

June 2023

insights



TALENT WARS

What People Look for
in Jobs and Locations



INTRODUCTION

More than three years after the onset of the pandemic, employers and communities across the U.S. are still reeling from unparalleled labor and talent shortages. With an estimated 9.6 million open jobs¹ across the United States, with only 5.7 million actively unemployed² workers, there are simply not enough people to fill the open jobs, skillset alignment aside. While this talent shortage is not new, the U.S. is facing several factors that are shifting the talent landscape:

- The “demographic drought”³ caused by declining birthrates and the coming surge in Baby Boomer retirement, which is slated to lead to what Insider is calling a “forever labor shortage.”⁴
- Declining labor force participation rates, which remain below pre-pandemic levels.¹
- Massive tech industry layoffs — more than 170,000⁵ since the start of 2023.
- Stagnant office occupancy — around 40% to 60% of pre-pandemic levels⁶ — indicating that hybrid and remote work is here to stay, while employer and employee sentiments about return-to-office continue to conflict.⁷
- Social and political unrest, coupled with lower consumer sentiment⁸ as a result of inflation and economic uncertainty.

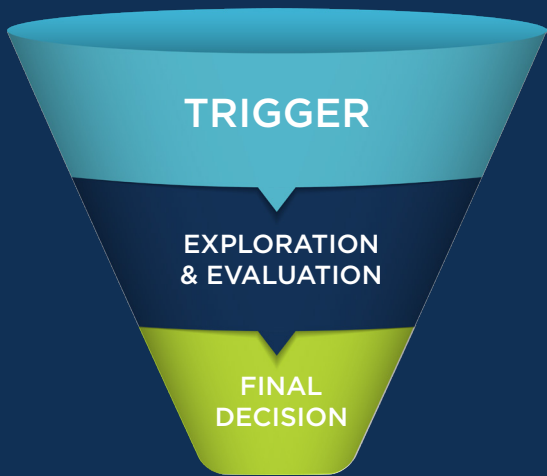
These factors and others are contributing to a new era of workforce challenges and opportunities. Communities across the country are under pressure to identify the trends, tools and tactics that will help retain existing workers and attract new talent to help ease employer hiring challenges and demonstrate capacity to attract new investment. To aid in this process, DCI has once again set out to better understand the “why” behind relocation and identify emerging trends.

In the seventh* edition of DCI’s “Talent Wars,” our national research study on the behaviors and preferences of relocating talent, we surveyed more than 1,000 people across the United States (ages 21-65) who moved to a new location at least 100 miles away from their previous residence in the

past three years. DCI’s study continues to take a deep dive into the top factors talent considers when making a career or location change, where they look to inform their decisions, migration patterns and more - all from the perspective of talent who relocated in the past 36 months.

With more than seven years of talent research to draw on, DCI has been able to capture trends on the evolution of the importance of place-based and practical matters in talent’s evaluation of jobs and locations.

*DCI’s national research report “Talent Wars” was conducted in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022



TOP TRIGGERS: WHY IS TALENT RELOCATING?

As we look at the “path to purchase” for individuals considering a new location or job opportunity, we think of this process as a funnel, where the initial trigger is at the top, followed by the exploration and evaluation stage and, finally, the ultimate decision. So, what exactly motivates relocation? What is the primary trigger that causes someone to consider this type of life change?

This year’s data confirms that talent continues to prioritize quality of life as an initial motivating factor causing them to begin to consider relocation, indicating that “The Great Reflection” — the effect of the pandemic upending our traditional notions of work and life — has had lasting impacts. Now more than ever, talent is prioritizing the ability to live (and afford) a full life outside of work over the “hustle culture” of the past.



The percentage of respondents reporting that they accepted a new job that required relocation was a primary trigger rose from 21% in 2021 and 2022 to 26% in 2023.”



When asked about the initial and primary triggers prompting them to consider relocation, respondents' top choices were: to have a better quality of life, to be closer to family, and that they accepted a new job that required relocation. Since 2021, the top two triggers remained the same: to have a better quality of life and to be closer to family, reducing in percentage only slightly from 2022 to 2023.

However, for the first time since the start of the pandemic, accepting a new job that required relocation rose to the third spot. The percentage of respondents reporting that they accepted a new job that required relocation as a primary trigger rose from 21% in 2021 and 2022 to 26% in 2023. These triggers allow us to interpret a shift back to pre-pandemic trends — that jobs are once again driving relocation.

What were the primary triggers that caused you to relocate during your most recent move?

	Top Triggers for 2021—2023		
	2021	2022	2023
Trigger 1	To have a better quality of life (38%)	To have a better quality of life (46%)	To have a better quality of life (45%)
Trigger 2	Wanted to be closer to family (30%)	Wanted to be closer to family (30%)	Wanted to be closer to family (27%)
Trigger 3	Access to larger living space (27%)	Realization that you wanted a different lifestyle (27%)	Accepted new job that required relocation (26%)

Today’s Visitor is Tomorrow’s Talent

The respondents who indicated that their primary trigger for relocation was based on traveling to a location or deciding to move after a trip rose from 13% in 2022 to 14% in 2023. While still not a top trigger, it is important to consider the role of tourism when attracting talent. If you apply this percentage to the U.S. population of 331.9 million, that means that more than 46 million people may have visited a destination and said, “I think I could live here.” This presents an opportunity for any entity involved in talent attraction. From the moment a visitor steps foot in a destination to the second they leave, it is important to have clear messaging on regional livability and job assets to plant the seed for relocation.

What Does Quality of Life Mean to Talent?

While quality of life remains the primary trigger for relocation, it’s important to note that the concept itself remains highly subjective. To help communities better understand how talent defines quality of life, DCI asked an open-ended question that asks talent to elaborate on their own definition of “quality of life.”

After your basic criteria have been met when considering a new location to move to (i.e., housing, job etc.), what specific quality of life factors become most important?



In 2021 and 2022, responses to this question indicated that quality of life was overwhelmingly defined by access to amenities and attractions, outdoor recreation and good K-12 schools. This year's results, however, saw a strong shift in tone. In 2023, we see quality of life was closely aligned to safety, stability and a general peace of mind in whatever location talent ultimately ends up in. For the first time, we heard terms such “access to mental health support services,” “environmental and air quality” and “work/life balance.” Additionally, while cost and access to housing has always been an important factor in location decisions, this year home ownership — versus renting — is strongly correlated with a good quality of life. Given economic conditions and rising inflation and interest rates, home ownership has become increasingly unattainable and is now considered to be a bellwether of an improved quality of life. When discussing cost of living, it is important to show not only affordability of essential goods, but also that talent can afford to purchase a home and put down roots in a community — factors that lend themselves to the sense of stability talent craves.

Additionally, being “convenient to services” is considered an important quality of life asset to talent. This indicates that people are putting a heavier emphasis on work-life balance and are no longer interested in things that take away from that balance, including long commutes and more time in the car.



