

Tolerance and Inclusion

By Ryan Regan

HOW MILLENNIAL SOCIAL VALUES ARE RESHAPING HOW COMMUNITIES GROW AND ATTRACT JOBS

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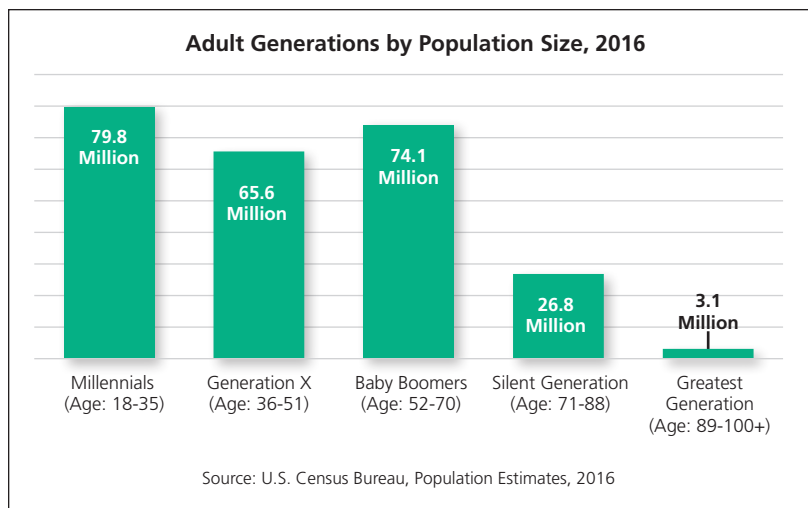
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millennials.¹ It's a word that elicits such sharp opinions from people you'd think they were their own political party. Rarely has an American generation been so microscopically analyzed as this group of 20 and 30-somethings, and perhaps for good reason. They are on track to be the most educated generation in U.S. history,² and in 2015, they officially surpassed baby boomers as the largest living generation who now also make up the greatest share of the U.S. workforce.³

In an era when economic developers and business executives are grappling with attracting a skilled workforce that is sustainable over the long-term, millennials are a panacea of sorts. The sheer size, youthfulness (most have 30+ years of work ahead of them), and stellar educational credentials of this generation garner the bulk of the attention among economic development practitioners, and deservedly so. However, in recent years, other key attributes – namely their open-minded social values – have bubbled up and affected community and economic development decisions in ways that were completely unforeseen just decades ago.

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QUALITY OF PLACE REIMAGINED

The competition for talented workers is fierce, and there is no doubt that millennials' presence in the workforce is fundamentally changing how communities attract and retain jobs. Skilled labor continues to be routinely recognized as a dominant driver in the site location process. No longer are people flocking to where the jobs are, but rather, corporations are flocking to where their talent pool is, even if it means moving just miles down the road. High-profile corporate relocation decisions in just recent years involving General Electric (Boston), Weyerhaeuser (Seattle), McDonald's (Chicago), and NCR (Atlanta) are just a sampling of the companies who spurned the suburbs in their respective locales in favor of the downtown city core where millennials abound.

In light of evolving trends in the site location process from the corporate decision maker perspective, communities too have adapted their economic

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The millennial generation now represents the greatest share of the U.S. workforce, and there is little doubt that they will have a significant long-term impact on the field of economic development. Increasingly it is the generation's trademark diversity and open-minded social beliefs that are driving new conversations about how economic development is thought of and practiced. Public backlash in recent years to "bathroom bills," "religious freedom bills," and restrictive immigration measures show how social policy and economic development are increasingly intertwined. Communities seeking to attract and retain millennial talent must be mindful of this reality given the premium that this critical cohort places on diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance.

development strategic focus. Investing in and maintaining traditional assets (buildings, sites, transportation and utilities infrastructure, etc.) remain central to any community's effort to grow its economy. However, competitive communities similarly understand the importance of investing in community assets that contribute to a high "quality of life" and "quality of place." Such investments play a critical role in any serious effort to grow a community's talent base.

Public investments that create a sense of community and a distinguishable quality of place are especially important in attracting and retaining millennial workers. This conversation is most often positioned in terms of physical investments like multi-family housing options, greenspaces, pedestrian-friendly public spaces, bike lanes, public transportation access, and more. While all are especially coveted by millennials drawn to central city amenities, quality of place is far more encompassing than just these visible assets alone.

While not a monolith, millennials are defined by their diversity and open-minded social beliefs. When it comes to two of the more hot-button topics in our modern political environment – LGBT rights and immigration policy – the uniqueness of the millennial generation relative to their peer adult generations is striking

A community's quality of place allows it to distinguish itself from peer communities not just in physical appearance, but in how residents and visitors attach themselves to the community. A strong sense of community and a shared sense of culture is not something that can be financed through a bond referendum like traditional quality of place investments. Instead, the authentic social bonds we develop with community members and the genuine emotional connection that one can claim with the place they live is what ultimately moves the needle when it comes to making a community an attractive place to live, work, and play.

