

Study of Young Professionals in Clinton, Franklin, Essex and Hamilton Counties, New York

**Conducted by the Technical Assistance Center (TAC) at the
State University of New York at Plattsburgh for the North
Country Workforce Investment Board (WIB)**



May 12, 2008

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB), the Technical Assistance Center at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh (TAC) conducted a study of the lifestyle and professional attitudes and choices of young professionals in Clinton, Franklin, Essex and Hamilton Counties, New York. A “young professional”, is defined for the purposes of this study, as a person between 20 and 44 years of age who is following a career path*.

The Workforce Investment Board requested the study in order to better understand this crucial sector of the regional workforce so that it may assist employers in retaining and attracting the best employees possible. The study reports new findings as a result of a survey and focus groups conducted of regional young professionals. Information regarding national demographics and trends is also included.

Highlights of the primary research data include:

Survey results

- 54% of the respondents stated that they either plan to stay permanently in the region, or for at least nine years.
- 75% of respondents stated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their current jobs.
- 58% of respondents stated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the community outside of their professional life.
- Regional young professionals ranked pay scale of jobs, educational opportunities, and number of jobs available as their top priorities in the area of economic/professional opportunities.
- Educational opportunities, professional development, and networking opportunities were rated as being most positive in this area. The variety of jobs, number of jobs, and pay scale of jobs were given the least favorable impression.
- The most important lifestyle opportunities for young professionals surveyed are recreational opportunities, community involvement/volunteer opportunities, arts and cultural opportunities, social gathering spots, and community identity and image.
- Of the preceding highly ranked lifestyle opportunities, respondents stated that recreational opportunities, community involvement/volunteer opportunities and community identity and image were generally well-provided for in the area. Social gathering spots and arts and cultural opportunities scored as “fair” or “poor” by nearly three-quarters of respondents.

* a career path is defined as a planned, logical progression of jobs within one or more professions throughout one’s working life.

Focus group results

- There were differing responses among participants in Clinton County and those from Franklin/Essex County. Those from the latter group generally expressed greater career and social challenges.
- Concerns about employers within the focus groups included pay levels and benefits, and also that employers should encourage strong morale among productive employees through positive feedback and incentives such as extra leave time or flexible work schedules.
- The quality of life and variety of recreational opportunities were cited as a main reason for young professionals deciding to live and stay in the area in the focus groups. Being near family was a secondary reason discussed. Clinton County participants expressed concern with a lack of family activities and arts and cultural opportunities. Franklin/Essex County participants stated that there were few gathering spots for singles, and few upscale restaurants.
- Participants lauded the opportunities for community involvement and volunteer activities in the region but stated that they could be better publicized for newcomers.
- Young professionals stated that the region has good material on which to build an identity, and image campaigns should be well thought out and comprehensively implemented.
- Focus group participants expressed concern with lack of cultural diversity in the region, with the exception of a few larger employers.
- In contrast to the survey results, a majority of the Franklin/Essex County focus group participants expected to leave in five years.

Demographic information study results

- 66,590 individuals fall into the study age group, or 38.2% of the area's total population. This compares to 37.3% statewide.
- The estimated number of young professionals participating in the regional workforce is 49,277.
- Federal statistics show an anticipated growth in the U. S. labor force of only 0.6% between 2005 and 2050; national demand for workforce between 2006 - 2016 is projected to increase 10%.
- New York State Department of Labor projects a statewide increase in demand for workforce between 2004 - 2014 at 7.4%, and in the North Country region, an increase in demand for workforce at 7.3%.
- Significant interest and good participation in the study indicates a need for continued research e.g. a marketing plan to attract and retain young professionals, and resurveying in three years.

II. DEMOGRAPHICS

Background

The WIB recognizes the significant shift in priorities of the workforce, which is increasingly comprised of “Generation Xers” (those who were born in the 1960’s and 1970’s), and “Millenials” (those who were born in the 1980’s and 1990’s). This comes at the same time as the Baby Boom generation reaches retirement age, creating a significant employment demand. A young professionals group has organized in the region to serve the professional development and networking needs of young professionals. Adirondack Young Professionals (ADK YP) is supported by the WIB, with administrative assistance, as it positively affects retention and attraction of workforce. An information sheet about ADK YP is included as Appendix A.

To address both the likely need and perceived change in workforce, this study will first present background information regarding demographics and national trends, then present the results of a survey of this group across the region. Next, it will provide focus group results and a number of conclusions, drawn from the information gathered.

A discussion of the generational component of the young professional group provides a useful framework from which to begin this study. Generation X, (sometimes liberally defined as those born between the early 1960’s and 1981), is most closely associated with the “baby bust” or extremely low birth rates following the baby boomers. Recessions of the early 1990s and early 2000’s resulted in many of this generation unemployed or underemployed, and in contrast to the Baby Boomer generation, Generation X-ers are characterized as being pessimistic about employment or financial futures, which has made them less loyal to long-term employers and seeking independent financial security. This generation has also taken societal issues such as racial conflict, AIDS, federal deficits and the social security crisis very seriously¹. Popular culture holds that this generation, which grew up in the Reagan and post-Cold War era, is marked by a measure of cynicism, and distrust of authority and traditional institutions. Generation X is quite familiar with technology and a fast pace of change. It is the first generation to grow up with personal computers.

The Millenials (who have also been called Generation Y), are those born in the 1980’s and 1990’s, but sometimes stretched to include those born as early as the late 1970’s, as this is when birth rates began to increase in the United States. These are the children of the Baby Boomers, and are clearly the future of the young professional workforce through the next 25 - 30 years. Media sources have reported that this generation is markedly

different from Generation X, particularly in that they are more idealistic and have grown up with strong expectations about positive support and feedback (from Baby Boomer parents) as well as a desire for a flexible, somewhat unstructured work environment. Media has presented much about this generation’s boundaries between their work and personal lives which have not been present in prior workforces, and where management styles require more “coaching” than “bossing”. This generation is extremely technologically competent and adept at multi-tasking. They also are known for placing importance on smooth and ample communications.²

Population of the Young Professional Group

For the purpose of this study, a “young professional” is deemed to be someone between the ages of 20 and 44 years old, who is on a career path.

According to the U.S. Census, there are 7,075,931 individuals who fall within this age group in New York State, or 37.3% of the State’s population. In the combined area of Clinton, Franklin, Essex and Hamilton Counties, there are 66,590 individuals who fall into this age group, or 38.2% of the area’s total population³. Table 1 presents more detailed information regarding the population distribution within these Counties. It is notable that the North Country region has a slightly higher percentage of this younger age group than is found Statewide.