EXPLORATION AND EVALUATION: WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO TALENT?

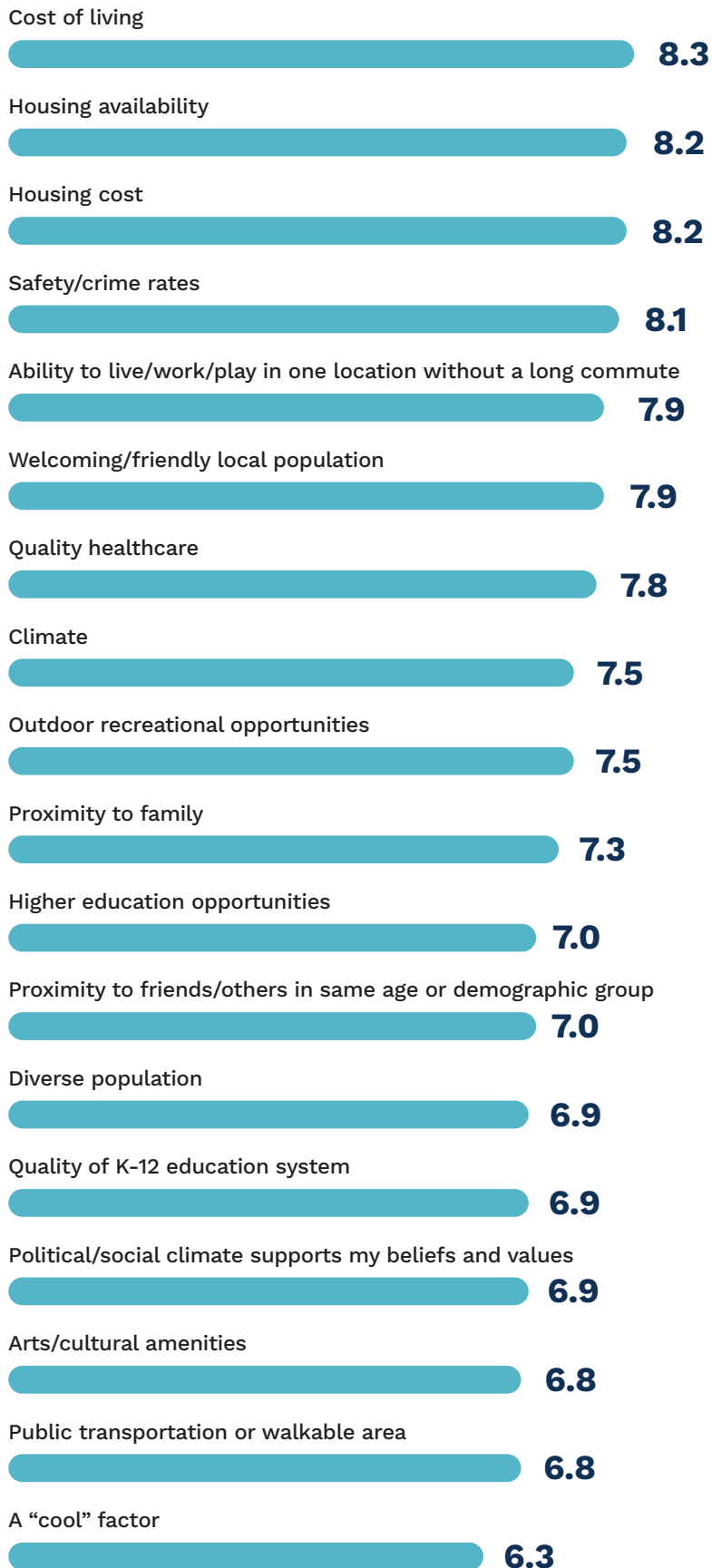
Importance of Lifestyle Factors

Following the initial trigger inspiring a relocation, talent begins to look at a series of lifestyle and job-related factors in order to explore and evaluate potential communities to call home. When it comes to lifestyle-related factors considered during the relocation process, cost of living remains the top factor. Consistent with the last iteration of “Talent Wars,” this indicates that talent will not relocate unless they can afford a similar or better standard of living compared to their previous location. Housing availability and housing cost tied for second place once again at a time when the U.S. is facing a national housing shortage and record-

breaking inflation. New to this year’s study, the ability to live, work and play in one location without a long commute rose to the top five factors, tied with welcoming/friendly population. This data suggests that as people return to in-office or hybrid work, there is a desire to maximize the time spent in and out of the office with shorter commutes.

Notably, the gap between the importance of lifestyle — and career-related factors continues to narrow, with the top lifestyle factors slightly outweighing the top work-related factors when it comes to evaluating a location.



How important were each of the following factors in your decision to relocate?

Importance of Job and Career Factors

Before talent considers a relocation, they want to know that the region is a strong and stable area for job prospects and careers. Job opportunities, a culture of work/life balance and salary and benefits offered in the area rose to the top for talent among job-related factors, followed by alternative job/advancement opportunities and job opportunities for a spouse/partner. In short, talent wants to know that there are job opportunities that match their skill and salary requirements and also opportunities should their first job not pan out.

On a scale from 1 (not important) to 10 (very important), how important were the following career/work related factors the last time you relocated to a new area?

