

1BERKSHIRE'S BERKSHIRE INITIATIVE FOR GROWTH REPORT

2017

1BERKSHIRE

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1Berkshire

An Innovative Approach to Economic Development

1Berkshire is a county-wide organization focused on economic development and promotion of the region as a preferred place to visit, to live, and to grow a business. It provides programs that connect businesses with each other and with potential customers, as well as works to develop future leaders and support entrepreneurs.

Through its partnerships, 1Berkshire leverages the energy of a much larger audience that includes the business community, visitor economy, creative economy, entrepreneurs, and young professionals.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Berkshire County is losing population.

In the 1970s, the county began losing population for the first time in over 150 years. While the reversal was gradually declivitous, it gained significant momentum a decade later. In 2010, it was revealed that the region lost more than 18,000 people since the downward trend began. That year, more people in Berkshire County died than were being born and more people left Berkshire County than moved to it. The trend, however, is not predicted to stabilize or improve; it's predicted to worsen.

What does this mean?

According to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, which conducted a review of Berkshire County's 2010 federal census data, annual population decline could increase 37% by 2030 – accounting for the loss 12,420 more people. If the trend does not change, we will see further declines in school-aged children and adults with advanced degrees. As a result, the labor force could see a reduction of 25%, primary and secondary school enrollment could drop 28%, and the senior population could increase 69%.

If these calculations sound alarmist, they are not intended to be. They illustrate several very possible implications of continued population loss, particularly the loss of young adults. But population decline is something we are all facing and struggling with today. It is threatening many of our community assets including schools, churches, hospitals, and companies that can no longer bear the burden of lagging students, parishioners, patients, or workers.

And yet, this issue is one that has the potential to unite us in our collective desire to make the region a better place to live and work.

What was the strategy?

From July 2014 through December 2016, 1Berkshire convened and coordinated a long-term task force known as the Berkshire Initiative for Growth (BIG). The purpose of this group was to understand and explore solutions to Berkshire County's population loss. BIG focused its efforts specifically on the recruitment or retention of young adults, or 22-40 year-olds, to the region. Today's generation of young adults, most commonly known as Millennials, is the largest subset of the country's workforce. They are poised to purchase homes and have children, and are developing innovative businesses and investing in their communities.

BIG grew to a 30-member task force that conducted research into Millennial behaviors and trends. Many members were young adults themselves; it was important to BIG leadership to avoid top-down policy-making and, instead, allow young adults to play an important role in the process. Other members represented businesses and institutions in sectors that are key to resolving population decline such as work-force development and housing.

BIG also engaged hundreds of residents and business leaders through focus groups, interviews, surveys, and events. Members were actively gathering information as well as prototyping and testing possible solutions in the community, in real time.

1Berkshire's Berkshire Initiative for Growth Report is an in-depth analysis of the population loss issue as well as a comprehensive summary of the work undertaken and accomplished by BIG. This report is divided into six sections: Introduction, About BIG, Findings, Programs, A Changing Landscape, and Recommendations. It concludes

by providing extensive resources and information in the form of endnotes, links, and a bibliography that BIG members compiled early in the task force's history.

Several themes overlap throughout the report. The key findings (page 8) reached as a result of BIG's extensive data analysis informed many of the programs and recommendations described in this document. In addition, four takeaways emerged that underscore BIG's philosophy as well as a greater consensus about population loss in general:

There is no silver bullet.

Berkshire County's population decline is a complex problem that requires a complex solution. An economic and community development deterrent of this scale demands big vision and decisive action and, at the same time, manageable victories. No effort is too large or small to make a difference.

A narrative of excitement and possibility must be communicated.

Despite the factors contributing to population decline, Berkshire County is a special community with immense offerings and unbounded potential. The overwhelming majority of those BIG surveyed enjoy living here because of the quality of life it affords, and this is a message that needs continuous reinforcement.

Young adults' number one concern is job availability.

Young adults and employers alike struggle to meet their needs when it comes to jobs. This fact is one of the most important and most challenging aspects of the

population problem. Young adults must be better connected with jobs that are available, and local educational institutions and companies must better prepare young adults for jobs in growing industries.

Alignment is necessary.

Population decline is an urgent issue for many businesses, organizations, and communities throughout Berkshire County. Now, these entities must collaborate and share resources in order to create regional change. Cross-sector collaboration is particularly important. Rebuilding this county's young generation requires the alignment of often siloed strategies so that reimaged solutions can be possible, increasing chances for success.

What's next?

This report was commissioned in the hopes that efforts to combat Berkshire County's population decline remain active and prioritized. While 1Berkshire will continue to facilitate programs and advance policies that increase the Millennial cohort, more can be done.

1Berkshire's Berkshire Initiative for Growth Report has been written with Berkshire business owners, community leaders, educational administrators, and policy makers in mind. The 18 recommendations and countless other insights found in the following pages will move this important work forward, if economic and community development leaders work together diligently and earnestly.

INTRODUCTION

Berkshire County, the westernmost county in Massachusetts, has a unique set of challenges and assets – many of which can be attributed to the region’s picturesque yet isolated geography. However, like many rural American communities, it has been facing a downward population trend for decades. Population growth has steadily declined in rural counties across the United States since the early 1980s¹ and the number of Americans living in rural areas is down 57% from 1930.²

Berkshire County’s many rivers, forests, and rolling hillsides provided the foundation for the growth of early industries such as farming, cotton and paper production, lumber manufacturing, and electricity generation. As these industries evolved the county prospered, reaching peak population in 1970 at 149,402.³ But the years that followed ushered in globalization and advancements in technology, and 3 million U.S. jobs were lost between 1998 and 2006.⁴ The closure of large manufacturing companies in Berkshire County in the 1980s abruptly exacerbated the population trend, stalling the economies of many of the region’s cities and towns and leaving in its wake a declining, aging population. However bleak the picture may have seemed, it was far from uncommon.

This population decline was first identified as a critical economic development issue in the *Berkshires Strategy Project*, a comprehensive strategic plan produced by the Berkshire Economic Development Corporation in 2006. The resulting action plan, *The Berkshire Blueprint*, called for an analysis of local population trends and contributing conditions in order to position Berkshire County for sustainable growth and future success.⁵

In 2010, with the release of the most recent decennial U.S. census, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) created a presentation-style report⁶ that historically contextualized the data and made projections based on trends in age distribution. Not only did Berkshire County possess dramatically lower numbers of 20-40 year-olds than Massachusetts and the U.S. (see graph below), but the region’s 50-65 year-old cohort, well larger than the national average, was the largest it had been in 40 years.

2010 Age Distribution Comparison



Given the significant dip in young adults and spike in individuals nearing retirement, BRPC speculated, Berkshire County could be facing serious negative changes to the labor force, educational systems, tax base, and housing market.

BRPC also speculated that, by 2030, the overall population decline will occur more rapidly as Baby Boomers, or individuals born between 1946 and 1964 and who account for most of the

current population, will begin reaching the end of their lives. With birth and in-migration rates predicted to remain low, there will be no counter-balance to this sharp increase in deaths and the downward population trend will worsen.

