



RADICALLY RURAL NEW RESIDENT RELOCATION GUIDE



*Strategies for Rural Communities to Attract and
Retain Workforce
December 2021*

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INTRODUCTION

A Need for Community: Relocating Urban to Rural

COVID, fires, remote workforce opportunities, and safety are all issues that have changed attitudes and created an urban population that is looking for change. People are seeking to relocate to places with more family safety, a safer environment, small business opportunities, and a peaceful setting. There are many examples of families and individuals who have moved to North Dakota for just those reasons, we learn about more every day.

North Central Planning Council's region has much to offer; lakes and many other outdoor activities, friendly communities, peacefulness, and importantly affordability in comparison to larger cities. Workforce is a national need, and communities large and small are offering creative incentives for people. **This publication offers just a snapshot of what incentives are out there, as ideas.**

This region has a great deal to offer, and with interesting incentives it might be the right place for the right families or businesses. The examples within this publication are just that, examples. There are any number of creative ways to entice people to this region, and we believe the communities and counties of our region have an opportunity, during this time of urban to rural relocation to promote their area to gain new residents, new businesses, and new workforce.

We have stories of families and individuals who have moved to rural North Dakota. People like the Peacock family who moved to Ashely, renovated an existing building and created a liquor store for the community...because it was significantly more affordable for them than any urban area, and they had visited and appreciated the community. They love raising their son in an environment that is safe. They have engaged in the community and made great friends.

We too often think that we have not enough to offer, yet we offer what so many people are looking for; a strong community culture, family safety, and affordable living. Add to that the wealth of outdoor activities and events that the North Central Region can offer, and it is a great package.

INTRODUCTION

A Need for Community: Relocating Urban to Rural (Continued)

The relocation incentives described here are broad and can be significant. What is included within this are examples of communities of smaller size; however, workforce needs have dictated more urban cities to offer incentives as well. What can you offer? What would benefit a family who moves to your community or county? **Remember, the incentives are great; however, data shows that community matters, and offering special, hospitality supported tours or visits to your area might be a benefit of its own.**

The offer of a visitor's package of hotel room, meals, and area tours and community meetings is an incentive to visit a community with opportunity, that might include jobs, entrepreneurial opportunities, and a wealth of outdoor activities.

STAND-IN GRANDPARENTS

The most creative, heart-felt offer out there.

A rural city in southeastern Indiana in the United States has piqued the interest of hundreds of families considering a move there after it offered stand-in “grandparents” to babysit their children as part of an incentive program aimed at attracting remote workers.

A local couple, Tami and Dan Wenning, volunteered to serve as grandparents to children from the first five families that agreed to move to Greensburg under the program. If more new residents make the move, other grandparents in the community “are more than ready” to step in and help,” Tami said.

Greensburg, southeast of Indianapolis, will offer the free babysitting service for the next six to 12 months as part of the program it’s calling “Grandparents on Demand”. Kids are also guaranteed to have a fill-in grandma and grandpa on Grandparents Day at school – a perk for those moving far away from family.

Just two weeks after the initiative launched, more than 1,000 applications have rolled in, said Evan Hock, co-founder of Indianapolis-based MakeMyMove, an online directory that connects remote workers with such offers around the country. Hock said the unique incentive has been a “big contributor” to the influx of interest, and considerations are now being made to scale-up the Greensburg program, depending on housing availability.

Tami, 57, volunteered for the incentive program through her work as director of the Decatur County Community Foundation and said she and her husband “absolutely love” serving as grandparents to their own kids already. They’ve also offered their home to more than a dozen foreign exchange students in recent years.

“I’ve lived here my whole life, and I’m excited to share with the people who want what we have, because what we have is special,” she said. “We’re the perfect place for somebody to raise a family, and I cannot begin to imagine moving away and being in a place where you don’t have that network of people that, in a pinch, you’ve got somebody to rely on.”

STAND-IN GRANDPARENTS

The five spots in Greensburg are expected to be filled in the next 30 days, Hock said, and new residents will get assistance moving to the city over the next two or three months.