A job opportunity for myself



Culture of good work/life balance



Salary and benefits offered in the area



Alternative job/advancement opportunities for yourself in your industry



Job opportunities for your spouse/partner



Diverse industry base

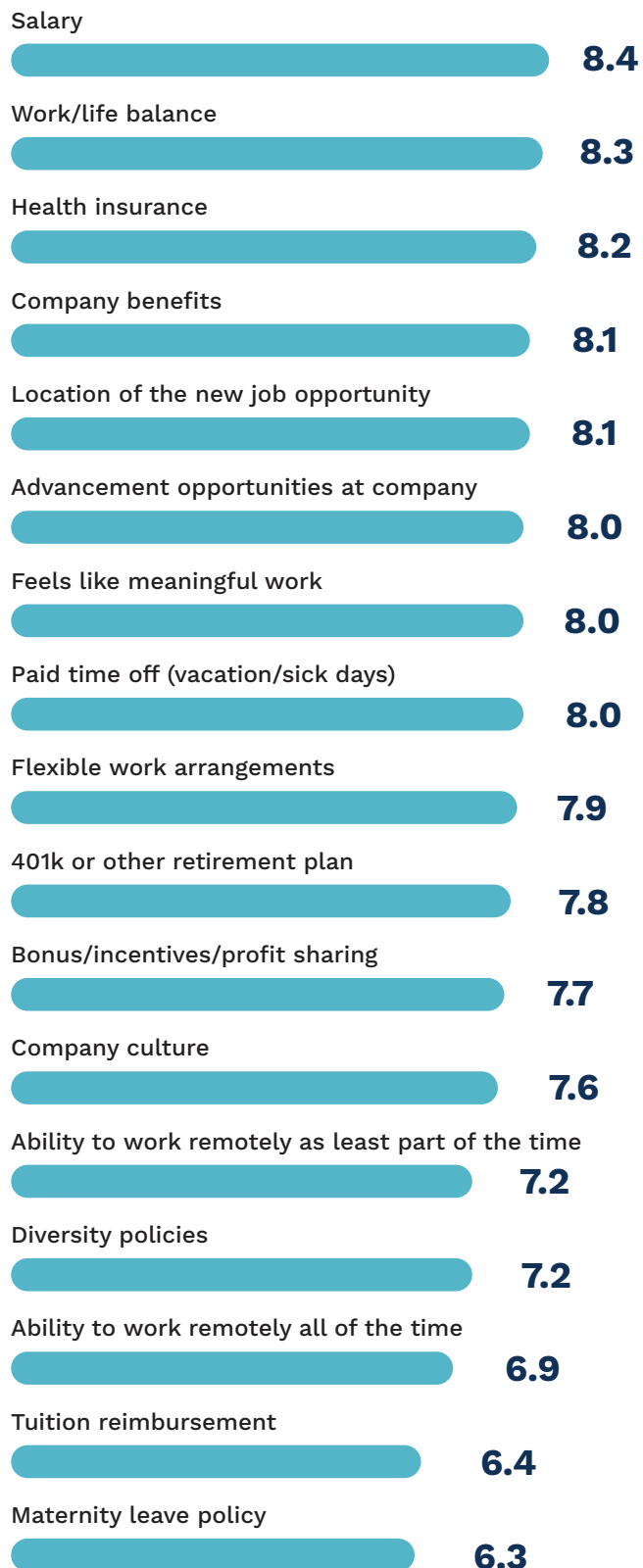


Strong entrepreneurial culture



Despite massive layoffs and a slight decrease in open jobs from 2022, talent remain in the driver's seat as companies compete to hire from a dwindling pool. The data confirms that employers and communities must promote more than the job itself to win over talent.

On a scale from 1 (not important) to 10 (very important), please rate each of the following factors if you are/were considering a new job opportunity?

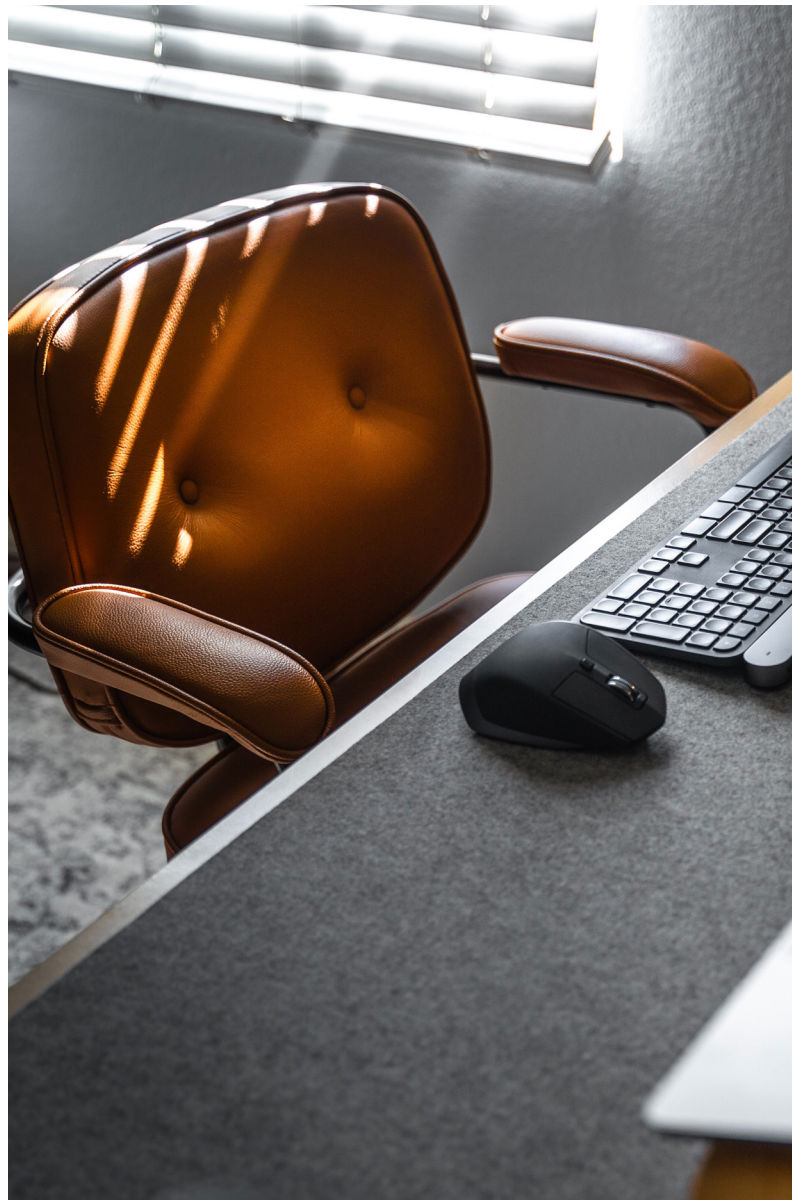


Salary remains the primary factor talent evaluates when considering a new job and has remained the top factor since the start of this report in 2017. Notably, if we take all of the lifestyle and career or job-related factors together, salary received the highest rating of importance, followed by cost of living and work-life balance, which tie for second. While salary remains key in relocation decisions, there remains only a 0.1 difference between the importance of salary and work/life balance. With that in mind, it is important that employers market the entire job package — ranging from salary to health insurance, remote work opportunities, company benefits, advancement opportunities and more.

Underscoring this point, flexible work arrangements is the No. 9 factor talent considered when evaluating a job opportunity. While not the primary factor, this data point emphasizes an overarching theme uncovered in this report — that talent increasingly wants flexibility with how and where they work.



While work-life balance continues to rise in importance, salary remains the primary factor talent evaluates when considering a new job and has remained the top factor since the start of this report in 2017.”

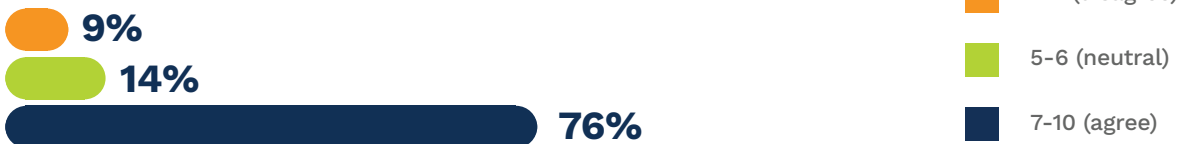


The Great Reimagination: Upskilling & Career Changes

If 2021 was the year of the Great Resignation and 2022 the Great Reflection, then 2023 could be coined the year of the Great Reimagination. Talent is increasingly open to rethinking and reimagining what their careers could look like. When asked if they would be willing to undergo additional training or education if it allowed them to shift their career path, 55% of respondents noted that they would be willing to do so and are aware of training in their region, and an additional 33% are interested in undergoing additional training but are unaware of available training opportunities. This makes a strong case for collaborating with employers, education institutions and local stakeholders to make available upskilling or reskilling resources readily available and easy to locate in a region.

