



"I want my kids to move back to Rockford."



*"I want a safe community to raise my family
and grow in my career."*



NEXT GENERATION CONSULTING

Becoming a Cool Community

Attracting and Retaining Talent To the Rockford Area

Evidence, Key Findings and Action Plan

February 21, 2007

by



NEXT GENERATION CONSULTING



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An Open Letter to Rockford

21 February 2007



Dear Rockford:

Tonight, I will present our firm's insight and advice on what you must do to attract and retain the next generation of knowledge workers to Rockford*.

These pages contain the evidence we've collected that lead to our conclusions, plus some insights from other communities who've been in the same place Rockford is today. Our intention is to arm you with both the *information* and the *inspiration* to ensure that Rockford's best days are to come – teeming with young professionals, their families and the energy and vibrancy they bring to a community.

You play a critical role in this effort

There is no better way to attract people to your community than for each of you to lift your head when you say that you're from Rockford, and to proudly rattle off to your family and friends the good reasons why you call Rockford "home."

Your attitude about your city is up to you. And to get this party started, I'm challenging each of you to sign a "Positively Rockford" pledge, available at www.nextgenerationconsulting.com/Rockford. By signing this pledge, you commit to doing your part to be a force for positive change in Rockford.

Rebecca Ryan

Next Generation Consulting

*Throughout report 'Rockford' refers to the greater Rockford/Winnebago County area.





Why this initiative? Why Now?

Three trends are coalescing in Rockford. Taken together, these trends demand a proactive, strategic and collaborative approach from community and economic development professionals to attract and retain young talent:

One: Economic Trends - Rockford's economy is shifting due to *rapid technological change* and *globalization*.

Further, many well-populated countries – especially in Asia – are waking up to their economic opportunities and rolling out progressive economic incentives to lure jobs and investment. Their strategies are working.

In Rockford, where manufacturing is a storied part of the community's history, globalization and technology are having a deep impact. It's not that manufacturing's impact is declining; the value produced by US manufacturers continues to grow briskly from year to year. But the value is being created by fewer workers. (Judy and Lommel.) Greater knowledge and skills are required by workers to hold jobs in advanced manufacturing environments.

Of the 4,000 Ph.D.'s who call Singapore "home," 1,000 are expatriots from other countries.

Galloping technological innovation has compressed the life cycles of products and processes, thereby putting a premium on companies' abilities to innovate rapidly or falter in the competitive race. Products now move from conception to production to obsolescence must more rapidly – and the pace is accelerating.

- Judy and Lommel, 2004

This shift from a goods-based economy to a 'knowledge-based' economy is reflected in other sectors as well. While the U.S. market for manufacturing jobs is shrinking, the job growth in **Professional and Business Services (PBS)**, (see blue box below) and other knowledge-based economic clusters is growing. In Chicago, the PBS sector accounts for 15% of total employment. From 1990-2004, the sector grew 165.9%. (Harpel, 2006).



Professional and Business Services (PBS) sector includes three sub-sectors:

- (1) Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (42%);
- (2) Management of Companies and Enterprises (10%); and
- (3) Administrative and Support Services and Waste Management Services (48%).

Two: Demographic Trends - Rockford is losing its share of educated young professionals. In 2005, about 25% of the U.S. population held bachelors degrees, compared with 13.1% in Rockford. At a time when the economy is demanding higher skills, Rockford cannot afford to lose its young, educated workforce.

To make matters worse, broader demographic trends indicate that the race for young talent will become even more heated.

This is because of the Baby Boom...and bust. As Boomers head closer to retirement, there is a smaller generation of replacement workers following behind them.

