12-1-2014

Attributes of Successful Communities for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Nebraskans

Rebecca Vogt

Nebraska Rural Poll and Metro Poll Research Brief

Attributes of Successful Communities for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Nebraskans

Essential Community Characteristics

Both the Nebraska Metro and Rural Polls asked residents how essential or necessary various characteristics are in order for them to have a high quality of life.

- *A sense of personal safety, jobs/economic opportunities, a quality school system (K—12), quality housing, available medical services, affordable housing, well-maintained infrastructure, and effective community leadership were the characteristics that were rated as absolutely essential by a majority of both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan residents. For most of the characteristics listed, the differences between the results of the two polls were small (Table 1).*

- *Residents of metropolitan counties are more likely to view adequate information technology, recreational opportunities and available college classes as being absolutely essential in a community compared to residents of nonmetropolitan counties (pink cells in Table 1).*

- *Residents of nonmetropolitan counties are more likely than residents of metropolitan counties to view a strong church/religious community as being absolutely essential (green cell in Table 1).*

Available Community Characteristics

Both polls asked residents to what extent the same list of characteristics describes their current community.

- *For many of the characteristics listed, there are only small differences between the two polls when comparing the proportions that rated each as being present to a great extent. Some of the characteristics rated similarly between the two polls include: low cost of living, friendly people, leadership opportunities, a local newspaper willing to report controversial items and effective community leadership (Table 2).*

- *Residents of metropolitan counties are more likely than residents of nonmetropolitan counties to say the following characteristics are present to a great extent in their current community: available college classes, available medical services, quality housing, recreational opportunities, affordable housing, jobs/economic opportunities, cultural opportunities, adequate*

Table 1. Aspects of Community that were Deemed "Absolutely Essential" for Community Success: 2014 Metro and Rural Polls

Question wording: *"How essential or necessary are the following characteristics in order for you to have a high quality of life?"*

Notes: Values are in percentages. Items sorted by the difference between the two polls. Differences of 10 percentage points or more are highlighted.

Specific Aspect of Community	Metro Poll	Rural Poll	Difference
Adequate information technology	42	31	11
Recreational opportunities	37	26	11
Available college classes	35	25	10
Quality housing	71	62	9
Well-maintained infrastructure	66	57	9
Jobs/economic opportunities	84	77	7
Available public transportation	27	20	7
Affordable housing	71	65	6
Cultural opportunities	25	19	6
A local newspaper willing to report controversial items	35	30	5
Low cost of living	48	44	4
Being close to relatives/in-laws	26	22	4
Sense of personal safety	83	79	4
A clean and attractive natural environment	51	49	2
A willingness to tax and/or raise financial resources locally	22	20	2
Effective community leadership	56	54	2
Available medical services	72	71	1
Lack of congestion	31	31	0
Leadership opportunities	25	25	0
Friendly people	46	46	0
Available senior citizen programs	28	29	1
A quality school system (K-12)	74	77	3
Available child care services	31	35	4
Acceptance of newcomers	37	41	4
A sense of community among residents	37	42	5
Strong church/religious community	38	50	12

Table 2. Aspects of Community that were Currently Present to "A Great Extent":
2014 Metro and Rural Polls

Question wording: *"To what extent do the following characteristics describe your current community?"*

Notes: Values are in percentages. Items sorted by the difference between the two polls. Differences of 10 percentage points or more are highlighted.