TABLE 1. Population of 20 - 44 Year-Olds in Four County North Country Region of New York State

	Total Population	Ages 20-24	Ages 25-34	Ages 35-44	Total 20-44 Age Group
Clinton County	79,894	6,949	10,741	13,682	31,372
Essex County	38,851	1,871	5,081	6,482	13,434
Franklin County	51,134	3,351	7,796	9,160	20,307
Hamilton County	5,379	176	526	775	1,477
Total 4 County Region	175,258	12,347	24,144	30,099	66,590

Trends in Labor Force and Labor Market

The overall labor force (all employable ages) of this four county area, according to the New York State Department of Labor in February 2008, was 84,000 and there was a 5% unemployment rate at this time. Given

that the participation rate in the workforce, according to a comparison of numbers employed versus population, is 74%, the estimated number of employed young professionals in the region is 49,277.

According to the U.S Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the growth rate in labor force has been decreasing each decade since the 1970's (when it peaked at 2.6%), and is anticipated to continue to do so⁴. Between the years 2005 and 2050, the labor growth rate is only anticipated to grow by 0.6%. The labor force is affected negatively mainly by the retirement of baby boomers and the stabilization of women's participation in the workforce, and positively by increasing numbers of ethnic groups participating in the workforce. The median age of a U. S. worker is growing older, expected to be 42 by 2020, according to the BLS⁵.

Demand for workforce, based on BLS data, demonstrates a projected 10 year growth rate from 2006 - 2016 of 10%⁶. While this is slightly lower than the 12% growth rate in employment seen in the decade prior, 1996-2006, it shows a lapse in growth of employment versus growth of workforce. This will continue to be exaggerated as the baby boomer generation retires. Service industries are generating most of the employment gain expected during these years, with professional and business services, and health care and social assistance comprising much of this growth. Based on the same BLS data, manufacturing employment will continue to decline in the U.S. Management, scientific, and technical consulting services, employment services, and general medical and surgical hospitals are sectors which will experience the largest growth nationwide.

A comparison to projected New York State employment growth (available only for the decade of 2004 - 2014) shows a slightly lower growth rate in jobs than that found nationally: 7.4%. The highest rates of growth for occupational classes in New York State (in descending order) are for post-secondary teachers, computer specialists, nurses, psychiatric and home healthcare aides, other healthcare support occupations, occupational and physical therapist assistants and aides, counselors/social workers, health diagnosing and testing practitioners, advertising/ marketing/ promotions/ public relations/ sales managers, and animal care and service workers.⁷. Each of these sectors project a growth rate statewide of 15% or higher during this decade.

North Country growth rates are just slightly lower than the statewide projections for job growth during 2004 - 2014, using the same data, at 7.3%. The North Country region as reported by the State Department of Labor also includes Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties. The following table (Table 2) summarizes those job fields which according to this data are projected to have at least 25% growth during this decade.

Two fields in particular are projected to have phenomenal growth during this time period: logisticians (over 60%), and aircraft mechanics and service technicians (over 100%).

Table 2. Projected High Growth Occupations (over 25%) in the North Country Region (including Clinton, Franklin, Essex, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties) for 2004 - 2014

Transportation Inspectors	Small Engine Mechanics
Ambulance Drivers	Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians
Dental Laboratory Technicians	Security and Fire Alarm Installers
Medical Appliance Technicians	Avionics Technicians
Textile/Apparel/Woodworkers	Gaming Supervisors
Tool-Die Workers	Entertainment Attendants
Electrical/Electronic Equipment Assemblers	Tour Guides and Escorts
Paving Surfacing Equipment Operators	Pipelayers
Carpenter's Helpers	Pest Control Workers
Dental Assistants	Music Directors
Medical Assistants	Fine Artists
Physical Therapist Aides	Forest and Conservation Technicians
Physical Therapist Assistants	Urban and Regional Planners
Physical Therapists	Mechanical Engineering Technicians
Occupational Therapists	Industrial Engineering Technicians
Health Technicians	Civil Engineering Technicians
Interior Designers	Surveyors
Environmental Engineers	Electrical Engineers
Network Systems and Data Analysts	Network/Computer Systems Administrators
Computer Software Engineers	Logisticians
Meeting and Convention Planners	Advertising and Promotion Managers
Sales Managers	

Lifestyle Trends in Young Professionals

Lifestyle statistics present important details when gathering information regarding young professionals. One of these is the increase in median age for first marriage for both men and women according to U.S. Census Bureau. In 1980 for instance, the average age of first marriage for a woman was 22, and for a man, 24.7. By 2003, the median age of first marriage for a woman was 25.3, and for a man, 27.1. Household size and composition have also changed and appear to be continuing these trends. Smaller families (fewer children and many individuals or couples with no children), and many single parent households, or other non-traditional types of households are quite common. These factors indicate fewer “traditional” family types for young professionals. The workforce is thus comprised of many varieties of domestic situations.

Rebecca Ryan, in her book “Live First, Work Second” discusses the commonality of the Millennial Generation living with their parents as young adults. This is a situation that most American youth in recent generations

avoided, and was in fact stigmatized, but living with one's parents as a working young adult is becoming increasingly common, mainly for financial reasons.⁸

Numerous researchers have studied what motivates young professionals. The economist Richard Florida of the University of Toronto writes that the "creative class", which includes many young professionals, who work in high technology, science and engineering, computers and mathematics, arts and design, entertainment, and education, are increasingly driving our nation's economy. Dr. Florida asserts that this creative class seeks communities that tolerate diverse types of households or other social situations, including people of different ethnic groups and races, varying age groups, different sexual orientations, and even "alternative appearances such as significant body piercings or tattoos". He notes that they are "drawn to places known for diversity of thought and open-mindedness".⁹

Dr. Florida finds that a community pursuing a successful economy can attract creative professionals by providing numerous job opportunities (as employees increasingly do not stay a long time at any job), a variety of nearby entertainment outlets and places to socialize (arts, music, outdoor sporting opportunities, parks, coffee houses and late night dining), strong community identity, opportunities for civic involvement, and authenticity of place (unique historic districts or heritage events). Dr. Florida points out that unmarried professionals, an increasingly large demographic group, can boost a city's economy by providing a good supply of downtown residents.¹⁰ Laurie Volk, whose firm Zimmerman Volk conducts feasibility studies for developers states that the Millennial generation has a strong preference to live in downtown areas. This is often the case even when the downtown area does not have an ideal amount of restaurants or other amenities, according to Volk.¹¹

Rebecca Ryan is the principal of Next Generation Consulting, a market research firm that specializes in Generation X. Ms. Ryan and her colleagues have built a solid reputation on understanding what young professionals desire in a community, and one of the main concepts is that they desire, first, a "cool" community in which to live, and then, a good job. Ms. Ryan states that Generation X and the Millennials, "want communities that 'fit' their values and lifestyle. They want employers that do the same".¹² She provides clear direction for employers and economic developers about the requirements in creating an attractive workplace and community for retaining and attracting young professionals. For employers, this includes providing a nurturing and flexible job environment. For economic developers this means creating a "knowledge-based economy" that is dynamic, with progressive business strategies that look at the whole community and its services.