As ominous as the long-term population forecasts were, the issue was nearing a critical point: analysts predicted that in 2015 Millennials will (and indeed, did) surpass Generation X to become the largest segment of the American workforce⁷ and the mass retirement of Baby Boomers will begin. It became clear that movement of Millennials into the region would have the most influence on easing and remedying population loss.

Berkshire County has a number of challenges that are contributing to young adults' lack of interest in moving to or remaining in the region. Millennials, or individuals born between 1980 and 2000, carry the highest student debt burden ever⁸ and, as a result, are looking for jobs with competitive starting salaries. Not only do urban areas seem to offer more jobs and career advancement opportunities, but Berkshire County's average weekly wages, at \$843, are \$6 less than the national average and slightly more than half of Boston's Suffolk County.⁹

Millennials are also the most connected generation. They want mobility and are dependent on digital technology for shopping, transportation, working, and dating. Millennials want to live in communities where nightlife, amenities, and other young people are abundant and close by. For rural communities, these demands can be difficult to meet. In addition to Berkshire County's comparatively small Millennial peer group, the region lacks reliable and accessible public transportation, broadband, and cellular systems, and has fewer entertainment and retail options.

Conversely, the region has significant assets that are attractive to Millennials. For young people that seek a work-life balance, Berkshire County provides a quality of life that is predicated on outdoor recreation, health and wellness, arts and culture, and the production of local goods including food. The county is also home to over 400 nonprofit arts, education, human services, and religious organizations which provide jobs and volunteer opportunities that appeal to Millennials' sense of service, mission, and social responsibility.

72% OF MILLENNIALS RATE A JOB AS GOOD IF THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

– LIVE IN THE GREY

Berkshire County boasts a lower cost of living than most urban areas. Although many Millennials are postponing getting married, having children, and buying their own homes, those who decide to grow their families and make investments find the area affordable. The beauty of the region as well as its proximity to major urban centers such as Boston, Albany, and New York City is appealing to those who are seeking a less stressful but connected lifestyle.

Thanks in part to the quality of life Berkshire County offers, the region is also attractive to Millennials who are interested in starting or growing businesses. A robust entrepreneurial ecosystem has been evolving that leverages the county's assets and supports young entrepreneurs at all stages. From co-working spaces and classes to experienced mentors and investors, tools are readily available for Millennials to build their own businesses on a foundation of innovation, talent, and creativity.

ABOUT BIG

In July 2014, 1Berkshire convened the first meeting of the Berkshire Population Task Force, renamed the Berkshire Initiative for Growth (BIG), in order to more aggressively address Berkshire County's population decline. The group was initially comprised of economic development leaders as well as representatives from 1Berkshire's three affiliate organizations: the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Berkshire Visitors Bureau, and Berkshire Creative.

This task force was not the first organized response to the changes in demographics. The Berkshire Chamber of Commerce formed Berkshire Young Professionals (BYP), a social networking organization, in 2006 as a resource for young adults in the workforce. In 2010, the Youth Leadership Program was created to prepare select Berkshire high school students for leadership, community involvement, and career development.

These early programs were critical in cultivating a professional network for young workers but employers, municipalities, and others were feeling a deeper strain. A more targeted strategy was needed to focus on the recruitment of young talent as well as the alignment of available and developing community resources.

BIG became a large scale, coordinated effort by business owners, community leaders, young adults, and 1Berkshire staffers to understand and respond to various issues contributing both to the out-migration of young adults as well as the difficulty in recruiting young adults to the Berkshires.

Task force members devoted the first six months to establishing an operational structure, priorities, objectives, and timelines. Several

decisions reached by member consensus were key to forming a targeted approach with attainable outcomes:

TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC

The population loss issue is a multi-faceted problem involving the movements of several population groups including school-age children, college students, young adults, individuals nearing retirement, and senior citizens. The task force chose to focus on the **22-40 year-old** age bracket as these are the individuals who are more likely to fill available jobs, have children, and seek lifestyle advantages that Berkshire County offers. Any recruitment or retention of individuals in this age range could have positive short-term impacts on other segments of the population.

TERMS

While individuals between 22 and 40 years of age today are known most commonly known as Millennials, the term **young adults** was chosen over this label as the descriptive term for BIG's target demographic. Millennials will eventually age out of the 22-40 age bracket. However, it will be necessary to attract young adults to Berkshire County well into the future if the population trend is to be reversed. Community and economic development leaders as well as CEOs will need to understand future young generations and tailor recruitment and retention efforts to their unique qualities and behaviors.

SCOPE

Based on historical data and current population information, BRPC calculated that **800 young adults** will need to migrate to Berkshire County annually in order to reverse the downward trend. BIG adopted this number as a means

to define a measurable goal and set the scope of work to be undertaken.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Although the formal subcommittee/working group structure fluctuated throughout the task force's two and a half year existence, BIG consistently prioritized the following areas of focus:

COMMUNICATIONS

INFRASTRUCTURE

SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

WORKFORCE/WORKPLACE DEVELOPMENT

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

First year efforts also included data collection through focus groups, informal interviews, and community surveys in order to better understand Berkshire County's strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of young adults themselves. Comparative analysis of like-sized and similarly rural communities revealed the county's deficits in specific resources and amenities that young adults prefer.

Throughout BIG's second year, the focus shifted from analysis to implementation. Members worked to accelerate short-term solutions and devised strategic plans with actionable steps to reach long-term goals. BIG meetings became longer idea-generating sessions, and crucial or urgent projects were given extra support and deadlines.

During this time, BIG developed communications about the task force including a purpose statement for internal and conversational use (see page 7). Newspaper articles and other press about population remained generally negative, and task force members refrained from contrib-

uting to the public discourse, opting instead to highlight the ongoing work of BIG while diverting attention away from the problem itself.

Coordination and collaboration also became increasingly important in year two. One of the ways BIG sought to align county-wide efforts already underway was through **infomercials**, or short presentations by community groups during bi-monthly BIG meetings. Infomercial topics included:

- **Berkshire County Education Task Force**
- **Berkshire County Regional Employment Board**
- **Berkshire Immigrant Center**
- **Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation**
- **Berkshire United Way**
- **Pittsfield Promise**
- **Pittsfield's Tyler Street District Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)**

MEMBERS

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BIG STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Berkshire Initiative for Growth has convened to develop and mobilize resources to attract more young adults and families to our region. The effort is coordinated by 1Berkshire, and includes community leaders and young adults participating in the task force. BIG has both short- and long-term strategies for attracting more young people, and also seeks to support existing groups and organizations throughout our community who are working toward the same goal.

FINDINGS

In order to most effectively combat population loss, BIG engaged in in-depth analysis of young adults' perceptions of Berkshire County, available and needed resources in the region, the financial health of young adults in Berkshire County, local employers' workforce needs, and Millennials' habits in and out of the workplace.