The relocation package also includes \$5,000 in cash, invitations to home-cooked meals at neighbors' homes, a one-year membership to the local co-working space and YMCA, free gift cards to the seasonal farmers market, and tickets to productions at the local playhouse.

The remote worker relocation package is designed to recruit new residents to the city amid a growing shift to permanent remote work that was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The campaign is part of a nationwide trend of workers moving to smaller communities with a more affordable cost of living.

Hock said 70% of applicants to the Greensburg program are remote workers, and interest is coming "from all over the country", including Texas, California, and New York.

MakeMyMove.com

[Do what you love, in a place that you love. - MakeMyMove](#)

Make My Move is a new company, based out of Indianapolis, Indiana. It is a new online directory helping to connect people with cities and towns offering incentives ranging from tax breaks to cash, mortgage forgiveness to tuition reimbursement, and more, all in the name of boosting their own local populations.

"If there's one thing we've learned over the last year it's the importance of living the life you truly want. That means living wherever you want as well. Luckily, there are dozens of cities across the United States that are now offering thousands of dollars to people willing to relocate, and they can all be found on MakeMyMove.com."

What Can Your Community Offer?

- Do you have an empty storefront available for an entrepreneur?
- Do you have an opportunity for a plumber, electrician, or other tradesperson to purchase a business due to retirement?
- Are there any small farms available in your area?
- Are there trails for hiking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing?
- Specialty hunting? Birds, deer, other?
- Unique restaurant with German, Scandinavian, or other ethnic foods?
- Homemaker clubs, trapshooting, and other community organizations?
- What makes you a great community?

OTHER RURAL INCENTIVE EXAMPLES

Bemidji, MN - 218 Relocate

[218 Relocate](#) | [Bemidji, MN](#) | [Telecommuter Campaign](#)

The Greater Bemidji 218 Relocate Incentive Package was created to encourage professionals interested in moving to the Bemidji area to choose their lifestyle and take the leap.

- Up to \$2,500 in reimbursed moving expenses and/or qualifying telecommuter expenses not already covered by employer/company including Gigabit internet service which is widely available throughout Beltrami County.
- One-year membership to the [LaunchPad](#) co-working space in the historic Mayflower Building (\$1,500 value).
- Free access to the [Community Concierge Program](#), connecting you and your family to the community.
- Teleworking support and tools through [Effective Remote Work](#) (provided by [Justin DiRose](#)).
- New Bonus Benefit: One-year Associate Level membership to the Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce (\$335 value).

Choose your lifestyle. Live and work in the northland.

Vermont

[Relocation Incentives](#) | [ThinkVermont](#)

The New Relocating Worker Grant, with a maximum award of \$7,500, is to encourage workers to move to Vermont to work for Vermont employers. The Vermont Legislature has created the following relocation incentives to attract new residents to the state and grow the workforce as well as provide support to Vermont employers. The [New Relocating Worker Grant](#) is available to new residents taking a qualifying job with a Vermont employer. The [New Remote Worker Grant](#) will be available after February 1, 2022 to new residents that work for an out-of-state employer.

OTHER RURAL INCENTIVE EXAMPLES

Newton, Iowa

[Housing Initiative | Newton, IA - Official Website \(newtongov.org\)](#)

The city of Newton goes to [extra lengths to get residents to settle into their community](#) long-term. They offer up to \$10,000 cash to new homebuyers and throw in a welcome package of over \$3,000.

The incentive also applies to new home construction as well giving anyone looking to plant down roots and the opportunity to build a dream home. The median cost of a home in Newton is just over \$105,000, making it attractively affordable over most coastal cities.

North Platte, Nebraska

[WORKNP - North Platte Area Chamber & Development Corporation, NE \(nparea.com\)](#)

Focused on economic development, North Platte knows more residents means a stronger economy. That's why [they match signing bonuses for new hires](#) up to \$5000. That extra cash goes far in a city with an exceptionally low cost of living.

