

# Launch Grand Forks: *Attracting and Retaining Talent to Grand Forks*

Executive Summary

January 25, 2010



Next Generation Consulting

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## **GLOSSARY | A Guide To Terms Used In This Document**

### **Young Professionals or “YPs”**

For the purpose of this project, “Young Professionals” are people aged 20-40. They are Grand Forks’ young workforce and future community leaders. Throughout the report, the terms “YPs” and “young professionals” are used interchangeably.

### **Emerging Professionals or “EP”**

For the purpose of this project, “Emerging Professionals” are college students aged 18-22. They are Grand Forks’ future workforce. Throughout the report, the terms “EPs” and “emerging professionals” are used interchangeably.

A **“Homegrown”** is a person who has lived her or his whole life in the Grand Forks region.

A **“Boomeranger”** grew up in the Grand Forks region, moved away (possibly for college or a job), and returned to the area.

**“Transplant”** is a term used to describe a person who did *not* grow up in the region, and moved to Grand Forks from somewhere else. Transplants usually relocate for educational opportunities, career reasons, quality of life, and/or to be closer to family.

A **“Convincible”** is a term used to refer to a non-resident -- either a former resident or someone who has never lived in the region -- who has considered moving (back) to the Grand Forks region.

A **“Next City”** is one that has the amenities most likely to retain and attract a next generation workforce. “Next Cities” tend to have higher than average scores in most of the Seven Indexes of a Next City (Earning, Learning, Vitality, Social Capital, Cost of Lifestyle, After Hours, and Around Town). “Next Cities” are talent magnets and also attract the companies that rely on talent.

### **Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation or “GFREDC”**

The GFREDC is a non-profit organization that provides comprehensive services to support local business start-up and expansion, as well as the attraction of new companies and industries to Grand Forks and the surrounding region. The GFREDC is funded by regional business and individuals, the city of Grand Forks, and Grand Forks County.

### **Next Generation Consulting or “NGC”**

Next Generation Consulting is the research and consulting firm that conducted the research and analysis you’re reading right now. They refer to themselves in the third person throughout this document, as either NGC or as Next Generation Consulting.

## RATIONALE | Why Does Talent Matter?

The traditional measure of a city's economic development is the number of jobs created or retained. This is an effective measure when the availability of good jobs is enough to lure and keep workers.

But it's not enough anymore.

The world's 40 largest mega-regions, which are home to some 18% of the world's population, produce two-thirds of global economic output and nearly nine in ten new patented innovations.<sup>1</sup>

Great talent drives Grand Forks' economic prosperity and talent clusters in the cities that have the assets and amenities they value.



*If highly skilled young professionals can live anywhere in the world, why should they choose Grand Forks?*

In a 2008 survey of Grand Forks' young professionals, 84% said they had a positive perception of Grand Forks' quality of life, but 59% said they would consider leaving the region within the next ten years.<sup>2</sup>

This aligns with a trend in the Grand Forks Metropolitan area. Praxis Strategy Group has found that there are few young professionals in Grand Forks with mid-level career potential.

"[There is] a clear lack of individuals in the early 30s to early 40s age group, topping out with a 30% lower concentration of residents age 35-39. This missing age demographic is consistent with employer reports of recruitment problems of mid-career professionals."<sup>3</sup>

Next Generation Consulting (NGC) knows that attracting and retaining top talent is an economic imperative for Grand Forks. Cities that attract and retain highly skilled talent grow faster and create more prosperity for the city.

Young professionals are the lifeline of our companies, our cities, and the future of our civic, cultural and nonprofit institutions. How can we retain them and attract others to Grand Forks?