On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), how much do you agree with each of the following statements.

I would be willing to relocate to a new region/state to access free training that allowed me to upgrade my career or job prospects



I would be willing to invest (at my own expense) in additional training if it allowed me to upgrade my career or job prospects



I'm aware of training programs available locally or online that would enable to upgrade my career or job prospects



Of those willing to undergo additional training, 76% noted that they would be willing to relocate to a new region or state if it offered free training to upgrade their skills or job prospects. Of these respondents, 72% also noted that they would largely be willing to invest (at their own expense) in additional training to upgrade their career. While not always a viable option for all location types, both employer-based and regional/statewide incentives do continue to play a role in the evaluation phase of the relocation process.

The Future of Remote Work

As the pandemic has deescalated to endemic status, employers (and employees) find themselves asking, what is the future of remote work? According to LinkedIn⁹, the remote work wave might have reached its peak, with 14% of paid job postings inviting remote applicants, compared to 20% in March 2022. To better understand talent’s attitude towards remote work, DCI asked about both their experience with working remotely and their preferred way of working in the future.

What is your experience with working remotely?/ How should you prefer to work in the future?

Preferred Future Work Arrangement	Current Work Arrangement			
	Fully Remote	Hybrid	Onsite (but remote in the past)	Never Remote
Fully Remote	59%	29%	22%	29%
Hybrid	25%	57%	50%	36%
Onsite	16%	14%	28%	35%



As many predicted, a variation of remote work appears here to stay, but there is an increasing willingness among talent to return to the office or adapt a hybrid work approach.”

Of those who currently work remotely, 59% would like to continue working remotely, while 25% would prefer a hybrid approach and 16% prefer to return to the office. Of those who primarily work in a hybrid setting, more than half would prefer to stay hybrid.

So, what does this mean for the future of remote work? As many predicted, a variation of remote work appears to be here to stay, but there is an increasing willingness among talent to return to the office or adapt a hybrid work approach. As major companies like Amazon, Google and Apple make headlines for scaling back their remote work policies, requiring employees to be in the office at least three days a week, employee and employer sentiments around remote work continue to conflict.

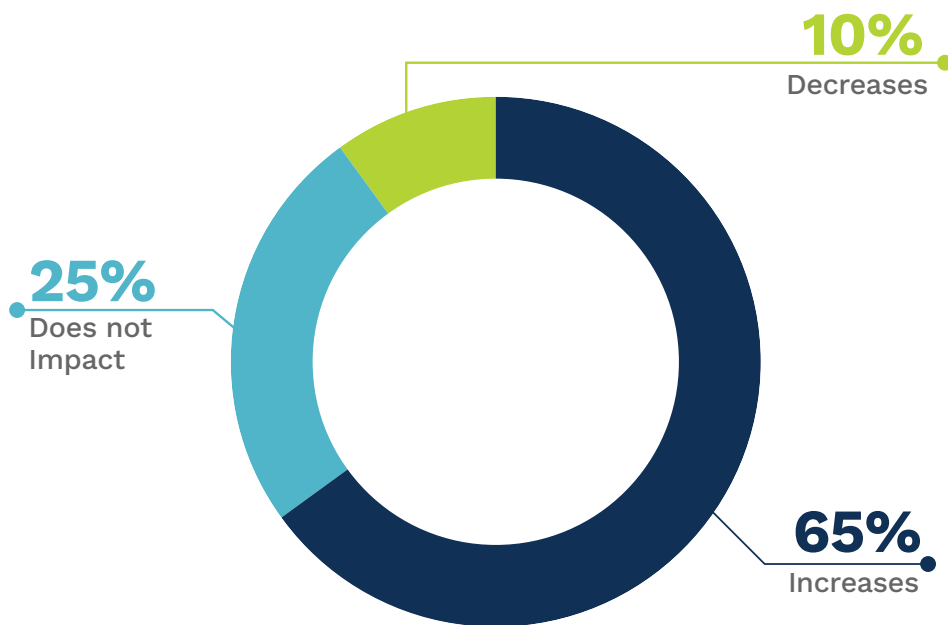


Checking in with Tech Talent

In 2020, the world saw a massive increase in tech employment as stay-at-home orders were enacted and daily activities turned virtual. Once a booming job market, the tech industry is now plagued by mass layoffs, with companies like Meta laying off more than 20,000 workers from March to November 2022. These layoffs appear to have a lasting impact on the perception of the tech industry as a whole, with reports claiming Gen Z is avoiding major tech companies¹⁰ and keeping an eye on companies that will, instead, provide a sense of stability¹¹ in the wake of a potential recession.

DCI's data supports the phenomena of tech workers leaving traditional tech markets. Of participants who identified as tech workers, 65% stated that these tech layoffs increased the likelihood they will move out of the state in which they currently live.

Please complete the following statement: The recent announcements of tech layoffs occurring at major companies...



- Increases the likelihood I will move out of the state in which I currently live
- Doesn't change the likelihood that I will move out of the state in which I currently live
- Decreases the likelihood I will move out of the state in which I currently live

With the instability of the tech industry, communities have the unique opportunity to not only market the strength and stability of their economy but the diversity of their industry base with open tech roles. Underscoring this point, 31% of respondents employed in tech occupations report their primary trigger inspiring their move was the offer of new job requiring relocation — compared to only 21% of respondents employed in non-tech occupations. Communities may also have to sell certain attributes to tech talent a bit harder as this cohort places a greater weight and importance on evidence that people with similar values, priorities, skill sets, etc. are already living in the area under consideration and which they ultimately relocated to. On a scale of 1 (not important) to 10 (very important), tech talent provides an average rating of 8.1 compared to an average of 7.1 provided by non-tech talent.

How important is it to know that people with similar values, priorities, skillsets etc. had already relocated to the area you most recently relocated to?