A number of research methods were used including focus groups, informal discussions, online surveys, interviews, readings, and content analysis.

SURVEYS

- **Workforce Needs Assessment[#]**

Conducted by the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board in conjunction with 1Berkshire, Fall 2014

Survey summary: page 11

- **Berkshire County Young Adult Survey^{*}**

Conducted by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission in conjunction with 1Berkshire, Spring 2015

Survey summary: page 9

- **Uber in the Berkshires[†]**

Conducted by 1Berkshire, Winter 2015/16

- **Berkshire Young Adults and Financial Management: A Survey[‡]**

Conducted by 1Berkshire, Fall 2016

Several key findings framed BIG's communications, programs, and collaborative strategies.

The majority of young adults living here like it.

In fact, according to results from BRPC's *Berkshire County Young Adult Survey*, 80% of respondents enjoy living in Berkshire County. The natural beauty, outdoor recreation, New England lifestyle, arts and culture, and local food and craft beverages were cited in the survey* and in interviews as reasons why young adults wanted to move to or stay in the region. 1Berkshire found similar results in its *Berkshire Brand Development Research* study commissioned in 2013. Nearly 75% of young professional respondents rated the Berkshires as a great place to live.

**"RAISING A FAMILY IN THE
BERKSHIRES HAS SO FAR
BEEN FANTASTIC."**

– PETER EGAZARIAN, 33

There's a lot going on, but activities and resources can be hard to find.

Although the preferred type and quantity of entertainment options varies from person to person, Berkshire County is arguably more socially vibrant than it has been in decades. "My head is actually spinning thinking of all the events that make the Berkshires fun for young professionals," said BIG member Bethany Kirchmann, 29. But of those young adult survey respondents who left Berkshire County, 42% left for lack of things to do.* Unless one is in-the-know, it can be difficult to find information about events, social groups, and other opportunities. "I didn't know where to look for resources," explained Jenn

1BERKSHIRE YOUNG ADULT SURVEY RESULTS

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission conducted a survey to understand the reasons why young adults between the ages of 18-39 stay or leave the Berkshires. The survey results are an analysis of 2,870 responses. 75% were raised in the Berkshires, and 67% currently live in the Berkshires. It's worth noting that the survey results represent an oversampling of those with undergraduate or graduate degrees.

(May 2015)

CURRENT YOUNG ADULT RESIDENTS

WHO THEY ARE

- 74% consider the Berkshires a desirable place to live
- 67% of those raised here still live here
- 44% of those raised here moved away and came back
- 41% believe they will still be here in 5-10 years

THEIR TOP 5 MOST IMPORTANT VALUES

- Quality employment
- Quality housing that they can afford
- Family
- Good schools
- Outdoor environment

WHY THEY LIVE HERE

- 67% Family in the area
- 47% Job in the area
- 44% Friends in the area
- 43% Enjoy the natural scenery
- 33% Enjoy the outdoor recreational opportunities

80% ENJOY LIVING IN THE BERKSHIRES

OF THOSE WHO MOVED AWAY

WHO THEY ARE

- 72% of those who left miss it
- 59% would return if their current job and pay was available
- 41% think they will move back
- Reasons why they may return include family, enjoyment of the natural scenery and outdoor recreation, the New England lifestyle, and friends in the area.

PROJECTED REASONS FOR LEAVING

- 63% Higher paying job
- 55% Lack of things to do
- 54% Career advancement
- 41% Limited nightlife
- 36% Different goeography

ACTUAL REASONS FOR LEAVING

- 68% Career advancement
- 50% Higher paying job
- 42% Lack of things to do
- 34% Education/training elsewhere
- 34% More urban setting

87% OF THOSE WHO LEFT ENJOYED IT

Distinctions were found between young aduts raised in the Berkshires and young adults who relocated here.		
	RAISED	VS RELOCATED
WHY THEY'RE HERE:	Family	Jobs
WHAT THEY ENJOY :	The four seasons Raising their families here	Cultural activities Scenic beauty
CHALLENGES FACED:	Affordability Lack things to do Feel the area is depressed	Far from friends/family Need faster internet Desire a more urban setting

“What can be done?”

- Higher paying jobs
- More opportunities for career advancement
- Better quality, more affordable housing
- Rail access to urban areas
- Improve nightlife

Gomez, 30. "I didn't know how to meet people after a certain age."

Young adults can't find jobs they want or jobs in their field here.

Young adults may enjoy Berkshire County, but they are not optimistic about job prospects. Nearly 60% of young adult survey respondents who live here may or will move away to pursue a better paying job, work in his/her field, or find career advancement elsewhere. 68% of those who have already moved away cite lack of job opportunity as the primary reason.* According to the *Berkshire Brand Development Research* study, college students and young professionals were reluctant to recommend that friends relocate to Berkshire County due to "lack of good job opportunities." Labor statistics provided by the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (BCREB) indicate that labor force and job growth did not occur in 2015¹⁰ and yet hundreds of jobs remain open and unfilled. This points to a communication gap between employers and workers, as well as misalignment between young adults seeking work and the work that is available. 45% of respondents to BCREB's *Workforce Needs Assessment* survey were unable to find workers with specific occupational skills.[#]

**"AS THE OWNER OF
A HIGH-GROWTH
ECOMMERCE BUSINESS
IN THE BERKSHIRES,
MY SINGLE BIGGEST
CHALLENGE IS THE LACK
OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED
JOB CANDIDATES."**

– PAUL LEBLANC, 40

Berkshire County's communication and transportation infrastructure doesn't compare with other Millennial destinations.

Berkshire County is relatively slow, both in pace (a benefit) and in connectivity (a detriment). Many young adults want to leave the hustle and bustle of city living, but not at the expense of their internet speed or cellular reliability. In February 2016, cellular coverage was 38% below the national average¹¹ and, presently, over half of Berkshire County's 32 communities are still without broadband access.¹² Similarly, the region's transportation system is lagging. As Millennials are abandoning their cars, passing on driver's licenses,¹³ and embracing public and crowdsourced transportation for day-to-day mobility, BRPC estimates that 96% of Berkshire County workers rely on personal vehicles to get around. Of the 1,578 individuals who completed 1Berkshire's *Uber in the Berkshires* survey, 88% would or might use Uber as a passenger and almost three of every four respondents would use Uber in the evenings and on weekends[†] – times when public transportation is very limited.

The county's expansive geography can hinder overall growth.

Many economic development experts agree that the population solution needs to take a collaborative, county-wide approach. But with 137 people per square mile (compared to 293 in Hampshire County, Massachusetts and 257 in Chittenden County, Vermont), it can be difficult to prioritize the needs of one county with such disparate subcommunities. With no county government, municipalities tend to protect their own resources or regionalize – creating their own economic development agencies, school districts, business groups, and marketing campaigns. Young residents, visitors, and

1BERKSHIRE WORKFORCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS

1Berkshire and the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board conducted a survey to understand the demand for workers and the current and future skills required of workers in the Berkshires. 217 companies and small businesses completed the survey. This information will be used to better align the needs of our existing business landscape with the many programs aimed at training, retaining, and strengthening our workforce.

