thrive.
- **Quality and accessible health care.** Health care providers deliver quality health outcomes.

## 3. Quality housing and building stock.

New residents may want to rent and test a town before buying a home. Those seeking to buy right away will likely be looking for homes that are not high-end but still comfortable.

- There's a diverse variety of affordable, move-in ready homes or apartments to rent and buy.

“

For my husband and me, deciding to settle in the Adirondacks has caused us to compromise somewhat from our dream jobs. But we are still totally happy with how things have worked out.

”

**4. Other young people.**

This is a chicken-or-egg problem, to be sure. Young people already living in town should be especially welcoming to visitors and newcomers in their demographic. And older town leaders need to be conscious of elevating younger people’s stature and presence in the community. (All residents, of course, should extend that welcoming sentiment as well. See #5.)

- Young people are featured in local publicity materials.
- Young people have a voice in local politics and improvement activities. Young people are invited to participate.

**5. Activities, places, and experiences that build relationships.**

New residents need opportunities to find and develop connections to peers.

- Formal or informal groups for people with shared interests, e.g., running clubs, book groups, meet-ups for new parents.
- “Third places” (home and work being first and second) exist at which to meet people – cafes and brewpubs, but also schools, after school activities, or a local trail or dog park.

**6. Positive digital presence.**

Potential new residents need to discover and learn about the town and get a good impression even before they visit.

- The town’s website is attractive and professional. It includes a section on relocation.
- Positive images and news stories come up in Google searches.
- The town embraces its heritage, focuses on sustainability, demonstrates a commitment to quality education and healthcare, is welcoming, etc. These are core value priorities by many in the 25–44 age group.

**7. A welcoming atmosphere that conveys safety and acceptance.**

Longtime residents may assume their town is welcoming because they’re accustomed to the place and know people already. What does the town look and feel like to newcomers who may have a different background or lack familiarity with small communities?

- People smile or nod to strangers on the sidewalk, road, and trail.
- Formal programs, e.g., “welcome wagons,” support new residents.
- Clear signage directs people to primary community assets.

“

I am really involved.  
I have more things  
to do here than  
I ever did on  
Long Island or in  
New York City.

”

## Community Readiness to Attract New Residents, continued

- Streetscape improvements like flower baskets and banners demonstrate community pride, and community events like parades, farmer’s markets, and street fairs invite mingling.
- Community leaders are proactively reducing prominent symbols of discrimination, e.g., Confederate flags.
- Community leaders have sought training and developed partnerships on how to support diversity.

### 8. Authenticity and walkability.

A thriving Main Street supports personal interactions and local investment and gives towns a desirable sense of character.

- There is an established downtown core with independent, unique businesses.
- People can safely walk between businesses, services, and institutions.
- Downtown streets and building facades look appealing.

### 9. Recreational trails and other assets reachable from town/hamlet centers.

People relocating to rural areas often do so because they seek outdoor experiences. Some recreation options should be located close to town centers.

- You can easily access trailheads, swimming holes, playgrounds, etc.
- Recreational assets and trailheads are well-maintained. Maps and signage make them easy for newcomers to navigate.

### 10. Demonstrated progress.

Most rural towns *don't* have all the amenities above in place yet – but obvious commitment to progress builds confidence that they’re moving in a positive direction. It attracts people who want to be part of something exciting.

- Signage in vacant storefronts describe what’s being planned there.
- Stories in local news, social media, etc. discuss efforts to improve the town – from broadband grants to façade improvements to trail construction.

“

I’d say if you’re up for a cool experience, and love the outdoors, then moving to the Adirondacks can be right for you. But it’s not necessarily easy. It’s not for the faint of heart.

”

## **What do Adirondack communities already have to offer and what do they lack?**

Most obviously, the Adirondack Park offers beautiful scenery, tremendous opportunity for outdoor recreation and abundant connections to the natural world. Its communities are nestled among world-class waters, wilderness, and outdoor resources. The existing protections of the Park ensure that many of these resources will be protected into the future, and a strong commitment to public health and preserving clean water further protects these resources. The Champlain Valley's small farms have created a local food movement that distinguishes the Adirondacks from other parts of the Northern Forest – and puts young people creating vibrant change front and center. Many of the Park's communities retain a walkable, tightly knit downtown core, and several of the Park's communities have been at the forefront of exciting initiatives to promote sustainability and address climate change. State investment in the Adirondack Diversity Initiative demonstrates real commitment to addressing implicit bias and racism. The extent to which communities take advantage of these assets varies; the most successful towns combine the Park's inherent assets with unique local character and initiatives.

As for what Adirondack communities lack, the response may be different for current residents than for potential ones. CGA participants identified a lack of quality housing, broadband access, and childcare as top concerns. Another was lack of diversity, which is tied to implicit bias and racism as both cause and effect. They also said that deferred maintenance of recreation assets threatens the Park's tremendous outdoor recreation assets.

Visitors – i.e., potential new residents – may perceive drawbacks that residents don't. One is the distance between towns, creating a sense of isolation and raising questions about where people buy groceries and get other basic services. Another is the impression that some towns look run-down and uninviting – again, perhaps no longer noticed by residents but apparent to people who are getting a first look at a community.

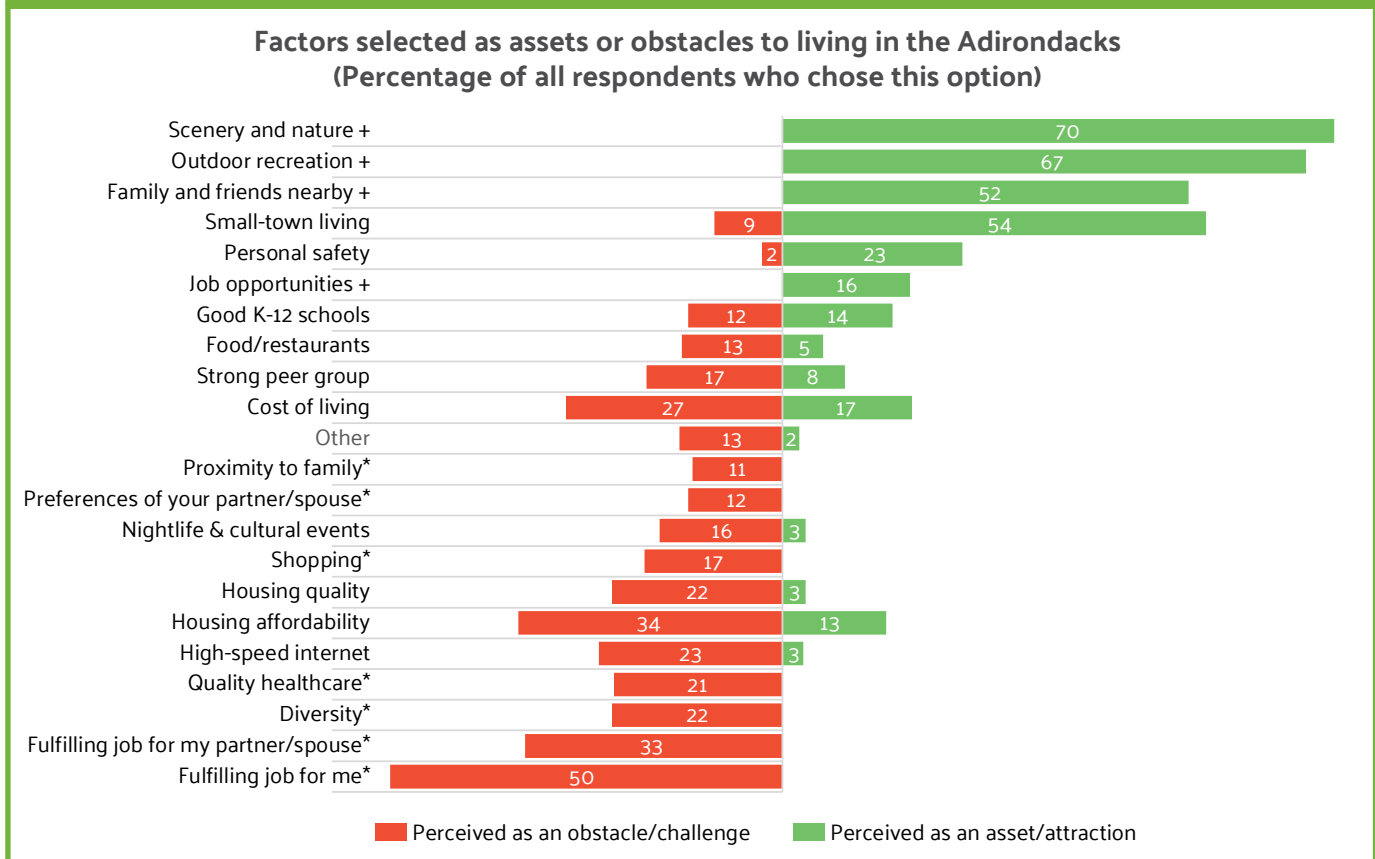
For Adirondack alumni, top obstacles related to jobs and housing affordability/quality, as well as diversity, healthcare, and high-speed internet. The factors listed as top assets or attractions were overwhelmingly related to outdoor recreation, scenery and nature, family and friends nearby, and the appeal of small-town living.