Summary of Demographic and Lifestyle Information

The data shows that there is a strong base of young professionals in the North Country region, although the area faces the same “brain drain” issue as the rest of the State as educated young adults depart. Data from both the federal and State Departments of Labor show that there is a continued increase in job growth (although slower than previous decades), but a decrease in workforce growth rate. The region will need to address this shortage in order to continue to grow its economy. These needs will be amplified by baby boomer retirement, particularly in technical careers or fields which require high skill levels. Information from economic and lifestyle experts establishes the cultural preferences of young professionals. Providing cohesive and attractive communities according to these factors is important in attracting and retaining young professionals. The type and extent of their preferences are measured in the subsequent sections.

II. SURVEY

Methodology

At the request of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), the Technical Assistance Center at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh (TAC) conducted a survey of the professional and lifestyle needs and opinions of young professionals in the Clinton, Franklin, Essex and Hamilton County region of New York State.

An on line survey instrument (Appendix B) was created by TAC, working with WIB staff. The survey was accessed through the “Survey Monkey” website. The WIB sent an invitation to its database of young professionals across the region to participate in the survey via an email with an imbedded link to the online survey. Two incentives (a gift certificate and ski passes) were offered as an incentive to participate.

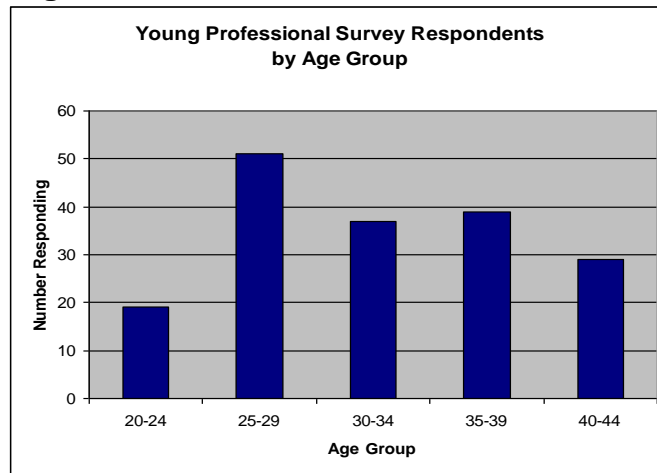
The survey was sent to 390 young professionals on February 7, 2008, with a closing date of the survey on February 17, 2008. The database was developed with the cooperation of the Adirondack Young Professionals (ADK YP). 197 responses were received for a response rate of 51%. Of these, several surveys were returned incomplete and a number were from respondents over the targeted age group of 20 - 44. This left 175 complete surveys from the target group. The complete results of the survey are attached as Appendix C.

This study was designed and the report written by TAC staff including project manager Victoria Zinser Johnson, Economic Development Specialist, and Howard Lowe, Director of Economic Development.

Demographics

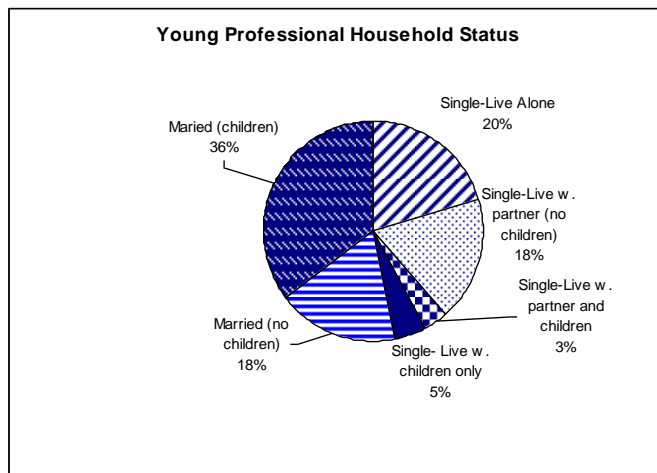
The mean age of the targeted young professionals group (20 - 44) is 32.3. Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents' age. Nearly equal numbers of each gender received invitations to participate in the survey, however, there was a higher response rate by females (61.5%) than by males (38.5%).

Figure 1



Living situations were found to vary significantly across the group, although the most common household status, comprising over one-third of the respondents, was the married with children family unit. Just over half of the group surveyed is married, and over three-quarters of the respondents live in some type of domestic partnership. Figure 2 depicts the household types of the young professionals surveyed.

Figure 2.

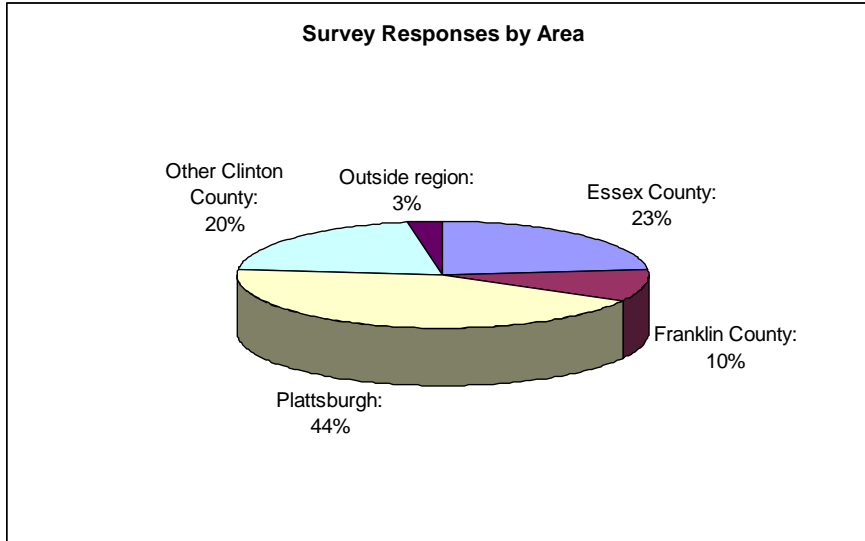


Survey respondents were spread across the five county region, although the highest concentration (44%) were those residing in the Plattsburgh area (zip codes 12901, 12903). This is also the largest population center within the area, with a 2000 Census population of over 30,000 in the City and the Town of