(Fall 2014)

THE EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

EMPLOYEE RETENTION

TOP 5 NEW EMPLOYEE SKILLS NEEDED

COMPUTER
COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC
TECHNICAL

TOP 5 ANTICIPATED BUSINESS CHANGES

NEW TECHNOLOGY
NEW WORK PROCESSES
NEW EQUIPMENT
EMPLOYEE TURNOVER
INCREASED STAFF NEEDS

Businesses that offer:

TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

50% Yes / 50% No

HIGH SCHOOL INTERNSHIPS

32% Yes / 46% Paid

COLLEGE INTERNSHIPS

60% Yes / 68% Paid

OFF-SITE TRAINING COURSES

73% Yes

ON-SITE TRAINING COURSES

60% Yes

TOP 5 EMPLOYEE RETENTION PROGRAMS

HEALTHCARE
401K PROGRAMS
ANNUAL BONUSES
FORMAL ORIENTATION
MENTORING

EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT

RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

Unable to find workers with specific occupational skills	45%
Unable to find workers with strong work ethic	37%
Cost of hiring/employing individuals	25%
Unable to find workers with basic core competencies	16%
Unable to keep skilled workers who leave to work for competitors	14%

ANTICIPATED WORKFORCE SIZE WITHIN 5 YEARS

51%

INCREASE

45%

REMAIN
STABLE

4%

DECREASE

RECRUITING QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES EFFECTS:

GROWTH/EXPANSION

LOCATION

53%

YES

47%

NO

89%

YES

11%

NO

PERSISTENT JOB VACANCIES

65 COMPANIES REPORTED
369 OPENINGS:

Engineers, residential support, laborers, management professionals, technicians, tellers, seasonal workers, servers, nurses, teachers, cooks, customer service, and accountants.

NO

59%

YES

41%

students feel the divide. “There clearly needs to be better information sharing between groups and collaboration so that as the Berkshires we are communicating a consistent message to young professionals,” explained Gary Levante, 27. Independent nonprofits such as 1Berkshire are leading the charge when it comes to county-wide collaborations, but the region continues to lack key comprehensive, easy-to-navigate resources.

Most young adults who live here can afford it.

Statistics demonstrate differing perceptions in the region’s affordability between natives (those who were raised here) and non-natives (those who chose to relocate here). In BRPC’s young adult survey, 24% of natives who still live in Berkshire County can’t afford to leave and 17% are living with their parents to pay off student debt.* Nationally, however, 26% of Millennials are still living in their parents’ homes.¹⁴ Conversely, nearly 75% of non-natives find the region affordable, according to 1Berkshire.¹⁵ This difference may be attributed to non-natives’ levels of educational attainment as well as experience living in places where the cost of living may be higher. Despite this, when polled about their financial health, young adults in Berkshire County have less student debt (39% say none at all) and higher rates of homeownership (48%)[†] than Millennials nationally.¹⁶

Employers should recruit with a locally-minded approach.

When looking at the specificity of Berkshire County’s assets and challenges, it becomes clear that the area attracts a “type.” Young adults who crave the conveniences and energy of a big city may not enjoy living in the region as much as young adults who enjoy outdoor recreation and a

**“WILLIAMS [COLLEGE]
HELPED ME DISCOVER THE
BEAUTY AND POSSIBILITY OF
THE AREA.”**

– BEN COHEN, 32

sense of community. According to Wayne Marzotto, Senior Engineering Manager at General Dynamics Mission Systems, the company changed its recruiting strategy to target college graduates from other rural communities who “are used to the kind of area this is.” Employers may not need to look very far to find these workers, however. In addition to the more than 5,000 college students in Berkshire County, there are tens of thousands more within a 50-mile radius. Tourism also plays a key role in recruitment. 1Berkshire’s *Berkshire Brand Development Research* study found that 10% of young professionals who relocated to Berkshire County discovered the region while on vacation. Additionally, more than one third of young professionals who moved here had friends or relatives in the area, 21% were raised here, and 16% attended college here.¹⁷ These statistics are a testament to the draw the area has for those who are already familiar with it.

PROGRAMS

Unlike many task forces, BIG's objective was not simply to study the problem of population loss and make recommendations to others. In July 2015, working groups were formed in order to more efficiently and quickly accomplish core goals set by the full task force. The four working groups – Communications, Connectivity, Workforce/Entrepreneurship, and a Steering Committee – continued projects underway and developed new programs that more proactively addressed the five prioritized areas of focus.

COMMUNICATIONS

- **BuiltintheBerkshires.com**

This prototyped website was created by entrepreneur and BIG member Paul LeBlanc and select staff at his company Zogics. The site contained curated lists of businesses, available jobs, and lifestyle resources.



Image courtesy Jen Salinetti, Woven Roots Farm

- **1Berkshire.com**

1Berkshire's new website, launched early 2015 as a result of its rebranding project, incorporates the message ("Life is Calling") that young adults can be personally and professionally fulfilled in Berkshire County. This audience is now included in all of 1Berkshire's internal and external marketing campaigns.

- **#liveBRK**

Initially designed as an Instagram hashtag, Live BRK is now the name of the landing page on 1Berkshire.com which contains information and resources for young adults. The web page features people, businesses, and activities in Berkshire County that are appealing to young adults.

- **Video Profiles**

During BIG's first year research phase, members interviewed 19 Berkshire natives, business owners, resource providers, and young professionals. 7 two-minute video profiles were created with the footage and were formatted and edited to contain the same open: the "Life is Calling" logo being painted. Profiles can be found on the Live BRK web page, YouTube, and 1Berkshire's social media accounts.

- **Blogs**

Lifestyle articles were written by community members, BIG members, and 1Berkshire staffers and incorporated into 1Berkshire e-newsletters and the Live BRK web page.

- **Media Partners**

Blogs, video profiles, and a #liveBRK Instagram feed, as well as select events and monthly polls, would be made available to partnering media companies for publication on their websites. This would serve to circulate the content to a wider audience.

SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

- **BerkshireFlirt**

Founded in January 2015, BerkshireFlirt is a singles events business owned and operated independently but inspired by the work of the task force.

- **Social Support for Interns**

1Berkshire held several events in the summer of 2015 to connect interns in various industries in Berkshire County. A summer events calendar featuring free or low cost activities (see page 15) was created in 2016 and distributed to hundreds of summer interns.

- **40 Under Forty Awards**

Launched in 2015, 40 Under Forty is an

annual celebration of 40 juried honorees under forty years old, organized and facilitated by Berkshire Community College but inspired by the work of the task force.

- **Events App**

BIG members researched social apps currently on the market and explored creating a new events aggregator with several locally-based software developers.