Employed in Tech Occupations

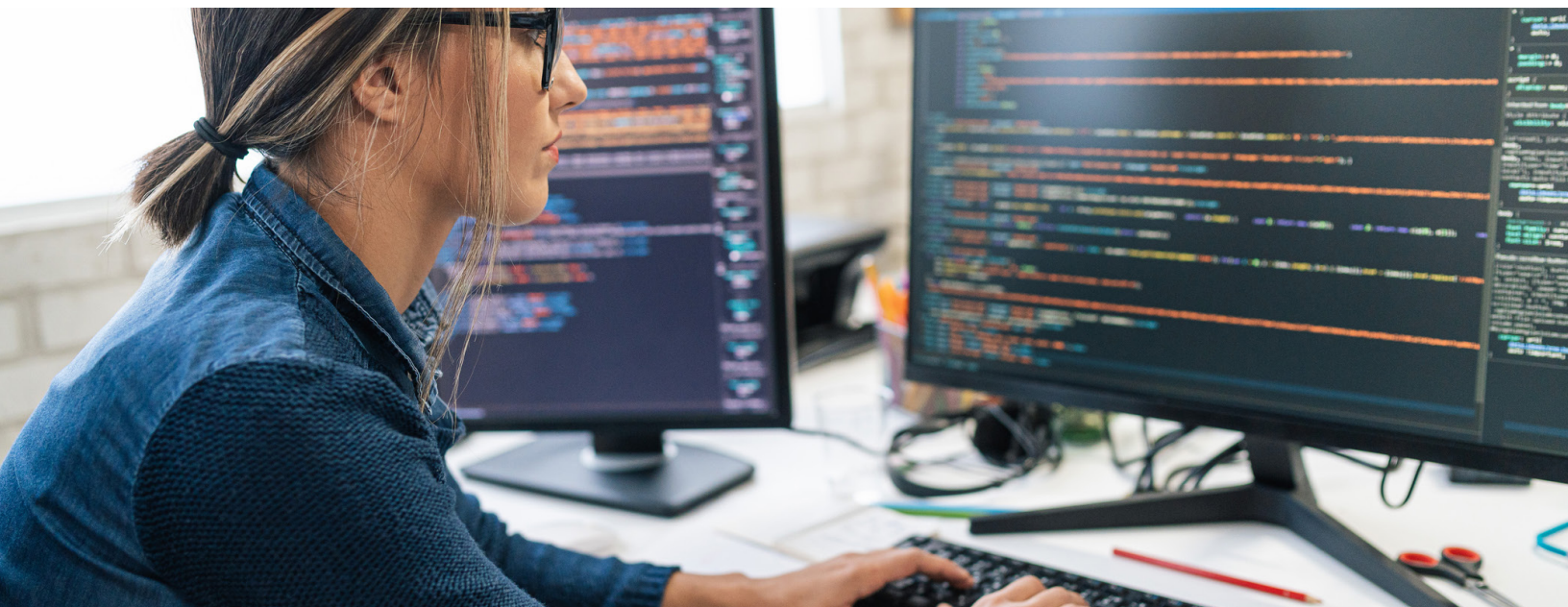


Employed in Non-Tech Occupations



Of participants who identified as tech workers, 65% stated that these tech layoffs increased the likelihood they will move out of the state in which they currently live.”

As tech workers continue to leave traditional tech hubs in droves, this levels the playing field for less traditional tech markets and employers.



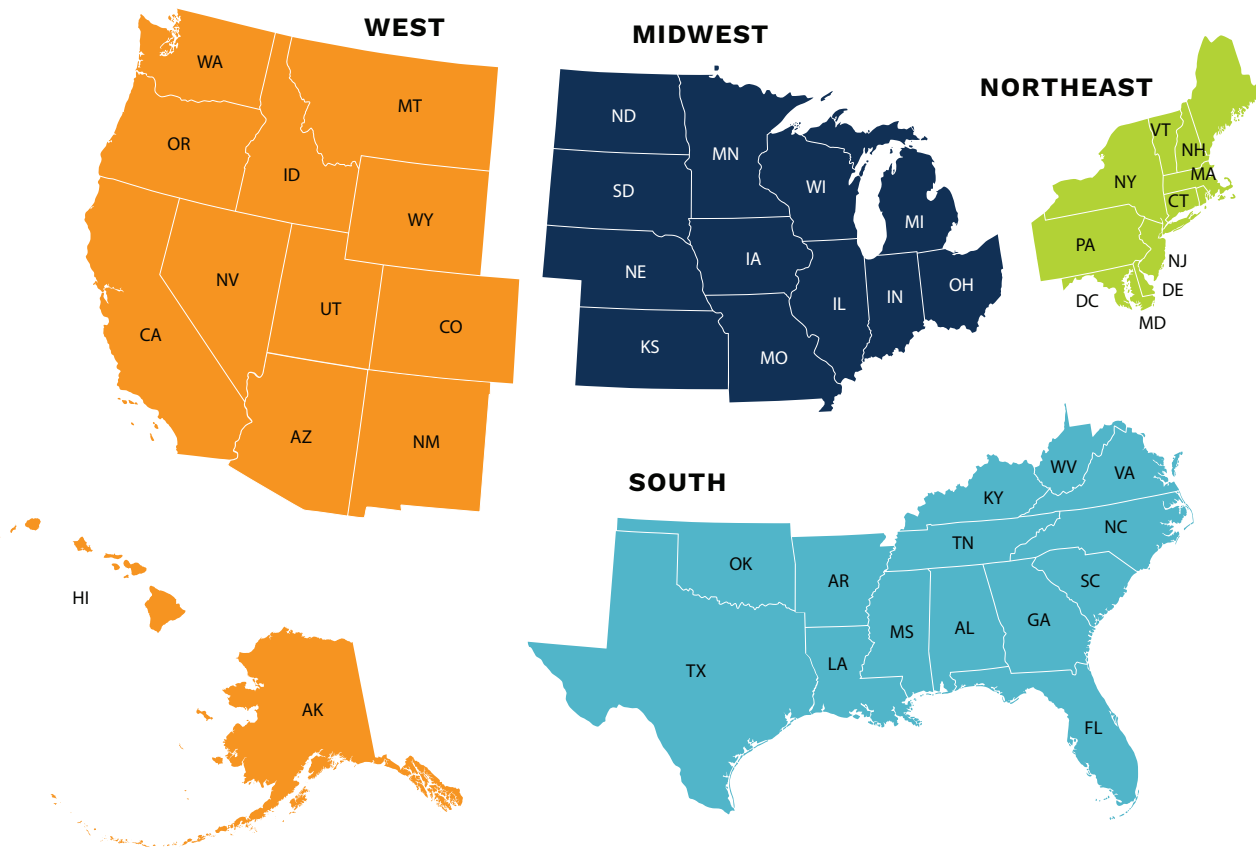


THE FINAL DECISION

Where Will Talent Relocate?

Understanding both the triggers that spark relocation and the factors considered when relocating is only part of the battle for talent. Before a community can begin marketing its jobs and livability assets to talent, it's important to understand where talent is relocating once they get to the final decision stage of the funnel. Like last year, respondents noted that they largely relocated within the same U.S. region. This year's data, however, does display a small increase in the spread of where talent is relocating, with 61% relocating from one Northeast location to another in 2023 compared to 57% in 2022.

Referring to the map below, what U.S. region did you live in before your most recent move? / Referring to the map below, what U.S. region did you most recently move to?



