Marathon County: A Next Generation Talent Magnet

Discover & Dream
Key Findings & Action Strategies

September 20, 2010

Next Generation Consulting
AN OPEN LETTER TO MARATHON COUNTY

September 20, 2010

Dear Marathon County:

Since June, Next Generation Consulting (NGC) has been evaluating Marathon County through the eyes of the next generation. Our central question was, “What will it take for Marathon County to be a destination for top talent?”

To answer this question we focused on two key areas of research. First, we developed a “Handprint” for Marathon County to help contrast the region’s assets in the Seven Indexes that matter to top, young talent when choosing a place to call home. Second, we engaged the community to capture their perceptions about Marathon County and ideas on how to make it a destination for top talent.

These pages contain the evidence we’ve collected that lead to our conclusions, plus some ideas that can guide Marathon County’s future efforts. We believe that Marathon County has great quality of life and assets that it can build on in its quest to attract, retain, and engage the next generation.

You play a critical role in this effort.

There is no better way to attract people to Marathon County than for each of you to lift your head when you say that you’re from the County, and to proudly rattle off to your family and friends the good reasons why you call Marathon County “home.”

Our intention is to arm you with both the information and the inspiration to ensure that Marathon County’s best days are to come – teeming with young professionals, their families, and the energy and vibrancy they bring to a community.

Respectfully yours,

Rebecca Ryan  
Founder

Molly Foley  
Lead Consultant

Margaret Leaf  
Lead Analyst
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary of Terms .................................................................................................................................................. 4

Rationale: Why this project? Why now? ....................................................................................................................... 5-6

Discover: What have we learned? ................................................................................................................................. 7
  1. Marathon County’s Handprint .................................................................................................................................. 7
  2. Increasing Marathon County’s educated population by just 1% could result in $120 million per year in additional income ................................................................. 10
  3. Residents value “Vitality” assets but they perceive Marathon County as not measuring up .................................................. 10
  4. Residents value the “After Hours” assets but they feel events and amenities need better publicity ....................................................................................................................... 11
  5. The lack of an identity within and for Marathon County is a challenge causing residents to feel disconnected ........................................................................................................ 12
  6. Residents perceive a lack of career growth opportunities in Marathon County .............................................................. 14
  7. Marathon County struggles in “Social Capital” and engaging young, diverse talent ......................................................... 15
  8. Marathon County residents would like to see more “After Hours” options .................................................................. 17
  9. Residents like the “Around Town” assets the County has but would like more options for alternative modes if transportation ............................................................................. 18

Dream: Where are we going? ......................................................................................................................................... 20
  1. Engage Emerging Leaders ..................................................................................................................................... 21
  2. Create A Green Economy ...................................................................................................................................... 23
  3. Create “Next Generation” Businesses ................................................................................................................... 24
  4. Develop a Long-Term Funded Plan ....................................................................................................................... 25

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................................................... 27

Methodologies .................................................................................................................................................................. 28

Credits ............................................................................................................................................................................. 29

About NGC ..................................................................................................................................................................... 29

Appendix ......................................................................................................................................................................... 30
**GLOSSARY | A Guide To Terms Used In This Document**

**Young Professionals or “YPs,”** for the purpose of this project, are people aged 20-40. They are Marathon County’s future workforce and future community leaders. Throughout the report, the terms “YPs” and “young professionals” are used interchangeably and extend to a growing class of young entrepreneurs.

A “Homegrown” is a person who has lived her or his whole life in Marathon County.

A “Boomeranger” grew up in Marathon County, moved away (possibly for post-secondary education or a job), and returned to the county.

A “Transplant” is a person who did not grow up in Marathon County, but moved to the County from somewhere else. Transplants usually relocate for educational opportunities, career reasons, quality of life, and/or to be closer to family. Increasingly, people are transplanting from one part of the world to another leading to a global flow of talent.

A “Next City™” or Community is one that has the assets and amenities most likely to retain and attract a next generation workforce. Next Communities tend to have higher than average scores in most of the Seven Indexes (Earning, Learning, Vitality, Social Capital, Cost of Lifestyle, After Hours, and Around Town¹). Next Communities are talent magnets and also attract the companies that rely on talent.

**Next Generation Consulting or “NGC”**

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.

The “Champion” is the point-person who can serve as focus area liaison to “Leads” and may offer to be one of the “Leads” or an extra helper on action strategies.

The “Leads” can be anyone who’s already leading on the issue or should be. Leads receive support from the “Champion.” There can be multiple leads on action strategies.

The “Supports” can be anyone who’s already working on the issue and strategies OR folks who need to know about it, because it falls within their agenda.

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¹ Next Generation Consulting groups these attributes into Seven Indexes which form the basis for this report. Learn more about the Seven Indexes on page 9.
RATIONALE | Why Does Next Generation Talent Matter?

A traditional measure of a county’s economic development is the number of jobs created or retained. But it’s not enough anymore.

People who are well educated and fully engaged will drive Marathon County’s future prosperity. And talent clusters in the communities that have the assets and amenities they value. Such attributes arise from a culture of public-private sector collaboration, next generation engagement, and intentional planning.

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.²

If highly educated and skilled young professionals can live anywhere in the world, why should they choose Marathon County?

Overall, Marathon County’s young professionals value the county’s recreational options and affordability. However, many have left or have indicated they would leave for better career opportunities.

Next Generation Consulting (NGC) knows that attracting and retaining YPs is an economic imperative for Marathon County. Communities that attract and retain YPs grow faster and create more community-wide prosperity.

Next generation talent is 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 Marathon County?

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

**Vitality** | How committed is Marathon County to an active and healthy lifestyle? This index tallies water quality, physicians per capita, measures green space and trails, farmers’ markets, and dog parks.

**Earning** | High school guidance counsellors tell students that they’ll have between nine and eleven jobs in their lifetime. The Earning index measures Marathon County’s average household income, the percentage of jobs in the knowledge-based sector, and more.

**Learning** | Is Marathon County committed to high quality education for all of its residents? This index tallies educational expenditures, student-teacher ratio, educational attainment, Wi-Fi hotspots, and more.

**Social Capital** | Great talent comes in every race, creed, and color. This index accounts for how open, safe, and accessible Marathon County is to all people. It includes measures of diversity, crime rates, and median age.