- **Virtual Welcome Packet**

The “packet” was a prototyped web page on 1Berkshire.com of curated resources, events, newsletters, and organizations that would help new young residents and employees feel welcome and connected to the community.

- **Ambassadors**

Ambassadors are community members who can be reached via email with questions about the region. The 1Berkshire.com web page showcases several Ambassador profiles at a time. Prospective residents and employees find the information they need

by speaking directly with locals.

INFRASTRUCTURE











- **Uber**

Uber, a ride-hailing company, is already operating in Berkshire County. BIG engaged Uber managers in talks to promote driver registration through flyers, postcards, and events in order to develop a more reliable service.



Image courtesy BerkshireFlirt

JUNE

✓	DATE	EVENT	TIME	COST	LOCATION	TYPE
<input type="radio"/>	9	BYP Networking Social	5:30-7:30PM	\$5	Beacon Cinema Pittsfield	
<input type="radio"/>	10	Arts Night Out: Tintype Portraits!	7PM	\$35	IS183 Art School Stockbridge	
<input type="radio"/>	11	Berkshire Craft Beer Festival	NOON	\$30+	Pittsfield Common	
<input type="radio"/>	12	"In The Dark" Story Slam	3PM	FREE	Dottie's Cafe Lounge Pittsfield	
<input type="radio"/>	18	Makers Day	All Day	\$14	Berkshire Museum Pittsfield	
<input type="radio"/>	18	King Kong at the Mahaiwe	4PM	\$7	Mahaiwe Theatre Great Barrington	
<input type="radio"/>	19	Brian Wilson's Pet Sounds at Tanglewood	2:30PM	\$25-110	Tanglewood Lenox/Stockbridge	
<input type="radio"/>	19	The Oregon Trail WAM Theatre	3PM	\$20	Six Depot West Stockbridge	
<input type="radio"/>	22	Cheese Tasting	6PM	FREE	Bascom Lodge Mt. Greylock	
<input type="radio"/>	24	Free Fun Friday	10AM-3PM	FREE	The Mount Lenox	

- **Transportation Hackathon**

1Berkshire sought funding to develop the hackathon, an event where teams would work for 24-48 hours to prototype private transportation solutions.

- **Ookla**

Ookla, a broadband speed test app that measures internet upload and download speeds, was promoted by BIG as a way for young adults to ensure they are receiving the service they are currently paying for.

- **RootMetrics and OpenSignal**

BIG members researched these cellular coverage apps that create maps detailing cellular service reliability of the four largest phone companies in the U.S.

- **Workbar**

BIG leadership engaged Workbar, a network of corporate- and independently-owned cowork spaces, in talks to envision a Workbar Hub in downtown Pittsfield.

WORKFORCE/WORKPLACE DEVELOPMENT

- **BIG Workplace Culture Event**

"Our Next B.I.G. Idea: Understanding the Future of Work and How to Attract and Retain Millennials" was held in April 2016 at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield. Berkshire business leaders learned about trends in workplace culture and participated in activities facilitated by Live in the Grey staff.

- **BYP Workforce Event**

This spring 2016 BYP panel discussion at Berkshire Community College informed students about career options in the Berkshires. The event was meant to serve as a pilot for future BYP career pathway events.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- **Entrepreneurial Meetups**

Launched in February 2015, entrepreneurial meetups are opportunities for successful business owners or resource providers to share best practices with entrepreneurs in casual settings such as cafes and bars. The series was developed by 1Berkshire but inspired by the work of the task force.

- **Business Bootcamp**

The pilot Business Bootcamp, a free, six-week prototyped educational program organized by 1Berkshire and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), provided participants with a basic understanding of the essential elements involved in successfully starting and growing a business.

- **Pitch Competitions**

Started in 2016, pitch competitions are facilitated by 1Berkshire but inspired by the work of the task force. They provide early stage entrepreneurs and students with an opportunity to present their business concept to a panel of judges for feedback and cash awards.



Image courtesy 1Berkshire

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The Berkshire Initiative for Growth was a significant step forward in sparking and aligning efforts to actively combat Berkshire County's population loss. For the first time, a series of posed, prototyped, and piloted solutions were developed with the singular goal of young adult recruitment and retention. Members representing 24 organizations and businesses across industry sectors and geographic locales informed community leaders about the implications of population loss, empowering their colleagues to take action. Because of this work, BIG provided greater awareness and understanding of ways to effect change.

Success can also be seen in tested strategies that grew into recurring events and new programs. BerkshireFlirt and Berkshire Community College's 40 Under Forty awards are entering their third years. Ambassadors continue to hear from people wanting to know more about the Berkshires. And restaurants, entertainment options, and events are easier to find thanks to GOberkshires, an events app launched in June 2017 by New England Newspapers, Inc. with the support of 1Berkshire.

Entrepreneurial programs born from and in addition to BIG have had an enormous impact on young adults' interest in starting businesses in Berkshire County. Pitch competitions and entrepreneurial meetups continue to draw young participants, and the Business Bootcamp –a collaborative program facilitated by MCLA and 1Berkshire– provided a cohort of early stage entrepreneurs with an understanding of vital business

concepts such as entity formation and financing. Complementing this off-campus program, MCLA awarded \$10,000 and a 10-week paid internship to a North Adams-based student business at the April 2017 finale of its inaugural Innovation and Entrepreneurship Challenge. In southern Berkshire County, BerkShares, Inc.'s Entry to Entrepreneurship, a business planning program for young people, has graduated 29 students, launched several businesses, and made a library of business plans available online since it began in 2015.

In addition, 1Berkshire's Live BRK web page has proven to be an effective platform for consolidating BIG's promotional materials and information such as videos, blogs, and events. The #liveBRK Instagram hashtag has been used over 1,500 times to date and is cultivating place-based pride in students and residents alike. 1Berkshire's new "Life is Calling" brand not only appeals to younger visitors, it is being applied to digital platforms such as Pandora and Yahoo to target young adults who may be interested in living in the Berkshires.



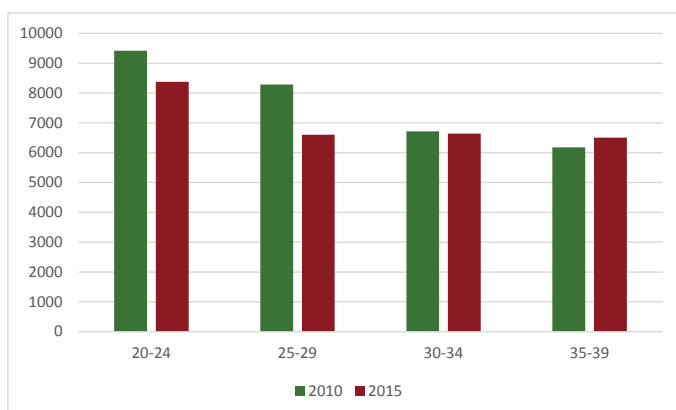
MCLA'S INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP CHALLENGE

Image courtesy MCLA

These tangible accomplishments are substantial, although evaluating whether 800 young adults have relocated to Berkshire County annually is more difficult to measure. While a reversal of the downward population trend may be seen in census data over time, newly released reports already indicate a positive shift in demographics. According to the most recent U.S. census taken in 2015, Berkshire County's young adult population is increasing.