Region Relocated To	Region Relocated From			
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Northeast	61%	10%	13%	8%
Midwest	16%	64%	11%	18%
South	13%	15%	69%	8%
West	10%	11%	7%	66%

When it comes to migration and population size, once again, respondents tend to relocate within a similar-sized community, with 60% relocating from one large urban location to another, 41% relocating from one mid-sized urban area to another, 64% relocating from one suburban area to another and 49% relocating from one rural area to another. While many continue to predict mass urban exodus, the number of respondents who relocated from one large urban area to another grew by nearly 12% since last year's report. However, it is worth noting that smaller communities are likely to compare favorably on cost of living and housing cost, the two top factors for talent when considering a relocation.

Area Relocated To	Area Relocated From			
	Large urban area (pop 1M+)	Mid-sized urban area (pop <1M)	Suburban	Rural
Large urban area (pop 1M+)	60%	34%	12%	15%
Mid-sized urban (pop <M)	22%	41%	16%	14%
Suburban	11%	15%	64%	22%
Rural	7%	10%	8%	49%

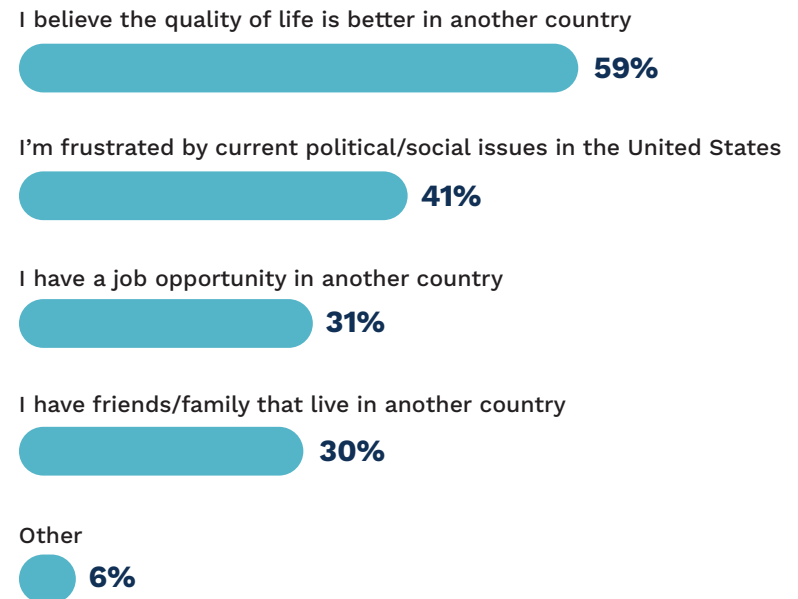


International Relocation Considerations

New to this year's report, DCI identified which U.S. regions international audiences relocated to. This data identified an even split between relocation to the Northeast and the Midwest, with 23% relocating to the South and only 15% of audiences relocating to the West.

Conversely, when DCI asked respondents currently located in the United States whether they would realistically consider a move to another country in the next five years, 39% identified that they were open to relocating to another country. Of those open to international relocation, they listed the nation's quality of life and political/social issues as key reasons behind their responses.

What is the primary reason you would consider moving to another country? (Choose all that apply)



When DCI asked respondents currently located in the United States whether they would realistically consider a move to another country in the next five years, **39% identified that they were open to relocating to another country.**”

As we look to better understand how talent across the world informs their relocation decisions, DCI will launch an inaugural report that dives into the European talent attraction landscape. While there are notable differences as to how international talent makes relocation decisions, DCI found that the underlying motivations and behaviors are largely similar to talent in the U.S. Seeking a better quality of life, international talent also prioritizes jobs that match their skill and salary requirements in locations that offer a comparable or better standard living. Interestingly, more than seven in 10 European residents of working age believe it is important to know that people with similar values, priorities and/or skill sets, had already relocated to the area under consideration for relocation as they look for safe and welcoming communities.

MARKETING & MESSAGING

How to Reach Talent

Unlocking what factors drive talent to relocate is only the beginning of the overarching talent attraction puzzle. To market a community to prospective talent, it's important to know exactly how talent learns about and forms impressions of a location.

For the second year in a row, DCI found that internet research and first-hand experience remain the top influencers of how people form impressions about a community. However, the gap between the two has increased significantly since 2022. Once separated by only 2%, the two now are separated by 13%, with internet research firmly in the lead.

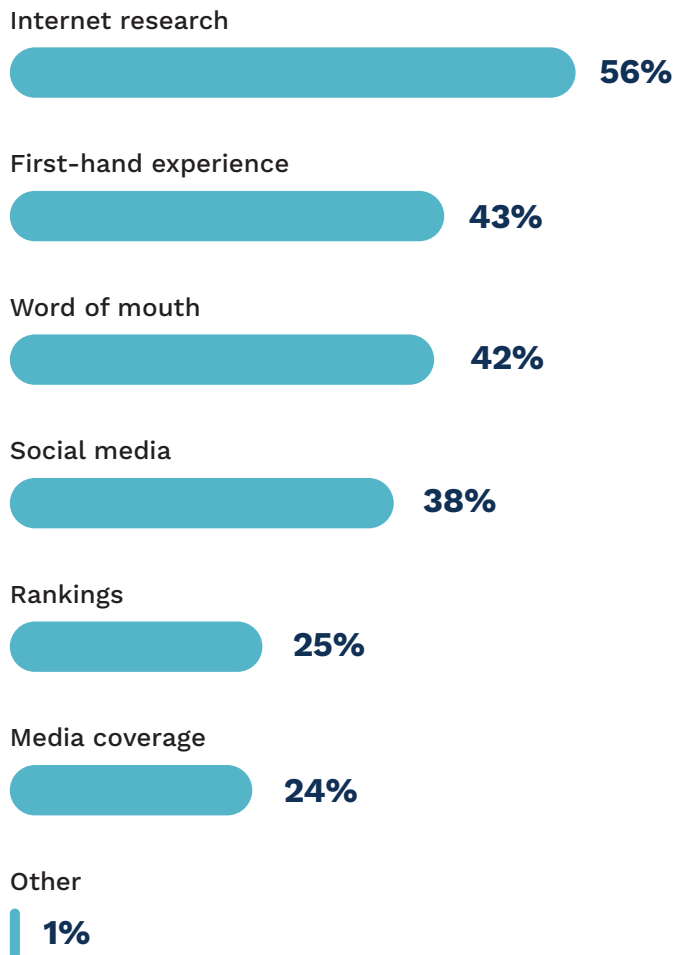
Historically, first-hand experience was the top way people learned and formed impressions about communities. As travel was restricted during the pandemic, the internet rose to

the top for the first time - a trend that continues to grow in strength. While first-hand experience remains important in forming decisions, this data shows that it is essential for communities to have a strong digital presence to compete in the global fight for talent.