These were precisely the findings of the influential *"The Soul of the Community"* study conducted in 2010 by the Knight Foundation and Gallup. The study encapsulates what so many communities get right and what so many get wrong when it comes to attracting and retaining millennial talent. As a part of this three-year study into the factors that influence community attachment, 43,000 people in 26 communities across the country – from Milledgeville, GA to San Jose, CA – were asked about the factors that influence their levels of attachment to their respective communities. The study examined 11 factors that influence community attachment and correlated survey responses by the respondent's stated level of satisfaction with their community. According to the

report, the two most important factors that attach people to their community are:

- **Social Offerings:** defined as "places for people to meet each other and the feeling that people in the community care about each other"
- **Openness:** defined as "how welcoming the community is to different types of people, including families with young children, racial and ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, immigrants, and young, talented college graduates"

The report's findings were remarkably consistent across the communities in the study, regardless of size or geographic location, and the factors outranked a number of more traditional "quality of life" factors, including public safety and education.

AMERICA'S OPEN-MINDED GENERATION

While not a monolith, millennials are defined by their diversity and open-minded social beliefs. When it comes to two of the more hot-button topics in our modern political environment – LGBT rights and immigration policy – the uniqueness of the millennial generation relative to their peer adult generations is striking. Consider the following:

- According to a 2017 Pew Research Center poll of adults, 74 percent of millennials (ages 18-36) support same-sex marriage. This level of support is the highest of all adult generations, and it is 18 points higher than the baby boomer generation.⁴
- A 2016 national Gallup poll of a representative sample of the U.S. population found that 7.3 percent of millennials (ages 18-36) identify as being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. This share of LGBT self-identification is more than double that of any other adult generation.⁵
- A 2015 poll by Fusion of 1,000 millennials (ages 18-34) found that 50 percent believe that gender exists on a spectrum and "some people fall outside conventional categories."⁶
- A 2016 USA TODAY/Rock the Vote survey of 1,539 millennials between the ages of 18 and 35 found that by nearly a 2-1 margin, millennials believe that transgender individuals should be able to use the bathroom according to the gender they identify with, not based on the sex they were born.⁷
- A 2016 Pew Research Center poll of adults found that 76 percent of millennials (ages 18-36) agree that immigrants "strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents." This is the highest share among all adult generations, and 28 points higher than the baby boomer generation.⁸
- Young immigrants continue to swell the ranks of the millennial generation. A Pew Research Center analysis of 2014 data notes that Hispanics are the youngest major racial or ethnic group in the United States, with almost 60 percent being millennials (ages 18-33) or younger.⁹

Appealing to millennial talent requires that communities be mindful of these attributes and employ a holistic, inclusive approach to their talent attraction efforts.

WHEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY COLLIDE

Noted urban studies theorist, Dr. Richard Florida, has conducted no shortage of research that looks at the nexus between social policy and economic outcomes. He is perhaps most well-known for his research on the “Creative Class,” a term he coined to describe the knowledge-based white-collar workers who he claims are key to driving economic growth in the post-industrial economy.

Florida makes the argument that the “three t’s” – talent, technology, and tolerance – are necessary foundational principles that communities must embrace in order to remain competitive in a global economy that places a premium on knowledge-based jobs. The talent supporting a technology-intensive economy is increasingly young, diverse, and tolerant, and these workers desire to live and work in communities that view these attributes favorably.

The tie between culture, tolerance, diversity, inclusivity, and millennial talent attraction has crystallized in just recent years for economic developers who, a generation ago, would have never placed a premium on such social and cultural factors.

North Carolina has, of course, been ground zero on this topic. In March 2016, the North Carolina legislature passed the *Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act* (also known as HB2 or the “bathroom bill”). The bill resulted in two primary changes to state law: it prevented municipalities in the state from enacting anti-discrimination policies, and it required that, in government buildings, individuals were to use the bathroom that corresponded to the gender on their birth certificate. The bill drew widespread condemnation from advocates in the LGBT community who contended that the bill greatly restricted the rights of members of the LGBT community.

The ensuing fallout was unlike anything seen before in the field of economic development. High profile projects like a proposed 400 new jobs from PayPal in Charlotte¹⁰; 250 new jobs from Deutsche Bank in Cary¹¹; and 730 new jobs from CoStar Group in Charlotte¹² were all scrapped with corporate executives citing HB2 as the reason for the snub. The college and professional sports industries weren’t spared either. The NCAA, ACC, and the NBA all relocated previously scheduled sporting events out of the state. Measuring the overall economic fallout from HB2 is an imperfect science, but just from publicized projects alone, the state lost thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions in capital investment amid the HB2 fallout. One estimate by *Forbes* from November of last year put the total economic loss at \$630 million.¹³ The number of non-publicized companies that removed North Carolina from consideration during the site selection process because of HB2 assuredly drives that figure higher.