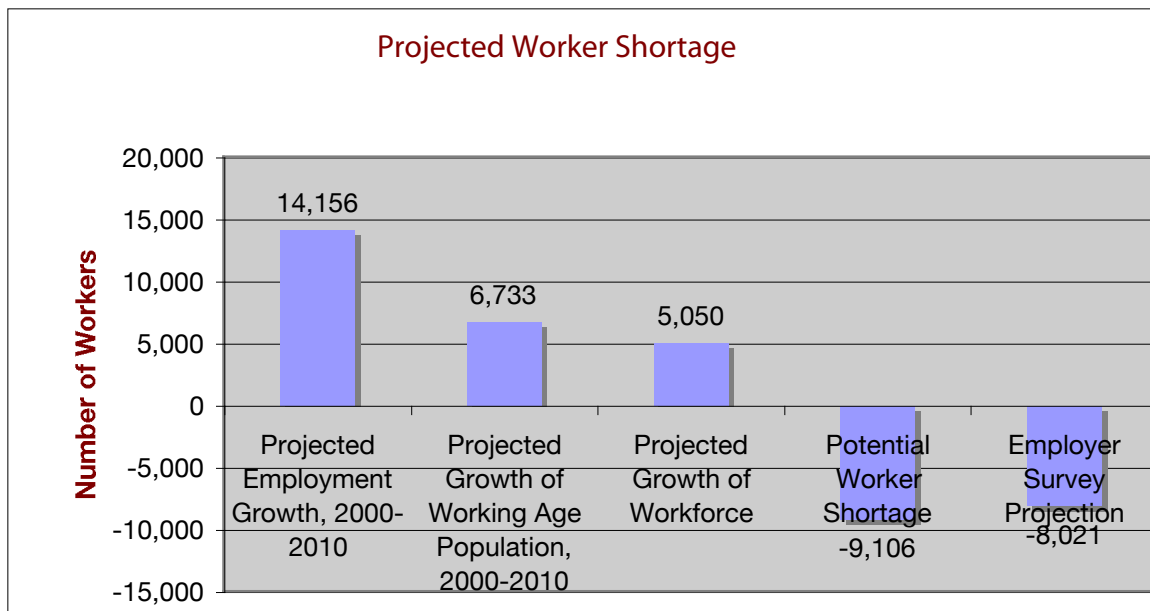
Forget about terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The next global war will be fought over human capital.

– David Heenan, Flight Capital



In Winnebago and Boone counties, the numbers are real. In a survey conducted in October 2006, 197 employers indicated a need for 8,021 employees in the next 2-3 years. Over half of these jobs (4,581) will be created through retirement and attrition. The remaining 3,440 are new jobs that employers expect to create to meet their organization’s goals. Sixty-four percent of respondents said that they are actively recruiting young talent to meet their planning goals.

Illustration 1.1: Projected Workers Shortage in Boone and Winnebago Counties



Sources: Judy and Lommel, 21st Century Workforce in Boone and Winnebago Counties, 2004. Employer Survey Projection based on Rockford Employer Survey administered for this project, August 2006.

In 2002, Peter Drucker wrote:

In developed countries, the dominant factor in the Next Society will be something to which most people are only just beginning to pay attention: the rapid growth in the older population and the rapid shrinking of the younger generation. (*Managing in the Next Society*, 2002)



Three: Psychographic Trends - Psychographics is the study of how people make decisions. The next generation makes decisions differently than their parents and grandparents - they first pick a place to live and then find a job.

Psychographics now has application in Rockford's future. For the next generation, cities are brands - which one they choose depends on how well they identify with its brand attributes and characteristics.

Three-fourths of college graduates under 28 years old say that where they live is as important as – or more important than – where they work. (Next Generation Consulting, 2002)

In Rockford:

- 58% of focus group respondents said that their community matters more to them than their job;
- 37.7% said their job matters more than their community; and
- 7.5% said both matter equally.

To attract and keep the next generation of knowledge workers, Rockford must build its brand and position itself as a 'cool community' with the next generation.

Rockford already has many amenities the next generation values - a pristine, up-and-coming Riverfront location, access to Chicago, affordable housing and historic neighborhoods and downtowns. The next step is for Rockford to leverage those strengths – to turn them into brand messages – that the next generation can access and evaluate in their relocation decisions.

What should we do?

We recommend a three-pronged approach to attracting and retaining young talent to Rockford. These strategies revolve around 3 P's: **Place, People, and Pride.**

Place - Rockford is a brand that's competing for the attention and affection of an increasingly fickle target customer: young talent. In research including over 20,000 young professionals aged 20-40, we've learned that the next generation evaluates a city along 7 indexes. Marketers may think of these 7 indexes as 'brand attributes.' We illustrate Rockford's scores in each index and offer descriptions below.

Recommendations to enhance Rockford's place-based brand attributes begin on page 11.

Rockford, IL - Handprint and Scores in the 7 Indexes

Next Generation Consulting has developed a proprietary system to "see" a community through the lens of the next generation. Specifically, the next generation analyses a community according to seven indexes as outlined below on a scale of one (low) to ten (high). A score of four is the national average..



Vitality	4	US Average	Vitality	5	Rockford
Earning	4		Earning	4	
Learning	4		Learning	4	
Social Capital	4		Social Capital	4	
Cost of Lifestyle	4		Cost of Lifestyle	4	
After Hours	4		After Hours	4	
Around Town	4		Around Town	4	



VITALITY - How healthy is Rockford? This index accounts for air and water quality, parks, trails and recreation areas, and the overall wellbeing of the community.

Rockford's score: 5.

EARNING - Young talent expect to have multiple jobs in their lifetimes and value a community with a breadth and depth of occupational options, plus support for entrepreneurial ventures. Rockford's score: 4.