**Cost of Lifestyle** | Recent graduates and young professionals are just getting started in their careers, and for many, affordability is key. This index includes variables that encapsulate a roof over the head and food on the table.

**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 in Marathon County.

**Around Town** | How easy is it to get to where you want to go in Marathon County? This index measures your county’s “walkability,” commute times, public transit usage, and more.

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DISCOVER | What Did We Learn?

In June 2010, Marathon County partnered with Next Generation Consulting (NGC) to determine what it will take for the County to retain and attract young professionals.

The research was aimed at defining Marathon County’s assets, challenges, and opportunities through the eyes of the next generation. It included benchmarking Marathon County’s data to a set of peer regions in the Seven Indexes; conducting focus groups with Boomerangers, Transplants, Homegrowns, and recent graduates currently living in Marathon County; and facilitating an intergenerational strategy session with 50+ established and emerging leaders within the County.

The key findings from this research are:

1. Marathon County’s Handprint scores meet or exceed those of its peer regions in five of the seven indexes - Vitality, Earning, Cost of Lifestyle, After Hours, and Around Town.

Figure 1, page 8 shows Marathon County’s scores in each of the Seven Indexes (in blue) compared to the average scores of their peer regions (in gray). Compared to its peer regions, Marathon County has competitive scores in the indexes that residents value most.

NGC’s research indicates that regions with index scores of 7 and above, on a scale of 0-10, are well positioned to compete very effectively for highly qualified next generation talent. Scores falling between 4 and 6 indicate a community ranks about average.

NGC recently pooled its 2008-2009 community survey data consisting of over 6,000 residents of communities across North America, from small communities of less than 50,000 to large communities of over 500,000. When asked to rate the importance of the Seven Indexes - from “Not at all Important” to “Very Important” - Cost of Lifestyle was ranked first, Earning was ranked second, and Vitality was ranked third.

Marathon County’s scores in Vitality, Cost of Lifestyle, and Earning are key strengths that the County can build on in its efforts to attract and retain YPs.

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4 The “Peer Regions” selected by the Marathon County Economic Development Taskforce were Fond du Lac, WI MSA; La Crosse, WI MSA; Eau Claire, WI MSA; Mankato, MN MSA; Muskegon, MI MSA; Bend, OR MSA; and Grand Junction, CO MSA.
Figure 1. Marathon County Handprint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marathon County</th>
<th>Peer Regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitality</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Lifestyle</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around Town</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social Capital</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cost of Lifestyle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Around Town</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding Marathon County’s Scores

Table 1 (below) shows the scores that go into Marathon County’s handprint compared to its seven peer regions. When reading Table 1, or looking at the Handprint on the previous page, the higher the score, the more attractive the region is for the next generation workforce.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Rank</th>
<th>MSA</th>
<th>Vitality</th>
<th>Earning</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Social Capital</th>
<th>Cost of Lifestyle</th>
<th>After Hours</th>
<th>Around Town</th>
<th>Avg. Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>La Crosse</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bend</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fond du Lac</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the handprint on the previous page and from the table, you can see that Marathon County:

- Scores better than its peer average in Vitality
- Scores at the average in Earning, Cost of Lifestyle, After Hours, and Around Town
- Scores slightly below average in Learning
- Scores below average in Social Capital

See Appendix: Supplemental Handprint Findings for detailed measures and scores on page 30.

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5 Geek-speak: Each peer region received a score from 0 to 10 in each index. The 0-10 score is based on how the region scored on individual data points compared to the group as a whole. Scores within each index were standardized and averaged to result in an average score of approximately 5. Thus, Marathon County and its peer regions’ scores are benchmarked against this average mean score. The overall ranking was determined by averaging the individual index scores for all seven indexes for a particular region to see who scored the highest and lowest overall.
2. Increasing Marathon County’s educated population by just 1% could result in $120 million per year in additional income.

Overall, Marathon county falls slightly below its peers in the Learning index, with a score of 4 compared to the peer average of 5. Compared to its peer regions, Marathon county ranks 3rd in student/teacher ratio and WiFi hotspots per capita, but 5th in libraries per capita, and 6th in community/technical colleges per capita and educational attainment.

Per capita income and post-secondary attainment rates are closely correlated. This has been defined as “The Talent Dividend” as part of CEOs for Cities’ latest research on the City Dividends in the United States. Using U.S. data from 2006, each additional percentage point improvement in aggregate adult four-year college degree attainment is associated with a $763 increase in annual per capita income.

In the U.S., raising the national median of the top 51 metro areas from 29.4 percent to 30.4 percent would be associated with an increase in income of $124 billion per year for the nation.

In looking at Marathon County, increasing the population with a 4-year university degree by 1% (from 20.7% to 21.7%) would mean an additional 1,575 people with a 4-year degree living in Marathon County. Using an overall per capita income calculation, this would result in an additional $120 million in income per year for Marathon County.

Using a standard economic impact calculator of 1.2, we can see that this increase in income could result in an economic impact of $144 million per year for Marathon County.

3. Residents value “Vitality” assets but they perceive Marathon County as not measuring up to their expectations possibly due to underutilization.

In focus groups, residents indicated that recreational activities, sports, and outdoor options in Marathon County are the most valued aspect of living in the region. However, most have a somewhat poor perception of some Vitality amenities. They view the river as polluted, and the riverfront as unsafe in some areas, but see a lot of potential for improvement, including riverfront restaurants, parks, beaches, and more bike paths.

Compared to its peers, Marathon county ranks 1st in miles of trails and 2nd in farmers’ markets per capita. Marathon county also performs better than average in water quality. The County scores about average in physicians per capita and dog parks, and below average in nature parks, indicating these areas can use improvement.
During the focus groups, much of the conversation around Vitality centered on Lake Wausau and the Wisconsin River. While some of the riverfront in Marathon County has been developed with parks and bike paths, other areas are not only underdeveloped, but even unsafe:

“You walk down First Street... you walk down the hill, along the river walk, and you drop right into what the kids like to call ‘Homicide.’ It’s this old warehouse... you can stand down there and there’s gang graffiti and there’s all this junk, broken glass, and it’s just this one section that’s horrible.” (20-year-old male, Homegrown)

All focus group participants agreed that adding attractions and services along the river, as well as on Lake Wausau, would be a big improvement for Marathon County. Outside of a Culver’s restaurant, participants could not name any waterfront restaurants or bars. In addition, they said that the lack of services for boaters drives people out of the region to lakes further north.