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Florida, "How the Crash Will Reshape America," The Atlantic, March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Young Professionals' Global Impact Survey of North Dakota, 2008

<sup>3</sup> "Enhancing the Grand Forks Workforce Ecosystem," Praxis Strategy Group

## **NEXT CITIES** | The Seven Indexes

Next Cities™ are places with the assets and amenities that attract and keep a young, educated workforce. Think bustling city centers, walkable neighborhoods, diverse career opportunities, and a vibrant art and music scene. Next Cities™ are places the next gen proudly calls “home” because they nurture the attributes and attitudes the next generation values. Next Generation Consulting group these attributes into seven indexes:

**Vitality** | How “healthy” is your city? This index tallies your air and water quality, measures your green space, and estimates your residents’ overall health (e.g. obesity, life expectancy, etc.).

**Earning** | High school guidance counselors tell children that they’ll have between nine and eleven careers in their lifetime. The Earning index measures your city’s future job growth, the diversity of employment opportunities, the percentage of jobs in the knowledge-based sector, average household income, and more.

**Learning** | Is your city committed to high quality education, for all of its citizens? This index tallies educational opportunities and expenditures, public library use, Wi-Fi hotspots, and more.

**Social Capital**<sup>4</sup> | Great talent comes in every race, creed, and color. This index accounts for how open, safe, and accessible your city is to all people. It includes measures of diversity, crime rates, voter participation rates, and the percentage of women and minority-owned businesses.

**Cost of Lifestyle** | Students and young professionals are just getting started in their careers, and for many, affordability is key. This index includes variables in the national cost of living index, which encapsulates a roof over the head, food on the table, clothes on the back, and a warm bed at night.

**After Hours** | There’s more to life than work. This index counts the places to go and things to do after work and on weekends.

**Around Town** | How easy is it to get to where you want to go in your city? This index measures your city’s “walkability,” airport activity, commute times, and mass transit opportunities.

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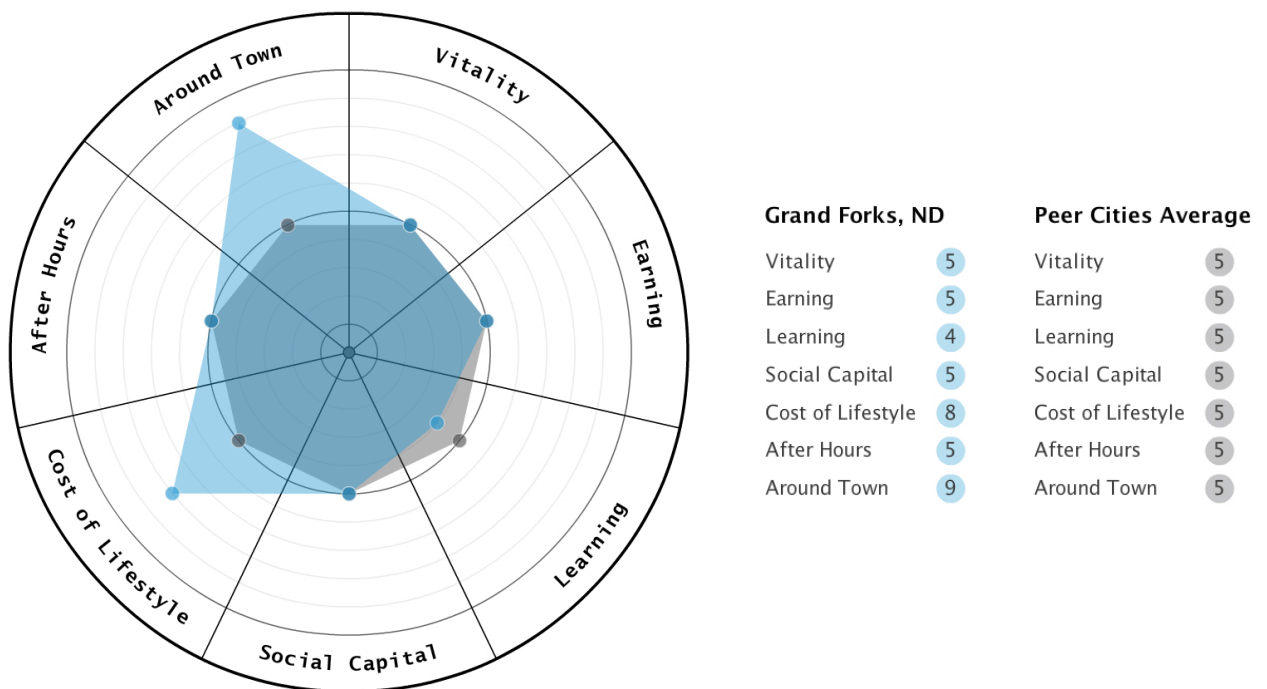
<sup>4</sup> Jane Jacobs coined the phrase “Social Capital” in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