Hamilton, Ohio

Hamilton, Ohio is smart to recognize that student loans are undercutting growth for college graduates. That's why [they offer resident incentives of up to \\$10,000](#) to college grads to relocate. The money is paid out incrementally over the year. The goal is to help you pay down those debts while discovering a great and affordable place to live. But there are eligibility requirements. Among several qualifications, those applying for the Talent Attraction program must have graduated within the past seven years from a STEAM program (one focused on science, technology, engineering, the arts or mathematics).

OTHER RURAL INCENTIVE EXAMPLES

Lincoln, Kansas

[City of Lincoln, Kansas \(lincolnks.org\)](http://lincolnks.org)

Looking to build your dream home? You may want to lay your foundation in Lincoln. [The city is offering free land](#) for new homebuilders. Lots ranging in size from 12,000 to 35,000 square feet are offered for free to anyone willing to establish roots in their town.

There are set guidelines and time restrictions for new building projects under the program, but they are well worth the chance to take that dream home from blueprints to construction.

CLIMATE CHANGE COULD HELP RURAL

How Climate Change Could Help Modernize Rural America The Conversation 10/19/2021

By Hillary A. Brown and Daniel R. Brooks, The Conversation

Given the right support, community leaders may be able to re-energize their towns by encouraging people displaced by climate disasters to move in.

“Managed retreat” is a proactive concept—it involves rebuilding in safer locations before disasters hit. That includes reinventing, reconfiguring and reconstructing housing and commerce. It could also mean creating networks of reinvigorated small towns, particularly those not far from the amenities and services of a sizable city.

Successful recovery and reinvention start with a community-supported plan for the future, including opportunities for in-town housing space, commercial opportunities and upgraded public services.

One way to encourage interest from investors and future residents is to focus on climate-friendly infrastructure powered by renewable energy. Areas rich in wind, sunlight and forests can update their zoning rules to encourage renewable energy investment, along with non-industrialized food production, such as organic farms.

Developing high-tech greenhouses, such as those populating farmlands across Europe, for example, could support new jobs and provide fresh produce. The coal country town of Morehead, Kentucky, for instance, is supporting a hydroponic greenhouse that’s now producing nearly 3 million pounds of beefsteak tomatoes a year.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

It Takes a Village: Rural Recruitment and Retention

Rural Health Information Hub

by Allee Mead

Benjamin Anderson, former CEO of Kearny County Hospital in Lakin, Kansas, remembers when his hospital and five or six others in the area decided to work together to recruit family medicine physicians finishing up their residencies. They collectively approached residency programs “and we said we want to recruit 15 or 20 primary care doctors out here,” Anderson said. “We are not as concerned with who goes where. We’re not going to fight over this doctor or that doctor.”

Working collaboratively also allowed these hospitals to pool resources and host what they called “focus weekends” or “fly-in weekends.” The hospitals shared the costs of hotel rooms for the potential recruits and conference rooms for meetings, and hospital CEOs personally provided ground transportation. Wealthy farmers and other business owners lent private planes to fly recruits to the area and a state farm bureau funded a steak dinner. A local zoo held a private event where the recruits and their families could feed some of the animals. Immigrant and refugee community members hosted meals to showcase the cultural diversity in the area.

The hospitals hosted three focus weekends, resulting in a total of 20 physicians signing contracts with a participating hospital. Anderson said the recruitment effort was so successful his hospital stood to lose its Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) status and needed a governor’s exemption in order to keep its Rural Health Clinic status.

“When we pooled all those resources together, we figured out we have the resources of a more urban area,” Anderson said. “There was a compounding effect, a realization that we’re better together.”

“We’re better together” is an excellent approach for recruitment efforts. Whether or not rural healthcare facilities are able to partner with nearby hospitals and clinics, they can partner with community organizations and local businesses and individuals to improve the job interview experience and help new employees quickly become and remain engaged in the community.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

First Impressions

It can be difficult to recruit healthcare professionals to rural areas for a variety of reasons. Job candidates might worry about a heavy workload or isolation, while rural facilities may struggle to compete with urban facilities in terms of salary or benefits.