The data reveals an increase of 524 20-40 year-olds in Pittsfield since 2010, and an increase of about 100 young adults in Adams and Lanesborough in the same five year period. "The county young adult population has actually gone up by 23, or 0.1%," explains BRPC in *Berkshire Benchmarks: Young Adults*, a report published in 2017 that analyzes the data. "While the number may not be significant, there is evidence the trend may have changed." When adjusted to follow young adults' movements over time, the findings are just as positive. Although the 20-29 age cohort continued to decline which reflects a loss of natives to college and local college graduates leaving the area, the 35-39 age cohort increased overall (see graph below).

Berkshire County Age Cohorts 2010-2015
(age adjusted)



This census data is an early indicator of population gains in BIG's target age demographic, yet business and community leaders must continue to work diligently and collaboratively to ensure the population trend stabilizes and reverses. While BIG is no longer a working group, Berkshire County is seeing a more pronounced shift towards regional strategic thinking, planning, and collaborating that is essential to effect this kind of large scale change.

In 2014, a comprehensive regional vision plan was adopted by BRPC, a commission comprised of representatives from all 32 Berkshire County municipalities. The plan, called **Sustainable Berkshires**, outlines policies for long-term growth and sustainability including key issues impeding population growth such as the economy, infrastructure, and housing. In addition to *Sustainable Berkshires*, economic policy is aligning thanks in part to the merger of the Berkshire Economic Development Corporation, Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Berkshire Visitors Bureau, and Berkshire Creative into **1Berkshire** – formalized in July 2016. 1Berkshire has become the county's single economic development organization and is leading the charge to update *The Berkshire Blueprint* to reflect new regional challenges and opportunities.

Educational access is also closely connected to population growth. Not only do children and young adults need educational pathways that build necessary skills for local career tracks, but the quality of public education is of particular importance to young families interested in relocating to Berkshire County. The **Berkshire County Education Task Force**, a committee of school administrators and civic leaders formed in 2015, has developed significant recommendations that address the cost of and declining

enrollment in public schools. The **Berkshire Compact for Education**, a group of education, business, and community leaders, engaged in a collective impact planning process in 2014 with the goal of ensuring that all Berkshire County students at every grade level have access to educational and career resources.

Transportation, technological connectivity, and workforce development remain priority issues that require substantial state or federal support in addition to collaboration of local leadership.

Reliable transportation options may be supplied in part by independent businesses and municipalities, but the success of a multifaceted and efficient transportation system hinges on resource availability and political policy alignment. Ambitious projects such as reestablishing commuter railroad service with New York City and Boston face many political hurdles but are integral to the movement of young adults from major regional urban centers to Berkshire County. On the local level, planning agencies are working with state officials to ensure resources fund the most important infrastructure projects. BRPC's **2016 Regional Transportation Plan** establishes "transportation projects and improvements for highways, public transportation, airports (though not air travel), railroads, and bicycle and pedestrian options" that are aligned with available funding sources.

Broadband access is equally reliant on public funds and subsidies. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute was established to create an infrastructure of middle- and last-mile fiber optic cable throughout the region, connecting residents and businesses to high speed internet. While private service providers are building a last-mile network in some communities, others

AREAS WITH COMPETITIVE FIBER CONTAIN 92% OF ALL BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS NATIONWIDE.

– FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION/COMPASS LEXECON

simply lack the customer base to create a worthwhile investment for these companies. **WiredWest** emerged as a cooperative of rural municipal-owned public power utilities working together to provide their constituents with low cost, high quality broadband access by building its own collaborative last-mile network.

State leadership is also better aligning executive infrastructure to provide more comprehensive workforce development support to local administrators and businesses. The **Workforce Skills Cabinet**, established in 2015, created a means of communication and collaboration between the Secretaries of Education, Labor and Workforce Development, and Housing and Economic Development. In April 2017, a regional planning initiative was launched by the cabinet that aims to leverage local resources and data to inform state-wide policy that will connect workers with jobs in regional high potential industries. This and other programs driven by the Workforce Skills Cabinet may incentivize the growth emerging industries in Berkshire County including engineering, manufacturing, financial services, and healthcare. While there are not enough employers in these fields currently to draw or retain young adults looking for long-term career opportunities, the cabinet could provide the tools necessary to train a local workforce, encouraging the growth of these sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The solution to the issue of population loss is just as complex as the problem itself. Recruitment strategies are vital to reverse Berkshire County's downward population trend, but retention tactics are critical to ensure that the population stabilizes. Both strategies need to be developed and implemented in tandem. The task force has outlined a series of recommendations within five themes that have been reinforced as priorities by multiple community stakeholders. While the directives are specific, the task force recognizes that all employers, service organizations, and civic leaders will need to balance their community's needs with available resources to create appropriate and tailored strategies.

WORKFORCE

Support entrepreneurial, business development, and business recruitment programs.

As the creative and hospitality industries clustered to each become strong economic sectors producing thousands of jobs, Berkshire County's emerging industries now must support programs and collaborations that encourage entrepreneurship and business development in these fields. Resources, incentives, and support networks must be cultivated to both attract and grow companies that will contribute to a dynamic, robust job market.

Improve workplace readiness with hard and soft skill training.

The alignment of Berkshire County high school, vocational school, and college curricula to meet employers' human resource needs is vital to building a sustainable, localized workforce. Employers, however, can do more to prepare new employees for the work ahead. Intensive

internships, apprenticeship programs, management trainings, tuition reimbursement, mentorships, and other learning opportunities provide workers with the time and motivation to grow into a position.

Recruit smarter.

Employers need to recruit for fit as well as ability. Young adults are looking to work in teams, companies, and communities that share their values. For entry level positions, employers can seek out the right candidates with specific geographic outreach, accurate job descriptions, social media tools, personalized interviews, and tours that showcase the work environment. Investing in additional resources to recruit Berkshire County natives, vacationers, local college graduates, and others who have familial or social ties to the region can help entice mid-career professionals who are more likely to enjoy living in the Berkshires. This kind of multi-faceted recruitment strategy can lower costs, increase employee retention, and improve productivity.

Make it easier for job seekers to find positions.

According to BCREB, hundreds of positions in Berkshire County are open today. BCREB, BerkshireWorks, and Berkshirejobs.com provide support for job seekers, but job listings are difficult to navigate. Some Berkshire employers utilize national websites such as LinkedIn and Indeed to post individual job openings, but these platforms do not highlight the opportunities in growing industry sectors or showcase high-quality job clusters in the region. A comprehensive and well-designed online jobs board or mobile-friendly tool can direct young adults' attention to jobs at Berkshire-based companies.

Offset wages with student debt support programs.