LEARNING - How smart is Rockford? Young knowledge workers want to live in communities with other smarties, where education is valued and accessible. Rockford's score: 4

SOCIAL CAPITAL - Young professionals value living in diverse communities. We look at Rockford's commitment to diversity, its racial profile, inclusion and care of minorities, and its commitment to broad-based young professionals organizations. Rockford's score: 4

COST OF LIFESTYLE - Can I afford to live in Rockford? Young talent are normally in the early years of their earning potential and are carrying enormous college debt loads. Affordability is key. This index includes all the variables in the national cost of living index, which includes a roof over the head, food on the table, and a ride to work, plus a few others. Rockford's score: 4

AFTER HOURS - There's more to life than work. This is the index tallies all the things to do and places to go after five. Rockford's score: 4.

AROUND TOWN - This index counts indicators of accessibility. How long will I sit in traffic on the way to work? Can I get around town on my bike? By foot? How easy is it for young professionals to get to where they want to go? Rockford's score: 4.



Place - Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to:

1. Make Rockford a Live/Work hub for young professionals by developing the downtown/riverfront area; and
2. Increase access and multi-modal traffic to downtown

Downtown Rockford's historic districts, density, proximity to the river and its potential as a live/work hub for young professionals are assets on which to build.

In focus groups, young professionals of all ages talked about the importance of a great downtown... *even those who don't live downtown*. They also agree that the riverfront is the first order of priority for development and redevelopment.

For YPs to enjoy downtown, it must be convenient to access with multiple forms of transportation. By increasing car, bike and pedestrian traffic downtown, safety goes up and perceptions that "there's something going on in Rockford" go up with it.

Enthusiasm for downtown is notably strong among nFACTOR members. nFACTOR is a youth movement that focuses on high school aged teens being in charge of themselves, their family, education, community and future. nFACTOR now has over 1,200 members in Rockford. These young people are turned on and tuned in to what's happening in Rockford. By engaging middle school and high school youth with Rockford's development, we are seeding future demand to live and work in Rockford. nFACTOR is a great example of how people can come together and be engaged in making Rockford a great place for the next generation. More information on nFACTOR is in the Appendix.

We recommend the following actions. Where noted, these recommendations will also increase your Handprint scores.

1.1 Offer continuous bicycle and pedestrian trails along the riverfront.

Rockford's Vitality score is its strongest score. By connecting the currently discontinuous bike and walking paths downtown, Rockford increases its Vitality score. Increasing pedestrian traffic also is proven to decrease crime. This will further improve Rockford's Social Capital score.



- 1.2 **Designate protected bike lanes along non-arterial streets leading in and out of downtown Rockford and to/from the riverfront.** For Rockford to become a community that attracts and retains the next generation, it must become multi-modal - a city where people can drive, which means that they can drive, walk, bike, blade or bus to and from work and downtown. Currently, Rockford does not offer protected bike lanes downtown, making it unsafe for bikers and bladers to commute to work in these ways. Protecting bike lanes also enhances your Vitality and Around Town scores.
- 1.3 **Eliminate one-way streets in downtown Rockford.** Converting one-way streets to two-way streets eases traffic, decreases congestion and accidents and increases profits to downtown merchants.
- 1.4 **Create a public-private fund to invest in moderate (50-unit) live/work spaces along the Riverfront.** Currently, this scale of development (50-unit residential projects) is too small for large development companies, but too big for individual investors. Yet, this is exactly the size of development that's appropriate at this time on Rockford's riverfront. Fifty-unit projects will bring enough density to jump-start other 'place-making' efforts required to make Rockford's downtown a destination for young professionals.
- 1.5 **Encourage and incent infill of appropriate retail, (i.e. bistros, boutiques, bars, etc.) along historic East State Street.** The presence of "Stroll Districts" – places where you can park once and walk to all your after-hours activities has an economic multiplier effect in communities. It becomes a hub for locals – keeping the local dollar circulating – and it also imports discretionary spending from visitors, pumping even more money into the local economy. Stroll Disticts are important to your After Hours scores. Notable stroll districts include Madison, WI and Pearl Street in Boulder, CO.
- 1.6 **Appropriately adjust the building code requirements for historic downtown properties.** Current requirements do not have exceptions for historic buildings, which require long and expensive permitting processes. This puts undue financial pressure on entrepreneurs, whose economic presence is critical for a healthy downtown.

**1.7 Support a TIF initiative to freeze property values of historic neighborhoods.**

The next generation is classic Do-It-Yourselfers. Spend time in the parking lot of any Home Depot, Menards or Lowe's, and you'll see that young professionals are investing their time and money to upgrade and/or restore their homes. Young professionals helped jump-start the gentrification of historic neighborhoods in Washington DC and Milwaukee WI and they can help do the same for Rockford, IL.