“

In addition to the rise in the importance of the internet in relocation decisions, dedicated talent attraction websites are becoming more important.”

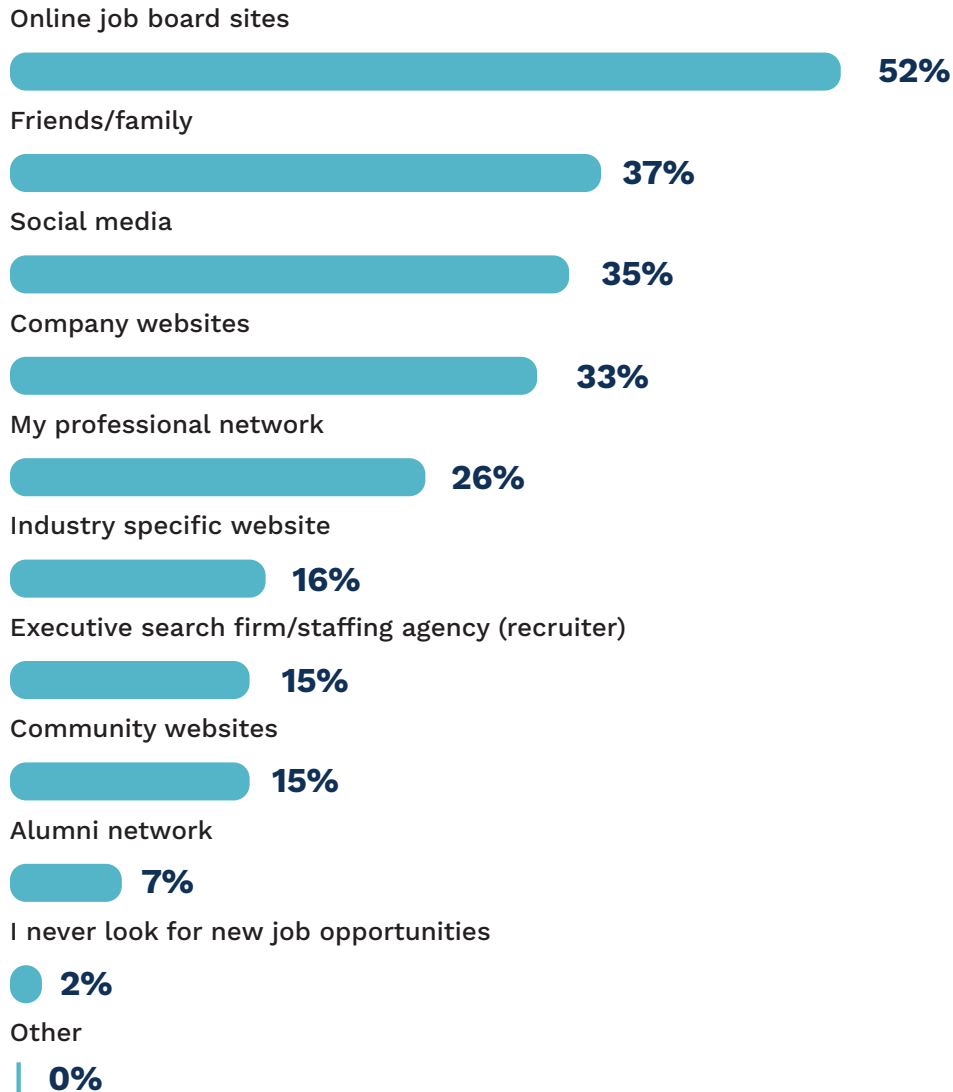
When you were considering places to relocate to, what influenced your perceptions of communities being considered? (Please choose all that apply)



In addition to the rise in the importance of the internet in relocation decisions, dedicated talent attraction websites are becoming more important. When asked how important access to a dedicated website that provides information about living and working in the area was during their last relocation, respondents rated this resource as 7.4 out of 10 on average, indicating that this is a valuable tool and a worthwhile investment for communities.

Top Sources for Job Opportunities

What sources do you utilize most often when looking for new job opportunities?
(Select up to three)



When asked what sources talent utilizes when looking for new job opportunities, online job boards overwhelmingly rose to the top at 52%, followed by friends and family at 37%, social media at 35% and company websites at 33%. Armed with this knowledge, it is important that communities with existing job boards prioritize making these boards search engine optimized to capture the attention of digitally savvy users.

Leveraging Tourism Resources

For the second year in a row, when relocating, talent referenced utilizing local/state tourism websites to gather information about potential locations. This continues to emphasize the importance of collaboration with tourism stakeholders to tell a region's complete story. Lifestyle is one of the strongest intersections between tourism and talent marketing, so it is important to make sure that talent attraction and tourism programs have messaging that elevates and complements each program respectively.

During your most recent relocation, did you refer to or look at the following information sources? (Choose all that apply)

Local/state tourism website

38%

Relocation guides

37%

Local/state tourism agency social media channels

35%

Local/state tourism guides/brochures (hard copy publications)

28%

None of the above

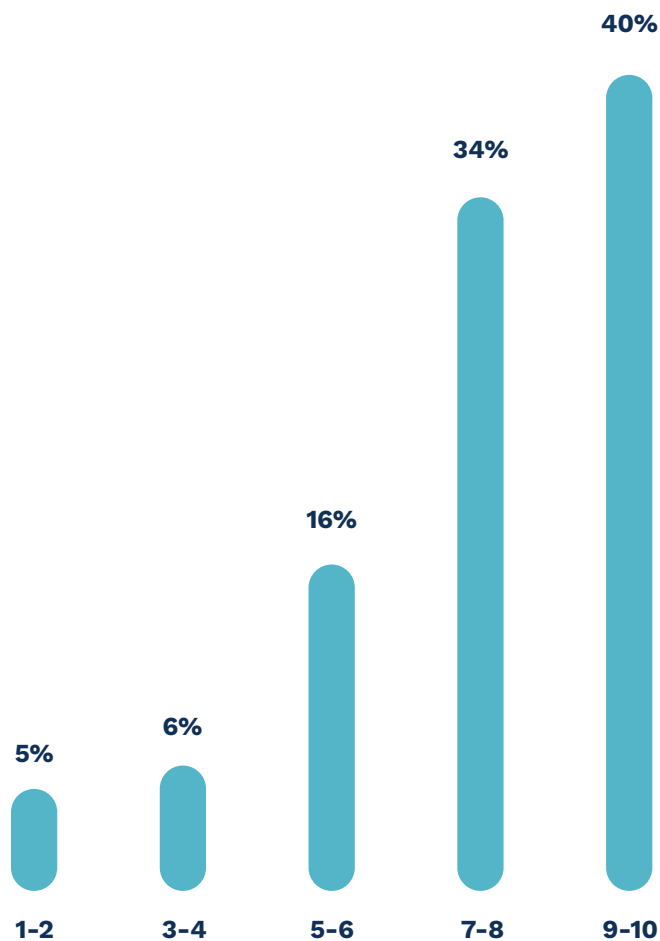
23%



The Importance of Community in Relocation

When relocating to a new area, talent largely wants to know that they will feel welcome in a new community. The data illustrates the importance of “social proof” as a motivating factor for talent to feel comfortable relocating to a new location; they want to know that others like them have relocated and found success in the region. When asked to rate the importance of knowing that people with similar values, priorities, skillsets, etc. had already relocated to the area you most recently relocated to, 74% of respondents rated it as having high or heavy importance.