## KEY FINDINGS | What did we learn?

In September 2009, the Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation (GFREDC) partnered with Next Generation Consulting (NGC) to retain and attract young professionals to the Grand Forks region. The research included a survey of over 800 residents and non-residents, focus groups with students and Boomerangers in the Grand Forks region, and numerous interviews and listening sessions with young professionals and other key stakeholders to define Grand Forks' assets, challenges, and opportunities.

The key findings from this research are:

1. The flight of young professionals (YPs) could cost Grand Forks \$159 million over the next four years.
2. Overall, residents (non-students) are committed to the Grand Forks region but they are not "ambassadors" of the region.
3. Grand Forks' Handprint scores meet or exceed those of its peer cities in six of the seven indexes - Vitality, Earning, Social Capital, Cost of Lifestyle, After Hours, and Around Town.



4. Students in Grand Forks value its learning opportunities, but are not as engaged in the community as non-students and are less likely to promote the city.
5. The perceptions of the “Around Town” and “Learning” amenities in the Grand Forks region are a definite strength, and should be actively promoted.

In the web-based survey, NGC asked respondents to consider each of the seven indexes and respond to two questions:

- ➔ How important are these amenities to you? (Value)
- ➔ How well does the Grand Forks region provide these amenities? (Perception)

Table 1 (below) ranks the Seven Indexes of a Next City according to residents’ *value* and compares it to residents’ *perception*. In the table, **green highlighting** indicates the closest matches between value and perception, while **yellow highlighting** indicates the greatest discrepancies between value and perception. The closer the difference is to “0,” the better match.

