Knight Soul of the Community 2010

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

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

Paula Lynn Ellis, Vice President/Strategic Initiatives
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

Why Attachment Matters

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

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

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

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

Attachment is also higher when residents agree that their communities provide the social offerings and aesthetics they enjoy. When residents enjoy their community’s offerings, they are more likely to spend their money on local activities and businesses, directly benefiting the local economy.
Highly attached residents are more likely to see their communities as being open to many kinds of people.
How Gallup Found the Factors With the Strongest Links to Attachment

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Attribute</th>
<th>Correlation to Attachment*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Offerings</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Services</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Involvement</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

- **Social Offerings** — Places for people to meet each other and the feeling that people in the community care about each other

- **Openness** — How welcoming the community is to different types of people, including families with young children, minorities, and talented college graduates

- **Aesthetics** — The physical beauty of the community including the availability of parks and green spaces

### Key Drivers of Attachment in 2010

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

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

Key Community Attributes

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

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

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

*New in 2010. Not included in overall attribute score to allow for trending to previous years.
OVERALL ATTACHMENT

In Boulder the overall community attachment mean score is 3.99 out of 5.00 in 2010, about on par with 2009 (3.89) and 2008 (3.84). Results reflect surveys conducted in Boulder County. Attachment in Boulder compares favorably with that of Akron, Ohio (3.41), and Gary, Ind. (2.80), and is as high as in the coastal cities of Bradenton, Fla. (3.98), and the City of Long Beach, Calif. (3.97) — all comparable communities of very high urban density and medium population.

Findings in this report represent the Boulder MSA unless otherwise noted.
KEY DRIVERS OF ATTACHMENT

Boulder’s social offerings, aesthetics, openness, and education are the most likely to influence residents’ attachment to the community in 2010, as they were in 2009. Boulder performs significantly better than the community’s comparison group average on all four drivers.

- **Social Offerings:** Boulder residents are positive about social offerings in their community — and significantly more so than other comparable Knight communities. A majority of Boulder residents rate the availability of social community events in their community highly. Residents are also more positive than negative on whether Boulder is a good place to meet people and the availability of arts and cultural opportunities. The community struggles most with being a place where people care about each other, as fewer than 2 in 10 residents rate this item positively.

- **Aesthetics:** The beauty of the Rocky Mountain setting is evident in residents’ ratings of aesthetics in Boulder. More than 8 in 10 residents rate the beauty or physical setting of the community and the parks, playgrounds, and trails highly. The community’s aesthetic ratings far surpass those of the comparison group and other Knight communities.
• **Openness**: Openness is another key community attachment driver in Boulder, but residents are relatively negative on this overall, compared with social offerings, aesthetics, and education. Less than one-quarter of residents rate Boulder highly as a good place for immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, and talented college graduates seeking work. Boulder residents are more positive than negative in rating the community as a good place for young adults without children, families with young children, and gays and lesbians.

• **Education**: Education ratings in Boulder are significantly higher than the comparison group average. Nearly half of residents give high ratings to the quality of the community’s colleges and universities. Far fewer rate the community’s K-12 public schools positively, but the one-third who do so is improved compared with 2009.
Drivers positioned farther up are more influential in causing emotional attachment. Drivers positioned farther to the right are rated by respondents as being better performing in a community. A driver that is both influential in causing emotional attachment and not rated as well performing (i.e., one that is positioned in the top left quadrant) represents an area of opportunity as an improvement in performance will have a particularly high impact on improving emotional attachment.
WHO IS MOST ATTACHED IN BOULDER

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

- **Geography:** Boulder residents living inside and outside the city have similar community attachment. The geographic equality in attachment underscores the community-wide positivity about Boulder’s aesthetics.

- **Age:** Those between the ages of 35 and 54 and those aged 65 or older are more attached to the Boulder community than are 55- to 64-year-olds. Attachment is low in this age group compared with the overall mean score for the community.

- **Gender:** Women in Boulder are more attached to their community than are men in 2010. Attachment among both genders, however, is up slightly compared with last year.
• **Income**: The highest and lowest earners in Boulder are the most attached, with scores higher than the overall mean for the community. Residents with a household income between $25,000 and $44,999 per year, however, have significantly lower community attachment than all other income groups analyzed.

• **Owners vs. Renters**: Home ownership is a driver of attachment in Boulder. Residents who own homes have higher mean attachment scores than do those who rent. Renters also have lower attachment scores compared with the community overall.
IMPLICATIONS FOR

BPULDER

For more detailed recommendations please go to www.soulofthecommunity.org/boulder

STRENGTHS TO LEVERAGE

Aesthetics is a key driver of community attachment among Boulder residents. Proximity to the Rocky Mountains allows for a variety of outdoor activities that are important to residents and could help attract people to the community. Boulder performs well in this area and could improve further if leaders maintain, invest in, and bring attention to the natural beauty of the community and the activities it affords.

Boulder outperforms comparable communities in every aspect of its social offerings, providing an important strength and comparative advantage for the community. Leaders should continue to serve residents’ interest in this area by further investing in offerings including community-wide programs and gatherings.

Leaders can also continue to drive attachment through the community’s colleges and universities, which residents rate highly. The community should draw on these positive perceptions to garner additional investment in and attendance to its higher education institutions and encourage young, ambitious adults to move to Boulder.

OPPORTUNITIES TO PRIORITIZE

While Boulder outperforms other comparable cities in terms of openness to various groups, leaders should do more to increase this key driver of community attachment. Learning events and festivals that promote a diversity of cultures and backgrounds may go a long way toward increasing the perception that the community is open to racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants. Creating opportunities for older people to engage in and take advantage of what the Boulder lifestyle has to offer is also pertinent to increasing the perception of openness and will at the same time help this group maintain good health. Leaders should also actively cultivate and promote offerings that appeal to talented college graduates, as attracting and retaining this group will be critical to the community’s long-term growth.

Boulder also struggles with the perception that the community is a place where people do not care about each other. Outdoor-related events that bring people together to foster more interaction and understanding are likely to have a compounding effect on community attachment and will also draw on the community’s strength in aesthetics.

Leaders should work to improve perceptions of the quality of K-12 public education in the community. Not only will this increase attachment overall, but a more positive view of public schools can also help to increase the perception that the community is a good place for families with young children, for gains on two critical dimensions.
The Gallup study is a 15-minute phone survey conducted in the 26 communities the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation serves, including Boulder. The survey is available in English and Spanish, and both landlines and cell phones are called.

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

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

In Boulder, Gallup interviewed residents in Boulder County.
About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote informed and engaged communities and lead to transformational change. For more, visit www.knightfoundation.org