Recognizing the economic losses and tarnished reputation the bill brought to the state, North Carolina’s political leaders reached a compromise earlier this year to repeal the controversial bill. Still, similar bathroom bills were introduced in the 2017 legislative session in over 15 states, including economic development powerhouses, South Carolina and Texas.¹⁴

The fiasco over HB2 in North Carolina comes more than a year after a law with similar anti-LGBT impacts, the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act*, became law in Indiana and resulted in a similar torrent of bad press and economic losses for the state. Such “religious freedom bills” have been vetoed by governors in states like Georgia and Virginia due in part to intense pressure from the business community fearing the similar kind of fallout that befell North Carolina and Indiana.

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The notion that these bathroom bills or religious freedom bills would have had such a profoundly negative impact on a state’s economic development efforts if passed a generation ago is almost implausible. But, with millennial workers now at the forefront of many a community’s efforts to attract and retain jobs, cultural perceptions can no longer be an afterthought, but instead, should be a priority.

IMMIGRATION AS A TALENT ATTRACTION TOOL

Immigration policy has become front and center in our nation’s political discourse, but unlike the debates going on in Washington, there is little disagreement among economic developers about the economic value of immigrants. Immigrants offer critical support at both poles of the workforce pipeline. According to analysis by the Pew Research Center of 2014 U.S. Census data, foreign-born workers exceed the share of native-born workers in both high-skill and low-skill occupations. This is the case for occupational groups related to Life, Physical and Social Science, Architecture and Engineering, and Computer and Math, in addition to Food Preparation and Serving, and Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance.¹⁵

Immigrants are also highly-entrepreneurial and make key contributions to the innovation economy. A 2016 study from the National Foundation for American Policy, a non-partisan think tank, showed that over half of the nation’s startup companies worth \$1 billion or more were started by immigrants. These immigrant founders created an average of approximately 760 jobs per company in the United States, and the collective value of their companies was \$168 billion.¹⁶ The abundance of immigrant-fueled tech entrepreneurship in this country

Recognizing the aforementioned economic boost that immigrants can inject into a community, many locales across the country have taken concerted steps in recent years to make immigrants the focal point of their overall talent attraction efforts. Many of these same communities have also blossomed into burgeoning hubs of millennial talent.



Source: Global Detroit.
<http://www.globaldetroit.com/detroit-is-now-a-welcoming-city/>

Immigrants and millennials are leading Detroit's turnaround.

is all the more remarkable when considering the fact that immigrants make up less than 14 percent of the total U.S. population.¹⁷

The concentration of immigrants in high-tech sectors of the economy is even more of a potential boon to economic developers when you consider the disproportionate number of local jobs created in an economy through growth in innovative industries. A 2012 report by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute found that for every one job in a high-tech sector – defined as those sectors most closely tied to STEM fields – more than four jobs are created in the local economy across a diverse array of income groups, from lawyers and dentists to cooks and retail clerks.¹⁸ The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has long documented similarly positive economic impacts of immigrants, including the fact that they drive up – not down – average wages for all U.S. workers by increasing productivity and stimulating investment.¹⁹

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DETROIT, MI

The post-Great Recession plight of Detroit is well-documented. Roiled by manufacturing losses and an exodus of residents out of the city's core, the Motor City turned to immigrants to bring it back from the brink. Global Detroit – a nonprofit organization funded in part by the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce – spearheaded efforts several years ago to attract immigrant talent, connect immigrants to economic opportunities, and tap into their entrepreneurial spirit.

The immigrant-friendly initiatives being led by Global Detroit and other community stakeholders are bearing fruit. From 2010 to 2015, the number of U.S.-born residents living in Wayne County (home to Detroit) contracted by 4.4 percent, while a 10 percent rise in the number of foreign-born residents was seen over the same time period.²⁰ Detroit has been reinvigorated by new downtown investments and a burgeoning software and engineering workforce – fueled by immigrant and millennial talent – that has contributed to the resurgence of the region's increasingly advanced auto industry.

Residents between the ages of 20 and 34 accounted for 22.3 percent of the city of Detroit's total population in 2015, a share higher than it has been in over a decade.²¹ Job browsing data released by the professional social network company, LinkedIn, found that Detroit is at the top of the mind for America's millennial job seekers. In 2016, Detroit had the third highest annual growth rate in job interest among millennials, falling only behind millennial juggernauts Austin, TX and Raleigh, NC.²² Leading companies in the auto and tech industries, like General Motors, Ford, and Quicken Loans, were top drivers of the job searches.