Plattsburgh. The few respondents from outside of the area are

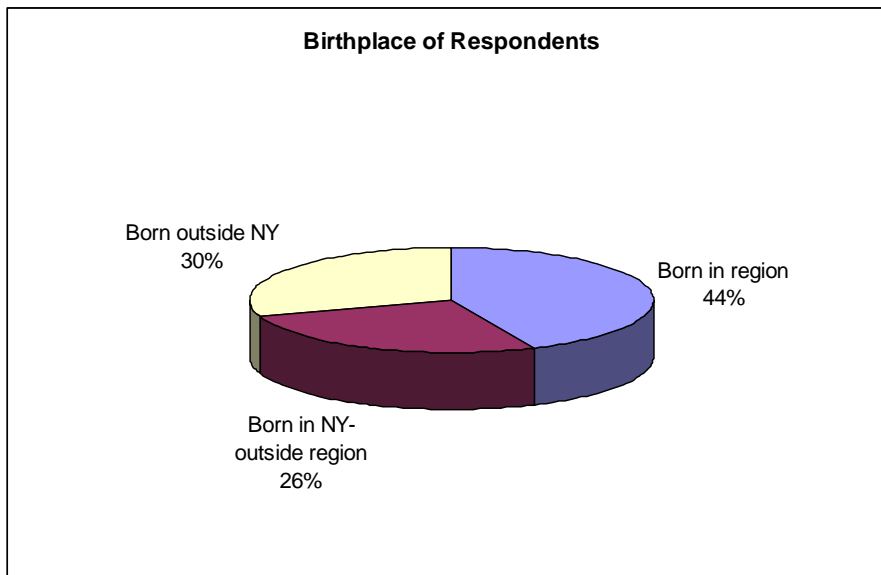
presumably college students who consider their “hometown” to be their family address.

Figure 3.



The three most common reasons for a move to the region were a “family move” (37%), “for a job” (25%), and “for school” (18%). Less than half of the respondents (44%) indicated that they were born in the region. Nearly one-third of the young professionals responding stated that they were from out of New York State, which represents a substantial in-migration of young talent.

Figure 4.

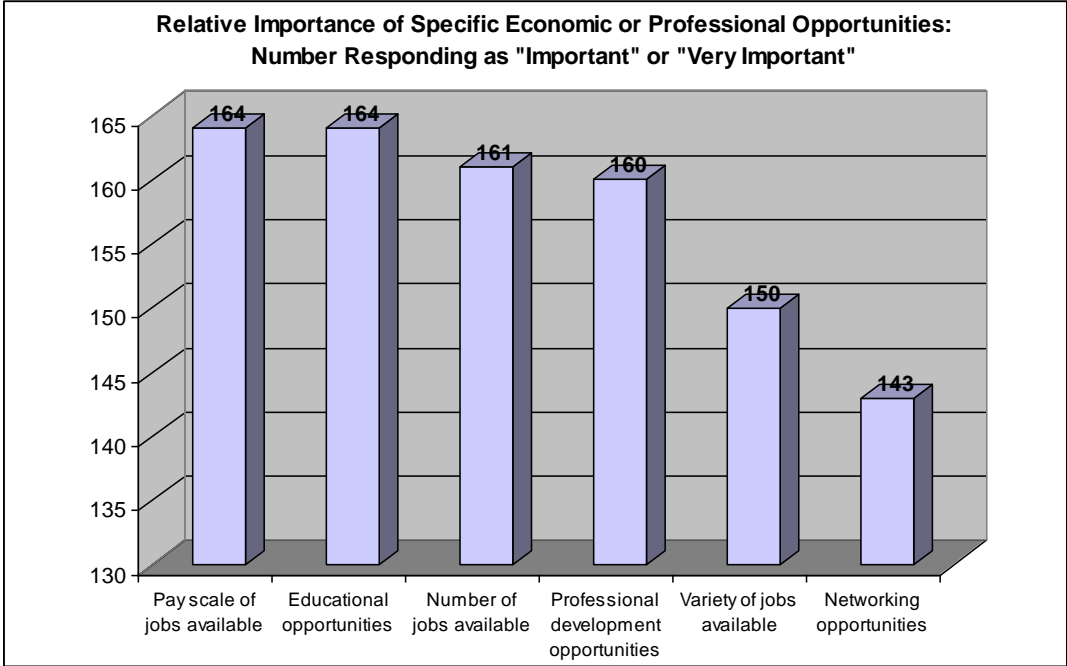


Opportunities: Economic/Professional and Lifestyle/Non-work related

The survey provided six categories of economic or professional opportunities, followed by seven categories of lifestyle, or non work-related activities, and asked respondents to rate their importance.

Figure 5 indicates that job pay scale, educational opportunities, number of jobs available and professional development opportunities rank very highly in importance to the young professionals surveyed. Note that for purposes of discussion, professional development is defined as ongoing, intentional systemic educational and training opportunities.

Figure 5.