One example of a Rockford-based neighborhood plan that might appeal to young professionals is the Midtown Arts Initiative. One objective to this plan, supported by Swedish American Health System and AMCORE Bank restores affordable, refurbished workforce housing in one of Rockford's central neighborhoods. For more information on this plan, please see the Appendix.

1.8 Support the development of high speed or commuter rail through the Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative (NICTI). Rockford's proximity to Chicago is one of its most attractive features to the next generation. Make it easy for them to live and work in Rockford while having access to the Chicago job and entertainment offerings. NICTI would positively impact Rockford's Around Town score by decreasing commuting times and increasing the number of people who take public transportation.

1.9 Pass a smoking ban for downtown bars and restaurants. Rockford's VITALITY index is its highest rated index on the handprint. This means that Rockford already is better than other U.S. communities in its commitments to park, trails and recreation areas. Progressive community leaders should work hard to protect the assets already in place, and take other measures – like passing a smoking ban – to leverage this index. Twenty-four Illinois communities have already passed smoking bans – including most suburbs of Chicago. The state of Illinois is also considering smoke-free legislation. Rockford should demonstrate its commitment to the next generation and its Vitality by passing a smoking ban.



People - Recommendations to attract and engage the next generation in Rockford's future.

Cities are for people. How do we attract and engage the next generation to Rockford? Here we recommend:

1. Connecting Rockford's young professionals to each other and to their community;
2. Creating employer networks to help attract and retain young "PBS" employees to Rockford; and
3. Designing a People + Place campaign to attract young professionals (back) to Rockford.

Connect Young Professionals (YP's) to Each Other and to Rockford

Next Rockford is currently the only independent organization in Rockford whose purpose is to connect YP's to the issues that affect Rockford's future. The Rockford Chamber of Commerce's Young Professionals Network (YPN) has dwindled in recent months due to a modified membership policy and lack of infrastructure. Yet the need exists for a broad-based, engaging forum for YP's to connect to each other and to the community. We recommend that:

- 2.1 **Start a broad-based Young Professionals Organization, modeled after the successful models in Milwaukee, Quad Cities and Pittsburgh.** A more broad-based YPO would give Rockford's young professionals a community-based forum to connect with each other, and to connect with issues that are important to them. This will strengthen your Social Capital score, and will provide a fresh pool of people and ideas to ignite Rockford's redevelopment efforts.
- 2.2 **Start a monthly Meet-Up for YP's in Rockford.** How do people who are new to Rockford break-in? How do YP's find each other? Until Rockford has a more broad-based YP organization (see recommendation 2.1 above), there should be a place for YP's to safely meet each other, especially if they are new to the community.
- 2.3 **Create a dynamic, online forum with a full directory of the places, events, and issues that matter to the next generation.**

Get Fresh - Fresh parties were started by a group of young professionals in Milwaukee, who wanted to help transplants to the areas meet new friends and get to know the city. On a random day each month, a "Fresh" email would arrive to newbies alerting them to the time and location of the "Fresh" party. Always spontaneous, these parties became an underground sensation.



Beetcafe.com is a local example of the kind of web-based entertainment guide that appeals to the next generation. A central component of Beet Café is its forum, which allows any member to post comments about events and listings. A forum is important because it allows multi-directional, online dialogue among and between members.

Online forums – and online life – are important to the next generation, who are now spending more time online than watching television.

OnMilwaukee.com is an example of a community-based website that offers dynamic, multi-directional communication about places and issues that matter to the next generation. It's similar to Beet Café, but more robust: it has paid staffs who cover politics, restaurants, kids+family and more.

What if Rockford had a single, alternative online source where young professionals could chime in on education issues, get movie and restaurant reviews and vote in online polls on political issues?

Creating employer networks to help attract and retain young “PBS” professionals to Rockford. In October 2006, we conducted an Employer Survey to gauge the region's appetite for talent. The results indicate that Rockford's employers have a need for employees to work in Professional and Business Services, sometimes referred to as the “PBS” sector.

This is important for two reasons.

First, PBS occupations are the fastest growing job clusters in the U.S. They include jobs in professional, scientific and technical services and management of companies and enterprises. The following table indicates the percentage of Rockford area employers who have expressed “urgent” or “moderate” need for these skills:

Management	84%
Technical	60%
Executives	44%
Scientific	9%



Second, Rockford's proximity to Chicago makes it a prime candidate for a PBS cluster. In the 1990's, Chicago's PBS cluster grew 160%. Today, PBS employers are considering moving to the suburban ring of large metro centers, both to secure cheaper costs of business, i.e. office space, taxes, and also to protect their back-office operations from terrorist or security threats, which are generally higher in large urban metros.

