Knight Soul of the Community 2010

Why People Love Where They Live and Why It Matters: A Local Perspective
At the Knight Foundation, our mission is to create more informed and engaged communities. We emphasize transformational projects. The Soul of the Community project reflects this mission. This study offers leaders a radically new way to think about their community and invites creative approaches for improvement. The report, based on interviews with residents in 26 Knight communities, proves that a significant connection exists between residents’ levels of emotional attachment to their community and its economic growth. It presents surprising and nearly universal findings about why people form lasting emotional bonds to where they live.

We hope these discoveries inspire renewed engagement in all residents and create lasting, positive change.

Paula Lynn Ellis, Vice President/Strategic Initiatives
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Introduction

On behalf of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Gallup, we are pleased to present the third annual Soul of the Community report. This study was conducted over three years in 26 cities across the United States where Knight Foundation is active. It was designed to find out what emotionally attaches people to a community — what makes them want to put down roots and build a life there.

In today’s challenging economic climate, community leaders are seeking new ways to attract and retain people, develop prosperous economies, add intellectual capital, and create jobs. This report provides a fresh perspective about the current driving factors of passion and loyalty in a community. Most importantly, it represents the voice of the residents themselves. Gallup gathered insights from nearly 43,000 individuals, and the resulting picture will help community leaders to answer important questions such as: What makes residents love where they live? What draws people to a place and keeps them there?

The study provides empirical evidence that the drivers that create emotional bonds between people and their community are consistent in virtually every city and can be reduced to just a few categories. Interestingly, the usual suspects — jobs, the economy, and safety — are not among the top drivers. Rather, people consistently give higher ratings for elements that relate directly to their daily quality of life: an area’s physical beauty, opportunities for socializing, and a community’s openness to all people.

Remarkably, the study also showed that the communities with the highest levels of attachment had the highest rates of gross domestic product growth. Discoveries like these open numerous possibilities for leaders from all sectors to inform their decisions and policies with concrete data about what generates community and economic benefits.

This report is not meant to be prescriptive, but rather to inform and engage leaders in new thinking and action. We hope you will read it, share it, and discuss with others what it might mean for the future of communities across our country. Our hope is that this leads to new conversations and partnerships, and new ways for all of us to work together to increase people’s attachment, to strengthen our cities, and to ensure a brighter future for all people and communities.
Community attachment is an emotional connection to a place that transcends satisfaction, loyalty, and even passion. A community's most attached residents have strong pride in it, a positive outlook on the community's future, and a sense that it is the perfect place for them. They are less likely to want to leave than residents without this emotional connection. They feel a bond to their community that is stronger than just being happy about where they live.

Why Attachment Matters

Over the past three years, the Soul of the Community study has found a positive correlation between community attachment and local GDP growth. Across the 26 Knight communities, those whose residents were more attached saw more local GDP growth. This is a key metric in assessing community success because local GDP growth not only measures a community's economic success, but also its ability to grow and meet residents' needs.

Gallup research proving the link between employee engagement in a workplace to business outcomes such as productivity, profitability, and employee retention helps to underscore why emotional attachment matters. Just as actively engaged employees are more productive and committed to the success of their organizations, highly attached residents are more likely to actively contribute to a community's growth.
The Relationship to Community Outcomes

Precisely how community attachment affects community outcomes is at best a scientific guess at this point. However, the data make clear that highly attached residents are more likely to want to stay in their current communities. When this is true for college graduates and other productive residents, it increases the number of talented, highly educated workers striving to positively affect economic growth.

Highly attached residents are also more likely to see their communities as being open to many kinds of people, including talented, young college graduates and families with young children. Communities that are more open to diversity are better able to compete for talent.

Attachment is also higher when residents agree that their communities provide the social offerings and aesthetics they enjoy. When residents enjoy their community’s offerings, they are more likely to spend their money on local activities and businesses, directly benefiting the local economy.

Knights Foundation works in 26 communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers.
Highly attached residents are more likely to see their communities as being open to many kinds of people.
How Gallup Found the Factors With the Strongest Links to Attachment

To find out what drives attachment, Gallup asked residents five questions examining their level of attachment to their community and then asked them to rate various aspects of the community such as basic services, the local economy, social offerings, and openness.

Gallup then analyzed the relationship between the overall level of community attachment and residents’ perceptions of aspects of the community itself to reveal the strongest links. The greater the correlation between attachment and a given factor, the stronger the link. Using this analysis, Gallup ranked the aspects of communities that have the strongest links to attachment, understanding that even small differences can be very meaningful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Attribute</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Offerings</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Services</td>
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<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Involvement</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The higher the correlation, the more closely the attribute is related to attachment.*
What Matters Most

What attaches residents to their communities doesn’t change much from place to place. While one might expect the drivers of attachment would be different in Miami from those in Macon, Ga., in fact the main drivers of attachment differ little across communities. Whether you live in San Jose, Calif., or State College, Pa., the things that connect you to your community are generally the same.