**To attract new residents,  
we must build on our  
many strengths, while  
also being realistic  
about our weaknesses.**

## Community Readiness to Attract New Residents, continued

Our interviews with younger Adirondack residents provided additional nuances: for example, food availability, quality and diversity are important to them and lacking in some parts of the Adirondacks. On the positive side, the strength of our communities – a strong sense of personal connection to other people – was among the greatest strengths that this group emphasized.

**Figure 7: Alumni perceptions on life in the Adirondacks**



\* These factors were only listed as potential challenges/obstacles

+ These factors were only listed as potential assets/attractions

Note: Respondents could choose multiple options.

These explanations are typical of the thought processes expressed by alumni about the idea of moving back to the Park:

- In my dream scenario, I'd have a home in the Adirondacks because I love all of the outdoor activities it has to offer. Pre-Pandemic reasoning for moving: my job – which requires living in a city near agencies and large corporate headquarters. If the option of telecommuting came up, the next thing on my list of needs would be to have a vibrant community with nightlife and culture – things that metropolitan areas offer. Authentic diverse food, concerts, people creating and open to things that are new and exciting.*

## Community Readiness to Attract New Residents, continued

- *My job has been 100% remote since the pandemic started. It's anticipated to continue for the remainder of the year. Many companies like us have decided to make this their permanent model. I think remote workers are the Adirondacks' best hope. Supplying the area with quality wired and wireless telecommunications access is a fundamental roadblock that needs to be resolved.*
- *I would LOVE to move back to the Adirondacks, given that I could find a job in my field (wildlife/environmental). I would be willing to push any shortfalls aside, other than that, to come back here and live permanently.*
- *I would love to move back, however the cost of houses can be prohibitive especially given the lack of non-service industry jobs. I would love to see more jobs in the area that aren't just to support tourism and a way to promote sustainable housing prices for locals.*



# Community Implementation and Investment Strategy

## Community-based implementation: An ANR community guide and starter tool

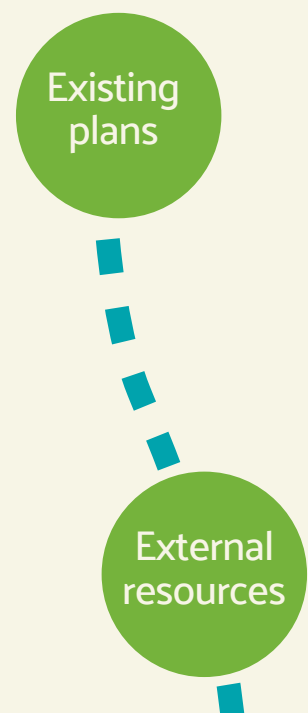
The process outlined below can be implemented formally or informally by individuals, organizations, communities, and the Adirondack region. It should be approached with a spirit of inquiry, openness, and communication. All stakeholders have a role to play, and a decentralized approach to the work – connected through regular communication and coordination – can be highly effective. The process will be most successful if the community can engage external support to move through this process, make a long-term commitment, and approach strategy implementation as a continual effort.

This strategy is different from typical community master planning, going deeper and built around the central theme of how the community can best position itself to attract a new generation of residents.

### PREPARATION

Most communities are frequently impatient to get to visible progress and see planning and preparation as too process heavy. However, any community development activity must be conducted on a firm foundation. Outlined below are steps – specifically recommended for rural communities – that can take anywhere from 3 to 12 months to complete. If a community has already been through versions of these stages, it can plug into the process at a place that reflects their needs. However, if prior processes were not focused specifically on attracting new residents, those plans may need further refinement to align with the recommendations outlined here.

- 1. Review survey and planning work already conducted:** Significant time is invested in existing master plans, downtown plans, community surveys, etc. It is critical to not reinvent the wheel – instead, learn from and build on previous activities, and engage prior participants and community stakeholders. Inclusivity of all perspectives should be a hallmark of this process from the start.  
**OBJECTIVE:** Existing plans, efforts, and participants are honored and updated to reflect a focused target audience.
- 2. Identify and engage external resources to support community process:** Professional facilitators or community development organizations can work with the community to navigate the Attracting New Residents process. An alternative for communities without discretionary budgets could be recruiting a volunteer advisor/facilitator from outside the community to lead discussions with a more objective approach.  
**OBJECTIVE:** Communities have consistent and impartial support to help guide this process.





- 3. Complete the Community Assessment Questionnaire:** A new lens is required for this process – one that requires objectivity and is based directly on what young people are looking for. The assessment tool includes a wide range of questions that potential residents may be asking themselves when deciding where to live. The process of reviewing and answering them will help communities get a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. It's extremely helpful (and perhaps critical) to have a third party (i.e., the person/group engaged above) work with the community on this exercise and review results to identify the most significant opportunities. (See Appendix 4 for Community Assessment Questionnaire).

**OBJECTIVE:** The community is more aware of how potential residents may perceive it and how to prioritize revitalization activities.

- 4. Ensure equitable and inclusive community input opportunities:** Community revitalization strategies and processes are inherently messy, requiring iteration and multiple voices. It is critical that all community members are invited to participate when and how they are able. Different venues, means and scheduling to collect input is essential for those that have different participation styles – in person, virtually, focus groups, surveys, in the evening, at the store or diner, school, etc.

**OBJECTIVE:** Community members feel part of the process and have ownership of the outcome.

- 5. Identify core values to guide the community strategy:** Knowing not everyone is working from the same background, it is important for the community to examine its assumptions about attracting new residents. Does the idea create fear, optimism, antipathy, excitement? To whom, and for what reasons? Going one step further, if the community is interested in attracting new young residents, what are the base principles they want to articulate to that audience? Do they value diversity, stewardship, education, etc. and how do they want to communicate these values? Are these the values that align with their target audience? Do they know if they do?

**OBJECTIVE:** A collective sense of community purpose and values.

## STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

- 6. Assess community strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities:** Many communities believe they are the best place to 'live, work and play' and overlook the many other places that actually can deliver on this promise better than they can. And again, this belief masks and minimizes underlying truths that need to be identified and addressed if the community is successful in attracting new residents. A community isn't typically the target of a SWOT analysis, but as stated elsewhere, younger people may have the opportunity to move anywhere in the country; it's critical to conduct an honest assessment of what assets exist to promote, what weaknesses

Complete assessment

Gather input

Core values

SWOT

need to be addressed, what threats may undermine efforts and what opportunities are not being capitalized.

**OBJECTIVE:** Use the discussions and questionnaire described above to create a basic outline of the community’s “balance sheet” and identify actions that may help address its liabilities.

- 7. Explore the community’s “positioning” – how it differentiates itself from others and conveys its special advantages:** How is the community capitalizing on existing assets and thinking of its unique value proposition? If there is nothing especially spectacular about the town’s assets, don’t claim something it’s not – rather, be authentic about the community’s values, assets, and amenities. Coordination with multiple communities expands the range of attractive elements.

**OBJECTIVE:** A community sense of what sets it apart when considering how it presents itself on the town or Chamber websites or in other venues.

**NOTE:** Communities can invest in detailed branding studies and develop sophisticated brand strategies and associated graphics. (See, for example, [this 2016 ROOST report](#) for Tupper Lake and the subsequent [branding guidelines](#).) This intensive work may be helpful but it’s not within financial reach for many communities. Instead, different exercises – perhaps led, as in the initial facilitation process, by an objective “outsider” – can help distill key messages. Dedicated financial resources could help multiple communities with basic market positioning.

- 8. Identify near/long term priorities and activities:** Traditional town master plans tend to be vague and general. In contrast, this work should focus directly on the needs of young people (the target audience) and ensure that projects are sequenced and additive, or at least strongly aligned and coordinated. Near-term activities can include basic improvements and aesthetics that in many cases aren’t costly, just require a fresh look or an adjustment of existing resources. Without structure and deliberate oversight, longer-term activities can easily be lost as staffing or leadership changes, or be pulled off course by funders looking for something different.

**OBJECTIVE:** Establish a clear and specific collection of activities to address persistent challenges, organized in general terms of timeframe, cost, and leadership.

- 9. Create living workplan:** To fully secure the objectives outlined here and deliver a community-based strategy, the core coordinating organization must create and actively use a workplan to provide context for activities, mark success, maintain clarity of goals, and organize projects as they are added and amended.

**OBJECTIVE:** A plan that guides community activities and resources.



Community Brand

Identify priorities

Create workplan

## IMPLEMENTATION

**10. Work the plan and implement activities:** Many well-intentioned efforts stall at the planning phase for a lack of resources, leadership, vision, or momentum. Interweaving short term projects through the planning process can help bridge planning into implementation, but more important is communication to stakeholders that the plan is just the beginning. Continued leadership engagement throughout the process is necessary to sustain efforts. Ad hoc versus standing committees help participants feel more relevant and useful and not in a “life volunteer” sentence. Shifting to implementation needs to reflect capacity – don’t take on more activities than can be achieved – or take on multiple activities that can leverage and build on each other for efficiency.