“I would like to see Marathon County utilize the river a little bit more, whether it’s more bike trails or a fun nightlife activity. It doesn’t have to be a bar. What about a restaurant on the river? I’m surprised that, I’ve been here almost 6 years, and nothing has popped up on the water.” (27-year-old male, Transplant)

“There is a lack of services along the Wisconsin river. We have boat ramps, but there’s really no place to get gas.... We have parks, but the parks department hasn’t really evolved to create a marina opportunity or a place where you can pull in and get ice and gas and supplies.” (43-year-old male, Transplant)

Residents also spoke about more parks, bike paths, and beaches along the river and Lake Wausau in order for Marathon County to compete with other areas:

“The cities that have a river often like to have something up and down the entire river, on one side or the other, for running, walking, biking. And there’s some of that expanding. It’s up near Wausau Concrete, down to Oak Island, you can take that trail. Some of it’s a bit iffy. To me, if that extended a lot further north and south, we’d have an advantage.” (63-year-old male, Transplant)

“There’s three pools to swim in, and we talk in the city about paying for those every year, and there’s not one single beach that you can go to. People find beaches in these little areas, but there’s not a real beach.” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

4. Residents value the “After Hours” assets but they feel events and amenities need better publicity, using a streamlined social media strategy
Most focus group participants agree that there are some great events and things to do in Marathon County, but they often find out about them after they’ve happened. While they spoke highly of City Pages (the free weekly newspaper), they were disappointed that City Pages lacks an online presence, and that the County lacks a social media strategy.

Participants would enjoy accessing a listing of all events and happenings in one centralized place. In fact, one focus group participant started a Facebook group for that exact purpose, although he admitted that it’s difficult for one person to maintain. Supporting endeavors like these -- by Marathon County’s most enthusiastic supporters -- would be a relatively easy way to make the county “stickier” and more attractive to its young talent.

“We all say we don’t know what the is going on around here. I started a group on Facebook called Downtown Wausau. And all I do is just write once a week about the things happening within walking distance of the 400 block. A couple thousand people are on there, and I get emails back every week just thanking me for letting them know what’s going on.” (31-year-old male, Boomeranger)

“People just don’t know about all this stuff. There’s not one central place that tells young professionals, here’s all this stuff that’s going on this summer.” (40-year-old female, Boomeranger)

Residents appreciate Marathon County’s amenities, such as the 400 block and the myriad parks and trails. However, as one Transplant said, “The city builds these beautiful parks, yet they don’t spend any money to promote them.” In particular, residents would like to see Marathon County better utilize social media outlets to promote the region’s events and assets, especially if the County wants to target young professionals:

“If we’re talking young professionals, our generation utilizes all those social media outlets. Granted, I’m not fully aware of how Marathon County utilizes that type of resource, but maybe they could do a better job of utilizing those avenues.” (27-year-old male, Transplant)

5. The lack of an identity within and for Marathon County is a challenge causing residents to feel disconnected to the County as a whole.

In focus groups, participants had trouble identifying the boundaries of Marathon County, as well as the towns that it includes. This related to a broader issue: Marathon County lacks an identity, and therefore lacks a cohesive brand or message to attract and retain young talent.

Although measures are being taken to brand the County, participants perceive an us vs. them mentality between Wausau and the rest of the County. They also voiced concerns about the lack of communication between municipalities, which makes a unified County identity more difficult.
Part of the “us vs. them” mentality stems from an urban/rural divide, and tension between the County’s strong agricultural identity and Wausau’s urban core.

“I think we’re identified by agriculture outside of Wausau. I don’t know that Wausau is as supportive of agriculture and rural areas. So I think there is some us vs. them, which sort of stops us from having a common identity.” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“There was a time there were more cows than people in Marathon County. We’ve evolved from there. But as far as an identity as a county, I don’t think that the County has really pushed one. I mean, you’ve got strong agricultural, strong healthcare, and outdoor recreation.... But we don’t have the same variety as other areas in the state. It’d be great to find something and take it to a point like Door County, but it’s one of the few counties in the state that has that kind of recognition.” (43-year-old male, Transplant)

Strengthening communication between municipalities -- especially between Wausau and surrounding rural communities -- is the first step to establishing a shared Marathon County identity. Residents would like to know about events outside of Wausau, and would like to see greater cooperation between municipalities in promoting events.

“When we’re talking about Marathon County and how can we attract other people -- what are the limits of Marathon County? It would be great to know more of the events in some of the cities outside of Wausau. I’m sure Abbotsford has stuff to offer. I’m sure Mosinee has stuff to offer that maybe we’re just not made aware of, whether it’s a lack of my effort or a lack of the County getting information out in some way, shape, or form.” (27-year-old male, Transplant)

“In two weeks, there’s an independent music festival here called ’Why Not Wausau.’ This guy from Chicago couldn’t understand why the city of Wausau didn’t want to give him money to hold his event on the side of Rib Mountain’s ski hill. And I’m like, they’re different municipalities. You’re calling something ’Why Not Wausau,’ but you’re putting it in Rib Mountain. The people in Rib Mountain don’t feel like they’re Wausau, they feel like they’re Rib Mountain, so they’re not going to help you either. He was just lost. That is a big problem.” (31-year-old male, Boomeranger)

All of the communities within Marathon County have unique assets to offer their residents, and unique ways to position themselves as hotspots for the next generation of talent. Pooling their efforts and capitalizing on their combined offerings will only heighten their presence on the next generation’s radar. Establishing a shared identity is the first step:

“I feel like as a community, we’re still kind of grappling with what we are.... all of the towns deserve to be affirmed, but then what is the broader picture of, how do we as a county identify with one another?” (28-year-old female, Boomeranger)
6. Residents perceive a lack of career growth opportunities in Marathon County and feel the County needs to help grow current businesses, and support new businesses and entrepreneurs.

For the most part, participants love their community and are happy in their current jobs. However, they recognize that there are limited opportunities to move up in their careers and/or change positions down the road. Marathon County risks losing these young professionals if it can’t attract the jobs to keep them around.

In the Earning index, Marathon county is on par with its peer regions. However, relative to its peers, Marathon county performs best in median household income and worst in patents per 1,000 workers. Marathon county is about average in terms of future job growth and knowledge workers, and below average in industrial diversity and venture capital investment.