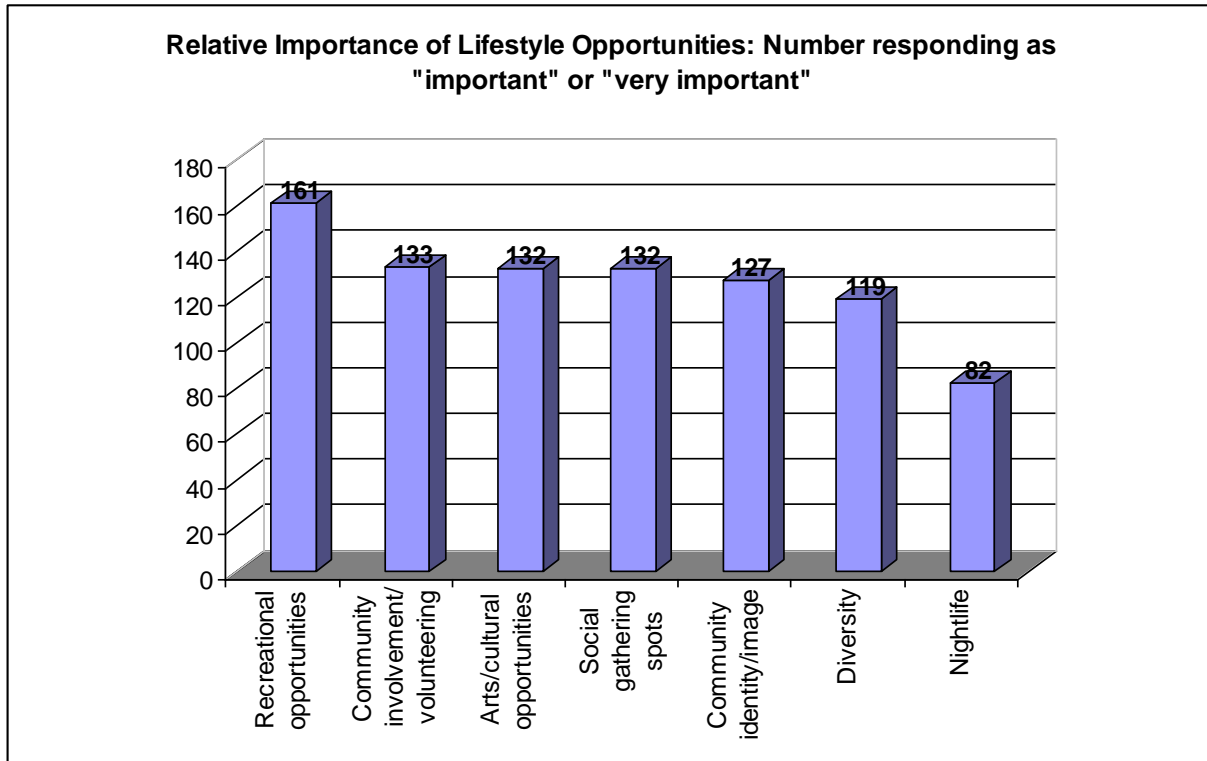


Most of the lifestyle categories ranked as significant to the young professionals, however there was more variation than found in the work-related categories. Figure 6 depicts the relative scale of these measurements, with recreational opportunities, arts/cultural opportunities, social gathering spots and community involvement/volunteer opportunities ranking the highest in importance.

Satisfaction with economic/professional and lifestyle opportunities

The next section of the survey measured how the region was doing in meeting these criteria as discussed above. Within the economic or professional opportunities, the strongest rated category was educational opportunities provided, with a majority of respondents stating that this category was rated either "excellent" or "good".

Figure 6.



The region is perceived as predominately “fair” to “good” in the other areas of economic measures, with strengths shown in professional development and networking opportunities. The weakest ratings in this section included the number and variety of jobs available. Figures 7-12 depict the ratings by categories. Where a category received zero response (applicable in some cases for “excellent” or “not applicable”), it is not depicted in the illustration.

Figure 7.

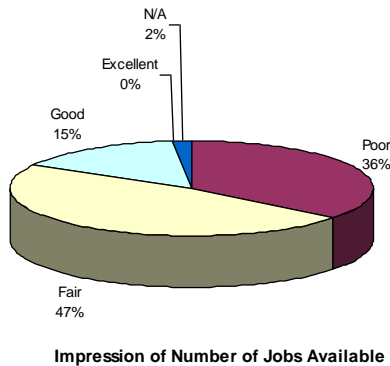


Figure 8.

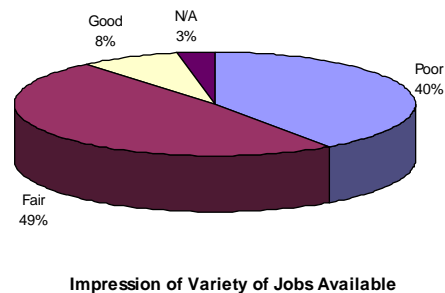


Figure 9.

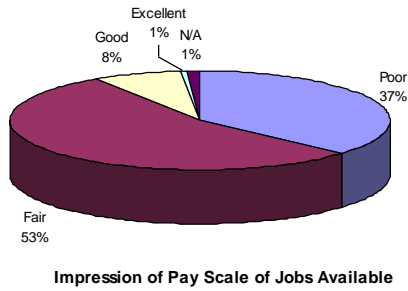


Figure 10.

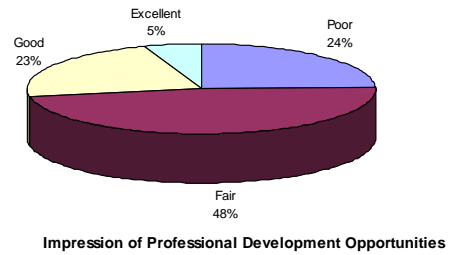


Figure 11.

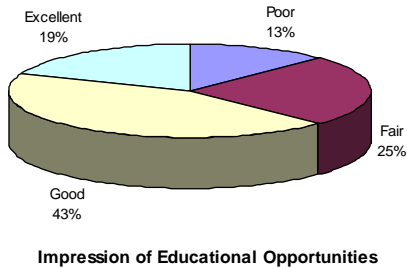
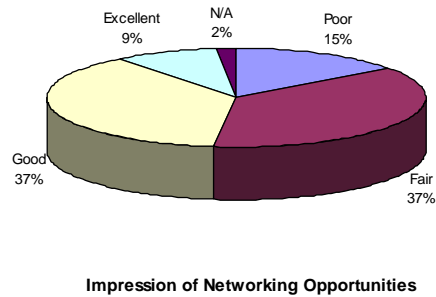


Figure 12.



The survey then measured how the region was rated by young professionals in meeting the lifestyle, or non-work indicators. Three of the seven lifestyle categories were ranked by a majority of respondents as either “good” or “excellent” in the communities in which they live. These include, in descending order of positive response: recreational opportunities, community involvement/volunteer opportunities and community identity and image.

Figures 13-19 show that there is room for improvement in the remaining four categories, with the “diversity of population” category providing the weakest rating. The categories of social gathering spots and arts and cultural activities, both of which were ranked as highly important, also received weak ratings.

Figure 13.

Perceived Recreational Opportunities

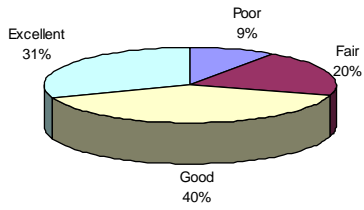


Figure 14.