**Table 1: Residents’ Value vs. Perception of the Seven Indexes of a Next City**

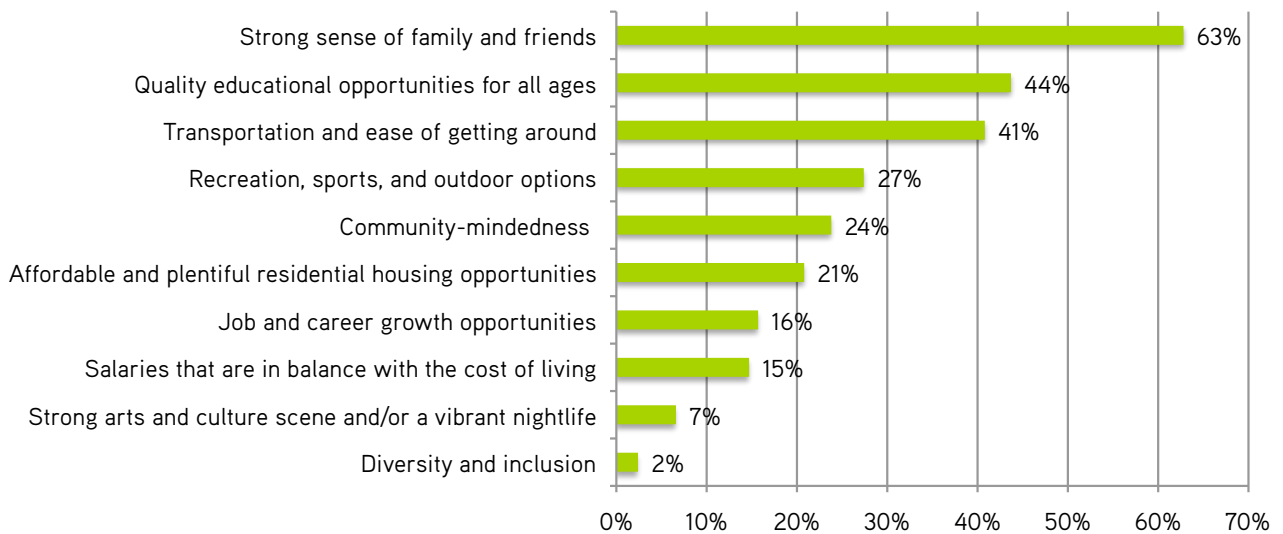
The Seven Indexes of a Next City	Value	Perception	Difference
<b>COST OF LIFESTYLE:</b> I want a community where I can afford to live, work, and play.	95%	70%	-25%
<b>EARNING:</b> I want a broad choice of places to work and an environment that is friendly to entrepreneurs.	90%	44%	-46%
<b>LEARNING:</b> I want to plug into a community that offers life-long learning and values being ‘smart.’	88%	79%	-9%
<b>VITALITY:</b> I value a vibrant community where people are ‘out and about’ using public parks, trails and recreation areas, attending farmer’s markets and living in a healthy community.	87%	66%	-21%
<b>AROUND TOWN:</b> I want to live in a community that’s easy to get around in; I don’t want long commute times.	83%	87%	4%
<b>AFTER HOURS:</b> I want to be able to find authentic local places to have dinner, meet for coffee, hear live music, or just hang out. I want to be able to attend art openings, theatre, and cultural festivals.	81%	49%	-32%
<b>SOCIAL CAPITAL:</b> I value living in a diverse community, where people are engaged and involved in community life.	70%	51%	-19%

**6. Residents value affordability and "Earning" opportunities, but they perceive Grand Forks as not measuring up to their expectations even though Grand Forks' Handprint scores meet or exceed their peer cities in both indexes.**

The next generation will not stay in a region if they can't find a job. At the same token, they are much more likely to commit to a region if they *do* find a good job. Earning opportunities, coupled with affordability, are key to attracting and retaining young professionals.

**7. The strong sense of family and community in the Grand Forks region is what residents value most, and what brings Boomerangers back.**

**What do you value most about living in the Grand Forks region?**



**8. Attracting Convincibles back to the Grand Forks region will reap economic gains.**

Of the 99 non-residents who completed the survey, 49 (50%) said they have considered moving (back) to the region. These are your **Convincibles**.

Grand Forks' Convincibles are young, well-educated, and mobile professionals.

Convincibles are important to the Grand Forks region for several reasons. They do not need a heavy-handed sales job to lure them back to the region. Most have already lived in the region, have affection for it, and are interested in returning. Their mobility - in that they are young and have not started families or purchased homes in their current cities - means that they can relatively easily make the decision to move back to Grand Forks.



## RECOMMENDATIONS | What should we do?

NGC recommends a three-pronged approach to retaining and attracting young talent to the greater Grand Forks region. These strategies revolve around the 3 C's: **Connect, Create, and Convince.**



### **Connect people – especially young professionals, students, and those who are young-thinking – in new ways.**

The rationale behind this recommendation is two fold and focuses on specific outreach and marketing strategies to help Grand Forks retain and engage the next generation workforce that currently call Grand Forks “home” while attracting former residents back.

To accomplish this, NGC recommends taking the following actions.