Compared to its peer regions, Marathon County ranked second to last in industrial diversity, which measures the variety of job opportunities in a community. The more diverse the job opportunities, the easier it is for young professionals to change jobs or advance in their careers. Marathon County’s relative lack of industrial diversity is a barrier for young professionals, which they spoke about in focus groups:

“If my husband and I wanted different jobs, we are out of this community lickety-split... because there is nowhere else to go for us. And I don’t want to stay in the same job for 30 years...I feel like we’re losing potential industry, because we’re so holding on to manufacturing.” (28-year-old female, Transplant)

“I’ve been where I am for 14 years, I had no intention of that. And I’m stuck until my kids are out of high school because the only way I can get a different job is if I leave, if I move.” (39-year-old female, Transplant)

“We’re going to lose people in their 30s because there’s no way to move up in your career. I don’t know where else I would go. I have one, maybe two options. I think you can spend all this money and all this time and energy on trying to make it a place to attract people, but you’ve got to keep them here.” (33-year-old female, Homegrown)

One way to address industrial diversity is to support the community’s entrepreneurs and small businesses, particularly in sectors that are attractive to Marathon County’s best and brightest.

“It’s definitely tough for computer programmers. There’s nothing here... high-tech is not big around here. If we could somehow encourage some software company, or two or three, to have a little enclave, that’d be great.” (40-year-old female, Boomeranger)
“It seems like small business is really the direction Marathon County needs to go.... But there’s so much opposition to getting up off the ground, so many restrictions to getting [a small business] to move forward, that it becomes incredibly overwhelming. So I think they just need to open up some doors and put on a friendly face and say, this is possible and this is how our community will grow.” (30-year-old female, Boomeranger)

7. Although the region has become more diverse in recent years, Marathon County struggles in “Social Capital” and engaging young, diverse talent.

Marathon county has the most room to improve in the Social Capital index (Score = 3). In particular, Marathon county ranks last in the percent of businesses that are women-owned, as well as median age (i.e. Marathon county has the “oldest” population relative to its peers). Marathon county is about average in ethnic diversity, and slightly better than average in violent crime and property crime.

Focus group participants agree that while Marathon County has become more diverse, it has not necessarily become more tolerant or inclusive of its diverse residents. In addition, local government is seen as an “old boys’ club” that’s difficult to break into (e.g. meetings are not advertised, and often occur during the day), and therefore unwelcoming to new voices.

In order to make Marathon County an even more appealing place for young people, young professionals from diverse backgrounds need to have a seat at the table. Residents perceive that county and city board meetings could be more welcoming to “new blood”

“If you look at the county board, how many are there under 70 years old? And not a lot of women either, there’s very few. And the few that I do know have described it as a good ol’ boys club.” (39-year-old female, Transplant)

“The only people showing up at these meetings to make these decisions are the people who’ve lived here forever. So we need to promote younger people to get involved, have their voice be heard, and attend these council and county meetings, so that when things are discussed about change, there’s other voices there.” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“What about getting new blood into the political scene of the city? Without term limits, it can be an old boys club.” (40-year-old female, Boomeranger)

Focus group participants talked about several barriers to participating in local government, like the county board. First, meetings are held during the day when most young professionals are at work. Moving meetings back to 5:00pm or later would be more conducive to attracting new voices:
“I don’t know if it was the county board or something like that, but they refused to move their meeting times back a few hours, until after 4:00, so that younger business people could attend, so that we can get some more youth involved.” (35-year-old male, Transplant)

Second, some participants perceived that local government is not welcoming to younger and more diverse voices. Leaders should reach out to these residents, who have often felt marginalized in the community:

“In addition to diversifying in regard to age, the ethnic populations that exist in Wausau are sorely represented in all facets. What does Marathon County look like for someone from the Southeast Asian population, who’s really been here fully since the early to mid ’80s?” (28-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“One time our group had a meeting with the mayor and an alderman. And I’ll never forget this.... We were talking about the 400 block, and the alderman says, ‘But down in the pedestrian mall, all these freaks were just hanging around.’ It really annoyed me, because I go down to the 400 block. Those ‘freaks’ are people I know; they’re friends of mine. That was the attitude we got, was all the people my age, my generation are ‘freaks.’” (20-year-old male, Homegrown)

Lack of diversity in Marathon County’s leadership may be a reflection of the larger community. In spite of the fact that County has become more diverse, residents still perceive the community as conservative, biased, and insular. It is difficult for new residents -- regardless of their background -- to “break into” the community:

“I think things are shifting. However, I don’t think that we provide open arms to diversity here. I think you still hear a lot of racial bias, you know, when the other race isn’t around you.” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“In this community, we’re very conservative. If it’s in the books, if it’s a law, if it’s regulation, that’s the way it is. No second guessing it. No changing it. No modifying it. Because that’s the rule. We’ve got to be more progressive and willing to look at what works and what doesn’t work. And I think because of our conservative nature, we’re not willing to go beyond that.” (30-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“I have a really hard time connecting to other people, because Wausau is so insular... When I moved here, no welcoming committee -- even though we have one -- wants to welcome a single female. So how do you connect?” (28-year-old female, Transplant)

“I had no friends, no family here, I came for a job and landed by myself. And the only way I was able to make friends who were twice my age was just through work. And that was my circle for a long, long time.” (27-year-old female, Transplant)
Residents enjoy the 400 block and the bars in Marathon County, but would like to see more “After Hours” options that do not revolve around drinking, creating better “stroll districts” in the County.

Participants really enjoy the events in the 400 block in Wausau, and see this as a major improvement to the area. In addition, while they like bars like Malarkey’s that hold regular events, they would like to see more “After Hours” options that do not center around alcohol. Residents feel that their options are limited to alcohol-related venues or events specifically geared toward families (and even family events often feature alcohol).

In the After Hours index, Marathon county is on par with its peer regions with a score of 5. Marathon county performs best in the number of breweries and brewpubs per capita, as well as the number of festivals per capita. Marathon county is about average in the number of restaurants per capita, as well as arts, entertainment, and recreation establishments. Areas needing improvement include the number of independent coffee shops and bookstores per capita.

Marathon County needs to focus its attention towards a variety of “After Hours” venues, from bars to galleries to coffee shops to bookstores, and events for young professionals, many of whom do not yet have children.