Perceived Social Gathering Spots

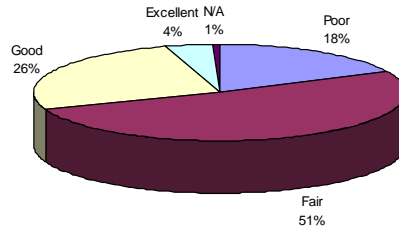


Figure 15.

Perceived Diversity of Population

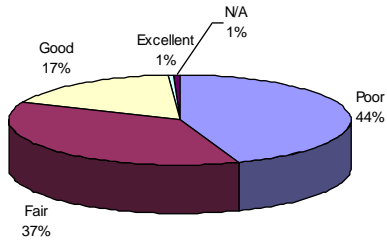


Figure 16.

Perceived Arts/Cultural Opportunities

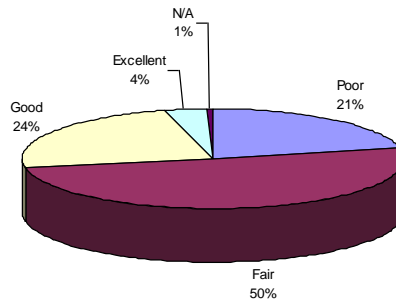


Figure 17.

Perceived Nightlife

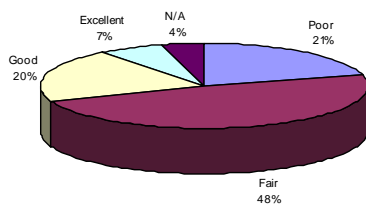


Figure 18.

Perceived Community Identity and Image

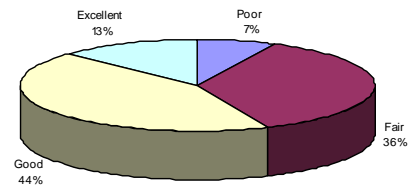
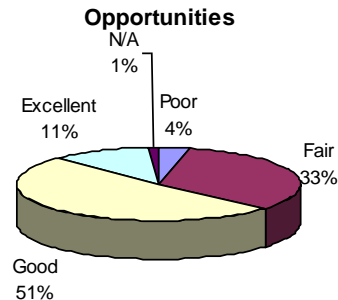


Figure 19.

Percieved Community Involvement/Volunteer



Service Club Membership

Thirty percent of the respondents state that they belong to a service club (5% Rotary, 5% Kiwanis, 2% Lions, 18% “other” service clubs or community organizations).

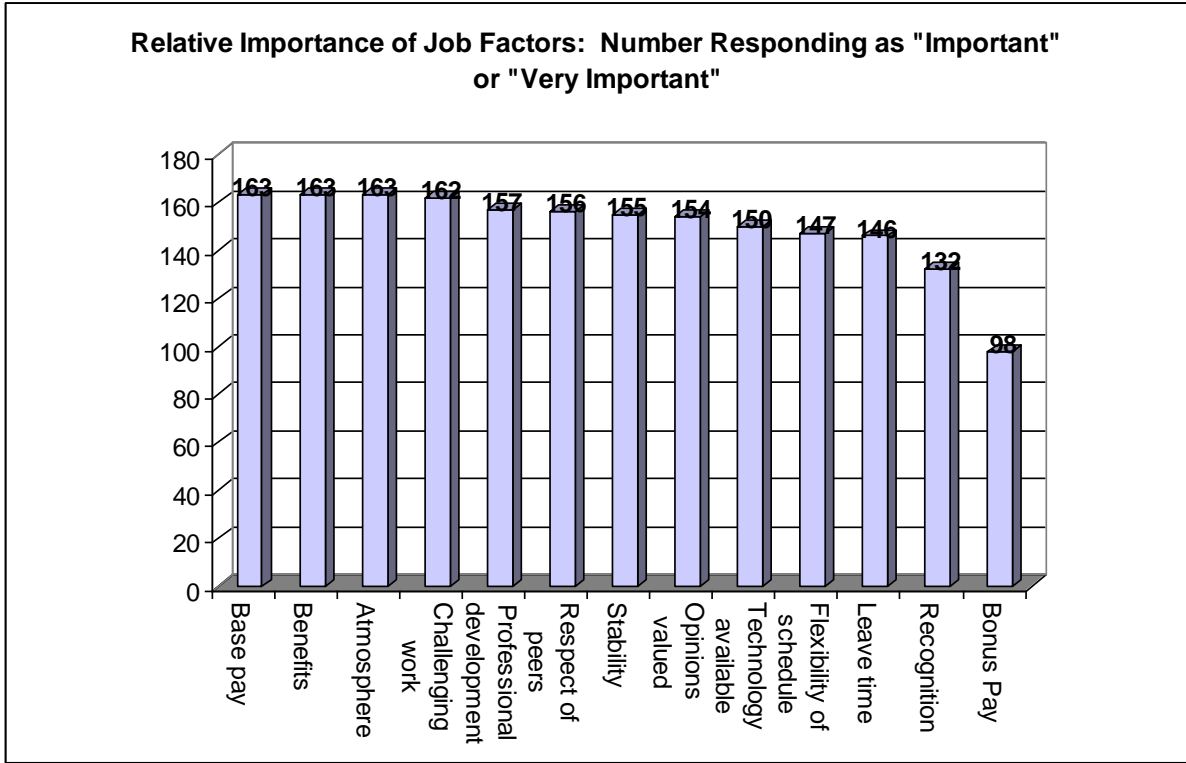
Importance of Workplace Factors

The survey asked the relative importance of 13 factors related to employment: base pay, bonus pay, schedule flexibility, vacation/leave time, benefits (health insurance, retirement, etc.), challenging work, stability, opinions valued, respect of peers, training/professional development, work acknowledgement/recognition, job atmosphere, and technology available.

All categories received over 50% of respondents answering that they were either “important”, or “very important”. The highest number (nearly 75%) responded that the benefits category was “very important”. Other equal or nearly equally significant categories when looking at the level of overall implied importance include base pay, challenging work, job atmosphere, stability, respect of peers, opinions valued and professional development.

Bonus pay and recognition categories are comparably lower in perceived importance. The open ended question regarding other priorities for jobs varied greatly (and with less than one-quarter of respondents answering them). One minor theme expressed included interest in opportunities for advancement and educational opportunities. Figure 20 depicts the survey topic results.

