Return migration and community assets during COVID-19: A northwest Missouri survey

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Outline

• Project Motivation and Response Overview
• COVID-19 and Where You Want to Live
• The Best Things About NWMO
• What Drives Migration Decisions in NWMO?
• What Will Influence Where Survey Respondents Move in the Next Five Years?
• How Can Maximize NWMO Strengthen the Region?
• Policy Implications
Project Motivation and Response Overview
Survey rationale

17 Rural Non-metro Counties

• How can leaders in Northwest Missouri stem population loss?

• Research in low amenity areas shows:
  • Return-migrants are more likely to migrate to a rural community than migrants with no roots in the region.
  • Family ties and attachment to place outweigh economic opportunities for return-migrants.
  • Return-migrants bring life experiences, new skills and new perspectives.
Persistent population loss affects many rural regions. Why do people leave? Why do they stay?

Components of Population Change: Northwest Missouri

- Natural Increase
- Net Int'l Migration
- Net Domestic Migration
- Total Change

U.S. Nonmetro Population Change, 2010-17

Source: USDA. Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, V2019
Migration follows age specific patterns

Northwest Missouri is considered a geographically disadvantaged region, defined as having low natural amenities relative to a national scale.

Research suggests NWMO is most likely to be successful attracting people between the ages of:
- 30-40
- 60-70
Purpose of the survey

• How can leaders in this low amenity, rural region focus their efforts to reduce net population loss?
  • The survey was a discovery process in work towards the goal of keeping and attracting talent to the region that feeds innovation and the entrepreneurship ecosystem necessary for building a more thriving region.

• What assets or characteristics are most valued within the region?

• Has COVID-19 created opportunities for rural communities to reattract out-migrants? Does this vary with age?
Survey details

Primary Targets: NWMO high school alumni ages 23-47
Secondary Targets: Current and former residents with a strong tie to the region ages 18-100+
Survey open: July 14-September 30, 2020
Promoted through email, Facebook, Twitter, news releases, and interviews with volunteers in local radio, television, and newspapers.

Responses

- Online only, using Qualtrics
- 2,182 respondents
- 1,939 complete responses
- Gender, age, geography, migration status
- Caveats: 75% of respondents were women and there were no population weights, online access bias
A wide range of views were captured, including by employment status: 12% of respondents own a business
A wide variety of ages responded

- Gen Z: 2%
- Millennial: 26%
- Gen X: 32%
- Baby Boomer: 35%
- Silent: 4%

**Millennial and Baby Boomer respondents’ views may be most important as they are more likely to move back.**

Gen Z age 25 years and younger, Millennial age 26-40, Gen X age 41-55, Baby Boomer age 56-74, Silent age 75 years and older.
We analyze respondents by their migration status

We used survey questions to create these groups:

- **Leavers**: respondents who grew up in NWMO but no longer live there
- **Returners**: respondents who grew up in NWMO, moved away, and have since moved back
- **Stayers**: respondents who grew up and have always lived in NWMO
- **In-Migrants**: respondents who did not grow up in NWMO but currently live in the region
Robust responses by age and migration status

This is a very robust set of responses that allow us to have confidence in examining differences between age and migration status.

Leavers: grew up in NWMO but no longer live there; Returners: Grew up, moved away, moved back; Stayers: Grew up and have always lived in NWMO; In-Migrants: did not grow up in NWMO but currently live there.
COVID-19 and Where You Want to Live
Research Questions

• Has COVID affected perceptions about rural lifestyles?

• Has COVID created opportunities for rural communities to reattract outmigrants?

• Does this vary with age/generation?

From: Von Reichert, Cromartie & Arthun, 2013
Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your attitude about where you want to live?

35% of respondents said COVID-19 has made them value living in a less populated area more than before.
By migrant status: Has COVID changed your attitude about where you want to live?

- 60% of respondents answered yes.
- 44% of all respondents said they now valued living in a less populated area more than before.

Q6.11 by Q1.6
Regressions

• Question: Has COVID created opportunities for rural return migration?
  • Will COVID make rural return migration more attractive?
  • Do outmigrants have different attitudes about where to live after COVID?
• Dependent variable: Has COVID changed your attitude about where to live?