When examining each factor in the study and its relationship to attachment, the same items rise to the top, year after year:

- **Social Offerings** — Places for people to meet each other and the feeling that people in the community care about each other
- **Openness** — How welcoming the community is to different types of people, including families with young children, minorities, and talented college graduates
- **Aesthetics** — The physical beauty of the community including the availability of parks and green spaces

### Key Drivers of Attachment in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knight Community</th>
<th>Attribute Rank in 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen, SD</td>
<td>1 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akron, OH</td>
<td>1 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biloxi, MS</td>
<td>1 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulder, CO</td>
<td>1 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradenton, FL</td>
<td>1 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte, NC</td>
<td>1 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia, SC</td>
<td>1 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus, GA</td>
<td>1 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
<td>1 2 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duluth, MN</td>
<td>1 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Wayne, IN</td>
<td>1 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary, IN</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Forks, ND</td>
<td>1 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexington, KY</td>
<td>1 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>1 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macon, GA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milledgeville, GA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myrtle Beach, SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palm Beach, FL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>1 2 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Paul, MN</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>State College, PA</td>
<td>1 3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallahassee, FL</td>
<td>1 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wichita, KS</td>
<td>1 2 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the study also measures perceptions of the local economy and basic services, these three factors are always more important in terms of their relationship to community attachment. This is not to say that communities should focus on building parks when jobs aren’t available. However, it does make it clear that these other factors, beyond basic needs, should be included when thinking about economic growth and development. These seemingly softer needs have an even larger effect than previously thought when it comes to residents’ attachment to their communities.

Generally, demographics are not the strongest drivers of attachment. In almost every community Gallup studied, attachment is more strongly related to certain perceptions of the community than to residents’ age, race, income, or other demographic characteristics. In other words, whether a resident is young or old, wealthy or poor, or black, white, or Hispanic matters less than his or her perceptions of the community. This reality gives community leaders a powerful tool to influence residents’ attachment to the community, no matter who they are.

**Key Community Attributes**

**SOCIAL OFFERINGS INCLUDES PERCEPTIONS OF:**
- Vibrant nightlife
- Good place to meet people
- Other people care about each other
- Availability of arts and cultural opportunities*
- Availability of social community events*

**OPENNESS INCLUDES PERCEPTIONS OF:**
- Good place for older people
- Good place for racial and ethnic minorities
- Good place for families with young children
- Good place for gays and lesbians
- Good place for young, talented college graduates looking for work
- Good place for immigrants
- Good place for young adults without children*

**AESTHETICS INCLUDES PERCEPTIONS OF:**
- Availability of parks, playgrounds, and trails
- Beauty or physical setting

*New in 2010. Not included in overall attribute score to allow for trending to previous years.
Attachment in Akron remained fairly flat overall in 2010 with a mean score of 3.41 out of a possible 5.00, compared with 3.42 in 2009 and 3.40 in 2008. The results reflect surveys conducted in Portage and Summit counties. This level of attachment is among the lowest compared with other very high urban density, medium population Knight communities of Boulder, Colo. (3.99), Bradenton, Fla. (3.98), the City of Long Beach, Calif. (3.97), and Gary, Ind. (2.80).

Findings in this report represent the Akron MSA unless otherwise noted.
AKRON'S SOCIAL OFFERINGS, AESTHETICS, OPENNESS, AND EDUCATION ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO INFLUENCE RESIDENTS' ATTACHMENT. EDUCATION BECAME EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TO AKRON RESIDENTS IN 2010, WHILE SOCIAL OFFERINGS LOST SOME INFLUENCE.

- **Social Offerings:** Akron residents rate the availability of social community events — something Gallup asked about for the first time this year — highest among four other social offerings measured. On all other social offerings, Akron residents rate them worse than do residents in two other similar Knight communities. About 2 in 10 residents rate the availability of arts and cultural opportunities, whether there is vibrant nightlife, and whether the community is a good place to meet people high. Akron residents are by far the most negative about whether people in the community care about each other, with the majority rating this dimension low.

- **Aesthetics:** Akron’s aesthetics are the community’s strength, with about half of residents rating the availability of parks, playgrounds, and trails highly. The beauty or physical setting of the community is also important to Akron residents, with slightly more than one-fifth of residents rating this metric high. These views have hardly budged over the past year, suggesting little forward progress in this important area.
• **Openness**: While openness is a key driver of attachment in Akron, no more than one in five residents give Akron a high score as a good place to live for older people, young adults without children, families with children, or racial and ethnic minorities. Fewer than 1 in 10 residents rate Akron positively in welcoming immigrants, gays and lesbians, and young, talented college graduates — and instead, more than half say the opposite. Thus, there is much room for improvement on this metric critical not only to attachment, but also to attracting the best and brightest to the community and creating a place in which they want to stay and start a business or a family or both.