SALT LAKE CITY, UT

Utah has long been recognized as one of the top states to do business in the country, but much of its recent success can be tied to the tech entrepreneurial activity taking hold in Salt Lake City. In 2015, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce ranked Utah #1 out of all the states for innovation and entrepreneurship and #2 for high-tech performance.²³ Salt Lake City's emergence as a tech hub has been driven by a boom in talented foreign-born and millennial workers who want to be a part of Salt Lake City's success story.

The Salt Lake County government and Salt Lake Chamber have been intentional in embracing immigrants in the community and leaning on them to fuel Salt Lake's economic growth. Last year, the Chamber and county government launched the Welcoming Salt Lake New Americans Task Force at the Salt Lake Chamber. The Task Force seeks to raise awareness about the economic contributions that immigrants make in the Salt Lake City

area. A report by the Task Force notes that immigrants in Salt Lake County contributed \$8 billion to the metro area's economy in 2014, and the county is home to almost 7,000 immigrant-owned businesses that generate \$145 million in annual income.²⁴

Salt Lake's burgeoning tech sector and top research universities combine to make it a hotbed of millennial talent.²⁵ A 2016 CB Commercial Real Estate (CBRE) "Scoring Tech Talent" report that measures a community's ability to attract and grow tech talent, ranked Salt Lake City as a top small market for millennial tech talent. U.S. Census data from 2015 shows that 34.5 percent of people between the ages of 25 and 34 in Salt Lake County had a Bachelor's degree or higher, and this share increased by 6.2 points since 2010 – far better than all other age groups.²⁶

DES MOINES, IA

The Des Moines area's primary economic development organization – Greater Des Moines Partnership – talks the talk and walks the walk when it comes to talent attraction. The Partnership sees immigrants and millennials as key drivers of a regional economy that is increasingly globally connected. In 2016, the Partnership released a multi-pronged plan to attract and integrate foreign-born workers into the regional economy. Action items include developing a micro-loan program specifically for foreign-born entrepreneurs, fostering integration between high-

skill foreign-born workers and existing employers in need of talent, and creating a Central Iowa Welcoming Center to meet the information and services needs of the region's immigrants.

While the Des Moines region's immigrant attraction efforts are just beginning, the region has entrenched itself over the last decade as a thriving hub of millennial talent. In 2014, *Forbes* magazine dubbed Des Moines the best city for millennials in the country,²⁷ and housing data from Realtor.com shows that 25-34-year-olds are

Source: Gardner Company. <http://gardnercompany.net/portfolio-item/adobe/>



Immigrants and millennials are helping tech companies like Adobe thrive in Salt Lake City.



Source: kactfs.org <http://www.kactfs.org/>

The Des Moines Social Club anchors a downtown that has the "it factor."

dominating the Des Moines housing market.²⁸ The community's success in drawing millennials is due largely to a community ethos that embraces art, culture, and the spirit of creativity. The city's vibrant downtown is anchored by the uber-hip Des Moines Social Club, which acts as the city's cultural heartbeat. The innovative arts and entertainment venue is housed in a renovated downtown firehouse and draws 25,000 people a month from across the country.

Tangible quality of place assets like the Des Moines Social Club and a community culture that is welcoming of creative young people and talented immigrants has turned Des Moines into a thriving magnet for the best and the brightest. It should come as little surprise that a 2015 Gallup survey measuring the levels of community pride in the 100 most populous metros in the country penciled Des Moines in at the #1 spot.²⁹

The field of economic development is constantly changing, and millennials are the definitive change makers of our time. Communities seeking to remain competitive in an uncertain future should be willing to adapt their talent attraction and economic development approaches accordingly, or, the workers of tomorrow may pass you by.

CONCLUSION

The millennials' takeover of the U.S. labor force is just beginning, and as time goes on, their role as drivers of economic development decisions will only grow more acute. As many in the economic development profession are learning, millennials aren't like the generations that came before them. They are unique among their peer generational groups in their racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. As we have learned, their tolerant social beliefs necessitate that economic development professionals and policy makers rethink conventional approaches to economic development. Divisive rhetoric and policies that marginalize members of the LGBT community and immigrants are a surefire way to alienate a generation that is overwhelmingly supportive of both constituencies.

Every community seeking to compete for millennial talent should recognize that investing in tangible quality of place assets is important, but as *The Soul of the Community* report showed, promoting an inclusive community culture is the key to the talent attraction kingdom. A growing body of research shows that community attributes like low levels of income inequality and high levels of social, racial, and spatial integration are strong influencers of sustained economic growth in metro regions.³⁰

The field of economic development is constantly changing, and millennials are the definitive change makers of our time. Communities seeking to remain competitive in an uncertain future should be willing to adapt their talent attraction and economic development approaches accordingly, or, the workers of tomorrow may pass you by. 🌐



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ENDNOTES

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