Student loan debt is the highest non-mortgage debt in the United States¹⁸ as well as the highest percentage of Millennials' overall non-mortgage debt burden.¹⁹ While young adults can decide to rent an apartment or bike to work to reduce their expenses, student debt is a fixed financial obligation. In addition, workers with Bachelor's degrees in Berkshire County make 28% less than their statewide counterparts.²⁰ If this wage gap remains, young workers will continue to choose to work in areas of the country that pay higher salaries, regardless of cost of living, in order to pay their student loans. Aside from increasing wages, employers can support their young employees by offering financial advising and training as well as incentives like debt payment contributions or, if applicable, participation in a state or federal loan forgiveness program.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

Provide opportunities for young adults to have a voice in decision-making.

While some executives may not find young candidates suitable for managerial positions, there are a number of ways to provide leadership opportunities to less experienced employees who have a vested interest in a company. Involving young adults in youth/junior boards, internal committees such as human resources or product development, and special project steering committees lets these employees take on additional responsibilities and work across departments. Additionally, holding more frequent and open meetings with supervisors demonstrates to younger workers that their work and opinions are valued.

FEATURED BUSINESS: WORKFORCE

GENERAL DYNAMICS MISSION SYSTEMS

General Dynamics Mission Systems in Pittsfield, Mass. is a growing company. 77% of its 260 new hires in 2016 were under 40 years old thanks in part to their targeted recruitment efforts, well-paying jobs, and flexible work schedule.

Recruitment

General Dynamics recruits graduates from schools in Western New England and Northern New York to fill entry-level positions; the company participated in 31 college fairs in 2016.

Internships

Internships are key to the company's success, and many long-term interns are hired post-graduation. 60-70 interns, about 65% local, worked at the company in 2016.

One Year Relocation Plans

Homeowner, Renter, and Entry Level relocation plans may include home-finding assistance, temporary housing, household goods transportation, and storage. Plans are offered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the level of the position and criticality of the role, in exchange for a 12-month employment commitment.

Engineering and Manufacturing

Leadership Programs

These 3-year extended professional programs for technical degreed employees with leadership potential provide management training as well as the opportunity to pursue a Master's degree with prepaid tuition.

Position Flexibility

Knowledge Management Plans and internal job postings create ease in employee movement and facilitate career growth.

FEATURED BUSINESS: WORKPLACE CULTURE

BERKSHIRE BANK

Berkshire Bank is a model organization for institutionalized community service. It has cultivated a purposeful workplace culture driven by data tied to its values.

Corporate Volunteer Program

Every employee (salaried and hourly) receives 16 hours of paid time off to volunteer for company-supported projects in their local community. 100% of Berkshire Bank's employees participated in 2016 and 70% participated in 2 or more activities, for a total of 40,000 hours of volunteer community service company-wide.

Matching Gifts Program

Berkshire Bank matches employees' charitable contributions dollar for dollar up to \$500 per employee per year.

Nonprofit Board Referral Program

This program matches appropriate and interested company employees with nonprofits in need of board members.

Better, Faster, Stronger

Better, Faster, Stronger allows employees to make suggestions about products, pitch ideas, or provide feedback. These comments are reviewed by a committee and company leadership, and have led to significant improvements and new policies.

Regional Volunteer Committees

90 employees of all career levels sit on 9 regional committees in the bank's service area. These committees cultivate leaders and develop cross-department projects.

AMEB Green

Berkshire Bank's environmental sustainability initiative strives to reduce paper and energy consumption company-wide.

Create a friendlier, more efficient work environment.

Young employees prefer their physical work environment to be flexible and supportive of their lifestyle. Incorporating up-to-date technologies, open floor plans, and modernized dress codes in the workplace as well as offering opportunities to telecommute while outside the office can help employees feel more comfortable and, thus, more productive. Companies that add health and wellness amenities such as fitness centers, healthy snack vending machines, and ergonomic furniture demonstrate a long-term investment in their employees. Creating flexible policies is equally important. Restructuring work schedules, parental leave, and vacation plans to allow employees to prioritize work and life equally can encourage self-motivation and company loyalty.

Provide opportunities for young adults to volunteer.

Berkshire County's non-profit organizations provide plentiful opportunities for individuals to volunteer. However, company-coordinated volunteer programs create stronger, more collaborative organizational cultures. Young adults are more likely to volunteer or give in groups (77% of Millennial employees prefer to volunteer with groups of fellow employees, rather than doing cause work on their own),²¹ and employers can play a powerful role in contributing to a young adult's sense of purpose.

Encourage executives and managers to engage in routine professional development.

Founders, owners, and executive leaders can set high standards for their employees when they engage in leadership development themselves.

Management retreats and CEO summits provide important insights into industry and economic trends. These trainings also help executive leaders become more open and able respond to changes in technology, state and federal policy, and the labor market.

HOUSING

Provide opportunities for young adults to learn about home ownership.

Although this current young generation is thought to be saddled with so much student loan debt that the majority of them still live with their parents, Millennials are finally outpacing other generations in home buying nationally.²² Despite this, many young first-time homebuyers still struggle with misconceptions about home ownership as well as building good credit or saving for a down payment. Employers, financial institutions, and community service organizations can connect young adults with financial advisers and real estate professionals who can help them prepare for and navigate the process of home ownership.

Continue focused investment in downtown neighborhoods.

Housing availability and affordability in Berkshire County varies from municipality to municipality. However, a common issue across the region is the lack of downtown market-rate housing to rent or buy. Young adults are particularly interested in living in close proximity to their jobs, friends, restaurants, and nightlife. In addition to encouraging the development of market-rate housing options, continued investments must be made in visible civic infrastructure in these neighborhoods such as convenient parking, street-scaping, lighting, public transportation, bike lanes, and green space.

FEATURED BUSINESS: HOUSING

GREYLOCK FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Greylock Federal leads the way in first-time homebuyer education loans with 24% of the overall mortgage market share. The credit union believes in helping young adults create pathways to home ownership via products and education.

First-Time Homebuyer Class

This program, offered several times each year, guides participants through the full scope of buying and maintaining a home. Students meet with realtors, insurers, home inspectors, and lawyers to understand every aspect of the process.

Certified Financial Coaches

9 financial coaches, 2 of whom are solely focused on this work, are available to consumers. They also present financial literacy trainings at colleges and companies, tailoring presentations to the needs of each employer.

Round-Up Checking Account

The Round-Up Checking is a new product developed with young adults in mind that rounds up debit purchases to whole dollar amounts and moves the difference into a savings account, enabling customers to cultivate saving habits.

Credit Builder Loan

This program allows young adults with little to no credit and no immediate borrowing needs to build a healthy credit profile over time.

Business Loans

Greylock Federal Credit Union has been an active proponent of market-rate housing development projects throughout Berkshire County and helps finance development in downtowns.