• Multivariate probit regressions
• Test variable: Migrant status
  • Out-migrant
  • In-migrant
  • Returner
  • Stayer
• Controlling for gender, employment status, household composition, age/generation, metro-location and survey month
### Regression Results

- **Test variables:** Migrant status
  - Left (out-migrant)
  - In-migrant
  - Returner
  - Stayer (omitted condition)

- **Dependent variable:** Has COVID changed your attitude about where to live?
  - No (column 1)
  - Yes—value living in a less populated area (2)
  - Yes—value living closer to friends and family (3)

- **Marginal effects reported on the next slide**

#### Regression Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>0.47 *** (0.14)</td>
<td>-0.80 *** (0.09)</td>
<td>-0.28 ** (0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-migrant</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.07)</td>
<td>-0.26 *** (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returner</td>
<td>-0.18 *** (0.04)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.15 * (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.30 *** (0.07)</td>
<td>0.21 *** (0.07)</td>
<td>0.19 *** (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Business</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.19 * (0.10)</td>
<td>-0.20 *** (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>0.02 (0.07)</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.12)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>-0.18 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.12)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.06)</td>
<td>-0.12 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Z</td>
<td>0.49 ** (0.24)</td>
<td>-0.56 ** (0.26)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millenial</td>
<td>0.25 * (0.15)</td>
<td>-0.34 * (0.18)</td>
<td>0.34 * (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>0.21 * (0.13)</td>
<td>-0.25 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.21 (0.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomer</td>
<td>0.10 (0.14)</td>
<td>-0.21 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.28 * (0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.09)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>0.20 *** (0.07)</td>
<td>-0.13 * (0.07)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>0.06 (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.19 * (0.10)</td>
<td>-0.08 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.30 ** (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.01 ** (0.10)</td>
<td>(0.08) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=1,752</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **N=1,752**
COVID has **not** changed my attitude about where to live

• 40% of respondents (n=766), *ceteris paribus*:

  - Leavers are 18% more likely to say this than stayers
    - Leavers are less affected by COVID, and maybe are happy where they are?

  - Returners are 7% less likely to say this than stayers
    - Returners are more affected by COVID, more likely to think about moving again? Broadened horizons?

• Stayers and In-migrants are no different from each other

• Younger generations are more likely to say this
  - Gen Z - 18% more likely than boomers or silent generation
  - Millennials – 9% more likely than boomers or silent generation
  - Gen X – 8% more likely than boomers or silent generation
COVID has changed my attitude about where to live: I value living in a less populated area more

- 44% of respondents (n=853), ceteris paribus:

- Leavers are 30% less likely to say this than stayers
  - Leavers left because they don’t value living in rural areas?

- No difference for returners, in-migrants or stayers

- People currently located in metro areas were 7% less likely to say this than those in nonmetro areas
COVID has changed my attitude about where to live: I value living closer to family and friends more than I did before

- 26% of respondents (n=499), *ceteris paribus*:
- Leavers were 9% less likely to say this than stayers
- In-migrants were 8% less likely to say this than stayers

- **Returners were 5% more likely to say this than stayers**
  - Due to COVID returners value friends and family more than stayers
  - Once you’re left, it opens your eyes to what you left and you appreciate it?

- Millennials, boomers more likely to say this than silent generation
Conclusions: COVID-19 and Rural Migration

• COVID has not made rural areas more attractive to natives who have left Northwest Missouri

• COVID has had less impact on younger people’s perceptions about where to live

• Consistent with previous rural migration research, low amenity areas are most desirable to people with existing family ties
  • Support families, youth organizations, target leavers
  • More deliberately engage in-migrants
  • Interesting differences about who feels like they belong in the community

• People need jobs to stay in the region (see next slide)
The Best Things about NWMO
Relationships with friends and family are the most valued characteristic about the region.

What is/was the very best thing about living and/or working in Northwest Missouri?

- Relationships with Friends and Family: 44%
- Community Pride/Strong Community Identity: 13%
- Cost of Living: 12%
- Safety: 9%
- Size of Town: 6%
- A Sense of Belonging: 6%

These findings are consistent with other studies.

Community pride and a strong community identity was the next most frequently chosen response among 17 options.
What is/was the very best thing about living and/or working in Northwest Missouri?

Relationships with friends and family was chosen by approximately half of all leavers, returners and stayers.

In-migrants were more likely to say cost of living than other groups.
What drives migration decisions in NWMO?
People stay in NWMO to be near family and friends and so their children can grow up like they did

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be near family and friends</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want my kids to grow up like I did</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in my community</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support my spouse</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always knew I wanted to stay</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support a family business</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage and salary job opportunities</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based opportunities</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational opportunities</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and geography</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives and people</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2,702</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Returners leave for jobs and educations, they come back to be near family and friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wage and salary job opportunities</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational opportunities</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support my spouse</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always knew I wanted to leave</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives and people</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be near family and friends</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and geography</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a certain quality of life for my children</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support a family business</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in my community</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be near family and friends</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want my kids to grow up like I did</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job opportunities</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support my spouse</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always knew I wanted to come back</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support a family business</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in my community</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In-migrants are more likely to move into the region because of a personal connection

In-migrants were drawn to move into NWMO by family connections, friendships and to support their spouse.