Figure 20.



Satisfaction with Employment and Community

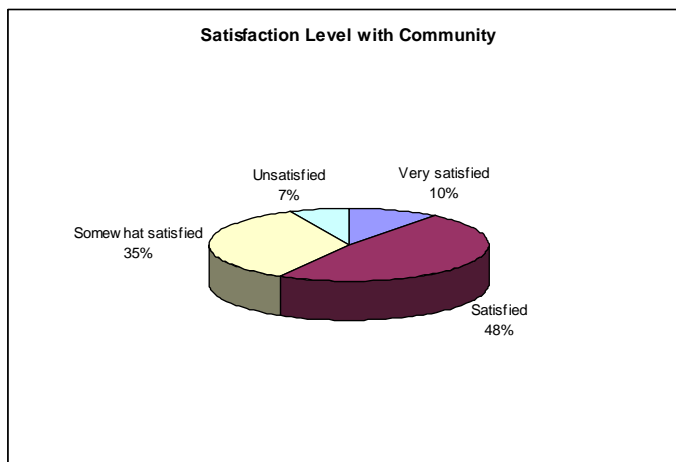
An important finding (Figure 21) from the survey was the general satisfaction of most young professionals with their current employment. 75% indicated that they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their jobs. Almost half of these were in fact “very satisfied” and only one-quarter of the group were only “somewhat satisfied” or “unsatisfied”. This is obviously good news for employers in the area, and continued improvement can be made following input from the previous material.

Figure 21.



Figure 22.

The survey then inquired how satisfied the respondents were outside of their jobs (Figure 22). While the results are still mostly positive (over 50% responded that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied”), the results were markedly less resounding. A sizeable group in this case, 42% percent, responded that they were only “somewhat satisfied” or “unsatisfied” with the community offerings at large. This deserves attention.



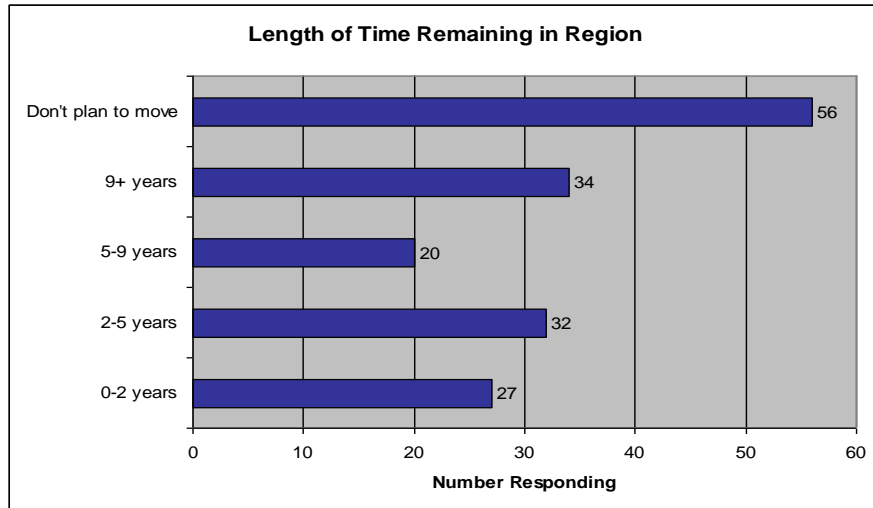
The open ended question regarding additionally important non work-related opportunities also had many varied responses, and less than one-quarter of respondents provided additional information here. However, there were two common themes presented here- nearly half of those responding said that facilities for their children were extremely important, including good schools, daycare, family activities and jobs that were in close proximity to their children. Another priority that was stated was access to good medical care.

Permanency of Residency

The final survey question related to length of time that the respondent intended to stay in the five- county North Country region. The results here again gave a positive indication, with the most common response being “don’t plan to ever move” (34%), followed by “nine years or more” (20%).

The 35% who do plan to move within the next five years are a substantial number however, and certainly some of this group could be persuaded to remain to work and live in the region with improvements made to their job and lifestyle concerns. Figure 23 illustrates this length of intention to remain in the North Country area.

Figure 23.



III. FOCUS GROUPS

Two focus groups were held to gather qualitative anecdotal information from young professionals representing different age, gender, ethnic, and occupational groups. The first focus group was held March 11, 2008 in Plattsburgh, with Clinton County young professionals. The second focus group was held March 13, 2008 in Saranac Lake, to obtain this information from Franklin and Essex County young professionals. Eighteen individuals participated in total (eight in Plattsburgh and ten in Saranac Lake).

Economic/Job Opportunities

The discussion first looked at impressions of the economic and job opportunities in the area for young professionals. Generally, the Clinton County participants provided more positive feedback about these opportunities than those from Franklin or Essex Counties. Clinton County participants identified as positive economic opportunities the proximity and potential of Montreal business markets, redevelopment of the former Plattsburgh Air Force Base, the opening of new retail establishments and businesses, tourism growth through activities such as fishing tournaments, and a growing, organized, young professional base. One criticism was the perception that local economic developers focus perhaps too much on attracting Canadian businesses, and do not spend enough time to develop local business opportunities or those that are not Canadian-based. The feedback on whether the community was headed in the right direction economically was mainly positive, with most participants agreeing with this statement, although a majority was hesitant in their agreement. One-quarter disagreed with the statement.

Franklin and Essex County participants stated that the economic and job positives for their region include a “resilient economy” that is used to working with “narrow margins”, an influx of people interested in small town living post 9/11, and residents who are protective of the lifestyle of the area. The negatives expressed included: difficulties in finding jobs or jobs for a spouse or partner, little upward mobility, the need to commute great distances, high costs of living including very high taxes and heating costs, geographic isolation, lower pay than typical in most fields, and a limited workforce. When asked about whether the community was headed in the right direction economically, the feedback was quite mixed, with a slightly higher percentage of negative responses.

Employers

Clinton County young professionals gave overall mostly positive messages about employers meeting their needs. Main concerns expressed were that most companies had limited opportunities for growth, too many also had low pay and/or few benefits, and that providing positive feedback and boosting employee morale was not a high enough priority. This focus group suggested that employers retain their good employees by using creative incentives other than pay increases, such as extra time off, flexible work schedules and providing positive messages of appreciation for work well done.