FEATURED BUSINESS: A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

NEW ENGLAND NEWSPAPERS, INC./ THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Since being purchased by local investors in 2016, New England Newspapers, Inc. and its flagship publication, *The Berkshire Eagle*, are transforming into world-class institutions which serve their communities internally and externally. The company has a renewed focus on quality and positive coverage that reflects local interests, and a business model that supports the local economy.

Accents

Accents is a weekly feature story and podcast that profiles immigrants living and working in Berkshire County.

Berkshire Landscapes

Launched in May 2017, *Berkshire Landscapes* is a 16-page Sunday lifestyle section that highlights the arts, culture, food, nature, people, and ideas.

Eagle Eye Team

This new investigative department consisting of 3 local reporters provides more in-depth coverage of bigger issues in order to generate solutions.

South County News Bureau

The Berkshire Eagle embeds dedicated reporters in all corners of Berkshire County, enabling better coverage of news and stories. Its newest office in Great Barrington opened in June 2017.

UpCountry Magazine

UpCountry Magazine, a revived bi-monthly, glossy lifestyle magazine, launched in January 2017. It has a circulation of 32,000 and is available in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

Increase awareness of incentive programs that spur housing development.

For many developers, the cost of building or renovating housing exceeds the price young adults can afford to pay to live in these spaces. State and federal incentive programs can offset some of the costs of developing market-rate housing and attract young professionals to these residential options. First-time homebuyer programs, environmental incentives, historic and new market tax credits, and technical assistance can spur housing development, especially in downtowns. Municipalities' community development departments are well-positioned to increase awareness of these and other incentives as well as actively support development projects that take advantage of these programs.

A POSITIVE NARRATIVE

Make a point to share positive community stories and opinions.

Those who have lived in Berkshire County for more than 30 years experienced a period of economic depression that resulted from a significant shift in industry. Although the region is rebounding, many economic issues persist and a negative, post-industrial narrative continues to be reinforced by some community members. This negativity, which is often passed down unknowingly by parents, teachers, and civic leaders, has an adverse effect on young adult retention. Choosing to share positive, hopeful stories about Berkshire County both verbally and digitally may, over time, generate optimism and pride, leading young adults to seek out Berkshire County as a desirable place to root their families and careers.

Pose solutions before sounding alarms.

Young adults are action-oriented and purpose-focused. They want opportunities to get involved and test ideas without being bogged down in criticism of the process, and they will not take action in a community that resists it. Encouragement to join nonprofit boards, open businesses, and run for public office must be provided.

IMMIGRATION

Continue efforts to understand and welcome growing multicultural populations.

Berkshire County is seeing a significant rise in populations from other countries, including many international families and students who are relocating to the area. The Hispanic population alone rose 58% in the last decade to 33,020 in 2010,²³ while others from Africa and Asia continue to immigrate to the region. The immigrant population is not only deepening but widening, with individuals from over 70 countries residing in Berkshire County according to the Berkshire Immigrant Center. Better understanding of these rapidly changing demographics will not only support the allocation of appropriate resources to groups with the most need, but encourage engagement with these populations in schools, the workforce, and the community. More events showcasing immigrant culture, cuisine, and heritage will increase awareness of multicultural groups, and symbolic civic gestures of solidarity and support are helpful to spur community discussion and cultural acceptance.

FEATURED BUSINESS: IMMIGRATION

BERKSHIRE HEALTH SYSTEMS

Berkshire Health Systems employs workers from every continent in the world, creating a culturally-rich professional community. It also provides accessible care to a growing number of Berkshire County residents with diverse backgrounds.

Residency Program

Berkshire Health Systems' Residency Program attracts bright, driven post-graduate physicians to continue training at their world-class facilities. For the many international physicians who complete their residencies here, the company works with an immigration consultant to secure proper visas that allow these doctors to train, and often stay, in the area.

Committee for Diversity and Inclusion

This employee committee meets monthly to coordinate company trainings in cultural sensitivity and awareness. The committee also plans the company's annual "Diversity Fair" that showcases the culture and heritage of its employees.

Language Assistance

Berkshire Health Systems provides job application assistance to immigrant job seekers. It also offers employees free access to language classes, primarily Spanish, provided by Berkshire Community College. In addition, patients receive language and translation services when needed.

Schwartz Rounds™

Schwartz Rounds™, an educational series for employees focused on compassionate and subjective issues, often broaches topics of diversity and inclusion.

Help immigrant workers navigate cultural and language barriers.

There are many benefits to fostering a diverse workforce, but employers often struggle to communicate with immigrant workers both before and after hiring. Listening and expressing look different from culture to culture, and a lack of awareness of various methods of communication can lead to an uncomfortable or inefficient work environment. According to Multicultural BRIDGE, employers that participate in cultural competence training "improve employee awareness and relations, customer service and satisfaction, program delivery, bottom line cost efficiency and new employee retention and integration." Employers can also engage immigrant employees in conversation about their understanding of policies, procedures, and goals, or provide tailored soft-skill training and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to these workers to improve communication and comprehension. Simply offering job applications in multiple languages or providing hands-on application assistance can reduce immigrants' barriers to entry to the Berkshire workforce.

Connect immigrants to community resources.

One of the most difficult hurdles for relocated immigrants is cultivating a sense of community. In addition to employment, language and cultural barriers prevent many immigrants from accessing the services they need to live, learn, and participate in the community. Access to healthcare, childcare, education, housing, and transportation is critical. Churches, community centers, and multicultural festivals help build social networks, but service providers need to have a more active presence in these spaces. In addition, a formalized resource referral network will allow these

providers to communicate and collaborate with each other. Translators provide an added layer of support, especially for accredited representatives, caseworkers, and lawyers helping immigrants navigate the American legal system.

Support entrepreneurial programs for immigrants.

From 1992 to 2011, approximately 24% of all U.S. entrepreneurs were immigrants²⁴ and the rate of immigrant entrepreneurship continues to grow today. According to the Berkshire Immigrant Center, the number of immigrants in Massachusetts with a college degree increased by 57.5% between 2000 and 2011. These students are well-positioned to take advantage of the entrepreneurial resources available in Berkshire County. For other young immigrants interested in entrepreneurship, however, specially-designed educational programs and events will be necessary to ensure access to these opportunities. Business planning, financing, permitting, insurance, employment law, and marketing are all aspects of a complicated business development process that immigrants need guidance to maneuver in order to find success.

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<http://tylerstreetpittsfield.com/TDI>

Sustainable Berkshires

<http://berkshireplanning.org/initiatives/sustainable-berkshire-regional-plan>

Workforce Skills Cabinet

<http://www.mass.gov/governor/administration/groups/workforceskillscabinet>

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Berkshire Compact for Education

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Berkshire County Education Task Force

<http://www.berkshireeducation.org>

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

<http://www.mcla.edu>

Pittsfield Promise

<https://www.berkshireunitedway.org/pittsfield-promise>

Williams College

<https://www.williams.edu>

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<https://opensignal.com>

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Youth Leadership Program

<http://1berkshire.com/youth-leadership-program>

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