For these reasons, Rockford is in an excellent position – both geographically and from an industry perspective – to grow this cluster. We recommend that the Rockford area:

- 3.1 **Form a recruiting collaborative to attract PBS talent from Chicago, Minneapolis and Madison.** Chicago, Minneapolis and Madison are already providing the greatest number of new recruits to Rockford area employers. By joining forces and recruiting together from these locations, PBS employers:
 - Demonstrate that Rockford has many job options;
 - Share the costs of on-campus and corporate recruiting and travel costs
 - Use ONE message to sell the “Why Rockford?” story.

In Nashville in 2002, the health care industry faced a serious crisis – how to attract nurses and technicians to relocate to Nashville. With the assistance of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, local HR professionals formed an alliance and pooled their resources to create a compelling message about why medical professionals should relocate to Nashville. The result? In the words of one nurse recruiter, “We knew we’d all hang separately if we didn’t hang together.”

- 3.2 **Develop an online Employer Directory and/or CD/DVD that can be used for Career Fairs and College visits that profiles Rockford's PBS employers/jobs types and skills sets required to fill such positions.** The Employer Directory should also offer quality of life information, including video testimonials from current Rockford-based PBS employees about their reasons for choosing Rockford.
- 3.3 **Develop PBS skill and certification programs.** It's critical to members of the next generation to continuously sharpen their skills and stretch their abilities. To develop a competitive PBS cluster, area colleges and universities should work with national accrediting bodies and local employers to design training and certification programs to ensure that Rockford's PBS cluster is best in class.



Design and Execute a “Why Rockford?” Boomerang Campaign

In addition to the PBS sector outlined above, there are other people who are likely to move back to Rockford - “Boomerangers.”

“Boomerangers” are people who grew up in Rockford, but left to go to college or cut their teeth in their first jobs. As they enter their late twenties or early 30’s, they are thinking about ‘settling down’ and starting a family...and want to do so back in Rockford, where they can be close to their families.

A “Boomerang” campaign might include the following efforts:

- 4.1 **A “Why Rockford” video competition.** The goal of the competition is to solicit real people’s stories on why they choose to live and/or work in Rockford. Selected videos could be used in a Boomerang campaign and/or loaded onto YouTube.
- 4.2 **A series of “Why Rockford?” Thanksgiving weekend events** - including a “Jobapalooza” job fair for young professionals and a “Rockford Rocks” bus tour of downtown’s coolest new developments – to reintroduce former Rockford residents back to the community.
- 4.3 **A targeted, multi-pronged approach to attract the area’s college alumni who are now 27-30 years old and living outside of Rockford.** A targeted approach might include:
 - A letter from Mayor Morrissey, outlining the live/work opportunities in Rockford;
 - A series of large, full-color postcards to repeat the “Why Rockford?” message; and
 - An event co-sponsored by Next Rockford to make a peer-to-peer pitch about the dynamic changes happening in Rockford.

Please note: Rockford’s creative community is alive and strong. A true “Why Rockford?” campaign should enlist the skills of a local, creative agency to ensure that Rockford’s brand attributes are fairly, consistently and creatively portrayed throughout the entire campaign. All the ideas offered in this “Boomerang Campaign” are merely jumping off points for a more dynamic, local discussion of a “Why Rockford?” campaign.



Pride - If you want people to be attracted to and stay in your community, they have to feel that living in Rockford is something to be proud of. This is difficult to measure but easy to sense. Here are a few things every citizen of Rockford can do today to increase their sense of pride in the community:

- 5.1 **Sign the Positively Rockford pledge at www.nextgenerationconsulting.com/Rockford.**
- 5.2 **Catch your city officials, leaders, local entrepreneurs and neighbors doing things right.** Leading a city, running a company and starting a new business are demanding and often thankless jobs. Send them emails, leave voicemails and offer a word of appreciation...even for the little things. This is a great way to be Positively Rockford.
- 5.3 **Keep Rockford clean and beautiful.** The “broken window” theory of urban decay has been proven in city after city. Residents and shopkeepers must keep up their property. Blighted areas of the city must be addressed and enforced. Investments in beautification and streetscaping not only make our streets welcoming, they keep them safe.