12% of respondents mentioned they moved into the region so that their kids could grow up like they did, suggesting they originated from a similar region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support my spouse</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be near family and friends</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage or salary job opportunities</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational opportunities</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want my kids to grow up like I did</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based opportunities</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and geography</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support a family business</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in my community</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always knew I wanted to come back</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives and people</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>754</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents who no longer live in NWMO were most likely to leave for jobs and educational opportunities.

Which of the following reasons contributed to your decision to leave the region?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wage or salary job opportunities</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational opportunities</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support my spouse’s career</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and inclusiveness of many perspectives</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always knew I wanted to leave</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a certain quality of life for my children</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be near family and friends</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship or business ownership opportunities</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and geography</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based opportunities</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support a family business</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to be more engaged in community leadership</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is consistent with why returners leave as well. People have different preferences for place, 7% of all responding leavers knew they always wanted to leave.
What will influence where survey respondents move in the next five years?
Nearly 1 in 4 respondents may choose to move

Returners were the least likely to say they will move
• 67% of all returners said they were somewhat or extremely unlikely to move
• 63% of all stayers said they were somewhat or extremely unlikely to move

Leavers were most likely to say they will move again.
• 42% of leavers said they were somewhat or extremely likely to move.
How important are each of the following factors in your decision about where you will live in the next 5 years?

Most frequently ranked as very important factors:

- Ties to the area
- Health care
- Access to a hardware, grocery, and other stores
- Broadband
- Quality k-12 schools
- Growing economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ties to area</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>2062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>2056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to a hardware, grocery, and other stores</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>2056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband or high-speed internet</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of local K-12 schools</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>2043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong or growing local economy</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>2042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy commute</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>2048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to fresh produce</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>2048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and geography</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic beauty (e.g., natural or architectural)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>2052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor recreation</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>2053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to a local lawyer, accountant and other professional services</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available housing</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>2039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and entertainment</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to a coffee shop/bakery</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked to identify the most important factor in their decision about where they will live in the next 5 years, respondents chose “Family and social ties” the most, and twice as often as the following factor, schools.

Regional development efforts can support families and intentionally help in-migrants build social connections within organizations.
Targeted investments can help build desirable communities

Most important factor in your decision about where you will live in the next 5 years by migration status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migration Status</th>
<th>Ties</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Healthcare</th>
<th>Broadband</th>
<th>Climate and geography</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Recreation</th>
<th>Stores</th>
<th>Commute</th>
<th>Access to fresh produce</th>
<th>Professional services</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Returns</td>
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<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stayers</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-migrants</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<td>17%</td>
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</table>
No matter where they currently live, people likely to move again value similar place characteristics.

**Top 5 Most Important Factors** in your decision about where you will live in the next 5 years:

- 1. Access to fresh produce
- 2. Coffee shops & bakeries
- 3. Access to professional services
- 4. Arts & Entertainment
- 5. Ties to the area

Ties to the area were still important to both groups, but they are more likely to value access to fresh produce, coffee shops and bakeries. Having a local lawyer, accountant and other professional services is also important. Coordinated development efforts can address these preferences.
Which of the following opportunities would make it easier for you to move back?

People who have left indicate more interaction personally and professionally as well as broadband and recreational amenities would make it easier for them to move back.

- N=179, 420 total responses.
  - 10% of all responses indicated no changes would make it easier
How can Maximize NWMO strengthen the region?
People have a variety of perspectives on strengthening the region

Local government will effectively handle important problems with integrity
- Disagree: 20%
- Agree: 37%

People are willing to help their neighbors
- Disagree: 6%
- Agree: 84%

People will work together to address local concerns
- Disagree: 16%
- Agree: 55%

I feel like I belong*
- Disagree: 10%
- Agree: 72%

People in my community respect my values
- Disagree: 12%
- Agree: 57%

*There were not strong differences among the views of stayers, returners and in-migrants except for “I feel like I belong.”
In-migrants were less likely to feel they belong

We'd like to feel we belong, but after 17 years we still don't really feel like we're accepted and members of the community.
What changes are you most excited about for the future of Northwest Missouri?

- Respondents often wrote about their aspirations for how they want to see the region change. These individuals want to see the region’s economy grow, better broadband, and more collaboration within their communities.