Essex and Franklin County young professionals stated that area employers generally do not pay enough or provide sufficient benefits; however they stated that there are notable exceptions. Lack of health insurance was cited as a significant concern although the group recognized that this is not specific to this region. The group expressed that the area is typically “behind the curve” and is not taking advantage of directions or policies that other regions have been implementing in order to develop their employees.

Non Work-Related Activities

All young professional focus group participants had positive things to say about leisure activities available in the area. The strongest opportunities were recreation-based, including water and mountain sports. The quiet, peaceful nature of the region was repeatedly cited as a positive quality. Essex and Franklin County participants emphasized the arts community and cultural events that occur in the area. Clinton County participants cited college sporting events available in Plattsburgh.

There was more variance expressed about what is not well-provided in the community. Clinton County young professionals stated that there are very few activities for children or families, and a lack of arts and cultural events. They also expressed a desire for more public access to the Lake Champlain waterfront, such as a non-motorized boating center and more biking and walking trails. Clinton County participants criticized the high number of bars and limited hours of retail and coffee houses in downtown Plattsburgh.

Essex and Franklin County participants stated that it is extremely difficult for young professionals without children to meet, and that there are almost no acceptable social meeting destinations. They also identified a lack of variety and number of restaurants, and a desire for upscale pubs, lounges, and eating establishments. The young professionals in this focus group stated that businesses often open in the area without a long term plan or professional appearance (e.g. inadequate or unattractive signs or inconvenient hours), and do not stay in business very long, which is unfortunate for the community.

Community Involvement/Volunteer Opportunities

Both focus groups stated that there are “amazing” and fulfilling opportunities to become involved with the myriad of community groups in the region. The only criticism was that for new residents, particularly singles, it can be difficult to find out about these opportunities.

Community Identity and Image

Both focus groups also thought that identity and image could be improved in the region. They noted that the communities’ image and identities have real substance (for instance, Saranac Lake’s artists and recreation base, Plattsburgh’s military and maritime history and recreation base), but a lack of consistent promotion locally and regionally. The Clinton County group questioned the use of Plattsburgh’s “Lake City” slogan as it does not seem to have caught on. The Franklin and Essex County group brought up Saranac Lake’s recent embracing of the concept of a “Green City”, cautioning that more work might be needed to be sure this really captured the area’s identity correctly. The groups stated that identity and image were important concepts and should be well thought out and coherently implemented in the long term.

Diversity

Both focus groups expressed concern with a lack of diversity in the region. Exceptions were noted, including several employers and universities which provide the majority of the region’s cultural and ethnic diversity. Both groups were concerned that there is some level of bigotry in the region. It was noted that an increased population of younger citizens and professionals would likely offset negative perceptions and hopefully enhance the area’s limited diversity.

Permanency of Residency

Most of the Clinton County young professional participants said that they planned to stay in the area long-term. The most common reasons given were proximity to family and an overall good quality of life in the area. Only one of the participants had imminent plans to leave, stating a preference for a more progressive culture that is prominent in other parts of the country. Another participant stated that staying in the area was dependent upon continued gainful employment.

The response of the Franklin and Essex County participants to this question was nearly opposite, with a majority planning to leave the area either in the near future or in the mid- term future once their children were older. Reasons given for this planned departure included geographic isolation and the high cost of living, limited jobs and job growth opportunities, and limited cultural and ethnic opportunities. There was a consensus that the area is great for raising children, and one participant noted that he would likely try to return when ready to have children. Only one participant stated an intention to stay long-term in the region, noting the high quality of life.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The study has developed a comprehensive picture of the attitudes of young professionals in the region. The topic of young professional workforce retention and attraction is getting a lot of local and national attention. The formation of and growing success of the Adirondack Young Professionals organization is indicative of this interest. A great deal of interest was expressed in the results of the project even as it was first being discussed, from a very wide audience. This rampant interest in the work that took place throughout the project validated itself both the need for this study as well as suggested that this conversation should be an ongoing process. The survey results at over 50% also demonstrate a group of young professionals who are actively interested in their community.

The respondents' comparison of the region's "economic and professional opportunities" as ranked in importance to young professionals versus how well they are being provided for in the community, revealed a significant level of dissatisfaction. Only in the education category did a majority of respondents report community resources as "excellent" or "good". The other top three categories: number of jobs available, pay scale of jobs available, and professional development opportunities, were ranked lower than "fair" or lower. To meet career goals of the young professional group surveyed, clearly these three areas should be priorities.

A comparison of the provision of the region's non-work related or lifestyle activities to the levels of importance demonstrated within the survey reveals a mix of successes and areas that require attention. The three areas that were ranked as being well provided for in this area: recreation, community identity and image, and community involvement/volunteer opportunities, were three of the top five most important indicated categories within the survey. These are clear successes and areas where communities should follow current directions to ensure that opportunities continue to be provided.

The two "top five" lifestyle opportunity preferences that did not rank as well were the provision of arts and cultural opportunities and social gathering spots.

Clearly these should be priorities for community improvement as they are a high priority for young professionals. Diversity of population is another category that received interest among a majority of respondents and should be a community goal in order to attract and retain young professionals. The only category measured which does not appear to require attention would be nightlife (bars, clubs, etc.), which did not receive significant interest by the survey respondents.

In summary of the focus group results, the first assumption that can be made is that the young professional community is not consistent across the region. Significantly different needs and issues were presented between the Clinton County and Essex/Franklin County focus groups. In the more rural areas of the region, the geographic isolation of the area appears to have a greater cost to young professionals, and result in further challenges to retention and attraction. Overall, the Clinton County focus group presented more positive feedback regarding their communities than that of the participants in Essex/Franklin County. The exception to this was the limitation of arts and cultural and family oriented opportunities in Clinton County, and the availability of these experiences in Essex/Franklin Counties. Both focus groups discussed an overall high quality of life being in place, particularly for recreation-based activities.

Given the significant interest generated by the studies within this topic, good participation in the research, and results which indicate that there is much work to be done in this area, several next steps are recommended.

1. The WIB should continue administrative support of the young professionals group, Adirondack Young Professionals (ADK YP). An established young professionals group is a key resource for those new to the community and those looking to establish professional “roots”.
2. The greater business community and community-at-large should have access to this report to encourage discussion, improve awareness of the issue, and develop new initiatives.
3. The WIB should consider conducting further studies regarding other areas of focus to retain and attract young professionals (i.e. - specific skill set needs), or a marketing plan.
4. This study should be updated in three years to “take the pulse” of the changing young professional community.

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