**OBJECTIVE:** The community sees movement and action.

**11. Communicate outcomes and celebrate all kinds of success:** Throughout the process, the community must be kept in the loop. Not everyone will choose to engage, but information must be shared to address potential criticism and to further engage stakeholders in implementation and increased awareness and pride. Social media and web communication provide new ways to share success – via video, photos, real-time events and more. The strategy here is to also get beyond feel-good to fundamental. It is critical that communities track and celebrate the changes in housing trends, student enrollments, tax rates, new residents, business starts, etc. to better understand and promote community change.

**OBJECTIVE:** Increased community engagement and pride; a sense of collective success.

## EVALUATION

**12. Revisit priorities and plan to identify ongoing gaps and means to address them:** No strategy should be static. A community’s approach needs to be revisited regularly, tailoring activities to reflect changing market conditions and adapting program delivery to ensure effective outcomes.

**OBJECTIVE:** A relevant and useful approach to address evolving community needs and priorities.

## ITERATION

**13. Keep going. [back to #10]**

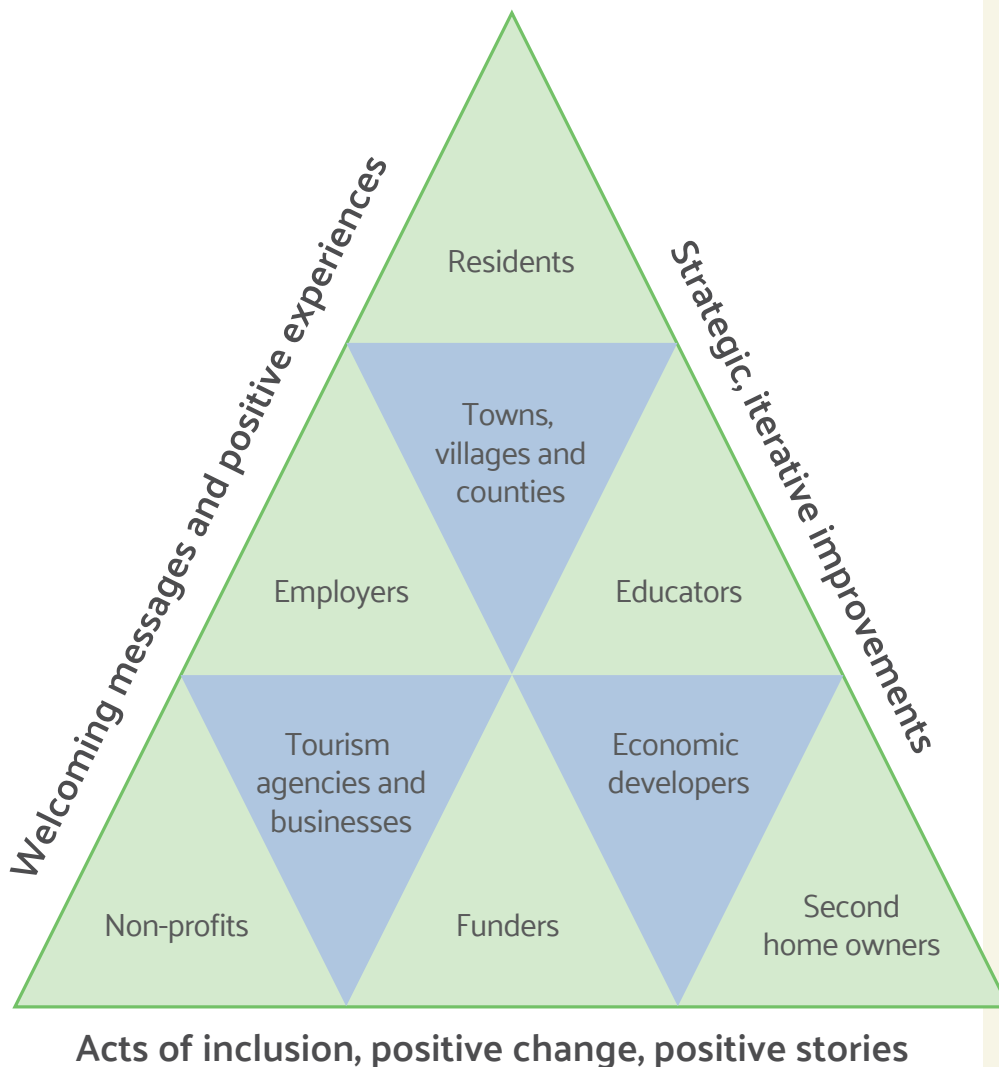


## Community Leadership and Opportunities

We believe that everyone can play an important role in helping to make the Adirondacks attractive and accessible to potential new residents, as depicted in the graphic below.

While this graphic is not comprehensive, the point is that these efforts can come out of individual action and grassroots efforts as well as from centralized, coordinated strategies – and that a wide array of participation is needed to ensure success.

Figure 8: Everyone has a key role



## Maintaining Momentum and Coordinating Implementation

Community-based adoption and implementation of an Attracting New Residents strategy is critical to testing new ideas and delivering incremental results. This is difficult, however, without concerted coordinating capacity that maintains momentum. Multiple entities can be involved in such an effort, but a loose confederation may be less effective than a central coordinating body responsible for advancing multiple conversations and approaches.

Strategy implementation can be organized into four components, and it will require a comprehensive set of skills: coordination and convening, facilitation, data collection, plan development, marketing, project management, fundraising, policy development and more. Each component can build on the other to strengthen the whole. They include:

- 1 **Share information.** More than fifty people from around the region expressed an interest in staying connected to this effort in the post-CGA survey. Local leaders are seeking new ideas, a community of practice, and inspiration for their efforts to improve community. Actionable items may include:
  - a. Disseminate information including new data, research, best practices, and stories of success through email, web, and social media.
  - b. Conduct webinar and other education opportunities to increase local knowledge, build relationships and raise sights for what is possible (this may overlap with other components).
  - c. Convene people virtually or in-person to discuss, showcase and learn from emerging projects.
  - d. Create an annual Adirondack Community Leadership award that raises awareness and celebrates individuals making a difference in their communities.

Figure 9: A four-pronged approach to implementing this strategy



**2 Facilitate interest groups.** As referenced elsewhere in this strategy, much of the work of making our communities attractive to new residents will start with local initiatives. At the same time, as shared by CGA participants, being connected to others across the Adirondacks working on similar issues can be a powerful and motivating driver.

The idea here is that representatives from locally-led efforts can plug into regular regional conversations that feed their specific work goals. Examples include groups dedicated to advancing outdoor recreation, community-based housing, shared workspaces, young professional networks, downtown redesign, etc. These groups will be most effective if leaders emerge to help co-design and lead them.

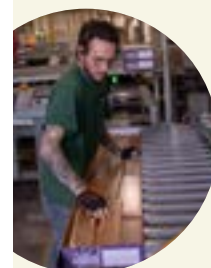
Actionable items to help connect people on specific topics, and bring awareness to and celebrate local efforts, may include:

- a. Host affinity group discussions using themes identified at CGA and through additional input. One example is the ad hoc Adirondack Community Recreation Alliance, an emerging organized effort to increase the role of outdoor recreation in local community economic development.
- b. Disseminate information (new data, research, best practices, and stories of success) through email, web, webinars, and social media.
- c. Support individual affinity group members to implement programs/ projects through access to resources and project management.
- d. Help coordinate and conduct advocacy to advance affinity group needs.



**Important themes** that have emerged from the Common Ground Alliance forum and other conversations as issues with core relevance to the success of this strategy – and which therefore must be advanced through the implementation process – include the following:

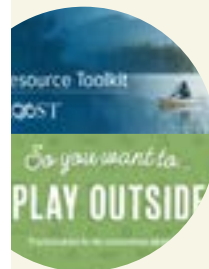
- **Diversity and cultural consciousness.** The Adirondack Diversity Initiative is providing important leadership on this issue and is building partnerships and opportunities for organizations and communities to learn and work together on addressing these issues across the Park. Many nonprofit organizations are pursuing some type of diversity and equity training, but this education is slow in its adoption across community leadership, schools, and other venues. This is increasingly becoming a central theme and barrier for younger people wanting to live in rural places, and it must be addressed openly and thoughtfully.
- **Housing.** Although ensuring quality affordable housing is a core challenge to this strategy, existing programs focus solely on income-restricted housing and do not address dilapidated in-town housing stock, workforce housing, or starter homes for first-time homebuyers. Some individual towns and counties have conducted housing studies and/or are actively pursuing housing solutions to address parts of local need, but these efforts are not currently coordinated or in conversation with one another.
- **Broadband and Cell Coverage.** The Adirondacks are woefully slow in deploying effective, affordable, and universal broadband, though we do have some positive players in this field: AdkAction maintains a broadband working group to keep interested parties informed and collaborating as state and federal broadband programs have been rolling out; DANC has been instrumental in supporting broadband expansion efforts; the Northern Border Regional Commission funded a Tupper Lake broadband project in 2020. More is needed. Related, addressing cell service gaps is an important and ongoing conversation that directly relates to the accessibility of the region for new residents.
- **Economic development: jobs and careers.** Many players are currently engaged here: county Industrial Development Authorities (IDAs) are typically seen as coordinating economic development in our region, and historically they have been focused on jobs provided by larger manufacturers. The Adirondack Economic Development Corporation, ANCA, Workforce Development Institute, and Point Positive are all playing a role in this space, as are education institutions. Chambers of Commerce and other economic development entities can highlight career-track individuals in promotional campaigns. Putting these pieces together to identify opportunities to strengthen career pathways – as opposed to simply create jobs – is an important next step. Stakeholders also need to more effectively communicate to potential residents the strengths of our local job market and resources for entrepreneurship.