- 1.1 Fund an Executive Director position for Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals**
- 1.2 Train and place young professionals, Boomerangers, and Transplants on local and regional boards of directors.**

There are two components to this recommendation:

- 1.2.1 Create a fast-track course called (or further develop existing at the Community Foundation) “Board-Ready: How to Serve Effectively on a Board.”**
- 1.2.2 Launch a Board Match service to pair nonprofit and civic organizations needing new board members with graduates of “Board-Ready.”<sup>5</sup>**
- 1.3 Create a dynamic website that aggregates all after hours events in the Grand Forks area, and makes them easily findable and searchable.**
- 1.4 Get intentional about building connections between students and the community.**

Research shows that a college graduate's decision to enter the local workforce depends in part on that student's connection to the area built over the course of their college career.<sup>6</sup>

- 1.4.1 Create links for EPs between university life and Grand Forks life through an online student guide to Grand Forks.**

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of community board match programs include: [Ready2Serve Omaha](#); [The Network Quad Cities' eNgage](#); and the [San Francisco Volunteer Center](#).

<sup>6</sup> Source: Collegia

1.4.2 Develop new programming through the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals to increase the kind and depth of connections interns establish in the community.

**1.5 Fund a grant program for high schools, colleges, and the university to develop partnerships with employers to develop a robust co-op and internship program.**

Almost 50 percent of internship students accept permanent positions with their internship employers. The retention of college graduates after 5 years of employment is 30% greater for internship graduates.



**Re-Create Grand Forks as an attractive, accessible place to live, work, play and grow.**

**2.1 Support long-term development strategies (downtown plan) that embrace the vision of distinct “stroll districts” throughout the region.**

**2.2 Embrace and celebrate the four-season nature of life in Grand Forks**

Winter is a reality in Grand Forks! A common theme generated during the Launch Grand Forks Dream session is the desire to embrace and celebrate winter, rather than hibernate through it.

2.2.1 Create a winter-themed festival that showcases Grand Forks in the winter and targets specifically the ‘next generation’ while being inviting to all ages.

**2.3 Support continued efforts in establishing increased “bike-ability” of the region by expanding bike-friendly infrastructure in Grand Forks, particularly from UND area to the downtown and greenway.**

**2.4 Engage the business community in the attraction and retention of talent to Grand Forks through a “What it means to be a Next Company” awareness campaign that educates businesses about the role they play in the competition for talent.**

**2.5 Implement “Next Company” awards (or similar) to recognize and create best places to work for young, and young thinking, talent.**

**2.6 Create positive, fact-based, perceptions and pride about Grand Forks quality of life.**

In NGC’s experience, there are four markers of sustainable change in a community: policy (enforcement or innovation), networks (like GGFYP), attitudes, and behaviors.

To attract and retain people to Grand Forks, residents (and potential Boomerangers and Transplants) need to feel that living in Grand Forks is something to be proud of. This is difficult to measure but easy to sense. Here are a few things Grand Forks can do today to increase the sense of pride in the region:

- 2.6.1 Encourage citizens to sign the “Launch Grand Forks Pledge” (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/launchgrandforkspledge>) and ask people to commit to talking about Grand Forks every day with new energy and a positive attitude.
- 2.6.2 Buy local campaign in 2010. Repeat in 2011, 2012, etc.
- 2.6.3 Develop a public relations “Launch Grand Forks” campaign reaching out to current residents of Grand Forks - the friends and parents of the Convincibles - educating them on the reality of living and working in Grand Forks.



### **Convince the “convincibles” to call Grand Forks home.**

Fifty percent of all survey respondents who’ve left Grand Forks have considered moving back. These are your **Convincibles**. They grew up in Grand Forks or attended school here, left to go to college and/or to pursue their first job(s). As they enter their late twenties or early 30’s, they talk about ‘settling down’ and starting a family. At this point, they become nostalgic for Grand Forks, and want to be closer to their families.

- 3.1 Build on the “Launch Grand Forks” public relations campaign (2.6.3) and design and execute a Boomerang campaign.**
- 3.2 Create additional “Launch Grand Forks” campaign materials including videos and a website.**

The goal is to tell the stories of young professionals who’ve transplanted to Grand Forks or “boomeranged” back to Grand Forks. Videos and a website would be the cornerstone of a broader, dynamic “Launch Grand Forks” regional and national campaign that would be hosted online and used by the GGFYP, Chamber, EDC, and employers to help “sell” candidates and businesses on moving to Grand Forks.