- The second most common response was a mixture of people who felt like the region was not changing or they were unaware of any exciting changes happening.

This was an open-ended write in response that generated 1,088 responses, these were grouped into eight categories.
What excites you about the future of NWMO?

**Growing economy**
- Young adults considering business opportunities and entrepreneurial opportunities in rural areas
- Downtown revitalization
- Local employment opportunities, local recreational options, local lodging (cabins, B and B), local community center
- The growth potential - more families, more businesses, more pride in each city
- I would like to see it grow and be more accepting to new businesses. I would like to see more activities for parents and children to partake in.

**Broadband and Infrastructure**
- Increasing ability to telecommute might allow us to keep talented individuals in the community
- Maintain & Upgrading Road & Bridges in Northwest Missouri
- The additional sidewalks are nice. And the new shops and restaurants are great too.

**Collaboration, Cooperation, More Diversity**
- I think the younger generations are stepping up and we may see more progressive communities
- New leadership means new opportunities for our town
- Attracting new people with new ideas to our communities
- Seeing communities around the area start to show they care about their appearance and friendlier attitudes towards more people. It seems like some communities are starting to understand that same people can't run things the same way forever or they'll just keep pushing new residents and younger people away.
- Residents of the region embracing similar and like projects and visions. Pride and togetherness

Selected write-in responses from the 1,088 provided.
What changes worry you the most about the future of Northwest Missouri?

- Respondents were mostly worried about the future of the NWMO economy, and they were concerned about national and local political strife and leadership changes.

- The quality of local health care resources, COVID recovery, crime rates and population decline were the next most commonly voiced concerns.
What concerns you about the future of NWMO?

A declining economy
- Lack of well paying jobs, poverty, not enough jobs for professionals
- Closing of multiple long-term businesses and more restrictive business hours for community center and stores
- Businesses inability to find qualified workers
- Business closures

Declining health and safety
- Broad concern about the availability of health care providers

Youth Development
- Lack of school funding
- Quality of local schools
- Less and less for our children to do. If not involved in sports then nothing much available.

Selected write-in responses from the 1,236 provided.
Policy Implications
What efforts would you support in your community? → #1, support new businesses (jobs)

- Involving new residents in groups and committees
- Championing efforts of people trying new things
- Supporting regional events
- Building or maintaining recreational gathering places
- Including a wider range of people and perspectives in local decision making
- Building stronger youth organizations
- Supporting new businesses

**Returners**
- 17% Involve new residents in groups and committees
- 17% Champion efforts of people trying new things
- 34% Support new businesses

**Stayers**
- 13% Involve new residents in groups and committees
- 20% Champion efforts of people trying new things
- 20% Support regional events
- 34% Support new businesses

**In-Migrants**
- 16% Involve new residents in groups and committees
- 18% Champion efforts of people trying new things
- 29% Support new businesses
COVID and Migration: Carefully targeted return migration efforts are warranted

• Family and friends are important—maintain those ties and capitalize on them in recruitment

• Towns and cities in NWMO may be most attractive to potential immigrants valuing living in a less populated area due to COVID (i.e., not too rural—is there a coffee shop, bakery and grocer?)

• Early retirees might be targeted, their migration perceptions were more impacted by COVID-19
Where can Maximize NWMO focus efforts to promote the region in ways that retain and attract residents?

Actively reach-out to newcomers (in-migrants)
- Nominate newcomers to serve on boards and in other leadership roles
- Let them get their footing for a year and then watch them contribute

Engage the business community in developing solutions
- Engage with a range of businesses, work across sectors when possible
- Collaborate with other organizations

Foster job-creating businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities

Be inclusive and foster new leaders
Where can Maximize NWMO focus efforts to promote the region in ways that retain and attract residents?

Areas like NWMO are most desirable to potential in-migrants with existing family ties to the area

- Support families and youth organizations
- More deliberately engage in-migrants and potential return-migrants

Think about what it means to be not just *family friendly* but *supportive of families*

- Engage young families in the region and talk about their needs and preferences. Prioritize reviving public spaces that are family friendly and invest in youth organizations.
Where can Maximize NWMO focus efforts to promote the region in ways that retain and attract residents?

**Schools as leaders in supporting families**

- School districts can engage new families before the start of the year and host schoolwide social events that help new families meet others. Encourage transfer students to join student organizations, discuss options with parents. Be inclusive.

- Develop ways to communicate with alumni after their five year high school graduation – talk about new events, community spaces, business openings, etc.
Thank You

tinyurl.com/ExceedUpdates
tinyurl.com/muexceed