# RESIDENTS

## Community Implementation and Investment Strategy, continued

- **Childcare.** The Childcare Coordinating Council of the North Country and the Adirondack Birth to Three (BT3) Alliance, a project of the Adirondack Foundation, are playing an important role in helping to improve the quality and accessibility of childcare in the region. A commitment by the region and state to quality childcare, preschools and after-school programs is one step in creating a family-supportive community. Another is ensuring the wages of workers in these sectors appropriately reflects the valuable role they play in economic development.
- **Strengthening information networks.** We have consistently heard that it is challenging for prospective residents to research Adirondack communities and for new residents to get a handle on life here – everything from available jobs to housing to events. While many existing media outlets (newspaper, radio, magazine, local listservs, etc.), Chambers of Commerce, apps and websites are already putting these messages out, there is a clear need to make them more complete, better integrated, and easier to find. This may not require a new effort, but a more effective use of an existing one.
- **Marketing to attract new residents.** As strategy implementation begins, we will need to develop a specific approach around active recruitment messaging, especially as it relates to existing tourism promotion by ROOST and others and implementation at multiple scales (town-led versus more regionally focused messaging). Marketing efforts need to be authentic, realistic, and focused on specific target audiences rather than trying to be all things to all people.
- **Proactive resident recruitment strategies.** The REDC Innovation Group and Point Positive have been framing a conceptual teleworker incentive program, St. Lawrence County has been considering opportunities for active resident recruitment, and individual communities have considered or developed their own approaches. Organizers of these efforts should maintain open communication and coordination so they support, not compete with, each other. They also need to be careful that the tools they are using are coupled with the kinds of investments that will meet new worker and resident expectations. Executed poorly, recruitment strategies can elicit negative press and word of mouth.



# RESIDENTS



**3 Implement community strategies.** This strategy is ultimately designed to help individual and collective communities work through comprehensive, data-driven, and long-term strategies to attract and retain new residents. Some larger Adirondack communities have the capacity to take on such sustained efforts; many do not. Engaging external support to manage this process may be an essential component of success. Actionable items may include:

- a. Create a competitive application process (with tools included in this strategy) for communities to apply to participate in partnership with a core coordinating organization to implement a strategy.
- b. Create a voluntary process in which communities self-identify as ready for strategy implementation and work with a team of organizations to do so.
- c. Invite selected pilot communities to partner with a core coordinating organization to develop and implement a strategy.

In each of these approaches, a core coordinating organization – or consortia of organizations – provides the necessary supportive capacity to help develop, implement, and measure the implementation of a strategy to attract new residents.

**4 Coordinate regional action.** Buttressing our locally-led initiatives, enhanced communication, and strengthened networks, we will need regional collaboration and convening. This need is not new and is served by several existing entities and forums, but the lens of Attracting New Residents can provide new focus to regional-level work. Opportunities for regional-level focus may include:

- a. Identifying regional-level policy priorities and advocacy needs to address gaps in existing statutes where policy changes are required to advance new approaches.
- b. Sustaining annual regional events to advance these conversations, such as the annual Common Ground Alliance forum, Adirondack Park Local Government Day, and the Northern Forest Outdoor Recreation Summit.
- c. Advocating for and developing consistent town-level data to guide our work.
- d. Coordinating the implementation of this strategy across mechanisms and geographies.

**To be successful in implementing this strategy, we will need to work locally and regionally**

# Conclusion

Attracting new residents to the Adirondacks is a long-term effort requiring introspection, collaboration, and thoughtful work toward ambitious community goals. Our research suggests that the Adirondacks and its communities are well positioned to attract and retain young people and young families to enrich the social and economic fabric of our communities.

The concepts and processes discussed here are intended to set communities on a path toward new resident-focused revitalization. Success will require tackling some larger, systemic issues facing our communities – infrastructure challenges, social dynamics, and basic economics – but momentum can be fueled through more accessible and incremental victories. Ongoing learning and information-sharing can propel our work and strengthen our networks.

And as we move into implementing this strategy, our greatest asset will be the passion of those who live here, work here, and love this special place.



# Appendix 1:

## Challenges and Potential Solutions Table

At the 2020 Common Ground Alliance forum we heard key themes representing the challenges to attracting new residents, along with policy or grassroots-level solutions that would help move the needle in addressing these challenges. This table compiles these themes, articulating the nature of the challenge, together with a collection of solutions that have been informed by the CGA breakout sessions and other inputs. It is not comprehensive; rather, it represents an archive of thinking emerging from the forum. Nor does it address the specifics of who should implement these solutions, or how. As part of implementing the strategy, we will need to dive deeper on these topics and think more carefully about driving towards solutions.

Issue	Problem(s)/Need	Proposed Responses/Policies	Regional and/or Local Responses/Options
<b>Housing</b>	A significant lack of affordable (workforce) rental housing or housing inventory for purchase for those looking to move to the area. Real estate that is for sale tends to be below \$100k and very low quality or above \$450k and out of reach for younger people and misaligned with area wages. Primary home buyers must compete with second home buyers.	"Build on town- and county-based workforce housing studies to create flexible public/private partnership opportunities (land bank, tax incentives, grant programs) to incentivize redevelopment of existing and construction of new in-town market-rate workforce housing.  Support workforce development programs to enhance participation in the trades."	"- Conduct workforce housing studies - Engage with private developers - Limit or regulate AirBnbs (share best practices in-region on best approaches) - Regulate rental housing to ensure that units are safe and up to code - Consider utilizing emerging Northern Forest Fund to develop community-led housing redevelopment"
<b>Welcoming</b>	Communities lack consistent and comprehensive wayfinding and human systems to welcome visitors and new residents.	Create a park-wide set of design and wayfinding standards and funding programs to implement.	"- Create welcoming committees, ambassadors, systems or programs (ala VT Welcome Wagon) - or simply empower local residents to welcome newcomers into the fold. - Conduct a self-audit to reflect on the community's welcome factor (signage, community appearance, walkability, accessibility, etc) - Ensure that frontline workers have training in providing a positive experience for visitors and newcomers. - Strengthen public assets and events – farmer's markets, concert series, town parks, dog parks, etc. – as an amenity for residents and a mechanism to welcome visitors/new residents and create interpersonal connections."
<b>Childcare</b>	A lack of consistent, full day and quality child care options limits employment and economic options for younger people.	Provide grant funding to rural childcare providers.	
<b>Broadband</b>	Private sector is unlikely to invest in low density areas and without quality, affordable, high-speed and redundant broadband, rural places will never be able to attract younger people. Efforts to date have not fully addressed the issue.	Create a park-wide broadband deployment plan for state and federal funding; Eliminate DOT right of way occupancy fees for broadband infrastructure in rural parts of NYS.	- Form local broadband committees to gather data and information and advocate for local solutions.
<b>Cell coverage</b>	Without consistent cell coverage in towns and villages, rural places will never be able to attract younger people.	Create and implement a regional cell coverage strategy to serve life safety and transportation navigation needs.	
<b>Jobs and careers</b>	Young people are seeking not only jobs, but fulfilling careers with a chance for upward mobility and advancement.		"- Enhance partnerships between economic development groups and educational institutions (secondary and post-secondary) to strengthen career pathways, create new professional networking and mentorship opportunities, and highlight existing career paths within the region. - Develop young professionals networking groups/ opportunities."