Goals, Activities, Leaders and Supporters - The nitty-gritty

Goals, Activities, Leaders and Supporters		
Rockford, IL		
GOALS/Activities	Lead	Support
1. Make Rockford an Urban Destination		
1.1 Offer continuous bicycle and pedestrian trails along the riverfront.	City of Rockford	River District, Rockford Park District
1.2 Designate protected bike lanes along non-arterial streets leading in and out of downtown Rockford and to/from the riverfront.	City of Rockford & Rockford Area Transportation Study(RATS)	River District, Rockford Parks, Local bicycling clubs
1.3 Eliminate one-way streets in downtown Rockford.	City of Rockford	RATS, River District
1.4 Create a public-private fund to invest in moderate (50 unit) live/work spaces along the Riverfront.	City of Rockford	Next Rockford, Rockford Housing Authority, Local Banks
1.5 Encourage and incent infill of appropriate retail, i.e. bistros, boutiques, bars, etc. along historic East State Street.	City of Rockford	Winnebago County, River District, Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC), Chamber of Commerce
1.6 Appropriately adjust the building code requirements for historic downtown properties.	City of Rockford	Rockford Historic Preservation Commission, River District
1.7 Support a TIF initiative to freeze property values of historic neighborhoods	City of Rockford	River District, Midtown District, Next Rockford



1.8 Support the development of high speed or commuter rail	NICTI	River District, Greater Rockford Airport Authority, Next Rockford, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB)
1.9 Pass a smoking ban for downtown bars and restaurants	City of Rockford	Local bar and restaurant owners
2. Connect Young Professionals to Each Other and to Rockford		
2.1 Start a broad-based Young Professionals Organization	Next Rockford	RAEDC, Chamber of Commerce
2.2 Create a Monthly Meet-up for YP's in Rockford.	Next Rockford	Chamber of Commerce
2.3 Create a dynamic, online forum with a full directory of the places, events, and issues that matter to the next generation.	RACVB	
3. Pursue an Economic Strategy to Attract and Retain PBS Jobs		
3.1 Form a recruiting collaborative to attract PBS talent from Chicago, Minneapolis and Madison	RAEDC	Workforce Investment Board (WIB), Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), Chamber of Commerce, Next Rockford
3.2 Develop an online Employer Directory and/or CD/DVD that can be used for Career Fairs and College visits that profiles Rockford's PBS employers/jobs types and skills sets required to fill such positions.	RAEDC	SHRM, WIB



3.3 Develop PBS skill and certification programs	Higher Education Alliance for the Rock River Region	RAEDC, WIB
4 Design and Execute a “Why Rockford?” Boomerang Campaign:		
4.1 A “Why Rockford” video competition	Greater Rockford Ad Federation Club	RACVB
4.2 A series of “Why Rockford?” Thanksgiving weekend events	Next Rockford, RACVB	Chamber of Commerce
4.3 A targeted, multi-pronged approach to attract the area’s college alumni who are now 27-30 years old and living outside of Rockford.	Rock Valley College, NIU, Rockford College, City of Rockford	Next Rockford
5. Instill a sense of Pride in the Rockford Community		
5.1 Sign the Positively Rockford pledge	Everyone	
5.2 Catch your city officials, leaders, local entrepreneurs and neighbors doing things right	Everyone	
5.3 Keep Rockford clean and beautiful	Everyone	Keep Illinois Beautiful



Summary

Rockford has a series of assets – proximity to water, an undeveloped Riverfront, a commitment to parks and recreation areas, historic neighborhoods, and proximity to Chicago - that make it a desirable area for young professionals.

Yet, 6 of Rockford’s handprint scores are at the national average; and only one score – Vitality – leads average U.S. cities.

To attract and retain the next generation of talent, Rockford must act decisively to differentiate itself from other mid-sized cities. Rockford must make a compelling, targeted case to young professionals about why they should move – or return to – Rockford.

Place. People. Pride. With these recommendations as a blue print, Rockford can offer a relevant answer to the question that young professionals are already asking:

“Why Rockford”



Methodologies - How was this information collected?

The following methodologies were used to gather data and insights that form the basis of our recommendations to Rockford.

Further details on the findings are available at www.nextgenerationconsulting.com/Rockford.

Focus Groups - In November 2006, Next Generation Consulting (NGC) conducted focus groups including 58 young professionals (YP's) in Rockford. The average age was 32, with 42 men and 16 women.

Following are selected focus group findings:

- When asked, "Which is more important, a 'cool community' or a good job?" over half (54.72%) said a cool community is more important. 37.74% said a good job is important and the remainder said both were equally important.
- When asked, "How long do you plan to stay in Rockford?" 30.91% of respondents said they were unsure.
- When asked, "How did you end up in Rockford?" most focus group participants revealed that they had "Boomeranged" back to the area, as seen in the following table:

Boomerang	38.89%
Job	12.96%
Family/Friends	16.67%
Never Left	16.67%
Job/Family/Boomerang	9.26%
Job/Family and Friends	3.70%

- Focus group participants have broad ranging experiences and expectations of cities. When asked "What is your favorite 'cool community?'" participants cited communities ranging from Barcelona, Spain to Williamsburg, Iowa.