Specific Aspect of Community	Metro Poll	Rural Poll	Difference
Available college classes	48	23	25
Available medical services	55	38	17
Quality housing	30	13	17
Recreational opportunities	28	13	15
Affordable housing	29	15	14
Jobs/economic opportunities	24	11	13
Cultural opportunities	21	9	12
Adequate information technology	25	14	11
Available public transportation	17	7	10
A willingness to tax and/or raise financial resources locally	21	16	5
Available child care services	22	17	5
Being close to relatives/in-laws	37	35	2
Acceptance of newcomers	21	19	2
Low cost of living	17	16	1
Friendly people	38	37	1
Leadership opportunities	14	14	0
A local newspaper willing to report controversial items	18	18	0
Effective community leadership	15	16	1
A clean and attractive natural environment	30	33	3
Available senior citizen programs	17	21	4
A quality school system (K-12)	40	44	4
Well-maintained infrastructure	15	19	4
A sense of community among residents	25	30	5
Strong church/religious community	35	44	9
Sense of personal safety	36	46	10
Lack of congestion	24	49	25

information technology and available public transportation (pink cells in Table 2).

- *Residents of nonmetropolitan counties are more likely than residents of metropolitan counties to say a sense of personal safety and lack of congestion are present to ta great extent in their current community (green cells in Table 2).*

Gaps Between What is Desired and What is Present in Community

Table 3 highlights the differences between the proportions of respondents to both polls who believe the characteristics are absolutely essential for them to have a high quality of life and those that describe their current community to a great extent. Positive gaps indicate a higher proportion of people believe the item is absolutely essential than believe it is present in their current community to a great extent. Thus, more of that service or amenity is needed in the community. Negative gaps indicate that a higher proportion of people believe the item is present to a great extent in their current community than believe that it is absolutely essential. In other words, people believe the availability of those characteristics is sufficient.

- *For a number of the characteristics with positive gaps for both polls, residents of metropolitan counties have smaller gaps than do residents of nonmetropolitan counties (pink cells in Table 3). One example is available medical services. While similar proportions of both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan residents believe available medical services are essential, a larger proportion of metropolitan residents believe they exist to a great extent. Thus, this is an area that may need more attention in nonmetropolitan counties.*

- *For some characteristics, residents of nonmetropolitan counties have smaller gaps as compared to residents of metropolitan counties. A couple examples include well-maintained infrastructure and sense of personal safety (green cells in Table 3). These represent potential areas of improvement for metropolitan areas.*

- *Many characteristics listed have small or no differences in the gaps when comparing the results of the two polls. While some of the items in that category have large positive gaps for both polls (effective community leadership, a quality school system and low cost of living), these gaps are similar between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties. These represent opportunities for improvement across the state, regardless of*

Table 3. Gap between Aspects of Community that are "Absolutely Essential" for the Community to be Successful and What was Currently Present to "A Great Extent": 2014 Metro and Rural Polls

Question 1 wording: *"How essential or necessary are the following characteristics in order for you to have a high quality of life?"*

Question 2 wording: *"To what extent do the following characteristics describe your current community?"*

Notes: Values are in percentages. Differences of 5 percentage points or more are highlighted.

Specific Aspect of Community	Metro Poll			Rural Poll			Difference in the Gap between the Polls
	"Absolutely Essential"	Exists to "A great extent"	Gap	"Absolutely Essential"	Exists to "A great extent"	Gap	
Larger Positive Gaps:							
Available medical services	72	55	17	71	38	33	16
Sense of personal safety	83	36	47	79	46	33	14
Well-maintained infrastructure	66	15	51	57	19	38	13
Available child care services	31	22	9	35	17	18	9
Quality housing	71	30	41	62	13	49	8
Affordable housing	71	29	42	65	15	50	8
Cultural opportunities	25	21	4	19	9	10	6
Acceptance of newcomers	37	21	16	41	19	22	6
Jobs/economic opportunities	84	24	60	77	11	66	6
A clean and attractive natural environment	51	30	21	49	33	16	5
A local newspaper willing to report controversial items	35	18	17	30	18	12	5
Recreational opportunities	37	28	9	26	13	13	4
Small or No Differences in Gaps:							
A willingness to tax and/or raise financial resources locally	22	21	1	20	16	4	3
Strong church/religious community	38	35	3	50	44	6	3
Available public transportation	27	17	10	20	7	13	3
Available senior citizen programs	28	17	11	29	21	8	3
Effective community leadership	56	15	41	54	16	38	3
Low cost of living	48	17	31	44	16	28	3
Being close to relatives/in-laws	26	37	-11	22	35	-13	2
Friendly people	46	38	8	46	37	9	1
A quality school system (K-12)	74	40	34	77	44	33	1
Leadership opportunities	25	14	11	25	14	11	0
A sense of community among residents	37	25	12	42	30	12	0
Adequate information technology	42	25	17	31	14	17	0
Positive and Negative Gaps:							
Lack of congestion	31	24	7	31	49	-18	25
Available college classes	35	48	-13	25	23	2	15