<b>Information</b>	It is challenging for prospective residents to research our communities, for newcomers to find vital services and job opportunities, and for visitors and residents to keep in touch with what is going on in the community.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide better-integrated information sources regarding job opportunities, housing, and events</li> <li>- Encourage employers and landlords to post their jobs/housing publicly rather than relying on personal networks and word of mouth</li> <li>- Provide landing page(s) on or linked from prominent websites to allow potential residents to research the region easily"</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural consciousness</b>	Implicit bias and racism and low individual awareness of these issues will limit the region's ability to attract young people.	Extend state funding for Adirondack Diversity Initiative process and training. Complement with community-level efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"- Increase commitments to cultural consciousness, including training, community liasons to Adk Diversity Institute, and visible accountability by elected and appointed officials as well as high profile organizations.</li> <li>- Address visible symbols that are threatening to BIPOC communities, such as confederate flags or school mascots."</li> </ul>
<b>Recreation</b>	"- Deferred trail maintenance and volume of users negatively impacts trail users' experience, limiting the attractiveness of community assets. - Recreational assets are not always well-connected with downtown areas, creating a missed opportunity to enhance quality of life and quality of visitors' experiences and drive business to our community cores."	Reprioritize maintenance of trails in DEC budget and provide transparency of spending. Elevate awareness of Adirondack Community Recreation Alliance (ACRA) principles and projects to promote new ways of thinking about recreation as a community development strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"- Together with DEC, identify solutions for greater engagement by towns, counties, and volunteers to complete priority recreational maintenance projects.</li> <li>- Identify opportunities for greater connectivity between downtowns, businesses, and recreational assets.</li> <li>- Where possible, utilize local actions such as complete streets policies, sidewalk improvement planning, and other similar approaches to enhance recreational connectivity."</li> </ul>
<b>Smart Growth / downtowns / capacity</b>	"Our communities have limited capacity to focus on downtown redevelopment efforts. Funds for comprehensive downtown redevelopment are limited, and in many cases the scale of award exceeds the need/ability of smaller communities to access the program. Downtowns are often in need of improvements to streetscapes and public spaces to make them more attractive, as well as important amenities like public bathrooms."	Create small community downtown/smart growth grants program and link grant funding to local training and technical assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"- Use existing planning and zoning to achieve more attractive downtowns.</li> <li>- Consider public/private partnerships to enhance business districts, including low-cost improvements like flowers.</li> <li>- Create prioritized infrastructure improvement plans, including public parks and public amenities like public restrooms."</li> </ul>
<b>Health care</b>	Our existing healthcare anchors face financial challenges, and inconsistent community amenities and aging populations create a challenging environment to attract healthcare workers and deliver services necessary for young families.	Ensure Adirondack participation in state policy discussions and national advocacy for stronger public support for rural healthcare systems.	Create partnerships between healthcare institutions and others in the community to highlight the important role these institutions play in economic development. Increase the use of the area's recreation assets as a means to improve rural health indicators.
<b>Economic Development</b>	Community and economic well-being is subordinate to environmental quality within the current regulatory structure of the park; economic development initiatives tend to be 'top down' by the state or regional non-profits and aren't always scaled properly or aligned with local priorities.	Enhance the economic development infrastructure focused on environmentally sustainable and 'right-sized' business development. Place a greater emphasis on locally-developed economic and community development initiatives and seek to align funding appropriate for multiple projects of differing scales.	Support the capitalization of a private, regional Innovation Fund that can provide funding to economic development projects at different scales.

# Appendix 2: Community Case Studies from the Northern Forest

## CASE STUDY: MILLINOCKET, MAINE

### Community Snapshot

Millinocket, population 4,500, became known as the “Magic City” for the near instant growth that came with the rise of the pulp and paper industry and its stature in the Maine woods in the mid-nineteenth century. Millinocket is located in central Maine along the northern end of the Appalachian Trail and just southeast of Baxter State Park. It is a place where connection to the forest is deep-rooted in the community’s identity. The final closure and dismantlement of Millinocket’s paper mill in 2008 accelerated the town’s population and economic decline, leaving many to question its future.

More recently, however, important investments in the regional recreation economy, community assets, and private business ventures has Millinocket back on the map and feeling optimistic about its future. Due to this upswing, Millinocket and the Katahdin region is poised to become a recreation destination and attract permanent residents.



## Investment in Community

Key initiatives and collaborations helping to stabilize the community's economic foundation and diversification along with a cohesive vision to retain and attract young people and entrepreneurs:

- **New, Coordinated Efforts:** Area stakeholders created The Katahdin Gazetteer, a regional vision for the areas' economy, building on its natural and cultural assets. From this, a group has come together to develop and implement a downtown revitalization plan focusing on improved infrastructure, business development, pedestrian corridors and public spaces. Other groups are seeking to expand affordable high-speed broadband.
- **Mill Site Redevelopment:** Building on its wood products legacy, the mill site is now poised for \$6M infrastructure improvements to lay the groundwork for wood products, renewable energy and tech businesses.
- **Growing the Recreation Economy:** New recreation assets including the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, East Branch Trails, Baxter State Park, Hammond Ridge trails and more are becoming widely known for their quality and diversity of offerings. This growing concentration of sites is the foundation of an increased effort to develop the region's outdoor recreation economy, and the jobs it can offer.
- **Community Revitalization:** Complete renovation of the Millinocket Memorial Library, 230 Penobscot Avenue (the Miller's Building), and individual properties as part of the Millinocket Housing Initiative have all brought new investment and renewal to community facilities including quality housing options in the downtown.
- **Capacity Building:** Philanthropic and public funders are supporting efforts by regional intermediary organizations to bring and build capacity in the community for long term success.

## Partners

Community partnerships are critical to creating transformational change. The entities listed below have been important thought leaders and contributors, experts and financial partners: Our Katahdin, Millinocket Memorial Library, Millinocket Regional Hospital, Town of Millinocket, Katahdin Area Trails, Outdoor Sports Institute, Friends of Katahdin Woods and Waters, Baxter State Park, Maine Community Foundation, New England Outdoor Center, Bangor Savings Bank, Brookfield Renewable Power, Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, USDA Rural Development, Ellitsville Foundation and many more.



## CASE STUDY: LANCASTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

### Community Snapshot

Lancaster, population 3,500, is a rural community located on the Connecticut River in northern New Hampshire where residents and visitors alike can easily access and explore beautiful recreational landscapes, including the Great North Woods region and White Mountain National Forest. As a service hub offering the regional hospital, retail shopping, restaurants and a theater, Lancaster is committed to focusing on important revitalization efforts to strengthen businesses and share their authentic small-town feel with new generations of visitors and residents.

**Investment in Community** – Examples of key initiatives and collaborations helping to draw young people to the community:

- **Downtown Revitalization:** Recent sidewalk improvements, commercial building improvements and increased access to the Israel River for public access continues to beautify and attract visitors. The renovation of historic Parker J. Noyes building on Main Street is a landmark project, creating new commercial space for the Root Seller Marketplace, as well as 6 modern apartments on the upper floors.
- **Business Diversification:** Area manufacturing and service employers Trividia, Pac Solutions, Weeks Memorial Hospital, Mountain View Grand and Motorcycles of Manchester are expanding their base of hundreds of area employees.
- **Destination Development:** Recent efforts to increase awareness of recreational activities in the area, a hiking challenge, and new marketing and branding efforts are enhancing the perception of the community and helping them to provide resources to residents while increasing offerings to visitors.
- **Business Development:** Regional and local economic development entities have provided in-person training for local business owners to improve energy efficiency, marketing, and façade improvements. Efforts to identify gaps and expand high speed broadband are underway.
- **Capacity Building:** Philanthropic and public funders are supporting efforts by regional intermediary organizations to bring and build capacity in the community for long term success.

### Key Partners

Community partnerships are critical to creating transformational change. The entities listed below have been important thought leaders and contributors, experts and financial partners: Town of Lancaster, Coos County Economic Development, Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the NH Charitable Foundation, NH Community Development Finance Authority, NH Preservation Alliance, USDA Rural Development, Garland Mill, Cloutier Development, Peter Powell Real Estate, North Country Ford, Passumpsic Bank, and many more.



# Appendix 3: Adirondack Alumni Survey Results

The Northern Forest Center conducted a survey aimed at alumni of Adirondack regional schools (primary/secondary and colleges), in order to understand this population as a potential audience for the Attracting New Residents strategy. Questions focused on whether alumni had stayed in the Adirondacks or moved away, what their reasons were for these decisions, and whether they were open to the idea of moving back to the Adirondacks. The survey was created using Survey Monkey and disseminated via numerous email and social media platforms, including listservs and/or social media pages or groups maintained by the Common Ground Alliance, the Paul Smiths College alumni office, North Country Community College, and the alumni networks of several regional high schools. The survey was completed during the late summer of 2020.

## Survey responses: The basics

533 people began completing the survey. Of these, many either disqualified themselves by indicating that they never attended school in the Adirondacks or did not complete the survey. 361 people completed the survey.

Of the 361 complete surveys, 71% of respondents attended elementary and/or high school in the Adirondacks, and 47% attended a 2- or 4- year degree program (including some who also attended elementary and/or high school in the region.)