- When asked, “What must Rockford do to attract and retain young talent?” the top vote getters were:
 - o Develop the river
 - o Bring people downtown
 - o Anchor stores downtown
 - o Elect better officials/get rid of stagnant officials
 - o Change/Improve public schools w/neighborhood schools
 - o Develop a centralized community plan and work together
 - o Make the newspapers/media better-have a YP column
 - o Develop a marketing strategy for Rockford and stick with It
 - o Increase parking availability/safety downtown

Overall, Rockford has a committed core group of young professionals who want to make an impact in the community, and have a keen sense of areas where the community can and should improve.



Employer Survey - From October 1-20, 2006, Next Generation Consulting (NGC) administered a survey that was emailed to 1,922 Rockford area employers. A total of 197 employers responded for a 10.25% response rate, an excellent result.

Following are selected summary findings:

- Respondents indicated a need for 8,021 employees in the next 2-3 years. 4,581 of these jobs will be created through retirement and attrition. The remaining 3,440 are new jobs that employers expect to create to meet their organization's goals.
- 84% of respondents indicated "Urgent" and "Moderate" need for the following skills sets:

Management	84%
Clerical	73%
Marketing/Sales	66%
Customer Service	66%
Technical	60%
Financial	47%
Executives	44%
Labor	44%
Little/No Training	30%
Licensed and Certified	20%
Scientific	9%

- Respondents indicated that they have the best success attracting young talent from Chicago, Milwaukee and Madison. These cities ranked higher than cities surrounding Rockford.
- When asked why respondents were working to attract young talent, they responded:

Planning for the future	64.1%
Average employee age is higher than we would like	29.7%
Customers are young, they need YP's to relate	20.0%
Retirees leave too many jobs vacant	6.9%
Board of Directors asked them to	4.8%



YP Survey - In January 2007, a web-based survey was emailed to members of Next Rockford, Rockford Area Economic Development Council and to the Steering Committee, who in turn forwarded the web survey to others. A total of 457 young professionals aged 20-40 responded to the survey. Eighty-nine percent live in the Rockford area; 11 percent live outside Rockford.

To interpret the survey, please note the following definitions:

Homegrowns are people who have lived in Rockford all their lives.

Boomerangers are people who grew up in Rockford, left at some point, and eventually returned.

Transplants are people who moved to Rockford from someplace else.

Following are selected findings:

- Homegrowns are the most likely to promote Rockford to their friends and family. 24% said they are “highly likely” to promote Rockford to others. Among other current residents, 16% of Boomerangers said they would recommend Rockford, and 13% of Transplants are highly likely to promote Rockford. Non-residents are the least likely to promote Rockford (9%).
- When relocating, 41% of young professionals say they rely most heavily on word of mouth from friends and family for advice on where to move.
- Jobs (56%) and family (68%) are the most often cited responses for what keeps young people in Rockford. Only 14% said they stay because of Rockford’s amenities.
- Respondents living outside Rockford had higher levels of education, were higher represented in professional services and made more money than respondents who live in Rockford.



Credits - Next Generation Consulting would like to thank the following individuals and groups for giving their valuable time, insights, and guidance to this process.

The **Steering Committee** included major investors in the project.

- Jeff Hultman, Next Rockford
- David Preece, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
- David Anderson, Next Rockford
- John Groh, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
- John Menzies, Next Rockford
- Janyce Fadden, Rockford Area Economic Development Council
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- Tonya Lamia, Rockford Area Economic Development Council

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- Rockford Park District
- Alpine Bank
- William Charles Ltd.
- workplace
- Arc Design Resources
- Associated Bank
- Blackhawk Bank
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Cool Community Handprint Data				
ROCKFORD, Illinois, USA				
INDEX/Metrics	Rockford	U.S. Avg	Comp [1]	Index Score
VITALITY INDEX				5
Air quality (100 is best)	33	48		
Water quality (100 is best)	56	55		
Life expectancy in years	76.7	76.9		
Number of Farmer's Markets	4		4	
Obesity rank (out of 51 states) [2]	23	25.5		
Acres of public parks, trails, greenspace	17,300		12,000	
Municipal smoking ban in bars/resaurants (yes/no)	No		Yes	
EARNING INDEX				4
Knowledge professions [3]				
Management	4.4%	4.7%		
Computer and Mathematical	0.9%	2.3%		
Architectural & Engineering	1.8%	1.9%		
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	5.6%	5.0%		
Professional and Business Services	17.0%	21.0%		
Super Creative Class Ranking (out of 332) [4]	106	166		
Unemployment Rate	4.7%	4.5%		
Innovation Ranking (out of 332)	47	166		
Technology Ranking (out of 332)	77	166		
Entrepreneurship Ranking (out of 162)	85	81		