Mark Barclay is director of member services at 3RNET, a national membership association. Barclay provides technical assistance, training, and other resources to 3RNET's national network of coordinators. "I work a lot with the employers that are using 3RNET to post their jobs and then the healthcare professionals that are trying to connect to those jobs," he said. His organization helps job candidates understand what it's like to work in rural and underserved areas and find employment opportunities while also helping healthcare facilities improve their recruitment and retention efforts.

"A lot of rural employers struggle with the capacity to have dedicated staffing and resources to do recruitment well, so we try to help build their capacity," Barclay said. He explained that many rural facilities do not have staff members solely dedicated to recruitment or marketing; these employees often fulfill multiple roles and don't have the time or resources to improve hiring efforts.

This lack of a dedicated recruiting/marketing person can affect job candidates' first impressions of a rural healthcare facility. "A lot of the first impressions of rural and underserved communities for the last 10 or so years have been happening virtually," Barclay said, adding that a job candidate may have a negative impression of a facility whose website "looks like it was built in 2001."

First impressions are also crucial when a healthcare professional visits a rural community during the job interview, as Pat Bertagnolli can attest to. He is the Community Enhancement Director for the Rough Rider Center (a community center) in Watford City, North Dakota, but he works closely with McKenzie County Healthcare Systems and its 24-bed Critical Access Hospital to welcome job candidates and new hires into the community.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

Bertagnolli, who grew up in rural Montana, worked for a delivery service company for 22 years until a friend of his said he was moving back to Watford City and wanted to hire Bertagnolli in a human resources position. Bertagnolli went to Watford City for a job interview and met some locals. When he was leaving a restaurant, the owner said, “Hey, Pat, it was really nice meeting you. And I certainly hope you’ll consider joining our community. We’d love to have you.” Bertagnolli said that gesture alone sold him on moving to North Dakota.

He remembers one success story at the hospital that demonstrates the power of first impressions. A hospitalist from Florida applying for a job at McKenzie County Healthcare Systems visited North Dakota when it was -25 degrees outside (-40 degrees with wind chill) and still took the job because she was so impressed by the hospitality and community spirit. “It can be done,” Sam Perry, former Senior Director of Operations & Ancillary Services at the hospital, said, “but it can only be done by having confidence in your organization and confidence in those around you.”

Focusing on Families

Barclay said that a healthcare organization needs recruiters within the facility but also in the larger community, including the school board, the chamber of commerce, and the banking industry. “What makes the community’s role different in rural and underserved areas is that you’re really trying to sell somebody on the entire community as opposed to just a job,” he said. “If you take a job in Chicago, you can assume that you’re going to have access to essentially all of the services and resources that you would need. If you take a job in a community of 750 people, it’s not as clear-cut that you’ll have options for schooling and for grocery stores.”

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Just as a healthcare professional needs to consider the larger community before taking a new job, a rural healthcare facility needs to consider the needs of a job candidate’s family, not just the individual. Chrysanne Grund has worked for [Greeley County Health Services](#) (GCHS), an integrated health system in Tribune, Kansas, in different roles for 28 years. Her current role as project director includes assisting with recruitment efforts.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

“We believe very much that we’re recruiting not only the individual, but their family when they come,” Grund said. During GCHS’s recruitment efforts, she and her team pair job candidates with individuals who have similar needs and interests. For example, if a job candidate has young children, her team will pair the candidate with a healthcare employee or community member who has insight into the community’s child care and schools. Grund said that her own children are in their twenties: “I don’t know what a person with a six- and a four-year-old is looking for in the rural community right now.”

During a visit for a job interview, local businesses offer food or provide fun activities for the family members. These same businesses also agree to help integrate the job candidate and their family into the community if the candidate accepts the job. Recently, a physician came to GCHS for a job interview. He, his wife, and their teenage boys had lunch at the bowling alley and later played disc golf. Then the family had dinner at a GCHS employee’s home with all the professional staff. The wife, a teacher, also had a chance to visit the area schools and discussed job opportunities.