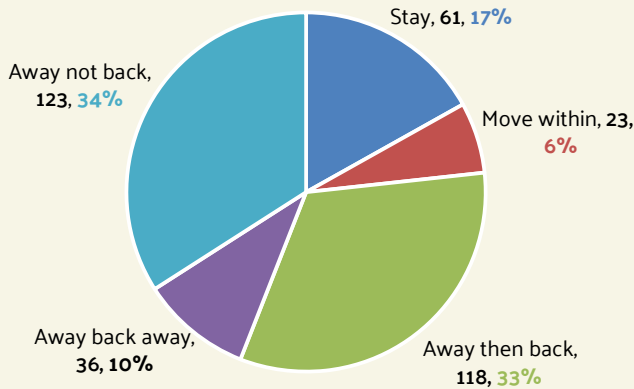
Attended elementary and/or high school in the Adirondacks?			
	Yes	No	Grand total
No higher ed in Adk	190	0	190
2-year degree program in Adk	45	58	103
4-year degree program in Adk	12	38	50
2- and 4- year degree programs in Adk	9	9	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>256</b> 71%	<b>105</b> 29%	<b>361</b>



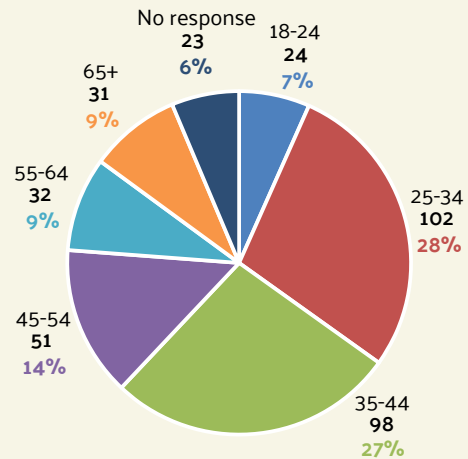


We asked what path each person took after graduation – whether they stayed in the same community in the Adirondacks (“Stay”); Moved to a different community within the Adirondacks (“Move within”); Moved away and then returned to the Adirondacks (“Away then back”); Moved away without returning (“Away not back”); or moved away, back, and away again (“Away back away”). Responses were:

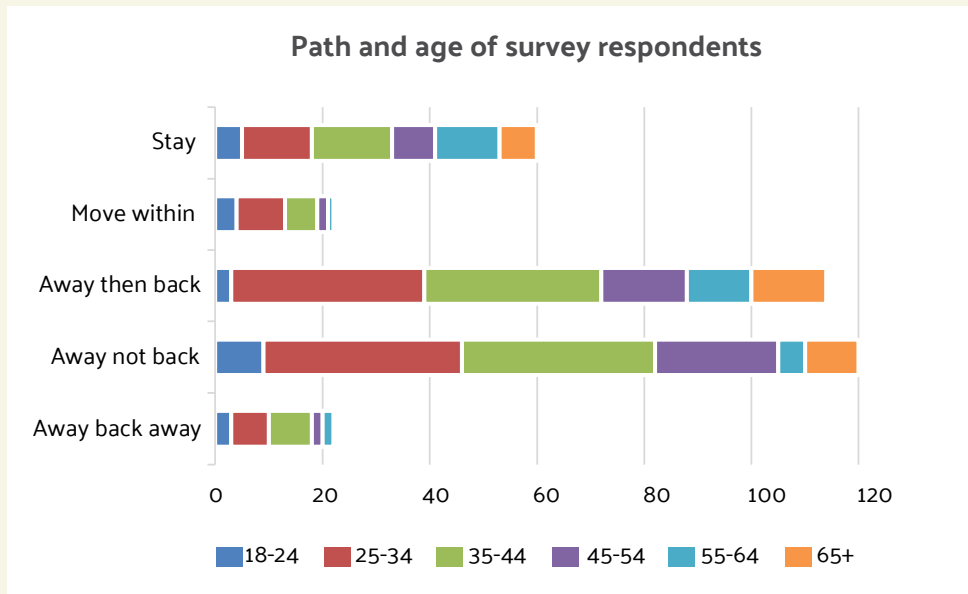
**Path taken by survey respondents**



**Ages of survey respondents**



The following table shows how the age of respondents compared to their indicated life path:



## Why do young people leave?

Among the 277 people who had left at some point (whether or not they came back) the top factors chosen – given the option to choose one or two – were:

	#	% who selected
To pursue further education	139	50%
For greater career prospects	81	29%
For a particular job opportunity	69	25%
To try out a different place	53	19%
Because of a relationship	24	9%
To be closer to family	19	7%
To get away from the Adirondacks	14	5%
Other	21	8%

## What do we know about regional alumni that do not currently live here?

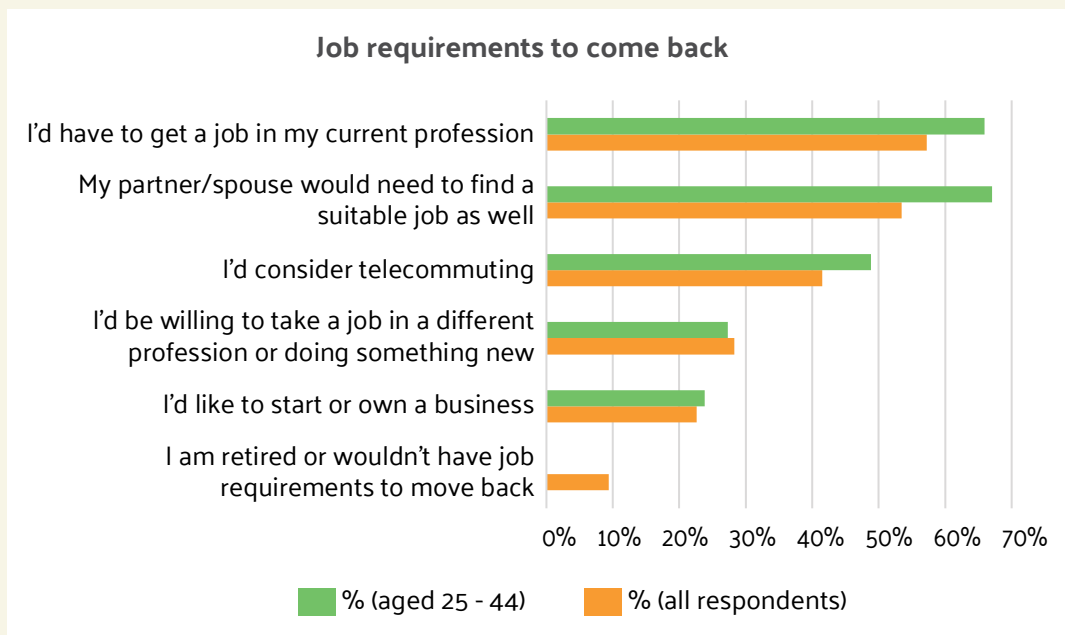
159 responses were from alumni who are currently living outside of the Adirondacks. Among this group, we asked questions about whether they visit the region, whether they are interested in coming back, how the pandemic has affected their thinking about coming back, and what they would need to relocate to the Adirondacks.

### Do they visit the Adirondacks?

Yes – overwhelmingly, survey respondents indicated that they return to the region. Three-quarters come back at least annually or more often: 37% come back a few times each year; 26% come back annually; 12% come back monthly or more; and 20% come back less than once per year. Only 5% indicated that they have not been back. We can conclude that **this group has a high fidelity to the region** – whether because of family, friends, or a love of the place – that draws them back.

### What would their job requirements be to come back?

Note that respondents could choose more than one option. This chart shows the percentage who chose each option, among all 159 respondents who currently live away, and among the 88 25 – 44 year-olds living away.



### Do they see themselves as coming back?

Overall, nearly three-quarters said that they either “Would love to move back” or “Would consider moving back if the conditions were right.” This high interest was true among all age groups, including our target demographic of 25 - 44 year-olds. These results indicate that, **if we can help this group see that the conditions are right for them to come back, we can have success enticing them back to the region.**

	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Away back away	Away back away	Away not back	Away not back	Grand Total	
I can't really see myself moving back to the Adirondacks	2	6%	42	34%	44	28%
I would consider moving back if the conditions were right	22	61%	60	49%	82	52%
I would love to move back	12	33%	21	17%	33	21%
Grand Total	36		123		159	

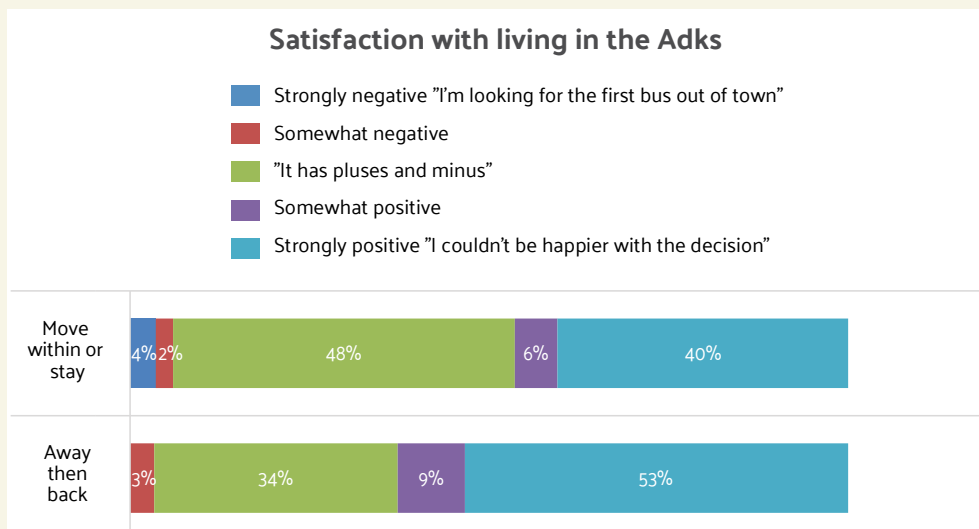
Again, these patterns pretty much hold up if you limit this to only ages 25 - 44 (n = 88)

	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Away back away	Away back away	Away not back	Away not back	Grand Total	
I can't really see myself moving back to the Adirondacks	1	7%	24	33%	25	28%
I would consider moving back if the conditions were right	8	53%	41	56%	49	56%
I would love to move back	6	40%	8	11%	14	16%
Grand Total	15		73		88	

### What do we know about alumni that currently live in the Adirondacks?

202 of the respondents currently live in the region. We asked them about their satisfaction and how they would promote the idea of relocating the Adirondacks to their peers.