Residents said there is “plenty to do any night you want, if you want to have something to drink,” but are also looking for activities that do not involve alcohol. They said the “alcohol culture” in Marathon County can be a problem:

“If you’re not from here and you move to this area, I talk to a lot of those people, and they’re just lost. How do you get connected? I mean, the only thing open after hours are bars.” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“I want a coffee bar open after 8:00 at night. I don’t always want to go to the saloon, I want to go get a cup of coffee at 11:00 at night.” (30-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“I think there’s plenty to do any night you want, if you want to have something to drink….. I grew up here, moved away and came back, and was a little surprised at the alcohol culture here. I mean, I like to have a few beers sometimes, but you go to church functions and people will talk about drinking for Jesus. Or you go to a kids’ ball game, and they’re like, ‘Man, I’m going to my kids’ ball game tonight because beers are only a dollar.’ So I think it’s a little too much. That makes for unhealthy living.” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

Residents also said there are many events geared toward families in Marathon County, but would like to see more events targeted toward young professionals. This would also help new residents -- who do not yet have families -- connect to opportunities in the area and to one another:
“I think it would be nice to have activities geared toward individuals, not always families. I think what brings people here has to do with safety and raising your kids here, and a lot of people aren’t captured in that.” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

Focus group participants raved about the offerings on the square, however, but would like to see it utilized even more. A few participants had experience trying to host events on the square, and wish the process were easier to navigate:

“And the amazing thing is that, the square is filled. It’s used on Thursday marketplaces. Every Wednesday, there’s concerts on the square. If we did more of that, that square is packed. Obviously people love the concerts on the square, so why aren’t we doing more of that?” (37-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“I’ve tried to put events on [the 400 block]. There’s a ream of paper forms you need to fill out, and a ridiculous amount of costs associated with it. There’s no entity taking over ownership of that square right now. There’s the city parks department, there’s Marathon county, and there’s Wausau Area Events.” (31-year-old male, Boomeranger)

9. Residents enjoy the “Around Town” assets the County has - short commute times and air service access - but more options are needed, including connected bike paths and bike lanes, more “walkable” areas, and expanded bus routes.

While Marathon County scores average relative to its peer regions in “Around Town” and has done a good job of building recreational paths for biking and walking, there is room for growth in transportation amenities. Residents would like to see more commuter bike routes, and more “walkable” areas. In addition, some participants would like to see more bus routes, while others acknowledge that the current bus routes are underutilized.

As shown in the Vitality index, Marathon County ranks first among its peers in miles of trails per capita. However, these biking and hiking trails are recreational rather than commuter-friendly. Most residents agreed that commuting by bike in Marathon County is, at best, a risky venture:

“There’s a lot more [bike paths] for recreation, but there’s not for commuting. At all.” (31-year-old female, Boomeranger)

“There’s not a lot of awareness that it’s an option to be a commuter on a bike. I mean, we have a professor at MC who, I don’t even know how many times he’s been hit, riding his bike to work. People are just not aware.” (31-year-old female, Boomeranger)
“If you’ve ever tried to weave your way around Wausau with a Burley and two two-year-olds in the back of it, it’s scary. It’s really scary. There’s no safe place to really do that. You have to take it somewhere and go. I couldn’t leave my house.” (34-year-old female, Transplant)

Another way to help commuters would be to expand bus routes and public transit options. This would especially benefit residents who do not have access to cars or cannot drive:

“The buses stop running at 6:00 at night, and they don’t run on the weekends. I work with different visually impaired individuals, or different people who don’t have any other access. There’s no way to get to where they want to go, unless they’re going to call a taxi.” (28-year-old female, Transplant)

However, other residents noted that the current bus routes are underutilized, and alternative solutions -- such as van lines -- might better serve the community:

“If you’re running a bus schedule, and you’re picking up two people or maybe three people on the whole route, I can see where the city is going, ‘Gee, that’s not cost effective at all.’ So we need an alternative solution, because there’s no way they can afford to run those buses for the few people that need them.” (20-year-old male, Homegrown)

Whether bus routes or bike lanes, all residents agree that Marathon County’s transportation options need to be expanded.
DREAM | Consider Taking Bold Actions

On September 1, 2010, more than 50 leaders participated in a first-of-its-kind intergenerational summit for Marathon County. The purpose of the summit was to bring together established and emerging leaders to identify priorities that will help Marathon County become a talent magnet for the next generation of top talent.

Next Generation Consulting facilitated the session with a goal to showcase the preliminary findings from NGC’s research and identify community-based bold actions needed to help Marathon County move forward.

Following is a summary of key themes and proposed actions that emerged from the session, along with additional ideas and best practices NGC has identified that can aid Marathon County in its next generation talent efforts.

Key questions explored during the summit included:

- Twenty years from now, will Marathon County be a better or worse region for the young and talented? Why?
- Of all the things we COULD do to make Marathon County a talent magnet, what MUST we do?

Nine areas of priority were identified by the group and four were voted on as TOP priorities to address immediately at the Summit. Key actions and next steps for the next 90 days were established in the four top areas, and are outlined on the following pages.

Nine Priority Areas of Focus

1. Create great internships
2. Embrace and engage diversity
3. Develop Gathering Places on the River Corridor
4. Engage emerging leaders
5. Create green economy, e.g. industries
6. Develop a long-term funded plan
7. Connect communities in the region
8. Create "next generation" businesses
9. Market & Communicate existing resources

Of the nine priority areas, four were identified at the Summit as a top priority:

1. Engage emerging leaders
2. Create green economy, e.g. industries
3. Create "next generation" businesses
4. Develop a long-term funded plan
Attendees divided into four groups and began exploring key questions to help develop actionable strategies within each area of focus. Trigger questions for each area included:

- How do we take action, regionally and locally, in this area?
- Are there sub-components to this area of focus?
- What assets do we already have in place that can aid us in this area of focus?
- If our success in this area was completely guaranteed, what BOLD steps would we take?
- Who’s going to be the champion for it? Who’s going to lead? Who’s going to support?
- Who needs to know we are working on it or want to work on it, because either it involves them or they need to be “neutralized”?
- How will we measure success?
- What are the next actions that need to be accomplished in the next 30, 60, 90 days?

The following pages provide an overview of the action strategies developed. Please note: not all focus areas are complete and require additional dialogue.

