

Growing Belonging & Opportunity in the Heart of America's Crossroads

A Summary of Northwest Missouri's
Primarily Rural Voices from 2020 and 2025



MAXIMIZE
NWMO



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
OF
NORTHWEST MISSOURI

2025 ALUMNI & RESIDENT SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY GOAL:
To Better
Understand How
to Retain and
Attract Talent to the
18-County Region

Survey Questions Asked About Key Topics:

- Reasons for moving in or out of the NWMO region
- Influences on where people will choose to live in the coming years
- What people value about their community
- What is offered in communities
- How people support their communities

How the Survey Was Conducted:

- Open for four months, from mid-June to mid-October, 2025.
- Designed similarly to the 2020 Alumni & Resident survey, so comparisons could be made.
- Open to current and former residents of 18 NWMO counties: Andrew, Atchison, Buchanan, Caldwell, Clinton, Daviess, DeKalb, Gentry, Grundy, Harrison, Holt, Linn, Livingston, Mercer, Nodaway, Punam, Sullivan, and Worth.

What can be done to maximize the potential quality of life experienced in NWMO?

HOW TO **KEEP** AND **ATTRACT** TALENT, **BUILD** COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT, AND **INCREASE** LOCAL CASH FLOW

1

**Expand leadership
development and local
opportunities for all ages,
including youth, to learn and apply
21st-century skills for success**

- Invest in ensuring local schools offer the **highest-quality education** possible that today's families and employers want and need.
- Promote programs that include **resiliency, looking at the big picture, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and critical thinking** in all industries & sectors.
- Foster a **"can-do" community spirit**.

3

**Ensure social connections are
strong for all those choosing
to live here: Stayers, Returners, and
Incomers**

- **Support the contributions of time, talent, ideas, and other resources** of everyone.
- Returners and Incomers are most likely to engage in community-building efforts. **Involve them beyond friendly welcomes.**
- Foster safe, positive, and trusting **relationships**.
- Embrace place-making by ensuring **arts and entertainment** and **outdoor recreation Options** exist and are marketed so they don't remain a secret.
- Maintain and expand accessible gathering places for **meeting in-person, resource sharing, and lifelong learning**.

2

**Promote and support
innovation, resilience, and
entrepreneurship attitudes and
behaviors to create jobs**

- Create and broadly **communicate Job and Small Business Opportunities** to alumni and people in the surrounding regions to attract new residents.
- Foster **economic development and support entrepreneurship** to keep working-aged adults in the region as they establish and grow their families, as well as launch their later chapters of life.
- **Show and tell the youth** about the possible careers here.
- Train more skilled tradespeople to build and maintain the infrastructure.

4

**Embrace the interconnected
nature of all sectors and
jurisdictions across the region**

- Continue to advocate for **high-speed broadband** availability until 100% coverage is achieved.
- Access to **healthcare, childcare, and assisted living** is critical, particularly for older adults and younger families.
- Increase the availability of desirable, healthy **housing for all**.

Quality of Life Core Aspects:

- Education
- Health
- Economy
- Built Environment
- Housing
- Social Connections
- Natural Environment



Who was involved in the survey?

1,082 people with NWMO Ties Responded

The 18-county region was grouped into 4 subregions:



Group 1: 338 Responses (31%)

Group 2: 419 Responses (39%)

Group 3: 258 Responses (24%)

Group 4: 67 Responses (6%)

Answers were split into 4 groups.

46% Stayers

23% Returners

26% Incomers/In-Migrants*

5% Leavers

71% participants were female,
less than in 2020 (75%)

59% have at least a Bachelor's degree

35% were age 60+.
more than in 2020 (31%)

This is common in community surveys.

**An in-migrant in this analysis is someone who has moved into the NWMO region for the first time. This differs from "immigrant," which refers to international border migration.*

NWMO's Population, Job, and Community Engagement Trends

2025 Projected Population: 247,000

(-0.9% overall), a decline since 2020

2025 Job Growth: 1.6% over the past 5 years,
less than MO's 9% growth

NWMO's agricultural & manufacturing-based economy benefits from:

- A close proximity to large metro areas,
- A lower cost of living, and
- High social engagement, among other advantages.

These can serve as foundational economic strengths to build on.