• **Education**: Akron’s colleges and universities are a relative strength compared with similar comparison communities, with nearly 4 in 10 residents rating the quality of higher education positively. Akron’s public K-12 education, however, is a relative weakness, with less than a quarter of residents rating this metric positively — and fewer than in comparable communities. These ratings are essentially unchanged since last year, suggesting little to no improvement on this metric critical to maximizing the potential of Akron’s current residents and increasing their likelihood to stay in the community.
Drivers positioned farther up are more influential in causing emotional attachment. Drivers positioned farther to the right are rated by respondents as being better performing in a community. A driver that is both influential in causing emotional attachment and not rated as well performing (i.e., one that is positioned in the top left quadrant) represents an area of opportunity as an improvement in performance will have a particularly high impact on improving emotional attachment.
WHO IS MOST ATTACHED IN AKRON

While demographic characteristics don’t have as much effect on attachment as residents’ perceptions of their communities, patterns do emerge among various groups.

- **Geography:** Those residents in the Akron area who live outside the primary city limits are as attached to the community as those living inside Akron.

- **Age:** Attachment is highest — and higher than the community average — among Akron residents who are 65 and older. Attachment is lowest among those aged 25 to 34, and only slightly higher among those aged 18 to 24, 35 to 44, and 55 to 64.

- **Community Tenure:** Marking a dramatic change from 2009, attachment is now highest among those residents who have lived in Akron for less than three years. The next group most attached is Akron residents who have lived in the community for 20 years or more. While the increase in attachment among Akron’s newest residents is encouraging, it came at the same time as sharp decreases in attachment among those who have lived in the community for three to five years.
• **Income**: Although attachment tends to increase with income in most communities and in the past for Akron, 2010 results depict something different and unique. The attachment for those making $75,000 or more per year is now the lowest among the income groups measured. At the same time, attachment increased among those making $25,000 or less per year.

• **Education**: Attachment varies only marginally by education level in Akron, with those with a high school degree or less are slightly less attached than those with more education. Attachment decreased this year among those with a high school education or less and increased among residents with some college education, while remaining flat among college graduates.
STRENGTHS TO LEVERAGE

The local **colleges and universities** are well-regarded compared with other comparison communities. This is an area where continued investment could pay dividends, especially because those with at least some college education continue to be the most attached. The community should do more to engage more residents with its higher education offerings, perhaps through continuing education programs.

Akron residents are also relatively pleased with the **availability of social community events**. As social offerings is the main driver of attachment, continued efforts in this area will lead to further improvement, especially if these events can help Akron residents meet each other and to increase the perception that people in the community care about each other.

Residents are proud of Akron’s **parks, playgrounds, and trails**. The community should continue to maintain and promote these offerings so that even more residents feel positively about them.

The increased attachment among those **newest to the community** also presents an important opportunity. Leaders should closely examine what metrics improved among this group to learn more about what specifically became more appealing to these new residents. Leaders can then continue to promote these strengths to help maintain this higher level of attachment after the five-year mark.

OPPORTUNITIES TO PRIORITIZE

**Social offerings** is a key area of opportunity for Akron, with many residents largely ambivalent or negative about the availability of arts and cultural opportunities and the nightlife. What’s more, there is a clear need to help residents meet each other and to foster a feeling of caring among one’s neighbors. Investment in this area would be a plus for Akron residents now and in the future — not only helping to increase attachment, but also to more strongly compete against similar communities.

Residents’ negative responses about the community’s **openness** could be inhibiting their desires to stay in their community and to recommend it to others. Leaders should particularly focus on the widespread perception that the community is not a good place for young, talented college graduates. Community leaders should prioritize economic growth, particularly in areas that will appeal to bright, young minds. Additionally, active and visible efforts to promote tolerance and diversity within the community could improve the perception that the community is a welcoming place for all groups, which will also help to attract a larger cross section of individuals to Akron.

The decline in attachment among those with the **highest incomes** also demands attention, as this high-income group is critical to growth and spending within the local economy. Leaders should work to improve perceptions of the community among this group to boost not only this group’s overall attachment, but also their likelihood of keeping their money in Akron and investing it back into the community.
METHODOLOGY

The Gallup study is a 15-minute phone survey conducted in the 26 communities the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation serves, including Akron. The survey is available in English and Spanish, and both landlines and cell phones are called.

Each year, a random sample of at least 400 residents, aged 18 and older, is interviewed in each community, with additional interviews conducted in selected resident communities. In 2010, 15,200 interviews were conducted, with 1,000 conducted in eight resident communities, including Akron. The 2010 study also included 200 interviews among residents aged 18 to 34 in the resident communities to give Gallup more information about that age group. Overall data were adjusted to ensure an accurate representation of the real demographic makeup of each community based on U.S. Census Bureau data.

Gallup also used U.S. Census classifications to choose the geographical area included in each community. For the most part, Gallup used the Metropolitan Statistical Area. However, in a few cases, Gallup used other accepted definitions of the community area. These census definitions allow Gallup to compare other information such as local GDP and population growth so that Gallup can more closely examine community attachment and key community outcomes.

In Akron, Gallup interviewed residents in Portage and Summit counties.
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About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

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