

How Attitudes about U.S. Cities Play a Role in Attraction Retention

In the competition for talent, to effectively attract and retain talent, regional governments and employers must understand how community characteristics play into workers' decisions about job seeking and relocation, according to a study by the Human Capital Institute.

The importance of relocation cannot be underestimated. Allan Schweyer, president and executive director of the Human Capital Institute, who co-authored the report, explained its purpose this way: "Employers and governmental

By Bob King, WorldatWork

QUICK LOOK

- ⇒ The study showed that the "brand" of a city played prominently in workers' attitudes toward living and working in that city.
- ⇒ The large majority of the respondents in the survey were satisfied living where they are currently located.
- ⇒ Respondents reported that potential employees holding degrees that relate to computer science and electronic communications are expected to be the toughest to find.



entities within a given region can play an important role in attracting job seekers with top leadership skills by promoting the unique advantages they offer to residents in concrete terms.”

Walk on the Beach

“Don’t tell them about the lakefront; take them for a walk on the beach,” Schweyer said.

The study showed that the “brand” of a city played prominently in workers’ attitudes toward living and working in those cities. Workers chose San Diego and San Francisco as the top two U.S. metro areas for job relocation, with New York City rating third. New York City also topped the list for least preferred, followed by Detroit, Los Angeles and New Orleans. Figure 1 on page 76 reports the cities that topped the most preferred and least preferred lists.

“Cities and employers that understand, manage and promote their brands will be best positioned to attract and keep knowledge workers of all ages,” Schweyer said.

The study’s research included 806 employees and 443 employers. Each group was asked more than 100 questions, and approximately one-half of the employer responses came from HR professionals.

Employee respondents rated 34 factors according to the degree of consideration they would assign each criterion when deciding — hypothetically — where they would live. Questioners asked participants, in particular, to indicate which were “No or small considerations,” “significant considerations” or “most important considerations.” Of the 34 criteria, the criteria in the top half were:

1. Safe streets and neighborhoods
2. Career and professional opportunities
3. Clean and attractive
4. Reasonable commute times

Workers chose San Diego and San Francisco as the top two U.S. metro areas for job relocation, with New York City rating third.

5. Quality affordable, accessible health care
6. Home-ownership affordability
7. Climate
8. Friendly environment
9. “A place I am proud to say I live”
10. Lots of parks and green space
11. Allows me to pursue my nonjob interests
12. Cost of living (excluding housing)
13. Access to excellent schools
14. Has an exciting, interesting feel or reputation
15. Tolerance toward all minorities
16. Great place to raise children
17. Reasonable taxation levels.

The factor finishing 34th of 34 was “close to the mountains.”

Key Findings

Other key findings of the report indicate:

- **People are hard to move.** The large majority of the respondents in the

survey were satisfied living where they are currently located. The report noted: “It is advisable to look for new employees among people in transition. This is obvious, of course, when it applies to people graduating from college or who have recently lost their jobs. But people can be in transition mentally months or years before they make a decision to move.”

- **People think about cities in the abstract, but they make relocation decisions concretely.**

Perceptions of a town may be made based on short trips, portrayals of the location in the movies or even urban myths. The report authors do indicate, however, that the Internet “has reduced this problem, but even then the city is seen through an overlay of facts and figures.”

- **The negative images of a city may have a stronger impact than the positive image.** The authors advised, “It’s not enough to ask ‘Do you have any questions about the community?’ It is also important to uncover and address the issues that exist, just as in any other selling exercise.”
- **“Town and gown” issues will not improve without more integration and alignment.** The report noted that the statement, “The region’s colleges and universities are assisting us in meeting the changing skill needs of our workforce,” is the statement that employers least agree with.

Skills and Competencies

Respondents to the survey expected to fill 100,000 jobs in 12 months. One-third reported a high degree of confidence in locating sufficient recruits in their own metropolitan areas. Thirty percent of the new recruits, however, will need to come from outside the respondents’ regions.

The study also examined the job categories that employers labeled the most difficult to fill, along with the top leadership skills they said are toughest to find.

Topping the list of difficult-to-find leadership skills are: strategic thinking/planning, leadership and motivation, and creativity, as well as innovation. They are followed by:

- Change management
- Risk-taking
- Judgment and decision-making
- Conflict resolution/consensus-building.

Respondents reported that potential employees holding degrees that relate to computer science and electronic communications are expected to be the toughest to find. Computer-related positions captured the top four spots of a list of most-sought-after degrees (in order of difficulty in recruiting). The top 10 list includes:



1. Computer science
 2. Computer systems networking and telecommunications
 3. Electrical, electronics and communications engineers
 4. Management-information systems and service
 5. Finance and financial-management services
 6. Nursing
 7. Business administration, management and operations
 8. Specialized sales, merchandising and marketing operations
 9. Accounting and related services
 10. Business/managerial economics.
- Talent Markets: The Importance of Location in the Competition for Human Capital* was conducted by the Human Capital Institute, a global think tank, educator and professional association, in collaboration with Monster. 

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