#### How satisfied are they to be here?



### How would they sell the Adirondacks to their peers?

Alumni living in the Adirondacks now would overwhelmingly cite outdoor recreation opportunities and the “quality/pace of life” as reasons their peers should move there. Respondents could choose more than one option.

Outdoor recreation opportunities	124
Quality/pace of life	106
Small town living	54
Strong community	53
Rural landscape	43
Personal safety	34
Good schools	32
Proximity to family and friends	30
Opportunities to get involved in the community	23
Affordability	12
Other	4

### What can we learn from all area alumni?

We posed several identical or very similar questions to all respondents regardless of what path they indicated. Among the 361 respondents we found the following:

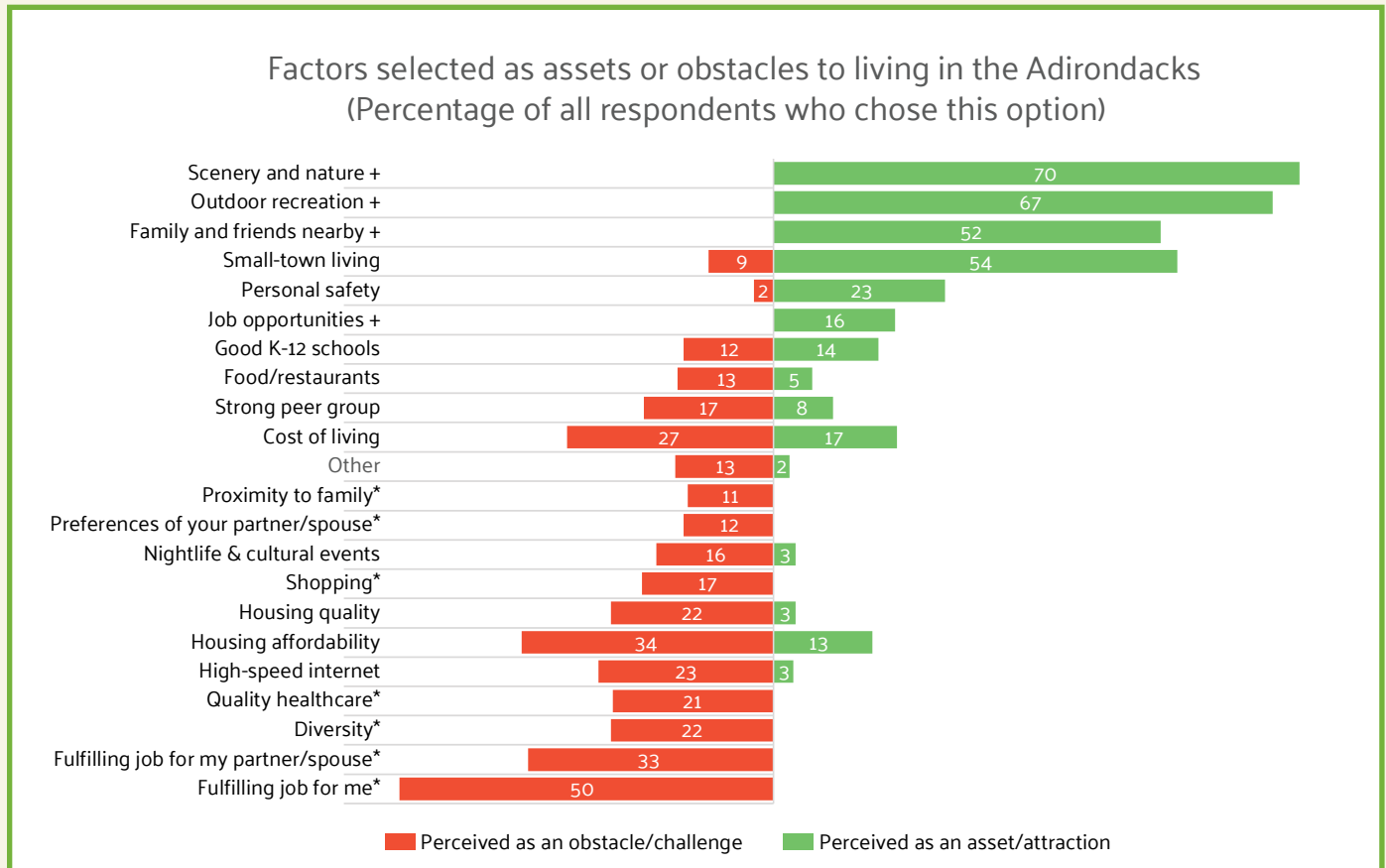
#### Has the pandemic changed their attitude about living in the Adirondacks?

Given the timing of when we implemented the survey, we wanted to know if the pandemic was affecting how they thought about living in the Adirondacks. More than half indicated that the pandemic hasn’t affected their perspective on living here, but of those whose attitudes were affected by the pandemic, the vast majority were more interested in moving back or more satisfied to live in the Adirondacks. A very small minority felt dissatisfied to live here or less interested to move back because of the pandemic.

	Away back away	Away not back	Away then back	Stay or move within	Grand Total	
The pandemic has made me LESS interested in moving back		3			3	1%
The pandemic has made me LESS satisfied to have moved back			4		4	1%
The pandemic has made me LESS satisfied to have stayed				3	3	1%
The pandemic hasn't changed my attitude	23	93	42	38	196	54%
Yes; I'm MORE interested in moving back	12	16			28	8%
Yes; I'm MORE satisfied to have moved back			67		67	19%
Yes; I'm MORE satisfied to have stayed				38	38	11%
Blank	1	11	5	5	22	6%
Grand Total	36	123	118	84	361	

## What are the perceived benefits -- and challenges -- to living here?

These questions were aimed at capturing respondents' perceptions of the greatest challenges or obstacles to choosing to live in the Adirondacks, and the greatest assets or attractions. We posed these questions separately (challenges/benefits) but included some of the same possible answers for response options in both, and thus we have condensed the responses into one graph here. Respondents could select up to five answers for challenges and five for benefits.



+ These options were only listed as possible responses as assets

\* These options were only listed as possible responses as obstacles/challenges

Although the graphic above represents all respondents, we have looked for any illuminating variation in how different groups responded.

For people 25 – 44 (as opposed to respondents of any age) we note that:

There was not much variation in responses to the question about assets or benefits based on age categorization.

Many factors, including housing quality and affordability, fulfilling job for my partner/spouse, cost of living, diversity, and especially good K-12 schools, were more highly ranked as obstacles or challenges for young people 25 – 44.

For people who have opted to stay in the same community or move around within the Adirondacks, we note that:

Personal safety and good K-12 schools are higher-ranking benefits to living in the Adirondacks compared to other groups.

Housing quality and affordability, cost of living, strong peer group, and shopping are ranked as more significant challenges/obstacles as opposed to other groups.

For people who moved away from the Adirondacks, and then back, we note that:

Family and friends nearby was the top-ranked asset/benefit to living in the Adirondacks for this group, much higher than for the other groups.

None of the challenges/obstacles was ranked higher by this group than by the other groups.

For people who have moved away and not returned, we note that:

Although this group listed outdoor recreation as a significant asset/benefit, it didn't rank this as highly as the other groups did.

Cost of living and housing affordability were seen as assets by this group much more highly than other groups.

Interestingly, this group also ranked job opportunities as an asset/benefit more highly than the other groups (albeit at a relatively modest level.)

Nevertheless, this group listed "Fulfilling job for me" and "Fulfilling job for my partner/spouse" as challenges/obstacles more than the other groups, and at very significant levels (e.g., 58% selected "Fulfilling job for me" as an obstacle to moving back to the Adirondacks.)

Other challenges/obstacles that this group selected more highly than the other groups included diversity, high speed internet, quality healthcare, and good K-12 schools.

## Conclusions

Alumni of Adirondack schools (primary/secondary and colleges) deserve to be a target audience of any effort to attract and retain new residents to the region, as they indicated a high interest in moving back to the area, and a pattern of repeat visitation that keeps them connected to the area. More so than other potential audiences, we can also assume that they understand the region.

The very high appeal of the scenic beauty of the region and the outdoor recreation opportunities present here stand out as selling points that alumni living here would stress to their peers if recruiting them to move back. A strong second group of factors included small town living, strong community, and rural landscape.

The high level of satisfaction in living here expressed by alumni who moved away and moved back suggests that young people should not be discouraged from pursuing higher education or career advancement outside of the region. Rather, it seems that this time away helps this group clarify their values and see the benefits of returning to the region.