“It was a wonderful experience,” Grund said. “He and his family have been out to visit several times and are in the final stages of buying a house. He will come to us summer of 2022. They were able to stay at a house next door to the hospital, loaned to us by a board member.”

McKenzie County Healthcare Systems also partners with the local schools. Bertagnolli has what he calls an ambassador program at the local high school made up of athletes, student council members, and Students Against Destructive Decisions members. These students meet with job candidates, give school tours, and explain how they help welcome new students if the candidates have school-aged children.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

Helping New Employees Stay Engaged

In addition to recruiting job candidates and their families, healthcare facilities need to consider how to get — and keep — the new staff members engaged within the larger community. Perry argues that it's important for healthcare providers to become involved in the community for their own sake: "By having regular activities both in and out of work, recruits (and their families) are much more likely to be retained and become part of the community in the long run."

Your nurse one day can be leading the choir at church and the lab technician who drew your blood yesterday may be coaching your child's sports team tomorrow night. This engagement is what really retains employees, not just salary, and this engagement is what we have tried to focus on by introducing both the employee and their families into the community.

Perry said that people in rural communities wear multiple hats. "Your nurse one day can be leading the choir at church and the lab technician who drew your blood yesterday may be coaching your child's sports team tomorrow night," he said. "This engagement is what really retains employees, not just salary, and this engagement is what we have tried to focus on by introducing both the employee and their families into the community."

Grund from GCHS shared that her facility is working on engaging with new employees after they've been hired: "We have tried to do a little better job of remaining connected with those families once they enter the community." This task isn't always easy, however. Grund admitted that it can be difficult to know how to best reach out to a new employee who is single or without other family connections, although employees with no family in town especially need this type of support.

Anderson, the former hospital CEO, said that while the hospitals in Kansas were successful in recruiting family medicine physicians to the area, the physicians told him that they didn't feel welcome outside of work. He said, "This is the feedback that we're getting from the physicians we recruited there: 'Everyone's friendly but I don't have any friends' or 'This is a wonderful place to practice medicine if I just had family here' or 'I haven't had a date with my spouse in a month and a half or two months or six months, but there's no one willing to watch our children.'"

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

This feeling of isolation can put a strain on healthcare professionals' mental health as well as their relationships. Anderson himself babysat a couple's children so the physician and physician assistant could have a date night for the first time in months: "I remember [the husband] saying that was worth more to him than a \$50,000 retention bonus."

Rural folks can be slow to warm up to new community members, Anderson said, but there are ways to help new providers feel welcome sooner, such as having four or five families in the community act as ambassadors. In his experience, immigrant families were the most influential in keeping providers in the community because they can empathize with moving to a new place and because "they actively need the same support."

Anderson said that "there's got to be a deeper commitment to hospitality" in the healthcare facility and larger community. He added that the effort needs to be done "similar to how we would launch a pain management or orthopedic service line" — for example, by determining a budget and creating a list of measurable goals and accountable stakeholders.

Inviting People In

Bertagnolli from North Dakota suggests that one way to think deliberately about recruitment is to bring in people from outside the community who can identify strengths that people living there may take for granted. In addition, he often asks employees and community members to articulate why they themselves live where they do and what makes them stay.

Anderson's advice for encouraging hospital employees, community members, board members, and others to join recruitment efforts is to call them into the work instead of calling them out. He remembers a time when a board member congratulated him on his recruiting efforts then asked how he'd be able to sustain it long-term. (Anderson and his family had become exhausted doing this work largely by themselves due to others' lack of interest.)

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

Frustrated, Anderson told the board, “If you want to ensure the sustainability of this, have these people over to your home for dinner.” One board member became defensive at his tone. Anderson realized later that a better approach to getting stakeholders involved is saying, “This work takes everybody. We need you to be part of the solution. Will you join us in this really important work, as it can make a big difference for our community?”

Recruitment and Retention Topic Guide

You can learn more about the challenges of and available resources for recruiting and retaining healthcare staff in the RHIhub [Recruitment and Retention for Rural Health Facilities](#) topic guide.