1. **Engage Emerging Leaders**

NGC has noticed and been impressed by a strong core of passionate young people who clearly care very deeply about the future of the Marathon County. This is an asset that the County must build upon.

The core, though strong and engaged, is small. To ensure the continued momentum of this energy, more people, especially those representing non-traditional professional occupations in Marathon County and newcomers, must be brought to the discussion and leadership tables.

Action must be taken on both a local (Municipalities) level and regional (County) level throughout Marathon County and region.

**Action Strategies Discussed:**
- Create better ways to identify emerging leaders.
- Host joint discussions among existing Emerging Leaders & Young Professionals Organizations (YP Orgs).
- Create better collaboration among YP Orgs, employers, and non-profits.
- Develop stronger outreach to the YP demographic to communicate benefits of engagement.
- Make leadership training more accessible.
- Utilize social networking tools more effectively.
- Create a network of mentors.
- Establish an environment where the YP voice is heard and accepted.
Next actions that need to happen within next 90 days:

- Identify technologies available to make government website more accessible.
- Promote opportunities to get involved in local and county government.
- Develop mentorship channels for emerging leaders and established leaders in county.
- Develop ways to better communicate with employers to get their YP employees plugged-in.
- Host a non-profit and government involvement fair for YPs to learn about engagement opportunities.

NGC’s Additional Recommendations:

- All of the region’s YP groups collaborate on a “Candidates Forum.” Forums can be hosted for each election season. The forum’s purpose is nonpartisan, to engage YPs more deeply in the vetting and election of candidates who can help the region become a talent magnet. [Best Practice: Tulsa Young Professionals.]
- Conduct a “Register to Vote” campaign targeting YPs. [Best Practice: MTV’s “Rock the Vote” campaign.]
- Create a YP PAC (Political Action Committee) focused on a YP based agenda.
- Promote a “Judge for Yourself” Movement - a rating system for county/region that allows the YP “masses” to offer opinions on issues.
- Establish a “Boot Camp” for YPs who want to run for office, or for those with an agenda that will help make the region a great place for YPs. [Best Practice: The White House Project’s “Go, Run” program.]
- Develop a regular communication vehicle to articulate the views and perspectives of young talent to municipal and provincial leaders. For example, YPs could collaborate on a series of “White Papers” that outline their positions on key issues, or YPs could host a bi-annual lunch with elected leaders, to discuss issues of importance to YPs in the region.
- Petition the local and county governments to have their meetings when more working adults can attend, e.g. after 4 PM. In addition, request that all meeting times and agendas be posted online.
- Use the Downtown Wausau Facebook page to note public meetings, and to chime-in on items of political importance.

Who should lead action strategies:

- United Way Emerging Leaders
- G2, Chamber
- Wausau Young Professionals
- Downtown Wausau

Who can support action strategies:

- Established government leaders
- Centergy Creative Council

The Champion: Name: TBD
2. Create A Green Economy

A County’s “health” is key in its ability to attract and retain today’s young talent. The next generation wants to live in a place that puts value on living a “green” lifestyle and doing “green” business. Residents in Marathon County are no different.

Action must be taken on both a local (Municipalities) level and regional (County) level throughout Marathon County and the region.

Action Strategies Discussed:
- Define “green economy.”
- Local and County government declares the region a “green region” and implements policies that require green standards & encourage green development.
- Identify businesses to attract that value doing “green” business.
- Designate funds to support green business growth and infrastructure.
- Encourage small, niche farms.
- Look at transportation and promote green standards.
- Diversify energy usage.

Next actions that need to happen within next 90 days:
- Define “green” for the County.
- Look at comparable cities & what they are doing.
- Chamber looks into certifying hotels/hospitality as “green.”
- Encourage organizations, emerging leaders, businesses, etc. to get involved.

NGC’s Additional Recommendations:
- Establish a “green/sustainability” taskforce at the County level with representatives from Municipalities to further how government can be a leader in green initiatives. For inspiration: consider Mayor Daley’s green initiative in Chicago; the Natural Step program in the City of Madison; or ecomunicipality programs in communities around the U.S.
- Develop a business recycling policy and other programs to help businesses “get green”:
  - [Best practice: mPower, a program of Sustain Dane that helps businesses become “green.”]
- Zero percent interest loans to develop “green” initiatives.
- Ensure that any programming done along with the Wisconsin River or Lake Wausau is carbon-neutral and environmentally sensitive.
- Host a “green summit” for Central Wisconsin.
- Create a resource center for green industries:
  - Let businesses know what is available in green resources.

Who should lead action strategies:
- Marathon County Board
• Local Mayors

Who can support action strategies:
• UWMC, engage students in projects & dialogue

The Champion:
• Marathon County Board
• Local Mayors

3. Create “Next Generation” Businesses

Action must be taken on both a local (Municipalities) level and regional (County) level throughout Marathon County and region.

Action Strategies Discussed:
• Become forecasters on future trends, proactively planning for future business, rather than simply reacting.
• Create “go-to” resource center for entrepreneurs.
• Communicate resources available in local area.
• Conduct comprehensive land use planning.
• Grow high-tech infrastructure.
• Support telecommuters - infrastructure needs, schedules, etc.
• Develop stronger public/private sector partnerships.

Next actions that need to happen within next 90 days:
• Continue dialogue by getting an intergenerational mix of stakeholders at the table who represent all sectors - business, education, government.

Who should lead, support, and champion action strategies: TBD

NGC’s Additional Recommendations:
Creating “Next Generation” businesses goes beyond bringing in the next big industry. Current businesses in Marathon County need to be thinking about how they can better develop, attract, and retain the next generation of knowledge workers, who are innovative and have an entrepreneurial spirit that can provide spin-off support as business grows.

Marathon County’s business community is a key element in the region’s development as a talent magnet for the next generation. Companies directly impact Marathon County’s score in the Earning index – depth of knowledge-base job opportunities, career growth, and average wages.
In order for the County’s business community to ensure they will have access to the workers needed to fill the jobs of retiring Boomers, they need to see themselves as the next generation sees them. It is also important for the business community to be engaged in the process of creating an economic environment that fosters entrepreneurship, innovation, and career growth.

Young professionals also perceive that the region lacks good paying career opportunities. Some of this could be caused by a lack of next gen friendly places to work. In focus groups participants cited lack of flexibility, poor career pathways, and tradition-bound leaders as three impediments to more dynamic workplaces in Marathon County.