NWMO Population and Jobs by Sub-Group
2025 Estimates and (5-Year % Change)

Group 2:

Home to Maryville
38K Population (-1.4%)
17K Jobs (+5.7%)

Group 4:

Home to Trenton
41K Population (0%)
15K Jobs (-8.5%)

Group 1:

Home to St. Joseph
133K Population (-2.0%)
62K Jobs (+2.6%)

Group 3:

Home to Chillicothe
36K Population (+3.1%)
14K Jobs (+5.0%)



NWMO Thriving Communities – Selected Contribution Indicators
Some regional data indicate higher rates of civic participation and nonprofit/social associations, good indicators of social engagement.

Contribution Indicator	NWMO Region	Missouri	U.S.
Census Housing Unit Response Rate*	93%	84%	83%
Voter Participation Rate	61%	64%	64%
Nonprofits Orgs per 100,000 Pop.	571	535	474
Social Associations per 100,000 Pop.	129	119	97

* % of NWMO households participating in the U.S. 2020 Census compared to MO and U.S.

Sources: Lightcast for population and employment figures. Thriving Communities data from the University of Missouri Extension

↑
SENSE OF BELONGING
is up
by 3 points
from 2020!

Summary of Responses by Group

Stayers



Moving Status	% Employed	% Age 60+
2025 Region	74%	35%
2025 Stayer	76%	31%
2020 Stayer	76%	56%

Stayer responders:

- Are more slightly more **employed** and **younger** than average respondents.
- They remain in the NWMO region to be **Near Family and Friends**, similar to 2020 respondents.

Key Differences:

- Considering **where to live**, they rank:
 - **Ties to the Area** and **Health Care** are most important, but they are less concerned with access to **Broadband** and **Arts and Entertainment**.
- Within their community:
 - They were **least likely** to have a **Leadership Role** (43%) in the community compared to other groups.
 - **56%** would **do a community activity** if invited, compared to 70% of In-Migrants and Returners.

In-Migrants



Moving Status	% Employed	% Age 60+
2025 Region	74%	35%
2025 In-Migrant	71%	39%
2020 In-Migrant	68%	32%

In-Migrant Responders:

- Are slightly **less employed** and **older** than average respondents.
- Even so, they primarily moved into NWMO for **Job Opportunities** in 2025, a significant difference from 2020, when it was to be **Near Family and Friends**.

Key Differences:

- **Relationships** are the top thing they value in the region, but it is **significantly less important** than for other groups.
- Considering **where to live**, they rank:
 - **Health Care, Strong Economy, and Quality Schools** a bit higher.
 - **Broadband** is what distinguishes them; it is very important.
- Within their community:
 - They were **more likely** to attend **Public Meetings**.
 - **70%** would **do a community activity** if invited, same as Returners. This compares to 56% of Stayers.

Returners



Moving Status	% Employed	% Age 60+
2025 Region	74%	35%
2025 Returner	76%	38%
2020 Returner	69%	36%

Returner responders:

- Are slightly more **employed** and **older** than average respondents.
- They left NWMO for job or educational opportunities, but returned to be **Near Family and Friends**, similar to 2020 respondents.

Key Differences:

- Considering **where to live**, they rank:
 - **Ties to the Area** a bit higher in importance than for others.
 - Access to **Arts and Entertainment** and **Outdoor Recreation** is more important for Returners, compared to other groups.
- Within their community:
 - They were **more likely** to **Volunteer Time, Help Raise Money**, and have a **Leadership Role** than other groups.
 - **70%** would **do a community activity** if invited, same as In-Migrants. This compares to 56% of Stayers.

Why do people stay, return, or leave?

Relationships remain critical, but **Jobs, Military, and Education** continue to be the most likely reasons people move into or out of NWMO.

Download the free 90-page survey analysis report at
<https://maximizenwmo.org/alumni-resident-survey/>



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1) Increased **volunteer support**, from 2020 to 2025, in most community development efforts – **More people are interested in ensuring their community thrives!**
- 2) Residents willing to **support new businesses** easily tops charts again, followed by wanting **stronger youth organizations** – **Investing in generational leadership development is a proven, promising practice!**
- 3) Including a **wider range of perspectives** is supported by 1 in 3, but interestingly, less so for involving new residents – **Balancing tradition with innovation is key!**
- 4) 1 in 4 are considering a move in the coming years – **Prevention of further population loss is critical!**