Still, for some who move away, returning presents real challenges and obstacles, consistent with the themes expressed elsewhere in this strategy. The ability to find suitable, fulfilling jobs – for the alumnus and his/her partner/spouse – as well as high-speed internet, housing, etc., are all important factors that cannot be overlooked as we try to entice alumni to return.

# Appendix 4: Attracting New Residents Community Self-Assessment Questionnaire

## Contents

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# Overview & Guide

This document invites you to explore a wide range of community characteristics. Some of the questions are ones that potential residents may be asking when deciding where to live. Others are critical indicators of community well-being that will directly affect attempts to attract and retain new residents.

A separate, fillable form of this questionnaire is available on request.

The process of reviewing and answering these questions should help communities understand their strengths and weaknesses – especially through the lens of how others might see them.

While community leaders may undertake this exercise, it may be highly beneficial to have an objective third party work with the community to complete the questionnaire, review results, and develop a plan to address issues and take advantage of natural opportunities. An external eye can help identify community weaknesses that have been normalized, and which are critically important to raise and address when seeking to attract new residents.

Many of the questions are subjective, so this tool, even if led by a third party, is ideally a team activity. It's best if a group of people discusses them and comes to agreement on the response than if one person enters their opinion alone. Places of disagreement are also revealing; the process and the questions can be just as important as the answers. Also, you'll probably need input from a range of local stakeholders such as municipal staff, school board members, realtors, business owners, and others. This should be a fun and revealing deep dive into what makes your community special (and where it can improve).

Some questions are framed as yes/no – you should always elaborate on your response to capture the reason behind it. The more thought you put into the answers, the more useful a tool this will be.

Once you've completed all the questions, review the whole document – again, ideally with a team, perhaps including one or more people who aren't residents to provide objectivity and context – and reflect on your responses overall:

- *What are you doing especially well? Where do you excel?*
  - *Do residents, visitors, or people “from away” know about these strengths? How could you convey or share them more widely?*
  - *Which of these strengths make you stand out from other communities in your area?*
- *What are the obvious weak points?*
  - *Are there items that could easily be fixed?*
  - *What's already being worked on?*
  - *Is anything so challenging that you don't feel equipped to address it at all yet?*

These reflections lay the foundation for building a workplan to guide your community's individual Attracting New Residents strategy.



## Downtown Area

1. What is the general condition of the downtown?
2. Has there been recent public and/or private investment? Do these investments add to the attractiveness, functionality or uniqueness of downtown?
3. What is the % occupancy of first-floor commercial properties?
4. List and describe any anchor/destination institutions.
5. Is there an established group focused on downtown improvement? Do they have a strong track record of getting things done?
6. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Demographics

1. What are the general demographic trends in town? See <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.
2. Are there any institutions that significantly skew or influence the data? (e.g., prisons, colleges, retirement communities)
3. Does the community have a significant seasonal population?
4. Are there any upcoming events that may affect the demographics?
5. Has Covid-19 caused significant demographic changes?
6. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.

## Education

1. Does the community house a public primary and/or secondary school? Private school(s)?
2. Are there discussions about potential school consolidation with neighboring communities?
3. What are the enrollment trends? See [NYSED Data Site](#)
4. Do local schools pay well relative to others nearby? See [https://www.seethroughny.net/teacher\\_pay](https://www.seethroughny.net/teacher_pay).
5. How does the community demonstrate commitment to the school? E.g., does the school budget generally pass as recommended by the school board? With/without difficulty?
6. How might an outsider considering moving into the district view the school system based on publicly available information like rankings? Are there any features of the school that you would want this audience to know about?
7. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Employment

1. Who are the major employers? Why did they locate here? How long have they been here?
2. Have new businesses opened recently? Why? By longtime residents or newcomers?
3. Are new businesses / job opportunities on the horizon?
4. Have there been any recent business closures or losses? Why?
5. What is the general balance between seasonal and year-round jobs?
6. Do employers recruit from elsewhere (“outsource”)? Why?
7. Are there co-working spaces available?
8. Is there a robust work-from-home population in the community?
9. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Financial Resources

1. What's the size of the town budget? Is it meeting the needs of the community? Is the budget stable from year to year?
2. Are any large projects being delayed or ignored for lack of resources?
3. What's the town's bonding capacity?
4. Does the town generally have discretionary funds available?
5. What is the town's experience securing and managing state and/or federal grants and loans?
6. Is there an expectation that certain town employee(s) must be skilled at grantwriting and grant management?
7. Does the town have a capital improvement plan, and does it follow it?
8. Are there individuals, organizations or corporations who provide significant private funding to community projects?
9. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Health Care

1. What health care facilities are available in town?
2. How far is it to the nearest hospital? How far away are urgent care and emergency services?
3. Are there any recent changes to local health care availability? Why?
4. Is local health care considered high-quality?
5. Do local health care facilities offer services on a sliding cost scale to accommodate lower-income individuals?
6. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Housing

1. What are the general real estate trends in town? E.g., how quickly properties are selling, what kinds of properties are most/least popular, etc.
2. What type of homes are generally available to buy? To rent?
3. Describe the general quality of housing. Is there a wide range?
4. Are there many contractors (construction, plumbing, electrical, etc.) in the area and are they readily available?
5. Has the town, county or area non-profits made any efforts to address housing issues?
6. Has Covid-19 changed any of the town's housing dynamics?
7. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Infrastructure

1. What's the status of town water? Sewer? Roads? Is the condition of these services limiting growth in the community?
2. What is the town's commitment to infrastructure maintenance?
3. Is there a significant maintenance backlog?
4. Does the town anticipate any near-term infrastructure investments?
5. Is there a plan for securing funding? A timeline for implementing projects?
6. Are there adequate bike lanes and sidewalks to make walking and biking safe and accessible?
7. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**



# Technology

1. Where is high-speed broadband available? Is there a map or is your response based on general understanding? (You may want to consult this FCC broadband map <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/#/> or the New York State Broadband Availability Mapper <https://map.nysbroadband.ny.gov/html5viewer/?viewer=broadband>).
2. How strong and broad is cell coverage?
3. Are there institutions with high-speed broadband access?
4. Are there any pending broadband investments?
5. Have there been any broadband studies / planning efforts?
6. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

## Visioning & Outlook

1. Does the town have a master plan? When was it last revised?
2. How does the town implement its master plan or other guiding documents?
3. Has the town gone through any other visioning / planning processes in the last 10 years? What happened as a result?
4. How would you characterize the community's general outlook on its status and future?
5. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Leadership

1. Are there any groups or organizations dedicated to building local leadership?
2. Are town leadership positions and committees operating at full capacity, or do there tend to be unfilled seats?
3. Do community leaders (formal and informal) tend to have a positive outlook?
4. Does town leadership tend to be open to new ideas?
5. Are there many different people involved in community groups, or is it typically the same group?
6. Are there informal leaders who work on significant projects independently from organized town efforts?
7. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Regional Connections

- 1. With what other communities do you have close ties, and why?
- 2. Are there regional organizations with which you've worked on various projects/initiatives?
- 3. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.

# Natural Environment

Resources for this section include the Adirondack Park Agency <https://apa.ny.gov/gis/>, state planning agencies [https://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/planning\\_agencies.html](https://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/planning_agencies.html), and local land trusts <https://www.findalandtrust.org/>.

1. What portion of the town is part of the Forest Preserve? What state land unit(s) are these lands part of?
2. Are there any major land parcels that are expected to be sold or developed in the near future, or that may be ecologically vulnerable?
3. Other than state lands, what other land in the town is in public ownership or conserved? Are these lands open to the public?
4. Are there any special environmental stewardship programs/groups?
5. Are there any known environmental hazards in the area?
6. Has the town prioritized land ownership - owning its own parkland, forests, etc.? Why?
7. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

## Culture & Recreation

1. Are there any special historical features, people, or events? What is the community best known for?
2. What arts institutions and opportunities exist? (museums, theaters, galleries, classes, etc.)
3. What recreational opportunities exist? (sports fields, tennis courts, swimming pools, bowling alley, gym, etc.) Which of these rec assets does the town own/manage?
4. Are there any recreation-related businesses? (e.g., bike shop, watersports, gear, guiding)
5. What formal recreational assets/programs does the town offer?
6. What would you want visitors to take away from a visit to your town?
7. Do you have public restrooms (and maintain them)?
8. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

**Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.**

# Community Life

- 1. Does the community hold any annual public events?
- 2. Where can you buy groceries? Is there fairly ample, diverse product selection?
- 3. Are there any public transportation options available locally?
- 4. What kind of shops and restaurants are available? Are they year-round, or seasonal?
- 5. Are there many appealing places for visitors to stay nearby (e.g., hotels, campgrounds, Airbnb)?
- 6. Does the community have a strong level of volunteerism? Are there many opportunities to serve?
- 7. Overall Comments: Strengths, weaknesses, specific areas for improvement.

Enter responses below. Add pages if necessary.



If you are interested in learning more about this strategy or becoming involved in this initiative, please email Leslie Karasin at [lkarasin@northernforest.org](mailto:lkarasin@northernforest.org).