By showcasing workplaces that are, overall, great places to work for the next generation, the region can begin to paint a more compelling picture of the current employment opportunities available to young professionals in the region while working with companies to create work environments that go beyond the paycheck and will attract and retain talent.

• Create a “What it means to be a Next Company” awareness campaign that educates businesses about the role they play in the competition for talent.
• Develop a “best places to work” competition or award.
• Streamline business start-up requirements by the city and county, to make it easier for entrepreneurs to get the licensing they need to hit the ground quickly.

In Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done, Larry Bossidy says that companies need three plans: (1) People, (2) Strategy, and (3) Budgeting/Operations. Companies must ask themselves, “What’s our people plan?” and “Will our hiring plan meet the staffing needs of our business when Boomers begin to retire en masse?” Companies must begin putting in place the people practices that will make them an employer of choice for the next generation.

4. Develop a Long-Term Funded Plan

Strategies need well developed plans and funding to support implementation of the plan. Action for implementation and funding must be taken on both a local (Municipalities) level and regional (County) level throughout Marathon County and the region.

Action Strategies Discussed:
• Identify TOP three objectives and TOP ten measurable goals.
• Present plan to County and Municipalities for buy-in.
• Develop list of other key stakeholders & secure buy-in and commitment.
• Sustain momentum, funding, and accomplishments.
• Communicate with stakeholders and public to get buy-in and involvement.
• Work together rather than independently.
Next actions that need to happen within next 90 days:
- Take what is learned from NGC project and branding project and develop top 3 objectives and top 10 measurable goals.
- Build a list of stakeholders that care about goals and may be impacted.
- Identify scope of work to accomplish each goal.
- Present a proposal to the county for funding considerations & buy-in.
- Communicate to public the goals & proactive steps to position Marathon County for the next 10-20 years.
- Broaden support - help, in-kind, and financial contributions.

Who should lead action strategies:
- Economic Development & Education Committee
- MCDEVCo
- Chamber of Commerce
- Other Key Stakeholders

Who can support action strategies:
- Wausau/Central WI CVB
- Centergy
- College/Tech Schools
- Media Outlets
- Municipalities
- Emerging Leaders
- Businesses

Who should be the Champion:
Name: John Small, Dave Eckman, Darien Schaefer
IN CONCLUSION | Where Do We Go From Here?

This project is truly a community project. The research summary and action themes in the previous pages are just a starting point. The ideas generated during this three-month process, once fine tuned and further developed, can certainly create desirable changes in Marathon County’s ability to attract and retain next generation talent. But it is when the thinking and ideology that is the foundation for this project is adopted by the community - truly embedded in the way dialogue happens and decisions are made in Marathon County - that the true impact of this work will become clear.

As the County moves forward on this journey, NGC’s greatest hope is that the region 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.

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

NGC encourages the dialogue to continue. Next steps might include further forums, the development of action teams, and strategy sessions to further explore the following for each area of focus:

- How can we take action, locally and regionally, in this focus area?
- Are there sub-components to this area of focus?
- What assets do we already have in place that can aid us in this area of focus?
- What key BOLD steps MUST we take?
- Who’s going to be the champion for it? Who’s going to lead? Who’s going to support? *(see definitions in Glossary of Terms)*
- Who needs to know we are working on it or want to work on it, because either it involves them or they need to be “neutralized”?
- How will we measure success?
- What are the next actions that need to be accomplished in the next 30, 60, 90 days to build forward momentum?

NGC hopes that by increasing the level of engagement and pride by all County residents, of all ages, feelings of loss can be replaced by a vigorous, enthusiastic, and universal excitement that the best days are still ahead for Marathon County.
METHODOLOGIES

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

Focus Groups
Next Generation Consulting conducted two focus groups with residents of Marathon County on July 28, 2010, and August 9, 2010. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. A total of 23 residents (14 women and 9 men) participated in the focus groups, and they ranged in age from 19 to 63 (median age = 34). Over half of the participants (61%) were residents of Wausau, while the other 39% were from surrounding communities.

Summit Strategy Session
On September 1, 2010, Next Generation Consulting (NGC) conducted a “dream” session with more than 50 leaders. This first-of-its-kind intergenerational summit for Marathon County brought together established and emerging leaders to identify priorities to help Marathon County become a talent magnet for the next generation of top talent.

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

The Handprint helps clients contrast their assets with peer regions, 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:

Marathon County Board of Supervisors
County Supervisor District 4, Steve Immel
Deputy County Administrator, Deb Hager
Focus Group Participants
Summit 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/
For the last two decades, young talented workers in North America have been clustering in cities and regions that have the assets and amenities they value. We call these talent hot-spots “Next Cities.” How does Marathon County stack up against it’s peer regions?

To help answer this question, Marathon County Economic Development Taskforce invited Next Generation Consulting (NGC) to evaluate the County in Seven Indexes which - taken together - contribute to a region’s ability to attract and keep the next generation workforce. Each index includes several unique measurements (described in depth in the later pages of this report). The **Seven Indexes** include:

- **Vitality** | How “healthy” is Marathon County? This index tallies water quality, measures green space, and healthy living assets.

- **Earning** | High school guidance counselors tell children that they’ll have between nine and eleven careers in their lifetime. The Earning index measures the diversity of employment opportunities, jobs in the knowledge-based sector, and more.

- **Learning** | Is Marathon County committed to high quality education, for all of its citizens? This index tallies educational opportunities, education levels, and access.

- **Social Capital** | Great talent comes in every race, creed, and color. This index accounts for how open, safe, and accessible the region is to all people. It includes measures of diversity, median age, and crime.

- **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 cost of living index.

- **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 Marathon County? This index measures the region’s “walkability,” airport activity, commute times, and mass transit use.

Taken together, the indexes can be plotted as a “Handprint” (see Figure 1, next page), so that community leaders can quickly identify areas in which Marathon County is leading, or lacking. The larger a community’s handprint, the more attractive it is to the next generation workforce.

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6 Jane Jacobs coined the phrase “Social Capital” in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*
NGC compared Marathon County to a panel of MSAs that bear similar demographic, geographic, cultural, or economic qualities. The “Peer Regions” selected by the Marathon County Economic Development Taskforce were Fond du Lac, WI MSA; La Crosse, WI MSA; Eau Claire, WI MSA; Mankato, MN MSA; Muskegon, MI MSA; Bend, OR MSA; and Grand Junction, CO MSA.