the type of county a person resides in, to better attract and retain population.

- *Two items have one positive and one negative gap. When looking at lack of congestion, the negative gap for the Rural Poll indicates nonmetropolitan residents believe that lack of congestion is sufficient in their communities. However, a positive gap exists for the Metro Poll which indicates more is desired (yellow cells in Table 3). The opposite is true for available college classes. A negative gap for the Metro Poll indicates sufficient availability there but a small positive gap for the Rural Poll shows that the availability of college classes is about what people believe is essential in nonmetropolitan areas (blue cells in Table 3).*

Implications

Communities across the state (regardless of where they are located) should work to improve the following areas in order to better attract and retain population: jobs/ economic opportunities, housing, infrastructure, safety, community leadership, cost of living, and their school system. These are areas that high proportions of residents view as essential, but fewer believe they are available to a great extent in their current community. For many of these items, the gaps are large for both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. However, infrastructure and

safety are two areas that have bigger gaps in metropolitan areas. Thus, communities in metropolitan areas need to strengthen these two areas to better market themselves to potential new residents. While it is fairly intuitive that sense of personal safety would be rated higher in nonmetropolitan areas, it is surprising to see infrastructure categorized as more lacking in metropolitan areas, given that sufficient funding for this item can be more challenging for smaller, rural communities. Housing and jobs/economic opportunities, however, are perceived to be bigger challenges in nonmetropolitan areas.

- *Communities in metropolitan areas can market their medical services to potential new residents. This is an item that most residents rated as absolutely essential for them and many residents in metropolitan residents also said it was available to a great extent in their current community. And, this is an area that communities in nonmetropolitan areas need to improve to better attract new residents.*

Methodology:

The Nebraska Rural Poll sampled residents from non-metropolitan counties and regional trade centers in the state.
The Nebraska Metro Poll sampled the seven counties that comprise the Lincoln and Omaha metropolitan areas.
Both polls sent 4 mailings regarding or containing the surveys in the spring of 2014 and had an online response option.

Authors:
Rebecca Vogt, UNL
David Drozd, UNO
Randolph Cantrell, UNL
Jerry Deichert, UNO
Brad Lubben, UNL
Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, UNL
L.J. McElravy, UNL

Nebraska Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Counties and 2014 Survey Sample

Metroplitan/Nonmetropolitan Status (2013 definitions) and Survey Sample

☐ Nonmetropolitan County Surveyed in Rural Poll (80)
☐ County Classified as Metroplitan but Surveyed in Rural Poll (6)
☐ Omaha or Lincoln Metropolitan County Surveyed in Metro Poll (7)

Note: There are 5 metro counties for Omaha (Cass, Douglas, Sarpy, Saunders, Washington), 2 for Lincoln (Lancaster, Seward), 2 for Sioux City, Iowa (Dakota, Dixon) and 4 in the newly established Grand Island metro (Hall, Hamilton, Howard, Merrick).

UNIVERSITY 1 OF
NEBRASKA
Lincoln

UNIVERSITY 1 OF
NEBRASKA
Omaha

Source: 2013 Metropolitan and Micropolitan Definitions, Office of Management and Budget, released 2-28-13
Prepared by: David Drozd, Center for Public Affairs Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha - December 1, 2014