## **IN CONCLUSION** | Where do we go from here?

This project is truly a community project. The research summary and conclusions in the previous pages are just a starting point. The recommended actions will certainly create desirable changes in Grand Forks' ability to attract and retain next generation talent. But it is when the thinking and ideology that is the foundation for this report is adopted by the community - truly embedded in the way dialogue happens and decisions are made in Grand Forks - that the true impact of this work will become clear.

As Grand Forks moves forward, NGC's greatest hope is that the city brings all of its citizens under the same 'tent' with respect to the changes that will come about.

Change is difficult. With every new and good thing that comes with change, something that was valued by someone is lost. When new buildings are constructed, views that citizens have cherished are changed. More bike lanes and priority transit lanes can mean less space for cars to drive and park. And when decisions are taken with the input of a wider constituency, those may be different kinds of decisions than have been made in the past.

NGC hopes that by increasing the level of engagement in that discussion by all citizens of all ages, feelings of loss can be replaced by a vigorous, enthusiastic, and universal excitement that the best days are still ahead for Grand Forks.

## **ONLINE APPENDIX**

NGC has created a password protected online appendix and filled it with additional project data, information and resources to assist Grand Forks in executing these recommendations.

URL: <http://nextgenerationconsulting.com/index.php/clients/8266/>

Username: ngc005

Password: 40000

## **METHODOLOGIES**

NGC used various methodologies to reach the conclusions in the “Key Findings” of this document. Each methodology is outlined below:

### **Community Survey**

From September 24, 2009, to October 30, 2009, Next Generation Consulting (NGC) administered a web-based survey that was emailed to young professionals, residents, and former residents of the Grand Forks region. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their demographic profile (e.g. marital status, educational attainment, income level, current occupation, etc.) and a set of questions about their values and impressions of the Grand Forks region. Non-residents, including former and potential future residents, were also asked whether they would move to the Grand Forks region and why or why not.

The survey shines the light on what residents value in a region, where the region does – and does not – align with their values, and why respondents choose to stay in or leave the region.

### **Focus Groups**

On September 29, 2009, Next Generation Consulting (NGC) conducted two focus groups with residents of Grand Forks. The first focus group consisted of 14 Boomerangers, or residents of the region who left and then came back. The second group consisted of 11 college students at the University of North Dakota. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours.

### **Dream Session**

On November 19, 2009, Next Generation Consulting (NGC) conducted a “dream” session with a group of community stakeholders including: YPs, students, elected officials, and business and community leaders.

### **Handprint**

Next Generation Consulting (NGC) developed a “Handprint” of Grand Forks in the seven indexes. A Handprint (right) is a visual scoring system that identifies a city’s assets and challenges in seven indexes that are valued by next generation knowledge workers.

The Handprint helps clients contrast their assets with peer cities, and helps stakeholders “see” areas in which they are strong and/or need to improve. The Handprint includes dozens of metrics (depending on the unit of measure, e.g. MSA, county, multi-county) that are standardized across its peer group.

## **CREDITS**

Next Generation Consulting would like to thank the following people and groups for their personal investment of time and energy, to ensure that our research was as complete as possible, and our recommendations were user-friendly:

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation  
Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation (EDC)  
Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals (YP)  
Survey Respondents  
Focus Group Participants  
Dream Session Participants

## **ABOUT NEXT GENERATION CONSULTING**

Next Generation Consulting (NGC) is the only U.S. firm with a proprietary indexing system to assist communities in their talent attraction and retention efforts. NGC has talked to nearly 40,000 young professionals since 1998. From these interviews, NGC identified that young professionals—who have many options in where they live and work—migrate to cities that have distinct and measurable characteristics.

Learn more about NGC and our services at <http://nextgenerationconsulting.com/>