How important is it to know that people with similar values, priorities, skillsets etc. had already relocated to the area you most recently relocated to?

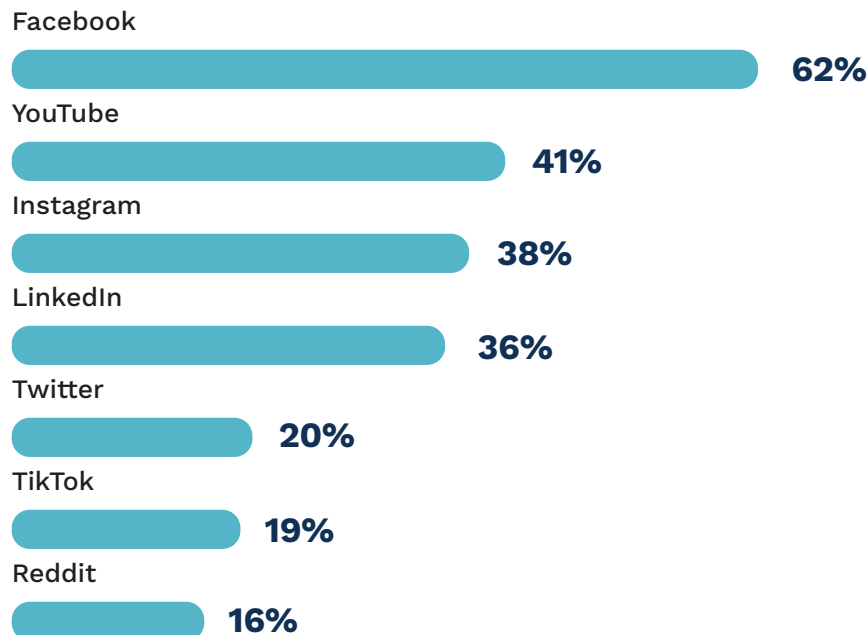


This data point further underscores the importance of showcasing a diverse range of success stories and testimonials from transplants as part of talent attraction marketing efforts so that talent can see themselves — and their cohort — in the community.

The Best Social Media Channels to Reach Talent

Social media is a crucial tool when it comes to marketing a community. With so many platforms in the market, what are the best ones to utilize when targeting talent? Among those who said they turn to social media to learn about job opportunities, 62% said they use Facebook, which held the top spot since 2018. This year's data shows that LinkedIn, one of the largest job search platforms in the world, fell to the No. 4 spot, with YouTube and Instagram surging ahead to No. 2 and No. 3, respectively. While TikTok continues to rise in popularity, it failed to break into the top five platforms influencing these decisions.

What social media sources do you most frequently refer to when learning about new employment opportunities and places to work?



When asked to rate the importance of knowing that people with similar values, priorities, skillsets, etc. had already relocated to the area you most recently relocated to, **74% of respondents rated it as having high or heavy importance.**



CONCLUSION

Top Five Takeaways

Consulting this year’s data, along with the previous six years of trends, five key takeaways emerge for community’s to consider as they look to attract and retain talent.

1 Talent continues to prioritize practical factors over “nice to haves” when making a relocation decision. Cost of living, housing cost and availability and safety/security remain the most importance factors, followed by the ability to live, work and play without a long commute. The pursuit of a quality of life remains a driving force behind relocation — but, most importantly, talent needs to know that they will find a comparable or better value in their new community. This underscores the importance of identifying “best bet” markets from which to recruit where your market competes favorably from a cost of living standpoint — and providing information and resources about the other factors that matter most to talent, including housing and safety.

2 Jobs are once again driving relocation post-pandemic. For the first time since the pandemic, accepting a job that required relocation rose to the top three triggers for relocation with the percentage of respondents reporting that they accepted a new job that required relocation rising from 21% in 2021 and 2022 to 26% in 2023. When it comes to job-related factors, salary remains king, but work-life balance is increasingly important, as is the presence of additional jobs and advancement opportunities. It is critical that communities demonstrate the depth and breadth of available jobs so that talent can feel confident in the future of their careers and their ability to make a living there.

- 3 Ushering in the era of the Great Reimagination, talent is increasingly interested in opportunities to advance their skillsets or shift careers.** Nearly 90% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to undergo additional training or education if it allowed them to shift their career path. However, 33% said that while they were interested, they were not aware of training resources. Of those that said they were open to training, 76% noted that they would be willing to relocate to a new region or state if it offered free training to upgrade their skills or job prospects. This illuminates the role that organizations involved in talent attraction marketing can play in drawing attention to existing training programs and educational resources.
- 4 The internet continues to rise in importance as a source for relocation. Increasingly, talent is turning to the internet during their location search.** While first-hand experience remains influential when it comes to the perceptions of a community, the gap widened this year, with internet research firmly in the lead. Additionally, respondents indicated that access to a dedicated website about living and working the area is very important, underscoring the importance of building a strong digital presence. In addition to covering the top lifestyle and career-related factors that matter to talent, websites of this kind should also include a diverse range of testimonials to illustrate to talent that likeminded individuals have already found success in the region.
- 5 Tech workers are more likely to relocate in light of the recent layoffs.** Of participants who identified as tech workers, 65% stated that the tech layoffs increased the likelihood they will move out of the state in which they currently live. Further, 31% of tech workers reported that their primary trigger for relocation was accepting a job that required relocation, compared to just 21% of non-tech workers. This presents an opportunity for communities with tech or tech-adjacent employment opportunities to attract new residents looking for stability in their career and life outlook.

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ABOUT DCI

Development Counsellors International (DCI) specializes economic development, tourism and talent attraction marketing. Since 1960, DCI has worked with more than 500 cities, states, regions and countries to attract visitors, businesses and talent. DCI combines tailored target audience research with place-marketing expertise to craft results-driven talent attraction strategies, campaigns and marketing programs.

Headquartered in New York City and with a regional office in Denver and locations across the U.S. and Canada, DCI is made up of 90+ place marketing experts with a passion for places.

Interested in learning more? Have specific talent questions? We'd love to explore how we might assist your community.

Our areas of expertise include:

- Customized Research/Perception Studies
- Marketing Strategy & Talent Program Consulting
- Brand Development
- Website Design & Development
- Search Engine Marketing & Paid Media
- Social & Content Marketing
- Influencer Partnerships
- Public Relations
- Speaking Engagements



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