INDEX/Metrics	Rockford	U.S. Avg	Comp [1]	Index Score
LEARNING INDEX				4
Local, accredited colleges and universities	3		5	
Level of education:				
High School Diploma or Equivalent	85.4%	84.0%		
Associates Degree [5]	7.1%	4.7%		
Bachelors Degree [5]	13.0%	27.5%		
Graduate/Professional Degree [5]	6.4%	6.3%		
Free WiFi Hot Spots	23		25	
Bookstores	21		28	

SOCIAL CAPITAL INDEX				4
Percentage of population under 44	63.7%	37%		
Ethnicity				
American Indian	0.4%	1%		
Asian	2.0%	4%		
Black	10.3%	12%		
Hispanic	10.8%	13%		
White	82.1%	78%		
Other	7.3%	6%		
Religious Diversity (Number of Churches)	226		234	
Functional YP Organization (Yes/No) [6]	No		Yes	
Volunteer Center	Yes		Yes	
Policy to protect gays in jobs and housing	No		Yes	
Crime (scale of 1 to 10, 10 is high)				
Violent	7	3		
Property	7	3		



INDEX/Metrics	Rockford	U.S. Avg	Comp [1]	Index Score
COST OF LIFESTYLE INDEX				4
Average income per capita	\$28,008	\$33,050		
Household Income	\$55,119	\$62,556		
Cost of Living (100 is U.S. average)	87.9	100		
Housing	58.3	100		
Food	101.6	100		
Transportation	104.5	100		
Utilities	126.2	100		
Health	101.3	100		

AFTER HOURS INDEX				4
Number of bars	79		95	
Number of art galleries	21		20	
Number of theatre/music venues	11		15	
Live music events [7]	46		56	
Restaurants: ethnic and specialty	72		80	
Natural food and health food stores	47		50	
Independent Retail	123		124	

AROUND TOWN INDEX				4
Commute time (minutes)	20.9	27.4		
Commuters who travel alone by car	80%	71%		
Commuters who use public/mass transit	1.82%	2%		
Number of direct outbound nonstop daily flights	2		6	

Notes

- 1] We use a Composite Score (“Comp”) in cases where a national average is unavailable. The Composite includes the average of all cities handprinted in the previous two years.
- 2] The 51 states include Washington, D.C.
- 3] “Knowledge professions” include the occupations which are expected to see substantial future growth, and will likely employ a large number of young professionals.
- 4] “Super Creative Class” includes actors, designers, musicians.
- 5] These educational attainment statistics are for residents 25 years and older
- 6] We define a functional YP Organization as one that is open to the public without restriction, and is staffed by a part-time, paid coordinator.
- 7] “Live Music” calculates an average weekly number of music events using a sample of 3 random weeks. We used the Go Now section of the Register Star.

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Notes and Sources

Handprint Sources

We used the following sources to calculate Rockford's handprint:

Bureau of Labor Statistics (12/2006)
Bureau of Labor Statistics (4/2005)
Centers for Disease Control
Chicago/Rockford International Airport (RFD)
City and County Laws
City and County Park Sites
Entrepreneur Magazine (2006)
Environmental Protection Agency (2/2005)
FBI, Uniform Crime Reports (2003)
Go Now (Rockford Register Star)
<http://univ.cc/states.php>
Local ordinances
Richard Florida Creativity Group
Sperling's Best Places (11/2005)
U.S. Census (04/2006)
U.S. Census Bureau (2003)
U.S. Census Bureau (2003)
USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (1/2007)
Yellow Pages (2006)
Yellow Pages (2006) & City Search
YPCommons and Google



Sources - In addition to the primary research we conducted for this project, we also consulted and referred to these resources:

Adam Smith, nFACTOR. Adam is the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning for the City of Rockford. Tel: (815) 987-5590

Midtown Arts Initiative is championed by the Riverfront Development Group.

Carter & Burgess, *Target Industry Analysis*, Prepared for the Rockford Area Economic Development Council, February 2006.

Ellen D. Harpell, Ph.D., "Professional and Business Services in Regional Economies," *Economic Development Journal*, Fall, 2006.

River District Framework Plan, Rockford, IL, January 2003.

Owner Survey Results (media release), Rockford Park District, August 23, 2006.

Richard W. Judy and Jane M. Lommel, *21st Century Workforce: Boone and Winnebago Counties*, January 31, 2004.

Rockford Area Quick Reference Guide, Rockford Area Economic Development Council, June 19, 2006.

www.beetcafe.com

Go Now, a publication of the *Rockford Register Star*