Figure 1 shows Marathon County’s scores in each of the Seven Indexes (in blue) compared to the average scores of their Peer Regions (in gray.)

![Figure 1. Marathon County Handprint](image)

<table>
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<td>Around Town</td>
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**Marathon County:** A Next Generation Talent Magnet
Understanding Marathon County’s Scores

Table 1 (below) shows the scores that goes into Marathon County’s handprint vs. its seven peer regions. When reading Table 1, or looking at the Handprint on the previous page, the higher the score, the more attractive the region is for the next generation workforce.7

Table 1: Overall Rankings

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<th>Overall Rank</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Index Scores</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the handprint on the previous page and from the table, you can see that Marathon County:

- **Scores better than its peer average in Vitality**
- **Scores at the average in Earning, Cost of Lifestyle, After Hours, and Around Town**
- **Scores slightly below average in Learning**
- **Scores below average in Social Capital**

The following page shares more detail about Marathon County’s scores index by index.

---

7 Geek-speak: Each peer region received a score from 0 to 10 in each index. The 0-10 score is based on how the region scored on individual data points compared to the group as a whole. Scores within each index were standardized and averaged to result in an average score of approximately 5. Thus, Marathon County and its peer regions’ scores are benchmarked against this average mean score. The overall ranking was determined by averaging the individual index scores for all seven indexes for a particular region to see who scored the highest and lowest overall.
Vitality | Score: 7

Marathon county shines in the Vitality index. Compared to its peers, Marathon county ranks 1st in miles of trails and 2nd in farmers’ markets per capita. Marathon county also performs better than average in water quality. Lastly, Marathon county scores about average in physicians per capita and dog parks, and below average in nature parks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VITALITY</th>
<th>Index Score</th>
<th>Water Quality</th>
<th>Physicians per capita</th>
<th>Nature Parks</th>
<th>Trails</th>
<th>Farmers’ Markets</th>
<th>Dog Parks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Measure</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Crosse</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bend</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fond du Lac</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Earning | Score: 5

In the Earning index, Marathon county is on par with its peer regions. Relative to its peers, Marathon county performs best in median household income and worst in patents per 1,000 workers. Marathon county is about average in terms of future job growth and knowledge workers, and below average in industrial diversity and venture capital investment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EARNING</th>
<th>Index Scores</th>
<th>Future Job Growth</th>
<th>Knowledge Workers</th>
<th>Industrial Diversity</th>
<th>Median Household Income</th>
<th>Venture Capital Investment</th>
<th>Patents per 1,000 workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Measure</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bend</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>$55,400</td>
<td>$9.45</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Crosse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>$48,200</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>0.929</td>
<td>$53,700</td>
<td>$0.17</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>$44,900</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fond du Lac</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>$51,100</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>$48,800</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>$41,000</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>$49,138</td>
<td>$1.2</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marathon County: A Next Generation Talent Magnet
Learning  |  Score: 4

Overall, Marathon county falls slightly below its peers in the Learning index. Compared to its 7 peer regions, Marathon county ranks 3rd in student/teacher ratio and WiFi hotspots per capita, but 5th in libraries per capita, and 6th in community/technical colleges per capita and educational attainment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING</th>
<th>Level of Measure</th>
<th>Index Scores</th>
<th>Student/Teacher Ratio</th>
<th>Number of Community/Technical Colleges</th>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>WiFi hotspots</th>
<th>Public Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.76</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.22</strong></td>
<td><strong>23.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marathon County:** A Next Generation Talent Magnet
Social Capital | Score: 3

Marathon county has the most room to improve in the Social Capital index. In particular, Marathon county ranks last in the percent of businesses that are women-owned, as well as median age (i.e. Marathon county has the “oldest” population relative to its peers). Marathon county is about average in ethnic diversity, and slightly better than average in violent crime and property crime.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL CAPITAL</th>
<th>Index Scores</th>
<th>Women-owned businesses</th>
<th>Race/Ethnic Diversity</th>
<th>Property Crime</th>
<th>Violent Crime</th>
<th>Median Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Measure</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Crosse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fond du Lac</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cost of Lifestyle  Score: 5

Marathon county performs about average in the Cost of Lifestyle index. Compared to its peers, Marathon county is much less expensive in terms of food/groceries, but much more expensive in terms of utilities. The median rent in Marathon county is slightly below the average of its peers, and median homeowner expenses (including property taxes, mortgage interest, and homeowner’s insurance) are about average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST OF LIFESTYLE</th>
<th>Index Scores</th>
<th>Food/Groceries</th>
<th>Median Homeowner Expenses</th>
<th>Median Rent</th>
<th>Utilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Measure</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
<td>$605</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
<td>$641</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Crosse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
<td>$613</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fond du Lac</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
<td>$623</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
<td>$646</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
<td>$633</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
<td>$808</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bend</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$878</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>$1,313</td>
<td>$681</td>
<td>105.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marathon County: A Next Generation Talent Magnet
After Hours  | Score: 5

In the After Hours index, Marathon county is on par with its peer regions. Marathon county performs best in the number of breweries and brewpubs per capita, as well as the number of festivals per capita. Marathon county is about average in the number of restaurants per capita, as well as arts, entertainment, and recreation establishments. But there is room for improvement in the number of independent coffee shops and book, periodical, and music stores per capita.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFTER HOURS</th>
<th>Index Scores</th>
<th>Arts, Entertainment, Recreation</th>
<th>Full Service Restaurants</th>
<th>Book, Periodical, Music Stores</th>
<th>Festivals</th>
<th>Independent Coffee Shops</th>
<th>Breweries and Brewpubs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Measure</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bend</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>124.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fond du Lac</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Crosse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Around Town | Score: 5

Compared to its peers, Marathon county is average in the Around Town index. Marathon county earned relatively high marks in walkability (3rd among its peers) and commute times (tied for 3rd). Marathon county has the most room for improvement in mass transit use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AROUND TOWN</th>
<th>Index Scores</th>
<th>Mean Cars per Household</th>
<th>Walkability</th>
<th>Airport Activity</th>
<th>Commute Times</th>
<th>Percent Mass Transit to Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Measure</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Crosse</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon County</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau Claire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bend</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fond du Lac</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Junction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>0.66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perception does not play a role in a region's Handprint scores.